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**Museums and Memory Representations of Violence in Colombia, 2000-2014**

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**Museums and Memory Representations of Violence in Colombia, 2000-2014**

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**Report**

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## **Abstract**

### **Museums and Memory Representations of Violence in Colombia, 2000-2014**

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This report discusses and analyzes the ways in which some communities remember. Focusing on examples that display violence in museum settings, the main goal of this paper is to illustrate how certain social groups interpret and represent atrocities of their past. Since the decade of 2000, Colombia has seen the emergence of several memory museums that intend to account for the violence of the 1980s and 1990s. These bottom up venues are part of a process of healing and community building that serves the purpose of restoring the social fabric of the peoples affected by brutalities. In contrast, there are the top bottom initiatives, generally undergone by the state, which narrate the past in a different way. This report examines the differences in the stories told by official and non-official museums and the messages both of these venues want to convey.

Drawing from sources and secondary bibliography about the National Museum of Colombia and two departmental institutions, The Hall of Never Again, Antioquia, and the Traveling Museum of the Memory of Montes de María, Sucre and Bolívar, this report describes the exhibitions of violence the coordinators of these venues had produced, what are they pursuing, and their intentions.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>VIOLENCE IN COLOMBIA DURING THE TWENTIETH CENTURY.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<i>Violence in Granada, Department of Antioquia, during the Twentieth Century.....</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Violence in Montes de María, Departments of Sucre and Bolívar, during The Twentieth Century.....</i>	<i>16</i>
<b>OFFICIAL MEMORY SITES IN COLOMBIA: THE NATIONAL MUSEUM.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<i>Exhibition “Cacarica: territorio de vida”.....</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Exhibition “Hacer la paz en Colombia, Ya vuelvo”.....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Failed Exhibition of Tirofijo´s Towel.....</i>	<i>30</i>
<b>MUSEUMS IN COLOMBIA.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<i>Non-Official Memory Sites in Colombia.....</i>	<i>41</i>
<i>Hall of Never Again, Granada, Antioquia.....</i>	<i>44</i>
<i>Traveling Museum of the Memory of Montes de María.....</i>	<i>53</i>
<b>MUSEUMS, MEMORY, TRAUMA, AND VIOLENCE.....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>CONCLUSIONS .....</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>77</b>

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this masters report paper is to discuss the ways in which some Colombian venues exhibit and display violence. It is divided in three parts, with the first, a historiography of Colombian violence, emphasizing two case studies: Granada, Department of Antioquia, and Montes de María, Departments of Sucre and Bolívar. This section describes who, why, and how different actors perpetrated brutalities against civilians and among themselves. The second focuses on three exhibitions undertaken or attempted at the National Museum to represent violence in the context of guerrilla and paramilitary warfare and counterinsurgency; two of the cases were exhibits that actually took place and the third one was a failed endeavor. The third section discusses other violence representations portrayed in two regional memory sites. Both refer to local initiatives developed by the communities to deal with their violent pasts. Most of the country suffered diverse atrocities like mass killings, disappearances, kidnappings, among other acts. However, these two sites were chosen because they have unique ways of representing violence in the country.

Both the National Museum of Colombia and the two local memory museums reviewed here have a particular way to narrate violent events past and one of the goals of this essay is to understand why they portray the armed conflict in diverse manners. The official venues, such as the National Museum, attempt to give voice to mainly the victims of violence. This institution has also tried to include in its narrative the perpetrator's presence, which has not been possible so far. On the other hand, the local museums openly concentrate only on the victims' experiences. This is a conscious decision made by the communities, a way of constructing a new collective identity that would help them get over the effects of the atrocities they lived. The differences in these representations of

violence are subtle but show how local communities forgotten by the state take action to overcome their painful past and claim part of a national narrative.

## VIOLENCE IN COLOMBIA DURING THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Colombian violence has been an issue widely studied by several scholars, such as historian Marco Palacios, historian Mary Roldán, sociologist and geographer Teófilo Vásquez; anthropologist and researcher of the Grupo de Memoria Histórica, María Victoria Uribe Alarcón; sociologist Alfredo Molano, and historian Gonzalo Sánchez, current director of the Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica (National Center for Historical Memory) in Colombia, among many others.

According to Sánchez quoted in Uribe Alarcón's *Antropología de la inhumanidad. Un ensayo interpretativo sobre el terror en Colombia* (Anthropology of Inhumanity. An Interpretative Essay about Terror in Colombia), the several massacres and mass killings of the first half of the twentieth century are different from the ones of the second half and the ones that are still going on. "The current guerillas are not the same as in the decade of 1950 and nowadays paramilitaries are not the same thugs as in la Violencia."<sup>1</sup> With this in mind, the researchers and academics of the Grupo de Memoria Histórica (Group of Historical Memory), created in 2005 as a development of the Ley de Justicia y Paz o Ley 975 de 2005 (Law of Justice and Peace or Law 975 of 2005) during the second mandate of President Álvaro Uribe Vélez (2002-2006; 2006-2010)<sup>2</sup>, suggest that Colombia's violence during the twentieth century can be divided in four stages. The period between 1958 and 1982 when the country transitioned from the bipartisan violence between the

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<sup>1</sup> Uribe, María Victoria. *Antropología de la inhumanidad. Un ensayo interpretativo sobre el terror en Colombia*. (Bogotá: Editorial Norma, 2004): 112.

<sup>2</sup> Esquema Ley 975, Unidad Nacional de Fiscalías para la Justicia y la Paz, 2012, website: <http://www.fiscalia.gov.co:8080/Esquema975.htm> Accessed March 18, 2015.



Liberal and Conservative parties, to a revolutionary one. During these years, the guerrillas grew rapidly. The interval from 1982 to 1966, was defined by the political projection, territorial expansion, and military buildup of the guerrillas, the emergence of paramilitary groups, a spread of drug trafficking, the end of the Cold War, the Constitution of 1991, and some failed peace processes. During the time span from 1996 to 2005), both guerrillas and paramilitary groups expanded, there was a political radicalization of the public opinion towards a military solution for the armed conflict, as well as a significant increase of drug trafficking. The period between 2005 and 2012, is a rearrangement of the armed conflict. The state proved its efficiency in attacking and weakening the guerrillas but was incapable of defeating them. At the same time, political negotiations with paramilitaries failed, which meant that these groups restructured themselves, became more involved with drug trafficking, and resulted in criminal organizations that challenged state authority.<sup>3</sup> Currently, we may be seeing the start of a new period, which started in 2012 with the peace negotiations in Havana, Cuba, but this process is still uncertain and ongoing. The subjects of this study are the third, fourth, and fifth periods. Although, the Colombian violence is a backdrop of this entire research. The main goal is to discuss how the state, and local communities victimized by such brutalities represent their realities.

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<sup>3</sup> Bello, Martha Nubia (Coord.). *¡Basta Ya! Colombia: Memoria de guerra y Maldignidad*. (Bogotá: Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica): 111.

Historian M. Palacios, Latin American scholar specialized in violence, in his book *Between Legitimacy and Violence: A History of Colombia, 1875-2002*, also attempted a periodization for the study of Colombian violence.<sup>4</sup> The scholar gives a detailed account of the general context of the country so the reader can have a better understanding of this phenomenon. Although he starts his work in 1875, for the purposes of this masters report, the years from 1980 to 2002, of his book, are the ones being considered.

Following Palacios, during the decade of the 1980 the guerrillas increased their practices of kidnapping and killing, and also the National Army of the country started to openly violate Human Rights. According to a report of Human Rights, quoted in Palacio's book, in 1980 in Colombia there were 33 special centers for nearly 50 forms of torture. A few months later the same organization reported 600 of these centers.<sup>5</sup>

By this time, in Colombia, the guerrilla that attracted most attention was the M-19<sup>6</sup> because of its defiance against the establishment and the performance of big and spectacular actions. Some of them were stealing Simón Bolívar's sword from the museum in which it was harbored, in 1974; robbing 4,000 rifles from an Army barrack in

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<sup>4</sup> Palacios, Marco. *Between Legitimacy and Violence: A History of Colombia, 1875-2002*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006): 11.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 273.

<sup>6</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup>

of April Movement, Movimiento 19 de abril or M-19, was a Colombian guerrilla movement. After its demobilization, during the late 80s, it became a political party, the M-19 Democratic Alliance, Alianza Democrática M-19 or AD/M-19. By 1985, its active members oscillated between 1500 and 2000, being the second largest guerrilla group in the country after the FARC. It was memorable for committing impressive actions that provoked conflicting feelings of amazement and anger among the different sectors of Colombian public opinion, such as the Palace of Justice Siege, the Dominican Republic Embassy Siege, 1980, and the theft of Simón Bolívar's sword from the Quinta de Bolívar Museum in Bogotá, 1974. The M-19 traced its origins to the allegedly fraudulent presidential elections of 19 April 1970.

Bogotá in 1979; seizing the Dominican Republican Embassy in 1980; and the act considered the most dramatic and daring was the Palace of Justice Siege in 1985.

Parallel to this, drug traffickers were getting stronger and started to intervene actively in the political life of the country. They created social and political movements trying to be accepted by the economic ruling class. However, the threat posed by the permissiveness of the Colombian state towards the drug problem caught the attention of the United States, which exerted its power and pressure for the application of the Extradition Treaty of 1979.<sup>7</sup> This international tension, which echoed in several Colombian politicians ignited a series of targeted killings that started in 1984 and have not stopped.

In 1986, to complicate the situation, the paramilitaries began to exterminate political leaders which they considered belong to the “left.” During this year and the following, 300 members of the whipped out party Unión Patriótica, UP, (Patriotic Union) were killed. According to anthropologist and historian, María Victoria Uribe, member and researcher of the Grupo de Memoria Histórica, and sociologist and geographer Teófilo Vásquez, in Colombia between January 1 1980 and December 31 1993, 1,223 massacres were committed in Colombia. These scholars created a data base where is possible to find statistics, ethnic filiation, number of victims, location, and circumstances of these mass killings.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Palacios, Marco. *Between Legitimacy and Violence: A History of Colombia, 1875-2002*. (Durham: Duke University Press): 281.

<sup>8</sup> Uribe, María Victoria and Vásquez, Teófilo. *Enterrar y Callar: Las masacres en Colombia, 1980-1993*. Vol II. (Bogotá: Comité Permanente por la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos 1995).

The attacks experienced by Colombian civilians during the 1980s and 1990s affected not only the urban dwellers but also rural population. The most common aggressions were massacres or mass killings, political murders, disappearances, torture, sexual violence, and kidnappings. From 1980 to 2012 these brutalities left more than 220,000 dead<sup>9</sup> and more than four million displaced persons, according to Francesca Fontanini, spokesperson for the Andean Region of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR.<sup>10</sup> Colombians who lived in rural areas suffered damage to their towns' infrastructure, the destruction of their homes, plots, and lands, and theft of livestock. Colombians who lived in urban areas suffered targeted killings, damage and explosions to cities' infrastructure, kidnappings, disappearances, and threats to their lives.

Palacios is one of many Colombian historians whose descriptions and analysis about violence focus on the public perspective. His aim is to write a big comprehensive picture of this phenomenon in the country. However, another approach to this history is suggested by sociologist, journalist, and writer Alfredo Molano who has devoted most of his life to denounce corruption of the Colombian powerful elites, the situation of the ethnic minorities, land struggles of the peasants, and many other forms of injustice. This has meant that he lived in exile from 1999 to 2002 due to threats to his life made by paramilitaries and some lawsuits powerful families of Colombia had filed against him.

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<sup>9</sup> Bello, Martha Nubia (Coord.). *¡Basta Ya! Colombia: Memoria de guerra y Mardignidad*. (Bogotá: Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 31.

<sup>10</sup> "Colombia: cuatro millones de desplazados y 400 mil refugiados." *El Espectador*, June 20, 2012, <http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/nacional/colombia-cuatro-millones-de-desplazados-y-400-mil-refug-articulo-354148>. Accessed March 18, 2015.

In most of his many books, Molano, has made clear his intention to give voice to the direct victims of the Colombian armed conflict. He has traveled throughout the country collecting testimonials of ordinary people. The following is an excerpt of a story told to him by a peasant of Pinillos, Department of Sucre.

Íbamos llegando a Pinillos cuando oímos la totiazón de las bombas que soltaban los helicópteros. Se descolgaban en picada, como gavilanes, y botaban sus huevos a la loca, como peleando contra todo el mundo. Nos pasaban raspando las cabezas con el ventarrón que hacían las hélices. Cuando ví que eran de la brigada del Ejército, pensé que la guerrilla se había tomado el pueblo. Tranqualicé a La Mona y le dije que no se asustara, que nada nos podía pasar porque nada habíamos hecho.<sup>11</sup>

We were arriving to Pinillos when we heard the uproar of the bombs being dropped from the helicopters. They were coming down as falcons throwing their eggs like crazy, as if they were fighting against the whole world. They brushed against our heads with the stiff winds of the propellers. When I realized they were the Army I thought that the guerrilla has occupied the town. I calmed down Mona and told her not to be afraid. Nothing could happen to us because we have done anything.<sup>12</sup>

This kind of story is very common all over Colombia. Most of the population suffered these attacks and lived in fear for a long time. Currently, Molano writes a column in *El Espectador*, one of the two major newspapers of the country. He insists in denouncing and making public the atrocities lived by rural communities and is very critic of the government.

Four sets of actors perpetrated violent acts in the decades of the 1980s and 1990s. The guerrillas such as Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC, (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia); Ejército de Liberación Nacional, ELN, (National Liberation Army); Ejército Popular de Liberación, EPL, (Popular Liberation

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<sup>11</sup> Molano, Alfredo. *Desterrados. Crónicas del desarraigo*. Bogotá: El Áncora Editores, 2001): 51.

<sup>12</sup> My translation.

Army), and Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo, ERP (People's Revolutionary Army). The paramilitary and drug trafficking umbrella organizations such as the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, AUC, (United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia) The state was involved through the actions of the Ejército Nacional de Colombia (National Army of Colombia) The drug organizations and mafias brutalized local populations. Even though these armed actors had their own particular signature forms of violence,<sup>13</sup> they often pursued similar objectives: control over peasant's productive land and resources. The guerrillas, paramilitaries, and drug lords needed strategic corridors for drug commercialization.

All the armed actors perpetrated violence in different ways depending on the territory and the period of the conflict. The Group of Historical Memory concluded that guerrillas, paramilitaries, and state forces choose and adjust their violent practices according to their objectives. The paramilitary groups implemented violence based on selective murders, massacres, forced disappearances, torture, threats, massive displacement, and sexual aggression. The guerrillas kidnapped, committed selective murders, damaged civil infrastructure and attacked, robbed, extorted, forced recruitment, and displaced communities. They also attacked urban areas and planted land mines. The violence perpetrated by the National Army centered on torture, arbitrary detentions, targeted murders, enforced disappearances, and excessive use of force.<sup>14</sup>

Since 1982, when Presidente Belisario Betancur took office, all the Colombian

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 35-37.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 35-37.

Chiefs of State have tried to find an end to the armed conflict. There have been many attempts of peace processes, including the undergoing one in Havana, Cuba since 2012. Every four years, time of the presidential term, the rulers of the country change the conditions of the agreements, retreat for negotiation, and the insurgent groups do not fulfill their commitments. According to Marco Palacios “the paramilitary groups have been the most elusive in Colombia.”<sup>15</sup> In 2002 the AUC started conversations with the then President Álvaro Uribe, in 2003 the Agreement of Santa Fe de Ralito<sup>16</sup> was signed, and supposedly they demobilized by 2005. This Agreement paved the way for the controversial Law 975 of 2005, mentioned earlier, to be conceived. The text of the Law 975 is vague, unclear, ambiguous and if reading between the lines it allows for the paramilitaries to be indulged and not held responsible for many of their atrocities. It also defines victim in a way that makes it difficult for the people to prove they are. “This law must be understood as a great victory of the paramilitaries because it left in the impunity almost all its crimes against humanity... and only 7% of the demobilized could be judged according to the Law.”<sup>17</sup> Related to drug trafficking, by 2006, the paramilitaries could not refute their links with this activity and their leaders, despite their insistence in denying any connection. Mean while, the guerrillas started to become disjointed, lose

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<sup>15</sup> Palacios, Marco. *Violencia pública en Colombia, 1958-2010*. (Bogotá: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2012): 169-170.

<sup>16</sup> Agreement signed between the AUC and the Colombian government in which the AUC committed to demobilize completely. However, this has not happen. The paramilitaries have reorganized themselves and former other groups names bacrim, bandas criminales (criminal bands).

<sup>17</sup> Palacios, Marco. *Violencia pública en Colombia, 1958-2010*. (Bogotá: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2012): 173.

some power, territories, and even prestige due to their evident relationship with drug traffickers.<sup>18</sup>

Palacios states that approximately since the mid 1970s the Colombian guerrillas were catalogued by the right as bandits and this image of them has stuck in the country's citizens, specially since the connections between guerrillas and drug leaders and their participation in this business was proved. The perception of the guerrillas as criminals with no political or social ideology is one of the factors that has contributed to their defeat, they do not have popular support, they are feared, and even though there are peace dialogues going on they are still attacking Colombian citizens and the Army.

Despite the violence of the 80s and 90s, which was perpetrated through massacres, selective killings, kidnapps, disappearances, displacement, and many other forms, has stopped, atrocities are still happening. For instance, as Teleantioquia News broadcasted in 2015, 40 peasant families of a town named Angosturas, in the Department of Antioquia, were displaced due to confrontations between the ELN guerrilla and the Army.

In the book *Blood and Fire. La Violencia en Antioquia, Colombia, 1946-1953*, historian Mary Roldán tells a history of this Department, allowing us to track and understand better its violence. Roldán mentions in her piece the 1997 displacement of 5,000 people that took place in Peque, one of Antioquia's towns, that was subject of an exhibition at the National Museum of Colombia in 2000. This exhibition was held along with the Carcarica diplay, which will be discussed later.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 177.



One of the strengths of Roldán's book is the purpose she has of demystifying Colombian violence. She stresses that the country has particular characteristics that have been understudied and overlooked such as the facts that "Colombia has rarely suffered from dictatorships, boasted no powerful military, managed its finances conservatively, and displayed no conflict based on ethnic differences."<sup>19</sup> This means that Colombia's armed conflict during the twentieth century still needs more analysis and a closer detailed look. It seems that there are too many generalizations and comparisons with other Latin American countries, which sometimes obscure the understanding of local contexts.

Roldán starts her analysis with La Violencia (1946-1958) and explains how these events were closely related to struggles between the regional and central state, and the regional state and its peripheral inhabitants. Roldán's work and her emphasis in bringing together individual and collective episodes of violence unveil manifold phenomena that are definitive for the reconstruction and comprehension of the armed conflict, its motivations, and its incidence in the present.<sup>20</sup> By acknowledging particular past events in certain communities it is possible to understand why their decision of creating memorial sites, such as memory museums.

### ***Violence in Granada, Department of Antioquia, during the Twentieth Century***

The town and municipality of Granada are located in a critical zone of the Department of Antioquia. It is the gateway to eastern Antioquia and home to an area of

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<sup>19</sup> Roldán, Mary. *Blood and Fire. La Violencia in Antioquia, Colombia, 1946-1953*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002): 11.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

water reservoirs that generates 35% of the electricity of the country. Antioquia, one of the 32 Colombian departments, is located in the central northwestern part of the territory with a narrow section that borders the Caribbean Sea. Most of its area is mountainous with some valleys, and is part of the Andes mountain range.

Besides being one of the richest municipalities of the Department for harvesting coffee, beans, sugar cane, and berries, Granada is near the José María Córdoba airport free zone and it is close to the freeway that connects this part of Colombia with Bogotá, the capital city. Due to its location and topographic conditions, Granada is a strategic corridor for the different armed groups (Army, paramilitaries, drug lords, and guerrillas) and is the path used to commercialize the drugs that come from the lands near the water reservoirs.<sup>21</sup>

One of the historical constants of Granada since the decade of the 1980s has been violence. In 1988 the first guerrilla attack took place. The second intrusion, in 1990, damaged the local Caja Agraria, the national Colombian institution that promotes rural development, which was shuttered in 1999. In addition, during the 1980s the FARC and ELN disputed the territory.<sup>22</sup> In 1997 and 1998, the guerrillas kidnapped the mayors of Granada, and during 1998, there were massive displacements from the rural areas. In

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<sup>21</sup> Ramírez, Gloria and Luengas, Lorena. "Salón del Nunca Más, Granada. Un proceso comunitario. Oriente Antioqueño." *Museos, comunidades y reconciliación. Experiencias y memorias en diálogo. XIV Cátedra de Historia Ernesto Restrepo Tirado*. (Bogotá: Museo Nacional de Colombia, Universidad Externado de Colombia, 2009): 26.

<sup>22</sup> Restaurando a Granada, March 22, 2013, website: <http://www.traslacoladelarata.com/2013/04/22/restaurando-a-granada/> Accessed October 13, 2014

1999, the ELN killed three police officers. From 1998 to 2000 the town of Granada's population dropped from 18,000 inhabitants to 5,500, the displacement of its inhabitants approaching 70 percent.<sup>23</sup> Some of the people that fled their lands went to other parts of the Department of Antioquia such as Medellín, the capital, or other municipalities, such as Nare and Puerto Berrío.

During the last decade, when the community was attempting some kind of reconstruction, violence returned. In April 2001, the paramilitary group Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, AUC (a paramilitary group), Bloque Metro, killed seven peasants. In July, the FARC executed the mayor. In 2002, another 3,500 persons suffered displacement by paramilitaries and the AUC ordered the local administration to shut down. In October of the same year, the FARC tried to take over the municipality but the Colombian Army repelled the assault.

It was also during these years that Granada suffered one of the most severe guerrilla attacks in its history. In 2003, a truck loaded with 400 kg of dynamite exploded in the town's main square. It left 21 people dead and 14 wounded. The material damage was incalculable. This incident is one of the most vividly recalled by the population because it destroyed almost all the urban area. That same year, there was another attempt to blow up the Police Command of Granada but it failed because a gas cylinder thrown by the guerrillas did not detonate.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.



**Photograph One:** View of the town of Granada after the explosion. Photo taken from <http://www.traslacoladelarata.com/2013/04/22/restaurando-a-granada/#!prettyPhoto/4/>

When these violent episodes ended, some survivors felt it was safe to go back to their town and lands. The peasants that returned decided to get together to repair the urban area affected by the explosion and remember those who died. With this in mind, they created the United Victims Association of the Municipality of Granada (Asociación de víctimas unidas del municipio de Granada), Asovida, in 2005. The main goal of the project was to honor the memory of the armed conflict's victims. The Association gained legal status as a community organization in 2007 and nowadays has more than 300 members, mostly women. In 2008, the mayoralty gave them a space adjacent to the

cultural center and Asovida used it to found the Salón del Nunca Más (Hall of Never Again) in 2009.

***Violence in Montes de María, Departments of Sucre and Bolívar, during the Twentieth Century***

The Colombian sub-region Montes de María has been highly coveted during the twentieth century, especially since the decade of 1980 due to its location and wealth of natural resources. Guerrillas, drug lords, the army, and paramilitaries dispute the control of the area because it permits access to the Caribbean Sea at the Gulf of Morrosquillo,<sup>24</sup> which is a corridor for the commercialization of cocaine in the Department of Bolívar. It has 15 towns or municipalities that occupy the fifth part of the departmental area.<sup>25</sup> The area also has a great diversity of flora and fauna that are propitious for agricultural production including corn, rice, cassava, yams, plantains, tobacco, coffee, and avocado.<sup>26</sup> Montes de María, called the “Caribbean pantry,” for the abundance of its production, is also the home of a Zenú indigenous group.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The Gulf of Morrosquillo is a gulf of the Caribbean Sea bounded by the Colombian Departments of Sucre and Córdoba. It runs approximately 80 kilometers (50 mi) from the mouth of the Sinú River, in Córdoba, to San Bernardo Point in Sucre.

<sup>25</sup> The following towns are part of the Montes de María: El Carmen de Bolívar, María La Baja, San Juan Nepomuceno, San Jacinto, Córdoba, Zambrano and El Guamo in Bolívar. Ovejas, Chalán, Colosó, Morroa, Toluviejo, Los Palmitos, San Onofre and San Antonio de Palmitos in Sucre.

<sup>26</sup> Aguilera Díaz, María. *Montes de María: Una subregión de economía campesina y empresarial*. (Cartagena: Banco de la República, 2013): 2.

<sup>27</sup> Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo. “Los Montes de María: análisis de la conflictividad.” June 10, 2010, accessed: April 8, 2014, [http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/documents/projects/COL/00058220\\_Analisis%20conflictividad%20Montes%20de%20Maria%20PDF.pdf](http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/documents/projects/COL/00058220_Analisis%20conflictividad%20Montes%20de%20Maria%20PDF.pdf).

In the decade of 1980, the appearance of three of the main guerrillas of the country, ERP, FARC, and ELN, engulfed the region of Montes de María in violence. These insurgents robbed cattle and kidnapped peasants owners of small, medium, and large scale pieces of land to finance their operations.<sup>28</sup> They also sabotaged, harassed, and attacked civilians such as farmers, whom they tried to recruit or brainwash. To counteract the guerrillas' presence, locals turned to the Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos de Colombia, ANUC (National Association of Peasant Users of Colombia), created in 1967 to promote and defend the peasant cultures of Colombia.<sup>29</sup> The presence of so many armed sectors in the zone was exacerbated by the arrival in 1990 of drug lords. From 1996 to 2005, there were approximately 234,098 victims of atrocities in this sub-region, according to official figures of the Comisión Nacional de Reparación y Conciliación (National Commission of Repair and Reconciliation).<sup>30</sup>

The violence inflicted on the 15 towns that comprise the Montes de María zone consisted mostly of massacres perpetrated by the paramilitaries and guerrillas. Among the victims were community leaders, peasants, students, unionists, human rights activists,

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<sup>28</sup> Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo. "Los Montes de María: análisis de la conflictividad." (June 10, 2010): 14. Accessed: April 8, 2014, [http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/documents/projects/COL/00058220\\_Analisis%20conflictividad%20Montes%20de%20Maria%20PDF.pdf](http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/documents/projects/COL/00058220_Analisis%20conflictividad%20Montes%20de%20Maria%20PDF.pdf).

<sup>29</sup> Asociación de Usuarios Campesinos de Colombia, ANUC. Accessed: April 9, 2014, <http://anuc.co/dynamicdata/historia.php>.

<sup>30</sup> Castro, Giovanni; Bayuelo Castellar, Soraya, and Samudio Reyes, Italia Isadora. "Museo itinerante de la memoria y la identidad de los Montes de María: tejiendo memorias y relatos para la reparación simbólica, la vida y la convivencia." *Estudios para la paz: representaciones, imaginarios y estrategias en el conflicto armado*. (Bogotá: 2013): 162.

and indigenous peoples. The best-known massacres, perhaps because of their coverage in the media, are the ones mentioned in the following chart.

**Table 1. Massacres perpetrated in the Montes de María region between 1997 and 2004<sup>31</sup>**

Rural Area	Municipality
Pichilín	Colosó
San Isidro	El Carmen de Bolívar
Caracolí	El Carmen de Bolívar
Capaca y Campoalegre	Zambrano
Las Palmas	San Jacinto
El Salado	Carmen de Bolívar
Las Brisas, San Cayetano, Mampuján	María la Baja y San Juan Nepomuceno
Mata de Perro	El Carmen de Bolívar
La Libertad	San Onofre
Flor del Monte, Canutal y Canutalito	Ovejas
Chengue	Ovejas
Retiro Nuevo	María la Baja
Chinulito y el Cerro	Colosó
Macayepo	El Carmen de Bolívar
La Aventura	Córdoba

The massacre of El Salado, a township of the municipality of Carmen de Bolívar, Montes de María, in 2000 received the largest media coverage because it was the bloodiest and a “chronicle of a death foretold.”<sup>32</sup> The local authorities alerted the state of the presence of paramilitary groups in their municipalities but government officials failed to act. This allowed for one of the worst massacres in the history of Colombian violence

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<sup>31</sup> De los Ríos, Edwin; Becerra Becerra, Carmen Andrea, and Oyaga Martínez, Fabián Enrique. *Montes de María: entre la consolidación del territorio y el acaparamiento de tierras. Aproximación a la situación de Derechos Humanos y el Derecho Internacional Humanitario en la región (2006-2012)*. (Bogotá: Publicaciones ILSA, 2012): 11.

<sup>32</sup> Chronicle of a Death Foretold. In Spanish, *Crónica de una muerte anunciada*, is a novela by Nobel Prize Gabriel García Márquez (1927-2014), published in 1981.

during the 2000s. This episode took place between February 16 and 21, 2000, leaving more than 100 peasants of the area killed by 450 paramilitary fighters, although initially the media confirmed only 30 to 60 deaths. Among the victims were a six-year-old girl and a 65 year old woman. The researchers of the GMH identified 60 fatal victims, 52 men and 8 women, three 18 year old individuals, 12 between 18 and 25, 10 young adults between 26 and 35, 23 adults from 23 to 36 years, and 10 elders. The atrocities included torture and decapitations.<sup>33</sup>

The mass killing was perpetrated by three paramilitary groups with the help of powerful families of the zone. They came together to fight the FARC. The reconstruction of this massacre made by the team of the GMH, leaded by G. Sánchez, can be found in the publication made of this episode. There it is possible to find, day by day accounts of the episodes that took place from February 16 to 21 2000. In this report the researchers describe and analyze carefully the context, the acts, and aftermath of the event, including testimonials of the survivors, such as the following:

En la cancha nos dijeron “los hombres aun lado y las mujeres a un lado” y nos tiraron boca abajo ahí, de ahí enseguida apartaron a un muchacho, le dijeron “usted se queda aquí con nosotros porque usted se nos escapó de Zambrano, pero de ésta no se nos va a escapar” le decían ellos. A él fue el primero que mataron en la cancha. Le pusieron una bolsa en la cabeza y le mocharon una oreja primero, y después esto se lo pelaron con espino, lo acostaron y le ponían la bolsa en la cabeza, él gritaba que no lo mataran, que no lo mataran, le pegaban por la barriga, patadas, puños, por la cara, toda la cara se la partieron primero, y nos decían “miren para que aprendan, para que vean lo que les va a pasar a ustedes, así que empiecen a hablar”, decían ellos. Entonces nosotros ledecíamos “qué vamos a hablar si nosotros no sabemos nada”. Ya después que lo tiraron en la cancha si lo mataron, le dispararon [...] A él le cortaron sólo una oreja, él lloraba y gritaba, fue el primero que

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<sup>33</sup> Sánchez, Gonzalo. *La masacre de El Salado: esa guerra no era nuestra*. (Bogotá: Centro de Memoria Histórica, 2009): 24-27.



mataron ahí [...]. Él se demoró en morir, esa agonía de la muerte es horrible, ver como se queja una persona.<sup>34</sup>

In the court they told us, “men to one side, women to the other,” and they threw us upside down there, immediately they took a young man, they told him, “You stay here with us because you escaped in Zambrano, but you will not get away this time.” He was the first to get killed in the court. They put a bag over his head, he screamed for his life, not to kill him, they beat him on the belly, kick him, fist him in the face, they broke all his face first, they said to us, “Look and learn, this will happen to you, so you better start talking.” We responded, “What would we say if we know nothing.” After they threw the young man in the court they killed him, they shoot him [...]. They cut off one of his ears; he cried and screamed, he was the first to be killed there. [...]. It took a while for him to die. That agony is horrible, to see how someone suffers.<sup>35</sup>

After some years of calm, the government identified the presence of new-armed actors in the region and other places of the country. These groups received the name of *bandas criminales*, *bacrim* (criminal bands) and included former paramilitary fighters who were involved in drug trafficking and extortion. In 2010, the Instituto de Estudios para el Desarrollo y la Paz, INDEPAZ (Institute of Studies for Development and Peace), said that these bacrim were now responsible for more violence than the guerrillas. “With names like the Black Eagles, Erpac and Rastrojos, these bacrim combine control of cocaine production and smuggling with extreme violence, but do not have any apparent political agenda.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 36

<sup>35</sup> My translation.

<sup>36</sup> “Profiles: Colombia’s armed groups.” *BBC News Latin America & Caribbean*, August 20, 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-11400950>, Accessed March 18, 2015.

## **OFFICIAL MEMORY SITES IN COLOMBIA: THE NATIONAL MUSEUM**

Since the decade of 1990, the National Museum of Colombia as part of its effort to document and represent the country's memory has produced several exhibitions related to violence. Three displays presented here illustrate how the institution has shifted its narrative over time, illuminating official state displays of the country's history of violence. Each one of them recalls painful episodes from a specific perspective. The first attempts to give voice to the victims of a massive displacement in the Pacific Coast of Colombia. The second presents the life of a guerrilla leader, Carlos Pizarro, murdered after he was reintegrated to society following one of the most jarring episodes in recent Colombian history: The Palace of Justice Siege in 1985. The third is a failed endeavor of including victimizers in an official commemorative site, due to their role in the armed conflict.

### ***Exhibition "Cacarica: territorio de vida"***

From November 16 through December 1, 2000, the National Museum of Colombia held an exhibition called "Cacarica: Territorio de vida" (Cacarica: Territory of Life). It consisted of a sample of pictures taken by Yesid Campos, a Colombian photographer, in which he addressed the displacement suffered in the region of the lower Atrato Chocoano in the Pacific Coast of the country. This photo display aimed to show the return of approximately 400 families to their homelands after a massive displacement that took place in their territory in 1997.

Since the end of the decade of the 1990s the National Museum, under the guidance of its director, Elvira Cuervo de Jaramillo, wanted to promote spaces for reflection and

questioning of the social conflicts of that time. Related to this, Cuervo de Jaramillo stated that unlike the traditional European museums that aim to preserve, increase, and exhibit their collections, a museum also has to engage and promote political and current debates.<sup>37</sup> As part of this effort, the director of the National Museum of Colombia also created the Conference Ernesto Restrepo Tirado, an academic space devoted to the historical analysis and discussion of the armed conflict of the country. The first conference was in 1996, soon becoming an annual meeting and publication.

In 2000 the V Conference Ernesto Restrepo Tirado focused on forced displacement and its implications in the Colombian economic, political, and social spheres. In this context, as part of the activities of the Conference, the photo exhibition on Cacarica came about. The images displayed meant to show the survivors' return to their homeland after the 1997 displacement, part of the military's Genesis Operation.

From February 24 to 27, 1997, the National Army of Colombia allied with paramilitary groups entered the Cacarica zone searching for members of the FARC, displacing 531 persons in 23 rural communities.<sup>38</sup> In 2004, this case was brought to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, which agreed to hear it in 2006. In addition to the massive displacement of the communities, the assassination and dismemberment of the communal leader Marino López also occurred. The aftermath of

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<sup>37</sup> Zambrano, Fabio. Exodo Patrimonio e Identidad. memorias de la v cátedra de historia de Ernesto Restrepo Tirado. *Historia Crítica*. No. 23, Diciembre 2003.Pp. 160-162.

<sup>38</sup> EFE News Service February 12, 2013. Colombia atribuye a FARC el desplazamiento de pueblos en caso ante CortelDH. Accessed February 5, 2015, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1286753022?pq-origsite=summon>

these events drove hundreds of residents of the Cacarica River from their homes and lands, who were relegated to miserable living conditions.<sup>39</sup>

The Cacarica exhibition was a significant attempt of the National Museum of Colombia to acknowledge the voices of the victims of violence. The intention of emphasizing the survivors' suffering was a way for the state to demonstrate its concern for its citizens.

Besides the photographs taken by Campos, the exhibition had only three main texts that are reproduced on two pages of the publication of the memories of the V Annual Meeting Ernesto Restrepo Tirado, *Éxodo, patrimonio e identidad*. They are testimonies of the people who returned to Cacarica. No other narratives were part of the display in this occasion. One of the panels read:

Somos población civil y a nosotros nos deben respetar la vida. Sin la memoria no hay futuro de verdad, con la verdad habrá luz y esperanza. Cinco principios que identifican nuestra comunidad: la verdad, la libertad, la justicia, la solidaridad y la fraternidad, que nos dan vida. Nosotros le decimos a los que nos desplazaron que nosotros somos población civil y que nos dejen trabajar como campesinos que somos, que no participamos ni directa ni indirectamente con ningún actor armado, no queremos hacer parte de esta Guerra. *Comunidades de Autodeterminación, Vida, Dignidad del Cacarica (Chocó)*.<sup>40</sup>

We are civilians and our life should be respected. Without memory there is no true future, truth brings light and hope. Five principles mark our community: truth, liberty, justice, solidarity, and fraternity. They give us life. We say to the ones who displaced us that we are civilians that they should let us work as the peasants we are, we do not participate directly or indirectly with any armed group, we do not want to be part of this War. *Self-Determination, Life, and Dignity of Cacarica (Chocó)*.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Displaced Afro-descendant communities of the Cacarica River Basin (Operation Genesis) vs. Colombia. Record of the Sentence of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. Accessed February 5, 2015,

[http://www.corteidh.or.cr/cf/jurisprudencia/ficha.cfm?nId\\_Ficha=377&lang=es](http://www.corteidh.or.cr/cf/jurisprudencia/ficha.cfm?nId_Ficha=377&lang=es)

<sup>40</sup> Museo Nacional de Colombia. Cátedra Anual de Historia “Ernesto Restrepo Tirado”(Bogotá: Museo Nacional de Colombia, 2000): 171-172.

<sup>41</sup> My translation.

This exhibition was one of the first attempts of the National Museum to represent the current situation of the country and a significant effort to include in a national discourse subaltern voices—but apolitical voices that present the peasants renouncing any partisan position in the conflict. Moreover, perhaps unsurprisingly in an official exhibit, the voices of the perpetrators were absent.

***Exhibition “Hacer la paz en Colombia, Ya vuelvo”***

From September 9, 2010, to March 27, 2011, the National Museum of Colombia held the temporary exhibition “Hacer la paz en Colombia ‘Ya vuelvo’, Carlos Pizarro” (Making Peace in Colombia. “I’ll be Right Back,” Carlos Pizarro), which had been presented in Spain in 2009 in the Casa América Catalunya. Focusing on the life of one of the former M-19 guerrilla leader Carlos Pizarro, the display looked back to the tentative peace process of the 1980s and 1990s and the role played by Pizarro when he laid down arms and was reintegrated into civilian life.

Carlos Pizarro was often compared with Ernesto “Che” Guevara, the Argentine revolutionary leader, due to their alleged physical resemblance and their armed struggle against poverty and hunger. Pizarro was born in Cartagena in 1951 and was murdered in Bogotá in 1990. He was 39 years old. Pizarro’s assassination caused great consternation among Colombians because he was the third presidential candidate killed in an eight-month period.<sup>42</sup> The other two presidential candidates killed were Luis Carlos Galán,

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<sup>42</sup> Lozano, Pilar. April 27, 1990. “El ex guerrillero Carlos Pizarro ametrallado en un avión en vuelo”. *El País*. Accessed February 11, 2015, [http://elpais.com/diario/1990/04/27/internacional/641167201\\_850215.html](http://elpais.com/diario/1990/04/27/internacional/641167201_850215.html)

candidate of the Liberal Party, August 18, 1990; and Bernardo Jaramillo of the Patriotic Union Party, murdered on March 22, 1990.

Pizarro was one of the founders of the guerrilla movement M-19 and member of the FARC. He was flying from Bogotá to Barranquilla when a hitman shot him on the airplane. One of his bodyguards returned fire and killed the assassin but Pizarro had already received 15 gunshots. When the plane returned to Bogotá and he arrived at the hospital, it was too late to save him, and he died two hours after the attack.<sup>43</sup> Until today, the perpetrators of this crime have not been brought to justice.



**Photograph two:** Taken from <http://lucasospina.blogspot.com/2011/04/ya-vuelvo.html>. It shows Bernardo Jaramillo, in a yellow shirt rising his hand; Carlos Pizarro in the middle, with a white hat; and Luis Carlos Galán. The three presidential candidates murdered in 1990. It reads: “We cannot die for nothing, nobody dies for nothing, and nobody should die for nothing.” (My translation.)

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

The name of the exhibition, “Ya vuelvo” (“I will be right back”), is an allusion to Pizarro’s desertion from the guerrilla. On September 11, 1973, he left a note on his folded uniform besides his service gun with those words.<sup>44</sup> The display, curated by his daughter, aimed to show Pizarro as a symbol of peace, highlighting some of his personal belongings like one of his hats, his letters, and his gun. It also depicted the peace processes of the 1980s and 1990s, the creation of the M-19, the amnesty that allowed Pizarro to recover his liberty after spending three years in prison, and the Palace of Justice Siege. This is significant because it is one of the few times that the National Museum of Colombia included in its exhibitions the Palace of Justice episode.

On November 6, 1985, Colombia suffered one of the boldest guerrilla attacks in its recent history, the Palace of Justice Siege. That day, in the late morning, near Bolívar Square, in downtown Bogotá, the conflict started with some shooting. Twenty-eight guerrilla members of the M-19 stormed into the basement of the Palace of Justice. They entered in three vehicles, killing the security guards and the building administrator. Another seven guerrilla members waited inside, and outside 28 insurgents were waiting because they did not arrive on time. Thus began the Antonio Nariño Operation, an armed action designed to judge the Colombian President Belisario Betancur (1982-1986) for

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<sup>44</sup> Pizarro, María José and Ruíz, Catalina (Curators). *Hacer la paz en Colombia “Ya vuelvo”, Carlos Pizarro. Documentación Exposición*. (Bogotá-Catalunya: Museo Nacional de Colombia, Casa América Catalunya, Fundación Carlos Pizarro, Ministerio de Cultura de Colombia, 200 Culturaes Independencia Bicentenario de las Independencias 1810-2010, 2011): 1.

supposedly betraying the cease-fire agreement signed by the guerrillas and the government on 24 August 1984.<sup>45</sup>

During this attack there were 98 dead and 215 survivors of 313 people that were at that time in the Palace of Justice. Among the deceased were 11 magistrates of the Supreme Court and 11 disappearances: seven employees of the cafeteria, three visitors, and the niece of a magistrate. Only 54 identified bodies were returned to their relatives and 36 were buried in a mass grave. According to a Truth Commission created to investigate the event, there is not an exact figure for the number of guerrillas killed. Of the 41 that were going to be part of the siege, only 35 entered, and of the two guerrilla survivors, one disappeared.<sup>46</sup>

Journalist Anna Carrigan, in her book *El Palacio de Justicia: Una tragedia colombiana* (The Palace of Justice. A Colombian Tragedy) describes the facts that took place during the attack. She analyzes the failures of the mandate of Belisario Betancur and the actions that provoked the siege. The victims and some of the perpetrators died due to some fires and smoke that ignited inside the Palace because of burning papers, the shooting between the M-19 and the Army, and the intrusion of National Army tanks that stormed in the building despite the claims of the magistrates to the President to retreat

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<sup>45</sup> Grillo, Andrés, May 30, 2004, “Noviembre 6 de 1985. La herida abierta”. *Revista Semana*, Accessed November 30, 2014, <http://www.semana.com/especiales/articulo/noviembre-1985-brla-herida-abierta/65866-3>

<sup>46</sup> “La tragedia del Palacio de Justicia, un monumento a la impunidad”, November 4, 2010. *Revista Semana*, Accessed November 30, 2014, <http://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/la-tragedia-del-palacio-justicia-monumento-impunidad/124115-3>



them.<sup>47</sup> After 28 hours of fierce combat with the Colombian Army, the guerrilla was defeated.

The M-19 was the group that established kidnappings as a common practice but its actions aimed to be monumental rather than lethal. However, for some Colombian sectors, the Palace of Justice Siege went too far and was the event that ended every kind of peace attempt during Betancur's mandate. Even five years after the Siege, in 1990, when members of the demobilized M-19 began to take part in the public and political life of the country, they were targeted for extermination.<sup>48</sup> Their alleged association with the political party Unión Patriótica, UP<sup>49</sup>, triggered the assassination of its members. The members of the UP suffered persecution because they were also associated with the FARC. Even though some of their associates were not affiliated with guerrillas it did not matter, the assumption was enough to take them out. In 1985, at the time of the Siege of the Supreme Court, Pizarro was the Second Commander of the M-19.

“Ya vuelvo,” took place in 2010 in the hall of the National Museum called, *Ideología, artes e industria* (Ideology, Arts, and Industry). It had many quotes from Pizarro's public statements, like the last one he made as a presidential candidate in 1990: “Ofrecemos algo elemental, simple y sencillo: que la vida no sea asesinada en

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<sup>47</sup> Carrigan, Anna. *El Palacio de Justicia. Una tragedia colombiana*. (Bogotá: Editorial Ícono, 2009).

<sup>48</sup> Bello, Martha Nubia (Coord.). *¡Basta Ya! Colombia: Memoria de guerra y dignidad*. (Bogotá: Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica): 137.

<sup>49</sup> The Patriotic Union or UP was a leftist Colombian political party. The FARC and the Colombian Communist Party founded it in 1985, as part of the peace negotiations that the guerrillas held with the Conservative Belisario Betancur administration. The party was subject to political violence from drug lords, paramilitaries and security forces agents during the mid-1980s, leading to its decline, disappearance and extermination.

primavera,” (“We offer something elementary, simple, and plain: that life should not be assassinated in Spring”<sup>50</sup>).

The exhibit also had videos of his public life, and some interactive devices such as display boxes for visitors to handle in order to find out different aspects of his life. The room also included a showcase containing some objects that survived the Palace of Justice Siege, such a complete list with the names of the people who died, an audio file of the Coronel Plazas Vega, one of the military officers in charge of recovering the Palace even with blood and fire, and his combat helmet. Next to this showcase, there was an audio file with the voice of the president of the Supreme Court, Alfonso Reyes Echandía, claiming to stop the fire. In between these two cabinets, there was a beheaded sculpture and a burnt-out typewriter.<sup>51</sup> Other cases displayed M-19 letters, more audio files, publications, and bracelets of the guerrilla group. “Ya vuelvo” also presented the demobilization of the M-19, the participation of its leaders and members in the presidential elections of 1990 and the National Constituent Assembly.<sup>52</sup>

The National Museum of Colombia mounted this temporary exhibition as part of a strategic plan that seeks “to contribute effectively to the development of the country and

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<sup>50</sup> Pizarro, María José and Ruíz, Catalina (Curators). *Hacer la paz en Colombia “Ya vuelvo”, Carlos Pizarro. Documentación Exposición.* (Bogotá-Catalunya: Museo Nacional de Colombia, Casa América Catalunya, Fundación Carlos Pizarro, Ministerio de Cultura de Colombia, 200 Culturaes Independencia Bicentenario de las Independencias 1810-2010, 2011): 1.

<sup>51</sup> Nullvalue, September 14, 2010. “El legado de Carlos Pizarro Leongómez”. *El Tiempo*, Accessed February 11, 2015, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-4141014>

<sup>52</sup> “Hacer la paz en Colombia, “Ya vuelvo”, Carlos Pizarro”. (*Vive.in*, 2011). Accessed, February 11, 2015), [http://bogota.vive.in/arte/bogota/exposiciones/septiembre2010/EVENTO-WEB-FICHA\\_EVENTO\\_VIVEIN-7899049.html](http://bogota.vive.in/arte/bogota/exposiciones/septiembre2010/EVENTO-WEB-FICHA_EVENTO_VIVEIN-7899049.html).

to the overcoming of the national conflicts.”<sup>53</sup> The Museum, following the directives’ initiatives of the 1990s, wants to promote a space for remembering in a critical way the violent acts of the two last decades of the twentieth century. This effort is also reflected in the hall opened in December 2014 and mentioned before.

### ***Failed Exhibition of Tirofijo’s Towel***

Pedro Antonio Marín, nicknamed Sure-fire (Tirofijo), was the real name of the guerrilla leader whose *nom de guerre* was Manuel Marulanda Vélez. His cold-blooded ability to fire arms with great accuracy made him famous. He was the leader of the FARC for more than 30 years. Born in 1930, he was the only guerrilla leader in the world who died at a ripe old age: 78.

Tirofijo carried around a towel, to dry the sweat from his face and shoo away mosquitoes and flies. This item, sometimes white, yellow or red, became an identity marker of Marulanda Vélez. He changed the color of the towel according to the occasion. For example, during the mandate of the Conservative President Andrés Pastrana, 1998-2002, and the ensuing failed peace process, Tirofijo used the red one. The Conservative Party of Colombia is associated with the color blue and the Liberal party with red. “Whenever he arrives [President Andrés Pastrana] with a blue shirt, I wear the red towel,” Tirofijo affirmed, “Because I am a Liberal.”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> “Hacer la paz en Colombia, “Ya vuelvo”, Carlos Pizarro. Museo Nacional de Colombia, available at <http://www.museonacional.gov.co/exposiciones/pasadas/Paginas/HacerlapazenColombia13.aspx>.

<sup>54</sup> Lozano, Pilar. May 31, 2008. “El oficio de ser Tirofijo”. *El País*. Accessed November 26, 2014, [http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2008/05/31/actualidad/1212184809\\_850215.html](http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2008/05/31/actualidad/1212184809_850215.html)

Tirofijo's towel became a well-known symbol of the armed conflict of Colombia. This is why in 2001, the director of the National Museum, Elvira Cuervo de Jaramillo, a Conservative politician, decided that the piece could be part of the collection of the institution and even displayed in an exhibition. This initiative surprised or offended certain social sectors. Some politicians and journalists saw it as a way of condoning Tirofijo's violent actions and the idea was widely criticized.

The exhibition proposed by the director of the National Museum at the time proved too controversial to succeed. She received so many letters filled with protest that the initiative died. Defending her position, she stated, "People think we are going to build Tirofijo an altar and that is not true. We know how much damage the guerrillas have done to the country."<sup>55</sup> Scholars of the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana of Bogotá, Colombia, Carlos del Cairo and Jefferson Jaramillo, in their article, "Los dilemas de la *museificación*. Reflexiones en torno a dos iniciativas estatales de construcción de memoria colectiva en Colombia" ("The Dilemmas of *Museification*. Reflections on Two State Initiatives for Building Collective Memory in Colombia"), analyzed the implications of Cuervo de Jaramillo's initiative. They stated that the strategy of the director of the National Museum to validate her proposal was to resort to the function of

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<sup>55</sup> El Tiempo, March 4, 2001. "Continúa debate sobre toalla de Tirofijo". El Tiempo. Accessed November 30, 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-599277>

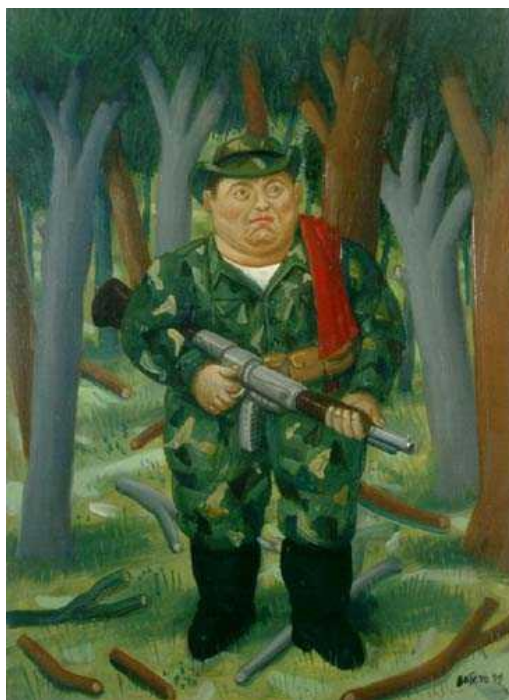
the institution to be the memory keeper of the country and the need to preserve objects with symbolic value, representative of current times, to be exhibited in the future.<sup>56</sup>

According to the then director of the institution, the aim of the National Museum was to collect significant objects that represent the contemporary history of Colombia. “But that does not imply that they are going to be necessarily part of an exhibition” because “we are aware that we cannot show the recent history of the country yet. We know we have to present all this in a particular rather distant moment.”<sup>57</sup> This statement of Cuervo de Jaramillo was meant to appease the wrath of the people outraged by her proposal of exhibiting the towel. Even though her main goal was to present the object to the public, if that was not possible at least the Museum would have the towel in its collections.

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<sup>56</sup> Jaramillo, Jefferson and Del Cairo, Carlos. (2013). Los dilemas de la *museificación*. Reflexiones en torno a dos iniciativas estatales de construcción. *Memoria y Sociedad* 17 (35): 76-92.

<sup>57</sup> El Tiempo, March 4, 2001. “Continúa debate sobre toalla de Tirofijo”. *El Tiempo*. Accessed November 30, 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-599277>



**Photograph three:** *Tirofijo* by Fernando Botero, painter and sculptor from Medellín, Colombia. This artist is famous for his depictions of people and figures in large, exaggerated volume, which represent political satire or humor. He is considered one of the most recognized Latin American artists. This depiction of *Tirofijo*, 1999, is in the Botero Museum in Medellín.

The hate mail Cuervo de Jaramillo received clearly demonstrated that many Colombians were not ready to look back and remember violent episodes dispassionately; it was too soon. However, the merit of her action was that she was looking beyond the moment and thinking about the kind of history that the Museum wanted to convey for future generations. Cuervo de Jaramillo attempted to make the National Museum a more inclusive institution. “I want the critics to tell me how are we going to tell the last 15 years of the history of this country without drug trafficking, paramilitaries, and the growth of the guerrilla. What do they want, that we tell that part of history with green ribbons and

white doves?”<sup>58</sup> She also had in mind two important events in Colombia’s historical past from which there are no physical remnants at all: The Banana Massacre of 1929, and the Revolution of the Commoners of 1781. Besides, the Museum has objects that belonged to Pablo Morillo, El Pacificador (The Pacifier), the fearsome soldier sent by the Spanish crown to reconquer New Granada.<sup>59</sup>

As far as Cuervo was concerned, one of the goals of the Museum’s collections was and is to contain several representative objects of Colombia’s recent violent history, among them Tirofijo’s towel. Cuervo de Jaramillo never stated she was looking for this item only. In this sense, she also made clear her intention of acquiring articles of other protagonists of the Colombian armed conflict, such as those of Carlos Castaño, the feared extreme right paramilitary leader.<sup>60</sup>

Cuervo de Jaramillo was in contact with Tirofijo and Iván Márquez, another guerrilla leader, when she visited San Vicente del Caguán,<sup>61</sup> town and municipality in the Department of Caquetá, which between 1998 and 2002 was the center of a demilitarized zone (DMZ), created for dialoguing with the FARC. The guerrilla leader accepted the proposal and said he would donate to the National Museum “the red one, which I used in

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> El Nuevo Herald, February 15, 2001. “El Museo de Colombia quiere exhibir la toalla de Tirofijo”. El Nuevo Herald. Accessed November 30, 2014, <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/farc/toalla.htm>.

<sup>60</sup> “Quieren exhibir la toalla de Tirofijo en Museo colombiano”, February 20, 2001. Accessed November 30, 2014, <http://www.terra.com.ve/actualidad/articulo/html/act28804.htm#top>

<sup>61</sup> Nullvalue, February 15, 2001. “Toalla de Tirofijo, de Museo”. El Tiempo, Accessed November 30, 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-620521>

the meeting with President Pastrana,”<sup>62</sup> the only condition that Marulanda Vélez demanded was that Cuervo de Jaramillo had to receive it in person.

The controversy caused by Cuervo de Jaramillo’s intention to enrich the National Museum’s collection with Tirofijo’s towel was so vast that she had to let the idea die. Regarding the fate of the towel, the only confirmed fact is that it never reached the National Museum.<sup>63</sup> If it had, perhaps it would have suffered the same destiny of other contested objects, which are actually part of the Museum’s collections, and have not been the subject of any exhibition yet. Among these pieces, it is possible to find the shirt that Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, Liberal politician, wore the day of his assassination in 1948, the event that triggered the riots of *El Bogotazo*. In addition, there is the suit Luis Carlos Galán, Liberal presidential candidate, killed by order of Pablo Escobar, was wearing the day of his shooting in 1989, which his wife donated to the Museum in 1999.<sup>64</sup> Despite the latter items being symbols of the armed conflict in Colombia and pertaining to two recognized victims, their display has not been possible because they raise mixed feelings of anger, sadness, impunity, and a sense that their exposure would suggest equivalency between killers and martyrs.

The objects that the National Museum of Colombia has not exhibited reveal the continuity in its narrative of the history of the country. The aim is to highlight an official

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<sup>62</sup> “Toalla de Tirofijo al Museo Nacional”. March 1, 2001. *Tal Cual*, Accessed November 30, 2014, <http://www.talcualdigital.com/ediciones/2001/03/01/p2s4.htm>

<sup>63</sup> Salamanca, Fernando, October 6, 2013. “Lo que el Museo Nacional no ha podido exhibir”. Kienyke.com, Accessed November 30, 2014, <http://www.kienyke.com/historias/lo-que-el-museo-nacional-no-ha-podido-exhibir/>

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*



discourse that has only included the perspective of the war's victims. The failed attempt of Cuervo de Jaramillo in 2001 is an example of this. The National Museum must not give any prominence to perpetrators of violence. However, some questions arise: Why did Colombians did not object to Carlos Pizarro's exhibition but hold such strong feelings towards Tirofijo's towel? Perhaps, because Pizarro was already reintegrated to civilian society and thus no longer seen as an assassin? Maybe because Pizarro had a tragic dead and was no longer a threat?

## MUSEUMS IN COLOMBIA

One way way societies deal with the pain of violent past events is by their representation in museums. Like in other Latin American countries, the atrocities committed in Colombia have been depicted in displays and some venues. However, not all of the sites related to historical memory display violence in the same way, and some of them not touch upon this subject at all.

There are 14 conventional museums in Colombia, attached to the Ministry of Culture that present historical topics in a traditional way. They are places that display an official narrative of historical facts, events, or significant people, such as presidents or independence heroes, and they receive state support and funding. Mostly, they praise patriotic personalities and events and they fit perfectly in the definition rendered of them by the International Council of Museums (ICOM): “A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.”<sup>65</sup>

Among these institutions, the best known is the National Museum of Colombia, founded in 1823 as a scientific institution. Its creation responded to the government’s interest to have a school of mining that had a natural history museum directed by the director of the school. Its intention was also to continue the work of the Spanish Royal

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<sup>65</sup> ICOM Accessed October 26, 2014, <http://icom.museum/the-vision/museum-definition/>

Botanical Expedition, 1783-1816.<sup>66</sup> Over time, the character of the museum evolved and with the turn of the twentieth century, the directors became more interested in presenting art and historic displays. So much so that until today the Museum preserves the division of having in its first floor prehispanic themes, in the second, historical matters, and in the third, artistic themes.<sup>67</sup> At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Museum acquired many archaeological pieces and promoted historical research. There was an interest at the time to recover a glorious prehispanic past and to devote attention to monuments. Colombian politicians and scholars wanted to show the world that in Colombia there were complex societies, similar to those of the Mayas, Incas, and Aztecs.<sup>68</sup>

Another institution as imposing as the National Museum of Colombia is the Gold Museum. This site is part of the Bank of the Republic, established in 1923, the state-run central bank that issues the Colombian peso among other tasks. In 1939 the Bank acquired the poporo quimbaya<sup>69</sup>, a well known gold prehispanic piece, by orders of the Ministry of Education.<sup>70</sup> That piece started the collection of the museum that currently has approximately 34,000 gold objects. The Gold Museum has an official narrative that

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<sup>66</sup> Segura, Martha. *Itinerario del Museo Nacional de Colombia, 1823-1994*. Tomo I. (Bogotá: Museo Nacional de Colombia, Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, 1995): 48.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 441-442.

<sup>68</sup> Botero, Clara Isabel. *El redescubrimiento del pasado prehispánico de Colombia: viajeros, arqueólogos y coleccionistas, 1820-1945*. (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Antropología e Historia, Universidad de Los Andes, 2006): 193-224.

<sup>69</sup> A poporo is a device used by indigenous cultures in present and pre-Columbian South America for storage of small amounts of lime (mineral). It has two pieces: the receptacle, and the lid, which includes a pin used to carry the lime to the mouth while chewing coca leaves. A very famous one is the Poporo Quimbaya, precolumbian artpiece of the classic quimbaya period, around 300 CE.

<sup>70</sup> Sánchez Cabra, Efraín. El Museo del Oro. *Boletín Cultural y Bibliográfico*. Vol. 40, No. 64, (2003): 3.

celebrates and preserves the complex gold work of the prehispanic cultures of Colombia, but its objective is similar to the one of the National Museum: to convey an official discourse exalting nationalism.

Following the trend of promoting greater regional pride within a nationalistic context, in 1998 the Vice President of the Republic proposed the first regional museum in the country. Inaugurated in 2009, the El Museo del Caribe (Museum of the Caribbean), in Barranquilla, the largest city and port in the Caribbean Coast region of the country, seeks to highlight the historical and cultural wealth of the Caribbean region.<sup>71</sup> It also conveys the same narrative as the National and Gold Museums, but at a regional level.

What is revealing is that the official museums mentioned here only deal with violence tangentially. They present violence only in temporary exhibitions, if they do at all, and usually show testimonies and survivors' experiences. When putting together significant exhibitions for commemorations, for example, producers and coordinators of displays overlook the armed conflict. Perhaps this is due to the stigma of Colombia as a beleaguered country, the desire to convey other ideas, or maybe because the internal war is too complex and controversial to exhibit, narrate, or represent.

An illustration of the above is the National Museum's exhibition held in 1994 to mark the quincentenary of the arrival of the Spaniards to the Americas. For such an important occasion, the Museum reopened its first floor with three halls: two

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<sup>71</sup> Forero, Andrés. "Sí, el Caribe también tiene sabor: producción de identidades regionales en el Museo del Caribe." *Baukara, bitácoras de antropología e historia de la antropología en América Latina*. (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2013): 36.

archaeological and one ethnographic. Milenios de diversidad (Millenniums of Diversity), the name of the exhibit, intended to convey an image of a culturally complex territory in which different human groups survive thanks to their own traditions and experience.<sup>72</sup>

The three halls of the exhibition showed archaeological objects from 18,000 B.C. to 1,200 AD, and the ethnographic gallery focused on contemporary indigenous and Afro-descendant groups. The latter hall was very controversial because its intention was to represent the reality of the time but it focused on exalting the cultural diversity through crafts, ceremonies, food, traditions, and worldviews. The difficult situations related to violence and the armed conflict (racism, marginality, poverty, lack of education) were not in any way part of Milenios de diversidad. Despite the fact that these communities experienced massacres, extrajudicial killings, kidnapping, disappearances, and many other brutalities, these facts were absent. Even the catalogue did not mention them.

Milenios de diversidad was a highly publicized event. The President of Colombia officiated at the opening of the exhibition and highlighted its importance for understanding Colombian realities.<sup>73</sup> This is also an example of how the state omitted narratives concerning (more recent) historical violence. In this sense, the National Museum adheres to its traditional self-appointed role as a civilizing agent in Colombia.

T. Bennett notes that during the nineteenth century the relation between culture and government developed through museums in England. Bennett states the capacity

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<sup>72</sup> Pineda Camacho, Roberto. Intérpretes de Milenios de diversidad. Milenios de diversidad. *Catálogo-Guía*. (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, Cámara de Comercio de Bogotá, 1994): 11-17:

<sup>73</sup> Nullvalue. Gaviría abrió la muestra Milenios de diversidad, August 3, 1994. *El Tiempo*, Accessed December 4, 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-187829>

attributed to high culture (museums) to transform the inner lives of the population as to alter their forms of life and behavior. Museums were meant to help govern the masses. The author bases his arguments in the Foucaultian notion of power, conveying that museums are a “civilizing” and regulating mechanism. They went from private to public displays, mediated by power discourses that the government intended to convey. It was about order, discipline, and surveillance.<sup>74</sup> Bennett’s interpretation of a museum’s function applies to the National Museum of Colombia, for instance. Its current headquarters, known as the Panopticon, served as a prison until 1946; in 1948 the building was adapted to become the National Museum, and renovated in 1975.

### ***Non-Official Memory Sites in Colombia***

Museums validate the past. Its formal exhibitions of former events highlight their relevance for societies and makes them part of their memory. However, there are different ways in which they do this. Memory museums generally relate to violence and armed conflicts. Since the 1980s they are emerging in Latin America and Colombia is no exception. Many are local initiatives to recreate and represent the violence inflicted upon communities in the decades of 1980 and 1990 through displays that range from photographs, murals, halls, and cemeteries to traveling exhibitions. They are constructing a particular memory to be remembered by future generations, and leaving out others, perhaps intentionally. The communities affected by violence feel the need to heal that past and view memory museums as an instrument to chronicle what they lived.

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<sup>74</sup> Bennett, Tony. *The Birth of the Museums*. (Routledge: London): 75-111.

These kind of commemorative spaces surged as non-state responses to represent historical violence. They are places for mourning, grieving, and of memory. However, they differ from the state museums in the ways in which they narrate their stories. Most of them are built from the bottom up with scarce funding. Their coordinators are community leaders, who generally feel excluded from national narratives regarding violence, and some do not want the entities to be regarded as museums, according to the ICOM definition.

The following chart shows 10 examples of memory sites in Colombia, but there are more, and plans for founding others. The ones presented here are part of an issue of a Colombian magazine called *Arcadia*, which in October 2014 published a special edition about memory. The venues chosen wanted to show the versatility of these places and attempted to publicize some less known memorials. Nevertheless, some important ones are not included, such as the Museo Itinerante de la Memoria de los Montes de María (Traveling Museum of the Memory of Montes de María); the Parque Monumento (Monument Park) of Trujillo, Valle; and the project of National Museum of Memory (Museo Nacional de la Memoria), to open in 2018. The chart also illustrates the diverse formats these places acquire.

**Table 2. Some Memory Places in Colombia**

<b>Memory Site</b>	<b>Town and Department of Colombia</b>
Galería Bélica, Warlike Gallery	El Placer, Putumayo, 1996
Casa de la memoria del Pacífico Nariñense, Memory House of the Nariñense Pacific	Tumaco, Nariño, 2013
Salón del nunca más, Hall of Never Again	Granada, Antioquia, 2009
Jardines resistentes de vida, Resistant Life Gardens	Medellín, Antioquia, 2008
Bosque de la memoria, Memory Forest	San Martín, Meta, 2008
La iglesia de Bojayá, Bojaya´s Church	Bojayá, Chocó, 2002
Ejes de la memoria, Axes of Memory	Bogotá, S.D., 2014
Quiosco de la memoria, Kiosk of Memory	Las Brisas, Bolívar, 2000
La Casa Arana, The Arana House	La Chorrera, Amazonas, 2015
Cementerio gente como uno, Cemetery People Like Us	Riohacha, Guajira, 2007

Memory sites are also emerging because of the state’s inability or refusal to include local communities in their narratives. It is impossible for the Colombian government to represent all the victims and survivors of the nation’s decades of political violence; they are too many, even with the emphasis only on the victims’ voices. Besides, government institutions like the National Museum do not have the capacity or resources to represent each one of the communities where massacres took place. The Cacarica exhibition mentioned before is an exception that can be explained by the effort the National Museum of Colombia is undertaking to include several and diverse narratives in its displays. Therefore, memorials supplement this gap, with the advantage that they represent and recreate their violent past according to their own cultural backgrounds, patterns, beliefs, and behaviors. This communities are in control of their decisions and do not follow the ones dictated by the state.

An important distinction worth mentioning is the one between memory and



community sites, memorials, or museums. There are about twenty of the latter in Colombia. They are spaces where the members of a community build self-knowledge and representation. They promote reflection, a critical perspective, and creativity, projecting the community's lifestyle inwards and outwards. Community museums also fortify memory, which feeds future aspirations.<sup>75</sup>

This definition, as opposed to that of the ICOM, takes into account local and regional processes, often including variables such as memory and identity, which relate more to the culture and manifestations of societies. Anyhow, memory sites, and among them memory museums, are different because they focus in exhibiting the memory related to the armed conflict, whereas community museums encompass several topics such as archaeological, ethnographic, and even scientific concerns.<sup>76</sup>

The memory museums that appeared in the decade of the 1990s emerged because communities felt underrepresented by the government. They could not countenance ignoring, forgetting, or overlooking the atrocities they had experienced.

### ***Hall of Never Again, Granada, Antioquia***

Founded in 2009, the main goal of the Hall of Never Again is to make the public aware of the violence this community experienced. Its main display consists of a wall covered with 180 photographs of some of the 2000 or more people murdered in Granada,

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<sup>75</sup> “¿Qué es un museo comunitario?” Accessed April 10, 2014, <http://museoscomunitarios.org>.

<sup>76</sup> Some community museums such as the Community Museum of San Jacinto are considered archaeological because they have an important amount of archaeological pieces, which are labeled, registered, and treated as a collection. In addition, the community feels very proud of these objects and identify themselves with them.

since the decade of 1980.<sup>77</sup> In this Hall, the survivors remember crimes such as 128 disappearances, 83 victims of landmines, and the displacement of 70 percent of the population.<sup>78</sup>



**Photograph four:** Entrance to the Hall of Never Again. Photo: Jimena Perry, August 2012.

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<sup>77</sup> “Sepultadas 21 personas de la masacre en Granada, Antioquia.” (Medellín: Caracol, 2000). Accessed April 9, 2014, <http://www.caracol.com.co/noticias/judiciales/sepultadas-21-personas-de-la-masacre-en-granada-antioquia/20001105/nota/75878.aspx>.

<sup>78</sup> Alonso López, Néstor. “Granada, Antioquia, el pueblo que dijo ‘Nunca más’ a la violencia. *El Tiempo* (Bogotá: 2010).

The intention of the picture display is to impress upon visitors that these were persons just like them; people whose lives marked a community and who therefore deserve remembrance. On another wall, beside the photographs, there are children's paintings, products of the workshops that the project encouraged. To the left of the picture display there are images of 15 mass graves found in Granada. The aim is that the spectator "assumes and puts him or herself in the victim's place."<sup>79</sup>

In another room, the visitor finds a large photograph of a march that took place in December 9, 2000, three days after the FARC destroyed the town. If someone was murdered his or her picture becomes part of the wall.



**Photograph five:** View of the wall with the pictures at the Hall of Never Again. Photo: Jimena Perry. August 2012.

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

One way the creators of this Hall have found to help the survivors cope with the brutal attacks they experienced is the use of *bitácoras*. These are notebooks where relatives and friends of the victims can express the sadness they feel due to their absence. They are tools designed to make the grieving process easier. In these *bitácoras*, it is possible to find mothers talking to their children, husbands to their wives, brothers to sisters, children to their parents, wives to their spouses, and other family members remembering their departed loved ones.

These notebooks become objects and records of the exhibition and in this sense they become a source of historical testimony and analysis. In their pages, it is possible to find narratives of the violence lived by a particular person or family and how they survived. The *bitácoras*, approximately 50, are public documents intended to talk to the dead, to show why he or she was important and who she or he was. They also help the public and visitors of the Hall to learn about local contexts and to link the people to community reconstruction processes. The *bitácoras* are as well part of the healing process of the survivors because there they can write down their feelings of loss and anger.

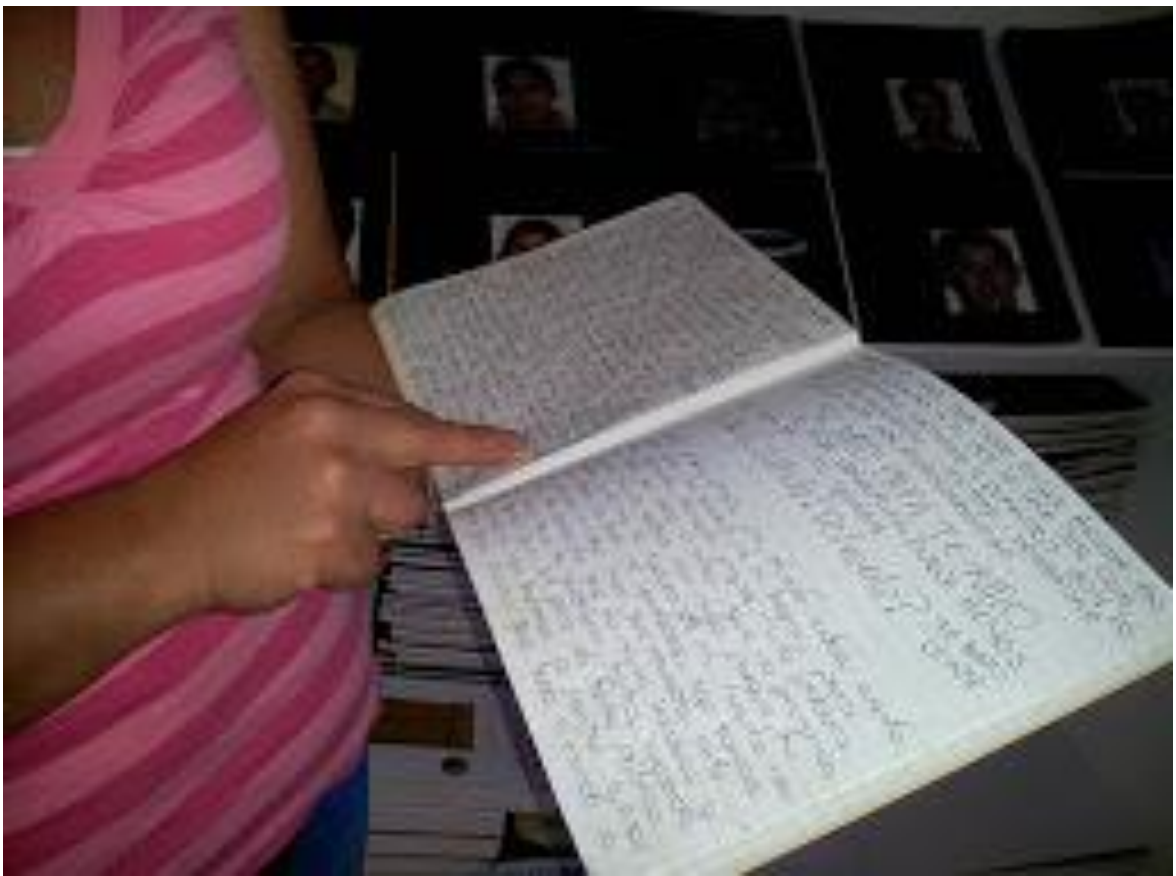
The *bitácoras* help to restore the social fabric of the community.<sup>80</sup> As Gloria Ramírez, one of the community leaders and coordinators of the process says “[they are part of a] place set up for our reparation, not the state one, but our own.”<sup>81</sup> The creators of

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<sup>80</sup> Ramírez, Gloria. Interview by Jimena Perry. Granada, Antioquia, Colombia. August 14, 2012.

<sup>81</sup> Ramírez, Gloria and Luengas, Lorena. “Salón del Nunca Más, Granada. Un proceso comunitario. Oriente Antioqueño.” *Museos, comunidades y reconciliación. Experiencias y memorias en diálogo. XIV Cátedra de Historia Ernesto Restrepo Tirado*. (Bogotá: Museo Nacional de Colombia, Universidad Externado de Colombia, 2009): 55.

the Hall designed these *bitácoras* so the victims and their families, besides expressing their pain and talking to their dead loved ones, could serve as records of when and how many people disappeared or died, and how many suffered displacement. They are a way to continue their relationship with the ones who were taken away, to let the public know what happened to the victims and their families, and perhaps to press for accountability in the future for the perpetrators.



**Photograph six:** Gloria Quintero, one of the peasant leaders of Granada and creators of the Hall. She is reading a *bitácora*. Photo: Jimena Perry, August, 2012.

The picture above shows Gloria Quintero, community leader, reading a *bitácora*. It is written by a daughter talking to her father. It reads,

I have many things to tell you, my dear father, I am older now, I have many more years, time goes by so fast. My love, my life has changed dramatically since you are not here. God gave many things but there are some many questions I need to ask you because you are the best teacher. Due to all the things you taught me I have been able to succeed. My dream is to see you again. I have suffered and I know that you too. [...] Father, no time is enough to thank you for what you did for me. [...] Now I understand so many things of life, however, I do not understand what happened to you, I do not understand, father. I do not understand, I never will. Why did they destroy my family? [...] They sent you to a place you did not deserve to be. From where you are, they broke my life and soul in a thousand pieces. I owe to you what I am now. I love you, father, I love you.

The Hall of Never Again is the result of a process that took six years. After the last massacre, in 2003, the community gathered in their grief and carried out activities, such as Stations of the Cross, a *chocolatada* (sharing one of the traditional drinks of their region, hot chocolate), sharing a *sancocho* (a stew of Latin America and the Caribbean made from various meats, tubers such as yams or cassavas, and other ingredients), and a fundraiser named *Granadatón*. These efforts gave the people a sense of solidarity and a new hope to believe they could overcome their violent past.

In 2013, the population of Granada commemorated the ten years that had passed since the bombing that destroyed the main square of the town. As Gloria Quintero, one of the leaders that made the Hall possible, says “[...] the value of remembering. Our loved ones die when we forget them. We want children to learn that forgetting is not the way to mourn.”<sup>82</sup> Gloria, like most of the people that still live in Granada, was a victim of violence: her brother was disappeared by paramilitaries in 2001.

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<sup>82</sup> Quintero, Gloria. Interview by Jimena Perry. Granada, Antioquia, Colombia. August 14, 2012.

The efforts of the founders of the Hall of Never Again focus on the symbolic reparation of the victims because they are aware of the impossibility of bringing back the dead. Their goal is to help people grieve and find closure for the absence of their loved ones. This intention, not part of the classic definition of a museum, marks the difference in their conceptualization and execution. It found inspiration in two similar Latin American venues. The Hall took into account the Guatemalan experience in the Recovery of Historical Memory (Recuperación de Memoria Histórica, Remhi), following its methodology of collection of testimonies.<sup>83</sup> Project Remhi was born in 1995 with the aim to find a non-official version of the violence lived in Guatemala during the twentieth century and to account for the victims' pain. The Remhi Project achieved this objective through workshops. The Granada community emulated this process. The purpose was to acknowledge another's pain and to understand and sympathize with his or her experiences.

Another influence for the Hall of Never Again was the Peruvian exhibition *Yuyanapaq. For Remembering, Visual Narrative of the Armed Conflict in Peru, 1980-2000* (*Para recordar, relato visual del conflicto armado interno en el Perú (1980-2000)*), founded by the Centro de Información para la Memoria Colectiva y los Derechos Humanos (Center of Information for the Collective Memory and Human Rights), established by the National Truth Commission of that country. The organizers used testimonies and photographs in the display with the aim of bringing together the observer

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

with the survivor and his or her family.<sup>84</sup>

The Hall of Never Again in Granada, inspired by the two aforementioned examples, combines features of classical museums, as defined by the ICOM , such as its non-profit character, their desire to be a permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of their region for education and study. However, one of the big differences in this definition is that the Hall of Never Again is not a place of enjoyment. In addition, the Hall follows principles of the new museology, which are more socially oriented, “instilling confidence in a society’s potential for development.”<sup>85</sup> For the new museology, the museum is “a tool available to a society to find, give form to, mark, and demarcate its identity, its territory and its frontiers in time and space, with respect to other societies and other social and cultural groups.”<sup>86</sup> The Granada Hall’s challenge is to give the visitors the sense of a living past, one that is present and needs to be known to prevent its recurrence.

The nature of the Hall of Never Again is a controversial matter. Its creators do not want their institution to be part of a classical definition of museums. Even though their goal is to exhibit their past, they do not want to convey a static sense of the violence exerted upon them. Thus, the first step the founders of the Hall took was to define its nature, functions, actions, and name. This reflected their conviction that museums were

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>85</sup> Hauenschild, Andrea. *Claims and Reality of New Museology: Case Studies in Canada, the United States and Mexico*. Accessed November 9, 2014, <http://museumstudies.si.edu/claims2000.htm#2>. Elements

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.



places for antiquities and dead animals. They have nothing to do with life while the Hall is for thinking about life.<sup>87</sup> The creators of the Hall need and want the validation that a museum provides but not the name.

The Hall of Never Again is a community response to the legal impunity and state silence that has surrounded these atrocities. Its funding does not come from the Colombian government and due to its scarce resources it only opens during the weekends. However, the Hall has received financial assistance from international agencies such as Spanish International Cooperation Agency for Development (Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo, AECID) and has won national peace prizes such as the Special Category Award of the Orlando López Prize in 2010. The emergence of this Hall and the fact that funding is not from the Colombian State demonstrates the impossibility –or unwillingness– of the government to honor the victims of the armed conflict. It also shows a kind of indifference towards small towns and municipalities that are far from the center of state power and do not carry significant economic or political weight in Colombia. The state’s inability to embrace victims and survivors of political violence is likewise reflected in the emergence of the Traveling Museum of the Memory of Montes de María, the next topic for discussion.

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<sup>87</sup> Ramírez, Gloria and Luengas, Lorena. “Salón del Nunca Más, Granada. Un proceso comunitario. Oriente Antioqueño.” *Museos, comunidades y reconciliación. Experiencias y memorias en diálogo. XIV Cátedra de Historia Ernesto Restrepo Tirado*. (Bogotá: Museo Nacional de Colombia, Universidad Externado de Colombia, 2009): 34.

### ***Traveling Museum of the Memory of Montes de María***

After the most intense assaults on civilians ended by the mid-2000s, the communities of the municipalities of Montes de María, organized themselves with the help and support of the Communications Colectivo de Comunicaciones Montes de María Línea 21 (Collective of Montes de María Line 21<sup>88</sup>). The Traveling Museum of the Memory of Montes de María, nicknamed *El Mochuelo*, planned to start its tour in October 2014 but it did not. Instead, it opened on October 10 2014 in Cartagena as a temporary exhibition in the Centro de Formación de la Cooperación Española, AECID (Center of Formation of Spanish Cooperation), with the support of the French Embassy in Colombia, the Consul of Spain, and the Director of the Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, CMH (National Center of Historical Memory). The CMH is a public establishment assigned to the Department for Social Prosperity, which aims to collect and recover all the documentary material, oral testimonies and any other, related to the Article 147 of the Law of Victims and Land Restitution. The CMH carries out activities like displays, movies, conferences, and meetings in order to disseminate what its researchers are doing for the collective and the individual memories of the violence victims.

From October 10-30, 2014, the display called *Memoria e identidad en los Montes*

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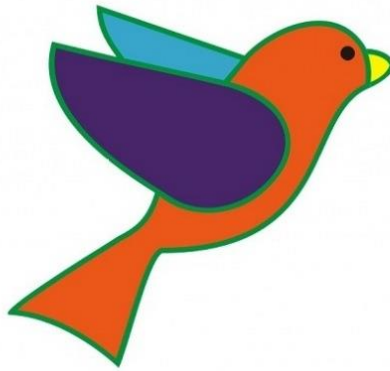
<sup>88</sup> The Corporación Colectivo de Comunicaciones Montes de María Línea 21 (Corporation Communication Collective Montes de María Line 21) is a nongovernmental organization, created in 1994 by a group of journalists, community leaders, teachers, and cultural promoters of Carmen de Bolívar. Their interest is to promote alternative spaces for communication in which the processes of recognition and reunion enable the construction of citizenship, participation, and identity. Colectivo de Comunicaciones Montes de María Línea 21. Accessed April 4, 2014: <http://colectivolinea21.galeon.com/>.

de María. Un preámbulo del Mochuelo (Memory and Identity in Montes de María. A Prelude to the Mochuelo), composed of photographs, audio files, and commemorative videos made by members of the Montes de María communities, aimed to commemorate the victims of the violence in this Colombian region. In addition, there were supplementary activities such as workshops and lectures related to peasants' memory of their territories and the claims of victims of violence. The *Mochuelo* will start its traveling exhibit during 2015.<sup>89</sup> After this first opening in Cartagena, the exhibition traveled to the Community Museum of San Jacinto where it will be hosted until it travels around the fifteen municipalities that are part of Montes de María.

The Traveling Museum of Montes de María, as the Hall of Never Again in Granada, is a vehicle the community uses to cope with the brutalities committed against the inhabitants of these regions from the decade of 1980 to the present. As in Granada, Antioquia, and following the new trends in museology, *El Mochuelo* does not have a collection of objects, in museographic terms, or a traditional building. Rather, it is a tent shaped like a *mochuelo* bird, which is also the logo of the museum because it is typical of the area and has inspired many popular songs.

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<sup>89</sup> Castro, Giovanni. Inicia en Cartagena el primer vuelo del "Mochuelo". October 17, 2014. Accessed February 23, 2015, <http://mimemoria.org>.



**Illustration one:** Logo of the Traveling Museum of Memory and Identity. El Mochuelo. Picture available in <http://www.caracolaconsultores.com/MIM/>

In this instance, there were a number of professionals involved with the traveling museum and assisting the community to implement their ideas: journalist Soraya Bayuelo, Founder and Director of the Colectivo Línea 21; and anthropologist Italia Isadora Samudio Reyes concerned with the study of gender, armed conflict, and peace research; historian and writer Giovanni Castro, former Technical Director of the Traveling Museum; and since October 2014 historian Julián González, current Technical Director, following Castro's resignation. These professionals did considerable fieldwork, gathered information and data, and suggested effective ways to convey the community's messages via the museum. As part of the work team, some graphic designers from the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana were responsible for its mobile structure.<sup>90</sup> In this sense, the museum is the result of the work that the Communications Collective of Montes de María Line 21, composed of journalists, teachers, community leaders and cultural

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<sup>90</sup> "Apoyo de Francia al Centro de Memoria Histórica." (Bogotá: French Embassy in Bogotá, December 12). Accessed April 30, 2014, <http://www.ambafrance-co.org/Apoyo-de-Francia-al-Centro-de>.

promoters, has conducted in relation to memory, territory, and communication, in conjunction with the victims of the armed conflict. It won the National Peace Price in 2003.



**Photograph seven:** One of the first models of what the museum would look like. Picture available in <http://www.ambafrance-co.org/UN-MOCHUELO-PARA-LA-PAZ>

Like the Hall of Never Again, the *Mochuelo* does not receive funding from the Colombian state. Its resources come from international entities, such as the French Embassy in Bogotá.<sup>91</sup> The Centro de Memoria Histórica in Bogotá administers the resources provided by the French Embassy.<sup>92</sup> The Agencia Catalana de Cooperación al

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<sup>91</sup> “El Mochuelo: un museo itinerante de la memoria en los Montes de María.” (Bogotá: French Embassy in Bogotá, December 12). Accessed July 30, 2014, <http://www.ambafrance-co.org/UN-MOCHUELO-PARA-LA-PAZ>.

<sup>92</sup> Public national institution ascribed to the Department for Social Prosperity, which purpose is to reunite and recover all the documentary material, oral testimonies, and by other means, related to violations of the article 147 of the Land Restitution and Victims Law. The gathered information is available for anyone interested, for researchers, and general public through museum activities, pedagogic exercises, and as many as necessary, to promote and enrich the knowledge about Colombia’s politic and social history.

Desarrollo, AECID, (Catalan Agency for International Development Cooperation) also funded the final part of the research for the museum.<sup>93</sup> This demonstrates once again the lack of capacity and interest of the Colombian government to memorialize the suffering of communities and victims.

Memory, identity, and territory are the three main thematic axes of the museum. The curators and producers of *El Mochuelo* believe that these topics are inclusive enough to enable the venue to become a space in which the inhabitants of the region can recreate their history in the ways they choose to, in order to build a peaceful future. The museum's script has five modules that illustrate the axes.

A first section welcomes the visitor, at the entrance of the tent, and has two rocking chairs representing the regional custom of sitting in the doorway of houses to talk with friends. It also has a welcome text written in *décima*, ten-line stanza of poetry in Spanish and translated into some native dialects, such as that spoken by the Zenú Indians. The second represents Montes de María with pictures, interactive maps, postcards that talk about the cartography, territory, women and their resilience, voices, memories, and tributes to the absent. The third and fourth parts, to the sides of the tent, the wings of the bird, represent liberty by presenting to the viewer a display of musical and gastronomic expressions. The fifth and last section is a space devoted to the communities' children. It

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<sup>93</sup> AECID is the main management body for Catalan cooperation, which combats poverty and works for sustainable human development. Its Charter States that the agency fosters full development, conceived as a fundamental human right, with the fight against poverty as part of the process for building this right. To this end, the Agency follows the guidelines of the 4th Master Plan, in accordance with the international agenda of the Millennium Development Goals and with a focus on three crosscutting axes: gender perspective, environmental quality and respect for cultural diversity.

has games and activities related to the knowledge of the territory and the cultural identity of the municipalities of Montes de María.<sup>94</sup>

An innovative aspect of the *Mochuelo* is the use the community, the curators, and production team make of the intangible heritage of the region, in order to keep active the healing process. One of the purposes of the project is to “forgive, move on, and preserve the memory of more than 3000 people that were killed by illegal groups.”<sup>95</sup> In this sense, the use of the term intangible heritage<sup>96</sup> takes on significant aspects.

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<sup>94</sup> “Museo Itinerante de la Memoria”. Accessed April 10, 2014, <http://www.caracolaconsultores.com/MIM/>.

<sup>95</sup> De la Cruz, Adriana. “Los nuevos vientos del Mochuelo. (*El Universal*, 2003). Accessed September 11, 2013, <http://www.eluniversal.com.co/bolivar/los-nuevos-vientos-del-mochuelo-130001>.

<sup>96</sup> The definition of Cultural Intangible Heritage taken from the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage approved by the United Nations in 2003, articles 1 and 2 of the Convention States: “The “intangible cultural heritage” means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. For the purposes of this Convention, consideration will be given solely to such intangible cultural heritage as is compatible with existing international human rights instruments, as well as with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, and of sustainable development. The “intangible cultural heritage”, as defined in paragraph 1 above, is manifested inter alia in the following domains:

- (a) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage;
- (b) performing arts;
- (c) social practices, rituals and festive events;
- (d) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe;
- (e) traditional craftsmanship.

For example, an iron talks to the survivors of the massacres to make them recall that “For a mother, a wife, not having to iron the shirts of their murdered relatives”<sup>97</sup> is sad and therefore becomes a cultural representation of a feeling of loss that is now part of their intangible heritage. The absence of the loved ones becomes an active part of the memory and a way in which communities remember them is focusing on their peasant traditions rather than material culture. However, the use of certain objects triggers memories related to the violence displayed in the museum.

Another characteristic of the *Mochuelo* is its itinerancy. The intention is that the tent will travel through the fifteen municipalities of the region to collect and display songs, stories, and other narratives to reinforce the importance of the right to speak and listen. A good example of the enterprise of recovering marginal voices is the tapestries of Mampuján, in the María La Baja municipality. These handicrafts tell the story of the displacements suffered by the local inhabitants. They also represent the women’s efforts to deal with their pain by resorting to sewing. “The first tapestry was called *Mampuján, día del llanto* (Mampuján, day of mourning), that was March 11 of 2000. It reminded us what happened, it is our memory.”<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> De la Cruz, Adriana. “Los nuevos vientos del Mochuelo. (*El Universal*, 2003). Accessed September 11, 2013, <http://www.eluniversal.com.co/bolivar/los-nuevos-vientos-del-mochuelo-130001>.

<sup>98</sup> Guerrero, Diego. “Las mujeres de Mampuján cuentan su desplazamiento forzado en mantas cosidas.” (*Vive.in*, 2010). Accessed, September 11, 2013), [http://bogota.vive.in/arte/bogota/articulos\\_arte/agosto2010/ARTICULO-WEB-NOTA\\_INTERIOR\\_VIVEIN-7847527.html](http://bogota.vive.in/arte/bogota/articulos_arte/agosto2010/ARTICULO-WEB-NOTA_INTERIOR_VIVEIN-7847527.html).





**Photograph eight:** Tapestry of Mampuján. Photo: Diana Sarmiento. Taken from <http://7urdianasarmiento.blogspot.com/2010/11/semana-de-la-memoria.htm>

This tapestry tells the story of the massacre perpetrated by the AUC in the Mampuján community in 2000. The paramilitaries arrived to the town with machetes threatening the population and looting their properties. They ordered the inhabitants of the town to line up for their execution but suddenly, after killing several people, the captain of the paramilitaries stopped the massacre arguing that they were innocent persons. However, the remaining people suffered displacement.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Sarmiento, Diana (2010). Semana de la memoria, Accessed November 2, 2014, <http://7urdianasarmiento.blogspot.com/2010/11/semana-de-la-memoria.html>.

Besides the legacy of violence, the survivors also have had to fight against stigma. For instance, as stated by G. Sánchez, Director of the National Center for Historic Memory, “many peasants ended being the target of judgmental glances that implicated them with one armed group or another.”<sup>100</sup> In response to this remark, the people of the Montes de María decided to create another image of their communities and the attacks they suffered. This is how memory occupies a fundamental place in the museum; revisiting the massacres becomes a methodological tool to create and tell a new history. In this sense, memory also becomes a way to eliminate stigma and is “essential in restoring dignity.”<sup>101</sup> As historian Giovanni Castro, former curator of *El Mochuelo*, notes, one of the museum’s main purposes is to distance its displays from violence. Unlike the Hall of Never Again, the *Mochuelo*’s aim is not to “shock or overwhelm the public with gory images of dismembered, tortured, and dead people, but to present the narratives of culture, songs, stories, and resilience chosen by the community.”<sup>102</sup> The violence displayed is minimum. The *Mochuelo* team works especially with children who did not experience the violence directly. “People want to leave that in the past. The bacrim are weakened, and the other armed actors are not present in the region anymore.”<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Guerrero, Diego. “Las mujeres de Mampuján cuentan su desplazamiento forzado en mantas cosidas.” (*Vive.in*, 2010). Accessed, September 11, 2013), [http://bogota.vive.in/arte/bogota/articulos\\_arte/agosto2010/ARTICULO-WEB-NOTA\\_INTERIOR\\_VIVEIN-7847527.html](http://bogota.vive.in/arte/bogota/articulos_arte/agosto2010/ARTICULO-WEB-NOTA_INTERIOR_VIVEIN-7847527.html).

<sup>101</sup> Sánchez, Gonzalo. *La masacre de El Salado: esa guerra no era nuestra*. (Bogotá: Centro de Memoria Histórica, 2009): 13.

<sup>102</sup> Castro, Giovanni. Interview by Jimena Perry. Austin, Texas – Pasto, Colombia, February 26, 2014.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

This museum, states Castro, “is a response not only to the bloodbath of El Salado, the most documented of the massacres, but to other ones like Chengue, Macayepo, Las Palmas... and many others that did not have the same public exposure.”<sup>104</sup> Regarding his work, Castro says, “I am a mediator between the museum and the community. I listen to them and suggest ways to put their memories on display. I am the one that helps to make visible their pain. This always makes me wonder if we really can provide something valuable to the communities in exchange for their telling and retelling the stories of what they lived.”<sup>105</sup>

The Traveling Museum found inspiration in two other venues: The Caribbean Museum, founded in 2009, in Barranquilla, and the Community Museum of San Jacinto. Following the lead of the Caribbean Museum, which relied on everyday scenes and landscapes to impart an immediacy to the spectator, the Traveling Museum’s curators and producers used interactive devices, videos, multimedia, and other technological equipment to enlivenmake the visitor’s experience. Material display objects are only ancillary.<sup>106</sup>

The Itinerant Museum of Montes de María tries to emulate the Caribbean Museum but it has not received any kind of governmental funding nor any significant publicity. Perhaps this is due to the difference in the topics these museums present. The Itinerant

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Forero, Andrés. “Sí, el Caribe también tiene sabor: producción de identidades regionales en el Museo del Caribe.” *Baukara, bitácoras de antropología e historia de la antropología en América Latina*. (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2013): 45.

Museum remembers the violent past from the peasants' perspective, emphasizing the oral word, cultural traditions, and the stories and collective imaginaries related to violence and survival. Implicitly, the Itinerant Museum shames the Colombian government by recognizing its failure to protect its citizens and to exercise the state's monopoly on the use of violence. The Caribbean Museum, on the other hand, exalts the geographic particularism and diversity of the Colombian nation.

However, Colombian scholars, like historian Clara Isabel Botero, question the status of the Itinerant Museum as such an institution due to its lack of objects. Traditional museologists take into account collections, logs, and archival records as markers of a museum. The Community Museum of San Jacinto, she notes, has “700 archaeological objects registered at the Instituto Colombiano de Antropología e Historia, which makes it a solid institution, a real one,”<sup>107</sup> which conveys the sense of a venue that conforms to ICOM's standards. It should be noted that the Community Museum of San Jacinto influenced the Mochuelo and that the two institutions have worked together. Botero says that when the inhabitants of San Jacinto talk about their museum they experience a sense of pride, as they are “the envy of the other municipalities.”<sup>108</sup> The Community Museum of San Jacinto praises itself for being a “true” museum that has an important object collection, registered at the Institute of Anthropology and History, in a proper building, which displays its pieces in appropriate cabinets.

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<sup>107</sup> Botero, Clara Isabel. Interview by Jimena Perry. Austin – Texas, Bogotá – Colombia, March 3, 2014.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

Both the Hall of Never Again and the Traveling Museum of the Memory of Montes de María are the product of communitarian processes that reflect the ways in which these particular local societies have decided to recreate and represent their violent past. The Hall of Never More wants to give the visitor a sense of what is to be engulfed by violence, whereas the Traveling Museum resorts to other sources such as oral traditions. The two local venues also exemplify how different communities mourn. They are memory spaces that become mechanisms used to recall the atrocities, and the conscious decision to create an archive of hope.

## MUSEUMS, MEMORY, TRAUMA, AND VIOLENCE

The Hall of Never Again and the Traveling Museum are two examples of how communities represent their violent past and mourn differently. This study highlights this diversity by following the concepts of acting-out and working-through, informed by Freud psychoanalytical theory, used by historian Dominick LaCapra. The scholar defines as “‘acting-out’ the compulsive repetition of the past as if it were fully present, resistances are not confronted, and memory as well as judgment is undercut;”<sup>109</sup> and “‘working-through’” as “a sort of psychological work which allows the subject to accept certain repressed elements and to free himself from the grip of mechanisms of repetition.”<sup>110</sup> These distinct notions suggest two manners of reacting to a traumatic experience. Acting-out refers to a repetition of the past events that does not allow individuals and communities to overcome their violent experiences, therefore living in constant fear. On the other hand, working-through would be the ability to take distance from the trauma source and elaborate it in a way that permits subjects and collectivities to move on with their lives. However, LaCapra states that these processes are interrelated and that he is not suggesting acting-out as a previous step for working-through or that everyone has to undergo the same proceedings in order to heal from a traumatic episode.

Although the Hall of Never Again might suggest this community is acting-out and the communities involved with the Traveling Museum are working-through, according to

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<sup>109</sup> LaCapra, Dominick. *Representing the Holocaust. History, Theory, Trauma.* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996): 48.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209.

LaCapra acting-out and working-through are often inseparable and can have many variations. The scholar even asserts that acting-out can be unavoidable for victims of extreme trauma, such as mass killings, displacements, disappearances, and that working-through becomes a kind of controlled repetition of the events.<sup>111</sup> The relation among the two concepts is a “distinction not a separation into different kinds or totally different categories, they are a distinction between interacting processes.”<sup>112</sup> The interaction mentioned by LaCapra is evident in the varied narratives of the Hall of Never Again and the Traveling Museum, because they cannot be fitted in either of these two categories as such.

The Hall of Never Again uses a descriptive and graphic narrative. The display of the pictures on the wall, mentioned above, is meant to affect the viewers. The survivors of the violence do not want people to forget what happened so they represent the atrocities, however this does not constitute a repetition in the sense of the acting-out notion works. This becomes a cultural decision that is a mourning process, which implies working-through the trauma. This community is not denying the consequences and pain the brutalities provoked them; on the contrary, their way to address it is to make it as visible as possible, which is a way of mourning. Even more, the insistence in telling the events as accurately as possible has the intention of providing answers and closure to people who do not know anything about what happened to their loved ones.

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 197.

<sup>112</sup> LaCapra, Dominick. Interview by Amos Goldberg. Jerusalem, June 8, 1988. Accessed, April 5, 2014, [http://www.yadvashem.org/odot\\_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%203648.pdf](http://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%203648.pdf).

The Traveling Museum of the Memory of Montes de María has undergone a different process even though the goal is the same as that of the Hall of Never Again: to acknowledge and remember past violent experiences in order to make those memories part of their current identities. Both memory sites are an effort made by the people to bridge the gap with their past and not feel so fragmented. According to LaCapra, for the victims, trauma produces a rupture with the past, challenging identity even to the point of convulsing it.<sup>113</sup> In their project of creating new identities, the communities of Granada and Montes de María have realized that their cultural specificities are the ones that will help them find a less painful relation with their pasts.

Nevertheless, it is possible to point out some differences between the Hall of Never Again and the Traveling Memory Museum of the Memory of Montes de de María. For the populations that comprise the latter region, the stigma of violence leads the museum to eschew the display of images of massacres. The Museum does not have pictures of the dead, and does not want young people and children to remember these events as the definitive marker of their identities.

The community museum of the Montes de María has the clear purpose of restoring the victims and their self-respect and self-esteem. The coordinators of the museum attempt to do this by recovering traditional peasant narratives and songs. The aim is to give voice to the voiceless. The producers of the Traveling Museum emphasize the oral histories and traditions of the peasants who were targeted by the violence of the 1980s

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<sup>113</sup> LaCapra, Dominick. *Historia y memoria después de Auschwitz*. (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2008): 21-22.



and 1990s. The photographs displayed by the Traveling Museum do not depict the violence.

Memory venues intend to honor, remember, and memorialize events and people brutalized by atrocities. Therefore, H. Holtschneider argues, memory museums target two audiences: one that commemorates and another that wants to know about the particular event displayed. In these exhibitions, the architecture and the placement of objects (artifacts, photos, and narratives) are spaces and guides for commemoration.<sup>114</sup>

Neither the Hall nor the Traveling Museum fit within the parameters of the ICOM's definition of a museum, nor do they receive state funding. In fact, the founders of the Hall of Never Again reject the label of a museum for they consider this institution to be a place "where things go to die..."<sup>115</sup> The Traveling Museum of the Memory of Montes de María also differs from the definition of the ICOM because it has a uniquely peripatetic operation, moving around the 15 municipalities where the violence of this region took place. This characteristic makes it uncommon in the Colombian context.

There are numerous examples of memory museums around the world, given the need of communities to remember and to heal from violent pasts. All Latin American countries except Venezuela, Ecuador, and Costa Rica have such memorials. In Colombia, there are approximately ten memory museums, memorials, or halls, but the ones in

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Centro de Memoria Histórica (2014). Tres. Salón del Nunca Más, Granada, Antioquia. *Revista Arcadia*, Accessed November 1, 2014, <http://www.revistaarcadia.com/impresia/especial/articulo/tres-salon-del-nunca-mas-granada-antioquia/39006>

Granada and Montes de María have special features, given their context, mobility, intentions, and displays.

Frequently, The Hall of Never Again and the Traveling Museum of the Memory of Montes de María fall into the general category of community museums even though they represent a very particular kind. Community museums are spaces where the members of a group build self-knowledge. This awareness could be related to LaCapra's concept of working-through because this exercise makes people think, evaluate, and question who they are, what happened to them, and where they want to go. Community museums also promote reflection, critical perspective, and creativity, projecting the community lifestyle inwards and outwards. They also fortify memory, which encourages future aspirations.<sup>116</sup> Memory museums fit in the latter definition, however, it should be added, that they are validating, emphasizing, and creating a specific memory related to violence.

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<sup>116</sup> “¿Qué es un museo comunitario?” Accessed April 10, 2014, <http://museoscomunitarios.org>.

## CONCLUSIONS

In Colombia, and worldwide, museums are places for remembering, representing, or recreating past events. How they do this, and with what intentions, changes historically. In Europe, the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century predecessors of the contemporary museums were the cabinets of curiosities. Their purpose was to whet the appetite of viewers for what travelers had seen and experienced overseas; however, they could be substantially different in their organization. K. Walsh calls these cabinets “proto-museums.”<sup>117</sup> They reflected the ideology of the time when object displays had only a European perspective. Flora, fauna, and other (ethnographic) objects were put together to convey a sense of chaos that needed to be sorted and ordered.<sup>118</sup>

Cabinets transformed into museums after the eighteenth century and their displays of objects gave great importance to sequences, to the idea of progress and development, and in many cases, objects were meant to show human evolution through time. The cabinets arranged and ordered their objects in displays through correspondence, analogies, with an emphasis on the ability of man to know or to discover through the power of examination.<sup>119</sup> However, the attempt to create a dialogue between museums and their audiences reflects a change in attitude since the nineteenth century.

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<sup>117</sup> Walsh, Kevin. *The Representation of the Past: Museums and Heritage in the Post-Modern World*. (Routledge: USA and Canada, 1992): 18.

<sup>118</sup> Hooper Greenhill, Eileen. *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*. (Routledge: London, 1992).

<sup>119</sup> Walsh, Kevin. *The Representation of the Past: Museums and Heritage in the Post-Modern World*. (Routledge: USA and Canada, 1992): 19.

Besides the task of remembering, museums were traditionally entrusted with generating, organizing, disseminating, and preserving materials. This implies that the objects that become part of a museum collection are valuable and worth preserving due to the information they possess.<sup>120</sup> The knowledge provided by museum collections implies that these institutions possess a kind of authority that the public lacks.

Museum insiders and outsiders have questioned this premise since the decade of the 1980s and even before. In this vein, anthropologist James Clifford conceived of museums as “contact zones,” a term developed by cultural/literary scholar Mary Louis Pratt. Following Pratt’s remarks about the inequalities in power and asymmetrical relations in colonial contexts, Clifford described the ethnographic museum as a “contact zone, “A space of colonial encounters, the place in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality and intractable conflict.”<sup>121</sup>

The National Museum of Colombia, and its aforementioned three temporary exhibitions, are examples of contact zones. There was little or no consultation with the communities involved in the displays, the creation of content was produced by outsiders, such as the case of the photographs of the displacement of Cacarica, and there was an intention to highlight the museum’s role as a civilizing institution. Official sites such as

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<sup>120</sup> MacDonald, George F. *Change and Challenge: Museums in the Information Society*. Karp, Ivan, Mullen Kremer, Christine, and Levine, Steven D. *Museums and Communities. The Politics of Public Culture*, pp. 158-182. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press): 160.

<sup>121</sup> Clifford, James. *Routes. Travel and Translation in the Twentieth Century*. (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997): 192.

the National Museum of Colombia are inevitably representative of the social inequalities that plague Colombia.

In the regional memory museums, on the other hand, peoples and their histories are not separated and disembodied, nor represented in and by State institutions. Therefore, they cease being contact zones and become spaces where a sense of collaboration and communication is present. Their contact with the communities stops being asymmetrical because they are built from the bottom up. The intention of the producers and coordinators of these smaller memory venues, like the Hall of Never Again and the Traveling Museum of the Memory of Montes de María, is to serve as spaces for reflection and mourning.

Since the decade of 1980, as noted above, museums have become increasingly concerned with visitorship, obtaining public support, ensuring greater sociocultural representativeness in their exhibits, and demonstrating greater sensitivity to community issues such as collective memory and identity. The institution of the museum has been pressed to convey messages that are not arcane, static, disembodied, or antiquarian. Currently, particular kinds of museums engage with community life and represent contemporary issues of social groups. In other words, as C. Mullen Kreamer notes “communities seek from museums a confirmation of their sense of history.”<sup>122</sup>

Nevertheless, Kreamer notes that historical presentations in museums are not

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<sup>122</sup> Mullen Kreamer, Christine. Defining Communities through Exhibiting and Collecting. Karp, Ivan, Mullen Kreamer, Christine, and Levine, Steven D. *Museums and Communities. The Politics of Public Culture*, pp. 367-382. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press): 372.

generally successful because they prevent the active audience from engaging with history due to its display as a series of events rather than as the interrelationships over time of individuals or groups.<sup>123</sup> The producers and creators of the memory museums implicitly recognize this shortcoming in their efforts to recreate and represent their violent pasts as part of their present. Therefore, in the case of the Traveling Museum of the Memory of Montes de María, even though violence is the backdrop of the exhibition, its producers are attempting to make the venue somewhat interactive and related to the people's daily contemporary life. This can be seen in the use of technology, and the emphasis in the oral word. In addition, the coordinators of the Hall of Never Again criticize (traditional) museums as places where past things collect dust and have a half-life, between forgetting and remembering, separated from the everyday life of the community."<sup>124</sup> In fact, some of the alternative memory museums in Colombia do not have objects, while others are itinerant, rather than housed in buildings. This leads to questions about time and endurance. Are memory museums capable of surviving the test of time? What kind of new identities are they creating? It might be too soon to answer these questions.

Skeptics like historian Susan Crane have questioned museums as memory institutions, despite their noble intentions. She states that since certain (re)collections of the past produce only one version of history, one that is informed by personal experiences and memories that go on in the mind of individuals, memory venues are not places where

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 374.

<sup>124</sup> Centro de Memoria Histórica (2014). Tres. Salón del Nunca Más, Granada, Antioquia. *Revista Arcadia*, Accessed November 1, 2014, <http://www.revistaarcadia.com/imprensa/especial/articulo/tres-salon-del-nunca-mas-granada-antioquia/39006>

the “truth” or “objective” facts are to be found. For Crane this tendentiousness of memory “has been most visible at the sites where modern western cultures construct public domain for memory, such as monuments, the media, and museums.”<sup>125</sup> She also argues that the display of personal historical memories in a museum setting often is “evidence of ignorance, willful prejudice, emotional needs, or lack of understanding of the knowledge and interpretations available from competently performed historical study.”<sup>126</sup> In fact, this excess of memory, this insistence on subjectivities, on intimate memories and their intersection with public memories is what is foregrounded in the Colombian museums I have examined. Any exhibition or display, of course, is mediated by cultural and historical subjectivities. Historian Benjamin Brower illustrates museums non objectivity when he states that “...exhibitions are only representations.”<sup>127</sup>

Another challenge memory museums confront is the impossibility to make visitors feel the same as the victims. Perhaps there is empathy or sympathy towards the survivors yet being in their place is something that just cannot happen. In the case of the Hall of Never Again, which has the goal of conveying to the visitors the pain they suffered and

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<sup>125</sup> Crane, Susan A. Memory, Distortion, and the History in the Museum. Messias Carbonell, Bettina. *Museum Studies. An Anthology of Contexts*, pp 318-334. (Blackwell Publishing: USA, 2012 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition): 320.

<sup>126</sup> Crane, Susan. Memory, Distortion, and History in the Museum. *History and Theory*, Vol. 36, No. 4, Theme Issue (Dec.,1997) 36: 44-63.

<sup>127</sup> Brower, Benjamin. The Preserving Machine: The “New” Museum and Working through Trauma. The Musée Memorial pour la paix of Caen, *History and Memory* 11, No. 1:77-103 1999: 77. In this article, Brower refers to the *Musée Mémorial pour la Paix*, opened in 1988 in the French city of Caen. This museum commemorates the Second World War and the Battle of Caen, June-August, 1944, between the Allied and German forces, during the Battle of Normandy. The memorial is dedicated to the history of violence and the causes and course of conflicts.

still do, the effort becomes just that, an attempt to reach the viewers but each will interpret what he or she is seeing according to its own cultural background.

In *The Participatory Museum*, Nina Simon, the executive director of the Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History, claims that museums must be places where the community and the staff of the institution create together, and not only respond to institutional agendas.<sup>128</sup> Simon says that this process is a co-creation between the museum and the people that gives voice to subaltern social actors, provides a community space for dialogue and creation, and helps individuals to achieve some of their own goals and those of the community as well. Her participatory museum aligns with the aims of memory museums because it is transforming the museum into an active place where people can go to interact among themselves and with the institution's displays. However, she argues that this kind of participation challenges "institutional perceptions of ownership and control of content,"<sup>129</sup> since community members are actively involved in the content of the exhibitions and both the audience and other members of the staff must trust their criteria and capabilities. This is what memory museums actually do. Most of them arose from the knowledge, decisions, and aspirations of the people that want to make public their experiences with violence. In addition, they want the audience to engage with their exhibitions and displays so that the museum becomes an ongoing interactive space where culture and creativity find their way.

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<sup>128</sup> Simon, Nina. *The Participatory Museum*. (Santa Cruz: Museum 2.0, 2010). Available at <http://www.participatorymuseum.org/chapter8/>.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.



The traditional functions, roles, perception, and definition of museums are changing in Colombia. The appearance of memory sites such as the regional museums, analyzed in this Master's report, show some turns the institution is undergoing. The museums authority, invested with knowledge and power, is becoming a more horizontal relationship.

In addition, national institutions, such as the National Museum of Colombia, have demonstrated their incapacity or unwillingness to represent all of the communities that were victims of atrocities. In fact, this task is impossible due to the great amount of atrocities and diverse populations in the country. Therefore, in order to bridge this gap, marginalized, and largely rural, populations, have come together to build, create, and develop their own and unique memory sites, ones that do them justice and help them reckon with their painful past.

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