

THESIS

STATE NARRATIVES ON WAR AND PEACE IN COLOMBIA, 2002-2016

Submitted by

Ana Mercedes Sánchez Ramírez

Department of Ethnic Studies

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Spring 2017

Master's Committee:

Advisor: Ernesto Sagás

Marcela Velasco  
Thomas Michael Swensen

Copyright by Ana Mercedes Sánchez Ramírez 2017

All Rights Reserved

## ABSTRACT

### STATE NARRATIVES ON WAR AND PEACE IN COLOMBIA, 2002-2016

This research considers state narratives of war and peace in Colombia from 2002 to 2016 as broadcasted in mass media through institutional campaigns, and it seeks to describe these campaigns as part of historicist practices that promote an ideal of the nation. The research follows the shifts in policies and discourses during the 21<sup>st</sup> century from promoting war to announcing peace by analyzing a visual archive made up of T.V commercials produced by the Colombian state in this period. In doing so, the research considers the tensions between nationalism, war, peace and memory in a political setting marked by the proclamation of a transitional scenario. Finally it reflects on the ways the historicist practices of the state fix victimhood between the duty to forgive and the permission to forget.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis is primarily the outcome of the support I received from the professors in my committee, their constant encouragement, and thoughtful considerations of my research. Special thanks to my thesis chair, Professor Ernesto Sagás for keeping me on track and reminding me on every meeting to ‘keep the eyes on the prize’. Professor Thomas Michael Swensen was the first one to convince me this was a work worth writing and for that I will always be grateful. Professor Marcela Velasco helped me to ground my research in conversation with Colombian scholarship and cultural context. Thank you all for your generosity in both time and resources to help me along the research process.

My appreciation also goes to the Ethnic Studies department faculty and staff for their kind words and suggestions about my thesis. The director of the Center for Women Studies and Gender Research, Professor Caridad Souza has aided not only this research in significant ways but also my own life journey, to her my warmest thanks. My fellow graduate students Hsiao-Ching Lin, Octavius Jones, Anthony Kim and Avondine Hill, our hours together have been meaningful and a much needed source of sanity. To my parents and sisters, Luz Elena Ramírez, Horacio Sánchez and Juana, Deya and Any, for their never-ending faith in me, and all their efforts to sustain my dreams. To my partner, Juan Carlos Vergel for his patience, dedication and loving care over the past ten years. To my son Juan Nahuel, for being the life force that keeps me going every day.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: <i>Approaching the Archive</i> .....	15
Chapter 2: <i>War Spectacles</i> .....	36
Chapter 3: <i>Peace is Possible</i> .....	60
Conclusion.....	84
Works Cited.....	93
Appendix.....	97

## INTRODUCTION

“The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe”  
*Understanding a photograph*, John Berger.<sup>1</sup>

On June 23, 2016 the Colombian government and the guerrilla organization FARC signed the “cease of fire” agreement in Havana, Cuba. Just two months later, on August 24 of the same year, the “final agreement” to end the armed conflict was announced. On both dates people in Bogotá and other cities of the country celebrated the announcement in front of giant screens displayed in public squares. The visual record on how these ‘historical’ landmarks were received by the Colombian citizenry, are filled with the emotional reactions of people that expressed a collective sense of euphoria and excitement. These public responses captured in camera, were later turned into visual material for the campaign “Yes to peace” that sought to gather support for the following plebiscite in which Colombians were asked to ratify the agreements of Havana. What the events, their witnessing, and the recording of the witnessing allow to consider, are the sites of production of Colombian national history and the role of war and peace tropes within them.

This research considers state narratives of war and peace in Colombia from 2002 to 2016 as broadcasted in mass media through institutional campaigns, and it seeks to describe these campaigns as part of historicist practices that promote an ideal of the nation. The period selected reflects two different presidential administrations in Colombia. Alvaro Uribe’s (2002-2010) that promoted a militaristic solution to the war and whose political discourse revolved around the rhetoric of the ‘war on terror’ and the insistence in the criminalization of the guerrillas as drug traffickers and terrorists. Uribe did this while putting forward a political agenda of re-insertion of

---

<sup>1</sup> Berger and Dyer, *Understanding a Photograph*.

paramilitary groups to civil life. The second period (2010-2016) covers the administration of Juan Manuel Santos, a former Defense Minister of Uribe and the government's candidate in the presidential elections of 2010. However, Santos has come to represent a distancing from Uribe's approach to the war and started peace negotiations with the guerrillas. As a response of this alleged political rupture, there has been a re-orientation of the representations on war and peace and the narratives emerging from them. Nevertheless they can still be considered as part of the same historicist practices, often appeal to the same rhetorical devices, and contribute to the outlining of a particular national identity in which the 'past' war is crucial to their ends. Therefore, the argument is not that there is a direct correlation between Uribe and war campaigns or Santos and peace promotion; rather the intention is to explore how war and peace narratives are by no means mutually exclusive when it comes to imagining the nation. The tensions between war and peace narratives do not comply with discrete time-frames or match exclusively one presidential administration or the other. They coalesce and work through nuanced regimes of representation, and they illuminate for us the complex power arrangements implied in the production of history of the war and (as) the history of the nation.

Following the ways in which nation and war came to be equalized in the official discourse, does not necessarily produce 'new' information about the contexts of violence. Information about the war abounds in Colombia; scholars, activists and official sources have been documenting, counting, organizing, classifying and archiving the war since it began. To archive the war has a twofold meaning, transversal to this work. Because the way in which the history of war has been told and organized tells a history of power and its ways, but also because in the more literal sense, *to archive the war* enables a decoupling from its material reality, to

locate it in the past and far away, and this process has imprinted the historical development of the conflict in insidious ways.

Therefore, this research is inscribed in the contexts of violence in Colombia, and yet is not concerned with the sometimes ritualistic reification of trauma or the reproduction of the events of violence that have caused almost 8 million victims in a country of 45 million inhabitants. The methodological and theoretical approaches work as an attempt to take a detour (to surpass or overcome is clearly unrealistic) from the (unintentional?) exploitative practices of the contexts of violence in Colombia that are not uncommon in scholarly and state sponsored literature about them. In this sense, violence is simultaneously the center and the margin of this research; the aim here it is not so much to ‘communicate violence’ but to interrogate it, and this means that this study seeks to follow the traces of the violence that appears in state narratives and to explore how they structure the possibilities for the nation to be imagined. In discussing the notion of violence, this research draws from Lisa Cacho’s arguments about economies of value of life, in which violence can be understood as the material practices that enforce those hierarchies of value. This includes practices often associated with war such as murders, massacres, forced migration, forced disappearance and kidnappings; but also practices of land dispossession and denial of basic human rights. Cacho argues that “the state acquires legitimacy and authority through sanctioning violence and formalizing disenfranchisement,”<sup>2</sup> therefore, state violence is not only constituted through the state’s use of force but through legal procedures that arrange national belonging and citizen-subject status.

Violence, memory and nation are articulated by Derrida when he argues that, “Foundational violence is not only forgotten. The foundation is made *in order to* hide it; by its essence it tends to organize amnesia, sometimes under the celebration and sublimation of the

---

<sup>2</sup> Cacho, *Social Death*. 142



grand beginnings.”<sup>3</sup> Following Derrida this research also examines the ways in which reconciliation works as a foundational move that not only organizes amnesia but also conceals and endorses current and future contexts of state sanctioned violence.

However, amnesia is not necessarily organized through official denial of the contexts of violence. In the Colombian case it seems to work in the hyper-visibility of the armed conflict and the powerful influence the tropes of the narratives on war have, of which the visual pieces examined in this research are just an example. Despite its non-exceptional character this cultural archive remains relevant, because it opens the possibility to look at state fantasies of the nation. The images considered in this research do not necessarily make an authenticity claim; they assumed awareness from the audience about the fictional resources utilized in the narrative. Looking at these visual pieces implies to ‘zoom in’ into the choices of drawing, from an ideological archive, particular rhetorical devices. And from there is possible to consider how those selective moves inform something about an aim of externalizing violence, not only from bodies or geographies but also (and most importantly perhaps) from the present.

These commercials are useful insofar they are sites for multiple regimes of representation and their interplay. Also in the ways in which the images that ‘make it’ into the frame, speak about the images that do not; and this conversation between marginal and centered visual devices, between the grievable lives<sup>4</sup> and the haunting spectrums,<sup>5</sup> reveals a complex network of meanings of violence that looks to instill sharp divisions among an imagined ‘us’ versus a feared and repudiated ‘them’. What is missing becomes part of the archive as well; because “between

---

<sup>3</sup> Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*. 57

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*.

images and in the interstices of how we have been taught to see, there are so many necessary and invisible forms.”<sup>6</sup>

While discussing the ways in which the state imagines and portrays the nation, its territories and peoples, this research does not consider the state as a monolithic entity or clearly delimited actor, rather as a set of processes and practices that can take the form of institutions or networks. Here, the cautionary arguments of Timothy Mitchell around the forms in which power and domination are often described prove useful. Mitchell claims that power has broadly been understood in terms of dichotomies that reduce its complex nature. He calls *enframing* the techniques in which “domination works through actually constructing a seemingly dualistic world”.<sup>7</sup> To Mitchell power does not work in two separate and opposite realms, both coercion and persuasion are desired effects of domination as well as the imaginary (in the sense of fictive) line often draw between them. Therefore, in Mitchell’s view the state will be nothing more than a set of practices that via regulations (e.g. the law) separate themselves from their material consequences, thus, legal technologies create the effect of the state. Parallel to the persuasion/coercion dichotomy, Mitchell argues that traditional definitions of the state have sought to differentiate state from society. The author identifies that boundary as uncertain and proposes instead to consider how the production of the state/society divide is constitutive of a social order; therefore “the state is no longer to be taken as essentially an actor, with the coherence, agency, and subjectivity this term presume.”<sup>8</sup> Ultimately, Mitchell calls for an understanding of the state not as a structure but as a structural effect, this is the result of a set of practices that make apparent the existence of the state as an entity separated from society. Mitchell’s arguments are echoed by Joe Migdal when he defines the state as a “field of power

---

<sup>6</sup> Tapia, *American Pietàs: Visions of Race, Death and the Maternal*. 131.

<sup>7</sup> Mitchell, “Everyday Metaphors of Power.” 547

<sup>8</sup> Mitchell, “The Limits of the State.” 90

marked by the use and threat of violence (...) actual states are shaped by two elements, image and practices”.<sup>9</sup>This research argues that in the case of the Colombian state, those practices are inseparable from the narratives on war and peace and the ideals of the imagined community of the Colombian nation that are embedded within them.

The tropes of sight, gaze and the visual field are also central features in this research, and thus, their signification cannot be taken for granted, nor the historical linkage of images with knowledge and power. The visual is first the core of the archive examined: the visual features of the commercials compose the state narratives on war and peace. The image as a site of knowledge, allows for a metaphor that considers the elements inside the frame and the ones that remain in the margins, and thus works to inquire the logics and tensions between presences and absences and what can be learned from them. Moreover, this work is also engaged with the ways in which spectatorship involves practices of seeing/gazing, and how these abilities are inscribed in power exchanges and knowledge practices. Finally, the gaze is also understood here as a distortable and always modifiable ‘apparatus’, ‘technology’ or ‘device’; therefore it also questions the ways in which the narratives on war and peace are able to modify an audience’s ability to ‘see’ and ‘envision’ the nation. Also, how such envisioning of the nation by the state underwrites the class, race and gender cleavages that have been the foundation of the contexts of violence in the country. Going back to John Berger’s quote at the beginning of this section, is possible to extend his argument to consider that the act of seeing is always producing new (even if ‘the same’) knowledge and beliefs. It follows that audiences might read state’s narratives based on their knowledge and beliefs about the war, but the narratives are also ‘creating’ a new referential world in juxtaposition to the death-worlds produced by the actual war.

---

<sup>9</sup> Migdal, *State in Society*. 16

Ultimately, the objective of this research is to follow the configuration of what sociologist Avery Gordon defines as an oppressed past, “whatever organized violence has repressed and in the process formed into a past.”<sup>10</sup> If, as argued here, the different reconciliation processes in Colombia work towards the concealment of past (and new) violences, the main goal of this research is to trace elements embedded in the campaigns’ commercials that collaborate with that process; to follow the representational procedures that render violence as past, and past as oppressed. Much of this research emerges from the haunting histories that are not told or (not necessarily different from these ones) that never were. And yet there is not at the end of this work (or anywhere else) a prescription or counter history to be found. Because there is power in looking,<sup>11</sup> the gaze proposed in here seeks to deconstruct the narratives on war and peace that the Colombian state has produced in the last 14 years. From this examination, the only possible outcome might be merely a provocation, a stubborn insistence in interrogating the images and the violences that they depict, reproduce, and perform.

### **Historical Context**

Scholarship that has addressed the political violence in Colombia has been also deeply influenced by the tropes used by the state. The script constantly revolves around a set of ideas about violence that, more often than not, demand a stronger presence of the state. However, even in the cases when there is a critique of the participation of state forces in the human rights violations against civil society, it is not likely to find a challenge to the idea of the nation itself. The central argument of this research is that the Colombian state deploys historicist practices around the contexts of violence that had taken place (and still do) in the national territory; furthermore, these historicist practices have become the privileged avenue to understand the

---

<sup>10</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*. 66.

<sup>11</sup> hooks, *Black Looks*.

Colombian nation. Wielding war and ending war, work as powerful imaginaries that bind the nation as a unity and conceal the violences of the nation-state. As Josefina Echavarría argues “Colombian history has been made a history of war.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, it is a highly complex task to provide a historical context that helps to understand the narratives in which the state produces a particular history of the nation. Complex but imperative, this section elaborates on some interpretations of the recent history of the armed conflict in Colombia.

Historian Fernán González argues that historically “internal violence has played a major role in the configuration of the Colombian state.”<sup>13</sup> This is a thesis that enjoys a good amount of popularity in the academic understanding of the Colombian nation-state and its historical marks as ‘unstable’, ‘incomplete’ and of course, ‘violent’. Daniel Pécaut explains this interpretation as a result of the banalization of violence in the Colombian context.<sup>14</sup> The XIX century independence struggle and subsequent wars are tied by historians with the violent period of bipartisan confrontations between *liberales* and *conservadores* of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the latter are considered to bear all the elements of the contexts of violence that will appear in the second half and that extend to this day. About this recent violence<sup>15</sup> Pécaut argues, “It was not only common to present it as a continuation of *The Violence* of the fifties, even as a violence that had permanently characterized Colombian history with no interruption, but it was not odd to assert that its expansion, however tragic for the victims, was also beneficial for many sectors.”<sup>16</sup>

What is clear in the history of the contexts of violence in Colombia is that they have been extended in time and unequal in space. Whether an uninterrupted continuum of terror or a set of

---

<sup>12</sup> Echavarría, *In/security in Colombia*. 36

<sup>13</sup> González, *Poder y violencia en Colombia*. 515.

<sup>14</sup> Pécaut, *La Experiencia de La Violencia: Los Desafíos Del Relato Y La Memoria*.

<sup>15</sup> That has been marked historically with the emergence of the first guerrilla organizations (1957).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 117.

independent conflicts, the inhabitants of the nation have endured decades of violence with significant social, cultural and economic impacts. Also, some geographies have suffered the effects of the different armed confrontations more than others. Therefore, when talking about the ‘war in Colombia’, there has to be a clarification of what period and territory is being discussed. Following this argument, when referring to ‘the war’ or ‘the armed conflict’ in this research the intention is not to provide a homogenizing portrayal of the contexts of violence that had historically taken place in Colombia, but to discuss the war as a trope through which nationalist discourses, appeals and policies are produced.

In his work *Power and Violence in Colombia*, González traces a history in what he identifies as a continuum of violence that starts with the wars of independence, and argues that the violence of the 19<sup>th</sup> century bears the same political homogenizing goal as that of the 20<sup>th</sup>. Often referred to as *La Violencia* (The Violence) or *La época de la violencia* (The times of violence) the period from the 1930s to the 1950s<sup>17</sup> has come to represent a landmark in Colombian history; a bipartisan armed confrontation, sometimes understood as a civil war, divided the country and dominated its political life for over two decades. González discusses the ways in which during this period the former local manifestations of violence for political hegemony “ended up being framed in a deeper rupture, caused by the confrontation between the modernizing efforts of liberal governments and the resistance of sectors of the conservative party and the Catholic Church, that will lead to a much higher polarization of Colombian society.”<sup>18</sup> In the 1950s, the repressive governments of Laureano Gómez and Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, paired with the international revolutionary upheaval represented in the region by the Cuban revolution, provided the political context for an insurgency to flourish in the form of guerrilla organizations

---

<sup>17</sup> There is not an absolute consent about the exact dates of the period known as *La Violencia*. Here the time span is meant to provide a less conservative account from the one that frames it from 1948 to 1957.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 251.

which were also reflecting a radicalized sector of the bipartisan confrontation of the previous decades. The agreements made in 1957 between the Liberal and Conservative parties to take turns in power, known as *Frente Nacional* (National Front) signified the elites' way to conceal the horrid violence towards which they had previously pushed the civil population. From guerrillas of liberal political orientation, there was a shift towards communist guerrillas (FARC, ELN, EPL and M-19)<sup>19</sup> that consolidated their presence in the territory for decades to come.<sup>20</sup> The context of violence that emerged from the confrontation of the state forces and the leftist guerrillas is the most relevant one for the purposes of this research. Understanding that by no means it is possible to provide a comprehensive account of its development, some important features of that context and its history must be highlighted.

Authors agree that the root cause of the recent armed conflict is the lack of an agrarian reform.<sup>21</sup> This led to the migration from rural to urban areas (both impoverished) throughout the century which paired with the already polarized political setting and influenced by the continental and transnational dynamics of the time, increased the social unrest. A second feature that makes the armed conflict that began on the 1960s more complex is drug trafficking, which quickly became a crucial factor on the survival of guerrillas and a major reason for the brutal pushback of the state, in both its military campaigns and ideological contestations.

Third, in the historical development of the conflict there have been several attempts to negotiate peace with the guerrillas.<sup>22</sup> The first major one took place during the administration of Belisario Betancour in 1982; afterwards president Virgilio Barco managed to sign peace

---

<sup>19</sup> FARC-EP: Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia- Ejército del Pueblo (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia- People's Army); ELN: Ejército de Liberación Nacional (Army of National Liberation); EPL: Ejército Popular de Liberación (Popular Army of Liberation); M-19: Movimiento 19 de Abril (April 19th Movement).

<sup>20</sup> Pécaut, *La Experiencia de La Violencia: Los Desafíos Del Relato Y La Memoria*.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.; González, *Poder y violencia en Colombia*.

<sup>22</sup> González, *Poder y violencia en Colombia*.

agreements with the M-19 and EPL guerrillas in 1990 which also resulted in the creation of a new constitution in 1991. More recently, president Andrés Pastrana promoted in 1998 new peace negotiations with the largest guerrilla organization, the FARC. However, González argues that “the ambiguities of that negotiation ended up deepening the rupture in the articulation among local and regional powers with the national government, this was reinforced by the abuses of the guerrilla in the de-militarized zone.”<sup>23</sup> During the last decade of the century, Colombians had also seen the escalation of the guerrilla’s violent acts. The FARC’s territorial disputes with paramilitaries, druglords and state forces consistently contradicted their public declarations of seeking a negotiated solution to the conflict. Increasing numbers of murders, kidnappings, attacks and harassment of civilians were consistently registered by mass media and paved the way for the ending of that cycle negotiations in 2001. These violent acts were not only perceived as a mockery to the peace process but also reinforced a sense of widespread impunity and a growing social unrest against illegal armed groups.<sup>24</sup> The failure of what was seen at one point as the historical final step to end the war, produced social discomfort against the guerrillas and a lack of strong policies of the state, and thus it provided the best climate for the policy of ‘mano dura’ (strong arm policies) of Álvaro Uribe Vélez to gain sympathizers.

As a final element, the conflict between the ‘legitimate’ forces of the state and the rebels was further complicated by the appearance of paramilitary groups that although often presented as merely a response to the armed insurgency, have always had the purpose of terrorizing civil society (mainly to usurp their lands) and repressing social movements. These organizations have had both the implicit and explicit support of the Colombian state, Nazih Richani explains that “In 1965, Decree 3389 was introduced by the Colombian state. When it became law in 1968 it

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 429-30.

<sup>24</sup> Palacios, *Between Legitimacy and Violence*.



authorized private citizens to organize and carry firearms. This law allowed the formation of paramilitaries as an explicit part of the state's strategy to combat insurgency (...) although the state subsequently introduced a new decree in 1989, in which it suspended the creation of these groups, by then they were up and running and the Colombian state was neither willing nor capable of fighting them."<sup>25</sup> State sponsorship of paramilitary groups was reactivated in 1994 when "Decree 356 of 1994 opened the way for the creation of self-defense groups called Convivir."<sup>26</sup> These organizations confederated in 1997 under the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia- AUC, a paramilitary group that by the time of its legal disintegration was made up of more than 30.000 members.<sup>27</sup> It was under Uribe's administration that the process of re-insertion of the paramilitaries took place, marked by the signing of the *Santa Fe de Ralito Agreement* in July 15, 2003.<sup>28</sup> The formal disappearance of paramilitaries allowed for a stronger offensive against the guerrillas. The historical development of this period of violence and the handling of the conflict in both the political and military arenas by the Colombian state set the climate for the presentation of Álvaro Uribe as the ultimate patriotic leader, and of his policies as the only viable option of the nation.

Uribe's approach decimated the guerrillas and managed to provoke a reorientation of large sectors of the population against the FARC.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless the victims of both illegal and state forces continued to increase during his eight years in power. In 2010, president Juan Manuel Santos was presented as the continuation of Uribe's discourse and policies, however, after eight years of militaristic efforts, the new government considered the guerrillas had been

---

<sup>25</sup> Richani, "Caudillos and the Crisis of the Colombian State." 406-7.

<sup>26</sup> García-Godos and Lid-Knut, "Transitional Justice and Victims' Rights before the End of a Conflict." 492.

<sup>27</sup> Londoño Fernández, Ramírez Parra, and others, "Estudio Sobre El Impacto de La Reinserción Paramilitar En La Vida de Las Mujeres de Comunidades Receptoras de Medellín, Bajo Cauca Y Urabá."

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> This included the promotion of a massive protest in February, 2008 against FARC and in support of the militaristic response of the state.

weakened enough to start peace negotiations again. The peace process -which had been casted by the state as unviable after Pastrana's failure - was placed at the forefront of Santos' administration. Peace supporters were no longer rendered as the terrorists allies,<sup>30</sup> but instead portrayed as what every Colombian should become.

### **Thesis Overview**

The first chapter considers the challenges in working with T.V commercials produced by the state on war and peace, and how they come to form an archive from which the historicist practices of the state can be outlined. In developing a theoretical and methodological framework for this research, this section provides the routes taken in order to fight the (logical?) impulse to interpret such narratives as merely propagandistic efforts of the state, and argues for a close reading of the commercial as texts in order to attend to what Sara Ahmed has described as the “grammatical specificity of the construction of the nation.”<sup>31</sup>

Chapter two, *War Spectacles*, deals with the narratives on war produced mainly during Álvaro Uribe's administration (2002-2010) and the representational efforts embedded in the promotion of a militaristic solution to the armed conflict. Uribe's political agenda seeking the physical extermination of the rebels needs to be paired with the actions of his government in the process of reinserting the paramilitaries, and this means that there were particular narratives on peace and reconciliation during his period as well. In the midst of these tensions, this section considers the ways in which the nation has come to be imagined through a lens of war.

Chapter three, *Peace is Possible*, explores how the naming of a transitional scenario becomes a fundamental site of power from which is possible to reify and refashion state sanctioned violence. Covering primarily the administration of Juan Manuel Santos (2010-

---

<sup>30</sup> Benavides, “Colombia's Elusive Peace.”

<sup>31</sup> Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*.

present) and the political events related to the peace negotiations with the FARC, this section examines the problematic nature of transitional and reconciliation scenarios, not only in the ways in which they arrange history into a 'now' and 'then', but also how these scenarios 'take place' within the same oppressive setting, that is, the nation-state.

The conclusion reflects on the ways the historicist practices of the state fix victimhood between the duty to forgive and the permission to forget. It also points towards further archival research capable of providing a more comprehensive account of the ways the Colombian nation is underwritten with the history of the war; and considers the violences that are likely to be found in such state practices.

## CHAPTER 1: *Approaching the Archive*

This introductory chapter considers how the commercials produced by the Colombian state form an archive on war and peace. Although some authors have argued that the term *archive* “has become a kind of loose signifier for a disparate set of concepts,”<sup>32</sup> it works here as a way to describe the collection of cultural texts emerging from the dissection, narration and fictionalization of the history of war in Colombia, as well as the merging of this history with a national(ist) discourse.

Within this framework it is worth to ask how this particular method (T.V commercials) for transmitting information about the war, shapes the knowledge that can be produced; not only to understand the war but the nation that has ‘lived’ it. Needless to say that the selection of such method is by no means accidental, and the established tie between war and nation is a constant interplay of inclusions and exclusions, of erasures and fabrications. The argument here is not merely that the “war spectacles” are destroying the archival record of what can be known about the history of the war, rather that these proclamations (and their silences) constitute an archive in themselves. When an archive is destroyed, that very destruction is inscribed somehow in the social fabric, and the involved events, however recorded (and there is little doubt they will be recorded) leave new traces (haunting absences?); a new archive that can be followed through the interrogation of its symptoms.

This section starts by describing the theoretical framework that enables the debate concerning the main argument of the research, this is, that the commercials on war and peace perform a significant amount of historical work meant to imagine the nation. It also contains a review of the relevant literature to interrogate the interaction between images and the production

---

<sup>32</sup> Manoff, “Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines.”10.

of a national history; as well as the ways in which current scholarship in Colombia has not developed an analysis of the commercials produced by the state that considers such interaction. The second part of the chapter reflects on the possibilities offered by the archive and the theoretical lenses that collaborate with the argument in the following chapters.

### **Literature Review**

This research emerges from the argument that the narratives on war and peace disseminated by the Colombian state through visual representations can illuminate the historical and political setting in which the understanding of the armed conflict became essential to imagining the nation. To explore the relationship between representations of violence and national identity there is a need to address both the theoretical discussion on representation and violence, as well as the scholarship that has devoted its efforts to grapple with the processes of national formation and the particular role of nationalism within them.

#### *Hurting images*

First, interrogating the visual narratives that emerge from the contexts of violence in Colombia, demands the development of a theoretical framework around the notion of representation, its practices and its visual forms. Feminist authors have largely discussed the ways in which representation and spectatorship are cultural forces that operate in different levels of power relationships. Drawing from their keen insights and unsettling arguments, it is possible to put forward the idea of representation of violence as violence itself; in other words, the ways in which the war is represented by the Colombian state not only conceal state violence but reproduce it too. This reification of trauma and aggression has a particular role in contexts of

national reconciliation and peace agreements, such as the ones that have been gaining predominance in the Colombian political scene since 2003.<sup>33</sup>

The issue of representation is constantly discussed along the problem of spectatorship; they are the two sides of a set of social practices that revolve around the negotiation of particular texts, narratives, discourses and images. Althusser's notion of *ideology*,<sup>34</sup> as well as Gramsci's concept of *hegemony*,<sup>35</sup> speak to the ways in which representations of reality are fabricated to produce an effect of domination in the audience. Echoing this idea, on Chomsky's definition of *propaganda*,<sup>36</sup> representations are always made with an audience in mind; therefore, they are considered to have a premeditated persuasive effect. This interpretation is part of a strong theoretical tradition that has sought to unravel the political intentions of 'manipulating the masses'. However, an analysis of the visual, only focused on how "convincing" or "effective" some images are, limits the possibilities to address the configuration of national narratives that transcend the immediate political profitability in which propaganda is often framed. Ann Laura Stoler's reading of Gramsci on the role of the state, offers a complementary insight: the state is not merely invested in educating consent but also (most importantly perhaps) in schooling desire.<sup>37</sup> The narratives on war and peace examined in this research go beyond attempts of persuading the audience; they are meant to shape the desires and expectations of differentiated subjects (victims, non-victims, perpetrators) while discursively producing a post-conflict national setting.

---

<sup>33</sup> This year marks the agreement between the Colombian government and the paramilitary organization AUC for the reinsertion of the organization's combatants to 'civil life'.

<sup>34</sup> Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses."

<sup>35</sup> Gramsci, "(I) History of the Subaltern Classes; (Ii) The Concept of 'ideology'; (Iii) Cultural Themes: Ideological Material."

<sup>36</sup> Chomsky, *Media Control*.

<sup>37</sup> Stoler, *Haunted by Empire*.

Without denying the powerful propagandistic effort (and effect) of visual narratives, this section moves away from that argument to consider how the intervention of feminists around representation has resulted in an interrogation of the interplay between the regimes of representation<sup>38</sup> and other forces of oppression. This means that the images as cultural texts have a social force, but that force can be understood only in the larger comprehension of manifestations of power inequalities.

Patricia Hill Collins refers to the *controlling images*<sup>39</sup> produced historically to represent Black women and describes those images as mechanisms meant to normalize social injustices such as sexism, racism, and poverty. Collins's analysis is not only circumscribed to visual representations; the images she discusses belong to a wider set of practices in which visibility plays a significant, but not unique, role. What Collins notices as remarkable in these images is their capacity to endure after the social dynamics of power have changed. Representation, then follows, is not only about the immediate instrumental use of particular rhetorical devices to reinforce categories of people, it also works as sediment for new forms of oppression and violence, always ready to emerge. This means that after a particular image has been consistently disseminated it becomes part of an ideological archive.<sup>40</sup> In the case of the Colombian reconciliation context, the images of the armed conflict work as reminiscences. Even after war is no longer promoted, the previous images of war enable the new ones of peace.

---

<sup>38</sup> Eugenia Siapera defines regimes of representation as "Sets of words and images, ideas and views, arguments and opinions that systematically construct difference in certain ways" Siapera, *Cultural Diversity and Global Media*. 147.

<sup>39</sup> Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*.

<sup>40</sup> An ideological archive is made up of a repertoire of rhetorical devices or tropes which circulate with particular purposes in society. This notion works here to establish a distance with the totalizing effect of the use of concepts such as ideology or ideological subjection.

This temporality of images is a crucial dimension when looking at the ways in which images work towards the constitution of social subjects. For example, Wendy Kozol,<sup>41</sup> analyzed the relocation of Japanese American citizens in photographs of internment camps during WWII. She argues that “subjects are produced through the interactions of material and discursive practices.”<sup>42</sup> The historicist practices of the state are characterized not only by a linkage between war and national identity, but also by an outlining of the ideal subjects of the nation. While subjection is a term closely linked to the notions of ideology or hegemony, these feminists’ perspectives around *subjects* render them as much more unstable and in need of a multidimensional reading of the types of violences that their images endorse. Following Kozol, the “body [is] not only a site upon which hegemonic power is written but also (...) a site of the complex and often contradictory conditions of gender, racial, sexual, and/or national identity.”<sup>43</sup> Rather than looking for fixated identities portrayed in the commercials produced by the state, this research aims to trace how the state’s imagined subjects of the Colombian nation take place in the historicist practices surrounding the armed conflict.

How then, are these images received, negotiated and transgressed by the social subjects that they deal with? Gloria Anzaldúa defines *la facultad* as “the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface. It is an instant “sensing,” a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning.”<sup>44</sup> The starting point of this research is based on this “sense,” in Anzaldúa’s terms, that below the superficial propagandistic nature of the Colombian state campaigns, there lies a complex network of historical, political, economic, and cultural agendas, relations and powers.

---

<sup>41</sup> Kozol, “Relocating Citizenship in Photographs of Japanese Americans during World War II.”

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 118.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 119.

<sup>44</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*.



*La facultad* allows a particular way of “seeing through things;” thus, provoking disidentification with the images that seek to lock people as subjects and allowing room for the critique of such images. Echoing some of these insights, bell hooks<sup>45</sup> argues for the recognition of the conventional representations that *do* violence to the image, and how this ignites an examination of the role of spectator, considered in this research as those who are the intended audience of the representations of contexts of systematic violence. In other words, both Anzaldúa’s and hooks’ arguments immediately direct attention to how the representations of the war are not only *imagining* subjects, but addressing them with different appeals.

Both representation and spectatorship configure the circulation of images capable of doing violence. One approach to this issue is provided by Laura Wexler’s<sup>46</sup> conceptualization of the photograph as a weapon. The author re-centers the logics of violence implicit in representing the Other and the possibilities of recovering the elements the image seeks to render dead. Furthermore, Wexler argues that the erasure of subjectivity and the inscription of an ‘othering’ identity through visual practices in general and in photography in particular, have been often disregarded in an academic reluctance that the author calls *photographic anekphrasis*, a refusal to see the violence happening in and through the image. Wexler’s arguments invoke another essential element in the analysis of images: the gaze behind the camera. It would be too easy to assume that behind the camera, there’s always the holder of social power, one that occupies one of the higher (if not the highest) locations in the social hierarchy; reality is of course more complex. Since producing images about an ‘other’ is always a form of exercising power, it is

---

<sup>45</sup> hooks, *Black Looks*.

<sup>46</sup> Wexler, *Tender Violence*.

also common to locate behind the lens those who seek to gain value by devaluing others.<sup>47</sup> Wexler analyzes the production of domesticity by women photographers in the nineteenth century, and rather than ascribing an unquestioned positive value to the women behind the camera's lens, the author calls attention to what different images/representation *do* for different people: She argues that "it is a mistake to assume that the value of a domestic images is the same for all through whose hands it passes (...) under certain conditions of political domination, ordinary-looking family photographs can be highly manipulative weapons."<sup>48</sup> In the photographs analyzed by Wexler, violence is concealed mainly because the image is produced under a different lens (domesticity). The complex process of representation does not become any easier when the violence is blatantly captured by the camera lens. In visual representations of the war, the visibility does not necessarily translate into an acknowledgment or empathy. Representations of violence as violence itself are also effective in obscuring structures of power and pushing to the margins whatever elements of that violence do not fit in the frame.

Regarding images involved in historicist practices around the war, Judith Butler intervenes to remind us that "there's no way to separate under present historical conditions, the material reality of war from those representational regimes through which it operates and which rationalize its own operation."<sup>49</sup> What Butler is suggesting is more than the already-known propagandistic objective of representations of war in certain social and political settings that demand the manufacturing of consent. Her argument merges violence and its representation as one, bearing a relational and interdependent nature, and this implies that from a theoretical standpoint there is no possibility of addressing one while disregarding the other.

---

<sup>47</sup> Lisa Cacho argues how "we are all recruited (...) to devalue lives, life choices, and lifestyles because valuing them would destabilize our own precarious claims to and uneasy desire for social value". Cacho, *Social Death*. 27.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 3.

<sup>49</sup> Butler, *Frames of War*. 29.

Both Wexler's and Butler's arguments on the contiguous nature of different forms of violence (in this research's case war and representation) allow a further development of how images that represent "past" violences are then enabling "present" ones to go both unrepresented and unnoticed. Their reflections are equally important to grapple with the processes of dehumanization that are concomitant to the infliction of violence. This denial of personhood and the differential allocation of social value are deeply tied to the configuration of the boundaries of the modern nation-state.

From these authors' interventions it is possible to argue that the production, reproduction, contestation and re-creation of social representations in visual practices are processes always located in the complex web of power structures that configure social contexts. To interrogate the image is to question the power relations (and the violence within them) invested in the visual. In examining the ways in which these violences intervene in how nations are imagined, it is useful to consider the theories around nation formation and nationalism covered in the next section.

### *Rising nations*

These reflections on the particular features and functions of the representation of war move us towards considerations around national formation. When Derrida<sup>50</sup> discusses the foundational violence of the nation, he is arguing that nation and war are forever tied. This bonding then leads to the particular manifestations of violence within nationalism. If, following Butler,<sup>51</sup> the frames of war determine what lives are worth grieving for; then it can be argued that within nationalist ideologies those grievable lives are also those who belong to the nation.

---

<sup>50</sup> Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*.

<sup>51</sup> Butler, *Frames of War*.

In *Imagined Communities*,<sup>52</sup> Benedict Anderson emphasizes on the importance of media in configuring the elements that enable people to see themselves as belonging to a national unity. In his widely quoted definition of the nation, Anderson explains that “it is an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”<sup>53</sup> The limits and sovereign rights of the nation extend to its spatial and social dimensions. In the armed conflict in Colombia these two realms of power have been constantly contested. Thus, it comes as no surprise that the production of a particular history of the war and its conclusion (by the promulgation of a long-awaited peace) is constantly reaffirming the existence of clearly limited and rightfully governed geographies and peoples.

In this regard, Homi Bhabha<sup>54</sup> discusses the production of the nation as narration; one of ambivalent nature regarding the pedagogical and performative sides of national identity in which national subjects are trapped. Countering Anderson’s arguments, Bhabha concludes that the homogeneity of the nation is always contested by those who inhabit its margins, and thus he argues that ““to study the nation through its narrative address does not merely draw attention to its language and rhetoric; it also attempts to alter the conceptual object itself.”<sup>55</sup> This means that examining the ways in which the nation is narrated leads to an uncovering of its fractures and its inability of self-fulfillment, what Bhabha refers to as the constitutive contradictions of the national text. Nevertheless, Bhabha adds, in spite of its contradictory nature the nation continues to work as a powerful Western idea in which history is always in the making. From this perspective then, the representations of war in Colombia (and the citizens’ recovery from it through discourses of peace and reconciliation) become signifiers of the ways in which the

---

<sup>52</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 3.

<sup>54</sup> Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. 3.

history of violence (and nation) are always in the production of more violence (and more national bonding).

Nation and nationalism compose the background of this study insofar as the narratives are always aiming to define both. The commercials produced by the Colombian state portray a nation overcoming war and subsequently arrange the appropriate nationalist feelings it must inspire in its members. In order to develop a critique of these historicist practices of the Colombian state, this research departs from any romanticized or hopeful view of the nation, understanding it as a project that regulates difference in terms of class, gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity. The features of the nation highlighted in this study are the ones that inflict violence on its citizen-subjects, and in the Colombian case, particularly on those who had been historically the victims of structural and state-sanctioned violence. If the nation-state not only underpins and prescribes, but it is based upon the exercise of violence, then the argument presented here appears as a restatement of the obvious. Nevertheless, looking at the large amount of scholarship invested in grappling with the nuances of the war (and peace) in Colombia the argument seems like a needed one. In other words, what results most problematic about the historicist practices that can be drawn from the commercials is not that they contain a strong nationalist appeal, is not that they produce knowledge about the past; but that they *produce a past* that underwrites the nation *as* a historical destiny. Thus the war (located in the past) is an affirmation of the nation insofar as it is presented as the threat that has been defeated.

These considerations revolve around a wide set of unfulfilled aspirations: security, hegemony, sovereignty, national destiny and nationalist commitment. The images of war and peace considered in this research are produced by the state to fill in the cracks created by all these historical ‘almosts.’ Nevertheless, the un-fulfillment of the nation becomes precisely its

most important rhetorical device: it is not that the nation ‘fails’ to be totalizing (as in hegemonic) but that this ‘failure’ justifies its existence. It forces national subjects to the endeavor of producing the nation, and thus, imagining the nation is nothing more than to invest in it.

### *Tales of war*

This research establishes the (somewhat arbitrary?) timeframe from 2002 to 2016 to examine the T.V commercials produced by the Colombian state. The rationale behind this choice is explained by the relevance of the policies around war and peace that took place during this period. The two presidential administrations covered (Álvaro Uribe’s and Juan Manuel Santos’) were deeply invested in the discourse of war as the primary concern of the nation. Nevertheless, the scholarship that has examined the media presence of the government and its policies during this period has been more concerned with making the case of war and peace representations as propaganda, than to further the argument on how those propagandistic efforts work beyond their immediate and more apparent objectives. The tales of war (and nation) in themselves have not been at the center of these analysis.

The political setting in which the 2002 presidential elections in Colombia took place, favored the growing support towards more reactionary approaches to the armed conflict. This position came to be represented in the figure of Uribe, and it guaranteed his election on the first round of voting on May 26 of that year. From the beginning the president portrayed himself as a prominent ‘mediatic’ figure, positioning his public persona and policies in order to figure prominently in the news headlines during his eight years in power.<sup>56</sup> His highly conservative opinions and tendency to polemicize, paired with the communication strategies of his administration (which included televised monthly meetings with citizens in different towns),

---

<sup>56</sup> See Gómez, “Del Régimen de Comunicación Política Del Presidente de Colombia Álvaro Uribe Vélez”; Viveros Vigoya and others, “Género, Raza Y Nación. Los Réditos Políticos de La Masculinidad Blanca En Colombia.”

gave him an unprecedented preeminence in the media. This particular cooptation of the Colombian media by the state is perhaps what guides most of the studies done around mass media in the 2002-2010 period. The compelling popularity and public support of Uribe might explain the scholars' over-investment in the propagandistic effects of those discourses. This has left unattended the long-term consequences of narrating the nation through the language of war.

In his work *Fictions of Power*<sup>57</sup> (covering the period from 2002 to 2010) Fabio López considers the media interventions of the state in a broad spectrum of news, speeches, and official addresses. He identifies Uribe's patriotic discourse as authoritarian right-wing nationalism and the overarching communication regime that this configured. This regime was based upon the binary of 'us' versus 'them,' the war on terror, anti-FARC sentiments, an unconditional defense of institutions, religious appeals, and the stigmatization of social movements, NGOs, independent journalism, and human rights groups. Nevertheless, the most compelling rhetorical device identified by López is the *ahistorical valuation* that Uribe presented of his own government; a 'before' and 'after' narrative, which worked both to emphasize the exceptionalism of his administration and to refute any critiques towards his political moves.

López also analyzes the ways in which the regime of communication was affected by the political scandals of the last years of Uribe's administration: ties of members of his government with paramilitaries, institutional corruption, and the army's violations of human rights. These worked to lower the popularity of the president and opened spaces for the future policies on war, more focused on a negotiated solution to the armed conflict. López concludes his analysis suggesting that "in the affective re-definition of the nation, not only was an *abusive fictionalization of the present and the past* produced, but also a *dangerous ideological unity* that

---

<sup>57</sup> López de la Roche, *Las ficciones del poder*.

favoured authoritarianism, militarization and the stigmatization of those who thought different.”<sup>58</sup> Devoting his analysis to that dangerous ideological unity, López disregards the rich argument behind the fictionalization of history.

Along the same lines of López’s analysis, Claudia Gordillo<sup>59</sup> provides in her book *Mediatic Security* an overview of the campaigns produced during Uribe’s administration. Looking at the campaign “Heroes in Colombia Do Exist,” Gordillo describes how the campaign works as a device to manufacture consent under the Hero rhetoric: “These campaigns and programs of the government are read in this study as political propaganda, insofar as one of its aims is to persuade, bond and coalesce individuals around a specific political discourse that produced, not only a type of security, but also new ways of control.”<sup>60</sup> According to Gordillo, the rhetoric embedded in the campaigns was meant to achieve society’s agreement with the policies of reinforcing the military and defeating terrorism. This, the author argues, was produced by the dissemination of fear and the emotional interpellation of the public. Linking it back to the Democratic Security Policy (DSP) of Uribe’s government, Gordillo presents the campaigns as a spectacle and simulation of the war which made these security policies necessary. She argues that DSP was a biopolitical device of ‘immunization’ of the audiences, and the campaigns were contributing to the functioning of that mechanism. The fictional discourses of the state promoted by the campaign commercials are always working in a necropolitical<sup>61</sup> logic to establish the extent of the state’s sovereign right to kill; while the ultimate sacrifice of those who wield that right is praised as the epitome of Colombian patriotism. Emphasizing the centrality of media in the Colombian political context, the author ends her analysis by claiming that “It is only through

---

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. 208. (Emphasis added) .

<sup>59</sup> Gordillo, *Seguridad Mediática la propaganda militarista en la Colombia contemporánea*.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 28.

<sup>61</sup> Mbembe, “Necropolitics.”



the mediatization of the war, of power and government discourse that these logics have been able to prosper.”<sup>62</sup>

Gordillo’s and López’ analyses are the most comprehensive ones in terms of the time period and the spectrum of information covered. Other media studies have been more concerned with specific political events during Uribe’s presidency. A brief overview here serves to highlight the main topics addressed by and the tendencies of the scholarship produced around this issue.

Scholar Juan Carlos Gomez<sup>63</sup> argues how politics is merged with television nowadays. In his case study the author analyzes news coverage of the assassination of one of Colombia’s state governors and his peace advisor by the FARC in 2003. Describing the purposeful ambiguities of political performance in Colombian media, Gómez foresees the consolidation of a regime of political communication in which “predominates an intermediation of mass media in the relationships of governors and governed.”<sup>64</sup> For Gómez this media intervention was instrumental to maintain Uribe’s popularity and to manufacture people’s consent and approval of his government’s policies.

This popularity allowed Uribe to carry out a constitutional reform in order to be reelected. Andrés Yepes-Charry<sup>65</sup> shows how during the reelection approval process one of the most influential Colombian magazines showed support for the reform by reinforcing a positive image of Uribe and presenting the process as a needed tool in order to keep him, and the DSP, ruling the country. In 2006, Álvaro Uribe became the first Colombian president to be consecutively

---

<sup>62</sup> Gordillo, *Seguridad Mediativa la propaganda militarista en la Colombia contemporánea*. 115.

<sup>63</sup> Gómez, “Del Régimen de Comunicación Política Del Presidente de Colombia Álvaro Uribe Vélez.”

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. 66.

<sup>65</sup> Yepes-Charry, “Marcos Interpretativos.”

reelected. Raúl Enrique García and Maria Juliana Quintero<sup>66</sup> look at the socio-discursive development of his second campaign against leftist candidate Carlos Gaviria. The authors examined one major national newspaper preference for Uribe's candidacy by its depiction of him as a charismatic political figure and the legitimization of his political agenda. On the other hand, his opponent was always portrayed under an uncertainty frame regarding his campaign successes and a mitigation of his government plans. García and Quintero come to the conclusion that this media coverage affected the voting results, and thus provided immediate political profitability for Uribe.

Some other scholars have tried to move away from the understanding of media representations of war as solely intended to organize a polarized social setting and thus dictate the political positions available to exercise citizenship in Colombia. Feminist theorist Mara Viveros<sup>67</sup> develops a compelling argument around the media's use of the values associated with whiteness and manhood during Uribe's administration as a source of political legitimacy and popularity. Her work complicates the readings on the regimes of representations of war in Colombia and on the ideal of the nation that was publicized by them. She suggests that the legitimacy of Uribe's administration came mainly from his portrayal of himself as the ultimate nationalist, a Colombian embodying all the values that the nation had lost to the hands of terrorism.

Furthermore, Viveros argues that there was a valuation and commodification of cultural identity promoted in this period, and simultaneously, a reinforcement of a process of marginalization in the power axis of race, gender, class, and ethnicity. Naming Uribe's approach

---

<sup>66</sup> García López and Quintero Vélez, "The Socio-Discursive Phenomenon of Legitimation in the Coverage of the Campaigns of Carlos Gaviria and Alvaro Uribe during the 2006 Presidential Elections."

<sup>67</sup> Viveros Vigoya and others, "Género, Raza Y Nación. Los Réditos Políticos de La Masculinidad Blanca En Colombia."

as neo-nationalist, she concludes that “the rhetoric of mestizaje used by his government as an impediment to racial polarization and a discursive valuation of Indigenous and Black people in media, as expressions of Colombian diversity, re-configured national identity.”<sup>68</sup>

Laura Wexler’s notion of *photographic anekphrasis*, as an academic tendency to overlook the violence occurring in and through photographs, seems to work here to describe the current scholarship on media representations about the armed conflict in Colombia, particularly those works examining state narratives on war and peace. Furthermore, to render the archive as a mere demonstration of the attempts at media manipulation of the Colombian population is to foreclose the possibility to inscribe it in a larger historicist process that works as the privileged avenue to reconfigure the nation’s limits and its sovereign power.<sup>69</sup>

These studies show the growing interest in academic research to address the political phenomenon represented by Uribe’s presidency and thus, an appreciation of the important role of his government’s efforts to shape the understanding of the armed conflict through media. Furthermore, they provide foundational elements to consider the historicist practices embedded in those efforts and to examine its effects in the years to come. This research seeks to be a step towards the examination of those historicist practices, clearly disregarded by the current scholarship analyzing the cultural texts stemming from mass media.

### **Methodology and Methods**

This research analyzes T.V commercials produced by institutions of the Colombian state such as the Army and the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace. The commercials were broadcast on national television, in both private and state-owned networks, between 2002-2016. In this study, these commercials are considered to be symptomatic of the circulating narratives

---

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 97.

<sup>69</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

on war and peace put forward by the Colombian state recently, and thus, as an avenue to approach the historicist practices and mechanisms of the state to process the war, as well as their intricate ties with national building ideals.

In developing the research questions, the intention is to address the tensions among state's policies, the context of violence of the country, and the larger meta-narrative about the history of the nation (See Appendix 1). The study is guided by the following main research question: How do the narratives on war and peace embedded in Colombian state's campaigns configure historicist practices that seek to determine the ways in which the nation is imagined? From here is possible to formulate three secondary research questions:

RQ1. What are the main visual and oral features of the narratives on war and peace present in Colombian state mass media campaigns?

RQ2. What are the rhetorical devices used to narrate war and peace in the TV commercials produced by the Colombian state?

RQ3. What are the changes and continuities between campaigns about the inevitability of war and the subsequent representations of the inexorability of peace?

### *Methodology*

The approach is meant to *deconstruct* the state's narratives on war and peace in Colombia. Deconstruction, a term coined by Jacques Derrida, is a concept that has been widely discussed, debated and defined; Derrida himself claimed on one occasion that deconstruction did not mean anything.<sup>70</sup> For the purpose of this research, deconstruction is understood as defined by Gayatri Spivak in her preface to *Of Grammatology*: "To locate the promising marginal text, to disclose the undecidable moment, to pry it loose with the positive lever of the signifier; to reverse the resident hierarchy, only to displace it; to dismantle in order to reconstitute what is

---

<sup>70</sup> Rolfe, "Deconstruction in a Nutshell."

always already inscribed.”<sup>71</sup> Merging the analysis of visual culture with hauntology theories in examining historical violence, Ruby Tapia echoes Toni Morrison’s novel *Beloved* in posing the challenge to “say things that are pictures and picture things that are not.”<sup>72</sup> “Saying things that are pictures” demands an effort to re-build the concealed bonds between the images and the social structures of power of which they are evidence. “Picture things that are not” means to fill in the gaps of the fractured narrative that the image seeks to promote.

In considering the commercials from this perspective, the underlying contention of this study is that in the interrogation and critique of the narratives of power, lies the possibility to craft new narratives, and in this particular case, to unsettle the nationalist discourses embedded in these visual representations of the Colombian armed conflict. Taking this notion of deconstruction as a starting point, and considering the significant insights of feminists to visual culture studies, the research draws from *feminist film analysis*, “a theoretical examination of films in terms of their signifying process means understanding that depictions of social ‘reality’ are mediated by a signifying mode with its own specific structures and determinations.”<sup>73</sup> Since the commercials are produced as a set of representations that allegedly speak to the reality of the conflict but that are not (generally) presented as “true” stories -rather they use actors and manufactured settings and plots- this research will consider them as belonging to the same realm as films, that is, as cultural products that constitute “a dynamic process of the production of meanings, inscribed into the larger context of social relations (...) a play of signification, dynamism and contradiction.”<sup>74</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup> Spivak, “Preface.”

<sup>72</sup> Tapia, *American Pietàs: Visions of Race, Death and the Maternal*.

<sup>73</sup> Camera Obscura Collective, “Feminism and Film: Critical Approaches.” 234.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* 236.

This work seeks to follow the dialogue between the systemic violence in Colombia and the efforts of the state to produce a history about it. This production of history does not necessarily operate on the basis of the erasure of events and its traces (destroying the archive). Instead what these cultural texts seem to teach us is that amnesia can also occur via the saturation of the historical record, and thus the normalization and officialization of the contexts of violence in Colombia. The commercials, as fictional tales of the war, do not necessarily make truth claims and yet are deeply invested in knowledge production, in sense-making. This research asks what it is about the fictional representations of war and peace that performs the historicist practices of the state? As fabricated images of the war, the ‘real’ is inscribed in the commercial as the overarching narrative that war spectators must draw from the commercial’s plot.

The methodological question here could be, following Laura Wexler, what can be recovered from the archive produced by the Colombian state about the war? These things to be recovered are always elusive (and yet blatantly present); therefore, the question might be rephrased borrowing from Avery Gordon’s *Ghostly Matters*: what can be *evoked* from the archive?<sup>75</sup> This research considers the archive formed by the commercials as being haunted (an archive is haunted no matter what is it about), and it is haunted in both obvious and subtle ways. It is indeed an archive dealing with war and peace, and thus the terror of mass killings, disappearances, torture and forced displacement, but is also haunted by the forces that have shaped the nation. What hauntology allows for the sake of this argument is to establish a tension between the margin and the center. And, as explained by Yen Le Espiritu, “we have to be willing to become tellers of ghost stories—that is, to pay attention to what modern history has rendered ghostly, and to write into being the seething presence of the things that appear to be not there.”<sup>76</sup>

---

<sup>75</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*.

<sup>76</sup> Espiritu, Thu-Huong, and Espiritu, “Thirty Years afterWARD.” xix

Deconstructing the visual record of the war, produced by the state as government advertisement, is a task less invested in presenting a dichotomy between ‘official’ and ‘counter’ history, and more interested in examining the interplay of absences and presences, as well as their significance. Because presences and absences are always arrangements of value, the narratives are constantly evoking the race, gender, and class cleavages that the nation -as a powerful idea<sup>77</sup>- underpins. As Gordon reminds us, history “is that ghostly totality that articulates and disarticulates itself and the subjects who inhabit it.”<sup>78</sup>

The methodology of *Feminist film analysis* acknowledges the violences that the image can do, but also the powerful potential of looking back. In developing the research there is a consideration of being a target of these rhetorical devices that address spectators with a framework to understand themselves as part of the imagined community of the Colombian nation, as portrayed by the state. But the research also explores the process of developing an oppositional gaze,<sup>79</sup> a disruptive, deconstructive and defiant look towards the violences that the images perform, endorse, obscure, and sanction.

### *Methods*

In order to develop the *deconstructive* effort of this research, and considering the archive selected for that purpose, this study employs a *textual analysis* of the commercials, treating them as texts from which a set of narratives on war and peace arise. Fairclough (1992) consider that texts “constitute a major source of evidence for grounding claims about social structures, relations and processes. The evidence we have for these constructs comes from the various material forms of social action, including texts.”<sup>80</sup> From this perspective the textual analysis of

---

<sup>77</sup> Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*.

<sup>78</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*. 184.

<sup>79</sup> hooks, *Black Looks*.

<sup>80</sup> Fairclough, “Linguistic and Intertextual Analysis within Discourse Analysis.”211.

the selected commercials will enable a discussion on the larger social and power structures that intervene in the Colombian armed conflict.

Following the narratives that emerge from the description of the commercials, the research provides an exploration of the rhetorical devices or tropes utilized to describe the armed conflict and the different social actors involved in it. Guided by the textual analysis method described above, the visual, oral and textual representations in the commercials compound the archive analyzed under the light of its immediate political intentions and its function as a mechanism for legitimating past and current state-sanctioned violence. The analysis also attempts to address where these rhetorical devices come from and how they contribute to the imagined community of the Colombian nation.



## CHAPTER 2: *War Spectacles*

### Introduction

The commercial opens with the image of a Spanish soldier in a horse looking from a mountain top, in white letters the viewer reads “*XIX century- Libertarian Campaign.*” Then, in the horizon, an explosion begins a slow motion sequence and sets the stage for a great battle to begin: Spanish soldiers on one side and peasant rebels carrying the Colombian flag on the other, all advancing into the battlefield. The colonial army is larger in numbers and stronger in weapons. There is another explosion. A man hides in the grass, and looking to his left he says “*It looks hard right?*” A face-painted modern Colombian soldier responds: “*But we can do it!*” Past and present warriors emerge from the ground to face their enemy, while helicopters fly over the scene. A narrator’s voice is heard: “*Times might have changed, but our heroes’ objective remains the same: to fight for freedom, sovereignty, and security in Colombia. Heroes in Colombia do exist!*” Before the end of the commercial, the Army’s logo is displayed and under it a legend that reads: “*200 years of honor and glory.*”<sup>81</sup>

As part of the celebration of the 200 years of what is known in Colombian history as “the independence cry,” the Colombian Army produced the commercial described above. It took “the libertarian campaign” nine more years (until 1819) to achieve independence from the Spanish Crown and produce with it a new national discourse based on the supremacy of the *criollo* elite. The commercial is part of a media campaign of the Colombian Army called “Heroes in Colombia Do Exist,” which magnifies the figure of the soldier, not only as the defender of the

---

<sup>81</sup> EjercitoNalCol. “Comercial Bicentenario Ejército Nacional” Youtube Video, 2:59. Posted [March 2010] [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mTv-7RXer\\_Q&list=PLB6C9514F5E339FFD](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mTv-7RXer_Q&list=PLB6C9514F5E339FFD).

nation but beyond that: as the ultimate brave and selfless hero, committed to the protection of his fellow citizens and willing to give up his life for them if necessary.

These types of campaigns were predominant in state narratives on war during the two presidential terms of Álvaro Uribe (2002-2010) and were coherent and constitutive of his policy of Democratic Security (DSP) as well as the popularized rhetoric during his period of “war on terror.”<sup>82</sup> This chapter examines the configuration of these narratives and the rhetorical devices utilized to provide a frame<sup>83</sup> for the Colombian armed conflict, which created strong ties between the history of the war and the identity of the nation. It also considers how peace and reconciliation narratives receded during this period as a response to at least two separate political events: the failure of the peace negotiations with the FARC attempted by Uribe’s predecessor, and the re-insertion of paramilitaries orchestrated under the Law of Justice and Peace of 2005.

The idea of *war spectacles* has a twofold meaning: first, as the ways in which the emergence of representations of violence are spectacles crafted for an audience by developing a set of rhetorical devices; and second, the title suggests that the narratives of war configure a particular lens for these audiences to see and understand national reality. These war spectacles are by no means the only narratives circulating about the history of the armed conflict in Colombia, and it would be difficult to make the case that they hold a hegemonic status. Rather, what follows from the examination of these narratives is precisely their unstable character that might render political profitability in certain sectors of the Colombian society, but that also operate, in a long-term logic, as sedimentation for the historicist practices of the state which

---

<sup>82</sup> Lesley Gill explains how these struggles to name the armed conflict reflected changes in the global politics of the time, ““When the Cold War fight against ‘communists’ (...) became obsolete, the simmering ‘war on drugs’ in the Andean region became, in the 1990s, a more important mechanism for mobilizing public support for intervention, especially US involvement in Colombia’s decades-long civil war. For a brief moment, the ‘narco-guerrilla’ replaced the communist’ as the new enemy, but the ‘terrorist’ quickly supplanted it in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks”. Gill, “War and Peace in Colombia.” 132.

<sup>83</sup> Butler, *Frames of War*.

produce the nation. This chapter's main argument is that placing state campaigns within the framework of historicist practices allows for new interrogations to rise and to envision a less immediate effect of the narratives; in other words, how the nation is *imaged* helps to understand something about how it is *imagined*.

The concept of imagined communities introduced by Benedict Anderson<sup>84</sup> in his influential work around nationalism provides a framework to discuss the narratives produced about war under the two consecutive administrations of Álvaro Uribe. Anderson's definition of nation as "an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign,"<sup>85</sup> emphasizes its homogenizing effect, one that even in the acknowledgment of difference (of class, gender, race, ethnicity) is most importantly depicting the nation as "a deep, horizontal comradeship."<sup>86</sup> The 'flattening' discourse during Uribe's administration was deliberately focused on the war, tracing a divisive line (defined by patriotism) between the legitimate members of the nation and the terrorists that were threatening its sovereignty.

The other relevant aspect in Anderson's understanding of the nation is that this 'horizontal comradeship' is worthy of sacrifices, often conceived under the idea of death. To kill and to give one's life (e.g., the Colombian soldiers and peasants in the bicentennial commercial), become the unquestioned will of every nationalist. Anderson's arguments are rooted in the understanding of nationalism as a culturally, rather than merely politically, fixated phenomenon. It is within a cultural setting, and history, that people identify as members of the nation.

Identification takes place through different strategies of representation bringing together a group of different people into an idea of unity and shared interests. Within that process, Anderson considered media as having a profound effect in providing the emotional devices for

---

<sup>84</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* 5.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* 6.

imagining the nation. For example, provincial, local papers help to delimit the geographical boundaries of the nation as well as the social dynamics within it. In the case of the South American colonies, these media interventions were influential in the fracturing of the Spanish Empire into many countries instead of under a continental identity of (Latin) Americanism. According to Anderson's approach, what determines these identities is the mediating function of nationalism between the state and the nation, because "official nationalism (...) [is] something emanating from the state, and serving the interests of the state first and foremost."<sup>87</sup>

While Anderson provides an important insight to consider the fabrication of the group that then becomes the nation, Homi Bhabha<sup>88</sup> reminds us of the exclusionary practices that are complementary to this process. He argues that there are "complex strategies of cultural identification and discursive address that function in the name of 'the people' or 'the nation' and make them the immanent subjects and objects of a range of social and literary narratives."<sup>89</sup> The configuration of the imagined community is then always in the process of defining where are its boundaries and who represents the ideal subjects of the nation-state. In examining the state narratives on war in Colombia from 2002 to 2010, the tensions around those boundaries and subjects emerge.

During the administration of Álvaro Uribe, the centrality of war and the militaristic solution to the armed conflict were reflected both in policies and in the media. The intertwined development of the discourse and the actions of the government were constantly embedded with nationalist appeals and the outlining of the new values of the nation. War not only as a material reality, but also as a representational scheme provided the imaginary to think about the nation. Furthermore, the ways in which the armed conflict came to be portrayed was essential to the

---

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.159.

<sup>88</sup> Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. 292.

political and military actions that followed. Here it is possible to borrow from Judith Butler's<sup>90</sup> analysis and her assertion in which war (representational) frames are not separable from their material reality. The 'frames of war' that Butler identifies, work to "decide which lives will be recognizable as lives and which will not, [and thus] must circulate in order to establish their hegemony."<sup>91</sup> The circulation of those frames during the period 2002-2010 exceeded the instantaneous effects of raising support for the government's policies, and came to form an ideological archive that reified the racial, gendered, class-based and ethnic hierarchies that emerged in Colombia after independence from Spain. Furthermore, this archive was also configuring the key tropes that helped with the transition from the inevitability of war to the inexorability of peace that has occurred in the most recent period (2010-2016), as a result of the current government's peace negotiations with the guerrilla organization FARC.

Uribe's emphasis on the militaristic response to the insurgency of the guerrilla organizations FARC and ELN, radically contrasted with his willingness to negotiate with paramilitary groups, mainly the AUC. The legal frameworks utilized during his administration to guide these seemingly contradictory policies provide important insights on how the historicist practices of the state develop in a multiplicity of sites, while constantly reinforcing a core ideological archive, which in this case is devoted to the affirmation of the Colombian nation.

### **Democratic Security Policy and Law of Justice and Peace**

On June 16 of 2003, president Álvaro Uribe Vélez signed the Democratic Security Policy (DSP). In the opening letter of the published format of the policy, Uribe addresses Colombian citizens in messianic rhetoric: "*The antipode of democratic policy is terrorism, that seeks to impose its will over others sacrificing the lives of thousands (...) in the face of terrorism there*

---

<sup>90</sup> Butler, *Frames of War*.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.* 29.

*can only be one response: to defeat it.*” In this short passage Uribe managed to reinforce two core ideas of his government: first, that the nation’s enemies are not ideological dissidents, but terrorists; and second, that the state has no other choice but to annihilate them. The inevitability of war on terror became unquestioned from that point on, bearing a strong presence in Uribe’s public addresses, as well as in the media coverage of his administration. Central to the narratives on war of this period, embedded in the campaigns of the state, is their alignment with the Democratic Security Policy of Uribe’s administration.

Some authors have argued how the DSP also reflects U.S neocolonial power over Colombia. Adam Isacson<sup>92</sup> pointed out how there was little concern from the U.S about Uribe’s draconian security policies and their consequences. Beyond the unquestioned support of the DSP, political scientist Francisco Gutiérrez-Sanín<sup>93</sup> argued in 2003, just one year after Uribe had become president, that “with its new global war, this time on terrorism, the Bush administration offered the Colombian government three basic motifs: first, to frame the Colombian conflict in terms of the war on terrorism (...) second, to ask for further relaxations of human rights standards (...) and third, (...) to invite deeper intervention.”<sup>94</sup> Although Gutiérrez-Sanín has ambivalent sentiments around U.S intervention in the Colombian conflict, he provides in this passage a fair interpretation of how a larger global discourse and political agenda merges with the needs and desires of national elites, both coinciding in a complete disregard for the people who actually inhabit the contexts of violence.<sup>95</sup>

---

<sup>92</sup> Isacson, “Optimism, Pessimism, and Terrorism.”

<sup>93</sup> Gutiérrez, “Institutionalizing Global Wars: State Transformations in Colombia, 1978-200.”

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. 148.

<sup>95</sup> Lesley Gill argues how paramilitary group AUC “grew more lethal with the passage in 2000 of Plan Colombia, a 1.3 billion mostly military US aid program, approved under President Clinton, that strengthened the police and the military, AUC’s closest allies”. Gill, “War and Peace in Colombia.” 135.

Josefina Echavarría<sup>96</sup> explores the discourse embedded in the DSP and elaborates on a critique of the assumptions of the benefits of a stronger state. Her analysis is guided by the premise that “the state in/security produces- it does not prevent- more violence.”<sup>97</sup> One of the main critiques raised by the policy had to do with the erasure of distinct lines between combatants (either forces of the state or ‘illegal armed groups’) and civil society. The policy considered measures to involve civilians in an espionage network that was meant to provide intelligence information to the state forces; the network worked on the basis of monetary incentives to those providing tips regarding the whereabouts of guerrillas. It is worth noting that the policy, while formally addressing all ‘illegal armed groups,’ was openly presented by the government as the legal tool to end the guerrillas. With the guerrillas as the ultimate enemies of the nation, the DSP asked Colombians to actively engage in the fight against terrorism; *democratic security* came to signify that everyone is in charge of protecting the nation.

This sentiment behind the DSP is synthesized in a commercial produced by the Colombian Army in 2008. A sequence of photographs flashes quickly on the screen. Each set of flashes is divided with a screen going black; against a background of violins and drums, a male narrator’s voice explains each set. In the first scene two men are looking at some architectural plans and pointing to a building: “*You are a soldier when you build.*” Following next, a teacher is talking to a classroom: “*You are a soldier when you teach.*” The third scene is a doctor delivering a newborn to their mother: “*You are a soldier when you give life.*” Then, a peasant working on the field: “*You are a soldier when you plant.*” The final set shows a couple of soldiers in an open landscape with children gathering around them: “*In Colombia we are more than 40 million soldiers.*” The screen freezes in a scene in which the soldier is giving his cap to

---

<sup>96</sup> Echavarría, *In/security in Colombia*.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. 3.

one of the children surrounding him; the narrator's voice echoes the sign which appears in white, capital letters: COLOMBIA ONE ARMY (COLOMBIA UN SÓLO EJÉRCITO)<sup>98</sup>. These images of productive and reproductive labor, matching the role of the soldier, place together imaginaries not only emergent from the DSP ("everyone must collaborate with securing the nation against terrorists"), but also from an envisioned nation which is seemingly progressing in the midst of the war. It comes as no surprise that commercials produced by the state do not reveal the deep economic inequalities and class differences of a country in which poverty reaches 27.8% of the population.<sup>99</sup> Nevertheless, the commercial does more than merely concealing economic hardship: it formulates that war is productive, and thus, state violence, whether wielded against 'terrorists' or civilians, must be understood as an avenue for development.

In her analysis of the DSP, Echavarría also argues that the policy produces particular imaginaries of the war, that in turn intertwine with those of peace, and that ultimately configure national identity imaginaries. She identifies three realms in which this happens: first, in the (re)definition of peace as the result of a strong state; second, the reframing of the conflict as a war on terror; and third (as a consequence of the previous two), exclusionary dynamics of 'us' against 'them' became more entrenched in the understanding of war promoted by the policy. The processes described by Echavarría in her analysis of the DSP are parallel to the ones that can be outlined for the commercials and campaigns produced by the state under Uribe's government. Moreover, both the policy and the campaigns belong to the same political discourses, draw from

---

<sup>98</sup> Ejército Nacional de Colombia, "Comercial fotos 2008" *Ejército Nacional de Colombia* video, 0:25. <http://www.ejercito.mil.co/?idcategoria=228741&pag=4>

<sup>99</sup> "Un total de 171.000 personas dejaron de ser pobres entre 2014 y 2015" [A total of 171.000 people ceased to be poor between 2014 and 2015] *El tiempo*. March 2, 2016. Accessed July 7, 2016. <http://www.eltiempo.com/economia/sectores/cifra-de-pobreza-y-pobre-extrema-en-colombia-2016/16525815>



the same ideological archive, and help to configure the historicist practices that not only conceal, but also reproduce state violence in Colombia.

The DSP was, nevertheless, only the preamble to the development of a larger institutional adjustment to the government's agenda. Another juridical landmark took place two years later with Law 975 of 2005, also known as Law of Justice and Peace (LJP). The LJP was designed as the result of the agreements between the national government and the paramilitary organization AUC, although it was formally presented as a legal framework for a period of 'transition' that contemplated the reinsertion of members of any 'illegal armed group'. Among a great number of critiques, the LJP has been under scrutiny for proclaiming a transitional scenario in the middle of the conflict.<sup>100</sup>

Alejandro Castillejo<sup>101</sup> highlights some of the most relevant critiques of the LJP: the Law seeks to erase the ties between the state and paramilitaries, it was the result of the tensions emerging from the agreements with the AUC; it allowed for 'druglords' to be included within its terms;<sup>102</sup> and furthermore, it enabled "a revisionist interpretation of history where longer temporalities and structural interpretations of the origins of armed conflict disappeared at least from public debate and government-friendly media corporations."<sup>103</sup> Castillejo also analyzes how the terminology of the LJP reflected political struggles around the conflict and how it was *named*. These nominal practices were in turn shaping what was recognizable as violence, who was to be acknowledged as a victim, and who as a perpetrator.

---

<sup>100</sup> García-Godos and Lid-Knut, "Transitional Justice and Victims' Rights before the End of a Conflict"; Delgado Barón, "Una Justicia Transicional Sin Transición."

<sup>101</sup> Castillejo-Cuéllar, "Historical Injuries, Temporalities of the Law: Articulations of a Violent Past in Two Transitional Scenarios."

<sup>102</sup> In presenting themselves as members/commanders of illegal groups these druglords will get special benefits from the state.

<sup>103</sup> Castillejo-Cuéllar, "Historical Injuries, Temporalities of the Law: Articulations of a Violent Past in Two Transitional Scenarios." 51.

The scholarship that has reflected around the juridical regulation of the narratives on war and peace in Colombia confirms that there is more to say about the media campaigns produced by the state than a mere explanation of them as propaganda. Castillejo makes the case that the language of the law makes unintelligible the structural dimensions of violence and its roots, and thus transition scenarios are a promise of *newness*. However, what if, expanding his argument, reconciliation is not only about a ‘new beginning’ but about the fulfillment of a national destiny, a mythology crucial to all nationalisms? Then these historicist practices deployed by the Colombian state resonate with what Homi Bhabha calls the ambivalent temporalities of the nation.<sup>104</sup> If the legal terminology of this period reflected political struggles around the conflict, and thus produced “a hegemonic transformation of the relationship between historical time and violence itself,”<sup>105</sup> then it can be argued that this change was not exclusive of the legal maneuverings that organized and prescribed ways of understanding the war, but larger historicist practices that can also be found in other cultural texts, such as the visual devices that are the main focus of this research.

Examining these historicist practices of the state, leads necessarily to an interrogation of the motivations to tell a particular history of the war and thus evokes presences that illuminate, not a counter-history, but a larger picture in which these texts are possible and needed. In other words, the commercials are simultaneously visual records of the absence of a history and visual devices for a particular history to be told. This research can only partially address both dimensions. It is possible to ask then, what is it that the history produced leaves behind? What is lost after such national history has been outlined? How do these exclusionary practices *produce* the nation?

---

<sup>104</sup> Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*.

<sup>105</sup> Castillejo-Cuéllar, “Historical Injuries, Temporalities of the Law: Articulations of a Violent Past in Two Transitional Scenarios.” 53.

## Spectators of War

Let us return to the bicentennial commercial mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. The commercial is part of the highly publicized campaign “Heroes in Colombia Do Exist”, which has been studied and analyzed<sup>106</sup> as a powerful tool of state propaganda. Following an Althusserian framework, the campaign indeed works as a manifestation of the *ideological state apparatus (ISA)* that seeks the reproduction of structures of power and domination in society.<sup>107</sup> In this case, the ideological appeal of the campaign serves to raise the figure of the soldier and concomitantly to reproduce the legitimacy of the state and its forces to exercise control over the national territory and its peoples.

The bicentennial commercial seeks to invoke the foundational violence of the Colombian nation.<sup>108</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, an impoverished peasant population exhausted by the colonial taxation system, began to show a growing unrest. This situation was quickly seized by the *criollo* elite that was also attentive of the crisis of the Spanish Crown.<sup>109</sup> The date that the commercial commemorates (1810) is not, however, the landmark of independence in Colombia; it is rather a widely-known historical anecdote of an event that took place in the capital of the country on the 20th of July of that year; “Having mobilized the *populacho* to defend the homes of the supposedly threatened creoles (...) they [creoles] provided the spark for a general explosion by deliberately provoking a dispute with a Spanish merchant known to be hostile with creoles.”<sup>110</sup>

The actual date of Colombian independence is August 7, 1819, which marks the Battle of Boyacá, when royalist forces were defeated by the patriots; therefore, the ‘accurate’ date of

---

<sup>106</sup> López de la Roche, *Las ficciones del poder*; Gordillo, *Seguridad Mediática la propaganda militarista en la Colombia contemporánea*.

<sup>107</sup> Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses.”

<sup>108</sup> Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*.

<sup>109</sup> Safford and Palacios, *Colombia: Fragmented Land, Divided Society*.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.* 87.

bicentennial is yet to happen. What this seemingly small detail helps to elucidate is that embedded in the commercial are practices that arrange meanings in ways that work in the production of a particular history. The popular protests that actually took place in 1810 have no place as visual references for the Independence period, and thus the narrative appeals to the armed confrontations between the patriot army and the colonial power.

The three-minute sequence depicts an epic battle that for the most part does not conflate both armies within the same frame; the first part of the narrative is mainly devoted to illustrating the differences among them. With an acoustic background of a sorrowful song by a woman accompanied by violins and basses, the royalists appear as a formally constituted army; they wear uniforms, have sophisticated firearms, cannons, and they also carry their empire's symbols, among them, Spain's flag. The patriots, on the other hand, have a very basic make up, dressed as peasants (all in white clothes) and armed with little more than bayonets and spears. Nevertheless, they as well carry a symbol: the modern Colombian flag. The use of this symbolic marker denotes the exacerbated nationalism needed now and then to face the enemies of the nation's sovereignty as represented in the flag; a flag that was not adopted until half a century later (in 1861), after the efforts to form a consolidated larger continental political entity failed.<sup>111</sup> In weaving together the struggles of ancient and modern patriots, a mythic understanding of the nation emerges: the role of the flag is not so much to signify the loyalties of the army, but to inscribe in the historical narrative the idea of a nation that was always ready to rise. Benedict Anderson<sup>112</sup> poses the question of how people come to feel such an attachment to the inventions of their imagination. This *political love* is configured in the commercial by the already-known

---

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

great destiny of the patriots; to linger in the national consciousness, in the school textbooks, and to occupy a privileged status in the annals of history.

Moreover, the visual disparities between a strong and structured army and an unorganized resistance aim to create a climate of unease for the spectator. When the armies finally meet, the camera takes the patriots' barricade as standpoint; it is from behind the bushes that the audience sees the first patriot combatants' fall. Another patriot takes off his hat and, trying to remain hidden in the ground, looks at his fellow combatants lying dead in the field; his eyes are watery and his facial expression is of despair. However when he talks he sounds eager and concerned, but not sad. At this point the commercial reaches its climax when the 19<sup>th</sup> century patriot looks to his left and -without surprise- addresses a 21<sup>st</sup> century soldier, 'properly' dressed and armed. Their conversation simultaneously reflects the anguish of the patriot peasant (*"It looks hard, right?"*) and the absolute confidence of the soldier (who in a reassuring and decisive manner, responds: *"But we can do it!"*) Accompanied by the modern army, the patriot leads the way into the fight. They start descending from the knoll, meanwhile the narrator's voice disrupts the acoustic background that had been playing: *"Times might have changed, but our heroes' objective remains the same: to fight for freedom, sovereignty, and security in Colombia. Heroes in Colombia do exist!"* The historical linkage embedded in this phrase speaks to the inevitability of war then and now, and to the supreme value of the nation in the face of death. The disruption of the time continuum of the commercial, just as the other purely fictional elements that are included (like the flight of helicopters), work to fulfill the purpose of framing this singular battle beyond its historical context, and thus implies that war as a metaphoric space has something to teach us about who 'Colombians are.'

Judith Butler<sup>113</sup> describes the differential framing of violence as a mechanism to regulate affective and ethical dispositions. In this commercial, there is nothing about war and violence that is unequivocally wrong; nor is the tragedy of loss presented as insurmountable. The war, fought under the ideals of ‘freedom, sovereignty and security.’ is understood and depicted not only as necessary, but as essentially good, because it sets up the conditions for the nation ‘to be.’ Following Butler, the frame highlights the lineage of heroes that the modern nation must honor; and thus the collectivity created (i.e., imagined) deepens the discursive production of ideal subjects. While the DSP was trying to produce an ideal nation/army of more than 40 million soldiers, the bicentennial commercial emphasizes the exceptionality of the army’s members: ‘heroes’ who must be admired and rewarded for their commitment, which cannot be matched by most. This exceptionality underpins the soldiers’ role in securing sovereignty and the consequential subservience of civilians to state forces. These apparently contradictory narratives are, however, complementary; they serve as sites to prescribe the working economies of value<sup>114</sup> which in turn organize the ways in which *lives* are discernible from those *who are not*.<sup>115</sup>

This exceptionality of the soldier as a rhetorical device in the narratives on war during Uribe’s administration is, unsurprisingly perhaps, also the response to one of the most horrid consequences of the DSP. In 2008, the nation was exposed to a widespread practice in the military known as ‘falsos positivos’ (false positives); it consisted of a strategy to produce results in terms of bodies of guerrillas killed in combat (positives). To accomplish the necessary numbers to back up the DSP and simultaneously obtain benefits that ranged from days off to monetary compensation, military units all across the country engaged in the illegal recruitment of young men from impoverished areas in the cities using the deception of a job offer. After they

---

<sup>113</sup> Butler, *Frames of War*.

<sup>114</sup> Cacho, *Social Death*.

<sup>115</sup> Butler, *Precarious Life*.

were transported to a rural location they were murdered and dressed as guerrillas, then the soldiers completed the scene placing weapons near to the bodies.<sup>116</sup> The ‘falsos positivos’ draw national attention on October, 2008, when the case of 19 young men from the small city of Soacha, victims of these so called ‘extrajudicial executions,’<sup>117</sup> was clearly tied to the Santander Battalion of the Colombian Army.

The government’s response came three weeks later in the form of the destitution of 27 members of the military. In his public declaration, Uribe was quick to condemn the crimes, while framing them as the result of a misrepresentation of the internal reward system of the Army: “*We cannot allow for the efficacy in the struggles against delinquents to be mistaken with cowardice to face delinquents; and the distortion of efficacy by killing innocent victims.*”<sup>118</sup> The ‘mistaken directives’ were later known by the public as Permanent Ministerial Directive 29/2005 and Decree 1400 of 2006.<sup>119</sup> The Directive and the Decree authorized monetary compensations for military results that included members of illegal armies killed in combat as well as their armament. Against the insistence of the government of referring to ‘falsos positivos’ as isolated events from these so-called misinterpretations, the reports of cases has only grown in the last 8 years; and around 5700 cases have been denounced so far. The criminal justice system has incarcerated more than 800 soldiers, but the high command of the Army, responsible for authorizing the rewards and overseeing military operations, has remained almost intact.<sup>120</sup> This

---

<sup>116</sup> Human Rights Watch report of 2015 adds, “In other cases, army members abducted victims from their homes or detained them in public places and transported them to the site of their executions. There were also many incidents in which paramilitary groups provided the troops with the victims.” Schoening, *On Their Watch*. 24.

<sup>117</sup> The terminology around this practice also reveals the power struggles that arose from its public exposure. The term ‘extrajudicial execution’ is highly inaccurate in Colombia, given that the country’s law does not allow for the death penalty, therefore there can not be ‘judicial executions’ to juxtapose to this crime typology.

<sup>118</sup> La Silla Vacía. “Documental sobre falsos positivos (2009)”. YouTube video, 54:51, posted by La Silla Vacía, March 6 2012.

<sup>119</sup> The decree was derogated one year later by Decree 1664 of 2007 but the Ministerial Directive remained active.

<sup>120</sup> Schoening, *On Their Watch*.

scandal followed other highly publicized setbacks for Uribe, who in his second mandate was struggling to remain in power for another period.<sup>121</sup>

The tainted image of the Army was paradoxically whitewashed through the exaltation of those chosen as scapegoats in the “falsos positivos” cases. The campaign “Heroes in Colombia Do Exist” evolved from 2008 commercials that portrayed an omnipresent state force, to the ones in 2009 that were devoted to describe how the valuation of life made by Colombian soldiers was unparalleled. One of the commercials produced in 2008 staged the hidden presence of the army as the guarantee of security by highlighting the Army’s careful labor of intelligence and depicting sophisticated military technology. The three scenes in the 32-second sequence manage to instill the sense of rightful violence in hands of state forces. First, the soldiers hidden in the bushes: *“Even if you can’t see us, we are always there.”* Second, the helicopters overflying a field: *“Even if you can’t hear us, we are also there.”* And finally the low-light green screen at the end: *“And even if the middle of darkness, we are your guardians.”*<sup>122</sup> They all work through a duplicity of meaning; to be protected is no different from being threatened. Without its final phrase the commercial might as well be directed to the illegal armed groups. As Judith Butler reminds us “to be protected from violence by the nation-state is to be exposed to the violence wielded by the nation-state, so to rely on the nation-state for protection from violence is precisely to exchange one potential violence for another.”<sup>123</sup>

An ethical turn in the narrative on war takes place in 2009. It could be argued how that turn matched the media exposure of “falsos positivos,” and how the discredit of the military was faced with this portrayal of the Hero as not only brave, but most importantly (and remarkably),

---

<sup>121</sup> In April 2008, almost a third of the Congress, all supporters of the government, were accused of ‘parapolítica’, this is, for having links with paramilitary groups and agreements with them to get elected.

<sup>122</sup> Ejército Nacional de Colombia, “Comercial camuflaje 2008” *Ejército Nacional de Colombia* video, 0:32. <http://www.ejercito.mil.co/?idcategoria=228741&pag=4>

<sup>123</sup> Butler, *Frames of War*. 26.



humanitarian. This is, by no means, a statement of the obvious; concerns around state propaganda remain crucial to the development of the scholarship that considers media discourses in Colombia and its political implications. However, it is also possible to envision that beyond the clearly propagandistic aims of the reorientation of military campaigns, there is a larger commentary that reinforces the state's valuation of lives in a differential way.

In one of the commercials produced in 2009 for the “Heroes” campaign, the exceptional ethics of the soldier are tested both in the battle front and against the audience's own ethical behavior. In an urban neighborhood, three men are walking up a hill, then an explosion is heard and on the next frame one of the men has lost a leg. His companions aid him in the midst of the confusion and despair created by the exploding landmine. Then, the characters in the screen transition from their ‘civilian’ clothes and urban setting, to military uniforms and a jungle landscape. The soldiers advance with difficulty and they surprise a man putting together the landmine, he quickly surrenders, the soldier who has helping his injured friend is now aiming at the man with his weapon and he screams agitatedly. Next a helicopter arrives, more soldiers descend to receive the troops, who approach the helicopter rapidly with their injured companion in a stretcher, and behind them other soldiers guard the bomber who is now handcuffed. The helicopter leaves with all men but one, a soldier remains on the ground wielding his weapon, while the slogan of the campaign reads in the middle of the screen: “Heroes in Colombia do exist.”<sup>124</sup>

The transition scene might have helped to argue for a return to the rhetoric of “Colombia one Army” if it were not for the narrator's voice that plays along with the images: “*What would you do, if you see your best friend lose a leg because of a landmine? What would you do if they*

---

<sup>124</sup> Ejército Nacional de Colombia, “Comercial 06 del año 2009” *Ejército Nacional de Colombia* video, 0:25. <http://www.ejercito.mil.co/?idcategoria=228741&pag=4>

*take away one of your loved ones? What would you do if you found the person who caused all this pain? How would you react? Only a hero protects life, no matter whose. Heroes in Colombia do exist.*” The commercial thus conveys that to respect the life of the enemy, regardless of personal pain, is a commitment that only a few in Colombia can make; this is the high ethics embodied by the military. The other not-so-subtle logic that the commercial arranges, is that the life of the bomber (and this could be easily translated to ‘guerrilla’ or ‘terrorist’ according to the circulating rhetoric of the time), is *barely* a life worth protecting. Only the humanitarian soldier will miss the chance to settle things with his enemies, and thus the commercial projects onto the ‘rest of Colombians’ the very vices of the state: a complete disregard for human life under the idea of ‘us’ versus ‘them.’ The ways in which the images arrange the value of those lives worth including in the national body linger across the commercials and support the historicist practices of the state.

On the documentary *Falsos Positivos* produced by Simone Bruno and Dado Carrillo in 2009, former General José Joaquín Cortés -one of the 27 military officers demoted on October 28, 2008- complained about being framed by the government in order to mitigate the public’s disavowal of the Army. He seeks to justify these crimes by arguing: “*It is almost understandable, almost understandable, that a troop who is on the battlefield, and a peasant, or a guide in the field tells them: -look, that one over there is the one planting the landmines, that one is who’s planting the landmines on the road, that one planted the landmine that killed a soldier yesterday, that one belongs to the militias, that’s the one bringing food to FARC, that’s the one who brings and takes food to guerrillas. And then, maybe one as commander can think that this commander of the battalion, of platoon, and that platoon that saw their companion die the day before, or two, three days before, a companion, as a result of a landmine, and that*

*person was the one who planted it, maybe one can think to arrest him, and then simulate a combat and kill him.*”<sup>125</sup>

In his rationalization of “falsos positivos”, Cortés bridges the gap between the carrying out of war crimes by the Army and the commercial of the “Heroes” campaign in 2009. The “hero,” as a trope crucial to the nation’s destiny, is vindicated. Set apart from the “rest of Colombians”, the soldier inhabits a site of exception; one that simultaneously glorifies his humanitarianism and justifies his crimes. And that difference between the state forces and those that they protect binds the violences committed by the first, in the name of the latter, in a national complicity. Moreover, when Cortés talks about the ‘peasant’ or “guide in the field,” he is referring precisely to the network of informants created by the DSP. If the soldier, in a moment of weakness, hurt by the death of one of his companions, commits a crime, it is only because he was ‘tipped’ by the community which (the commercial tells us) does not adhere to the same high standards of ethics as the military.

### **Peace Delusions**

In 2003, Ana María Bejarano examined the shift in government policies regarding the armed conflict. According to her, Uribe’s administration represented a rupture of the former approach since “not even during the most critical moments (...) did any government dare to even question the desirability, the viability, or the convenience of looking for a negotiated solution.”<sup>126</sup> Bejarano was hopeful that the new government would keep the military under civilian control and defeat the rebels; moreover, her main concern was how to deal with leftist guerrilla organizations and she underestimated the power of ultra-right wing armies to which she

---

<sup>125</sup> La Silla Vacía. “Documental sobre falsos positivos (2009)”. YouTube video, 54:51, posted by La Silla Vacía, March 6 2012.

<sup>126</sup> Bejarano, “PROTRACTED CONFLICT, MULTIPLE PROTAGONISTS, AND STAGGERED NEGOTIATIONS.” 240.

refers as the “so-called paramilitaries.”<sup>127</sup> The outcome expected by Bejarano is clearly challenged by “falsos positivos,” among a large number of other cases of human rights violations committed by the state during Uribe’s administration. However, the distinction she made within the legal category of ‘illegal armed groups’ was plausible in the public discourse of the government as well as in the legislation of the time.<sup>128</sup>

The reminiscence of the failed peace negotiations with the FARC in the previous administration, supported Uribe’s platform of “war on terror” and foreclosed narratives of possible dialogues with the guerrillas: The answer, as formulated by Uribe in the DSP, was “to defeat them.” Public addresses to the guerrillas became increasingly hostile and defiant, with the exception perhaps of campaigns calling the lower ranks of the guerrillas to demobilize. These campaigns deepened the criminalization of guerrilla organizations and their authoritarian structure. Allegedly based on testimonies from former militia members, the commercials were also directed to a wider audience, showing these lower ranks as victims of forced recruitment and *captives* themselves.

One of the stories simultaneously appealed to the hetero-patriarchal order and its pervasive nature on the enemy’s lines. The commercial opens with the close-up of a young woman’s pregnant body. She’s putting on her uniform inside a green tent, the audience doesn’t see her face, but they can hear her voice: “*I got pregnant while I was in the guerrilla group and I tried to hide it.*” On the next frame she’s digging a hole in the ground, when suddenly she puts her arms around her belly in a sign of pain, at the same time the boots of another guerrilla approach: “*But with the hard work I began to bleed and I had to tell the commander.*” A tender

---

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Furthermore, Alejandro Castillejo argues that “The Law [975 of 2005] was meant to divert attention away from Alvaro Uribe’s critics who demonstrated Uribe’s links with the creation of some of these groups during previous periods of his political life”. Castillejo-Cuéllar, “Historical Injuries, Temporalities of the Law: Articulations of a Violent Past in Two Transitional Scenarios.” 52.

image follows next with the scene of another pregnant guerrilla, being caressed by a man that stands behind her: *“I thought that he [the commander] would understand because his partner was pregnant too (...) the norms say we are all equal, but that is a total lie.”* The next scene shows another guerrilla putting down his weapon and examining some medical equipment (the audience still can not see any faces), behind them the young woman is being pushed towards a bed; *“They made me abort my baby, but the commander’s baby was born;”* while she narrates the finale of her story the scene shows a close-up of her cheek and a tear dropping. The resolution of the commercial merges the guerrilla/victim’s desires to the ones of the state: *“That is when I started to think about running away, until one day I got my chance,”* as the audience sees her running across the jungle dropping her jacket (and weapons?) the scene transitions to the logo of the Defense Ministry: *“Think about it, there is another life. Demobilization is the way out.”*<sup>129</sup>

The faceless guerrillas of the commercial not only seek to reinforce the testimonial nature of the story, they also serve to de-center the case so it is elevated to the status of prescription, and therefore one case is a proxy for all. The state stands for the value of freedom that this young woman has lost, a state that would criminalize her if she willingly wanted to abort. The concern is not then the denial of power to women over their own bodies inside the guerrilla organizations, but rather the usurpation of women’s bodies from the sovereign right of the state by the ‘terrorists’. The dialogue with the members of leftist armies remained locked at the individual level during Uribe’s administration; guerrillas running away from their ‘captors’ became one of the strategies to weaken these armies and also allowed for the government to claim that the Law of Justice and Peace was not made to give impunity to the crimes committed by paramilitaries.

---

<sup>129</sup> MinDefensa Colombia. “Comerciales Programa de Atención Humanitaria al Desmovilizado”. Youtube video, 4:44. Posted by MinDefensa Colombia, October 7, 2009. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AeFDn0tW4ag>

At the same time the war on terror (i.e., FARC and ELN) strengthened, the prospects with paramilitaries were almost completely the opposite. This was confirmed by the rapid demobilization of AUC units starting in 2003 after the signing of the *Santa Fé de Ralito Agreement*.<sup>130</sup> But peace with paramilitaries did not alter the government's agenda, since the "terrorist threat" continued to loom over the nation. Thus, as there were not major efforts by the media to promote these "peace agreements;" the debate quickly moved away from a discussion on peace towards the trope of transitional justice arranged by the LJP. This suspension of peace narratives also provided a historical cleavage for Uribe's administration, whose exceptionality was more fiercely promoted than the one of the soldiers in the "Heroes campaign."

## **Conclusion**

Colombian poet and novelist William Ospina<sup>131</sup> says "the Colombian territory is one with the least calling to unity that one might envision. It is enough to move three hours in any direction to find ourselves in a different weather, surrounded by a different vegetation and a landscape of always changing depth."<sup>132</sup> What Ospina argues is that the Colombian peoples and geographies have always been lacking an element that binds them to one another. The author further explains that, in the absence of ethnic, geographical or ancient unity, and as a result of the colonial heritage, Colombian elites in the 19<sup>th</sup> century appealed to the cohesive power of what they saw as the only homogenizing avenue: "the role of gathering the population was assumed very early by an element that came from outside: the language."<sup>133</sup> If this is true, then the historicist practices examined in this chapter might help to argue that for decades now, but in a particularly insidious manner in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the unifying element of the Colombian nation

---

<sup>130</sup> See Introduction.

<sup>131</sup> Ospina, *Pa Que Se Acabe La Vaina*.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid. 9-10.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid. 12.

has been war. This argument does not seek to reify the thesis of Colombia as a historically violent country, of an almost pathological cultural condition, but to insist in the powerful effect of the narratives on war and peace in fixing national identity within the logic of the armed conflict.

In this chapter, the close reading of the narratives embedded in the commercials is meant to gather traces of how the Colombian nation is imagined through the rhetoric of war. Instead of a neat picture, the workings of power are always elusive; instead of propaganda -carefully crafted to provide political profits- the commercials can be placed in a larger set of practices that, based upon nationalist rhetoric, mask the violence within the frame, legitimize violent means and glorify its perpetrators as heroes, outline the supreme ideals of the nation, and establish hierarchies for the valuation of life. Simultaneously, the regimes of representation that the commercials underwrite work towards the delineation of the boundaries of the nation, its peoples and territories.

The following presidential period allowed for the emergence of new narratives that promised peace and reconciliation; and yet, the narratives on war from Uribe's government remained relevant in the administration of Juan Manuel Santos. In lieu of the 'radical rupture' between Uribe's and Santos's policies regarding the guerrilla organizations, what can be drawn from the narratives embedded in the commercials is a more nuanced reconfiguration of state violence happening in and out of the screen. Narratives on peace have been deeply influenced by the peace negotiations with the FARC in Havana, Cuba. The finalization of the conflict, usually framed as the achievement of a national destiny, an assertion of sovereignty and a decoupling with the violent 'past,' has saturated the TV screens over the past 6 years. The ways in which

they coexist with the narratives on war from the previous period work to reinforce the interchangeability between the history of the war and the history of the nation.



## CHAPTER 3: *Peace is Possible*

*“La palabra paz carece de sentido, pero aún así es el mayor anhelo de los Colombianos”*<sup>134</sup>

### **Introduction**

In 2002, the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace produced a documentary that examined the failed negotiations with the FARC during Andres Pastrana’s administration. At some point, the narrator says *“The word peace has no meaning at all, but it still remains as the highest desire of Colombians.”* The peace process from 1998 to 2002, unfolded in the midst of these ambiguities of what peace meant and the constantly reinforced rhetoric that whatever sacrifice it required was worth it to finally save the nation, because peace was the unquestionable desire of all Colombians. However, on February 20, 2002, the government ended the peace negotiations after the FARC kidnapped a commercial flight earlier that day.<sup>135</sup> President Pastrana addressed the country, making an assessment of the process as a (partial) victory: *“today the guerrilla has been unmasked, and has shown its real face, the face of pointless violence (...) today nobody in Colombia believes the guerrilla is a political option and its popular support is close to zero (...) today we are more prepared than ever, more united than ever, more backed up internationally, and militarily stronger to face the violence that burdens us.”*<sup>136</sup> If an agreement had not been achieved, at least Colombians knew their ‘enemy’ better after the peace negotiations. The president blamed the FARC for breaking the agreements they had made, and publicly condemned them as a terrorist (instead of a political) organization.

---

<sup>134</sup> Oficina del Alto Comisionado para la Paz. “Memorias del Proceso de Paz con las FARC” Youtube video, 58:54. Posted by Andrés Pastrana Arango April 16, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3HLVG8eOqQA&list=PLWcu-09t-iu6sdTNSPM9Mg9hUegWkMSAf&index=9>

<sup>135</sup> One of the passengers was the senator at the time, Jorge Eduardo Gechem.

<sup>136</sup> “Alocución Presidencial sobre el final del Proceso de Paz -20 de febrero del 2002” Youtube video, 22:24. Posted by Andrés Pastrana Arango April 16, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F1Z0qQfiNK0>

In order to provide proof of this, the presidential address included the display of a set of images accompanied by the sound of gun fires and explosions along with a sorrowful song. As a prelude, Pastrana claimed that *“The FARC have done nothing but erasing with their actions the spirit of conciliation that they had signed on paper, let’s watch:(...)”* The following images were meant to depict the devastating effects of the violent acts committed by the FARC: combats, blown power towers and bridges, the harassment of civilians, the profanation of sacred places, *carro-bombas*,<sup>137</sup> a destroyed bicycle, people crying in the streets, a body lying below a police patrol, burned buses, buildings in ruins, the use of gas cylinders as explosive devices, and -in the closing frame- an airplane that symbolized the event that caused the end of peace negotiations. Perspectives were, nevertheless, not entirely discouraging for Colombians: *“Difficult times await for us, no doubt about it (...) we must be prepared because it is very likely that terrorist attacks will increase, to face this, we -good Colombians- must remain united more than ever (...) we must forget our inner divisions, small conflicts, and close lines against violence (...) an army of 40 million Colombians is invincible.”*<sup>138</sup> As discussed in Chapter Two, the sentiment of this address was later boosted by Uribe in his presidential campaign and administration.

The year 2010 marked the change of presidential administrations in Colombia, from Álvaro Uribe to Juan Manuel Santos. Santos had been Uribe’s Defense Minister from 2006 to 2009, and he only announced his candidacy when Uribe was ruled out as a candidate, after losing a second attempt to reform the Constitution in order to be reelected. As the government’s candidate, Santos’s campaign was focused on the reification of the political strategies of Uribe

---

<sup>137</sup> A widely spread practice of placing explosives inside a car that was abandoned in a targeted location.

<sup>138</sup> *“Alocución Presidencial sobre el final del Proceso de Paz -20 de febrero del 2002”* Youtube video, 22:24. Posted by Andrés Pastrana Arango April 16, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F1Z0qQfiNK0>

and the continuation of his ‘legacy.’<sup>139</sup> During his first year in power, Santos echoed Uribe’s rhetoric of “war on terror” and reinforced the triumphalism of the DSP.<sup>140</sup> Nevertheless, Santos and Uribe publicly distanced from each other after the new government’s announcement of peace negotiations with the FARC.

This chapter examines the re-activation of peace narratives that paralleled the peace negotiations of the government with the FARC, which became public in 2012, and had been developing in secrecy during the previous two years.<sup>141</sup> It further explores how peace and war narratives interact in the portrayal of a nation that can and will recover from the armed conflict; and the ways in which this long-awaited peace (re)arranges unallocated responsibilities about the past, and reconfigures state violence under the proclamation of a post-conflict era.

### **Law of Victims and Land Restitution**

To this day, the numbers of *desplazamiento forzado* (forced migration) in Colombia continue to increase.<sup>142</sup> Land (dis)possession has remained at the core of the armed conflict, and it is also central to the government’s current efforts of reconciliation. As a consequence of this, Law 1448 (also known as Law of Victims and Land Restitution, LVLR), was issued in 2011. The LVLR belongs to the legal framework that seeks to install the logics of transitional justice in Colombia.<sup>143</sup>

---

<sup>139</sup> Pérez, “Adiós Al sheriff.”

<sup>140</sup> On September 2010, when the commander of the FARC, Alfonso Cano sent a message to elected president Santos to start dialogues between the government and the guerrilla organization, Santos response was to ask the FARC to ‘stop committing acts of terrorism’ and that the military operations against them will be intensified.

<sup>141</sup> “Mesa de conversaciones con las FARC-EP” *Oficina del Alto Comisionado para la Paz*. Access date: July 12, 2016. <http://www.altocomisionadoparalapaz.gov.co/procesos-y-conversaciones/Paginas/mesa-de-conversaciones-con-las-farc-ep.aspx>

<sup>142</sup> On October, 2016 the number of victims of forced displacement reported by the Victims Unit was 6.937.205. “Registro Único de Víctimas” *Unidad de Víctimas*. Access date: October, 15, 2016. <http://rni.unidadvictimas.gov.co/RUV>

<sup>143</sup> As discussed on Chapter Two, the first attempt was the Law of Justice and Peace of 2005 designed as a response to the peace agreements between Uribe’s government and paramilitary armies.

Some authors have argued that the Law was the result of international pressure over the Colombian government and a ‘proof of good faith’ about the intentions of the state of protecting human rights and seeking peace.<sup>144</sup> Nevertheless, the passing of the Law 1448 was mainly a response to both the critiques raised by Law of Justice and Peace of 2005, and the need to legalize the historical land grabbing in the post-conflict scenario.<sup>145</sup> Therefore, the LVLR is not only as problematic as the previous law, but also has come to configure new forms of state violence which particularly target victims and their lands.

At first glance, the LVLR might seem to show significant changes in the portrayal of the contexts of violence in Colombia. For instance, the Law has been signaled as a landmark in the distancing between Uribe’s and Santos’s discourses on war and peace. This is because the Law acknowledges the existence of an “armed conflict” in the country, an interpretation that had been denied under Uribe’s framing of a “terrorist threat.” And although this shift could be significant indeed, it does not challenge the goals of previous policies. Instead the acceptance of the “armed conflict” frame, works towards a more discrete legal category of victim which is crucial for both the reconciliation and land dispossession agenda of the Colombian state.

One of the achievements of the LVLR is the re-signification of the legal understanding of the victims of the armed conflict.<sup>146</sup> The Law limits the possibilities for a person to be considered a victim in both temporal and contextual terms. The Law acknowledges as victims with full rights (truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-repetition) those who were harmed by human rights violations after January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1985.<sup>147</sup> Also, the Law denies any responsibility of the

---

<sup>144</sup> Valdivieso Collazos, “La Justicia Transicional En Colombia Los Estándares Internacionales de Derechos Humanos Y Derecho Internacional Humanitario En La Política de Santos”; Martínez Cortés, “Ley de Víctimas Y Restitución de Tierras En Colombia En Contexto.”

<sup>145</sup> Martínez Cortés, “Ley de Víctimas Y Restitución de Tierras En Colombia En Contexto.”

<sup>146</sup> Rúa Delgado, “The Moments of Transitional Justice in Colombia.”

<sup>147</sup> The LVLR acknowledges victims before this date but only as able to claim ‘symbolic’ reparation.

state forces in the commission of such human rights violations, and thus legally excludes those victims that recognize themselves as “victims of the state.” It is clear that these delimitations are problematic for a number of reasons: they do not account for the highly reinforced thesis of a continuum of war and violence in the country; they work towards the erasure of state crimes; and finally –the most troubling aspect of all- they work towards the compression of the political identification of “victim,” into the legal category crafted and imposed by the state.

The scholarship around the trajectories of victims’ organizations in Colombia contesting state actions has reflected on the ways in which the experience of violence by a person or a group becomes an avenue to create “emotional communities in which pain transcends indignation and propels organization and activism.”<sup>148</sup> From this argument it follows that the self-recognition as victims allows those who had experience violence to come together, develop joint agendas and challenge the social amnesia around violence. The LVLR provides, nevertheless, a less encouraging scenario: the legal constraints imposed in the category of victim are reinforced by highly bureaucratic and complex mechanisms that obstruct the participation of victims and their organizations in decision-making processes and the overall interactions of victims with the state in the procedures related to justice and reparation.<sup>149</sup> These exclusionary practices against victims<sup>150</sup> shed light on the pervasive outcomes of the Law in deepening victims’ vulnerability to different forms of violence.

Considering the large amount of victims of forced migration in Colombia, it comes with little surprise that these violences have been particularly intense in matters of land claims and restitution. For instance, law scholars Rocío Serrano and Milena Acevedo have argued that “the

---

<sup>148</sup> Jimeno, “Si Nos Mataron Callados Ahora Que Nos Maten Hablando’: El Poder Del Testimonio En El Posconflicto.”

<sup>149</sup> Berrío and others, “Las Mesas de Participación de Víctimas.”

<sup>150</sup> Martínez Cortés, “Ley de Víctimas Y Restitución de Tierras En Colombia En Contexto.”

fact that the law has been issued in the midst of the armed conflict, has intensified land dispossession and unchained a new conflict led by anti-restitution armies who have killed a great number of peasant leaders. By February, 2013, there had been at least 683 threats to land-claimers, and the death of at least 43 restitution leaders in the country.”<sup>151</sup>

The re-articulation of paramilitary armies in the geographies previously dominated by the AUC has effectively aligned with the economic plans of the government. Several scholars have argued that the National Plan for Development (PND) has goals that collide with those expressed in the Law.<sup>152</sup> Therefore, even when the Law claims that its goal is to provide the ways for victims to return to their land, these intentions are subordinated to the development of the agro-industrial complexes on those territories. On this matter, Serrano and Acevedo reminds us that “at the same time is a norm of transitional justice, Law 1448, 2011 bears economic and political aspects related to the agrarian reform of Santos’s government (2010-2014), that does not only aim to legalize land in rural areas, and reestablish victims’ rights, but also [actually] to propel agrarian development by supporting private investment and the alliance of state-private capital.”<sup>153</sup> In other words, the Law manages to seemingly repair victims and simultaneously force them to either sell or re-abandon their lands.

This violent and legal coercion for victims to give up their lands again, is insidiously veiled under the national reconciliation discourse. The narratives on war and peace that have come along with the legislation on transitional justice in Colombia seek to displace victims as political agents and render them as the undesirable byproducts of violence, as well as crucial

---

<sup>151</sup> Serrano Gómez and Acevedo Prada, “Reflexiones En Torno a La Aplicación de La Ley 1448 de 2011 Y La Restitución de Tierras En Colombia.” 547.

<sup>152</sup> González Pulgarín and Henao Guzmán, “A New Form of Concentration of Land in Colombia.”

<sup>153</sup> Serrano Gómez and Acevedo Prada, “Reflexiones En Torno a La Aplicación de La Ley 1448 de 2011 Y La Restitución de Tierras En Colombia.” 564.

tropes to ask for an investment on peace. The portrayal of the exceptionality of the ongoing peace negotiations has contributed significantly to this purpose.

### **Peace Negotiations with the FARC**

On September 4, 2012, president Juan Manuel Santos officially announced the beginning of peace negotiations with the FARC, as well as the results of a previous phase of dialogues between the guerrilla organization and the government. Given the discredit of guerrillas -crucial to the rhetoric of war on terror- and the previous failed experiences of peace negotiations, Santos had to present this process under the light of exceptionality. He addressed the country from the presidential palace and accompanied by his government cabinet as well as the highest ranks of the military. In one of his opening phrases he argued: *“I am convinced that we face a real opportunity to end definitely the internal armed conflict.”* This “real opportunity” was supported, according to Santos, by two main particularities of the historical moment of his government: that Colombia had changed and that this agreement was different. Changes were understood in terms of economic development and military success: *“Today we can talk about peace thanks to the successes of our military and police, and thanks to the growing presence of the state in every inch of the national territory.”* And the exceptionality of the agreement lied in that the peace negotiations would not imply the de-escalation of armed confrontations: *“This agreement is different because it does not include territorial concessions<sup>154</sup> and because there is not ceasing of military operations.”* The peace negotiations were thus framed as the ultimate goal of war: *“We do not fight for the sake of fighting, we fight to achieve peace.”* Moreover, Santos proclaimed his own place in national history: *“There are times in history in which a leader must decide if he risks to take new paths to solve the fundamental issues of his nation. This is one of*

---

<sup>154</sup> During the peace negotiations under Pastranas’ government there was a ‘distention zone’ installed of 42000 km2 in which there was no military presence of the Colombian state.

*those times. There are risks no doubt, but I believe history will be much more severe with all of us if we do not seize the opportunity before us. In any case the responsibility of this decision will fall on my shoulders and only mine.* ” This presidential address set in motion the legal and discursive efforts of the state for promoting peace as well as a mass media frenzy around the development of the dialogues.

Nevertheless, casting away fears that had feed into the inevitability of war during the last decade has proved harder than the government initially expected. This is due, to a large degree, to the strong opposition raised by the extreme right-wing party led by former president Álvaro Uribe. This “war on peace”<sup>155</sup> reflects a cleavage among the Colombian elites, “divided between one sector linked to former president Álvaro Uribe, linked to the rural power of land-owners and, therefore, direct representative in the political arena of the main drug-lords and paramilitaries (...) and on the other hand, Juan Manuel Santos, exponent of a more urban oligarchy, linked to the big industrial complexes of communication and favored political representative of transnational industries in the country.”<sup>156</sup> Banking on the anxieties extended to the Colombian audiences under the rhetoric of “terrorist threat,” Uribe remains relevant in the political arena and has managed to perform an opposition that obscures the concerns of other sectors with the peace negotiations, especially those raised by victims’ organizations. Therefore, to acknowledge Uribe’s party as the government’s opposition dismisses opponents, of both Uribe and Santos, as being outside the Colombian political scene.

---

<sup>155</sup> Fattal, “#WARONPEACE, @AlvaroUribeVel: The Barking Tweets of Paramilitary Populism.”

<sup>156</sup> Gorka and Martija, “Proceso de Paz En Colombia Como Catalizador de La Disputa Entre Paradigmas Antagónicos: Consolidación de La Hegemonía de Las Empresas Transnacionales Frente a Impugnación Del Modelo Neoliberal.” 41



The peace negotiations were planned in three stages: *exploratory*, *end of conflict* and *peace building*.<sup>157</sup> During the first stage, which ended on August 26, 2012 both parties agreed to the rules and agenda of the forthcoming discussions, which were presented the day of Santos's address, under the document "General Agreement to End the Conflict." Scholar Giohanny Olave, has argued about this agreement that "it vindicates the bellicose policy in presenting peace as the noblest of ends which justifies the infamous history of its means, means that are not open to discussion."<sup>158</sup> His critique suggest that the document only points to superficial compromises between the FARC and the government, but nonetheless the understandings of what the "end of the conflict" means for each one reflects a deep mismatch of goals and perspectives.

The second phase was the peace conversations in Havana, Cuba which started on November, 2012. Following the General Agreement, these discussions considered six main points in the agenda: 1) Comprehensive agrarian development; 2) Political participation; 3) End of the conflict; 4) Solution to the illicit drugs problem; 5) Victims and 6) Implementation, verification and countersignature. After four years of negotiations, on June 22, 2016, the government and the FARC signed the agreement on point number three of the agenda, which lead to the proclamation of the "last day of war." The bilateral cease of fire, guarantees on security and combat to paramilitaries, and the surrender of weapons on the FARC's side were the three core achievements presented to the audiences. In a ceremony that included the presence of the General Secretary of the UN, Ban Ki-Moon as well as several presidents of Latin American countries, both FARC and government representatives announced the day as a historical landmark. While president Santos claimed "*today-fortunately- with what we just signed, we turn*

---

<sup>157</sup> "Mesa de conversaciones con las FARC-EP" *Oficina del Alto Comisionado para la Paz*. Access date: July 12, 2016. <http://www.altocomisionadoparalapaz.gov.co/procesos-y-conversaciones/Paginas/ Mesa-de-conversaciones-con-las-farc-ep.aspx>

<sup>158</sup> Olave, "El Proceso de Paz En Colombia Según El Estado Y Las FARC-EP."357

*from this tragic and long page of our history (...) it is time for us to be a normal country, a country in peace!;*” FARC commander Timoleón Jiménez (alias Timochenko) sanctioned *“the main beneficiaries of our effort will be the future generations (...) may this be the last day of the war!”*

The peace negotiations have been consistently framed under this light of historical exceptionalism that does not only assure the success of the dialogues but also locates national subjects as recipients of the actions and decisions of the state and its acknowledged political opponents. In the narratives emanating from the peace negotiations, war is addressed in terms of the armed confrontation between the Colombian military and the FARC, and thus, to ‘put an end to the conflict’ means precisely the cease of hostilities among the two. Both parties locate the motivation of their historical efforts in the nation as a whole; war was fought because a people had to be protected/vindicated and now peace is being signed so the people do not have to suffer more the consequences of the war. The expected gratitude that follows from ‘the people’ links the historicist practices of the state with another trope embedded in the narratives of peace and reconciliation: progress and development, which are only possible with peace and the required approbatory gesture of the victims towards it.<sup>159</sup>

### **Faith in the Cause**

In consonance with the characteristics of the peace negotiations in Havana, the narratives emanating from the Colombian state during Santos’s government consistently encouraged a climate of reconciliation without stopping the promotion of war. The 2011 Army campaign “Faith in the Cause” is centered on the increased presence of the state (i.e., the armed forces) in the national territory at the same time that it summarizes aims of recruitment, celebration of the

---

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

military and a historical inflexion in which the nation (the *cause*) finds itself grateful and ready to develop.

The campaign's commercial has a simple overarching plot: the Colombian people (specifically those who live in the rural areas) are sending a message to the Army, the messengers (mainly young people) run through the diverse landscapes of the country in the search for the soldier that must be praised and acknowledged as a hero. In one of the scenes, the screen shows a young boy running through a bridge and then across a river. He then arrives to a small town of Indigenous houses called *malokas*. A group of six people are gathered and one of the men talks in an Indigenous language, with no captions available for the audience. Then, the camera follows another one of the young men, who exits the scene running.<sup>160</sup> The previous and subsequent scenes provide meaning for the appearance of these linguistically unintelligible characters that are placed in a spatial setting and dressed in a way that is meant to visually fixate them as Indigenous people: they are praising the renewed presence of the state and how this has secured territories and peoples, furthermore, how it has protected tradition and diversity.

Lisa Lowe argues that *official multiculturalism*, like the one found in the commercial "Faith in the cause," does not make visible the needs of historically marginalized populations, rather "it precisely obscures the ways in which that aesthetic representation is not analogue for the material positions, means, or resources of those populations."<sup>161</sup> Along the same lines, Sara Ahmed considers how "cultural differences that have historically been sites of struggle and antagonism are appropriated and neutralized as a sign of 'our' history."<sup>162</sup> The use of multiculturalism as a trope in the campaigns that promote the military capacity of the state and

---

<sup>160</sup> Ejército Nacional Col "Su causa y la nuestra, es ¡Colombia!" Youtube video, 6:14. Posted [June 2011] [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tFti7t\\_4efk&index=19&list=PL\\_GG6e0zmXDMWcNYHIKOkAlRAEcWB1V2k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tFti7t_4efk&index=19&list=PL_GG6e0zmXDMWcNYHIKOkAlRAEcWB1V2k)

<sup>161</sup> Ibid. 86.

<sup>162</sup> Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*.112.

announce its victory over the “terrorist threat,” serves as a site to examine the portrayal of the citizen-subjects and the ideals of nationhood that enable the history of the war (as the history of the nation) to ‘make sense’; and simultaneously works towards the concealment of the historical oppression and marginalization of Indigenous, Afro-Colombian and rural populations in the country.

Boal and Moallen refer to this aesthetic and rhetorical move as *multicultural nationalism*, which represents the state’s effort to overcome its inability to address the tensions that result from cultural diversity within the nation. Arguing the essentialist nature of multicultural nationalism and the problematic definition of cultural entities as static ways of living, the authors point to the commodification of cultural diversity and its inevitable insertion in the logics of capital; “it is not easy, therefore, to see how multiculturalism (...) can oppose an uncritical and commercialized notion of culture, which uses identity and ethnicity to create subjects incessantly being reformed within market-centered ideas of empowerment and endless choice-making capacities.”<sup>163</sup> Their arguments enable a reflection on the compromises that the state imposes on minorities during war and peace times. Development and economic progress are only possible because of the protection that law enforcement provides in rural areas, therefore, it will be incumbent on the communities to seize this time of peace and tranquility to ‘pull themselves out’ of poverty. One of the women characters in the commercial echoed this logic, when in talking to a young boy she says: “*Alex go on and tell them that their job, like mine, is of patience and constancy and for that I’m grateful. Go on and tell them!*” Her job is manual gold panning in a river, and by equating this traditional economy with the labor of the soldier, the communicative effect is that the state is granting the conditions for people’s subsistence through their own hard work.

---

<sup>163</sup> Boal and Moallen, “Multicultural Nationalism and the Poetics of Inauguration.” 258.

Several meanings emerge from the commercial: first, Colombia, as claimed in the bill of rights,<sup>164</sup> is a multicultural nation; second, what matters the most in this formulation is not cultural diversity but the discrete imagined community of the nation; and third, diversity can be measured in the form of preserved traditions such as clothing, settlements and language. The national unity of these culturally diverse and traditional groups of people is possible because of their shared investment in the reconciliation of the country and their gratefulness towards law enforcement for protecting the same thing they are performing. According to Benedict Anderson's<sup>165</sup> description of the emergence of Latin American nations, the concept of nationhood in these countries was built upon the erasure of Indigenous' and Afro-descendants' cultural identities under the umbrella of *mestizaje*. A sense of racial, ethnic and cultural homogeneity seems to stem from his analysis. However, Anderson also makes the case that one can be invited into the imagined community. Therefore, it is worth noticing the ways in which minority groups are invited into the reconciled country, centering and making them the very visual representation of the nation.

This argument has a particularly incisive effect in the understanding of the armed conflict in Colombia. As discussed before, one of the main tropes in the historicist practices of the state on war, is that the absence of the state in certain geographies of the country allowed for the rise of terror perpetrated by illegal armies. Nevertheless, as Thomas Biolsi<sup>166</sup> reminds us, the homogeneity of the modern nation-state is a mistaken assumption; responding to different political needs, the state can relinquish to exercise sovereignty in certain zones of the territory.

---

<sup>164</sup> One of the major legal transformations of the 1991 Constitution was the acknowledgement of Colombia as a multicultural and pluri-ethnic nation that recognizes Indigenous groups' sovereignty and the collective possession of land to Afro-Colombian communities. The previous bill of rights considered Indigenous people as wards of the state and have no special legal status for Afro-Colombians.

<sup>165</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

<sup>166</sup> Biolsi, "Imagined Geographies."

The once absent Colombian state is now claiming back its sovereign right over the territory and the people that inhabit it. Through the appeal to multiculturalism as a rhetorical device to imagine the nation, the Colombian state exerts multiple violences against historically marginalized populations, first acknowledging the abandonment of the state of large portions of the country, then presenting a paid debt by means of the reinforced presence of the law enforcement in rural areas, and finally profiting politically of its portrayal of cultural diversity, erasing any responsibility of the state whether it be for omission or action. Under the veil of multicultural recognition, the state attempts to reclaim legitimacy, deny the needs of minorities, and fabricate a sense of nationhood in which “the ‘we’ of the nation can violently reproduce itself in the name of liberal inclusion.”<sup>167</sup>

Because multiculturalism “introduces complexities of attachment, belongingness and identity,”<sup>168</sup> then this benevolent state, represented in its military forces, is now ready to leave the war behind and incorporate in its imagined community only those forgiving and forgetful subjects that do not look back but instead engage with the progress that comes along with peace. If, as Biolsi argues, “to have or to claim particular rights- that is, to be a political subject of any kind- is necessarily to inhabit particular forms of imagined or achieved-even if unstable or contested- political space,”<sup>169</sup> then it is only in this projected image of the nation that citizenship (and the exercise, demand or bestowment of rights) is possible.

### **Peace is Possible, Let’s Prepare for Peace**

After one year of peace negotiations with FARC – and upon the finalization of round eighteen of discussions- the chief of the government’s delegation in Havana, Humberto de la Calle, made an assessment of the advances of the process: “*We would have wanted more results,*

---

<sup>167</sup> Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*. 113.

<sup>168</sup> Restrepo, Walsh, and Vich, *Sin garantías*. 612.

<sup>169</sup> Biolsi, “Imagined Geographies.” 253.

*but he have advanced. (...) To dream with a country in peace is possible. We can change the history of Colombia, here and now, to give to our children and the new generations of Colombians a different country, in which the pain and suffering of the war are not longer the everyday news.*"<sup>170</sup> At the end of his address, De la Calle added a phrase that will become a motto for following campaigns on peace produced by the Colombian state: *"peace is possible, let's prepare for peace!"* The possibility and proximity of peace that emanates from the exceptionality of *these* peace negotiations, has been at the core of the narratives on national reconciliation that have paralleled the events in Havana during the last four years.

While the narratives on war during this period were mostly focused on rural populations (allegedly recovered from the horrors of war) expressing their gratitude for the protection provided by the state, the narratives on peace switch peoples and settings to install the labor of reconciliation as a responsibility of the younger generations that inhabit urban areas and that, as presented in the campaigns, have not experienced the war first hand. One of the "Peace is possible" commercials opens with a ten seconds sequence that shows consecutively the close up of seven young men and one young woman, each one looking straight and defiantly to the camera. Along with the images the narrator says *"We grew up in the midst of the struggle against drug-trafficking, we listened daily to the words: guerrilla, kidnapping, attacks. We got used to that as the normal life, but it is not."*<sup>171</sup> The following sequence shows more young people, enjoying the city: reading in a park, playing pool, riding bikes, and running, singing and playing the guitar, playing basketball, happily working, camping, driving and walking in the

---

<sup>170</sup> "La paz es posible, preparémonos para la paz: Humberto de la Calle" " *Oficina del Alto Comisionado para la Paz*. Access date: July 12, 2016.

<http://www.altocomisionadoparalapaz.gov.co/Prensa/Paginas/2013/diciembre/La-paz-es-posible-preparemonos-para-la-paz-Humberto-de-la-Calle-.aspx>

<sup>171</sup> Oficina del Alto Comisionado para la Paz. "Jóvenes, la paz en Colombia es posible" Youtube Video, 0:30. Posted [June 2015] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJ-8OcWoJF8>

streets. The narrator continues: *“Today, we can respond, and be the generation that dares to break from indifference. If we are the generation of the future, let’s change the present! Peace is possible, let’s prepare for peace.”* These portrayals of the city as a joyful space in which the new generations can detach from the daily reminded violence, locates the war both temporally and geographically; a war that happened sometime in an imprecise past is constantly imagined as having occurred somewhere *else* in the inhospitable geographies of the country. The possibility of peace is configured as detachment, as the opportunity to live life happily, or as Santos argued *“to be a normal country.”* The desire for normalcy is visually linked with the inhabitation of the public space, and in order to become a ‘public’ in themselves, these young people demonstrate the expected euphoria of no longer hearing the echoes of the war.

Another “Peace is possible” commercial consists of the narrative of a 72-year-old Afro-Colombian man whose face is framed uninterruptedly during the 30-second visual piece. Portraying him as an elder, his narrative confronts the incredulity towards the peace process by presenting a national identity capable of overcoming historical impossibilities: *“At 72 years-old, I’m an expert in watching things happen in Colombia that were impossible, to see our soccer team in a world cup, and we are on our fifth; that a Colombian could win a Nobel prize, and it also happened; that our cyclists win in Europe, or that our singers were world famous. And now I wonder: what was impossible? That is why I’m telling everyone who believes achieving peace is impossible, that Colombians achieve everything we set ourselves up to, and this 50-year war, we can end it as well.”*<sup>172</sup> Significantly enough, the man’s lips only move in the commercial to show a large smile, but his voice is heard in the background and not through his direct engagement with the audience. The man’s testimony unfolds as he slowly raises his head, from

---

<sup>172</sup> Presidencia de la República - Colombia. “La paz es posible, preparémonos para la paz” Youtube Video, 0:30. Posted [April 2014] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RmGC4y4PxCU>



looking at the ground to facing the camera; his excited grin meets the audience upon the ending of his optimistic speech, extending an invitation to end the war, as the ultimate impossibility to be overcome by Colombians. During the first years of the negotiations these persuasive moves might have been considered necessary, even crucial in order to shift the affective orientation of the citizenry around the ways in which the conflict should be solved. Yet, what is most relevant for the purpose of this discussion, is not the propagandistic aims the commercials had, but how the promotion of peace requires a historical narrative of the nation as thriving in spite of adversity and to graft on this responsibility to a new generation of citizens whose concerns must be focused on “building peace,” and “changing the future” so as not to develop any kind of links to the past and present violences in the country.

While aspiring to amnesia and concealment of state-sanctioned violence, the celebration of the proximity of peace has been meticulously balanced with the reminding of the horrors of war. Victims’ testimonies and visual devices contrasting the ‘now’ and ‘then’, are presented in the campaigns and seem to produce an ambivalent aim of affective orientation of the audiences. On one hand, the first two commercials discussed in this section provide an invitation to feel good about the historical opportunity that Colombians face with the peace negotiations, and on the other, some other visual pieces are invested in what Sara Ahmed calls *the politics of bad feeling*.<sup>173</sup> However, the simultaneous working of these politics of good and bad feelings does not provide a contradictory narrative but instead locates expectations on the imagined national subjects and their respective roles in upholding the nation’s ideals.

One commercial, filmed entirely in black and white against a piano soundtrack background, complicates the generational divide of the “Peace is possible” pieces. In the first scenes, two young couples, two men and two women, sit on chairs displayed for them in a set

---

<sup>173</sup> Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*.

which divides them from one another with a wall. The camera captures both characters, but they cannot see each other. In a black background the audience can read an opening that establishes the testimonial nature of the piece: *“We invited four young Colombians to talk about their lives (...) and this is what happened.”* The two young women begin by providing the response to a prompt the audience does not hear, but can be easily inferred (something along the lines of: *Tell me about a dream of yours*). In the following scene the two men also respond to the question; then, in another non-prompted response, one of the men says: *“for me happiness is (...) my family, the things I want to do and I want to achieve.”* After they all address their idea of happiness, the plot of the commercial unfolds: *“Well, honestly I have not been affected much by war, honestly, I mean, because in the world that I live, is not, not, the war isn’t (...) well I don’t feel it as much,”* the screen switches to the set of the two young women, to one of them who argues: *“Well maybe through newspapers and TV news.”* Then, the two remaining characters provide a testimonial account of their experiences with war: *“The armed groups came into the town, in that time they were recruiting children and my siblings were still, my oldest brother was about eleven years-old, ten or eleven years-old. The only way for us to be safe, so to speak, was to leave”* says the young woman who has not experienced war through the news. The screen flashes from one woman to the other during the testimony, and while listening at her set companion the other woman starts to show disturbance for what she is hearing. The second testimony re-enacts the visual and narrative features of the first one; the young man who has previously described happiness in terms of familial bonds and personal aspirations, tells his story of war: *“They arrived at the house, we were all sleeping and they arrived with guns, and they woke us all, and they took my father and my uncle outside (...)”* The other young man wraps his arms around his body and looks down. *“They tied them up, and they place them in front of the*

*house, my uncle was shot with a revolver and my father with a rifle.*” The commercial closes with the two couples standing up and meeting each other. The woman who was forcibly displaced with her family says: *“Violence, is very hard (...) it’s (sobbing)”* and then she whispers *“I’m sorry.”* Then the two men: *“I am from Colombia”* to what the other responds *“Colombia”*; back to the two women: *“from Colombia”* and again the response: *“Colombia.”* Each couple merges in a hug, comforting one another. The screen displays a question for the audience: *“Could anything worst happen to them?”* As the commercial cuts to darkness, the question turns out to be a rhetorical one: *“Yes...that you don’t care. Peace is also in your hands.”*

That there is a nationalist appeal at the end of a narrative about the past war and the reconciled future of Colombia is almost expected at this point. But the commercial also offers a more nuanced elaboration of the ways in which national subjects are expected to engage with and invest in the transitional period. The first clue the commercial provides in this direction is the euphemistic address of the war: *“armed groups”* and *“armed”* people, *“they arrived at night”* and *“they were recruiting children.”* The audience, it follows, does not need to know if *‘they’* are guerrilla members, paramilitary squads or state forces. This opaque depiction of violence is, again, just the first clue. The second one comes with the divide between victims and non-victims as the two available national subjects during and after reconciliation. The visual reinforcement of this separation is further accentuated by the apparent rural origins of the two young people who have experienced war and the urban origin of the other two. A third aspect which shapes the affective intentions of the commercial and their tie with ideals of nationhood is when the young woman sobs and ask for forgiveness. Her *‘sorry’* is, the audience can suppose, because in the middle of the filming she breaks into tears, and although she needs to follow the

script, her feelings interrupt her. A victim's apology for showing her emotional reaction to the testimony she just provided is the only expression of remorse in a visual piece that concludes with an interpellation of the audience to 'care' for victims.

Sara Ahmed has brilliantly conceptualized the ways in which "declarations of shame can work to bring 'the nation' into existence as a felt community."<sup>174</sup> And thus, Ahmed's insights provide a framework to consider the workings of an address which seemingly aims for empathy towards the victims and their traumatic stories, but that in many subtle (and not so subtle) ways is arranging a present time in which 'feeling bad' about the experiences of violence of others confirms, rather than challenges, the good nature of non-victim Colombians. Therefore, "the recognition of a brutal history is implicitly constructed as the condition for national pride."<sup>175</sup>

One last commercial produced in 2016 by the Ministry of Defense returns to this brutal history once more, and juxtaposes its images - black and white photographs- to those of the envisioned bright and vibrant scenarios of reconciliation. The 'past' and 'future' of the nation articulated in the commercial's narrative imply the need to engage with the labor of transition from one to the other: *"Where there was bleakness, there will be hope. Where there were abandoned fields and displaced people, there will be pineapples, mandarins, mangoes; there will be flowers. Where there were orphans, we will see families. Where sometime landmines exploded and deafening sounds, life will sound, we will celebrate life. Where there was despair, there will be professionals; there will be companies and progress. Where there was misery, there, there will be jobs. Where there was fear, we will fill it with smiles. Where there is still mistrust, there will be a hug of reconciliation. Peace is the way; there will be a new Colombia for our children.*

---

<sup>174</sup> Ibid. 72.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid. 78.

*Peace is better than war.*<sup>176</sup> The images also traced the radical turn in national history: whereas the ‘past’ of Colombia is depicted with desolated fields and buildings in ruins, with images of poverty and abandoned children, the ‘future’ is saturated by a warm light that touches on happy people and rich and open landscapes, with satisfying scenes of labor and intimate social bonds.

## **Conclusion**

Let us return to the announcements made in Havana on June 22. The end of armed confrontations set in motion a monumental effort of the government to prepare the country for a plebiscite that asked Colombians if they agreed with the compromises made between the government and the FARC. In the midst of the growing right-wing opposition led by Uribe, the government faced incredulity from some sectors and outright discontent from others. On August 24, 2016, the final agreement was announced and the peace negotiations ended with the outcome promised four years before. This implied that in the following months the ‘Yes to Peace’ campaign became central for the Colombian government, producing a large amount of visual pieces that were meant to promote the ‘Yes’ vote for the plebiscite.

The campaign “Sí a la Paz” (Yes to Peace) condensed the elements of the peace narratives of the last four years, with a particular emphasis on the younger generations and the responsibility of the voters to think of both the children and the victims. This required a trope in which both victims and children are presented as wards of the state and of the nation as whole. Victims, the argument follows, will be allowed to ‘grow’ into citizenship and economic progress; while children in turn, will be gifted with the exceptionality of coming of age in a peaceful country. The campaign seeks to evoke an ethical responsibility that depends upon a strong sense

---

<sup>176</sup> MinDefensa - Colombia. “Donde había guerra habrá paz” Youtube Video, 1:00. Posted [June 2016] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n2jvP7Hi9Jw>

of nationhood and an investment in the production of a historical turning point, the making of a legacy.

One of the commercials, “The children of Colombia want peace,” returns to the different geographies of war, although appealing to a new argument. This time interviewing a group of children, that shares with the audience their hopes for the future. In gray letters with a white background, the screen reads: “*We wanted to know what the dreams of Colombian children were.*”<sup>177</sup> A boy, whose name and place of origin are displayed on the screen, talks to the camera: “*Like I told you I’m going to be an acrobat.*” Then, other sign appears: “*In zones with armed conflict and zones without armed conflict.*” Another seven children express their imagined futures jobs as divers, football players, teachers, artists, performers, and policemen. The narrative signs interrupt once again: “*Today we know it. All children in Colombia have big dreams, no matter where they come from.*” In the next frame, the kids gather and build together a Colombian map on a table with clay models of their desired professions. “*In order for them to make them [the dreams] come true, they need a country in peace (...) Let’s make possible that the children in Colombia can fulfill their dreams. Peace is also in your hands.*” The commercial works towards a generational distancing from the trauma of war. These children, “*no matter where they are from*” are presented as merely Colombian kids full of dreams; violence hasn’t corrupted their experiences, and therefore they can stand as a proxy of the pristine national future. Unlike the claim to break from indifference present in the previous commercials, this one portrays the line between victims and non-victims as opaque; no matter the children’s geographical setting, the nation’s veil lends a homogenizing effect to all of them.

---

<sup>177</sup> Presidencia de la República- Colombia. “Los niños de Colombia necesitan paz” Youtube Video, 1:00. Posted [May 2016]  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EMM2wONSnXc&index=1&list=PLhPXdU\\_MMSvEceXIFgLaeazLFHOW\\_MpOv](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EMM2wONSnXc&index=1&list=PLhPXdU_MMSvEceXIFgLaeazLFHOW_MpOv)

The historicist practices of the Colombian state examined in this chapter are not only concerned with arranging the meanings of the past in order to produce nationalist ideals for the present. They are also deeply invested in the production of a history of the future; by naming a transitional period as exceptional (a once-in-a-lifetime-opportunity), a national destiny is envisioned and national subjects are distinctively charged with responsibilities to make sure such a destiny is fulfilled. The campaign to promote the ‘Yes’ vote in the plebiscite was highly indicative of those efforts. The logic of the commercials reflects the words of Santos the day he announced the beginning of the negotiations with the FARC: *“history will be much more severe with all of us if we do not seize the opportunity before us.”* This severity of history looms over the nation; furthermore, it brings the nation into existence by prescribing an allegiance to peace as the ultimate national project. However, in the midst of the widespread euphoria of the proximity of peace, Colombian audiences were also exposed to the ‘No’ vote campaign led by Uribe’s party. This produced a false dichotomy for many, if Uribe stands for the acknowledged opposition to the government, then any other objection became almost a political impossibility. The dichotomy managed to paralyze actions outside the polarity arranged between those who want state violence in the form of warfare and those who propose its reconfiguration under the label of peace.

On October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2016 Colombians voted ‘No’ to the plebiscite that would have ratified the agreements between the government and the FARC. By a narrow margin of 0,44% (about 53000 votes) the results of the plebiscite favored the most conservative positions of the political spectrum in Colombia. The current situation is filled with ambiguities around what had been presented by the government as a major accomplishment. A highly saturated mass media coverage has been feed by a rapid sequence of events: within just a week, the government and FARC

signed the final agreement, the ‘No’ option won in the plebiscite, and President Santos was awarded with the Nobel Peace Prize.<sup>178</sup> Although what has followed in the aftermath of the plebiscite is beyond the scope of this research, it is important to highlight that ‘Yes’ supporters have been protesting throughout the country, and demanding a concrete proposal by the ‘No’ promoters for the re-negotiation of the agreements. President Juan Manuel Santos has publicly expressed his intentions to conclude the process with a negotiated solution and has opened a ‘National Dialogue’ that incorporates the opposition led by Uribe. What seems to emanate from the current political climate in Colombia is the investment of national subjects in the opportunity extended by the state of making history and the envisioning of history making as unequivocally tied to the war and its ending.

---

<sup>178</sup> Final agreements were signed on September 26, the plebiscite took place on October 2<sup>nd</sup> and the Nobel Prize was awarded to Santos on October 7<sup>th</sup>.



## CONCLUSION: *Duty to Forgive, Permission to Forget*

“Today starts the end of the suffering, pain and tragedy of the war”  
Juan Manuel Santos, August 24, 2016.

### Victimhood in the Context of Reconciliation

Vietnamese scholar Yen Le Espiritu poses a challenge to see in the narratives of war the endings that are not over.<sup>179</sup> An apparently obvious argument suddenly becomes urgent: war in Colombia is not over. And there is not only an ongoing war because of the failed plebiscite, or because paramilitary armies continue to terrorize populations under new names; not only because there is one guerrilla organization (ELN) that has not signed an agreement with the government; and not just due to the fact that the state forces repress social movements in rural and urban areas consistently and brutally. The war is not over also because the history of the armed conflict continues to work as proxy for national history, and the imagined community of the nation is still envisioned as a collectivity whose ties rely in a communal (though uneven) historical experience of violence.

As discussed in this research, this narrative represents attempts to ‘locate’ violence geographically, temporally, and subjectively. In terms of space, the war is attributed to the multiple ‘inhospitable’ geographies of the country, based on powerful tropes that can be traced back to colonial imaginaries of savagery and the unknown dangers hidden in the jungle. Tropes also predominant in the 19<sup>th</sup> century’s discourse of the *criollo* elite when they formed a central government in the highlands to preserve European values and manners that could not be envisioned in the lower geographies where Indigenous groups, people of African descent, and *mestizo* peasants inhabited. It came with little surprise then, that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century these already

---

<sup>179</sup> Espiritu, Thu-Huong, and Espiritu, “Thirty Years afterWARD.”

stigmatized territories became the favored scenario of violence. Not that the war did not have profound impacts in urban areas across the country, but that the imagery around violence was constantly fixating it in the outskirts of the modern nation, hence the alleged difficulty of the state in controlling it.

This history's temporalities bear an investment in futurity and hope (of winning the war, of achieving peace) that arranges a sense of the present as a turning point or, in more legal terminology, a *transition*. Alejandro Castillejo has argued how this sense of the present configures “‘a transition in the middle of the conflict’: a transition yet-to-come, a promise to be fulfilled.”<sup>180</sup> The promise itself configures the notion that the war is in the past, and while the present is neither war nor peace, it is a state of longing for what it is to come. As reflected in the narratives of the commercials on war and peace, the transitional scenario demands an investment on the fulfillment of this national destiny. This investment is, nevertheless, distributed in insidious ways that target victims as the ultimate laborers of reconciliation.

According to this, the visual archive examined in this research also illuminates the ways in which national myths are enacted by a set of desired citizen-subjects. Among them, victims of the war occupy a particularly problematic place of rhetorical visibility and political isolation. In a setting in which reconciliation and post-conflict is not only possible but close, the figure of the *victim*, defined through legal, academic and mass media narratives, becomes central to the process of *ending the war*. In a disregard of their self-recognition as such, the category of victim becomes embedded with the intentions and definitions emanated from the state; because, as Patrick Brantlinger reminds us, in terms of social representations of violence “the assertion of

---

<sup>180</sup> Castillejo-Cuéllar, “Historical Injuries, Temporalities of the Law: Articulations of a Violent Past in Two Transitional Scenarios.” 48

agency is not the same as having it.”<sup>181</sup> Victimhood is presented in state narratives as an important location from which the efforts of reconciliation should come from. The logic seems to ask: who else, but the victims of the armed conflict are the most interested people in achieving peace? This rationality legitimizes the obligations projected onto victims, which can be formulated as performing the *duty to forgive* and granting the *permission to forget*. These narratives regulate the affection of different subjects towards war, reconciliation and the nation at large. For victims, they prescribe forgiveness and proper ways of mourning. For the ‘rest’ of Colombians, they arrange the history of a war as it were over, and they stipulate the politics of bad feelings.

### **The Duty to Forgive**

Developing his argument around transitional scenarios, Alejandro Castillejo describes how “the global gospel of forgiveness and reconciliation is part of a discursive framework and assemblages through which this teleological movement takes place.”<sup>182</sup> This means that forgiveness has a mediating role in history, and with that purpose in mind victims are targeted for a melancholic identification with the nation. As discussed in Chapter Three, victims in Colombia have faced multiple constraints from the legal apparatus of the state, while simultaneously being invoked as the motivation to seek peace. Through its narratives, the state imagines and portrays a nation that would restore victims’ rights and sense of protection, and all it asks from them in exchange is to relinquish their resentments about the ‘past.’

Jacques Derrida<sup>183</sup> talks about forgiveness as negotiation. What is being negotiated in the Colombian scenario is human life, social value, and a sense belonging to the nation; for

---

<sup>181</sup> Brantlinger, “The Smiles and Tears of Representation: A Cross-Talk Essay.” 260

<sup>182</sup> Castillejo-Cuéllar, “Historical Injuries, Temporalities of the Law: Articulations of a Violent Past in Two Transitional Scenarios.” 63

<sup>183</sup> Derrida, *The Gift of Death*.

forgiveness is not only a condition for peace but for the exercise of proper citizenship too. This negotiation includes the denial of state responsibility in human rights violations against civil society and the acceptance of an unuttered national apology that stands as the only way victims' rights will take shape.

In the erasure of the state violence that the commercials present there is more than just the fabrication of innocence for state officials. There is a larger innocence that spreads to the nation as a whole, a repentant state is never about acknowledging responsibility but about insisting in the strength of the enemies of the nation, even if that means to present the state as weak. And this argument is possible thanks to the fact that the weak state is something from the past, and since this has been presented as the enabling condition for war, it follows that contemporarily, with a strong state, peace is inevitable. As Ahmed argues, "national shame can be a mechanism for reconciliation as self-reconciliation, in which the 'wrong' that is committed provides the grounds for claiming a national identity (...) by witnessing what is shameful about the past, the nation can 'live up' to the ideals that secure its identity or being in the present."<sup>184</sup>

The duty to forgive is presented in state narratives as the victims' responsibility to invest in the fulfillment of peace, to endorse past and present violences and to grant the rest of the nation the engagement in a collective amnesia about the armed conflict, its causes, and the powers that continue to benefit from it. The realization of peace depends upon the temporary centering of the victims, formally endowed with rights, but completely lacking rights in essence; they must fulfill their duty to the nation in the name of peace. Because forgiveness is the only definite solution to an otherwise endless process,<sup>185</sup> its effects can be traced beyond the immediate compliancy with a specific policy. The subtle and pervasive result is the both forced

---

<sup>184</sup> Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. 77

<sup>185</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*.

and persuaded complicity of victims with structures of repression and terror. Forgiveness is imposed as a condition for reconciliation and simultaneously works as the consent for new forms of state-sanctioned violence, because “confessions and expressions of remorse from liberal states and empires therefore enact claims to the legitimacy of their existence.”<sup>186</sup>

If the current context of proclaimed reconciliation in Colombia is central to imagining the nation, from that follows that normative citizenship must be deeply invested in the achievement of peace. Those victims who refuse to do so are not only marked as deviant but also rendered as potential liabilities and thus, essentially enemies of the nation. Given the opposition to the current peace process raised by extreme-right-wing sectors of the Colombian elites, this is an argument hard to put forward. However, it is important to remember that the request for forgiveness did not started with these peace agreements, but rather ten years before with the reinsertion of paramilitaries. Over and over, victims have been faced in legal courtrooms with their victimizers, they have been requested to engage in acts of remorse and forgiveness, and finally to invest in the future and detach themselves from their past.

### **The Permission to Forget**

Avery Gordon presents a paradoxical condition when considering histories of state violence, “hypervisibility is a persistent alibi for the mechanisms that render one *invisible*.”<sup>187</sup> What Gordon is arguing is that presence and absences are always arrangements of value, and that in many occasions knowledge about violence can circulate (and even abound) without any acknowledgment of its present and future consequences. The author’s insights prove helpful to grapple with the ways in which the narratives produced by the Colombian state on war and peace, bank on the depiction of violence and simultaneously reinforce a sense of detachment

---

<sup>186</sup> Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom*. 122

<sup>187</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*. 17

with that 'violent past.' Amnesia is organized not merely as the fabrication of innocence for the state (and society at large) but also as a way of producing a particular national history. The forgiveness obtained from the victims, and their rendering as subjects of peace, is also permission to forget about them.

Mimi Thi Nguyen has elaborated on this tensions between forgiveness and historical memory: "if forgiveness as a moral obligation compels the subject of freedom to recompense liberal war makers for the costs of the war, that forgiveness may consequentially disappear the wounded and slain body into the universal history of the human, and banish those who experience violence *as* violence to beyond the humans altogether."<sup>188</sup> Therefore, forgiveness also points to a temporal delimitation of the scope of the war, which in turn establishes regulations of proper time frames to grieve and to recover. Along the same lines, Benedict Anderson argued that "the nation's biography snatches, against the going mortality rate, exemplary suicides, poignant martyrdoms, assassinations, executions, wars, and holocausts. But, to serve the narrative purpose, these violent deaths must be remembered/forgotten as 'our own.'"<sup>189</sup> Thus forgiveness closes the door to a violence that is rendered as 'past,' and the selective movements of remembering and forgetting are experienced in a national synergy of the imagined community.

Historically, in many episodes of national reconciliation there has been a concern with healing that is framed from a religious perspective.<sup>190</sup> However, the moral imperative to forgive in Colombia seems to operate under a more secular logic: it is not a spiritual search for healing, rather a neoliberal quest for progress. This notion of progress clashes with melancholic and traumatic attachments to the past. The visual archive examined here provides many examples on

---

<sup>188</sup> Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom*. 87

<sup>189</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*. 206

<sup>190</sup> Lund, "Healing the Nation."

how to forgive and to forget are coupled in the name of national development and economic prosperity. Therefore, amnesia here does not necessarily imply a complete oblivion or denial of the contexts of violence in Colombia, but rather a calculated interplay of presences and absences, in which the violences rendered as *invisible* are likely to be the ones that will continue to be inflicted in the near future.

### **Towards an Interrogation of Organized Amnesia and the Contexts of Violence**

This research was concerned on how cultural texts (such as the commercials produced by the Colombian state) can structure the possibilities for a nation to be imagined and the violences performed along the way. From a propaganda framework, commercials are a tool for subjection, that is, they constitute the ideological domination capable of “producing” particular social subjects. From the framework explored here the question of subjection can be displaced into how the imagined/imaged subjects of the nation constitute nationalist ideas and produce history in ways in which they reify the sovereign right of the state to kill.<sup>191</sup> Narratives on war fulfilling this role might not be regarded as particularly exceptional; nevertheless, in the international climate of a never-ending war on terror, the narratives on reconciliation in Colombia do provide a rich setting to discuss how state violence can transfigure itself, by mimicking a pure ideal such as peace.

This is more complex than saying that peace in Colombia will be “the peace of the pacifiers” which is, unquestionably, already happening. The larger question becomes: how does this peace stand for a set of historicist practices that enable an envisioning of the Colombian nation, one that reifies violence against victims and sets the path to the new violences to come? As examined in this research, the history of the war, its tropes and dramatic rhetoric, have been amply utilized to provide the Colombian people a sense of belonging and a common goal. And

---

<sup>191</sup> Mbembe, “Necropolitics.”

also as seen in the discussion of the legal actions of the state to deal with the armed conflict, there are very few reasons to consider that the ‘new chapter’ in Colombian history (the chapter of reconciliation) will offer to victims something more than public acts of remorse, formal restitution of land without guarantees to actually return to (or make a living out of it) and a national affiliation full of promises that are always yet-to-come.

This conclusion can be reached from many different sets of cultural texts. The ones considered here possess particularities of their own but are taken as symptomatic of the historicist practices of the state that seek to produce national myths, imagine proper citizen-subjects and orient their desires. Yen Le Espiritu urges scholars to not only see the endings that are not over, but to *do* something about them. What to do with this pervasive affective orientation of people towards a nationalist ideal remains unclear in this research. Disregarding any prescriptive intentions, the task faced is to grapple with the ideological archive that provides a framework to bear the unbearable, to (as Derrida puts it) forgive the unforgivable<sup>192</sup>.

The ideological archive explored in this research calls for recognition of the ways in which the images of national subjects linger in the collective consciousness of the nation, beyond the expectation and control of the state that crafts and disseminates such images. Therefore, it considers how racial, gender, and class relations of power become entangled and veiled under the fictions of democracy and equality provided by national identities. The economies of value underwritten by these hierarchies have been one of the main concerns of the field of Ethnic Studies and continue to be crucial in the attempts to grapple with the ways in which identities work as vehicles of violence. War and peace narratives reify the historical marginalization of Indigenous people, Afro-Colombians and impoverished peasants, by presenting their past and present conditions as a consequence of the armed conflict and then asserting peace as the

---

<sup>192</sup> Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*.



solution for their hardships. Moreover, in its teleological portrayal of history, these narratives envision a nation able to thrive thanks to the development of agro-industrial complexes, that, as discussed before, are only viable insofar they continue to displace traditional communities from their lands. It follows that the transitional period, also referred to as the process of the ‘construction of a stable and lasting peace’ will be based upon the infliction of old and new forms of violence.

As mentioned at the conclusion of Chapter Three, Colombians are currently facing a time of (publicly acknowledged) uncertainty. After more than a decade of the first announcements of a ‘transitional period,’ the insecurities about the ratification of the peace agreements with the FARC elicit national anxieties and continue to draw the citizenry into an investment on the aspirations of reconciliation. Sara Ahmed considers how “politics works in complex ways to align individuals with and against others, a process of alignment that shapes the very surface of collectivities.”<sup>193</sup> The alignments and re-alignments currently shaping the collectivity of the Colombian nation continue to point towards the proclamation of a post-conflict era, in which the war can become an episode locked in the past and in which the hopes for a reconciled future justify the violent means of the state in the present.

---

<sup>193</sup> Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*.73.

## WORKS CITED

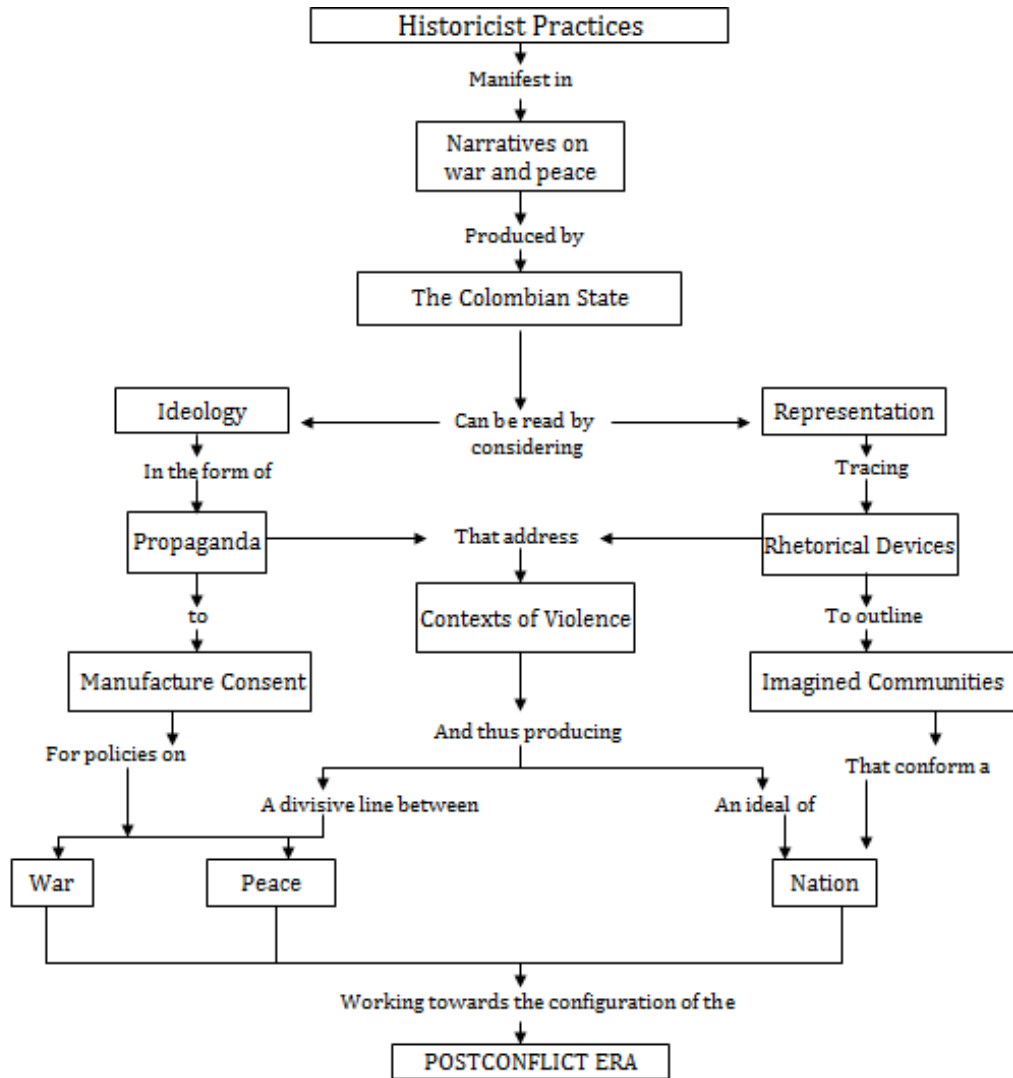
- Ahmed, Sara. *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*. Psychology Press, 2000.
- . *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Routledge, 2013.
- Althusser, Louis. “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses.” In *A Critical and Cultural Theory Reader.*, edited by Antony Easthope and Kate McGowan, 2nd ed., 42–50. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004.
- Anderson, Benedict R. O’G. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Rev. and extended ed. London ; New York: Verso, 1991.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands*. Aunt Lute Books, 1999.
- Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition: Second Edition*. University of Chicago Press, 2013.
- Bejarano, Ana María. “Protracted Conflict, Multiple Protagonists, And Staggered Negotiations: Colombia.” *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies / Revue Canadienne Des Études Latino-Américaines et Caraïbes* 28, no. 55/56 (2003): 223–47.
- Benavides, Farid Samir. “Colombia’s Elusive Peace: Perspectives for a Peace Process in Colombia.” *Criterion* 4, no. 1 (2015): 199–229.
- Berger, John, and Geoff Dyer. *Understanding a Photograph*. Penguin Books, Limited, 2013.
- Berrio, Julián Martín, and others. “Las Mesas de Participación de Víctimas: ¿Una Frustración Más O Un Mecanismo de Transformación Social?,” 2013.  
[https://derechopublico.uniandes.edu.co/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=392%3Alas-mesas-de-participacion-de-victimas-iuna-frustracion-mas-o-un-mecanismo-de-transformacion-social&catid=35%3A31&Itemid=94&lang=es](https://derechopublico.uniandes.edu.co/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=392%3Alas-mesas-de-participacion-de-victimas-iuna-frustracion-mas-o-un-mecanismo-de-transformacion-social&catid=35%3A31&Itemid=94&lang=es).
- Bhabha, Homi K. *Nation and Narration*. Routledge, 2013.
- Biolsi, Thomas. “Imagined Geographies: Sovereignty, Indigenous Space, and American Indian Struggle.” *American Ethnologist* 32, no. 2 (2005): 239–259.
- Boal, I, and M Moallen. “Multicultural Nationalism and the Poetics of Inauguration.” In *Between Womand and Nation: Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms, and the State.*, edited by Karen Kaplan, Norma Alarcon, and M Moallen. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999.
- Brantlinger, Patrick. “The Smiles and Tears of Representation: A Cross-Talk Essay.” In *Haunting Violations: Feminist Criticism and the Crisis of the Real*, edited by Wendy Hesford and Wendy Kozol, 251–61. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001.
- Butler, Judith. *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* Verso Books, 2016.
- . *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. Verso, 2006.
- Cacho, Lisa Marie. *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected*. NYU Press, 2012.
- Camera Obscura Collective. “Feminism and Film: Critical Approaches.” In *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, edited by Amelia Jones, 560. London ; New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Castillejo-Cuéllar, Alejandro. “Historical Injuries, Temporalities of the Law: Articulations of a Violent Past in Two Transitional Scenarios.” *Law Critique* 25 (2014): 47–66.
- Chomsky, Noam. *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda*. 1st ed. The Open Media Pamphlet Series 2. New York: Seven Stories Press, 1997.

- Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Rev. 10th anniversary ed. New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Delgado Barón, Mariana. “Una Justicia Transicional Sin Transición: Verdad, Justicia, Reparación Y Reconciliación En Medio Del Conflicto.” *Revista Análisis Internacional* 1, no. 4 (2012): 53–67.
- Derrida, Jacques. *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*. Psychology Press, 2001.
- . *The Gift of Death*. University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Echavarría, Josefina A. *In/security in Colombia: Writing Political Identities in the Democratic Security Policy*. Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Espiritu, Yen Le, Nguyen-Vo Thu-Huong, and Yen Lê Espiritu. “Thirty Years afterWARD: The Endings That Are Not over.” *Amerasia Journal* 31, no. 2 (2005): xiii–xxvi.
- Fairclough, Norman. “Linguistic and Intertextual Analysis within Discourse Analysis.” *The Discourse Reader*, 1999, 183–211.
- Fattal, Alex. “#WARONPEACE, @AlvaroUribeVel: The Barking Tweets of Paramilitary Populism.” Cultural Anthropology website. *Hot Spots*, April 30, 2015. <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/671-warenpeace-alvarouribebel-the-barking-tweets-of-paramilitary-populism>.
- García López, Raúl Enrique, and María Juliana Quintero Vélez. “The Socio-Discursive Phenomenon of Legitimation in the Coverage of the Campaigns of Carlos Gaviria and Alvaro Uribe during the 2006 Presidential Elections.” *Folios*, no. 38 (2013): 61–74.
- García-Godos, Jemima, and Andreas O. Lid-Knut. “Transitional Justice and Victims’ Rights before the End of a Conflict: The Unusual Case of Colombia.” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 42, no. 3 (2010): 487–516.
- Gill, Lesley. “War and Peace in Colombia.” *Social Analysis* 52, no. 2 (January 1, 2008). doi:10.3167/sa.2008.520208.
- Gómez, Juan Carlos. “Del Régimen de Comunicación Política Del Presidente de Colombia Álvaro Uribe Vélez.” *Palabra Clave* 13 (2005). <http://palabraclave.unisabana.edu.co/index.php/palabraclave/article/viewArticle/1461>.
- González, Fernán E. *Poder y violencia en Colombia*. Odecofi-Cinep, 2014.
- González Pulgarín, Jhon Jair, and Juan Pablo Henao Guzmán. “A New Form of Concentration of Land in Colombia: Law 1448 of 2011.” *Ecos de Economía* 16, no. 34 (2012): 75–109.
- Gordillo, Claudia S. *Seguridad Mediática la propaganda militarista en la Colombia contemporánea*. UNIMINUTO, 2014.
- Gordon, Avery F. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. U of Minnesota Press, 2008.
- Gorka, Xavier, and Rodrigo Martija. “Proceso de Paz En Colombia Como Catalizador de La Disputa Entre Paradigmas Antagónicos: Consolidación de La Hegemonía de Las Empresas Transnacionales Frente a Impugnación Del Modelo Neoliberal.” *Cuadernos Del GESCAL. Revista Del Grupo de Estudios Sobre Colombia Y América Latina*, 1, Año 2 (Agosto 2015).
- Gramsci, Antonio. “(I) History of the Subaltern Classes; (Ii) The Concept of ‘ideology’; (Iii) Cultural Themes: Ideological Material.” In *Media Cultural Studies: Keywords.*, edited by Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner, Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2006.
- Gutiérrez, Francisco. “Institutionalizing Global Wars: State Transformations in Colombia, 1978–200.” *Journal of International Affairs* Vol. 57, no. 1 (2003): 135–52.
- hooks, bell. *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992.

- Isacson, Adam. "Optimism, Pessimism, and Terrorism: The United States and Columbia in 2003." *Brown J. World Aff.* 10 (2003): 245.
- Jimeno, Myriam. "'Si Nos Mataron Callados Ahora Que Nos Maten Hablando': El Poder Del Testimonio En El Posconflicto." Cultural Anthropology website. *Hot Spots*, April 30, 2015. <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/673-si-nos-mataron-callados-ahora-que-nos-maten-hablando-el-poder-del-testimonio-en-el-posconflicto>.
- Kozol, Wendy. "Relocating Citizenship in Photographs of Japanese Americans during World War II." In *Haunting Violations: Feminist Criticism and the Crisis of the Real*, edited by Wendy Hesford and Wendy Kozol, 217–50. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001.
- Londoño Fernández, Luz María, Patricia Ramírez Parra, and others. "Estudio Sobre El Impacto de La Reinserción Paramilitar En La Vida de Las Mujeres de Comunidades Receptoras de Medellín, Bajo Cauca Y Urabá: Informe Final," 2007. <http://www.bdigital.unal.edu.co/47358/>.
- López de la Roche, Fabio. *Las ficciones del poder: patriotismo, medios de comunicación y reorientación afectiva de los colombianos bajo Uribe Vélez (2002-2010)*, 2014.
- Lund, Giuliana. "Healing the Nation: Medicolonial Discourse and the State of Emergency from Apartheid to Truth and Reconciliation." *Cultural Critique* 54, no. 1 (2003): 88–119. doi:10.1353/cul.2003.0036.
- Manoff, Marlene. "Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines." *Portal: Libraries and the Academy* 4, no. 1 (2004): 9–25.
- Martínez Cortés, Paula. "Ley de Víctimas Y Restitución de Tierras En Colombia En Contexto." *Berlín, FDCL*, 2013. [http://www.fdcl.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/web\\_LEY-DE-V%C3%8DCTIMAS-Y-RESTITUCI%C3%93N-DE-TIERRAS-EN-COLOMBIA-EN-CONTEXTO1.pdf](http://www.fdcl.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/web_LEY-DE-V%C3%8DCTIMAS-Y-RESTITUCI%C3%93N-DE-TIERRAS-EN-COLOMBIA-EN-CONTEXTO1.pdf).
- Mbembe, Achille. "Necropolitics." In *Foucault in an Age of Terror*, 152–182. Springer, 2008. [http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9780230584334\\_9](http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9780230584334_9).
- Mitchell, Timothy. "Everyday Metaphors of Power." *Theory and Society* 19, no. 5 (1990): 545–77.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics." *The American Political Science Review* 85, no. 1 (March 1991): 77. doi:10.2307/1962879.
- Migdal, Joel S. *State in Society: Studying how states and societies transform and constitute one another*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Nguyen, Mimi Thi. *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages*. Duke University Press, 2012.
- Olave, Giohanny. "El Proceso de Paz En Colombia Según El Estado Y Las FARC-EP." *Discurso & Sociedad* 7, no. 2 (2013): 338–363.
- Ospina, William. *Pa Que Se Acabe La Vaina*. Bogotá: Planeta, 2003.
- Pécaut, Daniel. *La Experiencia de La Violencia: Los Desafíos Del Relato Y La Memoria*. Medellín: La carreta histórica, 2013.
- Pérez, Guillermo. "Adiós Al'sheriff": Colombia Sin Álvaro Uribe." *Politica Exterior*, 2010, 110–120.
- Restrepo, Eduardo, Catherine Walsh, and Víctor Vich. *Sin garantías: trayectorias y problemáticas en estudios culturales*. Envión editores, 2010.

- Richani, Nazih. "Caudillos and the Crisis of the Colombian State: Fragmented Sovereignty, the War System and the Privatisation of Counterinsurgency in Colombia." *Third World Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (March 2007): 403–17. doi:10.1080/01436590601153937.
- Rolfe, Gary. "Deconstruction in a Nutshell." *Nursing Philosophy* 5 (2004): 274–76.
- Rúa Delgado, Carlos Felipe. "The Moments of Transitional Justice in Colombia." *Revista de Derecho Uninorte*, no. 43 (January 1, 2015): 71–109. doi:10.14482/dere.43.6270.
- Safford, Frank, and Marco Palacios. *Colombia: Fragmented Land, Divided Society*. New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Schoening, Max. *On Their Watch: Evidence of Senior Army Officers' Responsibility for False Positive Killings in Colombia*. New York: Human Rights Watch, 2015.
- Serrano Gómez, Rocío, and Milena Acevedo Prada. "Reflexiones En Torno a La Aplicación de La Ley 1448 de 2011 Y La Restitución de Tierras En Colombia." *Revista* 43, no. 119 (2013): 533.
- Siapera, Eugenia. *Cultural Diversity and Global Media: The Mediation of Difference*. John Wiley & Sons, 2010.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Preface." In *Of Grammatology*, Corrected ed. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.
- Stoler, Ann Laura. *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*. Duke University Press, 2006.
- Tapia, Ruby. *American Pietàs: Visions of Race, Death and the Maternal*. Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.
- Valdivieso Collazos, Andrés Mauricio. "La Justicia Transicional En Colombia Los Estándares Internacionales de Derechos Humanos Y Derecho Internacional Humanitario En La Política de Santos." *Papel Político* 17, no. 2 (2013): 621–653.
- Viveros Vigoya, Mara, and others. "Género, Raza Y Nación. Los Réditos Políticos de La Masculinidad Blanca En Colombia." *Maguaré; Vol. 27, Núm. 1 (2013): Género, Nación Y Ciencia; 71-104 2256-5752 0120-3045*. Accessed April 26, 2016. <http://www.bdigital.unal.edu.co/39022/>.
- Wexler, Laura. *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism*. UNC Press Books, 2000.
- Yepes-Charry, Andrés Felipe. "Marcos Interpretativos: Reección Presidencial Y La Figura de Álvaro Uribe Vélez En La Revista Semana." *Palabra Clave - Revista de Comunicación* 18, no. 2 (May 1, 2015): 537–62. doi:10.5294/pacla.2015.18.2.9.

## APPENDIX



Appendix 1. Conceptual Map.