

COLOMBIAN TROUBLES: ON THE DIGNITY AND JOVIALITY OF RESISTANCE AND SURVIVAL¹

Problemas colombianos: sobre la dignidad y jovialidad de la resistencia y la supervivencia

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the political aspects and reasoning behind collective organization during the contemporary armed conflict in Colombia, focusing on three key historical moments. The first section explores the emergence of collaborative groups within the context of the conflict, while the second section delves into the history of collective resistance to violence. Finally, we discuss the various tactics, networks, and community-based initiatives that have been established as active responses to the pain caused by the conflict in Colombia. We hypothesize that these associations should be viewed through a pluralistic lens, recognizing their inclination towards exploring new living possibilities and capabilities development.

Keywords: *armed conflict, communities, collective struggles, joviality, dignity, Colombian history, and memory.*

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RESUMEN

El artículo examina los aspectos políticos detrás de la organización colectiva durante el conflicto armado contemporáneo en Colombia. El argumento se centra en tres momentos históricos clave. La primera sección explora el surgimiento de grupos colaborativos dentro del contexto del conflicto, mientras que la segunda sección profundiza en la historia de la resistencia colectiva a la violencia. Finalmente, discutimos las diversas tácticas, redes e iniciativas comunitarias que se han establecido como respuestas activas al dolor causado por el conflicto en Colombia. Nuestra hipótesis es que estas asociaciones deben ser vistas a través de un lente pluralista, reconociendo su inclinación hacia la exploración de nuevas posibilidades de vida y desarrollo de capacidades.

Palabras clave: *conflicto armado, comunidades, luchas colectivas, jovialidad, dignidad, historia de Colombia y memoria.*

Before going to the heart of the matter, we will allow ourselves a brief philosophical introduction. To seek vengeance and retaliation through the path of resentment is to seek the settlement of a debt that cannot be repaid. Moreover, to seek retribution by assigning penalties equivalent to the evil committed is to live under the aegis of guilt. As Nietzsche teaches, evil and debt collection make an ancient and disastrous couple (2003).

It is necessary to resort to genuinely revolutionary gestures to abandon the economy of infinite debt and the problem of apparently just parities. Gestures that show that it is possible to leave the illusion of proportionality between Evil, Prison, and Forgiveness. There is an outstanding characteristic about the social movements dedicated to achieving peace: the noble claim of knowing that where there was evil, punishment does not settle anything; the bravery of understanding that where there was a grievance, truth serves to alleviate, though it is insufficient compensation for moral damage. The same goes for humiliation: it is well known that money as reparation does not repair. That gesture expresses the sobriety of those recognizing that where there were rape and torture, the regret of the perpetrators is valuable. However, that regret does not prevent the return of memories and wounds, which is remarkable. Outrages become profoundly engraved in memory: that much is clear (Salcedo, 2010: 106 and 108). However, we must recognize

how dignity and justice are present through the struggles of social movements that understand the power of free grace.

Looking at the data from the armed conflict in Colombia, we perceive a general pattern: many of the efforts towards experimenting with new forms of life and building up civil society have been marked by dynamics of territorial and political fragmentation, as well as by the presence of hierarchical or militaristic formations: paramilitaries, drug-traffickers, corruption rings, and guerrillas: it is as if collective endeavors in our country inevitably tended towards the messianic and the warlike. A quick grasp of the Colombian situation is enough to notice how we have invented creative (as well as sad, violent, and aggressive) forms of sticking together. *Colombian troubles: War and conflict in our history are terrible.*² And not only because of the victims, the number of violations of Human Rights, the phenomenon of displaced peoples, etc., but also because they reflect the incredible *malice and resentment* behind our collective enterprises throughout history. *It seems we are good at being together as long as that serves the goal of eradicating others.*

The problem becomes more complicated when we look at the apparent choice between two possibilities when dealing with a violent past: on the one hand, to forget nothing and doom oneself to restlessly carry the burden of one's memories, to live forever in the past, and become its miserable guardian; on the other hand, to be alienated from one's past through a focus on the present,

2 The expression is a reference to the following quote: "Aparte del café, las esmeraldas, los claveles o la cocaína, Colombia es conocida por el conflicto armado. Así, la gran pared del Museo de la Cruz Roja Internacional de Ginebra que registra anualmente los hechos de guerra y paz en el mundo, trae, desde 1948, la expresión Colombian troubles...". (Besides coffee, emeralds, carnations, or cocaine, Colombia is known for its armed conflict. Thus, the Great Wall of the Museum of the International Red Cross in Geneva, which annually records the facts of war and peace in the world, uses, from 1948, the 'Colombian Trouble' expression" (Palacios, 2012, p. 17).

wherein the past is a distraction, a task that is permanently put off (Traverso, 2007, pp. 37, 67). Because the interpretation of the past is an open problem related to the present, we feel compelled to follow the path of those who show hope and bravery. Recognizing the resentment that permeates the Colombian troubles highlights the creativity of collective endeavors in our country that have stressed peaceful resistance. Under the shadow of war, and beside the memories of the unspeakable, there lies the active power of all those who seek a joyful life. The time of wrath is also the time of the best and most creative human activities: experimentation and poetic self-affirmation. War is a time of lowliness and degeneration but also dignity.³

Here are the steps we wish to take:

The origins of the armed conflict in Colombia have to do with three determining and associated factors: the attempts to transform the structure of agricultural land ownership, the authoritarian and exclusionary nature of the traditional political parties, and the incapacity of dissident voices to formulate non-reactive political alternatives. We will avoid the problem of land. Instead, we discuss the logic of collective organization, which is at the core of the armed conflict.⁴

In the second part, entitled *Dignity*, we discuss three questions that are posed, one way or another, by the victims of violence: “What happened?” “What happened to us?” “Why did it happen?” These are questions for the historical discipline, but, we stress, they are also questions of first-person experience, of memory, questions

3 The emphasis is already present in *War, Memory, and History* by Gonzalo Sánchez. His provocative and suggestive invitation is to shift the focus from war and violence to our history’s affirmative impulses of Colombia’s more or less recent past (2009, pp. 31-32).

4 We closely follow Marco Palacios’ description of *Public Violence in Colombia from 1958-2010* (2012). Through it, we seek a rough reference to the historical process of public violence and armed conflict. We also found some coincidences in the general description of the phenomenon that Palacios suggests in the *Basta ya!* report of Memoria Histórica (2013). Therefore, we lean *in extenso* on those two documents.

for those who lived through trauma, especially for those who live a dignified life despite what happened.

The third section is about the networks and community enterprises that show a creative endeavor to face the present joyfully. Although violence and armed conflict have indeed marked people's lives for several decades, varied and intense efforts have also been made to promote peace and life collectively (Villarraga, 2013).

We do not attempt an exhaustive recount of such actions. To illustrate how joviality can animate social struggles, we engage a perspectivist and pluralist understanding of genuinely revolutionary social movements that experiment with the possible. In an attempt to elevate such collective initiatives for social change to a theoretical status, we want to defend the idea that the manifold jovial struggles in this country show a remarkable capacity for invention in the aesthetic, technical, intellectual, and legal realms. The diverse social machinery of Colombia (for example, the social machines that emerge in the gaping interstices that the Colombian State fails to cover) somehow produces such creativity, and the relation between one and the other requires examination.

§1. FAILURES TO UNITE

It is strange: being together also sets us apart. The matter of knowing what belongs to a set/space and what does not should be recognized and conjured to avoid the risks associated with slogans such as “the urgent task of rebuilding the nation,” “let us take our country back,” or “let us make our country great again” (Lefranc, 2005, p. 346). The frightful call for unity or reclaiming some past heritage, which has been a part of historical horrors for so long, is a problematic beacon for social harmony.⁵ The collec-

⁵ A clear symptom that this call for unity is based on an essentialist perspective is that the imperative of reconciliation is said to come from “the people” who prop up sovereigns but exercise no sovereignty.

tives risk becoming an exclusionary unit if it understands itself under topological demands, that is, under the claim of looking for a company only amongst those who are part of *us* as opposed to *them*. Whether our criteria are substantial or ideological, the truth is that we form gangs, and *parches*.⁶ That matter translates into unanimity, sectarianism, herd instincts, organizing bands, armed groups, etc.

Violence fosters friendships born of common enemies⁷ Moreover, it is visible in the way in which collective enterprises of a political and revolutionary nature were gestated and developed, with their notorious rates of warmongering, intransigency, ideological passion, and cycles of retaliation (National Center for Historical Memory, henceforth NCHM, 2013, pp. 40-51; 125). To put it more broadly: in Colombia, the paths towards social cohesion have been filled with all sorts of hopes and illusions, but also with a marked degradation towards armed struggle —i.e., selective murders, massacres, kidnappings, tortures, forced disappearance, sexual violence, illegal recruitment, etc. (NCHM, 2013, pp. 43-108). Admirable initiatives that imagined new peoples and ways of life coexisted with truly fearsome characters. Grassroots leaders and gangsters, public figures that spoke truth to power, and public figures that resorted to mass murder to keep it: *Charro Negro and Lupercio Montalbán, but also Pablo Escobar, the Castaño brothers, Tómate, Rafa Putumayo, Chema Bala, Jaime Garzón, Álvaro Gómez Hurtado, Álvaro Uribe Vélez, etc.*, all in the context of partisan violence, guerrilla warfare, and the war on drugs (Palacios,

6 In Colombian slang, “*Parche*” can mean a group of people who hang out together often or an inner circle that works to benefit its members preferentially over the rest of society.

7 Fortunately, this is not necessarily true. We can always be friends without being someone else’s enemies. Interestingly, making friends without implicitly making enemies tends to be related to noble goals such as building relationships built on trust, practicing mutual recognition, expressing solidarity, etc. See the efforts towards peace reviewed by Camila de Gamboa (2010), as well as ‘*Seré por la memoria*’ (Aguilar & Salas, 2010, p. 58) and COMADRES (Valbuena & Pineda, 2010, p. 87).

2012, pp. 25-65; also, Amorocho y Girón Serrano, 2014). In sum, perhaps, a war against society (Pécaut, 2001).

Seen as a whole, the struggle, hopes, violence, deceits, disappointments, and horrors can be described through three key moments:

Incredible illusions and struggles for equality occurred in the context of Party bureaucracies, hierarchies, and warlordism. In the 1960s onwards, social struggles occurred in a political arena defined by two vicious extremes: the representatives of imperialism and the self-appointed representatives of “the People”; the Marxist left against the response from the US, e.g., through the *Alliance for Progress* (Palacios, 2012, pp. 68-71; also, NCHM, 2013, pp. 117-118).

Traditional party bureaucracies, as well as communist variants of the left-wing organizations, left essential lessons in the matter of collective projects. Amongst others, the study of how both the internal logic of political parties and the revolutionary strategy of the unified front caused organizations to become jammed in internal personal and ideological disputes and to lose consistency and coherence.

Perhaps the sad dynamics of collective political organizations stem from the constant link between sectarianism (even in private life!) and open-armed confrontation —e.g., the macabre “rituals of violence” (NCHM, 2013, pp. 112; 125-126). Favoritism, sectarianism, elitism, and chieftain verticality are the main psychopolitical traits of the revolutionary organizations and the political parties of the time. In both the parties of the National Front and the left-wing revolutionary organizations, the matrix of associations was distinguishable by its closed nature, its affinity to heroes and patriarchs, and its vertical charisma with a tendency to violence (Palacios, 2012, pp. 72-75 and 141; also, NCHM, 2013, pp. 122-124).⁸

⁸ The NCHM says that “a decisive factor in internal breaks of guerrillas during their years of gestation was the strict control which leaders exercised over communities and the private life of militants. This interventionism turned the guerrilla into a set of undifferentiated subjects, as opposed to deliberative supporters. For that rea-

In the decade of 1970, the revolutionary strategy was reconsidered as much from the theoretical point of view as from the practical (Palacios, 2012, p. 101). As a result, the tradition of coffee production was transformed, and Colombia became a producer of nicotine, caffeine, cocaine, and gold—all merchandise that “stimulates the nervous system of the Western consumer” directly (Palacios, 2012, p. 102). At the same time, the decade brings accelerated processes of industrialization and urbanization, as well as a reformist State that coexists with rebellious and progressive undercurrents (NCHM, 2013, pp. 128, 131-133).

The 1970s decade was the time of several social and political empowerment processes by rural peasants, whose organization manners were supported and driven by reformist interests. These were motivated by such factors as the hope that land should belong to those who toil it (i.e., the National Association of Tenant Farmers, ANUC), as well as more politically radical tendencies (NCHM, 2013, p. 129): reformism operated alongside those who believed in taking up arms, and that this meant “walking with the people” (a famous slogan of the M-19 guerrillas, see NCHM, 2013, p. 130). These initiatives were met with military and political repression, as well as strategies of terror (NCHM, 2013, p. 130). In addition, the “National Security Statute” by President Turbay in 1978 left a deep scar in the institutional dynamics of State forces (NCHM, 2013, pp. 135-137).

Another factor in the socio-political landscape was the “horrendous symbiosis between violence and drug traffic” (Palacios, 2012, p. 103; it is essential to note that drug trafficking did not exclude State actors), which intensified as the 1980s approached. Toward the mid-'80s, its influence became notable, especially in funding armed actors by drug dealers (NCHM, 2013, p. 143). This

son, breaking loyalties generated catastrophic effects: expulsions, executions, and degradations. Initially, the sect-like environment caused agglutination, but afterward, it became an element of disintegration” (2013. p. 126).

problem intensified a complex mixture of discontent around land distribution, public protest in urban settings, the inflationary crisis of the time, and the lack of political channels to deal with social conflict (NCHM, 2013, p. 132; Palacios, 2012, p. 105). We have yet to mention—and will do nothing more than mention since it is a significant question—“the cultural impact of drug traffic, in as much as it seems to create a fast lane for upward social mobility, based on the culture of easy money and the capitalizing of violence,” which, in turn, lead to “the trivialization of violence and the deterioration of ethical standards in society” which was not limited to a loosening standard in the choice of a means to an end, but also in the selection of ends (NCHM, 2013, p. 145).

From 1970 to the 1980s, there was a marked tendency for collectives to form on the form of gangs, with a centralized chain of command. As a result, guerrillas and drug gangs seem to absorb all possibilities of collective action. Well into the 1990s, violence intensified and broadened its scope with the rise of paramilitary groups. By this time, theoretical and ideological talk around revolution had waned considerably, but violent action remained. Faced with State repression, some revolutionaries opted for democratic means of struggle and became parties (i.e., AD-M19). Still, these parties were persecuted by drug lords and State and paramilitary actors and faced massive forced disappearances (NCHM, 2013, pp. 145-147).

From 1970 to 1982, there was a notable legal hardening alongside partisan exclusionary politics (which resulted in even more vertical and sectarian social structures than in previous years). In a radical internal twist, the collective formations of the final years of the 1970s (up to well into the ‘80s) became differentiated and internally individualized and displayed a marked tendency towards violence and factionalism. Collectives compacted in bands of a warlike nature and viciously focused on unprecedented armed

and political struggles —it can be argued that the severe brutality of the ‘90s partially resulted from this process.⁹

As the armed conflict waged on, the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), Ejército Popular de Liberación (EPL), and Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) began to seem anachronistic concerning new social movements, “slow organizations,” “dinosaurs roaming the jungle,” in a new context of both growing paramilitary activity and democratic initiatives that attempted to open a legitimate dialogue about the normative nature of the State, such as the National Constituent Assembly (Palacios, 2012, p. 111; NCHM, 2013, pp. 149-156). It is as if between hopes of change, attempts to reach it through political paths, and radical sectarianisms of a reactive and conservative nature, the social dynamic of the most recent twenty years of contemporary armed conflict was exhausted.

What follows are the “years of the humanitarian tragedy, of the expansion of guerrilla and paramilitary and the struggle for the land through blood” (NCHM, 2013. p. 156). The socialization processes through centralized and vertical organizations that occurred during the communist struggle were repeated, in even more reactive forms, in smuggling organizations, bands of emerald traffickers, paramilitary groups, and drug cartels. As the drug business grew, romantic preoccupations with changing the world shifted towards marked consumerism and money-worship while still having the support of armed actors such as FARC and the ACCU/AUC.¹⁰ These are the years of “*Plata o plomo*” (give in

9 Thus, for example, the cartels of Cali, Medellín, and the so-called *Los Pepes* (persecuted by Pablo Escobar) can be understood. It can also be understood the solidification of the military strategy «guerrilla wars» in the FARC, EPL, and ELN and, finally, that of the drug-traffic-paramilitary groups congregated under the name Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia —a topic of the guerrilla expansion and the paramilitary hatching in times of peace policies (Palacios, 2012, pp. 100-101; NCHM, 2013, pp. 135-156).

10 “In 1995, the Autodefensas Campesinas de Córdoba y Urabá- ACCU- was founded, and in 1997 the chiefs of nine paramilitary organizations from different

to my demands voluntarily and receive money; otherwise, receive lead) and the terror campaigns of clandestine groups, as well as the formation of a thick web of connections between public sector administrators, private enterprise, *sicarios* (hired assassins) lawyers and professional politicians.¹¹

At this point, we can speak of *narco-guerrillas*, organizations that mix drug smuggling and anti-state military activities, which resulted in their adopting “the model of the paramilitary organization” (Palacios, 2012, pp. 118-119). Thus, a market of private security emerged. *Private security* is not just a means of organizing property relationships but also a symbol of a more profound orientation of our society, a generalized attitude of «every man for himself doing what best fits him» means and ends become intermingled. Selective murders, massacres, kidnapping, torture, sexual violence, dispossession and extortion, illicit recruitment, threats, terrorist attacks, forced disappearances, and sabotage: those are prototypical repertoires of violence which, in critical times of war, were intensified and deepened, with enormous human costs which are still hard to measure.¹²

§2. DIGNITY

The damages caused by armed conflict in Colombia manifest the degradation of violence and its devastating impact on people’s lives

points of the national geography met to conform the United Self-defenses of Colombia –AUC-, «provided of a unique direction and a governing body» defined as a «Political-Military movement of an anti-subversive nature in the exercise of the legitimate right of self-defense» (NCHM, 2013, p. 160).

11 By this period, violence had acquired a massive character. Massacres became a distinctive sign. Forced displacement increased, making Colombia the second country, after Sudan, with the most significant exodus of people. The repertoires of violence from armed actors registered their most enormous expansion in the history of armed conflict in Colombia (NCHM, 2013, p. 156).

12 “1996-2002: This is the most critical period of enlargement in war” and can be identified with the rise of paramilitary in Colombia, according to the Group of Historical Memory through the Report *¡Basta ya!* (That’s enough!) (2013, pp. 68 and 87-88).

(NCHM, 2013, pp. 259-327). However, this story has a contrasting side: the perspective of those who lived through what happened and led a dignified life, of those who found alternative pathways in the face of massive and collective pain. In the first section, we highlighted some of the critical moments of the Colombian armed conflict from 1958 to 2013.¹³ We aimed to highlight the existential challenge of recent decades concerning social change amid extreme difficulties and academic skepticism.¹⁴

The question of how to change the world is urgent and calls for new approaches. Is it possible to trust the joyful spontaneity of collective experiments without the imperatives of centralized organization and the political trickery that seems to be connatural to revolutionary ideologies? Recent initiatives of that nature give good reasons for hope. Our focus is not on the ideological content of collective organizations but on their associative properties, in whether they can avoid them/us dichotomies and the polarization that ensues from them —especially since 1964 in the Colombian case (Palacios, 2012, p. 160).

By their very nature, such jovial initiatives occur in the interstices, in the liminal places overlooked by power, and, therefore, tend not to be showcased in the comprehensive history of the conflict. Thus, it is essential to emphasize the relevance of historical conscience. That represents encounters between writing, the tale of the past, and the memory that complements and densifies it. It is the most affirmative core of the pathos of emancipatory

13 There is broad agreement about the general outline of this history: in *Public Violence in Colombia, 1958-2010*, Marco Palacios (2012, pp. 67-98) coincides with the briefing that the Historical Memory Group proposes in the report '*¡Basta ya!*' (That's enough!) description (2013, pp. 110-189).

14 The radical left still debates the general subject of the revolutionary situation (e.g., Žižek, Couzinaset, et al. 2010). On the other hand, as Palacios shows, the transition to peace has encountered all sorts of difficulties, such as its being tied to whoever holds the presidency. Palacios calls this "quadrennial peace," referring to how the electoral climate affects the peace, leading to its being treated incoherently (2012, pp. 142-158).

gestures born in the struggle for the present (Traverso, 2007, pp. 48-56). On this principle, we will show that following the thread of collective experimentation and resistance is a way of tracking active becoming.

§3. «CE QU'IL Y A DE CERTAIN C'EST QUE MOI, JE NE SUIS PAS MARXISTE»¹⁵

We remember the father of the Vargas boys, whom one day had no choice but to wait in futility and the cold of the night for his children to return (NCHM, 2013, p. 331). We remember María Antonia Fince and her wake amidst the silence (NCHM, 2013:332). We remember Mariela Morales, who went to the mall shortly before her death and said with some humor: “I need new jeans because I’m going to a delicate commission, probably to get killed, so I’m going to wear new clothes!” (NCHM, 2013, p. 362). What should a father and husband say if he is being taken away, his hands tied with his son’s shoelaces? “Goodbye, children, be good to your mother” (NCHM, 2013, p. 334). It was the same with Gabriel Enrique Vesga Fonseca. As if anticipating disaster, he said to Rosas (calling his wife by her last name, in mock formality): “Rosas, the commission is fucked up; what if they find us somewhere, growing meter-long worms.” His omens turned out to be true; he did not return (NCHM, 2013, p. 364).

Fathers, mothers, neighbors, fellow citizens, friends, relatives, and young people: the cases document how so many people suffered. The massacre of Bojayá happened so quickly that there was no time to help anyone (NCHM, 2013, pp. 334-335). People referred to the dead as “the ones that live in the river”: an axis of

¹⁵ That idea refers to the first encounter between Karl Marx and Paul Lafargue, in which the former, upon seeing the debate between “those two species, the ‘Marxists, and the anti-Marxist,” is cited by Lafargue as saying: «ce qu’il y a de certain c’est que moi, je ne sui pas Marxist» («what is clear is that I... I am not Marxist».)” From the “Introduction” by Diego Guerrero in *El derecho a la pereza* by Paul Lafargue. Madrid: Maia, 2013.

life. The violence turned the river into a place of death (NCHM, 2013, p. 335). Even more, the sense of time changes in rough conditions. What was before is no longer. There is no clear explanation because the event instantly ruins things, “very hard, very sad” (NCHM, 2013, p. 337).

Fear and violence disfigure humanity to the point of horror. Yet there are no monsters. Only humanity deformed as if in a vortex. Thus, what is at stake is not the existence of Evil but the excellence of human actions. Monsters are those who deny life, who smother it. Segovia, September 11th, 1998: No one could protect the people that night. They were abandoned. (NCHM, 2013, p. 343). At El Salado, there were warnings but no aid: “They said ‘no one goes to the hill, we won’t be responsible for what happens’” (NCHM, 2013, p. 344). La India (Santander), 1987: “Either they join up [the paramilitaries], leave with the guerrilla, leave the region, or die” (NCHM, 2013, p. 345). Trust cannot exist under these conditions. In fear, people “sell out”: “Such sorrow, one feared one’s friend. Because one did not know whether he was crooked [...] or not. It was all fucked up... and I still fear people a lot” (NCHM, 2013, p. 350). In violent times, there is no place for peers. There is only room for silence, doubts, forced loyalties, opportunisms, betrayals... Surviving the war or even personal profit became the justification criteria for immoral actions. It was called “*ser avispa-do*,” an expression that could be translated as “clever,” “shrewd,” “sly,” and “quick on one’s feet.” Crucially, while conveying moral looseness, it is understood as a positive personal characteristic: sharp like a wasp. That is a horrible characteristic of violent times in which actions become uninhibited (NCHM, 2013, p. 352). Fear leaves a mark. It leaves traces in people’s hands, shoulders, dress, and culture;¹⁶ Colombia’s development is still hindered by a culture

16 “Physical traces over the body integrate with a series of elements of the day-to-day local environment, go through such unnoticed and unsuspected elements, like the type of dressing or its color, but which in certain contexts such as paramilitary posts are interpreted as guerrilla-like: «Men cannot wear *ponchos*, they could not use

that privileges short-term personal gain over long-term communal benefits. We have yet to discuss a salient characteristic of the testimony of survivors: the passive and active collaboration with violent actors: indifference, aiding in cover-ups, and economic and logistical support (NCHM, 2013, pp. 342-358; indeed, there is much work to be done in the field of memory and adjudicating responsibilities of participants). But let us pursue our research in a more philosophical vein.

“In the beginning, there was the word «Wrath» and the word was successful” (Sloterdijk, 2013, p. 12). So terrible is the wrath that, as in antiquity, offers uncountable pains today. However, our cultural attitudes to wrath may have changed. We, the moderns, almost unavoidably disapprove of Wrath (Sloterdijk, 2013, pp. 12-13), however violent our way of life may be if adequately examined. Are otherwise peaceful humans led to war by terrible circumstances, or does Wrath deadly burst into the lives of men because they are violent? We have glorified violence in so many ways, and for such a long time, that skepticism about what we are as human beings seems natural.

At the same time, these wrathful beings are capable of (most often anonymous) heroism and dignity in the face of violence, experimentation in non-indifference, and non-helplessness.¹⁷ There is a need to validate the value and possibility of “acts of protection, solidarity, rescue, disobedience, and direct or indirect resistance” (NCHM, 2013, p. 329). How can heroic vitalism, the celebration

rainboots, they had to wear their shirt well tucked inside the pants” (NCHM, 2013, p. 354).

17 The perspective we follow is found in it thus presented. Sloterdijk claims: “In the tales of great deeds glow the first good news: under the sun something more than the undifferentiated and always identical takes place. In so far as authentic actions are performed, the shapeless answer by themselves the question: Why do men do something instead of nothing? They do it to expand the world with new things worth celebrating. Given that the performers of new things were representative of the human genre, though extraordinary, the way of pride and admiration is open to the others when they listen to the actions and suffering of the heroes” (2012, p. 14).

of life and humanity, be rescued from the point of view in which we are but servants to the causal sovereignty of facts and nature? Violence must never be underestimated; we must consider its nature and causes. However, this task must be complemented by a decided vision of dignity and positive human action.

When we read the histories of our conflict, we see that the characters with a reflexive interiority, a capacity for learning and efforts oriented by high criteria of action, are relatively few; cruel and reactive characters are far more frequent (NCHM, 2013, pp. 37-101). Perhaps the genealogy of violence in Colombia is also the genealogy of resentment and reactive collective forces of our land.¹⁸ Violence devastates worlds: it destroys material and symbolic environments, “spacial, social, spiritual and natural points of reference” (NCHM, 2013: 331-341); hopeful and joyful actions occur against this backdrop of devastation (Lear, 2008).

The task is to bring forth a perspective on struggle and revolution that can change the world positively, knowing how hateful it has all been. It is always better to think of the vigor with which the past is left behind than to live in a relation of semi-rebellion against it.¹⁹ But we have long ceased to feel human heroism as viable (Sloterdijk, 2010, p. 15), seeing it as having a place only in ancient rhapsodies, or worse, only among comic book superheroes, a matter for dark knights and Spidermen. However, actual examples of human heroism are in no way akin to the banal icons of the big screen. In truth, to appeal to heroism is to appeal to dignity, to recuperate the festivity of life amidst the horror. There

18 The expression “Autodefensas” (self-defenses) says it all about that point of view: fear and the need for defense represent the psychopolitical charisma of violence. We find it buried in the genesis of armed conflict: the core of the ‘autodefensas’ was already prepared amongst the countrymen in the times of Rojas Pinilla (Pizarro Leongómez, 1991; also, NCHM, 2013, pp. 112-135).

19 As Sloterdijk would say, the task is, thus, the study of self-affirmation in psychic and social systems linked to dynamics of wrath and historic resentment (2010, p. 30).

are heroes: none of them wear capes.²⁰ They are women, boys, girls, and everyday people. They are named in the “testimonial archive [...] a living portrait, bare and human, of the suffering unleashed by violence and how victims survived and saved their lives in the most adverse conditions” (NCHM, 2013, p. 329, 371).

§4. FREEDOM

What is the role of local agents in the search for better times? (Gamboa y Herrera, 2010: 24). A review of the lived memory of the experiences of dignity and resistance in armed conflict is an excellent way to underline the *affirmative sense* of non-violent values that rise against violence *from below*.²¹ Values that, among other things, embody the following perspective: there is no need to identify as a rebel, nor to belong to any party or sect, to change the world. In pain and terror, individual and collective efforts to *move on* feed the creative forms of revolution. Who are the revolutionaries? Those who celebrate life and its possibilities, sometimes through subtle acts or indirect answers. Or through solidarities, disobediences, rebellions against arbitrariness, armed control, stigmatization, or censorship. Life is celebrated through subterfuges, aids, and rescues. Alternatively, by recuperating spaces and ceasing to obey. In caring for ourselves and others, we find the celebration of life.

Care of self and others occurs in specific scenarios where people reach superior action criteria and obey noble imperatives. Offering food or refuge for others or sharing a bed can be considered sim-

20 Philosophy of culture is missing an analysis of two contrasting figures in the West: 1) the vengeful hero, who seeks retaliation in the face of injustice, and 2) the romantic or active hero, whose main task is to answer injustice with altruist acts of self-affirmation (in the sense of *conatus*). The task is suggested in *wrath and time* by Sloterdijk, especially in the chapter entitled “The business of wrath in general” (2010, pp. 599-70).

21 From the perspective *below on the problem of Transitional Justice* (Kieran McEvoy & Lorna McGregor, 2009). *Transitional Justice from Below: grassroots activism and the struggle for change*. Oxford: Hart Publishing

ple actions. But, as gestures of care, they strengthen the human tendency to consideration for others, with therapeutic effects. Collective bonds contribute to well-being and calm. To warn of killings in the town square, to bring food and water to those hiding, or to alert neighbors of dangers are gestures of protection (NCHM, 2013, p. 368).

Brave souls perform direct rebellions or uprisings, even if they cause reactive drives and acts.²² “What are you looking for?” asked the frightful commander. “Our children!” they answered. These are more than examples of resistance and stubbornness. Instead, they express access to human inheritance, the freedom that resists the obligations imposed by force. Some of the old Wrath runs usefully in the veins of those who oppose offense and mistreatment. *Thymós* is an archaic expression for what we would now call *citizen courage* – a source of many gestures of decency against armed authoritarians who wield power through fear.²³ What we see in people who refuse to obey force is pride, self-affirmative impulses, demands for justice, sentiments of dignity, indignation, and combative energies (NCHM, 2013, pp. 343-352; 374-3876). “You seem to have rebelled?” they criticized the brave woman. “One looks out for one’s children,” she said (NCHM, 2013: 369). We can resist stubborn facts and arbitrary people following the thread of life through creative acts. One day, they said: “[...] tell whoever is giving you orders that we wait here for them, to kill us,

22 Libertad, on the Gulf of Morrosquillo: “The narratives on the facts emphasize on how the reaction and self-defense of Luis Carlos and his uncle motivated a collective action of a disorganized armed rebellion” (NCHM, 2013, pp. 384-385).

23 “He who is interested in man as a carrier of pride and impulses that affirm the self should decide to break the overcharged knot of the erotic. In that case, he should go back to the Greek psychological and philosophical point of view, according to which the soul manifests not only in Eros and its intentions of this or that but, overall, in the thymotical impulses. While the erotic manifests roads to the objects we lack and through which we can feel complemented, thymotics open roads to what men are capable of affirming, to what they have, can, are, and want to be” (Sloterdijk, 2010, p. 26).

to bomb the town, to do whatever they wish, but we will remain here. We are tired of this situation”. There were many such acts of rebellion: in March 1981, in Cimitarra, Santander, in the town of San Carlos, in eastern Antioquia (NCHM, 2013, p. 386).

These acts of joyful courage, these lines of flight (see Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), are negotiations with multiple actors, resources, objects, and materials. Lines of flight make trouble, problematize, look for favorable routes to overcome horror, and establish connections with life. To negotiate is, therefore, to take flight without confrontation. Understanding lines of flight requires a subtle vision to perceive the subtle ways resistance is achieved. It can be considered irreverence, requiring joy, intelligence, and sobriety. Beautiful lines of flight reassign social bonds and affirm heterogeneous links in the face of death: “Father Antun, spiritual leader of the community, commemorated with them the return of the displaced by outlining a sketch in the floor of the church of Chocó with 119 candles. That night, besides praying to baby Jesus and the Virgin Mary, they invoked the protection of Changó, the African god of war and fertility” (NCHM, 2013, p. 367). Lines of flight include going to the movies when the paramilitaries have ordained a curfew or going out at night to avoid meeting armed actors; the paths of subtle resistance are many (NCHM, 2013, pp. 375-380).

Of course, acts of memory, ways in which the past is documented, and injustice denounced, are part of this: “cultural productions and documentaries [...], the artistic practices, [...] the sociocultural practices and oral tradition [...], the construction of places for memory [...], the different performative actions [...]” (NCHM, 2013, p. 387). There is a link between memory and social organization processes (NCHM, 2013, p. 390). To remember is an activity that, deep down, is a matter of *how we have lived together* with the past and how it is part of us. Memory is more of a network than an isolated black box (NCHM, 2013, pp. 391-395). And its resources are the narrations about *who we have been and can be*.

Let us look at two concrete places to round up the argument-not close it.

The municipality of Marquetalia suffered violent acts, critical impoverishment, and increased drug trafficking activities. All lead to a deterioration in people's day-to-day existence: money is scarce, children and young pregnant women drink in bars, and scores are settled through knife and gun fights (Peralta y Lázaro, 2010, pp. 224-229). To flee misery and delinquency requires special (although, deep down, simple) measures. Local initiatives emerged through cooperative associations that sought new ways of living and enhancing life, efforts to go from dealing in cocaine to planting avocado, plantain, cane, and coffee. The locals knew that cocaine money was dirty money. Cocaine brings known evils, including poverty, that brings more poverty (Peralta y Lázaro, 2010, pp. 231-234). The fact that the town's inhabitants developed alternative productive projects against this evil exemplifies the philosophical intuition that those collective activities are an engine of life, just as life guarantees the conditions and capacities that allow enlarging vital processes. It is in this sense that we speak of *work in the present*. What has happened does not matter as much as what we can do together. Currently, work through networks of solidarity and productive processes is part of the politics of development and social justice.

Samaniego: a municipality that had come to be centered around the drug economy (processing of coca leaves and poppy flowers) due to low agrarian production and a sharp drop in the price of coffee (Lázaro, 2010, p. 242). In addition, the problematic situation of the municipality worsened because of the intensification of fumigation and Anti-Drug Police controls in Putumayo, Guaviare, and Caquetá. For many years, the people of Samaniego suffered in the crossfire between the guerrillas and the Libertadores del Sur front of the AUC paramilitaries, put a lot of pressure during a cruel struggle of many years (Lázaro, 2010, p. 242).

It does not seem coincidental that peaceful collective answers to adversity emerge when people face the worst. That is another way of saying that productive projects embody an *ethos of solidarity*. The civic movement of Samaniego deserves our respect: “It has defined its management as the exercise of government through the participation and empowering of communities” (Lázaro, 2010, pp. 248-252). So does the Samaniego town of Montúfar for making municipal finances transparent and building collaboration through trust. That is how peaceful pacts are made, through transparency and trust, in the spirit of caring for ourselves and others (Lázaro, 2010, pp. 253-257).

§5. WRATH

In addition to verticality and sectarianism, armed groups are characterized by furor and effervescence. Whether they claim to seek “freedom from imperialism” or “freedom from godless communism,” the figure is the same: the explosion of concentrated energies (e.g., frustration, resentment, envy, discomfort, paranoia, etc.).

The essential element of wrath is that some people or groups deserve to pay their debts through suffering inflicted by those they harmed. In impunity and injustice, “the carrier of wrath discovers his most convincing targets” (Sloterdijk, 2010, p. 72). In wrath, there is no place for conformities. With pride, wrathful people charge against his enemies and assume he is legitimately wrapped with moral motives. Consequently, the wrathful assigns himself noble and inevitable tasks: “Hours that did not happen in agony; an overwhelming loss that could be suffered; a house that was left in its place without being blown up; a knife not yet stabbed in the body of the offender: all those inconveniences must be remedied” (Sloterdijk, 2010, p. 72). The wrathful is convinced, therefore, that the impunity of those who have committed atrocities is at stake. They are the recipients of his anger. And he must cause them pain.

The wrathful validates his actions through the offense he avenges, and his life revolves around pain inflicted and received. The wrathful yells with incandescent enthusiasm and creates ideologies—which other wrathful will follow, of course. “Whoever wants to keep his wrath must preserve it in hate” (Sloterdijk, 2010, p. 73). And what better tool than ideology, which allows us to say: “Segovia, we will pacify you” (NCHM, 2013, p.106)? Or “We belong here. AUC” (NCHM, 2013, p. 107). “In the Camilista struggle, ELN” (NCHM, 201, p. 138). Or “Welcome to Puerto Boyacá, land of peace and progress. Anti-rebellious capital of Colombia” (NCHM, 2013, p. 141). Or “Death to the leaders of ‘Marcha por la Paz,’ the guerrillas and their cooperators” (NCHM, 2013, p. 187). And so forth. In the end, wrath is overwhelming. And its ideologies are the product of dark and vague concepts capriciously cobbled together (Tilly, 2010; Vercauteren, Crabbé & Müller, 2010; Aguilar & Salas, 2010).

Wrath is a psychopolitical affection of a reactive nature that belongs to the emotional discharges of individuals and collectives that have assigned themselves messianic tasks. At the heart of wrath and sectarianisms, we find reactive traits such as (i) a monologic relation between the leader and his audience, (ii) centralism on the part of leaders, (iii) a sacralization of militaristic habits, (iv) hatred against the new, that is, a necrophiliac disposition (as defined by Fromm and Freire, see Freire, 1977, pp. 74-82) that hates the spontaneity of life (v) an ideology of holy causes, (vi) monopolization of signs, (vii) a politics centered on parties rather than communities, (viii) censorship of pacifist ideals, (ix) distrust of the individual and rejection of pluralism, (x) constant espionage and rumor (gossip), (xi) a polarizing treatment of the other, and (xii) tendency to violence and mistreatment.²⁴

²⁴ These psychopolitical traits have had, as an origin, the party-centered politics of the radical left and communism. Sloterdijk referred to fascist emotions when he interpreted the Russian situation of 1914 (2010, pp. 174-194).

Much of the violence we have suffered is rooted in the wrath of those who would defend a just cause, whatever *that* may be. At this point, we have to take a significant step towards the problem of elevating to theory the initiatives of creative and rebellious experimentation (primarily anonymous, but fortuitously preserved here and there) in the face of violence. We must, therefore, appropriate the problem of how to theoretically apprehend the heterogeneity of the many resistances and practices of freedom to offer a conceptualization of the many individual and collaborative tools that seek better times if we want to avoid the conclusion that social change is effectuated only by the wrathful.²⁵ We will propose that such a task can be achieved by a richly understood concept of *We*.²⁶

We are manifold, always. And this amounts to saying that each of us is legion. This idea captures a delicate enigma. The expulsion of the unitary identity centered on recognizing multiplicity is one of our most exciting and recent thought discoveries: we contain multitudes (see Bula, 2018). In the matter of subjectivity, there has been a long struggle to question the bourgeois idea of a quiet and dignified life (Hesse, 2009; Márai, 2004). Nowadays, the “range of experimental possibilities for experience and sensation capable of producing new ways of life [...]” (Pedraza, 2010, p. 14) is a matter of investigation in the humanities and social sciences.

The matter is easily perceptible without looking into specialized studies or academic literature. Social movements and collective actions arise here and there with varied, subtle differences and meet with the admiration of onlookers who celebrate the variety of life

25 We must mention the publication *Social and Citizen Movement for Peace* by compiler Álvaro Villaraga Sarmiento (2013) as a rich source on collective experimentation of an affirmative nature. The text is a direct source of description and analysis of peace movements in Colombia from 1980 to 2013. What we say here is inspired by this document’s illustrations of collective praxis.

26 Here we will only mention some traits of the general framework in which we posit a concept of “We.” We hope to write more on this subject.

(e.g., a recent article in *The Guardian*, 2018, about a community of single moms who decided to live together and form an extended family). The matter is masterfully expressed and summarized in *Steppenwolf*: “You will have to entangle your complication even more” (Hesse, 2009, p. 324). Nevertheless, there is in the part of us that is alive a capacity to find new paths that sidestep stubborn circumstances and painful resentment, often in ways unexpected, even by ourselves. *There is something fierce and indomitable within us, something that leads us to seek alternatives of becoming, to create something that did not exist before* (Pedraza, 2010, p. 11), something that can be found when we look to widening how we can live, rather than to selfish desires and everyday tasks.

However, it is unnecessary to suppose that we have two natures: a tame human existence of everyday duties and a wild, peculiar, and clandestine shadow, an obedient and family-oriented Dr. Jekyll and an anarchistic Mr. Hyde. Such a hackneyed vision of humanity points to a pious self-sundering. On the contrary, the matter concerns the process of becoming—both the authoritarian follower and the dyed-in-the-wool revolutionary leading impoverished cyclopean lives. Instead, alongside the drive for leading this or that kind of existence, according to these or those transcendent principles, there is a drive towards complicating existence, making it denser, fulfilling possibilities.

How? By treating life and identity as what they are, the former is an activity in permanent flux and is pregnant with possibility; the second is an ever-disputed territory, a rough and ever-changing map, however valuable. To eschew transcendent norms, formats, and functional templates opens the floodgates to multiplicity at the price of a heightened struggle for identity. I: that is a word that names a myth (Taylor, 1992). In the final analysis, seeking one’s mutation is to seek others and otherness to enrich life (not just my own). The word *joviality* captures this drive nicely.

What about the past? The jovial question is, of course, what are we to *do* with it: the past, the urgent task of public memory in

the face of atrocity, is to be seen as a tool to becoming, *as an aid to seeing what we may become*: practical philosophy. Philosophy is a never-quite-achieved attempt at apprehending the time yet to come. If the formula is correct and philosophy is useful when it expresses the options of a particular temporal present, then characterizing the current attempts of so many to achieve new possibilities of living is a philosophical undertaking. If that is true, the effort of incorporating into thought the presence of processes, initiatives, activities, collective and individual proposals, etc., is translated into the concept *We*, of which we offer a broad outline.

Let us now celebrate life where there was death: the claim calls forth essential matters. How do we come to be together, to form a *We*? Rather than thinking about imaginary, limiting, one-time *deus ex machina*-like social contracts, networks emerge as we find each other seeking a way out of the shackles of the past. The richness of our capacity of action depends on the intensity with which we become more complex, which reveals the disposition to support diverse states and to assume the constant task of seeing how to deal with what comes up. Our diversity and richness are not a natural legacy but an artifact of our aesthetic, technical, intellectual, and narrative inventiveness with which we act to become better, stronger, and happier.

We can invent ways to be together. But not in the sense of forging vertical, authoritarian entities. Of course, every group needs some scaffolding, which reflects the positions we adopt, the roles and prerogatives we assume, the norms and prohibitions we interiorize, etc. However, “Authority” can be understood as the expression of the *internal* function that dictates who we are and what we can do together. Thus, “authority” would mean something other than the threat of violence, the reverence for rank, and the goose-step. The problem of authority becomes the problem of the immanent formalization of norms. Indeed, in forming a *We*, we have an immanent obligation to be consistent with those who have chosen to walk alongside us and an inherent right to demand

the same. Imperatives are unavoidable but can be assimilated into the collective ambitions that intervene when formalizing group roles. What is our situation? What is our project? What resources do we have? With an immanent driving force, a *We* will emerge, even if papers are signed, statutes are agreed upon, or leaders are designated.

In collectives constituted jovially, sorrow is born joyfully. In scenarios of helplessness, even though everyone is friendly and smiles, what we say and do saddens us. In joy, despite difficulties, setbacks, or long work hours, *something inside us grows, and we become more*. We are still determining what we are to evolve. We cannot know. We can only ask ourselves which situations, events, words, gestures, initiatives, etc., make things go right and create life flow.

The premise of human history is that the existence of human individuals is at stake in concrete conditions and under the weight of lived events. We must enrich this premise by taking our collective capabilities seriously to avoid reliving old hopes and claims. Freedom is not born from inventing utopias or yearning for a golden past; it involves recognizing our present situation, which affects us, and that we can appropriate. Freedom becomes a real phenomenon in our capacity to transform the present by inventing unforeseen ways of acting, collectivities, and responses to events, leaving the weight of the past behind. The opposite of freedom is resentment.

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