

LANDSCAPES OF TERROR IN-BETWEEN HOPE AND MEMORY: POLITICS,  
ETHICS AND PRACTICES OF CULTURAL MEMORY IN THE PACIFIC COAST OF  
COLOMBIA

Catalina Cortes Severino

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Aproved by

Lawrence Groosberg

Della Pollock

Arturo Escobar

## ABSTRACT

CATALINA CORTES SEVERINO: “landscapes of terror in-between hope and memory: politics, ethics and practices of cultural memory in the pacific coast of colombia”

Under the direction of Lawrence Groosberg

This thesis starts with the following questions: why is it important today to talk, write and think about memory in contexts of violence? Why is it crucial within the practices of everyday life, for the creation of identities and the construction of the future? How can we understand the importance of the politics and ethics of memory in contexts where the violence operates in different levels of everyday life? I began to raise these questions after exploring these issues in the last year with the Process of Black Communities (PCN) of the Pacific Coast in Colombia. I explored through my documentary practice and research the implementation of *truth, justice and reparation* for their communities by connecting present struggles with the historical memory of slave trade. Hence, my work explores the articulations between politics, cultural memory and violence that are established through the practice of this social movement in contemporary Colombia.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Why is it important today to talk, write and think about memory in contexts of violence? Why it is crucial within the practices of everyday life, for the creation of identities and the construction of the future? How can we understand the importance of the politics and ethics of memory in contexts where the violence operates in different levels of everyday life? I began to raise these questions after I had the opportunity to explore these issues working in the last year with the Process of Black Communities (PCN) of the Pacific Coast in Colombia. More than a bounded entity, this network has been promoting alternative practices of resistance to survive in the middle of the Colombian conflict. At the same time they are engaged in different struggles in order to live as a community with the power of decision and governance over their own territory and life projects. Particularly, one of their principal struggles that I explored through my documentary practice and research is on the implementation of *truth, justice and reparation* for their communities by connecting present struggles with the historical memory of slave trade. As the activists of this collective put it, the articulation between remembering practices, identity politics and political mobilization within the Process of Black Communities becomes a fundamental part of its historical project. Hence, my work explores, through a combination of writing and documentary practice, the articulations

between politics, cultural memory and violence that are established through the practice of this social movement in contemporary Colombia. In this way, I am proposing a project that works as a social, ethical and critical praxis, as a form of response-ability that goes beyond the recognition of the silenced histories in everyday life.

The organizational processes of the black communities living throughout the rivers of the Pacific region became fundamental for the elaboration of Law 70 of 1993, which grants them collective property rights throughout the region. Through this legal action, both authority and autonomy were given to these organizations regarding decision-making processes over their own territories. As the official website of the PCN states: “We declare in favor of the permanence and pacific resistance of our communities inside their ancestral territories”; “we support differential attention policies that recognize our organizative processes and the right that black communities have to resist” (My translation, 2005, PCN).

Thus, the movement’s different struggles have fostered the creation of neutral and horizontal communities throughout the *Planes de contingencia* (Contingency plans), as a tactic to survive in the middle of the arm conflict. One important aspect of this plan has been the creation of a system of early warnings that allows communities to anticipate and prepare for their displacement. Even more, they are preventing the displacement to the large cities, and hence, the abandonment of their crops, by organizing temporal displacements to other nearby regions. With these plans, the PCN accompanies the communities that have been the target of increased violence in recent years as a way of

witnessing. The idea behind these plans is to intervene politically, by taking legal actions against the government with the help of national and international organizations what is happening in their territories. The strategy to internationalize their resistance or to “globalize their struggle” (Oslender: 2003) had been crucial to create international pressure in order to protect their territories and people. They also have bridged and reached academic intellectuals and are actually fostering alliances with other collectives and social movements inside and outside Colombia.

Until ten years ago, many analysts considered the Colombian Pacific region as a paradigm of peace in a country of war and violence (Restrepo: 2005). Since the 1990’s, these conditions changed and now the Pacific region of Colombia is a contested area of conflicting interests over the appropriation of territory and natural resources among the paramilitaries, guerillas, commercial ventures, government, and the local communities. Consequently, this region is today a ‘War scenario’ with massacres and massive displacement of entire communities to other regions of the country. Thus, the confrontation between armed actors, illegal crops (narcotraffick business), aerial fumigations, and large-scale projects of eradication, among others, currently deployed in the region, must be understood as profoundly affecting notions of territoriality where the right of self-governance and nurturing life projects by these communities are currently been threatened. Here, as Escobar (2003) claims, there is a common objective of the different projects of guerrilla, paramilitaries, capitalists and the state: the appropriation of these territories for a new configuration of the Pacific region adapted to the projects of capital modernity. Even more, as I will make clear in the following pages, this project and

logic constituted the historical colonial project still in place in the region which sacrificed (in terms of Agamben 1998) the black and indigenous populations in the name of the progressive modern time (in terms of Benjamin 1968).

The Colombian black communities have lived in the middle of fractures; displacement has been part of their cultural experience since their departure from the African coasts and arrival during the 17th century. These are communities that have lived within the constant haunting of their colonial past-present-future, in the middle of the *state of exception* that, along different articulations of power have turned these communities into sacrificable populations (Benjamin 1968). These are communities that have lived and continue to live in the middle of the operations, fantasies and desires of the modern project. But *simultaneously*, as Fals Borda (1979) describes with the case of the maroon communities in the 17th centuries, they have been proposing alternatives projects that resist the narratives and projects over their territories.

Here, I frame this project both theoretically and practically between the articulation of everyday life, violence and memory through an historical grounded interrogation. In the first section of this thesis, I will begin exploring the articulation between memory, violence and narration. Then, I will discuss the relation between memory and place as a space of construction. In the third section, I will open the debate around the practices of reparation<sup>1</sup> crafted by these collectives in the Pacific region at

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<sup>1</sup> Here reparation is understood in two ways. First, as a practice of healing-in order to engage the critical labor of redress-“redress is itself an articulation of loss and longing for remedy and reparation” (Hartman 2000: 50) in a personal and social dimension. And second, as a political, symbolic and economical reparation in relation with the state.



different levels. In the last section, I will enunciate and discuss the limits and possibilities of this project that must be viewed as immersed in (multiple) translation processes. I will conclude with possible questions and debates for the continuation of this project.

## CHAPTER II

### MEMORY, VIOLENCE AND NARRATION

*“It is important to question our normative sense of time, and to open a more expansive and inclusive feel of ‘being-in-time’ (Minh-ha 2005: 40).*

In this section, I want to highlight my understanding of memory principally within the frame of performance of memory<sup>2</sup> and how I am articulating it to violence and narration. I will explore this argument specifically, through the practices and agency of cultural memory within everyday life, in other words, how it operates in the present. Here, cultural memory is understood within a political and ethical frame which allows particular practices of reparation that permit to explore and carry out new ways of living in relation to the fractures of our past, present and future. For this paper, I understand the practices of reparation following Hartman’s arguments on redress: “Redress is a remembering of the social body that occurs precisely in the recognition and articulation of devastation, captivity, and enslavement” (Hartman 1997: 77).

Simultaneously, these performative reparative practices are proposing and challenge other temporalities, other time junctures. Set against the monumental linear

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<sup>2</sup> In this work I’m using performance theory as a method to approach the relationship between the embodied and the material in the production of knowledge, where the monumental archive and the experiential repertoire are in constant interaction.

time, they bring together other knowledges, justice, responsibility, forgiveness, and mourning. In this juncture, memory gives meaning and hope to the future. Conversely, the utopian space and time is understood here as a politics of feelings that allows to move forward, “a time and place that is not-yet-here” (Munoz 2006:10), giving meaning to the reconfiguration of the memory. As Hernan, a leader of the movement, suggested, when he was talking about the PCN’s struggles “*The PCN has the hope of contributing towards freedom, it is different from other struggles because these are channeled through the ancestral mandate; it is a strange thing because it does not seek power, but freedom*” (Hernan, personal communication 2006).

Some of the questions raised by my effort to articulate memory, violence and narration are: What are the implications of understanding remembering and forgetting as an embodied process, as a material politics and poetics? How does remembering the past incorporate the present and the future? (Pollock, personal communication 2006); and even more, how is it possible to articulate the performance of memory as a practice of reparation specifically in a context of violence? Here, practices of reparation are understood as processes of transformation that render the possibility of transforming our current present conditions, as “reparative acts that help us to situate ourselves not only in relation with the fragments of the past, but the ways in which we may piece ourselves together to carry forward into the future” (Chambers-Letson 2006:171). I am interested in engaging with practices of reparation operating at different levels (personal, social, political, ethical and historical) that move against the grain of the linear and empty time of the national amnesia understood principally within the silences created around the historical violence and the traces that it had left throughout the construction of meta-

narratives and its normalization. Thus, I will analyze the practices of reparation within the complexities of unresolved historical forgettings, justice and reconciliation at the local, national and international levels. Hence, an exploration of new ways to disrupt this amnesia becomes a most urgent and necessary task.

In the next pages, I will explore some of the performative practices of reparation that the PCN is carrying out at different levels: social, personal, political, ethical and historical. But simultaneously, my own intellectual work, the writing and documentary intervention understood as an artistic intervention, also becomes a practice of reparation. It proposes a political witnessing that seeks to explore the different articulations between remembering practices, identity politics and political mobilization against the national agenda of the “official history”. Overall, throughout this project I want to re-think the present-future from different possibilities of past-present different from the ones inherited by the constant haunting of our colonial past.

In this conjuncture, through this visual and writing documentation/reflective ethnography, I try to bring history, memory and knowledge to the level of immediate experience and individual subjectivity. Throughout the narration, body, places and violence are articulated to explain and remember those events of everyday violence (Feldman 1991). In this sense, narration has agency. These oral histories and body practices register the limits of official political codes of violence through an imagery of alterity and heterogeneity (Feldman 1991). Thus, my project can be understood as a way to interrogate modes of representation and to produce another kind of historical agent. In

other words I want to approach these subjectivities (PCN) as historical agents constructing and de-constructing history within a movement between the past and the future. This approach gives the possibility of other histories “outside” of the emptiness of time, where the linearity of the narration breaks into this emptiness and brings the conjunction and disjunction of multiples temporalities. This can produce what Chakrabarty (2000) calls *affective histories*, which are related with different forms of being-in-the- world outside the master code of secular history.

I am trying to map across “what the map cut up, the story cuts across” (De Certeau: 1984:129), to map the contemporary situation of the Pacific Coast of Colombia by taking journey with some members of the PCN. During these days together, I attempted (within the limits of its impossibility) to map the traces of the violence, to mark the unmark, to listen the silences that violence has left at different levels. But also I attempted, to understand the different forms of resistance that these communities have been creating in recent years, which are inscribed within the everyday life as a politics of feelings (hope) or a *politics of transfiguration* (Gilroy1993), allowing other tactics of resistance and other constructions of community and the subject. As another leader of the PCN who recently fled to Spain after receiving constant life-threats told me last summer: “*PCN for me, is almost my life, it is a process of community and self- construction*” (Vladi 2006 interview).

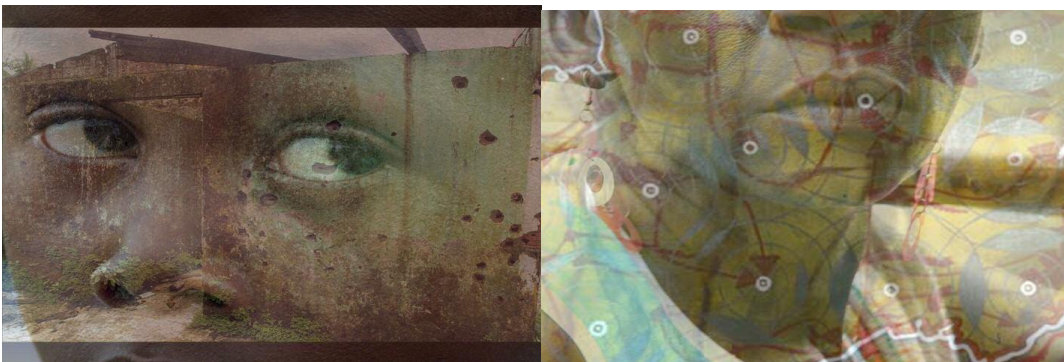
In this work, performance is understood as a narration which allow the disclosure, disruption and the re-narrativization of the “official” history, thereby opening

the possibility to join different temporalities and non-dualistic logics (past/present, dead/life, presence/absences, sacred/profane, space/time, reason/affect, among others). The historical project of the PCN must also be understood as encompassing other ways of *being-in-time*, “to belong-in a different mode-to and in a specific temporality-or a specific piece (milieu) of time-space-is also to belong to a different time-space”(Groosberg 2000), “*The PCN is an effort for changing, is an effort geared towards our new generation, it is a life project for the transformation of reality...*” (Jose personal communication 2006).

The PCN, as their leaders repeatedly reminded me, is a historical project that proposes other articulations, different from the ones of the modern nation state organized along the axis of State/Violence/Time (Taussig 1997, Coronil 1991, Grossberg 2000); which constantly inscribe the state of emergency upon bodies, constructing and dominating people’s past-present, their historical memory. Here, I want to clarify that the State here is understood as both rational and magical (Taussig 1997). In this vision, the state performs its historical memory and simultaneously constructs reality with very material and stark implications for its inhabitants in their everyday life. The PCN, echoing Chakrabarty (2000) arguments on the antihistorical consciousness, is engaging in diverse ways of being-in-the-world outside the master code of the secular-modern history. As he claims “this is partly because the narratives often themselves bespeak an antihistorical consciousness, that is, they entail subject positions and configurations of memory that challenge and undermine the subject that speaks in the name of history” (2000:37). As one of the leaders of the PCN puts it more clearly: “*not assuming today the responsibility with the past and the future will only contribute to make more difficult*

*and painful the path of the reborn (renacientes) communities. With their legacy of life and happiness, hope and freedom, the elders left a path. What today has to be walked through is not a new path”* (T. of Rosero 2002: 559). Their performance of memory becomes a tactic that twists the constant haunting of loss that the State creates as progressive time, as the only way to continue forward, as a form to control the past-present-future.

By connecting present struggles with the historical memory of slave trade, the PCN crafts other narrations for reparation not only directed to the future, but as Fanon (1967) argued, for another relation with their past. Today, these present struggles encompass a discussion of reparation at different levels, as a form to go against the oblivion of what has happened and what is still happening in the region. In other words, these practices of reparation are meant not avoid the invisibilization of the bloody civil war today, but also to avoid the erasure of the historical violence and the colonial specters that continue to operate within their everyday life.



The decision to continue the path of their *mayores* elders becomes a fundamental task to move forward. As Restrepo argues, commenting on the politics of the past of these collectives, “the contestation of institutional memories and narratives of the past are always nodal aspects attached to different kinds of ‘counter-hegemonic’ movements and

agendas” (2004: 700). This said, memory is endowed with agency and becomes a crucial site of struggle: a struggle for a utopian space and time that necessarily connects past, present and future struggles. In the words of Carlos, a leader of the PCN, *“we are descendants of the Black-Atlantic slave trade; as Afro-descendants, we come from the slave trade. Personally, I think, if slavery is the heart of the capitalist system of accumulation, inequality and racism inhabit the root of the problem.”* In this sense, memory has an ethical duty. Let me be clear. For Auge (1998), these remembering processes are understood between remember and forgetting, where oblivion is for memory what death is for life. In other words, one cannot be understood without the other. This argument opens up a space to understand the constant tension between remembering and forgetting, where the blurred boundaries between both have to be understood as an ethical imperative to re-think the present-future from different possibilities of past-present. Memory here is a site of social, political and ethical struggle, a possibility to change the present and future conditions of existence.

“The geographies of terror also are visible through the empty spaces, where, for example, complete towns have been abandoned after the paramilitars and guerillas massacres. This happened in the Atrato River between 1996-1997, where 20.000 persons escaped from their lands during long combats between the FARC guerrilla group and the militars. This happened in the Anchicaya River in May 2000 after the paramilitars killed twelve persons, kidnapped four and burned some houses; in the Naya River in April 2001, 400 afrocolombian peasants were displaced after a large paramilitary massacre; and in Bellavista in may 2002, 119 afrocolombians were killed during the combats between the FARC and the paramilitars. These events are just some examples because the list could continue”(Oslender 2003:41)



The above paragraph opens up many questions: How could it be possible to represent these scenes of violence? What is the intersection between material violence and symbolic violence? By posing these questions, I highlight the impossibility and complexity of the representation of violence throughout some theoretical approaches. Second, I want to talk about the implications that some of the dominant representations of the violence coming from the media, the state, the militaries and the academy over peoples lives. As Escobar (1988) argues, both through rational discourses informed by positive epistemologies, the government and some social sciences (violentology, criminology, etc) are trying to understand, to give meaning and to ‘intervene’ against violence through empiricism and normativism.

Currently, the *Plan de Seguridad Democratica* (Plan of Democracy Security) implanted by the Uribe government has been designed to “eradicate” violence throughout the performance of the law, order and discipline. A mode of cleansing the violence, reinstitute “security” and normality within the country. Here, the state of exception is the one that displays the order and the dominant representation and explanation of violence. In Colombia, for example, Villaveces-Izquierdo (1997) has carried out ethnographic fieldwork in two of the most important locations for talking about violence: the academy and the magistrates. Thus, by following what is commonly known in Colombia as the “violentologists” and the jurist that dictates or opposes the states of exception during the 1970s and 1980s, he is able to show the overcodified ways in which these sites of knowledge production have talked about violence.

In this conjuncture, this work presents alternative approaches to the dominant representations, in order to understand the complexities of talking and writing against violence, through the impossibility of its representation. As Taussig (1988) explains, violence cannot be understood through the universal, reason and realism which the state, the military and social sciences use in their accounts of violence. As he claims, behind the conscious self-interest that motivates terror and torture lie intricately constructed, long-standing, unconscious cultural formations of meaning that escape that fiction of the world represented by rationalism or utilitarian rationalism (Ibid: 9).

Hence, the representation of violence has to analyze through its body and geopolitics understanding and its implications in every day and material practices. Precisely, this has been the line explored by authors such as Das, Feldman and Agambem, who I am using here, where from different perspectives and approaches, violence is understood of symbolic and material levels, operating both through a structural and every day experience of violence. On the other side, it is essential to highlight how the different narratives coming from the State, international institutions, academics, NGOs, social movements, etc, construct the social identities of the victims via specific cultural representations, through media, news, official state discourses, etc. We have to understand the implications of these cultural representations; although here I will not dwell into the genealogy of these representations, it is clear that this is an urgent project for future work.

For Serematakis (1994) and Feldman (1994), these narrations are powerful enough to colonize the sensory experience. They produce cultural anesthesia as common

sense in present times. Indeed, for Feldman, the role of cultural anesthesia is to “infiltrate social perception to neuter collective trauma, to subtract victims and to install public zones of perceptual amnesia which privatize and thus incarcerate historical memory” (Feldman 1994:103). As the PCN reminds us, it is precisely against this infiltration that everyday life becomes a space for historical possibility, for other historical consciousness, where the *memory of the senses* has the potentiality to disrupt cultural anesthesia. It is here that the PCN operates, attempting to give and restore meaning to death through other historical consciousnesses that can only be understood through a *politics of mourning* (Derrida 2001 terms). As Marlene, a women leader of the Communitarian council of the Mira River reminded me: “*As leaders we have suffered many threats; we live in a permanent risk, but what matters is not if two or three of us give their life; we will do that today so that tomorrow twenty or thirty will have a liberated country, not for the fact that we pretend to be heroes, but because the deaths of our ancestors have demonstrated that to us*”. (personal communication 2006).

For the historical project of the PCN the restitution of the meaning of the deaths is crucial for the struggle to move on, for other future imaginations. Through this restitution, they are changing the political use of death, interrupting the oblivion and silence for the re-establishment of a dialogue with their death for the present and the constitution of the future. This restitution, as well, opens a possibility for the constructions of other meanings outside of the oblivion and silence. In terms of an elder that I interviewed in the Southern Pacific region “*We have to continue to struggling day after day; if anyone dies, his activities are over; but the history remains*” (personal

communication 2006). I would even suggest that this remainder constitutes a crucial struggle for enacting other concepts and practices of responsibilities, reparations, mourning, death. Needless to say, these are struggles that are crafted as alternatives to the modern-western spatial-temporalities. In this memory of resistance, we also find a dialogue with specters.

Here we could see how memory is understood as a cultural practice, as a bridge between the past, the present and the future. Its agency is located in the present, inextricably woven with the future and the past. Here the boundaries between past, present and future are blurred. Cultural memory is understood, for me and for the leaders and participants of the PCN, as a collective and political agency that re-constructs, re-mediate and re-configures the relation between different temporalities. Through the narration process that connects different temporalities, experience and memory are articulated. However in this articulation between experience, narration and memory it is crucial to understand at the same time the silences, which are impossible to be articulated through textual narration. As Das (2006:57) suggests “the pain of the other not only ask for a home in language, but also seeks a home in the body”. Here, the difficult relation between pain, language and the body becomes a central issue to explore in future work.

To conclude the section, I want to suggest that my project, must also be understood as a narration that tries to interrupt this cultural anesthesia. In terms of Brecht’s call, it is a project for *looking again* through a critical frame and opens a hope for responding *differently*. This cartography-cutting across is a space to re-think possible

ways to interrupt the monumental, the master narratives, the “main” events it calls for an ethics of the representation by which the viewer carries with him or her responsibility of ethical political engagement.

### CHAPTER III

#### MEMORY AND PLACE: DWELLING SPACES IN THE PACIFIC COLOMBIAN COAST

*“For us territory is like our life, we have their our granfathers, their burials, our maroon grandmothers, the people from the palenque”* (Yalile personal communication 2006).

*“There is another type of displacement in which even if people continue to live in their territory, they loose their means of life, it means to live in territories that have been expropriated of their territoriality. The levels of expropriations are alarming”* (Hernan personal communication 2006).

Through this documentary and written intervention practice, I underscore the relation between memory and place, as a articulation, as a form of space construction. In De Certeau terms, “space is a practiced place” (1984: 117). Territory, for the Afrocolombian communities, is a central site for the construction of a group identity and for the sense of continuity and discontinuity with their past. As Restrepo (2004) suggests, memory and the construction of a meaning about their past (other relations with their past) have been fundamental for these communities to recognize themselves as a collective. In fact, the Process of Black Communities (PCN) has as one of its sites of struggle the different claims about their past in order to locate themselves in the present, while projecting themselves in to the future.

As they suggest, “from our everyday lives, we support the historical struggle and reanimation of a cultural and historical ethnic identity of ancestral black communities and the traditional uses of natural resources” (PCN web page, 2005). From this conjuncture, as Restrepo (2004: 704) argues, it is crucial to highlight the articulation of a politics of memory with identity politics, which brought about the ethnicization of blackness in Colombia. For Restrepo, this process “supposed a redefinition of identities, memories and silence” (2004:702). Their reconstruction of an African descendency through screenings of documentaries in villages along rivers became a key element in their political strategy of mobilization. Within and outside their territories, an historical space emerged and was practiced. As Rosero claims: “The struggle of our elders in the new continent was to be able to define and govern in their own *maroon settlements (palenques)*, to have the power to construct their own future, their idea of what is human, of a whole cosmovision that allows people stopping being slaves, nurturing a way of living in harmony with nature, I think the PCN is a permanent search of those mandate to locate them (mandates) in the present and give them currency” (Translated from Rosero 2002: 557).

In recent years, the place-based practices of the Afrocolombian communities (Escobar 2001) have been affected by an escalation of violence, massive displacements, assassinations and massacres that have threatened, persecuted and displaced these territorial projects. For these reasons, I propose the term “landscapes of terror”, derived from Oslender’s (2003) concept of geographies of terror in his analysis of the conflict in the Colombian Pacific region. For him, geographies of terror must be imagined as the inscription of a whole technology of terror on spaces, bodies and imaginaries in local

populations. By using “landscapes of terror”, I want to evoke this same concept but to complement it with a consideration of time. In this sense both memory and place are mediated by the lived experience of violence. As a old man told me *“Now there are many threats; one gets kill for nothing. This region became dangerous when coca arrived, people were displaced and strangers arrived. In those years, we could fish, we could move freely, go around, now, after they arrived we cannot go”*. Here, the cartography of their territories is constructed through their experiences, through the dwelling of their memories. But also, as Massumi (1993) reminds us, it is also constructed through fear, control and silence(ing). In Taussig’s (1987: 5) words “terror is the mediator par excellence of colonial hegemony: the space of death where the Indian, African and white gave birth to a New World”.

The cartography of the present of the Pacific region has to be understood by memories of the violence, by the landmarks of the constant state of exception, by its traces, but also, by the memories of resistance that dwell within the black communities. As Riano-Alcala (2006) recalls when describing memory and places in Medellin, Colombia: “Places constitute physical, social and sensorial realms, not only for our actions, but for our memories and imaginations as well” (Riano-Alcala 2006: 67). From this conjuncture, I explored the configuration of spaces in the Pacific coast, being able to map across it with members of the PCN oral histories, memory practices, remembering process, songs, etc.





A central goal of this project is to make visible the traces, the remnants of these landscapes of violence. In other words, I focus more on the performance of the invisible than the performance of the spectacle. Here, the performance of violence is understood not only within the frame of the shocking spectacle, but throughout the everyday practices. Throughout these narrations, one is able to appreciate the degree to which everyday practices of Afrocolombian communities have been affected by violence. At the same time, through these narrations as well, one can underscore possibilities of alternatives within the everyday practices to twist the specific forms of domination and the display of the state of exception. Precisely, one understands how some of these twists are articulated with practices of memory. The progressive time implanted by the fantasies of the capitalist system is broken, disrupted by the everyday practices of memory. In this space, hope remains and the silences of the progressive time break apart.

I want to emphasize the articulation between practices of memory and place-making. Specifically I want to look at how this articulation allows particular forms of belonging through this specific case study. I will argue that this particular articulation between time and space is an articulation of mutual co-dependancy. Through dialogues that I had in the Pacific coast, I could perceive the constant juxtapositions of times and spaces, on one hand, between the progressive time embodied by the economies of terror, the desire of development, progress, accumulation and expropriation and on the other, of other forms of being-in-time.

Throughout my journey in the southern Pacific coast I became witness of *this being different in time* (Grossberg 2000), its presences in everyday life, in a present that is composed by memories and hopes. In the Bajo Mira River, for example, one of the tactics of resistance of the Communitarian Council against shifting agricultural practices (such as the African Palm plantations and coca crops) was to create a project of *parcelas*, small sustainable plots of land. These were reconstructed through memory and the traditional practices of the *ancestros*. These *huertas* were planned for the self-sustainability and food sovereignty of these communities. As Marlen, one of the leaders of these projects told me, “*We are trying to recuperate the system of our ancestors, who grew several crops in the same plot: manioc, maiz, cocoa, plantain, etc. We want to recover that for our food autonomy. Food autonomy as a way of resisting, a way of resisting while being there. To not follow the logic of the monocrop, which limits our autonomy*” (personal communication 2006).

Throughout these practices, as Marlen said, their ancestral knowledges have been embodied in these memories. Through them, these collectives momentarily interrupt the economies of terror and create different ways of operating (de Certeau 1984). They simultaneously interrupt the debt peonage (*endeude*), extraction and expropriation. In these small plots ancestral knowledges are present: The embodied experiences of *a people* that had lived for many years in a non-dualistic relation with nature, different from the extractive logic of capitalism. In colonial times, the pattern of extraction was organized around gold; today around the coca, the “monocultivos” and the macroprojects (Taussig 2004). As Taussig reminds us of his Cocaine Museum, there is constant haunting of the colonial progress, its fantasies and desires; different logics and life projects are operating in the same territory, with different belongings knowledges and memories. As Marlene claims, “The *parcelas* are a fundamental space of our struggle, of our everyday practices” (2006).

In similar ways, the PCN *acompanamientos* (accompaniments) with communities that have been targeted by violence becomes a tactic against the silences, where the politics of memory are crucial within their struggle and everyday projects. The *acompanamientos* are journeys made by leaders of the PCN with international or national NGO’s, with the purpose of witness(ing) their dire situation. As Jose, one of the leaders of the PCN explained to me, these journeys are made for the purpose of witnessing and recollecting information and, from these, initiating political interventions. The idea is to discuss the situation, to share what is happening and intervene in those organizational processes. As Oliver (2001: 8) reminds us when talking about the victims of oppression,

slavery, and torture, these processes do not merely seek visibility and recognition, “but they are also seeking witness to horrors beyond recognition”. This claim connects us to the world and to other people, which simultaneously changes the understandings of recognition, identity, subjectivity and ethical relations. From this perspective, it is possible to make visible the response-ability of the process of witnessing enabling different and ethical relations to difference.

One has also to consider how the articulation between memory and place in the constitution of the spaces, is also interlinked by soundscapes. In this sense, also think about soundscapes of terror? What are the sounds still dwelling in these places stained by violence? What about, not the spectacular sounds of the violence, but, rather, the residual sounds and silences of the unmarked? On another level, these soundscapes also correspond to songs and dances as multilayered narrations. In particular, in the Pacific coast, the songs and dances have a social life cycle that gives them representational and documentary capacities; furthermore, they are providing guidance to the ways in which places are experienced and constructed. Some of the songs recall past events and describes collective feelings and memories, evoking place as a realm of embodied experience.

*“The Spanish invaded and stole all the gold and earth and appropriated and exploited the indigenous... oh my beloved mother earth after they tore apart the black from the African mother earth and brought him here as a slave...ah... save us, ah, save us mother earth... we defended our life, we gathered and turned into in maroon palenques (...) and now they come with money and technology to steal our land and finish with our life... ah, mother land... blacks,*

*indigenous and raizales, we build our unit working for the traditional territory, we cannot forget something how long this alabado is” (Alabado from the group Pura Chonta)*

According to Restrepo (1996), the *alabados* are sad manifestations and are always constituted by the sorrows principally of women, without any participation of musical instruments. Their songs are narrating and embodying the history of the present, remembering the past and present situation of their territories.

At the same time, I want to highlight within the limits of this and every ethnography, how the specters of the past operate today in the everyday life of the Pacific region through social relations, urban spaces, signs, and cultural and political life (Gordon 1997, Kufteec 1998). Landscapes of terror attempts to understand how the present is always “haunted” by the past and how everyday practices are positioned between absences and presences. As Vladi once told me in Bogotá when referring to the ghosts and specters in the region and the urge to cleanse these from their region:

*“Our ancestors, who protect us, they have to heal and clean our places, those places where massacres occurred, have to be now cleaned, those places have to be re-constructed again. We haven’t been able to clean some places because these are still stained with blood, we have to find some of our elders to clean these places, until we find them and carry out the proper rituals these will remain stained, we hope to clean these places soon... we hope our ancestors can clean them, to be able to inhabit these places again” (Vladi personal communication 2006).*

In Vladi’s words and the whole project of cleaning these places, one perceives that the construction of the territory has to be understood, following Serematakis (1994),

within the sensory perception and memory constitutive of and constituting the material culture of these spaces. At this juncture, we can see how other logics are operating in the perception of the territories, and how everyday practices are located between absences and presences. Hence, one should also reckon on how violence operates in space, not only through the physical traces of destruction and blood, but also, invisible traces, marks, stains, the constant haunting of the specters of violence. Throughout these claims I aim to highlight how the specters of the past operate (haunt) in the everyday life of the south Pacific region and are informing social relations, constituting urban and rural spaces, and material objects.

In the year of 2003, the Colombian national newspaper published a most perplexing article (El Tiempo - Bogotá, Colombia -Posted on Dec-02-2003). It was an article that talked about how the struggle of local shamans, jaibanas in the Colombian Pacific Coast, was not only against the guerrilla and paramilitary groups but also aimed against spirits. They said that the eight years war between the illegal combatants had awakened those spirits that were responsible for the series of suicides that had occurred within these communities. As the reporter said, “the Embera’s indigenous group are not killing each other; these deaths are not voluntary. Evil spirits are possessing the sad and weak indigenous, who are hanging themselves. These are the dead of the war that haven’t been buried”. He also described that many unreclaimed bodies have been thrown to the river by the guerrillas.

My project re-maps the spaces between practices, simulations and absences, between past and present meanings. In this conjuncture, the performance of memory mediates narration and everyday life and negotiates the spaces between absences and presences. Echoing Kuflinec “these absences ‘empty’ spaces, remain shadowed by specters of what- was-before and possible futures to come”(1998: 83). It opens the space for reflective practices, and at the same time, for the generation of other kind of histories, of reparative practices. The place-making within the landscapes of terror has to be understood within the articulation of memory, violence and everyday practices, within a non-dualistic relation between space and time.

## CHAPTER IV

### PERFORMATIVE PRACTICES OF REPARATION-IN BETWEEN-HOPE AND MEMORY

*“Violence and the ways in which it is experience in daily life can not be reduced to the spaces of death and destruction; it must also be analyzed in the human and socio-cultural dimensions of living and reconstruction” (Riano-Alcala 2006:13).*

Practices of reparation move against the grain of the empty and linear time. Against the national amnesia and the cultural anesthesia (Feldman 1994). Practices of reparation that explore new ways of living in relation to the fractures of our past, present and future.

*“Initially displaced from Africa after being part of their culture with new senses of belonging, the current displacement of afrodescendantas makes one remember those times of slavery. The pain of the family fragmentation, the impossibilities of possessing and conserving any goods, the pain and abuse of women, the recruitment of men for a war of others, the denial of both their traditional authorities and their autonomy over their territory are images that come to our collective memory.  
( Rosero 2002: 59)*

Here, I will describe some of the performative practices of reparation operating at different levels that I could perceive that these black communities carry out as an



interruption of the ‘permanent state of exception’ where other belongings and other temporalities become possible. I focus on the agency of cultural memory as a practice of reparation and as a potentiality for other imaginations

*Places are marked by memories of death, destruction or fighting, much as people can be haunted by images of horror and destruction, but the memories of group rituals, local myths of collective moments of encounter inhabit these places as well. (Riano-Alcala 2006: 65).*

In our *recorrido* through the Anchicaya River surrounding the city of Buenaventura, the main port of the Colombian Pacific region, I could feel and perceive what the act of remembering means, *el acto de recordar*, the remembering act- in-itself, its potentiality. After one hour by boat from Buenaventura we arrived at a large meeting organized by the PCN. Here, many of the communities that lived along the Anchicaya River arrived to “commemorate” *la muerte* del rio Anchicaya, the death of the Anchicaya river, caused by the arrival of a Spanish multinational, which had constructed a dam in the region, with close connections to paramilitarism, as many of the conversations voiced. I was in the middle of music, decorated boats, food, humidity, children, laments and happiness, heat, and many senses of togetherness. The ceremony was principally crafted to remember what had been happening to the river and with their territory in the last years. In other words, the ceremony was a performance of a form of witness to this tragedy as an intervention to avoid the presence of the oblivion.

During the ceremony different groups of women danced and sang commemorating this tragedy. Meanwhile, the leaders of the communities and other guests spoke about the disaster provoked by the EASA (Spanish hydroelectric dam). They

evoked the contamination of the river, the displacement of some communities and consequently the implantation of violence in their territories. This event created the space to remember, a space to avoid the oblivion and a space for witnessing, a space for being together and a space for the practice of ethical duty. But for me, these communities were also displaying a process of reparation, a process of re-construction operating at the personal and social levels.

Their claims for reparation were various. From EASA, the communities expected some economical reparation for the disaster; Colombian State demanded the implementation of justice for recognition of the disasters that were happening; other international organizations present at the event wanted committed support to this struggle for recognition. Overall, the event in Anchicayá was a social reparation dedicated to their own communities. Through a ceremony that took more than eight hours, the act of remembering-in-itself had agency and helped to remediate, to reconstruct and to create a responsibility for the future and the past from the present (Bal 1999). Furthermore, beyond the desire to have the economic and justice reparations regulated by law, fundamental goals within the struggle of these communities, I also felt the necessity of the act of remembering in itself, an opening of a space for being together, an event. During that day, they remembered and reflected about what was and still is happening within their territories, within their everyday lives. This was also about a committed collective call for other possible future conditions: where hope moves forward, where the past and the future come together.

Collective dances carried the African Diaspora, embodying memories within the present and releasing the embodied memories of the violence. The songs I heard that day called for a better future and, together with other public displays, reconstructed history while trying to give meaning to the excess of violence. As Conquergood (2002: 4) says “The state of emergency under which many people live demands that we pay attention to messages that are coded and encrypted; to indirect, non verbal and extralinguistic modes of communication where subversive meanings and utopia yearnings can be sheltered and shielded from surveillance”. The whole ceremony was an act of escaping from this monumental forgetting, a space for re-thinking possible ways to interrupt the monumental master narratives.

During our journey, I was also struck by the coexistence of the sacred and the profane, a fundamental dimension that has to be understood within the historical struggle of the Process of Black Communities. In this sense, Chakrabarty (2003) calls for the necessity to incorporate the concept of translation as a way to narrate the *nonhistory* of those that escape the secular-empty-homogeneous time, which is also the possibility to disrupt the unity of time. The historical consciousness of the Colombian Black communities is engaged in diverse ways of being-in-the-world outside the master code of the secular-modern history. For Chakrabarty (Ibid: 27), “this is partly because the narratives often themselves bespeak an antihistorical consciousness, that is, they entail subject positions and configurations of memory that challenge and undermine the subject that speaks in the name of history.”

For example, in one of the meetings that I had with Vladi in the office of the PCN in Bogotá I witnessed how the sacred and profane came together within their historical struggle. When I arrived at the PCN offices, I found, on the first floor, an *altar* (sacred structure-place) with a glass of water, one flower, a traditional drum, some flower petals on the floor and a big board with some names written on it: Chango, Emania, Cho, among others. When I asked Vladi about the meaning and significance of the *altar*, he started to talk about the importance of the *mandatos ancestrales* (ancestral commands) of the Santeria. Vladi told me about the importance that the ancestors have for the black communities in general. He continued explaining how, today, some of the places where massacres had happened or those that had been touched with any form of violence had to be cleaned and reconstructed with the help of different rituals, and consequently these kinds of *altars* were a way of communication with their ancestor, as a form to make their spirit present.

Vladi's narration demonstrates how landscapes of terror are inscribed and perceived beyond their materiality. In both events narrated (Vladi's narration and the Anchicaya meeting) above I could believe in the possibility of the performative reparative practices as a way of mediation through narration and everyday life. Through negotiating meanings between absences and presences by reflective practices, other kinds of historiographies are generated and recuperated. As Hartman says "we must, first, situate performance within the context of everyday practices and consider the possibilities of practices in regard to specific forms of domination" (1997: 50). In both examples I could perceive and feel the struggle for returning voice, in Hartman's (Ibid.)

terms, to the “socially dead”, as a victim’s ethical duty to herself and to their communities. These performative practices of reparation demonstrated how cultural memory has agency in the present reshaping both the future and the past, in other words, how these memory practices help to make sense of the present and future possibilities. Overall, with these acts of remembrance, cultural memory has to be understood in terms of political agency, as a mode of cultural and political countermemory, which allows the re-construction and display of counternarratives that allow the remapping of those traces that still remain.



Another practice of reparation mobilized by the PCN consists in a project that started in 2005 on the implementation of *truth, justice and reparation*. This idea started as a response to the official policy created by the Colombian government, Law 729 of Justice and Peace, which has been criticized by civil society groups for benefiting paramilitaries and forgetting the victims. After this project was presented by the government, the PCN, in consultation with other organizations, proposed a counter project of justice and reparation from the communities’ perspective. In their proposal, the project describes how the official law does not consider any kind of reparation. Moreover, the document claims that this law exempts the Colombian state for its

responsibilities for the Afrocolombian communities that have suffered in the last decades through disappearances, massacres and displacements. As a counternarrative, the PCN is proposing alternative ways to implement the law of justice and peace by considering the story of the victims as the pillar for any social re-construction. For them “the historical memory is the recuperation of the “truth” from the experience of the victims [...]; it is necessary and crucial to keep alive the memory of the crimes so that they will not repeat again, for the struggle against oblivion is one of the most important aspects of human rights” (PCN Internal Document, 2005).

In the last year, the PCN began to work around alternative forms for implementing their project of Peace, Justice and Reparation with three workshops that took place in the cities of Tumaco and Buenaventura and the small village of Bojaya. In all three places, some of the most horrifying massacres occurred in recent years and violence had touched every corner and soul and left unnamable traces of horror and drama in the collective memory of their inhabitants. These workshops were meant to collect testimonies about these tragedies as an exercise for mapping the traces of the violence through the victims. In these spaces, they recognized the value of the empirical and non-scientific knowledge and the practical, tacit and ancestral knowledges as sources for the recognition of the rights of Afro-colombian communities. All these testimonies that they collect are used to make visible what is happening in their territories and to call for a political intervention in the national and international level. As was mentioned, the act of remembrance is one of their strategies of resistance in order not to forget. As such, these proposals, within the larger history of the political mobilization of these

communities, become new strategies for inscribing their past and present struggles. At the same time, they are also about the search for alternative personal, social and historical reparations to survive and build a future from the fractures produced by violence.

I consider it crucial to highlight the articulation and dialogue between the cultural politics of memory of peasant, black and indigenous communities, black communities, indigenous communities and the public policy of the memory such as that of the State's project of justice and reparation. Accordingly the cultural politics focus memory as a form of political agency, as a mode of cultural, ethical and political reparative practices. On the other hand, making reference to the public policy implicit in the memory implies the need to understand and analyze the discourses that the State, as well what national and international organizations construct around the politics of memory and issues of justice and reparation. From here, in this case of study, it is central to understand how the practices of reparation proposed by the PCN at different levels challenge the institutional, governmental, academic and international logics and categories around the implementation of a public policy addressed to issues of justice and reparation. A formidable question is thereby opened: how could these different logics be articulated or conciliated?

This argument is also related to the operation of different epistemologies and ontologies. For the Black Communities of the Pacific coast many of their forms of justice and reparations cannot be understood under the "rational" logic of the Colombian state's justice. As we can hear in the testimony of Valdi about the necessity to clean, through

their ancestors, their territories after the massacres, or the necessity to *enterrar a sus muertos* (*bury their dead*) in their territories within their specific rituals as a part of their senses of place, their belonging. For this reason, before even starting the dialogue between both sides it is crucial to establish a conversation between different knowledges, a space for the intersection of knowledges. And much more, in terms of De Sousa di Santos (personal communication, 2006), what we need is a space for *cultural translation*. Once in this utopian space, it is essential to highlight other proposals and alternatives for developing the issues around reparation in contemporary Colombia.

At the same time, the debate on justice and reparation necessarily involves considering different levels and positions, understanding, logics etc. It should be framed through the experience of the victims and the knowledge thereby produced, a fact that has been largely forgotten and denied within modern historiography, within its linear and empty time. The same communities of victims of the violence have created, in their everyday practices, knowledge from these experiences. As Castillejo (2006:14) argues, “grounded on notions of self-healing, remembering and social reintegration, these communities at the grassroots level, seek to reinsert their personal experience into the broader historical process”. Thus, the irreconcilable space of the experience of violence in the whole discussion of justice and reparation, becomes then the space of encounter between the academia, national and international organizations, State, NGO’s, etc and the victims. However, as Derrida (2004) will remember, it is here, in this irreconciliability, where the dialogue has to be done anyway.



But when talking about the experience of violence while attempting to refer to the traces and trauma, one has also to consider the impossibilities and constraints of language. We do not have a language to describe and even give meaning to them. The truth, as Agamben (1999) recalls, is always more tragic and terrifying than the written fact. However, as the songs, narrations and oral stories of the Pacific region vividly show, it is precisely within this impossibility where the translation work has to be done. Thus, our work as translators also should start from this impossibility, from the difficult, but much needed task of attempting to translate the reconstruction and re-signification of experience and the elaboration of meaning, and much more, thus must be done without reproducing the epistemic violence.

For example in the CTR (Commission of Truth, Justice and Reconciliation) in South Africa, Castillejo (2006) explains how this space was designed to give voice to the silences, where for the first time, victims could speak. However, as the author suggests, the victims were considered just as a source of information. After giving their testimonies, these were classified and archived without any context; the experience, emotions and affects of suffering were not considered within the historical knowledge produced by the reconciliation process. The only knowledge produced around the past was made from the commission, which prescribed *protocols* for talking about truth. It is precisely against this violent translation and reduction, where Castillejo, in ways similar to those I am proposing through my ethnography of memory, calls for the necessity to give value and dignity to the suffering experience; in other words, where suffering becomes articulated within the debate of the reparations. But the problem is still there.

How can we even attempt to give space to these affective histories, memories and experiences as constitutive of the knowledge produced within institutional spaces such as the TRC with its rationalities, protocols and classifications? If we do not want to continue reproducing this epistemic violence, how then do we privilege the memories of the body and place over the memories of the facts, dates and archives? It is precisely at this juncture that I understood the projects of the PCN, in order to establish a conversation between different knowledges.

At this point we have to come back to rethink the potentiality of the testimony, to break the silences that the “official” history has created. But testimonies are also incomplete. Agamben (1998) claims for the survivors of Auschwitz, these are also constituted by the lacunae of the witness, the *laguna intestimoniale*, of the radical impossibility to narrate and give meaning to the absent presence. However, these spaces become crucial to restore the meaning and the dignity of the dead extirpates of the Nazi extermination camps, themselves the products of modernity. From here, acknowledging its impossibilities, the voices of violence operate against oblivion, silences and the surrounding cultural amnesia. They struggle for restituting meaning to the places of the death. As Jean Franco says “The space of death is a particularly important as a site of struggle in the colonized areas of the world, and this struggle is of necessity ethical” (1999: 31). In simple terms, this is a struggle to articulate the traumatic past and to fracture the silences.

Thus, what becomes urgent in the debate around the issues of justice and

reparation in the relation between a cultural politics of memory and the public policy of memory, is clear, in Castillejo terms: how the voices of the victims have to be present in the debate on issues of truth, justice, reparation and forgiveness. The power relations and the universalization of a singular epistemology have denied their experience any historical recognition. Voices have remained in silence. The work of cultural memory discloses and inserts the experience of the victims within the practices of historical recognition. But more than than recognition of “how it really was” following Benjamin (1968: 255) this historical practice “seizes hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger” (255). As such, it attempts to break the silences and incorporate the voices that have lived within the experience of the historical dislocation into the historical project and therefore change the historical project.

But even so, one still has the question of why, for PCN, this historical reparation becomes important. After all, why ask for reparation? What are the historical narratives that are taking place within its process of reparations? The PCN opposes the historical narrative of the reparation as a teleological and universal narrative inscribed within the reconciliation of the nation-state as the solution and reparation of all the problems. Instead, they conceive of others narratives and much more complex reparations, with multiple textures and intersections not as a meta- or universal narrative, but, as multiple and fragmented.

I want to acknowledge that crucial issues remain to be considered in these reparation practices, for example, articulation between gender, reparations and violence.

As Maria Gines, one of the leaders of the PCN told me, when analyzing their workshops of memory and projects of reparation, gender should occupy a central role since women are the ones losing their husbands, sons and daughters and grandsons and granddaughters. For her, women carry the heaviest suffering and the most dire consequences of the conflict. The PCN also recognizes the necessity of installing these debates within an interdisciplinary field, as Carlos says, in order to understand the specificities of the reparations: to understand these as encompassing the political economy of reparations, the academic-political debate (in how the academic has to intervene in the debates around reparations) and the question of numbers. For him, the option is clear. Echoing Santos call for cultural translation, movements, strategically, will have to speak of numbers and statistics while still pushing the debate to consider the most complex and experiential dimensions of violence.

## CHAPTER V

### CO-WITNESS AND TRANSLATION AS A PERFORMATIVE PRACTICES OF REPARATION: DOCUMENTARY PRACTICES WITHIN THE POLITICS AND ETHICS OF MEMORY IN CONTEXT OF VIOLENCE

*“The task of the translator consists in finding that intended effect [Intention] upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original”*  
(Benjamin 1968: 76).

In this section, I will explore the potential of cultural productions, here, specifically, the visual intervention, to operate in the debates about memory construction or memory representation in the context of violence, and within the debates about justice and reparation. My master thesis should be understood as an interrogation of the role of art projects as practices of reparation. This said, this project is framed through a discourse of healing, where the performance of reparation does not only seek to heal the one who is injured, but also to distribute the injury and the ethical responsibility (Cho 2006: 305). This documentary/reflective and writing performative ethnographic intervention is understood in terms of reparation for the silencing of marginalized voices in the official histories. Through this call for the distribution of ethical responsibility, I consider this work as a process of translation at the intersection of memory, between private/public, social/individual, and collective/personal. In this regard, my position as an academic and visual artist is trying to write against the violence and trying to translate the experience of the people that live within the landscapes of terror; in a way, to make visible the density

of narratives, the material implications and spectral (hauntology) presences, to mark the unmarked.

This level of translation also aims to address the complexities of unresolved historical forgettings, justice and reconciliation at the local, national and international levels. This work also wants to highlight the problems of translation, the representation, of the untranslatability, of the unrepresentability, of the violence. I am also calling for an ethics of the representation by which viewers carry with them the responsibility for an ethical political engagement. My intervention offers itself as a “space of death” as Jean Franco suggests, a “space of immortality, communal memory, of connections between generations” (1999: 29).

But also, considering this project as a practice of reparation, has to be framed within its problematics, and its possible “dangers”; indeed, many of these types of projects fail because they give particular attention to the product and not to the process. At the same time, these are not conscious of the power relations present and inscribed within these. Hence, it is against this tendency that this and other similar projects have to be understood as translation processes occurring specific levels. Principally, as a creation of a critical space that fosters dialogic and reflexive processes, it aims, according to Feldman (1994), to disrupt the cultural anesthesia. Translation becomes a process, a practice without closure. I understand this project as a translation that simultaneously writes and elaborates a documentary against the violence in order to translate to other spaces, audiences, languages, textures; a bridge between different languages, peoples,

knowledges, etc. Even more, for Taussig (1987), the act of writing against violence carries with it an ethical responsibility understood as a form of witnessing. However, following Oliver (2001), there is also a necessity to move beyond the simple recognition and consider the emergence of other relationalities.

Conquergood (2002) calls for the necessity of the hermeneutics of the experience as a way of relocating, vulnerability, copresence, and humility within the understanding of our work. In this view, for him, epistemology, understood in Gramsci's notion of the organic intellectual, necessarily shifts the researcher from separation to ethical solidarity. I understand this project as an effort to articulate the academy with the Process of Black Communities. Here, my relation to the movement, "rooted in an ethic of reciprocity and exchange, is tested by practices within a community; social commitment, collaboration, and contribution/intervention as a way of knowing: praxis" (Conquergood 2002: 8). On the other hand, this documentary also seeks to be a political tool for the PCN, to show to the international audience the situation of what is happening in their territories, their communities, and moreover, the complexity of the structural and lived violence.

At this juncture, academic production is related to other spheres; cultural critique is intimately linked to cultural production and political intervention framed by theoretically rigorous analysis. Ethnography becomes a tool for social analysis, political action and cultural critique in ways that allow us to examine how social practices unfold in everyday life. Methodologically, this means being located at the intersection of creativity and critical intervention, but also, to carry out this interrogation through both

visual and written registers, textures, scales and movements. These are two interventions within their own limits and possibilities that complement each other and work simultaneously. Within this perspective, both visual and written language become modes of expression and at the same time sites of mediation, a translation of a creative space where the notion of in-betweenness takes place, both in the form and in the content. Finally, I consider this kind of project as a possibility to open up a space to develop projects between research and action, that is, in-between theory and practice, between disciplines, knowledges, subjects, communities, etc.

In this conjuncture, documentary brings history, memory and knowledge to the level of immediate experience and individual subjectivity. Here, concerning the constant tension between history and subjectivity, where listening to testimony is a way of witnessing, a way to encounter each other and a way to set up a conversation. For Oliver (2001), subjectivity and humanity are the results of witnessing. “The content of testimonies of oppression reinscribes the survivor as a victim and object even while the act of testifying restores subjectivity to the experience of objectification”. The construction of alternative and *affective histories* (Chakrabarty 2000), where the relation between past and future is different from the one dictated by “official” history, becomes a possibility. The performative element of the testimony makes visible that “time does not just flow in one direction from past to future but also from future to past”(Oliver 2001). An act of justice, of responsibility for the future and the past from the present.

Through the documentary practice, I’m integrating the visual and reflexive



ethnographic critique, where documentary practice is not so much about seeing, but about mobilizing to see beyond what is available to-be-seen (mark the unmarked, make visible the invisible). The documentary is thus understood as a way of inscribing history as relevant, where documentary practices engage with the politics of memory through collective and individual gaps. That is, not through chronology, linear accumulation, and succession of facts, but rather through cultural memory, personal histories, songs, popular stories, non “official” sources of information. Here, the documentary practice is located in the whole discussion of the role of art projects as a practice of reparation by which history is “remade” within another non-linear-temporality. At the same time, this kind of intervention allows the act of looking and listening of the audience to be included in this process.

One last debate to revisit is the question around aesthetics and politics. This conjuncture between art work and social critiques must not only be implied in the content, but also in the form, in a non dualistic relationship. In this way, aesthetics has to be understood within politics, relating the politics of forms and of aesthetics decisions. Consequently, I consider it crucial to highlight the work’s location and positioning, making visible the social view of the properties of an artistic medium and understanding the social scope of art and technology. Here, the documentary practice also has to be understood within a process of creativity and personal subjectivity that theorizes through and about documentary practice. Indeed, for this and future projects, one of the main challenges is trying to articulate social criticism and political engagement throughout aesthetic forms, trying to cross throughout documentary-fiction/ history-temporality/

form-content/ outside-inside.

During the process of this making this  
documentary, I constantly asked myself,  
how to make visible the invisible?

How to show the traces of violence,  
What is left and still remains in the  
everyday life of persons and their  
territories...

How to move beyond the repetitive  
representations of violence?  
How to translate what remains after these  
experience of terror? How?

Fragment of Landscapes of Terror: Between Hope and Memory  
Cortes-Severino 2007

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

In this conclusion I don't want to close this paper, but leave open with questions, debates and possibilities to continue to explore in the following years. A central idea that I tried to expose throughout this thesis is how the Afrocolombian communities are proposing other understandings of justice, responsibility, forgiveness, and mourning. Through these, the PCN is demonstrating the possibility of other knowledges, other consciousness, others logics. Through them, the disruption of "unity" and "universals" takes place. As Sedgwick (1994) says, they are opening up a space of a 'queer epistemology' that reacts against binary ways of thinking, a space between contrasting voices, between life and dead, between sacred and secular, between absences and presences, among others. This is a space that brings the possibility to re-think social ruptures against the paranoid practices of dualistic thought embedded in official discourses. As Hernan, one of the leaders of the PCN explained when we had our interview in the coastal city of Tumaco, *"many of those mandates are embedded in people's everyday life, but are unperceivable because they are removed from the logics of modern politics, these mandates are incomprehensible, they operate in the plain of the collective imaginaries, and not of private property and individual right"* (2006).

During my dialogue and journey with leaders of the PCN, I could witness other logics and practices inscribed in another temporality, others forms of *being in time*. Their struggles are placed within a politics of emotion, where the present does not only mean presence, but a constant haunting by the past and the future. In these acts, “place” does not only means where I live but, following Muñoz (2006) where “I tried to live” These are struggles inscribed within the transformation of time and space, in-between hope and memory. Or better, in Grossberg’s terms, these are struggles that “embrace temporality in the celebration of imagination, as the attempt to discover new ways of belonging to time, to the past as well as to the present and the future”(2000: 159).

After exploring the articulation between memory, violence and everyday life from different angles through the different sections of this article, I now want to turn to the practices of reparations. As I tried to illustrate with the case of those performance of memories enacted by the PCN, memory and hope are potentialities within these everyday practices, allowing us to explore new ways of living in relation to the fractures of our past, present and future. This is not to move forward and forget that past, “to repair” the irreparable, but to change the present conditions of existence, to live differently within the fractures and the impossibilities of reparation. Here, following Das (2006: 217), everyday life becomes the space for “reinhabiting the space of devastation again”.

I also want to pose a most difficult question: How could the possible scenarios of forgiveness become a possibility in Colombia? Could there be a space of a possibility of forgiveness? Here, I consider it central to grasp Derrida’s (2004) concept of forgiveness,

where this is only possible within its impossibility. For him, it is within this impossibility of forgiveness that the possibility of forgiveness lies: Forgiveness within the reparation of the irreparable. However, Derrida claims the necessity of the forgiveness within the paradox of the “*imperdonabile*” (unforgivable) and “*imprescrittibile*” (unprescriptible), *without* forgetting.

We should also ask the question: How could our work as academics be implicated within the politics of memory, justice and reparation? What would our role look like within and outside the academy regarding these debates? What I am calling for is a politics of translation, a process that articulates different knowledges and experiences, thus impeding the creation of more silences and epistemic violence. A politics of translation able to work between complex and multilayered, *affective histories* (Chakrabarty 2000) avoids the normalization of the historical silences created by the state of exception. But the paradox of translation is that there might not be any languages to disrupt these silences.

To finish, I want to use Derrida’s call for a the *politics of mourning* in order to flesh out the multiple dimension of these practices. As mentioned before, both leaders and participants of the PCN remind us of their responsibility within the spaces of the dead, with the spectres that live closeby. But they also remind us about the ethical responsibility implied when we talk, write and read about death. Within the debates of justice and reparation, they are mindful to give meaning to death and to highlight the responsibility that we have within the *politics of mourning* understood both in time and

space. For Das there lies “the possibility that one could occupy the space of devastation by making it one’s own not through a gesture of escape, but by occupying it as the present in a gesture of mourning” (2006: 214). At the same time, it problematizes the debates on justice and reparation not only with the survivors, but also with the spectres haunting our present. In other words, mourning becomes a space for political action that will always makes visible the violence and the loss, a form to being with specters . A call:

For the responsibility we have with  
the memory of the victims,  
For the specters living with us...

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