Claiming Spaces for Justice: Art, Resistance and Finding One Another in Bogotá

Colin Samson and Tatiana Sanchez Parra

If we stay quiet they kill us and if we talk [they kill us] too. So, let's talk.
Cristina Bautista, 2019 [1]

Baile es camino

'Hablamos con nuestros cuerpos',[2] says Daniela Garcia Hernandez of Al Margen in Casa de Paz, a social and commercial space that was established by ex-combatants in Bogotá after the 2016 peace accords signed between the Colombian government and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia - Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP). Daniela and her partner Karen Fajardo Capador are anthropology students who established Al Margen, a contemporary dance group dedicated to performances outside of the class-based art venues. During the COVID-19 pandemic, as part of Extempora Danza, they produced *Sociedad Anónima de las Tres 8*, a short film about Maria Cano, co-founder of the Socialist Revolutionary Party and the woman who led the struggle for workers' rights during the first half of the twentieth century in Colombia. The film, which combines contemporary dance and audio-visual archival work of Maria Cano's days, begins with an invitation for the audience to close their eyes and imagine the magnolia trees that were so common in Maria's times, to picture them, to imagine their scent around us, to join Maria, the '*flor del trabajo*', and one another in a space of imaginary communion. And we did.

It had been over two years since we started planning Colin's visit to Bogotá from England. It was supposed to happen in April 2020, but the pandemic changed all the plans. As happened everywhere, instead of the hope of working together, what was required of us was isolation. This visit, though, was a journey across the ways in which people find each other to create spaces of solidarity, resistance and creativity through art. It happened to coincide with election day in Colombia, which delivered the first ever left-wing government in the country with Gustavo Petro as President and Francia Marquez as Vice President in June 2022.

[1] Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), www.awid.org/whrd/cristina-bautista

[2] 'We speak with our bodies'

Historically, Colombia has seen the systematic annihilation of those considered a threat to the stability of the dominant white and mestizo, patriarchal, colonial, capitalist order. Gustavo Petro and Francia Marquez represented different but entangled struggles to subvert that order. Petro, a former combatant in the demobilised M-19 guerrillas, was not the first left-wing presidential candidate to run in Colombia. Those before him, however, suffered, as had he, from constant threats to their own lives and that of their families, and three had been killed. Jaime Pardo Leal, in 1987, and Bernardo Jaramillo Ossa, in 1990, were both candidates of the Union Patriotica party, a party that according to the Inter-American Human Rights Court suffered the 'systematic extermination' of its members at the hands of state agents, with over 6,000 victims.[3] Carlos Pizarro Leongomez, who ran for president after the M-19 demobilisation in March 1990, was killed in April 1990. Francia Marquez, an Afro-Colombian human rights and environmental activist and lawyer, has led the fight against the extractive industries and armed groups in the Afro-Colombian ancestral territories. Across her life, she has fought for Afro-Colombian cultural and land rights and against the colonial legacies that continue to impose dispossession and exploitation on Afro-Colombian, Indigenous and peasant communities. With the election of Petro and Marquez there was hope in the air, and people were finding each other after decades of being apart. Much of the visual and performance art of the streets, parks, galleries and museums expresses the same wish to breathe this air.

In *Sociedad Anónima de las Tres 8*, Daniela and Karen's bodies are bound together by invisible connections that constrain their movements and by turns mimic the motions of workers in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* and the graceful dances of Colombian *campesinos* of the twentieth century. They are in a plain, unfurnished, unremarkable room, a featureless place with fleeting glimpses of a window and door, suggestive of the people who themselves have been made featureless by autocracy and violence and whose bodies have been targets for control. Yet gradually, in this world away from the centralised art institutions of the city, their graceful, athletic movements allow them to become free. One scene has Daniela using dictionaries and academic books as walkways and as structures for balancing and making aerial movements. The performance breaks the connection between 'learning' with academia and establishes the primacy of motion and human connection. During the very strict militarised lockdowns Colombia endured over the first months of the pandemic in 2020, where not even park walks were allowed, Daniela and Karen moved away from their university lives and sought María Cano's company. Their private performance is spliced together with footage from archival films that document the struggles Cano fought for, and which in so many ways remain alive in contemporary struggles. The movements of Daniela and Karen's bodies entangle with footage from the 1930s workers' strikes, and in a changing landscape that featured the promise of modernity as represented in

[3] Redacción Judicial, 'Exterminio o genocidio: lo que dice el fallo de la Corte IDH en el caso de la UP', *El Espectador*, 30 January 2023, www.elespectador.com/judicial/exterminio-o-genocidio-lo-que-dice-el-fallo-de-la-corte-idh-en-el-caso-de-la-union-patriotica

the train, within a railway system that does not exist anymore in the country. '*Baile es un camino*',[4] Daniela tells us, 'it helps us explore inner thoughts and emotions. It is abstract yet physical.'

Karen Fajardo Capador and Daniela Garcia Hernandez in *Sociedad Anónima de las Tres 8*, 2021, 14'20", video still, courtesy of the dancers and Extémpora Danza Colombia

Casa de Paz

Casa de Paz, where we see the film in an attic room, is anything but featureless. It was born out of the dreams of the former FARC-EP combatants who created the beer microbrewery La Trocha in 2019. They not only wanted to find a place to sell La Trocha beers, but also to create a diverse community of people who believe in the peace project that came out of the 2016 peace agreements. Casa de Paz opened its doors during the pandemic, and despite the context that demanded isolation it has become a vibrant community of collectives whose diverse hearts beat together against militarisation, colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism and ecological devastation. Consisting of a series of floors in an old house in the neighbourhood of the Colombian elite of former times, Casa de Paz reunites efforts, economic projects and artistic endeavours led by former FARC-EP combatants, victims of the armed conflict and other grassroots organisations. On the ground floor is a café/bar, the microbrewery, a small community library, a shop selling indigenous-produced coffees, herbs, cosmetics, t-shirts and baseball caps, and an outdoor space for music, performance and smoking. On the middle floors, ex-combatants sell clothes, bags and hiking boots, while Afro-Colombian collectives produce ancestral herbal remedies and drinks

[4] 'Dance is a pathway'

such as the distinctive amber-coloured sugar cane liquor, *viche*. The main downstairs room features paper butterflies hanging from the ceiling, as if they were flying, with names on each one representing the over three hundred demobilised guerrillas who have been killed since the signing of the 2016 peace agreement.[5] In terms of visibility and safety, those who operate Casa de la Paz have learned from their own experience and similar initiatives led by former combatants in other parts of the city, who have been harassed and attacked by neighbours, the police and unidentified groups. It comes as no surprise that the house, which has become a hub of political artistic resistance, has no sign by the door to advertise that it is there.

Somos Minga' poster at Casa de Paz in Bogotá, Colombia, depicting indigenous resistance to assassinations and capitalism, photo by Colin Samson, 2022

In the last years, the COVID-19 pandemic has not been the only life-threatening concern for Colombians. Since the signing of the 2016 peace agreement, there have been over 340 massacres and over 1,300 social leaders, defenders of their territories, have been systematically killed.[6] With the reconfiguration of the war dynamics across the country during the right-wing presidency of Ivan Duque (2018–2022), for many people living in parts of Colombia under the

[5] See 'Informe: Situación de securidad de los firmantes del acuerdo de paz', *Indepaz.org.co*, 10 April 2023, downloadable PDF, p 3 https://indepaz.org.co/informe-situacion-de-seguridad-de-los-firmantes-del-acuerdo-de-paz

[6] See 'Líderes sociales, defensores de DD.HH y firmantes de acuerdo asesinados en 2021', *Indepaz.org.co*, 14 November 2021 https://indepaz.org.co/lideres-sociales-y-defensores-de-derechos-humanos-asesinados-en-2021

territorial disputes of legal and illegal armed groups the pandemic has been the least of their worries. Armed and political violence is entangled with state and economic violence. In April of 2021, for instance, the national agency in charge of official statistics announced that over 2.2 million Colombian families could only afford two meals a day.[7] As the pandemic exacerbated social inequalities, people took to the streets on April 2021 after the government proposed tax reforms that would have targeted the working class and the most impoverished people in Colombia. These demonstrations became a two-month national strike, *estallido social*, of an unprecedented scale in the country. But the protesters were met with widespread police brutality and a military response. Over eighty people were killed, forty-seven experienced sexual violence,[8] and, to date, there are at least twenty-seven cases of forced disappearance.[9]

Yet, in this context people found comfort, hope and joy within each other, and the energy to keep going with the struggle. For some in the many resistance points across the country under constant riot police siege, especially in Cali and Bogotá, people were able to eat better at the *ollas comunitarias* (community cooking pots) than in their own households.[10] Casa de Paz in Bogotá was one of many such gathering hubs in the city. And this is evident inside the house, which is an ever-changing, live gallery of aesthetic political encounters. The house is an explosion of colours and symbols of historic struggles and claims, adorned with images of hope, joy and resistance. Every wall is covered with murals, stylised posters and stickers, some made in a workshop upstairs, of images of the young men and women of the *primeras lineas* who were beacons of strength during the national strike. Others, such as those of the Indigenous guard, a non-violent authority set up to protext Indigenous territories from coca cultivation and illegal mining, depict Indigenous women and men bringing down the colonial statues of Spanish men associated with genocides. Other artistic expressions remind us of other fights, such as the one against impunity in the systematic killings of at least 6,402 civilians, mostly during the first half of the 2000s. These were presented as combat causalities by state agents.

As the posters around Casa de Paz suggest, the body is the central focus of much art in Colombia, both that of the streets and that exhibited in institutions of middle-class patronage. In Casa de Paz, we also met Quira, a popular street theatre collective that performs in public places such as the city's large, open Parque Nacional and in working class neighbourhoods. Their theatres are the open spaces where they invite participation from passers-by and audience members. Sergio Romero, the founder of the group, lost one of his eyes to riot police when he

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7 See 'Resultados décima ronda (Periodo de referencia: abril de 2021)', *DANE: Informacion para todos*, 25 May 2021, downloadable PDF www.dane.gov.co/files/investigaciones/boletines/pulso-social/presentacion-pulso-social-abril-2021-extendida.pdf

8 See 'Reporte sobre los hechos del violencia policial occuridos durante el 2021' www.temblores.org/_files/ugd/7bbd97_10674d3f5b324b6abe45fad8b1083b7b.pdf, downloadable PDF

9 See Jhoan Sebastian Cote, '¿Qué pasó con los desaparecidos del paro nacional?', *El Espectador*, 19 January 2022, www.elespectador.com/judicial/que-paso-con-los-desaparecidos-del-paro-nacional

10 See https://rednacionalollascomunitarias.org

was shot with a rubber bullet at a demonstration in 2014. The loss of his eye features in his play *El Retumbar de Mayo a Media Tarde*. Targeting the eyes has been a strategy of Colombia's Escuadrón Móvil Antidisturbios (Mobile Anti-Disturbance Squadron, or ESMAD), which was clear during the national strikes of 2019 and 2021. In 2019, for instance, about two hundred people may have been injured in this way,[11] and in 2021 about a hundred protesters suffered eye trauma and often loss of sight, as Duque and his cabinet sought to criminalise protest,[12] and as the increasingly militarised security forces moved from combatting guerrillas to fighting popular protests against the extreme pandemic measures, against the tax reforms which were further penalising the impoverished, and against social inequality.[13]

Police and armies around the world have increasingly favoured rubber bullets to suppress public dissent. Developed initially by British colonial forces in Hong Kong to control anti-colonial protests, they have been used extensively against social movements – such as the Black Lives Matter protests in the US, for example.[14] Sometimes police and soldiers aim at specific body parts with rubber bullets, and the eye is a common target. In the Occupied Palestinian Territories, many children and teenagers have died at the hands of the Israeli Defence Force (IDF), as they have in armed conflicts in other parts of the world.[15] In 2022, a teenager died in Jenin from her wounds after being shot in the stomach by an IDF soldier, and eighteen other Palestinian civilians in the Occupied West Bank were killed by the IDF during Ramadan alone.[16] In Iran, women protesters have recently been blinded in one or both eyes by police using pellets, birdshots and paintball guns (an injured eye became the symbol for protests in Iran over 2022),[17] and police also target the genitals of women who protest against the regime.[18]

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[11] See Peter Schurmann and Manuel Ortiz, 'Colombia's Strategy to Quell Protesters? Shoot at Their Eyes', *The Nation*, 16 July 2021, www.thenation.com/article/world/colombia-police-blinding-protesters

[12] See Amnesty International, 'COLOMBIA: Shoots On Sight: Eye Trauma In The Context Of The National Strike', 2021, downloadable PDF, p 17 https://policehumanrightsresources.org/content/uploads/2022/01/AMR2350052021ENGLISH.pdf?x19059

[13] See Julie Turkewitz and Sofía Villamil, 'Colombia's Police Force, Built for War, Finds a New One', *The New York Times*, 12 May 2021, www.nytimes.com/2021/05/12/world/americas/colombia-protests-police-brutality.html

[14] See Tala Doumani and Jamil Dakwar, 'Rubber Bullets and the Black Lives Matters Protests', *Human Rights Brief* 24, vol 24, issue 2, 2021, pp 77–82, available here: https://digitalcommons.wcl.american.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1962&context=hrbrief

[15] See Frank M Afflitto, 'Of Guns, Children, and the Maelstrom: Determining Purposive Action in Israeli-perpetrated Firearm Deaths of Palestinian Children and Minors', in Charles Fruehling Springwood, ed, *Open Fire: Understanding Global Gun Cultures*, Berg, Oxford, 2006, pp 42–55

[16] See '18-Year-Old Palestinian Girl Succumbs to Wounds Sustained by Israeli Army Gunfire', *The Palestine Chronicle*, 19 April 2022, www.palestinechronicle.com/18-year-old-palestinian-girl-succumbs-to-wounds-sustained-by-israeli-army-gunfire

[17] See Maryam Sinaee, 'Iranian Security Forces Fired Pellets, Blinding Many Protesters', *Iran International*, 24 January 2023, www.iranintl.com/en/202301243417

[18] See Deepa Parent and Ghoncheh Habibiazad, 'Iranian forces shooting at faces and genitals of female protesters, medics say', *The Guardian*, 8 December 2022, www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/dec/08/iranian-forces-shooting-at-faces-and-genitals-of-female-protesters-medics-say

Body parts are targets of the attacks of the army, the police and the agents of autocratic power against citizens who visibly and audibly resist, but the body, as Quira's street theatre suggests, is also a site of resistance and the centre of the dignity of those who labour and whose underpaid and demeaned work supports the lives of those who wish to maintain the vast inequalities of power, wealth and access to information. Colombia is one of the most unequal countries in the world. According to the World Bank in 2020, 'the top 10% of the country's earners received almost 40% of the country's income, which is 10 times what the bottom 20% earned'.[19] Inequality increased sharply after 2018 with higher rates of poverty, infant mortality and undernourishment coinciding with the tax and austerity measures of the Duque government. Layered onto this are the legacies of racism against Afro-Colombians and the Indigenous peoples, and the often violent patriarchy – all held in place by the highly militarised police, the army, private security agents and special anti-protest brigades.

The Murals of Cristina Bautista, Jaime Garzón and Dilan Cruz

Mirroring the physicality of dance and popular theatre that make the struggles concrete, the murals along Calle 26 in Bogotá are painted onto concrete. Structures such as pillars, mouldings and walls are the infrastructure for the movement of cars, carts, trucks, buses, bicycles, motorcycles and people. But what was a featureless and liminal transport corridor, associated with personal insecurity, has been transformed by vivid portraits and messages. The Galeria Feminista, for example, was created as an antipatriarchal collective effort in the public space to subvert the subjugation of cisgender women and people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions. In the middle of a constant colonial, patriarchal and transphobic siege, the 'gallery' has become a space of encounters for diverse feminist collectives. It features colourful and talented artistic expressions of the feminist struggles for reproductive autonomy and the demilitarisation of society. It screams against *feminicidios*, extractive economies, sexual violence, and demands an end to war. It celebrates the lives of the many women who have been murdered but who will never be forgotten – such as the assassinated Nasa Indigenous leader Cristina Bautista, who was killed along with four Indigenous guards in 2019 by dissident members of the demobilised FARC-EP. Her portrait sits behind the bold lettering 'Siempre Vivas'. Cristina was a UN Human Rights Office Indigenous fellow and an advocate of Indigenous human rights recognised for her work in her community and throughout the country. She will not be forgotten, and neither will the women who, in the graffiti '*si las mujeres paramos el mundo se detiene*', will stop the world if they decide to stop.

[19] See Colombia Reports, 'Poverty and Inequality', 27 April 2021 https://colombiareports.com/colombia-poverty-inequality-statistics

'Galeria Feminista' on Calle 26 in Bogotá, Colombia, with the mural of the assassinated Nasa Indigenous leader, Cristina Bautista, photo by Colin Samson, 2022

'Galeria Feminista': 'Si las mujeres paramos el mundo se detiene' (If women stop, the world stops), photo by Colin Samson, 2022

Opponents of the Galeria are contemptuous of the very idea that women might have value beyond their sexuality and reproductive capabilities. They overwrite the images of those who have been killed with more threats to kill and with crude drawings of penises. The penises are neither a sign of union, pleasure, fertility or talismans, as they were in some Ancient Greek and Roman mythologies, but weak weapons of erasure. The *machista* has contempt for the aesthetic, which he often associates with the feminine. Against the vibrant feminist murals, the scrawled penises boast of a talentless patriarchal backlash. The masculine world of strongmen is often associated with base tastes. One needs only to think of the vulgarity of the heroic monuments, the masculinised mega projects and phallic structures erected by strongmen around the world, and of the vulgar tastes in décor, clothing and art of the autocrats.

Farther along La Calle 26 from the Galeria Feminista, the concrete barriers along the side of the six-lane road are festivals of colour, but in the midst of them a huge image of Jaime Garzón looks down on the passing vehicles and people. Garzón was a popular intellectual and a comedian, a lawyer and activist who was engaged with endeavours promoting social transformation. He openly satirised politicians and the powerful and was executed by two men on a motorcycle in 1999.[20] At the time, there were more journalists assassinated in Colombia than in any other country in the world. One theory is that Garzón's execution was motivated by a desire to prevent him from continuing his work as an intermediary in cases of kidnapping by guerrillas.[21] There are images of him in many locations in Bogotá, including on Carrera 40 where he was assassinated.

There are also concrete pillars depicting people who have been murdered by the police and the army in the city centre. Prominent among them are images of 18-year-old Dilan Cruz, shot with a high velocity rubber bullet by ESMAD while at a protest connected to the General Strike of 2019. The exact spot where he was shot in Calle 19 is commemorated in murals on abandoned shop fronts, one showing Dilan above an image of the police captain who killed him, Manuel Cubillos. An informal Calle Dilan Cruz sign has also been installed. Along these streets and in the eyes of those who only allow themselves to look fleetingly, Dilan is still alive.

There are streets in Bogotá where other pedestrians often remind you to walk fast, to hide your mobile phone and to keep an eye open for muggers around you. Both the corridor of Calle 26, where the Galeria Feminista is, and Calle 19, where Dilan was killed, are part of these cartographies of risk in Bogotá. Against those fears of inhabiting the public space, artists have claimed the walls to name and remember those who have been killed for the struggles they represent. The public memorials to those assassinated by the state for speaking or protesting about that violence makes injustice palpable, but it is also shrouded in menace. Most people pass these locations with quiet indifference, afraid to slow their pace for fear of an encounter with those who are casually called *amigos de lo ajeno*, 'friends of other people's stuff'. In the Galeria

[20] See Steve Hide, 'Jaime Garzón: The day the laughter stopped', *The Bogotá Post*, 13 August 2019, https://thebogotapost.com/jamie-garzon-the-day-the-laughter-stopped/40134

[21] See Fabio Castillo, 'The go-between', *Index on Censorship*, vol 29, no 6, 2000, pp 11–13

Feminista, along one long, sleek piece of graffiti art, someone has scrawled '*Abortar Es Matar*' (abortion is murder), and this is adjacent to other graffiti threatening further assassinations, such as that of Cristina Bautista. The inference is that women are killing by aborting, and killing them for speaking out is the remedy. The counter-art is an art of deletion, and its hostility is in its contempt for art itself and for imagination, stories, beauty and the telling of truths.

Like Italo Calvino's 'invisible city' of Eusapia, Bogotá is also a kind of twin city 'in which there is no longer any way of knowing who is alive and who is the dead'.[22] In some locations in the city, the living seem dead, walking by as if they cannot see, feel or know those whose lifelike portraits beam across streets rammed with cars, trucks and motorbikes, and where frightened pedestrians wait for an opportunity to cross without joining the officially dead. But the presence of the dead, not in graves or catacombs but above ground in portraits, or in the floating butterflies of Casa de Paz, signify enduring life. In a city which does not deny death, it is those whose speech and actions have offended the powers who are celebrated in public spaces, and whose very presence are an indictment of the fetishised military arts of killing. Throughout the city, clean-cut army recruits strut through the narrow streets, splay themselves out around restaurant tables and always carry semiautomatic guns. In some sense, then, Bogotá is a living city, because, at least in what is on its walls and in the minds of its people, death is not sanitised and denied as it is in the cities of the rich world, festooned as they are with soulless and homogenous corporate imagery.

Cristina Bautista, Jaime Garzón and Dilan Cruz, whose smiling faces enliven Bogotá's concrete, are nevertheless living indictments of the rictus grin violence of the state. Speaking of Maria Thereza Alves's photographs of the people of Paraná, Brazil, in the shacks and fields that contain their lives, Michael Taussig tells us, quoting Levinas, that faces are 'the evidence that makes evidence possible'.[23] Art is, of course, evidence – but evidence that is not transmitted in the bureaucratic reports so demanded yet so ignored by the state. This evidence makes people alive to the feelings generated by the terror of the state, and, of course, of the economy.

El Testigo

Jesus Abad Colorado's photographic project *El Testigo* (The Witness), a permanent exhibition in the Claustro San Agustín, part of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia, is almost forensic evidence. When we visited it was difficult for the public to access it, and those who did had to run the gauntlet of the military blockades around the Casa Nariño Presidential Palace. The journalist and historian Julián López de Mesa records being detained with his students under multiple different pretexts when trying to access the exhibition. Military personnel told him that

[22] Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, William Weaver, trans, Harvest, New York, 1972, p 110

[23] Michael Taussig, 'Introduction', in Maria Thereza Alves, *Recipes for Survival*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 2019, p v

visitors must be accompanied by escorts, that a tour guide must accompany visitors but none were available, and he was even told that the war between Russia and Ukraine had changed the security situation.[24] The feelings of the prospective viewer are already coloured by the negotiations with soldiers at the checkpoints before arriving at the former convent of San Agustín, where any pre-existing nervousness can be mirrored by the stories, admittedly not all of violence, reflected in Colorado's almost three-decade long witnessing of the experiences of people all over Colombia of the armed conflict. In four large rooms, separated by the open walkways where nuns once silently strolled in contemplation, Colorado presented his mostly black and white photographs taken over several decades, along with text, which tell the viewers the stories of those who are depicted.

Claustro San Agustín, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá, photo by Colin Samson, 2022

In his statement, Colorado explains that this is his testimony – as all art and writing inevitably is – but it is one in which he is a witness, a kind of record-keeper of the experiences of the victims, their humiliation, suffering and their resistances. Lives are, for the most part, depicted as being along various avenues of displacement. Like the displacement itself, the photographs are always fragments in time. Images are rarely of the direct instance of death as they were in many

[24] See Newsroom Infobae, 'Julián López de Mesa denounces censorship against Jesús Abad Colorado's exhibition 'The Witness'', 20 March 2022, www.infobae.com/en/2022/03/20/julian-lopez-de-mesa-denounces-censorship-against-jesus-abad-colorados-exhibition-the-witness; and Julián López de Mesa Samudio, 'El miedo a "El Testigo"' [Fear of the Witness], *El Espectador*, 17 March 2022, www.elespectador.com/opinion/columnistas/julian-lopez-de-mesa-samudio/el-miedo-al-testigo

Colombian newspapers,[25] and as they were in the now iconic war photography of artists such as Robert Capa, Eddie Adams and Don McCullin. Instead, they evoke a permeable line between the living and the dead. For example, in the centre of the frame of one image an open-shirted man carries a refrigerator on his shoulders. The prized appliance, almost the same length as the man's body, bisects the frame, cutting diagonally across his shoulder, neck and head. In front of him a young girl walks carrying a bag over her shoulder, and others follow behind. To give things more urgency, a soldier, seen at the right of the frame, accompanies them. The caption explains that this is Misael and his daughter Karina, and that they are vacating their village after seventeen *campesinos* had been killed by FARC guerrillas. Colorado further explains that Misael must also retrieve his family's pigs and chickens and their clothing, and that they only make the news for one day. The incident took place in 2003 in the village of La Tupiada in San Carlos, Antioquia where Colorado's family is from and where in 1960 his grandfather and two uncles were murdered for their liberal beliefs in a conservative region. Some of Colorado's other relatives were shot and disappeared since that time by FARC.[26]

Jesús Abad Colorado, *Misael, with his daughter Karina, running from their village in San Carlos, Antioquia, carrying the refrigerator from their house following the massacre of seventeen campesinos at the hands of FARC*, b/w photograph, 2003, from *El Testigo* (The Witness); image in the public domain

Evidence from the faces of Colorado's many subjects are the evidence that somehow makes the viewer feel the violation. Traversing the military checkpoints en route to the exhibition is the harbinger to witnessing what the state, and perhaps some soldiers, would prefer was forgotten. It was, then, with a certain trepidation, and perhaps exhaustion, that we wandered the rooms of San Agustín. To the Colombian, however, the experience is immediate.

[25] See María Paula Suárez, 'El Testigo: Witnessing the Colombian Internal Armed Conflict through Journalistic Photography', in *AHM Conference 2022:'Witnessing, Memory, and Crisis'*, vol 1, Amsterdam University Press, pp 87–93

[26] See Nelson Fredy Padilla, 'Jesús Abad Colorado: la mirada por excelencia', www.premioggm.org, 10 September 2019, https://premioggm.org/noticias/2019/09/jesus-abad-colorado-la-mirada-por-excelencia

It is not one of 'sympathy', as Susan Sontag wrote of the images of troubles in 'faraway places' that declare 'our' innocence.[27] Rather, it is one of confrontation. As the president of the Colombian Truth Commission, Father Francisco de Roux, said in his speech during the event in June 2022 where the Commission presented its final report, 'There is a future if there is truth':

> Why did we Colombians let this tearing apart of ourselves pass for years, as if it were not with us? Why did we watch the massacres on television day after day as if it were a cheap soap opera? Why was the security surrounding politicians and big property not security for the people and the *resguardos*, and the popular sectors that received the landslide of massacres? How can we say that we are human, when all this is part of us? [28]

While Colorado's photographs are harrowing evidence of lives torn apart or lost, they demonstrate human presence and as such represent a truth that cannot be easily suppressed, especially since his prints have been produced over several decades, and many from before the advent of easily manipulated digital photography. Much of the violence, however, leaves little trace. People are simply absented or disappeared.

Cajas Negras

Ironically, the same technologies that are used to deceive can also be used to find what has disappeared. Traces of the absent have been created by Forensic Architecture (FA) in their project, *Cajas Negras*, that was showing at Museo de Arte Miguel Urrutia (MAMU). This consists of an installation, film and documentation concerning the events of November 1985 at El Palacio de Justicia in Plaza de Bolivar in Bogotá, following the army response to the takeover of the building by M-19 guerrillas. After the army rammed through the front entrance to the building with a tank, the fatalities and the wounded were brought out. What happened to many of those who were evacuated is unknown; they 'simply' disappeared. FA have collated media and other footage from the days of the counter siege, along with information from human rights organisations and friends and relatives of the victims. The film explains how the evidence was put together, beginning with a family photograph album belonging to a member of the FA research team. It shows a mother, father and child in Plaza de Bolivar in 1984, one year before the siege and the disappearances. Knowing the father's shoe size, the researchers could match this to the length of the paving tiles and digitally reconstruct the geography of the space on the day of the counter siege. A three-dimensional plastic model of El Palacio and the Plaza, with toy representations of soldiers, evacuees, secret army operatives, medics and onlookers, was arrayed

[27] See Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Penguin, London, 2003, pp 91–92

[28] See Francisco De Roux, 'Hay Futuro si Hay Verdad' – Presentación del Informe Final de la Comisión de la Verdad, 28 June 2022, Bogotá, on YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=rPZao0rSV_4&t=5431s (from 43.08)

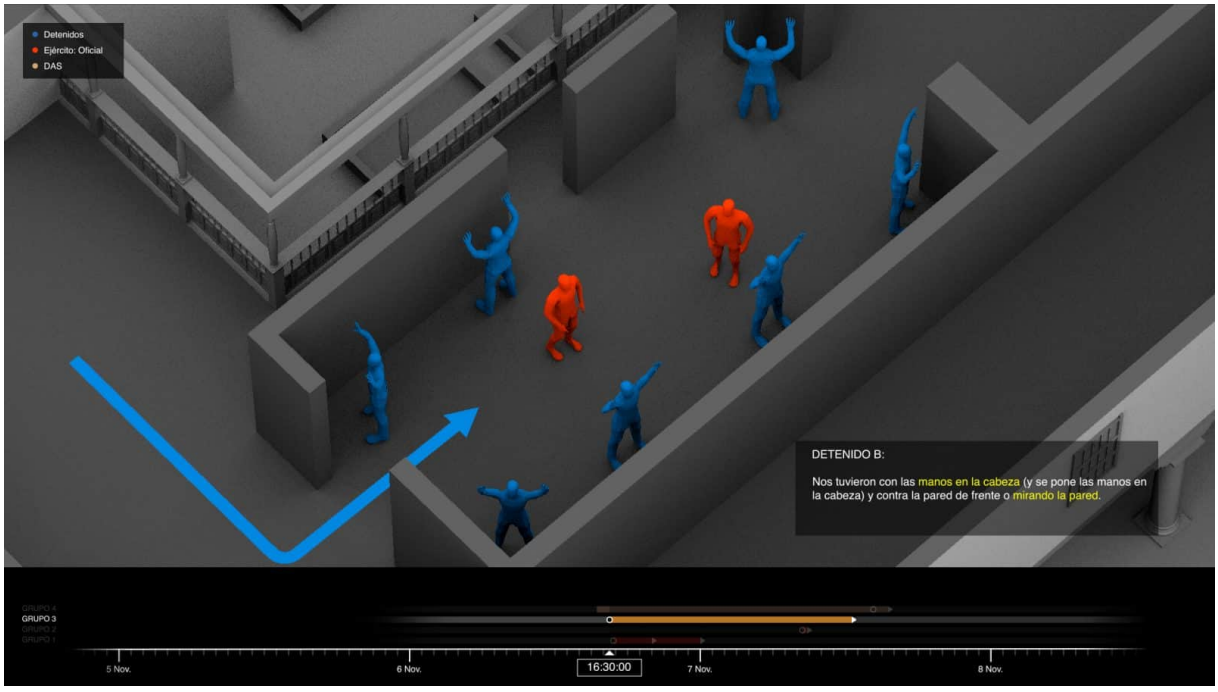
under a huge vitrine, and the digital version was presented in the film. In the photograph, the father, Alirio Pedraza, who stands facing the camera, holding one hand of his infant son aloft while his partner Virginia Vargas holds the other, was disappeared five years after the siege, joining hundreds of thousands of other disappeared people in Colombia.

The disappeared – specifically, twenty-two named individuals who the authorities believed to be 'enemies of the state' – are the subject of the FA investigations, and they are part of crimes that are 'sustained in time' for the perpetrators have not come forward and the bodies have not been found. The evidence remains in 'black boxes', where the evidence was buried, destroyed and denied. But FA have put together video footage from the days of the siege to show how the army created security cordons and filtering stations for evacuated civilian hostages. Synchronising cameras with events over the two days, FA have identified the faces of those who subsequently disappeared and who they were able to name as they are shown in videos being led away by soldiers and policemen, who in turn are directed by undercover agents in civilian clothes. The film shows cafeteria workers and a magistrate being led away to the museum of Colombian history, La Casa del Florero, or into ambulances, never to be seen again. But after the first day of the counter siege, the camera operators were moved to a different location, limiting the ability of TV crews to film the range of acts of disappearance, creating more black boxes and hiding whatever was done to the hostages. In a separate video based on testimonies gathered from survivors taken to Casa del Florero, FA have been able to reconstruct the architecture of torture and disappearance. The video presents a birds-eye 3D reconstruction of the rooms where the hostages were taken by various military and police units, before being separated into groups and processed. Some were taken to other buildings where they were tortured and released. This was the fate of those who were simply visiting El Palacio de Justicia. Others, including cafeteria workers, were taken to a garrison, tortured and disappeared.

The footage uncovered by FA records the last moments that many people were seen alive and thereby notes the life of persons murdered by the state. But these nervous-looking civilians in grainy videos are only vestiges saved from concealment after most of the footage of the event, and particularly the close-ups of those being escorted out of El Palacio, were confiscated and presumably destroyed. A few have remained. The last frames of the FA film show frightened suited men, presumed 'enemies of the state', being led away by soldiers with their hands behind their heads. These uncovered archival videos are the last of what is known of these people. This archaeological investigation using multiple sources has discovered otherwise hidden connections between the military personnel removing people from the Plaza de Bolivar and their disappearance. It exhumes presence from absence, life before oblivion. As a practice of 'investigative aesthetics', this all becomes part of the evidence available to the commons, rather than to corporate social media.[29]

[29] For a full account of the methodology of Forensic Architecture, see Matthew Fuller and Eyal Weizman, *Investigative Aesthetics: Conflicts and Commons in the Politics of Truth*, Verso, London, 2021

Forensic Archicture, *Cajas Negras*, 2021, video tracking and 3D reconstruction of the path of Carlos Horacio Urán Rojas as he exits the Palacio de Justicia in Bogotá, courtesy of Forensic Architecture



Forensic Architecture, *Casa del Florero*, 2021, the organisation and choreography of the Casa del Florero as a black box, built from testimonies of detainees, courtesy of Forensic Architecture

Fragmentos

Vestiges of life taken by violence and state terror are also the subject of Doris Salcedo's work. Known for her large-scale transformations of public spaces, including *Mourning Jaime Garzón*, a line of 45,000 roses hung on walls along the route taken by Jaime Garzón on his last day of life, Salcedo's more recent *Fragmentos*, from 2018, are 'marks left behind on your body and your mind, but also on your skin and in your heart', as one of the women explains in the film accompanying 'Fragmentos – Espacio de Arte y Memoria' in the Museo Nacional de Colombia. The women, all victims of sexual violence in the armed conflict, were solicited by Salcedo to collaborate in the making of the entire floor of a gallery. They were asked to fashion melted-down weaponry that had been handed into the authorities by FARC at the end of the Peace Process in 2016. The melting was done by workers in huge blast furnaces at the INDUMIL metallurgical plant, with the metal then being made into square tablets that were subsequently worked into flat surfaces, each piece bearing the individual marks of the women's hammers. Thanks to the work of women's and feminist movements, since the 1990s more attention has been given to women's experiences of conflict-related sexual violence. However, for a long time, women's agency, as well as their anger, fears, frustrations, and their joys and happiness – as their experiences of war don't deprive them of those – have often been left aside. The marks of the hammering in these tiles made from melted weapons could be read as a non-written language of women's stories of violence, but also of resistance, transformation and solidarity.

Doris Salcedo, *Fragmentos, Espacio de Arte y Memoria*, 2018, floor tiling made from melted down and beaten guns, installed in the Museo Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá, image courtesy of the Museo Nacional de Colombia

The result is an eerily polished, gunmetal-coloured surface, creased and cracked by the women's pounding on what had been thirty-eight tons of weaponry. Walking along the sleek passages and opening into rooms with fairly spartan installations, such as a huge tray of oxidised paperclips entitled *Leviatán* by Pablo Mora, both Salcedo's floor and Mora's *Leviatán* speak to the banality of violent authority. The guns are, of course, more deadly, but the now rusted office paper clips symbolise both the lives lost and made anonymous at the hands of the state, but the continuously deadening effects of the bureaucracy of violence, disappearance and sexual abuse. The piece is in Mora's words, 'a counter-archive.'

Pablo Mora, *Leviatán*, installation view in the Museo Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá, photo by Colin Samson, 2022, courtesy of the artist and the Museo Nacional de Colombia

Fragmentos, however, offers the possibility of doing something about violence, and about sexual violence in particular. As the women were hammering the melted-down guns into sheets, and doing it collectively in a workshop with Doris Salcedo, they were, according to Maria Felicitas

Valderama, able 'to get rid of the poison and start to feel a little bit of relief' (19:17). Another woman, Magaly Belalcazar, was 'beating down on those memories' (19:38). But it is clear that the almost alchemical transformation of violence into art was also a reflection on the community of those who suffered sexual violence, as well as its unforgettability. While the women joined together in addressing the violence, *Fragmentos* gave them symbolic redress, and somehow the solidness of the gun-metal floor is a symbol of the permanence of the scars. Rather than monuments, which are 'detached and monolithic statements in the public space',[30] *Fragmentos* is a counter monument, a group of admittedly fragmented memories, but nonetheless a response to the false memory of masculine and crudely nationalistic public monuments.

There is power in what can be achieved through art and what it exposes. But there is also power in the possibilities that emerge when people come together, sometimes only to find one another. This visit was a journey through some of the languages and paths that people have found in various artistic expressions, in the midst of a pandemic that demanded isolation and in the context of the patriarchal, economic and armed violence that seeks to discipline bodies, annihilate diversity and impose fear. Many conversations about impunity, political projects, grief, joy and imagined futures have emerged from this art of resistence.

We are extremely grateful to our research assistant Sara Cano Díaz for her help with planning and implementing our research. Particular thanks to the members of Al Margen, Quira and our hosts at Casa de Paz, and to Camilo Sanchez, Sabine Michalowski and Zahra Khedri for help and encouragement along the way. Colin's visit to Bogotá and the conversations that have emerged from it would not have been possible without funding from Pontificia Universidad Javeriana and the Department of Sociology at the University of Essex. Special thanks to the very supportive administrative team at the Instituto de Estudios Sociales y Culturales Pensar at Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, who made the visit possible, and to the administrative team at the Department of Sociology at the University of Essex, without whom we would not have been able to enlarge our research team. Every effort was made to acquire reproduction rights and permissions; the editors and authors apologise in advance for any that were not.

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[30] Miguel Rojas-Sotelo, 'The deaths inscribed in us: Art, memory, and public space in Doris Salcedo', in Carlos Gardeazábal Bravo and Kevin G Guerrieri, eds, *Human Rights in Colombian Literature and Cultural Production: Embodied Enactments*, Routledge, New York and Abingdon, Oxfordshire, 2022, pp 19–43, p 26

Colin Samson is Professor of Sociology at the University of Essex. He has worked with Indigenous peoples for most of his career and published several books on their ways of life and human rights. These include *A Way of Life that Does Not Exist: Canada and the Extinguishment of the Innu* (2003), *A World You Do Not Know: Settler Societies, Indigenous Peoples and the Attack on Cultural Diversity (*2013) and, with Carlos Gigoux, *Indigenous Peoples and Colonialism: A Global Perspective* (2017). Colin collaborated with filmmaker Sarah Sandring on the films *Nutshimit* (2010) and *Nutak* (2013) about the recent and historical experiences of the Mushuau Innu. His latest book is *The Colonialism of Human Rights: Ongoing Hypocrisies of Western Liberalism* (2020). In the 1990s, he published articles on the Chicano artist Ruben Trejo and the Anishinaabe author Gerald Vizenor in ***Third Text***.

Tatiana Sanchez Parra is currently a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Fellow in the School of Social and Political Science at the University of Edinburgh. Tatiana's research is situated at the intersection of feminist studies, socio-legal studies and Latin American studies. She works on issues related to feminist peacebuilding, reproductive justice and reproductive violence in contexts of war and political transitions. At the time of Colin's visit to Bogotá, Tatiana was an Assistant Professor at Instituto de Estudios Sociales y Culturales Pensar of the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana (Colombia). Her work has been published in English and Spanish and has appeared in journals such as the *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, the *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*, *Crime, Media, Culture* and *The International Journal of Transitional Justice*. Her first book, *Born of War in Colombia: Reproductive Violence and Memories of Absence*, will be published by Rutgers University Press in the Spring of 2024.