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## Treball Fi de Màster

*Memory space as symbolic repair in post-conflict situation: the case of Bojayá*

*Ixa Bachman Durán*

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MASTER THESIS

**MEMORY SPACE as SYMBOLIC REPAIR  
in POST-CONFLICT situation:**

**The case of Bojayá**

Bellavista – Bojayá – Chocó – Colombia

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*“It is a struggle of memory and permanent truth to be recognized”*

– Gonzalo Sánchez Gómez –



Figure 1. Bojayá 2002, Photograph: Jesús Abad Colorado

# Abstract

During the last fifty years of armed conflict in Colombia, the Pacific region was one of the most affected with both severity and frequency. The Bojayá massacre (May 2, 2002), marked forever the lives of the survivors. This thesis seeks to understand how memory spaces can be a symbolic repair tool for victims in societies that have been hard hit by violence. Using the lyrics of the traditional ancestral songs of the Colombian Pacific, and analyzing the collaborative work in the construction of the memorial space *Fragmentos* in Bogotá, I propose what a memory space should be like for the Bojayá community. I propose, based on the songs, some guidelines and establish the key determinants of an architecture of the senses so that the space contributes to the symbolic repair of the victims. Therefore, the primary objective of making the sensory architectural experience for Bojayá's residents and its visitors a facilitator for its reconciliation with the world is achieved.

## Key Words

Memory spaces; Symbolic Repair; Post-conflict; Collective Memory; Afro-Colombian Culture; Architecture of the senses; Bojayá; Participatory Process

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis reflects on the construction of memory spaces in post-conflict situations, particularly in the Colombian context. Colombia has lived an especially violent and painful history and, finally, since 2016 Colombia began to construct peace. I was born in a country shaken by warlike violence, and still do not know what it is to live in peace. I grew up in a society typified by its indifference which has led many to perceive kidnapping, forced disappearances, confrontations, attacks, and massacres as normal. However, fortunate enough to not being directly victimized, I grew empathetic, I have scars in my soul, and I have wept for the social unfairness. A few years ago, I promised myself that I would give my everything to contribute to bring peace to my country. Achieving peace implies that we must finally confront our memory; appropriate our history, and understand what happened so that we can finally look to the future. According to Gonzalo Sánchez (2016), former director of the National Center for Historical Memory (CNMH for its initials in Spanish), during a talk at the 2016 Bogotá International Book Fair, he stated the conflict that accompanied Colombia for so many years was the consequence of using amnesty among conflicting political parties as a tool for conflict resolution. The author argues, “for not having done an exercise in memory, in identifying the victims and the participants who fell throughout the war, the germ of today's war emerged. Our current situation is the direct consequence of not having made memory” (Sánchez, 2016:7). The construction of collective memory is one of the required steps to achieve peace. Under provisions from The *Final Agreement for the Termination of the Conflict and the Construction of a Stable and Lasting Peace* signed in 2016 between the Colombian government and The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC for its initials in Spanish), both parties agreed to reveal the truth, symbolically repair the victims and rebuild the country's memory.

During the war, rural areas were the most affected; Bojayá, an Afro-descendant community in the Colombian Pacific, was not an exception. The Bojayá massacre represents one of the most painful episodes in our recent history, it took 17 years for survivors to be allowed to properly identify and bury their deceased. A community that, in addition to war, has historically experienced exclusion, poverty, and human rights violation in its territory (Amnistía Internacional, 2017), and does not have a memory space where to heal and jointly repair themselves.

The main objective of this research is to understand how memory spaces can contribute to the symbolic repair of victims. In particular, this thesis explores means of designing memory spaces in contexts such as Bojayá, by means of understanding the historical and cultural singularities of this community. Furthermore, the main argument feeds an existing reflection on the role of memory spaces in societies affected by violence. Therefore, in the following chapters, I will



analyze how collective memory can be materialized in memory spaces and how those spaces can contribute to the symbolic repair of victims. Centering on Bojayá, the community has the desire to possess a memory space that allows them to experience a symbolic repair process and that facilitates truth reconstruction in this corner of Colombia.

Initiatives to build memory are more relevant nowadays if we contemplate the shift in perspective, by the current director of the CNMH, regarding the importance of historical heritage in unveiling the truth of our conflict. The CNMH main objective is to contribute to society's and victims, collective repair and truth disclosure regarding the State's obligation to dutifully restore the memory of human rights violations that occurred in the context of the Colombian armed conflict. All of which is part of the process of peacebuilding, democratization, and reconciliation. The current CNMH administration has denied the heretofore-historic perspective on the armed conflict in Colombia, which resulted in widespread victims' mistrust of CNMH. Recent CNMH membership suspension from the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience<sup>1</sup> is also related to censorship by the new director.

Additionally, in the Colombian context, and spite of our violent past, there are few examples in which memory spaces are tools for social reconstruction and reconciliation. As Isaak (2016) puts it, in Colombia the spaces for memory and reconciliation are needed since the arts have been dedicated to social reporting (far from the victims) and the ephemeral nature of these interventions makes it impossible to build a collective memory.

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<sup>1</sup> International Coalition of Sites of Conscience ("the Coalition") is the world's only network of Sites of Conscience. With more than 275 members in 65 countries.

## 2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In Colombia, armed conflict has always been present; pain and suffering are now part of our memory and our identity. After 50 years of struggle, we can finally envision efforts to start building peace. It is essential to embark on processes that allow us to build memory and reconciliation. Taking this as a starting point, two theoretical pillars give form to the conceptual framework of my research. First, I researched literature that discusses issues of collective memory construction in post-conflict situations (Halbwachs, 1950; Nora, 1989; Jelin, 2002; Sánchez, 2006; Chrysostomou, 2016). Thus, in the first part of this chapter, I am going to explain the importance of generating memory in the Colombian context. Since it is through memory that we can recognize and understand our past in order to avoid the recurring collective amnesia. The second half, results from the previous one and focuses on how memory spaces make possible the victim's symbolic repair (Nora, 1989; Sierra, 2014; Isaak, 2016; Ayala et al., 2016; L. A. Sánchez, 2016). I will discuss how memory spaces contribute to the construction of the victim's symbolic repair by making the conflict visible and recognized.

### Construction of COLLECTIVE MEMORY in POST-CONFLICT situations

There is a latent discussion about the difference between collective memory and history. Halbwachs (1950) is one of the first scholars to define the differences between collective memory and history by formulating that history examines the group (society, community) from the outside process that encompasses a reasonably long duration in time; while collective memory is the group seen from within, over a much shorter period of time. Following this argument, it is possible to say that collective memory is more fragile since it finishes when the group disappears. The difference between history and (collective) memory is crucial to my research on Bojayá since both concepts always intersect and feed on each other. Pierre Nora (1989) is another of the authors that talks about the difference between these two concepts arguing that “Memory is life [...] It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting [...] susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past” (1989:8). Thus, I could say that the presence of memory is relative to people's lives and that it is continually changing due to the constant act of remembering and forgetting.

The construction of collective memory has also been widely debated. Academics such as Jelin (2002) argues that “the collective of memories is the interweaving of traditions and individual memories,” according to this the collective memory is built to the extent that individual memories dialogue through each other, or as Halbwachs (1950) says each individual memory is a point of view on the collective memory. If the collective memory is the addition of personal memories, then how do these memories come together to build collective memory? Ramos (2013) argues that language is the structural axis of collective memory, the tool that articulates memories. He states that the nature of memory is narrative since it is through the stories where events are ordered (in time, space, with actors and actions); this gives credibility, acceptance, and meaning to both, who tells it and who listens to it. In other words, stories and orality (even songs) become the articulators of collective memories.

The memory construction process is unique and specific in each community since this process is intimately linked to each culture. In the particular case of Bojayá, the memory practices built by the survivors of the massacre date back to Afro-descendant practices. The Bojayaseños (naturals of Bojaya) sing (alabaos and vallenatos) to try to convey what happened but, above all, to restore daily life, because singing helps to release pain and continue living. According to Millán (2011) in Bojayá, several behaviors seek to explain from the suffering standpoint what happened and not from description of the events., “the nonsense, the uncertainty, the loss of what was taken for granted, [...] the creative act of transmitting a pain that is sung” (2011:28). However, in the case of Bojayá, the songs are not only created to vent the pain, but they are also a way of “re-narrating, reconstructing the sense of the horrified world and recovering the times and spaces that were left unconnected” (Millán, 2011:37). Returning to the differentiation marked by Halbwachs and the argument of Ramos's narrative, we see how the community of Bojayá through songs is building its collective memory. A collective memory that talks about the violence and the feelings of the victims. It seems that the massacre is being narrated, but as Millán (2011) concludes, the reality of being Afro-Chocoano is being reaffirmed, it recalls its historical condition, as a forgotten group in the society (Mosquera et al., 2007; Vergara-figueroa, 2018).

Huyssen (2020) insists that the construction of collective memory is especially important in societies that have suffered trauma and violence since it is impossible to have a successful future without understanding the past. This argument is not only crucial for Colombia's historical moment, but also for communities such as the Bojayá, which under no circumstances should relive the horrors of its past. Knowing and remembering the past gives the future more possibilities of not repeating the same history and avoiding amnesia. As Isaak (2016), suggests, when time passes, there will be no human being who has survived the experience of the massacre, who can tell what happened, so the memory of this story will be lost forever. But above all because, as Sánchez, (2006) says, “in the face of the physical destruction and devastation of villages and

towns, the desecration of temples and the rape of women [...], the memory would be the instrument for rebuilding social unity, political organizations, cultural ties and personal identities that terror and war had pulverized”(2006:86). This argument is probably the most persuasive about the importance of building collective memory in post-conflict situations; the need to rebuild societies. After Colombia’s extended strife, the scars are too deep and diverse; the entire country needs to be rebuilt. Communities, like Bojayá, that have suffered the horrors of war also need to be rebuilt. The Bojaseños have survived but have also lost part of their culture, their identity, and their Afro-Colombian heritage (Mosquera et al., 2007; Vergara-figueroa, 2018).

## MEMORY SPACES as SYMBOLIC REPAIR tool

The concept of *lieux de mémoires* proposed by Pierre Nora (1989) provides the tools to understand the territorial expressions of memory. In Nora’s (1989) words “the most fundamental purpose of the *lieu de mémoire* is to stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things, to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial [...] *lieux de mémoires* only exist because of their capacity for metamorphosis, an endless recycling of their meaning and an unpredictable proliferation of their ramifications” (1989:19). Thus, following Nora’s ideas, I consider that *lieux de mémoires* is the materialization of memory and it can take place in objects and spaces. For this research, I am interested in studying when the *lieux de mémoires* occur in space and how they can contribute to the preservation of collective memory.

This leads us to ask ourselves, how can we materialize collective memory? Academics such as Isaak (2016) state that architecture creates places but also can generate interactions between body, mind and environment and, as such, can create experiences that move human beings (evoke memories). Above all, it can make the past visible. Thus, I believe that art and architecture can create spaces of experiences and emotions to remember the past. Intentionality architecture allows us to transmit and generate these sensations in space through the interaction between scale, proportions, lighting and materiality, because “architecture has the liability to materialize memory, that we do not forget our past” (Isaak, 2016:87).

There are different types of architecture, and probably the memorial type is the one that best adapts to the demands of memory spaces, since with this architecture, the primary function is not to shelter, but to remember. Shen (2018) argues that memorial architecture allows us to remember, cry, and make sense of the intangible. Human beings need something permanent and tangible to make sense of loss, to have a connection between the memory and the present, a physical connection of concrete and stone. Thus, memorials have the function of helping to process present pain and preserve collective memory for future generations. Other academics (Garzón-Ochoa,

2019) consider that the purpose of the memorials is broader since they view them as symbolic representations that reflect the sensitive relationships between community and place, they find them as inhabited places that are prone to new appropriations and meanings. The physical object to replace the void in social reconstruction becomes a tool to reconcile past and present; time is a fundamental element for memorials since it is with the passing of time that memorials evolve and acquire new social functions (Shen, 2018). This argument may be a way of exemplifying Nora's idea of metamorphosis as a feature of *lieux de mémoire*.

In post-conflict context these spaces could have an additional function: to become tools of symbolic repair for victims of human rights violations. For Colombians Ayala, Rodriguez and Osorio (2016) symbolic repair<sup>2</sup> is commonly given through the recovery of historical memory, through physical and experiential spaces that contribute to remembrance and commemoration that promote victims recognition and their life stories with the purpose of inviting the society to a reflection. Bello (2016) complements the idea of symbolic repair by mentioning that this can only happen when victims feel that in a space their voices, their memories, their struggles, and their complaints are acknowledged by the State and by society.

The concept of symbolic repair is explained by Rodrigo Uprimny and Maria Paula Saffon (2009) as a symbolic way of recognizing the suffering caused to victims through which they should recover their citizenship status. A condition from which they were excluded when they became victims. Repair also makes visible the human rights violations that were not visible before. Sometimes this recognition can be given through memory spaces. However, it is essential to keep in mind that not all the memory spaces are part of a symbolic repair process. Because, as Yolanda Sierra (2014) argues, the State is responsible for repairing the victims, so a memory space that contributes to the symbolic repair must have the State's express manifestation.

Furthermore, memory spaces can be tools of symbolic repair if they: first, tell the truth of what happened, build memory and dignify victims; next, fulfill a pedagogical and sensitizing role, not only in terms of emotions but also as a tool to modify behaviors concerning respect for human beings. So, when the State recognizes the victims and is involved in the process of symbolic repair, it is giving the victims back their citizen's status. By this means the State is providing the victims the possibility of rebuilding themselves into the future.

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<sup>2</sup> Congress of the Republic of Colombia (2011) regulates the processes of symbolic repair in Colombia. Article 141 defines symbolic repair as: "any provision made in favor of the victims or the community in general that ensures the preservation of historical memory, the non-repetition of the victimizing acts, the public acceptance of the facts, the request of public forgiveness, the establishment of the dignity of the victims and the dissemination of the truth".

Following Sierra, (2014) when the artistic and architectural manifestations are practices carried out by the victims on their own initiative, they cannot be considered as part of the symbolic repair process mainly because they claim, resist and fight instead of repairing; also because they have not been part of any state process. Considering the ideas of Bello and Sierra, the recognition by the State is essential for memory spaces to contribute to the victim's symbolic repair. This argument is critical to the case of Bojayá, because as is ascertained by the CNMH (2010), the survivors for years have asked the State for formal recognition of its responsibility in the massacre. Therefore, in the report of *The Observation Mission in the Middle Atrato* made by The Colombia Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR, 2002) the State has failed to fulfill its duty as guarantor of rights according to international human right standards and IHL<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> International humanitarian law

### 3. PRESENTATION OF THE CASE STUDY: *BOJAYÁ*



Figure 2: Location of Bellavista, Bojayá, Chocó, Colombia. Made by the author

Colombia is located in the extreme north of South America, thus enjoying the privileged condition of having a coastline in both oceans (the Atlantic Ocean and the Pacific Ocean). The department<sup>4</sup> of Chocó is the only one in the country to have these two coasts in addition to the Darien jungle and the Atrato and San Juan river basins. This combination of geographical conditions makes Chocó an attractive environment for smugglers and drug traffickers, due to its strategic position and its dense, almost inaccessible jungle. In the middle of this forest, in the basin of the Atrato river is located the municipality of Bojayá. The town of Bellavista is the municipal center of Bojayá.

Significant social inequalities have characterized Colombia's history. Gonzalo Sánchez mentions that "The war is one of the most prominent manifestations of the protracted crisis in Colombian society, a society that is part of [...] 'inorganic democracies' [...] characterized by a mixture of parliamentarism and civil wars" (Sánchez, 2006:21). That is why the same author (G. Sánchez, 2006) concludes that memory in Colombia is intrinsically linked to division, to the ruptures and pains of society.

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<sup>4</sup> Colombia is a unitary and decentralized Republic that is divided administratively and politically into 33 divisions: 32 departments, which are governed from their respective capital cities and a capital district, Bogotá.

## The Territorial Struggle: Deep and Invisible Colombia

The citizens of Chocó, in the Colombian Pacific, are mainly Afro-descendants and indigenous people (74% of the population is Afro-Colombian and 11% indigenous<sup>5</sup>). This demographic profile is the result of the cultural contact between indigenous and African slaves during the Spanish colonization. The historical abandonment in which this region has lived has plunged Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities into structural violence and a systematized exclusion whose historical character dates back to Spanish colonization when they were oppressed, discriminated and subjected. These Afro-Colombian communities are struggling against social exclusion, discrimination and economic exploitation. The State has maintained a weak relationship with the region typified by the lack of resources, services and social benefits. More abundant resources provided to other regions, exacerbate the marginalization of the Pacific and its population (Mosquera et al., 2007; Vergara-Figueroa, 2018). Chocó lives in poverty and exclusion, especially in rural areas, where the extreme poverty rate is close to 80%, as Amnistía Internacional (2017) shows in the report *The Years of Solitude Continue. Colombia: Peace Agreement and Guarantees of Non-Repetition in Chocó*.



Figure 3: Mourning in Bojayá. Quibdó June 2002. Photograph Jesús Abad Colorado

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<sup>5</sup> According to data from the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE from the initials in Spanish).



The systematic abandonment of the State is exacerbated by arms smuggling, cocaine transport and exploitation routes since it allows access to the Pacific corridor (border with Panama and the coast on the Pacific Ocean). Drug traffickers, smugglers, guerrillas, and paramilitaries dispute the territory and impose themselves on Afro and indigenous communities. The Atrato became a frontier of war, where the limits between counterinsurgency and drug trafficking became increasingly blurred, according to the report: *Bojayá: the war without limits* by the National Center for Historical Memory (2010). The abandonment has caused the silencing of the communities' desperate pleas.

Seven early warnings issued prior to the actual massacre were ignored. They were issued by OHCHR (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights), Chocó Regional Attorney, Ombudsman, The Diocese of Quibdó, and several national and international NGOs. A response to the warnings could have avoided the tragedy of May 2, 2002. The massacre constitutes a war crime against collective subjects<sup>6</sup> since the magnitude and complexity of the damage caused to the victims is captured by understanding that victims belong to black and indigenous communities, which have deep collective ties and strong identity connections with the territory (CNRR-GMH, 2010).

## The Massacre

In the recent history of Colombia, the events perpetuated in Bellavista, on May 2, 2002, are known as the Bojayá Massacre, which took place amid the clashes over territorial dominance between armed guerrilla groups of the FARC and the paramilitaries. The confrontation lasted several days, time in which the Colombian State remained indifferent, without taking any action to protect the civilian population trapped in the middle of the crossfire (CNRR-GMH, 2010; Millán, 2009; Velásquez et al., 2018).

During the clashes, the FARC launched four gas pipettes filled with shrapnel against the paramilitaries, who used the civilian population as a human shield. At around eleven in the morning, the third pipette thrown by the guerrillas broke the church ceiling, hit the altar and exploded. The 300 people sheltered in the temple were having breakfast at the time (CNRR-GMH, 2010). With the bang, 78 people died, 48 of them were children. Moreover, 13 other people from

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<sup>6</sup> In the Constitution of 1991 and the Judgment of the Constitutional Court T-254 of 2004, «... each person who is a member of an ethnic group is subject to individual rights; Furthermore, ethnic groups are collective subjects of rights, that is, that the rights and freedoms of people who belong to indigenous peoples and black communities are rights and freedoms of the community understood as a whole, as a culture that is different from the others, as a proper way of seeing, feeling and expressing reality and appropriating their territory »

neighboring towns died from the clashes that took place the days before and after the tragedy. More than 10 people have died of cancer caused by the shrapnel left by the explosion. Other victims carry the marks on their bodies and all the people of Bellavista have the tragedy engraved in their memory (Quiceno Toro & Orjuela Villanueva, 2017; Velásquez et al., 2018).



Figure 4: The church after the massacre. Photograph Newspaper El Tiempo

The combat did not stop despite the horror of the explosion. Survivors had to flee under firing, waving white handkerchiefs, they climbed into boats and paddled away with their hands. Boat after boat, the whole community of Bellavista fled. The wounded remained among the rubble and next to the dead, listening to the continued fire and enduring the intensity of the sun during the day and the heavy rain at night. They buried the deceased in a common grave, without names, without farewells, without ceremonies. The situation did not allow anything different. The events of May shook the Atrato region of Choco, generating uncertainty in the population about the possibility of new confrontations, so the communities began to migrate. According to the CNMH (2010) approximately 1,744 families, about 5,771 people in situations of forced displacement, arrived at the municipality. The indigenous people who lived in Bellavista took refuge in their jungle communities and Bellavista remained utterly silent and empty. These indigenous people were not taken into consideration in the official count and, therefore, did not have access to humanitarian aid.

Approximately four months later, due to the difficulty in finding decent living conditions and the State's promise to provide humanitarian aid if they returned, most of the displaced decided to go back to their territories. They had lost everything and now they had to rebuild their lives while the war continued. The actors of the armed conflict continued fighting for territorial dominance and none gave in. A more significant military presence led to the escalation of conflict which also further hindered the territorial autonomy. Military measures and controls on civilians resulted in constant interrogations and restrictions.

## Relocation: Unfinished Promises



Figure 5: Displacement of the community of Bojayá. Photograph Jesús Abad Colorado

After the massacre, many national and international institutions arrived offering to mitigate the damage caused and to repair the victims. State agencies came up with proposals that responded to their own interests. Curtailed by legal limitations to carry out projects in “high risk” areas, agencies defined the need to relocate the town (Millán, 2009). For residents, for the Quibdó Diocese and for members of regional organizations, the community's decision to support the

relocation was the result of pressure from government entities and the desperate need to receive resources from local authorities. Ultimately, the government declared that it could not make any investment in a high-risk area. The only possibility for receiving aid was accepting the relocation (CNRR-GMH, 2010; Velásquez et al., 2018).

The new town was located one kilometer away from the former site, distanced from the river that had been key to their environment and culture. They lost access to the river that traditionally was the place for meetings, farewells, and receptions, the center of community life. Daily chores such as washing clothes and trash disposal traditionally done by the river now had to be completed within their houses. The meetings and conversations tied to these activities disappeared. Children no longer were required to learn to swim, a typical activity and usually acquired at an early age. The distance from the river, as well as the restrictions imposed by the groups that disputed the territory, eroded fishing in an ancestral fishing village. The new town was located on the land that the community had set aside for the eternal rest of their ancestors and changed the dynamics towards the dead. The distance between the houses and the cemetery was not enough to guarantee the isolation and silence associated with this sacred place (CNRR-GMH, 2010; Millán, 2009).

The State's response of relocating the town after the massacre is seen by many as an adverse reaction, as stated by the Ombudsman's Office in its 2003 report. Because it did not address comprehensively the problems of the region, it did not modify the vulnerability of communities vis-a-vis the conflict, and it did not change structural factors such as poverty conditions. Additionally, the decision to relocate the town is striking, because after the massacre the physical damage, except for the church, was limited. The new village was never fully completed the houses lacked doors, windows, and public services (CNRR-GMH, 2010; Velásquez et al., 2018). The new Bellavista also gave rise to a new way of life (Vergara-figueroa, 2018).

Survivors and victims' relatives still have mental health problems since the State did not provide psychological support as part of the reparation program (CNRR-GMH, 2010). The State ignored the construction of memory spaces that would allow for healing and repair in a new life. When thinking about the old town, everyone shares feelings of nostalgia, which are exacerbated by the abandon of the old Bellavista, consumed by weeds; that is why the community has raised the idea of turning it into a place of commemoration. The general discontent voiced by the community has to do with the widespread breach of the State's basic responsibilities (CNRR-GMH, 2010; Vergara-figueroa, 2018).

## The Late Goodbye: 17 Years Later

During the peace talks, the government started a collective repair process. Therefore, in 2015, the FARC participated in the act of acknowledging responsibility for the massacre before the community. In this act, the social leaders expressed that the exhumation, identification and dignified recovery of the bodies was a priority for all. Although 13 years had already passed, the survivors had to wait 4 additional years to finally say goodbye to their deceased.



Figure 6: Anicencio carrying his dead wife in the jungle. Bojayá, 2002 Photograph: Jesús Abad Colorado

By year end of 2019, the burial of the fatalities of the Bojayá massacre finally took place, in a vigil ceremony following the tradition of Afro-Colombian culture. However, the agony of this town continued. In the absence of the State, armed groups (the ELN guerrilla and the paramilitaries called the Gaitanista Self-Defense Forces of Colombia or the Gulf Clan) have come to fight over territorial dominance of the areas previously controlled by the FARC (that under the peace agreement retired from this region). These groups subjected the population to crossfire again and increased the use of land mines in the territory. It seems that history is repeating itself, the community through its social leaders and the Ombudsman's office has issued early alerts and

the Government has not responded. Leyner Palacios, Bellavista's social leader, says: “I am frustrated and afraid because everything is repeating itself. After suffering the terrible massacre, the one of May 2 in 2002, and after undergoing 5 displacements with my family [...], I show that violence continues to rage with my people” (Palacios, 2020). The situation in the Pacific area and several rural areas of the country is proof of the lack of commitment of the current government with the implementation of responsibilities negotiated in the peace agreement. Moreover, the systematic murder of social leaders throughout the country has not been contained.



Figure 7: Delivery of the identified remains of the victims of the massacre, 2019. Photograph: Colprensa

## 4. METHODOLOGY

For this research I was planning to do some interviews with members of the community and specially a community leader, but recent death threats across the country made it impossible. So, I figured that my research questions could also be addressed with secondary data. Thus I decided to rely on two different types of sources: traditional afro-Colombian songs (alabaos and vallenatos) and the architectural work by Doris Salcedo, *Fragmentos*. The alabaos will provide me with information to address the question of how the community's perspectives about its memory ought to be used as insights to design memory spaces. Different authors have studied the alabaos as a political tool of resistance; but the idea to study the lyrics as a means to explore and define approaches to characterize the proposed built space as one that enables the victim's repair and memory has not been addressed. In addition, *Fragmentos* will help me question how the participation in the process of space creation is also part of the victim's symbolic repair. These two sources will help me define some guidelines on how to create a memory space for the community of Bojayá.

The Bojayá community carries on their shoulders the memories of war, but also the memory of exclusion and oblivion. Their Afro culture has allowed them, through songs, to vent their sorrows, but also to build their collective memory (Millán, 2011; Quiceno et al., 2017). The alabaos (responsorial a cappella songs - verse and response) are fundamental in the ancestral traditions of the Colombian Pacific, and they are part of a mortuary ritual to farewell their deceased. Alabaos are transmitted from generation to generation, and their role in processes of collective mourning has been studied by various authors (Millán, 2009; Quiceno et al., 2019). According to these investigations, the alabaos became cultural practices - especially for women - to tell what they were experiencing. After the massacre, women joined together to sing particular praises that eventually would give birth to the group *Las Cantadoras de Pogue*, that began to use singing as a valid means to make public their grievance (Quiceno et al., 2019). After the Bojayá massacre, the alabaos became a form of sorrow and expressions of memory, where they reflect their pain and suffering. A way of resistance or in the words of Ereiza Asprilla, singer of Bojayá "through the alabaos, we denounce to the world so that they understand and hear that we have suffered the war, so that they realize that pain exists and that we are living it" (Interview to Asprilla in La Silla Vacía, 2020). Like the alabaos, the vallenatos have also been a way of lyric demonstration to transmit what happened. The men who helped handle the bodies composed vallenatos to unburden and continue living (Millán, 2009). Although the vallenatos have not had the same level of diffusion as the alabaos after the massacre, they continue to be used by the people of Bojayá as a means to release pain.

The “new songs” as they call the alabaos that they compose to narrate the penuries of war are different from the traditional funeral songs. Because as Máxima says “we sing with great force, we sing with great force because we are saying to the world that in Bojayá they did this to us, in Bojayá they finished us, we do not want this anymore, we do not want it to be repeated, and we are doing it in our own words” (Máxima quoted in Quiceno et al., 2019:36). The alabaos then, are not only a tool for relief where the dead are mourned, but now they are also a tool to help build their collective memory.

In this research, I propose various analyses seeking to generate guidelines on how a memory space could be built for the Bojayá community. Supported in some authors I am interested in searching through the lyrics and melodies of the alabaos and vallenatos the community’s spirit. I intend to retrieve the voice of the collective memory to find clues on how a memory space could be designed. The proposed guidelines should respect and complement the ideas that have already been generated by the community about a memory space.

I will analyze the work *Fragmentos* done by the plastic artist Doris Salcedo who created a space of memory as a result of the peace dialogues in Havana. This ‘contra-monument’ as the artist names it, was made from metal obtained from smelting 37 tons of weapons surrendered by the FARC under the peace agreement. In the process of creating this space, women victims of sexual violence in the conflict were invited to participate (Padilla, 2018). The objective of studying Salcedo’s work is to understand how the process of creating this space has contributed to the ongoing process of symbolic repair of the victims and society. In parallel, also to provide recommendations for the specific case of Bojayá, based on the learnings derived from the participation of victims in the construction of *Fragmentos*.



## 5. ANALYSIS: ON HOW TO BUILD A MEMORY SPACE FOR BOJAYÁ



Figure 8: *Las Cantadoras de Pogue*. Photograph: Centro de Estudios Afrodiaspóricos, Ceaf

### The Feelings of Bojayá

The Afro-Colombian oral tradition originates from the resistance of African slaves to Catholic evangelizing. By virtue of oral tradition memories of African ancestors survived in the new world, as they were forced to distance themselves from their non-verbal cultural practices (Quiceno et al., 2017). The alabaos that are sung in the Pacific became way to rebuild collective memories and resist the unfavorable conditions that these communities have had to endure. Once you understand the origins of these ancient songs, it is not surprising that, given the circumstances of the massacre, orality has once again become a form of resistance. In the case of Bojayá, the alabaos exemplify Ramos' (2013) idea of narrative as the articulating axis of collective memories.

In this portion of the Colombian Pacific, oral tradition, as a tool for relief, is used not only in the alabaos but also in the vallenatos and even in the ragas and raps created by the young. The “new alabaos” are used to remember the victims in ceremonies which are held every year on massacre’s

anniversary and in other events such final corpse identification at the end of 2019. The visibility that *Las Cantadoras de Pogue* have achieved has allowed them to use their songs to convey their message of struggle and resistance to multiple corners of the country. They are invited to participate in important events such as the 2016 peace signing ceremony in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia.

As Delma Constanza Millán (2009) explains, Afro-Chocoano songs are characterized by their self-definition. To relate the massacre is to understand who lived it. This characteristic of self-definition allows us to understand who the Bellavisteños (naturals of Bellavista) are and how they perceive themselves.

*“When I was a child I lived very pleased / Cuando yo era un niño vivía muy complacido*  
*To see the beautiful things / De ver las cosas bonitas*  
*That I found in **Bellavista** / Que en **Bellavista** encontraba*  
*Peace, love and understanding / Paz, amor y comprensión*  
*And the most pleasant of all that we lived proud of / Y lo más grato de todo lo que vivíamos*  
*orgullosos*  
*To see the beautiful fish that came out of the **Atrato** / De ver los peces hermosos que del **Atrato***  
*salían*  
***Bellavista** was a pretty town with a well-known name / **Bellavista** era un pueblo bonito y de un*  
*nombre conocido*  
***Bellavista** town I never let go it into oblivion / Pueblo de **Bellavista** nunca lo meto al olvido”*

Domingo Valencia

(taken from Millán, 2009)

In this vallenato, written up by Domingo, the Atrato River and the town of Bellavista are mentioned. The strong relationship that Bellavisteños hold with the land is remarkable (Vergara-figueroa, 2018). Millán (2009) argues that for communities in the Colombian Pacific, the river is an element that provides definition and belonging and also settles spatial relationships: upstream, downstream. The importance of the river in the life of the communities that live on its banks is also reinforced by themselves "the river, which is our life here, the river, for us ,is now dead ... we only use it to transport ourselves and not to fulfill needs like bathing, fishing, washing dishes,

brushing clothes; we used to go down and wash clothes and it felt good to meet other women [...] and that was happiness! [...] All those things are already over” (Interview, adult woman, an inhabitant of Bellavista, 2009 taken from CNRR-GMH, 2010). Besides, the name of Bellavista originates precisely from the relationship of the town with the river. Bellavista is a viewpoint, it has a Vista (view) - Bella (beautiful), to both sides of the river. Although the river is mentioned by some authors (Millán, 2009, 2011) as a fundamental aspect of Bellavistense's identity, in this work I want to highlight the **river** as an element of the **territory** that can be used when thinking of a memory space. Understanding the intimate relationship that the people of Bojayá have with the river is central because the memory space must not only acknowledge the victims but also transmit its importance to future visitors. Therefore, it is essential to understand that the people of Bellavista consider the **river** as part of who they are; for them, you cannot live detached of the **river**.

The relationship with the **river** is part of a more fundamental relationship, the one with the **territory**. For black and indigenous communities, the **territory** is vital for their daily life and their memory, as it is the place where their past, present and future have meaning. The **territory** is where life begins and ends; the territory is "the mother". Historically for these communities, the **territory** is sacred and carries symbolic value. Additionally, they feel that they have a responsible relationship with the **territory**, which they look for and preserve, since it is the place where their ancestors and their spirits live, (Millán, 2009; CNRR-GMH, 2010; Vergara-figueroa, 2014). Thus, the **river** is part of the **territory**, and has a symbolic historical relationship with the communities. Their memories reside and came to being there. The **territory** plays a fundamental role in the construction of the social fabric since these communities have identity links with it. I conclude that the memory space, in order to fulfill its reparative function, should be located there, in the **territory**, not only for the spiritual meaning but also to allow the residents to have a very close relationship with space, to feel close, to protect their memories and finally heal.

For Juhani Pallasmaa (2006) author of *The Eyes of the Skin*, architecture must be **multisensorial** to convey a moving experience. I believe that memory spaces must precisely awaken this type of user experience, so I will use the **senses** as the primary tool to try to define the architectural characteristics of the memory space. The **river** and the **territory** are essential geographic elements for the Chocó communities due to the role they have in their culture (Millán, 2009; Vergara-figueroa, 2014). Reconnecting with **earth** and maintaining ancestral knowledge is part of the objectives of a memory space. **Touch** is one of the senses that best allows this connection, "the skin reads the texture, weight, density and temperature of matter" (Pallasmaa, 2006:58). I can imagine a memory space that is explored barefoot, to feel the humidity of the Chocóan soil on your soles, and feel the mist of the **territory**. A space that **smells** of jungle, humidity, green, river, because as Pallasmaa (2006) states, **smell** can make the eyes remember. A space that is so

close to the Atrato that it is invaded with the **sound** of the **river**, where for a moment the **contact** with the land, the **smell** of the jungle and the **sound** of the water bring the visitor to a state of calm.

In addition to the relationship with the **territory**, I want to highlight another fundamental element that appears in the alabaos and vallenatos: the idea of **not forgetting**, more so than remembering. Because **not forgetting** suggests permanence and durability, its there, is present; while remembering is the result of the conscious effort of reminding. For cultures of the Pacific, it is essential to maintain communication between the worlds of the living and the dead, so not forgetting is permanently remembering those who left. As Millán (2009) explains for the Bellavisteños **not forgetting** is to help in reestablishing communications between the world of the living and the world of the dead. Connection with death springs from the **territory** since remembering is **memory**, and it is present in the **territory**.

*“What happened in Bellavista is **not erased** / Lo que pasó en Bellavista **no se borra**,*

*What happened in Bellavista is **not forgotten** / Lo que pasó en Bellavista **no se olvida**”*

*\_Domingo Valencia\_*

(Taken from Millán, 2011)

*“**Fifteenth anniversary** / **Decimoquinto aniversario***

*and this remains for history / y esto quedo pa’ la historia*

*Tell those in **the press** / Díganle a los de la prensa*

***To not erase the memory** / que no borren la memoria”*

*\_Decimoquinto Aniversario - Las Cantadoras de Pogue\_*

(Taken from the CD Voces de Resistencia)

Both lyrics explicitly mention the theme of **not forgetting** and not losing memory. Even after fifteen years, the call to keep the memory alive has not subsided. Furthermore, the authors look for national awareness by asking the press not to let the memory be forgotten.

The relationship that the construction of the social fabric and remembrance is closely linked to the territory because for “the Bellavisteños it is impossible to split memory and territory, repairing what happened has to do with repairing the space and the memory; repair the communication

between space and time” (Millán, 2009:126). Along these lines, memories are impressed in the territory; the **territory** has memory. Therefore, the way to repair is through the act of **not forgetting**, of remembering the past event (the massacre) in the territory (Bellavista) in which it occurred. In order to heal the wounds that remain in the **territory**, in the memory, the space must be intervened and the memory preserved. This relationship of repair through the territory and the memory is also emulated in other alabaos.

*“Gentlemen, armed groups / Señores grupos armados*

*We ask from the heart / Pedimos de corazón*

*repair those damages, Amen / Que reparen esos daños, Amén*

*Caused in our region / Causado en nuestra región*

*We are reaching the mass grave / Vamos llegando a la fosa*

*Aching heart / Dolidos de corazón*

*And those who did the damage, and Amen, / Y los que hicieron el daño, y Amén,*

*They feel no pain / No sienten ningún dolor*

*Today we remember the day / Hoy recordamos el día*

*Of everything that happened / De todo lo que pasó*

*And we look at the place, and Amen / Y miramos el lugar, y Amen*

*Where the deed happened / Donde el caso sucedió”*

*\_Vamos Llegando a la Fosa - Las Cantadoras de Pogue\_*

*(taken from the CD Voces de la Resistencia)*

In these lyrics composed by *Las Cantadoras de Pogue*, the community talks about repairing **the facts** (*those damages, the day and what happened*) in the **territory** (*our region, the mass grave and where the deed happened*) and **not forgetting**. Understanding these relationships becomes a basic theme of this research, so it is necessary to think of a memory space that respects and values these fundamental relationships of Afro-Choco culture.

This alabao also refers to the mass grave where the bodies of the victims were buried. The survivors not only carry the pain of the traumatic massacre but also the effect generated by

knowing that their dead ended in a mass grave, without farewells. Mass graves, like wars, dehumanize death, which is why, as Castro (2019) writes, mass graves have an unbearable effect on survivors, due to the impossibility of pointing the uniqueness of the individual. The lack of presence of a singular individual diminishes his social status and his **dignity**. Furthermore, a corpse in a mass grave is one that has not been buried with a name, nor with traditional funeral rites, so that souls can rest in peace. Even though, at the end of 2019, the community was able to say goodbye to their dead in a burial with the rites and praise of their culture the pain still remains. I consider that the pain and trauma generated by the mass grave must be taken into account when thinking about the memory space. The loss of identity and the lack of individuality have been some of the reasons for the general pain. The memory space should incorporate a place to acknowledge each of the victims, leave their names engraved on the **territory**, make them **visible** and restore their **dignity**.

To make victims **visible** is to give them back their identity, their **dignity**, through the creation of a space that allows mourners and new generations to reconnect with the dead. This space should offer for each of the victims, an area with their names and, if possible, a picture or a significant object. A space in semi-darkness and in silence because as Pallasmaa (2006) explains, **light** and **shadow** are fundamental in the architectural experience. Darkness generates feelings of solidarity. The author also explains the power of acoustics of silence. “The silence of architecture is a receptive silence, which makes us remember. A powerful architectural experience silences all outside noise; it focuses our attention on our own experience and, as with art, it makes us aware of our essential solitude” (Pallasmaa, 2006:54). Thus, it could be argued that after having reconnected with the earth, through **touch**, **smell** and **sound** in the first enclosure, we move to a second one, more melancholic, in which **sight** and **hearing** (sound of silence) take the scene; to help us to remember the victims of the massacre.

However, the importance of **territoriality** in the community, **remembering** and **visualizing** victims are not the only elements that must be taken into account when creating this memory space. It is essential to keep in mind that one of the purposes of these spaces is to be able to repair victims. As pointed in an interview by Leyner Palacios, leader of Bojayá “having a place of memory is urgent, that allows healing processes” (Interview to Leyner Palacios in Estupiñan, 2015). To heal is to repair, that is why the memory space must allow the symbolic repair of the community. Taking up Sierra's (2014) ideas, the State is responsible for repairing the victims and guaranteeing the non-repetition of the events. State recognition is essential for a memory space to be a symbolic repair tool, and this is also clear to the victims of Bojayá. As the lyrics show, the theme of the responsibility is also central in some songs.

*“What happened in Bojayá / Lo que pasó en Bojayá*  
*That was already warned / Eso ya estaba advertido*  
*They informed the government / Le informaron al gobierno*  
*And didn't make sense of it / Y no le prestó sentido*  
*Just because we are black / Sólo porque somos negros*  
*They treat us that way / Nos tratan de esa manera*  
*Oh they declare us the war / Ay nos declaran la guerra*  
*To get us off the land / Para sacarnos de las tierras”*  
*\_La Patrona de Bojayá - Las Cantadoras de Pogue\_*

(taken from the CD Voces de la Resistencia)

The lyrics of this alabao highlight the responsibilities of the government in the Bojayá massacre; in their pain, they make the government responsible for not trying to avoid it. This discussion today, 18 years later, is still current. As Martha Nubia Bello (2002) argues, the blame must be attributed to the FARC and the paramilitaries for having carried out the massacre. However, the State also bears part of the responsibility, not only for the historical abandonment, but also for having ignored the calls for help from the community and different organizations, and for the breach of its constitutional duty to protect the civilian population.

This alabao also touches on the issue of racial discrimination, still prevalent despite recent social and identity mobilization of Afro-descendant groups in Colombia and other places in Latin America (Mosquera et al., 2007; Restrepo & Rojas, 2004; Wade, 1995, 2012; Wabgou M, 2012). Being black or Indian in Colombia means not having the same opportunities, and it means, for many of them, living amid conflict. According to Amnistía Internacional (2017) report the Pacific region has historically suffered from poverty, exclusion and violation of human rights. In the same report, they show how the Ombudsman's Office in 2016 declared that the Chocó region suffers a humanitarian crisis and the Colombian Constitutional Court states that the communities “must bear the inherent dangers of confrontation on the basis of pre-existing structural situations of extreme poverty and institutional abandonment, which operate as catalytic factors for the serious violations of individual and collective human rights that the presence of the conflict in their

territories has represented for them” (Constitutional Court sentence T-025 of 2004 quoted in Amnistía Internacional, 2017:11). These conditions of exclusion and historical oblivion attest to the invisibility of the communities of the Atrato in the realm of national reality. The systematic forgetfulness is also mentioned in the following vallenato composed by Domingo after the massacre. He wrote it for the President's visit (2002), who strolled through an empty town abandoned out of fear of violence.

“Hey Mr. **President** / *Oiga señor **Presidente***  
*Oh, doctor Andrés Pastrana / Ay, doctor Andrés Pastrana*  
*Has come **to visit** / Ha venido a **visitar***  
*this beautiful Choco land / esta linda tierra chocoana*  
***Look how my town is** / **Mire cómo ésta mi pueblo***  
*All houses closed / Todas las casas cerradas*  
*The inhabitants of Bellavista / Los habitantes de Bellavista*  
*They are already displaced / Ya se encuentran **desplazadas**”*  
\_Vallenato Dos de Mayo – Domingo Mina\_  
(taken from Mouths of Ash by Juan Manuel Echavarría, 2003)

This vallenato underlines the sudden visibility received as a result of the massacre. As Leyner Palacios summarizes: “the world came to realize that we existed and lived... and how we lived, right? All this tragedy, from May 2, is an explosion where the world knows the reality that we were living” (interview to Leyner Palacios, in Castro, 2019). I believe that understanding the background of oblivion and exclusion that these people have suffered, and the struggle that they have sustained for years to survive cannot be ignored when thinking of memory space. Their life story must also be told. Even though the massacre is the event that drives the creation of the memory space, it cannot be forgotten that State abandonment is precisely one of the reasons why it is perpetuated. The future space has to pay tribute for so many years of resistance.

“Hey mister Manuel Santos / *Oiga señor Manuel Santos*  
*We will **ask the favor** / Le vamo' a **pedi' el favor***  
*May this **dialogue in Havana** / Que este **dialogo en la Habana***  
*Pay close **attention** / Le preste mucha **atención***



*We Colombians / Nosotros los colombianos*  
*We are expecting peace of / Estamos pendientes de la paz*  
*And we believe that at this table / Y creemos que en esta mesa*  
*You can **negotiate it** / Si la pueda **negociar***  
*We the **peasants** / Nosotros los **campesinos***  
*We are very **stunned** / Estamos muy **azarados***  
*Because the **damn war** / Porque la **maldita guerra***  
*a lot of people **has killed** / ha mucha gente **ha matado**”*  
 \_La de Manuel Santos – Las Cantadoras de Pogue\_  
 (taken from the CD Voces de la Resistencia)

The previous alabao is also addressed to another president (Juan *Manuel Santos*) in 2014, but this time within the framework of the peace talks that were taking place in Havana. Through songs, they ask to continue with the peace dialogues. For these regions of Colombia, peace is not only the end of conflict but also the promise to finally benefit from social changes. Peace became the only hope since after the massacre the conditions of oblivion and abandonment prevailed. Although the town became visible due to the massacre, it remained mostly invisible. Leyner Palacios shares this in an interview “After 13 years, [Bojayá] continues in total abandonment. [...] The housing situation is precarious in most communities. But, the situation of the aqueduct, of drinking water, is terrible. [...] Children there die from curable diseases because there is no adequate care system ”(Leyner Palacios quoted in Estupiñan, 2015). This song is another song for hope, it is pleading for that promised reparation that they have been waiting since 2002.

Oblivion and abandonment have defined the history of the Pacific communities and have profoundly influenced their culture. Thus, I consider that the last enclosure of the memory space should be dedicated to Afro-Chocó history. A space of **sensorial** affluence, where the powerful sound of the alabaos flood the space and reaches the soul, because "the sound creates a feeling of intimacy" (Pallasmaa, 2006:50). A space where the colors of the materials stimulate the senses, where the synchrony of the dancing bodies provokes emotions, where their roots are preserved.

In synthesis, I propose a memory space that allows this community to reconnect with its **territory** and its **roots**, which restores **dignity** and **individuality** to the victims of the massacre and makes the community **visible**. A place where **collective memories** are kept, a *lieux de memoire*, where "architecture is the art of reconciliation between us and the world, and this mediation takes place through the senses" (Pallasmaa, 2006:72). A memory space made up of a sequence of thresholds. Each of which has a specific atmosphere, responding to a spatial-emotional itinerary: repair. The

three proposed limits seek to create a *promenade architecturale* (architectural promenade), which in terms of the architect Rogelio Salmons is “weaving 'a continuum', between 'culture' and 'nature' [...] to 'reveal and [...] awaken knowledge and appreciation of things' ” (Rogelio Salmons quoted in Saldarriaga, 2014:124)

## The community's wishes

Old Bellavista is an undeniable proof of the remnants of war. A town abandoned, initially by terror and then by politics. The physical and intangible footprints reflect the reality that the communities of the Pacific have lived for years. A town that the community wants to preserve and turn into a memory space, as Lucero Álvarez, a native of Bojayá, expresses it in an interview in the video *Bojayá: the War Without Limits*, made by the CNMH, “I wish that at this site here [old Bellavista] we could turn into a true sanctuary, where we can keep the memory of all, of all the victims ” (Lucero Álvarez in CNMH, 2010). For Álvarez, the idea of memory is linked to the territory, when figuring the memory space in the old town where the events occurred. Ten years later, the request remains the same; however, now the pain derived from abandonment accompanies the plea. As Elizabeth Álvarez manifests in a video produced on the occasion of the eighteenth anniversary of the massacre, “we should have already organized the place of memory, our old Bellavista should be in another situation, the ruins of old Bellavista should not be, just as they are” (Elizabeth Álvarez in CNMH, 2020). Thus, the idea of the impossibility of splitting **memory** and **territory** is reinforced. With the abandonment and disappearance of the town in the scrub, the people of Bellavista feel anguished, so they insist on turning it into a place of commemoration (CNRR-GMH, 2010). However, the voice of the community is not the only one crying out for a memory space, in the recommendations regarding repair made by the CNMH on the occasion of the report, *Bojayá: The War Without Limits* (2010) they remind the State that in its duty to preserve the memory of the victims, they should respond to the request of the residents to preserve the old Bellavista as a sanctuary and place of memory.

In response to the different memory initiatives that have been developing in the Atrato region, the Committee for the Rights of the Victims of Bojayá and the Greater Community Council of the Integral Peasant Association of Atrato<sup>7</sup> (COCOMACIA for the initials in Spanish) have created a base document for the construction of memory programs and projects in the region. These guidelines seek, among others, to commemorate and dignify the victims left by the conflict in the Middle Atrato, to strengthen the local knowledge of their Afro-Chocó culture, to understand the

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<sup>7</sup> Ethnic Authority of the Middle Atrato. In the Chocó Department, administers the community councils of the municipalities of Quibdó, Middle Atrato and Bojayá.

territory as the articulating axis of the different memories and to preserve and care for the *lieux de memorires*. I consider that the exposed guidelines correspond with the interpretation made of the alabaos. The commemoration of the memory should take place in the **territory** where the events were perpetrated, the footprint of the old Bellavista should be **preserved** as a place of memory. The geographical proximity to the **river** should be capitalized to promote the repair of the community's relations with the Atrato, and, at the same time, facilitate connections with the other memory spaces in the region. The connection between the old and the new Bellavista should be possible in the territory, and through the constant visits to the memory space, a constant relationship with memory will be maintained.



Figure 9: *Las Cantadoras de Pogue*. Photograph: Centro de Estudios Afrodiaspóricos, Ceaf

## *FRAGMENTOS*

During the peace talks in Havana, it was agreed that with the weapons rendered by FARC, three monuments of peace, justice and reparation should be built, three monuments that represent the end of armed conflict. The sites selected were Bogotá, the capital of Colombia; the United Nations headquarter in New York and Havana, Cuba (where the negotiations were carried out)

The monument in Bogotá was commissioned to the plastic artist Doris Salcedo, who, with the support of the architect Carlos Granada, created the work *Fragmentos* in the ruins of a downtown

colonial house. María Belén Sáez de Ibarra (2019), art curator and director of cultural heritage at the National University of Colombia considers that *Fragmentos* is a space of commemoration that was born under a new notion of memory and history. Where it is achieved that all voices - even the most difficult and silenced - have a place. Bearing this in mind, Doris Salcedo proposes the creation of a antagonistic space to a unique and definitive narration of the conflict: a “contra-monument”. Therefore for Sáez (2019) in *Fragmentos*, it is not a single memory but rather several memories that are built by the groups of people who enter briefly such space. This fosters the construction of memories for society as a whole; it is a space where "memory becomes a form of social awareness that is achieved by the possibility of engaging in difficult dialogues" (Sáez, 2019). I consider that this construction of memories of which Sáez speaks is nothing more than the creation of the collective memory of Jelin and Halbwach when they argue that collective memory is the interweaving of individual memories. *Fragmentos* is the physical space where Colombian society can begin to interweave its individual memories to build a collective memory. A story constructed by different views on the same events.

*Fragmentos* pillar is its floor constructed with metal from nine thousand weapons submitted by the FARC. The floor of a commemorative space, an empty and silent space, where the insights, memories and commemorations of various artists will be housed. The “contra-monument” is made of many insights, of infinite voices, as the artist points out it is "an infinitely inconclusive process" (Doris Salcedo quoted in Sáez, 2019). “*Fragmentos* is configured, then, as a common space. Only in the unpretentious spaces, societies fractured by conflict can bravely recall and assume their past ” (Sáez, 2019). Thus, I consider that *Fragmentos* then becomes a *lieu de memoire* because, as Pierre Nora (1989) explains, the fundamental purpose of *lieux de memoires* is to halt oblivion, and their mutating capacity is reflected in that unfinished process. I think that the middle Atrato region needs a space to host the memory initiatives that have been developed sporadically in the territory and make them dialogues so that together they build the collective memory of the region in a *lieu de memoire*.

Salcedo invited women victims of sexual violence to participate in the collective creation of the flooring since she considered them “the weakest victims and those who need to be more visible” (Doris Salcedo quoted in Duzán, 2019). The women hammered to transform tin sheets into dies where metal from FARC weapons would be cast. The imprints on the metal sheets would be engraved on the floor tiles, as a testimony to their suffering. Launching of a new hope, the hope of peace. I consider that the physical act of creating, of hammering the metal, is part of the symbolic repair because manual work helps to liberate, it serves as a catharsis of pain. Several individuals in need of liberation managed to create a collective work. According to the testimonies collected by the Network of Women Victims and Professionals “listening to the sounds of hammers hitting the metal dies and feeling the tiredness of our hands when repetitively

performing this action represented for us a process of catharsis, of liberation” (Red de Mujeres Víctimas y Profesionales, 2019). Thus, I believe that the victim’s participation in the physical construction of the space should be considered as part of the process of symbolic repair. Through the act of hammering they leave their pain engraved in that new space. I think that engaging in physical work in the construction of a memory space is also a form of therapy. The **tactile** dimension of the **multisensory** space comes from the physical work in the construction of the space, from the contact and molding of different materials. To help release pain, I think that the Bojayá community should be able to participate actively in the creation of its memory space. Additionally, repetitive physical tasks evoke the repetition of verses in the alabaos, a repetition that also helps in the liberation process.

*Fragmentos* is an example of a memory space that contributes to the symbolic repair of victims, because it is a space that allows the construction and preservation of national collective memory, which leads to rebuilding ourselves as a society. For the specific case of Bojayá, I considered that the survivors, the mourners should participate in the physical construction of the memory space. Cut the wooden columns, shape the floor, hammer the joints, and prepare the concrete, all over and over again, until the space is done. By manipulating materials, stimulating the senses, and performing repetitive actions victims finally heal.



Figure 10: Estebana Roa Montoya working in *Fragmentos*. Photograph: Juan Fernando Castro

## 6. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

In this thesis, I have analyzed several alabaos and the space *Fragmentos*, intending to create, in symbolic repair code, the guidelines for the construction of a memory space for the Bojayá community. The starting point to build my argument was to highlight the importance of the construction of collective memory in post-conflict situations since it is through memory recovery that societies that have seen destroyed by traumatic events, such as war, manage to rebuild themselves. Secondly, it was supported by how memory spaces could contribute to symbolic repair of victims. For which purpose it was necessary to understand how space and its creative process have to meet certain requirements in order to contribute to the symbolic repair of the victims.

As I argued throughout this paper, not all memory spaces contribute to the symbolic repair of victims. In order to fulfill this role first, it must facilitate the construction of collective memory, a task that, in the case of Bojayá, is derived from elements captured from the oral tradition through alabaos and vallenatos. These songs were not only considered as the starting point in defining space characteristics but also it is ascertained that they ought to be present in the memory space, as a way to guarantee that the victims feel identified and recognized in the site. Second, to contribute to the symbolic repair, the space must be constituted as a *lieux de mémoire*. Third, obtaining State recognition is fundamental, since this allows relations between the parties to begin to heal. State recognition encompasses not only facts and the victims, but, most importantly, its responsibility, thus enabling the community the possibility to start weaving new relationships.

Additionally, I propose that to persevere in guaranteeing victim's reparation and for the space to become an authentic site for symbolic repair, it is necessary to assure, in its design and construction, the participation of the community. In the exercise that I undertook in this thesis, I used alabaos and vallenatos to singularize the voice of the community. Although it is not used to elaborate a design proposal based on the analysis of the ancestral songs, I consider that through its lyrics the people of Bojayá are participating in the process of conceptualizing the memory space. Using songs is an invitation to community involvement that, despite not being a form of direct participation, is a valid approach to capture the feelings of the community. However, this does not mean that only the analysis of alabaos and vallenatos fulfills required participatory work since, as I have repeatedly pointed throughout this paper it is essential that the community participates not only in the design but also in the actual construction of the memory space. As *Fragmentos* experience demonstrates, participating in actual construction also contributes to the healing process and additionally provides community ownership and closeness with the space.

However, unlike the case of *Fragmentos*, located in the country's capital, far from the conflict zone, in Bojayá the memory space must be located exactly in the area where the events occurred and near the place where the community lives. This condition will surely result in a lasting space, not ephemeral, which is transformed as the community assumes it as its own and advances in its process of symbolic repair.

After analyzing the *alabaos* and *vallenatos*, I identified three recurring themes: the relationship with the territory, the massacre and Afro-Choco history. As these are the three main narratives, I propose that they be the same ones that are materialized in the memory space of Bojayá. A tour, a *promenade architectural*, through three threshold that facilitate the connection with the territory, the memory of the massacre and the commemoration of the victims and, finally, the reconnection with their roots, with their history a spatial-emotional itinerary that brings repair. Following Pallasmaa's ideas, I propose that the determining factors of architectural design are the senses, in order to generate a moving experience. The primary objective is that the sensory experience facilitates our reconciliation with the world.

In this thesis, I explored how to symbolically repair victims by means of creating a memory space and the proposal of using cultural expressions - apparently distanced from architecture - to build architectural spaces. Although my research focused on the specific case of the Bojayá community, I consider that the lessons learned can be applied to similar cases throughout the country because, finally, we all need to reconcile and rebuild ourselves. I believe that architecture should not be absent, not be indifferent to this process of constructing peace.



*“Peace is not only the silence of the guns...”*

– Jesús Abad Colorado –

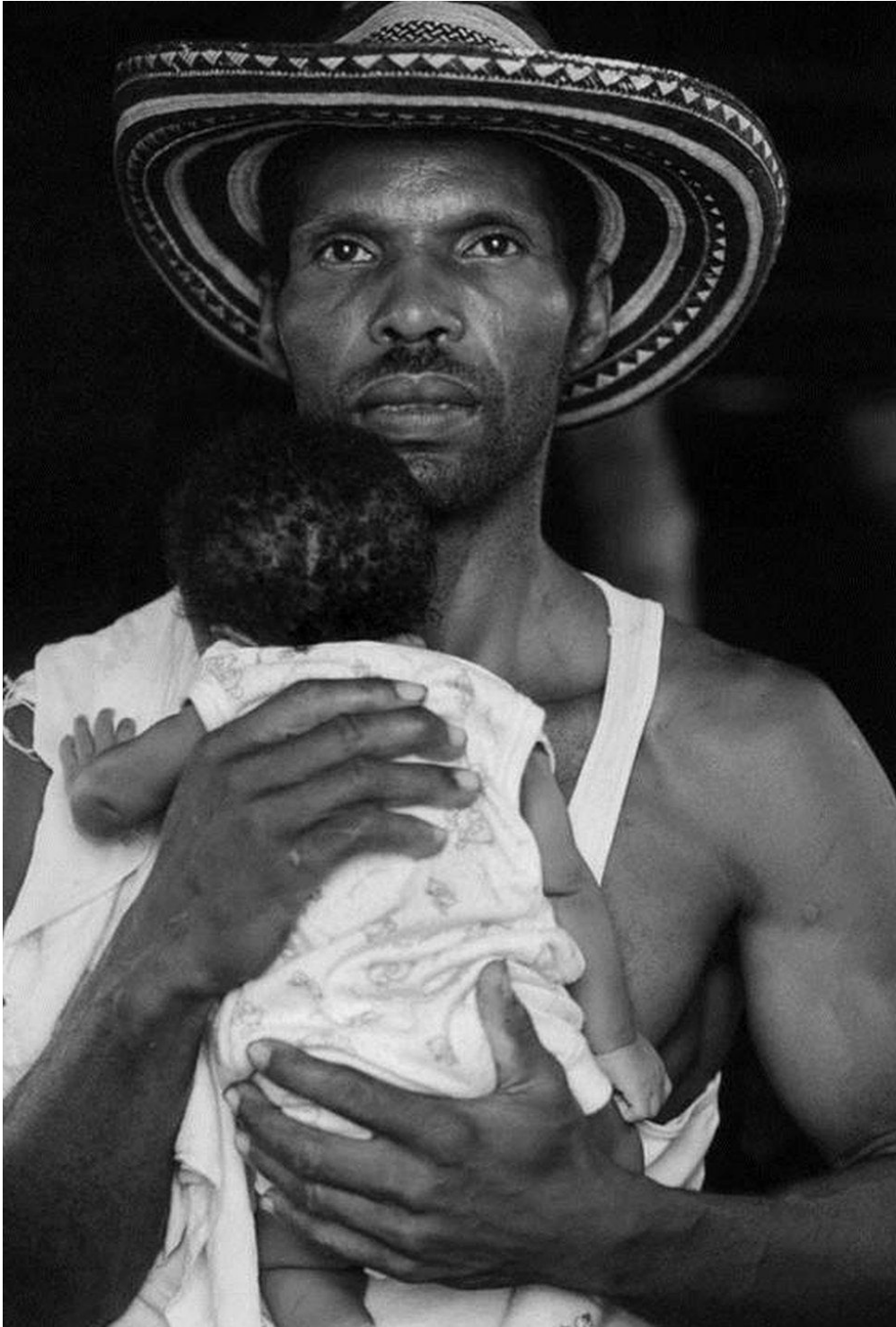


Figure 11: Atrato River, 2002. Photograph: Jesús Abad Colorado



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