

NGOS and Memory in Colombia: The case of Medellín

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with analyzing the production of narratives of the past in different social contexts such as those to which the NGOs of Medellín have access. My approach to memory, from the concept of institutional memory, tries to understand the ways in which institutions such as NGOs occupy a place within the power structures and how they have an impact on the representations of the past. This thesis is organized into three chapters. The first chapter develops the theoretical framework of the thesis in which I argue the importance of the concept of institutional memory. In the second chapter, I seek to identify the origins of contemporary memory practices in Medellín. I concentrate on describing how the process of urbanization of Medellín made local memory practices very particular and noteworthy. Throughout this chapter, I unveil the historical links between the already mentioned organizational experiences and the contemporary interest in memory. And finally, in the third chapter, I examine a set of important institutional memory initiatives to demonstrate how neighborhood-based organizations were dispossessed of their own ways of remembering. In this chapter, I demonstrate that such practices entered into the civil society organization model promoted by NGOs and the local government. This work represents my interpretation of the process described. It contributes to a suggestive understanding of the processes regarding memory practices and commemoration over the past twenty years in Medellín.

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ACRONYMS

ANUC: The National Association of Peasant Land Users (La Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos de Colombia)

APP: Alliance for Progress (Alianza Para El Progreso)

CEHAP: Center of Habitat Studies (Centro Centro de Estudios del Habitat Popular)

CINEP: Centre for Research on Popular Education (Centro Popular de Investigación Popular)

COMFENALCO: The Family Benefit Fund of Colombia (Caja de Compensación Familiar de Colombia)

CNMH: National Center of Historical Memory (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica de Colombia)

CPPM: The Presidential Security Advisory Council on Medellín (Consejería Presidencial para Medellín)

CRIC: Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca in Colombia (Concejo Regional de Indígenas del Cauca)

EPL: Popular Liberation Army (Ejército Popular de Liberación),

EZLN: Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional),

ICT: Office of Planning and Territorial Credit Institute (Oficina de Crédito Territorial)

INCORA: Colombian Institute of Agrarian Reform (Instituto Colombiano de la Reforma Agraria)

INER: Institute of Regional Studies (Instituto de Estudios Regionales),

IPC: Popular Training Institute (Instituto para la Educación Popular)

JAC: Community Action Boards (Juntas de Acción Comunal)

M-19: The 19th of April Movement (Movimiento 19 de Abril)

MOVICE: Movement for Victims of State Crimes (Movimiento de Víctimas de Crímenes de Estado)

UP: Patriotic Union (Unión Patriótica)

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INTRODUCTION

Since 2005, with the creation of the Historical Memory Commission, and later in 2011 with the National Centre of Historical Memory (CNMH), both in Bogotá, people began to speak the "boom" of memory in Colombia. These institutions responded to the demands of thousands of victims of the Colombian political conflict in order to know the truth and demand justice from the state and the armed actors. Scholars and journalists spoke endlessly about such a boom. The importance of investigations and publications carried out by the CNMH is unquestionable. For the first time, the victims' testimonies were part of the national scene. However, I had doubts about the history of local practices in Medellín, which I knew about for a long time before the so-called boom, in particular, the project called the *Skin of Memory* in Barrio Antioquia, Medellín (1999). As a result, I became interested in developing a thesis to track the process of institutionalization and co-optation of memory practices by the state, which finds its highest expression in the CNMH. The case of Medellín allowed me to look at a local process and how civil society organizations such as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) —in partnership with local government— had instrumentalized memory in order to display their own institutional *ethos*. I became very interested in describing how social organizations, such as NGOs, make use of collective memory to be politically legitimized. NGOs offer a critical entry point for the analysis of memory since they allow an examination of patterns and meanings in the transnational flow of ideas, people, and resources as well as the changing relationships among citizens, civil society, and the state.¹

¹ William F. Fisher, "Doing Good? The Politics and Antipolitics of NGO Practices," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26 (1997): 439–64.

This thesis is concerned with analyzing the production of narratives of the past in different social contexts such as those to which the NGOs of Medellín have access. My approach to memory, from the concept of institutional memory, tries to understand the ways in which institutions such as the NGOs occupy a place within the power structures and how they have an impact on the representations of the past. In my work, NGOs are considered places of memory (Realms of Memory) whose fundamental purpose is to stop time, “to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things, to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial...in order to capture a maximum of meaning in the fewest of signs.”²

Research Design

The qualitative approach framing this project suggests that the problem of memory practices in the city of Medellín (Colombia) arises from substantive issues. As substantive, I understand those research issues emerging from the analysis of a specific sector of the social reality as they manifest themselves in practice and not from previous conceptualizations made by any of the social disciplines. In this sense, choosing memory as my topic responds to my personal interest in how memory informs identities and from my personal previous approaches to memory initiatives carried out by different NGOs in Medellín. That is why I took an interest in the personal and professional experiences of the interviewees in order to give a common thread to the story presented here. I was more concerned about the ways in which these groups of people understood the origins of the practices of memory in the city than to confirm the existing theories produced by scholars in fields like social memory studies or transitional justice. In that sense, I assumed a descriptive-inductive approach employing sources

² Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire,” *Representations* 26 (1989): 1–21.

used by the historians in order to investigate specific events and institutions. From this perspective, I produced an analysis of the past that sought to explain contemporary events.

My research aims to interpret and describe a historical process rather than provide its verification.

Under such logic, the design of the interviews responds to basic principles of qualitative research: What are the beliefs and feelings that identify people from NGOs in Medellín? How do these organizations handle power in relation to the groups over which they have a direct influence? What does memory mean for both the members of NGOs and social movements? The answers to these questions helped me, first, to confirm the importance of working on a particular case such as Medellín, and, second, to affirm the need to establish a sort of institutional approach to the issue of memory. To do so, I began from the fact—as stated in the theoretical framework—that memory today, is no longer a “space of experience” but a “horizon of expectations.”³ Throughout the thesis, I argue that the NGOs of Medellín have appropriated organizations’ and social movements’ practices of memory. That is why I have focused on how the members of the NGOs recall processes of institutionalization and how they naturalize the meanings of memory according to the objectives of the institutions for which they work. I chose the twelve interviewees because of their level of involvement as researchers, scholars, and activists. The categories of analysis emerged from observations and interviews that guided the process of collecting bibliographic information. The search for more and new theoretical sources was guided by my findings during the research. This involved a sustained and open review of related literature without intending to build a unique and closed framework of interpretation and analysis. Bibliographical information comes from different disciplines and specific fields of analysis seeking to build bridges between memory studies, history, and political economy.

³ Reinhert Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985).

Despite the fact that I know Medellín very well, it was necessary to do a sort of mapping —figuratively speaking— to be able to identify respondents' personal and professional trajectories. This 'mapping' allowed me to identify not only the actors but also the events and situations in which they have interacted, the variations of time, and the places in which they developed specific actions. This "social mapping" —as Howard Schwartz and Jerry Jacobs call it—allowed me to identify the source of the practices in social movements that took place in the 1980s; a circumstance which has not been made explicit by any publication so far in Colombia.⁴ Following the logical processes by qualitative research, I proceeded to select the places and the most significant moments in the process in order to demonstrate my main arguments. Throughout my fieldwork I had the opportunity to experience places and institutional logics, of which I had been completely unaware during the thirty years that I lived in Medellín.

Facing the dilemma of the depth and scope of this thesis, it was necessary to choose a homogeneous case to describe the logics of a subgroup. Consequently, many of the interviews were with members of the Corporación REGION. The members of this NGO —more than any other in the city— share personal and professional experiences in relation to practices of memory in Medellín. Corporación REGION is recognized as the NGO that has been most involved in the design and implementation of social intervention projects in which memory plays a fundamental methodological role.⁵ Despite the difficulties of distance and resources to conduct this research, this strategy allowed me to delve into the topic and write an innovative thesis. To understand the meaning I gave to the gathering of information,

⁴ Howard Schwartz and Jerry Jacobs, *Sociología Cualitativa: Método para la Reconstrucción de la Realidad* (México D.F.: Trillas, 1984).

⁵ Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*. (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1990).

it is important to say —as suggested by Grant David McCracken— how in qualitative research the person in charge of the process, "operates" as the main instrument for data collection and analysis⁶.

This reference to the role of the researcher is useful in three ways: first, because I could understand the history of the practices in Medellín based on my own experience in Medellín, to explain how the city had changed over the past thirty years; in the second place, because I began establishing contacts since June 2013, which helped me to build a good relationship with the interviewees. Having maintained this relationship for more than six months, gave the respondents the confidence to express the contradictions existing among the NGO where they work on the issue of memory practices; and finally, because after seven years outside Colombia, I could put some distance with the ideological stances generated by political conjunctures I experienced in Medellín and because I was seen by many not as a local but as a "foreigner" whom they could trust with information about the tensions between institutions.

Collecting the information through interviews was not determined by closed thematic frameworks. I conducted open and flexible interviews. The interviews started off from a very broad general question, which sought to trigger a fluid and spontaneous conversation. The function of the following questions was delving into my topic of study but starting from the particularities proposed by the respondents. This "framework" of the interview sought to avoid mistakes by social, cultural or personal ignorance. Interviews were also supported by a comprehensive guide that allowed me to put myself in the institutional reality explored. José Ignacio Ruiz Olabuénaga speaks of this kind of non-structured conversation as an in-depth interview. My goal was to understand rather than explain, maximize the

⁶ Grant David McCracken, *The Long Interview*, (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1988).

meanings, achieve a sincere subjective answer more than a really objective one, in order to capture emotions bypassing rationality.⁷

Regarding the storage of data, I resorted—in the first place—to a simple Word format in which I transcribed the interviews. From these transcripts, I could establish thematic groupings that later allowed me a different reading of the same data. From the interplay of these descriptive categories and the construction of second-order categories, I structured the subsequent synthesis and conceptualization of the data. To establish the relationship between the categories, I elaborated a very simple matrix of information in OneNote where I could also add pictures, recordings and accompanying texts. This grouping or ‘clustering’ technique allowed me to categorize and sort things, events, actors, processes, and scenarios that repeatedly were related to institutional memory practices. Once established the occurrence of reiterative themes, I proceeded to the final stage of conceptualization and theorizing. For Matthew Miles and Michael Huberman, for instance, the process of qualitative analysis should conduct the research from the empirical domains to the conceptual level, "the transition from the metaphors and their relationships to the initial theories."⁸

Content

This thesis is organized into three chapters. The first chapter develops the theoretical framework of the thesis in which I argue the importance of the concept of institutional memory. For this thesis, institutional memory is an analytical category capable of capturing the political nature of "memory-building" and "memory-keeping." This concept allowed me to identify the limitations of the concept of

⁷ José Ignacio Ruiz Olabuenaga, *La Decodificación de La Vida Cotidiana. Métodos de Investigación Cualitativa* (Bilbao: Universidad de Deusto, 1989), 170.

⁸ Matthew Miles and Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994), 298-306.

global memory. This thesis argues that the concept of cosmopolitan memory is 'overdimensioned'.⁹ This thesis coincides with the argument of Brian Conway that local memory enterprises are fundamental to the creation of narratives of memory in terms of a global frame of reference. Although memory does not escape the conditions implied by the world system, it is necessary to understand the local context in which memory is expressed and negotiated. Globalization is a process that cannot exist independently of the local and territory. The concept of institutional memory has the potential to capture the influence that political elites and civil society organizations have to give a particular meaning to the past and impose it on other members of society. In the second chapter, I seek to identify the origins of contemporary memory practices in Medellín. I concentrate on describing how the process of urbanization of Medellín made local memory practices very particular and noteworthy. From the processes of urbanization —illegal and improvised— new social movements arose, bringing with them identity claims. By the late 1970s and during the 1980s, the city's major NGOs emerged as a result of organizational experience and resistance in the city's popular neighborhoods. Throughout this chapter, I unveil the historical links between the already mentioned organizational experiences and the contemporary interest in memory. And finally, in the third chapter, I examine a set of important institutional memory initiatives to demonstrate how neighborhood-based organizations were dispossessed of their own ways of remembering. In this chapter, I demonstrate that such practices entered into the civil society organization model promoted by NGOs and the local government. This work represents my interpretation of the process described. It contributes to a suggestive understanding of the processes regarding memory practices and commemoration over the past twenty years in Medellín.

⁹ Brian Conway, "Local Conditions, Global Environment and Transnational Discourses in Memory Work: The Case of Bloody Sunday (1972)." *Memory Studies* 1, No. 2 (2008): 187–209.
<http://mss.sagepub.com/cgi/doi/10.1177/1750698007088385> .

CHAPTER ONE

Theory and Memory

1.1. What does memory mean today?

In recent years, memory has become a central concept that structures political and interdisciplinary research. Despite its indefinite nature, memory disputes the place that analytical tools such as class, gender or race, and concepts such as identity, hold today.¹⁰ Old notions that gave meaning to the definition of history such as nature, language, or culture have given way to memory, forcing historians to redefine the borders of their discipline just as scholars in other social fields have done. In other words, activists and scholars see memory today as the "connective structure of societies,"¹¹ as the structure that has informed the decisions that determine, a "present-future" as Reinhert Koselleck stated even though this is completely uncertain, or a "past present" determined by the end of the utopias.¹²

Humans experience a new form of collective memory and scholars had been aware of it since the dawn of the twentieth century. Walter Benjamin, Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, and even Eric Hobsbawm, were part of a generation marked by the shock of the Great War and obsession with memory. Febvre, following Nietzsche, emphasized the necessity of forgetting and considered the

¹⁰ Jay Winter, "The Memory Boom in Contemporary Historical Studies," *Raritan* 21, no. 1 (2001): 52.

¹¹ Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins, "Social Memory Studies: From 'Collective Memory' to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices," *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998): 105.

¹² Andreas Huyssen, "Present Pasts: Media, Politics, Amnesia," *Public Culture* 12, no. 1 (2000): 21–38.
<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/pc/summary/v012/12.1huyssen.html>.

historical discipline as “a way of organizing the past so that it does not weigh too heavily on the shoulders of men.”¹³ This generation also included Thomas Mann, Stefan Zweig and Marcel Proust in literature; Maurice Halbwachs in Sociology; and Frederic Bartlett, Charles Blondel and Lev Vygotsky in Psychology, all of whom began to lay the foundations for the social conception of memory. They, in turn, inherited an explicit concern for the subject during the turn of the century period, of which Henri Bergson's philosophy, Émile Durkheim's sociology, and Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis are clear examples. Despite these early efforts to understand memory, its flourishing as part of a research agenda took a long time to occur. In fact, the works of Pierre Nora, Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, David Lowenthal and Eric Rousso, go back no further than the 1980s when the impoverishment of the three major historiographical models, Historicism, Marxism and Positivism, as well as the need for new “forms of representation,” began to be evident.”¹⁴

This crisis of the major explanatory models of society was a reflection of the deep frustration against modern rationality, which had already been expressed because of the devastation left by the first and second world wars, the Holocaust, the wars of liberation in Africa and Asia, the Latin American dictatorships, and the Vietnam war. The horrors of war and suffering caused a shift in the contemporary experience of time, space and society making it necessary to represent and understand it differently. The failure of the Enlightenment project, the skepticism regarding the ideas of progress and the end of the unitary history gave way, as Gianni Vattimo stated, to a plurality of “levels and modes of reconstruction of the past in the consciousness and in the collective imagination.”¹⁵ To Eric Hobsbawm,

¹³ Lucien Febvre, *Combates por la Historia* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1986), 243-244

¹⁴ Kerwin Lee Klein, “On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse,” *Representations* No. 69 (2000): 127–150.

¹⁵ Gianni Vattimo et al., *En torno a la postmodernidad* (Barcelona: Anthropos, 1991), 9-19

it was not the crisis simply of a particular way of organizing societies but rather "a crisis in every way."¹⁶ This was the "time of astonishment" —as art historians call it— before the horror produced by poison gas, bombings, the European concentration camps, the atomic bomb and napalm, which left artists without the ability to explain what was happening.¹⁷ Figurative art, for example, had already run out of argumentative elements to explain acts of war such as the bombing of the Basque town of Guernica. According to Hobsbawm, the destruction of the past, or rather of the social mechanisms that linked one's contemporary experience with that of earlier generations, is one of the most characteristic and eerie phenomena of the late twentieth century.¹⁸

The recollections of victims were no longer irrevocably tied to traditional frameworks of memory such as the nation-state or the heroic, religious and family stories revolving around them. In fact, memory had transcended those frameworks to turn us all into witnesses to suffering.¹⁹ There is a need to account for the testimonies, to classify, reify, reproduce, and archive them. In this sense, Nora suggests that history destroyed memory as a social practice, as a milieu. According to Nora,

The fear that everything is on the verge of disappearing, coupled with anxiety about the precise significance of the present and uncertainty about the future, invests even the humblest testimony, the most modest vestige, with the dignity of being potentially memorable. Have we not often enough deplored the loss or destruction of what might have enabled us to know those who came before us, and so wish to avoid a similar reproach from those who will come after? Remembering has become a matter of meticulously minute reconstruction. Memory has begun to keep records: delegating the responsibility for remembering to the archive, it deposits its signs as the snake deposits its shed skin.²⁰

¹⁶ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991* (Buenos Aires: Grijalbo Mondadori Buenos Aires, 1998), 21.

¹⁷ José Andrés Rojo, "El Estupor es la Respuesta que Surge ante el Horror. Interview to the Art Historian Valeriano Boza," *El País*, January 15, 2005, http://elpais.com/diario/2005/01/15/cultura/1105743604_850215.html .

¹⁸ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, 13

¹⁹ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003).

²⁰ Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 8.

The Annales School in France, over three generations, opened the door for a "new social history" of everyday life that meant a break with the linear and anonymous processes and official accounts that were now challenged by those narratives that did not fit the heroic model of resistance of traditional frameworks of conflict.²¹ Let us remember the discussions held by Bloch and Febvre with Halbwachs on the use of collective memory in the 1920s. Indeed, as Jeffrey Olick explains, the relations between Halbwachs and Bloch were quite important for both the formation of Halbwachs's ideas and their transmission to the present. Bloch, for instance, encouraged Halbwachs to redefine his relationship to historiography.²² Also, Bloch contributed to the transmission of Halbwachs's ideas, both directly and institutionally. Bloch not only wrote a prominent review on Halbwachs's book *The Social Frameworks of Memory*, but also included a chapter on collective memory in his *Feudal Society* published in 1939 in which he extensively engaged with the concept, as well as with the Durkheim's work on "collective representations."²³ Yet, while "collective memory" was not a dominant topic in the work of Febvre with whom Bloch founded the Annales school of historiography, Halbwachs's idea of memory affected the development of that tradition. Both Bloch and Febvre were inspired by the Durkheimian tradition in developing what later came to be known as "total history," an approach that emphasized large structures and long-term transformations —*The Longue Durée*— over events in the short term —the "conjuncture."²⁴ Their emphasis on "ways of life" and particularly "mentalities" —which gave rise to the famous *History of Mentalities* in the 1960s and 1970s— was clearly related to Halbwachs's focus on topics like memory as well as by the Durkheimian ideas about "collective psychology."²⁵ Certainly, part

²¹ Winter, "The Memory Boom in Contemporary Historical Studies," 57.

²² Jeffrey K. Olick, "Introduction." In *The Collective Memory Reader*, eds. Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 22

²³ Marc Bloch, *La Sociedad Feudal* (Madrid: AKAL, 2002).

²⁴ Fernand Braudel, *La Historia Y Las Ciencias Sociales* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1970).

²⁵ George Duby, "Historia social e ideologías de las sociedades" In *Hacer la Historia*, eds. J. Le Goff y P. Nora (Barcelona: Laia, 1985), 157-177. Peter Burke, "Strengths and Weaknesses in the History of Mentalities" *History of European Ideas* 7, no. 5 (1986): 439-451. Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth Century Miller* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980)

of the re-emergence of memory in the 1980s was led by the third generation of Annalists such as Jacques LeGoff who wrote the influential *History and Memory* (1992); Philippe Ariès and Maurice Agulhon on funerary practices and the symbols of power respectively²⁶; and Nora's encyclopedia on *Lieux de Mémoire* of 1984-1992, published during the time of the French Revolution Bicentennial. This latter book, together with Yerushalmi's *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (1982), is, in fact, the most popular academic reference to pinpoint the origins of this contemporary memory boom.²⁷

By the end of the 1970s, and the beginnings of the 1980s, the "memories of present time" or "living memory" had attained a crucial relevance. In 1979, still in the midst of the Cold War, the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer argued that it was time to rescue the phenomenon of memory as a purely psychological faculty to be seen as an essential element of the "finite and historical human being"²⁸ while, in *The Return of Narrative*, the British historian Lawrence Stone described the end of the belief in the possibility of a coherent scientific explanation of the transformations of the past. Stone emphasized the importance of a narrative history able to analyze the subjective aspects of the tragic contemporary human existence.²⁹ Via the tape recorder and video camera, witnesses and victims of war now had a voice that transformed the sense of realism, truth and concurrency hitherto experienced by academics, particularly historians. Whereas the First World War had been represented by poetry and silent film, people experienced wars such as the Vietnam War in "real time," through television, from the scene of the incident, and through the voice of perpetrators and the victims; this represented

²⁶ Philippe Ariès, *Ensayos de la Memoria 1943-1983* (Bogotá: Norma, 1996) and *The Hour of our Death* (New York: Vintage, 2008).

²⁷ Nora's class was published in *La Nouvelle Histoire* (1978) directed by Jacques Le Goff and Roger Chartier. Also see: Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992); Michele Vovelle, *La Métamorphose de La Fête En Provence de 1750 À 1820* (Paris: Flammarion, 1976).

²⁹ Lawrence Stone, *El Pasado Y El Presente* (México D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1981).

the birth of the "tele-intimacy with death and destruction" as Susan Sontag called it.³⁰ Scholars faced a different kind of validation of testimony. The crisis of authority that historians experienced regarding traditional models and sources of historical research was expressed in 1987 by Hobsbawm in *The Age of Empire*, when, attracted by the distinction between lived history and written history, he writes, "where historians try to come to grips with a period which has left surviving eyewitnesses, two quite different concepts of history clash, or, in the best of cases, supplement each other: the scholarly and the existential, archive and personal memory."³¹ The deployment of mass media; the building of monuments, museums and documentary, photographic, and audiovisual archives; war commemorations in Atlantic Europe and the United States; well-funded research centers; and the empowerment of exiled European academics in American universities were some of the factors that made possible the existence of a new audience and, with it, a cultural industry and a dramaturgy that gave meaning and coherence to new narratives as the Holocaust, slavery, and the war in Vietnam.

1.2. New Politics of Identity

However, the origins of the memory boom cannot be reduced to a postmodern academic account of the crisis of linear time. Another major precondition to explain the interest in memory was the politics of identity that emerged as a set of counter-hegemonic narratives that challenged the false generalizations of Eurocentric and imperialist history about what constitutes the past.³² In the 1970s and 1980s, new social movements and protests about peace, nuclear energy, equality of political, racial, and ethnic rights, local autonomy, gay rights and feminist movements, transformed the classical

³⁰ Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 21

³¹ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of the Empire. 1875-1914* (Barcelona: Labor, 1989), 4.

³² Winter, "The Memory Boom in Contemporary Historical Studies," 55. Also: Charles Hale, "Cultural Politics of Identity in Latin America," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26 no. 1 (October 1997): 568.
<http://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev.anthro.26.1.567>.

nationalist, popular, and class claims.³³ The new politics of identity accounted, through memory, for distinct social trajectories and narratives of oppression. For the new social movements, ethnic groups and civil society, the act of telling what they remembered would mean henceforth to be taken into account by distant others. According to the communications scholar Jesús Martín-Barbero, there is no identity without narrative as this is not only expressive but constitutive of who we are.³⁴

In Latin America, the rise of indigenous movements in the 1970s provides a concrete example of the presence of identity claims in the new global scene. These movements centered on building recognition of their identity, their memories and their own ways of narrating the time, nature, and the world. From the "Declaration of Barbados" in 1971, organizations such as the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca in Colombia (CRIC), Neuquén Mapuche Indigenous Confederation in Argentina, the Katarista Movement in Bolivia, the Aguaruna-Huambisa Congress in Peru, the Federación Shuar in Ecuador among many others, were strengthened by their criticism of the liberal model for which the indigenous question was reduced to the problem of poverty and underdevelopment, and whose solution was an assimilationist model through education and technological progress; and of the rejection of the Marxist explanation which via political activism or insurgency understood the indigenous population as an economically oppressed class who should fight alongside other deprived classes.³⁵

Academics and activists generally agree that three general causes facilitated the revitalization of indigenous movements and, in general, the so-called "new social movements." These were their

³³ Francesca Polletta and James M. Jasper, "Collective Identity and Social Movements," *Annual Review of Sociology* 27, no. 1 (August 2001): 286. <http://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev.soc.27.1.283>.

³⁴ Jesús Martín-Barbero, "Comunicación: Agenda Intercultural," *Chasqui. Revista Latinoamericana de Comunicación* no. 102 (2008): 22. <http://www.revistachasqui.com/index.php/chasqui/login>.

³⁵ Julio Ruiz Murrieta, "Identidad Cultural Indígena, Pluralismo Cultural y Ciudadanía Multicultural En América Latina," *UNESCO: Management of Social Transformations (MOST) Programme* (2014): 1-11. <http://www.unesco.org/most/wsf/murrieta.pdf>.

participation in the transition from dictatorships to democratic systems where they got involved in electoral processes, the multicultural nature of constitutions such as those of Nicaragua (1987), Brazil (1988), and Colombia (1991) which normatively recognized the right to identity and autonomy, and particularly by the confluence of these organizational processes in the celebrations of the 500th anniversary of the discovery of America (1987-1992) when a myriad of narratives and different perspectives on the history of colonialism took place.

Despite the open opposition of indigenous organizations, the celebration of the fifth centenary of Columbus' "discovery" inserted them for the first time in a discussion about the overall defense of the right of peoples to autonomy and the acknowledgement of their ancestral knowledge and memories as World Heritage. The organization, resources,³⁶ and the network of institutions and groups around the celebration —whether in favor or against it— gave the indigenous movements a greater capacity and a wider sphere of action to renegotiate their position with nation-states, non-Indian national society, and international organizations.³⁷ For instance, thanks to the lobbying capacity and political pressure that indigenous organizations had achieved since the early 1970s, in 1992, UNESCO declared that the discovery of the Americas was a mutual discovery of all peoples; it was the birth of a "new global consciousness." A year later, in 1993, the United Nations declared a year of all indigenous peoples.³⁸ Such statements also responded to the open rejection by indigenous people of the celebration of a historical process which they soon termed as genocide. The Peruvian Indian Movement Tawantinsuyu asked Spain to pay almost \$600 million in compensation for having perpetrated a "genocide never seen

³⁶ Only the Spanish government through the Spanish International Cooperation Agency invested about 14 billion pesetas on the celebration: Walther Bernecker, "El Aniversario Del 'Descubrimiento' de América en el Conflicto de Opiniones." In *El Peso Del Pasado. Percepciones de América Y V Centenario*, eds. Walther Gustav Bernecker, José Manuel López de Abiada, and G. Siebenmann, (Madrid: Verbum, 1996), 25.

³⁷ José Emilio Rolando Ordoñez Cifuentes, "A Propósito Del V Centenario Y La Reacción de Los Pueblos Indios." In *Rostros de Las Prácticas Etnocidas En Guatemala. Cuadernos Constitucionales México-Centroamérica*, 24 (México D.F.: UNAM, 1996): 176. <http://biblio.juridicas.unam.mx/libros/1/174/1.pdf>.

³⁸ Bernecker, "El Aniversario Del 'Descubrimiento' de América En El Conflicto de Opiniones", 25.

before in world history," or as the Bolivian indigenous organization Tribunal de los Derechos Indios (Tribunal of Indian Rights) who, in response to court cases and truth commissions that had occurred worldwide, filed a suit against Spain and the Vatican, for the crimes of the Conquest and evangelization before the International Court in The Hague.³⁹ Through those claims and another campaigns and meetings such as the Continental Campaign 500 years of Indigenous and Popular Resistance in Bogotá in 1990; the Second Continental Meeting of Indigenous, Black, and Popular Resistance in Xelajú (Guatemala) in 1991; the Indigenous Parliament of America in Ottawa in 1991; the declaration of 1992 as the International Year of indigenous, black and popular resistance, and Rigoberta Menchú's Nobel Peace Prize in 1992; the struggle for indigenous identity and memory in the continent had gained a place from which demands for the establishment of a different international order have continued.⁴⁰

Within the same context of democratization and liberalization of the economy and Latin American politics, human rights movements made their appearance with a very special feature: their claims were focused on the fight for the missing —initially in Argentina and Chile, and in denouncing the persecution and extermination of members of leftist parties and opposition by the military dictatorships or agents of democratic governments as occurred with UP (Patriotic Union) in Colombia. Such claims produced a type of associative networks different from other movements embedded in the politics of identity. These movements, writes Elizabeth Jelin, responded to an uncertain damage that demanded a kind of indeterminate justice because everything that could be said about it is that "something had

³⁹ Sandra Patricia Rodríguez, "Conmemoraciones Del Cuarto Y Quinto Centenario Del '12 de Octubre de 1492': Debates Sobre La Identidad Americana," *Revista de Estudios Sociales* 38 (Enero 2011): 64–75. <http://res.uniandes.edu.co/view.php/676/index.php?id=676>. While writing this chapter, The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) meeting in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines presented progress in its plan to claim financial compensation for slavery and genocide of native peoples to the governments of the United Kingdom, France, Spain, Portugal, and the Netherlands. See also: http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2013/09/20/actualidad/1379648861_372374.html

⁴⁰ José Emilio Rolando Ordoñez Cifuentes, "A Propósito Del V Centenario y La Reacción de Los Pueblos Indios," 24.

happened." In this sense, since then, the task of these movements was to establish "what really happened" and particularly to make sure that whatever had happened was never forgotten.⁴¹ Its claim to keep the memory of the missing and killed people alive would be an unmistakable feature of these movements. Since this was not the type of claim taken into account in any previous national or popular project, the human-rights movements and of victims of state, enunciated memory not only at the local level, or as an essentialist narrative of indigenous peoples, but also from a cosmopolitan viewpoint that expressed a global consciousness for the defense of human rights. This internalization of globalization, according to Ulrich Beck, occurs when global concerns provide both a political and moral framework for local experiences.⁴²

The emergence of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), in 1991, represents a third landmark that gave visibility and attention not only to the indigenous movement but also to other movements that demanded the recognition of collective memory.⁴³ With the logic of cultural industries, the existence of the internet and an increasing number of radio and television stations programmed and managed by the communities themselves, the Zapatista movement managed to make visible the values associated with their collective memory.⁴⁴ The establishment of impressive transnational networks of solidarity by the Zapatista cause through alternative media, the EZLN made possible a different consideration of historical temporalities. It also demonstrated that these organizations and

⁴¹ Elizabeth Jelin, "The Politics of Memory. The Human Rights Movement and the Construction of Democracy in Argentina," *Latin American Perspectives* 21, no. 81 (1994): 38–58.

⁴² Ulrich Beck, "The Cosmopolitan Society and Its Enemies," *Theory, Culture & Society* 19 (no. 1) (February 2002): 18. <http://www.ingentaselect.com/rpsv/cgi-bin/cgi?ini=xref&body=linker&reqdoi=01>, 2002): 17–44.

⁴³ Martín-Barbero, "Comunicación: Agenda Intercultural," 22. El EZLN apareció el primero de enero de 1994, el mismo día en que el NAFTA tomó efecto. The New York Times called the Zapatista rebellion the first "post-modern" revolution. Also see: Thomas Olesen, *International Zapatismo: The Construction of Solidarity in the Age of Globalization* (London: Zed Books, 2005).

⁴⁴ Martín-Barbero, "Comunicación: Agenda Intercultural", 23.

movements could mobilize different resources in relation to a political opportunity.⁴⁵ The EZLN first opened up a new kind of political action in Latin America that distinguished memory as one of the many expressions of identity and understood memory as a potential negotiating tool. Régine Robin, referring to the Zapatista movement, said, "We have to save the memory of past struggles against forgetting."⁴⁶ In August 1999, in a major national meeting regarding the defense of cultural heritage, those assembled by the Zapatistas to call a halt to the ongoing proposal of a Cultural Heritage Act, which sought to privatize the historical heritage of Mexico, Subcomandante Marcos spoke explicitly about how memory would become synonymous with the strength of Latin American social movements in subsequent years:

Brothers and sisters who have come to the National Meeting in Defence of the Cultural Heritage, you probably remember the words that we used in the public appeal with which we called for this meeting. In case you don't, I shall repeat them. They say, 'In defence of memory'. This is why we are here. This is why we have brought ourselves together. We can't allow our memory to be sold. This is not just because by losing it we would start to lose irredeemably our own selves, but also because memory is the only hope which we have been left —with it and through it— to create our future.

If today we are on the defensive, this is because the day is still dominated by evil and wickedness. Because the night is still the privileged space of memory. But also because the night of memory is the site where a new day is already taking shape...and announcing itself.

The time will come in which we will put an end to and expel both evil and wickedness. There will be no corner of the night or the day for them. They won't even reach our memory or remembrance. They will be what they already are, a nightmare. Only, such a nightmare will be finally over.

Brothers and sisters, it is the time for words, yet again. Let's create the best space we can for them (the space that is and will always be inside us) and let them find and meet us.

⁴⁵ Ilse Scherer-Warren, "Redes Sociales y de Movimientos En La Sociedad de La Información," *Nueva Sociedad* 196 (2005): 77–92. <http://www.nuso.org/revista.php?n=196>. Clifford Bob, "International Zapatismo: The Construction of Solidarity in the Age of Globalization - Edited by Thomas Olesen," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 26 no.1 (2007): 140-141. http://resolver.scholarsportal.info/resolve/02613050/v26i0001/140_iztcosogebto.

⁴⁶ Régine Robin, *La Memoria Saturada* (Paris: Stock, 2003), 337

Let speak, then, all who are different. Let them speak and meet memory; let them conspire with memory and through memory let them carve a better future: tomorrow. This is the word of the Zapatistas: in defence of cultural heritage and for everyone...⁴⁷

What the EZLN, and movements that are part of this new form of political action, began to make evident was the emergence of a kind of *strategic essentialism*, as defined by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.⁴⁸ These movements and social organizations developed conscious "essentialist" rhetoric as a political strategy rather than eternal truths. Charles Hale writes that it is crucial to understand that this essentialism is inherent to all speeches and actions and therefore our questions should be focused on who is using this essentialism, how it is presented, and where its effects are concentrated.⁴⁹ The approach proposed by Hale is interesting because it places this analysis in the middle ground between the purely discursive analysis and the purely economic structural language that predominates in the analysis of globalization. It is also necessary to emphasize the fact that the place that both social movements and memory discourses occupy depends heavily on the networks to which they have access and the strategies, mobilization and availability of human, informational, financial and institutional resources. This "opportunity structure" made available a common vocabulary with which to refer to the prevailing economic system, the environmental crisis, war and its victims, and human rights. The aforesaid vocabulary, in turn, is localized and naturalized even though it responds to a global framework of concern. Olick notes that one of the features of the contemporary memory boom is precisely the naturalization and location of such phenomena as unique, which then requires us to understand the different temporalities and multiple realities of these processes of appropriation and

⁴⁷ Pier Paolo Frassinelli and Maggie Ronayne, "In Defence of Memory: The Struggle for the Past and the Present in Chiapas," *World Archaeological Bulletin* 12 (2010): 64–78.

<http://www.worldarchaeologicalcongress.org/site/bulletin/wab12/Frassinelli.html>.

⁴⁸ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," In *Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1987): 197–221.

⁴⁹ Hale, "Cultural Politics of Identity in Latin America," 578.

occupation of a space of discursive power.⁵⁰ Resorting to concepts such as genocide, barbarism, forgetfulness, forgiveness, or slogans like "Never Again!" (¡Nunca Mas!) are just samples of how words travel to denote a specific reality in which they are divested of the place and the context in which were first enunciated.

But, also, what the use of these vocabularies shows, as in the case of the celebration of the quincentennial is that different landscapes of memory began to overlap and even dispute moral superiority. Let us remember the statement of the Peruvian Indian Movement Tawantinsuyu that the Spanish conquest was the worst genocide in the history of mankind. Following Jay Winter, the imprecise use of the term "collective memory" in every corner of contemporary arts and humanities, and particularly the use made of memory, in most cases, simply as an independent variable in the analysis of social movements and organizations of civil society has convinced me to abandon any undertaking seeking its definition.⁵¹ As Olick puts it, "memory is not a thing, but a process. Indeed, because all social life is process and flux, memory is particularly important."⁵² Hence, this thesis focuses on how social organizations, such as NGOs, make use of collective remembrance in order to be politically legitimized. This analytical perspective allows me to understand, at a defined place and time, what these social organizations are trying to do with memory when they publicly, through institutional and organizational networks of solidarity, try to invoke the past. Accessing these networks constitutes a condition of possibility so that the collective memory of a specific cluster of individuals and institutions —within a specific territory— is recognized. As suggested by Eşref Aksu, it is very difficult

⁵⁰ European Network Remembrance and Solidarity, "What memory for what past. What theory for what memory? Closing remarks by prof. Jeffrey Olick", YouTube video, 28:41, posted Mar 7, 2008, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UF8uR6Z6KLc>.

⁵¹ Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2006), 5.

⁵² Jeffrey K. Olick, "Products, Processes, and Practices: A Non-Reificatory Approach to Collective Memory." *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 31, no. 1 (2006): 5–14. <http://btb.sagepub.com/content/36/1/5>.

for the actors in the world of politics to act alone without access to resources that networks provide. It is easier, however, for elite institutions like states, NGOs, think-tanks, and some individuals, to maintain relationships focused on memory claims.⁵³ Memory today, according to Koselleck, is no longer a “space of experience” but a “horizon of expectation.”⁵⁴ Regarding the specific case of Medellín, Colombian researchers Soledad Betancur and Omar Urán have stressed that collective action in the city is globalized, “to the extent that the survival of the organization depends heavily on the management of international resources. Within the region, the multiplicity of NGOs and the scarcity of resources provided by the state and private actors makes almost impossible to finance a lasting action.”⁵⁵

Some agendas —Aksu asserts— can, in a sense, be mediated and pursued more efficiently due to the interactions of these organized elites. There is no doubt, for instance, that the extermination of millions of Jews, the slave trade and the events of 9/11 were atrocious deeds against humanity. However, the way in which modern society relates to these tragedies around the world is not necessarily a sign of collectivity.⁵⁶ Placing only some dramatic events at the center of global reflections on memory downplays the ability of societies to remember, share, and own more than just spectacular or traumatic events. The selection of such events as episodes that mankind must remember has profound implications for political and media power.⁵⁷ These circumstances place memory on a symbolic battlefield in which individuals, states, ethnic groups, institutions, and organizations of civil society,

⁵³ Eşref Aksu, “Global Collective Memory: Conceptual Difficulties of an Appealing Idea,” *Global Society* 23, no. 3 (July 2009): 317–332. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13600820902958584#.U12gAhusiSo>.

⁵⁴ Reinhert Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985).

⁵⁵ Ibid. María Soledad Betancur, Angela Stienen, and Omar Urán, “Construir Capital Social para Configurar Un Entorno Innovador En Condiciones de Debilidad Político-Institucional.” In *Globalización: Cadenas Productivas y Redes de Acción Colectiva: Reconfiguración Territorial y Nuevas Formas de Pobreza y Riqueza En Medellín y el Valle de Aburrá*, ed. María Soledad Betancur (Bogotá: Tercer Mundo, 2001), 254.

⁵⁶ Richard Ned Lebow, “The Memory of Politics in Postwar Europe.” In *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*, eds. Richard Claudio Lebow, Kansteiner Wolf, and Fogu (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 1–64.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

whether local or transnational, struggle with the imposition, prevalence, or the survival of their stories within existing comprehensive frameworks of meaning such as the nation-state —despite its own exhaustion.

It should not be forgotten, however, that a comprehensive view of the problem is necessary to look at the power struggles, discrimination and subjugation among "subaltern" or "oppressed" subjects.

Indeed, the ways in which subaltern subjects is used the same memories and the same resources to legitimize their control over other subaltern subjects, are an overlooked issue. It is necessary to take into consideration that a very important dimension of identity building is the acknowledgment of the historical memory of the close others. A reading of the silences that make possible the constitution of any identity and political memory is needed. My approach to the problem of collective memory in the city of Medellín is based precisely on the fact that collective memory acts as a syncretic, unstable, and strategic expression of memory. Without the global context, NGOs' political legitimacy, for instance, is in danger of vanishing. In this regard, Winter insists when he says that "If the term "collective memory" has any meaning at all, it is the process through which different collectives, from groups of two to groups in their thousands, engage in acts of remembrance together. When such people lose interest, or time, or for any other reason cease to act; when they move away, or die, then the collective dissolves, and so do collective acts of remembrance. This is what Halbwachs meant when he wrote his seminal work on *Les Cadres Sociaux de la Mémoire* in 1925."⁵⁸

The fact is that along with the most recent processes of globalization, culture has undergone a profound change in terms of the experience and sensibility about time, and therefore it is necessary to provide an explanation about how groups have made use of memory locally. It is important to look at

⁵⁸ Winter, *Remembering War*, 4

the details of local trajectories within the context of "Globalization" of memory.⁵⁹ The Colombian case will show that it is necessary to discuss the specific local trajectories and its details such as the role played by "privileged institutions" such as NGOs, and particularly the way in which these civil society organizations serve to institutionalize collective acts of memories within the framework of the nation-state.

1.3. Institutional Memory

With globalization there was a profound restructuring process of the basic structures of society, and thereby the actual capacity of contemporary states to produce narratives that draw together people within its specific territory. Globalization seems to be the era of multiple temporalities. There are now many ways of experiencing time, of interacting simultaneously with no fixed time frame. Collective memory —created by nations as an intersubjective phenomenon to legitimize their institutions— was affected by the growing need of these states to establish alliances and agreements with other states and transnational organizations. These alliances and agreements between states were aimed at defending and promoting political structures that facilitated not only a model of economic exchange but also the security and the very existence of its territory and the citizens who identified with it. When the collective memories of social groups were exposed to global frameworks they began first to absorb different vocabularies and narratives about war, peace and the environment, and then second, to spaces within which the actors had to fight for a place of recognition. As already stated, when people were in contact with these "global territories" through networks of support and solidarity, the collective

⁵⁹ Roland Robertson, "Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity." In *Global Modernities*, eds. Scott Lash, Roland Robertson and Mike Featherstone (London: SAGE, 1995): 25–44.
<http://www.worldhistory.pitt.edu/DissWorkshop2011/documents/rolandrobertsonglobalization.pdf>.

memory of a specific cluster of individuals and institutions —within a specific territory— began to be recognized.

According to Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, the emergence of a global consciousness has allowed the development of *cosmopolitan memory* that effectively transcended the state's role as the central producer of memories. These cosmopolitan memories serve as a backdrop on which it is possible to negotiate globalization and its risks.⁶⁰ For these authors, memories of the Holocaust have facilitated the formation of such transnational cultures of memory that have the ability to become the cultural basis for human rights policies. However, the concept of cosmopolitan memory has been overestimated by authors such as Levy and Sznaider. As this thesis will show, discourses of global consciousness are determined by institutions, organizations and elite actors —carrier groups— who ultimately define the degree of legitimacy of other discourses and the artificial extension of the historical experiences which all human beings should accept as their own. I agree with Conway's criticism of Levy and Sznaider's overestimation of the extent of cosmopolitan memory.⁶¹ Levy and Sznaider's thesis on a global language memory seems to exist without a framing context. We need to know how the new global language is built at the local level through, for instance, museums and forms of embodied experience such as marches and processions. These are the result of decades of intense reflection on the meaning of memory in places such as Medellín. Starting in the 1980s, urban grassroots organizations began to think of memory as a way of expressing political needs or discontent although it was only in the mid-2000s when scholars and activists started to talk about the Colombian memory boom.

⁶⁰ Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006.), 35

⁶¹ Conway, "Local Conditions, Global Environment and Transnational Discourses in Memory Work: The Case of Bloody Sunday (1972)".

It is essential to analyze the logic shaping the choices memory entrepreneurs —as Conway calls them—make about how the past should be remembered. I agree with Conway's argument that local memory entrepreneurs are fundamental to the creation of memory narratives in terms of a global framework of reference.⁶² That is to say, even though memory does not escape the conditions of power implied by the world system, it is crucial to understand the local context in which memory is expressed and negotiated. Globalization is a process that cannot exist independently of the local and a particular region. As Santiago Castro-Gómez says, when speaking of "global territories," we are referring to processes that occur "within" specific subjectivities and locations.⁶³ The agents of globalization, the "carriers" or "entrepreneurs" of global memory are social actors who are part of specific support networks from which they work to redefine the role of collective identity based on the interests of the groups to which they belong. It is important to remember that memory, in any dimension, be it global or local, is a place of power and competition. It is within memory that the narratives of certain social groups and institutions are more valued than others. Even when globalization de-locates and re-locates, this process does involve the construction of new power hierarchies. It is—in essence— a new distribution of privileges and exclusions "of possibilities and despair, of freedom and slavery."⁶⁴

Authors and analysts have questioned the nature of the concept of cosmopolitanism —typical of the analysis of globalization— because it corresponds to a global culture of upper classes. For authors such as Craig Calhoun and Barbara Mitzal, cosmopolitanism usually underestimates the social

⁶² Ibid., 191. Conway also uses the terms 'memory entrepreneurs', 'memory choreographers', and 'memory makers'.

⁶³ Santiago Castro-Gómez and Eduardo Mendieta, *Teorías Sin Disciplina. Latinoamericanismo, Postcolonialidad y Globalización en Debate* (México: Miguel Ángel Porrúa, 1998), 10.

<http://people.duke.edu/~wmignolo/InteractiveCV/Publications/Teoriassindisciplina.pdf>.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 10

movements and identity claims within the context of the nation-state.⁶⁵ According to Calhoun, nation-states remain as the main source of solidarity, particularly for those less educated, excluded and oppressed.⁶⁶ In this regards, cosmopolitan memory is unable to resolve the tensions between social organizations and movements that are directing their political claims through both the nation-state and the universalism of human rights. Along these lines, Gilberto Giménez argues that:

Regarding the relationship between globalization processes and collective identities, we must immediately disregard the idea of a global memory. Just as there is no one global culture, but a globalized culture in the sense of an increasing interconnectedness between all cultures under communication technologies, there cannot be a global identity, because there is not a homogeneous culture that can sustain it nor common symbols that serve to express or collective memory that can nurture or otherness with which to confront the same scale.⁶⁷

There is no fully homogeneous and standardized culture or a fully decentralized and pluralistic culture. While identities can be quietly subjected to a process of standardization through the universal offer of the same products and the same messages, it also generates a counter-movement—as Mario Margulis proposes—an affirmative reaction of local identity.⁶⁸ This forces us to pay attention and to positively evaluate the memories linked to region, which although they are transformed, equally resist the homogenizing waves of globalization. Just as Martín-Barbero argues, "Supported in their techno-economic dimensions, globalization triggers a process of global interconnection, connecting everything that informational and instrumentally has worth like companies, institutions, individuals, while

⁶⁵ Craig Calhoun, *Nations Matter: Culture, History, and the Cosmopolitan Dream* (London: Routledge, 2007). Barbara Mitzal, "Collective Memory in a Global Age: Learning How and What to Remember," *Current Sociology* 58, no. 1 (January 20, 2010): 24–44. doi: 10.1177/0011392109348544.

⁶⁶ Calhoun, *Nations Matter*, 1. Sarah Radcliffe and Sallie Westwood, *Remaking the Nation. Place, Identity, and Politics in Latin America* (London: Routledge, 1996).

⁶⁷ Gilberto Giménez, "Cultura, Identidad Y Metropolitanismo Global," *Revista Mexicana de Sociología*, 67, no. 3 (2005): 505. <http://www.revistas.unam.mx/index.php/rms/article/view/6029>.

⁶⁸ María Elena Figueroa Díaz, "Políticas Culturales Para El Desarrollo En Un Contexto Mundializado," *Política y Cultura* 26 (2006): 174. <http://scielo.unam.mx/pdf/polcul/n26/n26a8.pdf>.

disconnecting everything with no value because of commercial reasons."⁶⁹ In this way, it is possible to separate the analysis of memory from the problem of isolation, exclusion, marginalization, and structural poverty, which appear subsumed by "globalizing" discourses such as those of human rights, democracy and victimization. In that vein, this thesis follows Arjun Appadurai's idea of globalization "from below" which is founded on social movements that proceed independently of the actions of corporate capital.⁷⁰

One of the main objectives of this thesis is to break with the traditional dichotomies between global and local structures of power in the analysis of social memory in Latin America, particularly in Colombia. In terms of memory, the case of the Holocaust—as suggested by Levy and Sznajder—certainly serves to exemplify the dilemma caused by the tension between the global frameworks of memory, the local scales in which memory operates, and the way in which discourses on human rights are instrumentalized.⁷¹ However, what this thesis aims to identify is the way in which discourses and global carriers negotiate with local sensitivities in order to give a new political direction to the memory claims within social frameworks such as the nation-state. This thesis attempts to confront the question of who owns memory and who determines its politics; among memory scholars, this is a question that has been systematically overlooked. In order to characterize the historical trajectories of civil society organizations like the NGOs in Medellín, I use the concept of institutional memory, which is more appropriate because it allows the demonstration of conditions of power, and the contradictions implicit

⁶⁹ Jesús Martín-Barbero, "Desarrollo y Cultura o La Globalización Desde Abajo." In *Cultura Y Desarrollo. Un Compromiso Para La Libertad y El Bienestar*, ed. Alfons Martinell, (Madrid: Siglo XXI Editores, 2010), 27

⁷⁰ Arjun Appadurai, "Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination," *Public Culture*, 12, no. 1 (2000): 3. http://muse.jhu.edu.proxy.library.carleton.ca/journals/public_culture/v012/12.1appadurai.pdf

⁷¹ Natan Sznajder and Daniel Levy, "The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory," *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 1 (2002): 87–106. <http://journals2.scholarsportal.info.proxy.library.carleton.ca/tmp/16512610508557652384.pdf>.

in interactions of local and global actors and the institutions that ultimately legitimize narratives of memory, human rights, victims, and historical truths.

The concept of institutional memory has the potential to capture the influence that political and cultural elites and civil society organizations have in order to give a particular meaning to the past and impose it on other members of society. Institutional memory is itself an analytical category capable of capturing the political nature of "memory-building" and "memory-keeping." As Aksu suggests, institutional memory can also help us understand the creation, continuous adaptation, and active interconnection of organizational memories in search of particular political agendas.⁷² According to Charlotte Linde, these organizational memories consist of "paradigmatic narratives" which are those stories that members of an institution tell each other in order to explain the origins and history of their institutions and how that particular history affects the life of both individuals and the community for which they work.⁷³

Another factor that determines the importance of a concept such as institutional memory is that it enables us to recognize how the political uses of memory are constructed. In the Colombian political context, for instance, civil society organizations have recently occupied symbolic spaces left by a nation-state that is no longer able to produce binding narratives. Based on the recognition of those spaces that civil society organizations have come to institutionalize memory discourses, the *Museo Casa de la Memoria* (The House of Memory Museum) in Medellín is a very important example of how local authorities, supported by civil society organizations, claim to fill the symbolic space left by the national master narratives. These historical accounts were unable to explain —and include— what

⁷² Eşref Aksu, "Global Collective Memory: Conceptual Difficulties of an Appealing Idea," *Global Society* 23, no. 3 (July 2009): 323. doi: 10.1080/13600820902958584.

⁷³ Charlotte Linde, *Working the Past: Narrative and Institutional Memory*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.). doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195140286.001.0001. The interviews conducted for this research sought to identify specifically the way in which members of institutions such as the Corporation REGION understood the history of memory practices of their own institution, the regularities of that history, and the differences.

was the role of “subalterns” and “victims” in the history of the city during the last thirty years. The concept provides a more manageable and narrow approach to the analysis of the memory and the mechanisms of “memory-building” and “memory-keeping” used by social organizations. In other words, institutional memory promises better possibilities to analyze the problem of the institutionalization of memory.⁷⁴ By concentrating people, ideas, associations, networks and resources from the global system, NGOs are a clear example of how institutional memory operates.⁷⁵

Since the late 1970s, Latin American NGOs have become a unique form of social organization linked particularly to social and civic movements, local and national governments and transnational cooperation and advocacy networks. As platforms that serve their actors to reformulate discourses of development and democratization, NGOs can be seen as a reaction to the global integration by individuals struggling to find forms of associating that serve their needs.⁷⁶ NGOs, according to William Fisher, offer a critical entry point for the analysis of memory since they allow an examination of patterns and meanings in the transnational flow of ideas, people, and resources as well as the changing relationships among citizens, civil society, and the state.⁷⁷ For this thesis, NGO activists are key players in the construction of identities and modernities in developing countries like Colombia. I seek to understand how NGO activists and academics have influenced the understanding of the recent past in the city of Medellín. In order to show how the NGO activists in Medellín have managed to build and legitimize a political discourse on memory, I focused on the social spaces in which they are located. Such spaces—in the way I see them—are marked by tensions between the multiple modernities

⁷⁴ Aksu, “Global Collective Memory: Conceptual Difficulties of an Appealing Idea,” 323.

⁷⁵ Henry D. Delcore, “Nongovernmental Organizations and the Work of Memory in Northern Thailand,” *American Ethnologist* 30, no. 1 (2013): 76. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3805209>.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 61

⁷⁷ William F. Fisher, “Doing Good? The Politics and Antipolitics of NGO Practices,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26 (1997): 439–64.

taking place in Colombia, the family histories of activists, and the professional networks to which those activists have access.

Although many scholars emphasize the need to define an object of interest in research about memory and the ways in which memory becomes embodied, I am more concerned with the production of narratives of the past within the social contexts in which NGOs have gained influence. As Thomas Abercrombie asserts, "Recollecting and commemorating the past always takes place in contingent contexts where power is at play. As a result, alternative forms of social memory and alternative possibilities for construing the social are always in contention."⁷⁸

My approach to memory, and in particular to institutional memory, attempts to understand how the place that institutions or organizations as the NGOs hold within the social structures of power and impact the representations of the past. In this sense, I consider NGOs places of memory (*Lieu de Mémoire*) whose fundamental purpose is to stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things, to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial...in order to capture a maximum of meaning in the fewest of signs."⁷⁹ An important key to analyze the memory work by NGOs in Medellín is to contextualize it within the idea of development, democracy and the critique of developmentalism. The idea of development, for instance, is critical to understand the how the past is built in a place like Medellín. from the time of its emergence in the 1980s, local NGOs have consistently suggested through the idea of developing the necessity of transforming an "unviable present" into "a present past" that informs and legitimizes the civil society and its future. Since then —I argue— the conditions to

⁷⁸ Thomas Abercrombie, *Pathways of Memory and Power: Ethnography and History among an Andean People* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 21.

⁷⁹ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire," *Representations* 26 (1989): 1–21.

speak of a Colombian "memory boom" began to arise. This "boom," however, is no stranger to the local competition for occupying a place within transnational networks of support or to the tension between politics of memory of an essentially centralist character. The creation of the CNMH in Bogotá began a process of centralization and co-optation of international cooperation resources that hierarchically organize the memory work and the access of other institutions such as local NGOs to projects and resources. There is a process of institutionalization that puts at risk local and genuinely democratic expressions of remembrance.

CHAPTER TWO

Social Movements, NGOs and Practices of Memory

Until the 1970s, inspired by the developmentalist ideology of progress, many Colombian researchers thought that globalization would bring social and cultural uniformity to a nation fragmented by years of violence and exclusion. For them, developmentalism meant the transformation of traditional societies into modern communities leaving out the deepest cultural differences. Historians, for instance, endlessly repeated the need to understand the recent history of Colombia from the point of view of the relative success of the European nation-states. This developmentalist model did not provide a way to perceive the cultural diversity from which traditional communities sought to become modern. However, contrary to what was expected, globalization became a strategic place to recognize new ways of "being together": movements and protests throughout the length and breadth of the country, in defense of cultural, racial and sexual diversity in regions, towns and neighborhoods, the opposition to centralism, clientelism, war and violence, and the defense of local culture and everyday life, provided forms of communal connections. From developmentalism, it was impossible to conceptualize social reality, according to Arturo Escobar.⁸⁰

In this sense, globalization was no longer exclusively in the sphere of economic exchange but also had profound social and cultural implications. Scholars stopped talking solely of production to respond also

⁸⁰ Arturo Escobar, *Cultura, Ambiente y Política en la Antropología Contemporánea* (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Antropología, 1999), 14.

to the sphere of consumption, which meant definite progress in the approach to research. For instance, as Pilar Riaño Alcalá wrote, academic fields such as that of communication studies proposed that the starting point of research about popular culture should be the articulation points between the processes of mass media production on one side and on the other, the everyday routine use of media within the context of family, community and nation rather than simply understanding media as hegemonic control devices.⁸¹ "It is not only about measuring the distance between messages and their effect, but about the building of a comprehensive analysis of consumption understood as a set of social processes of appropriation of the products," states Martín-Barbero.⁸² According to Martín-Barbero, the place of analysis of consumption should be the same as that of daily practices from which new relationships are established over time.⁸³

This shift of analytical perspectives mainly reflects, in the first place, concerns about how the processes of capitalist globalization had begun to transform the political, cultural, moral and social boundaries of the nation-state; in the second, the failure of traditional organizational forms of the labor movement in its stated goal to destroy capitalism, and the final discrediting of "real socialism" as a desirable option by those committed to a social transformation; and in the third place, by the need to respond to the claims of new actors such as women, youth, gays, non-Catholic Colombians, and the poorest inhabitants of urban areas. These new historical subjects opened a new space for political action, rooted largely in the concerns of everyday life and experiences of oppression.

⁸¹ Pilar Riaño, "The Popular as Subject of Study: A Review of Latin American and North American Research Traditions," *Maguare* no. 9 (1993): 190.

⁸² Jesús Martín-Barbero, *De Los Medios a las Mediaciones. Comunicación, Cultura y Hegemonía* (México D.F.: Editorial Gustavo Gili, S.A., 1987), 231.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

Colombia could no longer be explained solely by the contradictions in the sphere of production, nor even by the degree of economic dependence of the country, but also by the capacity that individuals and civil society organizations had to transform the country. Active subjects were playing —during a time of profound crisis— a very important role outside the purview of the state and political parties unable to channel the demands of contemporary Colombian society. New demands were not expressed through large nationwide demonstrations such as those promoted by the indigenous movement Quintin Lame (1910-1938), the Railway Labor's Political League in Antioquia in 1912, or those that occurred on April 9th 1948 after the assassination of the liberal politician Jorge Eliécer Gaitán.⁸⁴ In fact, in Colombia, during the last three decades of the twentieth century, everything occurred except something resembling nationalistic "enthusiasm." Instead, new demands emerged and rapidly proliferated through the civil society organizations, located in the slums and the middle class neighbourhoods of the big cities, in small towns, in regions of recent agricultural colonization, in regions affected by major infrastructure projects such as hydroelectric dams and highways. That was the case of the western part of Antioquia where the construction of a 107.021.000.000 m³ reservoir took place. In this part of the province, thousands of farmers were obliged to change their place of residence to the municipal capital and to transform their traditional ways of life and habitation.⁸⁵

Participants of these movements coined the adjective "civic" in order to legitimize their own ways of organizing and mobilizing against the state authorities, which otherwise labeled them as subversives. It was also a way to escape from the actions of political parties, guerrilla and drug cartels and to locate their demands outside of specific social class claims. This name, however, was problematic. According

⁸⁴ Roberto González Arana and Ivonne Molinares. "Movimiento Obrero y Protesta Social en Colombia. 1920-1950." *Historia Caribe* VIII, no. 22 (2013): 167–193. <http://132.248.9.34/hevila/Historiacaribe/2013/vol8/no22/6.pdf>.

⁸⁵ Leopoldo Múnera, *Rupturas y Continuidades: Poder y Movimiento Popular en Colombia, 1968-1988* (Bogotá: CEREC, 1998). Carlos Hernando Olaya R., *Nunca Más Contra Nadie. Ciclos de Violencia en la Historia de San Carlos. Un Pueblo Devastado por la Guerra* (Bogotá: Cuervo Editores, 2012). Paula Andrea Cardona, "Tejiendo La Memoria del Viejo Peñol" (undergraduate thesis, University of Antioquia, 2007).

to Martha Cecilia Garcia, "civic" did not quite specify the content of the struggle or the movement. These movements defined their goals as "non-partisan, non-political, not subversive, non-class."⁸⁶ Civic movements, as defined by Javier Giraldo, were a set of collective actions, coordinated by a relatively stable group, spaced over a long time, with assertive or proactive goals developed to meet the social demands of a broad sector of the population. These organizations did not restrict their actions simply to strikes or mobilizations. They were forged by struggles and conflicts, and profoundly marked by popular culture.⁸⁷ The flourishing of popular civic movements showed forms of exclusion, questioning the intended character of the state both as a representative of the public interest as well as a producer of unifying stories. In this sense there was a growing dissatisfaction regarding a centralist, clientelist, and non-secular regime acting in a way that was divorced from the reality of the local and regional life. Debates about decentralization, municipal reform and secularization of the state were increasingly important.⁸⁸ Demonstrations and protests seeking ways of improving public services, social assistance, service roads and public transportation, health services, credit and technical assistance, culture and education, and in general, greater acknowledgment and popular participation in local and regional development plans, confirmed this generalized unease.⁸⁹ Strikes, for instance, jumped from thirty-seven between 1977 and 1978 to sixty-eight in 1982 alone.⁹⁰ "Colombia is governed to the rhythm of civic strikes" said the Liberal president Alfonso López Michelsen in 1975.⁹¹ Even right-

⁸⁶García, "Luchas y Movimientos Cívicos en Colombia Durante los Ochenta y los Noventa. Transformaciones y Permanencia," 88.

⁸⁷ Javier Giraldo, "La Reivindicación Urbana a Nivel Local. Pasos y Luchas Cívicas." In *Controversia* ed. Javier Giraldo (Bogotá: CINEP, 1987), 9–48.

⁸⁸ Pedro Santana, "Local Governments, Decentralization, and Democracy in Colombia." In *New Paths to Democratic Development in Latin America. The Rise of NGO-Municipal Collaboration*, ed. Charles A. Reilly (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), 165–177..

⁸⁹ García, "Luchas y Movimientos Cívicos en Colombia durante los Ochenta y los Noventa. Transformaciones y Permanencia," 94.

⁹⁰ Cristina Escobar and Francisco de Roux, "Movimientos Populares en Colombia (1970-1983)." In *Movimientos Populares en América Latina*, ed. Daniel Camacho (México D.F.: Siglo XXI Editores/Universidad de las Naciones Unidas, 1989), 197. Norberto Emmerich. "El Plan Colombia". Universidad de Belgrano, Buenos Aires, 2002. http://www.ub.edu.ar/investigaciones/dt_nuevos/87_emmerich.pdf.12

⁹¹ Pedro Santana. "La Descentralización en Serio Riesgo." *Caja Virtual*, 2007.

wing politicians such as Álvaro Gómez Hurtado, years later, suggested that the intense social mobilization of these years was the new way of doing politics. In the Bogotá newspaper *El Siglo*, Gómez Hurtado wrote in 1987, "If the civic strikes are the new political scenario sought by the Barco government, we must to promote them. This democratic opening cannot be wasted. In addition, given the government lethargy, it seems like civic strikes will be the only way of being heard."⁹²

Reforms were urgent not only in fiscal matters but also in regards to social representation. Since the conservative national constitution of 1886, the capital's bureaucratic elites had restricted the popular election of mayors and governors, who were appointed directly by the President. However, the intense social tension in the 1970s was not advanced as a clash between local elites and the Bogotá bureaucracies, as occurred in the nineteenth century, but as demands from the most diverse social organizations whose claims to services that the state could provide, were strongly tied to the identity and the territory they occupied.⁹³ Hence it is not possible to distinguish the exclusively political from the cultural, the popular, and particularly the territorial. In that sense, the revaluation that movements of citizens made of the territory where their claims took place led to the very redefinition of the nation and of contemporary Colombian civil society.⁹⁴ The territory, Gloria Naranjo tells us, was not just a context of struggle, but a determinant part of life for social organizations.⁹⁵ It is from the local, regional and territorial dimension that the movements built identities that allowed them to differentiate themselves; first from the unions, economic associations, guerrillas, drug cartels, and political parties; and second,

<http://www.viva.org.co/cajavirtual/svc0063/articulo01.pdf>. 1

⁹² Álvaro Gómez Hurtado. "Editorial." *El Siglo*, June 08, 1987.

⁹³ Las guerras civiles durante el siglo XIX manifestaron bien la relación tensa entre lo local, lo regional y lo nacional. Mientras 9 guerras civiles fueron consideradas de carácter nacional, unas 50 están circunscritas al ámbito local o regional. Malcolm Deas, *Intercambios Violentos* (Bogotá: Taurus, 1999), 20-21.

⁹⁴ Jesús Martín Barbero, "Comunicación: Agenda intercultural," *Chasqui. Revista Latinoamericana de Comunicación* no. 102 (2008): 24. <http://www.revistachasqui.com/index.php/chasqui/login>.

⁹⁵ Gloria Naranjo Giraldo, *Medellín en Zonas* (Medellín: REGION, 1992), 2.

to legitimize themselves against the state and the armed forces who since then have labeled them as subversives.⁹⁶

The emergence of movements of social mobilization led many analysts to proclaim that a new era of collective social action in the country had started.⁹⁷ It was a new kind of social mobilization through which urban popular culture found new spaces for expression. The neighborhood youth groups in Medellín, civic strikes in Bogotá in 1977 and eastern Antioquia, Casanare and Putumayo between 1974 and 1978, women's organizations, and uprisings of settlers in the Magdalena Medio, were some of the events that contributed to the emergence of a strong scholarly research agenda and activism that gave voice to the protagonists of such movements.⁹⁸ The shift in the type of organization occurred not only in the agendas of the actors but also in the modalities of action. As shown in Figure 1 below, riots, roadblocks, and the occupation of government offices made the headlines in the local press while organizations began to understand the essential role of cameras and microphones to generate visibility and sympathy in a hostile political environment.

⁹⁶ García, "Luchas y Movimientos Cívicos en Colombia Durante los Ochenta y los Noventa. Transformaciones y Permanencia," 90

⁹⁷ El 10 de septiembre de 1994, el periódico El Tiempo de Bogotá, tituló "Se Imponen los Movimientos Cívicos". Archivo Digital-Periódico El Tiempo. <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-208998>

⁹⁸ Arturo Alape, *Un Día de Septiembre. Testimonios del Paro Cívico 1977* (Bogotá: Ediciones Armadillo, 1980). Álvaro Camacho, "Informalidad Política. Movimientos Sociales Y Violencia," *Nueva Sociedad* no. 106 (1990): 41. http://www.nuso.org/upload/articulos/1849_1.pdf. Pedro Santana, "Crisis municipal: movimientos sociales y reforma política en Colombia," *Revista Foro* no. 21, (1986): 4-15. Marta Inés Villa, *Memorias desde el Retorno. Sistematización de Las Prácticas de Memoria Impulsadas en los Programas de Retorno al Municipio de San Carlos, Antioquia, 2009 y 2013* (Medellín: REGION. Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica. Departamento de Prosperidad Social, 2013), 11. En 1979 por ejemplo, tuvo lugar en Medellín el primer simposio sobre estudios regionales, organizado por la Fundación para los Estudios Sociales (FAES), que fue paradigmático para la consolidación de la historia regional y local en Colombia



Figure 1. La Ceja Civic Strike (Antioquia). 1977. Source: <http://fuegoinsurrecto.blogspot.ca/2011/05/12-de-mayo-de-1977-paro-civico-en.html>.

The struggles were now oriented by organizations that privileged horizontal over vertical organization and the centrality of the traditional parties and unions. These collective expressions were organized around specific events and particular demands on issues affecting the entire community life. In these struggles, the state, argues Marta García, was seen by the movements, at the same time, as the guarantor of collective goods and services and as the adversary because it denied or limited the rights of the inhabitants of towns and regions as part of the whole nation.

The state and political parties ceased to be a unique frame of reference serving to channel material and identity demands. In this sense, collective memory began to reappear as a result of the disintegration of tradition and delegitimation of official history. Colombian historians and intellectuals like Arturo Alape, Medófilo Medina and Orlando Fals Borda devoted themselves to collect testimonies

and stories of such movements.⁹⁹ Popular and civic movements claimed that they began to operate in such a way to transform the exclusionary past through their present struggles, in contrast to the electoral ritual that reified past oppression that they denounced. Social movements idealized themselves in order to isolate elements of the past to make sense of both the mobilization and the territory in which political and identity claims took place.¹⁰⁰ The stories produced by these movements around their origins were designed, in the first place, to motivate action, and, in the second place, to compete with the hegemonic commemorations of the state. These organizations then began compiling a sort of Counter-Memory, in this case, actively working towards the transformation of the political and social reality of the Colombian state. Counter-memory implies memorialization as a collective process of learning the forgotten, suppressed and excluded stories. As the celebration of the 35th anniversary of the National Civic Strike in 2012 demonstrates (See Figure 2), memorialization is today a central place among civil society organizations. In that sense, competence —Olick argues— is clearly at the core both of memory and identity.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Arturo Alape, *Un Día de Septiembre. Testimonios del Paro Cívico 1977*, 20. Orlando Fals Borda, "Marginality and Revolution in Latin America, 1809-1969," *Studies in Comparative International Development*, VI, no. 4 (1970): 63-89; *Reflexiones sobre la aplicación del método de estudio-acción en Colombia* (Asunción: Centro Paraguayo de Estudios Sociológicos, 1973); *Rural Cooperatives As Agents of Change* (Genève: UNRISD, 1975); "The Challenge of Action Research," *Development: Seeds of Change*, 1 (1981): 55-61; "Science and the Common People," *The Journal of Social Studies*, 11 (1981): 1-21.

¹⁰⁰ Elsa Blair Trujillo, *Conflicto Armado y Militares en Colombia* (Medellín: Editorial Universidad de Antioquia, 1999), 85.

¹⁰¹ Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins. "Social Memory Studies: From 'Collective Memory' to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices." *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998): 126. Michael Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice. Selected Essays and Interviews* (Edited by Donald F. Bouchard. New York: Cornell University, 1977).



Figure 2. Commemoration of the 35th anniversary of the 1977 civic strike. Escuela Nacional Sindical (ENS). Poster. 2012. Medellín. Fuente: www.ens.org

In this regard, traditional problems of political economy such as power, stratification and contestation were crucial since memory informs essentialist discourses that serve to legitimize the present of social organizations and its place within hegemonic and subaltern narratives. The struggle is not just because people are hungry, but because they feel that there is an unfair distribution of symbolic, material, and political goods such as memory.¹⁰² The intertwining of power and memory is quite subtle. Memory is not completely authentic, contrary to the claims of Colombian scholars and activists. As Chantal Mouffe suggests, the fact that social movements respond to voluntary associations means they are also imagined communities looking at the past in order to legitimize their actions in the present.¹⁰³

Collective memory is a process where memories and experiences meet the needs of the present, "is about creating the past to incorporate the present of the community, and to make sense and

¹⁰² Archila, *Vida, Pasión y ...de los Movimientos Sociales en Colombia*, 38

¹⁰³ Chantal Mouffe, "Democracia Radical: ¿Moderna o Postmoderna?," *Revista Foro*, 24 (1994): 23.

justifications to the future,” as Elsa Blair reminds us.¹⁰⁴ It is important to understand that essentialism is inherent in all the speeches and actions about memory and therefore our questions should be focused on who is using this essentialism, how it is presented, and especially where its effects are concentrated. This approximation, proposed by Hale, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, is interesting because it places this analysis at an intermediate point between the purely discursive analysis and the purely structural language that predominates in the analysis on social movements, particularly in the context of globalization. While pre-modern societies live within the continuous past, contemporary societies separate memory from the continuity of social reproduction, transforming it into a matter of explicit signs, not of implicit meanings. We now compartmentalize memory as a mode of experience; our only recourse is to represent and invent what we can no longer spontaneously experience.¹⁰⁵

In this thesis, I understand that memory can be initially connected to a specific group but whose ties to the original source are eventually lost.¹⁰⁶ The dramatic change from the rural world —where memory was more present to inform solidarity, family ties, and the sense of belonging to the place —to the urban world where memory disappears as a means is illustrative of what happened not only in Colombia but throughout Latin America. The social frameworks of memory were reduced to the territory, the neighborhood, the social movements’ demands against the state, and the mass media. Medellín and the inhabitants of its neighborhoods are a clear example in this regard. The history of contemporary memory practices in Medellín is the result of both the mass immigration of peasants to the cities and urban violence but also the result of organizational processes of civic movements which

¹⁰⁴ Elsa Blair Trujillo, *Conflicto Armado y Militares en Colombia*, 88.

¹⁰⁵ Nancy Wood. “Memory’s Remains: Les Lieux de Mémoire.” *History and Memory* 6, no. 1 (1994): 123–149. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25618664>.

¹⁰⁶ Pierre Nora, “Conflicts and Divisions,” In *Realms of Memory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

claimed a place within the narratives promoted by Non-Governmental Organizations. However, it is not possible to speak of Medellín as a whole, in relation to organizational processes. The neighborhood, in this sense, is fundamental. According to Alfonso Torres Castillo:

The neighborhood is where the first generation of migrants builds the most stable and lasting relationships; countrymen, old buddies and new friends, redefine their loyalties around the new category of neighbors. In addition, the neighborhood becomes in the place of cultural affirmation and entertainment; the place of the bazaars, religious festivities and holidays, the place to play soccer and drink beer. For many of its inhabitants, the neighborhood also became the workplace, the site where the butcher's shop, the bakery, the ice creams, the empanadas or fried food are located.¹⁰⁷

According to Martín-Barbero, the neighborhood —not only in Colombia but also in Latin America— is the great mediator between the private world of home and the public and strange world of the city.¹⁰⁸

The neighborhood provides its citizens with the social frameworks for the construction of their identity while allowing memory to express recent struggles in the city.¹⁰⁹ Partisan political violence in the countryside had greatly weakened the bonds of trust and loyalty between fellow-countrymen. Medellín meant a new set of relationships and social organizations that were woven through solidarity and resistance to exclusion. It is from the experience of neighborhood social organizations, daily journeys of its inhabitants, that the main NGOs in the city imagine and perform many of their projects around the city. This work with neighborhood organizations is the hallmark of NGOs whose core is the people's daily life that is first deployed in the neighborhood.¹¹⁰ Around the neighborhood, the first projects on

¹⁰⁷ Alfonso Torres Carrillo, *La Ciudad en la Sombra. Barrios y Luchas Populares en Bogotá, 1950-1977* (Bogotá, CINEP, 1993), 11.

¹⁰⁸ Jesús Martín-Barbero, *Oficio de Cartógrafo. Travesías Latinoamericanas de La Comunicación En La Cultura* (Santiago de Chile: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2002), 273-277. Paul Anderson Gil and Luisa Fernanda Valderrama. "La Historia Barrial y su Situación en Pereira: Primeros Aportes a la Temática." *Historia 2.0* 6, no. 3 (2013): 63–82. <http://historia2.0.historiaabierta.org/>.

¹⁰⁹ Jesús Martín-Barbero, *De los Medios a las Mediaciones. Comunicación, Cultura y Hegemonía* (México D.F.: Editorial Gustavo Gili, S.A., 1987), 219.

¹¹⁰ Rubén Fernández Andrade, personal interview with author, Medellín Government Building (Medellín), December 10, 2013.

memory took place; the most emblematic case was the *Skin of Memory* (1997) in Barrio Antioquia. This initiative was driven by a set of NGOs, international cooperation agencies and local government institutions such as Corporación REGION, Corporación Presencia Colombo-Suiza, la Agencia de Cooperación Internacional Española (Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation), the Caja de Compensación Familiar COMFENALCO (Family Compensation Funds of Antioquia), and Alcaldía de Medellín (Medellín Mayor's Office).

2.1. Civil Society and Popular Civic Movements in Medellín

*"Medellín not so many years ago began to develop within the modern concepts of urbanization. It has no historical memories. There are few places of public entertainment. It just begins a little social movement that will change our conventual and eager life for a more friendly one."*¹¹¹

By the 1970s very little remained of the colonial Medellín founded in 1675, or the republican city of the late nineteenth century. The elites of the city had knowingly renounced the past in order to make way for a modern city that was supposed to wipe away the inertia of custom and tradition. Influenced by the nineteenth-century discourse of progress and later by the ideas of development, traditional elites and the population applauded the demolition of the old spaces as they did not allow for the city's progress. The urban history of the city never referred to an emblazoned or glorious past, but to a "recent" past linked to the need of trade, money and capital. The Antioqueño¹¹² writer Emiro Kastos (1825-1884) thus described the inhabitants of the city:

¹¹¹ Ricardo Olano cited in: Jorge Restrepo Uribe, *Medellín, Su Origen, Progreso Y Desarrollo* (Medellín: Servigráficas, 1981), 73

¹¹² Adj. Natural of the Province of Antioquia (Medellín)

That ... cheerful, communicative, frank, sympathetic character that distinguishes the inhabitants of cheerful and warm countries is not here. People do not meet up but to address issues of money. Here reigns such individualism and idolatry of the self that it can be assured that there are men but not society. Antioqueños don't believe that they were born to do something other than to buy and sell, and beyond money nothing deserves their attention or respect...¹¹³

Since Kasto's *Artículos Escogidos* in 1859 until well into the twentieth century, the region's intellectuals noted that Medellín was a profoundly unequal city. León de Greiff and Fernando González in the twenties and Gonzalo Arango and the nadaistas in the 1960s and 1970s, described a very exclusionary city. In fact, the city was not planned for the poor.¹¹⁴ Building codes legally established the most strict social segregation; forbade the poor to live in the south while forced them to concentrate in the hillsides north and west of the city.¹¹⁵ The administration's attempts to regulate the use of land were generally against the interests of developers, industrialists and businessmen who opposed them. This is one of the reasons for which the growth of the city became more and more cluttered. Medellín became a city growing at a rapid pace but without public and private agreements which would permit the physical and symbolic integration of different sectors and *barrios* (neighborhoods). There was, in this sense, a process of "informalization" not only of the economy but of all social relations.¹¹⁶

The state actually took part in the planning of the city only until the early 1970s when, through the newly created Instituto de Crédito Territorial—ICT (Office of Planning and Territorial Credit Institute), it promoted the building of upper-middle class condo buildings and infrastructure for the popular sectors.

¹¹³ Emiro Kastos, *Artículos Escogidos* (London: Juan M. Fonnegra, 1859), 68-69.

¹¹⁴ Nadaism is a Colombian literary movement developed from 1958 through 1964 with main roots in Surrealism and Dadaism, and also established cultural contacts with the beat generation. The Nadaists led a protest against traditional institutions who promoted a society and culture with little purpose, this was framed as a 'philosophically nihilistic'. 'Do not let faith intact or an idol in its place' was the slogan that characterized the young protesters. See more at: <http://www.scoutnetworkblog.com/2012/10/16922/nadaism/#sthash.NAf88iZt.dpuf>

¹¹⁵ Jorge Orlando Melo. "Espacio e Historia en Medellín." *Colombia Es Un Tema*, <http://www.jorgeorlandomelo.com/espaciomedellin.htm>.

¹¹⁶ Daniel Pécaut, *Crónica de Dos Décadas de Política Colombiana, 1968-1988* (Bogotá: Siglo XXI Editores, 1989).

Influenced by the structural adjustment policies of the World Bank, the state needed to implement a process of capital surplus absorption through urban redevelopment.¹¹⁷ But, it was too late. Political violence began in 1948 after the death of Liberal leader Jorge Gaitán, and the intense process of capital accumulation, industrialization and concentration of all kinds of services produced the progressive migration of thousands of peasants to Medellín.¹¹⁸ The green hillsides of the Aburrá Valley, where the city is located, which previously the elites enjoyed so much, were filled with houses and slums. The city's population increased from 180,000 inhabitants in 1940 to 358,189 in 1951; 772,887 in 1964; and by 1973 it had risen to 1,077,252.¹¹⁹ So, the population of Medellín had tripled in a period of thirty-three years. This process of settlement and urbanization produced disputes that increasingly separated public and private interests. Due to the power exerted by the private sector, the city administration allowed well-defined urban boundaries, causing —as suggested by Claudia Avendaño— a very fast process of marginalization and a mobile population that did not identify itself with the city. Each sector of the population was isolated and marginalized from that part of the city with which they did not have a direct experience. There was no communication between the barrios because it was not necessary. Medellín was a compendium of imaginary cities.¹²⁰

Through the local press and radio news, protests such as those of the Barrio Moravia, a neighborhood built on a former landfill (See Figure 4), occupied the imagination of middle and upper classes.

"Medellín is getting crowded by strange and dangerous people" the traditional inhabitants of the city used to say. Physical marginality was clearly reflected in the behavior of individuals, who increasingly

¹¹⁷ Charles A. Reilly, "Public Policy and Citizenship." In *New Paths to Democratic Development in Latin America: The Rise of NGO-Municipal Collaboration*, ed. Charles A. Reilly (Boulder, CO: Reinner Press, 1995). David Harvey, *Rebel Cities. From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (Madrid: Ediciones Akal, 2012).

¹¹⁸ Verónica Perfetti, "Tres Proyectos Para Un Deseo la Ilusión de una Ciudad." In *Historia de Medellín* (Medellín: Suramericana de Seguros, 1996), 85–104.

¹¹⁹ Fernando Botero, "El Espejismo de La Modernidad En Medellín: 1890-1950." *Lecturas de Economía* 39 (1993): 26

¹²⁰ Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1974).

became more indifferent to the living situations of others, and also in their apathy towards everything regarding citizen participation and development. So an inorganic city was built, as Avendaño states, where dialogue was almost impossible and social organizations were isolated among themselves.¹²¹ Thus, the popular barrios of Medellín gradually became the main stage of daily struggle for decent living conditions and access to public services such as water, electricity, sewerage, public transportation and service roads, political participation, soccer fields, libraries, schools, health posts, formal employment, and other issues.¹²² The case of the Barrio Moravia is a good example of neighborhood-based claims to ensure decent living conditions as illustrated on the images below (See Figures 3 and 4). There, organizational processes were primarily directed towards achieving the necessary elements for survival such as water and energy, and the fight against government forces. Since the early days the state tried to get rid of the slum, as it was argued that they were located at the gate of the city.

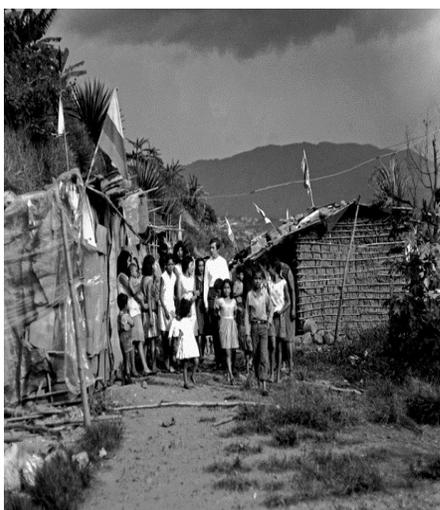


Figure 3. Barrio Moravia. 1968. Source: Giovanna Pezzoti. Museo Casa de la Memoria

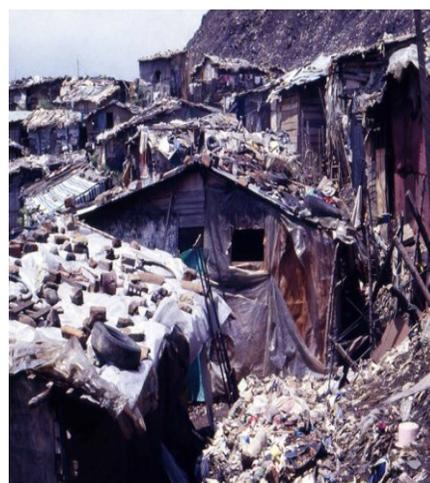


Figure 4. Barrio Moravia 1982. Source: Jorge Melguizo. Museo Casa de la Memoria

¹²¹ Claudia Avendaño Vásquez, “Desarrollo Urbano de Medellín En El Siglo XX,” *Revista Pensamiento Humanista* 4 (1998): 90. Ibid., 90.

¹²² Alfonso Torres Carrillo. “Barrios populares e identidades colectivas.” *Serie Ciudad y Hábitat* 6 (Bogotá: Barriotaller, 1999). www.barriotaller.org.co/publicaciones/barrios_populares.

Within this context of urban segregation and lack of planning, civic and popular movements emerged, as "the only way to obtain help from the state in order to resolve their everyday needs."¹²³ Despite the existence, since 1958, of other organizations promoted by the state such as the Community Action Boards (CAB), civic movements and neighborhood organizations gained greater legitimacy. Through the Juntas de Acción Comunal —JACs (Community Action Boards) and other government agencies like La Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos de Colombia –ANUC (the National Association of Peasant Land Users) and the Instituto Colombiano de la Reforma Agraria —INCORA (Colombian Institute of Agrarian Reform), the government initially sought to restore the order disrupted by political violence and to rebuild the rural sector by creating grassroots organizations able to interpret the needs of grassroots organizations.¹²⁴ Upon being organized, the JACs were indeed generally welcomed particularly by the rural population. By 1962, for example, the JAC had gained momentum. In 1966, 9,000 JACs had already been formed throughout the country supported largely by the nascent Alliance for Progress (APP) for which Colombia became a showcase in the subcontinent.¹²⁵ However, over time, many of these local boards fell into the clientelist traditional patterns under which votes were exchanged for the financing of public works putting an end to the potential development of communities. Both the JAC and the political system were seen by the population and social organizations in many places, with much suspicion. This sentiment was expressed by one of the founders of the Barrio Moravia, when she recalled that:

The police used to come and knock us down. It was our struggle, to fight the law. And the Community Action Board over there sent the police to our places. Because back then

¹²³ B. Vargas Concha and Isabel Ramírez, *Así se desarrolló y creció el barrio La Francia* (Medellín: n.p., 1986).

¹²⁴ Marion Ritchey-Vance, *The Art of Association: NGOs and Civil Society in Colombia* (Rosslyn, VA: Inter-American Foundation, 1991), 18.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

Jaime Gómez was around, a political schemer from the Liberal Party it is said... he used to send the police to our places by means of the Community Action Board. Every single shanty had a flag (Colombian flag), in order to be left alone. But the police did not respect those flags. They would take them down and throw them at the people, and knock down the shacks. There was one mounted police patrol over there and another one over here. While one patrol was going up the other would be coming down. That is how the fight began; it was really tough...to build the shacks we had to keep an eye on when the police went to sleep...either up in El Bosque or here.

There were some young ladies, from here and down Anacéfora Flórez's way, who would distract the policemen. So, while they were sleeping over there, we were invading over here...it was the same over there, when they were over here...we invaded over there. It was how the shanties invasion spread all over. The police showed no mercy to the people. We were severely treated, and they even stole the materials we used to build the shacks. People were hit...we were battered.

The president of the trade union at NOEL¹²⁶ helped us to install the water supply ...and to make a lot of improvements here.... and to build the shacks... they sent us food, a lot of stuff. They barbecued pork and beef... they sent lots of meat to the people over here...when we invaded some place, they sent a pot full of food...we cooked and fed everybody...Then our "compañero" from the Labor Union was killed and... that situation touched us deeply¹²⁷.

This process of organization and resistance in marginalized neighborhoods in the city helped to consolidate associative forms such as the civic popular movements. The task of these organizations consisted mainly in raising funds through raffles, bazaars, cultural events and competitions, cooperating with the construction of houses for newcomers, and mobilizing the community to demand or protest against the absence of the state. The community work was the foundation on which values and forms of behavior that enabled types of group and neighborhood identity were created. This is how —Naranjo tells us— that community work is marked by the multiple difficulties resulting from seeking

¹²⁶ Noel, formally known as Compañía de Galletas Noel S.A. (English: Noel Cookies Company) is an emblematic factory of the city, founded in 1916.

¹²⁷ Carlos Alberto Serna Quintana. "Moravia: Un Escenario de Resistencia y Memoria." Colombia, 2011. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aj-kT4p--lk>.

the solution for daily needs¹²⁸. This type of partnership work meant, however, a big challenge. They were people from very different cultural backgrounds: fishermen, Afro-Colombians from Urabá (on the Caribbean Sea), mestizo peasants from the Cordillera Central, or former Medellín inhabitants with urban experience of more than two generations. Naranjo says:

Undoubtedly it meant a great impact on the population, coming from different backgrounds to participate in a process of mutual constitution at a site not yet consolidated. They are also migrants suffering high level of pressure because of the critical situation of poverty and the effects of political violence. Uprooted from their origins, with cultural learnings corresponding to rural universes, the new inhabitants of Medellín must become suddenly in urban dwellers with everything that meant.¹²⁹

Along with this organizational process, there was a very important mark left by the Iglesia Popular de los Pobres (Popular Church for the Poor), represented by priests who accompanied the process of settlement, particularly in the poorest slums in the highest part of the Aburrá Valley.¹³⁰ The "preferential option for the poor," or Liberation Theology, also prompted civic organization in the city parishes through youth, women, and parent groups. Liberation Theology was born in Medellín. It was formed in "The Conference of 1968" responding to an attempt to answer the question of how to be a Christian in an oppressed continent through pastoral work. Influenced largely by the Brazilian Paulo Freire, intellectual founder of Popular Education, and by Marxism, liberation theologians raised the question of whether the revolution would have a theological meaning. Liberation Theology also guided other discursive practices and methodological approaches that emerged in Latin America during this era. Colombian leftist political activists received these practices with enthusiasm. Popular Education, Participatory Action Research and Popular-Alternative Communication, were methodological and

¹²⁸ Gloria Naranjo Giraldo, *Medellín En Zonas*, 19.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 21

philosophical approaches that intersected eventually to make sense of the practices implemented by the city's NGOs.

Many of the books and articles written in the second half of the 1980s made reference to the need for putting these discursive practices and methodological approaches at the service of the urban popular movements and new social movements. Although memory was not an explicit theme of reflection, it is clear that the use of testimonies and the history of the various subjects and popular social movements by the approaches above mentioned, stimulated the emergence of biography and the direct expression of the protagonists of history. When I asked the anthropologist Riaño Alcalá, a leading scholar on memory studies, about the place of memory within the political and research agenda on popular culture, she said:

To be honest, I was not aware that I was working on it. I did have an interest in urban anthropology. At this point in the context of anthropology at the National University of Colombia, during the late seventies and early eighties, the vast majority of people were working with indigenous groups. At the same time, the department was living the period of maximum influence of Marxism. The people at the National University were very involved in political activism, participation and leftist party membership. I was involved in working in the Bogotá neighborhoods more on political issues. But it was there where I found a niche from which I could combine my political activism and anthropology. I started thinking how to justify this interest against a very skeptical group that did not see that anthropology could be done in urban areas. That's when I started working on the ideas of popular culture. However I approached popular culture from an ahistorical vision and culture was not seen as heritage. I saw it more from popular cultural practices, lifestyles. But there was not the conceptual repertoire of memory. It was a kind of anthropology that was not influenced by this dimension ... as were migrants to the city, it was thought that there (in the barrios) there were neither historical assets nor memory repertoires.¹³¹

¹³¹ Pilar Riaño Alcalá, personal interview with author, Via Skype, November 7 2013.

These theories and pedagogical practices sought to develop and strengthen organizations and social movements to guarantee the existence of a true democracy.¹³² The emergence of a political-based culture arising from people's everyday life was assumed as a critical aim to strengthen civil society. The Centro Popular de Investigación Popular—CINEP (Centre for Research on Popular Education) in Bogotá, under the guidance of the Society of Jesus, and the Instituto para la Educación Popular—IPC (Popular Training Institute) in Medellín —perhaps the most important NGOs in Colombia at the beginning of the 1980s— and linked to the Popular Church and revolutionary Christian left, are very important examples in this regard. Popular Education and Participatory Action Research determined the ideological approaches of these and many other social organizations, particularly NGOs.

In regards to the existence of a common thread running through the interest about popular culture, the work of NGOs in Medellín and the *Skin of Memory* (1997)¹³³, Riaño Alcalá, associate professor at the University of British Columbia states:

When I finished anthropology, I began to work at the CINEP. They asked me to adapt my thesis methodology to work with different groups throughout the country who were interested in working on popular groups. The idea was to do participatory action research¹³⁴. This was what led me to Medellín for the first time because the CINEP had a very close relationship with the IPC. And there I started doing these workshops to discuss popular culture. There was an impressive interest in the subject. We are talking of 1984-85. We worked very closely with groups in different parts of Medellín, discussing cultural practices, and communication, and gossip, and spaces, and so on, in order to recognize a very rich popular culture. I ended that investigation in 86 (...) but it is precisely in that year when the country was facing the reality that in Medellín teen hitmen existed, right there, in the slums.

¹³² Alfonso Torres Castillo, *Educación Popular. Trayectoria y Actualidad*, (Caracas: Universidad Bolivariana de Venezuela, 2011).

¹³³ The first major milestone of memory practices in Colombia (1997).

¹³⁴ Pilar Riaño Alcalá, “Espacios y Prácticas hacia una lectura de un barrio popular” (undergraduate thesis, National University of Colombia, 1983).

And when I went there to work on my doctoral dissertation —that is the time of the *Skin of Memory*— I asked myself: "What happened?" I was in all those neighborhoods, I was with the boys who were in those neighborhoods, participating in the cultural groups, and no one talked about this! Nobody was talking about violence. Nobody was talking about the teens getting involved in the drug trade? But I was there! We did not see, or did not want to see it. So, my doctoral thesis was on the way people chronicled the violence. It was in that context that I decided to ask questions about memory, about what people remember, and how violence occurred.¹³⁵

The interest in memory practices in Medellín is linked, first of all, to a process of discursive consolidation of social organizations through theories and pedagogical practices such as popular education; second, to the need to instrumentalize memory according to specific objectives such as development and also political and civic education; third, to the fact that the practices of memory are linked to the defense of human rights and the rejection of violence to which Colombian society, especially the city of Medellín, were subjected; and finally to support the peace agreements that occurred around the 1991 Constitution. Urán, partner and researcher of the IPC, confirmed this argument in an interview when he stated:

Yes! Popular education was very influential. Popular education was the framework of reflections, workshops, and methodological discussions. I think Popular Education continues to influence a lot the focus of the IPC today. Right there the IPC ideological option is elaborated. The problem is not only to educate "virtuous" citizens but also political citizens able to build local power. (...) Political power is closely linked to the methodologies of popular education because it is not simply to bring social scientists to the people. This is inherited from popular education where the fundamental concept is that education occurs through praxis. To that extent there is a strong interest between popular education and memory. Even part of the methodology we used had been developed by Orlando Fals Borda¹³⁶. Fals Borda insisted that, always, insisted that in these processes it was not possible to educate without investigating reality. Then, we have the obligation to go to the storehouse of memory. So part of political education is also a reading of the

¹³⁵ Pilar Riaño Alcalá, personal interview with author, Via Skype, November 7 2013.

¹³⁶ Orlando Fals Borda (Barranquilla, 11 July 1925 - Bogotá, 12 August 2008) was a Colombian researcher and sociologist, one of the most important Latin American thinkers, and one of the founders of participatory action research. He also played a key role of the foundation of CLACSO (Latin American Social Science Council) at the end of the sixties. Fals Borda developed an ethical conception of the subversion based on a particular method of analysis and a praxis called "positive subversion" through the idea of commitment. His most important work was *The Violence in Colombia* (Bogotá: National University of Colombia, 1962). Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orlando_Fals_Borda

historical process itself in each locality. That means more than history, what we do is memory.¹³⁷

From these research practices and activism, social organizations began to build alternative memories against dominant narratives reified and displayed particularly in the public space (See Figure 5). These 'counter-hegemonic' memories are subjected, however, to a process of institutionalization from below, exposing the real problem of the dyad of memory and forgetting. To the extent that NGOs earned political spaces and funding resources within the vacuum left by the state as a mediator of social relations, the ways of seeing and understanding social activism and memory practices tended to be appropriated. Neighborhood story contests, commemorations, memoirs, magazines, seminars, workshops, city tours, itinerant museums, and manuals on how to systematize the practices of local memory, provide evidence of such processes of control.¹³⁸ Mary Douglas in *How Institutions Think* (1986), reminds us that:

When we look closely at the construction of the past time, we find the process has very little to do with the past at all and everything to do with the present. Institutions create shadowed places in which nothing can be seen and no questions asked. They make other areas show finely discriminated detail, which is closely scrutinized and ordered. History emerges in an unintended shape as a result of practices directed to immediate, practical ends. To watch these practices establish selective principles that highlight some kinds of events and obscure others is to inspect the social order operating on individual minds.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Omar Urán, personal interview with author, Biblioteca Comfenalco (Medellín), December 19 2013

¹³⁸ León Restrepo Mejía, "La Historia de Mi Barrio." In *Historia de Medellín*, ed. Jorge Orlando Melo, (Medellín: Suramericana de Seguros, 1996), 723

¹³⁹ Mary Douglas, *How Institutions Think* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 69.



Figure 5. *The Race* (1986). Rodrigo Arenas Betancur.
Government Building Square. Downtown Medellin Source: David Barrios Giraldo

2.2. NGOs in Medellín

In Medellín, the emergence of civil society began to fill the space left by the traditional parties that had lost capacity as mediators between communities and the state. One of the elements of civil society that grew tremendously since the late 1970s was the non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Historically, the interests of large landowners, industrialists, and merchants were represented through family ties and different sorts of associations with the capacity to influence policy and the election of political leaders. However, as we saw earlier in this chapter, the processes of modernization, industrialization and urbanization gave rise to new interest groups —latent as Douglas called them— concentrated on working for the solution to the problems of the poor and disenfranchised people.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ Mary Douglas, *How Institutions Think*, 80

Through these organizational experiences, especially in civic grassroots movements but also in those promoted by the state or by the trade unions, hundreds of young people from Medellín channeled their energies and ideals towards the creation of NGOs. Neighborhood leaders who had learned from experiences in civic movements, parish youth groups and community action boards, and in local subsidiaries of the ANUC, saw the potential for community action free of partisan overtones. When I asked Rubén Fernández Andrade, founder of Corporación REGION and who played a leading role in the process of consolidation of local NGOs, about the experience of its members in these movements, he said:

When the Corporación REGION was born three types of social and ideological tradition came together. One of them was the city neighborhood movements (*barrio* movements). Several of us had been members of *barrio* organizations during the 70s. Within the context of leftism, there was a break with the labor movement as a core of interest. So, what we proposed was that the core of interest was the daily life of people. That is in the *barrio* where the everyday life is deployed. Today, *barrio* life has changed, but back then everyday life was displayed in the neighborhood. So, for example, at that time, we promoted neighborhood research around cultural practices that were very innovative. We did maintain a close conversation with the trade union movement and the working world but we were different. The second tradition was from the trade union world. In REGION there were people who brought extensive experience of counseling and struggling within that sphere. A very valuable dialogue was established between them and those of us who came from the *barrio* organizations. And there is even a third tradition that was that of the base ecclesial movements, many of us came from that tradition.¹⁴¹

It was a new generation that created the city agencies of technical assistance, legal services, research centers, and community action groups through which the energy of which the political system had not taken advantage was channeled. Many of these new leaders, as Marion Ritchey-Vance proposed, “(...)emerged (à la Albert Hirschman’s principle of the conservation of social energy) to found a new

¹⁴¹ Rubén Fernández Andrade, personal interview with author, Medellín Government Building (Medellín), December 10, 2013.

generation of independent, nonpartisan organizations seeking creative ways to democratize the society and to get goods, services, and power to the disenfranchised."¹⁴²

Institutions such as the IPC, Corporación Vamos Mujer, Corporación Mujeres que Crean, the National Union School, CONVIVAMOS, and Corporation REGION (see Table 1), among others, were founded by professionals, scholars, former government employees and citizens with "civic" conscience" who integrated their experiences in the family, the territory, and organizations in order to work for the most disadvantaged sectors in their communities. This new generation burst into the scene with new themes and public agendas for the city, linked to the global discourse on cities, as reflected in the philosophy of programs and initiatives such as the Strategic Plan for Medellín and the Metropolitan Area (1995), plans of rural development and local networks of science and technology.¹⁴³

¹⁴² Marion Ritchey-Vance, *The Art of Association: NGOs and Civil Society in Colombia*, 22

¹⁴³ María Soledad Betancur, Ángela Stienen and Omar Urán, "Construir Capital Social para Configurar un Entorno Innovador en Condiciones de Debilidad Político-Institucional." In *Globalización: Cadenas Productivas & Redes de Acción Colectiva: Reconfiguración Territorial y Nuevas Formas de Pobreza y Riqueza En Medellín y El Valle de Aburrá*, ed. María Soledad Betancur (Bogotá: Tercer Mundo, 2001), 240.
<http://bibliotecavirtual.clacso.org.ar/ar/libros/colombia/ipc/betancur/cap9.pdf>.

Table 1. Existing NGOs since 1979 in Medellín, Colombia

ONGs	Date of Founding	Place	Origin	Purpose
Corporación Vamos Mujer	1979	Envigado (Medellín Metropolitan Area)	Shepherding duties and Neighborhood Organization. Christian Revolution in Latin America	Improvement of the material conditions of life for women and their organizations.
Instituto Popular de Capacitación – IPC	1982	Medellín	Unions, Neighborhood Organization Professionals, and Scholars. Christian Revolution in Latin America	Directed to the actors in the labor sphere, urban issues, and the use of alternative law.
Escuela Nacional Sindical (ENS)	1982	Medellín	Unions, Professionals, and Scholars	Agency specializing in the reflection and action on the problems the world of labor in general and workers' organizations, particularly the unions

Corporación Cultural Nuestra Gente	1987	Medellín	Neighborhood Organization (Santa Cruz Neighborhood)	Education and training through cultural activities such as theater, puppetry, radio, television, communication and community
Corporación REGION	1989	Medellín	Unions, Professionals, and Scholars (Founders of the IPC)	Center of critical thinking. Devoted to the formation of critical citizenship and a democratic political culture. It promotes opportunities for deliberation and consensus of social and political agendas.
Corporación Cultural Barrio Comparsa	1990	Medellín	Neighborhood Organization (Manrique Neighborhood)	It started as an alternative of life to the generations of young people at the time of growing violence. Since then the institution has established as a multiplier project of art and culture, through festive expressions as the carnivals, parades, music and street theater.
Mujeres que Crean	1990	Medellín	Feminist activism	Originally known as the Institute of Working Women and initially directed their actions to the field of women's health, socio-political and trade union women workers, and training to promote citizenship of young women

Corporación CONVIVAMOS	1990	Medellín	Civic Movements (Villa Guadalupe Neighborhood)	Addresses issues such as forced displacement, impoverishment, poverty, exclusion, increased violence, urban dynamics of armed conflict and the expansion of drug trafficking.
Corporación Viva la Ciudadanía	1990	Medellín	ONGs association: Conciudadanía, Corporación REGION, y ENS	Weaves networks and help to build forms of social organization seeking the strengthening and consolidation of democracy in Colombia
Escuela Nacional Sindical (ENS)	1982	Medellín	Unions, Professionals, and Scholars	Specializes in the reflection and action on the problems the world of labor in general and workers' organizations, particularly the unions
Corporación REGION	1989	Medellín	Unions, Professionals, and Scholars (Founders of the IPC)	Center of critical thinking. Devoted to the formation of critical citizenship and a democratic political culture. It promotes opportunities for deliberation and consensus of social and political agendas.

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Corporación CONVIVAMOS	1990	Medellín	Civic Movements (Villa Guadalupe Neighborhood)	Addresses issues such as forced displacement, impoverishment, poverty, exclusion, increased violence, urban dynamics of armed conflict and the expansion of drug trafficking.

The growing enthusiasm for NGOs in Medellín occurred within the context of the decentralization laws and structural adjustment, and the peace treaty with communist guerrillas that led to the new National Constitution in 1991. Through the popular election of mayors and governors, the citizenry was able to acquire a greater role not only in the distribution and control of fiscal resources and the provision of public services but also in the implementation of community care programs for victims of violence. This process that Colombia shares with Latin America, was an effort to strengthen the historical role of municipalities as mediators between citizens and government. The reforms were particularly important for NGOs, first because of the responsibility they took on to educate the public about the rights and

responsibilities of citizenship, and to report any violation of these rights and responsibilities; and second, because the process empowered the municipalities to contract with local NGOs to work on a wide range of public programs, which in turn gave them the opportunity to generate income from their operations. NGOs definitely became an alternative, but not a solution to the problems of isolation, apathy and articulation of the communities. This was made explicit by the Presidential Adviser for Medellín Jorge Orlando Melo in 1995, when he stated:

If something became clear after all these years of efforts of Medellín and its people, it is the importance of prioritizing the mechanisms of participation and dialogue to solve urban problems experienced by the city, and that cannot simply be resolved from technocratic investment decisions (...) what is missing is the qualitative leap that would give a real change in the political practices of the city, which are marked by a profound indifference to the political world. This can be seen —but this is just a symptom— in the fact that Medellín is the city in which less people are involved in the election of their rulers. Such indifference is evident also in the withdrawal of important social sectors, isolated from the political world, which is looked upon with suspicion and distrust.¹⁴⁴

However, perhaps one of the most important features of the presence of NGOs in Medellín is that they began to conceive of themselves as a genuine and independent force able to produce change. Ruben Fernández affirms:

REGION very quickly said something that was key for me. We were not a grassroots organization; we did not intend to replace them or be their spokesmen. We were a social actor —that was the category used back then— therefore we were a group; a group with their own opinion and public agenda that sometimes coincided with popular movements. For instance, we sometimes had very strong differences and discussions with the teachers union because the rights of education of children were more important than the labor rights of teachers. That stance caused us difficulties because until then organizations like ours were extensions, were at the service of the people's organization.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Jorge Orlando Melo, *IV Seminario Alternativas de Futuro*, (Medellín: Consejería Presidencial, 1995), 8.

¹⁴⁵ Rubén Fernández Andrade, personal interview with author, Medellín Government Building (Medellín), December 10, 2013.

The self-esteem of these organizations was strengthened both through the creation of their own networks as well as the possibility of a place within global advocacy networks on human rights and the environment. But, beyond the efforts to improve the quality of life for their immediate beneficiaries, NGOs in Medellín served a bigger purpose. Within a context of armed resolution of political and social differences, NGOs and popular movements managed since then to develop an incipient "culture of democracy" that sought to make room for migrant peasants, workers, students, and neighborhood leaders, to offer them a vision of leadership as an opportunity for service. In that way, Colombia had begun manufacturing a new social fabric and a set of organizational relationships that would help partially to overcome the violence afflicting the Colombian population, especially Medellín.¹⁴⁶ As suggested by Ritchey-Vance, when referring to the role of NGOs in Colombia: "Where competition and confrontation have been the norm, they espouse cooperation. Where official programs are subject to sudden change, they assure a thread of continuity."¹⁴⁷

2.3. Corporación REGION and the origins of institutional memory practices

The history of NGOs in the 1970s and 1980s, as a form of social action in Latin America and in Colombia, was deeply associated with leftist thought in its various versions ranging from Marxism to social democratic thinking and revolutionary Christianity. This set of ideological perspectives converged on criticism of the capitalist system, and in some cases, the claim of armed struggle as an option for transforming society. REGION was born in November 1989, just as the fall of the Berlin Wall helped to confirm that the model of society developed in the Soviet

¹⁴⁶ Marion Ritchey-Vance, *The Art of Association: NGOs and Civil Society in Colombia*, 28.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 22

Union and Eastern Europe was no longer sustainable. The unification of East and West Germany marked a turning point for leftist thinking in Latin America as it led to the question of what kind of society should be created. The end of political utopias was also accompanied by the processes of transition to democracy in South America and the political negotiations following the civil wars in Central America, which forced the intellectuals of the continent to pose the question of the "reinvention of democracy."¹⁴⁸ This process of re-evaluation was accompanied by a readdressing of policy through three critical aspects: the idea that political logic is contrary to the logic of war; the end of national unity as an exclusive frame for the construction of democracy and the claims of difference through the reencounter of politics with civil society (as we have seen throughout this chapter); and finally, the need for social projects to materialize these ideas through political "pacts."¹⁴⁹

At that time, Colombia experienced what writers like Paul Oquist call a "Partial collapse of the state" or "Sovereignities in Suspense" as Maria Teresa Uribe calls it, which put in evidence the inability of the Colombian state to control both the territory hegemonically and to produce binding national narratives.¹⁵⁰ This collapse, according to Oquist, was expressed in the high homicide rates, inefficiency and corruption of the police, and the consequent expansion of private security; the presence of guerrillas, paramilitaries and drug cartels that disputed the control of the territory with the state; high rates of impunity; the increase of weapons in civilian hands; and the absence of state institutions in some regions, such as those of recent peasant colonization. This

¹⁴⁸ Max Yuri Gil Ramírez, personal interview with author. Corporación REGION headquarters (Medellín), December 11, 2013.

¹⁴⁹ Norbert Lechner, *Los Patios Interiores de La Democracia: Subjetividad Y Política* (México D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1990).

¹⁵⁰ María Teresa Uribe de Hincapié. "Las Soberanías En Disputa: ¿Conflicto de Identidades o de Derechos?" *Estudios Políticos* 15 (1999): 23–45. Paul Oquist, *Violencia, Política y Conflicto En Colombia* (Bogotá: Instituto de Estudios Colombianos, Biblioteca del Banco Popular, 1978).

was the moment when the Medellín cartel was able to openly declare war on the Colombian state; when sectors of the state security forces exterminated the political party UP (Patriotic Union); and when paramilitary armies emerged, able to dispute the territory not only with the state but also with the guerrillas in the countryside and in the city. Different forms of violence overlapped fueling the collective imagination that nourishes memory and the neighborhood, local and regional histories, and linked the past with the present, building as Uribe argues, "a sort of omnipresence (of violence) around which the nation is conceived."¹⁵¹

However, this was also a time in which it was possible to glimpse a solution to the unfeasibility of the Colombian state, as contended by the current Corporación REGION's CEO Max Yuri Gil.¹⁵² The demobilization of armed insurgent actors such as The 19th of April Movement (Movimiento 19 de Abril, M-19) M-19, Ejército Popular de Liberación-EPL (Popular Liberation Army), Corriente de Renovación Socialista, the Quintin Lame Armed Movement, and Autodefensa Obrera, generated a great social mobilization around the importance of a National Constituent Assembly. In Medellín, which had become the most dramatic war scenario, there was already awareness among some sectors of society about the need to find a solution to this conflict scenario. Youth, intellectuals, business groups, the Catholic Church, among others sectors, were mobilizing to converge first around the Consejería Presidencial para Medellín-CPPM (The Presidential Security Advisory Council on Medellín) in 1990 and a year later in the National Constituent Assembly.

¹⁵¹ Uribe de Hincapié. "Las Soberanías En Disputa: ¿Conflicto de Identidades o de Derechos?," 29.

¹⁵² Max Yuri Gil Ramírez, personal interview with author, REGION headquarters (Medellín), December 11, 2013.

At this crossroads, Corporación REGION was born as an off-shoot of the Popular Training Institute (IPC). This division is relevant to the extent that it was based on the resignation of the future founders of REGION to the fact that the armed struggle for the seizure of power was finished as a strategy. For REGION, ethically and politically, it was not possible to support — even symbolically— the seizure of power through arms. REGION also raised the need to reformulate the relations of civil society with the state.. To that extent the importance of public and democratic institutions was re-valued. It was no longer necessary to destroy the state —as proposed by the leftist insurgency for a long time— but rather to strengthen it as a way to achieve the democratic organization of society. This new relationship between public institutions and civil society had its ultimate expression in the aforementioned CPPM. The CPPM was a unit established by the Presidency in order to implement specific actions to solve the city's serious problems of violence. Along with youth and neighborhood social organizations, the CPPM began to develop a very intense relationship with civil society organizations, especially NGOs, neighborhood organizations and community organizations, the ones which wielded legitimacy in the territory. Despite the underlying need for the state to instrumentalize control over the territory, this project involved the construction of a presence distinct from that exerted by the armed actors.

The cooperation between institutions was difficult not only because of the struggles to build networks and movements that take an interest in the city's development as a whole, beyond the neighborhood, but also because the city had already gone through years of deep disintegration of the social fabric. The city had experienced not only the violence used by drug cartels, but also

exerted by paramilitary forces, urban militias, and groups of social cleansing.¹⁵³ These criminal organizations seriously undermined, and weakened social organizations. However, this was a very important moment because links between neighborhood, cultural, and academic organizations were forged and close and lasting relations were established. Nuestra Gente, Barrio Comparsa, Convivamos, el Instituto de Estudios Regionales-INER (Institute of Regional Studies), or Centro de Estudios del Habitat Popular-CEHAP (the Habitat Studies Center), are examples of a long list of organizations which launched different projects seeking to establish a public agenda on the specific needs of the city. The relationships between these organizations and the governmental world were crucial —particularly at the local and regional level— in order to promote peace and coexistence, urban planning and development. This was possible, despite the deep mistrust of the state, which worsened over the years of extreme violence: the state was not there to protect them and the national police and army were accused of being accomplices for the criminal groups.

REGION then became interested in the practices of memory. Although there is no agreement among the members about how the organization began to show interest in memory, it is possible to identify three different paths described by its members.. The first is that gradually, within the framework of the defense of civil rights —particularly the issue of life and integrity— the demand arose for the recognition of the voice of the victims of violence, and the claim for life and the integrity of people and social organizations "became a supremely felt need by society" as stated by Gil Ramírez¹⁵⁴. This situation is understandable within the context of violence in which

¹⁵³ Since at least the late 1980s, in several countries in Latin America, clandestine social cleansing organizations have engaged in the elimination of what can be considered "undesirable" social elements, such as criminals, drug addicts and the homeless.

¹⁵⁴ Max Yuri Gil Ramírez, personal interview with author, REGION headquarters (Medellín), December 11, 2013.

REGION was born. During 1991, for example, Medellín became the most violent city in the world with 6,810 homicides.¹⁵⁵ To the extent that violence became more acute in the city, REGION came to realize, that the reconstruction of the memory of what had happened in the most difficult moments in the history of the neighborhoods was a way not only to heal wounds but also to reconstruct the individual projects of individuals and communities that had been shattered by violence.

In the second place, besides the methodologies learned from popular education, researchers on popular history and culture such as E.P. Thompson, and the Latin Americans Néstor García-Canclini, Martín-Barbero, and Jesús Galindo, had a big influence.¹⁵⁶ For them, research on memory was an essential part of the cultural labor in all communities. NGOs such as REGION invested considerable time and resources to rebuild memories of neighborhoods in Medellín. These research results were always made explicit through cultural expressions such as theater and graphic arts, community radio, television programs, documentaries, and different publications such as newspapers and books whose purpose was to preserve values such as solidarity that were at the core of the creation and organization of city neighborhoods.¹⁵⁷ Solidarity was an essential condition for survival in these neighborhoods. In this regard, reconstructing memory was a way to restore and promote the story that the inhabitants had built around the origin of their communities. And in the third place, the experience of joint work between the NGOs and the local government in the city neighborhoods, made the difference with other experiences in the country. In Medellín, during the 1990s, NGOs were the social

¹⁵⁵ Saúl Franco et al. "Mortalidad Por Homicidio En Medellín, 1980-2007 Deaths by Homicide in Medellín, 1980-2007." *Ciência & Saúde Coletiva*, 17, no. 12 (2007): 3209–3218.

¹⁵⁶ Marta Villa, personal interview with author, Biblioteca Publica Piloto (Medellín), December 19, 2013

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

institutions that most had an impact on the public agenda of the city. They claimed, repeatedly, the cultural agenda as part of the public agenda of the city; memory always had to occupy an important place.

This interest in memory as a tool to rebuild identity and repair the social wounds explains the continuous adaptation and active networking of institutional memories in search of specific political agendas. Organizations like REGION then began to fill the gap left by the state through the emerging institutional memories. This kind of memories were constituted by "paradigmatic narratives" consisting of stories that members of an organization tell each other in order to explain the origin and history of their institution and how that history has "transformed" both the life of individuals and the communities for which they work. It is from the recognition of the empty spaces left by the state that social organizations and NGOs in Medellín began to institutionalize experiences and practices of memory. The *Skin of Memory* project (1997) led by REGION Corporation, occurred in the Barrio Antioquia, precisely one of the neighborhoods of Medellín where the penetration of drug trafficking and violence had occurred as a result of an ongoing process of isolation, abandonment and stigmatization by the state. This project coincided with a high level of empowerment and legitimacy of organizations such as REGION, able to concentrate people, ideas, associations, networks and resources from global advocacy networks. To that extent, the public agenda could be pursued and mediated more efficiently. In this sense, the *Skin of Memory* became a milestone in the history of social organizations of Medellín. Since then activists and professionals understood that through institutional practices of memory, network support, and with the support of the local government, it was possible to break down the barriers between neighborhoods and the logics imposed by the armed actors in the territory.

However, the experience in Barrio Antioquia was accompanied by a process of professionalization of NGOs and with it of the practices of memory. The professionalization of NGOs used the knowledge gained from everyday practices in the neighborhood in order to restructure them hierarchically, separating memory from the social movements. To the extent that NGOs created and became entangled in keeping the networks of power and the legitimacy of their discourses and institutional agendas, these social actors moved away from the social energy —mentioned by Ritchey-Vance— and the original focus on building movements that advocated for social change.

The recent creation of local museums like the Medellín's House of Memory Museum, the National Museum of Memory (Bogotá), and institutions such as the National Center for Historical Memory (CNMH) demonstrate in the first place the process of hierarchization of practices and in the second, the centralization and concentration of resources. For Fernández, this situation is “the worst tragedy of community-based organizations.”¹⁵⁸ While local NGOs dedicated to the promotion of practices of memory like IPC, REGION, and Vamos Mujer are today facing serious problems of funding, institutions such as the CNMH and the National Museum of Memory in Bogotá have managed to acquire and concentrate a large amount of economic and institutional resources. In addition, according to the anthropologist Riaño Alcalá “this process of institutionalization takes away the political sense of memory; memory becomes only a performative act.”¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ Rubén Fernández Andrade, personal interview with author, Medellín Government Building (Medellín), December 10, 2013.

¹⁵⁹ Pilar Riaño Alcalá, personal interview with author, Via Skype, November 7 2013.

This situation has required local institutions to rely on a large provider of resources like the CNMH to advance projects in relation to memory. The empowerment of national social movements of victims within the CNMH occurred by also silencing other experiences of memory different from the strictly political conflict. This has had the effect, as suggested by Gil Ramírez, of maintaining memory exercises within very restricted settings.¹⁶⁰ The CNMH posits the existence of a process of capturing and substantialization (institutionalization) of memory, which becomes exclusionary, having totalizing effects and aims of homogenization.¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ Max Yuri Gil Ramírez, personal interview with author. Corporación REGION headquarters (Medellín), December 11, 2013.

¹⁶¹ Eduardo Apokada and Mikel Villarreal, *El Poder En Busca de Autoridad* (Alicante, España: Educa, 2008), 113.

CHAPTER THREE

Institutionalization of Memory

3.1. The case of Barrio Antioquia

In 1997, people in the neighborhood known as Barrio Antioquia organized a project called *Historia de Barrio* (The Neighborhood History) as part of the peace and non-aggression pacts promoted by the local government among youth gangs —locally called the Combos— in the neighborhoods of Medellín. Led by the NGOs Corporación REGION and Presencia Colombo-Suiza (Colombian-Swiss Presence), the goal of this project was that the neighborhood's people —mostly directly related to the conflict— would come to know their past through the collective reconstruction of individual experiences during the most critical and significant moments of the community history. Inscribed within the methodological and social intervention traditions carried out by NGOs in the city —as mentioned in the previous chapter— this project sought to repair the social fabric through the emotional elaboration of collective traumas.

At the beginning of 1998, Corporación Colombo Suiza and Corporación REGION, in partnership with other institutions such as the Secretary of Education and Culture of Medellín, COMFENALCO (the Family Benefit Fund of Colombia) and the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation, proposed to continue the process begun in May 1997, given the positive effects observed among some of the participants in terms of their social dynamic and lifestyles. The second phase's main purpose was to make public the results of the previous stage in order to unite the whole community through the institutional memory practices. Within this environment, there was a realization that only through inter-

institutional work —both official and non-governmental— was it possible to make meaningful social interventions in the territory. Therefore, in the midst of bullets and funerals, these organizations —and the community— started to envision the most important memory and public art project so far in the city. The project —as its coordinator Mauricio Hoyos Agudelo conveys — sought through testimony and artistic expressions, to exorcise and mitigate the Barrio Antioquia inhabitants' unpleasant memories, generated by over fifty years of exclusion, abandonment, stigmatization, and violence.¹⁶² This project stemmed from the idea that the elaboration of grief was a vital element in the process of communal living. The project the *Skin of Memory* considered that recovering significant and painful memories of the past could avoid a stagnation of hate “which is perpetuated as the only reference that fuels revenge and social immobility.”¹⁶³ According to Riaño Alcalá, the key to this project was that how to remember could allow creative development and could be used to transform the lives of communities existing amid violence.¹⁶⁴

As an inter-institutional process, the *Skin of Memory* gave a new meaning to the use of painful past memories of a specific territory such as the barrio (neighborhood). The people could share their experiences while also being the recipients of the emotions of their neighbors and fellow citizens, creating an opportunity for reflection that would significantly improve the quality of community life. This type of work, in accordance with the ethical NGO obligations at that time, also had as an important purpose to fill the gap left by the state regarding social interventions in different areas of the city. The lack of state involvement, particularly in this time of extreme violence, had given greater importance to the armed groups than to nonviolent actors, deepening further the city's bias about Barrio Antioquia.

¹⁶² Mauricio Hoyos Agudelo, personal interview with author, Avenida La Playa (Medellín) December 30, 2013.

¹⁶³ Mauricio Hoyos Agudelo, *La Piel de La Memoria. Barrio Antioquia: Pasado, Presente y Futuro* (Medellín: Corporación REGION, 2001), 25.

¹⁶⁴ Pilar Riaño, personal interview with author, via Skype, November 7, 2013.

Peace pacts with the *Combos* (the youth gangs), lasted until government subsidies and support ended. Part of the problem was that the Colombian state was unable to recognize that the reasons for the armed clashes in the Medellín neighborhoods were much deeper. Lack of planning and programs, absence of civil and judicial authorities, the informality of the economy, and the lack of recognition for identities —particularly of youth— led to the legitimization of different armed actors by the population of Medellín. The armed actors were then able to exert control over social relationships and customs. The *Combos* were legitimized to the extent that they shaped aesthetics and ways of thinking and behaving closely related to drug trafficking. Nonetheless, these aesthetic expressions encountered a very important popular culture and very profound forms of social resistance. The imposition of the first tolerance zone of the city in Barrio Antioquia certainly gave this area a particular character. Since 1951, in addition to the first inhabitants —mostly Liberals displaced by the political violence in the 1940s— and the prostitutes, the neighborhood was home to a picturesque set of characters revolving around the illegal economy and of the underworld: gamblers, thieves, bums and hustlers all created an atmosphere of illegality and marginality that allowed crime and the forbidden to be a form of valid, possible and profitable life.¹⁶⁵ In this sense, traditional forms of economic subsistence started to be gradually replaced by illegality. Hoyos Agudelo writes: "As the people of the neighborhood shifted formal occupations, prostitution, the marijuana trade and robbery of houses and pedestrians began to emerge as a possibility of survival."¹⁶⁶

The absence of the state in the planning of the city, the subsequent processes of isolation and stigmatization, were all circumstances that prepared the ground for organized crime in the Barrio. In

¹⁶⁵ Mauricio Hoyos Agudelo, *La Piel de La Memoria. Barrio Antioquia: Pasado, Presente y Futuro* (Medellín: Corporación REGION, 2001).

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

fact, by the 1970s, Barrio Antioquia was already the core of smuggling, drug and arms trafficking, and female sex traffic of the city. Physical and sexual violence, theft, jealousy, or property destruction were many of the ways in which local residents expressed the status of their relations and social structure. Over half a century, psychiatrists, politicians and journalists contributed to the establishment of social representations that placed people in this neighborhood between pathology, social immorality and crime. The neighborhood was imagined as the epicenter and symbol of social marginalization that other city dwellers feared and avoided.¹⁶⁷ This was the image and stigma about the neighborhood that three American journalists recounted in 1988:

Barrio Antioquia is undoubtedly the most dangerous area of Medellín. Declared tolerance zone decades ago and located next to the old airport, the neighborhood accommodates prostitutes of both sexes and dispossessed people of the minimum values. The perpetrators of the most heinous crimes of Medellín are almost always from Barrio Antioquia and were mainly migrants in these slums who participated in the vicious Cocaine Wars that took place in Miami and New York between 1979 and 1982. Next to Itagüí district in southern Medellín, Barrio Antioquia is a place where gunmen are achieved easily. Customers interested in a “little job” can literally stop at any corner and hire a murderer.¹⁶⁸

However, these expressions of social relationships cannot be understood simply from violence and crime indicators. The inhabitants of Barrio Antioquia also managed to generate positive dynamics of cultural and identitarian resistance as a result of family and neighborhood solidarities and emotional ties. Marginality forced them to build an urban territoriality independent of the city. Since 1993—the year in which more than 200 young people died violently in the barrio—the community itself began proposing projects for positive coexistence. Despite the enormous difficulties and surprises, it is important to underline that the six combos—that kept the neighborhood ravaged and divided by

¹⁶⁷ Pilar Riaño Alcalá, “Encuentros Artísticos con el Dolor, las Memorias y las Violencias,” *Iconos* 21 (2004): 95.

¹⁶⁸ Paul Eddy, Hugo Sabogal and Sara Walden, *The Cocaine Wars* (New York: Norton, 1988), 29-30,

continuous shootings— were the actors who actually decided to promote a ceasefire.¹⁶⁹ Barrio Antioquia became a pioneer of peace processes in Medellín. The social diagnostics that emerged after the intervention processes in the neighborhood demonstrated that more complex cultural and social fabrics existed in the neighborhood than social networks articulated to crime and lawlessness.¹⁷⁰ While local residents were living in a situation of extreme violence, efforts to maintain their oral traditions and community celebrations that linked the present to the past, to the sense of belonging to the neighborhood also persisted. Around tango music, for instance, the local people built a unique identity both in terms of the dance and the body. The myth of the death of Carlos Gardel (1935), the most famous tango singer of the times, right next to the neighborhood, in the old airport, coexists with the daily life of the inhabitants. In the famous tango bars of Barrio Antioquia, people give a different sense to the history of the neighborhood and its cultural expressions. Through dance and music, people have established a close link with the past of the city, which now excludes them. Tango connects people to the stories of the first countryside migrants who listened for the first time the phonograph through the voice of Gardel. In *El Patio del Tango Bar*, anyone can read a sign that says: “Carlos Gardel died in this neighborhood on June 24, 1935 at 3:10 pm.

3.2. The *Skin of Memory*. A Public Art Project

The starting point for the *Skin of Memory* project was the fact that the urban experience of the local people was deeply fragmented. The institutions in charge of this project acknowledged that violence and exclusion policies have had a devastating impact on the social fabric and everyday experience of

¹⁶⁹ “En diciembre llegó la paz. Barrio Trinidad, pionero de los procesos de pacificación,” *El Mundo*, Medellín, March 17, 1999, 8.

¹⁷⁰ Pilar Riaño Alcalá, “Encuentros Artísticos con el Dolor, las Memorias y las Violencias,” *Iconos 21* (2004): 95.

the local people and their organizations. A profound social and collective wound was open. As presented by Riaño Alcalá —based on the concept of social injury proposed by the artist Doris Salcedo— social suffering resulted from the impact of global, national and local authorities on the everyday experience. According to Riaño Alcalá that suffering was experienced from:

The extreme death experiences, paradigmatic games of loyalties, lack of community processes of grief, and the breakdown of social trust. It about a social suffering as Kleinman, Das and Lock (1997) have noted that has its origins and consequences in the devastating injuries that social forces can infringe on the human experience.¹⁷¹

The project sought to bring together the most significant elements and situations of everyday life in order to explain the imagination of the people, "built and fed by images and chains of words, to make it a physical experience to be touched, stared, smelled, tasted and heard."¹⁷² In that sense, the organizers proposed an installation (performance) resulting of the collective work. For this, a methodology based on workshops of individual and interviews about collective memory was proposed by the institutions in order to identify the uses of space, time references, and the dynamics of socialization of culture and identity. Over time, workshops about conceptualization and historical context and contrasting of oral stories were designed to ask the participants about what they wanted to tell and how they wanted to express themselves. Through recognition of a common history, the project sought to legitimize peaceful coexistence and to reject murder as the immediate horizon for the resolution of conflicts.

¹⁷¹ Pilar Riaño Alcalá, "Encuentros Artísticos con el Dolor, las Memorias y las Violencias," *Iconos* 21 (2004): 96.

¹⁷² Mauricio Hoyos Agudelo, personal interview with author, Avenida La Playa (Medellín) December 30, 2013.

The reconstruction of the neighborhood's history was then constituted by the pedagogical motivation to continue the process begun in 1997. The workshops' development was strengthened to the extent that participants exchanged knowledge and experiences in spaces and defined times. During these exchanges, the participants broadened their perspective on the popular expressions of the neighborhood's history and collective responsibility towards violence. The project, in fact, enabled the participants to re-signify new historical interpretations of everyday life marked by violence. As such, memory reappeared as a generator of social cohesion. This project began to be conceived as an artistic expression recognizing orality and materiality as predominant forms of transmission of memory among the population. "In the workshops I found twenty year old guys who had an altar in his room with photos of ten of his friends who had been killed," says Riaño Alcalá.¹⁷³ Through such expressions, people sought to explain their interaction with the objective, social, and subjective world; rebuild community life, religious practices, and generational experiences; and recover invaluable cultural knowledge that challenged the prevailing social, economic, political and moral order. Thus Colombian anthropologist Riaño Alcalá and the American plastic artist Suzanne Lacy appeared to propose the realization of a museological project—or communal public art as it was named by the institutions—based on their own experiences as researchers working with communities and marginalized groups of immigrants in Canada and the U.S. This project proposal was consistent not only with the results of the workshops in Barrio Antioquia but also with the resurgence of an important cultural movement in Medellín.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ Pilar Riaño, personal interview with author, Via Skype, November 7, 2013.

¹⁷⁴ Suzanne Lacy, "Debated Territory: Toward a Critical Language for Public Art." In *Mapping the Terrain. New Genre Public Art*, ed. Suzanne Lacy (Seattle: Bay Press, Incorporated, 1996), 171–185. Lacy participated en 1992 en el "Culture in Action" which was the first community-based art project that transcended internationally. See: Mary Jane Jacob, *Culture in Action: A Public Art Program of Sculpture Chicago* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995).

Lacy's artistic concept revolved around the idea of a temporary museum containing personal items of mourning which were valued by the inhabitants of the sector. With this representation of a collective process of elaboration of mourning enabling a collective reflection on the meaning of violence and the value of peaceful coexistence was activated. During the workshops, photographs, trunks, toys, songs, clothing and many other devices were collected and presented in order to stimulate conversation, recollection and the strengthening of communal ties among participants. Many of the participants had previously been enemies. Gathering objects was one of the activities which required most preparation. It was necessary to train the participants —mostly youth— in techniques for collecting oral information. In addition, it was required to recover the history associated with the object to understand the feelings and memories associated with it. In order to identify materials for public exhibition, object collectors opted for a major cultural practice Antioquia society which was visiting their neighbors. These visits sought to establish a close relationship that would allow the visited persons to share and evoke memories through the objects. Local journalist, Patricia Nieto, described the task of the collectors as the “archeology of daily life.” Nieto added:

What objects have marked the paths of others? Why one eye focuses on an object that is indifferent to others? What happens in the heart and mind of a community that has assisted in life to its own archeology? Strange archeology, which rescues living objects. Strange archaeologists who have rediscovered their own devices to account for what they are.¹⁷⁵

The vast majority of objects were rather ordinary and of everyday character. However, the meaning of the objects transcended their routine uses to indicate their status as unique items. In this sense, it is crucial to note, as Eugene Rochberg-Halton says, that:

¹⁷⁵ Mauricio Hoyos Agudelo, *La Piel de la Memoria. Barrio Antioquia: Pasado, Presente y Futuro* (Medellín: Corporación REGION, 2001), 21.

Valued belongings are means through which to objectify the self, to create an external extension of personal identity, a tangible presence in one's surroundings. Yet presence alone is not enough when disconnected from its human context of significance. "Things present are judged by things past," as the sixteenth-century English proverb has it (Hazlitt 1907), which is to say that what we *have* gains its meaning through its connection to those experiences and memories that have shaped us into our present condition. Having "something" means to be in a relationship to it, a relationship mediated by all those experiences that have conditioned the possessor and the thing possessed, and that form the medium between person and thing.¹⁷⁶

Many of the objects exhibited in the bus-museum were objects of mourning connecting the loss of the loved ones to the material world such as clothing and objects that many young people were carrying at the time of their death. Some others were objects full of oral tradition. From one generation to the next, these objects provided a concrete sense of the past: a Singer sewing machine on which the great-great grandmother sewed and patched clothes, the machete of a great-grandfather who had fought in the War of the Thousand Days, photographs of a first communion or marriage, were artifacts that bound family histories to the cycles of life, the generational changes and kinship.

Another important function of the workshops is that they allowed to the participants to develop maps about places and non-places in the neighborhood that made reference to beloved and feared sites of memory within the neighborhood. The reference to cemeteries, in that sense, is a prime example because to the people of Medellín they represented one of the privileged places to celebrate the struggle of memory versus forgetting and the silence of death. Around these places of memory, residents of neighborhoods like Barrio Antioquia, deployed all the elements of their popular culture. The decoration of the graves —says Riaño Alcalá— is part of the rituals and practices of remembrance taking place around the domain of the material world. They are local expressions struggling against the

¹⁷⁶ Eugene Rochberg-Halton, *Meaning and Modernity. Social Theory in the Pragmatic Attitude* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 169.

'routinization' of death and the trivialization of violence.¹⁷⁷ In this regard, one participant, referring to the Campos de Paz cemetery —where the boys killed in violence in the neighborhood were buried— said at one of the workshops held on November 15 (1998):

For me, the non-place is the cemetery. I just go to visit the cemetery in daytime. I see the mausoleum and the statues. Only in the cemetery there are always statues, cremations, halls, all inhabited by the dead. At the cemetery, I do not talk to anyone, I get depressed a lot, I do not think anything good. I just remember. The cemetery drags all my energy, destroys me. And then I go out looking forward to destroy, to see that there is nothing.¹⁷⁸

Another key activity of this process was called "urban tours." Through them, the participants were able to encounter places of memory mentioned by the other participants, in order to produce an acknowledgment of collective identities. The violence exerted by the 'combos' had produced the segregation of different sectors within the same neighborhood. As such, the inhabitants of a sector called "The Spark" could not cross to another sector called "The Parking." In this sense, workshops, and the methodological strategy as a whole, allowed the participants to be sensitized for the purpose of finding items that symbolized the collective processes of life and death in the neighborhood's history. Throughout the workshops, different proposals paved the way to realize the need to install a museum of a transitory and itinerant nature. The breakdown by sectors imposed by the 'combos' prevented the institutions from choosing a single place of exhibition, as initially thought, which led the coordinating institutions to decide that a bus would solve such difficulties. The bus was a metaphor for the ways of inhabiting the city. Public buses meant an alternative to the fragmentation of different sectors. On the bus, one was immune. In addition, the bus was a significant element of memory and identity in Medellín. They are the primary channel through which most of the city dwellers experience urban life on the

¹⁷⁷ Pilar Riaño, *Arte, Memoria y Violencia. Reflexiones sobre La Ciudad* (Medellín: Corporación REGION, 2003), 18

¹⁷⁸ La Piel de la Memoria. Promoting Group. Transcription. Corporación REGION. Medellín, noviembre 15 y 16 de 1998.

buses, and on which news and rumors travel. On the buses, people pray, sing and recite. There, different iconographic elements display the most important historical traditions and contemporary popular culture.

Undoubtedly, the bus met the most essential requirements of the project: to involve the vast majority of local people during the event, as lenders of the 474 objects to display or simply as visitors. The bus-museum crossed boundaries in the space of the city and tried to build another law, not from the imposition by armed actors, but from the consensus open through the transit from individual memory towards collective memories. The bus was a place that served to provide a tribute to the people of Barrio Antioquia. This project sought to overcome the suspicion and hostility between neighbors and to create an expressive channel to think about the future. As Riaño Alcalá recounts: "We understood the museum as well as a receptacle of a living memory, a kind of sensory texture, a skin from memory felt and resignified by each of its visitors."¹⁷⁹ In ten days, the bus-museum, as an expressive place of memory, received more than 4,000 visitors from all neighborhoods and organizations of the city, transforming the isolated urban experiences of residents.

¹⁷⁹ Pilar Riaño, personal interview with author, via Skype, November 7, 2013.



Figure 6. Bus-Museum Barrio Antioquia. 1998. Source: <http://mde11.org/?p=2243>.

The objects in the exhibition (See Figure 6 above) allowed neighborhood traditions to be performed simultaneously with national events that survive in the family history: a black and white photo of the Liberal leader Jorge Gaitán whose assassination (1948) is claimed as the cause of the current phase of violence in Colombia, confirmed this connection. The materials collected and the work of the participants reflected the ways in which local conflicts were articulated with national processes such as the partisan violence of the 1950s, drug trafficking, urban planning and social exclusion.¹⁸⁰ The arrangement of the objects created an "aura ritual" that accounted for the magnitude of the loss but also the way the people perceived themselves as a community. Also, visitors from the rest of the city established different associations with their own experiences of living in Medellín. These "foreigners" broke symbolic boundaries by going into a feared place in the city, thereby opening relations beyond friend-enemy dichotomies. The residents, who gave an object, as well as the museum visitors were asked to write a letter that included a desire for an unknown neighbor for the future of Barrio Antioquia. About 2,000 letters on white paper, placed in thick white oversized envelopes were exposed unopened next to the objects in the museum. As shown on Figure 7 below, at the end of the exhibition, a

¹⁸⁰ Pilar Riaño Alcalá, "Encuentros Artísticos con el Dolor, Las Memorias y Las Violencias," *Iconos* 21 (2004): 92.

choreographed gathering of bicycles, mimes, storytellers, and traditional musicians, toured the neighborhood streets celebrating the museum while anticipating the future by delivering the letters to every household in the neighborhood. This final celebration took up key elements of a typical carnival and ceremonial expressions that retrieved the festive atmosphere of the streets as neutral living spaces.



Figure 7. *The Skin of Memory*. Final Event. Source: http://mde11.org/?page_id=2107

The *Skin of the Memory* not only transformed the life of Barrio Antioquia. The project also transformed the interdisciplinary dimension of the subsequent social interventions in the city. The *Skin of Memory* determined—as suggested by Riaño Alcalá—the way in which local researchers incorporated the aesthetic and performative perspective and the way in which scholars recognized the social practices of memory. Riaño Alcalá says:

For me, the *Skin of Memory* influenced my own way of thinking knowledge. I also think that it was quite interesting because it gave me some guidelines to work on memory. It was also revealing for the fact of what can happen when you use the material world and the world of creation and installation, as a bridge to revive other things. So yes, for me it was a project that marked like few my research and intellectual work.¹⁸¹

¹⁸¹ Pilar Riaño, personal interview with author, via Skype, November 7, 2013.

This project also served to redefine the concept of public art by regional artists. This interest evolved from a position that understood art as a transposition of what was happening in the gallery or museum into a "new kind of community public art" whose predominant areas were determined by the popular urban culture as streets, alleys, shops, parks and market places. This new way of understanding art attended to a greater extent the processes of socialization and social-political issues of specific places where institutional interventions were carried out. Such proposals brought up the loss of objectivity and authorship as well as a greater integration into the socio-cultural space in which they developed. The practices and politics of memory that were advanced, since then, have led local artists to encourage the development of projects in areas where violence, social exclusion and marginalization took place. Regarding this change in perspective, Lacy said:

By leaving the centrality I sacrificed a bit of my authority in my own area as visual expert. To the contrary, the pleasure of a public project, much broader in scope and meaning of any work than something I could have created alone, was the reward for my collaboration.¹⁸²

However, we cannot lose sight of the fact that museological proposals as such and their discussion, showed the predominance of the expert over the public. Lacy's proposal of grouping the objects according to visual narrative threads following dominant themes such as the loss of a loved one or friend were definitely a disciplining of what people had to see and how they had to see. After training in techniques of documentary collection, collectors of such objects were called "literacy tutors of memory"¹⁸³. As suggested by Hoyos Agudelo —field coordinator of the *Skin Memory*— the curatorial work of the bus-museum was the result of a hierarchical relationship of the participating institutions

¹⁸² Pilar Riaño, *Arte, Memoria Y Violencia. Reflexiones Sobre La Ciudad* (Medellín: Corporación REGION, 2003), 38.

¹⁸³ Subsequent projects would call them "technicians of memory".

over the participants in the workshops and during the overall process.¹⁸⁴ The very displaying of the bus-museum offered the public the opportunity to not only to be recognized but also to be part of the institutional ethos of the participating NGOs in regards to the need to re-develop memory. This is how this work of social intervention carried out by NGOs such as REGION marks a milestone in the institutionalization of the practices of memory. The *Skin of Memory* formalized the expected democratic habits of the population involved. For the NGOs, the work with some elements of recollection and memory was necessary in order to rebuild the social fabric, the meaning of living together, and the very model of social intervention. In that sense —as I see it— this project was about a kind of dramaturgy of the civil society organizations claiming legitimate representation for themselves.

The project inaugurated a different model of social integration both professional and technocratic. Given the failure of the models of coexistence promoted by state, it was necessary to implement flexible and experimental models of action, serving individuals and social organizations under the influence —in this case— of the local NGOs. The *Skin of Memory* —as local experience— determined how the memory of the communities was instrumentalized in processes of peace, reconciliation and justice transforming social memory into an institutional framework of juridical claims of truth. Since then, Medellín has become a model of intervention in the national context in which memory has played a central role. My criticism, in this regard, is that to the extent that the practices of memory are instrumentalized via institutionalization, communities were left without the ability to use memory as a source of direct action. When NGOs such as those involved in the *Skin of Memory* suggest the use of exemplary memories, at the same time, this process hides social hierarchies from which memory is used to transform the daily life of the community. I understand that the institutional practices of memory implemented in Medellín resulted in a *presentist* memory, defined by Olick as a type of memory that:

¹⁸⁴ Mauricio Hoyos Agudelo, personal interview with author, Avenida La Playa (Medellín) December 30, 2013.

(...) poses limits to the degree to which they can be changed, while placing other pasts beyond our perceptual reach; the structure of individual choice makes some pasts unavoidable and others impossible to face; and the structure of social conflict over the past means that we are not always the ones deciding which pasts to remember and which to forget.¹⁸⁵

This is, however, a feature of the practices promoted by NGOs in developing countries. Several authors have warned that the reformist character of NGOs has led to the containment of counter-hegemonic struggles and political activism in communities in order to manipulate pedagogical practices. In that sense, Natascha Mueller-Hirth explains that NGOs have distanced themselves from social movements to confront "constructive engagement" with the state, as suggested by Fernández in the previous chapter, against direct action. Institutionalized politics, the media and the courts were represented as the appropriate and legitimate channels through which policy may be influenced in the democratic era.¹⁸⁶ In contrast, neighborhood mobilization and protest were represented by the NGOs as outdated, with the effect of being portrayed as an unacceptable way of action. There is a "NGOization" —defined by Aziz Choudry and Dip Kappor— as the professionalization and depoliticization of social action by drawing on knowledge produced in contemporary struggles and everyday practice pertaining to NGO-social movement relations.¹⁸⁷ As such, neighborhood-based organizations were stripped of their own ways of remembering that could be expressed in silence or oblivion through which they also resisted and created. NGOs were looking to turn institutional practices of memory into a civic model to make feasible the strengthening of democratic institutions. The *Skin of Memory* "was a triumph of civil society," says Fernández.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins, "Social Memory Studies: From 'Collective Memory' to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices," *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998): 128.

¹⁸⁶ N. Mueller-Hirth, "South African NGOs and the Public Sphere: Between Popular Movements and Partnerships for Development," *Social Dynamic*, 32, no. 2 (2009): 423-435

¹⁸⁷ Aziz Choudry and Dip Kappor eds., *NGOization. Complicity, Contradictions and Prospects* (London: Zed Books, 2013).

¹⁸⁸ Rubén Fernández, personal interview with author, Medellín Government Building (Medellín), December 10, 2013.

Two subsequent events confirm the importance of this intervention model inaugurated by the *Skin of Memory*. The first took place in 2011, at the third biennial of Medellín in 2011 organized by the Museum of Antioquia. There, a retrospective of the *Skin Memory* confirmed the project as the obligatory reference for Medellín organizations in terms of memory and pedagogical practices (See Figure 8). And second, the project *The Routes of Memory* (2013) that took up the idea of the tours of the Bus-Museum in Barrio Antioquia in 1999. Interestingly, this second project sought to connect the city of the privileged with the city of the excluded, poor and displaced by violence. *The Routes of Memory* was the result of the collective work of two months of meetings between a group of eleven victims of the internal armed conflict, members of Corporación REGION, Medellín Mayor's Office, and a significant group of artists from the Colombian-American Cultural Center. This project of "collaborative art" sought to draw attention to the experience of suffering and victimization of eight women and three men, both in their hometown and in Medellín. Along the way, the memory promoters—as they were called—served to foster dialogue with travelers on *The Routes of Memory*. However, as many of the interviewees assert the aesthetic prevailed over the recognition of the victims. It is very interesting to see how the process of institutionalization resulted in the sanitizing of memory, freeing it of any contradiction, as revealed by Riaño Alcalá:

For me, this project contained very interesting ideas, and what the institutions did was very interesting such as stopping at each place and doing an event there regarding the memory of the victims. But I think right now that what I saw was a project that was aesthetically biased, because many artists were all wanting to express themselves, then it was "Blablaba" and that's the image that prevails. I think that it's very interesting—this idea of showing people another society. At least when I was there, the city personalities were going to take a ride on the bus. The project problematizes me anyway because it is a stage for you to see, to be touched. However you get off the bus and that is it... To the contrary, *The Skin of Memory* was about doing and feeling memory.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁹ Pilar Riaño, personal interview with author, via Skype, November 7, 2013.



Figure 8. *The Skin of Memory Revisited* (2011). Source: <http://www.suzannelacy.com/mde-11-encuentro/>

3.3. NGOs, the State, and the Institutionalization of the Memory Practices in Medellín

Although there were several projects and inter-institutional initiatives using memory as a methodological tool since the end of the *Skin of Memory* in 1999, it was not until 2005 when the Program for Victims of Armed Conflict (PAVCA—Programa de Atención a Víctimas del Conflicto Armado) included memory as one of its core frameworks for reflection. As an initiative of the Medellín Mayor’s Office, PAVCA sought to transform the violent events into social learning for citizen coexistence through reconstruction and dissemination of the historical memory of the armed conflict. This program responded both to the alarming increase in the city of the rural population displaced by violence and the paramilitary demobilization processes carried out during the government of Álvaro Uribe Vélez.¹⁹⁰ In this regard, Andrés Arredondo, coordinator of the historic field of PAVCA relates that:

¹⁹⁰ 10.4 percent of people living in Medellín are victims of armed groups equivalent to 250,000 inhabitants. Jorge Iván Posada, “En Medellín hay 250 mil víctimas del conflicto armado interno,” *El Colombiano*, July 25, 2012,

We try to do an institutional exercise arguing that working memory of an ongoing conflict represented a very high level of complexity both to categorize memory and think about the victims' world. Victims are paradoxical social subjects insofar as the victim is steeped in political, social and cultural networks in which the processes of victimization go back and forth. In this sense, the victim can be simultaneously a victimizer. So, we tried to build public policy on victims.¹⁹¹

This program also responded to a new type of local government, whose work team came primarily from the city's most important NGOs, giving a new orientation to institutional work.¹⁹² In that sense, there was a process of concentration of professional resources that hierarchically restructured professional practices of memory. This process confirms my argument that neighborhood-based organizations were stripped of their own ways of understanding the political role of memories. In this regard, the researcher of the Institute of Popular Training (IPC) Urán states that:

The Mayor takes over the agenda built by NGOs and social movements. Somehow NGOs were in government. This is tricky because the NGOs lose their critical capacity before the government. On the other hand, from the point of view of human resources, the state monopolized many members of NGOs. There is a crisis in human resources for NGOs that are left to a new generation with less experience in politics.¹⁹³

The Program for Victims of Armed Conflict (PAVCA) then gave local government the opportunity to partner with NGOs to build a project on memory according to their own idea of how the recent history of the city should be recalled. Once NGOs achieved high levels of empowerment for themselves, and under the umbrella of human rights, PAVCA programs and NGOs such as Corporación REGION initiated a process institutionalization of the memory through which identity as acclaimed by

http://www.elcolombiano.com/BancoConocimiento/E/en_medellin_hay_250_mil_victimas_del_conflicto_armado_interno/en_medellin_hay_250_mil_victimas_del_conflicto_armado_interno.asp

¹⁹¹ Andrés Arredondo, personal interview with author, Villanueva Shopping Center (Medellín), December 7 2013

¹⁹² Gabriel Jaime Bustamante. Social Director at the Medellín's House of Memory Museum, personal interview, December 23, 2013.

¹⁹³ Omar Urán, personal interview with author, Comfenalco Library (Medellín), December 19 2013

neighborhood-based organizations in Medellín in the 1970s and 1980s, was effaced. The institutional need to attend and take care of the victims —Arredondo states—‘sclerotizes’ the social place of people.¹⁹⁴ In other words, for the state, the people's identity affected by the violence began to rely solely on their status as victims. Arredondo says:

Policies of attention to victims immediately skew the possibility of building social relationships with the city from dimensions such as tradition, culture, and history. This has also led the displaced community to build community from the paradigm of victim and not those from other dimensions. That is unfortunate. They need to be citizens, not victims. I have tried to say that we cannot approach people simply because they are victims. However, I have to admit that in midst of the conflict it is very difficult.¹⁹⁵

The demand for human rights passes from being enunciated exclusively from the national and local context to being part of a discourse of global dimensions. Local institutional memory carriers begin to think themselves as global players to fulfill specific purposes in their territory of influence, creating a very strong symbolic competition with organizations that were opposed to global discourses in the first place and also that claimed memory in terms of class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity. In fact, from a global awareness for compliance to the rights of victims, the PAVCA claimed memory for itself while also imposing it. Strongly influenced by the practices implemented in countries in transition to democracy such as Argentina and Chile, and the transfer of resources from international development cooperation for the attention of victims, the program relied on the fact that memory was synonymous with truth, and, in that sense, had to be exemplary. PAVCA then considered —according to Mechas Ossa, director of PAVCA (2010-2012) — that, “For victims, memory was restorative and integrative; for the general public who listens to the victim’s memory it was educational and enlightening; for the

¹⁹⁴ Andrés Arredondo, personal interview with author, Villanueva Shopping Center (Medellín), December 7 2013

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

nations it was a necessary and irreplaceable condition; and finally for the state and citizens, it was a lesson about what should not happen again.”¹⁹⁶

For the development of memory actions, this program implemented several strategies that were due to the logic of tension between global discourses and local political needs. Specifically, the strategies implemented by PAVCA had as its ultimate purpose to present and disseminate the victim’s memory among populations that turned its back on the conflict. According to Ossa, “the presentation at the mall “El Tesoro” —whose visitors come mostly from the upper class— surprised the visitors as if they were aliens to the Colombian conflict; as a conflict which was possible only in the media.”¹⁹⁷ The first of such strategies was the *Tunnel of Memory* (2008), whose most direct referents in the local sphere were the *Skin of Memory* and in the international sphere the experiences of museums dedicated to the memory.¹⁹⁸ Inspired by Holocaust museums, this inflatable structure picked up the metaphor of “seeing the light at the end” as a promise of change after a long journey of suffering and sacrifice. Within the logic of institutional appropriation, the museum proposed the instruction of visitors in order to turn them into “memory promoters.” This itinerant museum expected the visitors to acquire the conceptual and technical skills needed to promote an exemplary memory through which justice is sought.

Along with other projects such as the Archive of Memory, these projects demonstrated a reading from top to bottom; it was in the upper echelons that the way in which communities should remember was decided. Memory as a direct object of attention and analysis was expressed through isolated initiatives. As we have seen so far, the practices of memory in Medellín —as a direct object of attention and analysis— were expressed through isolated initiatives. In this respect, in 2005, one of the most

¹⁹⁶ Mechas Ossa, personal interview, Antioquia Government Building, December 18 2013

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ <http://tuneldesarrollolamemoria.blogspot.ca/>

important initiatives in relation to the practices of memory appeared. This was the construction of Medellín's House of Memory Museum. Again, as an institutional and government initiative, the new museum intended to give a deeper meaning to what it meant by memory. This initiative was aimed at promoting practices of collective memory from below. In light of that, the Mayor of Medellín Alonso Salazar, a founding member and partner of the Corporación REGION, proposed to conduct a consultation process with different social organizations—including the Movement for Victims of State Crimes— under the idea of a museum script able to collect the diversity of stories and memories of the city's recent history.¹⁹⁹ The Mayor expected this new space to contribute to the establishment of a pedagogical space and continuous and participatory construction of historical memory; as a meeting place for critical reflection on the past and how this informs the present and future of the city.²⁰⁰ Despite the silence of the interviewees, this process of public consultation revealed deep tensions over how institutional memory initiatives were producing an official history. The history of the museum shows how memory in Medellín is increasingly becoming a battlefield, sharpened by the fact that local people still live in the midst of war and violence. In that respect Arredondo says:

The fact that the conflict has not ceased is crucial because it determines the practices of memory. Working on memory amid the conflict is a social reality. The implementation of public policies is quite schizophrenic. In Colombia, people live parallel realities. Public policies of memory are implemented as if the conflict had ceased. There is a long-winded learning: while in the field everyone was being killed in the city people pretended that nothing was happening.²⁰¹

Institutional policies of memory reflect specific political and financial situations. Two circumstances serve as examples to illustrate what happened during the consultations on the museum script. In the

¹⁹⁹ Luz Amparo Sánchez. Researcher at Corporación REGION-Coordinator of the Public Consultations, personal interview, Café "El Astor", December 30 2013.

²⁰⁰ Gabriel Jaime Bustamante. Social Director at the Medellín's House of Memory Museum, personal interview, December 23, 2013. Corporación REGION. "Public Consultations and Memory Workshops.2010 – 2011" (Medellín: n.p., 2011).

²⁰¹ Andrés Arredondo, personal interview with author, Villanueva Shopping Center (Medellín), December 7 2013

first place, as previously happened with the *Skin of Memory*, the project of the Medellín's House of Memory Museum lasted until the Mayor Alonso Salazar's term of office ended in 2011. Despite the fact that the structure of the museum was completed and there was positive public reception, the project was abandoned for two years until December 2013 when it was opened, but without exhibits (See Figure 9).



Figure 9. Medellín's House of Memory Museum. December 28th 2013. Source: David Barrios Giraldo

The museum never had guaranteed resources to operate in the future. The initiative was then subject to the disinterest of the new municipal administration whose links with the NGOs and grassroots organizations were quite weak. Instead, the new mayor Aníbal Gaviria proposed installing in its place a watchdog institution to investigate public policy, housing and habitat, something that had little to do with memory.²⁰² And second, the pressure that the Movement for Victims of State Crimes exercised against the museum. For these movements, the museum was a state initiative and therefore it was not possible

²⁰² Gabriel Jaime Bustamante. Social Director at the Medellín's House of Memory Museum, personal interview, December 23, 2013. Corporación REGION. "Public Consultations and Memory Workshops.2010 – 2011" (Medellín: n.p., 2011).

to support it. MOVICE's testimonies were the backbone of the project.²⁰³ The MOVICE considered that the recovery of historical memory was crucial in order to recall and tell other realities outside the official story promoted by the state and its allies. In recent years, a part of the social movement for human rights has begun to revolve around demands for truth and historical justice whose centerpiece is memory. The groups and associations that form the regional chapter of MOVICE, have developed a set of strategies for recovering historical memory independently of institutional and "official" initiatives. In this regard, it is important to highlight the installation of photo galleries, public hearings, commemorative events, and monuments through which the movement has sought to both denounce the state agents responsible for killings, massacres and disappearances and to inform public opinion on their own narratives about war. Las Madres de la Candelaria (part of MOVICE), inspired by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, are a good example of initiatives that resist institutional cooptation. Since 1999, on every Tuesday, in front of the Cathedral La Candelaria (in downtown Medellín) the Madres de la Candelaria have assembled in order to draw the public's attention to the pain of their memories and to promote the importance of re-dignifying the victims as a central issue for the reconstruction of the Colombian nation, after so many years of civil war. Everyone can hear these women shouting "we want our sons and relatives alive, free and in peace!."

The museum was itself a monumentalization of memory that deprived communities of their obligation to recall or the voluntary and autonomous desire to forget.²⁰⁴ Nora suggests, in that direction, that when a society delegates the task of remembering to a place of memory such as the museum, the memory is

²⁰³ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights – IACHR. <http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/defensores/docs/pdf/defensores2011.pdf>, [The Inter-American Court of Human Rights asserts in this inform that paramilitary forces were created, sponsored and supported by different entities of the state.](#) Specifically, the Movement for Victims of State Crimes MOVICE (Chapter Antioquia) was formed since 2005, as a group of the direct victims of the Colombian state agents or paramilitary groups

²⁰⁴ James E. Young, "The Counter-Monument: Memory against Itself in Germany Today." *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 2 (Winter, 1992): 273. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343784>.

self-contained and separate from everyday life.²⁰⁵ That is the result of the institutionalization of memory practices. With the process of concentration of institutional, professional and financial resources, society is at risk of forgetting its own contradictions and resolving them. Referring to contemporary experiences of monumentalization, James Young argues for instance that:

Under the illusion that our memorial edifices will always be there to remind us, we take leave of them and return only at our convenience. To the extent that we encourage monuments to do our memory-work for us, we become that much more forgetful.²⁰⁶

As I raised in the theoretical framework in chapter one, insofar as social actors are increasingly visible, claims for the recognition of narrative deepens. Each time, it is more difficult to distinguish landscapes of memory from each other and therefore to define what the memory means with more precision.²⁰⁷ Hence, I have focused on how social organizations, such as NGOs and their partnerships with local government, have made use of collective memory in order to be politically legitimized. I assert that at present memory, as stated by Koselleck, is no longer a "space of experience" but rather a "horizon of expectations."²⁰⁸ This analytical perspective has allowed me to understand, at a defined place and time, what these social organizations have tried to do with memory when they publicly —through institutional and organizational networks of solidarity— try to invoke the past. Accessing these networks is, in a global context, the possibility that the collective memory of a specific cluster of individuals and institutions in a particular territory is recognized, as was underlined in the case of Corporación REGION and to a lesser extent the IPC. As suggested by Aksu, it is very difficult for the actors in the world of politics to act alone, without access to the resources that networks provide. It is

²⁰⁵ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire." *Representations* 26 (1989): 13

²⁰⁶ Young, "The Counter-Monument: Memory against Itself in Germany Today," 273

²⁰⁷ Jay Winter. 2006. *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press. 4

²⁰⁸ Reinhert Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985).

easier, however, for elite institutions like states, NGOs, think tanks, and some individuals to maintain relationships focused on claims of memory.²⁰⁹

Institutionalization is positive in some ways, for example, it is through these that the state and non-governmental organizations became interested in memory. The existence of the Museum House of Memory, the establishment of a network of NGOs interested in the subject, and the creation in Bogotá of the National Historical Memory Center have enabled the acknowledgment of the voice and the needs of individuals marginalized by war. However, what these institutions indicate is the state's appropriation of the practices of memory.²¹⁰ This capture of practices is also produced by International Cooperation Agencies. As stated by the majority of the interviewees during my fieldwork, the international crisis and, consequently, international cooperation resources have been reduced and redirected the memory work locally. Despite the great effort that organizations like REGION made by performing memory projects since the late 1990s, the crisis of resources from international cooperation has gradually forced them to become agents of the National Centre of Historical Memory (CNMH), a state agency that concentrates most of the resources. As Amparo Sánchez, researcher at REGION, says "The CNMH hired us to investigate an emblematic case as the intra-urban forced displacement in the Comuna Thirteen in Medellín. To make this work we had to apply the techniques of research proposals by CNMH."²¹¹ Undoubtedly, the role played by the CNMH since 2007 to produce large reports of violence have led to talk about a "memory boom in Colombia."²¹² However, its location, and

²⁰⁹ Eşref Aksu. "Global Collective Memory: Conceptual Difficulties of an Appealing Idea." *Global Society* 23, no. 3 (2009): 317–332. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13600820902958584>.

²¹⁰ Max Yuri Gil Ramírez, personal interview with author, REGION headquarters (Medellín), December 11, 2013

²¹¹ Amparo Sánchez Saldarriaga. Researcher at Corporación REGION, personal interview with author, Café Astor (Medellín), December 11, 2013

²¹² Trujillo: Una tragedia que no cesa (2008); El Salado: Esa guerra que no era nuestra (2009); Memorias en Tiempo de Guerra. Repertorio de Iniciativas (2009); La Masacre de Bahía Portete. Mujeres Wayuu en la mira (2010); La tierra en disputa. Memorias del despojo y resistencias campesinas en la costa caribe (1960-2010) (2010); La Rochela: Memorias de un crimen contra la justicia (2010); Bojayá: La guerra sin límites (2010); La masacre de El Tigre, Putumayo: 9 de enero de 1999 (2011); La huella invisible de la guerra. Desplazamiento forzado en la comuna 13-Medellín (2011); Mujeres y Guerra.

the composition of its members demonstrates the political centralism historically suffered by Colombians. “There is not an easy relationship —Gil Ramírez, CEO of the Corporation REGION says—because the reconstruction of memory passes through the territory and CNMH members are overwhelmingly from Bogotá (...) they did not even invite us to the presentation of the final report to which we contributed so much.”²¹³

The high degree of professionalization and concentration of resources by the CNMH, is worrisome not only because they acquired the ability to historicize Colombian society but also because they can produce and administer both official and local narratives. The CNMH is monopolizing explanatory readings of the past and representations of the future clearly inconvenient for memory exercises carried out by neighborhood-based organizations, for instance. The CNMH represents the highest level of institutionalization of memory until today through which society runs the risk of condensing a variety of interpretations of war and violence with different effects in one single group of people. The degree of empowerment of the CNMH will determine —to a large extent— how the recent history of the country is thought about and specifically how memory can be preserved or how the social order can be contested. These types of institutions —as Paloma Aguilar shows happened in another countries— condense the representation of public memory of the war in a nation, with the severe implication that the Colombian war is not over yet.²¹⁴

Victimas resistentes en el caribe colombiano (2011); Mujeres que hacen historia. Tierra, cuerpo y política en el caribe colombiano (2011); La Resistencia de la Asociación de los Trabajadores Campesinos del Carare (ATCC) (2011); “Nuestra Vida ha sido nuestra lucha”. Memoria y Resistencia en el Cauca indígena (2012); El Placer-Mujeres, Coca y Guerra en el Bajo Putumayo (2012); Una verdad secuestrada: cuarenta años de estadísticas de secuestro (1970-2010) (2013); Guerrilla y Población Civil (2013); Una Sociedad Secuestrada (2013); La Política de Reforma Agraria y Tierras en Colombia. Esbozo de una memoria institucional (2013); Desafíos para la reintegración. Enfoques de Género, Edad y Etnia (2013); y finalmente el gran informe, ¡Basta Ya! (2013). <http://www.centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/index.php/informes-gmh/informes-por-temas>

²¹³ Max Yuri Gil Ramírez, personal interview with author, REGION headquarters (Medellín), December 11, 2013

²¹⁴ Paloma Aguilar et al., *The Politics of Memory: Transitional Justice in Democratizing Societies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

The fact that the war actually continues in Colombia, has determined that memory is a resource to denounce and demand the truth: a memory of legal nature. NGOs work on memory in order to prevent the kingdom of oblivion and silence about the atrocities committed by armed actors, as stated by Amparo Sánchez. Although initially I agree, this claim is problematic because it denies the silence and the oblivion implicit and necessary to all expressions of memory. The processes of institutionalization and victimization practices have emerged as a dominant discourse that ultimately does not guarantee the moral symmetry of all subalterns. I seek to draw attention to the need to denaturalize violence as a source of explanation of Colombian history. The simplification and manipulation of the narratives means essentially the denial of what a society has achieved outside the conflict or as a result thereof. In that way, memory would then become into a possible path for the reinvention of the country within a framework of moral symmetry of all subjects.²¹⁵ It is imperative that the construction of plural historical accounts that —following Walter Benjamin’s metaphor of the angel of the history— constitute the liberating power of the future in the past. Benjamin proposes the ‘dehegemonization’ and ‘defatalization’ of the past leading to the recognition of the pluralities in history.²¹⁶ The Colombian historian Gonzalo Sánchez, director of CNMH recognizes this: "Today there is much talk, maybe too much about the trauma and the shock of returning to the past (the past does not repeat!): The past has made us dangerous. We also need to emphasize the need to recover the enjoyment and the longing to return to the past, to live the past with optimism."²¹⁷ Looking back at the past brings two major difficulties: first of all, the coexistence of diverse historical experiences of traumatic victimization

²¹⁵ Fuyuki Kurasawa, "The healing of wounds: on forgiveness" *The work of global justice: human rights as practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 57-93. Rodrigo Uprimny and Maria Paula Saffon, "Transitional Justice, Restorative Justice and Reconciliation. Some Insights from the Colombian Case" in *Coming to Terms with Reconciliation-Working Paper Library*. www.global.wisc.edu/reconciliation/.

²¹⁶ Walter Benjamin, *Discursos interrumpidos*, (Madrid: Planeta-De Agostini, 1987), 11.

²¹⁷ Gonzalo Sánchez, "Tiempo de Memoria, Tiempo de Víctimas," *Análisis Político* 63 (2008): 21.

hinders the reinscription of other historical experiences. The traumatic nature of these experiences leads to a kind of "memory" that, according to Jean-Louis Déotte, silences shared experiences.²¹⁸

We need to rethink the role of public memory as an opening exercise to the past, which critically problematizes forgetfulness, in order to affirm the possibilities of thinking on heterogeneous, decentralized societies. Memory must be understood as the narrative space from which to organize and make sense of the debates on both the dominant power structures as well as strategies of resistance.

²¹⁸ Jean-Louis Déotte, *Catástrofe y Olvido. Las ruinas, Europa, el Museo* (Santiago: Ed. Cuarto Propio, 1998), 241

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