FACING MEDUSA: (INTIMATE) ART AND RESISTANCE IN THE
COLOMBIAN ARMED CONFLICT

by

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“The most marvellous is not the beauty, deep as that is, but the classic attempt at beauty, at the swamp’s center.”


Abstract

The Colombian armed conflict is one of the oldest conflicts in the world. Numbers hardly explain the damage it has caused. Artistic responses to war emerge in this context, sometimes with the purpose of exerting some form of resistance to violence. I examine the ways in which similar responses operate and can produce social change, by tracing the work of three Colombian visual creators: Erika Diettes, Jesús Abad Colorado, and Juan Manuel Echavarría. This study reveals how their practice (re)configures certain spaces as intimate public scenarios of collective spectatorship/witnessing. The investigation also speaks of the inmost relation between the victims and survivors that they work with, spectators, and the creators themselves. That relation evidences the creators’ role as companions of the people they work with in conflicted contexts. Resistance becomes a central concept with which to understand both spectatorship/witnessing acts and the companionship relation mentioned above. Ultimately, their visual practice allows publics to resist emotional paralysis when looking at the horrors of war; that is to resist “turning into stone” when looking at Medusa.

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1 For the purpose of this investigation, I define the Colombian armed conflict as a non-international armed conflict which includes “armed confrontations occurring between governmental armed forces and the forces of one or more armed groups, or between such groups arising on the territory of a

2 Medusa is Greek mythological character: a female monster with many snakes instead of hair who turned people into stone when they looked directly into her eyes.
Preface

This dissertation is an original and unpublished intellectual product of the author, Paola Adarve-Zuluaga. The fieldwork reported in Chapters 2-3 was covered by University of British Columbia Ethics Board Certificate # H14-02012, under the title “Art and Resistance in Colombia”. The author was the lead investigator, responsible for all major areas of methods design, concept development, data collection and analysis, and writing of this document. Pilar Riaño-Alcalá was the supervisory author on this investigation and was involved throughout this research in all stages.
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3 I include the archive number in the “author space” to recognize the original author of each painting, although the work “La guerra que no hemos visto” was put together by Juan Manuel Echavarría.


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Facing Medusa: (Intimate) Art and Resistance in the Colombian Armed Conflict

1. Introduction

Throughout my work I have been concerned with the creation of spaces of convergence between art and scholarship. Scholars and artists who are interested in oppression, injustice, and domination can produce this convergence (Simonds, 2013; Sommer, 2014). The personal and the political convene in this arena to shape creative approaches to problematic realities (Simonds, 2013). In this sense, the research that informs this dissertation emerges as a space where art and scholarship intersect to look at a specific problematic reality.

For this purpose, I follow a particular understanding of art. This thesis draws on the idea of an aesthetic regime (Rancière, 2013) to trace how creative practices intertwine with cultural, social, and political actions to challenge the status quo. Therefore, I understand art as aesthetic practices that are “political because they contest, impact, and alter what can be seen and said” (Tanke, 2011, p. 3). In that sense, I inquire about the political potential of art as a disruptive practice in the context of a particular problematic reality. In this case, that particular reality entails a violent scenario.

Tanke (2011) explains that the idea of aesthetic art according to Rancière discards the notion that things have a single and fixed meaning. That art is “one of the means by which the meaning of an object, a body, a policy or a group of people can be contested” (p. 3). I relate the possibility to contest meaning to a probability to disrupt the status quo. Thus, I argue that the aesthetic character of art can manifest as a “disruptive energy” (Sommer, 2014, p. 7) that is related to forms of resistance to violence. More concretely, I argue that to contest, impact, or alter meanings within a violent regime can imply resistance to violence. Building on this point is my main argument: art can be resistance to violence. Accepting the assumption that art can be resistance, my overarching research question is: in what ways can art be resistance?
To begin answering this question, I address what is understood by the term “resistance”. Debates around this concept suggest that there is no clear consensus among scholars when defining resistance. However, most definitions accentuate that resistance implies an action in opposition to something or someone. It entails adopting disruptive behaviors and/or actions to challenge or counter something or someone. However, there are disagreements regarding the intention of such actions (was the resistance act intended as such?) and their recognition (do resistors recognize their resistance acts as such?) for determining whether there is resistance or not in a given situation (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004). I introduce my own approach to the concept of resistance in the theory chapter.

As a Colombian, my interest for artistic resistance to violence stems from personal knowledge of the context of the Colombian war. This war has its more recent roots in the 50s and it has involved a multiplicity of actors. Over 80% of the subsequent deaths of this conflict have been civilians. These deaths are the result of a repertoire of terror strategies and human rights violations by all parties to the conflict (Grupo de Memoria Histórica[^4] [GMH], 2013). In this context, artistic responses to war might spur from a diversity of intentions, including a wish to reveal an untold story of suffering and/or survival, or to remind the public about a specific violent event that should not be forgotten.

My research focuses on the purposes behind aesthetic responses to violence, as well as on the intricate ways in which such responses affect the scenario where violence occurs. The main objective of my thesis is to trace forms of resistance in creative practices that respond to violence in the context of the Colombian armed conflict. In particular, I will focus on visual creative practices. I seek to understand how some artists turn to art in the midst of war, how particular artistic practices unfold in this setting, and what they produce. More broadly, I hope to underscore the importance of artistic responses in a scenario like Colombia.

[^4]: In English: Historical Memory Group.
My research for this thesis focused on the work of three Colombian visual creators whose practice engages with different aspects of the internal war in Colombia. Their work is concerned with victims’ responses to and/or experiences of violence. Nevertheless, their practices are qualitatively different because they approach the conflict from different angles. These authors are Erika Diettes (visual artist), Jesus Abad Colorado (photojournalist), and Juan Manuel Echavarria (visual artist). Their work speaks to the armed conflict in Colombia in singular ways, especially because Erika and Juan Manuel understand their visual work from an artistic lens, whereas Jesus Abad understands it from the perspective of photojournalism.

However, there are artistic elements to Jesus Abad’s creations, especially in light of the argumentation presented in the first paragraphs of this introduction in terms of disrupting the status quo. This difference between the creators’ work will be present throughout this text, keeping in mind Jesus Abad’s own understanding of his work as we will focus on both the aesthetical and documental aspects of the authors’ visual pieces. I will refer to all three of them as “creators” in order to recognize the similarities and differences between their practices. Their visual pieces address issues such as forced displacement, violence, human suffering, resistance, love, life, and memory, among others, in the frame of the Colombian armed conflict.

Similarly, in this text I aim to analyze the visual practices of Juan Manuel, Erika, and Jesus Abad as creators of spaces where individual and collective witnessing takes place. Their visual works are located in what we identify as public spaces (museums, galleries, community spaces, among others) where a collectivity of people become spectators of those works. However, the spectators’ experience of seeing the work might complicate the configurations of that public space, as well as the spectators’ role. The visual creations of Juan Manuel, Jesus, and Erika are testimonies of what they have seen or heard about certain aspects of the armed conflict in Colombia. I seek to explain how their work becomes a means by which spectators turn into witnesses and how that transformation might relate to art as resistance.
However, this affirmation is further complicated when this inquiry digs deeper and asks new questions: what forms of violence could the creators’ art resist? What might be the effects of this resistance, if any, in current structures of domination? Does this resistance in any way enable social change? These are but a few questions that I will address in the construction and analysis of the association between art and resistance. I hope to contribute to ongoing debates on the conceptualization of resistance through this study. I will explore this term in the chosen context and ask questions that allow us to move beyond the identification of a specific action as resistance, towards a deeper understanding of its intricate workings. Furthermore, I also hope to bring some insights to current discussions about the importance of recognizing forms of resistance in order to acknowledge the possibilities of agency\(^5\) in situations of oppression (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004).

The following sections of this introduction will describe the methodology and methods that I followed in order to do my research. In the methodology section, I position myself with regards to my investigation and I speak about the significance of situating the concept of resistance. Next, I describe the methods and steps I followed for the literature review, the data collection, and the data analysis. The following section introduces the theoretical framework. It explains the conceptual background that informs my research, drawing from relevant sources. The final section of the introduction provides a brief context of the Colombian armed conflict, in order to contextualize readers on the origins and some of the dynamics and consequences of war in Colombia.

1.1. Methodology

This section describes the methodology of this research in terms of two specific critical strategies: first, considering my positionality as a researcher and second situating the concept of resistance. Drawing from Feminist Theory –particularly the idea of *situated knowledges* by Donna Haraway (1988)– as well as Grounded Theory, my research methodology followed an inductive process. I strove for taking into account the

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\(^5\) For the purpose of this investigation, I define agency as the capacity that people (agents) have to act in any given situation or environment, even if it is an oppressive one.
subjectivity of each research collaborator, as well as my own in such a process. I was also concerned with not imposing any concepts or assumptions of my own, including resistance as one of the key notions in this research. That is why I propose an initial definition and nonetheless situate the concept by adapting it to the context of the Colombian armed conflict, and to the definitions of my research collaborators. The following sections explain in detail the methodology.

1.1.1 Positionality

As a main component of the methodology of my thesis, I draw from Donna Haraway’s notion of situated knowledges (1988). This means that I position myself as a Colombian scholar with a specific upbringing in relation to my research. This takes into account that “our beliefs, backgrounds, and feelings are part of the process of knowledge construction” (Hesse-Biber, 2014, p. 200). I position myself as a researcher whose lived experiences determine my academic interests and approaches, specifying how I bring the personal and the political into my study, because “[…] lived experience is the ground from which all politics come” (Lippard, L., as cited in Lacy, 2010, p. 153).

Along these lines, I am also interested in answering the question “What were the historical causes that put us in particular personal places?” (Lippard, L. 2010, as cited in Lacy, 2010, p. 153). Grounding my work through my positionality using Haraway’s concept allows me to have strong objectivity in the sense proposed by Harding (as cited in Naples and Gurr, 2014). She affirms that aiming for a neutral kind of objectivity will always recoil, because it renders invisible the workings of power. Thus, Harding advises that researchers acknowledge the social, political, and historical aspects of knowledge production. To do this entails providing a more transparent and potentially ethical study (Longino, as cited in Naples and Gurr, 2014).

As a Colombian scholar, I am part of a population in Colombia with access to higher education. Thus, I assumed that my educated background entailed a “privilege” that I should “mitigate” in order to relate to my research collaborators. My university educational background defines the questions that I asked in my research —or even the
fact that I got to do research and ask questions. It also determined the possibility of interviewing certain subjects for the purpose of answering such questions. For instance, my first points of contact with research collaborators were Juan Manuel Echavarría and Erika Diettes, rather than community leaders and/or victims/survivors of the armed conflict, like Fabiola Lalinde and Noel Palacios\(^6\) –who were later contacted by the artists themselves to participate in this research. That access is also due to the fact that violence has been distant to me, as I was born and raised in an upper-middle class environment in Bogotá, Colombia.

Moreover, I have been trained to analyze, scrutinize, and interpret the armed conflict from an academic standpoint; more specifically from disciplines like Cultural Studies, Anthropology, and Gender Studies. Thus, my approach to this reality is very specific, which makes my reflections qualitatively different from that of some of the research collaborators. This background led me to assume that I would have certain difficulties relating myself with some of the research collaborators, because who we are and what our lives are like are the result of profoundly different experiences.

For instance, some of the collaborators have had direct experiences with war in Colombia, whereas I have not. Before I met them, I was afraid to be perceived as “privileged” (given my lack of lived experience with the conflict) and thus ignorant of the realities of war and violence in Colombia. Also, many of the research participants came from rural backgrounds. As I mentioned, I was born and raised in Bogotá. Therefore I also assumed that my background as “city” person would prevent some of them to “accept” me and be honest and comfortable in our interviews.

These assumptions led me to be especially attentive to the research collaborators’ own notions of concepts like resistance during our interviews. In that way I sought to attend to their particular contexts and avoid imposing mine. Additionally, I was raised and influenced by a family concerned with the social, political, economic, and cultural

\(^6\) Both Fabiola and Noel specifically stated that they authorized me to use their real names in this document, through the signed consent form that I provided for them before our interviews.
realities in Colombia and the world. There are social scientists and artists in my family, as well as others scholars. My interest in approaching art and the armed conflict in Colombia through a qualitative study is very much due to the fact that I grew up in that environment. Thus, my context also determined that I focused my research on representations of violence, rather than, for instance, experiences of violence per se.

Finally, it is also important to include a piece on my positionality in terms of the effects that the research process had on me after it was finished. In particular, conducting fieldwork was a profoundly inspiring and learning experience. It fostered a new understanding of different aspects of violence in Colombia, such as its complex dynamics and the extensive and brutal harm it has caused in Colombia. It also incited many questions and ideas on how to actively one may mitigate violence as a researcher. My fieldwork also stimulated a strong wish to work hands-on in the context of the conflict towards such mitigation. Through my interviews, I also learned the significance of speaking and especially listening to those directly affected by violence in my country. I realized the importance of such difficult and intimate conversations to inform myself about the conflict in Colombia and importantly, to become a witness to the stories of survivors and victims.

1.1.2 Situating Resistance

For the purpose of this research, I approach resistance as a situated notion (Haraway, 1988). I argue that I can only approach resistance conceptually if I locate it in a specific case study, in order to recognize the specificities of the context in which such resistance presumably exists. By situating resistance as an idea, I acknowledge that it is socially constructed (Gal, 1995; Prasad and Prasad, as cited in Hollander & Einwohner, 2004, p. 548) and intend to avoid simplistic and pre-conceived affirmations about it. Along these lines, the first step I took was to offer an initial and theoretical definition of the concept as a starting point.
The second step was during the interview process. I asked all research collaborators to explain what resistance meant to them in the context of the visual practices of Juan Manuel, Erika, and Jesús. The third step was analyzing their responses, which resulted in the actual definition of resistance. The theoretical definition that I initially proposed became complete when it became rooted in the research collaborators’ own definition of resistance. The review of theory was a tool for me to frame what the research collaborators defined as resistance. As a result, this investigation recognizes the intricate understandings and workings of resistance situated in visual practices of the Colombian armed conflict.

1.2 Methods

In order to answer the proposed research question, this investigation followed three main steps: a literature review, data collection, and data analysis. The literature review includes contributions from a variety of disciplines, which speak to three main topics – art and violence, resistance, and the Colombian armed conflict. Some of those disciplines are anthropology, sociology, art history, and cultural studies. Similarly, the literature review provided the conceptual framework for my research. The literature review also included what other artists and scholars have written about the work of Erika, Jesús, and Juan Manuel. It is incorporated in the description of their work in later chapters.

1.2.1 Literature Review

The first part of the literature review focuses on how art and violence relate in specific ways through history and in the particular context of the Colombian armed conflict. It also explains some of the social, cultural, and political conditions that determine spectatorship, representation and meaning making. Art offers different ways to either reproduce or challenge the status quo. One way to do this is using art as a means or a form of resistance. Consequently, the second part of the literature review focuses on resistance studies. The reviewed texts are mainly from anthropology and sociology, performance studies, and political science.

Works on the topic of resistance help understanding current debates on that notion, but most importantly they help explain the relation between art, resistance, and violence. A
third part of the literature review focuses on the Colombian armed conflict so as to contextualize the social and political environment where the works of Jesús, Erika, and Juan Manuel were produced. I will mainly draw from the contributions of a 2013 report of the GMH in Colombia, “Basta Ya!”\(^7\), which provides an extensive review on the origins, dynamics, and consequences of the Colombian armed conflict, as well as a close look at victims’ memories and resistance in that context. Finally, the literature review includes works written in English and Spanish.

### 1.2.2. Data Collection

The data collection constitutes the second step to answer the research question. I conducted fieldwork in Colombia –specifically the cities of Bogotá and Medellín– and personally interviewed Juan Manuel, Erika, and Jesús and others who have collaborated with them (either scholars, artists, community leaders, or victims and survivors of the armed conflict, among others). In total I conducted eight interviews for this investigation. All research collaborators\(^8\) were chosen according to Jesús, Erika, and Juan Manuel’s own suggestions. I developed two different sets of semi-structured interviews, in order to guide different types of conversations with the interviewees, according to their role in the research. All interviews were recorded under their informed consent. The first set of interviews was for Jesús, Erika, and Juan Manuel to ask them to speak to their own visual work. The second one was for the rest of the interviewees (Ileana Diéguez and Nadis Londoño for Erika’s work, Fabiola Lalinde and Alberto Sierra for Jesús Abad Colorado’s work, and Noel Palacios for Juan Manuel Echavarría’s work), who shared their views and feelings about the artists and their works. Thus, both sets are qualitatively different, although equally important for the purpose of this research. All interviews were developed in Spanish, because it is the native language of all research collaborators, as well as mine.

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\(^7\) “Enough already!”

\(^8\) I refer to all my interviewees as “research collaborators” (as opposed to participants) in order to recognize their active collaboration in this research. Through our interviews, they helped me build on some central ideas and concepts, like that of Medusa and resistance.
Consequently, all quotes from interviews will be included in both Spanish and English in this work. This allows Spanish speakers to read the original version of the interviews, given that “[s]ome words that are essential to understanding the meaning of the narratives have a specific meaning within the context of the group interviewed” (Massera, as cited in Chilisa, 2012, p. 154), in this case Colombian people. Ana Catalina Salazar and I translated them to English. I revised all translations given that I have some familiarity with the context of participants—as I too am Colombian and met with all of them—, which might mitigate the loss of cultural meaning embedded in language (Massera, as cited in Chilisa, 2012). Therefore, it is fundamental to note that this is a bilingual research document, which entails another strategy that follows a critical methodology.

O’Donoghue emphasizes the significance of discursively, ideologically, and epistemologically positioning the specific art pieces analyzed in arts-based research and the authors of such pieces (2008). Hence, questions for Erika, Juan Manuel, and Jesús revolved around their own visual practice, how they relate it to the armed conflict in Colombia, and the intentionality of their work, as well as perceived reactions from spectators and effects in the settings where their work has been displayed. Questions addressing the rest of the research collaborators focused on how and why they got involved with the work of Erika, Juan Manuel, or Jesús, how they perceive their visual work, and what they think their pieces and practices produce in the places where they have been displayed.

The data collection also includes personal reflections from a journal in which I described different aspects of the fieldwork, such as specific details about the interviews—the settings in which they took place, how I related to the research collaborators, my feelings and thoughts during the interviews— or general impressions about the fieldwork. The third phase of the data collection consisted of the contextualized analysis and interpretation of their visual work as cultural products. This step drew from some of the literature review’s material on art, art history, and cultural studies, among others. Collected data interviews inform the chapter that describes the visual practices of Erika, Jesús Abad, and Juan Manuel, as well as the subsequent ones.
1.2.3 Data Analysis

The third step that helped me answer the main research question was the data analysis and interpretation. First I analyzed the visual works of Juan Manuel, Erika, and Jesús as cultural products. I drew from Cultural Studies and Semiotics to contextualize these products and understand their social, political, cultural, meaning-making, and representational dimensions, specifically in relation to the Colombian armed conflict. In my analysis, I considered that “[...] the ‘methodological eclecticism’ that characterizes cultural studies means [that cultural studies is] non-prescriptive about method” (Pink, 2008, p. 130). Hence, I interpreted their visual practice parting from questions that are conceptually framed in one of the streams of Cultural Studies, called Visual Cultural Studies (Pink, 2008). The work of Stuart Hall (1997) was particularly useful. These questions also drew from the work of Roland Barthes on Semiotics. Some of the general questions were:

- What is being represented in this work?
- How is this representation developed?
- What are the social, political, and cultural circumstances in which this art piece was developed?
- What are the different elements that characterize what is represented in this art piece?
- What/who is this art work representing? How is it representing it/him/her/them? What does it do? Where is it being displayed? How and why might it be considered a resistance piece?

Some of the questions inspired by the work of Stuart Hall (1997) on representation were:

- What meaning(s) does this image convey?
- Thinking about the visual as a language communicating meaning: does this image reflect an existing meaning? Is it expressing only what the creator wants to say, his/her “personally intended meaning? Or is this meaning constructed in and through language?” (Hall, 1997, p. 15).
The second stage of the data analysis and interpretation was the interviews and journaling data analysis. In order to do this, I drew from qualitative research methodology. The process began by transcribing the interviews while taking some preliminary notes about possible connections between the collected data and the topic of resistance, or other general topics with consistent patterns. After, I attentively read the transcriptions and coded them. This entailed assigning specific words to fragments of text, sorting coded segments of text, compressing information into analyzable fragments, and producing analytical concepts (Hesse-Biber, 2014). I assigned pre-established codes to transcription fragments, such as “resistance” (how interviewees define it and how they perceive it operates in relation to the creators’ practice), “the tasks of art” (how the creators’ practice is described according to the interviewees), and “art and affect” (how the relation between the creators, spectators, victims and survivors, and art is mediated); these were my topic categories, which defined the three main chapters of my thesis.

Each topic category was composed by a series of subcategories: “actions and behaviors”, “external powers”, “sources” and “forms of resistance” for the “resistance” topic category; “photography”, “circuits”, “creators’ role”, and “what art does” for the “tasks of art” topic category; and “actions”, “emotions”, “senses”, and “values and qualities” for the “art and affect” topic category. Each subcategory was conformed by key words that the interviewees used to describe the topic categories. This way, the topic categories and the subcategories are directly informed and thus grounded on the research collaborators contributions. These codes helped me relate my data to my research question. I also used open coding to account for any new and unexpected elements that emerged in the interviews. The following step was memoing, which consisted of describing data and summarizing it, including significant quotes, and writing reflective ideas or questions about my interpretation and analysis of the data (Hesse-Biber, 2014). Coding and memoing enabled a subsequent generation of themes, parting from common elements relevant to my research. The coding, interpretation and analysis of data, as well as the
writing of my thesis took place on the unceded and occupied territories of three Coast Salish nations, the Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh, and the Musqueam nations in the Greater Vancouver Area, in the province of British Columbia.

1.3 Theoretical Frame: Art, Violence, and Resistance

This investigation revolves around three axes, two of which are addressed as one: on the one hand, visual art and violence, and on the other hand, resistance. The first part of this section develops around art and violence and the second one examines resistance.

1.3.1. Art and violence

The 1999 exhibition “Arte y Violencia desde 1948”\(^9\) at the Museo de Arte Moderno\(^10\) in Bogotá illustrates how visual art in Colombia has been prolific as a register of Colombia’s history of violence. About this exhibition, Tiscornia affirms that “It showed how over a period of more than fifty years, Colombian artists have constantly reconsidered the methods used to materialize a kind of visual equivalent of the tragedy itself, capable of positioning the viewer in the other’s place, making the intransmissible – the experience of horror – into something transferable” (N.d., para. 7). This speaks to a need for telling Colombia’s history of conflict in a way that spectators engage with that history through its visual account. It also speaks to art as a means of telling stories in many different ways and how humanity has long been telling its (hi)stories through art. In Colombia, the works of artists like Debora Arango (1907-2005) illustrate that need for telling stories. She was a 20th century painter, who was one of the first artists to represent the violence that the country was experiencing during the 1950s. Débora Arango painted many pieces alluding to the political, social, and cultural situations in Colombia at that time (especially during the 1940’s and 1950’s), like “La República”\(^11\) (N.d.), “Rojas

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\(^9\) “Art and Violence since 1948”.
\(^10\) The Modern Art Museum.
\(^11\) “The Republic”.

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After Arango, many Colombian artists have addressed violence in Colombia in their works. “Arte y Violencia desde 1948” included some of the most notorious Colombian visual art pieces depicting violence in Colombia, such as: “Violencia” (1962) by Alejandro Obregón, “Piel al sol” (1963) by Luis Ángel Rengifo, “El martirio agiganta a los hombres maíz” (1966) by Pedro Alcántara, “Sr. presidente qué honor estar con usted en este momento histórico” (1986) by Beatriz González, and “Aliento” (1995) by Óscar Muñoz. These art pieces tell stories about real events or situations in Colombia, thus they constitute a visual archive and memory of that part of Colombia’s history. Art pieces like the ones referenced here reveal the importance of using art to know and understand our own history, as well as its significance to represent, narrate, remember, and denounce the armed conflict in Colombia (Schuster, 2011). The relation between art and violence allows us to know, understand, and remember our history and our existence. Moreover, it sets the ground for us to think about links between art and resistance in contexts of violence.

The intersection between art and violence has often been described in terms of its possibilities to disturb the status quo. Authors like Dalla Déa (2012) and Simonds (2013) state that art counters hegemonic forces by expressing oppression and exposing injustice. They also argue that social change might take place as a result of that disturbance. Whether the latter is the aim of some of the Colombian artists who depict the Colombian conflict or not, their works can still express oppression and expose injustice, and thus disrupt hegemonic forces. This was the case of Débora Arango, whose art pieces have only been recently recognized because of their polemic content. On the other hand, Ordóñez (2013) highlights that art –especially, public art– has the potential to challenge official stories by showing and telling different stories. The former are frequently

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12 Former Colombian President.
13 “Military Junta”.
14 “13 of June”.
15 April 9th Massacre.
privileged over particular stories, thus art has the ability to make those neglected stories visible. In this sense, the importance of Colombian art as a historical archive lies in its capacity to visibilize the overlooked stories of Colombian history.

Moreover, artistic images about violence have the potential to move spectators closer to realities that were unknown to them. Such move can entail an emotional displacement from not engaging with such realities to engaging with them, allowing dialogues to happen between such realities and spectators (Simonds, 2013; Didi-Huberman, 2004; Riaño-Alcalá, 2010; Riaño-Alcalá, Lacy, and Agudelo, 2003). It also opens up spaces for caring thoughts, feelings, and conversations, undermining the invisibility of marginalized stories of violence, as well as spectators’ ignorance and indifference towards such stories. For instance, the forementioned painting by Alejandro Obregón, “Violencia”, was probably denouncing not only the violence of Colombian war, but its particular cruelty towards women and the rural lands in the country – the figure of the woman resembles that of mountains, which are typical of the Colombian rural landscape.

However, art and artistic interventions can also produce and reproduce certain narratives – for instance narratives that visually reproduce colonial regimes and hierarchies – (Lehrer, Milton, and Patterson, 2011), enforcing the status quo, or at least certain aspects of it. A good example of this is the comic book “Tintin in Congo” (1930-1931) by Hergé, which has been criticized because of its racist content. It portrays black communities in Congo as a sort of servant savages who look the same. Hence, the purposes and impacts of artistic manifestations in relation to violence can be ambiguous. Riaño-Alcalá (2003; 2010) explains that we can re-signify violent experiences, how we see ourselves, how we relate to each other, and the spaces we inhabit and/or transit parting from alternative artistic and cultural representations. This means that we can transform the narratives that enforce a violent status quo through art.

However, spectators are “[…] separated from both the capacity to know and the power to act” (Rancière, 2009, p. 2); spectatorship can be passive in this sense, thus it does not necessarily involve a process of contextualization or a space for significant action in
relation to what is being looked at. Therefore, there is a need for spectators to learn from what they look at, instead of just being seduced by it. Rancière adds: “it requires spectators who play the role of active interpreters, who develop their own translation in order to appropriate the ‘story’ and make it their own story” (2009, p. 22). In this sense, spectators are responsible for filling the act of looking with meaning (Riaño-Alcalá 2003; 2010). We can illustrate that act through Oscar Muñoz’s piece, “Aliento”. This series of photographic silk screenings do not reveal their content – the photographs of disappeared people in Colombia – until spectators breathe into them. Their breath – which could be a metaphor for their look – “activates” the content of that piece, as if the disappeared and the art piece itself were telling spectators that their look affirms their existence. The interactive feature of “Aliento” provokes spectators to learn and reflect about the piece, thus creating its meaning.

Regarding the process of meaning making, Hall argues that meaning is constantly being constructed, and thus is never fixed, because “it is the result of a signifying practice” (1997, p. 24). Hall explains de Saussure’s vision of representation, which is grounded on the binary division of the sign, into signifier (word, image, sound) and signified (the actual object, subject or event that the signifier refers to). Because the relationship between both is dynamic – it changes according to historical and cultural transformations – representation is also dynamic. This confirms that interpretation is crucial to meaning making and will be bound to such changes. Interpretation becomes an essential part of the process of meaning making, thus, the one who receives and interprets a given sign is as important as the one who emits the sign. Hence, a sign is not meaningful unless it is interpreted. The signifying practice that Hall refers to is spectatorship in this case; thus, spectators of any visual piece that speaks to violence complete the process of meaning making (Hall, 1997). It is also important that we remember that language is a social phenomenon, thus images are a social phenomenon too. A piece of visual work cannot and does not convey meaning unless someone interprets it or experiences it. The role of spectators is crucial to the tasks of art. Muñoz’s piece is again significant to this regard, as it fosters the active role of spectators that Rancière mentions.
Processes of meaning making and representation are dynamic. This idea poses further questions on the relationship between art and violence. Is there one right way of representing violence through art? Who decides what the right way of representing violence through art is? The following case illustrates the dynamism of meaning making and representation of violence through art and the issues it can generate. Lehrer, Milton, and Patterson (2011) refer to a 2009 art exhibition about the Inuit experience in Residential Schools in Canada. The authors explain how Inuit communities did not agree with the way they were represented in that exhibition. Artists from the exhibition probably did agree with their representation of the Inuit communities. The disagreement between the artists and the Inuit communities exemplifies how people have different ways of representing and interpreting the world, or the people inhabiting it, or specific events, situations, or experiences. This example illustrates the fact that the representation of violence can be a complex issue according to context and that “right” or “wrong” depends on it and the different subjects involved—in the previous case, it was the context of Residential Schools in Canada and subjects were Inuit communities and artists who did not belong to such communities. Nevertheless, it is most important to recognize and understand such complexities, rather than reducing them to “right” or “wrong”.

Art reveals such differences in relation to representation and meaning making, especially through spectatorship as a way to understand that which is being represented. Therefore, recognizing the different ways in which we make meaning of violence and how it is being represented through art can be useful to understand violence. The “Arte y Violencia desde 1948” art exhibition exemplifies the numerous ways in which people—in this case, artists—understand violence in Colombia, and thus represent it in diverse manners. Such differences in interpretation and representation and the potential they offer for spectators to understand violence will be illustrated in more detail through the artistic practices of Juan Manuel, Erika, and Jesús. Their work is also part of the historical visual archive of Colombia’s armed conflict.
1.3.2 Resistance

In beginning to define resistance, there seems to be a common element: it usually implies some kind of opposition to something or someone—such opposition implies a tension, which can vary in its strength. It appears simple, but questions arise from this point onwards. Does it entail an action, or behavior, or a way of thinking? Does it have to be repetitive? Does it take place collectively or individually, or both? Is there a need for intentionality and/or awareness of such resistance for us to be able to call it that? We will examine some of the most significant issues in describing resistance in the following paragraphs. After, we will approach a definition of resistance.

Resistance can take place in collective and individual ways among a group of people. For instance, Osorio (2001) relates the type of collective action of resistance from people who have experienced displacement to the process of individual identity making—an identity related to territory, or as ‘displaced’ people, for example. A collective action can take many forms. Osorio illustrates a type of collective action by describing how the Comunidades de paz\(^{16}\) from Urabá (Chocó) were forcibly displaced from their territory, but kept the promise of return as a fundamental slogan for their collective struggle. Their sense of community and collective struggle is grounded on their Black communities’ tradition and on the ancestral occupation of their territories. Osorio asserts that the construction of the collective necessarily relates to the construction of the individual, because individual needs and identities are negotiated in collective actions (Osorio, 2001). The Comunidades de paz negotiate and reaffirm their identity as individuals who are part of such black communities, by collectively agreeing to displace and demand return, while returning in small groups to their territories.

There are also different temporalities to resistance. Therefore, it can involve a series of everyday actions, motivations, and/or behaviors (Riaño-Alcalá, 2012), which can be repetitive or take place only once. Silence, for example, can be an every day resistance act (ibid). It can also take place once or several times (not necessarily on an every day

\(^{16}\) Peace communities. These communities have existed since the 1960’s in the Northwestern region of Colombia, but were officially created in 1997 in San José de Apartadó.
basis). For instance, the performance acts of the Madres\textsuperscript{17} and the Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo\textsuperscript{18} in Argentina. Diana Taylor (2003) explains how they resisted terror through their silent performance acts, such as walking around the Plaza de Mayo – Argentina’s financial and political center – once a week, wearing photo IDs of their disappeared children or grandchildren (Taylor calls this act DNA performance). Thus, it is important to recognize that resistance can take the form of a disruptive act (evident or confrontational), or mere survival tactics (silent, non-confrontational) (Osorio, 2001; Riaño-Alcalá, 2012), or even something in between.

James Scott (1999) theorized such silent forms as “hidden transcripts”. By explaining such notion, he emphasized the “hidden” character of resistance, indicating that those he calls “the oppressed”\textsuperscript{19} (Scott also refers to the subordinate, weak, and powerless) resist subjugation of the “oppressors” (Scott also refers to them as the dominant and powerful) through unseen and secreted strategies. According to Scott, oppressors also use hidden transcripts to represent the entitlements and practices of their domination that cannot be openly declared. Scott exemplifies the power relation between oppressed and oppressors as that between the worker and the boss, the tenant and the landlord, the slave and the master, and someone from a subject race and someone from a dominant race, among others. He argues that relations of domination work in similar ways crossculturally, in a way that subordinate groups have self-interest in reinforcing hegemonic appearances, which is why their transcripts are hidden. Finally, Scott also affirms that the secreted strategies that the oppressed use are forms of ideological insubordination that he calls “the infrapolitics of the powerless” (Scott, 1999, pg. xiii), which constitute their resistance to subjugation.

Scott’s theory on the hidden transcripts is considered one of the most significant contributions to resistance studies. However, some of the ideas contained in Scott’s (1999) text are contested. Thinkers like Gal (1995) and Hoffman (1999) question the binary vision that Scott follows in his theorization of resistance, reducing subjects to

\textsuperscript{17} Mothers.
\textsuperscript{18} Grandmothers of the May Square.
\textsuperscript{19} This is the choice of words of James Scott, whereas I rather use the term resisters for my research.
“oppressed” and “oppressors”, thus simplifying power relations. That rigid categorization veils the complex stories and power dynamics that lead an individual to be considered an oppressor or oppressed person in specific circumstances. The categorization into either oppressor or oppressed also dismisses other subjectivities that play a role in power relations when speaking about domination.

Gal (ibid) also critiques Scott’s binary categorization of relations of domination. She states that such categorization dismisses subjective and cultural specificities in power relations. Additionally, she questions Scott’s assumption that there is a “natural (precultural, presemiotic) interactive self […]” (Gal, 1995, p. 89) when he proposes the idea of hidden transcripts. According to her, Scott also assumes that strategies like irony or ambiguity have inherent resistance functions, disregarding the linguistic, ideological, and cultural contexts that influence such strategies. Ortner (1995), on the other hand, appreciates Scott’s contributions insofar as he helped show the ambiguities of resistance by evidencing it as a prevalent everyday phenomenon. She also critiques binary ideas that reduce subjects to dominant and subordinate; however, she does not appear to see that reduction in Scott’s account of resistance. Scott’s contribution on resistance recognizes and emphasizes its every day dimension, which is essential to broaden any definition of resistance and to understand the potential range of resistance actions, behaviors, or motivations. However, it is important to build on such notion avoiding to reduce subjects to “oppressed” and “oppressor”, and to discarding the influence of culture in resistance dynamics.

Another key aspect of resistance is related to the following question: who can or should be considered as a resistor? It is important to acknowledge the different overlapping roles that people may play in situations of armed conflict –including the role of resisters–, which sometimes are unexpected or overlooked. For instance, a guerrilla member who took part in forcing a family’s displacement might be seen as a perpetrator, but we might also perceive him as a victim because he is a 14-year-old teenager who was forcibly recruited. Maybe that teenage boy was given the “choice” of joining the guerrillas or watching his family die and then being killed. By choosing the former –joining the
guerrillas—, could he have been resisting something? In fact, the act of joining a guerrilla group under the described circumstances might fall between two categories that Osorio (2001) advises to distinguish: actions of resistance and actions of survival.

She states that the difference between both concepts is critical consciousness. Osorio explains that critical consciousness is essential in actions of resistance, especially in relation to the notion of civil resistance. The latter includes recognition of the power that the “powerless” hold as subjects with rights and is linked to an unarmed struggle premised on unity and solidarity (Osorio, 2001). Such features of recognition and organized actions entail critical consciousness. In this sense, the “organized displacement” of the aforementioned Comunidades de paz is a collective action that can be considered as civil resistance, thus involving critical consciousness. The concept of critical consciousness helps us problematize the categorization of subjects in war as perpetrators, resistors, or victims, among others.

Moreover, authors like Brown (1996) and Hoffman (1999) question the deliberate use of the concept of resistance. Hoffman explains how certain notions of “identity ‘health’” (1999, p. 683) grounded on a legitimized Western psychological discourse are often linked to empowerment. He critiques how that link between identity ‘health’ and empowerment in a dominant discourse of multiculturality evidences a lack of consideration for context and for complex psycho-cultural processes of identity/self formation. According to Hoffman, that linkage also disregards that power and resistance can be situated in people whose identities do not fit the Western psychological model. He argues that such conflations also assume that empowered identities automatically emerge from a successful process of identity awareness. When empowerment and resistance discourses are co-opted by a dominant discourse like that of multiculturality, they become disempowered (Hoffman, 1999). Ultimately, Hoffman proposes that resistance and empowerment are looked at as notions of self and person rooted in Western cultural psychologies. This critique is important because it underlines the significance of cultural and subjective specific approaches (like the one proposed by Gal) to better understand resistance. In this sense, Hoffman’s argument also opposes Scott’s account of resistance.
The discussion on identity awareness is also related to one of the challenges in resistance studies: the role of intentionality and awareness in defining resistance. Hollander & Einwohner’s typology of resistance (2004) is useful in this regard, as it is centered in aspects of visibility and intentionality, underscoring the “interactional nature of resistance” (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004, p. 548):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table I. Types of resistance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is act intended as resistance by actor?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overt resistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covert resistance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unwitting resistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target-defined resistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Externally-defined resistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missed resistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempted resistance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not resistance</td>
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It is worth clarifying that such clear distinctions are hard to apply, but this does not mean that the typology is not useful; rather, it indicates its limits. As Hollander and Einwohner argue, resistance is socially constructed; hence, power plays a fundamental role in such construction. Therefore, power dynamics are central in defining resistance. According to Riaño-Alcalá (2012), resistance can alter power relations, thus modifying an external power. In that case, the resistance act is the modification of an external power with regards to the subject who resists. For instance, the temporary collective displacement of the Comunidades de paz from Urabá and their eventual return to that land was an act of resistance, insofar as such communities resisted the forced and absolute dispossession of their territory. In this case, the forced and absolute dispossession of land is the external power that the Comunidades de paz modified.

Taking into account the previous analysis of resistance and the authors’ contributions, resistance will be understood here as a repertoire of individual and collective actions, motivations, and behaviors aimed at opposing or modifying external powers, ranging
from disruptive to more subtle tactics. Moreover, I propose to look at the issue of intentionality and awareness from a different angle. Rather than asking about intentionality and awareness to determine if an act entails resistance or not, we can ask about the importance of recognizing resistance in certain contexts. Such recognition can be important because studying resistance can sometimes help in restoring “the balance between oppression and agency” (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004, p. 550). Recognizing someone’s resistance acts means recognizing their will power and capacity for action in an oppressive situation. Similarly, Pilar Riaño-Alcalá argues that recognizing acts of resistance entails justice, insofar as it involves acknowledging the suffering, the sacrifices, and the actions of resistors (Leebaw, as cited in Riaño-Alcalá, 2012).

A final clarification is necessary. Resistance is still a label that might not always apply or be useful in every context: it’s a category that might help us understand some of the ways and mechanisms through which people (victims, witnesses, combatants, bystanders, among others) respond to violent situations, but it does not entail a single “truth” about a specific situation and the people involved in it. I chose resistance as one of the lenses through which we can understand the relation between art and violence for the reasons stated above, but it should not be taken as a definitive or exclusive one. The theoretical definition of resistance that was provided in this section will be finalized and situated through the research collaborators contributions, which will be discussed in further chapters.

1.4 Context: A Brief Review of the Colombian Armed Conflict

The Colombian armed conflict has been recognized as the oldest unsettled conflict in the world (GMH, 2013, p. 111). Its heterogeneous character has allowed it to adapt to the different historical, economic, and sociopolitical changes across several decades since the 1950’s in Colombia. In their 2013 report “Basta Ya!”20, the GMH identifies the evolution of this conflict after the two-party violence that erupted in the late 1940’s and early 1950’s. The first period (1958 – 1982) marks a transition from the two-party violence to a form of subversive violence. Leftist guerrilla groups started to multiply and social

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20 In English: “Enough now!”
mobilization was at its peak. The second period (1982 – 1996) was characterized by a complex combination of manifold factors. Guerrilla groups spread in the Colombian territory and went through a process of military growth and political projection. The State went through a crisis and partial collapse, as a result of issues like the *Proceso 8.000*\(^{21}\) and the alliance between the military sector and the emerging paramilitary groups. The latter grew exponentially partly due to their relation to drug trafficking, which erupted and expanded in this period. In 1991, Colombia promulgated a new Political Constitution committed to principles of Human Rights, democracy, plurality, and multiculturality.

The third period (1996 – 2005) constituted the exacerbation of the Colombian armed conflict. Paramilitary and guerrilla groups extended simultaneously, while the State was still going through a political crisis produced by the *Proceso 8.000*. Drug trafficking was still growing and its organization was transforming. The fourth and most recent period (2005 – 2012) of the Colombian armed conflict is marked by its readjustment. During these years, the military actions of the State against the guerrillas achieved their highest efficiency and weakened them. Political negotiations with paramilitary groups took place in 2004 under the polemic *Ley de Justicia y Paz*\(^{22}\) implemented by former president Álvaro Uribe Vélez. Ex-paramilitaries subsequently re-armed into fragmented, volatile, and changing groups through a violent re-organization of paramilitary structures. These paramilitary successor groups are strongly permeated by drug trafficking and are more focused on pragmatic criminal actions but maintain an anti-guerrilla counterinsurgency discourse and continue to target human rights activists. Their behavior is highly challenging vis à vis the Colombian State (GMH, 2013, p. 111).

\(^{21}\) In English: “The 8.000 Process”. That was the name given to the judicial process that former Colombian president Ernesto Samper faced for accusations of receiving drug trafficking money for his presidential campaign. These accusations resulted in a severe loss of legitimacy of that government among Colombians.

\(^{22}\) In English: Justice and Peace Law. This law was an attempt to bring definite closure to negotiations between the Colombian government and paramilitary groups. It strived to harmonize efforts towards respecting victims’ rights to truth, justice, and repair with a politically and juridically acceptable punishment for the paramilitaries. The latter would demobilize and promise not to commit crimes again and to tell the truth about the ones they already committed. In exchange, the paramilitaries would receive reduced prison sentences of 5-8 years. This process has failed, among others things because many paramilitaries re-organized into fragmented groups (GMH, 2013, pp. 244-246).
The National Register of Victims (Registro Único de Víctimas, [RUV]) registered 25,007 disappeared people and 4,744,046 displaced people from 1985 until 2013. Between January 1\(^{st}\), 1958 and December 31, 2012, an alarming number of 220,000 people have died due to the Colombian armed conflict (ibid, p. 31). Out of this number of victims, 81.5% have been civilians and 18.5% combatants, which means that non-combatants have been the ones most affected by violence (ibid, p. 32). Armed actors attack the civil community forcing its alignment to competing armed groups. These attacks also aim to collect resources from civilians and accumulate force. Thus, civilians forcibly become a source for economic, political, logistic, and moral support for the different armed groups. Such attacks correspond to a diversity of violent modus operandi amidst these groups, which include the following modalities identified by the GMH (2013): forced displacement, sexual violence, kidnapping, extrajudicial murders, forced disappearance, massacres, forced recruitment of minors, and terrorist attacks.

This is one of the bloodiest conflicts in Latin America’s contemporary history. Its complexity responds not only to the conflict’s ability to adapt to different contexts, or the amount of victims, facts of its brutality, or the multiplicity of armed actors. It is also a result of complex social dynamics and alliances that emerge from intentional political and military strategies. This speaks to the multiple political and social responsibilities involved in the Colombian conflict. In this regard, the impacts of this war on Colombian civilians lie not only on the cruelty with which armed actors have attacked them, but also to the lack of justice, recognition, and reparation from society and the State towards victims, survivors, and those affected by the armed conflict in Colombia (ibid, p. 259).

The following chapters examine the artistic and visual practices of Erika, Jesús, and Juan Manuel, in order to understand their role and that of their work in the specific Colombian context. The guiding questions for this examination are: what might be some of the contributions, if any, of visual projects that address the Colombian armed conflict in a justice scenario? How might such projects relate to resistance in that setting, if they relate at all? What is the importance of visual accounts of the conflict when intersecting with art? These questions will be answered in following chapters. It is important to note that
this analysis is being carried out while peace talks between the guerrilla group FARC-EP (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo\textsuperscript{23}) and the Colombian Government are taking place. They started in November 2012 in La Havana, Cuba and are at a very advanced stage. At this moment, five out of six points in the peace process agenda have been agreed upon. Outcomes of these talks are still to be seen in years to come.

\textsuperscript{23} Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army.
2. The Creators

Incluso completamente rayado
Un simple rectángulo
De treinta y cinco
milímetros
Salva el honor de todo lo real... 24
J-L. Godard.
Histoire(s) du cinéma, Paris.

The following chapter builds on the stories, information, and images collected on Juan Manuel Echavarría, Erika Diettes, and Jesús Abad, as well as the work they develop. The first section is dedicated to the artists: Juan Manuel and Erika. The second section is dedicated to the photojournalist: Jesús Abad Colorado. Both sections involve a narrative analysis of the biographies they shared with me and the stories research collaborators contributed during the interviews 25. They also include the voices of experts on the creators’ visual practice, from a written archive that includes other interviews or essays that I consulted from different sources. The profiling of each creator should help understand their visual practice, including their motivations, the methods they use, the specific visual strategies they follow, the people that they work with and how they relate to them, the spaces and publics they appeal to, and the role of their images in the Colombian armed conflict. Ultimately, this chapter allows readers to first approach not only the possibilities that visual practices offer in a conflicted scenario, but also their relation to different forms of resistance in any of the aspects mentioned above. In this sense, this is the first step to answer the research question and trace the possible connections between aesthetic practices, violence, and resistance by looking closely at the specific case studies of Jesús Abad, Juan Manuel, and Erika in Colombia.

24 Even completely scratched/a simple rectangle/of thirtyfive millimeters/saves the honor of everything that is real...
25 As it was mentioned earlier, Noel's interview informs Juan Manuel's section, interviews with Fabiola and Alberto contribute to Jesús Abad's section, and Ileana and Nadis’ interviews inform Erika's section.
The original words of the research collaborators are given a central space in this chapter, thus, a substantive number of quotes in Spanish were included. This strategy is a critical move that unfolds in two ways: on the one hand, Spanish was the language through which I negotiated all relations with research collaborators, as well as the language spoken in all my interviews. It is also the language in which I first formulated many aspects of my investigation, such as the questions for my interviews and the codification of my data. Finally, it is the native language of all interviewees, as well as my own. Thus, to include the original quotes in Spanish aims to recognize the predominant use of this language in this investigation, despite the fact that I am writing this thesis in English. This critical move allows for a destabilization of the interviewed-interviewee relation, by looking for a balance between both voices in this chapter.

2.1 The Artists

The following description of the visual work of Erika Diettes and Juan Manuel Echavarría focuses on their artistic practice. Both of them define their work in terms of art and thus, will be analyzed from that perspective. However, each sub-section is written from two slightly diverse places, given that their narrative responds to the oral and written archive collected for each artist, and to the nature of each artist’s work. Hence, Erika’s sub-section evidences the connection between her work and the armed conflict in Colombia. She approaches the conflict by exploring human experiences like love, suffering, memory, and dwelling. Juan Manuel’s work focuses more on visibilizing, representing, and understanding different practices, situations, or events associated to the conflict, like the Bojayá massacre26, or the paintings depicting the narratives of a group of Colombian ex-combatants.

2.1.1 Juan Manuel Echavarría: The Power of Metaphor

It was pouring rain at La Candelaria that night. Juan Manuel and I had agreed to meet at La Peña, a coffee place in that bohemian and colonial neighborhood in Bogotá,

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26 In 2002 a gas cylinder was thrown inside a church where civilians of Bellavista in Bojayá, in the department of Chocó, Colombia were taking refuge. There was a confrontation between a group of paramilitaries and another one from the FARC. The latter attacked the paramilitaries with the cylinder, but they missed their target and hit the church instead. 119 people were killed that day.
Colombia. I used to go to that place many years back, when it was known as the French Bakery. It still is a beautiful place, with stunning architecture and delicious pastries. I asked my brother to walk with me to La Peña, because walking alone at night in La Candelaria can be risky. We arrived a little early, so we sat and waited for a while. Juan Manuel arrived and he had also brought company: Aureliano Palacios. He is from Bojayá, Chocó and has been friends with Juan Manuel for many years. He survived the Bojayá massacre. That night, Aureliano also told us he was studying medicine in Villa de Leyva, Colombia. After we all introduced ourselves, the interview started, although it did not really feel like an interview – or what I had anticipated that our interview was going to be like. Rather, it felt like a conversation between people who were getting to know each other.

Juan Manuel Echavarría was born in Medellín, Colombia, in 1947. In fact, this is a period that has been commonly identified as the beginning of the Colombian armed conflict (GMH, 2009; 2013) although one of his artistic projects would later challenge that notion by recognizing the beginning of violence in much earlier stages of Colombia’s history. He studied Art History in the United States. By that time, he used to travel across Europe, particularly, Greece. That experience taught him a few things about mythology and poetry. His career as a writer began soon after and he wrote his first book: “La Gran Catarata”27. His great passion for writing deeply informs the way he does photography today. About these early experiences, he explains:

When I discovered there was something like the Odyssey, and when I started reading about Greek myths, I felt they were loaded with poetry and I became very dreamy. My first book, La Gran Catarata, comes out of this. I have written three books and all of them look at history. (Reid and Echavarría, 2000)

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27 “The Great Waterfall”.
Juan Manuel wrote a second book titled “Moros en la costa”, which compiled three short stories based on the “Crónicas de Indias”\(^{28}\). By this time, he was living in New York and had spent 30 years as a writer. He felt that he was drowning in his writing.

I was in New York, drowning in my literature — I was exhausted. I have very good friends in New York who are artists and I told them I was drowning in the world of writing; I was becoming too neurotic. In writing you need two disciplines: one, to sit down and write by yourself; and two, to read a lot, and reading is also an exercise you do alone. (Reid and Echavarria, 2000)

In 1995, two visual artists and friends encouraged him to explore photography; so, his transition to the visual arts began. Soon after that, he was in a neighborhood in Bogotá called 20 de Julio\(^{29}\) and what he saw, would plant the seed for his first artwork to be born: “Retratos”\(^{30}\) (1996). It also was a defining moment for the artist to determine the course of his work. Juan Manuel explains:

Me di cuenta que había una serie de almacenes y muchos maniquíes en las aceras […]. Pero yo vi que esos maniquíes estaban rotos, mutilados. Y siempre veía a la gente pasar y nunca mirar esos rostros mutilados. Y yo dije: ‘yo he sido uno de estos transeúntes que nunca he querido mirar la violencia de mi país’. Después de hacer esa serie entendí que de ahora en adelante yo iba a investigar a través de la fotografía, a través del video, la violencia de mi país, a la cual durante toda mi vida, hasta los 50 años le había dado la espalda\(^{31}\) (¡Pacifista!, 2015).

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\(^{28}\) “Chronicles of the Indies”.

\(^{29}\) 20th of July.

\(^{30}\) “Portraits”.

\(^{31}\) I realized there were a series of stores and a lot of mannequins on the sidewalks […]. But I saw how those mannequins were broken, mutilated. And I kept watching people walking by and never looking at those mutilated faces. And I said: “I have been one of those pedestrians who have never wanted to look at my country’s violence”. After making that series [of photographies] I understood that from that moment on I would investigate my country’s violence through photography, through video recording, the violence that I had turned my back to my whole life, until I was fifty years old.
Juan Manuel’s literary interests, however, are imprinted in the way he conceives his art, as well as in the way he makes his photographs.

Escribí durante 30 años y como ya he dicho en alguna o alguna entrevista, mi literatura fue un naufragio. Pero el que sobrevive un naufragio, algo se trae del naufragio. […] y yo me traje la pasión por la metáfora. Me pareció que […] la metáfora puede ser esencial para el arte, no?33 (Juan Manuel Echavarría, November 14th, 2014).

A passion for metaphor shapes Juan Manuel’s art since he began taking photographs. Those mannequins symbolize the long overlooked victims of war in Colombia; the ones many Colombians have been ignoring for decades in the midst of a war that started over fifty years ago. From that experience at the 20 de Julio in Bogotá, Juan Manuel traded the

32 “Portraits”.
33 I was a writer for thirty years and as I have already said in some other interview, my writing was a shipwreck […] But he who survives a shipwreck takes something back with him […] I took with me my passion for metaphor. I thought […] metaphor could be essential to art, right?
four walls of his studio in the city for the open skies and green lands of the rural areas of the country, where war continues to be waged. Since then, there is a historical recount of some aspects of the Colombian war in his work. In fact, his following project –“Corte de Florero”\(^{34}\) – was related to the 1950’s civil war known as “La Violencia”\(^{35}\) (GMH, 2009; 2013). The country was strongly polarized into two warring parties, the Liberal and the Conservative party. This conflict eventually derived in vicious forms of violence on both parts against each other. María Victoria Uribe, a Colombian anthropologist and historian, wrote *Matar, Rematar, y Contramatar*\(^{36}\) in 1990 to document the bodily repertoires of torture and killing during this period. Juan Manuel Echavarría read about the violent practice of body cuts in Colombia in the 50’s in Uribe’s book and resolved to represent this violence in a very specific way.

Throughout the ’50s there was this violent language of cuts, or rituals having to do with death. One is called the Colombian Necktie, which is being studied right now by anthropologists. A hole was made in the throat of the victim and the tongue pulled out through the hole. They perform this ritual on the corpse. In the Flower Vase Cut, the head is removed and the legs and arms are cut and the dismembered body parts are put inside the torso as if it were a flower vase. […] the geographical situation of Colombia makes it very rich in flowers and biodiversity. Independence from Spain was in 1820, and at the end of the 18th century Spain sent a commission to study the flowers of Colombia. […] That botanical expedition ushered in the independence of Colombia. It was a moment of reflection, and I wanted to make that connection with the botanical expedition, because my dream, my idealism, is that art can have a purpose; art can create order and thought\(^{37}\) (Reid and Echavarría, 2000).

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\(^{34}\) “Flower Cut Vase”.

\(^{35}\) “The Violence”.

\(^{36}\) To Kill and Overkill.

\(^{37}\) By stating this Juan Manuel perhaps means that art can help us understand reality, by creating order and thought.
Juan Manuel’s idea behind “Corte de Florero” also takes form through metaphor. It is not just the visual elements emulating flowers that constitute that metaphor, but also the names he gave to each “flower.” They imitate the taxonomy applied for the classification of flowers in the Botanical Expedition. These names are composed by two words in Latin: the first one is the scientific name of each type of flower and the second word suggests something about the acts of violence perpetrated in the 50’s in Colombia. For instance the name *Maxillaria Vorax* refers to the orchid’s name in Latin, *Maxillaria*, while *Vorax* is Latin for voracious. “Violence is voracious” (Reuter, 2005, para. 4).

I never saw the war on television, but I did hear about it on the radio, so the violence I knew wasn’t visual it was oral. [...] I remember that I would hear things like: ‘The Conservatives have gone into Liberal town and they have planchar-ed the liberals.’ I used to go into the laundry room where the help was ironing the pants and somehow that association stayed in my mind. I remember thinking: ‘My god, it must hurt! Planchar another human being must hurt because I can see that it burns.’ Somehow, in childhood, those pants – my father’s pants – were being ironed and I would say, ‘Well, that’s a human being’. (Rush and Echavarría, 2014).

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38 “Flower Cut Vase, Dionaea Viscosa”.
Additionally, the connection that Echavarría makes to the Botanical Expedition also suggest that violence in Colombia started well before 1948, tracing it back to Colombia’s colonial past (Reyes, 1999). Juan Manuel’s next art piece did not focus on history. In 1998, he developed “Escuela Nueva.” One of Juan Manuel’s cousins has a small house in the Pacific coast of Colombia and had invited him to spend a few days there. During his stay, he learned how inhabitants of Chicocorá in Chocó abandoned their village out of fear of violence. Echavarría decided to head for the village to see what had happened. In an interview with Calvin Reid for BOMB Magazine, when the interviewer wondered about how the artist made presence through absence, Juan Manuel replied:

[…] the most painful thing, or what made me feel the most, was to see that which was left by the children of Chicocorá. That was the most horrendous part. Adults are one thing, but children are very delicate, fragile creatures. To see the horror of the school, the sense of abandonment, the composition books left in the classroom. To know it was called Escuela Nueva, the new school, and there was nothing there (Reid and Echavarría, 2000).

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39 “Flower Cut Vase, Orquis Lugubris”.
40 “New School”.
According to Juan Manuel’s reflection from the previous quote, he did not seem to be immediately thinking about metaphors or any particular ideas when he witnessed what

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41 “New School”.
42 “New School”.

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happened in Chicocorá. He was feeling the abandonment left after displacement that he witnessed. This is significant because it suggests the affective and situated engagement of his work—which both motivates his work and what he wishes to communicate to spectators. Thus, metaphors and affect are two different layers of Juan Manuel’s pieces and key ones in his own understanding of his work. In fact, he explains that [...] yo busco a través de mi trabajo abrir no sólo espacios de reflexión sino espacios de conmoción (Adarve and Echavarría, 2014). In the following years, Juan Manuel developed three more pieces: “La Bandeja de Bolívar” (1999), “La Maria” (2000), and “Guerra y Pa” (2001). They all follow the traces of Colombian war and also address Colombia’s history. However, the focus of this work is limited to a selected number of relevant works for the sake of a deeper analysis and contextualization.

His following art piece is “Bocas de Ceniza” (2003). This work is very well known nationally and internationally. As well as “Guerra y Pa” and “La Bandeja de Bolívar”, “Bocas de Ceniza” was exhibited in the Museum of Modern Art in New York. It has also been shown in community spaces in the department (province) of Chocó, Colombia and in an academic environment at the Universidad de los Andes in Bogotá. It is a video where seven survivors of different massacres in Colombia sing their experiences, sorrows, and hopes, at a very close range with the camera. This allows for an unusual sense of intimacy with the singers. They do not look away and, as a spectator, you have no time to breathe while you engage with their gaze and attentively listen to their singing voices. One of the participants in the video, Rafael Moreno, sings a song he composed after having witnessed the forced displacement of people down the Atrato River in Chocó, Colombia. These are the two initial fragments of the words to his song:

43 “through my work I seek to open up spaces for reflection, but also for commotion”.
44 “Bolivar’s Tray”
45 “The Maria”.
46 The word “pa” is used to replace the word “paz” in this title. Juan Manuel explains that it is a way of imitating the accent of people from the Caribbean coast of Colombia. In that region, the final “s” in some words is not pronounced. Thus the word “paz” becomes “pa”.
47 “War and Peace”.
48 “Mouths of Ash”.

Oiga Señor Presidente

Hey Mr. President, how are you going to rule, this way the peasants, man! They will be, finished off (bis). Hey Mr President, good grief! Don’t you feel pain, from so much displacement, man! That you can hear across the region (bis).

Oiga Señor Presidente ¡caramba!
a usted no le da dolor
de tanto desplazamiento ¡hombre!
que se oyen por la región
(Bocas de Ceniza/Mouths of Ash, 2003)

As I sit in my desk writing these words to Rafael’s songs, I remember that Aureliano, the man that Juan Manuel had brought with him to our interview, is Noel Palacio’s brother – one of the singers of this video. I also remember my interview with Noel, at La Candelaria in Bogotá. Noel explains:

Hey Mr. President, how are you going to rule, this way the peasants, man! They will be, finished off (bis). Hey Mr President, good grief! Don’t you feel pain, from so much displacement, man! That you can hear across the region (bis).

[Bocas de Ceniza/Mouths of Ash, 2003]
él captó permanece intacto. [...] Y yo pienso que lo que yo digo en una canción no puedo pararme y decirlo en un medio de comunicación, porque mi vida está corriendo peligro (Noel Palacios, December 9th, 2014).

Noel sees great value in how art has the ability to remain, in this case to immortalize his story. Similarly, he points at the possibilities that art opens for safe spaces to speak about Colombian war. For that he is thankful to his music. Concerning the relationship they have built, Juan Manuel explains in our interview:

A mi lo que me interesa del trabajo mío es salirme de la burbuja en la que vivo en Bogotá. [...] lo que me gusta es ir y conocer zonas diferentes de Colombia, conversar con la gente, abrazarme con esas personas y hacer amistades como ésta aquí, mi amigo Aureliano de Buenavista, Bojayá, de hace muchos años con Bocas de Ceniza. Es eso. Y persistir, continuar en esas amistades que a veces se tejen (Juan Manuel Echavarría, November 14th, 2014).

Juan Manuel, Noel and Aureliano are very close; so much that Noel mentioned in our interview that Juan Manuel plays a father-like figure in his life. This story is not unique to them. A similar thing happened to Juan Manuel and all those who created this particular piece.

No podía filmarlos y después largarme. Estos cantantes que filmé me conmovieron. Estoy involucrado en sus vidas, en sus proyectos personales. Hablamos por teléfono. Nos vemos. Conozco a sus familias y me he asegurado de que sepan donde están siendo exhibidas sus canciones. He aprendido muchas

51 [...] when the massacre in Bojayá took place, I was seventeen years old. I am thirty now. [...] I took part in one of his art pieces, Mouths of Ash, and that’s when we met, and [now] I see my song is intact. [...] I have grown old and I have changed in so many ways, but the moment he captured when he recorded that video, that moment he captured remains intact [...] And I think that what I say in a song, I can’t stand and say it in the media, because my life would be at risk.

52 What I am interested in, talking about my job, is getting out of the bubble that I live in in Bogotá [...] what I like doing is going and knowing different places of Colombia, talking to people, hugging those people and making friends with them, like this one [Juan Manuel looks at him and pats him on the back], my friend Aureliano from Buenavista, Bojayá, from Mouths Ash, many years ago. That is what it is. And to persist, to maintain those friendships that sometimes you forget.
cosas sobre esta guerra a través de sus historias. Al final del año pasado tuve una exposición en la Universidad de Los Andes en Bogotá y, excepto Rafael Moreno, todos ellos vinieron. Sentí que era importante para ellos ver cómo los demás sienten y responden a sus cantos. Pienso que esto les permitió hablar más sobre su dolor, sobre sus heridas. Para mí también fue importante que ellos se dieran cuenta cómo presento sus canciones (Reuter and Echavarría, 2004).

The fact that Juan Manuel is concerned with showing the people that he has worked with how their songs are being presented in different spaces speaks to the importance of spectatorship in the effects that Juan Manuel’s work can have to that regard. What he mentioned in relation to the importance of them seeing how people react to their singing, as well as the possibilities that enables for them to speak about their suffering is also relevant. It suggests that there is a particular type of spectatorship happening with his work; one that might have a significant impact on the lives of the people that the creator has worked with. Thus, this also speaks to the relationship between the creators, their art, the people they work with, and spectators.

Echavarría conducted fieldwork for “Bocas de Ceniza” in Bojayá, where he became close to the people he met and that he worked with. The stories and testimonies that he listened to impacted him deeply. That means that in order to represent what he has seen or heard, he departs from a personal place. Nonetheless, Juan Manuel also feels the need to embody the stories of objects, animals or nature through his art. It is also the case for a work he developed in 2005 titled “NN,” which consists of a series of photographs showing a battered mannequin. Echavarría has been developing another similar work

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53 I couldn’t just film them and leave. These singers I filmed moved me. I am involved in their lives, in their personal projects. We talk on the phone. We meet. I have met their families and I make sure they know where their songs are being displayed. I have learned a lot about this war through their stories. At the end of last year I had an exhibition at Los Andes University, in Bogotá, except for Rafael Moreno, they all came. I felt it was important for them to see how others feel and respond to their chants. I think this allowed them to talk more about their sorrow, about their wounds. To me, it was also important that they could see the way I present their songs.

54 In this context, I refer to fieldwork as the act of traveling to Bojayá back and forth in order to listen to people’s stories and testimonies about the massacre, as well as to record their singing about that event.

55 No Name
since 1998 until today called “Los Testigos.” It features a tree and a few animals as witnesses of abandoned places. Thus, Juan Manuel’s art recounts Colombian history by appealing to a diversity of spaces, subjects, and objects. He is interested in knowing the stories told by objects like abandoned mannequins, or by rural landscapes where people have been displaced from, or by the animals that become the sole inhabitants of such landscapes. Echavarría feels an intense drive to know and make memory of a history that, he feels, is circular, in the sense that Colombia is constantly repeating that violent history.

In 2006, Juan Manuel started developing “La guerra que no hemos visto.” It is an artistic project that involves people and their stories, but it is unprecedented in its nature, at least in Colombia. It consists of a series of workshops developed in Bogotá through his “Fundación Puntos de Encuentro” with former soldiers of the Colombian army, as well as with former guerrilla and paramilitary members. They no longer belong to those groups because they deserted, or demobilized as part of the Ley de Justicia y Paz, or were wounded in combat. Bogotá’s City Hall made it possible to contact some of the ex-combatants. A total of 80 men and women painted 420 paintings in those workshops, 90 of which were selected for the exhibition that is available at the project’s website. Over a period of two years, 35 of these ex-combatants painted their memories and versions of what they have experienced in the Colombian war. According to Juan Manuel, it is crucial that we recognize that those whom we identify as perpetrators have stories to tell, and that those stories also compose the war landscape in Colombia.

[...] how can we expect to make sense of the war without their stories. When I began working with these people in a two-year-long series of painting workshops, they would say to me: ‘Who wants to listen to my story? I am a perpetrator.’ But those perpetrators, as I would learn, are also victims. [...] The brush allowed them to talk about their experiences, things that many of them had never shared with

56 “The Witnesses”.
57 “The war that we have not seen”.
58 Echavarría established this Foundation in 2006 as a non-profit organization that promotes, supports, and generates alliances that seek the exhibition of artistic projects to preserve the historical memory of Colombian war. : “Meeting Points Foundation”.
anyone. It distanced them from their own experience with the horror of war. Art speaks in the spaces that our culture silences (Rush and Echavarría, 2014).

Illustration VIII. “La guerra que no hemos visto”\textsuperscript{60}. Archive # B021-0132.
Juan Manuel Echavarría. 2007.

Noel Palacios was one of the facilitators of these workshops. This experience opened his eyes to some aspects of the Colombian war. The activity entailed building confidence among all participants, Juan Manuel, and the facilitators –some of whom had been victims of violence in Colombia. As Noel explained, trust was gained because they engaged in these activities together for a long period of time (two years). Among other things, this assured participants that there were no potential government informants in the project’s space, which was one of their fears when participating in the workshops. Building trust also implied recognizing the meanings and processes involved in being a combatant in Colombia’s armed conflict. This is illustrated by Noel’s own experience in these workshops:

[…] Yo pienso que una de las partes más importantes de ese taller para mi como campesino, fue que en este taller se le dio voces a los soldados rasos, que son los que hacen el trabajo sucio. […] muchas personas me preguntan ‘Bueno pero usted cómo, siendo sobreviviente de la masacre de Bojayá, que la guerrilla mató a sus… hizo masacre en su pueblo, ¿usted cómo hizo para trabajar con ellos?’ Y al

\textsuperscript{60} “The War We Have Not Seen”.
principio tenía mucho rencor pero después me di cuenta que estos muchachos también eran víctimas [...]61 (Noel Palacios, December 9th, 2014).

Thus, this particular work evidences the possibility that art offers to point to the complexities of the figure of “the perpetrator.” It helps to understand the circumstances that led someone to become involved in the war and to hurt other people. This is possible through the confrontation that workshop participants and facilitators and the exhibition’s spectators face when engaging with these paintings and their context: that of people who have experienced violence as both victims and perpetrators. Hence, witnessing their stories confronts spectators with a discourse that destabilizes the rigid meanings of categories like victims and perpetrators. However, it is important to highlight that the authors of the pieces remain anonymous in this work, which –even it is for safety reasons– might make different publics wonder about the way that the authorship of “La guerra que no hemos visto” is being framed. To this regard, Ana Tiscornia (the curator of “La guerra que no hemos visto” exhibition at the Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá62 [MAMBO] in 2009) decided that the authors’ names the armed group to which they belonged would not be made public in the exhibition. This decision was made in order to let spectators fill the pieces with meaning with their “off-guard” gaze –not being biased by political views according to the person who painted a given piece.

61 [...] I think that one of the most important parts of that workshop for me as a peasant, was that in this workshop ordinary privates were given a voice, they are the ones doing the dirty work [...] many people ask me: “well, but how do you, a survivor of the massacre in Bojayá, after the guerrilla killed your... carried out a massacre in your town, how could you work with them?” At first I was full of resentment, but then I realized those boys were also victims [...].
62 Modern Art Museum of Bogotá.
Another project that Juan Manuel has been developing for several years is the well-known “Requiem NN” (2006-2014). This project was born from a very particular ritual performed by the people who live in Puerto Berrío, Antioquia. Often, armed actors throw the bodies of those they kill into rivers in order to disappear them. Thus, many corpses travel the waters of the Madgalena River, which makes its way through Puerto Berrío. These corpses are NNs: they used to be people with a name, a family, and an identity. Perpetrators of violence took all of that away from them, by killing them and trying to disappear them by throwing them into the river to wander and not be found. Inhabitants of Puerto Berrío began adopting these corpses. Fishermen would pull them out of the river and then the corpses would have burial in the town’s mausoleum. People choose one NN, name it—thus giving them an identity, sometimes even by naming them after a missing relative, or giving them their own lastnames—and embellish their tomb. In return, people ask the adopted NN for favors. Juan Manuel read about this ritual in a newspaper in 2006 and decided to go and see it with his own eyes.

63 “The War We Have Not Seen”.
64 A region located at the northwest of Colombia.
65 From the Latin “nomen nescio”, which means “I do not know the name”. “NN” can be interpreted as “Ningún Nombre” in Spanish and “No Name”.
collectively and perhaps unconsciously, the people of Puerto Berrío are saying: we won’t let the violence erase you, we snatch you away from those who want you to disappear, we take care of you, we baptized you in death, you become part of us. The pact with the dead resists the violence and reconstructs the social fabric. I have made many journeys to document the changing tombs. Among the death and destruction of more than 50 years of violence in Colombia, the NN tombs of Puerto Berrío are a unique gesture of humanity (Echavarría, 2010, para. 4-5).

Noel and Juan Manuel both see a great act of resistance in the relationship that people from Puerto Berrío have built with the dead traveling down the Madgalena River. Noel also thinks Juan Manuel is doing an act of resistance through his work in “Requiem NN”.

Él se va a las zonas de conflicto. Él no manda a otra persona a que haga el trabajo por él. Él va y se mete a esos lugares y él mismo investiga, él mismo va y habla con la gente. Él mismo hace todo. […] Entonces de una u otra forma está resistiendo, ¿por qué? [Porque él podría decir] ‘bueno, pues no me está pasando a mí, yo estoy acá en mi ciudad, yo estoy sabroso…’. En cambio él se va y se mete a esos lugares. […] desde mi punto de vista, está haciendo una resistencia66 (Noel Palacios, December 9th, 2014).

66 He goes to the conflict zones. He does not send other people to do his job for him. He goes to those places and he investigates himself, he goes and talks to people himself. He does everything himself. […] So, in one way or another he is resisting, why? [Because he could say] "well, it is not happening to me, I am here in my city, I am cool...". Instead he goes to those places […] from my point of view he is performing a resistance.
The ritual performed by the people from Puerto Berrío, seen also as an act of resistance, is what makes “Requiem NN” possible. However, what Echavarría has been doing through his art in that place can be in itself an act of resistance. Visibilizing Puerto Berrío’s ritual is a way of immortalizing it, but also a kind of homage that counters current attempts from the local priest and the Attorney’s office to forbid this ritual.

[...] resiste al olvido. Ese ritual de Puerto Berrío, en estos momentos, el nuevo cura lo está combatiendo, no está permitiendo que las tumbas se pinten. La fiscalía está interviniendo para que esas tumbas de los NN no sean adoptados. Entonces las instituciones hoy en día están contra este ritual. Y esas fotografías son una evidencia de que esa voz colectiva actuó de esa forma con la violencia que le traía el río. Entonces hay una resistencia para el no olvido\(^{67}\) (Juan Manuel Echavarría, November 14\(^{th}\), 2014).

\(^{67}\) [...] it resists oblivion. That ritual from Puerto Berrío, the new priest is fighting it right now, he is forbidding the tombs to be painted. The attorney’s office is intervening so the NN graves are not adopted. So, institutions today are against this ritual. And those photographs are evidence that the collective voice acted that way with the violence the river brought them. So there is a resistance against oblivion.
“Requiem NN” consists of a series of photographs of these tombs and also a documentary about this ritual in Puerto Berrío. The former has been exhibited at national and international levels, in Colombia, Canada, The United States, and Estonia. It has circulated in art galleries, and community and academic spaces, like the “Ciudadela Educativa y Cultural América” in Puerto Berrío, or the “Centro de Memoria, Paz y Reconciliación” in Bogotá, as well as the Universidad de los Andes in the same city. Also, some have written about it in national newspapers like “El Espectador” and in blogs. The documentary is available online through Juan Manuel’s website. There is a great quality of art that is illustrated by this particular piece. It moves through different spaces and publics. This volatility can be very powerful when it comes to visibilizing and creating different discourses about violence in Colombia.

A mi me interesa mucho espacios que también se salen del circuito del arte. […]
Yo finalmente creo que mi obra es para dejar una memoria. […] (Juan Manuel Echavarría, November 14th, 2014).

68 “America Educational and Cultural Citadel.”
69 “The Spectator”. A renowned national newspaper in Colombia.
70 I am very interested in spaces that are not a part of the art circuit […] I ultimately believe that my work is meant to leave a memory [...].
His latest artistic contribution is titled “Silencios”\(^{71}\) (2010 - present). It compiles a series of photographs that show the silent natural and artificial landscapes –most of them used to be schools– in Mampuján, in Montes de María\(^{72}\) that remain after internally displaced people have abandoned them. Nevertheless, other displaced people who have settled there have adapted these places to be their homes. In relation to these photographs and the empty spaces in them, the emptiness can be considered as a metaphor. A metaphor for all the untold and invisibilized stories of Colombia’s war. They are apparently invisible stories that compose and fill those supposedly empty spaces. This is how Juan Manuel works: not only through metaphors but also through stories. Stories of all kinds –and in this case related to violence– are what have made his art possible.

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\(^{71}\) “Silences”.

\(^{72}\) The Maria Mountains. A region at the northermost area of Colombia.
y abrirme ante esas experiencias (Juan Manuel Echavarría, November 14th, 2014).

Juan Manuel Echavarría has an extensive record of artworks, each of which shows great complexity in how they were conceptualized and then materialized. His artistic journey has touched different aspects of violence in the Colombian war. Combined with an aesthetic gaze, they all offer a great deal for spectators to reflect on. They also offer an experience of deep engagement for spectators. An engagement that involves precision and depth in our look. Precision to see a sharp image and depth to have a more comprehensive look at what is framed in that image. As spectators we seem to have a sort of responsibility to feel Echavarría’s work. Yes, it is important that we think about it. But it is also important to feel it.

[...] yo quiero tocar vísceras, yo quiero ser visceral con mi obra como lo hice con Bocas de Ceniza. Que cada vez que cantaban se desgarraban. Y los ojos como las ventanas al alma (Juan Manuel Echavarría, November 14th, 2014).

My interview with Juan Manuel was about to be over. The recorder was still on. We started talking about different things: my work, my brother’s work. Then, we went back to Juan Manuel’s work. He shared with us a crucial reflection that speaks directly to a central quality of art when it comes to address horror. It is also a central metaphor in Echavarría’s understanding of his work and art in general:

[Yo] voy tocando temas con cada uno de mis trabajos como para dejar un mosaico de qué vi, qué encontré, pero siempre atravesados por la poesía y la belleza. Siempre. Porque yo no creo que el horror se tenga que hablar o expresar en el arte a través de más horror. Me interesa una mirada indirecta. Pensemos en el mito de

73 [my pieces] are full of history because what I like is not working within the four walls of my studio in Bogotá, but listening to people, going to the Colombian countryside, knowing the stories, seeing what happened in the war and open up to those experiences.
74 [...] I want to touch people’s entrails; I want to be visceral with my work the way I was with Mouths of Ash. The way every time they sang they [spectators] were torn. And the eyes [were] like the windows to the soul.
la Medusa, en la mitología griega. Quien miraba a la Medusa directamente se petrificaba y tenía que usar un escudo como espejo, para poderle cortar la cabeza. Esa es la mirada indirecta. […] Goya hace un grabado sobre una masacre en Los desastres de la guerra y abajo escribe ‘no se puede mirar’. Yo lo que pienso es que él nos está diciendo ‘a través de mi arte si se puede mirar la masacre’ para reflexionar sobre ella, para conmovernos con ella. Entonces yo creo que ahí el arte juega un papel muy importante, porque nos deja ver el horror a través de una mirada indirecta y esa mirada indirecta es la que nos permite reflexionar y sentir en una forma diferente, sin petrificarnos75 (Juan Manuel Echavarría, November 14th, 2014).

75 [I] touch on [different] topics with each work of mine to leave a mosaic of what I saw, but always crossed by poetry and beauty. Always. Because I do not think horror must be talked about or be expressed in art through more horror. I am interested in an indirect look. Let us think about the myth of Medusa, in Greek mythology. Whoever looked directly into Medusa’s eyes would petrify and would have to use a shield as a mirror in order to behead her. That’s the indirect look. […] Goya made an engraving of a massacre in The Disasters of War and below he writes: “it can’t be looked at”. I think he is telling us that “through my art you can look at the massacre” to reflect on it, to be moved by it. So I think art plays a very important part in that sense, because it allows us to look at horror through an indirect look and that indirect look is the one that allows us to reflect and feel differently, without petrifying.
2.1.2 Erika Diettes: De Amores Profundos\textsuperscript{76}

Erika was the first person I interviewed for this research. I was very nervous. It really felt like my whole investigation depended on how that single interview turned out. It also felt like that was the real starting point of my research and that from there, there was no turning back. We were meeting at one of her studios, in Bogotá at Las Torres del Parque\textsuperscript{77}—she has another studio downtown in Bogotá and another one at the municipality of La Unión\textsuperscript{78} in Antioquia. We had agreed to meet around 6:00 pm. I was there early. I waited with a friend at a little corner store, until it was time.

I got there and the doorman announced my name. I went inside, knocked on the door (or rang the bell?), and her assistant Paula opened the door. My heart was racing. This studio was spacious and neatly arranged. I was able to spend a few minutes observing everything, including some of the works she had there. My heart was slowing down. I was trying to figure out a little bit about who Erika was. She greeted me very kindly and offered me something to drink. Agua de panela.\textsuperscript{79} Regular beat. We sat and talked (even laughed!) for an hour and a half, and agreed to meet again to finish the interview. We both had taken our time to ask questions and give answers. I left her studio that night with a renewed love for my research, absolutely sure that I had taken all the right decisions doing this investigation.

Erika was born in Cali, Colombia in 1978. At a young age she went to the United States, but returned to Colombia after a few years. She has BA in Communications from the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá. She has two Master degrees, one in Visual Arts (Pontificia Universidad Javeriana) and one in Social Anthropology (Universidad de los Andes). Her passion for photography emerged when she was a teenager.

Me fascina tomar fotos, desde los quince años yo decidí que iba a ser fotógrafa.
Todo ocurrió porque trasladaron a mi papa a Washington y yo no hablaba inglés.

\textsuperscript{76} Deep Love.
\textsuperscript{77} The Park Towers. This is a residential compound downtown in the city of Bogotá.
\textsuperscript{78} The Union.
\textsuperscript{79} A common drink in Colombia made out of raw cane sugar and water.
Y cuando yo entré al cuarto oscuro por primera vez fue una locura. Para mí esto fue demencial. Me llega en un momento en el que el mundo de las palabras no existía, Porque no entendía nada, no escribía nada, no leía nada. Descubro la fotografía casi como una tabla de salvación, no? Una cosa mágica (Erika Diettes, October 1st, 2014).

In 2005 Erika developed Silencios: a series of portraits and testimonies of survivors of the Holocaust who relocated to Colombia after the Jewish genocide. Each image is composed by three photographs: one of the survivor’s testimony, one of the person, and one of an object from the past that brings them back to any experiences related to World War II. Erika explained in our interview how “Silencios” implied approaching the Holocaust survivors to understand what happens when people witness and suffer that horror. The process involved long talks with the survivors. In this sense, the resulting art pieces reveal Erika’s focus on the subject that she is photographing. This artwork immediately tells something about Erika and her artistic interests and methods: talking to people and getting to know them and their stories. Building trust. Creating significant human connections to allow survivors to share their stories. These images were exhibited in several museums in Colombia and Chile, as well as in the Teatro Faenza in Bogotá, Colombia.

[...] mis primeros trabajos siempre tuvieron que ver con el retrato, siempre tuvieron que ver con los testimonios. Mi fotografía siempre ocurría después de charlas largas con el sujeto. [...] Es hablar con el testigo, no? Silencios es un esbozo de la pregunta que luego vengo a desarrollar en el resto de mi trabajo y es

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80 I love taking photographs; since I was fifteen years old I decided I was going to be a photographer. It all happened because my father was transferred to Washington and I did not speak English. And when I went into the dark room for the first time it was insane. To me it was demented. [Photography] came to me when the world of words did not exist, because I could not understand a word, I could not write a thing, I could not read a thing. I find photography as a rescue board, right? Something magical.

81 “Silences”.

82 Faenza Theatre.
¿qué pasa cuando tu has tenido que ser testigo y víctima de esos horrores?\textsuperscript{83}

(Erika Diettes, October 1\textsuperscript{st}, 2014)


In 2007 Erika developed “Quebrado,”\textsuperscript{84} a triptych that speaks to a personal experience of the artist. The guerrilla murdered one of her uncles. He was shot seventeen times when he was in his car. Erika and her family found out when they saw the news on TV. This art piece is not published and is not as widely known as Erika’s other art works. However, she conducted anthropological research for her Masters studies examining this experience. It is now published as a book entitled “Noticia al aire…Memoria en vivo”\textsuperscript{85} (2010). In her book, Erika inquires about the impact on her family of learning about this event through TV. She conducted an ethnography of these impacts, specifically thinking about the representation of violence and how it affects processes of mourning – the way Erika’s family found out about her uncle’s murder determined their mourning process of that loss.

\textsuperscript{83} […] my first pieces were always related to portraits, they were always related to testimonies. My photography would always happen after long conversations with the subject. […] It is about talking to the witness, right? “Silencios” is like a draft of a question that I develop later in my work, which is: what happens when you have had to be a witness and a victim of those horrors?

\textsuperscript{84} Broken. In Spanish, the word “quebrado” is usually used as slang to describe the way hitmen kill their victims. To “quebrar” (break) someone is to kill them.

\textsuperscript{85} “News on the air… alive memory”.

52
Armed groups in the Colombian armed conflict practice different strategies of violence and terror, which include forced disappearances. The bodies of people who are forcefully disappeared are usually thrown into rivers. In Erika’s next art piece, “Río Abajo”86 (2008), she photographed the clothes of disappeared people, floating in transparent water. This is one of Erika’s most renowned art pieces. She developed it during her first semester as a Master student in Anthropology at the Universidad de los Andes in Bogotá. At that time, Erika’s personal experience with loss incited a question in her mind: how might the representation of violence affect the process of mourning? As part of her studies, she started to read about violence in Colombia and one specific topic stood out: rivers as the biggest cemetery in the world.

86 “Drifting Away”. 

53
Me cruzo con esto y entonces me surge la idea de representar de alguna manera el tema de “los ríos son el cementerio más grande del mundo” [...] Mi idea inicial pues era muy sencilla. Era ropa de personas desaparecidas fotografiada dentro de agua 87 (Erika Diettes, October 1st, 2014).

Illustration XVI. Installation of “Río Abajo”. Parroquia de nuestra Señora de Las Nieves, Bogotá, Colombia. Paula Alvarado. 2014.

Erika started working with members of ASFAMIPAZ (Asociación Colombiana de Familiares de Miembros de la Fuerza Pública Retenidos y Liberados por Grupos Guerrilleros 88), who provided the clothes that Erika would photograph, in this case uniforms of disappeared members of the military forces. Soon enough, she realized that by photographing only their clothes, she was overlooking other victims within the Colombian conflict. She managed to get in touch with AMOR (Asociación Regional de Mujeres del Oriente Antioqueño 89) through a friend.

[...] es allí donde [comienza] este recorrido por el país, frente a frente, [porque] no se trataba únicamente de recoger camisas, no? 90 (Erika Diettes, October 1st, 2014).

87 I walk into this and then I come up with the idea of portraying somehow the issue of “the rivers are the biggest cemetery in the world” [...] my initial idea was very simple. Clothes of the disappeared people photographed in the water.
88 Colombian Association of Relatives of Law Enforcement Members Retained and Liberated by Guerrilla Groups.
89 Regional Association of Women from Northeast Antioquia.
90 [...] that is where the journey across the country [starts], face to face, [because] it was not just about collecting shirts, right?
El trabajo no se queda en recoger las prendas y después regresarlas o quedarse con ellas, sino que hay todo un seguimiento, un compromiso con esa comunidad del que ella parte para crear su obra\(^{91}\) (Ileana Díéguez, November 22\(^{nd}\), 2014).

As it happened with “Silencios”, “Río Abajo” also involved an intimate experience with the people that Erika was working with. She was constantly travelling back and forth from her studios to the communities, connecting with people and bearing witness to their stories. It was a process that went beyond the mere recollection of objects to photograph them, acquiring a testimonial dimension through the interviews she developed with them and moving her to become a witness of their stories. According to Erika, “Río Abajo” is an artistic work that also goes beyond the topic of violence insofar as it speaks to experiences of love in relation to processes of memory and mourning.

To this regard, it is worth mentioning that I have chosen to look at Erika’s work through that particular lens (the armed conflict in Colombia), which does not mean that this is the only dimension. It is however intertwined with two fundamental topics in her work: memory and mourning. Erika is interested in exploring how loss in the context of a violent death produces certain memory making processes and mourning experiences – how do people remember their lost loved ones, how and when do they speak about them, what material objects do they keep from them, why, and how. Interestingly, it seems that Erika’s motivation to create her art lies in her wish to understand and represent human experiences –like love, memory, and mourning– while for Juan Manuel it is about representing an idea (i.e. people adopting NNs pulled out from the Magdalena river).

Para mi, mi trabajo habla de la memoria y habla del duelo. Reducir esta obra únicamente a la violencia es justamente eso, es reducirla. No se trata únicamente de personas desaparecidas forzosamente por grupos armados, se trata de la forma como una mamá guarda la esperanza de que el hijo va a volver. […] Lo que se iba a generar era una imagen bella, que dignificara la memoria del amado, porque

\(^{91}\) The work is not just about collecting the pieces of cloth and then returning them or keeping them, there is a follow-up, a commitment to the community that she starts from to create her piece.
fíjate que estamos hablando es de profundos amores. Esta es una obra que se hace a partir de la memoria y la memoria es ante todo un amor muy profundo (Erika Diettes, October 1st, 2014).

Ileana Diéguez has theorized extensively on Erika Diette’s work, especially “Río Abajo,” focusing on mourning and its relation to the body. Ileana is a professor at the UAM (Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana) in Mexico. She has a PhD in Philosophy and Letters and did a postdoctoral residence in Art History at the UNAM (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México). She obtained her Masters degree in Comparative Literature at the UNAM and graduated from Theatrology and Drama at the Instituto Superior de Arte de la Havana. She is also Erika’s friend and colleague. To characterize “Río Abajo” with regards to the elements of mourning and the body, Ileana connects Erika’s work to:

[...] todo ese proceso de elaboración de la memoria, de construcción de una memoria viva, una memoria que está en construcción, imaginada [...] y sobre todo a la otra dimensión de una memoria dolida que es esta cuestión de los duelos suspendidos, de los duelos que no han podido ser realizados. Cuando hablamos de memoria en un país en conflicto, esa memoria está articulada al cuerpo. Creo que además Erika ahí coloca una dimensión en su obra y es la posibilidad de articular esto que Judith Butler ha llamado el duelo público, no? (Ileana Diéguez, November 22nd, 2014)

92 To me, my work talks about memory and mourning. Reducing the piece to violence is precisely that, to reduce it. It is not just about the people that armed groups forcibly disappeared, it is about how a mother is hopeful about her son coming back. [...] What would emerge would be a beautiful image that would dignify the memory of the loved one; notice that we are talking about deep love. This is an art piece that is made from memory and memory is first of all a very deep love.
93 Autonomous Metropolitan University.
94 National Autonomous University of Mexico.
95 The Superior Havana Institute of Art.
96 [...] that whole process of memory making, of the construction of a living memory, a memory in construction too, envisioned [...] and especially to the dimension of a hurt memory that is [also related to] the matter of the pending mournings, the unfulfilled mournings. When we talk about memory in a conflicted country, that memory is articulated to the body. I also think Erika places a different dimension in her work and it is the opportunity to articulate what Judith Butler has called the public mourning, right?
Memory and mourning compose “Río Abajo” in a specific way, through the absent body. As Ileana Diéguez pointed out in our interview, Erika makes use of a strategy of representation through the use of the clothes that evoke the absent bodies. In this sense, the disappeared bodies (re) appear in the images through a visual representational strategy. This approach also creates space for the making of memory and for public mourning, when pain is inserted in the public scene precisely by exhibiting these photographs. The memory-making process also takes place through Erika’s artistic practice when she meets with the communities, she hears their testimonies, collects the objects, registers them, creates the art pieces with such objects, and exhibits them.

Regarding the concept of public mourning, Judith Butler (2006) proposes vulnerability as a fundamental human condition that manifests as the impossibility of a person remaining intact when coming into contact with another person. That vulnerability is a bodily condition that subjects us to others’ threats and acts of violence. Bodily vulnerability visibilizes such subjection and interdependent bonds between humans. Butler proposes mourning as a political tool that, acting as the conscience of loss, uncovers that vulnerability. According to her, that uncovering is important because it can result in efforts towards protecting that vulnerability.

In this sense, the public exposure of loss in Erika’s “Río Abajo” surfaces that vulnerability in the Colombian context. This is essential to understand the mise en scène of that art piece and its implications in terms of the issues of public responsibility. If we are all vulnerable with respect to each other, then we are all responsible for others’ vulnerabilities as we are also that “other” who can hurt people. Surfacing that human condition creates a sense of common vulnerability which we can only protect as a community. This also speaks to the possibilities art offers in contexts of war or post-war to create a sense of common vulnerability that prevents violence to govern (again) that community. As we will see in further paragraphs, public mourning and the making of memory are common topics in some of Erika’s art pieces.
The use of transparent water has awakened different views on “Río Abajo” and the particular aesthetic parameters that Erika decided to use. Ricardo Arcos-Palma\textsuperscript{97} reflect on the representational strategy of using transparent water:

Muchos pensarán que esas imágenes no aluden directamente a un río crecido, violento, lleno de tierra. Esto es cierto, pero a la artista no le interesa “representar” el río en sí que se ha llevado esos cuerpos violentados. Sino por el contrario hacernos ver cómo esas prendas que estaban listas para vestir al esperado que nunca llegó, flotan en una especie de agua pura, limpia que en este caso es metáfora del alivio\textsuperscript{98} (Arcos-Palma, 2010, p. 9).

\textsuperscript{97} He is a Colombian curator, theorist, and critic of Colombian art, profesor at the Universidad Nacional in the city of Bogotá.
\textsuperscript{98} Many would think that those images do not directly allude a swollen and violent river, full of dirt. This is true, but the artist is not interested in portraying the river that has taken those abused bodies. On the contrary, she wants us to see how those clothes, which were ready to be worn by the awaited ones that never came, float in some kind of pure water, clean, which in this case is a metaphor for relief.
That metaphor of a sense of relief speaks to the emotions engrained in this artwork and in Erika herself, as well as in the people that she worked with to create this piece. When asked what could “Río Abajo” smell like, Erika explained:

[...] es un olor desde el amor. Cuando tu ves a la gente en el cementerio limpiando la lápida, poniendo la floresita…todo ese gesto de embellecer es una cuestión como de decir: te cuido con amor, te cuido con esmero99 (Erika Diettes, October 1st, 2014).

I asked the same question about “Río Abajo” to Nadis Londoño, a sociologist currently working as a professor at the Universidad de San Buenaventura in Medellín, Colombia. More specifically, she does psychosocial accompaniment to victims of the conflict in the region of Antioquia, Colombia. She accompanies Erika when she does her fieldwork with communities in Eastern Antioquia, and thus has become very close to her artistic work. When I asked her what “Río Abajo” smelled like for her, Nadis said:

A mi me da una sensación y es como de acariciar y abrazar. Es como si eso necesitara ser mirado, mirado con el corazón, con la humanidad que todos tenemos por distintos que seamos. [Es] como la necesidad de abrazar y acariciar y decir “tranquilas que ustedes ya tienen un lugar”100 (Nadis Londoño, November 20th, 2014).

“Río Abajo” was first exhibited in 2008 and its most recent exhibition was in 2014. It has circulated in very different spaces, like the Centro Cultural Recoleta101 in Buenos Aires, Argentina (2008), De Santos Gallery in Texas, USA (2008), the (now) Salón del Nunca

99 [...] it is a scent from love. When you see people at the cemetery cleaning the gravestone, placing a little flower... the gesture of embellishment is like saying: I take care of you with love, I take good care of you.

100 It [the art piece] makes me want to caress and hug. It is as if that needed to be looked at, looked at with the heart, with that humanity we all share no matter how different we are. There is a need to hug and caress and saying: “do not worry, there is a place for you now”.

101 Recoleta Cultural Center.
Más\textsuperscript{102} in the town of Granada, Antioquia (2008), the Palacio de la Inquisición\textsuperscript{103} in Cartagena, Colombia, the Newark Arts Council in Newark, NJ (2009), the Art Museum at the Universidad Nacional at Bogotá, (2010), the Templo el Señor de las Misericordias in Medellín, Colombia (2014), and the Parroquia Nuestra Señora de las Nieves at Bogotá (2014). The particular volatility of “Río Abajo” in relation to the spaces through which it has circulated –thus, its adaptability to multiple and qualitatively different exhibition scenarios– is an essential characteristic of Erika’s art. It does not only aim for an artistic circuit, but also for community and public spaces, which are accessible to a wider range of publics.

Erika’s following work, “A punta de Sangre”\textsuperscript{104} (2009) speaks to the same issue: the forced disappearance of victims of the armed conflict into rivers. This piece is a triptych composed by the photograph of a woman describing her experience with the disappearance of a loved one, another photograph of a vulture with blood in its beak, and another photograph of the water of a river in between the other two photographs. The vulture becomes an unfortunate ally in alerting people about the presence of a body in the riverbanks where corpses usually float. The image of the woman conveys a sense of grief for a lost loved one. The vulture to the right is expressionless, but the blood in its beak reveals the real reasons behind his allegiance. They are both looking at the clear water, both looking for a body, but with different purposes. This triptych was exhibited at the Plaza de Bolívar\textsuperscript{105} in downtown in Bogotá. The decision to install “A Punta de Sangre” in a plaza that symbolizes “power” as it is surrounded by the Palace of Justice, the City Hall, the National Capitol, and Bogotá’s cathedral might suggest a relation between nation building and blood: literally meaning that Colombia was built on blood. It was also exhibited at the Plaza de la Merced\textsuperscript{106} in Cartagena, Colombia.

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{102} Never Again Room.
  \item \textsuperscript{103} Inquisition Palace.
  \item \textsuperscript{104} “All Blood and Guts”.
  \item \textsuperscript{105} Bolivar’s Square. It was named after Simón Bolívar, who freed Colombia and other Southamerican countries form the Spaniards ruling and founded La Gran Colombia (The Big Colombia) which after fragmented and resulted in a different political organization of countries in this region.
  \item \textsuperscript{106} Mercy Square.
\end{itemize}
La indiferencia general generada por estos enfoques reporteriles es la excusa para que esta artista busque hacer evidente en forma monumental una situación real que sólo puede ser denunciada en el sentido inverso. Si los gritos de auxilio siempre se dirigen al centro del país para pedir la ayuda oficial, gritar desde adentro, desde el histórico lugar que simboliza el poder de una nación es aludir a su historia \(^{107}\) (Padilla, N.d., pp. 1-2).


Erika’s most recent work is called “Sudarios”\(^{108}\) (2011). It portrays 20 women who have been victims of the Colombian armed conflict in Antioquia, as they remember and narrate how their loved ones were murdered. The women witnessed and survived these killings.

\(^{107}\) The widespread indifference generated by reporter-like approaches becomes an excuse for this artist to evidence, in a monumental way, a real life situation that can only be denounced in its reversed sense. If cries for help are always directed to the center of the country asking for official help, screaming from the inside, from the historical place that symbolizes the power of a nation, is to allude to its history.

\(^{108}\) “Shrouds.”
Erika engaged in interviews and conversations with all of them, some of who in fact belonged to the communities that she worked with for “Río Abajo.” It is important to note that Erika underlines how her art pieces emerge in a spiral way: one leads to the next. She sees the production of her work as a continuous cycle. The interviews she held with these women were also focused on their testimony on the experience they had when their loved one was murdered. As they reached a moment of deep pain through their storytelling, Erika snapped a photograph with her camera. The resulting images were set in a seven foot tall silk canvas, as a reminiscent of the Christian reliquary, The Shroud: the agony of Christ, the Passion and the Piety. Erika chose to display these shrouds in churches and temples, hanging the shrouds at different heights. This installation also includes the sounds of a sighing woman. It seems all these elements come together to create a sublime experience that will connect us to these women’s pain. What Erika did through this photographic work was to “find a communicable language of sensation and affect with which to register something of the experience of traumatic memory […] in a manner of formal innovation” (Bennett, 2005, p. 2).

Es una exposición para templos y eso lo aprendí mirando a la gente, porque si tu miras la disposición física, mental y emocional cuando uno entra a un templo es distinta. Así tu seas el ateo más ateo, hay algo en la arquitectura del espacio, hay algo en el silencio (Erika Diettes, October 1st, 2014).

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109 It is an exhibition made for temples and I learned that by looking at people, because if you look at the physical, mental, and emotional disposition when you enter a temple, it is different. Even if you are the greatest atheist of all, there is something about the architecture of that space, there is something about its silence.
The women appear to float above and around us. Presenting the work in churches, Diettes elevates their burden to a spiritual one, their suffering acknowledged and dignified in that most sacred of spaces. The larger-than-life-size scale overwhelms us, as if to suggest the enormity of the violence that lay hidden behind their eyes, and like martyrs seeking redemption, their presence invites us to share in their burden. We are spared their individual horrors but, taking form in our imagination, their torment is enough to envisage our own (Guice, N.d., p. 2).

Nevertheless, recognizing the impossibility of other people’s pain not slipping through our fingers is crucial. Erika and Ileana Diéguez discuss that moment captured in “Sudarios” by the artist, as one revealing how pain exceeds itself. Erika describes it as “the silence of pain” and Ileana understands it as “the transcendence of pain” (as cited in Duarte, N.d., p. 3). Sometimes the pain and the horrors are excessive and thus representing them might seem an impossible task. Here we must remember Georges
Didi-Huberman’s words: “Imágenes pese a todo”\textsuperscript{110} (2004). Despite the incommensurability of horror, images must be and we must attend to them. Images allow us to grasp horror and we owe it to our fellow humans in pain to go through with that attempt.

The materials chosen and the layout of the shrouds also speak of the war. As Angela Maria Duarte puts it,

\begin{quote}
Es una presencia que se materializa en la tela, en nuestra posibilidad de tocarla, pero en el contacto imposible con el dolor y las vivencias que ‘representa’, en la posibilidad de enjugar las lágrimas, pero nunca de consolar el rostro, de devolverle su tranquilidad\textsuperscript{111} (Duarte, N.d., p. 2).
\end{quote}

In Erika’s words, “Sudarios” is about portraying how these 20 women experience the Colombian armed conflict in their intimate lives and the emotions involved in such process. To approach that dimension of their lives, Erika understood that the work she would have to develop around their testimony and the women as witnesses would involve developing an intimate connection with them, as well as her own engagement as witness to their stories. There is a multiplicity of subjects involved in “Sudarios” concerning the process of witnessing. These women witnessed the death of their loved ones and by listening to their testimony, Erika also becomes a witness of such horror –although a different kind of witness. This artwork operates as a twofold testimony: the women’s testimony and Erika’s testimony. We can also identify three types of witnesses: the women (the recognized victims/survivors/affected), Erika (the artist), and the spectators. As spectators, we are witnesses to the women’s embodied remembering through Erika’s work. This process reveals how art might play a significant role in addressing impacts of war.

\textsuperscript{110} “Images despite everything”.

\textsuperscript{111} It is a presence that materializes in the fabric, in the possibility we have to touch it, but in the impossible contact with pain and the lived experiences it “represents,” in the opportunity to wipe the tears, but never to comfort the face, to give it back its peace.
Sudarios tiene que ver con el testimonio y el testigo. Juega con el pasado y el presente, porque evidentemente las mujeres están recordando. [...] detrás de los ojos de ellas, en su recuerdo, está el victimario matando a su ser querido y ellas están allí. Entonces es un pasado de tres personas, cierto? Está el victimario, está el muerto y está ella. Pero la imagen es un presente, la imagen no es un pasado, es ese presente congelado de ellas recordando ese pasado\textsuperscript{112} (Erika Diettes, October 1\textsuperscript{st}, 2014).

Conversations about loss, love, violence, or the Colombian armed conflict in “Sudarios” do not only happen when and where that art piece is exhibited. Such conversations actually emerge from the earliest stages in Erika’s work: her fieldwork. As she mentioned in our interview, her art starts in talks with the people she will be working with –her role in those interviews seems to be focused on listening, thus on acting as a witness. Such talks involve the aforementioned topics as the starting point for Erika’s work. Without such privileged spaces, her art would probably not be possible.

[...] es justamente en ese espacio íntimo donde podemos escuchar el testimonio sin afán, con amor, entendiendo lo que hay allá en el otro. Es el paso fundamental para que después Erika pueda transformar esas piezas en grandes\textsuperscript{113} obras (Nadis Londoño, November 20th, 2014).

\textsuperscript{112} “Sudarios” is related to the testimony and the witnesses. It plays with past and present, because evidently the women are remembering [...] behind their eyes, in their memories, there is the victimizer killing their loved one and they are there. It is thus the past of three people, right? There is the victimizer, the dead person, and there is her. But the image is a present, the image is not a past, it is that frozen present of them remembering the past.

\textsuperscript{113} [...] it is precisely in that intimate space that we can listen to a testimony without any rush, with love, understanding what lies in “the other.” It is the fundamental step for Erika to later transform those pieces into great works of art.
Erika’s decision to display “Sudarios” in temples and churches responds to similar criteria of exhibition to those used in “Río Abajo.” They involve thinking about the relation between her art and spectators – which include the survivors of war that Erika has worked with. Such decision, we might dare to say, also reveals something about the relationship that Erika built with such communities:

Erika no hace su obra únicamente para espacios del arte o para el público tradicional de la galería, no? Ya ves la decisión tan lúcida que ha tenido Erika de colocar sus imágenes en un circuito de circulación de memoria y de sujetos de dolientes en relación a todos estos procesos de guerra y de violencia. Sudarios y Río Abajo han sido obras que si han pasado por circuitos artísticos, pero que no se quedan allí, porque se ha priorizado la puesta en espacios de comunidades, comunidades de dolor\textsuperscript{114} (Ileana Diéguez, November 22nd, 2014).

\textsuperscript{114} Erika does not make her art only for those art related spaces or for the traditional art gallery publics, right? You can see the lucid decision she has taken to display her images in circuits where
Yo siento que ella [Erika] es una artista con alma […] detrás de la mujer de Bogotá, la mujer que está allá en los medios, con los grandes artistas, hay una mujer de un gran corazón, de una gran humanidad […] los alcances [de la obra] no son solamente hacia afuera, los alcances son también lo que [ésta] ha representado para las familias y las personas que han participado en los proyectos de Erika. Ahí hay un trabajo bonito de acercarse, de entender que el otro siente, que el otro tiene dignidad, que el otro –aunque le hayan pasado cosas durísimas y se sienta postrado– también tiene fuerza y energía y por eso sigue vivo. Entonces el otro es un sujeto al que hay que acercarse, que hay que reconocer, que hay que validar, que hay que escuchar. Entonces no es la fotografía por la fotografía. Es la fotografía con una historia que la acompaña, unas personas que la vivieron y que deben ser reconocidas (Nadis Londoño, November 20th, 2014).

Nadis and Erika have a very close relationship after working together for several years now. Nadis recognizes two aspects of resistance in Erika’s work: first, the resistance of the victims and survivors of the conflict who in the words of Nadis, transform pain into resistance; second, the resistance exerted by Erika as an artist.

La gente se empieza a reconocer también no sólo desde el dolor sino desde la resistencia. Ese dolor ya hace parte de una resistencia porque es que ya es una obra y es una obra que no solamente llega a mi pueblo, es una obra que ha salido a otros países […] Para mi es una resistencia maravillosa, porque si esa gente no resistiera, pues no podríamos hacer nada ni desde el arte, ni desde el

memory and mourners of all those war and violence processes circulate. “Sudarios” and “Río Abajo” are pieces that have crossed the art circuits, but that go beyond it, because there has been a priority to circulate them in communities’ spaces, communities of pain.

115 I feel that she [Erika] is a soulful artist […] behind that woman from Bogotá, that woman that is in the media with the big artists, there is a woman with a great heart, with a great humanity. This art piece is significant not only outside, because it has meant a great deal to the families and the people that have participated in Érika’s projects. There is a beautiful process of approaching and getting close [to people], of understanding that the other has feelings, that the other has dignity, that even when that person has been through a lot and might feel prostrated, he/she is also strong and full of energy and that is why he/she is still alive. Thus, the other is a subject who must be approached, who must be recognized, who has to be validated, who has to be listened to. So this is not photography for the sake of photography. This is photography with a story, with the people who lived that story and who must be recognized.
acompañamiento psicosocial que es lo que yo hago. Entonces la resistencia está en que el dolor, por grande que sea, también se puede transformar y la gente lo transforma. […] La resistencia de las obras está en que los artistas son libres de elegir, ella eligió mostrar, mostrar lo que pasa en el conflicto y eso es resistir116 (Nadis Londoño, November 20th, 2014).

In our interview, Ileana explained that she would rather speak about survival instead of resistance and she connects such a notion directly to the nature of art, specifically to images. She understands resistance as the possibility that images offer for survival through time. In this sense, an image can recover gestures, subjects, or happenings through time. This means they survive and even outlive us. She is reminded of Didi-Huberman’s assertion that

Una imagen siempre tiene más de futuro que el ser que las mira. Nosotros que miramos las imágenes, las imágenes seguirán hablando para otro de algún modo. La imagen siempre tiene mucho más de futuro que el ser que las mira. Y es desde allí que veo esa relación, lo que habita la imagen y permitirá que eso que habita la imagen siga hablando117 (Ileana Diéguez, November 22th, 2014).

On the other hand, Erika relates resistance to her work through specific acts of the people that she works with, acts of aguante118 or esperanza.119 She gives an example of one mother that she met, whose son disappeared twelve years ago. She explains how she still set the table at breakfast, lunch, and dinner with food for him in case he comes back.

116 People start recognizing themselves too, not just from grief but from resistance. That grief is already part of a resistance, because it has become a piece of art that has not only reached my town, it is a piece that has gone out to other countries. […] to me this is a wonderful resistance, because if these people did not resist, we would not be able to do anything, not through art, not through psychosocial support, which is what I do. Resistance lies thus in the fact that grief, as great as it is, can be transformed and people transform it […] The resistance of the art pieces lies in the artists' freedom to choose, she chose to show, to show what happens in the conflict and that is resisting.

117 An image always bears more future than the person looking at it. We look at images, the images will keep speaking to someone else in some way. An image always bears more future than the person looking at it. And that is the place that I part from to see that relationship, that which inhabits the image and will allow that something inhabiting the image to keep speaking.

118 endurance.

119 hope.
Erika describes this as an act of resistance for very particular reasons: she sees that she has created a fiction for herself, to endure the loss of her son and continue living.

Es como una ficción que te creas para poder aguantar el siguiente tramo. Pero no deja de ser un espacio de la ficción Entonces en ese sentido creo que el arte entra a formar un papel fundamental, porque es que necesitamos ficciones. En Colombia si que necesitamos ficciones, porque es un país donde la realidad no la podemos mirar de frente. O sea, la realidad nos aterra y con toda la razón (Erika Diettes, October 14th, 2014).

To face a reality of violence we have to create fictions and art can be a powerful tool to produce these. There are several characteristics and strategies of the different forms of contemporary art –literature, painting, filmmaking, photography, performance, etc– that serve this purpose. For instance, literary fictions that include information on real events or characters, like Junot Díaz’s “The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao” (2008). The author’s strategy was to combine both fiction and reality in that book. It tells the fictional story of Óscar de León –an overweight teenage boy from the Dominican Republic growing up in New Jersey, U.S.A. – whose destiny was inevitably bound to Rafael Trujillo’s brutal dictatorship in the Dominican Republic –, which took place between 1930 and 1961. In this case, Erika’s photographic work allows a specific form of fiction with regards to the Colombian armed conflict, which actually also combines fictional (the transparent water) and real (the clothes of the disappeared one) elements. Erika’s own statement might explain how it works:

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120 It is like a fictional story you tell yourself to withstand the next stretch. But it does not stop being just fiction. In that sense, I think art plays a fundamental role, because we need fiction. In Colombia we do need fiction, because it is a country where we can’t look at reality face to face. I mean we are terrified by reality, and no wonder why.
There is a kind of magic to capturing something that you are also transforming, because what is beautiful about photography, the magical and wonderful thing about it is that you are transforming reality and you turn it into something else.

deep love.
2.2 The Photojournalist

Jesús Abad Colorado defines his practice from a point of view that differs from that of the artists. While the latter organize their work around each individual work of art, Jesús Abad organizes his work around situations or events that he covers as a photojournalist. I have written this section in a way that underlines these differences, even though there are intersection points between the visual work of the three creators. The following chapter will address similarities and differences in more depth. This will help us understand the significance of looking at their work together.

2.2.1 Jesús Abad Colorado: Where the Eyes Meet the Heart

Writing about Jesús Abad Colorado, or “Chucho,” as his friends call him, is not easy – especially in English, which is not the native language of either of us and is not the language we communicate through. Many (many!) texts have been written about him. You can easily find information about his life and especially his work on the Internet. He has been interviewed countless times and has exhibited his work as a photojournalist in different places within and outside of Colombia, his home country. His powerful images have captured many of the innumerable faces of Colombia’s armed conflict for over twenty years. His black and white photography has caught diverse publics’ attention and, today, he is known as the “photographer of war” in Colombia. In an interview for “El Espectador,” he was asked:

¿Le gusta que lo nombren fotógrafo de la guerra?

Es lo de menos. Siempre ando buscando la vida, aún en medio de la muerte. Mis ojos por fortuna se sorprenden hasta con el vuelo de una mariposa (Cuevas and Colorado, 2012).

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123 A renowned national Colombian newspaper.
124 Do you like being called photographer of war? - That does not really matter. I am always looking for life, even amidst death. Fortunately, my eyes amaze even at a butterfly’s flight.

I do not think I understood who Jesús was in relation to his work until I first saw him speak at a conference in Colombia in 2014. I was doing fieldwork for this paper’s research back at that time. As part of my fieldwork for this thesis, I attended a conference about documentary photography at the Jorge Tadeo Lozano University in Bogotá. Jesús Abad was speaking at this event. Him and I had briefly spoken via email a few days before and agreed to meet at the conference, as a way to set the ground for our future interview. I could not have been more excited! For a long time I had been looking at his photographs on the Internet, in books, magazines, and journals that illustrated different aspects of the Colombian war. What drove him to begin doing that work? What inspired him? How did he deal with the emotions such work can spur? I wanted to know all about it. I had high expectations about what I was going to see and listen to that day.

I arrived very early and it was a cold early morning, like all early mornings in Bogotá. I waited at a nearby coffee shop, drinking some hot tea. It was almost time for the event to start so I decided to head upstairs, to the conference room. I was surprised because there were very few people. I sat at a spot fairly close to the podium. The room started filling up with people very quickly. Then, it was full. We all waited for a little longer than the set time for the event to officially begin, and, after a few minutes, it did. Organizers and moderators made a formal introduction. They made a few reflections on the relation between images, history, and memory. A question was asked: what is documentary photography and what does it mean in Colombia? Somewhere between these interventions Jesús Abad Colorado arrived. He had been rushing to get there. All speakers –including him– were expected to answer. There were very few speakers. It was the first speaker’s turn. Jesús Abad was second. His turn was up. I had my pencil and my notebook ready.

\textsuperscript{125} Autodensas Unidas de Colombia. In English: United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia.
Jesús Abad Colorado was born in Medellín, Colombia, in 1967. He’s the youngest of eight brothers and sisters of a peasant family. In 1960, when immediate ravages from “La Violencia” were still tangible, Jesús Abad’s paternal grandfather and two of his uncles were murdered in San Carlos, Antioquia. They were Liberals in a territory dominated by the Conservatives. Three months after this murder, Jesús Abad’s grandmother, he explains, died from deep sorrow. His parents were displaced along with their five children – Jesús had not been borne yet. This story, however, the story of his family and especially his parents is one of love and resistance. In our Skype interview, he explained:

[...] cuando yo pienso en resistencia tengo que pensar por ejemplo en mis padres, [...] ese papá y esa mamá siempre nos enseñaron el camino de la solidaridad, el camino del respeto, el camino de ponerse en los zapatos del otro (Jesús Abad Colorado, November 1st, 2014).

As many other stories related to the armed conflict in Colombia, the story about Jesús’s family is clearly related to death, tragedy, and loss. But if that is the only thing we take with us, we are not paying enough attention. We have to look more closely, read between the lines, listen beyond words, and understand that life and resilience are also part of the

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126 Abandoned homes because of forced displacement.
127 [...] when I think about resistance I have to think for instance of my parents [...] my father and mother who always taught us the path of solidarity, the path of respect, the path of putting oneself in someone else’s shoes.
stories of those who have been affected by war in any way. This is one of Jesús’s main arguments when he talks about his own work:

Illustration XXIII. Río Atrato, Bojayá, Chocó. Jesús Abad Colorado. 2002.\(^{128}\)

[la mía] no es una mirada que se regocija con la muerte, sino que es una mirada que trata de buscar la vida que uno todavía encuentra en los espacios de tragedia. […] hay fotografías que seguramente tendrían todo el de la tragedia, el olor de la sangre. Pero también tendría que decir que tienen el olor de un amanecer, el olor de un jazmín, el olor del mar o el olor de los ríos, el olor de la vida.\(^{129}\) (Jesús Abad Colorado, November 1st, 2014).

Jesús Abad has a BA in Communications from the UdeA (Universidad de Antioquia), in Medellín. He has also been conferred a diploma in Responsible Journalism. As a student, he was constantly reading news from “El Mundo,”\(^{130}\) specifically texts by human rights lawyer Héctor Abad Gómez\(^{131}\) and Alberto Aguirre. He explains that their approach to journalism nurtured his view on human rights and journalism itself. Due to his human rights activism, Héctor Abad Gómez was murdered by paramilitary groups in 1987. Jesús Abad felt the murder of his dear friend and professor. By that time, he was in his second semester of Communications. Leftist ideologists and activists were being persecuted in Colombia as part of the rise of paramilitary groups at that time. This trend was evidenced

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\(^{128}\) This man was Aniceto Córdoba’s father in law, Clirio. He was holding up a white flag on the boat they took to cross the Atrato River, so armed groups would not shoot them on their way to bury Aniceto’s wife, Ubertina.

\(^{129}\) […] my gaze does not rejoice at the sight of death, it is a gaze that seeks life where tragedy has taken place […] there are photographs that would surely have the smell of tragedy, the smell of blood. But I would also have to say they have the smell of a sunrise, the smell of a jasmine flower, the smell of the ocean or the smell of rivers, the smell of life.

\(^{130}\) “The World.” A newspaper from Medellín, Colombia.

\(^{131}\) Professor of Jesús in the UdeA.
in Medellín, especially in the Universidad de Antioquia, where about 15 people (students and faculty) were killed following the orders of former paramilitary leader Carlos Castaño (Redacción Ipad, 2012). Terrified by what it meant to be and to think differently in Colombia, Jesús decided he wanted to tell Colombia’s story through images, his images:


Ese contacto con tantas personas golpeadas por las acciones militares de la guerra interna, esa cercanía con una desgracia que se ahoga en la indiferencia y la lejanía de las ciudades despertó en mi, muy temprano, la inquietud y la necesidad de registrar cada episodio de aquel dolor, para sumarlo a un documento más panorámico e integral sobre la historia reciente del conflicto armado colombiano. No dejaba de pensar que esas imágenes hechas en medio de la tensión y la urgencia con la que un fotoperiodista llega a cada escenario de guerra podrían, al pasar el tiempo, verse con más calma y respeto, así como con el interés de incorporarlas a una historia con más reflexión y desde la memoria de las víctimas. Ese documento, decía yo, sería una manera de luchar contra la desmemoria que cubría a los muertos, a los desplazados, las viudas, los huérfanos, y aquellos

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132 The destroyed church and mutilated Christ figure where the Bojayá massacre happened.
As a student, Jesús had also started experimenting as a photographer in social events with a borrowed camera from a fellow photographer from his neighborhood (Baracaldo and Colorado, 2014):

Ese fotógrafo -recuerdo- me prestaba una cámara para que trabajara con él [...]. Yo quiero mucho a los fotógrafos de pueblo porque valoro su ejercicio de construcción de memoria (Baracaldo and Colorado, 2014).

After learning about his interests, his older sister gave him his first camera. Jesús had started documenting the reality that surrounded him in Medellín. He had an exhibition called “Los colores de las comunas en Medellín,” which was a cultural project from a group called “Barrio Comparsa.” This exhibition, he explains, showed the city of Medellín as a distant one from that associated to Pablo Escobar. In 1992, Jesús Abad began his internship in “El Colombiano” as a photojournalist. The first event he

133 Being in touch with so many people that have been impacted by the military actions of internal war, being so close to a tragedy that drowns in apathy and the distance of cities awoke in me, at an early age, the interest and the need to record every episode of that pain, in order to add it to a more comprehensive and integral document about the recent history of the Colombian armed conflict. I couldn’t stop thinking that the images captured amidst tension and the urgency that photojournalists experience when arriving at a war scenario could later be seen calmly and with respect, as well as with an interest to incorporate such images to a story of reflection and that came from the victims’ memory. I said that document would become a way of fighting the forgetfulness that hid the dead, the displaced, the widows, the orphans and all the lands snatched by war and its instigators, and so I had to do my part from journalism against oblivion.

134 That photographer – I remember – used to lend me a camera so I could work with him [...]. I really like little town photographers because I appreciate how they participate in the construction of memory.

135 “The Colors of the Medellín colonies.”

136 “Troupe Neighbourhood.”

137 Drug lord Pablo Escobar was born in Medellín, Colombia. He was the head of the Medellín cartel, which eventually controlled 80% of the cocaine shipments from Colombia to the U.S. (The Biography.com website, 2015). He became a very powerful and well-known drug lord, thus the city of Medellín was very much associated with him, especially on the 1970’s and 1980’s.

138 “The Colombian.” A newspaper from Medellín, Colombia.
documented working with this newspaper, was the ambush and killing of 14 army soldiers in the road that goes from Medellín to Urabá\textsuperscript{139} by the FARC-EP, he remembers:

Cuando llegué ya habían recogido los cuerpos de los soldados. La carretera estuvo una semana bloqueada por la guerrilla. Cuando entré a la escuela con un colega, vi los uniformes destrozados, las botas, los utensilios marcados con las insignias del Ejército y, al asomarme a la escuela, fue muy fuerte lo que encontré. [...] Ese fue el primer hecho que documenté y que fue muy impactante. Era practicante\textsuperscript{140} (Baracaldo and Colorado, 2014).


The guerrilla left their bodies in front of a school in that road. When young Jesús went inside the school, he found an old chalkboard with a fragment from a biblical story

\textsuperscript{139} Both are located in the Northwest region of Colombia.
\textsuperscript{140} When I arrived, they had already collected the soldiers’ corpses. Guerrilla groups had blocked the road for a week. When I entered the school with a colleague, I saw the wrecked uniforms, the boots, the utensils marked with the Army insignia and, when I peered into the school, what I found was horrific [...]. That was the first event that I documented and it was really shocking. I was an apprentice.
written in it. It was the story of Cain and Abel. As Jesús Abad began his journey as one of the few photojournalists who would document some of the most terrifying and impactful war events in Colombia, the last words that were written in that chalkboard were perhaps a warning or a prophecy of what he would find in the way: brothers and sisters killing each other. However, Jesús reminds us that life always finds its way:

[...] entramos por el Putumayo por San Miguel y había un alambrado. El terreno está todo impregnado de petróleo, los árboles y las alambradas. Entonces todo es negro, pero por la noche llovíó. Están colgando gotas de agua de las alambradas y esas gotas son transparentes, diáfanas, limpias. Entonces para mi es muy bonito poder hacer una fotografía de esas [...] como si fueran unas noticias musicales. [...] ¿Es una fotografía para que salga al otro día en un periódico? No, no va a salir en un periódico, no es titular de nada. Pero para mi sí es importante tenerla y poderla presentar en un espacio distinto, donde uno tiene la posibilidad de elaborar otro discurso [...] es entender que la vida es una cosa supremamente amplia, pero a veces la reducimos demasiado (Jesús Abad Colorado, November 1st, 2014).

141 According to Genesis, the first book of the Bible, Cain and Abel were both sons of Adam and Eve (the first man and women to inhabit Earth). Cain committed the first murder by killing his brother Able out of anger and jealousy.

142 We entered through San Miguel, Putumayo, and there was a wire fence. The field is covered in oil, the trees and the wire fences. So everything is black, but it rained at night. There are water drops hanging from the wire fences and those drops are transparent, crystal clear, clean. So for me it is really beautiful being able to take photographs like that [...] as if they were little music notes [...] Is this a photograph that will feature in tomorrow’s newspaper? No, it will not. It will not make the headlines. But it is important for me to have that image and to have the possibility of showing it in a different space, where one has a chance to elaborate a different discourse [...] it is about understanding that life is such a broad thing, but sometimes we reduce it too much.
Puede que yo vaya a cubrir una situación de orden público o una situación dolorosa, pero otra cosa es la forma como uno mira cierto tipo de situaciones. […] yo trataba de hacer fotografías que tuvieran un sentido humano, que tuvieran un sentido ético. […] Entonces uno no aprende a hacer clic con el dedo, sino con el alma143 (Jesús Abad Colorado, November 1st, 2014).

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143 I might go cover the news of a public order situation or painful situation, but it is really about the way one looks at certain kind of situations […] I tried to take photographs that would have a humane sense, that would have an ethical sense […] So one learns to click not with the finger, but with the soul.
Jesús started working as an independent photojournalist in 2001 (Jesús Abad: el fotógrafo de las víctimas de una guerra desgarrada, 2006 - 2007). He has devoted much of his time, to photographing scenarios of war and to witness its effects. For Jesús, talking to people is very important and rooted in a deep sense of humanity, respect, and empathy. Talking to people is also significant because through his photographs he seeks to register resistance and resilience; to know and tell the stories of people whose name –every single one, he remembers. His work aims to contribute to Colombia’s multifaceted memories of war and to keep proof of what he has seen.

Yo llegar a un escenario de una masacre en septiembre del año 95. En la finca “Los Punas.” Eso pertenece a Carepa y había 17 o 18 obreros asesinados con las

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144 After the Bojayá massacre, there were shootings between the guerrilla groups and the army in Napipí. Ubertina Martinez was wounded in the cross fire and Aniceto Córdoba, her husband, had to bury her in the jungle, away from their loved ones. Jesús accompanied Aniceto to the burial. He feels like crying whenever he remembers what Aniceto told him: “Y yo qué le voy a decir a mis hijos, si yo la traía viva” – “What am I supposed to tell my children, she was alive when I brought her” (Jesús Abad: el fotógrafo de las víctimas de una guerra desgarrada, 2006-2007).
manos atrás, con la misma pita con la que se amarra el banano y como estaba haciendo un trabajo en Urabá, cuando me avisaron de esa masacre estaba muy cerca […] a estos trabajadores los acusaban de ser colaboradores de un grupo que se llamó Los Comandos Populares\(^{145}\) […]. Si yo le digo esto a gente simpatizante de las FARC en Colombia o Europa, no creerían la escena y dirían “no esos eran seguramente armados” […] entonces las fotografías de alguna manera se convierten en una prueba testimonial\(^{146}\) (Jesús Abad Colorado, November 1st, 2014).


Jesús’s sensibility also drives his interest for people’s stories. He wants to listen to those stories, get to know the people who are part of them, and be able to tell them not only

\(^{145}\) This group had made an alliance with Colombian public forces and with paramilitary groups. The FARC retaliated anyone who was presumably collaborating with those groups.

\(^{146}\) I arrive to the scenario of a massacre in September, 1995. At “Los Punas” farm. It is located in Carepa and there were 17 to 18 workers who had been killed and had their hands tied up on their backs, with the same rope they use to tie bananas and since I was working at Urabá at that time, I was near when they told me about that massacre […] those workers were accused of cooperating with a group called “Los Comandos Populares” […] If I told this to people supporting the FARC in Colombia or in Europe, they would not believe it and they would say “they [the workers] must have been armed” […] so photographs become a sort of testimonial evidence.
through his images, but also through his words. Very often, Jesús Abad gives talks in academic spaces or public events in museums or galleries, because his work is not limited to newspapers, journals, magazines, or books dedicated to the Colombian conflict. His photographs circulate in the art world, in galleries and museums, as well as in the human rights and academic world –when they are used for instance as the evidence for human rights reports or for academic books. Therefore, there is a volatile quality to his images that emerges from that tension between the artistic and the documental character of his photographs. Such volatility allows his work to travel back and forth from art galleries to newspapers. Partly, Jesús Abad relates the artistic quality of his photographs to his sensibility and the beauty he sees even in the presence of death. Thus, beauty despite death is what he imprints in the images he reproduces. His view on the world is the lens that he uses to take his photographs.

Jesús Abad also presents his work and testimony in events related to victims’ movements in the country or to his work on memory. In fact, he was one of the researchers of the GMH in Colombia. Over the years, he has become a known figure not only amongst journalists and artists, but also amongst those communities and individuals who have most suffered the violence in Colombia. That is due to the way he relates to them when he goes to cover a specific event or situation. Jesús spends several days with the communities in the places he visits; he talks to them, listens to their stories, and gets to know them. He also accompanies these communities during the situations or events that he documents. He has built a relationship of trust with victims and survivors of the armed conflict, because –as he explains– he approaches them as human beings. He cares about them, their stories, and about communicating such stories to others. Thus, he witnesses and bears witness of their stories in a committed and caring way, which is evidenced through his work –both visual and verbal. For the reasons stated above, the people that he works with trust him and his work so much, that they turn to him looking for his help, looking for his visual testimony.
In his 25 years of experience, Jesús has travelled across Colombia and has been back to the communities and places that he visited and documented, looking for stories, often visiting dangerous places where few or no journalists go. He has survived six kidnappings, but earned a testimony like no other. He was the only journalist who registered the infamous San José de Apartadó massacre. He remembers how Santiago, Natalia, and Deyner, two, five, and eleven years old correspondingly, were beheaded. He also remembers that the death of these children did not seem to be as important for the media to cover the massacre. It is important to remember that the community of San José de Apartadó –to which the three murdered children belonged to– have endured one of the most remarkable processes of peaceful resistance, through the creation of the Comunidades de Paz.

Yo llego al lugar tras cinco días de la tragedia, pero soy el único que asistí porque ningún otro medio de este país quiso ir, pues en medio de ese proceso con Álvaro Uribe y la Seguridad Democrática, aquí contar la historia de siete muertos u ocho muertos en San José de Apartadó, pues no valía la pena. Muchas veces es el volumen de muertos el que mide si un noticiero o periódico va.

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147 [...] toda le gente termina entonces acudiendo es a uno y dicen: ‘por favor ayúdenos con una imagen, ayúdenos con su testimonio’ (Jesús Abad Colorado, November 1st, 2014).

148 In 2005, two families—including three infants—were massacred in San José de Apartadó, in the Urabá region in Antioquia, Colombia. Paramilitaries and members of the armed forces committed the crime, but nobody has yet been convicted for it (Diez años de la masacre de San José de Apartadó, 2015).

149 Refer to section 1.2.3.

150 I arrived to the place five days after the tragedy, but I was the only one because no other media wanted to come, because during Álvaro Uribe’s Democratic Security process, telling the story of seven or eight dead people in San José de Apartadó, well, it was not worth it here. Often, it is the amount of dead people that determines if TV news or newspapers go.
As a photojournalist with a uniquely large photographic register of war in Colombia, Jesús Abad Colorado has won numerous national and international awards including the Simón Bolívar Prize for Journalism in Colombia (he won this award three times), the Caritas award from Switzerland, and the International Prize Freedom Award from the United States. He has also participated in over thirty individual and collective exhibitions nationally and internationally in countries like Switzerland and Spain. Jesús Abad’s work was also exhibited in Canada in 2006. The exhibition was entitled “A Visual Journey on Memory, Place, and Displacement.” It preceded the World Peace Forum at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver and took place at the Museum of Anthropology. Jesús has participated in, collaborated with, and written several publications on human rights and armed conflict including “Relatos e Imágenes: El desplazamiento Forzado en Colombia”\textsuperscript{152} and “Desde la prisión, realidades de las cárceles en Colombia”\textsuperscript{153} (Jesús Abad Colorado: Landscapes and Battles: Two wings wait for the end of the tragedy, N.d.).

\textsuperscript{151} After the massacre.
\textsuperscript{152} “Narratives and Images: Forced Internal Displacement in Colombia.”
\textsuperscript{153} “From the Prison, Realities of Jails in Colombia.”
Thus, Jesús Abad’s meaningful work has earned him a significant reputation in journalism and human rights circles, as well as in artistic ones. However, what he highlights most about his visual practice are the stories that some of the survivors of the Colombian armed conflict have shared with him. Fabiola Lalinde is one of them. She has been a central figure to movements of relatives of the disappeared in Colombia. Her son, Fernando Lalinde Lalinde, was disappeared by the Colombian state in 1984. He was part of a leftist movement.

Members of the armed forces tortured and killed him. They attempted to pass of his death as a casualty in a combat with a Colombian guerrilla group – killing civilians and making them pass as combatants is called *falso positivo*.


Fabiola is one of the founders of ASFADDES (Asociación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos) and founder of the “Operación Cirirí.”

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154 *falso positivo.*

155 In this picture she is holding a sculpture of the Sirirí bird, symbol of the operation that she pioneered in Colombia called “Operación Cirirí” in order to look for her disappeared son, Luis Fernando Lalinde. She is also wearing a picture of her son, which reminds us of the Madres and Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo who also publicly wear the pictures of their disappeared loved ones.

156 Relatives of the Disappeared Detained Association.

157 *Sirirí Operation. The Sirirí (with s) is a bird found across Colombia. The Sirirí is known for the aggressive, noisy, and intense defense of its territory, especially if it is nesting. Fabiola adopted the bird’s name with “c” to name her struggle to find her son, which became a nation-wide movement against forced disappearance in Colombia. In our interview, Fabiola emphasized that even though she*
Fabiola fought tirelessly to know what happened to her son. She received her son’s body in 1996 and the OAS (Organization of American States) recognized her son’s case as an extrajudicial execution—it was the first case to receive such recognition from the OAS. Fabiola met Jesús Abad Colorado in several events related to human rights violations in Colombia. At first, she explained, she thought he was just another journalist from “El Colombiano,” but then she realized there was much more to his work. Fabiola told me:

Es el fotoperiodista que ha documentado con mayor profundidad, dignidad y respeto el dolor provocado por la guerra de Colombia desde el punto de vista de las víctimas. [...] A él lo catalogan como un fotógrafo de la guerra, del dolor; pero también lo es, de la solidaridad y del amor.¹⁵⁸ (personal communication, February 21st, 2015).

Jesús Abad has also built close relationships in other circles. That is the case of Alberto Sierra: an art curator and critic from Medellín, Colombia. He studied architecture in the Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana and has mostly dedicated to curate art in places like the Museo de Antioquia¹⁵⁹ and the Centro de Artes¹⁶⁰ of the Universidad EAFIT (Escuela de Administración, Finanzas y Tecnología¹⁶¹). He promoted the creation of the Museo de Arte Moderno¹⁶² in Medellín, as well as the creation of the Galería la Oficina,¹⁶³ and has published several art magazines (Restrepo and Sierra, 2012). I interviewed Alberto Sierra in la Oficina.

One of the initial reflections that Alberto shared with me about Jesús Abad’s works was that Jesús does una investigación de los paraísos donde sucede la guerra¹⁶⁴ (Alberto founded it, we must recognize how many other people have appropriated it, especially mothers of disappeared people in the country.

¹⁵⁸ He is the photojournalist that has documented the pain caused by war in Colombia from the victims’ point of view with the greatest depth, dignity and respect. [...] He has been categorized as the photographer of war, of pain; but he has also been the photographer of solidarity and love.
¹⁵⁹ The Antioquia Museum in the city of Medellín.
¹⁶⁰ Arts Center.
¹⁶¹ Administration, Finances, and Technology School.
¹⁶² Modern Art Museum.
¹⁶³ The Office Gallery.
¹⁶⁴ “an investigation of paradises where war happens.”
Alberto Sierra refers to the countryside landscapes where war is usually waged in Colombia. These places are considered paradises because they are tremendously fertile and green lands, where you can grow a diversity of plants and foods. They are also very much admired for their beauty. The impacts of war in Colombia are visible in its natural landscapes. In Jesús words:

[...] llega a uno a veces a un espacio y encuentra que en una casa donde está abandonada, la naturaleza decora la casa, o la ventana de tal forma que le permite a uno mirarla con otros ojos en medio de la soledad y el abandono. Y entonces la resistencia no la enseña la misma naturaleza (Jesús Abad Colorado, November 1st, 2014).


\[165\] [...] sometimes you arrive somewhere and you find that nature decorates an abandoned house or a window in such a way that it allows you to see it in a different way amidst solitude and abandonment. So nature itself teaches us about resistance.
Alberto has nothing but kind words about Jesús Abad. In our interview, he explained how they met ten or twelve years ago through mutual friends, to organize an exposition on a series of his photographs. They put all the photographs on a table to begin organizing the exposition. They both ended up crying. Their friendship illustrates the way Jesús Abad relates to the people that he works with and how close or intimate it can be. Moreover, the fact that they share great interest and sensibility towards his images speaks to the emotional engagement that his work awakens in spectators, including Sierra.

[...] yo me siento realmente feliz de conocer a una persona que tenga la sensibilidad de Chucho y yo insisto en que Chucho además de ser un magnífico fotógrafo, es un hombre que mira a la sociedad desde un punto que tiene más corazón [...] y él tiene esa particularidad de que conversa con la gente [...] porque la gente quiere, no? Porque él es muy respetuoso. La gente no se siente acorralada con una foto. [...] hay gente que ha estado en la mitad de la guerra y le agradecen a él mucho166 (Alberto Sierra, November 20th, 2014).

166 [...] I feel truly happy to know someone as sensible as Chucho and I insist, besides being a magnificent photographer, Chucho is a man that looks at society from a soft-hearted perspective [...] and he is particular in a way, he talks to people [...] because people want to [talk to him], right? He is a respectful man. People don’t feel cornered by [him taking] a photograph [...] there’s people who have been amidst war and who are really grateful to him.
Jesús’s relationship with the victims/affected/survivors he photographs can be very close. He carefully listens to their stories and to what happens in their lives. He explains that he does not go to a place having his finger ready to snap his camera. Rather, he starts by simply talking to people. As Alberto and Fabiola describe, Jesús Abad goes beyond the usual definition of an artist and beyond that of a journalist. In fact, these are some of the words that Fabiola Lalinde and Alberto Sierra use to describe Jesús Abad and his work.

\textit{Fuera de serie},
\textit{bondadoso, generoso,}
\textit{solidario, aliado,}
\textit{compañero, acompañante,}

Out of the ordinary
kind, generous
solidary, ally
partner, companion

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{167}} In April 14, 2004, four Wayuu indigenous women were brutally tortured and a whole community was displaced from Bahía Portete, at la Guajira, Colombia (the Northernmost department of Colombia). Paramilitary groups were involved and were persecuting women from that Wayuu community. Jesús Abad was part of the GMH team that researched this massacre. During fieldwork at la Guajira, Jesús Abad took this picture of the destroyed and abandoned homes and schools at Bahía Portete.
As Sierra adds, Jesús Abad becomes people’s companion and war’s witness:

[...] lo que sería horrible sería decir que solamente es eso, que solamente es el artista. Es un testigo importantísimo con una gran calidad ética y estética. [...] El es un hombre demasiado bondadoso [...] y es un acompañante-testigo, y es un buen testigo168 (Alberto Sierra, November 20th, 2014).

Despite all the risks that taking such role might entail in Colombia – journalists and witnesses are frequently killed – Jesús does not seem to intend stopping at any time soon. He has witnessed terrifying scenarios and has heard disturbing testimonies. However, a deep connection to life and a longing for social justice keep him on his feet.

Hay que mantener la alegría y la esperanza para no ahogarse en el dolor. Si me llego a dar un descanso en este trabajo será para aullar un rato, llorar, porque no es justo que sigan pasando cosas tan dolorosas169 (Jesús Abad: el fotógrafo de las víctimas de una guerra desgarrada, 2006 - 2007).

168 [...] what would be awful would be saying that he is just that, that he is just the artist. He is a very important witness, with great ethical and aesthetic qualities [...] He is such a kind-hearted man [...] and he is a witness-companion, and he is a good witness.

169 You have to stay happy and hopeful so you don’t drown in sorrow. If I ever take a break in this job it will only be to howl for a while, to cry, because it is not fair that things this painful keep on happening.
In an interview for “El Espectador,” when asked if death has ever almost reached his toes, he says:

Tal vez, pero yo le respondo recordando una canción de Nando Coba que interpreta Soraya Bayuelo, líder de los Montes de María en Sucre: “…la muerte me vino a buscar y yo le dije: ¡carajo, respeta! Yo tengo cien años no más, por donde mismo viniste regresa. Ay, conmigo que nadie se meta”\textsuperscript{171} (Cuevas and Colorado, 2012).

\textsuperscript{170}Granada is one of the places in Antioquia that has been most affected by war in Colombia. In this photograph we see a group of people from Granada and from non-governmental organizations marching against recent violent actions from both the FARC and paramilitary groups. 

\textsuperscript{171}Maybe, but I answer back remembering a song written by Nando Coba and sang by Soraya Bayuelo, leader of Montes de María in Sucre: “...Death came for me and I said to her: have some respect, damn! I am only a hundred years old; leave the same way you came in. Oh, no one messes with me.”
What I wrote on my notebook at that conference was really not important to understand Jesús Abad Colorado’s work. It is what I remember from that moment that has truly stayed with me. I remember he is a fantastic storyteller. I remember he had us all unquestionably engaged from the beginning. He was inspiring and his words were filled with a tired and sad, yet lively, loving, and hopeful tone. A young woman from the audience told him how inspiring he was while she cried. I think we were all equally moved by his intervention. His testimony is very powerful and connecting, which is vital to communicate the stories of those directly affected by war in Colombia. This speaks to the engaging relation that is created between his images, his words, spectators, victims/survivors of the conflict, and himself. Most importantly, such engagement can be a form of resistance, as will be described in further chapters. Jesús told us several stories, including one about the Monalisa, a prostitute dressed in a Monalisa dress who was in the streets of Medellín and whom he had photographed a few years back. She let him photograph her holding a mirror in front of her face, so it did not show. Sometimes we are not ready to be seen, but in this war, as Jesús Abad repeatedly explains, we have to look. We have to look, but in a very particular way: we have to look from that place where the eyes meet the heart.\footnote{172 I chose these words in reference to the way Jesús Asbad often describes his work. To him, taking photographs is about connecting the eyes with the heart (Notiagen, 2011).}
3. Art, Affect, and Resistance

This chapter examines the visual practices of Juan Manuel, Jesús Abad, and Erika in relation to three main aspects. First, the task of art: what their visual work does and how it does it, how it relates to different spaces and people, and what the creators’ roles are in the context of the Colombian armed conflict (section 3.1); second, art and affect: the significance and role that affect plays in the creators’ work on violence in Colombia (section 3.2); third, the exercise of resistance: the relationship between their visual creative practice and resistance (section 3.3).

3.1 The Tasks of Art

Tell them, tell your friends and acquaintances if you do not come back, it will be because your blood stopped and thickened at the sight of those atrocious, barbaric scenes, of the death of innocent and unprotected children of my forsaken people.

Tell them that if your heart should turn to [stone], your brain becomes a cold thinking machine and your eye transforms into a camera, you will not come back again. [...] Hold me tightly by the hand, do not tremble [—], because you will have to see even worse.

“One Rouleaux d’Auschwitz”. Z. Gradowski, I (1944)

One of the possibilities that art offers is to tell stories in different ways. Humanity has long been capturing its history and existence through art, by telling such stories. This section examines such possibilities in the photographic work of Jesús Abad Colorado, Erika Diettes, and Juan Manuel Echavarria, specifically with regards to the way they address the Colombian armed conflict. This section explores what I call the tasks of art. Such tasks are defined in terms of what of their work does, where it circulates, how it circulates, and what the role of the creators is in the context of the conflict in Colombia.

Drawing from the creators’ profiles in the previous chapter, this section is informed by the interviews I conducted. It also incorporates insights from scholars who have written
on art and violence, tracing the meaning and importance of aesthetic representations of violence and how different people—spectators, artists, victims/survivors of the armed conflict—relate to such representations. Similarly, this section will explain the relation between the creators, the work they develop, and the victims/survivors they work with. Ultimately, this section discusses the nature of art and its possibilities for approaching the multiplicity of experiences encompassed within contexts of violence.

3.1.1 Photography: Between Art and Document

One of the main points of discussion that emerged through the analyzed interviews was whether the photographic work of these three creators is documentary or artistic—assuming the difference between both is clear-cut. One might think that Jesús’s work, photojournalism, is closer to documentary photography than Erika’s or Juan Manuel’s art. However, the matter is much more complex; their work touches on both dimensions of photography, only at different levels and with different approaches. This evidences the blurred lines between both types of photography and also the diversity of possibilities to explore one issue through creative practices.

In our conversation, Jesús said he does not explicitly think about making either documentary or artistic photographs, even though he is a photojournalist. He explains that he decides what kind of photography to create based on a need to give testimony of what he has seen, thus to document an event. He also underlines that his photographs are proof of what he has seen. To this regard, Alberto Sierra highlights the historical significance of his friend’s images to an archive on war in Colombia. Fabiola Lalinde explains that Jesús has documented the ravages of war. Both Alberto and Fabiola use other words like register and evidence to describe Jesús Abad’s photographs; thus, the very language used to describe Jesús’s work reveals its strong documentary character.

The particular aesthetics of his work come into play when snapping his camera, when he thinks about doing this in a way that does not hurt viewers and drive them away through

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173 By documentary photography I understand that which chronicles real life events or situations using nonfictional visual techniques.
explicit images of violence. His aesthetic approach to documentary images looks for “the beautiful” and kind images of humanity and life amidst war. He also underscores the ability of photography to remain, to survive time. Documentary photography used in media like newspapers, TV news, and specialized magazines does exactly the opposite in Colombia. There is a constant bombarding of images of war in Colombia, which are quickly forgotten; sometimes they make news just for a few hours or a day even if the images illustrate shocking tragedies.

With regards to this issue, Juan Manuel explains:

[…] there is a conscious purpose behind my aesthetizing of violence. In a country like Colombia, where the media has been giving us sensationalism as a routine through photographs, journalism, television news . . . we have become totally anesthetized by this sensationalism (Reid and Echavarría, 2000).

The way Juan Manuel represents violence is mainly through metaphor. It certainly inspired many pieces like “La Bandeja de Bolívar,” “Retratos,” “Corte de Florero,” “Guerra y Pa,” “La Maria,” and “Silencios,” among others. In other works, like “La Guerra que no Hemos Visto,” “Requiem NN,” and “Bocas de Ceniza,” the focus is on how others make art as a departing point for Juan Manuel’s own work. These works also have a descriptive nature seeking to show what happened at certain times and/or places. Thus, these works evidence his efforts to learn about the war in Colombia –in order to represent it– by traveling to, and spending significant time in, places like Puerto Berrío in Antioquia, or Bojayá in Chocó. The stories that he listens to when he travels are hence depicted in his photographs. All of these characteristics speak to the documentary character of his images. Like Jesús, Juan Manuel does not see it necessary to speak about violence through violence. In other words, he believes there is no need to show horror through horror. Rather, Echavarría sees in his art a possibility to look at horror through beauty. This is an element we find in Erika’s work as well.

This speaks to art’s ability to provoke what Juan Manuel calls an *indirect look*. He explains that when horror becomes unbearable to look at, there are different aesthetic
strategies that allow us to look at horror indirectly. For instance, “Requiem NN” does not show people pulling out any decomposing bodies from the Magdalena River in order to talk about the adoption ritual in Puerto Berrió. Rather, he illustrates such rituals through the photographic account of the painted tombs where the bodies are put before they are buried. His photographs focus on highlighting the aesthetics of such tombs, through an equally aesthetic technique. It especially highlights color and symmetry, which together create the beauty that Echavarría talks about. The poetics of his images lies in the underlying idea of adopting NNs, decorating their tombs, and asking them for favors and in a way turning them into saints. However, we know that this ritual in Puerto Berrió also speaks to disappearance in Colombia – the horror. This is what lies underneath the surface of the photograph.

Consequently, Juan Manuel creates an artistic lens that transforms the way horror is being presented. Such re-presentation is what allows spectators to look at horror indirectly. What is the importance of an indirect look through art in contexts of violence? What does it mean specifically in the scenario of the Colombian armed conflict? These questions tie into the previous debate about artistic and documentary photography, insofar as documentary images are expected to demand a direct look from spectators. The combination of artistic and documentary representational strategies allows spectators to look at horror (real events or situations) differently, or in Juan Manuel’s words, indirectly. This is important in Colombia because it counters the indifference that looking directly at horror can cause.

Indifference in Colombia is related to the incommensurability of the armed conflict, in terms of its complexity and the suffering it has caused. Nevertheless, art constitutes a mechanism through which such incommensurability can be addressed. This capacity of art can be described by a metaphor to which both Juan Manuel and Ileana referred to when addressing the possibilities that art offers when it speaks to that horror. In the Greek mythology, whoever looked directly at Medusa would petrify. The only way Perseo was able to defeat her, was using a mirror so he could behead her. Art functions as that

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174 Perseo is a demigod from the Greek mythology who defeated Medusa.
mirror we can use to look at Medusa, to look at the horror so we do not petrify. As we will see in this chapter and the following ones, art does a diversity of things. However, I find that possibility it opens for us to face Medusa, to face the horrors of the Colombian war—or any horror for that matter—is crucial.

It is crucial because by re-presenting horror, we can look (differently) at it. In this sense, we can look at horror and give a meaning to it. Hall’s (1997) explanation of representation based on de Saussure’s work is useful at this point. Let us remember that for de Saussure, representation is the combination of the signifier (word, image, sound) and the signified (the actual object, subject, or event that is being referred to). When we look at the horror of war through an explicit image—i.e. the close up of a dead body that focuses on its wounds/blood and barely includes anything else in its frame—, what is being represented is the dead body. This means that the signifier is the image of that dead body, and the signified is predominantly the dead body. An explicit image like that considerably reduces the possibilities of drawing any additional complex meaning or context about what is being represented.

However, if we see the image of a mother crying over her son’s dead body, the signified becomes much more ample and complex. The signifier is still the image, but the signified encompasses the pain of a mother whose son has been murdered, the injustice and suffering that violence causes, and the complexities of justifying someone’s murder in the context of war, among others. To look with meaning implies having access to a wider context, which allows us to understand complex meanings like violence, love, or suffering. Furthermore, it allows us to have a relational meaning. Thus, that look becomes complex and more complete. It gives meaning to visual narratives of the Colombian armed conflict in order to know it, understand it, and remember it in its multiple dimensions. This is essential to understand the central role that art plays in the larger scenario of Colombian war, as a tool to approach violence in a humane way.

Erika proposes an aesthetization of violence aimed at dignifying memory through art. This is true specifically for “Río Abajo,” where rivers are represented as transparent
water—as opposed to turbid and dirty—and the clothes floating in it are not shown terribly worn or destroyed. Also, this art piece was printed in big crystal panels. These techniques come together to create a very specific experience of how people perceive the topic of forced disappearance in Colombia. Through a beautiful image, as she describes it, a metaphor for relief and dignification is conveyed. Erika explained that rather than creating a violent image, she wanted to create an image that would be beautiful in that it would be bright, colorful, and transparent. According to her, this would allow people to look at it and feel peace. Furthermore, it is possible to think that the aesthetic representation of the river as transparent water is a metaphor for the cleansing of violence from that space, thus also from the clothes and the body that was disappeared. That transparency is what allows the metaphor for relief and dignification, by limiting the space of violence in the image while giving it to beauty. In “Sudarios,” for instance, the artistic approach involves several strategies also related to the material in which photographs are printed—silk—and the way they are displayed—hanging at different heights in temples and churches. This generates a sublime experience for spectators, especially when we realize that the photographed women were at the height of their pain when remembering the murder of their loved ones. Hence, the conceptual elements in Erika’s art are very strong.

Nevertheless, she explains that she has a “fascinación por lo documental…porque si bien mi obra no es documental en el sentido estricto de ir a fotografiar el conflicto, si es una obra que está muy cercana al documento.”175 This is revealed especially through the relation between her work, the witness, and the testimony, which is present in all of her artwork. The creation process of all her pieces has involved talking to witnesses of violence in Colombia and listening to their testimonies. The stories that her images tell are the stories she has heard. In this sense, Erika’s art is close to being documental because it documents real stories. However, it is not entirely documental because it uses fiction to portray or represent such reality.

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175 [...] fascination for documental work... Because even if my work is not documental in the strict sense of photographing the armed conflict, it is very close to a documental work.
In any case, the testimonial quality of Erika’s work might not be immediately evident to spectators in all her art pieces. For instance, the clothes in “Río Abajo” are not constructed as the narrative and main testimony of survivors—whereas other works like “Silencios” or “Sudarios” do address testimony more directly. The latter pieces are about witnesses of and testimonies about violence, they are the central figures that we see in the photographs; thus they become central to the images’ narrative. In “Río Abajo,” the dimension of testimony is underlying. Such images speak to memory and mourning with rivers as the scenario of death and dis/re-appearance. What we see is the river and a piece of clothes. Witnesses and testimonies are not present in this piece as in the aforementioned ones. Thus, the testimonial aspect of an artwork is not always identified through its narrative, but rather “in a certain affective dynamic internal to the work” (Bennett, 2005, p. 1). In any case, the dialogue established with her collaborators is what in the first place allows Erika’s art to be, since such testimonies are the departing point for her creations.

3.1.2 The Circuits

One of the defining features of the creators’ work and their works’ relation to artistic and documental photography is the spaces in which they are circulated. Art galleries, museums, churches, temples, local cultural and community spaces, memory centers, universities, institutional documents, magazines, and newspapers, among others. The works of Erika, Juan Manuel, and Jesús share the fundamental characteristic of a powerful fluidity and visibility in their images, which travel across a wide range of spaces. I have characterized these as five fundamental circuits: the artistic circuit (mainly museums and galleries); the community circuit (local cultural communitary centers like the Salon del Nunca Más in Granada, Antioquia, or the Ciudadela Educativa y Cultural América, in Puerto Berrío, Antioquia); the media circuit (newspapers and magazines); the institutional circuit (memory centers linked to institutions, like the Centro de Memoria, Paz y Reconciliación176; documents linked to institutions like the GMH); and the academic circuit (spaces in universities like the Universidad Jorge Tadeo Lozano or the Universidad de los Andes, both in Bogotá).

176 Memory, Peace and Reconciliation Center.
The possibility of navigating through all these different circuits is deeply bound to the publics that have access to the creators’ works, as well as to the tasks of art. As Erika explained in our conversation, the spaces in which some art project is shown is not necessarily determined a priori—actually, this almost never happens. Rather, elements like how that project wants to be communicated and to who is what later defines where it should be displayed. These elements are usually revealed through the process of art making, not before. Thus, for instance, to have an exhibition at local cultural centers aims at including communities that were directly involved with the artpiece itself and that for different reasons have easier access to such spaces. The choice of showing “Sudarios” at temples responds to a similar need, combined with the idea of creating a specific experience for spectators.

In our interview, Jesús explained the significance of sharing his work in academic spaces, especially with students, to share his experiences and what he has witnessed as a photojournalist in Colombia. This also speaks to the pedagogical character of art (Lehrer, Milton, and Patterson, 2011; Sommer, 2014), which might appear more evident in these spaces—although as Noel explained in our conversation, there is a capacity that art has to educate, teach, and raise consciousness about specific issues by communicating certain messages. Jesús also appreciates the advantages that exhibiting his work in artistic spaces offers. It allows his visual testimony to be shared with and to be seen by different publics and in different ways. It is worth acknowledging that Jesús Abad’s work circulates in different ways than Juan Manuel and Erika’s work, given that he is a photojournalist.

Therefore, his images are included in several documents from institutions like the GMH, where his work was recognized as a way to document historical memory, as well as a direct source of visual narratives and testimonies of lived experiences of violence. His photographs are also included in newspapers and specialized magazines to support articles related to violence in Colombia, like “El Espectador” or “El Colombiano.” His work is also used as a visual testimony in public talks and events for/with groups of victims and survivors of war in Colombia. Also, the particular documental character of his images influences the way people receive them.
The fact that Jesús is a photojournalist has implied a stronger perception of his work as documentary with artistic elements, whereas Erika and Juan Manuel’s work might be perceived as artistic with certain documentary features. In fact, one of the essential differences between their works is the use of fictional elements or strategies. While Jesús uses virtually none, Erika uses a few fictional techniques in her art making use of imagined or fabricated situations or objects, such as the transparent water in “Río Abajo” or the “frozen” moments of memory and pain in “Sudarios.” Such fictions help Erika create metaphors, like the one for relief in “Río Abajo.” Juan Manuel, by contrast, relies less on fictionalization and more on metaphors, as seen in “La Bandeja de Bolívar,” “Corte de Florero,” “NN,” “Retratos,” or “Silencios”.

On the other hand, Jesús does not use fiction as much. It is actually the specific photographic techniques (focus, zoom, color, frame, among others) that enhance the aesthetic and communicative quality of his images. Jesús Abad focuses on showing a different and extensive account of events or situations related to war in Colombia. Some of his photographs appeal to tropes like irony to make a statement about the armed conflict. This is the case with the image of a child soldier from the FARC-EP standing by a sign that says: “No Maltrate a los Niños, Son el Futuro. FARC-EP.” There is also an image of a boy soldier laughing, which might suggest that we forget combatants are human beings too. In this sense, we can see the different ways in which each creator uses form—the inherent qualities or modus operandi of art—to create certain meaning—the object of representation outside of art—(Bennett, 2005) in their visual pieces.

Returning now to the topic of circuits, Juan Manuel emphasized the great value that he sees in presenting his work outside of the artistic circuit, particularly highlighting academic, institutional, and community spaces. This also nurtures the documental aspect of his work, when calling for the attention of several publics who are (or perhaps should be) concerned with war in Colombia, instead of limiting spectators to a group of

177 Different in terms of how it differs from common photojournalism images with explicit content.
178 “Do not mistreat children, they are the future, FARC-EP.”
intellectuals and artists whose interests might diverge from that. A similar thing happens with Erika’s work, when it is displayed in cultural and community spaces. She has exhibited works like “Río Abajo” in several community spaces like the (now) Salón del Nunca Más in the town of Granada, Antioquia (2008), the Templo el Señor de las Misericordias in Medellín, Colombia (2014), and the Parroquia Nuestra Señora de las Nieves in Bogotá (2014).

When Erika exhibited this piece in Granada, electrical power was shut down at the Salón del Nunca Más. People spontaneously brought candles, lit them, and held them behind the crystals where the photographs were printed to see them closely. This created a beautiful, intimate, and commemorative environment at the exhibition, which gave Erika the idea for the set up of her following exhibitions. The impact of the creators’ pieces is therefore deeply associated to the way and places in which they are presented, as well as to the publics that have access to them. In turn, the place of exhibition and publics are profoundly defining in conforming the documental character of photography. In this sense, when an artistic work circulates in a newspaper, for instance, this says something about its documental character. A similar thing happens when a documental piece circulates in artistic spaces.

The fact that their work is deeply connected to the witness and the testimony constitutes another element that shares that documental quality. In fact, in most cases, without testimony there would be no artwork. The creators’ work entails witnessing visual or oral testimonies, which are later manifested and communicated by Juan Manuel, Jesús, and Erika through different aesthetic techniques. This means that they are bearing witness to the testimonies they heard or saw in their artistic practice. Spectators become witnesses of such testimonies –both the creator’s testimonies and the original testimonies through the act of seeing. The act of seeing becomes witnessing when the viewer recognizes the documental character of images that speak of lived experiences of violence. This entails a complex testimonial dimension of the creators’ work, which ties into what Bennett (2005) calls the politics of testimony. She explains that there is an assumption coming from a philosophical realism standpoint, that art can capture and communicate real
experiences. Such assumption might be a precarious one within a politics of testimony. Bennett proposes

[...] that such politics requires not a faithful translation of testimony; rather, it calls upon art to exploit its own unique capacities to contribute actively to this politics.” (2005, p. 3)

It also implies a displacement from the private or intimate sphere of the daily lives, experiences, and testimonies of those involved in the Colombian war, to a more public space. Thus, the process of witnessing also becomes a public and even a collective one, encompassing spectators as a group of witnesses, rather than individual ones. This spatial displacement from the private to the public sphere also has consequences in terms of what art does, as an open and public strategy accessible to many people.

Concerning the documentary character of photographs, Fabiola Lalinde’s showed me a few of Jesús’s images during our conversation. She said that what we were seeing in those photographs was “la realidad, la gente no puede negar que tal cosa no fue así, ahí está. Ahí está todo lo que pasó, ahí está la muestra de lo que pasó, mira”¹⁷⁹ (Fabiola Lalinde, November 24th, 2014). This dimension of photography as evidence is possible because of the “special credibility of the photograph” noted by Roland Barthes (as cited in Taylor, 2003, p. 177). Diana Taylor reflects on this particular aspect of photographs in “The Archive and the Repertoire” (2003). She explains how the military regime in Argentina destroyed photographs (for instance IDs) of those who opposed the regime, as part of the government’s mission to leave no trace of their victims’ lives. What the interviewed creators are doing in Colombia is visibilizing that which has been made invisible, what has been denied, or what has been forgotten. In this sense, they also offer a channel or a medium through which those involved in the armed conflict can give testimony of their lived experiences and what they have witnessed. They are speaking to that reality that Fabiola talks about.

¹⁷⁹ “reality, people cannot deny that such thing did not happen, there it is. There is everything that happened, there is the proof of what happened, look”.

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In fact, Sontag (2013) suggests that we understand photographs as traces of truth, which becomes evident in artworks like “Río Abajo” by Erika Diettes. In this piece, Ileana explains, the floating clothes appear as precisely that: traces or remains—in this case, traces or remains of a person who was once alive. The clothes operate as proof of the disappeared person’s previous existence, thus countering the disappearance act and also speaking to it. Moreover, the clothes also constitute a trace of a particular reality; namely, forced disappearance in Colombia. That reality is very complex but it leaves traces that account for it—again, the clothes. “Río Abajo” accounts for those traces and therefore for forced disappearance in Colombia.

However, the fact that “Río Abajo” represents a trace of that reality but not reality itself means that such photographs can pass as untrue. In a way, they are only pieces of a whole, not the whole itself. Hence the whole can be denied because it is not entirely shown, which entails an interesting ambiguity. On the one hand, the truth that images speak to can be denied, because the images are only traces of that truth (to better illustrate this point, refer to the Holocaust photograph below). On the other hand, by being only a trace of truth, images can speak to it cunningly. This means that some photographs can be non-confrontational, which enables them to challenge the status quo going somewhat unnoticed. Noel emphasized this when he explained that art offers a safe space for him to speak, which he would not be able to do otherwise, because his life would be in danger.

Illustration XXXIV. Auschwitz Resistance 282 cropped. Alex Errera. 1944.

180 This was a photograph taken in Auschwitz by a Sonderkommando Greek-Jewish officer known as Alex Errera. It shows women walking to the gas chambers. Gérard Wajcam claimed this image lied because it didn’t show the extermination of the Jews in gas chambers, nor did it entirely show the
Nevertheless, how do we make sure that as spectators we are actually perceiving that trace of truth in photographs, instead of missing that trace because we are looking for the whole—which does not fit in a photograph anyway? One of the questions that I formulated for my interviews was what I called the “limits of art,” precisely related to the aforementioned question. In our conversation, Ileana explained that what we need to understand is that there is a fundamental need to show something in art, despite the incommensurability of that something, at least in the context of photographs on violence. Didi-Huberman (2004) discusses this issue in relation to photographs of Auchswitz. His words are very telling in this sense: we must make “Images Despite Everything,” despite the incommensurability of horror. Speaking about the “limits of art” in this case might entail dismissing that which images speak to concerning truth—for instance, denying the fact that the Holocaust happened and that it involved acts like killing people in gas chambers, which is what the photograph above refers spectators to. Thus, despite that image not showing for instance people burning in gas chambers, it shows another part of the process involved in gas chamber killings.

However, because it is not an image that explicitly shows the act of killing or burning, it can be denied. What Didi-Huberman argues is also that despite that possibility of denial, we must still make images. Although it is difficult to state what that “truth” entails for each interviewed creator, we can draw from what they understand about their work and their practice to have a closer understanding of that “truth.” For instance, Jesús Abad underscores that although his visual pieces evidently speak to some of the tragedies that happen in Colombia, it is important that spectators recognize the sense of beauty and life that he seeks to convey. In this case, we could suggest that one of the motivations for Jesús Abad’s works is thus to show the truth about both life and death, and beauty and horror in the context of the Colombian armed conflict. Furthermore, the fact that Fabiola and Alberto see Jesús’ images as evidence of what has happened in Colombia supports that claim.

Rancière explains that such image did not claim to present the totality of the process of elimination of the Jews. This is what Susan Sontag refers to when she calls our attention into thinking about photographs as traces of truth.
To acknowledge the (trace of) truth that images speak to allows spectators to contextualize the photograph as a testimony of its time. Nevertheless, spectators are “[…] separated from both the capacity to know and the power to act” (Ranciére, 2009, p. 2). Hence, spectators can learn from what they look at, rather than simply becoming jaded by it. Ranciére explains that “it requires spectators who play the role of active interpreters, who develop their own translation in order to appropriate [emphasis added] the ‘story’ and make it their own story” (2009, p. 22). Spectators fill the act of looking with meaning through these acts of contextualizing and interpretation (Riaño-Alcalá, 2003; 2010). This act of learning ties into the pedagogical character of art referred to by Noel and Nadis when they speak about understanding, knowing, and recognizing the Colombian armed conflict through the creators’ photographs. To this regard, Juan Manuel also emphasized his intention to provoke reflection in spectators. Along these lines, actions like understanding, knowing, recognizing, and reflecting give meaning to images. The learning process embedded in this form of spectatorship is simultaneously an act of giving meaning to the creators’ visual works.

In the process of giving meaning to a visual work that addresses violence, Hall’s words reminds us that meaning is never fixed and is always constructed because “it is the result of a signifying practice” (1997, p. 24). That signifying practice is the act of witnessing. That meaning is never fixed is true especially when what is being interpreted are abstract concepts like love or suffering. Erika’s work is especially oriented towards love and suffering as human experiences that she explores for instance in “Río Abajo,” in relation to mourning. In this sense, different spectatorship experiences result in a diversity of interpretations. Erika explained that especially in places outside of Colombia, people seemed to immediately connect mourning to the artpiece, whereas in Colombia spectators relate it more often to the armed conflict. Visual representations can play with these subtle displacements of meaning, which is what allows us to use a variety of visual signs (in the specific case of visual art) –as opposed to words– to represent and understand concepts like love, suffering, and mourning. The relationship between meaning, representation, and image is not static, because as language, it changes according to
historical and cultural shifts and conditions. This is why views on “Río Abajo” differ deeply between different cultural contexts.

3.1.3 The Role of the Creators

Another dimension of these different tasks is related to the variety of roles that Erika, Jesús, and Juan Manuel have taken in the art process with the people that they have worked with. We have mentioned the role as witnesses to the Colombian armed conflict. All the creators have consciously decided to take on these roles. Jesús explicitly declares his intention of witnessing and bearing witness to war in Colombia. He even mentions that people themselves ask him for help in this sense: “[...] toda le gente termina entonces acudiendo es a uno y dicen: ‘por favor ayúdenos con una imagen, ayúdenos con su testimonio’” (Jesús Abad Colorado, November, 1st, 2014). Juan Manuel explains that he wants to listen to the stories of those affected by violence in Colombia and leave a memory of those horrors. Erika wants to speak to the intimate experiences of mourning and memory. As she puts it, she has done that since the beginning of her career by engaging in conversations with witnesses of horrors like Auschwitz or the Colombian conflict.

In fact, the making of memory through art is an essential element in all the creators’ work. For instance, Jesús explains: “[mi trabajo] sería una manera de luchar contra la desmemoria que cubría a los muertos, a los desplazados, las viudas, los huérfanos, y aquellos territorios arrebatados por la guerra y sus instigadores y debía hacer desde el periodismo mi trabajo contra el olvido” (Colorado, 2014). Similarly, all research collaborators identify the making of memory as one of the great values of the creators’ work. A sort of classification of memory emerged from the interviews. Ileana spoke of a living memory to explain the relationship between Erika’s work and the Colombian armed conflict, referring to a past that is still present in many survivors’ lives (i.e. “Sudarios”). Fabiola and Noel spoke of historical memory also to explain the relationship

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181 “everyone ends up resorting to me and they say ‘please, help us with an image, help us with your testimony.’”
182 “[my work] would be a way of fighting against the forgetfulness that covers the dead, the displaced, widows, orphans, and those territories that were snatched by war and its instigators and my work against forgetfulness must be done from journalism.”
between the work of Jesús Abad and Juan Manuel with the armed conflict in Colombia, as that which accounts for history (the sum of all images). According to Jesús Abad and Alberto, there are also intimate memories that result from personal experiences and are embedded in the creator’s images. This means that memory plays an important role in the creators’ practices.

Also, the presence of memory in the creators’ work speaks again to the documental character of their visual pieces in relation to testimony. Let us unpack this relation by suggesting that memory plays a twofold role with regards to testimony: on the one hand, it constitutes the departing point for the testimonies that inform some of the creators’ pieces, especially Erika’s work. She draws directly from her collaborators’ testimonies to conceptually create her images – this is particularly evident in “Río Abajo” and “Sudarios.” Memory is where such testimonies come from, which is especially related to the intimate memories that Jesús Abad and Alberto referred to. In this sense, both “Río Abajo” and “Sudarios” directly appeal to the intimate memories of Erika’s collaborators. Additionally, she takes the photograph after the violent event happened and not at the place where it happened. Her work also seems to conceptualize an emotion or idea conveyed in the testimonial act. In “Sudarios,” for instance, she takes the photograph during the act of remembering, highlighting perhaps the idea of memory in relation to emotions like love and suffering.

Jesús Abad’s visual practice is fundamentally different in this regard. He takes the photograph and collects the testimony of those who are present at the place and moment in which the event occurred, documenting human suffering and creating a historical record through his photographs and a tape recorder he carries. However, he is also often a witness to what happened, because he is present at the place and moment of the event. In this vein, most of his images constitute not only a register of an event and others’ testimonies to that event, but also his testimony as well. Thus, his images also constitute his own intimate memories of what he has seen and registered in situ and in “real time.” In Juan Manuel’s case, memory is present in diverse ways with regards to testimony. In pieces like “Bocas de Ceniza” and “La Guerra que no Hemos Visto” he works with his
collaborator’s intimate memories by visibilizing their testimony. “Silencios” documents the abandonment of the schools that he witnessed. The still images of “Requiem NN” work in a similar way –as a register of the resistance ritual in Puerto Berrío–, whereas the video entails a compilation of his collaborators’ testimonies and lived experiences.

The creators’ images speak to the historical memory mentioned by Fabiola and Noel. They collectively contribute to a larger archive of visual memory that narrates, denounces, represents, and gives testimony to Colombian armed conflict. This is the second point that marks the twofold relation between memory and testimony. Erika, Juan Manuel, and Jesús Abad’s photographs also trigger a process of memory making through acts of individual and collective spectatorship in the spaces where they are exhibited or published. This relation between memory and testimony helps identify more elements in relation to the documental character of the creators’ work. It also helps explaining how spectators become witnesses.

In addition to the witnessing role of Erika, Juan Manuel, and Jesús, I propose a few roles they play through processes like the ones described above. The artists’ commitment to the communities and some of the individuals that they have met along the way is illustrative of the relationship that they have with survivors of the conflict. Such commitment has transformed sometimes into some form of friendships –Fabiola and Noel are good examples of that– and it has also shaped the way they conceive and develop a given artpiece. That commitment entails a process that involves several steps, which include identifying one place (i.e. Bojayá) or one community (i.e. the people in Puerto Berrío who adopt the NN tombs) or one particular situation (forcibly disappeared people), getting access to the information, the places, and the people, traveling, talking to people, getting to know each other and trust each other, among others.

One of the parts of the artistic process that the three creators value most is the relationship they build with the people from communities they work with. This was strongly emphasized by Nadis, Alberto, Ileana, and Fabiola. In the case of Erika and Juan Manuel, from the moment they begin thinking about their next artpiece, to the moment
they meet the people that will tell them their stories, to the moment they actually hear those stories and then re-narrate them visually, they have accompanied these people in their lives for at least a few months. Some of these processes have taken several years – i.e. “Río Abajo” and “Requiem NN.” Travelling back and forth is of course a big part of that process. These constant movements include getting close to people, listening to them, and engaging with their stories. Connections are built throughout this process.

In the case of Jesús, he might suddenly go and cover a specific situation all of a sudden without having been in a place before or without having met the people beforehand. Even in cases like these, he never starts taking photographs without speaking to people about his intentions first. In our interview, Jesús explained that he always seeks to respectfully build a relationship with people even in such circumstances. In many cases he returns to the place and documents some sites and people over time. Jesús remembers every personal story he listens to, and even remembers the names of all those involved in such stories. Like with Fabiola, he keeps in touch with many of the people he has photographed.

This act of accompaniment translates into acts of solidarity and becoming allies, as some of the research collaborators manifested. It also translates into the role of companions. Adopting such role is a fundamental part of the creators’ visual practice because they reach a certain level of intimacy and trust with their collaborators, which in one way or another helps them develop their visual pieces. It also helps to better understand the Colombian armed conflict and its consequences on victims and survivors. According to the interviews, there is a conscious decision to accompany people in the ways that have been described.

For instance, Fabiola and Adriana (her daughter) explained that “él [Jesús] acompaña en medio de todo” (Fabiola Lalinde, November 24th, 2014) – “[...] sí, él no se queda ahí en la foto. El sólo hecho de estar con la gente para [ellos] es un apoyo”183 (Adriana Lalinde,

183 “he accompanies in the midst of everything [...] yes, he does not just take the photo. The fact that he accompanies people entails support for them.”
November 24th, 2014). Alberto says that Jesús is an “acompañante-testigo”\textsuperscript{184} and that he does his work “siendo aliado, siendo compañero de la gente”\textsuperscript{185} (Alberto Sierra, November 20th, 2014). The significance of Fabiola, Adriana, and Alberto’s words is evidenced in how Jesús accompanies victim and survivor communities in their struggles for justice and search for truth. For instance, he returned to the community of San José de Apartadó to accompany them and document the search of the bodies of four members of the community who were tortured and assassinated by the Colombian Armed Forces in 2005. He has done similar work many times with many communities in Colombia.

Speaking about the work that she develops with Erika, Nadis says: “siento que el momento más importante es el momento en el que acompañamos la gente”\textsuperscript{186} (Nadis Londoño, November 20th, 2014). Ileana underlines what those moments of encounter with communities mean and generate:

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\ldots\text{ esta cuestión de estar siempre, no solamente de donar. Es decir: aquí les dejo mi obra, [pero también] los acompaño en su dolor \ldots \text{ toda esta especie de compromiso –incluso más allá de eso porque hay muchos niveles en este proceso de encuentro con la comunidad}^{187} \text{ (Ileana Diéguez, November 22nd, 2014).} \\
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In our conversations, Noel, Aureliano, and Juan Manuel addressed emphatically the relationship they have built through the years after they met for “Bocas de Ceniza.” In the case of Puerto Berrío, Echavarría has been traveling back and forth since 2006 until today (2015). Thus, there is a relationship with the community of Puerto Berrío that the artist has committed to through the years.

These examples illustrate the different levels that conform the creators’ roles in relation to the visual pieces they make, and the relations they establish with the people that help

\textsuperscript{184} “companion-witness.”
\textsuperscript{185} “being an ally, being a companion for people.”
\textsuperscript{186} “I feel that the most important moment is that in which we accompany people.”
\textsuperscript{187} “The fact of always being there, not just giving. It means saying: I leave you my art piece [but I also] accompany you in your pain […] this commitment –even more than that, because there are many layers to this encounter with communities.”
developing their work. The creators become companions for these communities, by speaking to them, and recognizing them, their stories, their resistance, and their pain. This has a very specific impact within the larger scenario of conflict in Colombia. This companionship is deeply related to another dimension that emerges with regards to what I call “intimate art” –what I propose Erika, Jesús, and Juan Manuel do. It is concerned with affect and a sense of appropriation. We will discuss this dimension in the following section.

3.2 Art and Affect

There is an affective dimension to the work of Jesús, Erika, and Juan Manuel that becomes a determining factor in the way they engage with their art and their collaborators. It also defines the effects/affects of art. This is deeply linked to spectatorship and to the nature of art. I propose that there is a dimension of affect that mediates the relationship between art, creators, survivors of the armed conflict, and (other) spectators. Ergo, there is another level (perhaps a deeper one) to the discussion of the previous chapter in relation to the nature of photography, to circuits and publics, to the roles of the creators, and to how survivors of war in Colombia experience that art. This dimension is conformed by several emotions, values, senses, actions, and qualities that all those I spoke with for my investigation mentioned in our conversations.

3.2.1 Emotions

According to the conversations I had with the research collaborators, emotions like pain, love, and tenderness describe what the creators’ work generate in spectators, including collaborators. In our conversation, Erika explained that a photograph can have an immediate affective effect. It will most likely impact you in some way as soon as you see the image. Part of the powerful and engaging effect of the creators’ photographs are linked to the emotions they generate. To this respect it is worth mentioning Sara Ahmed’s theory on how emotions are cultural practices, rather than psychological states (2004). Ahmed further states that emotions are collective rather than individual. This idea is particularly interesting in terms of spectatorship. Ahmed explains that emotions create communities, implying both inclusion and exclusion of certain people. In this vein, I want to pose a few open questions. Who is being included and excluded in the creative process
of Jesús, Juan Manuel and Erika? What does that inclusion/exclusion imply in terms of spectatorship? This helps us complicate the affective elements of the visual pieces that are being analyzed.

*Gratitude* is one sentiment that results from the process involved in creating a given visual piece. This feeling comes from survivors of the armed conflict and is directed towards Juan Manuel, Jesús, and Erika. For instance, Alberto affirms that “hay gente que ha estado en la mitad de la guerra y le agradecen a él mucho,” speaking about Jesús Abad’s work (Alberto Sierra, November 20th, 2014). Jesús also mentions how “la gente se acerca y le agradece a uno” (Jesús Abad Colorado, November 1st, 2014) in many of the different places that he has visited as part of his visual practice. Some of those survivors really appreciate the fact that their stories are being told, perhaps because knowing about violence is usually the first step to address it. However, as Nadis explained, the fact that the victims’ stories are being recognized and given value – especially within circuits of people who might be ignorant of the ways of war – also generates that feeling in them.

*Empathic feelings* mediate how people engage with the visual pieces in question and how artists engage with their creative visual practice. This mediation evidences an affective connection that is built between spectators and survivors, and artists and survivors. This was revealed through some of the interviewees’ expressions when asked about the reactions they had seen in the different publics that attended to the creators’ work. For instance, Alberto explained that what Jesús Abad’s work awakens in spectators is kindness, which he then related to compassion and finally described as “sentir el dolor del otro” (Alberto Sierra, November 20th, 2014). When the same question about publics’ reactions to the artist’s work was asked to Nadis, she described that Erika’s pieces enabled spectators to “conectarse con el dolor de otros” (Nadis Londoño, November 20th, 2014). The “others” that Alberto and Nadis refer to are the victims and survivors of the Colombian armed conflict. Jesús, on the other hand, described that

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188 “there are people who have been in the midst of war and who are very thankful to him.”
189 “people come to me and thank me.”
190 “feeling the others’ pain.”
191 “connecting with others’ pain.”
through his practice he aims at “ponerse en los zapatos de los demás”\textsuperscript{192} and to encourage the same of spectators – he also refers to victims and survivors when speaking about “the others” (Jesús Abad Colorado, November, 1\textsuperscript{st}, 2014).

\subsection*{3.2.2 Values and Qualities}

There were other concepts that the research collaborators used to describe the relationship that communities built with the creators and vice versa. Rather than emotions, these can be described as values and qualities, because they connect to the ethical dimension that roots the work of these creators. For instance, Jesús referred to the great sense of respect that he has towards the people that he works with, which in turn allows for trust to be built as part of their bond. Respect also allows for a sense of dignity and worthiness to be constructed between them. Ileana, Alberto, Noel, and Jesús underlined notions of responsibility and commitment from the creators towards these communities, which have been essential to shape their relationship and the finished visual pieces. This is reflected in the creators’ field work: as it was previously mentioned, they travel as far and as many times as they feel they have to in order to share meaningful moments with their collaborators. This is also related to the creators’ generosity, which was mentioned by some research collaborators, like Alberto and Erika. According to Alberto and Noel, values like solidarity, kindness, and compassion also mediate the relation that the artists develop with the people they portray through the years, and in general with the victims, survivors, and those affected by the armed conflict in Colombia.

All research collaborators mentioned several human and social qualities related to those values. Nadis and Alberto described the creators as people with great hearts who really cared about what they are doing and the people that they are working with. They also explained how the artists could hardly do what they do, if they did not put their hearts into it. This speaks to a particular kind of engagement – an affective one– within creative practices that relate to the Colombian armed conflict. This is art that incorporates not only a socio-political component, but also an affective one. Other qualities like a great sense of sensibility and humanity were mentioned in conversations with Alberto, Ileana,

\footnote{192 “put oneself in someone’s shoes.”}
and Fabiola. There is a particular quality that was described by Noel, Jesús Abad, Ileana, and Juan Manuel as work that is “made from the soul.” This refers to a place from which creators develop their work, or better yet, as a place from which they relate to their collaborators and the visual pieces. In Colombia we often say that something is done or made “desde el alma,”193 when that something is born from honest and true feelings, from deep within.

3.2.3 Senses

The previous elements are values, qualities, and emotions that we might relate to, since we have possibly experienced them when engaging with a work of art or visual piece. In some of the conversations held with the research collaborators, there was a relation traced between the work of the creators and what it generates for them. I asked my research collaborators to imagine what some of the creators’ images might smell or taste like, which resulted in interesting reflections. This sensory experiment is significant because it asked them to engage with the visual pieces from a place that perhaps they had not explored before; it sought to explore the sensory experience of spectatorship beyond critical thinking. For instance, Ileana and Jesús associated the artworks they were looking at to the taste of tears, while Erika mentioned the taste of “agüita aromática,”194 a soothing beverage. As Erika explained, “agüita aromática” is one of the beverages that is always available at funerals—at least in Bogotá, Colombia—to put people at ease. For Erika, it is also related to a sense of relief and comfort. For his part, Noel mentioned the taste of blood, because as he described, the Colombian armed conflict has spilled too much blood and this is something he has experienced himself. Nadis and Alberto felt a lack of appetite.

When asked about the smell, Jesús mentioned some of his images could smell like jasmine flowers, rivers, or the sea, clarifying that he knows his visual work could also produce unpleasant feelings, but we have to learn to look beyond that because he is always looking for life in what he visually captures. Alberto said Jesús’s work might

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193 “from our soul.”
194 “herbal tea.”
smell like sweat, because of all the effort put in by the photojournalist, which was also mentioned by Juan Manuel about his own work. He also referred to the smell of nature and to that of humanity, indicating that the subjects/objects that he portrays are the ones defining that sensory characteristic in his work. Erika associated her photographs with the smell of the white flowers that are usually used in cemeteries, specifying that the smell could not come from any place that was not related to love. It could never have a putrified smell, she said. Noel does identify some of the works of Juan Manuel to that of putrefaction, recalling his own experiences as a survivor of the armed conflict in Colombia. Ileana could only relate Erika’s images to pain, explaining that yes, she sounded very tragic, but “estos no son tiempos felices,”195 she emphasized.

3.2.4 Actions

Research collaborators also described how creators approached people in the communities they have worked with and how they expect spectators to relate to their photographs. As it was previously mentioned, Juan Manuel and Noel often referred to the friendship they created after “Bocas de Ceniza.” In fact, Juan Manuel explains that he travels to different places in Colombia to listen to what people have to say about their experiences with war in the country and to become their friend, as he affirms he did with Noel and Aureliano Palacios. Nadis said that Erika’s photographs awoke in her a need to embrace and caress, in a soothing manner. She even mentioned a healing ability of this artist’s work, explaining that she has seen it happen when working with Erika. She also emphasizes the significance that listening, approaching, recognizing, and understanding play in the process of artmaking for Erika, but also in the process of becoming spectators of people’s stories through her images.

Jesús also underscores the importance of understanding and reflecting on what one is witnessing either as a creator or as spectator. He stresses that this is in part made possible because his work seeks to interpellate people to stop for a moment and take that time to reflect and understand. In this sense, sharing what he does and what he has witnessed is an essential component of his work. Finally, the most common action that the research

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195 “These are not happy times.”
collaborators used to describe what the creators’ work does was conmover, meaning to be emotionally moved, affected, or unsettled. When something moves us or affects us, it challenges us deeper by disturbing us emotionally; or as Juan Manuel put it, it implies “tocar vísceras”. I argue that the action of moving reveals a twofold effect of the artworks of Erika, Jesús, and Juan Manuel: one of affective displacement and one of affective appropriation. This effect renders their work into what I call “intimate art.” A deep look into some of the scholarly work developed around the relation between art and violence will shed some light on these arguments.

One of the main connections that have been traced between art and violence is the disruption of the status quo. Authors like Simonds (2013) and Dalla Déa (2012) argue that art can challenge hegemonic forces by expressing oppression and exposing injustice, which might even eventually result in some form of social change. Ordóñez (2013) underlines the importance of how art (especially, public art) has the ability to counter official stories that veil particular histories and truths that have been neglected. In this sense, images about violence, for instance, have the potential of moving spectators closer to unknown realities. This emotional displacement can create dialogues between spectators and those realities and stories linked to violence that were invisible (Didi-Huberman, 2004; Riaño-Alcalá, 2010; Simonds, 2013). This means that the stories of injustice and oppression embodied in images allow for informed and caring feelings, thoughts, and conversations to take place, thus disrupting the status of invisibility, indifference and ignorance towards such stories. This emotional engagement is what I call affective displacement.

Specifically speaking about creative work related to violence, it is important that spectators inform themselves about what they are looking at and reflect on it. An image does not necessarily “speak by itself” and we risk trivializing it by assuming that it does. Thus, the pedagogic character of art is being “honoured” by learning about what is being looked at. Learning from images, for instance, implies understanding them and thus, in a way, appropriating the images’ stories, as we put them in our own language. As Rancière

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196 touching entrails.
stated, “it requires spectators who play the role of active interpreters, who develop their own translation in order to appropriate the ‘story’ and make it their own story” (2009, p. 22). I argue then that understanding art might become an intimate process in which responsible spectators strive for intimately relating to the stories art tells.

Regarding public representations of violence and conflict, Simon (as cited in Lehrer, Milton, and Patterson, 2011) state that museum professionals and academics also need to be aware of this responsibility, because curatorial work is a pedagogic exercise too. This means that showing and organizing artistic works requires a sense of the learning process it stimulates. Therefore, responsibility works both ways and we are all involved. In this vein, affective appropriation is a contextualized, responsible, and sensible process. It is allowed by the effect of affective displacement previously described. Appropriation begins with our emotional engagement.

3.2.5 Intimate Art

Juan Manuel, Erika, and Jesús’s works constitute intimate art, because they provoke an affective and embodied appropriation of the stories that inspired their photographs. It is intimate not only because of this connection made between spectators, the image, and the stories. It is intimate art also because from the beginning, the creators themselves affectively appropriate the stories they engage with. The entire process of visual creation constitutes an intimate experience that begins and ends within the affective dimension. This affective dimension that art opens is important because it challenges the status quo of violence—which includes physical violence, but also other forms of violence like indifference. In this context, affect is revolutionary because it signifies an involvement of some kind from spectators. Affect produced by an engaged gaze in visual art can help reconstruct the social fabric by encouraging caring relations and emotions. In the following section we will discuss the relation between the visual practice of the creators as it has been described so far, and the exercise of resistance.
3.3 The Exercise of Resistance in Creative Visual Practices

In an earlier chapter I problematized the concept of resistance by accounting for several authors’ theorizations of this notion. I discussed related matters of awareness and intentionality, power relations and the influence of certain cultural ideas. I examined such matters in relation to how we conceive resistance, and issues of identity and subjectivity of those we recognize or not as resisters. In this vein, various questions guided an analysis of resistance as a concept: does it entail an action, or behaviour, or a way of thinking? Does it have to be continuous? Does it take place collectively or individually, or both? Is there a need for intentionality and/or awareness of such resistance for us to be able to call it that? After examining several scholar sources that speak to these questions, I defined resistance as a repertoire of individual and collective actions, motivations, and behaviours aimed at opposing or modifying external powers, ranging from disruptive to more silent tactics.

The definition of resistance that I provided was a useful starting point to recognize forms of resistance related to the visual practices of Erika, Jesús, and Juan Manuel. What I found was that resistance does not define their practice or their visual works. Rather, it can be found as a type of weaving throughout their work. In other words, resistance operates as a connecting thread that builds on certain aspects of their visual practice and that touches on different dimensions of it. For instance, sometimes it is present in the situation that they photograph (i.e. a protest demanding peace); other times it is present in the way they photograph and represent that situation (i.e. showing beauty –plants– in a war scenario –abandoned schools–); and other times, it is present in the effects that their visual work has (i.e. raising awareness).

The importance of recognizing resistance in their creative practice is that it shapes diverse aspects of that practice and of the social, cultural, and political spheres of the context in which it is immersed. This helps us see how resistance plays a very specific role in relation to social change, when combined with a visual practice. Furthermore, recognizing resistance can counter victimizing discourses and acknowledge different forms of agency in conflict situations. What is the importance then of art and resistance
as two forces acting together? I argue that they might help us reflect on who we are in this conflict, and thus recognize each other in this context. This in turn might help to form or strengthen bonds of solidarity within the Colombian internal war.

Apart from other possible effects in relation to memory, healing, and the denunciation and exposure of injustice, among other effects, art and resistance have also constituted a way of telling stories of the Colombian armed conflict. In the following paragraphs we will discuss the importance of telling such stories, through some of the views of the research collaborators. This discussion is divided in three sections, one per creator. Each section identifies four basic aspects of resistance in their practice: actions and behaviours (what resistance is or does), sources of resistance (who or what is resisting), the external powers being resisted, and some of the forms that resistance takes in the creators’ work.

3.3.1 Jesús Abad Colorado

The research collaborators identified a series of actions and behaviors as resistance in relation to the creators’ work. For instance, Jesús thought about some of the stories that he wants to tell through his images when I asked if and how he recognized resistance in his visual practice. He referred to the stories of people’s resistance that he photographs, specifically as examples of persistence or endurance. He reflected on how some peasants return to their lands and start growing their crops again as a way of resistance after they have been displaced. In this case, I suggest that peasants resist displacement and the pressure of armed groups by returning to their lands and growing crops. This form of resistance entails not giving up and enduring; thus, they resist attempts from armed actors to weaken them as peasants. Jesús particularly remembered his family’s displacement. In fact, he mentioned how his parents were his first example of resistance. He explained that despite what happened to them, they always taught him the way of love rather than vengeance, which is what also guides his practice as a photojournalist. Jesús states that doing his photographic work from this perspective also allows him to see greater value in people’s resistance, particularly as an ability to recover tranquility and move forward in the context of Colombian war. He relates resilience—the ability to recover readily from adversity—to a capacity for love that people have:
[...] yo recuerdo por ejemplo un señor, Ricardo, hermano aquí en un barrio de Medellín. Alrededor de su casa, que no era más de 40 centímetros la franjita que tenía del lote que rodeaba su casa hecha en tabla, tenía mucha planta aromática y me decía para qué servía cada una de ellas. Un hombre desplazado por la guerra de Urabá y tenía su finca, sus vacas, sus caballos y termina viviendo en una casa en Medellín en la periferia y de tablas y me dice: “Un día sembré todo de maíz. Fueron como 40 matas y cuando recogí hice como 10 arepitas y fui tan feliz”. Y entonces yo miro a Ricardo con su esposa y yo lo que tengo que hacer es sonreír, porque es que yo digo, es esa capacidad de resistencia, es esa capacidad amorosa de entender que la vida continúa y que eso es lo que yo tengo a veces que narrarle a la gente de este país con una fotografía.197 (Jesús Abad Colorado, November 1st, 2014).

These are some of the acts and behaviors that Jesús portrays in his photographs, which entail a fundamental step towards showing other faces of the Colombian armed conflict through his practice. He also identifies nature as a source of resistance, offering Ernesto Sabato’s reflection on the matter. In his brief text “La Resistencia”198 (2000), Sabato explains that a crack is the only thing that life needs to be born again. This is essential to Jesús’s work and his motivations for doing his work the way he does. As he often states, he is always looking for life through his photographs, which he evidences through images of nature’s persistence despite some of the impacts of war. Jesús also mentions how his work also aims at portraying some of the formal and collective resistance movements in Colombia. For instance, he mentions ASFADDES (Asociación de Familiares de

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197 [...] for instance, I remember a man, Ricardo, a brother here in one of the neighborhoods of Medellín. Around his house, in the strip that surrounded his wooden house wasn’t more than forty centimeters wide, he had many aromatic herbs and he would tell me what each one of them was good for. A man displaced by war in Urabá and he used to have his farm, his cows, his horses, and he ends up living in a wooden board house in the periphery of Medellín and he tells me: “One day I sowed all my corn. There were about forty plants and when I harvested them I made like ten arepas and I was so happy”. And so I look at Ricardo and his wife and all I can do is smile, because I say, it is that capacity to resist, to lovingly understand that life goes on and that that is what sometimes I must tell people of this country through a photograph.

198 “The Resistance.”
Detenidos Desaparecidos\textsuperscript{199}, the movement that was co-founded by Fabiola Lalinde and that he has accompanied for many years.

Moreover, both Alberto Sierra and Fabiola Lalinde identified specific acts of resistance in relation to Jesús’s practice as *persistence* or *endurance*, although in distinctive ways. For instance, Alberto explains that “esa resistencia está en que él hace un seguimiento”\textsuperscript{200} (Alberto Sierra, November 20\textsuperscript{th}, 2014), referring to the way Jesús Abad keeps in touch with many of the people he has photographed and returns to the places he has been to continue documenting. According to Alberto, this shows that Jesús truly cares for them – the subjects of his images. On the other hand, Fabiola speaks about the resistance of those that Jesús Abad photographed: “todas esas fotos de la gente, cómo resiste y aguanta y sufre y sigue ahí… ¿qué más resistencia?”\textsuperscript{201} (Fabiola Lalinde, November 24\textsuperscript{th}, 2014).

Hence, the difference between Alberto and Fabiola’s view on resistance in Jesús Abad’s work lies on the fact that, on the one hand, Alberto identifies Jesús as the subject-resistor, whereas Fabiola highlights the resistance of the people he photographs.

It is important to note that Alberto emphasizes that Jesús’s resistance is based on his commitment and long-term accompaniment to the people and the communities that he works with. Alberto explains that the *persistence* that this accompaniment requires, which combines with acts of *witnessing*, is what makes Jesús a resistor. On the other hand, Fabiola expressed her vision of resistance through the following phrase: “morir de pie o vivir arrodillado”\textsuperscript{202} (Fabiola Lalinde, November 24\textsuperscript{th}, 2014). She identified those *who fight for human rights* in Colombia as those who resist, which in fact include her and Jesús. These notions of resistance are fundamental to broaden our notion of this concept within the armed conflict, as well as to expand our conception of resistors. The fact that creators can also be seen as resistors is vital to understand their role and practice in

\textsuperscript{199} Relatives of the Disappeared Detained Association.
\textsuperscript{200} “that resistance is present in that he does a follow up.”
\textsuperscript{201} “all those photographs of people, how they resist and endure and suffer and they're still there... what greater resistance than that?”
\textsuperscript{202} die standing or live on your knees.
relation to Colombia’s war. These visions are also evidenced in Erika’s and Juan Manuel’s artistic practice.

### 3.3.2 Juan Manuel Echavarría

When asked about resistance in his work, Juan Manuel first talked about the people from Puerto Berrío, highlighting how they “rescue” the bodies that were thrown into the Magdalena River –this case is portrayed in “Requiem NN”. This community resists the armed group’s attempt to disappear those bodies by pulling them out of the river and adopting them. The people from Puerto Berrío snatch the bodies away from their killers. Resistance in this case manifests as a series of acts and rituals that disrupt the disappearance act. There is a second act of resistance for Juan Manuel, which lies in the possibility that his work offers to resist forgetfulness through the making of memory. By documenting cases like the one in Puerto Berrío through photographs, Juan Manuel’s practice resists oblivion and evidences some of people’s responses to violence.

For Noel Palacios, “Requiem NN” also portrays a very meaningful example of resistance. In this case, he relates this notion to how the community of Puerto Berrío snatches the bodies they pull out of the rivers from “los violentos.”[^203] He explains that the community makes the bodies theirs, give them names, and bury them. When specifically relating art to resistance, Noel explains that this is evidenced through the ability of art to state the presence or existence of something or someone. According to Noel, this is possible because art provides a safe space to speak out rather than staying silent—which for him would not entail resistance. This is especially related to the type of resistance that Vélez Rendón (2004) refers to when he explains that in Colombia, art can constitute an alternative political channel when no other channels are available, particularly for marginalized groups. To this regard, it is important to note that art is one possible alternative channel among other forms of political engagement. This helps us keep in mind that although art has great potential, additional channels will always be necessary in order to resist, including the official ones.

[^203]: “the violent ones” referring to perpetrators.
For Noel, resistance operates as an act of visibilization and this is revealed in artworks like “Requiem NN.” Here it is useful to remember Taylor’s (2003) reflection on how photographs were used to visibilize the disappeared ones during the Argentinian dictatorship. She explains that was an act of resistance from the Madres and Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo. According to Noel, visibilizing what happens in Puerto Berrio through visual art rather than through the media allows a resistance to indifference. He explains that this indifference is deeply related to the way the media in Colombia deliver the news in an intense and graphic way, showing horror through horror. Noel affirms that this causes people to eventually turn away from such news. Nonetheless, horror can be approached through art in a way that allows people to look at it differently. The look enabled by art can be filled with meaning and that is what constitutes resistance to indifference.

Noel further identified Juan Manuel as a resistor for his choice of caring about the armed conflict in Colombia and its impacts. From Noel’s viewpoint, the fact that Juan Manuel goes to far away places to find out about what has happened through people’s stories and especially the fact that he takes on the responsibility of doing everything himself, involve resistance. Noel’s view on who can resist in the context of the Colombian war sheds light on the role that creators play in such circumstances. This is important because it points to who can take on different types of responsibilities for war and peace in Colombia.

3.3.3 Erika Diettes

In the case of Erika’s artistic practice, resistance is seen in many different ways, although endurance and actions countering indifference are common topics too. Erika first related resistance to the endurance of the people that she has worked with to develop her artpieces. She especially associates that to a diversity of acts associated with maintaining one’s life or dignity. Behaviors like being hopeful or keeping calm at least temporarily are acts of resistance to the emotional impacts of war, as they entail endurance to keep on living as emotionally healthy as possible. In this sense, Erika describes how some survivors of the Colombian internal war create fictions in order to resist:
[...] Río Abajo se vuelve entonces una cosa super potente [porque] fíjate lo infame [que es] en determinado momento tener que inventarte una tumba porque no la vas a tener. [...] En ese sentido creo que el arte entra formar un papel fundamental, porque es que necesitamos ficciones. En Colombia sí que necesitamos ficciones, porque es un país donde la realidad no la podemos mirar de frente. La realidad nos aterra y con toda la razón204 (Erika Diettes, October 14th, 2014).

In this sense, photography used to produce images that linger between the fictional and the documentary can be important for the spectatorship/witnessing act. This produces a paradoxical idea: in some cases we need fiction to see reality in contexts of violence. Fictions can help us face reality, face Medusa, but those are not absolute fictions; as Bennett states “[...] what is important is that art itself challenges rather than reinforces the distinction between art (or the realm of imaginary discourse) and the reality of trauma and war” (2005, p. 4). This is essential to understand that fictions can entail resistance when speaking about the violence of images and the reality they somehow portray, as well as in relation to real life situations of violence. Fictions allow us to endure the horror, to live through it, to resist it. Moreover, like Noel, Erika stressed on the importance of that safe space that art becomes for publicly denouncing matters related to the Colombian armed conflict, especially when victims/survivors are the ones who make such denunciations through art. It allows us to be loud about such denunciations, while keeping anonymity. This refers to another type of resistance, one aimed at opposing the imposition of silence in oppressive situations rather than enduring a certain situation.

Public denunciations through art entail demands for recognition of specific violent realities or situations. In the case of photographs, such demands relate to the aforementioned “special credibility of photographs” (Barthes, as cited in Taylor, 2003, p.

204 [...] Río Abajo becomes a very potent thing [...] think about how infamous it is having to create a tomb because you will not have one. In that sense I believe that art plays a fundamental role, because we need fictions. In Colombia we need fictions, because it’s a country where we cannot look reality in the face. Reality terrifies us and no wonder why.
177). We discussed how Sontag (2013) urges us to conceive photographs as traces of truth, rather than truth itself; images can only partially denounce truth. If that is the case, the reality that they show can be denied. For instance, “Requiem NN” does not actually show armed actors killing someone, throwing the body into the Magdalena River, and then people in Puerto Berrio pulling the body out of the river. However, that artwork speaks to that reality (forced disappearance in Colombia) by visibilizing a part of it. In this case, that part is the ritual of people in Puerto Berrio.

Nevertheless, because forced disappearance is not shown explicitly in Juan Manuel’s photographs, that reality can be denied. The possibility of denial plays with the perceived legitimacy of the photograph. However, that tension allows for a subtle reference to forced disappearance in Colombia. This is what Scott (1990) denominates a “hidden transcript,” in that it is a silent and non-confrontational type of resistance – to silence and indifference in this case. Therefore, that tension between the perceived legitimacy of visual pieces that address the Colombian armed conflict and their capacity of visibilizing and denouncing that reality is what defines if and how some visual work might imply a form of resistance.

In relation to Erika’s art, Nadis Londoño first relates resistance to that of the people that they work with: she identifies different actions or behaviors related to endurance or finding the resources to heal themselves. Nadis emphasizes that, without their resistance, none of the work that she and Erika do would be possible. She also explains that the way many victims and survivors of the Colombian armed conflict find the means through which to face that situation is a fundamental act of resistance, which is therefore the starting point for any creative process that is developed with them. Specific acts that allow them to face such situations are difficult to pinpoint because they can vary significantly, but we have already mentioned some of them, like displacing from one’s territory when in danger, or keeping silent when fearing death. However, for Nadis, the behaviors or actions of resistance that stand out the most have to do with the victims/survivors’ capacity to transform their pain into something else. According to Nadis, this form of resistance is what ultimately makes Erika’s art possible: the
transformation of victims/survivors’ pain into that endurance and ability to heal themselves. That transformation is tied to people’s acts of resistance and is worked on and made evident through art, at least in the case of Erika’s work. Along these lines, we can consider victims and survivors as resisters, art as a means, and Erika as a type of facilitator or bridge between both. In fact, Erika herself mentioned in our interview that she did feel that she was playing the role of a sort of mediator in her artistic practice.

Nadis also sees Erika as a resistor, because as an artist she chooses to show what the media does not show, or what some civilians and spectators choose not to look at. To show something in the first place is what gives people a chance to engage in the act of looking and to recognize the armed conflict through that act. Showing that which is being ignored entails resistance to indifference, according to Nadis. This goes back to Noel’s vision on resistance and indifference, which he also related to the way media in Colombia deliver the news of the armed conflict. The difference is that Noel sees art itself as the source of such resistance, whereas Nadis sees Erika as the source of resistance in this case. She also sees Erika’s choice to care about Colombia’s internal war as a significant act of resistance. In fact, this connects again with the issue of indifference, because to say that Erika has chosen to care means that she chose not to be indifferent. Her artistic practice, especially including her commitment to the people that she works with and the affectionate relations that she establishes with them is an evidence of such statement.

On the other hand, Ileana Diéguez would rather not define Erika’s work in terms of resistance. She explained that in her opinion, that concept has been overused through the years and that now she finds it more useful to speak about survival. She refers to that which survives in an image through time and thus, that which outlives us. Therefore, Ileana connects this concept directly to the nature of art, particularly of images. In other words, Ileana sees images as survival. The latter is in turn what allows for a later retrieval of that which it captures. This survival however, is not a precarious one. Ileana describes that the original conception of this term indicates that such survival is possible because of an accumulation of texts in an image, in this case in Erika’s photographs. Thus, it is a rich and complex survival.
Ileana explains that Erika’s images have different layers or texts that compose it. If we take for instance an image of “Río Abajo,” the first layer might be the water and the clothes that we first see, but there is a second layer, which speaks to the absent body. Hence, the clothes are the trace of that body. If we peel off the first layer –the clothes, we find the second layer –the absent body. In this vein, that underlying layer evidences the survival of the absent body through the image. This is the possibility that photographs offer in Erika’s practice and is what Ileana is interested in, rather than resistance. This is a significant contribution to our discussion because it not only offers an alternative to resistance, but it also reveals that palimpsest quality of images that Ileana mentions: that layering that is speaking to much more than we might first think when viewing a given photograph.

3.3.4 Witnessing, Bearing Witness, and the Creators as Resistors

To this point, we have discussed the collaborators’ different views on the issue of resistance in the practice of Erika, Jesús, and Juan Manuel. There are two aspects of resistance that I wish to highlight for the purpose of this thesis. They are related to some of the external powers that most research collaborators identified as the ones being resisted. For the first aspect of resistance that I want to underscore, the associated external powers were indifference and oblivion. This type of resistance crosses the practice of Juan Manuel, Erika, and Jesús and that speaks to several of the points made by all research collaborators: witnessing and bearing witness. Even though Erika, Jesús, and Juan Manuel engage with such acts in different ways, they all do engage with them. This is especially evident in conversations with the research collaborators about resisting indifference by mirando/ denunciando/ conociendo/ reconociendo/ mostrando/ recordando\(^\text{205}\) the armed conflict. As artists, Juan Manuel and Erika have become witnesses and so has Jesús, as a photojournalist. There is also an act of bearing witness, which is performed by some of the victims/survivors that have worked with them, through their storytelling. For instance, Erika’s visual work has always involved talking to the witness:

\(^{205}\) looking at/ denouncing/ knowing/ recognizing/ showing/ remembering.
Desde el principio mi trabajo siempre tuvo que ver con el retrato, siempre tuvo que ver con los testimonios. Mi fotografía siempre ocurrió después de charlas largas con el sujeto. Siempre había diálogo (Erika Diettes, October 1st, 2014).

On the other hand, it is performed by Erika and Juan Manuel as well, through their photographs and in Jesús’s case, through his photographs and his public interventions –like the one that I attended at the Universidad Jorge Tadeo Lozano in 2014, where I met Jesús Abad. Concerning his public interventions, he explains:

Cuando yo hago una charla […] la gente ve esas fotografías y entienden que los vi, que en distintas regiones he visto cómo la gente huye y que pueden huir con una nevera al hombro, que pueden huir con un marrano, con un perro, con una gallina, que rescatan un loro, que rescatan un cuadro de su casa (Jesús Abad Colorado, November 1st, 2014).

The creators have also opened up the possibility for others to become witnesses by enabling other ways of looking at horror in different circuits –institutional, artistic, and community spaces, as well as the media and the academia. For instance, “Requiem NN” has been displayed at the Universidad de Los Andes in Bogotá, Colombia. This is mostly an academic space. However, this artwork has also been exhibited in the “Centro de Memoria, Paz y Reconciliación” also in Bogotá, Colombia. This space is public and welcomes the community; it is also an artistic and institutional space. Thus, the multiple spaces where the creators’ pieces are displayed and presented allow the witnessing act to reach many different publics. As was mentioned, this entails a complex web of the act of witnessing and bearing witness. The fundamental point here however is to consider the importance of seeing this as one of the main and common acts of resistance that is

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206 From the beginning my work was related to portraits, to testimonies. My photography always happened after long talks with the subject. There was always dialogue.

207 When I give a talk [...] people look at those photographs and understand that I saw them, that in different regions I have seen how people run and that they can run carrying a fridge, or a pig, or a dog, or a chicken, or that they rescue a parrot or a painting from their home.
revealed through the analyzed visual works and the interviews. Witnessing and bearing witness in Colombia seems to be an essential act of resistance for three reasons. First, because it directly counters one of the problems that many of the research collaborators identified in relation to the Colombian armed conflict: indifference. Telling stories about war in Colombia and listening to those stories are essential to step away from indifference towards an interested and more knowledgeable look at the armed conflict. War leaves no time or room for crying for the dead, to mourn them, to dignify them, or even to name them. That is what Erika refers to when she explains how vile it is that people have to create fictional tombs, because they cannot have an actual one. The people that she worked with for “Río Abajo” were denied the possibility of grief. This means that art opens up spaces and produces pauses for spectators to witness stories of war in Colombia, but also for all those things that war denies to their victims: mourning, crying, dignifying.

The second reason why this type of resistance is significant is that it connects to the affective dimension—witnessing and bearing witness can open spaces for affective responses. Affective responses are produced by the relational and contextual manner in which Jesús, Erika, and Juan Manuel present their visual pieces. The relational and contextual content of the visual pieces prompts spectators’ understanding of what they are looking at. Such response is in turn a reaction to the new set of meanings embedded in the creators’ images—for instance when spectators now relate a dead body with a mother’s love and suffering. Affective responses can be crucial to help reconstructing the social fabric of Colombia at micro and macro levels, especially if they trigger caring actions and responsibility.

Moreover, affective responses are generated by the aesthetic look\textsuperscript{208} that art enables. That aesthetic look is filled with specific meanings depending on the relation between signifier and signified (de Saussure, in Hall, 1997). The meaning that I am underlining here is a meaning deeply connected to affect. The fact that art enables that meaning in spectators’

\textsuperscript{208} I use the term “aesthetic look” in relation to Rancière’s definition of an aesthetic regime and aesthetic practices as political (refer to chapter 1, pages 7 and 8).
gaze, signifies that such meaning has been impacted, contested, and altered (Tank, 2011) –the dead body has acquired new meanings. Along these lines, a look filled with affect becomes a witnessing act filled with affect. Also, the aforementioned relational process embedded in the act of witnessing constitutes a (re) distribution of the sensible in the sense proposed by Tank (2011). That (re) distribution implies a disruption of meaning. Ultimately, that disruption drives spectators towards affective responses to war in Colombia.

In this sense, the acts of witnessing and bearing witness as resistance relate to an affective dimension with regards to what I call “intimate art.” Both acts are a way of appropriating stories in the sense proposed by Ranciére (2009). Intimate art refers to an affective appropriation of such stories made possible by an affective displacement –we can think about this displacement as a movement from a place in which spectators are not engaged emotionally and do not care about what they are witnessing, to a place where the opposite happens. This affective displacement is triggered by art; in this case, by Erika, Jesús, and Juan Manuel’s photographs. The latter enable acts of witnessing and bearing witness, partly because of the possibility they offer to look at horror in a specific way. This displacement is therefore what links witnessing and bearing witness to an affective appropriation of stories through art; an art that becomes intimate through meaning. Thus, the significance of recognizing, witnessing, and bearing witness as acts of resistance lies in that affective dimension.

Third, recognizing witnessing and bearing witness as acts of resistance is important because it means that such acts speak to the agency of the victims/survivors of the armed conflict, as well as about the creators’ role within the context of the Colombian armed conflict –which might not have been considered before in terms of resistance. I will discuss the latter point further in this section. This also sheds light on the role that different publics in Colombia have both as civilians and witnesses of any type of art addressing the armed conflict. Thus, witnessing as resistance also speaks to the agency of spectators. Finally, the quality of art that we previously associated to the metaphor of Medusa is meaningful to this regard. Arts’ capacity to be a lense through which we can
transform our gaze towards horror is what allows spectators and victims/survivors and Jeús, Erika, and Juan Manuel to witness and bear witness. This has a deep relation to what Erika mentioned in our interview, when she said that creating fictions is a way to resist in the context of the Colombian armed conflict. Therefore, art as that possibility of fiction can be a fundamental condition for witnessing and bearing witness as a form of resistance.

The second aspect of resistance that I want to highlight is directly related to the question of resistors. Most research collaborators first identified communities of victims and survivors of the Colombia armed conflict as resistors. However, *Erika, Jesús, and Juan Manuel were also identified as resistors*. What might be the significance of this, particularly in the context of Colombia? This speaks to the role that they have played in such context. This is important in the first place because artists or photojournalists like Jesús might be disregarded as resistors. Nevertheless, observations of the research collaborators suggest otherwise and reveal that whether Juan Manuel, Jesús, or Erika were explicitly thinking about resistance or not when developing their projects, they have indeed practiced resistance through some of their actions, behaviors, or motivations. Whether it is in the form of endurance or care, or acting as witnesses and bearing witness, they have inserted themselves in particular resistance dynamics that in this case connects to their practice as artists or as a photojournalist. This reveals the importance that their account of the armed conflict plays in relation to justice in Colombia, developed through a process with victims and survivors of the armed conflict and using art as a tool.

Williamson (2010) underscores the importance of resisting through art, because that resistance comes from nowhere else other than the actual site of struggle: “It is not the morally self-conscious art of liberal protest, nor is it the defiant art of outrage, it is the diverse, complex, extraordinary rich art of resistance. It is rooted directly in the context of struggle.” (Williamson, 2010, p. 10) Hence, according to Williamson, this would distinguish resistance art from other forms of art. Nonetheless, a few questions arise in order to clarify some assumptions conveyed by such affirmation. First, what exactly would define a context of struggle? How broad could it be?
This expands the notion of context of struggle and also locates Juan Manuel, Erika and Jesús as resisters. Furthermore, Williamson (2010) affirms that the work of artists who purposefully ignore injustices around them will become obsolete, hence suggesting that artists do have a responsibility to speak to such injustices in their works. Rather than looking at responsibility as a demand or obligation, I propose that we look at it as a possibility that artists or those working creatively have to play an active role within a scenario of war in order to mitigate or counter some of its impacts. More concretely, the possibility here is for people like Jesús, Erika, or Juan Manuel to become resisters and thus contribute to justice in Colombia’s armed conflict through their practice –i.e. making memory, leaving an evidence of what has happened, accompanying victims/survivors, contributing to an understanding of war, and creating representations of violence that do not repel our gaze. Resistance to indifference thus means taking on such responsibility. Furthermore, to think in terms of resistance might be a common place in certain cases – especially in academia, but it does not entail that the concept is necessarily obsolete. However, victimizing discourses are still present and highlighting people’s ability to resist them is still necessary in some cases.

The account for resistance that we have discussed highlights two important aspects of resistance identified by research collaborators. The first aspect refers to witnessing and bearing witness as forms of resistance that counter mainly indifference and oblivion. The sources of resistance are victims and survivors of the armed conflict in Colombia, as well as Erika, Juan Manuel, and Jesús, and art itself. The second aspect of resistance is related to the role of the creators in the Colombian armed conflict. The ones resisting in this case are victims and survivors of the armed conflict in Colombia, the social movements and organizations they have created, Erika, Juan Manuel, Jesús, and nature. In the following and final chapter we will explain the significance of these findings, especially in the scenario of Colombia’s internal war, but also in relation to the discipline of art and the search for social justice.
4. Conclusions

In the introduction, I described my interests in aesthetic responses that constitute or generate resistance to violence; especially, responses from artists. I also underlined my focus on responses that aim at generating social change. To this end, my investigation asked: in what ways can art generate resistance? A series of related questions followed, which helped me answer the first one. These questions were: what forms of violence could this art resist? How would this resistance look like and how would it operate? What might be the effects of this resistance, if any, in current structures of domination? Does this resistance in any way enable social change?

The previous chapters answered those questions in a contextualized manner, drawing from the visual practices of Erika, Juan Manuel, and Jesús. As it was evidenced, there is no single answer to these questions because resistance takes on many different forms: actions, motivations, behaviors; is generated from different “sources”: communities, artists, nature, among others; and resists different aspects surrounding war in Colombia: oblivion, indifference. I also discussed the possibilities that art and resistance offer for social change, for example in terms of creating caring relations between victims/survivors of the armed conflict, and artists and spectators.

This final chapter discusses three main conclusions. The first conclusion is that the aesthetic practices of Jesús, Juan Manuel, and Erika illustrate how resistance is a form of situated knowledge. This conclusion entailed asking about the importance of recognizing resistance in the context of the Colombian armed conflict and the creators’ visual practices. These practices also revealed a way of doing art that is mediated by relationship building, testimony, and solidarity in the context of the Colombian armed conflict. That mediation is the ground on which resistance takes place in their work.

The second conclusion points to the way resistance is visible in the creators’ work through their artistic and documentary practices, in the intimate relations they build and the multiple spaces in which they and their art are present. Through their work, art
becomes a site of struggle (Williamson, 2010) and of solidarity with the victims and survivors of the Colombian war. The third conclusion emphasizes the affective process that mediates the engagement of creators, publics, and victims/survivors of the Colombian conflict with the creators’ visual practices. That affective process constitutes a fundamental form of resistance in the scenario of Colombian war, in relation to the two significant points that I will refer to.

The first point is that visual creators have become companions of the people they work with. This speaks to the affective dimension of their visual practices and to the ways “intimate art” operates in their work to build relationships, trust and solidarity. As it was explained in previous chapters, affect can be revolutionary in a society like Colombia, where violence has become a part of everyday life for its inhabitants. This is what makes intimate art and affective relations an exceptional opportunity to help reconstruct the social fabric in Colombia. The second point is that the creators’ practices trigger witnessing acts when spectators affectively appropriate others’ stories through the visual work of Erika, Jesús, and Juan Manuel. In this context, witnessing entails resistance to indifference.

Artistic and visual practices like the ones of Jesús, Juan Manuel, and Erika allow us thus three fundamental acts. First, to look at horror differently, which—as Jesús often says—encourages us to look at ourselves in the broken mirror of war. That allows us to recognize the Colombian armed conflict, as well as those involved and even our role in that conflict. Second, to acknowledge resistance exerted by different people, acted in a wide range of ways, and operating at different levels. This contributes to acknowledging and rethinking issues of agency: people’s capacity to act in a given situation or environment, even if it is an oppressive one; responsibility: people’s possibility to act and engage in order to mitigate or counter the impacts of war; and justice in the Colombian internal war: to mitigate or counter the impacts of war entails justice with victims and survivors, especially in terms of recognizing their sacrifices and suffering. Third, it helps

209 With this expression, Jesús refers to the possibility of spectators to recognize themselves and each other in that mirror, different and similar as we are, so as to recognize the conflict and move forward (Colorado, 2015).
rebuid the social fabric that violence constantly tears apart, by creating and promoting affective-intimate relations with those directly involved in the conflict, as well as an affective-intimate engagement with such reality.

There is therefore a multiplicity of impacts that derive from visual practices like the ones examined in this investigation. Realizing these impacts could promote the support of initiatives that encourage creators’ engagement with communities in Colombia, perhaps even encouraging different government entities or organizations focusing on the armed conflict to manifest or expand their support towards such initiatives. Moreover, this might also stimulate further research on this topic. This would be useful not only to keep promoting support to visual and artistic projects in general, but also to contribute to our knowledge on the different topics, practices, and disciplines that this research draws from: armed conflict, violence, resistance, solidarity, and visual art, among others.

Such research could investigate the intricate ways in which solidary bonds are formed through art in more depth, focusing on the experience of victims/survivors of the conflict in Colombia, as well as looking at spectators’ witnessing experiences. It would also be meaningful to study cases in which two or more of the categories we are using –creator, survivor, ex-combatant, and spectator, among others– overlap, to further understand the complexities of discussing violence and art. Conclusively, this investigation is a contribution that will hopefully encourage not only more research oriented towards the aforementioned topics, but also specific efforts towards developing and supporting more artistic or visual projects that address the Colombian armed conflict. Such efforts could thus help Colombia to be a more just society.
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