

Collective Memory and Conflict Representation:
War and Peace in Colombian Museums and Centres

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The general indifference to the war was surprising and rather disgusting.

-George Orwell, Homage to Catalonia.

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1. Introduction

Guerrilla groups started to pop up throughout Latin America since the 1950's until the 1970's as a reaction against dictatorships, social inequality and foreign interventionism. These movements gained popularity after the victory of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 as the region became, during the course of the Cold War, a conflict zone where capitalist and communist economic models were implemented by force. The rise and decline of several armed groups can be studied with historical distance nowadays, and the integration to democracy of some of them can be even traced. However, this is not the case in Colombia, where an internal armed conflict continues after more than 50 years. This is the last South American nation where illegal armed groups are still fighting in order to overthrow an official government.

The active stakeholders of this struggle are: the government (with the country's official army), the guerrilla movements and various paramilitary groups. The war between these has had a huge negative impact upon the civil society. For instance, the conflict has left over 5,7 millions of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Colombia, making it the country with world's second highest number of IDPs after Siria.¹ Violation of human rights, intolerance, corruption, the growth of a drug market worldwide, the State's lack of presence in a great portion of the territory, and its incapability to control the use of force and possession of weapons are just some aspects of the war that have been shaping Colombian society for over five decades. But after many years of violence there is, at the present time, an ongoing peace treaty taking place in Havana-Cuba² between top government officials and the FARC (Colombia's oldest guerrilla movement). Different sectors of society are starting to reflect upon their possible roles in a post-conflict scenario, due to the present socio-political situation. Considerations around economics and politics are the most active, but some cultural institutions are slowly starting to participate in the discussion.

The objective of this research is to analyze four Colombian museums and centres whose missions and visions are related to the country's violent context. These are: the National Museum of Colombia, the National Center for Historic Memory, the Center of Memory, Peace and Reconciliation and the Museum House of Memory. These institutions strive to *stage* the conflict by organizing exhibitions of diverse nature. They also seek to *shape* a collective memory that intends to create awareness about the war's atrocities (by stressing that such horrors should never happen again). Another task that all these institutions share is to *report* on the country's history and current affairs re-

¹ "Norwegian Refugee Council" accessed June 20, 2014, <http://www.nrc.no/?did=9180710>

² The initial phase of the negotiation took place in Norway in 2012.

garding the conflict, by providing knowledge and publishing researches that would help to better explain the armed struggle. The performance and further results of the previous three actions (staging, shaping, and reporting) varies depending on the institution, as each one has particular origins, trajectories, perspectives, targets and tactics. For this reason, each institution analyzes and narrates the violence that Colombians have faced for decades in different ways. These establishments produce different outcomes, despite the fact that they belong to the same context and respond to the same situation, reason for which it is important to understand their particularities. It is because of these preceding statements that this thesis aims to answer the following research question: *How have the National Museum of Colombia, the National Center for Historic Memory, The Center of Memory, Peace and Reconciliation and the Museum House of Memory reflected upon the war in Colombia in order to stage the conflict, shape a collective memory and report it?*

In order to tackle the research question efficiently and clearly this thesis is divided in three main chapters: *collective memory*, *institutions*, and *conclusion*. Several approaches towards memory and the concept of collective memory are addressed in the first chapter. A solid theoretical framework is provided here, and the mnemonic properties and their role and place within museums are discussed at this point. Following this the case studies are analyzed individually. The history of these institutions is described in order to have a proper context from which their missions and visions can be discussed. Their architecture and location are taken into account as well, as some of the institutions work on a local level whereas others intend to reach a national range — three of the museums are based in Bogotá, Colombia's capital, while the Museum House of Memory is located in Medellín, Colombia's second biggest city. After this, some exhibitions are described, the shaping of collective memory is analyzed and the nature of their researches and publications is examined. The challenges that these institutions have to face are set out in this chapter as well. Studies of the interaction between museums and communities with social problems are used at this point. This chapter is the core of the thesis, as aspects considered in the research question are strongly present here. Afterwards the conclusion rounds up the discussion.

But before delving into the memory matters, first of the three main chapters, it must be clarified at this point that the origins, causes and effects of the internal armed conflict are not deeply analyzed in this research: doing so would deviate the purpose of this investigation. Some issues about this topic are superficially mentioned in order to better clarify the context in which the case studies were created. However, a broader description of the present sociopolitical events is indeed neces-

sary, because the relevance of studying these institutions will be clearer if this point is properly explained.

Since 2010 the Colombian government started to decree laws and design bills intended to give a judicial structure for eventual peace talks with illegal armed groups. Three of these are: Transitional Justice Law (December 9, 2010), Victim's Law (June 10, 2011), and the Legal Framework for Peace (July 31, 2012). One of the most important issues behind these is that the Government started to shift the way the war was legally addressed, as with the Victim's Law the existence of an internal armed conflict was recognized. This recent judicial approach is of great relevance, because the official statement that prevailed before declared an existence of a terrorist menace in the country. The change from "terrorism" to "internal armed conflict" may seem small, but it is indeed a big step that is providing new ways for understanding the violence, and it is enabling new strategies that seek to solve the problems. For instance, the government has accepted its responsibility and participation in the atrocities that have historically happened (which was not the case under the terrorist menace idea), and the State has begun to indemnify victims of the war.

These laws and issues also enabled the creation of some institutions that intend to explain and analyze the origins and causes of the conflict, preserve a collective memory around it, and serve as tools for fostering reconciliation and peace (such as some of the case studies of this thesis). They seek to fulfill the previous goals because Colombians don't have yet a clear comprehension about the war itself, despite the fact that the internal conflict has lasted for more than five decades. Colombian citizens are still not fully conscious of the reasons that triggered the armed struggle, nor about the magnitude of its aftermath. There is also a lack of common analysis regarding the fear and oppression that the conflict has unleashed upon the country's inhabitants.

But perhaps the most important political event of the past couple of years is indeed the peace negotiation that is taking place in Cuba. These talks are very atypical when it comes to agreements that seek the ending of internal armed conflicts, as these take place in an ongoing war — hostilities continue within the country while peace is negotiate abroad. The conflict continues internally without truces or bilateral ceasefire, even in a presidential election year as 2014. The peace process was highly politicized between the campaigns of the two main candidates: one that supported the continuation of the negotiation, whereas the other fiercely declared his will of ending it. The re-elected president, that manifested the necessity of keeping the peace process, won by a small margin; which proves that the country is strongly divided into two sectors: one that envisions the end of the war

through peace, and other that is more inclined for the continuation of military intervention. There is general skepticism regarding the outcome of these peace talks, as it seems that the negotiation is advancing slowly and the government and the guerrilla are stuck in certain debates — the government accuses the FARC members of perpetuating violent actions against civilians while the illegal armed group claims that the government is still not providing the proper concessions needed to achieve an agreement. It is true that the outcome of these peace talks are uncertain, but peace never seemed so close in the whole history of the conflict.

2. Collective Memory

A clear theoretical framework about *what* collective memory is, *how* it is addressed, and *why* it is relevant in Colombia is needed in the analysis of the case studies. But before defining the mnemonics in a social sphere a description of what memory is in itself is necessary first. This topic is studied from an interdisciplinary perspective that makes a general consensus around it difficult. Barbara A. Misztal explains that defining collective memory, and other types of memory, is challenging because on the one hand the nature of things that are remembered is diverse, and on the other because there is no unique reason for which certain things are retained.³ Several disciplines, that range from psychology, neurology, philosophy, cognitive sciences, anthropology, sociology and museum studies, analyze issues regarding remembrance matters. This multidisciplinary approach is beneficial for the discussion, as it provides a broader theoretical frame. It is also important to analyze first how memory works on an individual and collective level before jumping into the museum sphere, because it will be clear that remembrance is not something transparent. Memory is always shaped and influenced by internal and external factors, such as previous experiences, social context and institutions.

Several studies that analyze memory fail in providing a definition of it, or further considerations about its origins. What is done in most cases is just the description of some modalities based on different ways of remembering. After studying memory literature it can be inferred that not many researchers analyze its meaning, they mainly aim to elaborate certain issues around matters of remembrance. A proper starting point for studying memory would be then its etymology, which curiously enough is often neglected in the literature regarding this topic. The roots of the word memory come from the Latin word *memoria*, which is the combination between the adjective *memor* (mindful, remembering) and suffix *ia* (to create nouns).⁴ This means that memory is a noun that refers to the act of remembering. Another starting point to define memory is, of course, through a dictionary. The Oxford English Dictionary provides the following definition: "*Senses relating to the action or process of commemorating, recollecting, or remembering. / An act of commemoration, especially of the dead / The perpetuated knowledge or recollection (of something) / A memorial tomb, shrine, chapel, or the like; a monument / Senses relating to the faculty of recalling to mind. / The faculty by which things are remembered; the capacity for retaining, perpetuating, or reviving the thought of*

³ Misztal, *Memory and Democracy*, 1321.

⁴ "Oxford English Dictionary" accessed June 5, 2014, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/116363?redirectedFrom=memory#eid>

things past".⁵ The curious aspect of these definitions is that memory is linked with the mind, knowledge, past and the dead, but yet is clear that, in both etymology and definition, it is related to an act. The act of remembering.

Researches concerning memory have led to its ramification and the formulation of different categories in an individual sphere. For instance, *screen memory* was coined in 1899 by Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, to describe those memories that distort reality in order to protect the holder from previous unpleasant experiences.⁶ *Flashbulb memories* was the term used in a Harvard University research from 1977, by the psychologists Roger Brown and James Kuklik, to define those memories that are based on emotional events that produce high arousal states, which are somehow frozen by the receiver as a result of the excitement.⁷ The cognitive psychologist Ulric Neisser termed *episodic memory* in 1982 to describe the fact that memories from episodes that repeat themselves are more accurate, as opposed to memories from events that occur occasionally once.⁸ Other terms that were studied in 1986 by Daniel Schacter, professor of psychology at Harvard University, are *explicit* and *implicit memories*. The former refers to the conscious act of holding past experiences, whereas the latter refers to those that are unconsciously kept.⁹

These concepts are just a few examples that prove that memory has several connotations in the individual sphere. However, variants also appear in cases that exceed personal limits. Cultural Memory, Social Memory, Political Memory and Collective instructions are some of the concepts used by different scholars to refer to the workings of the mnemonics within social groups. For instance, the writer Susan Sontag advocates for the usage of the term Collective Instructions in her studies, as a strategy to direct the attention towards an authority that *instructs* society what and how to remember¹⁰. Collective Memory was chosen for this thesis because it addresses explicitly the idea that a collectivity is involved in the act of remembrance, and that the shaping of the mnemonics is not something that is only instructed from a higher social institution but rather is molded by the interaction of the individuals that belong to a social group. Nevertheless, this concept is still difficult to grasp, as Misztal explains: "*its definition has proved elusive because of the difficulties in-*

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Schacter, *Memory Distortion: History and Current Status*, 7.

⁷ Ibid., 18.

⁸ Ibid., 16.

⁹ Ibid., 19.

¹⁰ Simini, *Memory Museum and the museum Text*, 15.

involved in the conceptualization of collective memory's complex relations with myth and history and because memory (...) is assigned multiple meanings".¹¹ So what do scholars study as Collective Memory?

According to Maurice Halbwachs, one of the fathers of the study of remembrance in the group sphere, memory has a strong social component because it is formed and sorted within the pressure of society.¹² Which at the same time shapes the perceptions, experiences and interactions of the members of society.¹³ This idea suggests that individuals don't remember things as they would personally like to, but that this process is highly mediated by their social environment. Memory is not crafted in isolation, but rather in the interaction between individuals from a certain conglomerate. The idea of collective memory doesn't address only how memory is molded within a group, but it also refers to how memories are shared. But the main aspect of the Collective Memory concept is that it stresses the fact that the social surroundings mold the personal act of remembrance, as Misztal points out when she explains that "*although it is the individual who remembers, remembering is more than a personal act, as even the most personal memories are embedded in social context and shaped by social factors that make social remembering possible, such as language, rituals, and commemoration practices*"¹⁴. These previous descriptions concerned the *what* of memory. Now its time to address *how* it has been approached.

The workings of memory were a matter of study for the ancient Greeks. Simonides de Ceos was one of the founding fathers of the called *Art of Memory*, which were manuals and treatises that sought to explain how memory worked in order to teach how to master mnemonic practices. The relevance of controlling memory is explained with a story that involved Simonides himself. It is told that he was invited to recite lyric poetry at a banquet in front of a small audience. After his recital Simonides left the banquet hall, and later on the roof of the place fell down killing all the diners. The accident was terrible, to a point where no one could identify the bodies. However, the identification of the corpses was only possible thanks to Simonides, because he remembered exactly the places where the people of the audience were sitting. He was able to identify the victims of the accidents due to his mnemonic capacity¹⁵. It seems that this anecdote is also useful to provide a

¹¹Misztal, Op. Cit.

¹² Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*,51.

¹³ Pennebaker and Banasik, *On the Creation and Maintenance of Collective Memories: History as Social Psychology*,4.

¹⁴Misztal, Op. Cit., 1321.

¹⁵ Yates, *The Art of Memory*, 2.

stronger connection between the act of remembrance and the dead, however, the training of memory had applications that surpassed the one described in the previous story.

The gymnastics of memory was an important part of the studies of rhetoric, because it enabled a speaker to deliver longer speeches. The techniques for training the mnemonic skills were based on the idea that memories could be stored inside imagined places within the mind: *loci*.¹⁶ The mind was thought to be conformed with a set of storage rooms where facts could be kept and retrieved depending on the mastery of the individual. There was no printing press at the time, so the “*trained memory was of vital importance*”.¹⁷ But the goal of the *Arts of Memory* was not only to teach how to store facts and events in the mind’s rooms efficiently for improving memory skills.

Another crucial aspect of the enhancement of the mnemonic skills was that the efficient retrieval of memories could enable the creation of new knowledge, as Mary Carruthers explains: “*the craft of memory “(...) is not fundamentally just an overly complicated procedure for preparing to pass examinations for memorizing random facts(...) Rather it was a craft for creating new knowledge*”.¹⁸ This approach connects remembering with the production of new information, as memory can enhance learning and the crafting of knowledge. This leads to the idea that well-trained scholars in memory matters were even more valuable than books, or even entire libraries, as they held all the information in their minds. For this reason “*masters of memory were considered to be quasi-divine beings by their contemporaries*”.¹⁹ The performance of memory was significant during the Middle Ages and part of the seventeenth century in Europe as well, because it was considered a crucial aspect of education²⁰.

The *Arts of Memory*, and the idea of training the mind in order to improve the mnemonics, is also a topic addressed by Umberto Eco. He explains that some of these treatises were based on the assumption that all the elements of the universe are connected, and that relationships between them can be weaved. Some techniques intended to group specific elements with similar others in order to lower the memory’s working load. Memory was then activated and improved through the

¹⁶ Op. Cit., 7.

¹⁷Op. Cit., 4.

¹⁸ Carruthers,*Mechanisms for the Transmission of Culture*, 26.

¹⁹ Yates, Op. Cit., 6.

²⁰ Ibid., 3.

use of associations.²¹ The intention of this was not only to train the mind to hold efficiently and accurately more facts and information, but to increase the knowledge by concentrating on the essence, similarities and relations of things.²² Carruthers and Eco describe how memory was not something left to the hazards of the mind, but that there were actually tactics in order to improve the mind's capability of remembering, which were carefully crafted, followed and practiced. These considerations are of great value for this thesis, as the case studies seek to address the essence of the conflict in order to weave connections and provide knowledge about it. But all these previous cases belong to old approaches of how memory was addressed in the past (by the ancient greeks and their Arts of Memory), so for nourishing the argument more modern ones are presented below.

Studies and experiments of “*how memories are encoded, stored and retrieved*”²³ have been developed with a completely different approach since the late nineteenth century. The goal of some of them was to understand the distortions of memory and its unreliability, based on the idea that personal experiences and expectations mold the act of remembering. These studies explained that memory is not something “pure” that can be allocated in “rooms within minds”, as it is molded by social, physical and biological factors. This approach of understanding the inaccuracy of memory fits under the concept of memory distortion, which over the years has become a fruitful field of research for several disciplines, as explained by Daniel Schacter in the introduction in the book *Memory Distortion*²⁴. Although memory can be often accurate, professionals from different disciplines (cognitive sciences, psychology, psychiatry, philosophy, sociology, history, and neurology) have strived to understand under which circumstances there are “flaws” in the act of remembering.²⁵ The intention of these studies is not to enhance the mnemonic skills, as the *Arts of Memory* pursued, but to better understand how memory is molded by distortions.

Some of these studies show that memory is an act of interpretation, that may be modified by external stakeholders and factors, or past personal experiences. This means, for instance, that the act of remembrance can be manipulated through statements, questions or actions, in order to shape memory in a certain way.²⁶ These ideas suggest that the past is reconstructed in an analytic process that

²¹ Eco, *The Art of Memory*, 3.

²² Ibid.

²³ Schacter, Op. Cit., 2.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 4.

²⁶ Ibid., 13.

can alter the accuracy of memory.²⁷ For instance, in 1932 Sir Frederic Barlett²⁸ argued that memories “are imaginative reconstructions of past events that are heavily influenced by the rememberer’s knowledge structures”.²⁹ Things get tricky at this point, as memory cannot only help to produce new knowledge, but preexisting knowledge can have an influence on how things are remembered. It seems that memory and knowledge have a strong influence in shaping each other — knowledge can change the nature of remembrance, and memory can help to craft new knowledge.

The way memories are allocated in the brain is also researched in new studies, specifically in the fields of biology and neurology. This approach poses a significant difference with regard to the previous *Arts of Memory*, as these new studies address do not address the mind as the place where memories are stored anywhere, but look for physiological correlates of it in the human brain. Modern research seek to understand how memory is distorted due to several factors, and how the brain works when remembering. Memory is no longer considered something stable that can be effectively allocated in a mind and then efficiently retrieved. Instead, it is understood nowadays as a complex system that is not carefully organized according to an individual will, but rather is heavily determined by many external factors. Until so far, the *how* of memory has been described for the individual. It is time to enter the domains of remembrance in a collectivity level.

One essential aspect of collective memory is that it is shared. According to Maurice Halbwachs no memory is feasible outside the frameworks used by people living in society.³⁰ He explains as well that memory is produced by the pressure of a collectivity, that obligates individuals to shape their inner memories.³¹ Halbwachs argues that virtually all memories are indeed collective, because these are discussed with others.³² These short statements start to controvert the concept of an individual memory, as it seems that there is no such thing as a subjective memory (because memory is always influenced and practiced within society). Michael Schudson even declares that: “*there is no*

²⁷ *ibid.*, 17

²⁸ In order to conclude this, he first told a story to a group of subjects and afterwards he asked them to recount the story in different occasions. He noticed that the subjects didn’t remember all the events, and that their memories about the story changed with every report. In 1967 the studies of the German psychologist Ulrich Neisser showed similar findings. He explained that the act of remembering is far from being an awakening of memories, as past events are actually constructed and molded with preexisting knowledge.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁰ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 43.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 52.

³² Pennebaker and Banasik, *Op. Cit.*, 7.

such thing as individual memory(...). Memory is social".³³ Schudson states this because, for him, memory is located in institutions, rules, laws and records, rather than in individuals.³⁴ He continues to explain that memory is always social because it is distributed across social institutions and cultural artifacts, from where individuals can access them.³⁵ Both Halbwachs' and Schudson' basis is that the act of memory requires interactivity and suffers from mediation through social structures. In this sense museums are quite important institutions when it comes to memory matters.

General tasks of museums, according to the definition given by the International Council of Museums (ICOM), are to acquire, conserve, research, communicate and exhibit tangible and intangible heritage³⁶. But the workings of these institutions are also related to memory matters, because what they acquire, conserve, research, communicate and exhibit has an impact of how society remembers certain events and facts regarding heritage and history. The birth of the museum as a cultural institution exemplifies this. Its dawn coincided with the creation of the national states during the nineteenth century, so these establishments sought to shape and educate citizens with certain ideas, values and memories that were orchestrated by the state. Private collections (that belonged to the royalty, the clergy or other wealthy members of society) were opened to the public and exhibited in order to fulfill the previous desires.

Culture became a useful tool for governing and exercising new forms of power, and museums were a vessel to exercise such control.³⁷ The instrumentation of cultural elements, objects and an heroic past was crucial in the conformation of states. National feelings were evoked around collections and exhibitions; individuals were guided to self recognize in such elements and imagine themselves as part of a bigger social group.³⁸ This previous statement may remind one of the term *imagined communities*, which was coined by Benedict Anderson in 1983 with the purpose of defining what a nation is.³⁹ This concept explains that members of a specific nation imagine themselves as part of a certain conglomerate, despite the fact that they probably will never acknowledge other

³³ Schudson, *Dynamics of Distortion in Collective Memory*, 346.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 347.

³⁶ "ICOM", accessed July 25, 2014, <http://archives.icom.museum/definition.html>

³⁷ Bennet, *The Birth of the Museum*, 19.

³⁸ Nonetheless, according to Bennet, the process of making accesible these institutions in the public sphere was not something that happen quickly; at the beginning several sectors of society were still excluded as there were restrictions based on genders and their social class.

³⁹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 5.

members of the same group.⁴⁰ National Museums were then the institutions that helped in the process of imagination, because they provided “*the scenography and stage for the performance of myths of nationhood*”⁴¹, and thus they had the authority to decide what was worth remembering.

Museums provided the discourse and the physical objects that supported the creation of a collective memory for the conformation and consolidation of nations. Pennebaker and Banasik explain that “*for societies to exist at all, the societal members must share a very high percentage of their experiences to increase the cohesiveness of their memories*”.⁴² Museums were, in this order of ideas, the institutions that dictated and exhibited those shared experiences that glued memories together, and thus nourished the imagination of the community.

The described relation between collective memory and museums obeys concepts and notions from the nineteenth century and the birth of national states, distant from the current affairs that are the concern of this thesis. The case studies described here don’t strive to consolidate the state or shape good citizens. It is true that the National Museum of Colombia had these goals in its beginning, as it will be explained in chapter 3, but it has nowadays different missions and visions. Collective Memory is not used by the case studies to strengthen the concepts of patriotism and support governmental interests as in the nineteenth century, but rather as a tool for the construction of peace. This is not something new that only concerns the institutions of the South American country, as others museums have dealt with collective memory and peace in other cases.

The idea of focusing museum work towards the reflection upon war is notorious with the institutions that analyze the atrocities of the Holocaust and pay tribute to the victims. The Holocaust museums are of great importance for the study of collective memory and war, because they “*have provided a frame of reference and a template by which other modern atrocities world-wide are remembered and commemorated*”.⁴³ Silke Arnold-de Simini argues, when studying Jewish museums, that having knowledge about the atrocities is not enough for preventing them: there should also be a component of *imaginative empathy (...)* to ensure moral responsibility.⁴⁴ These can be accom-

⁴⁰ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

⁴¹ Knell, *National Museums and The National Imagination*, 4.

⁴² Pennebaker and Banasik, Op. Cit., 6.

⁴³ Simini, Op. Cit., 16.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 15.

plished through the shaping of a collective memory, where society can share the empathy and responsibility.

According to Simini the role and duties of museums have been questioned over the past decades, specially because of big scale atrocities that have impacted society. One outcome of this, as she points out, is the conformation of *memory museums*. These differ from the History and National Museums because the memory museums “*define themselves not just as sites of academic and institutional history but as spaces of memory, exemplifying the shift from a perceived authoritative master discourse on the past to the paradigm of memory which supposedly allows for a wider range of stories about the past*”.⁴⁵ These type of museums seek to recover and examine what was forgotten or neglected from dominant narratives. Yet another significant contrasting issue between History and National Museums and memory museums is that the latter are not dedicated to objects, but to a story. This means that the narration is not based on the appreciation of objects, but rather they are there to strengthen the representation of the story. Objects are not entirely relevant just by themselves, instead their true value resides in the fact that they serve as evidence of certain events.⁴⁶

The relation between collective memory, atrocities, and their place in museums, is addressed as well by Steven Lubar. He explains that museum should share the job of interpretation and creation of meaning with their visitors in these cases, in order to join the personal experiences of the spectators with the greater narrative provided by the cultural institutions. He states that “*Memories are personal and specific; exhibits are general. Memories are incorporeal, exhibits show things. Memories stand on their own; a good history provides context*”.⁴⁷ It is noticeable that these ideas contrast with Hudson’s concept of memory (as he explained that there is no such thing as individual memory because memory is always social). But the purpose of presenting Lubar’s approach is not to start a debate between these two authors, but to point out that museums are not just containers of objects. On the contrary, these institutions are vehicles that may seek to carry past memories for present analysis, and that must be aware of the visitor’s nature expectations.

Until this point the *what* and *how* of memory have been addressed. The explanation of the former was based on etymology and definition. The latter was approached with an historical perspective, in order to explain how memory was conceived throughout time in specific contexts and

⁴⁵ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 17.

⁴⁷ Lubar, *Exhibiting Memories*, 399.

how it fitted in different types of museums.⁴⁸ What is still missing then is the *why* of collective memory: *why* is this element so important in the case studies? Gonzalo Sánchez explains that considerations around memory are, in Colombia, an act of rebellion against the violence and impunity, and that remembrance is a laudable instrument for confronting the war.⁴⁹ According to Sánchez, memory is a reaction against violence and not just a product of it. This approach shows how special the Colombian case is, as discussions around memory are being addressed *during* the conflict and not *after* it. The act of remembering is crafted while the events take place, and not only when they end. This approach suggest that remembrance is a living process, rather than just a simple organization and storage of facts and events from a distant past that can be retrieved when necessary. Memory, as an act of rebellion, is important in the case studies because it is a moral call that pushes society to reflect upon the war's atrocities — as in the case of the *memory museums*. It is significant that collective memory is also highly associated with the act of remembering and commemorating the dead.

The shaping of a Collective Memory around the conflict is important as well because the study and recovery of a neglected past has an impact upon the future. This aspect is close to Andreas Huyssen's ideas, as he points out that "*Remembrance shapes our links to the past, and the way we remember define us in the present. As individuals and societies we need the past to construct and anchor our identities and to nurture a vision of the future*".⁵⁰ Collective Memory is then important for the Colombian institutions because it aims to *define* and *explain* the present society based on past events and facts that were avoided, with the goal of drawing a path towards reconciliation. These establishments are also relevant because collective memory does not exist alone in the individuals or in society, but in cultural artifacts.⁵¹ These artifacts can condense and narrate the memories, which can be preserved by institutions like museums. The main point of these previous considerations is that collective memory is becoming the base from which the pillars of the future Colombian society are going to be set. The outcome of a society that can transit from a violent context to a peaceful one can be strongly marked by the working the cultural institutions analyzed in this thesis.

⁴⁸ It is important to mention that the approach taken in this thesis is based on Western researches.

⁴⁹ Sánchez, *Prologo*, 13.

⁵⁰ Huyssen, *Twilight Memories*, 249.

⁵¹ Igarta and Paez, *Art and Remembering Traumatic Collective Events*, 81.

One last consideration about memory must be clarified before jumping to the next chapter. To memorize is a verb that may also come to mind when thinking about remembrance issues, but there is a profound difference in between remembering and memorizing. According to the Oxford English Dictionary memorize is *"to commit to memory, learn by heart"*,⁵² which suggests that something must be learnt by hard. There is then more space for interpretation and the creation of new knowledge while remembering as this is a more dynamic activity, whereas memorizing is more about keeping static thoughts and facts in mind. These previous considerations are of great significance for the analysis of the Colombian case studies, as they promote memory as a tool that may be used to analyze the past in order to design strategies for crafting a better future. The studied institutions within this thesis deal with this precise aspect of the nature of memory, as they strive to bring to the surface certain events and facts in order to reflect upon them and foster new knowledge and interpretations. The goal is that Colombians will be able to analyze the conflict with the help of the cultural institutions, rather than just memorizing facts.

⁵²"Oxford English Dictionary" accessed June 5, 2014, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/116361?redirectedFrom=memorize#eid>

3. Institutions

The longing for peace is pushing Colombian museums and related centres to analyze the sociopolitical events, because it is commonly thought that these are the institutions that have the authority to create knowledge, narrate history, report upon problems and preserve memories by collecting objects. However, these types of institutions should not be taken for granted. The way knowledge is weaved, how collective memory is shaped, and how war is represented are issues questioned in this paper, rather than being accepted as a given truths. A thorough study of these establishments is important because they have a great responsibility in the country's present context, as they can start bridging certain social gaps. The previous statement may sound very naive, but it will be explained how these case studies intend to provide tools for the reconciliation of a fractured society. It is also important to mention at this point that these cultural institutions don't work under the classical idea of a Museum that collects and preserves objects, reason for which some of these prefer to be considered as centres of memory and not as museums (in the traditional sense).

One fundamental issue about museums is that these are “*protean organizations*” (Kratz, Karp,2007:1) that mutate over the years, having its reason in a shift of their goals and mandates with time. Simon Knell explains that “*museums are never what they seem to be*”⁵³, as there is always behind them an elaborated construction of messages that is conceived by museums professionals and transmitted through different tactics. Hooper-Greenhill points out that “*museums have been active in shaping knowledge over the last 600 years*”⁵⁴, but such activity has not been executed equally throughout time. Knowledge, truth and memory have been molded and crafted by these establishments in various ways, depending on their context, their staff and their visitors. According to Corinne A. Kratz and Ivan Karp museums are institutions that “*have different mandates and complex and contradictory goals*”⁵⁵, specially in the present days where they seek to approach a broader range of audiences. The following section, where the case studies are addressed individually, shows how some of these aspects of changes, shifts, and complex and contradictory goals are present in each institution.

⁵³ Knell, *National Museums and The National Imagination*, 6.

⁵⁴ Hooper-Greenhil, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, 191.

⁵⁵ Kratz and Karp, *Introduction Museum Frictions*, 1.

a. The National Museum of Colombia.

The National Museum of Colombia was founded in 1823 under the government of the country's first president, Simón Bolívar, and first vice-president, Francisco de Paula Santander. According to Beatriz González, the chief curator of the Museum's art and history collections in between 1990 and 2004 and a relevant artist in the Colombian art scene, the institution had three main focuses in its beginnings: the study of the country's natural resources, proving the world that Colombia was a civilized nation and consolidating the new republic.⁵⁶ However, the main guideline was the study of the natural sciences, reason for which supervision was asked from the German scientist Alexander Van Humboldt. Under his advice the following experts from different sciences were gathered to found the Museum: the mineralogist Jean-Baptiste Bossingalutl, the chemist and mineralogist Mariano de Rivero, the physician François-Desiré Roulin and the naturalists Jacques Boudun and Justin-Marie Goudot.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, as of 1825 the National Museum started to collect objects related to the country's history, more specifically with objects regarding the war of independence. After a couple of years, when the euphoria of the independence dissipated, a broader range of objects started to be collected; like coins and portraits of illustrious members of society (González, 2000: 90). The Museum started to gather art works as well, specially between the end of the 1820's and the 1880's. González explains that this was a result of the civil wars during this period, because there was a need to protect the national heritage. For this reason a National Gallery of Painting was inserted to the Museum in 1864.⁵⁸ The National Museum of Colombia has worked then under the triad of Science, History and Art.

Over the years the National Museum was historically based in different buildings, but since 1948 a prison from the nineteenth century houses its collections. The building itself is part of Colombia's narrative of violence and the clash between modern and conservative concepts around punishment and order. The prison, designed by the Danish architect Thomas Reed, was built between 1874 and 1878; a time when a new approach towards the problem of criminality was taking form. The modern prison sought to treat the inmates humanly, with the goal of placing them back in society rather than focusing on corporal punishment.⁵⁹ The importance of reclusion in order to "educate" prisoners was in accordance with the fact that death penalty was abolished in Colombia in

⁵⁶González, *¿Un museo libre de toda sospecha?*, 86.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁵⁹ Garzón, *En Busca de la Prisión Moderna*, 2.

1863, so the need for a modern prison was imperative. The state's responsibility was to provide the necessary means (education and work) and the adequate establishment (a proper building) to make this transition possible.⁶⁰

The prison that is now the National Museum of Colombia was known by two names back in the days when it held inmates: The Central Penitentiary and the Panoptic. This last name stuck in the imagination of Colombians, and the building is still referred nowadays as such. However, the building itself is not a panoptic as it was devised originally by the British philosopher Jeremy Bentham. The Panoptic consists of a circular building where all the cells were visible from a central post. It was designed for an effective surveillance and, according to the French philosopher Michel Foucault, its major goal was "*to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power*".⁶¹ The power of the Panopticon was based on the visible and the unverifiable: the inmate was aware of the control tower from where he was observed, but he was not able to verify if he was being watched.⁶² The cross-shaped building that now houses the National Museum of Colombia has no central point from where every cell were watched, fact that marks a mayor difference from Bentham's Panopticon. Although surveillance was possible from the middle point not everything was observable from there, reason for which this building is not strictly a Panoptic (Fig. 1 shows the difference between Bentham's Panopticon and the National Museum's Panoptic).

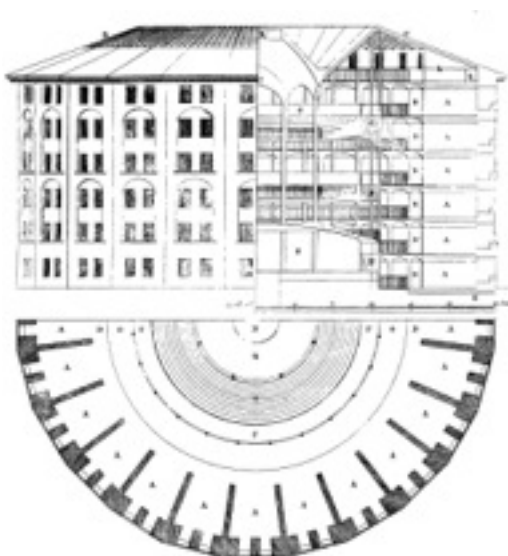


Fig.1

⁶⁰ Ibid., 8.

⁶¹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment*, 201.

⁶² Ibid.

According to Beatriz González there has been no deep reflection about the *coincidence* that a prison turned into a National Museum.⁶³ She addressed this issue briefly by explaining that both types of institutions provide a sense of order and exclusion. Prisons exclude inmates from liberty, while museums exclude art works and objects that don't fit into their discourse.⁶⁴ Tony Bennett argues that the functions and power of prisons and museums run in opposite direction, though they possess parallel histories.⁶⁵ He explains that these institutions developed during a similar time frame (in between the late eighteenth and mid-nineteenth century), but that their intentions and functions were diametrical. The modern prison, for instance, intended to shift a public punishment to an enclosed reformation, whereas the modern museum sought to switch a private admiration to a public contemplation. Prisons controlled punishment by prohibiting its public gaze and putting the inmates behind the bars, with the intention of transforming their behavior. Modern museums and other modern exhibition complexes, as addressed by Bennett, controlled knowledge by ordering objects and creating discourses in order to educate the working classes.⁶⁶ This means that while one institution was working on transferring actions from the public arena to a private space, the other one was opening to the public activities that were before private. The modern prison practiced its power on individuals for security matters, while the modern museum exercised its power by selecting and classifying objects for cultural purposes. The function and power of these two institutions relate in the fact that both sought to exercise the power of control and order, but with opposite intentions. After describing how the modern prison and the modern museum relate and oppose, a question about the fact that a prison became a National Museum of a country whose history is crossed with violence arises: Is this just a mere coincidence, or could this be significant?

A starting point for answering the previous question is the National Museum's mission and vision: The first states that this specific institution should "*Safeguard the cultural heritage that it is under its responsibility, and based on it narrate the story of the country's cultural processes in a way that all citizens may be reflected in that narrative. Moreover, its purpose is to support the consolidation and development of the museum field in the country*".⁶⁷ Its vision projects that: "*In 2014 the Ministry of Culture will be a fundamental part of the country's economical, social and educa-*

⁶³ González, Op. Cit., 94.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, 61.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 63.

⁶⁷ "Misión Museo Nacional de Colombia", accessed March 5, 2014, <http://www.museonacional.gov.co/el-museo/mision/Paginas/Mision.aspx> / The translation of these are made by the author of this thesis.

tional development, facilitating the population a major access to the enjoyment of cultural goods and services, strengthening the Colombian identity".⁶⁸ There is no mention of the internal armed conflict or the violence, as it is evident. The National Museum does not specialize in these issues, but it could be said that the cultural processes of the last 50 years have been mediated by the conflict. For this reason the analysis of the internal armed struggle fits into the museum's mission, and affects its vision as it inhibits the country's general development.

Nevertheless, it seems that the fact that the museum was formerly a prison is not included in strongly in the present narrative — there are just some rooms that are still kept as cells, where some objects from the prison are exhibited. The essence of the prison, reeducate inmates into society for a peaceful coexistence, is not fully used as a metaphor in the working of the museum. But this institution has a much broader mission, so the fact that it was formerly a prison cannot be connected only with the conflict's narrative. It could be just a coincidence then that a penitentiary turned into a cultural institution, but what is significant is that this shows both the scarcities that the country has had since its beginning and the lack of importance given to culture (as it has been historically neglected in Colombia). There were never big palaces, wealthy households, or other great buildings that could have had safeguarded the cultural heritage (as it is the case in other countries). In Colombia a prison was the proper place for securing the heritage.

The National Museum does not have the unique mandate of analyzing the conflict, but nonetheless, several exhibitions, publications and colloquiums have specifically studied the conflict and previous civil wars. Some exhibitions are: *Cien Años de los Mil Días / Hundred years of the Thousand Years* (October 21, 1999 - August 12, 2000) , *Cacarica: Territorio de vida / Cacarica: Land of Life* (November 16, 2000 - December 1, 2000), *Peque: el desarraigo / Peque: The Uprooting* (December 10, 2002 - February 9, 2003), *Fragmentos de Destierro y Desarraigo / Fragments of Exile and Uprooting* (April 12, 2003 - June 10, 2003), *Tiempos de paz. Acuerdos en Colombia 1902-1994 / Time of peace. Agreements in Colombia 1902-1994* (August 14, 2003 - November 2, 2003), *Galán Vive / Galán Lives* (August 12, 2009 - January 10, 2010), *Hacer la paz en Colombia "Ya vuelvo", Carlos Pizarro / Making the peace in Colombia "I'll be back", Carlos Pizarro* (September 9, 2010 - March 27, 2011).

⁶⁸ "Visión Museo Nacional de Colombia", accessed March 5, 2014, <http://www.museonacional.gov.co/el-museo/vision/Paginas/Vision.aspx>

These exhibitions approached the conflict from different sources and perspectives. For instance, both *Galán Lives* and *Making the peace in Colombia "I'll be back"*, *Carlos Pizarro* strive to remember specifically two politicians that were murdered while running for presidents. The narration in these two was built upon two relevant figures of Colombian politics. The exhibited objects belonged to them or to their relatives, while others were part of the Museum's collection. *Cacarica: Land of Life*, *Peque: The Uprooting* and *Fragments of Exile and Uprooting* were three exhibitions that represented the conflict from the victims' point of view, which addressed directly the impact that violence has had on certain communities. Oral and written testimonies of the victims were collected and exhibited in this case. *Peque: The Uprooting* was part of a colloquium where the country's phenomenon of internally displaced persons was analyzed. The National Museum of Colombia seeks to enable spaces where reflections about the country's conflict and current affairs can be triggered.⁶⁹

But perhaps *Time of peace. Agreements in Colombia 1902-1994* is the one that has a more direct relation with the current affairs, though it took place eleven years ago. The intention of this exhibition was to present how peace was pursued throughout the twentieth century, and 423 exhibited pieces helped to support the narration.⁷⁰ Is it important to clarify that in 2003 there was no ongoing peace process between the government and the FARC, as it is the case today. The spirit of the time regarding peace was different from the present days, when there are many more initiatives discussing solutions to the war. Despite this, the National Museum of Colombia directed its attention to tackle peace matters back then. These are just some example of exhibitions that approached the violence, but a more precise and concrete example of how objects are collected in times of war and peace is presented next.

Cristina Lleras, the former curator of the Art and History collections of the National Museum of Colombia, explains that the Museum holds only a few objects that address to the internal armed conflict and memory issues. The shortage, according to her, lies in the fact that the conflict is still ongoing and because the Museum is isolated from the populations and regions that suffer the most from the ravages of war.⁷¹ However, the National Museum has a collection of objects that help

⁶⁹ "Peque el Desarraigo", accessed April 29, 2014, <http://www.museonacional.gov.co/exposiciones/pasadas/Paginas/Pequeeldesarraigo47.aspx>

⁷⁰ "Tiempos de Paz", accessed April 29, 2014, <http://www.museonacional.gov.co/exposiciones/pasadas/Paginas/TiempodepazAcuerdosenColombia1902199483.aspx>

⁷¹ Lleras, *Colección de Documentos Históricos*, 2.

to represent and stage one dramatic event of the conflict: the siege of Colombia's Justice Palace. The way this collection came to be is a vivid evidence of how memory can be politicized, and it also suggests that the conflict is still an open wound that seems far from healing.

A guerrilla movement called M-19 attacked the Justice Palace on November 6 of 1985 in order to make a public trial of Belisario Betancur, the president of the time. They alleged that he failed to keep some agreements of a peace treaty that was being carried out between the government and the illegal group.⁷² The government reacted fiercely to the aggression by instructing the army to regain control of the Palace at any cost. The bloody events ended on November 7 with the death of innocent people and the destruction of the Judicial house of Colombia. The events of these two days are considered one of the darkest moments in Colombia's recent history, and yet the true causes and effects of these are not clear. For instance, some people that were taken out alive from the Palace by the army, as video footage reveals, were found dead days later (which lead to speculate that the army committed tortures and murders).

Despite the fact that the truth of these events was still blurry in 1994 a project that sought to collect objects from the destroyed Palace was presented to the Advisory Board of the National Museum in that year. The artist Doris Salcedo and the priest Fernán González proposed the creation of a room dedicated to exhibit objects from the siege; objects that were kept in the basement of the Palace under poor preservation conditions. One intention behind this idea was to create an exhibition that would help visitors to reflect upon Colombia's contemporary history.⁷³ After a bureaucratic exchange of paperwork the Judicial branch of Colombia, institution that owned the objects, decided to donate some to the National Museum of Colombia: a couple of chairs, a couch and a typewriter are some of these (Fig. 2). The museum has done a couple of exhibitions in which war and peace have been topics, as explained above, and the objects retrieved from the Justice Palace siege have been exhibited in these.

The National Museum has one hall called *Ideologies, Art and Industry (1910-1948)* where objects related to political events that molded the twentieth century can be found. However, there is still no permanent space or exhibition that strongly and continuously reflects upon the conflict that started during the 1950's. According to Cristina Lleras the museum's strategic plan states that the

⁷² There are other possible reasons that have been discussed and denied over the years, as for instance the destruction of documents that incriminated drug dealers, and documents that had to do with their extradition to The Unites States.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 3.



Fig.2

institution should analyze the memories of the conflict, and some of the temporary exhibitions have reflected this.⁷⁴ One reason for which there is still not a clear study of the conflict in a more permanent manner is that the conflict is still not over — there is no historical distance from which the museum can work upon.⁷⁵ Another fundamental reason for this is that the National Museum is funded by the state, so the ideas expressed by the institution cannot be independent from the government.⁷⁶

The Collective Memory that this institution crafts regarding the conflict is based upon temporary exhibitions, that fit with an official discourse. It is noticeable that they pretend to have a neutral voice, but the State's responsibility is not addressed openly. The museum has published researches and books that resulted from the exhibitions and related activities (like conferences and colloquiums). But again, what it is noticeable is that there is no permanent collection of cultural artifacts or objects that help to report upon the conflict in a more precise and constant fashion.

⁷⁴Lleras, *The National Museum of Colombia*, 464.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

b. The National Center for Historic Memory

The National Center for Historic Memory (CMH for its initials in Spanish) is a more recent institution. It was created in 2011, but is the result of projects and laws that were designed and decreed a couple of years before. The core of the CMH comes from the Historic Memory Group (MH), which belonged to the National Commission of Reparation and Reconciliation (CNRR). This commission was conformed under the law 975 of 2005, Law of Justice and Peace, that was created as a judicial tool to facilitate peace processes, the reincorporation of members from illegal groups, and the reparation of the conflict's victims.⁷⁷ The task of the CNRR was to advise the official government in these matters, and the MH was specifically a research group that belonged to this organization.

The more recent history of the National Center for Historic Memory can be traced in two laws: law 1424 of December 29th of 2010 and law 1448 of June 10th of 2011, and in the decree 4803 of 2011. The first is denominated the Transitional Justice Law, because it focuses on the process by which active members of illegal armed groups resign to their activities. The second article of this law establishes that the central government must promote an Agreement for the Contribution of Historic Truth and Reparation, in order to encourage national reconciliation and the victims' compensation. This agreement establishes that those who resign to illegal activities have the obligation to confess the truth of the acts they conducted. For this reason, the fourth article of the law 1424 ordered the creation of a non-judicial mechanism that would recollect, organize, preserve and share the information that would result as an outcome from the Agreement for the Contribution of Historic Truth and Reparation. Creating a center that would collect the gathered truths was underlined by this law with the intention of reporting upon the conflict, and not with the goal of gathering proofs that would interfere in prosecutions.

The law 1448 of 2011, or "Victims' Law", dictates the actions and strategies by which assistance and reparation is going to be provided to the victims. The article 146 explicitly orders the creation of a Centre of Historic Memory, which has the obligation of collecting documents related to the violence and violation of human rights that have resulted from the internal armed conflict. The purpose of this Centre, as described by the law, is to make public all the information to a broader audience by using "*museum and pedagogic activities*"⁷⁸. The article 148 specifically states

⁷⁷ The peace process in this case was done with paramilitary groups, which followed extreme right ideologies.

⁷⁸Article 147, Law 1448 June 10th of 2011

the functions of the Centre, and it highlights the creation of a *Memory Museum* which would be destined to strengthen the collective memory regarding the recent history of violence in Colombia.

However, it is the decree 4803 of 2011 that officially shapes the National Center for Historic Memory. It is described in this that its goal is to analyze the conflict, but by strongly taking into account the victims' perspectives. It is stated in this document that the Centre must receive, recover, conserve, compile and analyze the variety of objects and documents related to the violations derived from the internal armed conflict, with the objective of creating activities that would help to *"establish and clarify its causes, to know the truth and contribute to avoid the repetition of these events"*.⁷⁹ The National Center for Historic Memory has thus a demarcated task of studying the conflict and producing material that would help to better explain it. This decree also grants another important function to the center, which is to *"design, create and administrate a Museum of Memory, destined to achieve the strengthening of the collective memory regarding the events of Colombia's recent history of violence, with the endeavor to combine efforts from private sector, civil society, international cooperation and the State"*.⁸⁰ What it is evident from all the previous description is that the creation of the National Center for Historic Memory was highly mediated by the law.

The National's Center for Historic Memory mission is: *"Contribute to the realization of the integral compensation and the right of truth that the victims and society hold, as well to address the State's duty of memory regarding the violations made in the context of the Colombian armed conflict in a horizon of peace construction, democratization and reconciliation."*⁸¹ Its vision is: *"The National Center for Historic Memory will be a platform of promotion, articulation and inclusion of the armed conflict's multiple memories , with a preferential option for the victims, which contributes to the integral reparation, historical clarification, guarantees of no repetition and the building of a sustainable peace."*⁸² These statements have a clearer connection with the conflict and the collective memory. The reason for this is that the Centre was founded with the purpose of addressing issues regarding the conflict specifically.

The National Museum of Memory, that must originate from the National Center for Historic Memory, has not become a reality yet. At the moment the Centre is working on itinerary exhibi-

⁷⁹ Decree 4803 of 2012

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ ¿Qué es el Centro de Memoria Histórica?, accessed April, 30, 2014, <http://www.centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/index.php/somos-gmh/i-que-es-el-centro-de-memoria-historica>

⁸² ibid.

tions, with a strong component of workshops and community participation. In general, the content of these are photographs taken by artists or that belong to the victims' relatives. It is interesting to see that the most used medium is photography, as it is one of the most effective means in which remembering can be triggered. As mentioned, the Museum has no physical location so far, so the exhibitions have been presented in other centres (like for instance in the Center of Memory, Peace and Reconciliation). But the Centre has a good website where all the digitalized material from exhibitions can be viewed. For instance, the Exhibition *Volver al Pasado para Reconstruir el Futuro / Back to the past to Rebuild the Future* gathered pictures of victims of the massacre in *El Salado*; the exhibited images were owned by relatives of the fallen (Fig.4).

The Museum may have not any physical structure so far, but it already has a director: Juan Carlos Posada. He is an architect that has previous experience working with institutions that focus on communities and social development. For instance, he worked in the initial phase of the Museum House of Memory (which will be discussed later on in this thesis). It is curious that the first director of the Museum is an architect when there is no building yet — which may be seen as a statement from the institution: the Museum still has to be designed. But despite this the article 9 of the decree 4803 of 2011 states that the National Museum of Colombia has to provide guidance to the National Museum of Memory, so there are already some guidelines that show how the museum could eventually work.

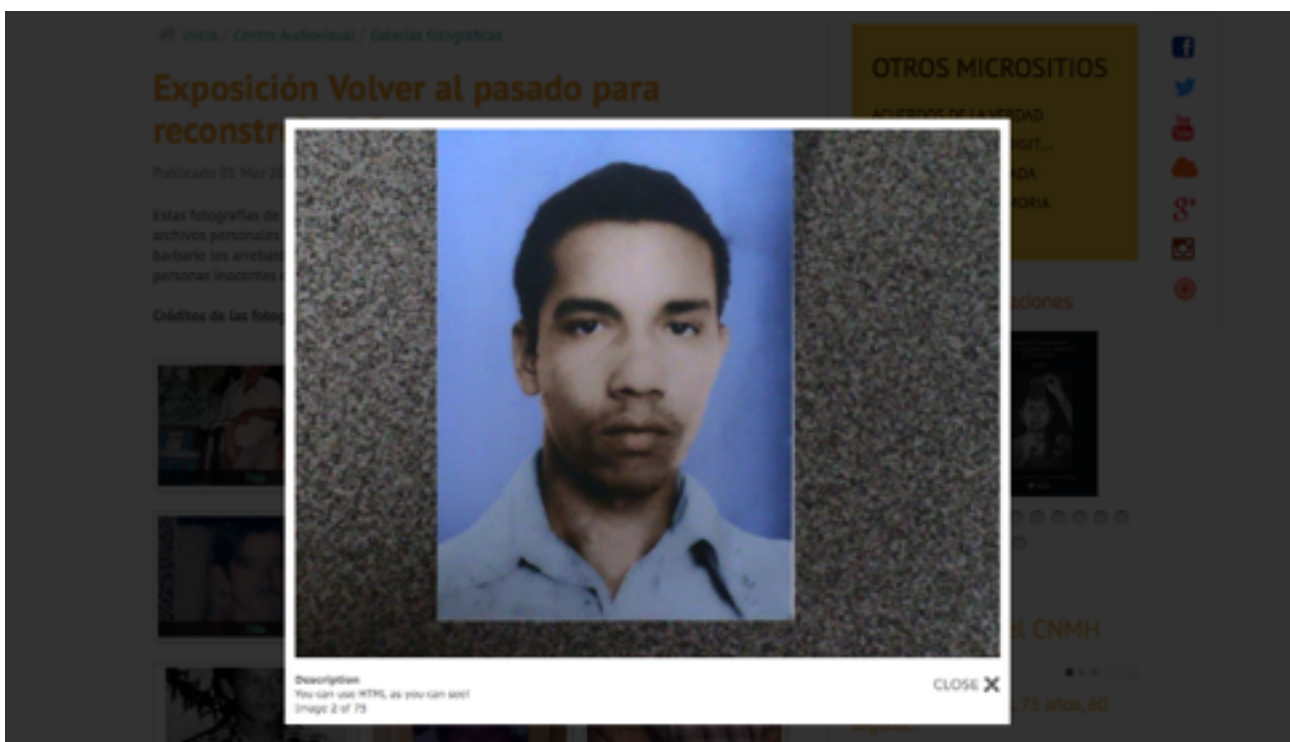


Fig.4

It is noticeable that this institution is shaping a Collective Memory based on the experiences of those who have suffered the most, and it brings up to the front tragic events in order to have public discussion about them. It must also be mentioned that the Centre uses the term historic memory rather than collective memory, but it could be argued that there is not a substantial distinction between this (if memory is seen as something that is mediated by society).

Several publications, documentaries and multimedia information can be accessed and downloaded from the Center's website. The most important research that this institution has published is *¡Basta Ya! Colombia: Memorias de Guerra y Dignidad / Enough is Enough! Colombia: Memories of Peace and Dignity*. This was published on 2013, and in only one year it has had a huge impact upon Colombian society. According to Andrés Suárez, a researcher from the Centre, the country embraced the fact that the violent past must be part of a public debate with this document, and different sectors of society requested that their stories should be studied and included in future researches.⁸³ These publications give a broad perspective of the conflict on a national level, and calls are made for researching at a community level.⁸⁴ It must be added that the National Centre for Historic Memory is very strong when it comes to researches, but it lacks a collection that would eventually support the Museum work.

c. Centre of Memory, Peace and Reconciliation

The history of the Centre of Memory, Peace and Reconciliation — located in Bogotá —, is a clear example of how policies regarding memory can bloom from non official initiatives. The idea behind this centre originated from the Institute of the Studies for Development and Peace INDEPAZ (its initials in Spanish), a non governmental organization (NGO) founded in 1984. The purpose of this institution is self explanatory with its title, but it must be added that it advises different organizations in matters regarding victims' rights and justice while it studies as well the nature of the illegal stakeholders and their activities. One strategy that this NGO uses to share the produced knowledge is offering Certificate Degrees about topics related to their investigations.

Camilo González Posso, president of INDEPAZ, proposed in 2008 to the City's administration the creation of an institution that would ensure that memory around the conflict would not be

⁸³ "Un año de la Presentación del Informe Basta Ya", accessed August 5, 2014, <http://www.centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/centro-audiovisual/videos/un-ano-de-la-presentacion-del-informe-basta-ya>

⁸⁴ Ibid.

forgotten, that a collective memory based on the participation of the victims would be created, and that such a memory would be used to reflect upon the future.⁸⁵ The initiative was added to Bogotá's Development Plan for the period 2008-2012 by the City's Council in the agreement 308 of 2008, under the activities outlined for Colombia's bicentennial of independence in 2010 — reason for which the institution was initially named *Bicentenary Centre of Memory, Peace and Reconciliation*. The project was not finished at the desired date, but the administrations that followed continued the project under the name Centre of Memory, Peace and Reconciliation.⁸⁶ This finally opened in December of 2012.⁸⁷

The Centre stands on a land that was once part of Bogotá's Central Cemetery. Simón Bolívar, Colombia's first president (the same who conceived the creation of the National Museum), ordered the construction of the graveyard in 1827 in the city's outskirts. Its design was based on social hierarchies: outstanding members of Bogotá's society were buried in the middle whereas poor citizens were buried in the surrounding areas. The main part of the cemetery still stands today, while the space intended for the poor was badly preserved and forgotten. However, urban renewal plans proposed the construction of parks in these areas, reason for which one part became the Revival Park and other the Reconciliation Park. The Center of Memory, Peace and Reconciliation is situated in the latter one.

Preliminary forensic works were done in these parks before the Centre's construction, because the area was also formerly a mass grave that contained corpses of the victims of the 9th of April of 1948. On this specific date a political leader called Jorge Eliecer Gaitán was murdered, and a massive riot exploded in the city. This event, commonly known as *El Bogotazo*, caused hundreds of deaths and a partially destroyed city. After the exhumation and the construction of the park a monument for the victims of this episode was built on the Revival Park. Similar works were done in the Reconciliation Park, where over 3,000 bodies were found.⁸⁸ The human remains, along with some clothes and objects (like crucifixes), help to narrate several aspects of living customs from the

⁸⁵ "Centro de Memoria", accessed August 2, 2014, <http://centromemoria.gov.co/centrodememoria/>

⁸⁶ Due to a corruption scandal within the city's administration. Samuel Moreno Rojas, the mayor of the time, was removed from office for his direct participation in transferring high amounts of public money for personal benefit; creating with this a severe crisis in the city's budget. For this reason, many of the city's projects stopped because of the lack of funding

⁸⁷ "Centro de Memoria", Op. Cit.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

past, reason for which some of these were later preserved. It is not entirely clear where these human remains and objects are stored, or if they are going to be eventually exhibited.

The coincidence of a prison turning into a museum was addressed in this thesis with the case study of the National Museum of Colombia. Theories of control, order, the surveillance of inmates and the formation of citizens were analyzed at this point. So what can be said about the fact the a cemetery became a Centre of Memory? The Centre of Memory, Peace and Reconciliation does not have the mandate or intention of working as a Museum, conceived under the traditional ideas of collecting and exhibiting. So in this specific case the issue is not between a cemetery turning into a museum, but rather a cemetery turning into a Centre for Memory. There are indeed several examples of the combination between cemeteries and the creation of collective memory, specially when it comes to the fallen of World War II. Cemeteries have been made throughout Europe and North America in order to honor the ones who lost their lives during the war. Long fields of green grass with consecutive and identical graves (or crosses) are consistent elements among all these. These cemeteries became memorials to honor the war's casualties — these are not museums, there are no collections or even exhibitions. These are sites where tribute is paid to the ones who died. These are places for solemnity.

The Colombian case study has certain specificities that makes it different from the previous examples of cemeteries and memorials. The Center of Memory, Peace and Reconciliation does not honor specifically the ones whose bodies rested in the former graveyard. There was no intention to create a memorial specifically for them, or to reflect upon the events that caused their deaths. Nevertheless, the coincidence that the Reconciliation Park was in the past a cemetery is not neglected by the Center. It rather becomes significant because it is used strongly in the Centre's narrative.

It was explained before, when analyzing memory, that Simonides de Ceos was able to identify corpses after an accident due to his great mnemonic skills. This act of memory served to stress the importance of such ability, and it set the foundation stone of the *Art of Memory* — remembering was then, related to the dead. The intention of the ancient Greek was to identify those who died only to demonstrate his superiority when it came to the act of memory. The Center of Memory, Peace and Reconciliation worked in the identification of those who were buried in the former cemetery, but it also works for the recognition and remembrance of those who have died due to the conflict. The Centre also seeks to reflect upon the causes and effects of the violence, with the intention of creating mechanisms that would support peace and reconciliation processes. Remembering is not a



Fig. 3

matter of the past, remembering is a matter of the future. These issues were even taken into account in the structure's design (Fig. 3).

Juan Pablo Ortiz, the architect who designed the Center, explains that "*the building is a monument to life, to the victims and to the hope of a peaceful future*"⁸⁹, reason for which different victims' organizations participated in several activities during its construction. For instance, they encapsu-

lated earth that belonged to different regions of Colombia in test tubes, and they later introduced them in some holes of the Centre's structure once it was finished (Fig. 4). The concept of using soil has an important significance, as the struggle for land tenure and its property is one of the main reasons that unleashed the internal armed conflict in Colombia. Traditional construction techniques that use soil were also used during the building process.

Several exhibitions and activities are organized by the institution. The Center works on projects planned for both its galleries and the open air (like parks and squares in Bogotá). This means that there are exhibitions displayed within the building, but that there are as well specific ac-



Fig. 4

tivities planned for public spaces within the city. A temporal exhibition was *Del 9 de Abril a los Diálogos de la Habana / From the 9th of April to Havana's Dialogues* which gave an overview of Colombia's recent history and a background of the Peace Talks that are taking place in Cuba.⁹⁰ This exhibition consisted of six separate spaces that address different moments in time. Domestic spaces and a café were recreated

⁸⁹ Posso, *Memoria. Centro de Memoria, Paz y Reconciliación*, 161.

⁹⁰ "A propósito del 9 de Abril", accessed August 5, 2014, <http://centromemoria.gov.co/proposito-del-9-de-abril-lecturas-y-videos/>

here to explain how certain events and news were discussed and received at certain moments of time. Objects like radios, television sets and several pieces of furniture were included in the staging of such places. The scenery was completed with a series of photos, videos and animations, where the narration about different aspects of the conflict was presented to the audience.

It must be pointed out that the exhibition's objects were anonymous. It was not explained to whom they belonged, or from where they were retrieved. The objects were just displayed to tell a story, but they didn't contain any particular history in themselves; no specific reflections were triggered by them. They were not directly linked with any specific event, or any person in particular. The intention of the exhibition was not to gather spectators around specific objects, but to create a stage where the visitor was able to "*observe and touch in order to recover suppressed, silenced and negated memories*".⁹¹ The main goal of this exhibition was to provide alternative versions of the official history.

The Centre lacks of a collection that could be used for exhibition purposes; but it was already clarified that this institution has no mandate to work as a museum based on objects. The Centre also works with temporary exhibitions where the displayed items are the result of workshops with the communities — an active participation of the victims is promoted by this institution. For instance, some activities intend to trigger discussions about the internal armed conflict and memory by drawing, painting, weaving, or even cooking. Photography exhibitions are also displayed in the Centre, but these do not focus solely on exhibiting material related to the Colombian context; as content from other conflicts is also presented in the institution. For instance, the photography exhibit *Yuyanapaq para recordar* / Yuyanapaq for Remembering that refers to the Peruvian Internal Armed Conflict was displayed by the institution.⁹² The Centre has also a good website, where the material regarding the exhibitions and workshops can be browsed.

Modern Art also plays a role in this Centre, as a replica of Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* made out from tiles is exhibited in its garden for just a couple of months. This object was donated to Bogotá by the administration of the city of Guernica, as a symbol of how art can react and reflect the suffering produced by violent acts. The fact that the Centre has a replica of a *Guernica* is of great significance, because this artwork is an icon that represents how art can react to the war's atrocities.

⁹¹ From the 9th of April to the Havana's Dialogues online information. <http://centromemoria.gov.co/portfolio-item/exposicion-del-9-de-abril-a-los-dialogos-de-la-habana/?lang=sp>

⁹² "Yuyanapaq, la exposición de la Comisión de la Verdad del Perú", accessed August 2, 2014, <http://centromemoria.gov.co/yuyanapc-la-exposicion-de-la-comision-de-la-verdad-del-peru-en-el-centro-de-memoria-paz-y-reconciliacion/>



Fig. 5

Next to the Centre there is also an artistic intervention made in 2009 by Beatriz González, who was the former chief curator of the Art and History collections of the National Museum of Colombia. The intervention is called *Auras Anónimas / Anonymous Auras*, and it was done on the columbariums of the former cemetery which were forgotten and almost demolished. The artwork consists of eight images that were repeated and placed on the vaults. Each represented two persons carrying a dead body (Figure 5 shows the Replica of the Guernica and *Auras Anonimas*). The artist used the idea of seriality in order to reflect upon all the violent deaths that are daily and repeatedly caused by the internal armed conflict.⁹³ This intervention was initially conceived by González to be ephemeral and later replaced with new projects from other artists, but this seems to have been neglected (it still stands today), and is strongly used in the discourse of the Center of Memory, Peace and Reconciliation.

It is explained in the Centre's mission and vision statements that promoting collective memory will help to understand the origins and causes of the conflict, while at the same time it is a tool that will help to achieve reconciliation and peace. It is also stressed by its director in institutional videos and publications that the Centre doesn't pursue the shaping of an official memory directed by the government, but rather it bases the shaping of the collective memory on the interaction with the victims: they have a big participation in this task. Collective memory is crafted by this institution with a strong component of victims' narratives and participation. As it was also the case of the National Center for Historic Memory. One thing that is worth noticing of the researches and publications of the Centre is that they are sponsored by the city's administration, and that they are more

⁹³ "Beatriz González", accessed August 3, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gjjZL9p6tXo>

focused on discussing and analyzing issues regarding memory. But yet, there is no investigation that has had a big impact on the country, such as the Enough is Enough report.

d. Museum House of Memory

Medellín is Colombia's second biggest city. Nowadays it is considered the country's most innovative city, that is leaving behind difficult times. Its reality has drastically shifted, from being considered a hopeless place in the eighties and the nineties due the drug cartel wars to become one of Colombia's most promising places. It is in this city that the Museum House of Memory is being built by an initiative of the city's administration, from an idea that flourished specifically from the *Armed Conflict Victim's Care Program* (created in 2005). In 2006 the city's administration included in its projects the construction of a place dedicated to honor the victims and harbor their memories. Curiously enough this project was also envisioned to become part of the works for Colombia's bi-centenary of independence: by locating it at the Bicentennial Park (which was going to be built for such events). The Museum was very well advertised in its initial stage as the first Museum House dedicated to the memory of the conflict, and it sought to become a place for social encounter.

The architecture of the project is very important for its narrative. The architect Jorge Gaviria explains that the building symbolizes a tunnel where reflections upon the internal armed conflict and the victims are made.⁹⁴ Both the Bicentennial Park and the Museum House of Memory were part of a urban renewal process, focused on the recuperation of water sources and social development. However, due to organizational problems and lack of financing the Museum is still not finished, though it was partially inaugurated in 2011 (Figure 6 shows the Museum's design and Figure 7 shows its actual state).

The lack of updated information on the Museum's website shows that work has been limited. News ranging from 2011 and 2013 also show the institutional crisis, specially when Carlos Uribe (the Museum's director) resigned his job claiming that there was a lack of support — in six months 20 staff members were reduced to 5, making the proper execution of projects impossible. The city's administration has still not given a proper budget to the Museum House of Memory to work at an operational level, reason for which many activities have been postponed. Despite these issues, the museum has worked on several expositions with topics regarding the conflict, mostly based on photographs and the participation of the community.

⁹⁴ <http://www.museocasadelamemoria.org/site/>



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

But one significant strategy that the Museum has been using, as a reaction to its institutional problems, is the organization of conferences and colloquiums where the local community can attend and discuss about the peace process. For instance, a forum organized in July and August of 2014 seeks to recollect proposal suggested by the community, which would be eventually presented to the stakeholders of the Peace Negotiations in Cuba. The initiatives of this

Museum seek to shape a collec-

tive memory based on victims' experiences, and on their direction participation on the peace building. It must also be added that several publications are offered in the institution's website, which are the same published by the National Center for Historic Memory. This shows how these two institutions share the produced knowledge, and it evidences that the National Center for Historic Memory is an authority in these matters.

c. Challenges

All the Museums and Centres addressed in this thesis have a strong social component in a context where violence is a pervasive element throughout society. Several academics have studied the role and authority of museums in contexts of inequality, stating the benefits that these institutions can provide. For instance, Richard Sandell points out that *"Museums have provided an enabling, creative, perhaps less threatening forum through which community members can gain the skills and confidence required to take control and play an active, self-determining role in their community's future"*⁹⁵, while Dawn Casey states that *"Museums(...) are becoming more inclusive and accessible, and establishing themselves quite consciously as a forum for the debate of contem-*

⁹⁵ Sandell, *Museums and the Combating of Social Inequality*, 99.

porary issues”.⁹⁶ However, these approaches come along with new challenges that need to be solved, as the “*acceptance of the social and moral agency of the museum as an institution raises innumerable complex issues for those who work with them. Issues of balance, partiality and moral judgment are those that many museums are already grappling with*”.⁹⁷ These issues don’t escape the case studies presented in this thesis, as the vertiginous current political and social affairs have an impact on the work of the cultural institutions.

The work that is being done by the previous institutions is relevant for Colombian society. They address sensitive issues with the intention of analyzing and explaining a war that has lasted for more than fifty years, with the purpose of reporting the events to society. This is done in order to set the ground for a more peaceful and tolerant society. This sounds very nice, but the case studies have to face difficult challenges that affect their works and results. Five mayor challenges that these case studies have to overcome are: funding, truth, oblivion, narratives and collections.

-Funding

All the initiatives that have been discussed in this thesis have indeed good intentions, but they cannot work based on just good will. The Museum House of Memory is an example of how there is a booming of initiatives that strive to work for the victims of the internal armed conflict and the clarification of the events, but that despite the desire to achieve these goals there are administrative and economical issues that affect the good performance of these institutions. This is why one main challenge that these establishments have to face is the scarcity of resources. This is one issue that these case studies have to analyze thoroughly, specially because their workings must start reaching even citizens of the country. These institutions will have to keep on growing in a post-conflict scenario, in order to have contact with even more communities and address problems that have been not tackle until now.

-Truth

Other challenge that these institutions must face carefully raises from the concept of truth. One thing that characterizes the case studies is that they strive to examine the internal armed conflict from distinct perspectives, but also that they are all link to governmental institutions (either the State or local administrations). This dependance to certain official establishments may infer in their

⁹⁶ Casey, *Museums as Agents for Social and Political Change*, 292.

⁹⁷ Sandell, Op, Cit., 109.

analysis. It seems that truth is addressed in a very narrow way, and is not considered yet that each stakeholder believes to own the valid one. Each possesses its own perspective of the events, so the quest is to retrieve these multiple truths (according to their holders) and counterpose them in such a fashion that it wouldn't trigger any more rage, hatred and violence. The different truths that can sprout from the present sociopolitical situation should be confronted, analyzed and corroborated, in order to merge them in an inclusive narrative. The case studies have designed exhibitions and published researches that address the conflict from different perspectives, but one issue that must not be forgotten is that the war is still ongoing, so there is still no historical distance from which the events could be studied more objectively. Things that are now still ignored or forgotten may be addressed in the future, and truth can change with time.

The point is that the institutions should take into account that future historical revision may study issues that just cannot be examined today, or that even may change the present analysis. It is commonly said that history is written by the winners, but in this case history will be written from a story of several stakeholders that weren't able to defeat each other. These previous considerations lead to think that the Colombian Museums and Centres have to be more transparent in their workings, by always taking into account and acknowledging that their workings and modes of filtering and organizing information may affect the knowledge, the memory and the representation of the conflict, and most importantly: the truth.

-Oblivion

The Colombian cultural institutions should also be more meticulous with the study of collective memory. Valuable and courageous efforts are indeed being done at the moment by these Museums and Centres in order to recover from oblivion things that Colombian society is neglecting, as it was already stressed out. But two relevant aspects of memory that seem to have been ignored by the case studies is that memory can be distorted by the work of the institutions, and that in order to remember other things should be forgotten. Memories may be deformed when serving the purposes of an establishment, and also when entering the framework of the present.⁹⁸ Not everything will be remembered, not all the stories can be directly included in a shared narrative, so collective memory should be carefully analyzed because certain issues will inevitably slip from memory.

⁹⁸ Halbwach, *On Collective Memory*, 47.

The act of remembering in a collectivity comes along with the act of forgetting, which was crucial in the conformation of the Nation according to Ernest Renan. For him “*the essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common, and also that they have forgotten many things*”⁹⁹ because certain traits of heritage and individuality needed to be put aside in order to conform a larger conglomerate, and also because the process of state building was brutal and violent. Hence, there were certain harsh facts that needed to be erased in order to create a common feeling. He explains as well that: “*The modern nation is therefore the historical result brought about by a series of convergent facts*”¹⁰⁰, so forgetting was a tool that made the merging of certain events easier. There is a tension between memory and forgetting, so the institutions that deal with a social remembrance in Colombia must be transparent with this issue. They make a strong moral call for avoiding oblivion of the war’s horrors, so difficult negotiations between what can be remembered and what could be forgotten may arise. There is an evident desire to remember in order to never repeat the atrocities, as it is explicitly stated by the Museum House of Memory, so the task is to discriminate what can be then remembered with the intention of avoiding its repetition. This is perhaps a challenge that may sound tough, or even arrogant, but is an issue that should be strongly taken into account. Otherwise false expectations of the scope of collective memory are being harvested among Colombians.

How to use the Collective Memory and the oblivion are also challenges that the Case Studies have to carefully analyze. Barbara Misztal explains that collective memory can be used in an open or closed way.¹⁰¹ The former refers to a usage of memory that seeks to separate history from myths and national propaganda, for enabling trust relationships and cooperative relationships. The latter refers to a perspective where memory doesn't include different points of view, and that is highly mediated by particular interests. In this sense the task that the Colombian Cultural Institutions have is to continue with an open use of the collective memory.

-Narratives

Colombians are still strongly divided in those who support a peace negotiation and those who back military actions. One challenge that the case studies have to overcome is the creation of a strong narrative that can include the different point of views with balance. Andreas Huyssen ex-

⁹⁹ Renan, *What is a Nation*, 11.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁰¹ Misztal, *Memory and Democracy*, 1331.

plains that “*many museums still have trouble adjusting to their new role as cultural mediators in an environment in which demands for multiculturalism and the realities of migrations and demographic shifts clash increasingly with ethnic strife, cultural racisms, and a general resurgence of nationalism and xenophobia*”¹⁰², so the Colombian Cultural Institutions have the task to keep adjusting themselves as cultural mediators.

The inclusion of different histories and memories is a challenge that these institutions have to tackle. This is indeed very sensitive issues within museum studies, as it is difficult to “*decide who deserves a hearing, and how much weight their opinion bears*”.¹⁰³ Some questions that these institutions must try to answer meticulously and constantly are: Whose stories are kept? What version is shared? Whose voice is predominant? How are the offenders’ perspectives included? So far the Museums and Centres started to approach the conflict from a macro perspective, and efforts are being done to identify some local aspects of the war by stressing the relevance of the victims' stories and perspective. This is not as simple as it sounds, as it is yet very difficult to determine who the victims are. At the present time there is a big debate in the country regarding this matter, as the inclusion of them in the Peace Talks in Cuba is being discussed by the stakeholders. There is still no consensus of whom or which organization should rightfully represent the victims, or even there is still no common agreement of who can be considered as a victim; questions about this issue are publicly been done. For instance the following question is discussed now: Can the army’s soldiers be considered and recognized as victims? The difficulty of defining who the victims are adds a challenge to the inclusion of diverse narratives within the cultural institutions. Also, the inclusion of the perspective of the ones who committed the crimes (the government and the illegal groups) is still very sensitive, reason for which achieving a consensus of how to include them in a shared narrative is quite difficult.

The narrative's challenge expands when other non-official sources start to compete (as for instance the entertainment business). A common situation that is noticeable in Colombian television since a couple of years ago is that topics regarding the conflict are now the theme of soap operas, series, and movies; which change and distort many significant aspects of reality for the sake of a higher rating. The spectators are not fully aware of this, and fiction is being interpreted as history. The Colombian Museums and centers have to compete with this type of entertainment, that have addressed the topics in a much faster and effective manner. This is indeed a very difficult challenge,

¹⁰² Huyssen, Op. Cit., 35.

¹⁰³ Dubin, *Culture Wars*, 483.

because these entertainment channels have a more immediate contact with the majority of the population.

The Colombian institutions should design more strategies in order to improve their reach. The case studies have the challenge to design and implement more educational activities, and thus gain a more broader audience, like: kids, teenagers and the elderly. Each group requires a specific type of approach, so these establishments have to start working upon this issue by creating educational material for a wide range of people. So far, the produced content seems to be focused mainly for the academic circles, and not yet for communities or citizen from rural areas. In order to accomplish this the case studies should start working with focus groups, in order to identify the needs of specific groups.

Other aspect that should be added is that the Museums and Centres need to study thoroughly other examples where wars, conflicts and collective memory were narrated by similar institutions in other countries. Work done by South African Museums regarding the end of the Apartheid can serve as examples of how inclusive narratives were designed by cultural institutions. Holocaust museums can also help to guide the work of Colombian case studies, as pointed out by Beatriz Gonzalez.¹⁰⁴ But what can these last would help to frame the work done in Colombia?

One study that is worth noticing about the Holocaust Museums and their place in both European and a global context is *Memorylands*, written by Sharon Macdonald.¹⁰⁵ In this book she analyzes how memories regarding the evens of the Holocaust transcended national borders to become what she called a *cosmopolitan memory*.¹⁰⁶ This concept refers to a memory that doesn't belong anymore to a specific community or collectivity, but that it rather became part of a transnational remembrance. This has had a huge impact on society in a global scale, as the *cosmopolitan memories* from the Holocaust have been used as *discursive frame* for any atrocity.¹⁰⁷ This means that different struggles around the world have looked at the Holocaust as an example to come up with strategies that would respond to more local necessities — as the case of the present Colombian situation.

¹⁰⁴ “Beatriz González”, accessed August 2, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gjjZL9p6tXo>

¹⁰⁵ Macdonald, *Memorylands*.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 188.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, 190.

Macdonald explains that one fundamental issue of the *cosmopolitan memory* is that there is a shift from a social memory, based on biographical experiences, to a cultural memory that is mediated by representations.¹⁰⁸ Mass media communication were central for this change, as television and films reproduced the narration of the Holocaust at a global level — there was then a globalization of memory.¹⁰⁹ There is a big difference of how media has played a role in both the European and Colombian context, as in the old continent it helped to boost memory, whereas in the South American nation it is distorting the narration. This is a challenge that the case studies have to face, because the stories regarding the internal armed conflict are use to sell, rather than to create awareness and consciousness. In Colombia social memory is not shifting to cultural memory, but rather is shifting to fiction (that can be easily forgotten). The task is then to strengthen a collective memory that would address properly the internal armed conflict, and that slowly would become part of Colombian Culture. This point is significant, because collective memory in the South American is in its dawn.

Elements that can be taken as example of the Holocaust Museum, that could be significant for the Colombian case studies, are: how the narration of the events have changed with time, how the principle of *never again* has reached a broader scope, how awareness about the war has crept into the mind set of the population, and how history and heritage fit into a post-war reconciliation context.¹¹⁰

-Collections

The National Museum of Colombia is the institutions that has gathered most of the objects related to the internal armed conflict. The other Museums and Centres exhibit mostly photographs or other printer material. The Center of Memory, Peace and Reconciliation is not interested in starting a collection based on objects, as they don't want to work as a museum. The problem with this is that they have a traditional understanding of what a museum is, by considering these as places that only collect and exhibit objects. But museums nowadays are more vibrant establishments, that seek to have a major impact upon their visitors. Museums are not longer any more places for the muses, where the knowledge was simply learnt. These institutions have shifted over time, as it was explained before, and the way collections are built has also shifted. Objects are collected and dis-

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 189

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 211.

played by cultural institutions in order to trigger questions, to start discussions, and create associations. It is for this reason that the case studies have the challenge to update their approach towards collecting, and they should revise the concept of what a museum is. In this sense, the Colombian institutions should be more active in Museum Studies.

The fact that these Museums and Centres reflect upon the war when the conflict is still ongoing is something that may be useful in this aspect. The institutions work directly with communities that have a direct contact with the struggle, so they have access to a good source of objects that can start being analyzed. The case studies can work hand in hand with local communities to identify such objects that could help to reflect upon the war; the challenge is to start identifying the objects.

4. Conclusion

The pursuit of peace in Colombia is pushing different sectors of society to reflect upon the internal armed conflict, and cultural institutions are starting to be more active in these matters. The case studies examined in this thesis showed how certain Museums and Centres seek to analyze the war by designing exhibitions, crafting a collective memory around the victims' perspective and by publishing researches. These Museums and Centres have reflected upon the conflict by looking into what has been historically neglected from the war, with the idea of including voices that were not heard in order to create a comprehensive narration of the events.

The architecture and location of these institutions is significant, as these elements add meaning and sense to the work they carry on. The exhibitions that are organized by the case studies are characterized by the usage of photography, and the scarcity of objects. The victims' experiences and stories are strong components from which a collective memory is shaped by these establishments. Most of the researches and publications study the conflict from a general point of view, but this has opened the possibility to start investigating more local phenomenas. Despite this there are still a number of challenges that these institutions have to face in order to ensure that society will benefit from their work.

Colombia is at a verge of a social and political transformation where a new type of society may start to be crafted, and culture is an important element in this process. A transformation to a more tolerant country, that would accept its difference with peace and not deny them with violence, can be shaped with the support of cultural institutions — these can analyze the problems from its roots and not from the surface. The work of Museums and Centres can provide content that would explain better the internal armed conflict, and from which the recognition of certain neglected issues can be done. It is true that peace is still uncertain in the present Colombian context, but never in recent Colombian history an end to the conflict seemed that close.

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Abstract

The objective of this research is to analyze four Colombian museums and centres whose missions and visions are related to the country's violent context. These are: the National Museum of Colombia, the National Center for Historic Memory, the Center of Memory, Peace and Reconciliation and the Museum House of Memory. These institutions strive to *stage* the conflict by organizing exhibitions of diverse nature. They also seek to *shape* a collective memory that intends to create awareness about the war's atrocities (by stressing that such horrors should never happen again). Another task that all these institutions share is to *report* on the country's history and current affairs regarding the conflict, by providing knowledge and publishing researches that would help to better explain the armed struggle.

This thesis aims to answer the following research question: *How have the National Museum of Colombia, the National Center for Historic Memory, The Center of Memory, Peace and Reconciliation and the Museum House of Memory reflected upon the war in Colombia in order to stage the conflict, shape a collective memory and report it?* In order to tackle the research question efficiently and clearly this thesis is divided in three main chapters: *collective memory, institutions, and conclusion.*

Collective Memory was chosen for this research because it addresses explicitly the idea that a collectivity is involved in the act of remembrance, and that the shaping of the mnemonics is not something that is only instructed from a higher social institution but rather is molded by the interaction of the individuals that belong to a social group.

The longing for peace is pushing Colombian museums and related centres to analyze the sociopolitical events, because it is commonly thought that these are the institutions that have the authority to create knowledge, narrate history, report upon problems and preserve memories by collecting objects. However, these types of institutions should not be taken for granted. The way knowledge is weaved, how collective memory is shaped, and how war is represented are issues questioned in this paper, rather than being accepted as a given truths.

All the Museums and Centres addressed in this thesis have a strong social component in a context where violence is a pervasive element throughout society, and several challenges arise from this aspect. Five mayor challenges that these case studies have to overcome are: funding, truth, oblivion, narratives and collections The studied institutions have to face a these in order to ensure that society will benefit from their work.

Colombia is at a verge of a social and political transformation where a new type of society may start to be crafted, and culture is an important element in this process. A transformation to a more tolerant country, that would accept its difference with peace and not deny them with violence, can be shaped with the support cultural institutions.