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## Journalism and Memory: Strategic Scenarios in a Transitional Horizon in the Colombian Context

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### ABSTRACT

The journalistic record is a “pharmaco” for a memory that “illuminates” as much as “obscures”. This study analyzes the role of journalism and memory as strategic and essential scenarios to promote democratic exercises that strengthen eventual political transition in Colombia. The study concludes that the journalism has not resolved the problem of studying the past related to armed conflict in the country. Based on a content analysis of different journalistic records, this study suggests that journalism Colombian not have had a relevant impact to understand that disruptive, violent and lurid past don't have repeated again.

**Keywords:** Communication, journalism, memory, narrative transition.

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“Information of what is happening elsewhere, called «news», highlights conflicts and violence –«if there is blood, goes first» states the hoary guideline of the sensational press and news programs that give off headlines twenty four hours a day – to which is answered with indignity, compassion, excitement or approval, while each misery is posted in full view”

(Sontag, 2011: 23).

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## 1.0 Presentation

By the end of the year 2010 some attached researchers to the *Peace/Conflict Communications* group from the faculty of Social Communication of Santo Tomás University, began a series of reflections about memory. Discussions were materialized in a document<sup>2</sup>, in which, roughly, three possible exploratory routes were posed in order to address the topic from the angle of communication<sup>3</sup>. Initial interest had as a starting point to recognize certain boom in the research, academic, and above all, political agenda of the country in topics related with the memory field, but also to problematize some approaches that, in line with the regulatory framework of law 975 of 2005 or Justice and Peace law and law 1148 of 2011 or Victims and Land Restitution law, conceive «memory» as a fundamental and strategic scenario to achieve, among others, the “reconciliation” and “peace” in a transitional horizon without transition (Uprimny, 2006).

In the document two aspects were also recognized which we still are considering top issues: On one hand, the understanding that the studies on the memory field imply a complex approach in relation with the political, social and armed conflict that this country is experiencing, especially in the discrepancies in the diverse interests that are registered in the way of approaching one, or more, linked past(s) that deal with what we call “internal armed conflict”; on the other hand, the recognition that in the studies there is also a compulsive obsession in working with narratives regarding pain that precisely emerge of the different types of violence experiences, a path that most of the groups devoted to the topics of memory take. Therefore and without ignoring the importance, for the country, of the analysis and reflection of multiple voices, narrations and aspects that emerge from the grotesque armed conflict, it was drawn to attention to extend the approaches to other social frameworks, understanding that memory is the warp of collective identities.

In exploring the proposed paths on that initial page, concern bursts in reflect on the fields of journalism and memory, understanding that both are essential and strategic scenarios for facing processes – mainly political and legal- that have been legitimizing little by little the idea of a transition conducive to overcome the internal armed conflict. Law 975 of 2005, or Justice and Peace law, law 1448 of 2011 or Victims and Land Restitution law and the Peace Legal Framework are, for now, the only guide on the subject.

Regarding journalism, without a doubt this is a vital field in strengthening democracy in moments in which Colombia “bets”, one more time, for a negotiated outcome with the main rebel group that the country has got –Revolutionary Armed Forces Of Colombia, People’s Army (FARC-EP)– to reach a political agreement that ends with their demobilization. The political and social transition that has to keep in step with the negotiation also has to find in the field of journalism a predominant referent so that paraphrasing [Benedict Anderson \(1993\)](#); it can (re)build the country as a community that imagines itself united about peace and reconciliation yearnings.

The role of the memory, on the other hand, turns out to be also fundamental for two reasons: first, it is necessary to assume a past related to the internal armed conflict as a conflictive matter, not resolved, that requires to be worked on, to overcome that combination that [Jesús Martín-Barbero \(2009\)](#) calls

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<sup>2</sup> Central theses to both documents were condensed afterwards in the “Memory and narration: warps of collective identities”, published in the *Hallazgos* research magazine, edition number 17.

<sup>3</sup> First route recognizes a purpose on common work between both fields: promote processes that redound in the political empowerment of the subjects in social scenarios, assuming memory as a job that requires an agency so that the build senses about the past are established towards political, social and historical grievances from different communities, specially subordinate sectors. In accordance with this, the second route recognizes that in the works about memory there are some senses in dispute laying behind that find in communication different ways in which legitimize, discuss, challenge or reject different versions regarding past events. There lies the importance of taking the media, including those that are part of the communities, to understand the immersed logic in the production, circulation and consumption. The last route focuses on oral history, in which memory and communication are substantial elements; nevertheless, the paragraph emphasizes in authors and experiences that take us to a long-term temporality, in which memory is part of rituals, ceremonies, chants, myths as representation and reproduction ways of a not so recent past. ([Gómez y Reyes, 2012: 161 – 180](#)).

amnesia and amnesty, but also to bring about basic open and public reflections that will enable Colombian society to understand that there are “realities” from that past that must not be repeated; in accordance with this, a second reason is in recognizing that works in the memory field have to contribute so that this disruptive, violent and rough past can be narrated, told or reported from different voices, including those from the perpetrators, to make it intelligible in present and future times.

In consequence the chapter is developed in two sections: on the first one reflections are made about the journalistic registration as a pharmaceutical device that in the memory code has the ability to “enlighten” as well as “darken”; in the second one reflection is focused on the field of journalism and its possibilities as the social memory agency, to provide debate and deliberation.

## 2.0 Literature review

### 2.01 Journalistic registration as a pharmaceutical device

Reviewing the literature about the role of journalism in contemporary consumerist societies or, from the other side, when one has the opportunity of speaking with mass media reporters and writers, there is no doubt in qualifying the journalistic work as another way of making history (to tell the present history, some say) since this job contributes to visualize situations that in any other way will be relegated to oblivion (Amado, 2010; De Fontcuberta, 2006; Martini, 2004; Stanford, 1994). Journalists, also, consider that their registration integrates a heritage that will allow building in the future a bridge with the past, offering elements from which it is possible to rebuild events that marked an era.

Nevertheless, from other scenarios assessments tend to be diametrically opposed. Walter Benjamin, for example, accused the press’s speech as a detonator in the death of narrative inasmuch as the production of information indulges verifiability and, therefore, is not memorable (2008: 218), whereas Jorge Luis Borges and Ernesto Sábato didn’t doubt to point out that what is written in the newspapers is there to be forgotten because insignificant events are reported (Barone, 1996: 115). The truth is that precisely those newspapers full of information are archived and accumulated in different places (specially libraries, documentation centers, archive centers,) so they can be consulted, ratifying the idea of press records, as with any other type of records, are made up of documents and sources of information. But how to understand these journalistic records that, under languages and genres, are different both in the possibilities they bring to delve in contextual aspects and in the ways of informing, describing, narrate and, most important of all, build events?

The thesis in which I am interested in arguing is that journalistic registration is a pharmaceutical device that in the processes of production, circulation and recognition (Verón, 1993)<sup>4</sup> has the ability to “enlighten” as well as “darken”. But, when does the journalistic registration “enlightens” or darkens” over those constructed “realities”?

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<sup>4</sup> Following Eliseo Verón (1993), journalistic speeches, as other text identified within the social field, are a “textual package” in which you can trace multiple marks and trails that derive from different determination levels. The journalistic speech is part of a logic that forces to recognize the articulation among its *production*, its *circulation* and its *consumption*. To understand all the discursive operations implies to confront two ways in which underlie two types of reading: on one hand, the production of the speech –linked to a reading of the process of its generation- and, on the other, the consumption –linked to a reading of reception-. Consequently, Verón specifies that the operation of every speech depend on two types of grammars: the *production grammar* and *recognition grammar*. In that outline is important to take into account three notions that compose the *production* and *recognition grammars*. The first notion is *operational*, understood as the relation that exists between the speech and the social and historical conditions that produce it. These social and historical conditions leave *trails* in the speech, which allows its reconstruction. Afterwards, the *trails* become in *production* or *recognition footprints*, understood as indexes that establish a specific relationship with the speech. (Verón, 1993: 129). The *operational* notion, therefore, is overlapped in the speech concept in itself evolving as a social and historical product. Regarding the field of journalism, Verón states that press speeches posses an additional element that draws them apart form other social speeches: they are characterized by a process of production and instant consumption, in which historical remoteness among the production and recognition grammars is practically non-existent. In this sense, the journalistic speeches, as part of a widely disseminated field, are defined by society as a service in which they are an expression of a social act of consumption. (Verón, 1993: 20 – 21).

The metaphor has its base in Jacques Derrida's essay "Plato's Pharmacy" (1975) where the final Egyptian myth that appears in the end of *Fredo* is analyzed in relation with the origin writing as an invention for memory<sup>5</sup>. One of the main thesis in the essay is in rejecting the platonic argument that considers the drug from the dichotomy of remedy/poison, benefit/harmful, true/false, essence/appearance, interior/exterior, life/death; Derrida considers that writing escapes this oppositions because it is put together as a supplement (*hypomnesis*) to which one uses due that the memory of men is finite and requires writing to activate itself. Therefore, writing, according to Derrida, does not possess a determined and character of its own, it is ambivalent (1975: 166). Without ignoring that the journalistic registration does not escape to this ambivalence, especially when the material for analysis is formed by records that are read from a «here» and from «now», it is also clear that news, chronicles and reports are statements whose analysis allows to identify meanings and purpose (Nunan, 1993: 7).

## 2.02 Journalism as scenario to promote debate and deliberation

In June 2014 law 975 or Justice and Peace law turned eight since its validation. Therefore, one could ask: Which political and social impacts have arisen from the confessional testimonies of the formal members of the Calima division from the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia? Which has been the debate and which the discussion that the confessions have promoted? Has this debate been possible? What impact has had the judicial protocol of limiting the dissemination of the confessional testimonies on the basis of ensuring the procedural law principle of the confidentiality of the legal proceedings? What has been the role of journalism in the Law and Peace framework?

In my point of view, in the Colombian context the discussion about Law and Peace as a transitional effort has taken paths that have not been very productive. Despite the holes that the norm can have, maybe the main problem is in some enunciation places that, Leigh Payne (2009), are located on opposite sides: on one side you find the ones who distrust about everything the perpetrators can say and some public figures associated with some of the armed rebel groups<sup>6</sup>; this position would bet for silencing the perpetrators that only look to justify their crimes, in which case everything said, not said or that could be said is ignored; on the other side you find the ones that defend the confession model, arguing that the free versions of the perpetrators have produced tangible results like the confession of more than 25 thousand homicides, more than a thousand massacres, more than 13 thousand files sent to ordinary justice to be investigated, among others, members of the public force, officers and/or political leaders for their links with the confessed events.

What stands between both of them are, in most of the occasions, moralizing discursive postures that end in the simple but devastating disqualification. What is most clearly perceived in that sterile discussion are the figures that have been produced by the advancement in the judicial processes of Justice and Peace; always impressive figures and, therefore, attractive to some journalistic speeches that reduce the "violence" to a cause/effect in an armed, political and social tension expressed in the number of murder victims, disappeared, displaced people, tortured and other human rights violations.

The reflection, as indicated also by L. Payne, should not go through for what the perpetrators say, not say, reveal, silence or forget. Their confessional stories will always be scripts that do not escape to multiple interests at stake (2009: 5). Reflection should pass through the debates and discussion that

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<sup>5</sup> Briefly, in the platonic myth, Socrates convinces Fedro of the superiority of speaking over writing is referring to the myth that narrates its origin, where god/inventor *Theuth* has to justify before the god/king *Thamus* his inventions, including writing. The latter is presented by *Theuth* as a *pharmakon* for the memory and wisdom, meaning, as a cure or remedy against a memory that for men is deficient. *Thamus*, nevertheless, senses that writing as a *pharmakon* has the opposite effect, it damages what apparently is beneficial at first, because writing will make men forgetful, because their capacity to remember won't come from the inside but from the outside through the footprints found in writing (1975: 154). In consequence, the god/king *Thamus* decides that writing, as a *pharmakon* is poison.

<sup>6</sup> A good example of this is what the ex-president figure of Álvaro Uribe Vélez represents, a sector of society sees him as one of the promoters of paramilitarism in Colombia in recent history, but also seen from another sector as the "savior" that stopped insurgency and demobilized paramilitarism through its "democratic safety" policy.

the confessions should promote in public realm to give way to a *contentious coexistence* dialogue. The reflection/discussion should go through what the confessions literally communicate, understanding that those things they communicate is not a “common” matter for all of the Colombian society. And precisely, for not being a “common” matter for everyone is that debates and deliberations are important, having as a foundation what the perpetrators are saying or leave unsaid in Justice and Peace.

In that exercise of *contentious coexistence* Payne, following Vivian Patraka, distinguishes between the scenario/site of representation and the space of representation. The scenarios and places of representation also mold the type of confession of the perpetrators making possible that they deny, keep silent or claim amnesia before a court of law expecting to evade a guilty verdict from it, meanwhile in an scenario of negotiation and agreement such as the one in Justice and Peace is possible that other type of confessional testimonies are promoted in which repentance and denouncement can emerge; in cases in which the confessions are made for a journalistic scenario, heroic, sadistic or exaggerated versions stand out.

On the contrary, in the space of representation several meanings and interpretations stand out from the confessional testimonies (Edelman, cited by Payne: 22) and, for that precise characteristic, the meanings of the past are controverted and remade (Auslander, cited by Payne: 23). The space of representation allows the participation of other political sectors (journalism, victims, survivors, human rights organizations, etc.) that appropriate the space of representation to discuss, challenge or overthrow what is happening. That is why it is usual that in the Justice and Peace public hearings survivors and victims’ carry communicative pieces, usually audiovisual, to request the judge to present them when they do not agree with what the perpetrators have said. In other processes of Justice and Peace, even, those present have interrupted undoubtedly the public hearings to challenge the versions of the perpetrators, accompanying their voices with posters with different rejection slogans.

In a broader horizon that space of representation has in the mass media, especially journalistic media, a very important faction due to the mediation power they possess. There are not many attendees to the Justice and Peace public hearings –most of them with a particular interest–, which imply that in the social field the testimonies and confessions that circulate are recognized thru the journalistic records. Those testimonies in the media, in which editing and selection processes of the registered material have taken place, become the confessional fact and not the interpretation of it. The main purpose, therefore, is that journalistic representations become scenarios through which the public discuss the political importance of the confessions made by the perpetrators regarding past violence, even when there are interested meanings that, in any way, can be refuted. In that context, journalism is a decisive scenario in political and social transitional frameworks. (Payne: 23).

### 3.0 Methodology

The corpus consists of journalistic records of the more important newspapers of Colombia in a methodological perspective that has two components: 1) textual analysis of the records in its phase production; 2) analysis of representations and meanings that underlie records. The methodological design is developed in two phases (Prieto, 1985):

- a) An descriptive phase that have to both the location of records to be analyzed as characterization as: titles, publication dates, journalistic genre and the location within the body of the newspapers.
- b) An analytical phase is formed by four parts, that included by the logic of production records. The following diagram shows the path traced:



Figure 3.1 Resources for analysis

Phase	Component	Features
Basic Structure	Ideas core	Central themes of the record. That is manifest or latent.
	What is said and not said	The record does not tell everything. The analysis identifies what is said and not is said
	Classification	Expressions to classify actors, actions and places.
Narrative structure	Identifying actors	Identification of subjects that appear on the record: people, places or institutions.
	Identifying actions	What it is said of the actors?
	Identification of locations	Social, geographic, institutional and symbolic environments.
Structure of style	Platitude	Expressions that are repeated to set up "common places".
	Amplification	Resource that highlights characters, situations or places in the record.
	Ambiguity	Ambiguous expressions (for example "dark forces")
Ideological structure	Mono and polyphony	One or more voices in the registry.
	All expressed	A single version in the record
	Opposition	Schemes opposition in the registry

#### 4.0 Results and discussion

To understand this journalistic register as a pharmaceutical device –meaning, as a supplement that eventually allows overtaking exercises of re-construction and re-definition of the past–, a way to follow is on the side of the genres, identifying at the beginning three levels<sup>7</sup>.

**a) News registration:** Journalistic information has as an objective to account for a series of events considered as «relevant», the news being the main base of the job. Despite that it constitutes in itself a register that is characterized by description, it is impossible to talk about news that, in itself, is a supplement for the memory; even and depending on the described event, it can be discussed if the data offered allows to activate the memory for future remembrance, even distinguishing the recalling act with the reconstructing act. Journalists know that news is of a limited kind of structure –the famous inverted pyramid–, that –when organizing hierarchically the information according to the importance of the data available– aims to offer a quick and brief reading that in most occasions has removed context. Based on present time, news do not offer any possibility so that the journalist and the reader can deepen in the topic that is informed and described. In some cases and according to the deployment the topic has in the journalistic agenda, the reading will demand and informed reader (Verón, 2002), being he the one who provides the context of the information embodied in the newspaper page. It is inferred that the degree of difficulty for a partial or total comprehension of the news will be proportional with time, since the referent will blur until it disappears, transforming the journalistic description, in most of the cases, unintelligible. On this first level news become a register that provides data<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Without a doubt another path to follow is within the representations that underlie in the journalistic registers; representations whose analysis allows concluding that in these registers a pharmaceutical device is configured which “enlightens” as well as “darkens”. It is not in my interest to go deeper about this in the present chapter, but is important to not lose sight the importance of asking about the *ethos* of the journalistic speech.

<sup>8</sup> An interesting example is found in the work of [Adriana Schryver Kurtz](#) –“Journalism and memory of the victims of Shoah” (2009)–, who reflects upon the relationship between the two areas taking as a unity of analysis a plain journalistic note publish on the 22 of September 1981 on *Der Tagesspiegel* newspaper about the extinct German Federal. From the press note the story of Felice Rahel Schragenheim is reconstructed and made public, who died in Auschwitz concentration camp in 1944, through the testimony of

**b) Chronicles, interviews, columns and editorials:** A second level configures when the journalistic exercise works after other genres in which one/several context/s underlie in the informative treatment. The main difference with the first level is in the possibility that those modalities offer so that the journalist can deepen in the multiple aspects that can wrap an event, and that it delivers the necessary elements for its reading and comprehension. Adjusted to an interpretation framework and to a specific historical moment, this type of production, nevertheless, does not constitute in itself the recording of the memory. Although the story is more intelligible, especially when its revision is done from a temporal distance, the chronicle or interview inevitably will turn in documents that, as records that provide data or records «for history», will be at the researchers disposal so they can remove them from the files according to the interests anchored to the present<sup>9</sup>. That press that carries out its job in dictatorial or totalitarian political contexts in which censorship prevails does not escape this dynamic; despite that their job is projected as an «alternative» opposite to the «official press» that hides or silences, its dynamic its inscribed facing political and social imbricated interests with a «here» and a «now». It occurred in Argentina a month after judicial hearings against ex commanders from the last dictatorship (1976 – 1983 began, when *The Journal of the Trial* was released (may 1985) as a weekly publication that along the way covered the sessions and published the transcripts of the testimonies (Feld, 2002: 25 – 26). A similar experience arises in Colombia in 2008 when the Fundación Ideas para la Paz (Ideas for Peace Foundation) and *Semana* magazine, supported by the Friedrich Ebert–Fescol and Avina foundations, assemble an strategic alliance to create the web portal (Verdadabierta.com) that has been publishing documents, news, chronicles, testimonies and stories related with paramilitary group activities. Political situations are linked with the development of Law 975 of 2005 (Justice and Peace law) that allowed that perpetrators and victims could begin to offer their testimonies to judicial authorities. In this regard, Verdadabierta.com is considered as an information source for a better understanding of the paramilitary phenomenon in its diverse dimensions, assigning to itself the authority of laying the foundations of what in a future will be the truth.

**c) The report:** A third level is represented by the report as a genre characterized by its research as a journalistic exercise. When setting as a purpose to unravel past events, it offers new readings and perspectives to episodes that once where condemned to silence or did not emerge to the public, allowing activating the memory in a present time. Is illustrated, just to name some relevant examples related with the southern cone dictatorships, the works of Chilean José Miguel Varas –*Neruda and Damocles' egg* (1991); *Illegal Neruda* (2003); the Argentinian Horacio Verbistky –*Third World War Last Battle* (1984), *Ezeiza* (1985); *Dirty post-war* (1985); Uruguayan Samuel Blixen –*Condors' Womb* (1994); *Sendic. Lives of a Tupamaro* (2005); *Liber Seregni, Peoples' General. Military Against Uruguayan Dictatorship* (2010). A recent example in the Colombian affair is represented by Germán Castro Caicedo's research *The Palace Without Masks*, published by Planeta in 2008, that, starting from the testimonies entered in the archives of the judicial processes, reconstructs the two days that the occupation of the palace of justice lasted (six and seven of November 1985) by the insurgent group M-19, and its subsequent retrieval with “blood and fire” by the military armed forces, and contributes novel elements that invite to a (re)reading of the event to the extent that meanings are presented which grow apart from the judicial investigation and official reports including the one from the Truth Commission from 2009.

It is clear that this type of journalistic works in their process of inquiry and realization drink from the press registers as archive documents described in the previous levels, backing away from that information production logic that is not in vain accused of favoring a fragmented representation of the events it describes (Martín Barbero, 1978: 171; Colombo, 1976: 54). In such sense, journalistic works that turn their eyes back through research exercises that include relevance of information through archived

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Elizabeth Wust, who challenged the Nazi regime by protecting four jewish women, including Felice Schragenheim, hiding and protecting them in her flat.

<sup>9</sup> It is pertinent to complement the idea with the statement made by Paul Ricouer regarding the register as an orphan document to the extent that it does not have a designated recipient for its reading; its dormant in the archives waiting to be interrogated. Making reference to the historian's work, which can be extended perfectly to the researchers work, Ricouer raises the words of Marc Bloch: “The good historian resembles the ogre of the legend. Where he sniffs human flesh, there he knows where his prey” (2008: 219 – 222).

documents have the aspiration to offer a “light” over the “shadows” that stretch out over the past. Nevertheless and for this same aspiration, inevitably it will also become a heritage for subsequent inspections as the represented meaning can be assumed, rejected and/or discussed, that is, are not determined forever.

Having said that, no matter in which level we place the journalistic speech, it is not in discussion that the press registers are a drug for the remembrance and not for the memory, where the ambivalence remedy/poison not only lives, in my opinion, in the register as a document from an archive; it will also be in that potential reader that in the exercise of (re)reading and (re)interpreting the document will know or not how to question it, as the question with which it approaches it during the inquiry will also provide “light” or “shadows”.

In the Colombian context, nevertheless, journalism and mass media are not yet those spaces of representation which will allow and exercise of *contentious coexistence* because the topics of Justice and Peace are not significant for some informative agendas that, at best, address the matter from those registers which I have called *pharmaceutical*, since they sell literally the illusion of “informing” when they present a story related to the topic. I want to illustrate the argument with a couple of relative recent stories (end of 2012) that are related with Justice and Peace.

The first one is dated 12 of December when the magistrates from the Justice and Peace courtroom from the Tribunal Superior de Bogotá (Bogotá Superior Court) sealed the legalization of charges against Éver Veloza García, alias ‘HH’, as commander of the Bananero and Calima front from the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia; 88 crimes were legalized in total among massacres, homicides, conspiracy, tortures, abductions, under age recruitment, among the most resonant crimes. Thanks to the confessions given by the deceased paramilitary commander, the magistrates declaration was shocking with regard to considering in an official manner, for the first time in the countries’ recent history, the extermination of more than two thousand members of the Unión Patriótica Party (UP) as a political genocide<sup>10</sup>.

The second story developed a couple of days later, 17<sup>th</sup> of December, when the same Court sentenced to eight years of prison (the maximum penalty expected by Justice and Peace) one of the most important commanders of the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia that was not extradited to the United States<sup>11</sup>; his name is Fredy Rendón Herrera, alias the ‘German’, that commanded the emblematic Elmer Cárdenas front which operated in the pacific region of Colombia, especially in the department of Chocó. While the sentence hearing was developing, the Fiscalía General de la Nación (district attorney’s office) made an important request in the legal, social and political field, but not important for the journalistic register: investigate and run after the assets of the branches in Colombia of Chiquita Brands transnational with the purpose of making up for the victims of the Urabá antioqueño and chochoano region, located on the northwest side of the country. Given the corporations’ responsibility in financing paramilitary groups during the nineties<sup>12</sup>.

The truth is both events, relevant to the “transitional framework” that the country is experiencing,

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<sup>10</sup> The Unión Patriótica (UP, Patriotic Union) is a left wing political party, which its foundation goes back to the negotiation process that the FARC-EP was progressing with the government of Belisario Betancourt Cuartas (1982 – 1986). Two presidential candidates (Jaime Pardo Leal y Bernardo Jaramillo Ossa), eight members of congress, three representatives, seventy city counselors, eleven mayors and more than five thousand members were systematically murdered in a period of no more than five year, in an extermination strategy that involved paramilitary groups, State security armed forces and drug dealers. A reconstruction of the story of extermination of this political movement appears on the documentary *The Red Dance* (2003) from director Yesid Campos.

<sup>11</sup> Be recalled that in between 2008 and 2009 fourteen commanders and perpetrators from the paramilitary groups were extradited to the United States, required charges related to money laundry.

<sup>12</sup> Chiquita Brands, Substitute of the United Fruit Company was investigated in 2007 by the Department of Justice of the United States for its proven financing of paramilitary groups in Colombia for an estimate amount of 1.7 million dollars. The company admitted to a federal court that indeed they financed the paramilitary in exchange of protection for their employees. The company was fined for 25 million dollars. The federal court has kept the documents and name of the executives who authorized the payments secret. ([Evans, 2007](#)).



where literally unnoticed, spent in news in a matter of seconds<sup>13</sup>. Only the digital portal Verdadabierta.com did a permanent coverage, followed by an analysis of what both judicial decisions involve.

## 5.0 Conclusion

In his intimate diaries the poet Charles Baudelaire recorded a febrile, live, accurate and current image of journalism as scenario that records and spreads the perversity of a civilized and modern human condition.

*“Is impossible to glance at any newspaper no matter what day, month or year, and not find in every line the most horrible tracks of human depravity...”*

*All newspapers, from the first to the last line, are nothing more than a string of horrors. Wars, crimes, thefts, lasciviousness, tortures; the malevolent incidents of the princes’, of countries, of individuals: an orgy of universal atrocity. And with that repugnant aperitif the civilized spills its morning food” (Baudelaire, 2009: 58).*

Maybe the most disturbing about that image is that the field of journalism has made it the recipe for informative production; recipe that reaches its boiling point in a context like the one in Colombia in which news of what commonly is denominated “public order” is the centerpiece in the agenda. Therefore, the “massacre”, the “murder”, the “assassination”, the “forced displacement or the “kidnapping” as journalistic “realities” overlapped with the internal armed conflict will always be attractive events for registration.

The analysis allowed to conclude the following:

1. When the paramilitary perpetrators are offering their versions about their criminal actions within the law and peace law framework, Colombian society has no possibility of listening to them because the same norm prevents that the public hearings are broadcasted publically, on the basis of safeguarding the due process of law of the charged and subdued paramilitaries. That condition forces the journalistic media to pick the more relevant affairs for registration – for example, the public hearings of some of the more representative commanders; but it also implies that the declarations or confessions of the paramilitaries are the product of an exercise in which the registration, most of the time, lacks interpretation in the informative coverage, preventing that those media versions become a referent for reflection and, above all, promote deliberation or a public debate against the way the paramilitary acts in the country. Their communicative senses are always limited to a present time always fleeting.
2. Along this lines, the journalistic writing –linked especially to the news as the preferred genre of the profession– has its data storage guaranteed but not necessarily its communication; and it is possible that those news, built under the still current and effective recipe of the inverted pyramid framework, become in a dough of illegible signs for the future, because the writing *per se* does not ensure meaning, because this one is outside writing in itself. Is enough to review news from thirty, forty, fifty or more years ago to discover that most of the headlines make reference to incomprehensible events, and even though someone might claim that that register is a mark for the «memory», the truth is that most of those news from the past do not communicate.

<sup>13</sup> The report from the [International Criminal Court](#) form November 2012 which pointed out the case of the mistakenly called “false positives” (murders committed by members of the public force whose victims where young people from popular areas of the main cities in the country) that can be considered a practice that was part of a state policy was conveniently unnoticed by the Colombian media. The report states that: “There is a reasonable basis to believe that the acts described above were committed pursuant to a policy adopted at least at the level of certain brigades within the armed forces, constituting the existence of a State or organizational policy to commit such crimes” (2012: 3).

3. Furthermore, is very common to be tempted of thinking that the memory topic has become a public affair in recent years. As [Alejandro Castillejo \(2009\)](#) points out, the topic has always been public, although its discussion has been reduced to specific scenarios. The sensation, however, can be explained by the fact that the memory topic has also become a part of the journalism agenda, whom has put into circulation a series of discourses and narratives that, more than making the topic public, made it more visible; an abuse of memory according to [Todorov](#) terms (2008: 34) since that dissemination does not guarantee the exercise of *contentious coexistence*.
4. The analysis undermines the idea of journalistic records (news, reports, interviews or reports) as registers of memory. The journalistic record is always external to the memory. Consequently, the journalistic records trigger the recollection.
5. An essential factor to determine like the records have “lights” or “shadows” on the events of the past is in the formats of the journalistic genres.
6. The special mention for two types of journalistic approach: 1) investigations that are studying events of the past to build new readings and significances which enter into discussion with historical and political "truths"; 2) journalistic work for a "here" and a "now", but projected for future generations.

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