The struggle to belong
Dealing with diversity in 21st century urban settings.
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THE CONTESTED CEMETERY

POLITICAL CULTURES AND CULTURAL POLICIES IN BOGOTÁ CENTRE[1]

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1. The city of the living and the city of the dead

To understand the city of the living it sometimes pays to take a look at what is happening in the city of the dead. And in Bogotá both have experienced big transformations over the last twenty years. Those who visit the centre of the Colombian capital for the first time today, whether landing at the airport or arriving by bus, find themselves passing through the middle of an open air building site where cars stuck in endless traffic jams try to pick their way through piles of rubble, craters swarming with labourers, broken pipes and temporary signposts.

If the traveller, passing through the heart of this urban chaos on the grand avenida 26 that links Eldorado airport to the historical centre, decided for some reason to pause and visit the central cemetery, he or she would see that not only the living but also the dead are subject to all kinds of inconveniences, traffic jams and mistreatment. The old Campo Santo area, in the very heart of the city, is in fact the epicentre of a profound rebuilding programme in both material and conceptual terms.

The monumental area remains relatively peaceful, just as middle to upper class residential zones. But the working class areas of the cemetery have suffered clearances and relocations: tombs emptied of their inhabitants, graves overturned by diggers and cranes, mass graves of the N.N. covered over with a ghostly park deleting even the *post mortem* address of those who have already lost their names.

But what is gestating behind the scaffolding, the tarpaulins, the no entry signs? What city models, for both living and dead, are being built? What relationship will there be between the city's inhabitants of today, yesterday and tomorrow? What political culture is inspiring the new cultural policies that accompany this process? And, vice versa, what impact do the debates, controversies, and conflicts surrounding policies of memory, patrimony and the public use of history have on physical buildings and citizen relations in twenty-first century Bogotá?

An exploration of the spaces and recent history of the central cemetery will be our key to focus on some of the great metamorphoses of Colombian political culture over the last twenty years: the irruption of cultural rights starting from the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural constitution of 1991 (Wade, Urrea Giraldo and Viveros Vigoya, 2008; Vignolo, 2009); the affirmation of the so-called citizen culture in Bogotá in the second half of the 1990s (Sommer, 2005; Mockus, 2001); the consensus and dissent around the "democratic security" and "inversionist trust" of the community state proposed by Uribe in his eight years of government (2002-2010). In turn, all those conflicts, controversies and negotiations that occurred between clashing cultural policies over the last turbulent twenty years have led to the formulation of cultural policies linked to patrimony, memory and the public use of history. While often contradictory and paradoxical, these policies are contributing to radically change the face and heart of Bogotá. For better or for worse we will leave the reader to judge.

2. The gentrification of the old cemetery

The 'ellipse' forms the ancient, monumental part of the cemetery. Inside the elegant oval walls that separate it from the chaos of the city centre lie the remains of presidents, heroes and patriotic martyrs. It is the place where the forefathers of powerful, rich families with prestigious names rest. But it was not always thus. When, at the end of the seventeenth century, the Bourbon kings sought to implement the new urban logics based on corporeal hygiene and discipline, separating the living from the dead, they found themselves faced with unusual resistance.

Escobar (2005) writes that: "It was a matter of abolishing this deeply-rooted habit of not using sacred fields for burying people several times over (…) Carlos III's measures for building cemeteries placed outside populous zones (royal order of 24 March 1781 and royal document of 3 April 1787) or prohibiting burials inside temples (royal document of 8 April 1787) had no immediate effect, not even in Madrid."

Two reasons lay behind this particularly obstinate resistance. First and foremost was the question of religion: ever since the colonial era the churches and monasteries were considered as special spaces providing a window on the afterlife, facilitating communication between the living and the dead. Cemeteries, on the other hand, as new measures of governmental power to control and discipline bodies even after death, according to the new norms of economic rationality and medical hygiene, generated suspicion as to their efficiency as bridges allowing mediation with the afterlife.

Second was the question of social status: the great families of the city refused to transfer their own defunct loved ones to the fields to the west of the city, to a situation considered to be in promiscuous vicinity to the bodies of the poor. Affairs did not change with the process of independence, to the point that in 1827 Bolivar himself signed a decree effectively repealing the royal orders of forty years earlier.

What we witness here is thus a true process of *ante litteram* gentrification. To induce the well-off population to respect the rules, signor Buenaventura Ahumada, twice nominated mayor of the city, gave the good example of being buried in the new space (Escobar, 2005). Finally the city of the dead could count an official authority figure among its eternal inhabitants, one able to keep the riff-raff in order. But it was only in 1837, following the decision of the then president Francisco de Paula Santander – hero of the independence and patriotic father second only to Simón Bolivar – to be buried there, that the central cemetery would become the most sought-after *post mortem* abode in the country.

The gentry, the landed aristocracy, the great and the good of Bogotá thus began to grab the best sites available. Between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the cemetery became, little by little, adorned with neo-classical monuments and cenotaphs (with the occasional timid romantic variant), statues and sarcophaguses, bronze busts and marble columns. The tombs of the less well-off were instead progressively marginalised, ignored, made invisible, even though the working classes never ceased to visit the monumental ellipse.

3. From the monumental cemetery to the suburban

From the thirties to the fifties the central cemetery lived its golden age, becoming one of the key points of social life in Bogotá. In this period the city of the dead succeeded in representing hierarchical structures, values and founding myths, heroes and even the bipartite conflicts on which the city of the living was founded in a convincing way.

This situation began to change, however, halfway through the twentieth century when, as told by Calvo Isaza (1998, 65) "the transferral of the graves of various social groups to the "Gardens" in the north of the city and the massive character of the new galleries began to affect the balance of social composition within the Cemetery, which until at least the fifties had included a mix of all the urban groups."

First and foremost this period saw the progressive abandonment of this space among the dominant classes. A new elite generation of those educated in the United States and who had grown up with the American dream, decided to re-establish their lives in the new quarter in the north of Bogotá. In

the eyes of the middle classes, who could afford the move, the centre of the city was nothing more than the broken dream of a little Paris by now transformed into a nightmare Latin-American megalopolis, where one was struck by "the precocity of the devastation of time", as Levy Strauss (1955) wrote at the time in his *Tristes Tropiques*.

The habitat of life, but also the habitat of death, naturally. The analogies between one and the other are clear for all to see. The model now is that of the North-American war cemetery, not Père-Lachaise in Paris or Verano in Rome. And so it is that at the side of the northern road of the city both the new "conjuntos cerrados"[3] and the so-called "garden-cemeteries" can be seen, Catholic imitations of Protestant funeral practices typical of Anglo-Saxon countries.

The swarming life of the central cemetery was thus substituted by the privatised privacy of the "Peace Gardens", the "Rest Gardens", or the "Eternal Gardens", so similar to the "quiet desperation" of the American suburbs or the solitary serenity of golf courses. In the place of the confusion of a ferociously hierarchical society, but one used to social and corporeal promiscuity, we find the logic of social segregation by "estratos"[4], where the homogeneity of each quarter is accompanied by invisible yet insurmountable barriers to the next. And the same happens with neighbouring tombs, that these belong to the same social group is guaranteed by annual maintenance fees paid to undertakers.

As early as 1985, Martin Barbero wrote on this theme that: "On the other hand, the conversion of the cemetery to a "Garden" is not, as at first may appear, a profanation, nor the profanisation of what is sacred. It is more the exact opposite: one of the highest levels of consecration of the mercantile system. This is done through the production of a simulacrum, through, that is, the simulation of the rituals of death, through their parody. Because death is not a private fact. All peoples have seen and celebrated in death a fundamental connection of social life, of the emergence and expression of relations that link some to others, even beyond the grave. And this is what is denied in the modern cemetery, where everything presupposes and leads towards the privatisation of death, a death converted into an assumed family, but family as property unit". (Martín Barbero, 1985: 5).

Then, in 1976, Unicentre appeared, the first shopping centre in the north of the city, prototype for the huge malls that would suck the social life out of Bogotá, rendering the old shopping *pasajes* of the centre, designed to recall Parisian *passages*, completely obsolete in the eyes of the bourgeoisie. Here too Martín Barbero (1985, 5) reads the signs: "In the bourgeois cemetery religious trade is left outside. This trade takes place in the separation hidden from view by the mercantile masquerade. (…) while funeral rites and, still today, popular practices in cemeteries are the celebration of an exchange in which the objects – offerings – are nothing but a meeting place and affirmation of subjects, in the other cemetery the rationality that dominates and shapes is that which springs from the order of objects, that of symmetry and equivalence."

Finally, at the ritual level, we see the progressive victory of Halloween over "All Souls' Day". As Miñana (2004, 6 and 15) writes: "Halloween enters Bogotá - and from there Colombia – in the sixties, an import and literal imitation of the celebrations of the United States among the higher classes. Halloween, that is, began in Bogotá as a fashion, and as a symbol of class distinction. (…) It is a banal, mediatised phenomenon of the consumer society and, at the same time, a phenomenon

[3] In Colombia particular types of areas, generally middle-to-high class, homogeneous in urbanistic and social terms, separated from the rest of the urban fabric by walls or barriers, and subject to strict inspections by private security firms, are referred to as "conjuntos cerrados".

[4] An "estrato" in Bogotá refers to the territorial divisions by which tariffs for public services are determined (water, lighting, gas etc.)

rooted in esotericism, in the unnameable, in magic." The festival of the dead, of Anglo-Saxon origin, made inroads in the city through private bilingual schools, and soon found its principal church in the shopping centres. The "All Souls' Day" of colonial tradition has instead found its key point in the cemetery.

4. Strategies of patrimonialisation: the cemetery becomes a museum

What then was the fate of the old Campo Santo? "When the elites left the central cemetery, the people did not inherit an empty space. (…) – continues Calvo Isaza (1998, 79) – today the oval or old part continues to receive the bodies of the most illustrious politicians incessantly. Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, Luis Carlos Galán, Álvaro Gómez, among many others. The place where ex-president Virgilio Barco was buried was chosen in March 1987 during his agony, and there he was buried a few months later. In reality they are the only members of their social group that continue to be buried there. This demonstrates how the consecration and dramatisation of the political domain, through death, is one of the last collective acts to resist the secularisation of social relations. The funeral monuments and the cemetery, as historical patrimony, persist as scenarios in which power is represented."

The monumental cemetery, up to that point a space of social life linked to funeral rites, thus becomes a sort of museum in which national history is narrated through the biographies of the emblematic personalities who rest there. It was not by chance that it was declared a National Monument in 1984. A new phase had thus begun, in which the cemetery became a privileged stage for the political struggles that have racked the country throughout its history. From that moment on, being buried in the cemetery meant nothing short of ensuring a place in the historical memory of the country for them and their ideas for many popular and party leaders.

The left-wing parties in particular, excluded from the representative system of political life for the duration of the Frente Nacional (1958-1974), found a space for representation in death. Access to the *necropolis* thus became a way to compensate for the inaccessibility of the *polis*. Thanks to some public finances available for the tombs of illustrious persons and patriotic martyrs, in addition to the funds of mayors, parties and mutual aid societies, trade unionists, communist leaders and even guerrilla militants made their triumphant entrance into the monumental zone and, thus, into the narrative of national history alongside generals, presidents and great entrepreneurs.

The first of the above of some importance was José Raquel Mercado, president of the Confederación de Trabajadores de Colombia (CTC) and "martyr of Colombian democracy and trade unionism", as his epitaph reads, kidnapped and assassinated by the M-19 guerrilla group in 1976. At a short distance, however, we find one of the most charismatic leaders of M-19, Carlos Pisarro Leongómez, he too killed the following year, in 1990.

To Luis Carlos Galán, liberal candidate for the presidency, killed by assassins hired by Pablo Escobar in 1989, an enormous mausoleum of red granite and white marble was dedicated at the very heart of the so-called Line of Immortals. The monuments dedicated to Jaime Pardo Leal and his companion in militancy within the Unión Patriotica, Manuel Cepeda Vargas, represent in some ways the thousands of victims of the only case of genocide perpetrated by a political party ever seen.[5] The cemetery thus became a symbolic space where the historical relevance of certain

[5] 2 presidential candidates, 8 members of congress, 13 deputies, 70 councillors, 11 mayors and thousands of militants were assassinated by paramilitary groups, elements of the State security forces and the Colombian Army, as well as by drug-traffickers. Some of those who survived fled the country. Corporación para la Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos - REINICIAR http://www.reiniciar.org/drupal/files/videos/casoup.swf

political victims of assassinations whose blood marks Colombian society was claimed. The only left-wing leader present in the ellipse to die a natural death is Gilberto Viera, one of the founders of the Colombian communist party in 1930, and party secretary until his death in 1991.

We are thus confronted with a pure strategy for the patrimonialisation of salient moments in the nation's history, sought through what Tovar Zambrano (1997, 158-159) calls the "symbolic mummification" of great statesmen: "In the end it is a matter of contributing, through the perpetuity of iconography along with historical writings, to the resurrection of the famous dead, with their works and their examples magnified, in the spirit of present and, above all, future generations. The scholar Eduardo Posada was absolutely right when he said that history was 'a resurrection'. To have a right to such a resurrection a person had to distinguish themselves among the living and the dead. What saw him chosen and differentiated was both love and a life in the service of the country, even dying for its honour. With the mise-en-scène of the dead, that is the resurrection and glorification of great men, their constitution as archetypes, models or stereotypes of permanent social identification is attempted, among other things."

5. Tactics for re-assigning meaning: popular saints and the souls of the departed

The transformation of the central cemetery into a museum exhibit, where antagonistic and conflicting visions jostle for hegemony over Colombian history, represents without a doubt an important change. At the same time, however, in a more subtle but perhaps more powerful way, the practices associated with daily life in the city of the dead have been changing.

The great migratory waves from rural regions to the city that led to the exponential growth of Bogotá in the fifties created the conditions for a re-appropriation of the cemetery by urbanised peasants. These new residents of Bogotá found in the cemetery an ideal space to rebuild a relationship with the afterlife that urban life seemed to deny.

Once again, Calvo Isaza (1998: 78 and 82), picking up some seminal reflections made by José Luis Romero (1976) writes that: "Through non-institutionalised cults, magic and superstition, these settlers sought to integrate themselves into the city on acceptable terms, in accordance with the social and economic expectations that had brought them thus far, but armed with formulas inherited from peasant life. (…) The cemetery offered a place laden with meaning, that allowed them direct contact with a supernatural world and to manipulate a social reality often openly hostile".

The cemetery thus became the privileged backdrop for the cult of popular saints, an extraordinary example of the subversion and reassignment of cultural meaning to "official" history via spontaneous practices and traditional rituals that elude the control of dogma. Since then, and to the present day, the cemetery has come alive every Monday with performances and symbols belonging to a popular religiosity springing from the undergrowth of official Catholic liturgy. The Catholic hierarchy has swung between repression and tolerance, depending on circumstances. In certain periods these practices are considered as examples of idolatry that must be exterminated, as weeds that threaten to suffocate the *hortus conclusus* of the ellipse. At other times, on the contrary, they are seen as seeds from which the true faith may grow among the ignorant. The adoration of miniature images such as the Madonna of the Carmen, the *Divino Niño*, or the Sacred Heart of Jesus (Vignolo: 2009, 85-128), which form part of the official iconography of the Church, takes place through rituals involving flowers and candles, according to Andean traditions of indigenous origin. "*Murales* and graffiti inscribed on the gravestones and mausoleums evoke curses and blessings, white and black magic, the evil eye, witchcraft and counter-witchcraft. Concoctions, wax effigies,

feathers and bones form a part of the cult repertoire, together with liturgical elements such as the bible, white capes, crucifixes, cups and missals." (Peláez, 1994). As do also *mariachis* and love letters, poems read aloud and burned coins.

These are bona fide everyday tactics of invention, to put it in De Certeau's (1999) terms, the protagonists of which are a series of personalities that, little by little, become the real points of reference of the cemetery. The so-called "popular priests" above all. These people, despite never have been ordained, offer to celebrate improvised masses to honour the dead for a small amount of money. Or the *escaleristas*, who rent out their ladders to those who wish to visit a dead person occupying cubicles at the higher levels in the external wall or the vaults. And then the sorcerers and sorceresses, elderly people visiting friends or family and idle students, homeless wanderers and pickpockets, gangs of youths smoking marijuana or *basuco* and EDIS workers, the company charged with the upkeep of the city's public cemeteries.

On this subject, Martín Barbero (1985, 4) writes: "the cemetery overflows its walls, invading the surrounding area. The neighbourhood forms an integral part of its dynamic, there we find many other shops: selling pencils, flowers, candles, religious objects, but also lotteries, horoscopes, *fritangas*, books and magical objects such as coral and monkey's paws, blackbird beaks, etc. The same multitude of beggars, street children, small-time thieves, the same variety, the same heterogeneity."

This is how certain tombs become privileged destinations for pilgrimages by individuals and groups seeking particular intercessions. The motive is explained once again by Calvo Isaza (1998, 82-83): "For the people *Campo Santo* is the place where the souls of the defunct who have not ascended into heaven dwell. They are omnipresent. The association of anonymous remains and unmarked or empty graves with these lost souls grants an important place in the popular imagination. The most forgotten are the most powerful, because they have no family to pray for them, and they possess a great capacity for interceding among the living, hoping in this way to earn through their prayers the eternal rest denied them as a consequence of their sins on earth."

In other words, the cemetery is a porous place, with permeable borders with the afterlife, where every kind of communication, traffic, and trade between the living and the dead is facilitated. And some personalities become privileged intermediaries in these exchanges. The famous Jewish entrepreneur Leo Siegfried Kopp (1858-1927), of German origin, for example. "He founded the 'Bavaria' brewery and the 'Fenicia' glassworks, among the most important of that era. He is remembered for how he cared for his workers, always responding to their petitions, at the present time his tomb has been converted into an important pilgrimage site in the Cemetery. Miraculous abilities are attributed to it". (Escobar 2003, 114).

Kopp's paternalistic attitude to working relations at the dawning of Colombian industrialisation (Archila: 1991, 128) transforms him, in the everyday life of the ellipse, into a sort of "patron saint for the unemployed", who queue up before his tomb. In addition, "the singular statue in the mausoleum of Leo Kopp is distinguished, beyond the fact of its bodily position similar to Rodin's thinker, by the similarity of the face with the conventional iconography of Simón Bolivar. The bronze sculpture receives requests and prayers in its ear to give work, health and gifts to the poor, as Kopp did in life" (Calvo Isaza, 1997: 90).

The tragic story of the Bodmer sisters, who died at a young age in 1903 just one day apart, has in turn converted them into privileged figures for interceding where children are concerned. This is why their statues are perennially decorated with toys, figurines, drawings of angels and characters from comics. Agustín Murillo, on the other hand, is the favourite for those seeking love, perhaps as

a result of his rather splendidly formed statue. "His tall and handsome body has had various crosses, graffiti and a heart carved into it, probably with stones. Most noticeable are the lipstick kisses on the statue's face and chest. But also an inscription that challenges the law: free us from the police!" (Calvo Isaza: 1997, 91).

6. The irruption of cultural rights in Campo Santo

These ways of living and reassigning meaning to the central cemetery came from afar, but there is no doubt that it was only following the Constitution of 1991 that they could be claimed as legitimate expression of specific cultural identities in the ambit of a State subject to the rule of law. The Carta Magna, which emerged from the peace process between the government and the demobilized insurgent group M-19, constituted a veritable watershed in Colombian political culture. It in fact marked the refoundation of the country on a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural basis, and the definitive abandonment of a national myth resting on the triad of race (the white or *mestiza* race, the product of the progressive *blanqueamiento* of indigenous, black and zambos people) religion (Catholicism) and language (Castilian).

The rhetoric of the *mestizaje*, "this founding fiction of the imaginary of the Latin-American nations" as Mara Viveros (2009: 381) defines it, is generating particularly ambiguous scenarios in Colombia today. It functions in fact as both a mechanism of inclusion and, at the same time, of discrimination, promising the possibility of social ascendancy through biological and moral improvement, marking a hierarchization of racial differences (Wade, 1997: 59).

Its use in political practices often willingly tends to render power relationships, struggles for hegemony and confrontations over the control of economic and symbolic resources lying at the root of ethnic discriminations and social injustices invisible. On the other side, it is certain that speaking of a *mestiza* nation has allowed the destruction from the inside of the racist and intolerant traditions of colonialist mentality, contributing to the development in the 1991 Constitution of one of the most radical legal proposals in the world in terms of the defence of ethnic minorities and cultural groups until then invisible or marginalised.

According to Mara Viveros (2009: 382), "Colombian multi-culturalism has generated a new language, that of ethnicity, which has allowed new meanings to be given to differences, converting them into valued cultural attributes. It has also created the possibility to celebrate diversity and arouse representative expressions of the plurality of the Colombian population as something positive. The problem with this prospect is that it has eulogized difference without questioning its relationship with inequality, as if all groups were socially equal and different belonged uniquely to culture."

What is at stake is the reorganisation of the principle of citizenship on an already non-universal basis of differentiated access, beginning from the identification of specific cultural rights for different groups, communities or individuals. As Alain Touraine (2009: 53-54) specifies: "at the beginning it was a matter of obtaining political rights, like those celebrated by the French revolution. A century later the problem was to recognise social rights, essentially for workers and, in particular, labourers. From this came the trade union struggles, the strikes, the social laws, the collective meetings. Today the fundamental theme is the defence of cultural rights. It is the principle point on the agenda in a world of mass consumption, mass communication, where social power is not longer limited to political power, but has spread to economic power and now cultural power with the mass media. The question of cultural rights is central."

In other words, the irruption into the political arena of struggles for cultural rights – around belongings of gender, race, ethnicity, language, etc. – has tended to unhinge both the notion of law and that of culture. On one side the emphasis on diversity puts the entire Latin American legal structure, based on the republican tradition inherited from the French revolution, which considered access to the rights of the citizen in abstract and universalistic terms, at risk. In this new scenario citizenship becomes "a dynamic concept and not only the exclusive result of State action, since the institutional vision of citizenship is constantly transformed by processes of production, circulation and the strategic and tactical usage of socially pertinent knowledge to reinvent communal life and social wellbeing." ("Ciudadanías incluyentes" research group, 2009: 41)

It is for these reasons that, from the 1991 constitution onwards, the cultural terrain in Colombia became a crucial battlefield for all types of claims by diverse sectors of the population. It is sufficient to think of how many indigenous communities and communities of African descent over the last twenty years have appealed to their own ethnic belonging in order to negotiate crucial questions such as land ownership, the administration of justice, control of public order, access to healthcare, education, and some form of social security, with different state organs.

On the other side, who defines who is indigenous or African, and who is not, in the final instance? Languages, costumes, dances, rituals, ways of dressing.. in a word, culture. And what device allows us to define something as indefinable as cultural belonging? Today, the answer is ever more evidently patrimony.

Patrimony becomes the fundamental device for the ascription of individuals and communities to a certain cultural context, which in turn determines the normative frame of reference. Patrimony, that is, functions as a "stamp of cultural quality" that the State, in its diverse components, concedes to groups and communities as the result, always uncertain, of complex disputes, negotiations, and agreements.

In sum, we are witnessing the emergence of novel forms of agency among traditionally subaltern individual and collective subjects, through processes of "patrimonial activation" (Moncusi Ferré, 2005: 101), oriented to reclaiming, through cultural practices, that which on paper is their due as constitutional right.

The dynamics at work in the central cemetery are, in this sense, emblematic. The mausoleum of the previously mentioned trade unionist Raquel Mercado, for example, has become a cult location for some black communities residing in Bogotá. Not for his struggles in the sphere of work, but because his mausoleum is topped by a bust that represents him with African physiognomy.

But the most spectacular case is that of Maria Salomé. Popular legend portrays her as a black prostitute who, because of her profession, was flayed to death. The place she is buried has transformed into a place of constant pilgrimage for sex workers of both sexes, as well as for the city's LGBT sections. But the story does not end there. It turns out in fact that the tomb neighbouring Maria Salomé's is that of Julio Garavito "one of the scientific marvels of the country" (Escobar, 124) after whom the International Astronomical Union even named one of the moon's craters in 1970. (On the dark side, yet still..).

The vast majority of Colombians know of Garavito however, more than for his gifts as an astronomer, physicist and mathematician, because his face adorns 20 thousand peso banknotes. For this reason he too is the recipient of honours and rituals from those visiting Maria Salomé, including the rubbing of banknotes bearing his image on the column on top of his tomb, and its decoration with all kinds of rubbish.

This type of attention has generated irate protests from some of his descendants, who succeeded in having the body of Maria Salomé transferred to the south cemetery, implying that it was below the dignity of their illustrious dead relative to abide for all eternity at the side of a woman with such a bad reputation. All in vain. The cult of Maria Salomé continues apace around the now empty tomb. To prevent further "profanation" of Garavito's monument by a public considered contemptible, the family covered it with a tarpaulin of the kind used during building works.

There are even rumours that the incident induced the principle owners of lots to organise the founding of an association of "friends of the central cemetery" whose main aim would be to privatise the Campo Santo and restrict visitors' access. But much more would be needed to discourage those seeking contact with the afterlife through the man with his name written on the moon.

7. The frustrated miracle of the Renaissance Park

If in the monumental zone disputes over the last twenty years have regarded the management of a patrimonial space declared a common good of cultural interest, the problem for the rest of the cemetery has been a more brutal one couched in terms of destruction or conservation. This is the case of the zone where the N.N. were buried, today partly transformed into the 'Renaissance Park'. But to understand the polemic over the city of the dead, we must place the events taking place in the meantime in the city of the living into context.

Between the beginning of the nineties and the new millennium Bogotá city hall embarked on the most ambitious and articulated urban transformation project seen in the city for fifty years. These plans foresaw, among other things, a new public transport system named Tranmilenio, the construction of public buildings (above all libraries, schools and archives), the pedestrianisation of some zones in the historical centre and the construction of cycle paths. Ambitious expansion works were also begun at Eldorado airport, while Avenida 26, which links the centre with the airport, became the principle pole of development of the metropolis, with the emergence of entire middle-to-high class quarters and sumptuous buildings housing the principle national and foreign corporations.

In 2005, the municipal authorities launched the Plan zonal for the centre, better known as the Plan Centro. As the official website of the Office for Urban Renovation states: "the Plan Centro proposes to salvage, provide impulse to and improve the infrastructure of buildings and services to repopulate this zone of the city. The centre will become a competitive and attractive destination for national and foreign investment, thus pushing forward the development of the city and the entire central region of the country. (…) The urban component of the Operation is based on three central concepts: A different Centre, an inclusive centre and a sustainable centre". (www.eru.gov.co)

The growing urban population in the zone surrounding the cemetery had forced the progressive transferral of a large number of bodies outside the city centre. Once the bodies had been moved, the decision over what to do with the land now available to the municipal authorities remained. At the end of the nineties the Peñalosa administration transformed the portion of land adjacent to the Hebrew cemetery into a park, rather pompously named "Renaissance Park", evidently referring to its recent history as a graveyard, but also playing on the artistic pretensions of the place.

In reality the operation failed, and continues to fail today, in both an urbanistic and a cultural sense. The energy of a space built over what had been mass graves, together with the relative insecurity of the access roads from neighbouring quarters, renders the park poorly equipped for distraction and

reflection, as the promotional pamphlet distributed by the City would have it. To this must be added the scarcity of trees and lawns, in addition to the city's obsession with banning activities: no drinking, eating, smoking, dog walking, skating, cycling, or even kite-flying!

Despite efforts to attract citizens by organising cultural and artistic events, the park therefore remains deserted most of the time. The miracle did not come about. The Park, despite all efforts, is not seeing a rebirth. It continues to be a funereal place. And perhaps that is its true vocation, frustrated by projects as visionary as they are inattentive to the *genius loci* of the place.

Curiously enough it is in a corner of this very park that the same Peñalosa administration chose to place the only existing official monument to the memory of the so-called *Bogotazo* of 9 April 1948, a true watershed in the history of Bogotá and Colombia (Alape, 1987; Braun, 1998). That day the assassination of the political leader Jorge Eliecer Gaitán in the centre of Bogotá provoked a violent popular revolt that ended in thousands of deaths, and the burning and looting of large areas of the city. The uprising was bloodily quashed, but continued in the rest of the country, marking the beginning of the period of *Violencia,* a civil war that caused something in the region of 200.000 deaths between 1948 and 1960 (Booth: 1974).

In the meantime, a complex controversy had immediately surrounded the destiny of the murdered leader's body, one that continues to this day. "While the *caudillo's* wife refused to deliver the body until the conservative government resigned, representatives of the regime and the liberal party agreed on the details of the funeral. Gaitán's supporters hoped the body would be buried in the centre of the city, in the place where Rafael Uribe Uribe was assassinated, or beside the statue of the Libertador in Bolivar square, or in the central cemetery. But the principal fear of the conservative and liberal elites was that the people would once again take over the city and the insurrection would continue in these symbolic and historical spaces." (Calvo Isaza: 1998, 28-29 citing Braun: 1995, 231-234).

Finally the funeral was held without the body in the Parco Nacional, while Gaitán's body was buried in his own house, a private residence hurriedly converted into a national monument in order to legalise such a bizarre decision, unique in the history of the city. The body is still there, flaunting municipal bans, rules on hygiene and political practices. Another fate was suffered by many – nobody knows exactly how many – of the thousands of those killed in the revolt. Hastily removed from the streets during those convulsive days, they ended up in the mass graves of the central cemetery. Forgotten for many years, they were once again the subject of discussion during the construction of the Renaissance Park.

And thus the need for the timid commemorative plaque. Placed there, of course, by the city hall, not by the Colombian state, which continues to fail to provide any narrative or official position on the nation's most important event of the twentieth century. While we cannot really speak of a miracle, we can in this case at least speak of grace received. Late, but received.

8. The vaults, from dormitories to artistic installations

The destiny of the vaults, enormous structures with rows of niches at several levels that from a distance recall the dormitory quarters of European city peripheries, is a very different one. Up until a few years ago these were the resting places of the dead of minor families. In this case too the dilemma was whether to pull them down or invent another function.

"The theme dates back to 2002, when all the remaining bodies had already been removed, and it had been decreed that the structure [of the vaults] would no longer be a cemetery. The change of

use was the subject of heated discussions between municipal administrators and academics, artists and patrimony professionals. The former posited that the city should be looked at in terms of progress, pleaded the weakness of the structures and shared the recommendation of the architect Rogelio Salmona that the vaults should be demolished in view of their low architectural value, leaving only the roofs inside the park. The others, for their part, replied that it was not admissible to delete the past in this way and argued that reinforcing the structures was all that was needed to keep them standing. In the end, two vaults were knocked down. Today four survive." (Rodriguez, 2009).

What to do then with these crumbling structures, so full of memories? The new mayor Antanas Mockus, better familiar with semiotics than his predecessor Peñalosa, decided to transform them into a symbol of his policy to lower the homicide rate in the city. Through a minimal intervention, to which signs reading "Life is sacred" accompanied by stylised flowers were attached, Mockus transformed these shadowy monuments to death into an artistic installation from one day to the next.

As he himself had occasion to state at a convention in Paris: "the homicide rate reached its historical peak in 1993 (80 homicides for every 100.000 inhabitants per year) and since then has reduced year after year until reaching 23 for every 100.000 in 2003. From 2001 to 2003 approvals for the use of arms in self defence decreased from 24% to 11%. In sum, in the central cemetery of Bogotá there have been six empty vaults for four years, great popular pantheons where people were buried in Latin American style, one above the other. On each of these edifices today the inscription "Life is sacred" can still be read (Mockus, 2004).

Once the scene had been set, Mockus used it for non-violent actions and civic resistance. For example, he summoned the citizens to the cemetery for an act of solidarity with the victims of the bloody FARC attack on the Club del Nogal of 9 February 2002, as well as for the international day against the death penalty of 5 December of the same year (Mockus: 2005, 38). This was a rare example at the global level of civil society initiatives being systematically promoted, top down, by city authorities (Sommer, 2005, 2).

These were the last moments of one of the most important seasons of change in Colombian political culture, one we could name the period of "citizen culture", flag and symbol of the political career of Mockus. To use his own definition, the starting point for this was "the hypothesis that a breach or "divorce" exists between the law, morality and culture, which are the three systems that regulate human behaviour. (…) This hypothesis led to the city hall's decision to prioritise the initiative entitled 'citizen culture', a group of programmes and projects undertaken with a view to fermenting communal urban living through a conscious change in behaviour. (…) The actions of the municipal authorities drove an improvement in behaviour that exceeded expectations leading to greater harmony between law, morals, and culture." (Mockus: 2002, 1)

9. "Anonymous auras": the cemetery as a centre of memory

But times were changing. While in Bogotá debates over which artistic strategies were best suited to teaching the urban population to behave more like "good citizens" continued, in the rest of the country war was once again raging. In a country that with great dismay had discovered the existence of between 2000 and 10.000 mass graves, in which between 10.000 and 30.000 people were buried, victims of selective murders, massacres and extra-judicial executions by paramilitary groups, guerrillas, and the public forces of order (Navas, 2009: 163), deciding how to manage the old mass graves in the capital's cemetery could certainly not be considered an ordinary administrative question for a municipal office.

"What will the country do? – asked Luz María Sierra in El Tiempo (2007: 193) – In the first effort in the history of Colombia to seek out the truth of an atrocious era, there would be no justification if the urban country living in the twenty-first century did nothing to avoid the rural country's continuing to be devastated by barbarous acts." The symbolic and material management of the cemetery returned once again to the fray as a subject of burning importance in political debate.

We are faced then with a further twist in Colombian political culture. At stake is hegemony, in the Gramscian sense, over national history. One of the major results of the eight years of the Uribe government (2002-2010) was in fact that of the elaboration of a highly effective discourse on the role of violence over the two hundred years of the country's republican existence, upon which its policies of "democratic security" were built. The principal problem of Colombia, according to this perspective, was the presence of violent groups of bandits and terrorists, keeping the vast majority of the population in check, and impeding social progress and the economic development of the country.

The narrative arc centres on the effects of violence rather than its causes, which are essentially reduced to the presence of FARC terrorism. From this the need for a strong man, able to pacify the country through good works as well as a hard line. "The discourse of "democratic security" reconfigures a large part of Colombian public appointments, presenting itself as a hegemonic project of national culture, saturating communication channels with entertainment news, defining political friends and enemies, rewriting national history according to its own ideological outlook." (Vignolo and Murillo, 2011).

From this derives the stance, at first incomprehensible, of Uribe's government, where a belligerent stance existed alongside an obstinate refusal to accept the existence of an armed conflict in Colombia, even when clashes and massacres were daily news. Ceding on this point would in fact have meant recognising a role for the enemy.

A further paradox: a country whose government denied, against all evidence to the contrary, the existence of a conflict, was resorting to a post-conflict definition to justify mechanisms of transitional justice. In sum, Colombia saw a shift from no conflict to post-conflict in the first decade of the 2000s, without even recognising the conflict itself! Only this year, amidst much polemic, did the Santos government finally admit the conflict's existence.
On the other side, the peculiar reading of national history found proud opposition in the capital's administration, in the last few years held by the left. Clara López Obregón, who promoted an ambitious project to build a Centre for Memory, Peace and Reconciliation on the land of the central cemetery, stands out among those who opposed that reading. The initiative began, despite countless difficulties, with the objective to "give dignity to the memory of the victims and to promote a culture of peace and respect for human rights, through the creation of education and reflection on the past and present of our country." (www.centromemoria.gov.co). From this sprung other important initiatives, for example the participative construction of a memory map to reclaim the places linked to violations of human rights and the armed conflict. Or the ambitious project to build an archive with legal as well as historical functions. Or indeed the promotion of activities and initiatives for peace by victims' associations and social organisations (www.centromemoria.gov.co).

But the most spectacular result in terms of media visibility and political implications was the approval of the project for the construction of an enormous building "that will rise up next to the vaults, plunge into the ground and penetrate the entrails of a place full of the city's memories", as Rodríguez writes (2009). The director of the centre, Camilo González Posso, in turn declared: "it is important that this place is recognised and identified as a space for memories and reflection: we

cannot forget that many people were buried here for more than a century. What we want to do is not invoke tragedy, but dignify the memory of those who are gone." (in Rodríguez 2009).

In response to Uribe's neo-patriotic discourse, which sought to set up an extreme right communitarian State on the basis of the military pacification of democratic security, the left called for the recognition of the conflict and the right to memory as an exercise in active citizenship, the only path possible for the negotiation of a lasting peace.

"With this architectural work, which will be the meeting point for remembering, - declared Clara López Obregón (2009) in her inauguration speech – and with the activities that will take place here to build peace, Bogotá will reaffirm (…) that there is no better opportunity to leave behind the cycles of violence and reclaim the best of creativity. The trees that rise from the earth and accompany pedestrians and visitors are part of the homage to life that this Centre symbolises, that will not cease to look at the old vaults that watch over hundreds of N.N., silent witnesses to a part of our history, who will continue there for hundreds of years, reminding us that we must not forget that "life is sacred".

Reprising the words of Antanas Mockus, in 2009 the city hall thus commissioned the plastic artist Beatriz Gonzales to create a piece for the vaults. Her proposal, which will be inaugurated in the coming months, is entitled "anonymous auras". The film maker Diego García has made a documentary on the subject, in which the working process behind the piece's creation serves as the narrative thread to tell the story of the Colombian armed conflict. As we can read in an interview with Gonzales conducted by Dominique Rodríguez (2009): "The presence of death requires a ceremony. (…) To wish to delete that from the collective memory is to go against human nature, which needs to preserve the memory of its dead. After all, (…) a city that loses its ceremonial spaces is a city that deletes its past."

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