



The role of collective memory in emotional recovery of political violence in Colombia

El rol de la memoria colectiva en la recuperación emocional de la violencia política en Colombia



Research

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ABSTRACT

This article enquires about the role of collective memory events of political violence victims of some organizations in three regions of Colombia, eastern Antioquia, southern Córdoba, and Medellín city on the processes of subjective and emotional transformations. It is made from a psychosocial perspective using a hermeneutic phenomenology approach. Life stories were developed with in-depth interviews to 32 people (26 women and 6 men) of Eastern Antioquia, 13 people in southern Córdoba (10 women and 3 men) and 13 mothers of Candelaria; 4 women life stories of the three regions studied; and 19 focus groups with participants of victims processes of the three regions. All these stories were transcribed and analyzed by the categorical analysis method by matrix. Emotional affectations of the victims and following emotional transformations arising by group, collective and public memory events in individuals and collectives involved in the execution of these actions are presented outlining a Psychosocial view that allows to approach from research and intervention to psychological, social and political phenomenon.

Key Words:

Collective Memory, Victim Of War, Social Psychology, Emotional Affectation

RESUMEN

El presente artículo indaga sobre el papel que tienen las acciones de memoria colectiva de organizaciones de víctimas de violencia política en tres regiones de Colombia, Oriente Antioqueño, sur de Córdoba, y la ciudad de Medellín; sobre procesos de transformación subjetiva y emocional. Se realiza desde un enfoque y una perspectiva psicosocial utilizando como enfoque la fenomenología hermenéutica. Se desarrollaron relatos de vida con entrevistas en profundidad a 32 personas (26 mujeres y 6 hombres) del Oriente Antioqueño, 13 personas del sur de Córdoba (10 mujeres y 3 hombres) y 13 madres de la candelaria; 4 historias de vida a mujeres de las tres regiones estudiadas; 19 grupos de discusión con participantes de los procesos de víctimas de las tres regiones. Todos estos relatos fueron transcritos y fueron analizados por el método de análisis categorial por matrices. Se presentan las afectaciones emocionales de las víctimas, y las consecuentes transformaciones emocionales suscitadas por las acciones grupales, colectivas y públicas de memoria en los sujetos individuales y colectivos que participan y ejecutan estas acciones, esbozando una mirada psicosocial que permita acercarse desde la investigación y la intervención a este tipo de fenómeno psicológico, social y político.

Palabras Clave:

Memoria colectiva, Víctima de Guerra, Psicología Social, Afección Emocional

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1. INTRODUCTION

The present article is part of a wider research that gave rise to the doctoral thesis: "The role of collective memory in the social fabric construction and the collective empowerment of political violence victims in Colombia", which was written by me and was presented in the Institute of studies about migrations of Universidad Pontificia de Comillas in Madrid, Spain. This work tackled the analysis of 20 categories that allowed a holistic, systematic and complex view of the subjective processes (individuals and collectives) of memory that favored subjective transformations, empowerment and dignity recovery of surviving victims, social fabric reconstruction, and others.

In this text, we will work exclusively the category "Subjective emotional situation" to analyze the damage and emotional recovery of victims/survivors as one of the main aspects that can be tackled from psychology using a psychosocial approach, which provides elements to evaluate the impacts caused and the processes that have allowed subjective transformations in the participants of this investigation regarding the emotional field.

After almost 60 years of violent conflicts, it is obvious that there are systematic violations to the human rights and the international humanitarian law in Colombia. The realities of victims in this country saturate any calculation: according to Consultoría de los Derechos Humanos para los Desplazados (CODHES, 2011), there are 5.1 millions of displaced people in Colombia (between 1985 and 2011); this number changes to 3.875.987 if the state source is observed in detail (Acción social de la Presidencia de la República, 2012)¹. This is about people that have escaped from their homes due to threats and violent events against them, that is why 77.189 rural communities have been completely displaced (CODHES, 2011); this population group has suffered the expropriation of 6.638.195 millions of hectares (CODHES, 2011). In the other hand the number for homicide victims can be about 250.000 according to the human rights organizations. Nevertheless, the number would be 850.00 if homicides related to social violence and drug trafficking are included (Valencia, 2011). The fact is that, according to the public prosecutor's office, 174.618 homicide victims and 34.750 cases of forced disappearances (CODHES, 2011) have been reported to find a solution in the setting of justice and peace law.

In Colombia has been created a mythical image of violence that represents an impersonal, incomprehensible and extensive entity experienced by

victims as a natural disaster, so nothing or hardly something can be done except running to try saving the life as it was an earthquake. Thus, the individual stories have not been included in a wider report since the collective ones, of explanatory character, acquired the shape of myth and were extracted from history using a repetition principle: Violence² always returns, and incidents has a "real" connotation that does not allow them to be included in an explanatory narration with meaning, so it remains just in the individual experience that sometimes is impossible to tell (Pécaut, 2003). Victims, classified in diverse fields as sick people (depression, TEPT, paranoid personality or anxiety disorders), are trapped in their own scene and mentioned as cases of human rights violations or subjects of state assistance

For these reasons, it is necessary to analyze the role that memory, as collective and public event, has in the processes of subjective transformation and, in the case of the present text, regarding the emotional recovery processes of political violence victims/survivors in Colombia.

2. METHOD

The present research belongs to the field of social psychology which tackles the interaction between the individual subject structures and cultural/social structures (Martín-Baró, 1983). From a trans-disciplinary view, I expect to be closed to the complexity of the problem by working in a phenomenological and hermeneutical perspective, which implies a qualitative analysis of the incidents and experiences in the reports of participants that were collected through in-depth interview, life stories and discussion groups.

2.1. Participants

58 life stories of 58 people, 4 life histories, and 19 focal groups with the participation of 180 people and 8 qualitative questionnaires to experts were carried out after psychosocial support processes through the training of life and mental health promoters (PROVISAME), the work in mutual support groups (GAM), suitable places to share experiences in groups, and public, social and political processes of collective memory. In total, 250 people took part in the complete investigation. In addition, they are from three places and processes of victims in Colombia: east of Antioquia, south of Cordoba, and mothers of Candelaria.

¹ Republic of Colombia's presidential office that deals with displaced people and victims of political violence

² I use the word "Violence" with a capital letter due to the connotation of superlative and mythical character that it has in Colombian people reports.

2.2. Information gathering techniques

In this investigation, life stories (Bertaux, 1982) were carried out through the technique of in depth-interview. These reports allowed us to understand the view that interviewed participants have about the incidents, which was useful to obtain descriptions for an interpretive or critical approach. The interview, of a non-structured character, was guided by an outline focused on categories, subcategories and analysis indicators to the extent of a better comparison among the subjects (Martín Beristain, 2007; Martín Beristain, González, & Páez, 1999; ODHAG, 1998). Discussion groups were carried out with a semi-structured format that allowed us to get the main senses and meanings to make public event of memory and analyze the processes of psychosocial transformation of political violence consequences in individuals and groups.

2.3. Procedure

The information was analyzed with a categorical analysis method by matrix after transcribing the interviews, life stories and focal groups. This method works in an analytical way: it is possible to progress in the interpretation in an interactive way between inductive and deductive processes until the construction of interpretations that allow the production of research results. One of the main characteristics of this method is the use of matrixes of analysis that are a methodological instrument to order and clarify, which allows to visualize the reports in a general view; this favors the finding of relations between the categories of analysis and discourse. The next steps of the analysis processes are the following:

2.3.1. Analysis of coherence (intratextual):

Each transcription was analyzed regardless the other ones based on in the *categories* previously created: it was carried out a first selection level, sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph. Each section of text was settled into one of the categories. At the end, each category produced a new text that was not ordered or codified.

2.3.2. *Intertextual analysis*: the contents that appear repeatedly, grouping the shared elements by individual reports and particularity or variability of each one, were taken. It was carry out an exhaustive analysis focused on the category of analysis "subjective emotional situation" until review all the texts of coherence (intra-subject) in this category.

2.3.3. *Theoretical codifying*: the information was organized following an axial procedure that involves "deuration and differentiation of the derivative categories (concepts)" (Flick, 2004) in a relation that goes from generals to particulars,

from the main concepts to the derivative and marginal concepts, from the elements with less explanatory power to the those that are theoretical example or development. This analysis was done into an inter-textual matrix.

2.3.4. *Theorizing (first level)*: First, it is created a text that makes visible the researcher's voice, which has more participation in the text construction. It is proposed some interpretations, some hypothesis, conceptual development that are illustrated with the participants' stories. It is arisen a process of stories selection that can account for the main theoretical and interpretative constructs that have been built.

2.3.5. *Theorizing (second level)*: It involves more abstraction that allows conceptual constructs of a character more generic with which it is possible to have a conversation, supporting, reinforcing, refuting and discussing other conceptual fields within the discipline.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Emotional consequences on the armed conflict victims:

A violent incident triggers multiple emotional reactions that could last in time in the psyche and body. People can live for many years with these emotions which could become in a model of their life experience. Sadness and sorrow are the most common emotions and usually the first ones to appear in subjective processes of the surviving victims. It implies a great suffering called "the horrible" by them. It is accompanied by loneliness and desolation to the extent of feeling that everything is pervaded by this sadness and sorrow that can last in time.

It was a thing, a pain, a very horrible suffering... to know that I've lost my husband, the father of many children; he was so hard-working and nobody knew anything... (Oriente, E27). What loneliness! I could not even walk, there was no one... I remained at home alone and saw the sad wall, so I said: "are the walls crying as I do?" And my suffering last, I got a pain in my heart. A feeling... like oppression. I wanted to cry all the time. Everything was crying and crying. (Córdoba, E3)

About the case of missing people, participants seemed to cling to the felling of "horrible", pain and suffering that last in time since they cannot get the pain over due to the absence of the body. Thus, the absence of the person can become a constant presence because they do not know what happens, where the body is, and have not the possibility to bury the dead people as it is normally practiced in their culture. In these cases, the uneasiness and grief can be permanent and can be clearly differentiated from

the process in case of (violent or natural) death of beloved people since there is no cognitive closure of the incidents and the family is "frozen" in time. It opens an endless parentheses that only would close with the person appearance whether alive or dead:

... because when a person is missing in the family, no one can replace that person; and the memory of missing people is always with you; and about the forced disappearance, you don't have a body to say that you're going to finish the mourning or say: "yes, this was my brother, he was killed, or something, and I'm going to bury him", but you cannot do that. I still remember that person, and he remains in my mind... (Madres, E5)

Besides the aforementioned, the participants say they have quit the social life. They want to shut themselves away and do not see anyone, they have lost the interest in social relationships and use shyness as a defensive behavior against pain since they feel they are buried in life, without taking a shower, eating, doing something by themselves they just want to suffer the same fate that the person they lost in an unspoken alliance with the missing or dead people. Nothing makes senses for them, social life is martyrdom, and solitude and confinement allow at least to do not face someone's eyes and people presence, questions, and complaints...

... And I was always locked up in a bedroom. I ate just one meal a day because they forced me to eat it, I lost my appetite. I did not like to visit anyone, not even to my sisters who lived close. I did not like to see people's face, so I did not show my face outside the door... (Madres, E7)

In some cases the guilty of surviving, the pain for being a survivor and the experience of feeling that they do not deserve the life remains. All these emotions and imaginaries lead to this prostration state that has a corporal correlate: eyes and head to the floor, shrunken body towards the abdomen, hands crossed, weary walk and drowsiness in all their movements.³

³ In this text, this state is called "prostration" to distinguish it from "depression". I do this not only to avoid linguistics bias, but the setting of understanding that I am trying to construct in this analysis as well. Although systematically it is the same, when I use the term "depression" I am trying to express a clinical, nosological and pathological feature, i.e. the victim has a mental disease. Thus, his/her task would be not only to get the situation of victimization and the challenges that it involves over, but to cure a disease as well. In the other hand, depression, as category, either allows to see and analyze the damage caused by the political situation and human rights violation. In other words, "prostration" describes the same situation, but it does not have the same psychologist or medical sense. That is why it is possible to develop a work that involves

Another emotion associated to victimization is anger. However, it is not so tied to the incident, but to the meaning and ways of symbolizing of the event in addition to the way in which they occurs. Thus, if sorrow and sadness are correlatives of the lost, anger and impotence are correlatives of humiliation, power abuse and the evident asymmetry that exists between the armed individual and the participant, the family and the community that is the aim of his/her violent action, i.e. anger rises in a proportional way against the impotency experimented in these incidents when people is humiliated, there are coercive power, and the power asymmetry becomes subjugation: "you feel impotent, anger when you don't find the meaning of anything at all" (Madres, E12)

Anger increases when you have to live quietly with the armed individual plus the past incidents, when you cannot report them or seek for justice, when it is not possible an action that allows a balance and a symmetry. This ends up being a humiliating experience because while the offender exposes his power, the victim is reduced to its simplest expression. The emotion is even more intense when mockery is added to humiliation and they have to remain silent:

We were once in a business with my husband, it was at 11 pm. Then, one of them came, said hello and took a seat near to the table... I did not beard it and leave to cry on the sidewalk because I couldn't take him, shake him and ask him: Where is him? We lived several situations like that all the time in the town; we know they knew where he was, what they have done to him. We had to remain silent, they mocked about it and I felt they were enjoying my pain (Oriente, E13)

And yet, as in the latter case, anger can be the trigger of injustice awareness and a possible action to reclaim the rights. The problem becomes bigger when it is not possible that recognition. In armed conflict context, anger and impotence for acting powerless, not reporting or not seeking justice, the unexpressed pain, the mocked sadness and humiliation are slowly transformed into resentment and hatred. For this reason, many of participants have recognized in their stories the emergence of hatred as a way to give meaning, focus, and guide their anger, pain and impotence emotions.

...because it hurts a lot, and I kept anger that became hatred... we never were bad people, nonetheless I lived with this hate or bitterness. Actually, sometimes you carry that to home because you are always grumpy, my daughter said to me "mommy, I see that

facing the incidents, the context, the human rights violation and the collective recovery.

bitterness you have every day”... (Córdoba, E6)

Meanwhile, fear and terror installed on participants may be evident in their daily lives and are expressed as constant uneasiness hosted in personal and social imaginary. The chance of relive the victimization by the permanent presence of armed individuals is not just a hypothesis or a probability, but a real and latent possibility. Daily life is affected so deeply that it is impossible to eat, sleep, work, and live without an uneasiness perspective that appears like a cape that covers everything and does not allow seeing something different. That is why in some cases, it was enough reason to make entire families and communities displace to other territories:

...then, we were very nervous, we couldn't sleep or something... because the thing is that the dead of three or four each week produces an indelible impression on people... the fear... you heard a dog barking and you thought they were back. They were in the paths for 15 or 20 days... that generated the displacement (Oriente, E19).

This fear affects social contact as well, because they do not want to meet people. For this reason, fear is an important determinant of the social fabric deterioration since people break their relationships, are afraid of their neighbors, do not want to go out, and acquire mistrust as a learned behavior. They are cautious and have an attitude of continuous defense with the resulting deterioration of caring communities and the individualization that breaks the collective sense (Lira, 1990; Martín Beristain & Rieira, 1994).

This way of understanding relationships and social world can be presented as “delusional” and “paranoid” in some cases. However, it is necessary to be careful with the analysis of this kind of emotional behaviors because they can be a way of organizing thinking and action in a context with the same characteristics of the Colombian armed conflict, which can result deeply useful and adaptive, as regards Martín-Baró (1990) for the Salvadoreño case and the next participant in this context:

... I learnt to mistrust everything. If I go to a place, to the street, I keep a watchful eye to avoid somebody that can attack from behind... I learnt to be cautious, to don't trust anyone, to protect myself, to survive... If I saw a stranger looking at me, I was suspicious and knew that I had to find another place, a way out... practically, one learns to live with a street culture, yet I still being like that... (Madres, E5)

People choose silence because they do not participate or contribute to solve the problems in the community since they feel and think that everybody can be an enemy. The image of the entity that can hurt is acquired by the community, which breaks the social bonds and prevents any reliable relation.

3.2. Subjective transformation: emotional recovery in groups of support and shared memory

The transformation process of negative emotions and the emotional effects experienced by the political violence victims in the three studied places was carried out in a setting of interaction, group shared memory in processes of coordinated mutual support groups (GAM) that were supported by people of the same community (Promotores de vida y salud mental – PROVISAME), and collective spaces of memory expression in public matters and the social and political mobilization that was configured in the organizations of the victims.

Hence, the unity with others, meeting and sharing the lived memories in the support groups generated an emotional transformation setting through the removal of negative emotions deeply rooted in the participants. Now, that liberating effect of negative emotions has not happened in the overnight, it has involved a long process that has gone through catharsis and release episodes. The abreaction effect is a necessary step in the subjective transformation of emotions, but it is insufficient. That is why catharsis was the first part in the dynamic that was setting up:

... With support groups you can take a load off your mind because you can tell what is repressed inside of your chest to a group... So, you listen to other people's stories and when you tell yours, you feel free, like you can float because you do not have it inside anymore ... (Oriente, E25)

Although the relief did not arrive immediately, the participants found that this was a place to “let out” the unpleasant feelings they had inside. That first part of the process- which involved crying, emotion removal, and pain and sadness outburst- implied some criticisms and questions since the management of emotional “contagion” was a challenge considered in the beginning. What did happen when someone began to tell a story, to express the pain repressed for several years? Emotions just surfaced and in some cases they overflowed. The risk was that the rest of the group would “infect” and the experience would cause a chain reaction of tears and pain without the possibility of receiving a suitable support. This initial fear was enunciated by the participants at the beginning of their own process:

...because at the beginning they did not want to share anything, they thought that it

would not be useful, and I said: they do will help to let out all this bitterness we have. Here they are going to help us to health this hate, these things we have inside, the incidents we have lived, this violence, and this war we have to deal with.”... because we can't express what we feel, because we have a lump in our throats, because some of us believed that something wrong would happen to them if we told anything; they were afraid of repudiation. So, you feel you have all these things here (pointing at her chest and throat). It feels so good when you let these things out because life makes sense, you feel happy and want to get over this situation and move on. This has been really useful to me (Oriente, E22)

The result has been that pain has subsided, sadness has been faced, they can now talk about the incidents, and emotional experience can be described as different from the baseline. A key for a radical transformation of negative emotions is that it is part of a long-term process that involves perseverance and persistence and allow collecting and transforming them, because it is possible the suitable time to remove the emotions, to make catharsis, to receive mutual support and to have a guide (or guides) from the same community and so on to build an affective bond that stimulated the appearance of resilience factors and confrontation ways.

It is possible to find three key elements according to the participants' stories that show the process by which the support group and the shared memory were a subjective reconstruction and emotional recovery setting. The first one and more widely referred is the experience of “checking” that pain is not only personal, it becomes a socialization of pain in which the victim start thinking that the incident is something she/he deserved, a divine punishment or a singular experience:

...you think that pain is only yours, but after seeing that there are a lot people who feel the same, I thought: “the pain is not only mine, it is the pain of many mothers that have suffered the same” ... (Oriente, E2)

The second element is about the following point: if there are so many people that suffer a similar or even stronger pain, the individual feels motivated to go out of their own sorrow since he/she can see the pain of others. Being among all these experiences and the fact of letting out the own sorrow to lend a hand to others generates a task of mutual consolation:

...when I started to go to these organizations of victims, I began to see that not only me felt pain, there were lots of people with a harder pain than mine. Because I found

some cases where a woman have got killed three or four children, and also his husband and she had missing people too. It means there was a bigger pain than mine. I saw her crying and I comfort her. We comfort each other... And I learnt that instead of being comforted, I had to comfort them because it is a huge profit since they had to comfort me too... (Oriente, E7)

Personal pain becomes shared pain and social pain, which enables a resilient force that allows the confrontation, because this task that reinforces bonds and mutual support constitutes a third factor that enables relief, emotional recovery and trust rebuilding:... “you learn to share that pain with others, and you see that the pain is not mine but of all, then, it is a shared pain, a supportive pain...” (Oriente, E13)

It is taken the first step to understand that political violence is a bigger and broader reality that has to do with all the community and the entire society, i.e. it is possible to recognize there is an explainable mechanism of repression with a (social, political and economic) wider purpose that is not an awful fate particularly designated to them.

... externalizing what you feel and share it with other people who understand you, because they have felt the same pain or have experienced similar incidents,... helps you to heal, it reduces the weight of your mind (Córdoba, E4).

Some practical explanations can be established: The first one regards the recognition of this methodology as a positive feedback process that occurs in the shared memory dynamic: each person tells his/her story, participants support each other, and they experience not only comfort but satisfaction and joy. The perception of feeling useful begins to contribute to the recovery, emotional load is reduced and they feel a general relief. That experience becomes a vital daily reference. Surviving victims find a space of stability and a social network; they stop regarding themselves as victims and recover a perception of “normality” within them.

Change and transformation stories arise; the subjective experience is emotional “healing”. Thus, negative emotions such as hatred, anger and resentment are slowly transformed. Therefore, personal and emotional transformation process implies, in some cases, fear, resentment and anger overcoming to deal with feelings of revenge, which is also experienced as “healing”: “... because it taught us to erase hatred and resentment, to look at life in another way, to move on, to face what comes in life...” (Oriente, E22).

In particular, the participants talk about a better subjective emotional perception. People report a feeling of optimism and joy, they recover the possibility of having celebrations and strengthen or create new relationships in a constructive spirit with a new vitality:

“So now they speak, dance, sing and everything, and that is something we did not do at the beginning...” (Córdoba, E3). “One gets more friends, as if one would be like before, joy sharing with them...” (Córdoba, E5) ... I suffered a strong headache, my column hurt, I forgot many things, I got behind a door to mourn my children’s death, I felt very alone... until I joined the support group, I changed a lot there, it helped me to heal a lot of sorrows and remove that “thinking”... (Oriente, E8).

3.3. Emotional recovery in memory public events

When memory construction processes begin to cover the interpersonal and group elements make possible the appearance of stories, narratives and discourses in the social and political areas. For this research, the studied group has brought their memory from the private and individual fields to a group level and subsequently or simultaneously, depending on the region and the case studied, to a socio-political level. Thus, their stories take a place in local and regional societies. Therefore, it is important to take into account the question about the role of this process -which involves memory public events and resistant collective memories construction- into the dynamics of subjective transformation from an emotional dimension that involves reinforcement in healing process and recovery at that level.

It is important to say that some authors (Páez, Asún, & González, 1994; Páez, Basabé, & González, 1998; Páez, Valencia, Basabé, Herranz, & González, 2000; Rimé, Páez, Basabe, & Martínez, 2009) attribute to memory public action only a cathartic function that allows releasing negative emotions that flow in a specific moment and become obvious in the mobilization. Thus, the participants expressed feeling emotionally “good” since there was a clear recovery regarding moods and willingness to do daily activities,

... Well, first, it has been useful because we can release that bad energy we had, that pain. When we make a memory public event, we throw what has happened to us, so it has been useful a lot... because we are externalizing, trying to free our heart from that pain... (Córdoba, E1).

In addition, this mood recovery is touched not only by memory events but also by the fact of being pain fellows thanks to the mutual support received inside the organization. Thus, the participants clearly

report that collective spaces of memory are an opportunity to vent their anger, which implies, like in the support group, emotion abreactions and feelings that oppress the individuals. It also becomes a way of releasing tension to move on: *“I told my story in many places, also publicly. I vented out my anger and sadness, it relaxed. I feel I’ve got a fortress that motivates me to keep going” (Oriente, E17).*

As a place of public expression, collective memory events also allow a sense of freedom, because they can express what they had to keep in silence once. To be seen and heard in a public place is a good exercise to state the repressed feelings: *“... to express and say what I feel to those who has not experienced this makes me feel an emotional recovery every time I’m doing it. It makes me feel like a different person...” (Madres, E8).*

It is necessary at this point to identify spaces: it can be defined three kinds of scenarios of public expression of memory and collective manifestation of pain. The first ones are the events that have a ritual characteristic, are closer to funerary commemoration, and focused on dignifying the people beloved by the participants in their memory and religious symbology (for example: light journey or liturgical celebrations such as marches to the cemetery, masses and other religious events). Secondly, we can find public events that have a vindicable purpose with a sociopolitical content of society and state demands, including armed groups (for example: marches and sit-ins). Finally, a third kind of events involve spaces where is possible to tell testimonies and write them, set stories, define facts and understand the conflict. For example: memory books, multimedia, murals, etc.

It is from this distinction where it is possible also to draw more precise conclusions about the statements made. The participants in this research believe that one of the basic stimuli to perform these events is precisely that these places are a suitable scenario to face the pain, the fear and other negative emotions to seek their emotional recovery:

...and I can tell that remembering is useful, because when things happened, one of the most painful things was that my children avoided talking about my other son. When they saw me talking and crying, they didn’t want to speak and say nothing about that. I know that my pain was painful for them too. I grew stronger when I went to these processes and lived memory public events... So I do can tell that memory heals, because it becomes public and one feels that person (the loved one) is still important, that person is still alive, still making history in our society, even though he/she is dead. (Córdoba, E11)

What happens here has to do with the task of confrontation and resistance, which means for people

to go outside, even in silence or a religious celebration, but stating what was kept quiet and suffered for many years and knowing that even power actors and armed individuals are there coexisting in the same scenarios. This courage and resistance act allows facing negative emotions linked to pain and sadness. They leave from the private to the public and have a first social recognition. They become visible. Dead people were humans and the pain they feel for them is legitimate (Uribe, 2010; Villa, Tejada, Sánchez, & Téllez, 2007). In this context, public action memory ends up being protective and healing.

Moreover, these collective memory processes contribute to reinforce the dynamic built in the mutual support group around the tasks for mourning overcoming, since these are spaces of (now public) expression and statement of what happened, facing social denial and indifference. Therefore, they also involve a supportive framework to make better the mourning tasks (Martín Beristain, 1999): they favor the incidents acceptance, because when there is a social recognition, they can be incorporated into a historical understanding that links past, present and future; besides, memory and dignity of the loved one becomes explicit.

... You can remember the person you love in those memory events but without that pain, because it is done to remember. I remember my brother, he was a good brother, my sister too, she was a nurse and I loved her, I remember her. I feel sadness no more, I remember her with joy... It is not about forgetting the killed person, but remember her/him without suffering and I talk about them, because when I talked to myself, I felt like a lump in my throat and I could not talk... Not anymore, I remember him and I feel calm... (Córdoba, E12)

Consequently, it also favors the adaptation to the new situation. It favors the symbolic relocation of dead people making a new way for reinstatement (Martín Beristain et al., 1999). All this is a key to the reconstruction of bonds that enable the survivors' daily life recovery in their community. Therefore, people leave isolation, overcome the consequences of offenses and victimization, generate strategies to resist and keep living with dignity; which means there is a real emotional recovery in a medium term and subjective level since it is a process rather than specific actions.

These actions also call out a community condolence that allows the survivor dignity recovery. Thus, despite how difficult and painful may be the memory for the victim, the emotional "contagion" that exists in public rituals, and the tears and sadness they feel; there is also a desire to keep these actions to

avoid the loss of the loved ones from the human beings' mind, by developing and transforming emotions such as resentment and hatred in a process that leads to the release of positive emotional mechanisms, which in some cases ends up reversing on surviving victims: *"... I changed the resentment and hatred I felt for those people, it was something heavy here in my chest that made me sick, and I do not feel these things anymore, thanks God..." (Oriente, E26)*

Participants also report the overcoming and confrontation of fear, since public action compel to emerge from anonymity, to show herself/himself, and highlight their own experience, making people feel more confident, overcome their fears and share their memories: *"... the first thing: it helps you to remember constantly but without pain. Another thing is relive the story, it helps you to lose your fears, to learn to live, to give confidence; I have seen it and I have lived it..." (Oriente, E24).*

3.4. Positive feedback between mobilization, organization, public memory, and emotional transformation

When actions have acquired a more political aspect and have been guided to social, political and rights recognition events, it is possible to understand more clearly that events of public and collective memory have a defensive role against negative emotions in such way that they make possible not only catharsis, but emotional transformation. These actions are part of an organizational process that also includes the mutual support groups and professional support. People do not participate individually in the act. There is a control and support setting, people that know they can lend a hand or a huge, i.e. there is a psychosocial situation that allows the interaction between the subject, his/her inner features and emotions in a social setting. Besides, a social group that is willing to listen has been created, which improves the transformation and resilience (Cyrułnik, 2006, 2008; Das, 2008):

... the fact that it removes memories doesn't mean it's bad; On the contrary, I think is good... because if I wouldn't give to myself the opportunity to cry, I wouldn't be here telling you what I'm telling you, I mean, it removed things and hurt because it should, but if you don't do it, it is going to be stuck and is going to be shown in other ways: If I hadn't told that at that moment, I would be an alcoholic even today and I think I wouldn't have my family and children. I would have lost them, because if you can't let out these emotions ... you have to find the way to do it. Of course, rituals and events of memory remove things, but it is necessary to do that... (Oriente, E20)

Besides the aforementioned, a supplementary dimension appears in this complex view: a positive feedback is produced between the organizational process and the memory event, because after all, the social organization is transformed into a setting of expression, where management and action allow recovering control about life (Cabrerá, 2004; Lira, 2011; Martín Beristain, 1999, 2007), and feeling that something has been achieved and that there is a reliable social network:

... I quit my isolation because in the organization I was not only facing my problems, but helping other women to face theirs. I do that labor and I like it because I feel useful, good and happy when people listen to them, when their documents and denunciation have been received, I feel happy when they get their administrative reparations... and when they get the human remains of their sons, because thanks to Madres de la Candelaria they have got their bodies (Madres, E2)

The meeting with others is favored at the time that social cohesion increases. Thus, it is useful to prepare the collective reinforcement, which makes possible new public events with more emotional containment that allows transformation in survivors' life in a long-term with or without explicit processes of psychological or psychosocial support.

3.5. Some limits and difficulties in public events of collective memory

On the other hand, particular situations in which collective memory could affect in a negative way the personal processes can be observed within the complexity and multiplicity where the interplay between personal and collective elements, which involve an emotional dimension, is possible. The first case, where victimization processes have been experienced by several reasons: the first one and more obvious is losing another beloved person by the action of a state or illegal armed group. However, this is experienced in a subjective way when memory is used with political purposes to maintain an official history that legitimize violence and crimes, such as the case in Colombia with the discourses of the previous government and the paramilitary groups that negotiate with the state. It also happens when memory is manipulated to used it in meetings with assassins, which occurs in some regions of the country and some towns of eastern Antioquia like in the following case:

...didn't I tell you everything was ok until my son was murdered?... besides, there was another organization that carried out memory events, we had to participate with displaced people, and I know my

son's dead had to do with the same paramilitary group... (Oriente, E27)

Another experience in which a person can feel counter-productive emotional effects of these public events of memory is when beloved people are not included in dignifying or visibility processes due to omission, forgetting, or just oversight. When memory events do not achieve their goal, fall into a routine, or become a place to observe pain without reach the pretended recognition, it is felt that a victim identity is created, which can limit the possibilities of personal reconstruction and get an active behavior and a citizenship of rights. Although it is not a problem of memory events but context, it involves the deterioration of the action that would be close to the revictimization:

You're making memory there, you're demanding rights, you're remembering, you're complaining to the state and society for that missing person, but you're having a painful load in your mind because you're remembering people and demanding their presence even if you know they are not going to come back. You always hope they will come back because you didn't see them dead. I think that is something emotional, that sadness is always there by demanding the presence of people that are not going to come back... It is emotionally very hard because you are again in the role of victim, it is like having a nameplate on the back that says: "I am a victim", and that is very hard because you can be trapped in a circle (Madres, E5)

The aforementioned means that representation and reproduction of public events should be linked to emotional recovery processes and place appropriately the participants without exclusions and ambiguities about demands and the event. People should be informed about the ceremony and know that it cannot be manipulated to different purposes since it needs to propose clear objectives that allow the pretended recognition. With these conditions, it is possible to achieve a better emotional recovery and a better welfare that allow recovering control of life (Lira, 2011; Martín Beristain, 2010a, b). Table No. 1. Synthesizes these aspects.

Another element is allowing recuperation, transformations and improvement recovery, then people could describe these processes as restorative and liberating, which does not implies to erase or to forget the incidents magically or to eliminate pain. For this reason and the implications of public events of memory, the participants recognize that they have learnt to live with pain rather than to eliminate it and that they have recovered the control of their life and their negative emotions rather than remove them.

Thus, from an emotional point of view, it is possible to obtain easier an integration process of emotions that are part of social spaces of public expression, accepted individually and collectively, and mitigated up to the point that are added to the “normality” of participants’ life.

Since it is not possible to return to the initial state, the incidents are permanent and unforgettable, which is proper. Having the experienced pain and consequences present in memory is an incentive for

public events. That is why it is not about magic formulas. There are complex processes that have progresses and relapses. However, tenacity, collective strengthening, mutual support, and solidarity are elements that have positive effects and produce meaningful emotional changes and transformations where subjects can reconstruct their subjectivity, which allows the emotional recovery.

Table 1. *Events of memory as defense against negative emotions.*

Factors that could contribute to emotional recovery	Factors that could not contribute to emotional recovery
1. Making the event as part of a process of periodic mobilization with preparation and persistence.	1. Making the event with specific activities with preparation and out of procedural settings
2. Having clear objectives to have achievements and definite steps in the recognition.	2. No having objectives or no having achievements long-term.
3. Memory processes that include everybody without removing some stories or narratives.	3. Memory processes that exclude some people or some kinds of victims.
4. Avoiding political manipulation that wants reconciliation in contexts of impunity.	4. Having an objective that is not the victims’ recognition and using their memory as a way to allow pseud reconciliation.
5. Psychosocial, support, and organizational strengthening processes.	5. Memory as product of an external project that do not search empowerment of the community.
6. Protected places where victims can feel safe.	6. Revictimization because the armed conflict continues.
7. Spaces that allow the struggle for truth and justice.	7. Contexts of impunity that increase impotence, anger and pain.

4. DISCUSSION

The reflection about qualitative evidence throughout this paper have allowed going in detail about the emotional condition of people when they suffer political violence incidents. From some points of view it is possible to talk about depression or other nosological definitions (Trastornos de ansiedad, TEPT, etc.). Besides, people include this kind of concepts in their quotidian language because it is a way to understand and give meaning to that experience that seems unbelievable and hard to tell. Beyond this clinical or medical aspect, it is necessary to make an effort to understand the deep emotion that affects the surviving victim identifying some meanings and absurdities experienced. Losing the will to live, to work, to eat and to sleep may involve a confirmation of the clinical profile, but also a language used by the victim to ask for company and support, which is important to get an answer about his/her condition.

This experience is taken as living in darkness, without a horizon. The world is closed and it seems to end i.e. it deeply affects the vital sense, the future projects seem to be finished, and the perception of the own story and identity in a threat between past, present, and future seem to break (Lira, 2011; Martín Beristain, 2005), without a concrete way to reconstruct it.

This research allows affirming that collective and public events of social and shared memory are experience that allow overcoming this kind of conditions without the intervention of a pathological, psychological and medical point of view. According to psychosocial approach (Clancy & Hamber, 2008; Hamber, 2011; Lykes 2001a, b; Martín Beristain, 1999, 2010b; Martín Beristain & Pérez Sales, 2008) surviving victims were not taken as a set of symptoms to be routed over a psychological intervention. It was not even fundamental to make a psychopathological diagnosis about their situation. Mutual support

process, shared memory, collective memory and public event organization have meant to the victims of these regions a transformation process in many aspects of their personal, family, social and community life. These memory events promote a psychosocial and psycho-political place that enhance and transform individual and collective subjectivities from a proactive, consciousness-raising and reconstructive perspective of social and community bonds emotionality.

It is created an experience called anthropology of pain by Veena Das (2008a). Actually, in "Wittgenstein and Anthropology" (Das, 2008b) the author affirms that linguistic format of pain always involves the other. When in Spanish the verb "doler" is conjugated, it does not refer to an active role of the subject like other verbs (e.g. correr, dormir, callar, reir, etc), but do refer to something that happen to the individual. When somebody wants to express pain, he/she say: "it hurts"; it means that it is something happening, suffering, instead of something that is being made. Besides the onomatopoeic word to express it is generally a moan such as "¡Ouch!"

"Saying 'I have pain' is asking for someone else recognition, it is not just a demand for affection, but for something that is ethical and political as well. For this reason, the pain negation of others is not an intellectual mistake, but a spiritual one that affects the future..." (Das, 2008b, pp. 334).

This mistake refers to the indolence and indifference of the rest of society when victims' stories, tales, and aches are ignored.

These processes of collective memory begin to invert that social logic because memory is shared and it became public when the story is told, that "¡Ouch!" is shared and heard by others in the group space, where it is received. The "Ouch" demands the social recognition i.e. involves solidarity.

When horror have been experienced, this demand is not needed, what is lacking sometimes is the ability of others (the ones of the quotidian relations) and the social "Other" to answer, contain, support, recognize, and listen to the victim experiences. This is exactly what is denied in the social aspects, which sometimes saturates the professionals of social sciences who do not answer the experiences they listen because they give nosological meaning to that private people of their vital experience and some factors that can help to the recovery.

Thus, when it is defined from a pathological or legal classification (Das, 2008a, b) or when is placed in the TEPT (Clancy & Hamber, 2008; Summerfield, 2000, 2001), there are no possibilities to understand and transform this reality, which does not happen just in an emotional and individual level, but also involves social, political and economic elements concerning confrontation, resilience and resistance processes that are unknown or eliminated when the suffering is

simplified by the category of "disease" or "right violation" as well.

However, these spaces of collective memory allow that transformation and reality when they take the hand of another, when the process of mutual condolence is carried out, when the public space is created, when it is stated and demanded and when the sociopolitical context is mobilized, bond and confidence are strengthened building a space of vital referent. At this point, somebody "takes charge of that pain" (Das, 2008a, b), it is possible then an individual and collective reconstruction that allows a community construction because this shared, public and collective memory allows going from multiple tragedies to just one: The tragedy of war and armed conflict that should ceased and are not legitimized by social imaginary.

Therefore, sharing the memory does not necessary mean the speech. It implies an expression. The possibility of expression occurs in multiple forms (verbal, playful, artistic, performative, etc.). This needs another person to listen and the construction of a relationship between pain and horror. Thus, this opportunity will be suitable when there is a social setting that listen and is created when the social system (by self-management, cooperation project presence, and state or ONG intervention, etc.) allows spaces where victims and communities are assumed as subjects of their own life, subjects of rights and fellows, who know things from which people can learn and should discuss.

In that way, it is created a place for another and doors are open for the construction of affective bonds and participative settings where the participant leaves his/her victim identity for citizen recognition to be the protagonist of their own destiny and community. In this context, speaking about shared memory makes sense and allows the reconstruction of subjectivity, the dignity recovery, and the social fabric recovery.

Besides, it is necessary to affirm that collective memory that becomes stories and public events also have an important role in the subjective transformation of people who makes part of these processes into the emotional dimension in long-term when it is within processes of mobilization and social organization of wide reach, which remains in time.

Also, it could be accepted that this way of memory construction contributes clearly to the strengthening of social cohesion of a particular society because it favors solidarity, creates bonds, and confidence restoration.

This role of collective memory is not part of a casual and linear relation. The simplistic conception in which is established the linear relation between memory, testimony or truth, and emotional recovery cannot be tackled (Hamber, 2008; Hamber, Mosikare, Friedman, & Maepa, 2000; Hamber, Nagin & O'Malley,

2000; Hamber & Wilson, 2002) because this simplicity allows a partial view of reality and weakens the power and impact of the memory events and the search for true. It is necessary a complex view in which psychosocial support favors victims' dignity and emotional recovery, social fabric reconstruction through mutual support and rehabilitation since the beginning, victims' organization and training process, empowerment for social and political events in a psychosocial approach, and a perspective of rights recognition from a view that allows a complete citizen. All this process is a continuous interaction that favors the dignity and emotional recovery of victims and the social fabric reconstruction.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

At the end of this paper, it is possible to affirm from a complex view that public events of collective memory allows transformation of emotional processes that were created in violent incidents: pain overcoming (not including missing family), sadness acceptance, and anger and hate transformation are important evidence of mutual support and shared memory processes that are reaffirmed in the organizational dynamic and public events of memory. Anomie overcoming, isolation and prostration evidenced several times in the reports of participants are a clear confirmation that allows maintaining that memory tasks are important into the processes of emotional transformation of the victims and control recovery of their lives. Thus, memory processes should be considered in intervention processes, programs and psychosocial attention projects to victims of political violence and armed conflicts by international cooperation, the ONGs and states, because they clearly affect the mental health of participants.

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