

The process of spectacularization of violence in Colombia. A tool in the construction of fear¹

El proceso de espectacularización de la violencia en Colombia. Una herramienta en la construcción del miedo



Juan Carlos Córdoba Laguna. A Social Communicator and Journalist at the University Jorge Tadeo Lozano, Bogotá. Doctor in Communication and Culture from the University of Lisbon, Portugal. He has a master's in communication and Culture from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro-Brazil and is a specialist in Communication and Image Theories from the Federal University of Ceará-Brazil. He is a professor who has developed projects linked to research groups in Colombia, Brazil, and Portugal. He has had articles published on the topics of urban imaginaries and media violence.

University Jorge Tadeo Lozano, Bogotá, Colombia

juan.cordoba@utadeo.edu.co

ORCID:0000-0003-3777-2410

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Abstract:

Local mass media developed technical mechanisms and conceptual strategies, such as spectacularisation or major spectacle as a result of the armed conflict in Colombia, allowing them to grow as relevant media companies. This article is derived from the doctoral thesis "The Media Meta-narrative of violence in Colombia: its spectacularisation in a culture of fear," in which a chronological documentary monitoring local media is made from the 50s by using variables such as historical facts and the description of its respective treatment. The iconicity that the spectacular images from the Colombian conflict have gained have served the ideological and economic intentions of the mass media and their fixation on individual and collective imaginaries.

Keywords:

Entertainment; mass media; Colombian conflict; imaginary.

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Resumen:

Como consecuencia del conflicto armado en Colombia, los medios de comunicación locales desarrollaron mecanismos técnicos y estrategias conceptuales, como la espectacularización, que les permitieron crecer como empresas mediáticas; este artículo se desprende de la tesis doctoral: "El metarrelato mediático de la violencia en Colombia: su espectacularización en una cultura del miedo", en donde se hace un seguimiento documental cronológico de los medios locales, desde la década de los cincuenta, con la descripción histórica y el análisis de su tratamiento. La iconicidad que han alcanzado las imágenes espectaculares del conflicto colombiano ha servido a las intencionalidades ideológicas y económicas de los medios y a su fijación en los imaginarios individuales y colectivos.

Keywords:

Espectáculo; medios de comunicación; conflicto colombiano; imaginarios.

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1. Introduction

The following is a historical account from 1948 to 2018 in Colombia, in which violence has played a prominent role. The communication channels used to tell the story, the way the information has been handled and some specific principles such as guilt and responsibility are shown, which can be seen in specific events.

1.1. *Trust in the media: the 1940s and 1950s*

April 9, 1948, is the starting point for the analysis in this work. On this date the presidential candidate for the Liberal Party, Jorge Eliecer Gaitán was assassinated, triggering a civil war against the Conservative² opposition. In this period, peasants armed themselves in defense against the army, which had taken a political stance. According to authors such as Arturo Alape (1983),³ this phenomenon gave rise to the guerrillas.

The historical period between 1948 and 1953 known as “Violence” had several fronts in the media: the press, mainly in the newspaper *El Tiempo*, owned by the Santos family, who had a political affiliation to the Liberal Party. Several members of the family were political figures, including several presidents (the most recent being Nobel Peace Prize Winner [2016]) Juan Manuel Santos [2010-2018]). Another was the radio due to its local nature in small cities, which served as an ideological instrument and political proselytism for its owners. A third front which Martín Barbero (1987) refers to was orality through rumor or commentary, and the use of the public square and the streets as stages for forming an opinion. In terms of Habermas’s (1987) theory of communicative action, this was essential for Colombians in this period to form their opinions, myths, and ghosts.

Despite the existence of mass media and their constant communicative connection with individuals, disinformation regarding facts, victims and places of conflict fostered an indifferent response among the population. This indifference is still prevalent even in the 21st century; it is demonstrated in the high numbers of casualties, such as the 220,000 homicides since 1958, or the almost 5 million displaced people between 1985 and 2012 (National Centre for Historical Memory or CNMH in Spanish, 2012). In spite of the internal conflict or extremely cruel acts, including paramilitary massacres since the 90s, victims’ stories have not been able to shake a population that feels uninvolved. Hannah Arendt explains this behaviour from the perspective of responsibility:

“When the person in questions appears in front of their fellow human beings, is set apart in relation to them, in the sense of being responsible only for themselves, for this kind of person, any and every inclination that motivates them for good or evil is a temptation that can lead them ‘astray’ in the world and for this reason there is a duty to resist” (2007: 21).

Regarding guilt Arendt explains that unlike the perpetrators of the crimes other actors participated in the acts by remaining silent and tolerant, most of Colombian society falls into this category. However, individuals also avoid being informed about the conflict, they isolate themselves from it and even create far-fetched parallel stories, which the media facilitates.

2 The traditional political parties in Liberal Colombia have ideologies regarding the separation of Church/State and free trade between economic powers. The Conservative maintain ideals of defense and Catholic moral traditions, economic protectionism and strong authority, among others.

3 Arturo Alape [1938-2006] is one of the most significant scholars of the violence in Colombia.

“I think it is possible to demonstrate that the processes are far more reaching in terms of clarifying the specific fault of those who, not forming a part of the class of criminals, despite playing a role in the regime, or those who merely remained silent, tolerating the state of things as it was, when they had a position that would have allowed them to speak out” (Arendt, 2007: 52).

The second period of violence in Colombia is that of the guerrillas', who were favoured by the Cuban Revolution between 1953 and 1959. With the arrival of television in 1954 under the military dictatorship, the country began to be informed about the conflict during this period through images, which was fostered by high illiteracy rates. Media coverage of the conflict transitioned from the stories that people told to a search for the spectacular, anecdotal, curious, and novel, which the guerrilla State confrontation could offer.

1.2. The discovery of spectacularisation: 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.

The journalists' following up of the conflict in these decades exposed a country unknown to most of its inhabitants, the reporters' notes were a constant, showing the camps and a guerrilla's day to day life, thus revealing the media's power to gain acceptance. The media unconsciously gave a face to the guerrilla, who the population had only created an image of, in part, through the fantastic stories told by previous generations. For the first time, the country saw and heard guerillas, in particular, the group M-19⁴, they learned that it was made up of young people that spoke of the country's problems in a common language, as opposed to the State's repetitive and unattractive discourse.

The media indirectly constructed an image of rebellion and social transformation for the M19's which was seen in the group's daring operations, such as the theft of Bolivar's sword in 1974, weapons theft from a guarded military barracks using tunnels in 1979, the Dominican Republic Embassy siege in 1980 which culminated in a cinematographic departure for Cuba, taking a group of Embassy hostages with them. As well as the coverage of the following peace talks in which a guerrilla was seen willing to negotiate, finally ending tragically in the Palace of Justice siege in 1985, in a military attempt to regain control the building was burned down and over a 100 people were killed, many of them were high court magistrates. Antonio Navarro, a member of the amnestied M-19 and now a renowned politician, would affirm 30 years later:

“What I have established from post-event information is that it was an attempt at replicating the Dominican Republic Embassy siege, a successful armed propaganda operation by the M-19 in 1980. But the Palace of Justice thing should never have happened. The analysis of the national situation at the time it occurred was completely wrong, the planning of it was disastrous, and its results marked the history of Colombia with fire” (Navarro, 2015: 87/88).

The Palace of Justice siege [1985], transformed the media's stance, which seemed to accept that the treatment given to the information was wrong, and no longer gave political advantage to the left wing. However, the country had little time to reflect due to the outbreak of violence caused by drug trafficking.

The construction of the image of the drug trafficking again passed through the process of cultural matrix described by Martín Barbero (1987), orality and folklore are essential in this process, popular culture is no longer an abstract concept

4 Socialist-style guerrilla warfare created in 1970, which was able to reunite different sectors of Colombian society.

and materializes in individuals' daily lives who recognise themselves in it: "popular culture as a place from which to think about the here and the now" (Martín Barbero, 1984, p. 81).

An example of the above are the first references to drug trafficking through the stories and songs from the Colombian Caribbean through which the anecdotal extravagances of the burgeoning drug trafficking captivated local audiences. The Colombian media were discreet about it, due to the degree of penetration the phenomenon had in society. This discretion meant that it almost went unnoticed, drug traffickers were only accepted when their might was shown through terrorism. However, their presence was constant from the beginning in the poorest neighbourhoods in different cities, where the heads of these organisations helped the population, thus creating an image of benefactors. On the contradictory image of the drug trafficking trade as a villain or a savour, Sánchez states:

"A set of habits that came to form [...] a more complex structure: the social institution of drug trafficking, which through different legitimacy mechanisms and domination managed to position this group of bandits 'for the rule of law', although popular heroes in public opinion" (Sánchez, 2009: 92).

Drug trafficking brought terrorism to the cities and became a new form of violence in a Colombia that had already become accustomed to it in rural areas. Beltrán (2006) highlights how the conflict took place in the countryside: "in most rural areas the violence did not cease until practically 1972... the confrontation between paramilitaries and guerillas in the rural setting... one of the main problems arising from the Colombian rural problem now is displacement" (2006: 2), demonstrating the constant impact of the conflict on rural populations.

Drug trafficking changed the targets of violence to the assassination of presidential candidates, ministers, prosecutors, journalists, the civilian population, among others. The methods also changed: car bombs, as well as airplanes, exploding in flight, the bombing of public buildings and newspaper headquarters ⁵, and hit men, which favoured spectacularity as an element that marked this period in the media with unspeakable images, this was also combined with the media practice of resorting to self-censorship to protect itself.

Pablo Escobar's story has served as raw material for television series and films, ⁶ helping to create a myth around him. The period of drug trafficking is probably the chapter of violence in Colombia most covered by the international media since cartels' terrorist acts created spectacular images and events, bringing the country into the international spotlight.

1.3. The spectacular, an essential element for the success of the messages: 21st century

The period of drug trafficking refocused the attention dedicated to the guerilla, whose organisations were in crisis due to the collapse of socialism from 1985. However, their new alliances with drug trafficking had enabled them to survive by obtaining other means of funding, as well as through the selective kidnapping of members of wealthy families or

5 The newspaper El Espectador denounced drug trafficking and, in response, The Medellín Cartel used hitmen to murder its director Fidel Cano and bombed its headquarters, destroying the newspaper. Regarding the public buildings, the headquarters of the Administrative Department of Security (DAS) was bombed, an attack in which 70 people died.

6 In 2015, two series based on Pablo Escobar's life: Escobar "Paradise Lost" and Narcos, were released by Netflix.

visible figures in the region, mainly cattle ranchers, landowners, and politicians⁷. In response, these actors supported the formation of paramilitary armies whose purpose was to annihilate or drive the guerrillas out, such as the United Self-defense Forces of Colombia (known as AUC in Spanish)⁸. Their actions included committing a massacre every two days between 1999 and 2000 or according to the UNHCR (UN Refugee Agency) the seizure of 6,000,000 hectares of land, and mass displacement of around one million people in 15 years.

Like drug trafficking, paramilitarism was supported by a part of Colombian society who saw it as their saviour, media support for it was also decisive. This support influenced the population's reaction, as they assumed that the problem was not so serious. The infiltration of paramilitarism in politics is called "para-politics," the president at the time Álvaro Uribe Vélez has been accused of belonging to it alongside other politicians, several of them are in prison or are being tried in legal proceedings, but often do not receive any real sanction. Some of these allegations have been made by world-renowned media:

"The cables published this Friday by The New York Times, put Former president Uribe in a compromising position, just hours away from presidential elections this Sunday. The events mentioned in the cables would have taken place between 1992 and 1995 when Uribe Vélez still belonged to the Liberal Party. The former president has reiterated that he has never had anything to do with drug trafficking" (*El Espectador*, May 25, 2018, Judicial Section).

The end of Uribe's government marked the beginning of a decline in the fight against guerrillas who remained during its mandate, although they had been weakened by financial problems and the loss of their leaders⁹ they began talks in 2013. This polarised the country who took opposing sides on any issue between left and right wing, like in the 2016 Plebiscite. President Santos' government sought to endorse the Peace agreements signed with the FARC in Havana, but to the public's general surprise "No" won in the 2016 Plebiscite, empowering the right wing that would go on to win the 2018 presidential elections.

The triumph of "No" was another chapter in media spectacularisation, the "No" campaign leader implemented a strategy of disinformation about the peace agreements. This was used to win votes, by distorting victims' and indigenous groups' marches calling for an end to the conflict, and by discrediting the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to President Santos. This phase was full of information, unexpected events, opinions with little historical reference, apologist, extremist or conciliatory approaches, as well as views that interfered with the way individuals constructed their view of the conflict.

In the 2016 referendum, private TV channels in Colombia engaged in a struggle to win viewers over and generate profits from the event. They resorted to the spectacular to achieve this goal; while at the same time showed an optimistic country

7 The most famous kidnapping by the FARC was of a French-Colombian citizen and presidential candidate, Ingrid Betancourt, which lasted six years [2002-2008]. Her release was obtained through a military operation to deceive the guerrillas, dubbed "Operation Checkmate".

8 Together with the massacres and displacement, the paramilitaries assassinated Jaime Garzón in 1999, one of the most renowned journalists and comedians in the country.

9 Raúl Reyes was assassinated in 2008, in a Colombian Army military operation in Ecuador. In 2009, the FARC announced that its founder Manuel Marulanda "Tirofijo", the world's oldest guerrilla had died.

that wanted peace. The media exploited and rewrote historical events which were easily spectacularised, and this version was probably believed by a percentage of the population.

This research has a documentary nature, and for this purpose, four media were chosen: print, radio, television and digital media together with their respective communication items. Ten highly recognised incidents were selected by audiences regarding the Colombian conflict, from the period 1948-2008, they were analysed using a qualitative method, through an analysis matrix, incorporating categories that sought to track elements of spectacularity used during the production process of the news items.

The application of the matrix made it possible to confirm the hypothesis that the studied Colombian media have progressively increased the use of spectacularisation as a resource, and as a strategy to achieve greater visibility.

2. Framework of reference

During the last 25 years, the Colombian conflict has become a tool for attracting audiences and generating profits. Throughout this time new aesthetics have emerged that resort to the use of the spectacular to accompany drug trafficking, paramilitarism and guerrilla stories, among others, which have gained enough strength and approval to permeate the way Colombians show themselves to the world and how their day-to-day life is told; therefore we must understand categories such as that of everyday life:

“Everyday life is largely heterogeneous and this from various points of view, first of all from content and significance or the importance of our types of activity. The organisation of work and private life, distractions and rest, systematised social activity, traffic and purification are organic parts of daily life” (Heller, 1985: 40).

The spectacularisation of the Colombian conflict coincides with the French author Guilles Lipovetsky's principles of “Artistic capitalism” (2015) and “New beauties”; there is a source of raw materials in Colombia for constructing these types of stories. Colombia could start to change its prevailing narrative proposal from 2016 with the signing of the peace agreements and the beginning of a post-conflict period.

The violent situation in Colombia has systematically provided material for the media and the arts, as exemplified by Lipovetsky's proposal, where war produces inputs that are successfully marketed and acquired for various uses, including, entertainment.

Lipovetsky presents the concept of “Artistic Capitalism” (2015), where culture, art, and information, among others, enter and compete in the market with the same logic of any product in a society that is opening up to the 21st-century market. It is marked by a change in individuals' way of relating to the concept of beauty, which is more tolerant, they cling to the present and have a relativism in their values. He also proposes the idea of “New beauties,” which implies a change in what is aesthetically accepted in mass culture, in which beauty is offered as a new seductive and enjoyable experience.

“What needs to be understood is that artistic capitalism does not produce art (by contemporary artists), artistic capitalism produces another art form, a new genre that is not the same but is produced for mass consumption and that has specific

characteristics that are in cinema, television, cartoons, advertising, and entertainment music, any art that is aimed at the general public, at a universal audience". (Lipovetsky, 2013, in a conference).

Art loses characteristics of Independence and transgression, only to become another mass media consumer product offered to individuals who determine its use. Lipovetsky calls this period, "Transaesthetic Age," where art can be found in many places, and it is now aimed at fulfilling the expectations imposed by entertainment and trends, among others.

"Artistic capitalism has managed to create a growing aesthetic environment, it is true, at the same time it no longer spreads aesthetic norms of existence (pleasure, emotion, dreams, escapism, entertainment). But the existing aesthetic model geared towards consumption that it promotes is far from being synonymous with a beautiful life to such an extent that it is inseparable from addiction and impatience, from submission to commercial models, from a relationship with time and the world dominated by the imperatives of speed, performance and accumulation" (Lipovetsky and Serroy, 2015: 28).

The war in Columbia surpassed the informative plane and the traditional view of manipulating situations, to make them seem less serious, creating a well of feasible narrative possibilities to be successfully used in different media formats. Elements of seduction were used in these media formats coinciding with the basis of "Artistic Capitalism" and the importance of the image.

Key events in the Colombian conflict have taken place in front of the cameras in real time, a characteristic that has not necessarily been as prolific and detailed as in other wars. However, according to Lipovetsky, it is an element that governs the present moment because it is an essential ingredient in the show's production and attractiveness.

Events such as members of the army being taken prisoner and held captive in the jungle for years, a guerrilla who places a "collar bomb" on a housewife, the inhabitants in a village being caught in the crossfire between guerrillas and paramilitaries and taking refuge in a church where a "cylinder bomb" falls and explodes killing 117 people (Semana, 2002), are easily marketable events for the media, as they are aware that they capture audiences' attention through the equation of emotion, exoticism, and spectacularity.

The Colombian conflict is a readily marketable product, consumption and profit are gained through diverse formats, coinciding with Lipovetsky's proposal in the "Society of the void" (1985), in which the tragedy of some is turned into entertainment for the masses and amusement for global audiences. In these cases, the media promotes this model through a positive symbolic construction that helps the individual to accept it: "Artistic capitalism not only makes the economy aesthetic but also the tastes and practices of individuals, it helped to promote an aesthetic ideal founded on pleasure" (Lipovetsky, 2013: in conference).

This conceptual formulation creates an aesthetic identity with which these products are recognised, followed and cultivated by their consumers, in turn, giving rise to genres such as Narcoliterature and Narcotelevision, which win consumers over and position the "new beauties" as aesthetic proposals different to established canons.

The serialisation of these aesthetics establishes protocols for the presentation of media products and naturalises them in individuals' daily life. The Colombian media has capitalised on curiosity, initially local in these new formats, where the raw, bizarre and decadent, are based on true events to win audiences over.

These formats generated an aesthetic that is easily recognisable by Latin American audiences, which has been called "Capitalism gore" by the Mexican Sayak Valencia. In addition to consuming them, she states that Latin Americans relate to them, holding a place in their daily lives, making them a part of popular culture.

"To refer to the reinterpretation given to the hegemonic and –global economy– in (geographically) frontier spaces [...] the term gore [comes from] a cinematographic genre that refers to extreme and categorical violence [...] to explicit and unjustified bloodshed (as a price for the Third World to pay which clings to the increasingly demanding logic of capitalism)" (Valencia, 2010: 15).

The "new beauties" being produced by the media and winning over audiences with the aesthetic of drug trafficking is not exclusive to Colombia, in Latin American countries such as Brazil, its media has resorted to showing violence in cities, favelas, police abuse of power, and poverty. In Mexico, border problems have even influenced the U.S media industry.

The "new beauty," which is the aesthetic of the drug trafficking and armed conflict in the media has contributed to creating an "aura" surrounding Colombia and its situation, which is resignifying its image. The conflict in Colombia and its consequences are real, but the experience that most individuals have of it is through television series that narrate it in a fragmented way, in turn, enabling audiences to express their opinions on blogs and fulfill a social demand to be informed about the reality of it.

Lipovetsky asserts that postmodern democracies have spaces where opposing ideas can be expressed. For this author, there is less violence nowadays than at any other time (at least in Europe), what has increased is the sensationalist way that the public is exposed to it. "The modern age was obsessed with production and revolution; the postmodern age is obsessed with information and expression" (Lipovetsky, 1985:14).

Postmodernity, although hedonistic and individualistic, proposes other more diverse ways of socialisation. As a result of the growing volumes of information that circulate, it is impossible to process, causing apathy and collective trivialisation. The private acquires value, the here and the now is presented regardless of their historicity, leading to a collective lesson:

"Social training is no longer carried out by disciplinary imposition or only by sublimation; it is now carried out by self-seduction. Narcissism, a new technology of flexible and self-managed control, socialises by de-socializing, puts individuals in agreement with a pulverised social system while glorifying the realm of the expansión of pure ego..." (Lipovetsky, 1985: 55).

Although Colombia coincides in some points with Lipovetsky's ideas, the country is far from achieving pacification or being a safe area. Perhaps, what most distances it from this proposal of a postmodern society are the education levels which, despite improvement still do not allow us to speak of a population that is educated with the necessary arguments for criticising its own system, therefore facilitating its manipulation. In 2015, the Index of Ignorance ranked Colombia in the sixth position in a study conducted in 33 countries.

The Colombian media have separated the good from the bad, making it more politically correct. The enemy's power that the system has to face justifies the results of death, destruction, and poverty, which would not be so great, according to the State itself and its propaganda apparatus, if controlling these enemies were not a priority, a principle that coincides with Guy Debord's proposal: "This perfect democracy manufactures its inconceivable enemy itself; terrorism. Indeed, it prefers to be judged by its enemies rather than by its results" (1990, p. 36).

Debord (1990) describes the historical journey that converges in the 21st century in a society that uses the spectacle as one of its most significant consumer articles, including politics, which seeks to manipulate citizens using the spectacle as a tool.

"It is not a supplement to the real world; it's over added decoration. It is the heart of unrealism in real society. In all its guises, information or propaganda, advertising or direct consumption of amusement, the spectacle constitutes the present model of socially dominant life" (Debord, 2008: thesis 6).

In Colombia, the media are part of economic groups. Despite proclaiming their social function, the need to win over audiences is necessary for ensuring a financial profit. On the other hand, the existence of a violent conflict produces raw informative material which can be shown spectacularly, making it a sure formula for generating profits. This, in turn, has created a particular public that consumes its products, as a result of being steered in this direction.

Debord warns how social interaction becomes mediated by the spectacle, and the spectacle becomes the enabler of social links, causing the social space to disappear. Although this notion was previous to the rise in the massification of networks, the principle maintained is that: "the spectacle is not a set of images but a social relationship between people, mediated by images" (Debord, 2008: thesis 4).

In the case of Colombia the boundary between reality and fiction has been erased, making it a useful tool for the spectator to manage to classify a character's name who has been in the media spotlight in the correct scenario, "the best way to understand the role of the media is to see them as part of a broader confrontation between political antagonists for the control of the public agenda and the public interpretation of specific political realities" (Hangli, 2011: 2).

The disinformation the audience receives is both the result of the flood of information that they are inundated with daily and of a control strategy which has been maintained over time, relying on people's lack of schooling, who have been trained through the media: "spectacular domination has simply educated a generation subject to its laws" (Debord, 1990:18).

The Colombian drug cartels are Debord's (1990) starting point for illustrating the functioning of the integrated mafias, as another element that makes up the spectacular society, which, not only appears in the mass media when it commits crimes but also takes advantage of technological advances and social structure. They become entrenched at different levels in society: "the mafia is not alien to the world: it is perfectly integrated into it. In the times of the integrated spectacular, the mafia reigns as the model for all advanced commercial enterprises" (Debord, 1990:85).

Artistic capitalism, spectacle, and fear are added to the idea of new beauties as Zygmunt Bauman affirms: “Just like a good currency ready for any investment, the capital of fear can be used well in any business: both commercially and politically” (2005: 52).

The Mexican Rosana Reguillo (2001), places Bauman’s proposal in the Latin American context and focuses her attention on how contemporary fears are constituted in a frontier space in which processes, speech patterns, characters, politics, and stories converge, making it difficult to assign them a fixed terrain or isolate them. For this reason, studying them requires a nomadic view that follows them, since, for this author, fear can be defined as something that: “is always an individual experience, socially constructed and culturally shared” (Reguillo, 2000: 9).

Reguillo’s proposal touches on the media and the schemes they use to achieve expected results, according to the specific characteristics of the region:

“Media logic, modern Sherezadas that keep us on the edge, attentive to detail, of the microscopic amulet that allows us to elude the evidence that we face every night, like the sultan, the weakening of the imagination, of the impulse of life and we require another narrator capable of re-enchanting us through the mediation of the word-image, the meaning of a world from which, we think that we have already extracted all of its secrets. The media with its infinite capacity to surprise” (Reguillo, 2000).

The spectacularisation of the conflict has consciously or unconsciously contributed to the consolidation of an imaginary of fear that has taken root in the readings that Colombians make of their reality.

3. Methodology

This paper makes a documentary survey of the coverage of a selection of iconic events in the Colombian conflict between 1948 to 2008 (60 years), in the primary and traditional local media. These have been characterised over time as a government-type and some form part of the two largest economic groups in the country, in this spectrum, there are no opposing media with considerable audience sizes, the distribution is carried out in the following way:

Print:

- *El Tiempo* Newspaper: the leading newspaper in the country founded in 1911, owned by the Santos family. The former president Juan Manuel Santos from 2010-2018 and Nobel Peace Prize Winner 2016 is a part of it, the political behaviour of this newspaper has traditionally been government oriented.
- *El Espectador* Newspaper: founded in 1887, making it the oldest in the country, it is the second most read. Its director was murdered and its headquarters bombed in the eighties due to accusations against the Medellín Cartel. The political behaviour of this newspaper has traditionally been gubernatorial.
- *SEMANA* magazine: founded in 1946, is owned by one of the two largest oligopolies in Colombia, which have supported the government and right-wing ideas.

Audios:

- National Radio of Colombia: state radio station although State funded it did not show strong political inclinations.
- Radio Stations CARACOL, RCN, TODELAR: The first two form part of a media conglomerate that also includes television and is owned by the three main economic groups in the country (Santo Domingo, Ardilla Lulle, Sarmiento Angulo), with political lines aimed at supporting the government in power.

Visuals

- The television newscasts of the 1980s and 1990s were characterised as small programmers, related to liberal and conservative political tendencies. They were owned by traditional families, which were characterised as moderate, these media gradually disappeared when private television channels were created in 1997.

3.1. Selection of pieces

The sample selection (journalistic pieces) was carried out with the criterion of news items through which communication pieces were chosen about historical events in four different media impact periods, which also had elements that could be spectacularised, regardless of whether they were used or not by representative media in the country, the chosen incidents were:

- 1948, The Bogotazo: Assassination of a political leader which triggered riots that partially destroyed the country's capital, an event that remains present in the Colombian imagination as a historical breaking point.
- Murders of Rodrigo Lara 1984 (Minister of Justice), Luis Carlos Galán 1989 (presidential candidate), and Jaime Garzón 1999 (renowned comedian). Three national figures murdered by paramilitaries and because of drug trafficking throughout fifteen years. Although these assassinations are only three out of a list of 250,000 in fifty years of the conflict, they managed to shake a country familiar with these types of events.
- Taking of hostages from the Dominican Republic Embassy (1980) and the Palace of Justice (1985), both carried out by the M-19 guerrilla group. They were high media impact incidents broadcasted in real time on television, achieving spectacular outcomes — the Guerillas departure for Cuba with the hostages, the attempt at retaking the Palace of Justice using tanks and helicopters that sparked a fire in the building, burning it down with hostages and guerrillas inside in the country's main square during the early hours of the morning. Both were respectively real incidents that took place in front of the cameras in a spectacular way.
- The case of Pablo Escobar 1984-1991, possibly the most exploited and successful media incident of the Colombian conflict at an international level. It combined elements such as spectacularity, action, a reality check, extreme violence, exoticism, morbidity, among others.
- Military massacres in the late 90s and early 2000s in remote regions, although inventoried by the media, their tendency was not to exploit the possibilities of spectacularisation of the images, such as acts of extreme cruelty against the

defenseless civilian population accused of aiding the guerrillas, possibly because in doing so the media could have increased the sense of intensity of the conflict among the population.

- The kidnapping of Ingrid Betancourt 2002-2008. This event generated information that was to a greater or lesser extent spectacularised by the media for six years and which reached a climax with her release in a military intelligence operation dubbed (Operation Checkmate), which would become a film script and a media product of global acceptance.

3.2. Consolidation of the physical sample

- The 40s and 50: radio and written press (20 pieces).
- The 60s, 70's, 80's and 90's: radio, written press and television (42 pieces)
- 21st century: written press and electronic media (25 pieces).

Table 1. The 40s and 50.

Channel	Media	Facts/Events	Sources	Total
Radio	National Radio Station	1948, The Bogotazo of,	Sound archive from <i>the Fonoteca de la Radio Nacional de Colombia</i> and (<i>Inravisión</i>) <i>Instituto Nacional de Radio y Televisión</i> . Signal memory site: https://www.senalmemoria.co/articulos/el-9-de-abril-en-9-audios-de-la-fonoteca-de-senal-memoria	12
Written Press	- <i>El Tiempo</i> . - <i>El Espectador</i>	1948 The Bogotazo of	National Newspaper Library of Colombia	8
Pieces				20

Source: created by the author

Table 2. 60s, 70s ,80s and 90s

Channel	Media	Events	Sources	Total
Radio	CARACOL RCN TODELAR	Murders: of Luis Carlos Galán, Rodrigo Lara and Jaime Garzón.	Sound archive from the Fonoteca of <i>La Radio Nacional de Colombia</i> and in the (<i>Inravisión</i>) <i>Instituto Nacional de Radio y Televisión</i>	12
Written Press/ Print media	<i>El Tiempo</i> <i>El Espectador</i>	Taking of hostages at the Dominican Republic Embassy and the Palace of Justice,	National Newspaper Library of Colombia	6

Television	Channels one and two, 24-hour newscasts, <i>Nacional, T, V hoy, Mundo visión</i> (by Jorge Enrique Pulido (80s) Newscasts: RCN and Caracol (90's)	Pablo Escobar Case	<i>Inravisión</i> archive	24
Examples of the pieces			http://caracol.com.co/programa/2014/11/06/audios/1415267580_495619.html http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-16422759 http://pacifista.co/los-periodicos-de-la-toma-asi-nos-contaron-los-hechos/ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GKyxKdOx-_M https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dN4HIXFv9LU	
Pieces				42

Source: created by the author

Table 3. 21st century

Channel	Media	Events	Sources	Total
Press	Magazine <i>Semana. El Tiempo. El Espectador</i>	Military massacres	National Newspaper Library of Columbia	18
Electronic media		The kidnapping of Ingrid Betancourt	Electronic Media Sites.	7

Examples of pieces			http://especiales.semana.com/especiales/proyectovictimas/cronologia/index2.html http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-1298829 http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-1344168 https://colombia2020.elespectador.com/territorio/que-pasaba-en-colombia-hace-18-anos-en-los-dias-en-que-ocurrio-la-masacre-de-el-salado http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-4365370 https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/paz/articulo-asi-fue-el-secuestro-de-ingrid-betancourt https://www.lanacion.com.ar/1026706-rescataron-a-ingrid-betancourt https://www.laprovincia.es/mundo/2008/07/03/ingrid-betancourt-recupera-libertad-seis-anos-farc/161557.html https://elpais.com/internacional/2008/07/02/actualidad/1214949625_850215.html http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/spanish/latin_america/newsid_7486000/7486564.stm	
Pieces				25
General total				87

Sourced: Created by the author

3.3. Matrix

This seeks to find striking features in the communicative products of each period locating in them:

- Emotional displays (alterations in character, laughter, crying, voices between cuts).
- Handling of elements in pieces using morbidity (use of men's and women's bodies, death, sex, the bizarre, the occult).
- Creation of suspense to show a fact.
- Use of language (words and expressions with a certain intensity and their functioning in a situation and at a particular time).

4. Presentation of Results

The description and analysis of the findings obtained in the study of the selected sample of Colombian media about iconic events from the internal conflict in the seventy year period, is divided into three periods, 40's and 50's, 60's, 70's, 80's and 90's, and the 21st century, which allowed the hypothesis to be validated, regardless of the technology available at any time, the use of the spectacularity factor has been increasing due to its effectiveness.

4.1. *The 1940s and 1950s*

4.1.1. *Radio*

In 1948, during the Bogotazo, *Radio Nacional* (National Broadcasting Radio), was seized by the Liberal Revolutionary Militias who misreported that the conservative president Mariano Ospina Pérez had been ousted and the revolution had triumphed in several cities in the country with the military's support. This report is accused of stimulating the riots that partially destroyed the city.

“From the radio stations, commentators high on violence incited their listeners to go out into the streets to protest Gaitan's murder. Fed by what they heard on the radio, the angry crowd burned the city causing destruction that left more than a thousand dead that day” (Ethical Network, 2018).

The coverage of this event was mainly descriptive, not analysed, and the speaker's view was transmitted. Through his altered voice, he gave importance to details; there was no contextualisation of the moment nor a projection of the implications that this would have, even so, initially, it is not possible to determine the speaker's particular political stance. The strikingness of the incidents made him focus on the description of destruction and death. The information that reached the stations was alarming because it came from the centre of the capital and from individuals calling from places near the riots or who went to the studios. As a result, the speaker was aware that at that time he had the radio listeners' attention and interest.

4.1.2. *Written press*

In 1948, during the Bogotazo, while on the radio the transmissions were live, the newspapers (*El Espectador* and *El Tiempo*) came later, for example, *El Espectador*, only circulated a four-page edition three days later, allowing them to obtain a broader picture of what happened. Despite this, the headline and the photo on the front page of *El Tiempo*, in itself is intimidating: “Bogota is semi-destroyed,” the content of the article in this edition is descriptive, it repeatedly questions the architectural future of the city and political future of the country.

In the information in the newspaper as well as on the Radio, it seems that at the outset there was no premeditation about the effects of these messages on the population, in spite of the dramatic and embellished nature of their descriptions.

Table 4: Front page of the newspaper *El Tiempo*, 1948



Photo: Carlos Amézquita, El Tiempo Archive

4.2. The 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s

4.2.1 Radio

Assassination of Rodrigo Lara, April 30, 1984. The announcers and journalists were astonished by the assassination of a minister, which, at the time, was unthinkable. The event was not understood, the possible culprits were not pointed out, nor was the problem of drug trafficking gauged, the journalists themselves were overcome with emotion and became disoriented in light of the event. One of the spectacular elements about the Minister's assassination was the hitman, in this case, Bayron Velásquez. He was a 17-year-old, who had travelled from Medellín to Bogotá to assassinate Rodrigo Lara, but since he did not know the city, he was quickly captured.

- Murder of Luis Carlos Galán August 18, 1989. When comparing the radio coverage of this event with the assassination of Rodrigo Lara, five years later, the radio announcers are more measured. However, at the same time the morbidity increased among field journalists, who gave more space to daily sources, unknown to the listeners, such as some attendees at the demonstration where the candidate was assassinated, these sources recounted details of the incident excitedly. Unlike the assassination of Rodrigo Lara, where the information had almost no variations, in this case,

- The Palace of Justice siege on November 6 and 7 1985. The newspaper coverage by *El Tiempo* was more extensive compared to *El Espectador* since the former published an extra edition on November 7. Although the footage of the Embassy and the Palace of Justice took place in front of the cameras, the latter quickly resorted to exploiting the spectacular elements and anecdotes from the event, there was also a wealth of images and unconfirmed information, such as individuals who left the building and disappeared, the role of the president at that time, the military, guerrillas, and drug trafficking. The spectacular prevailed in images and stories over analyses, explanations, and contexts in this event.

4.2.3 Television

- The Case of Pablo Escobar. Through the development of real stories, the power structure of some television newscasts transitioned from the hands of political families in the '80s to groups of journalists in the '90s; this would determine how contents were handled in this period. Contents were predominately immediate, there was a flood of fleeting information, and an effort to gain credibility among audiences, partly explained by the channel's communicative dominance at that time (in 2000 this changed), when truth was stranger than fiction, coinciding with the beginning of the rating dictatorship; to win audiences over and assure advertising, and as a result the subsistence of the news content.

In this scene, the spectacular was elemental to successfully attracting audiences' attention, who consumed the information about everyday life, regardless of its importance. In the case of Escobar, especially between 1990 and 1991, the cinematographic, anecdotal, a strong popular cultural presence, the importance of details, incidents that were not contextualised and had few sources, together with self-censorship, were the common denominator in the formula for economic success in these formats that would be upheld in the future.

In this period from 1984, with the assassination of Minister Rodrigo Lara, the media gradually made a transition from astonishment to rationalisation of the informative material. They became aware of the power that the spectacular element implies, even at times when the harshness of the facts demands that the information be rigorously treated.

4.3. 21st century

4.3.1. Written press

Paramilitary Massacres. The journalistic genre of the chronical was used, although it was a real or newsworthy fact, it was aided by literary devices. On occasions this made it seem like it was dealing with a fictional story happening in a different place at a different time, and not an event that had just occurred in the country. Unlike other incidents, the massacres are spectacular, but if we compare them with what happened in the Palace of Justice, the case of Escobar or the release of Ingrid Betancourt, incidents that have similar characteristics, the massacres were not as exploited as media spectacles.

“The credit that can be given to information depends, on the one hand, on the social position of the informant, on the role they play in the exchange situation, on their value of representativeness in relation to the group of which they are spokesmen, and, on the other hand, on the degree of commitment that they manifest in front of the information transmitted. (Charaudeau, 1997: 62)”.

In the news texts, statistics are handled, there is a presence of mainly official sources, photographs, tables and maps, and a cinematographic narrative scheme is upheld, where there is space for the anecdotal and emotional.

4.3.2 *Electronic media*

The case of Ingrid Betancourt. This was novel in the media due to technological changes and the communicative model, in which users can autonomously choose the means of communication, time and what fragments of information they want to consume. This meant that when Betancourt was released on July 2, 2008, the audiences were atomised in different media, such as news sites and public institution portals. The portal Equinoxio published how the coverage of the event had been on 18 of the most important news sites in the world that same afternoon.

The media impact of the release operation “Operation checkmate” caused users to collapse local information sites, which updated information throughout the day. This event maintained traditional media coverage characteristics, such as the use of primary sources, in this case, the army. The description of the incident was similar to film schemes because this like other incidents described here was truth stranger than fiction, but was supported with multimedia resources such as audio, image, and video.

The Betancourt’s release was one of the first cases in which those platforms considered at the time as new information technologies, served to construct a spectacular scenario, which allowed the user to interact with the volumes of information about the incident, at every second

Even so, the characteristics of new media had already been seen on the website La Jornada, a year before Betancourt’s release. Versions of Betancourt’s death were discussed on the portal La Jornada, i.e, fake news which is more common in this medium, the incident was also narrated with a wealth of images, dramatisations and animations, in particular, the reenactment of her release, her arrival to Bogota and her departure for France. There were few background analyses, new information and implications of the incident, a repetition that rather than inundate, seemed to please new audiences.

The twenty-first century starts with the handling of information through situations facilitated by the successful propagation of the spectacular using technological tools, the prioritisation of global audiences, including ones in Colombia. This period has been marked by consumption through images and post-truth as a way of describing situations which are present in individuals’ daily lives.

5. Discussion

In Colombia, the degrees of spectacularity increased exponentially in the media over the decades, due to technological development, affecting the formation of a post modern society that moved away from reason as a conceptual axis, and the principle of modernity, approaching the emotional. This has affected relationships and social cohesion and has facilitated audience acceptance of spectacular contents constructed using techniques that guarantee specific results.

The almost industrial production of messages with striking characteristics has been facilitated by the Colombian context, where attractive images and stories are produced constantly. On many occasions, they do not need an oral narration or

to be put into context to be consumed by different publics. In addition to the population's low educational levels, the strategies of manipulation that include spectacular techniques used by broadcasters, its justified existence in the culture of fear and the flood of information instead of informing disorientate, among other things.

Technological devices facilitate access to information and its serialisation, allowing individuals to appropriate its characteristics, including making value judgments that when incorporated into cultural baggage, could be used as a reference when judging reality or even when making political decisions. This occurs even when judgments are far from reality or are not based on weighty arguments because the individual can disarticulate or invisibilise them.

Although information about the conflict is part of Colombians' daily life and many of the events take place near their homes, a large part of the population can abstain from what is happening, due to the media's scheduling of the conflict. The degree of attention and the importance that the audience should give to the events is determined by the media; as a result, parties identify with stances the media present, creating a scheme in which conflict feeds the media's messages, which in turn feed social elaborations and individuals' cultural baggage.

The spectacular treatment of the conflict by the Colombian media has it a product of a specific time, in which the economic success of the messages related to it are easily commercialised in the international media market, eager for stories that astonish audiences. Although international audiences receive unpublished stories on a daily basis, they still demand novel ones, which Colombia has been continuously supplying since the nineties. These messages have a short lifespan and are quickly replaced by others that are equally spectacular. Since they have an ahistorical dimension, but which momentarily satisfies a receiver attracted to the eye-catching nature of these stories, audiences have a low criticality towards them and are faced with the impossibility of building memory.

The media's spectacularisation of the incidents of the Colombian conflict has guided the audiences' attention towards the emotional, using tools such as reiteration, inundation, as well as the technical quality of production, which can alter the final view of what happened and its gravity. All of this results in subjects upholding these versions in their daily lives, making them see their reality as something coherent and decreasing their capacity to take action.

One of the elements that have allowed the spectacularisation of the Colombian conflict is the iconicity¹⁰ of the images that it generates, facilitating media's use of it and the fixation on individuals, even in culturally different environments. These narratives presented globally as spectacular show how Colombians appropriate their reality and recent history. The spectacular image can guarantee a place in individual and collective imaginaries, which depends not only on individuals but also on the media's intentionality, which can predict which of these will be more successful or create floods of heterogeneous information about a situation so that, in the end, it can be trivialised.

In Colombia, the media use the incidents of the conflict as raw material to feed different channel's programming, transforming them into serialised content in news and fiction formats. In particular, the mass acceptance of the latter has given rise to literary and television "genres" exported as Narcoliterature and Narcotelevision, respectively. These contents

10 Images such as those of Ingrid Betancourt's in captivity, Pablo Escobar, armed and camouflaged guerrillas have iconic characteristics.

manage to contaminate others, including non-violent content, due to the element of the spectacular that has become essential for succeeding in an increasingly competitive media market.

These spectacular contents, regardless of their proximity or distance from reality, have resignified facts and characters with the help of cultural elements, levels of information and daily life, which determine the individual's reading of the reality. Thus, the communicative scheme tends to be more vertical in the sense that the medium narrates and the receiver nods, the negotiation is not as explicit as cultural studies propose.

The incidents told spectacularly in the media tend to diminish an individual's ability to resignify them, since they are more inclined to accept the messages as a reality coherent with the situation that is happening. As a result the construction of collective memory is affected, where there is also a discourse of invisibilisation of those parts of reality that were not portrayed by the media.

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