

ANUNCIANDO LA AUSENCIA: TRAUMA AS A CREATIVE AND COLLECTIVE
MOTIVATOR IN META, COLOMBIA

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

This research analyzes how the women from Tente theater group transformed their traumatic experience concerning disappearance into the theater play *Anunciando la Ausencia* or *Announcing the Absence*, which engages the audience in the systematic disappearance in Colombia during the armed conflict. I did archival research on historical documents regarding the armed conflict in Colombia. I carry out participant observation in the houses of the actresses, the rehearsals of the play, and the performance of it. I also interviewed the actresses, their closest relatives, human rights organizations, and the performance audience. The theoretical exploration concerning the archive and repertoire in the play contributes to the analysis of the artistic and political embodiment. My results show that trauma and *Anunciando la Ausencia* are simultaneously collective and individual, which has allowed the creation of the play and the connection with the audience. Pain is a crucial intersection of trauma and theater because it is an effective way to communicate and receive Tente's testimonies. This research emphasizes the potential of emotions, particularly pain, anger, and joy, in the visibility of the disappearance in Colombia and the actions to stop it.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Alicia, Carmen, Gladis, Nidia, and Paulina, actresses from Tente theater group. I admire your creativity and agency. Thank you always.

And to Julia, the woman that teaches me bravery. I love you.

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Contributors

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	ii
DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
CONTRIBUTORS AND FUNDING SOURCES.....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
LIST OF FIGURES.....	vii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER I COLOMBIA, A WOUNDED COLLECTIVE BODY.....	5
Guerrillas Insurgency (1958-1978).....	6
Paramilitarism Insurgency (1978-1990).....	8
The complicit state of the war (1991-2002).....	11
The Peace process (2002-2016).....	13
Disappearance and Tente theater group.....	14
CHAPTER II THE OBJECTS SPEAK: BODY, BODIES, AND EMBODIMENT.....	23
Tente.....	27
The play.....	43
Play's structure.....	44
Trauma and the archive-what the play means and does.....	63
CHAPTER III COLOMBIA IS WRITTEN WITH T OF TRAUMA AND THEATER.....	73
CONCLUSIONS.....	93
REFERENCES.....	98

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
1	Actresses performing Anunciando la Ausencia.....	23
2	Paulina and a picture of Maria Cristina talking about her disappearance..	28
3	Paulina hugging Maria Cristina’s Nursing Clothes.....	29
4	Alicia serving Avena to her yoga group.....	31
5	Alicia and her mom.....	33
6	Carmen with the t-shirt and hat of her husband.....	35
7	Carmen showing the Gallery of Memory to a College Professor.....	37
8	Gladys in her living room showing the toys from her disappeared son....	37
9	Nidia and her granddaughter in her house.....	39
10	Nidia in the theater play Anunciando la Ausencia.....	41
11	Alicia During the Theater play, as the death character.....	42
12	Gladys with her son's clothes.....	51
13	Gladys, Nidia, Carmen and Alicia laughing during rehearsals of the play	53
14	Gladys and the objects to remember Fabian, her son.....	74
15	Nidia’s Memory Book.....	81
16	Tente actresses during the toast.....	91
17	Audience and actresses.....	92

INTRODUCTION

I met the Tente theater group in 2017 when I was doing an internship at the Centro Nacional de Memoria Historica National Center for Historical Memory with a focus on artistic and cultural initiatives. The Tente theater group was one of the creative initiatives within the national center. At first, three things caught my attention: the age of the actresses, the fact that it was their first time doing theater, and how their memory exercise permeated their lives and testimonies. Since they grew up in the middle of the armed conflict, they lived the armed conflict indirectly in their territories and then directly when their loved ones disappeared.

After I met them, the group invited me to an art exhibit for victims of state crimes in Bogotá, the capital of Colombia. During the event, Tente actress Paulina Mahecha showed me the drawing she had made depicting the violent events surrounding her daughter's disappearance and killing in 2004 (Comision de la verdad, 2004). The drawing, which shows the dismembered body of her daughter, distressed me. While she was showing me the drawing, Paulina described the last moments of her daughter – violent and heartbreaking events – with a calm that amazed me. Paulina was expressive. As she narrated the events, her hands moved, her feet and voice were resolute, her eyes firmly focused on me.

At that moment, I became interested not only in her life experience, but in how she expressed it. I wanted to know more about how Paulina and the other Tente members processed and expressed, as individuals and as a collective, their relatives' disappearance. I wanted to better understand the creative and collective process through which those women used their bodies to share painful experiences.

In this thesis, I analyze how the Tente converts traumatic experience into a theatrical performance. I am particularly interested in the types of embodiment the play enables, the relationship between political and artistic performance, and how gendered practices relate to those performances.

My research draws on ethnographic research conducted in the summer of 2022. During fieldwork, I conducted 30 interviews with the Tente actresses and their closest relatives. I met with officials from human rights organizations who have supported the Tente group in its artistic and political journey. Additionally, I worked with Tente to put together a performance of their play *Anunciando la Ausencia* in a community space at Villavicencio, a town in the Meta department- In Colombia, department is a paralel to a State- where many of them live. I assisted the actresses during rehearsals for several days, helped them set the stage, and promoted the performance to the broader public. The performance was well attended, with people from different ages and backgrounds. I was able to interview some audience members after the performance.

Although the Tente has done several performances of *Anunciando la Ausencia*¹, my analysis will focus on that June 2022 performance. In this thesis. During fieldwork, I learned these are strong, creative, and brave women with open hearts, inside and outside the stage. I learned how powerful it is to portray an experience as painful as the disappearance of a son or daughter through poetry, metaphors, art, and love.

In this project, I propose a qualitative approach to the victims of Colombia's armed conflict. The historical and consistent participation of the state in that conflict shows the complex situation many Colombian citizens face. Historically, state institutions or armed forces have

¹ The videos from other performances of *Anunciando la Ausencia* are available online, see El Tente (2016).

failed to assist and defend the population against violent crimes such as forced disappearance. On the contrary, the State has often taken part in the conflict, making the problem even worse. This context is essential in understanding the reasons behind the Tente theater group and the significance of the play *Anunciando la Ausencia*.

In Chapter 1, I provide a sociohistorical description of the armed conflict in Colombia. The chapter is structured around four main periods: Guerrilla Insurgency (1958-1978), Paramilitarism Insurgency (1978-1990), State complicity in the war (1991-2002), and the Peace process (2002-2016). Throughout the chapter, I show how the disappearance has been a systematic practice executed by state and non-state groups.

I also discuss the nonprofit organization MOVICE (Movimiento de víctimas de crímenes de Estado- National Movement of State Victims). MOVICE has played an important role in advocating for the victims of disappearance and denouncing the Colombian government for its role in the violence against innocent civilians. The Tente theater group started within the schools of memory organized by MOVICE. As I explain in the chapter, differences between the organization and the theater group led to Tente's departure. Although the group is not with the organization anymore, the actresses recognize MOVICE's importance in their creative and political work.

Chapter 2 discusses the lives of the Tente actresses in their day-to-day context. I also provide a detailed description and analysis of *Anunciando la Ausencia*. As I show, the play is comprised of four main moments, which I call "The encounter," "the search," "the testimony," and "the mourning." I argue that artifacts of memory such as the clothes and the diaries have an important role in the actresses' performances and testimony. Likewise, the moments of collective encounter in the play (dancing and singing, for example) are essential in creating a group

narrative. Besides, voice and body gestures, such as screaming or crying, are important channels for Tente members to engage with the audience.

I establish a relationship between the broader historical process presented in chapter 1 and *Anunciando la Ausencia* by considering structural trauma. I argue that trauma is embodied in the actress's actions, words, and affective connections with the objects in the play. The collective encounters in the performance express the collective nature of their testimony as their individual performances show highlight personal elements. Pain is crucial in the balance between the personal and the collective, the private and the public, and the aesthetic and the social.

In *Anunciando la Ausencia*, the actresses' embodiment of memory, pain, and hope through artifacts, gestures, and collective moments is what allows them to convey their creative and political projects. These elements are the archive and the repertoire they use to interact with the audience.

Chapter 3 expands on the theoretical framework surrounding the trauma-performance relationship. I describe various points of intersection between those two fields, which I refer to as the second (and ongoing) wound, the collapse of time narrative, the crisis of truth, and the witnessing experience. In my analysis, I argue that the symbolic and metaphoric language present in *Anunciando la Ausencia* is congruent with the struggles of making sense of and talking about the brutality of a disappearance.

Following the discussion of Chapter 2, I show that actresses' pain and emotional vulnerability are key components in their artistic and political process. As an inevitable consequence of the disappearance, pain serves as connecting thread between the actresses and the audience. To understand that relationship, I include thoughts and impressions from audience members regarding the play's emotional impact.

CHAPTER I

COLOMBIA, A WOUNDED COLLECTIVE BODY

I thought I lived in the country of Alice in Wonderland; when she disappeared, I saw the political, the social, and the economic in Colombia. (Paulina, 2022)

The statement was made by Paulina, an actress from the Tente theater group while talking about Colombia's history and the lack of knowledge in the country about our armed conflict and its socio-political context. She assures that before her daughter Maria Cristina disappeared and was killed, she did not know about Colombia's conflict and inequities. After the event, however, she realized all the injustice, violence, and impunity surrounding all Colombians.

Maria Cristina was born, raised, and assassinated in the department of Meta. Located next to the border with Venezuela, essential oil pipelines make this a particular region. Historically, the area has been abandoned by the state. These characteristics have made the department attractive to illegal armed groups, whose actions have deeply affected the civilian population. Maria Cristina, for instance, was killed by one of the illegal armed groups in the region that have support from the governmental armed forces and politicians.

This chapter offers a sociohistorical context of Colombia and the Department of Meta. I will describe the forced disappearance, the foremost armed actors, and Victim-centered organizations based on official reports. My goal is to reflect on the role of the civilian population and art activities in this war and the construction of what the social movements in Colombia call Paz total, or total peace. I base my analysis on the guidelines of the document “No mataras” or You will not kill, created by the Truth Commission in Colombia after the 2016 peace agreement.

Guerrillas Insurgency (1958-1978)

This period is known as "Frente Nacional," when the two main political parties- Conservatives and Liberals- agreed to take turns of four years each for assuming the federal government. This situation generated a restricted democracy in which the people that did not feel represented or were ignored by it, like the peasants and indigenous, choose guns to achieve radical and fast changes. Most of the guerrillas were formed during this period and combined political and military strategies. The FARC guerrilla was consolidated between 1953 and 1964 (Verdad abierta, 2012). Furthermore, the government considerably repressed the population with the excuse of the political presence of guerillas. As Rodrigo Uprimny, a Colombian college professor of constitutional law, human Rights, and theory of the State, states, the 1958-1978 National Front government “was not able to consolidate a democratic culture, tolerant and respectful of differences, for which fanaticism has resurfaced with other expressions: anti-communism and revolutionary messianism.” (Uprimny, 2020)

The relationship between Colombia and the United States had an essential role in the socio-political context of this period. The counterinsurgent war was an inheritance from the security policy of the United States, which perceived communism as a threat to the status quo and hemispheric stability — the first guerrilla groups aligned with leftist ideology and the communist party. Therefore the “contra insurgents” ideology functioned to attack those groups and the civilian population aligned with them.”² This doctrine of persecuting and eliminating the opposition as a domestic enemy has produced substantial human rights violations in the country.

The land was central in the first regional conflicts, particularly in the central region of the country. On one hand, the Colonists and big owners of the land, men belonging to the wealthy

² Forced disappearance was strongly associated with the logic of the counterinsurgency struggle, and was linked to torture as a means of obtaining confessions from the enemy. (Centro Nacional de Memoria Historica, 2013, p.59)

classes of the country, took advantage of their position to group men, primarily their workers, with guns to defend the lands from the state government that did not align with their political views. On the other side, the peasants and land workers joined together to defend their small portions of land from the big owners.

The FARC guerrillas initiated in Marquetalia in 1964 (Tolima Department) as group of peasants who decided to go to war after Jacobo Alape (one of the most important political leaders from the communist party), was assassinated. The indiscriminate attacks from the national army with the support of the regional elites in 1964 to the land workers of the area stirred the impulse to create self-defense peasants that will be called FARC EP (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia- Ejercito del Pueblo).

In 1965 the ELN (Ejército de liberación del Pueblo) guerrilla started.

Unlike the FARC guerrilla, initiated from specific peasant groups intimately related to land issues, the ELN emerged from a group of students and workers believing in a fast revolution and inspired by the Cuban context. (Comision de la verdad, 2022, p. 82)

Organized and developed in the 1950s in Meta, the liberal guerrillas, led by Guadalupe Salcedo, opposed the liberal political party³. The government offered the liberal guerrillas (affiliated with the liberal political party) amnesty in exchange for demobilization. Many militants did not accept the demobilization and nurtured new communist-style guerrillas in the Tolima department. The national army attacked the population of several territories in Tolima, which pushed the civilian population and guerrilla troops toward the department of Meta. In

³ At that time, the bipartisan war that took place between the conservative and liberal political parties was at its height; since the conservative party was the ruling party, it was the one that used the national military forces to attack the liberals. (Comisión de la verdad, 2022)

1965, the First National Conference of guerrillas was held in Meta. That conference gave way to the creation of the FARC guerrillas.

In the late 1970s, ELN guerrilla arrived in the Meta department. The establishment of large extensions of livestock exploitation and the expansion of mining sponsored by the Colombian State facilitated the presence of illegal armed groups in the region. However, with little financial support, the group's existence in the region was weak.

The oil pipelines in the department of Meta have been the primary source of funding for the ELN in the territory since the organization's inception. The eastern plains are a strategic region for the guerrillas because they are close to the border with Venezuela, facilitating the illegal trafficking of gasoline across the border (Centro Nacional de Memoria Historica, 2013).

It is during this period that Alicia's, an actress from Tente, uncle, then living in a small town called Viota in Meta, disappeared. Most of the population were liberal peasants during a period the government was striking the liberal party. According to Alicia's mother, peasants then decided to create self-defense groups to protect the territory. Her uncle would have disappeared when he passed that self-defense area.

Paramilitarism Insurgency (1978-1990)

The main actors in Colombia's armed conflict were either formed or defined during this period: guerrillas, narcotraffic, paramilitaries, and State. The repression from the State of the civil population aligned with the safety doctrine of the United States and increased the social non-conformity because the national army was constantly attacking civilian population with the excuse of the counterinsurgent doctrine. Furthermore, the drug traffickers created contra insurgent groups, financed elections, campaigns, and companies to increase their influence in Colombian society,

The paramilitarism started from the MAS (Muerte a secuestradores, or Death to kidnapers) movement. These groups were financed and supported by the alliance between drug groups, state forces, and economic and political elites that felt threatened by the guerrillas. The drug cartels supported the contra insurgents' movement by donating money and people, while the state armed forces authorized the use of their guns by the MAS. Besides guerrilla members, the social leaders, opposition, and left militants were attacked by this movement.

By 1986 Colombian society was calling for the decentralization of the country. There was a shared belief that, since the end of the Frente Nacional period, democracy was still limited, and violent conflict in several regions was getting worse. Because of the exclusive focus on Colombia's central areas (e.g., Bogota, Medellin, and Cali), distant regions such as the eastern plains had a limited presence of the state. When people living in those peripheral regions protested, the state responded violently. Human rights organizations played crucial role by denouncing the abuses of the actors involved in the conflict and fighting against impunity. In addition, urban and rural civil movements that wanted higher autonomy and justice in the regions stood out and led to environmental, women, and young movements (Comisión de la verdad, 2022). Those include the Unitary Central of Workers (CUT) and the National Indigenous Organization (ONIC).

Using the counterinsurgents' war as an excuse, paramilitarism carried out several massacres. For instance, the Massacre in Trujillo Valle (Semana, 2010), when social leaders and militants of civic movements were assassinated was carried on by an alliance of paramilitaries, drug traffickers, and State agents (including armed forces and local politicians). Drug bosses, high commandants of the state armed forces, influential businesspeople, and politicians supported the paramilitary groups and contributed to the impunity of their actions. Between 1977

and 1991, the paramilitaries focused on certain areas of the country, including the Meta Department. These groups were able to expand their activities thanks to the support of the State and the cover-up of the actions. Justice employees and researchers were also killed and exiled during this period after investigating crimes carried out by the paramilitaries and the narcotraffic. “The National Association of Officials and Employees of the Judicial Branch (Asonal) calculated, for its part, 110 murders before 1985 and 240 between 1987 and 1991”(Ramirez, 1991)

The expansion of paramilitary groups (Peasant Self-Defense Forces) began in the department of Meta. The seeds of the paramilitary groups in the Meta region came from the Boyacá region, a department that nurtured solid paramilitary groups with the support of the mining sector. They are not a consolidated structure nor a political movement but a war strategy to take territorial control and consolidate drug trafficking. They unleashed a war with the guerrillas in the territories controlled by the latter and with different paramilitary groups.

The ACC or Peasant Self-Defense Forces were the germ group of paramilitarism (Centro Nacional de Memoria Historica, 2013). They arrived in the department of Meta using money from businesspeople, war strategies from former guerrillas, and, above all, the complicity of the army (Comision de la verdad, 2022). The oil wells were substantial in the consolidation of the ACC since significant oil multinationals paid the paramilitaries for security.

In 1984 the FARC guerrillas signed a peace process in the Department of Meta with the government, which supported the creation of the political party UP (Union patriotica- Patriotic Union) by the guerrilla. The UP won several elections in the region and was seen as an obstacle by the big landowners due to the resistance to a possible redistribution of lands in the Meta

department. The MAS (Death to Kidnapers) movement in the region went after the UP political party.

The complicit state of the war (1991-2002)

The 1991 constitution represented the need to seek peace and restore public order seriously disturbed by the actions of drug trafficking and subversive organizations (Hernandez, 2016). It promised a more democratic country, even as essential armed actors in the country and the narcotraffic groups were excluded from the talks preceding the national constituent assembly. The constitution, on paper, shows a pluralistic democracy. However, the civil war and the land dispossession carried on by paramilitary groups have showed a different reality.

The FARC and ELN guerrillas (not included in the talks before the constitution) started unfinished peace processes with the government during the 1990s. The president of Colombia these years, Cesar Gaviria, extended the invitation to all the armed groups to be part of the constitution since the only guerrillas included at that point were the demobilized guerrillas, including the M-19, the Popular Liberation Army, the Quintín Lame Armed Movement, and the Revolutionary Workers Party (Salgar, 2016). The guerrillas were negotiating their participation when the national army attacked the central command of FARC guerrillas in the department of Meta, ending the possibility of the guerrillas joining the constituent project.

Besides the guerrillas, another obstacle for the lawmakers was the narcotraffickers, particularly the drug boss Pablo Escobar. By the end of the 1980s, Escobar declared war on the Colombian State due to the extradition of drug leaders to the United States. In parallel, the most critical drug groups were fighting against each other for the control of the cocaine roads. This war included constant bombs in Colombia's major cities and the assassination of judges.

By 1993, the FARC guerrilla doubled in number. As its relations with the communist party deteriorated, they aimed for rural and urban clandestine organizations. The production of coca became the basis of their financial support. The ELN, on the other hand, focused on sabotaging the petroleum industry since, by the nineties, petroleum was the primary source of financing for the national economy.

During the 1990s, numerous human rights organizations carried out the campaign "Colombia Human Rights" to denounce the violations of human rights and denounce the complicity and responsibility of the Colombian State. These organizations held a seminar on truth commissions in Latin America.⁴ The conference showed the importance and complexity of documenting and systematizing information on crimes against humanity.

From this experience, in 1996 seventeen non-governmental organizations founded the project "Colombia Never again." (Movimiento Nacional de Víctimas de crímenes de Estado, 2005) to document information on victims of torture, disappearance, and execution in the country since 1965. For instance, the document narrates the violations by the armed forces toward civilians with the logic of the attack on the guerrillas between 1982 and 1986:

The Armed Forces reacted to the peace initiatives with the permanent inclination to continue the military confrontation of the counterinsurgency fight and make the civilian population the main target of their actions, coining the term "guerrilla helper" as a rhetorical weapon to justify the physical elimination of social activists or simple inhabitants (Nunca mas, 2011)

⁴ The project Colombia nunca mas or Colombia never again is particular within Latin America projects because the documented crimes have occurred in the middle of formal democracy. While other regional countries carried out the systematization in a post-dictatorial period or transition to a constitutional regime.

In the 1990s, the FARC EP expanded after the peace process. In the early 2000s, the government launched the Plan Colombia (Duran, 2020). The official objectives of Plan Colombia were to end the Colombian armed conflict by increasing funding and training of Colombian military and paramilitary forces and creating an anti-cocaine strategy to eradicate coca cultivation. The effectiveness of the Colombia plan was questionable because the action against drug trafficking was not as forceful as expected. Also, the paramilitaries achieved political and economic power at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s.

The Peace process (2002-2016)

The Plan Colombia led to the internationalization of the armed conflict. While in other Latin American countries the documentation of state violence occurred in a post-dictatorial period or transition to a constitutional regime, in Colombia that took place during a formal democracy.⁵ The smear campaign and destabilization of the FARC guerrillas were carried on by the state armed forces and the paramilitaries with increasing violence. The Democratic security doctrine amplified the concept of the “internal enemy,” and the state institutions and political elites were questioned because of their alliances with narcotraffic and paramilitarism and their several human rights violations. Alvaro Uribe, the former president between 2002-2010 was openly accused of links with paramilitarism (Relief Web, 2015).

The civilian population has been the main affected by the armed conflict in Colombia through practices of dehumanization and violation of rights such as forced disappearance (Comision de la verdad, 2022), torture, displacement, sexual violence, and confinement. It is the population that already lives in vulnerable conditions in economic, social, and political matters, the same one that is mainly affected by human rights violations.

⁵ Plan Colombia: Strategy sponsored by the United States to attack the drug groups and the insurgent groups.

As Tente actress Nidia told me, disappearance is an “eternal crime.” It continues to be perpetuated in the endless search for the bodies of the disappeared and their kidnappers. Torture and murder go hand in hand with enforced disappearance. This crime is an intentional action and military strategy that aim to exert control over the population and its territory. The families of the disappeared are eternally affected by the disappearance. In addition to constantly asking "where are they?" they must endure criminalization and stigmatization while searching for their loved ones.

There have been 121,768 who disappeared between 1985 and 2016 ⁶. Forced disappearance, which peaked around 2002, was used mainly by paramilitary groups (but also by police forces and less often guerrilla groups) in their attempt to hide the magnitude of the war (by hiding their victims’ bodies) and intimidate local leaders.

Disappearance and Tente theater group

From the civilian human rights violations that happened with the state's complicity, such as the links between paramilitarism and local governments, or the relationship between politicians and drug cartels, seventeen non-governmental organizations founded the project "Colombia Never again" in 1996 to document information on victims of torture, forced disappearance, and execution in the country since 1965.

The conglomeration of social and human rights non-governmental organizations that came about with the "Colombia never again" project paved the way for MOVICE (Movimiento de Víctimas de Crímenes de Estado or National Movement of State Victims) In 2005, those

⁶ The practice of disappearance has been associated in Colombia at the end of the 1970s and 1980s with the implementation of the Security Statute of the government of Julio César Turbay Ayala (1978-1982) when forced disappearance began to be carried out as a counterinsurgency practice by members of the armed institutions. (Comisión de la Verdad, 2022)

organizations promoted the II National Meeting of Victims of Crimes against Humanity, serious human rights violations, and genocide. They also founded the National Movement of State Victims.

MOVICE analyzed the project "Colombia Never Again " and concluded that the State was responsible for crimes against humanity in the armed conflict. Following the logic of the modern State, the Colombian State and the military forces have the responsibility of guaranteeing respect for the fundamental rights of citizens. However, the State has limited capacity. Additionally, "there is a social, political, economic and ideological intention promoted by the Colombian State and its agents, or permitted by it, and implemented by paramilitary groups" (Movimiento de Víctimas de Crímenes de Estado , 2005). For instance, the Colombian courts and the commission of truth from Colombia found that the Colombian army was responsible for the disappearance of 6,402 people that were publicly claimed as casualties in combat. They were young people tricked and killed by the army.

MOVICE brings together more than 200 organizations of victims of displacement, forced disappearance, and selective killings. And accompanying organizations and defenders of human rights. The MOVICE "is an instance of organization, and mobilization of victims of state crimes" (MOVICE, 2005). They articulated the organization over the historical truth, comprehensive reparation, justice, and recognition of the victims as political subjects.⁷

MOVICE is structured through local iterations (known as "Chapters") in fourteen departments of Colombia particularly affected by violence. Its activities are divided into 1) Truth and Memory, 2) Legal and Guarantees of Non-Repetition, 3) Fight against Disappearance, and 4)

⁷Recognizing the Victims as a political subject is central to my research. I call these women political subjects because their involvement with MOVICE places them in power relations with two characteristics. On the one hand, control and dependency on the armed conflict impacted their lives, the negligence of institutions, and obstacles in the search for their relatives (threats, lack of support). On the other hand, their identity and self-awareness are visible in the play's creative process and community-based construction on everyday experiences related to the armed conflict.

Land and Reparation. The memory schools for non-repetition are part of these strategies. The schools seek to expand the discussion about rights through memory.

In 2016, the FARC-EP guerrilla and the Colombian government signed the peace process. "The Agreement includes a comprehensive agricultural development plan with access to land and services and a strategy for the sustainable substitution of illicit crops." (Cancillería de Colombia, 2016) This agreement also advocates for the truth about the crimes committed during the armed conflict. Unfortunately, Colombia's current government has hindered the Peace Agreement's implementation. The government has not invested in rural development since territories that the guerrillas controlled still do not have access to electricity and education. The safety of citizens continues to be a serious problem: more than 500 local leaders and activists have been assassinated since the agreement was signed.

The ACC (paramilitary group) had territorial disputes with the centaur bloc (paramilitary group) until the centaur bloc made alliances with the national army to gain territory. Even though this bloc decided to demobilize in the 2000s, many ACC members did not do so and remained in the Meta region. Despite the demobilization of some paramilitary groups, victims interested in demanding justice were threatened and pressed to remain silent. They were persuaded not to seek for the restitution of their lands or request assistance from organizations such as the CNRR (comisión Nacional de reparación y reconciliación- national commission for reparation and reconciliation). The demobilization process of the paramilitaries was unsuccessful. These groups reconfigured but continued to invade of territories and use violence against local communities.

The link between paramilitary groups and political leaders in the department of Meta has been recognized, and several department governors have been convicted. These government-paramilitarism relations also included the alliance between the army and paramilitarism in

consolidating territories. In addition, the links between regional governments, paramilitaries, and businesspeople have been identified, particularly with emerald producers and international oil companies.

Organizations such as the international committee of the red cross (CICR) have created guides to identify the search steps and let the relatives know their rights and the statal institutions in charge of those rights.

The victims can go to three different institutions: Personerías, control and monitoring bodies of the respective territorial entities, which exercise the function of Public Ministry and are in charge of the defense, protection, and promotion of Human Rights in their jurisdiction; Defensoría, which has the responsibility to watch over the rise, exercise, and dissemination of Human Rights; Procuraduría, which is the highest body of the Public Ministry, also made up of the Defensoría and the Personería. The Public Ministry will intervene to defend the legal order, public assets, or fundamental rights and guarantees.

The search includes four areas where relatives can find information. The data in hospitals and Medicina legal, which is the entity in charge of verifying and controlling expert evidence and forensic examinations carried out by the judicial police forces of the state and other bodies at the competent authority's request. The interview with people that could have further information, such as friends, family, or the last people that saw the disappeared person. Check the places where the person was for the last time; Share the information with all the statal entities that could support it.

The criminal complaint of the disappearance is made to the *Fiscalía*, prosecuting institution, or the police. The complaint aims to start a judicial investigation into the crime of disappearance to know what happened, where it disappeared, and who is responsible for it.

Relatives, friends, or anyone who knows detailed information about the disappearance can do it immediately after it. Therefore, victims attempt to collect the data so they can make a criminal complaint. As Alicia mentioned, the legal process is slow, and it seems not just because the entities are overloaded but also because there is little will to advance in the processes.

Frequently, the police, the only institution present in rural and peripheral zones of the eastern plains, refuse to take complaints of forced disappearance. As an imposition on the relatives of the disappeared, there was a period of 72 hours to receive the protest⁸, which possibly condemned many disappeared to death since, for the authors of the disappearances, the negligence of the state authorities, either voluntarily or through agreements with paramilitary groups, left the way clear to the deployment of their actions. Tente member Paulina told me she could not denounce her daughter's disappearance immediately because the entities presumed it was not a disappearance. However, the police and the Fiscalía must start a quick search if the relative believes it is a disappearance.

According to a 2020 report about missing people in the eastern plains of Colombia, issued by the human rights organization Fundacion Nidia Erika Bautista,

Under the armed conflict in the territory, of the 85 cases studied for this report, in 60% of the cases, the families did not report the crime at the time due to the refusal of the authorities to receive the reports, due to the absence of authorities in the area of the facts or due to ignorance of the rights (Fundacion Nidia Erika Bautista, 2020, p.74)

The risk that the disappearance is repeated in another family member, mainly the one requesting the search, exacerbates the fear of reporting. Paulina and Nidia, actresses from Tente theater group, state they have received several threats because of their search and the support of

⁸ According to administrative decision N° 0007 from 2011 of the Colombian defense minister the search for the disappeared person must be immediate.

other victims. Additionally, in the 1980s and 1990s, the administration of justice and the lack of accountability caused the absence of judicial activity and clarification. According to the report, during that period, the action of entities such as the Personeria was almost nil. The victims do not trust the institutions because of their negligence, apathy, and discrimination. Then, the right to know where the disappeared people have left profound psychosocial damage to family members increased by the justice and peace law, done in 2005 as part of a failed peace agreement with paramilitarism, where the perpetrators refrained from giving effective responses to the victims.

Since the governmental entities do not guarantee the human rights of the disappeared people and their relatives, human rights organizations such as MOVICE, red cross, and Fundacion Nidia Erika Bautista are critical in the search for the disappeared. These organizations provide legal and political resources for their relatives to start and continue their investigation. Furthermore, they offer collective encounters with other victims where collaborative support and strength are essential to maintain the search and the claim of justice for the disappeared.

Other human rights organizations, such as Fundacion Agape, organize safe spaces in Colombia where those involved in forced disappearances and members of civil society carry out experiences of coexistence. They result in instances of reconciliation and the establishment of significant links between people belonging to opposing groups within the armed conflict. Nidia has had artistic workshops with this organization and appreciates having another perspective on the armed conflict.

A MOVICE report concluded that:

From 1984 to 2012, 62 massacres were perpetrated, leaving 403 fatalities, all of which were the responsibility of paramilitary groups (the Peasant Self-Defense Forces of Meta

and Vichada - ACMV, the Self-Defense Forces of the South of Casanare and the 'Block Centauros' of the AUC). In 10 of them, the participation of the Public Force, members of the Joaquín París Battalion in San José del Guaviare, and the VII Brigade of the Army, based in Villavicencio, has been demonstrated (MOVICE, 2005)

The MOVICE's Meta Chapter, located in Colombia's eastern plains, includes organizations such as the Union of Democratic Women of Meta, Civipaz Puerto Esperanza; the Norman Pérez Bello Claretian Corporation, with its missionaries; the Orlando Fals Borda Collective; Indigenous Settlement of the Future (ASEIMPOME). Tente actress Paulina and political activist Vilma are founding members of the Meta Chapter. The chapter's objective is to denounce the crimes against the civil population by collecting and documenting human rights violations. Every eight days, the MOVICE members collected testimonies and information about crimes where the state was implicated. Also, lawyers and human rights collectives were interested in supporting the work of MOVICE by advising the victims on legal or public policies aspects, such as the Central Unitary of Workers (CUT)

The MOVICE members also learned about legal and human rights topics to assist the other victims in sharing their testimonies. Facilitators such as Vilma received political and legal non-formal education. They use their knowledge to collaborate with other victims who lack legal or political education about the formal procedures to file a claim. Working as volunteers, Paulina and Vilma have visited dozens of cities and towns collecting testimonies and advising families.

The data they have collected goes into to special registers about the armed conflict in Colombia, compiled by the Center for Research and Popular Education Program for Peace (CINEP) and the National Center for Historical Memory in Colombia (CNMH.) Additionally, this information is often the first instrument victims have to request the Fiscalía to take action.

Getting to know the life of the disappeared such as their job, their likes, and their friends, contributes to advancing their legal case. In an interview, Vilma, a facilitator from MOVICE, explained the collection of data regarding disappeared people:

Look, you ask the person what the family member's name was, where he lived, where they were, what he did if they were part of a board, a political party if he was a social leader, if he was part of an association. How old were they? How many children had? If he had a wife, who was that person? (Ortiz, 2018, p. 84)

The theater group Tente was formed at MOVICE's Memory schools for non-repetition. That space allowed them to get together and discuss different artistic languages to talk about the disappearance of their loved ones. The memory books or diaries was one of the most helpful strategies the actresses found during this period; for some, the books were also the most effective therapy in dealing with their pain. The diaries included writings, drawings, and pictures. As I discuss in the next Chapters, those memory books served as the basis for the testimony moment in *Anunciando la Ausencia*.

Memory School participants in Meta have also used music as a creative output. In 2011, a group of victims visited a mass grave in La Macarena (a nearby town) in search of disappeared bodies. That experience led Paulina to create a song called *El Angelito* or my little angel. According to Vilma, then a MOVICE facilitator, the song was a good strategy to bring the school participants together and narrate their experiences. With assistance from Vilma, Sebastian (a long-time activist in memory organizations), and James (a theater teacher), the women involved in that project came together and founded the Tente.

Although human rights organizations have supported the victims of the armed conflict, particularly the victims of disappearance, some are critical of those organizations and their

interests. For Tente member Alicia, human rights organizations often use the victims' data for their financial benefit. The victims' distrust of the organizations is justified if we consider the small number of projects focused on the victims even after receiving large funds from European countries in 2016 (as part of the peace process) to sponsor those activities.⁹ Alicia (actress from Tente theater group) states "So, like that thing about organizations, about foundations: come here, come here, they offer more dynamics here, this one offers more outings, this one offers. So, that's how it becomes like marketing, like something I don't like."

For Tente member Carmen, human rights organizations are often self-centered: they do not like their members joining other organizations. She mentions Tente had issues with MOVICE because they were working with the Fundacion Nidia Erika Bautista organization. In 2018, tensions between MOVICE and Tente led to the theater members' decision to leave the organization and promote their play independently.

⁹ After the end of Ivan Duque's administration (2018-2022), several lawmakers denounced the loss of millions of Colombian pesos that should have been used to support the peace process.

CHAPTER II

THE OBJECTS SPEAK: THE BODY, THE BODIES AND THE EMBODIMENT

The Tente is a bird of the rural areas in the eastern plains, and it cares for children in the peasants and indigenous communities. As an alarm, it warns of unforeseen events and threatens possible danger to children by opening its wings when someone unknown enters people's houses. Likewise, Tente theater group cares about the memory of all the disappeared. (Paulina, 2022)

Figure 1

Actresses performing Anunciando la Ausencia



Note. Copyright 2022 by author

Anunciando la Ausencia is a theater play from the Tente theater group. The play is a collective creation of current and former actresses in the group. It was conceived in 2011 during the memory schools, which are organized by MOVICE (see Chapter 1). The facilitators from MOVICE and theater instructors from human rights organizations have accompanied the play

over the years. They have guided and helped the actresses with issues of dramaturgy, scenography, and corporal expression.

There are five actresses: Paulina, Nidia, Carmen, Gladys, and Alicia.

Nidia, Paulina, and Gladys are wearing traditional women's peasant costumes from Colombia's Eastern Plains region— a flower as a hair accessory, a white blouse, a long skirt with embroidery on the tip of different colors, and espadrilles shoes. Carmen wears a hat, a black and white checkered button-down shirt, red pants, and boots.

There is an instrumental song in the background and a blue light illuminating the space. In one of the corners, back of the scenario, there are five cemetery crosses with “NN” (anonymous or unnamed person) written on each and five white candles in front of each cross. There are flowers on the crosses and a vase in front of them. Additionally, there are six foliage of leaves on the floor on one of the sides of the scenario. In one of the corners in the front of the stage, there is a wood table with pots, maracas, and rose petals. A large white fabric made by the actresses serves as the background. It has the name of the group, and two messages: Cultura, Verdad y Memoria (Culture, truth and Memory;) and Testimonios, Nos resistimos a olvidarlos (Testimonies, we resist to forget them)

The play begins with Alicia walking into the stage. Wearing a black hat with a veil on the front and a long, elegant black dress, she represents death. Alicia carries the clothes that once belonged to the disappeared relatives and places them in the foliage of leaves. After that, the actresses start the Parrandon (Party) by dancing on the stage and talking about their current lives back on their old farms and celebrating their life and encounter cooking and sharing food and playing the Maracas. A new actress, Nidia, walks into the scene with flowers and a backpack and joins the parrandon, dancing with the actresses.

Then, Nidia leads the line in which the actresses walk on the stage. She holds a cross, equal to the ones in the corner, and a colorful candle. She passes the lead to another actress, the cross and the candle; until all of them have led and talked. At the same time, they are walking around the stage. Paulina, the last one taking the lead, puts the candle and the cross in the corner with the other five candles, and all the actresses stare at the crosses for a few minutes.

Nidia breaks the silence by shouting, "Busquemos Mujeres!" (Let's search women!) All the actresses walk around the scenario mentioning the places they need to go look, such as the rivers or the mass graves. The actresses are searching along the stage, looking for the disappeared.

Carmen picks up a blue t-shirt and a hat from one of the leaves' foliage and asks: "To whom could these belong?" Nidia steps in. She hugs Carmen, takes the clothes, and shares her Testimony about her son's disappearance, and the life and dreams of her son, Deiber, starting from how he used to dress. When Nidia ends, she says again, "Busquemos Mujeres!" all the actresses go back to searching around the scenario. Each actress shares their Testimony, from three to five minutes, about the missing person incorporating the clothing in their narrative. The last Testimony starts with the clothes of Rosita's son, a former friend of the group who died of cancer without ever finding her disappeared son. Carmen takes these clothes as if she owns them. She shares Rosita's story and ensures that her search is still alive.

The actresses proceed to organize the foliage of leaves in a horizontal line. Paulina and Gladys spread white and red rose petals along the stage. Then, in turn, each actress talks to their disappeared loved one.

After all the actresses have addressed the disappeared relatives as if they could hear, Paulina explains that what mothers like them are experiencing is a living death. While the

actresses stand up, death walks into the stage with a new joyful instrumental song. The death character talks about the consequences of the violence in Colombia and slowly integrates into the group. All the actresses hug and finish the play.

Anunciando la Ausencia is a live event and ephemeral community construction. In order to maintain its structure, the play's script highlights key actions and general moments. Since the disappearance is a sensitive topic in the lives of each performer, their testimony changes based on the emotional state of the actresses, the progress of the search, and the political situation. Throughout the play, the protagonists share with the audience details about their loved ones: how they disappeared, what clothes they wore, what jobs they had, and what their dreams were. Through objects that belonged to the disappeared, they speak of their searches and demand justice.

In this chapter, I will examine what type of embodiment the play enables in relation to the artifacts present in the play (including the clothes), and to gestures performed during their testimonies, such as crying or dancing. Additionally, I will consider the relationships between political and artistic embodiment, where pain is at the intersection of these fields. All the performances of Anunciando la Ausencia keep a consistent structure, with monologues, memory artifacts (such as clothes and pictures), and group gatherings (such as the dance and the search). These three elements of the play are essential to understand the types of embodiment the play enables.

I start with a brief description of how the group theater was created around 2011. Nonprofits such as MOVICE (discussed in Chapter 1) played an essential role in bringing women together and encouraging them to deal with trauma and pain through art. My analysis of the play is enmeshed with the biographies and personal stories of the actresses. I will clarify how

trauma is placed in everyday life and on the theater stage and the relationship between day-to-day life and the artistic experience. Additionally, I analyze the monologues and the memory artifacts, such as the clothes and the group meetings during the play, to comprehend the theatrical experience concerning trauma, political action, and embodiment.

The interviews with Alicia, Carmen, Gladys, Nidia, and Paulina; with Vilma and Sebastian, the two people from the Human rights organization that have been with Tente since the creation of the play; and with some of the relatives of the actresses are part of this chapter. Additionally, the notes from the participant observation during my visit to the actress's houses and the play's performance are included in this document segment.

Tente

The Tente includes five women who have been victims of the armed conflict since their relatives disappeared. The women are from the eastern plains region of Colombia and are between 55 and 70 years old. The disappearances of their relatives are directly related to the action of paramilitaries, guerrillas, the Colombian army, and the Colombian police. Below I provide a biographical summary of each actress.

Paulina lives in Villavicencio with her husband. She was born in the rural area of the Meta department, and due to the violence in Colombia, she arrived at Villavicencio to work as a maid. As a child, Paulina was abused in the houses she worked in and escaped from them. She had a daughter that died as a baby, two sons still alive, and a daughter who disappeared.

Maria Cristina, Paulina's daughter, disappeared in 2004 in Calamar, Guaviare. Maria was the eldest child and the closest to Paulina. She was doing her nursing internship assisting the health space in Calamar (a small rural town in the eastern plains). Before arriving at Calamar, a paramilitary group kidnapped her. Calamar was a place where the FARC guerrilla was present.

Maria was accused of being part of that guerilla for working in the area and assisting the rural population.

Paulina noticed the disappearance two days after the kidnapping because Maria never arrived in Calamar. As soon as she started the search, she received a message warning her to stop the search if she wanted to keep her life. In the beginning, the judicial entities did not want to help her with the search, and she was not informed about the legal procedures. She insisted several times and started to look on her own.

During the peace process with these groups, Testimonies given by Paramilitaries leaders assured that Maria Cristina was tortured and dismembered. While talking with Paulina, she shared the official document with the transcript of the paramilitary leader's Testimony that kidnapped her daughter. The details in the document were inhumane, painful, and uncomfortable, and I could not finish the document. Paulina was narrating the Testimony of the paramilitary leader, her voice was firm, and she was barely affected by the complicated details she was narrating and had been narrating to everyone for years.

Figure 2

Paulina with a picture of Maria Cristina talking about her disappearance



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Paulina is a recognized social leader. She is the founder of the Tente theater group. Because of her passion and devotion to the search, she knows more about human rights, and judicial resources than the leaders of the human rights organizations I spoke with. Tente women and some other mothers looking for their children have found a referent, support, and assistance in the search in Paulina. All her work is visible in the appreciation from the other victims and the symbolic reparation she has achieved for Maria Cristina, such as a mural in an essential university at Meta and the naming of the health space in Calamar in Maria's honor.

Figure 3

Paulina hugging Maria Cristina's Nursing Clothes



Note. Copyright 2022 by author

Alicia lives with her husband, Luis Eduardo, in a white house full of plants, paintings, and poetry. They share their love for education, art, and activism, and their granddaughter, Sofia, a painter and political scientist who is like a daughter to them. Alicia and Luis met in the JUCO (Communist youth in Colombia); they have been involved in political and community organizations since the 80s.

Alicia does not have a son or a husband that disappeared during the armed conflict, but she has a disappeared cousin, Alberto, and a disappeared uncle. She assures me that her

neighborhood is full of families with disappeared relatives. Alicia takes care of the memory of other family members, and she sees herself as a support for the other Tente actresses that have experienced disappearance.

The disappearance of Alberto points out the potential that pain has in society from her familiar experience with Alicia. She insists that pain is deep and can not be avoided individually or collectively. Alberto's situation joins the family even in political views because when the disappearance touches a family, even with different political perspectives, it is impossible to avoid the violence surrounding the daily life of everyone in Colombia.

Alberto disappeared in Villavicencio in 1991, close to Alicia's house. She showed me another family's house with a disappeared relative, just a few streets away from her place. She assures us there was a systematic practice in the neighborhood, and at least seven young men disappeared.

Alicia is collecting the data on these families since they are afraid to talk or ashamed of what happened to their families. Alicia assures the institution (Fiscalia) in charge of Alberto's disappearance has not advanced in the case. They constantly call the family to ask them about the family's findings.

Alicia and her husband were in the social movement Patriotic Union (Union Patriótica-UP), which was persecuted by the state that accused them of being the civil face of the FARC Guerrilla. All her closest friends were persecuted, exiled, and killed. After she experienced the persecution, she joined MOVICE. She was a member of the MOVICE for a long time, accompanying the community processes of the movement. The person who was doing the character before Alicia was Amparo's daughter, a woman who lost one of her daughters and was

part of the Tente Theater group. Alicia took the role because she has had experience with theater and was part of a corporal expression formation space within MOVICE, she shares:

At first, I almost didn't go out, I liked it better. Then, to see them there in front of the public, and because Doña Nidia said 'come on, Alicia' I started to go out more to the front with them.

Alicia has had informal theatrical formation like most of the members of the Tente Group. She has assisted workshops within devised theater companies in Colombia, such as the Candelaria group. She has been part of the Teachers labor Union for decades and, more recently, of the Yoga group for memory, where people involved or wanting to be involved in the memory of the disappeared join through Yoga. Alicia has experience in public manifestations spaces using the body, particularly theater.

Figure 4

Alicia serving Avena to her yoga group



Note. Copyright 2022 by author

The death character has evolved since Alicia joined the group. Initially, the character was a black and rude presence with no appreciation for the dead bodies. It used to take the clothes

and throw them away in the scenario without care. Juana Salgado was one of the teachers the National Center of Historical Memory provided to the group. She insisted on giving the character a more delicate and careful role, and Alicia has worked over those pieces of advice.

Alicia assures Tente does street and political theater. The theater play is immersed in improvisation as a necessity in performances in public spaces and street political action where the context changes permanently. As Diana Taylor (2002) affirms, the street performances, such as H.I.J.O.S¹⁰, have the necessity of the immediate due to safety concerns and to all the unpremeditated context that is the public space. The street performances have a political impact due to the accessibility to all the people occupying the spaces, which is essential in the complaints that are not addressed by official entities. Likewise, Alicia assures the play has a clear political intention focused on stopping the disappearance and the violence in the country in the eastern plains as she states:

The play is a political instrument, because we want these acts of violence to change, not to exist again, and this is one way; it is a way, a little easier, more linear, more of reaching people, more of connecting with them that, suddenly, written in a book, not everyone reads and it does not impact. Instead, people listen, see them and they are the ones who are talking. In addition, there is more connection, there is a lot of connection, there are many audiences there, I have seen, well, many audiences, they have connected a lot with them.¹¹

Figure 5

Alicia and her mom

¹⁰ A social movement of disappeared people's sons and daughters during the Argentina dictatorship. (Taylor, 2002)

¹¹ La obra tiene un instrumento político, porque ese instrumento político es porque nosotros queremos que cambien esos hechos de violencia, que no vuelvan a existir y esta es una forma; es una forma, un poco más fácil, más lineal, más de llegar a la gente, más de conectar con ella que, de pronto, escrito en un libro, no todo el mundo lee y no impacta. En cambio, la gente escucha, las ve y son las mismas quienes están hablando. Además, hay más conexión, hay bastante conexión, ahí hay muchos públicos, he visto, pues, muchos públicos, han conectado bastante con ellas. [author translation]



Note. Copyright 2022 by author

Carmen lives in Vista Hermosa, Meta. She does not have a stable financial source of income. She works in various places and takes care of her mom in Villavicencio when she has enough time. She grew up in the rural areas of Meta and lived there with her husband, Silvio, who disappeared. They were forced to leave their house because of the violence and migrated to Bogota, the capital of Colombia.

Silvio, her husband, disappeared in Bogota in 1991. The experience was challenging. After his disappearance, she was in charge of the family in all aspects, and she did not know anything regarding the disappearance. Her daughter remembers this time as a vulnerable stage in their childhood that she had opted to forget.

After Silvio disappeared in 1991, Carmen gave away most of his clothes. She kept some of his shirts and leash for years after his disappearance. Carmen states she liked his style, and the objects reminded her of him. Furthermore, while Silvio was alive, she used to take his clothes and perfumes, and she kept the tradition when he disappeared.

Silvio's hats and clothes are a metaphor for the memory work that Carmen has been doing for decades. Time has impacted the materiality of the objects. The hats and shirts he used while

he was with Carmen have been disappearing as the clues of his body have, and they have been damaged and broken. Carmen bought new shirts, hats for daily use, and for the play *Anunciando la Ausencia*. The new items resemble the old ones since they have the same style. She has tried to keep the memory and the search alive, just as she kept objects that remind her of Silvio.

Carmen works to maintain the memory of her husband, even when it seems broken and destroyed by institutional entities or by a Colombian society that sees him as a number. She remembers him in the play and resembles his presence:

I kept two hats for many years: one that he had for going out, which was very pretty, and the one for work. I kept those hats for many years, but in the end, after keeping them for so long, they softened; they practically fell to pieces since they were just old. I have always bought new hats in his name and kept what belongs to him. If a hat is damaged, I buy another one, which is the replacement.¹²

Figure 6

Carmen with the t-shirt and hat of her husband

¹² Yo guardé muchos años dos sombreros: uno que él tenía de salir que era muy bonito y el de trabajar. Yo conservé muchos años esos sombreros, pero a lo último, de tanto guardarlos ellos se me fueron como ablandando, ellos se despedazaron prácticamente, ya de lo mero viejitos ellos como que se pudren, entonces no... De nuevo, pues es obvio que yo siempre he comprado nuevos sombreros y yo los compro a nombre de él y lo conservo que es de él, pero pues ya de él, la verdad, no, no tengo el sombrero, ni nada de eso, porque pues eso ya, dígame tantos años, o sea, que todo la que llueve tanto y eso se va como pudriendo las cosas y pero sí, entonces yo siempre he cargado. Se me daña un sombrero, compro otro y luego este es el reemplazo.[author translation]



Note. Copyright 2022 by author

Carmen also saves Silvio's pictures with their children and their report schools, which Silvio used to sign. She assures that he was concerned about their children's education because he did not want them to be peasants like he was. This shows the impact of the state's abandonment of the rural areas and the stigmatization of peasants. The perception of what it means to live in rural spaces is negative due to their financial precarity and the stigmatization from the state institutions. Silvio's pictures, their children's reports signed by Silvio, and a gold clock he gave to Carmen are part of the objects Carmen includes in the Memory galleries of the Tente group.

Carmen is part of a human rights organization called "Fundacion Nidia Erika Bautista." She gets information about people that have disappeared and, based on her experience, helps the family with the judicial and search processes. She acknowledges that this task carries many risks for her, but she trusts the families that seek her help. She shares the following regarding her activist work towards memory:

Yes, I have about seven testimonies collected from disappeared people from over there. So they will give me the stories and everything so I can give them to the human rights organization to see if we collaborate on the search. They tell me, ‘Oh, Carmencita, help me, look at my child, my son, my husband is missing. You see, you are already in this. Well, help me. I will give you the data.’¹³

Carmen arrived at the Tente theater group after Angel's song and during the creation of the memory diaries or books. The theater play is vital in Carmen's life because it is a place to speak out loud about the inequities of society. *Anunciando la Ausencia* is related to her day-to-day life because she has the space to talk to people she does not usually talk to, such as students or elite groups who are ignorant about the situation in the peripheral areas of Colombia. Her concerns regarding the discrimination she experiences in daily basis are below:

They discriminate against me everywhere. They treat us the worst, because one comes from the countryside, so then one also sort of goes out or stands on stage, one gets like that fury against people to see the discrimination that they do to one, because one does bring pain, while there are others who have not suffered pain like the one that one has had to go through.¹⁴

Figure 7

Carmen showing the Gallery of Memory to a College Professor

¹³ Sí, ahorita por lo menos ya tengo cinco, tengo como siete testimonios recogidos de personas desaparecidas de allá de Santo Domingo, entonces me las van a dar las historias y todo, como para que yo las dentre a la fundación para ver si le colaboramos para la búsqueda, ahí debe haber que llaman a las personas que están allá. Yo les comento y pues me dicen "Ay, Carmencita, ayúdeme, vea mi niño, mi hijo, mi marido está desaparecido y tantos años, no sé nada. Usted vea, ya está en esto, pues ayúdeme, yo le voy a dar. [author translation]

¹⁴ A uno lo discriminan por todos lados, por todos lados. Porque ya uno es el malo, ya uno que viene de por allá y que no, lo tratan lo peor, porque uno viene del campo, entonces pues también uno como que sale o se para en un escenario, a uno le da como esa furia contra la gente de ver la discriminación que le hacen a uno, porque uno sí verdad, trae un dolor, mientras que hay otros que no han sufrido un dolor como el que a uno le haya tocao pasar. [author translation]



Note. Copyright 2022 by author

Gladys lives in a big house with her daughter, and her granddaughter next to the Farmacy her daughter handles. She has two daughters who are her financial, emotional, and physical support. She has a grandson, about two years old, who smiles every time Gladys is close. She is a shy woman and is a mediator in the Tente group.

Figure 8

Gladys in her living room showing the toys from her disappeared son



Note. Copyright 2022 by author

Her son, Fabian, disappeared in 1999 in Granada, Meta. She denounced the situation to the judicial entities, but the case's progress is precarious, as she states:

No, well, what I know, well, that they took him away and put him in a car, that was what a man said, supposedly, because it was never known if it was true. Furthermore, they took him away, and he never returned; nothing was ever heard of him again.¹⁵

Periodically, she goes to Bogota to check the progress of the entities. The red cross called her to be part of a group with victims of disappearance, where they shared psychological and judicial resources for the search. There, she met several mothers who had disappeared relatives, including some Tente members. Based on the work with human rights organizations such as the Red Cross, it is believed that paramilitarism is accountable for Fabian's disappearance.

Gladys joined Tente after seeing the play several times, and she got interested in the space to visualize and keep searching for her son. Without any previous experience in theater and after an invitation from Carmen, she joined Tente. Gladys has been in the Tente theater group for more than two years, and she is the newest member and has done two performances with the group. Since she joined the group, she has been closer to Memory artistic projects, mainly plastic art projects. In these artistic groups, she has done toys that remind her of her child, and she does clothes for the toys.

Nidia lives in a small town called Gaitan, Meta. Her neighborhood is full of family friends and family. She lives in a house with her son and her grandson. Her daughter, Maribel, another victim of the disappearance, lives in the front house. The day I visited her, May 30, 2022, was the birthday of Deiber, her disappeared son. He would be 43 years old today.

Figure 9

Nidia and her granddaughter in her house

¹⁵ No, pues, lo que sé, pues, que a él se lo llevaron y lo subieron a un carro, eso fue lo que dijo un señor, supuestamente, porque nunca se supo si fue verdad o no. Y lo llevaron y nunca más volvió, nunca más se volvió a saber nada de él. [authortranslation]



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Deiber Santiago disappeared in front of Nidia's house in 2003. Based on her research with Paulina (another actress of Tente), and the one from victims organizations such as MOVICE, she knows the paramilitarism is accountable for her son's disappearance. He disappeared in 2003 when a couple of men kidnapped him from his house at five in the morning.

She grew up and lived for years in the rural areas of Meta, where the FARC guerrilla was present. Nidia has experienced the stigmatization as Maria Cristina (Paulina's daughter) did. As she shares below, she was stigmatized by paramilitarism since they accused her of being part of the guerrilla. In the middle of her search for Deiber, one of the main paramilitary groups in Meta kidnapped her.

The Four of them all beat me, tortured me, there was abuse, there was everything. When it was over I couldn't stand up, then they told me that they had already done everything they wanted with me and then they made me stand up, I couldn't stand up right away and they gave me another kick, that I should stand up lightly. So I had to drag myself as much as I could, I dragged myself on the ground, until I could stand up. I only asked God to

help me and when I could stand, they yelled at me from over there and said rude things to me, to run, to run.¹⁶

She has experienced the consequences of Deiber's disappearance in her body. After long days of crying, she lost her memory, and had cancer. She assures that crying helps to relieve, but if it is permanent, it has emotional and physical consequences. Based on her experience, the challenging moments such as the abuse or the disappearance are a motor to keep searching for Deiber and live with joy and love as the collective and spiritual aspects are present.

Art, particularly the Tente theater group, has been a space where the collective, and the spirituality are present for Nidia. She assures that the connection with the public gives strength. The spectators' genuine hugs and affection make the group feel loved and cared for. Furthermore, they noticed their work impacts their search as the people are getting to know that disappearance is constantly happening in Colombia. Nidia still cries, but she also remembers the love from others.

Figure 10

Nidia in the theater play Anunciando la Ausencia

¹⁶ Entre todos cuatro me golpearon, me torturaron, hubo abuso, hubo de todo. Cuando ya estaba que no podía pararme, entonces me dijeron que ya habían hecho ellos todo lo que habían querido conmigo y entonces me hicieron parar, yo no pude pararme en seguida y me dieron otra patada, que me parara ligero. Entoes me tocó arrastrarme lo más que podía me arrastraba por el suelo, hasta que me pude parar, yo solo le pedía a Dios que solo y lo único que rezaba era el Padre nuestro y le pedía a Dios que me guardara y cuando ya me pude parar, entonces me gritaban desde por allá y me decían groserías, que me parara, que corriera, que corriera.[author translation]



Note. Copyright 2022 by author

Nidia has had spirituality, mainly Catholicism, as her primary resource to process the abuse she has suffered and the pain of Deiber's disappearance. One of the gifts she gave me during my visit is a book of catholic songs she has used to maintain her strength. Indeed, it made me cry and feel her love and care.

The play

Anunciando la Ausencia started within the MOVICE, which denounces the state's negligence in crimes against the civilian population. The Colombian state does not recognize the disappearances of their loved ones. As Alicia mentioned, the institutional entity in charge of the disappearance of Alberto has not advanced in the 31 years of his disappearance; as Paulina states, the judicial entities refused to take the denunciation of the disappearance of Maria Cristina until she started the search. The institutional entities and organisms of Colombia, such as Fiscalía (Judicial entity) or Personeria (in charge of defending the rights of the citizens), have not shown interest in advancing on the search as they archive the cases and expect the families to forget or resolve on their own. Alternatively, they refused to take the denunciation with excuses that citizens without law education can not comprehend or argue. Furthermore, as Marta, an ex-

member of the Tente group, pointed out during the interview, the National army does not contribute to the search with information or protection for the victims. Her son Cristian, who disappeared, was part of the army, and the institution did not provide any information.

Play's structure

As the play synopsis provided at the beginning of this chapter indicates, *Anunciando la Ausencia* is structured around four main moments: the Encounter, the Search, the Testimony, and the Mourning. In what follows I describe each of those segments in more detail.

I. The encounter

Figure 11

Alicia During the Theater play, as the death character



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Alicia moves smoothly in the scenario and moves the clothes of the disappeared from one place on the stage to another with a slow, patient, and careful path of movement. The character's costume is a black hat with a black veil covering her eyes, a long sleeve black shirt, and black

pants, all designed and bought by Alicia. She leaves the clothes of the disappeared slowly and patiently in the foliage leaves. She then says “How many lives have to disappear, so that these lands stop bathing in blood”¹⁷

Alicia stares firmly at the public. She looks around to indicate the crosses. As she leaves the stage, she says “All those abandoned bodies and today they are the shelter of death”¹⁸

Alicia told me that she practiced the movements for her character several times. She amplifies her arms by doing circular movements in an intent of showing how death is all over the country. In 2017, Alicia collaborated with students from the College of Villavicencio to produce the soundscape related to the death character. At the play's opening, there is an instrumental song with a high-pitched woman's voice singing random rhythms.

As Alicia leaves, the song "Egoismo," a popular song from the 1982 composed by Julio Miranda is played. As it is traditionally associated with Colombia's eastern planes, the song helps to localize the play culturally and geographically. Paulina, Carmen, and Gladys enter the stage, clapping and dancing to the song. Once in the center of the stage, they look at each other and greet each other.

Paulina:

“Hi, How are you?”¹⁹

Carmen:

“Good, I'm back at the farm, I'm already harvesting and you?”²⁰

Gladys:

¹⁷ “Cuántas vidas han de desaparecer, para que estas tierras dejen de bañarse de sangre” (Announcing the Absence, 2022)

¹⁸ “Todos esos cuerpos abandonados y hoy son el abrigo de la muerte” (Announcing the Absence, 2022)

¹⁹ “Hola ¿Cómo está?” (Announcing the Absence, 2022)

²⁰ “Bien, ya volví a la finca, ya estoy haciendo cosech, ¿y usted?” (Announcing the Absence, 2022)

“Comadre²¹ I am good , on the farm. I have rice and beans, also chickens”²²

They reencounter in the Parrandon after a long time of not seeing each other. They talk about their personal lives returning to their farms and Colombia's political and economic context, for instance Paulina mentions the free trade agreements of the country and the impact on the local agriculture. They take the Maracas from the table on the stage and start playing them while dancing. Using the pots on the table, they cook *Sancocho* (a traditional soup in several Latin American cuisines) for the parrandon. Then, Nidia walks into the scenario with flowers and a backpack, and Paulina asks:

Paulina:

“Katira, where do you come from”²³

Nidia:

“I come from walking mountains and savannahs. I have collected these flowers from the edge of the rivers, looking for a son who has disappeared”²⁴

Nidia joins the group in dancing, and Carmen invites the actresses to drink *guarapo* (the liquid extracted from pressed sugarcane). She leads the toast by saying:

Carmen:

“Here's to our loved ones who have disappeared, here's to all those searching mothers who have a lot of courage. I toast for don't turn off this road for us to find our missing relatives”²⁵

²¹ Comadre is a traditional way to call a friend in Colombia

²² “Comadre bien, en la finquita bien. Tengo arroz y frijol, también gallinas” (Announcing the Absence, 2022)

²³ “Katira, ¿De donde viene?” (Announcing the Absence, 2022.)

²⁴ “Vengo de andar montañas y sabanas. Estas flores las he recogido del borde de los ríos, buscando a un hijo que me han desaparecido.” (Announcing the Absence, 2022.)

²⁵ “Brindo por nuestros seres queridos que nos han desaparecido, brindo por todas esas madres buscadoras que tienen mucho valor, que no nos apaguen este camino para encontrar a nuestros familiares desaparecidos” (Announcing the Absence, 2022.)

After the toast, the four actresses leave the stage. The popular tune is replaced by the sounds of wind. The death character enters the stage, walking fast, and moving each leaf foliage from the side of the scenario to different parts of the stage.

The character of death evidences the intimate relationship between the disappeared bodies and the territories. Alicia assures me that the territories are alive, they are not static because the trees changed; the weather affects the natural environment and has a mutual relationship with its inhabitant. The collective creative decision to include wind sounds in the background shows how death is constantly moving and extending over the country.

Following Jaclyn Pryor,²⁶ an interdisciplinary scholar who centers on live art as it intersects with questions of time and space, *Anunciando la Ausencia* is a space full of possibilities. Staging the disappearance of loved relatives implies the creation of worlds that can not only tell but transform past and present events. As the women toast and celebrate their reencounter, they transform the disappearance into an event that brings them to new collective ties. I will further analyze the importance of these collective ties in this and the next chapters.

II. The search

Nidia leads the line in which the actresses walk onto the stage. She holds a cross, similar to the ones in the corner, and a colorful lit candle. They stop at the center of the stage, and Nidia says:

Nidia:

“I have searched at San Martín, a place from the eastern plains, for all that savanna and I have not found my son”²⁷

²⁶ Pryor, J. I. (2017). *Time slips : Queer temporalities, contemporary performance, and the hole of history*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press. Retrieved from <https://catalog.library.tamu.edu/Record/in00003881256>

²⁷ “He buscado por San Martín de los llanos, por toda esa sábana y no he encontrado a mi hijo” (*Announcing the Absence*, 2022.)

As soon as she finishes, she passes the cross and candle to Carmen, who now leads the line. She stops at another part of the stage, talks about her unsuccessful search as she has not found Silvio's body, and passes the objects to the person behind her. They repeat the actions of passing the objects, walking around the stage, stopping, and talking about the search until all of them have talked.

Carmen:

“I have looked for my husband in graves, in the rivers, in the savannahs and I have not found him. This light that I carry is what gives me the courage not to give up in the search”²⁸

Gladys:

“I have looked for my son in cemeteries, in mass graves, in morgues”²⁹

Paulina:

“I have spent 38 pairs of shoes in the search, in Bogotá, in the prosecutor 's office. This is the light of love, of fraternity as mothers in this search because we cannot remain silent”³⁰

Paulina, the last one to take the lead, puts the candle and the cross in the corner with the other five candles, and all the actresses crouch down a bit and circle around the crosses and candles in the corner, looking at them for a few minutes.

During the search moment of the play, all the actresses occupy the stage, walking together in the same line and taking different directions, looking on the floor for the clothes of

²⁸ “He buscado a mi esposo en fosas, en los ríos, en las sabanas y no lo he encontrado. Esta luz que llevo es la que me da la valentía de no desfallecer en la búsqueda” (Announcing the Absence, 2022.)

²⁹ “He buscado a mi hijo en cementerio, en fosas comunes, en las morgues” (Announcing the Absence, 2022.)

³⁰ “He gastado 38 pares de zapatos en la búsqueda, en Bogotá, en la fiscalía. Esta es la luz del amor, de la fraternidad como madres en esta búsqueda porque no nos podemos quedar calladas” (Announcing the Absence, 2022.)

the disappeared. By doing this collective search, the group reenacts the bleak process of searching for their loved ones. As Susan Owen (2014) argues, "Reenactments using the body have a powerful and immediate impact on a visceral register and can reveal the past in ways that words can not." The power of the body lies in its ability to communicate beyond words. The Tente presents the collective aspect of a traumatic event walking together on stage – the disappearance unites them as a group

III. The testimony

As the actresses walk around the scenario, moving the foliage of leaves and looking for clues about the disappeared, they mention the places they need to keep visiting in their search. Then, Carmen picks up a blue t-shirt and a hat from one of the leaves foliage and says:

Carmen:

"I have found clothes. Whose will they be?"³¹

Paulina:

"Maybe they are from the public, let's ask!"³²

Nidia:

"That garment belongs to my son."³³

Nidia receives the clothes and hugs Carmen. She opens the T-shirt and shows it to the public while she gives her testimony. She hugs the T-shirt and dances with it as if the object is her son, Deiber.

Nidia:

³¹ "He encontrado estas prendas, De que desaparecido serán?" (Announcing the Absence, 2022.)

³² "No serán del público? Pregunta!" (Announcing the Absence, 2022.)

³³ "Esa prenda es de mi hijo" (Announcing the Absence, 2022.)

“This garment belongs to my son, a young man of 24 years. He did not like colored clothes; he always wore black clothes. However, I did not like black clothes. As a mother, I do not like to see young people dressed in black. The happiest day of my life was December 31st, 2002. He arrived with this shirt around ten at night, turned on the speaker, and put on the song’ ‘Five to go until midnight the year will finish. I run home to hug my mom’ Nevertheless, the saddest day of my life was March 5th at 5 in the morning. The waves of violence came to my house. They flogged him and took him away. That is where the dreams of a young man who wanted to give his parents a little house end. Let's search, women!”³⁴

The other actresses stop walking and look at Nidia while she talks. When Nidia ends, all the actresses return to walking around the scenario and telling the places they need to search. Nidia then picks up a hat and a poncho from the floor.³⁵ She asks, "whose could they be?" Gladys hugs Nidia, takes the clothes, and shares her testimony. The group repeats that pattern until the four of them have given their testimonies.

Gladys holds the hat and poncho gently. Her voice and eyes are firm towards the public during her narrative. Her eyes look at the floor just before she describes her son's disappearance. While she talks about it, her feet and hands are doing small and continuous movements, where she moves her hands in circles, while holding the clothes.

Gladys:

³⁴ “Esta prenda es de mi hijo, mi hijo era un joven de 24 años. No le gustaba la ropa de colores, siempre usaba ropa negra. Pero a mi no me gustaba la ropa negra, como madre no me gusta ver a jóvenes vestidos de negro. El día más feliz de mi vida fue un 31 de diciembre de 2002. El llegó con esta camisa como a las 10 de la noche, prendió el equipo y puso la canción que dice: Faltan cinco pa las 12 el año va a terminar, voy corriendo a mi casa a abrazar a mi mamá. Pero el día más triste de mi vida fue un 5 de marzo a las 5 de la mañana, llegaron las olas de la violencia a mi casa, lo flagelaron y se lo llevaron. Ahí terminan los sueños de un joven que quería darle una casita a sus padres. Mujeres busquemos!” (Announcing the Absence, 2022.)

³⁵ A garment of a type originally worn in South America, made of a thick piece of woolen cloth with a slit in the middle for the head.

“These clothes belonged to my son, he really liked the cap and the poncho. My son was a 16-year-old boy when he disappeared. He was a very affectionate son, very attached to his older sister and me, he worked shining shoes. But on March 18th, everything changed. He went out to ride a bicycle. According to a man who was with him, a few blocks from the house, a taxi without license plates put my son in the car and that is all I know”³⁶

Paulina shows the clothes to the audience, a nurse uniform (shirt, pants, and shoes). She hugs them hard and touches them with her face while talking. She screams and cries when sharing what happened to her daughter. She smells the clothes and starts walking again.

Paulina:

“Do any of you identify with this garment? I feel its aroma, I feel its absence. They got her out of a car, raped her and killed her when she was five months pregnant, with the excuse she was from a guerrilla, because she helped the poorest people and it brought me depression, my crying turned into a fight in this search, I know that I can't find her, because I've been to the field five times and I can't find her, but I keep looking for her. These are the shoes that she used to take care of her patients. I smell my daughter, she is here with me”³⁷

Carmen opens the big hat, shows it to the audience, and smells it. She looks at the audience; her voice gradually starts to break until she cries when talking about her children.

³⁶ “Estas prendas eran de mi hijo, a él le gustaba mucho la gorra y el poncho. Mi hijo era un niño de 16 años cuando se desapareció. Era un hijo muy cariñoso, muy apegado a su hermana mayor y a mí, él trabajaba lustrando zapatos. Pero aquel 18 de marzo todo cambió. Él salió a montar bicicleta, según dijo un señor que iba con él, a una cuadra de la casa un carro tipo taxi sin placas subió a mi hijo a el carro y hasta ahí no se supo más” (Announcing the Absence, 2022.)

³⁷ “Alguno de ustedes se identifica con esta prenda? Siento su aroma, siento su ausencia. La bajaron de un carro, la violaron y la mataron con cinco meses de embarazo porque era guerrillera, porque le ayudaba a la gente más pobre. Y me trajo depresión, mi llanto se volvió lucha en esta búsqueda, se que no la puedo encontrar, porque he ido cinco veces a terreno y no la puedo encontrar pero sigo buscándola. Estos son los zapatos que usaba para tomar el curso y atender a sus pacientes. Siento el aroma de que mi hija está aquí conmigo” (Announcing the Absence, 2022.)

Carmen:

“These garments belonged to my husband. He was a farmer. I still feel the aroma of his sweat. When we went to the river, he would spread out the poncho on the banks of the river and sit there with his four petals. However, death came, and violence touched us, and they took him away, leaving those four children without their father, and destroying that person's dreams. Today my children ask me, ‘Mom, why did they take my father away?’ I do not have an answer to give them”³⁸

The narrative regarding the life of the disappeared, their disappearance and what the search has implied is visible in the monologues of each actress. The actresses direct their bodies towards the public, the tone of their voice constantly changing depending on the extensive range of emotions they experience. The content of their narrative is detailed and descriptive and implies heartbreaking acts due to the violence surrounding the disappearance of each loved one. During those monologues, the body, as the primary communication between the actress and the public, is a statement about the emotional vulnerability the actresses experience and their repetitive actions. They repeat five times the sequence of movements that includes picking the clothes, giving them to the owner, hugging and receiving the clothes, talking and keep walking.

Gladys’s favorite moments in the play are the monologue and the mourning at the end of the play. These are the moments she feels closer to her son. As she explains:

At that moment, it is like when one surrenders to the memory to tell that yes, it is true.

Moreover, when we mourn, it is like another part, like it transports you and makes you, suddenly, remember the loved one at that moment how he was since he was born until the

³⁸ “Estas prendas pertenecían a mi esposo, mi esposo era un labriego campesino. El decía que si se le quemaba su rostro, las chachas no lo querían. Aun todavía perfuma el aroma de su sudor cuando íbamos al río el tendía el poncho a orillas del río y sentaba ahí a sus cuatro pétalos. Pero llegó el día que nos tocó la muerte y la violencia, y se lo llevaron dejando a esos cuatro niños sin su padre, derrumbando los sueños de esa persona. Hoy en día mis hijos me preguntan ‘mamá, por qué se llevaron a mi papa?’ No tengo una respuesta para darles” (Announcing the Absence, 2022.)

moment he was lost. One remembers everything. Everything that happened comes to mind, everything that was, what was.³⁹

Figure 12

Gladys with her son's clothes



Note. Copyright 2022 by author

The disappearance, as a systematic practice carried on by different armed actors in Colombia, constitutes a structural trauma. The trauma was a collective experience for the actresses of the Tente before the play existed, and it is collective experience in the performance. The theater is the space where the structural trauma, which is collective because is rooted on the common historical experience as Colombians, opens new possibilities beyond the traumatic event (i.e., the disappearance) while keeping it open. As Griselda Pollock (2009) states, "Although ourselves may be fragile and vulnerable to their trauma, the transmission is not overwhelming but humanizing."

³⁹ En ese momento como que más. Es como cuando más uno se entrega como al recuerdo a contar que sí, es verdad. Y también cuando hacemos el duelo. Pues, es como otra parte, como que lo transporta a uno y hace que uno, de pronto, recuerde el ser querido en ese momento cómo era de pronto, desde que nació y el momento que se perdió. Entonces, todo eso lo hace a uno, porque, por más que uno esté ahí agachado, uno está recordando todo, se le viene a la mente todo lo que pasó, todo lo que era, lo que fue. [author translation]

Each one shares her experience searching for their relatives and simultaneously makes trauma collective and individual.⁴⁰ The actresses present a narrative that is collective because it exists in the context of a decades-long armed conflict that has affected an entire country. What the actresses express in the play is this structural trauma.

The monologues mention the difficulty of accessing the judicial system and moving forward with the investigation of the disappearance, the lack of truth about the circumstances in which the disappearance happened, and accountability against its perpetrators.

Besides having in common the trauma of disappearance, the actresses also share a social background. They are all from the eastern plains of Colombia and face economic difficulties. As a marginalized group, their socioeconomic condition likely affected the search for their relatives. A large part of the group has physical illnesses that developed after the disappearance. Nidia experienced memory loss and cancer after a long period of crying and grieving. Paulina experienced depression and other psychological issues.

"24 years, four months, ten days, I do not know about him. I will not give up.

Who did this, and Why did they do it? I will not get tired." That is how Gladis ends her monologue in the play.

Even when the monologues are deeply personal and include details about the life and disappearance of their sons and daughters, the collective dimension is still present. Gladys mentions that she took into account the rest of the group when creating her monologue. Carmen and Paulina helped her by suggesting how to structure it:

That was something inquisitive, like jumping from one moment to another because I wrote it, repeated it, and nothing. Moreover, I went to see them, and I was there taking

⁴⁰ Pryor assures that the Trauma is individual and collective at the same time. (Pryor, 2017)

care and watching almost all of their presentations. So, I learned more by watching them than by writing it because they told me, ‘write this and write this and everything.’

Moreover, I wrote and reviewed it, but I learned more from them. Well, I am still missing, but now, I think it went well the two times I have performed, or I do not know, or for not taking me out, they will say that it turned out well, but [laughs]⁴¹

Figure 13

Gladys, Nidia, Carmen and Alicia laughing during rehearsals of the play



Note. Copyright 2022 by author

While the testimony of each group member is shared collectively and built partially with the others, the experience of each actress is different. That is revealed in the gestural and verbal language each actress chooses to embody. Nidia's tone of voice is high, but she never screams. Her actions have a slow rhythm, and she rarely interrupts the dialogues of her companions but patiently waits. Paulina's tone of voice is high, and she frequently shouts. She is fast and

⁴¹ Eso fue algo muy curioso, como de dar un salto de un momento a otro, porque yo lo escribí, yo lo repetía y nada. Y yo me iba a verlas a ellas, casi en todas las presentaciones que ellas estaban, yo allá estaba poniendo cuidando y mirando. Entonces, yo como que aprendía más viéndolas a ellas que escribiéndole, porque a mí me decían, "escriba esto y escriba esto y todo". Y yo lo escribí y lo repasaba, pero aprendí más con ellas. Pues, todavía me falta, pero ya... pues, en las dos veces que me he presentado, pues, pienso que fue bien o... no sé; o por no sacarme dirán que quedó bien, pero [risas] [author translation]

forceful, her actions are direct and substantial, and she regularly intervenes during the dialogues of her companions.

Although the experience of pain from the traumatic event in all its complexity (before, during, and after the play) each actress goes through is unique, all are willing to bond with each other as a group. The crying of the actresses during their monologues and the hugs either between them or with audience members epitomize a response to their pain. Drawing on Sarah Ahmed, scholar that works at the intersection of feminist, queer, and race studies concerning how bodies and worlds take shape, I argue that the pain of others is inevitable in the embodied experience of each one. Ahmed proposes an ethic of responding to the pain of others, which implies being open to what cannot be known or felt since pain, like trauma, resists language. (Ahmed, 2002)

Likewise, Elaine Scarry (1985) affirms that understanding one's pain and others' pain can be done through different modes of embodiment, including vocality and gestures. The possibility of expressing the pain is more effective with sounds such as crying since humans learn this language before learning to speak a language. Throughout the play, the actresses cry about the disappearance of their loved ones.

The actresses state that the pain these disappearances have inflicted is a complex life experience rather than just a harmful consequence of the disappearance. They share it through crying, screaming, hugging the clothes, and moving nervously as Gladys does as she is always moving her hands when she is talking.

As crying is language before words, it does not have the same semantic limitations, facilitating the communication of pain between the actresses and the public. The audience is willing to learn about the deep pain felt by a mother who has lost their son or daughter, they are

open to establishing bonds with the actresses and with others who have experienced something similar.

Each actress performs a monologue that is repeated in every performance. Some elements of the monologue change depending on the context while others remain the same throughout different performances. The Testimony is permeated with emotion, anger, sadness, and frustration. Those emotions are shared with the public through words, crying, screaming, gestures, and interactions with objects such as the clothes. The voices break and harden. Hands tightly embrace the attires. In the monologue, each actress conveys an emotional rhetoric of the body. Following Taylor,⁴² I believe these qualities of the Testimony make the disappearance palpable, further engaging the audience with the five actresses. On the importance of emotions in the play's political impact, Alicia believes:

It's very important. I think that this emotional part is almost the most important thing in this case, because it makes us feel that we must take part in the construction of the new society, that is, of those good coexistence, of that new thing that we want to project, of that push instead, that we do not have to normalize states of violence; I mean, it's not humane to keep normalizing this.⁴³

Making the pain public encourages the audience to embody it. On the one hand, that allows the audience to feel the effects of the traumatic event. On the other hand, it challenges them to deal with the pain they just embodied. Here, the question arises: how can incorporating

⁴² On the one hand, Trauma and performance are characterized by repetition. On the other side, Trauma and performance are felt effectively and viscerally in the present. The Testimony is vital in the two aspects mentioned since HIJOS repeats the Testimony about their parent's disappearance. In contrast, it repeats the performance, in which they denounce those responsible for the disappearances. In addition, when they repeat their Testimony, the performance spectators become witnesses and participate by hearing this Testimony live and in the present. (Taylor, 2002)

⁴³ Es muy importante. Yo pienso que esta parte emocional es casi lo más importante en este caso, porque nos hace sentir que debemos de hacer parte en la construcción de la nueva sociedad, o sea, de esas buenas convivencias, de eso nuevo que queremos proyectarles, de ese empuje de cambio, de que nosotros no tenemos por qué normalizar unos estados de violencia; o sea, no es humano seguir normalizando esto. [author translation]

pain as a collective process become political activism? For Alicia, pain has the potential to build collective ties and transform violence that has been normalized in the country:

The pain of the disappearance of any relative is hard. Furthermore, I go beyond the pain caused by losing a family member. I go further to that sense that I tell you of the community, the conscience, and the responsibility that we have as a society in which what happens to our neighbor, what happens to our friend, what happens to our brother-in-law hurts. So, I cannot say what hurts me because it is not only my son. It is any person who is missing and who disappeared in such a violent and aggressive manner. It should hurt all of society. Society should understand that it is damage that was done to all of humanity, all of society and that we should all be fully aware that we have a responsibility towards the disappeared regardless of whether it has not touched us.⁴⁴

Additionally, Carmen believes pain, mainly the pain young people take from the theater play, can inspire social change:

Well, because sometimes you feel the pain of others, suddenly you have a change, suddenly you think of things more viable, because you say well, me, suddenly we make an effort between fed up, that is, that there is going to be a kind of change that does not happen anymore because another youth is coming, more things are coming, we do not know how tomorrow will present itself to us. So many people I say that it is better than

⁴⁴ El dolor de un hijo no tiene género, el dolor de un hijo no es porque sea hombre o sea mujer, el dolor de un hijo es el de un hijo, el de un hermano, el de un primo, cualquier familiar de uno. Y mire que voy más allá del dolor que produce perder un familiar, voy más allá, a ese sentido que yo le digo de la colectividad y de la conciencia y de esa responsabilidad que nosotros tenemos como sociedad en que nos duela lo que le pasa a nuestro vecino, a lo que le pasa a nuestro amigo, a lo que le pasa a nuestro cuñado, a lo que le pasa. Entonces, yo no puedo decir que es que a mí me duele, porque es solo mi hijo o porque es mi hijo, nos debe doler cualquier persona que falte y que sea desaparecida en la forma tan violenta y tan agresiva como han desaparecido los familiares de nuestras compañeras debe dolernos a todos; en realidad debe dolerle a toda la sociedad, debe entender la sociedad que es un daño que se hizo a toda la humanidad, toda la sociedad, que todos deberíamos de ser completamente conscientes que tenemos una responsabilidad con los desaparecidos independientemente que no nos haya tocado a nosotros. [authortranslation]

that, that they have found out about the whole reality of life and well, suddenly many think that there is peace, that there is change, for the youth of today.⁴⁵

The Testimony highlights the systematic disappearance in Colombia and the government's complicity in this practice. The audience thus learns about a reality that, as some audience members told me during the interviews, is often distorted by mainstream media.

The disappearance caused by the armed conflict involves thousands of families in Colombia. However, due to emotional, physical, and safety concerns, those directly affected often choose to do not a public in terms of going to official institutions or joining groups of memory as the MOVICE. At the same time, Tente members promote the collective search and turn their pain into political action. They urge society to act even at their personal risk – as Nidia or Paulina have experienced. These decisions keep the memory of the disappeared alive and their relatives mobilized by a collective that cares about and supports them across different spaces, including universities, art institutions, and activist organizations.

Gladys's daughters are reluctant to repeat the story of their disappeared brother since it stops them from thinking about their present and future. Furthermore, they would prefer Gladis not to be involved in the play as it revives her pain every time she performs. However, they support her economically and emotionally when she goes to rehearsals and performs. In the next chapter, I further discuss the “collapse of time” that lies at the intersection of performance and trauma.

⁴⁵ Pues porque unas veces uno sintiendo el dolor de los demás, de pronto tenga un cambio, de pronto uno piense las cosas un poquito más viables, porque uno dice bueno, yo, de pronto hacemos el esfuerzo de entre hartos, o sea, que vaya a haber como un cambio de que no pase más eso, porque pues ya vienen otra juventud, vienen más cosas, el mañana no sabemos cómo se nos presente. Entonces pues mucha gente yo digo que es mejor que eso, que se han enterado de toda la realidad de la vida y pues, de pronto muchos piensan en que haiga paz, en que haiga cambio, pa la juventud de hoy en día.[author translation]

During our interview, Gladys talked about the strength necessary to keep searching for her son. She thinks about the present and the future while engaged with the play, and she is aware and thankful for the permanent support of her family and the Tente. She also believes the pain of the disappearance can create collective ties:

Well, it is painful, yes? Because we are going to tell the story on the stage many times, it hurts, right? But, it has also been very good, because one integrates with more people, one knows more cases, and it seems that one's mind clears a little despite the fact that one goes through so much pain and everything, but one's mind clears. For example, I kept myself locked up in the house, I didn't go out anywhere, I didn't have friends, I didn't talk to anyone.⁴⁶

Alicia assures that the emotions related to the disappearance, such as sadness, anger, and frustration, can pave the way to a better society.

My mom from the play tells me, 'daughter, do not lean on yourself so much' that is, she sometimes sees that, suddenly, remembering is going to cause suffering. However, I tell my mother, 'no, I feel that I must continue, that I am not only there for Alberto, but for everything that has happened' because my mother knows that Luis and I have been in these processes of change for many years, We have always wanted to live in a better society for our children, for our neighbors and for the whole world, whom I do not know either.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Pues, es doloroso, ¿sí?, porque vamos a decir... a la hora de uno presentarse o, de pronto, a la hora de uno ir a contar por allá la historia, muchas veces a uno le duele, ¿sí? Pero, ha sido también muy bueno, porque uno se integra con más gente, uno conoce más casos y como que a uno la mente se le despeja un poco a pesar que uno va con tanto dolor y todo, pero a uno se le despeja la mente. Yo, por ejemplo, mantenía en la casa encerrada, yo no salía a ninguna parte, yo no tenía amigos, con nadie hablaba. [author translation]

⁴⁷ Mamá de la obra solo me dice, "hija, no te recargues tanto", o sea, ella, a veces, ve que, de pronto, va a causar sufrimiento estar recordando. Pero, yo le digo a mamá, "no, yo siento que debo seguir, que no solo estoy ahí por Alberto, sino por todo lo que ha pasado, porque mi madre sabe que yo y Lizarazo llevamos muchos años en estos procesos de cambio, siempre hemos querido vivir en una sociedad mejor para nuestros hijos, para nuestros vecinos y para todo el mundo, a los que no conozco tampoco. [author translation]

Furthermore, Alicia states that not just the performance allows her to contribute to the memory of the disappearance through emotions. Participants in community spaces where she participates, such as the Yoga group of memory or the Teacher's labor union, are inevitably filled with anger, sadness, and frustration. However, the collective purpose of healing the body or fighting for education rights is the point to highlight.

In the same line, Nidia assures us below that the pain is inevitable. Deciding what to do with it is a personal matter by putting it on the stage, in her experience, has given her strength. Spirituality and the catholic church have been other sources of strength. Furthermore, hearing the painful testimonies of other mothers gives her a different perspective to engage with her own experiences. “We cannot allow ourselves to be broken in pain. So yes, we have already overcome that. Well, I have already overcome it, thank God.”⁴⁸

At the MOVICE schools of memory, each Tente member shared her trauma through various means, mainly by building their written diaries. When starting to devise the play, the group wanted to tell the story about the life of their disappeared relatives through objects. Vilma assures us that during the first rehearsals, several objects were attached to their stories. The clothes of the disappeared are crucial in the monologue of the Tente group as the actresses use them to share the life of the disappeared and keep their memory alive.

Nidia introduces the t-shirt of his son Deiber by describing how he used to dress and the colors he liked. She says the most important day of her life was on December 31, 2002 when Deiber came to the home with the blue t-shirt Nidia held during the play. She and her son danced

⁴⁸ No podemos dejarnos quebrantar en el dolor. Entoes sí, eso ya lo hemos superado harto, pues para mí, yo lo he superado ya, gracias a Dios, bastante. [author translation]

for the last time that night to a traditional Christmas song, Nidia sings it, and dances while holding and hugging the t-shirt.

Gladis shares that her son worked shining shoes before he disappeared. While showing the clothes of Fabian, her 16 years old son, she narrates how he came home from work, changed his clothes, went out to ride a bike, and was kidnapped and disappeared.

Paulina receives the nurse clothes of Cristina, her daughter, from another actress and immediately hugs them tightly and smells it while asking the public, "Do you identify with these clothes?" and saying, "I still feel her smell." Her daughter was using her nurse suit, what she used to help vulnerable people in Colombia when she was tortured and assassinated. Paulina cries and hugs the clothes stronger.

As soon as Carmen receives the clothes of her husband, a tear falls on her face. She shares the 30 years of search for her peasant husband. He loved hats because they protected him from the sun and kept his skin shiny and attractive. While sharing the clothes, Carmen mentions she feels his smell and has memories of him working on the land. Silvio (her husband) and their children used to go to the river, cook, and sit in his poncho.

Gladys constantly recalls that his son was still a teenager when he disappeared. The images she has from him are mainly in his early stages of life. She clings to the image from his childhood and, simultaneously, regrets the short time she could spend with him. Today, she does clothes for her son. She has toys that resemble him, and she weaves clothes for the toys.

Following, there is a fragment of Gladys talking about these objects:

And, the clothes, well, it is what I am telling you, how one remembers that he dressed, how he liked to dress. So, as they are two different things apart, they have the same meaning, yes? Because he always liked to dress well.⁴⁹

The clothes are elements that show the embodiment of the trauma since they belong to the disappeared people and are crucial in the testimonies of the actresses. They help analyze the artistic and political embodiment in the play. Alicia (actress from the Tente) assures the artifacts of memory, such as the clothes, impact the actresses and the people that witness their Testimony. They are sacred to each group member.

IV. The mourning

During the mourning moment of the play, there is a melancholic instrumental song in the background, and rose petals on the floor. The actresses organize the foliage of leaves in a horizontal line, and each one leaves the clothes of their disappeared relative in one foliage.

They kneel in front of their relatives' clothes, head down, put their eyes on the floor, and some of them pray. Nidia remains standing because of her knee issue. They all do collective mourning for the bodies that have not been found. In turn, each actress talks to their disappeared relative.

Carmen

“Silvio, we will never stop looking for you. Your children long to find you, you already have grandchildren, and one of your grandchildren wrote a song for you. We will not stop until the day I find you and bury you like you deserve”⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Y, la ropa, pues, es... lo que le digo, como uno se acuerda que él se vestía, como a él le gustaba vestirse. Entonces, como que son dos cosas diferentes, aparte, pero que tienen el mismo significado, ¿sí?, porque... él siempre le gustó, pues, vestirse bien, tener su buena ropa, sus buenas cosas a pesar que era muy pequeño, como él trabajaba. [author translation]

⁵⁰ “Silvio nunca te dejaremos de buscar, tu hijos te anhelan encontrar, ya tiene nietos (...) uno de tus nietos te hizo una canción(...) no vamos a parar hasta el día que te encuentre y te de sepultura como tu la mereces” (Announcing the Absence, 2022.)

Paulina:

“Cristina, my beautiful girl, you were the light of my eyes, you were my life, you were everything, I will continue looking for you even if I get old”⁵¹

Nidia:

“ I always wait for you alive, because in the hearts of us mothers, a child never dies, we always carry them alive, I always wait for that call at the door that tells me ‘I’m here, mom”⁵²

Paulina

“Women, looking for faces, feet, hands, hearts, backs, all those parts of their bodies (...) This is a living death”⁵³

Carmen, Paulina, and some spectators are crying during the Mourning. Paulina screams while she closes the mourning and gets support from Nidia and Gladys to stand up after kneeling. Then, all of them help Carmen to stand up as well.

While Nidia, Carmen, Paulina, and Gladis are standing up, Alicia enters the stage as the dead character claiming justice for the mothers condemned to pain and sadness. At the same time, she does smooth movements with her arms and walks along different spaces in the scenario.

Alicia:

“Entire towns sullied, communities massacred, mothers condemned to pain and infinite sadness. As long as impunity reigns, the cold tomb grows and grows, and no one returns from it”

⁵¹ “Cristina, mi niña hermosa, tú eras la luz de mis ojos, eras mi vida, lo eras todo, seguiré buscándola así este viejita” (Announcing the Absence, 2022.)

⁵² ‘Siempre te espero vivo, porque en el corazón de nosotras las madres, nunca muere un hijo siempre lo llevamos vivo, siempre espero ese grito en la puertas que me llame y me diga “Aquí estoy, mamá” (Announcing the Absence, 2022.)

⁵³ : “Mujeres, buscando rostros, pies, manos, corazones, espaldas todas aquellas partes de sus cuerpos. Esto es una muerte en vida” (Announcing the Absence, 2022.)

Finally, the women hug each other and close the play by saying collectively:

“We are seed, we are memory, we are the sun that is reborn in the face of impunity”⁵⁴

The actresses close the play with a phrase that affirms the possibilities born in the past and the future. The identity of the victims of the armed conflict is transformed into a seed and memory. The actresses permanently talk about what happened; to create narratives about what happened and what is to come.

The mourning and the collective are part of a structural trauma that does not stop because the disappearance in Colombia is still a reality. Besides, they are part of the extensive nature of trauma, as it goes beyond the traumatic event to the impact on the present and the future.

Trauma and the archive-what the play means and does

Vilma, the MOVICE officer who accompanied the Tente group from their beginning in 2011 until 2018, insists that the last moment of the play was supposed to share with the public what they have learned from the search, their plans, and the hope to change the violent context. She assures the actresses never reached that moment; instead, they chose to cling to the Testimony and focus on the disappearance and pain from it.

Vilma’s narrative does not align with the group’ vision of the play because the hope to change the violent context is at the end and throughout the play. As I show in this chapter, the pain the actresses share with the public is related to the hope of change and the political action the actresses currently do and hope to stop the disappearance around the country. According to Alicia:

In the first part it's how we dignified, who they were, what they did, it's a way of bringing them, it's a presence in the moment. And then what is done is the duel, how it happened,

⁵⁴ “Somos semilla, somos memoria, somos el sol que renace de la impunidad.” (Announcing the Absence, 2022.)

how the events were; The second is how the events unfolded, what happened, who was he, how did they take him, when did they take him, the dates. And then the mourning what we want to rebuild, how we have been able to rebuild ourselves, how that search is carried out, all the search work; and it is also about making a collective search, that they search alone, but they also search collectively, they help each other, they unite in that search, and in that search they find themselves.

Moreover, one day they celebrate, not that they have lost their children, but that memory helps them to build new things for them from then on, that these presences serve to build new societies, that those absences help them to bring them to the present and help build new societies and that people understand that these absences should not have occurred, that all of us had the right to have our relatives, that our relatives die of old age.⁵⁵

Alicia's perspective aligns with my vision since she states that *Anunciando la Ausencia* promotes the disappeared relatives' human dignity. The celebration of the past is the celebration of the memory that helps to transform the present collectively. Therefore, hope is present throughout the play.

⁵⁵ Es que en la primer parte es cómo dignificamos, quiénes eran ellos, qué hacían, es una forma de traerlos, es una presencia en el momento. Y después lo que se hace es el duelo, cómo pasó, cómo fueron los hechos; segundo es cómo fueron los hechos, qué pasó, quién era él, cómo se lo llevaron, cuándo se lo llevaron, las fechas. Y después el duelo, lo que queremos reconstruir, cómo nos hemos podido reconstruir, cómo se hace esa búsqueda, todo el trabajo de búsqueda; y se trata de hacer también una búsqueda colectiva, que ellas buscan solas, pero también buscan colectivamente, se ayudan, se unen en esa búsqueda, y en esa búsqueda se van encontrando.

Y un día van celebrando, no que hayan perdido sus hijos, sino que esa memoria les ayude a construir a ellas cosas nuevas de ahí para adelante, que esas presencias sirvan para construir nuevas sociedades, que esas ausencias les ayuden a ellas es a traerlas al presente y ayuden a construir nuevas sociedades y que la gente entienda que esas ausencias no debieron darse, que todas nosotras teníamos derecho a tener nuestros familiares, a que nuestros familiares se mueran de viejitos. [author translation]

For Vilma, the play is an effective way to talk about the disappearance because the art is an accessible space for all types of people to get closer to the disappearance situation, as Carmen mentions during her interview. Vilma states:

Because, for example, the case was documented here and, well, we have a Memory gallery. So, well, that was made visible there and suddenly what did we do with the cases? Go report and everything. And everything is being left as it is, filed away. So we said 'no, another way to make it visible, for people to see... Break the indifference' yes? So through a play, a play, because everyone saw it.⁵⁶

The involvement of Colombian society as a whole in the disappearance problem is necessary because the disappearance is a historical and structural trauma. Concerning the structural trauma Pollock (2009) exposes two faces of Structural trauma. First, an inevitable event in the formation of subjectivity, examples of this trauma are birth or loss of the breast. Secondly, overwhelming events that impact the construction of subjectivity. These include abuse, the death of loved ones, and exile. From her perspective what makes an event overwhelming is the relationship with the structural or collective trauma we all have. I will deepen on this overwhelming nature in chapter III.

Colombian society and the actions to resolve it will be more effective as they are more collective. The Testimony from victims of the armed conflict and the theatrical setting implies a closer and more dynamic approach to the traumatic experience of the Colombia public, who has been affected directly, as some audience members share since they also are victims of the armed conflict or indirectly as they know the impact of the conflict through the news.

⁵⁶ Porque, por ejemplo, aquí se documentaba el caso y, bueno, tenemos una galería. Galería... Entonces, bueno, eso se visibilizaba ahí y de pronto ¿qué hacíamos con los casos? Ir a denunciar y todo. Y todo va quedando como ahí archivado, como... Entonces dijimos "no, otra manera de visibilizar, que la gente vea... Romper la indiferencia", ¿sí? Entonces que a través de una obra, de una obra de teatro, que porque todo el mundo la vea.[author translation]

About Tente's process from the traumatic event to the play. Diana Taylor (2002), A scholar focused on theatre and performance, performance and politics, feminist theatre and performance in the Americas, analyzes the performance of H.I.J.O.S (social movement in Argentina.) It is made up of the sons and daughters of those who disappeared during the dictatorship in Argentina. The objective of HIJOS is to hold the people involved in the disappearances publicly responsible. This social movement occupies the streets, uses the disappeared photos, and draws the names of those responsible in the public space. Taylor points out that HIJOS demonstrations are performances seeking justice and making a memory of the dictatorship in Argentina and the disappeared people.

Based on the analysis of the actions of HIJOS, Taylor establishes the relationship between Performance and trauma. The author points out two critical aspects of this relationship. Trauma and performance are characterized by repetition, and they are felt effectively and viscerally in the present. The Testimony is vital in the two aspects mentioned since HIJOS repeats the Testimony about their parents' disappearance during the performance. When they repeat their Testimony, the performance spectators become witnesses and participate by hearing this Testimony live and in the present.

The relationship between trauma and performance presented by Taylor is relevant because Tente also experienced a traumatic event related to the disappearance of their loved ones and created a performance in which they bear witness to this disappearance. The repetition of their Testimony in the performance is vital in the memory of their relatives. Moreover, through theater, a performance in the present and life, Tente involves the audience searching for truth, justice, and non-repetition.

Concerning the importance of the present in the performance, Peggy Phelan (1996) , a scholar focused on the performance as a live event. She argued that the ephemerality of performance is crucial to its force, states that performance's life is the present because it implies the presence of living bodies. Throughout the text, the author assures that the writing or the recording alters the performance, and the real can only be seen in the present or live. The value of the present in the performance is shown in the inability to reproduce it or duplicate it in the same line. As the actresses in the play work with the spectators' reactions, they can find moments to improvise and build a closer relationship with the audience.

Likewise, the actresses of Tente refuse to have a detailed script with all the plays written because the performance constantly changes as the search progresses (or not), as they feel on the day of the performance, or depending on the safety conditions of the space they are performing. Furthermore, members such as Paulina seem unnecessary to rehearse because they already know the general structure and will adapt their Testimony based on the performance context.

Regarding the embodiment in *Anunciando la Ausencia*, Taylor points out that bodies are conduits of memory. The author takes up her concept of repertoire, which implies that bodies pass knowledge, build history, and make a memory. Accordingly, the Tente actresses pass the memory of their lives and search for the disappeared through their bodies. As Paulina uses her neck to hold the photo of Maria Cristina or Carmen cries as she recounts why Silvio wore a hat, they pass memories with their bodies beyond the speaking language and include the spoken narrative.

In the same vein, Rebeca Schneider (2011) claims that the body is a place of memory because memory is passed from body to body. The author values the repertoire concept and extends the archive concept since she points out that the archive is a social performance.

Schneider ensures that an archive as social performance implies no longer an archive that guarantees an untouchable or permanent past. The archive is subject to what is done in the present or future, as the script in a play.

Taylor's and Schneider's are valuable in the embodiment that the play *Anunciando la Ausencia* enables because the play has the repertoire in the spoken Testimony of the actresses, in their cries or their screaming. Moreover, it also has the archive of the photos and the clothes of the disappeared. Tente's actresses transmit their loved ones' life and disappearance stories from the repertoire and the archive.

The actresses embody the archive since they take the clothes of their loved ones in their hands, hug them, feel them, expose them to the public, and hang a photo of their loved ones around their necks. The actresses turn the archive into a social performance by embodying these objects since they acquire relevance and meaning. For example, clothing is not just used clothing; it is the memory of a missing body, as Nidia remembers Christmas with Deiber through his T-shirt or Paulina remembers the day Maria Cristina disappeared from working as a nurse with her nursing uniform.

By embodying the clothes by holding them with care and solemnity, hugging them, and exposing them to the public, the actresses show the value and relevance of the artifacts. Taylor (2003) affirms that repertoire has a dialogic relationship with the archive because how the objects of the archive are embodied and interpreted affects those objects' value, relevance, or meaning. Likewise, in the play *Anunciando la Ausencia*, the bodies are conductors of memory. As Taylor Points out, the actresses give value, relevance, and new meaning to the objects from their embodiment. The actresses' bodies are memory conductors when they embody the clothes and photos of their loved ones, which are objects of the archive.

The clothes from the disappeared people are embodied by the relative of the person that owned them and by the actress that picks them carefully from the floor and asks: "who owns these clothes?" Therefore, the trauma is presented as collective. The collective nature of Tente's performance is to remember the disappeared, claim justice, and keep them alive.

Additionally, valuing the role of their bodies and the clothes of their loved ones in sharing their Testimony, the actresses question the hegemonic narrative Colombian state and institutions have registered and presented in the public space regarding the disappearance in the country and the disappearance of their relatives as Nidia shares below:

We left those universities or those schools full like covered in that love and everything. Moreover, children and young people have integrated much into this. They are very encouraged by the social work and all of this because they said, they only see this on the news, but it is not the same to see it on Caracol, on RCN (Mainstream media in Colombia), than with us, who have suffered it and are telling the story in detail.⁵⁷

The political impact of the play is rooted in pain generated by the disappearance. Taylor points out that performance transmits political commitment from trauma. The author states that the pain, a consequence of the traumatic event, is made public on stage or in the street, and "by emphasizing the public rather than the private, repercussions of traumatic violence and loss, social actors turn personal pain into an engine for cultural change" (Taylor, 2002, p. 154)

When the pain is made public, the audience embodies it because they feel the repercussions of the traumatic event while seeing the play and have to deal with it. Taylor states that the audience witnesses the Testimony of the traumatic event and embodies the pain and the

⁵⁷ Nosotras salimos de esas universidades o de esos colegios llenas, como rebozadas de ese amor y todo. Y pues los niños, los jóvenes también se han integrado mucho en todo esto y les anima mucho los trabajos sociales y de todo esto, porque ellos decían "Esto lo vemos solo por noticias, pero no es igual verlo por Caracol, por RCN, que ustedes mismas que lo han sufrido nos lo estén contando con pelos y señales [author translation]

responsibility of past events and behaviors. If the audience embodies the pain, the trauma becomes a collective trauma that must be healed.

Following a Tente performer, Alicia, the physical interaction with the public is part of the importance of the body during the performance. She mentioned below a radio theater experience of the group when the play did not catch the public's attention because they did not interact with the spectators.

Perhaps it is that at a face-to-face level within a play, when the body is present, well, one sees the public, and the public approach them, closer to them, because first I was further back. (...) So, one sees how the public empathizes with them, connects with them, and embraces them as if they show solidarity.⁵⁸

Pain as the root of collective action paves the way for political work. On stage, the actresses from Tente embody pain by crying and screaming. They make it collective pain with the other actresses and the audience as they occupy the public sphere of a theater stage. The women of Tente create bonds with each other and the public from pain, allowing the collective embodiment of the individual pain. When the public or the other actresses embody the pain of others, there are three consequences:

1. They feel the pain of the disappearance of an unknown person.
2. They embody the responsibility to heal the pain that disappearance generates.
3. The play reflects that the violence of the armed conflict is a collective problem, even when it affects individuals in different ways.

⁵⁸ Quizá es que uno a nivel presencial dentro de una obra, cuando está el cuerpo, pues, uno ve el público y el público se acerca a ellas, (...) Entonces, ve uno cómo ve el público empatiza mucho con ellas, el público conecta con ellas, el público las abraza, como que se solidarizan.[author translation]

Therefore, the political project of the actresses that includes truth, justice, and non-repetition resonates in the collective from the pain and incentives of collective action.

Sebastian has been working with historical memory for years and accompanied the Tente and the MOVICE when they decided to build a theater play. He assures us that the play was conceived as a political performance. The disappearance testimony shared by those who experienced it is sensitive and spontaneous. Therefore *Anunciando la Ausencia* was devised as a general structure that allows the actresses to share their private life and trauma.

Tente is a pioneer in testimonial theater as they broke the silence towards the disappearance in Colombia and openly pointed to public officials as accomplices of their loss during the interviews. Such as when Alicia assures the judicial entities are not interested in the search or when Paulina assures they did not want to start an investigation. It summoned victims of disappearance who felt alone and lost in searching for their relatives.

Anunciando la Ausencia was performed at the beginning, and still, in public parks, where people related to the disappearance and citizens unaware of the situation got engaged with the disappearance. Vilma assures that the public spaces and college campuses are strategic because people not interested in the topic can see the play and get involved in the memory and search of the disappeared.

Following Ahmed,⁵⁹ one's pain is uncertain as others' pain is. This uncertainty is the basis of the collective bonds since being willing to the unknown is how we create the bonds. The disappearance in the middle of the armed conflict is the experience that unites the actresses of the

⁵⁹ The pain of others is inevitable in the embodied experience of each one, so Ahmed proposes an ethic of responding to the pain of others, which implies being open to what cannot be known or felt since pain resists language, as Scarry affirms. In addition to the impossibility of feeling the other's pain, Ahmed affirms that the most uncertain pain is their own. So if it is difficult to understand the own pain, it is practically impossible to understand that of others. However, we create bonds with others by being willing to the unknown. (Ahmed,2002)

Tente theater group. In addition, they share the context of the armed conflict and the negligence of state institutions in the face of disappearance.

The state's negligence is reflected in the involvement of the police and the army in the disappearance of their loved ones, how the judicial institutions have blocked the truth and justice processes in the face of the disappearance, and the institutions that watch over citizens' rights have ignored them. Then the pain around the disappearance of their loved ones makes actresses aware of their connection with others who have also experienced it.

Tente's political impact on the actress's daily life is described by Alicia when she talks about her granddaughter Sofia:

I think that something is not working and that something must change and that this is also part of sensitivity, solidarity, and compassion; In other words, there must also be compassion in the way of living, as Sofía said, if there is no solidarity, if there is no empathy and if we do not see the world around us. collective forms are essential. If we do not think about the groups or communities, well, something is happening in our society, we are failing in something, and we have many gaps to be filled. ⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Pienso que algo no está funcionando y que algo debe cambiar y que también eso hace parte de la sensibilidad, de la solidaridad y de la compasión; o sea que también debe haber compasión en la forma de vivir, en la forma... como decía Sofía, si no hay solidaridad, si no hay empatía y si no vemos el mundo... que nosotros tenemos que vivir de otras formas, las formas colectivas son importantes. Si nosotros no pensamos en los colectivos, en las comunidades, pues, también estamos teniendo... está pasando algo en nuestra sociedad, estamos fallando en algo y tenemos muchos vacíos [author translation]

CHAPTER III

COLOMBIA IS WRITTEN WITH T OF TRAUMA AND THEATER, PERFORMING TRAUMA

I see that trauma is very present. In other words, one sees that they are still feeling that loss, that the loss is there, right? I think that many of the diseases that one catches at the hard times are also due to what one has suffered, to what one has gone through that has not yet been able to extract, and that also generates sickness. If one is close to the world, the discomfort worsens. So everything they have done, everything they touch on in the play, well, it has made it possible for them to belong to this play and to be able to do it with pain, with all the suffering that it has, but also with the joy of being able to transmit this suffering to others, not so that they continue to suffer, but so the world knows what happened.⁶¹(Susana, 2022

Susana, who attended a performance of *Anunciando la Ausencia* in June 2022, shares how she perceives pain in the play. The pain is rooted in the traumatic experience surrounding the disappearance of Tente's loved ones. That pain is inevitable and comes in different ways. It can be Nidia's or Rosita's cancer (which would end up taking away Rosita) or in Carmen's and Paulina's crying and screaming throughout the play. It is deeply personal, and each actress in the group has had a relationship with the pain. For instance, Nidia temporarily lost her memory

⁶¹ Lo veo muy presente ese trauma. O sea, ve uno que ellas están sintiendo aún esa pérdida, que esa pérdida está ahí, ¿sí? Que está presente, o sea, no es, o sea realmente pienso que también muchas de las enfermedades que uno coge en esos momentos también se debe a eso, a lo que uno ha sufrido, a lo que uno ha pasado que no ha podido todavía sacar de uno y eso también le genera a uno. Si uno se cierra en esto, pues el malestar es peor todavía. Entonces de pronto eso, todo lo que han hecho, todo lo que han tratado con con la obra, pues ha hecho posible que hasta ellas puedan hacer, pertenecer a esta obra y poderlo hacer con dolor también, con todo el sufrimiento que tiene, pero también con la alegría de poder transmitir a los demás este sufrimiento, no para que sigan sufriendo; sino para que el mundo sepa lo que ha pasado. [author translation]

because of the crying; Gladys decided to focus on her daughters and maintain a close social circle while crafting clothes and toys for her son. Pain and trauma are at the center of the play as the actresses narrate the trauma and share their pain on the stage by singing, dancing, and embodying their relatives' clothes. The audience engages with these elements as they learn about the actresses' search and struggles.

Figure 14

Gladys and the objects to remember Fabian, her son.



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For Cathy Caruth, a scholar on the conceptualization of trauma, who proposes questions about the meaning of survival and the nature of witnessing, trauma is not the disappearance itself but the experience that surrounds it and carries it on until today. According to the author, "[a]n overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, the uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (Caruth, 1996, p. 11)

In this chapter, I will delve into the movement from trauma to performance by considering four main elements: the second wound, which I will describe later; the collapse of time narrative, the crisis of truth, and the witnessing experience. To better understand the role of pain (touched on only briefly in Chapter 2), I draw on Caruth's conceptions of trauma and Schechner's (1985), a scholar that combines his work in performance theory with approaches to the broad spectrum of performance, including theatre, play, ritual; notion of restored behavior. In my analysis of the relationships between trauma and performance, I will rely on interviews with the actresses and their relatives, organizations, and spectators. I argue that Tente has been able to build crucial social bonds (with artistic and political implications) from trauma and pain.

trauma here refers to the women's struggle to confront the disappearance of their children, one of the most shocking situations for a mother. This event surpasses the day-to-day experiences of the Tente group. As Caruth states, it is a breach in the processes of cognition, their ordinary life, and hence in how they make sense of the world.

Following Caruth, trauma is a "wound inflicted not upon the body but the mind ... a breach in the mind's experience of time, self and the world" (Caruth, 1996, pp. 3–4). As the wound is in the mind, it does not heal immediately, chronologically, or by following standardized procedures. It instead tends to repeat and emerge as an involuntary reenactment that people cannot simply leave behind. Then, it is an ongoing wound built from the event and its experience. As I argue below, we can compare that ongoing wound emerging from the original wound to Schechner's concept of restored behavior.

According to what Jaclyn Pryor (2017) mentions, the wound breaks with the linear assumptions about time because the convulsive repetition of thoughts, dreams, sensations, or feelings associated with the event do not belong to the past, the present, or the future. Judith

Herman (1992) , a scholar focused on the understanding and treatment of incest and traumatic stress, assures that "the survivor-sufferer is unable to live in either past or present: traumatic events destroy the victim's fundamental assumptions about the safety of the world, the positive value of self and the meaningful order of creation" (Herman 2001, p. 51) However, I suggest that the Tente actresses take the collapse of time characteristic of trauma as part of their creative process with the play. Although they often worry about safety in their region and collective trust, they are not broken by the trauma. Rather, they turn it into art and political activism.

Luz, a play spectator I interviewed during fieldwork, also sees a double in the play: the individual trauma that each actress carries and shares during the play and the collective trauma of the actresses as they engage with the public. As Luz explained:

Well, it is a way for them to exorcise all that, all those 'demons' they have from all this, to let more people know their story, what happens. So I feel that apart from the fact that it is for them that: to exorcise all that and get it out, it is also to let people know that this happens, that it continues to happen, and that, well, there is much insensitivity about that, right? Because it happens, it came out in the news, and that is it, that was it.⁶²

In focusing primarily on *Anunciando la Ausencia* as a collective creation, I am interested in how the Tente manages trauma in the theatrical field. At the same time, it does not seem possible (and productive) to disassociate that collective endeavor from the actresses' biographies because their trauma is a deeply personal experience. Indeed, as discussed in the previous chapter, the testimonial performance is the central and most prominent part of the play. I do not

⁶² Pues es una manera de ellas como de exorcizar todo eso, todos esos "demonios" que las acompañan a partir de todo esto que sucedió. Entonces es como que haya más personas que conozcan toda esta historia, pues parte de la historia, de lo que pasa. Entonces siento que aparte de que es para ellas eso: exorcizar todo eso y sacarlo, es también hacerle saber a la gente que esto pasa, que sigue pasando y que, pues que hay como que mucha insensibilidad en cuanto a eso, ¿no? Porque pasa y pues sí, de pronto salió en la noticia y ya, listo, eso fue todo. [author translation]

deepen on their personal stories, but I acknowledge their importance in analyzing the theater play and trauma.

On the individual/collective nature of the play, Caruth draws on Schechner to define trauma as a restored phenomenon. The relation between trauma and performance bears on the convergence of private and public spheres, the crisis of truth, and the collapse of the time narrative.

Following Patrick Duggan (2011), through restored behavior trauma generates a crisis of truth. In the restored behavior, "The original 'truth' or 'source' of the behavior may be lost, ignored, or contradicted—even while this truth or source is being honored and observed." The scripted actions, the known texts, the scored movements, and the sequence of events in performance are restored behaviors because they are "twice-behaved." They are not first-time actions, texts, or movements but rooted in the originals. Likewise, trauma as a double and repeated wound is not the actual event but is rooted in it.

Following Schechner, there is an illusory decision over the action because the original behavior cannot be changed. The rehearsals are not natural events but a space of individual and collective decision-making that narrows down the choices or implements standard rules over the narrative. In congruence, *Anunciando la Ausencia* brings the double wound of the disappearance to a public space. There, they honor the original event through a narrative structured around the encounter, the search, the Testimony, and the mourning, which are filled with improvisation.

In the same line as Trauma, restored behaviors collapse the time narrative by offering individuals and groups the opportunity to go back to what they were, what they experienced, what they wish it had happened, or to perform who they wish to become. In the encounter part of the play, the actresses invite the public to a place where the violence in their rural territories is

over and we can go back to the farms they had to leave behind due to the armed conflict. The mourning part speaks to their desire to bury their relatives even if they do not have the body for the funeral.

During a performance, as a theater play, the actresses and actors are not entirely themselves but still themselves and are playing roles directly related to their biographies (thoughts, emotions, experiences, and actions). Furthermore, in testimonial theater, where the actresses play themselves because they narrate their own experience, they integrate behaviors, texts, and actions that seem to be from somebody else. For instance, during the Party or Parrandon they are sharing their own experience but they are following a stage sequence of movements, they are in a place they never have been and they are celebrating an event that they have not experienced.

Put in personal terms, restored behavior is 'me behaving as if I am someone else' or 'as if I am 'beside myself,' or 'not myself,' as when in a trance. But this 'someone else' may also be 'me in another state of feeling/being' as if there were multiple 'me's' in each person. (Duggan, 2011, p. 7)

The tension of being oneself or not during a performance shows the simultaneously private and public nature of restored behaviors. Because the actress looks to recover herself in the performance, on the stage, and in the encounter with others while she is not entirely herself, it is clear in *Anunciando la Ausencia* when the actresses share imaginary narratives that break time conventions, such as the encounter and the mourning spaces. It is also noticeable when they express visceral emotions related to the disappearance of their relatives.

For instance, Gladys does not talk about her son or gets melancholic about it in her day-to-day life, but in the theater performance, she does both. She is herself even when that is not

how she behaves in some other spaces. Stephanie, an audience member from the June 2022 performance, I interviewed during fieldwork, explained she was aware the women on stage were “acting” due to the scenography, the play’s narrative arc, and the spaces she was invited to see. But her main engagement with the play was the feeling of pain and hatred the actresses convey. As Stephanie explained:

I think I feel represented not in how they act, but in how it hurts them because I know it would hurt me too. However, I do not come out hating or hurting at all. Instead, I feel that I came out happy because before, perhaps, I did not believe there were people like that. You do not expect a 70-year-old to keep looking for his lost son 20 years ago. Furthermore, it gives me hope a lot.⁶³

The public nature of the performance embraces the witnessing of the audience. Following Dori Laub, we could say witnessing traumatic experiences implies the ethical responsibility of participating in the truth of those events and then engaging in the search for the truth, meaning the audience feels a responsibility of at least listening with attention to one of the most overwhelming experiences of a mother. In that sense, *Anunciando la Ausencia* witness/audience engages with the second wound: they witness a testimony that is re-framed and restored by the actresses. Andres, another audience member, states that the collective encounter during the parrandon, or the initial party in the encounter, includes not only the actresses onstage but the audience as well. Andres states:

On the emotional side, I can say there was a roller coaster of emotions. The most permanent, highest points were emotions of reflection: sadness, surprise, and dismay.

⁶³ Creo que me siento representada no en la manera en la que ellas actúan, sino en la manera en que a ellas les duele, porque yo sé que a mí también me dolería. Pero, para nada salgo odiando o doliendo, sino que siento que salgo feliz, porque antes, tal vez, no creía capaz que hubiera personas así, ¿sí? Tu, no esperar que alguien de 70 años siga buscando a su hijo hace 20 años perdido. Y me da esperanzas, muchísimas. [author translation]

However, there were also moments of joy and celebration when they had their party, the whole thing. Furthermore, it is the reflection that, despite everything, they keep going. Despite everything, that experience allows them, at least, to meet again with other people who have had the same experience, and with us, who are the spectators, we are part of the encounter.⁶⁴

According to Van Der Kolk and Onno Vann Der Hart, "These 'unassimilated scraps of overwhelming experience' are consigned instead to other (somatosensory or iconic) neural networks, from which they trigger the reenactments and flashbacks of the trauma symptom" (Kolk & Hart, 1995, p. 160–75) Those who have experienced trauma perform repeated sensations, emotions, and actions from it. These repetitions, following Kolk (1991), are rooted in the struggle of assimilating trauma within the existing mental scheme and day-to-day spaces.

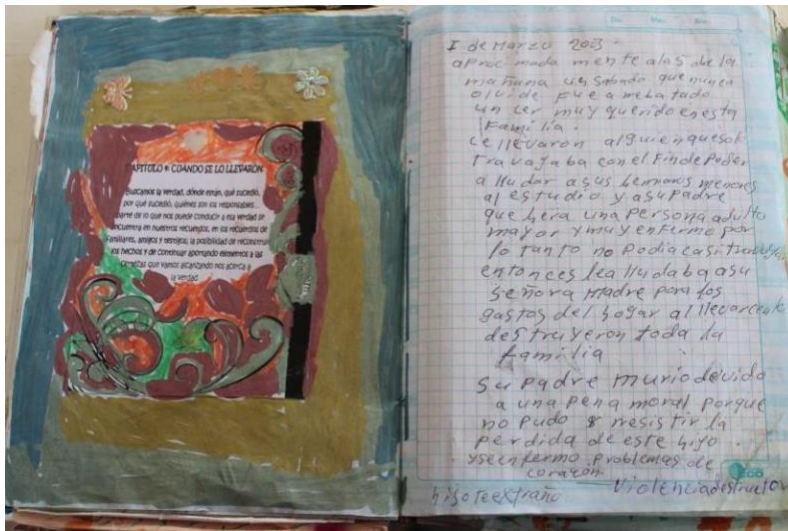
Theater makes trauma accessible through symbols and metaphors. It can incorporate dreams, thoughts, or flashbacks by narrating events through languages that escape the day-to-day experience. Thus, the theater is one of the channels the Tente women use to narrate the events and to unlock the traumatic experience. Prior to the play, the group created Memory books, which included drawings, writings, and collages. Those artifacts were a crucial channel the actresses used to access trauma. Sebastian, a human rights activist who has been with Tente since its creation, assures that these memory books, developed during MOVICE's memory school, were vital for the theater play and the personal struggle of the actresses. As he explained:

⁶⁴ En el tema emocional, puedo decir, un poco, que cierta montaña rusa de emociones, obviamente, los puntos más permanentes, más altos, fueron emociones de reflexión, entre ellas la tristeza, la sorpresa, la consternación. Pero, también había momentos... tal vez de alegría, tal vez de festejo que... bueno, era cuando ellas hacían su parranda o festejaban, todo el asunto. Y, pues, es la reflexión a eso que, a pesar de todo, siguen adelante, a pesar de todo esa experiencia les permite, al menos, reencontrarse con otras personas que han tenido la misma experiencia, como nosotros que somos los espectadores, los que hacemos parte de eso. [author translation]

Very nice and very powerful because it served them for all the psychosocial work that they were not being accompanied with. Well, they did their work with those notebooks. Furthermore, well, it was compelling and extraordinary.⁶⁵

Figure 15

Nidia's Memory Book



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Iris, Alicia's daughter, highlights the importance of the memory books in helping each actress manage trauma and share their pain:

When they wear the clothes or find crying or pain, how they express themselves with that pain, like very angry. Moreover, this time, in this last performance, more I felt more connection, let's say, with energy, universal energy, what we call God, universe, and cosmos. So, as that peace is felt, it is transmitted. I felt critical were the memory books,

⁶⁵ Muy bonito y muy potente, porque le sirvió pa todo un trabajo psicosocial que no estaban siendo acompañadas, pues, ellas mismas hacían su trabajo con esos cuadernos. Y, bueno, fue muy potente, muy bonito. El caso es que sí, todo salía ahí, del MOVICE, para qué, todo eso fue el nicho. [author translation]

where they have done the work of the photos, the experiences, and some writing I did not know about. It is an inspiration; the books help to release many things and to heal.⁶⁶

As Iris mentions, *Anunciando la Ausencia* offers a narrative of/from trauma, where the actresses follow a script with the general structure of the play but can improvise and incorporate objects to their narrative. The elements used during the Encounter, Search, Testimony, and Mourning share an aesthetic related to the actresses' traumatic experience. For instance, the pots used in the Encounter (Parrandon) come from the Eastern plains, helping the audience to situate the play geographically and culturally. The candles, the crosses, and the flower petals join the experience of the actresses in La Macarena, a mass grave in the Eastern plains where Paulina and Vilma had searched for their disappeared relatives – as a place where the anonymous bodies of victims of the armed conflict remain unburied. Vilma comments on the crosses in the play:

The crosses mentioned how influential Macarena's graves were, that had an impact at the national and international level in July 2007. Mass and individual graves and false positives and disappearances were visible, MOVICE was there. The mayors and the administration were ordered to pass information to the courts on the unidentified bodies, the missing people.⁶⁷

The memory books were the origin of the Testimony in *Anunciando la Ausencia*. They helped the actresses narrate their trauma through words, drawings, poetry, and pictures. Nidia, a

⁶⁶ Cuando ellas colocaban la ropa o encontraban, siempre, el llanto, el dolor, como se expresaban ellas con ese dolor, ¿no? como de mucha rabia. Y esta vez, en esta última obra, en la Casa Amarantas, se sintió más conexión, digamos, con una energía, una energía universal, lo que llamamos dios, universo, cosmos. Entonces, como que esa paz se siente, se transmite. Algo que sentí muy importante fue cuando también los libros, cuando ellas tienen un libro de memoria donde han hecho ese trabajo de las fotos, de las vivencias, algunas escriben, no sabía, entonces, ahí hay una inspiración; y eso hace que se suelten muchas cosas que han sanado en ese sentido. [author translation]

⁶⁷ Eso del cementerio era para nombrar lo importante que fue la audiencia de Macarena. Acá se hizo una audiencia que tuvo incidencia a nivel nacional e internacional que fue la audiencia de Macarena en julio del 2007 donde se visibilizó fosas comunes e individuales y falsos positivos y desaparición forzada, entonces nosotros participamos en esa audiencia. Se ordenó a los alcaldes y a la administración pasar un Información sobre los cuerpos no identificados, los desaparecidos [author translation]

Tente member, shares the psychological support she feels by writing in the memory book about Deiber, her disappeared son, and the abuses she has gone through. Furthermore, she assures that *Anunciando la Ausencia* has been essential in healing the traumatic wound:

Yes, that has helped us heal. Everything, we present the play, we go to talks at the universities, we have gone to those in Villavicencio: we have gone to Unimeta, Uniminuto, Unillano, and several places. To schools, high school. It has had a significant impact; the children have integrated a lot with us, the youth are lovely, and we love them very much. I always say: a son was taken from us, but God multiplied them to us like the sand of the sea. So that is very nice: feeling a hug, a love, a kiss, that is nice, so we enjoy that a lot, and that heals us.⁶⁸

Nidia has constantly used poetry as a channel to narrate the trauma surrounding Deiber's disappearance. Her testimony in the play uses metaphors related to the sea, describing the day her son was kidnapped in front of their house as the day, "[t]he waves of the violence arrived at my house." Additionally, she always mentions how the young people she has encountered since then are daughters and sons like "sea sand that multiplies."

The attempt to heal the wounds by narrating the traumatic experience is part of what Judith Herman defines as the central dialectic of trauma. This dialectic is the relation between the desire to eliminate the violent, sad, overwhelming events that generate flashbacks or hallucinations and the necessity to talk about them to understand and try to heal.

⁶⁸ Sí señora, eso nos ha ayudado a sanar. Todo, el estar nosotras presentando la obra, nosotras vamos a conversatorios a las universidades, hemos ido a las de Villavicencio: hemos ido a la Unimeta, a la Uniminuto, a la Unillano, hemos ido a varias... A colegios, bachilleres también hemos ido. Ha impactado mucho, los niños se han integrado mucho con nosotros, las juventudes son muy lindas, nosotros los amamos mucho. Yo siempre digo: nos arrebataron un hijo, pero Dios nos los multiplicó como la arena del mar. Entonces niño que vamos conociendo, lo vamos entrando en nuestro corazón y lo vamos amando mucho. Entonces eso es muy bonito: sentir un abrazo, un cariño, un beso, eso es lindo, entonces eso lo disfrutamos nosotras mucho y eso nos sana [author translation]

The Testimony segment is an eternal struggle for the actresses because, after decades of searching, they do not expect their relatives will come back, at least not alive. For Jasbleidy, Carmen's daughters, the Testimony has a negative impact on her family, as it reenacts the struggles they have gone through since the disappearance while not offering much reparation or consolation. As she explained:

So, when mommy begins with all that, one begins to... like to return the cassette.

Moreover, one begins to say... where is the family? Where was he? And I collapse in my world. It was not pleasant for me to be there, which was vital because one has not gone through it, and I have not assimilated everything mommy told me. It is like you try to do everything, like to be crazy about all this, So I say 'no' I mean, I had never experienced what mommy did.⁶⁹

Jasbleidy's reading of the play shows its emotional impact on the audience. They show how evoking the disappeared person breaks the temporal structures by blending past, present, and future. In the Testimony, when Carmen talks about her husband's disappearance and her family's struggles since then, Jasbleidy feels "her world collapses." Lilian, who attended the play in June 2022, assures that emotions are critical in the play and in the message about disappearance the actresses convey:

I say that the entire course of the play is about emotions. The fact that these mothers, in their flesh, represent that anguish. This would be bliss if this country changed and we

⁶⁹ Entoes, en ese momento que empieza mami con todo eso, empieza uno a... como a devolver el casete. Y empieza decir uno... ¿dónde está la familia? ¿um? ¿Dónde quedó realmente? ¿sí? Y a ver que como que cada uno se derrumba en su propio mundo, ¿um? Yo te diría que para mí no fue grato estar allí. Fue algo, algo fuerte. Porque... porque uno no ha pasado por... como que uno no se ha sentido como a... como a asimilar todo esto que mami, que mami cuenta, ¿sí? Como que uno no. Como que uno trata de que todo, como a... a hacerse el loco a todo esto, ¿um? Entoes, digo yo "no...", o sea, yo nunca había vivido eso que, que mami hizo. [author translation]

were all complete in our families. There are different feelings in the play, from beginning to end.⁷⁰

From the actresses' perspective, the necessity to talk about the traumatic event is related to the psychological support of having audience/witnesses as companions in their experience and to the political dimension of remembering and confronting disappearance in Colombia. Consequently, the relationship with the audience has a crucial role in the performance of *Anunciando la Ausencia* as it lies both in the private and public spheres. For the actresses as individuals and as a group, the play provides psychological support to heal the wound and a political space to denounce disappearance.

Following Caruth, the Testimony has limits concerning trauma because it is a rupture in the traditional understanding of being in the world and resists simple comprehension. Similarly, Leigh Gilmore (2001) argues that "language fails in the face of trauma," which "mocks languages and confronts it with its insufficiency" Gilmore's paradox of trauma resonates with the dialectic proposed by Herman. This paradox implies that while the survivors have the compulsion to testify and make others aware of their experience, trauma resists language and communicability. Consequently, the actresses explore multiple ways to communicate trauma during the play – they cry, scream, and remain silent. Lilian, an audience member, shares an interpretation of the play that aligns with Gilmore's argument:

The feeling of pain has to happen because of what they have experienced. That pain is part of the duel, and I think it should be that way to overcome that absence somehow. So, I think it is essential because of the mourning that must be done, that feeling of pain

⁷⁰ Yo digo que todo el transcurso de la obra son emociones. El hecho de esas mamás, en carne propia, estar representando esa angustia, ese dolor, esa esperanza, tal vez, que algún día si no regresan, algún día... si este país cambiara, que estuviéramos todos completos en nuestras familias esto sería una dicha. Entonces, todo el tiempo son sentimientos distintos en la obra, o sea, de principio a fin. [author translation]

present there in tears, in the screams, in the moans, in the silence. Well, in many things, I think the pain must be present to mourn those people and to have some peace of mind, even during our sleeping hours.⁷¹

Anunciando la Ausencia is filled with testimonies that reflect the subjective experience of the actresses rather than facts about the traumatic experience. This is partly due to the lack of public factual evidence about forced disappearance in the context of Colombia's armed conflict. Relatives still do not know what happened or who the culprits are due to the risks of retaliation when searching for answers and to the lack of willingness from state institutions. Paradoxically, this subjective nature of the play addresses the limitations of Testimony concerning trauma because the comprehension of real stories of trauma is expanded on the subjective experience of the survivor, expressed in metaphors, symbols, and artifacts during the theater play. Vilma, a human rights activist from MOVICE, comments about the role of the artifacts in the actresses' desire to testify:

Well, it was to bring all those things and transmit them. So, also the personal questions, yes? What do we have of them as this live? The guitar, a notebook, yes? That is what we could have of them, as the machete, Since they were peasants. So each one said that to herself. Yes, there were several rehearsals because sometimes it was tedious, so it was repeated a lot, yes? That shirt, the pants, almost like repeating the same, yes?

Bodily expressions of pain such as crying or screaming are potent ways to communicate trauma. In the mourning part, for instance, Carmen and Paulina cry while talking to their loved

⁷¹ Bueno, ese sentimiento del dolor, yo digo que tiene que darse, porque yo pienso que eso que se experimenta, ese dolor es como parte del duelo. Pienso que debe ser de esa manera para poder superar, de alguna manera, esa ausencia. Entonces, pienso que es muy importante por el duelo que se debe hacer, ese sentimiento de dolor ahí presente en las lágrimas, en los gritos, en los gemidos, en el mismo silencio. Bueno, en muchas cosas yo pienso que debe estar el dolor presente para hacerle el duelo a esas personas y poder, yo creo que, en algún momento, tener algo de tranquilidad, así sea en nuestras horas de sueño [author translation]

ones about their relentless search. The crying relieves the pain concerning the disappearance and engages with the public from a visceral and emotional standpoint. Audience member Andres explains that:

So, the play insofar allows that link seems that it can allow that, as long as the public recognizes it since people also feel that they are not alone in saying something that it is not to have fun but to identify themselves in pain and more when, then, they find that, well, their life matters to me, I feel identified with their life. I think that there is part of overcoming that trauma; when people, suddenly, the victims feel that there is a genuine interest in their lives and not like the fact of instrumentalizing them, because I am going to see a play and am going to entertain myself for 2 hours or because I am going to do my thesis or because a project or something worries me, but when that recognition of the other is given. Moreover, there is a hug, and you say: thank you very much, it is not like, well, I saw the play, and I left.⁷²

Andres speaks about the ethic of witnessing the play. That ethic lies in the empathic unsettlement the audience feels toward the actresses. The audience resonates with the testimonial aspect of the play as it represents the survival of the actresses and "supports their sense of subjectivity and positions them as agents rather than victims." The play shares with the public an experience of real pain in a theatrical framework, to which the audience responds in visceral manner. As Andres, another audience member, states:

⁷² Entonces, la obra en cuanto permite ese vínculo me parece que sí puede permitir eso, como, desde que el público lo reconozca, desde que las personas también sientan que no están solas contando algo, que no es para ir a divertirse, sino para identificarnos en el dolor y más cuando, entonces, encuentran que, bueno, su vida me importa, me siento identificado con su vida. Yo creo que ahí hay parte como de superar ese trauma; cuando la gente, de pronto, las víctimas sienten que hay un interés genuino en su vida y no como el hecho de instrumentalizarlas, porque voy a ver una obra de teatro y me voy a entretener 2 horas o porque voy a hacer mi tesis o porque me afana un proyecto o algo, sino... cuando se da ese reconocimiento del otro. Y hay un abrazo y uno dice: muchas gracias, no es como, bueno, vi la obra y me fui [author translation]

The pain, first of all, was necessary and perhaps it may sound weird that one mentions pain as a form of construction or learning. However, we have to consider that our country has a history of more than 50 years of pain, and the pain of a country as violent as ours has become our daily life. Moreover, we reach a point where not even pain moves us; not even pain makes us sensitive because we have somehow become accustomed to it.

So, the pain, the main thing would be not to feel it, not to feel this kind of pain in the country. However, it can be used when we reach the point where we are today. I even dare to say that it should be used to mobilize consciences, to raise awareness, above all, and to return, a little, to that essence of human beings that we are moved by the other. We can begin to build together for the other.⁷³

Following Hans-Thies Lehmann (2020), the aesthetic of responsibility lies in the connection between the sending and receiving signs through theater. It has a double sense of the condition of possibility of response, responsibility, and the ethical obligation to respond and to enable responsibility from others.

Tente is unique because the people sharing the Trauma are the ones who suffered it, and they acknowledge that they are going through it even though they also have political objectives. Their shared political goals are to stop the disappearance in the country by remembering the disappeared and enlightening those unaware of the magnitude of this crime in Colombia.

Attending the play makes Colombians like Juliana more engaged with that political cause:

⁷³ El dolor, primero que todo, fue necesario y tal vez puede sonar, de pronto, curioso que un mencione el dolor como forma de construcción, de aprendizaje. Sin embargo, pues, tenemos que tener en cuenta que nuestro país lleva una historia de más de 50 años de dolor y el dolor de un país tan violento como el nosotros se vuelve, lastimosamente, el pan de cada día. Y llegamos a un punto en el que el dolor, ni siquiera el dolor nos conmueve, ni siquiera el mismo dolor nos hace sensibles, porque nos hemos, de alguna manera, acostumbrado a él.

Entonces, el dolor, obviamente lo primordial sería no sentirlo, no sentir en el país esta clase de dolor, pero cuando ya llegamos a un punto en el que estamos actualmente, se puede utilizar, incluso, me atrevo a decir que se debe utilizar para movilizar conciencias, para sensibilizar, sobre todo, y para volver a retomar, un poco, esa esencia de seres humanos que nos conmovemos por el otro y podemos empezar a construir entre todos por el otro.[author translation]

In general, when one learns about the war and sees all the things that happened, one tends to feel a lot more anger than anything. It is a very predominant thing, and it is always anger. Moreover, the rage arrives at a certain point, but I think that through it, nothing is achieved, as it is not possible to walk the path, to build again, nothing is achieved. I think that in the play, I did not feel all the anger that I suppose they felt and felt a lot; More than anger, it is like sadness and empathizing with the people who suffered this. I think this helps to heal and recover all those things. So, yes, the play changes one's perspective on the situation.⁷⁴

The play shows both the private and public roles of those women, as they fulfill the traditional care roles as women, mothers, and wives and also occupy the public space as actresses and activists for the memory of the disappeared in Colombia. Jenny, a journalist who made a report with some members of Tente, points out the transition to the public arena in terms of gender roles:

The women are the ones from the house who have to organize the food and the partying. That is, it is them, and the man enjoys it. So that also says a lot on a cultural level. Women, in terms of those tasks that have been assigned to them.

They as women, in the space of the play, also show are the ones who organize themselves the most to go looking for them. They are the ones who had, or have had to live through, the disappearance of their children, but not only have that sudden

⁷⁴ Por lo general cuando uno aprende sobre la guerra y ve todas las cosas que sucedieron, pues, uno tiende como a sentir mucha rabia más que todo, es como una cosa muy predominante, siempre es la rabia. Y la rabia hasta cierto punto llega, pero, creo que a través de ella no se logra nada, como que no se logra recorrer el camino, a construir otra vez, no se logra nada. Y creo que en la obra no sentí a pesar de toda la rabia que supongo que ellas sienten y sintieron muchísimas; más que la rabia, es como la tristeza y el empatizar con las personas que sufrieron esto, pues, de frente. Y creo que esto sí es algo que ayuda a sanar y a recuperar todas esas cosas. Entonces, sí, creo que la obra como que le cambia a uno la perspectiva de la situación. [author translation]

disappearance of the news, but it is the point of ‘come on, where am I going to look for him. Come on, I put my shoes, my sneakers, whatever I have,’ because we also have to understand that the majority of disappeared persons live in rural areas or some cities and in municipalities that are third, fourth, fifth, sixth category, yes?⁷⁵

Along the same line, Diana Taylor (2002) posits that motherhood is crucial in the transition from private space to public space of Plaza de Mayo mothers in Argentina because the performance of the mothers of Plaza de Mayo posits motherhood as a social construct beyond a biological mandate. The author states that the mothers' notion of motherhood gradually became political rather than biological because they questioned the state about all the disappeared, not just their biological children. They question the Argentine State by occupying the public space and making themselves visible. The mothers go from the private to the public space, politicizing their work and surviving since their bodies are at risk if they are not visible.

Paulina and Vilma are aware of the Plaza de Mayo mothers and their legacy to the memory of the disappeared. While talking with Paulina, she highlighted their activism and visibility to denounce the disappearance. Tente actresses know the impact they have as mothers mourning for their children on the witnessing audience. By this, I am not saying they are exploiting their suffering. However, they are embracing it on the stage and engaging with people that most likely are not interested in the systematic disappearance the armed conflict has caused.

Additionally, following Ann Cvetkovich (2003), in *Anunciando la Ausencia*, Tente women transit towards the public space by sharing their pain in metaphors and symbols. By

⁷⁵ Las mujeres son las de la casa, las que tienen que estar organizando la comida, los parrandos, o sea, son ellas, y el hombre disfruta. Entonces eso también dice mucho a nivel cultural. La mujer, en cuanto a esas labores que se les han sido asignadas. Ellas como mujeres, en el espacio de la obra de teatro, también muestran son las que más se organizan para ir a buscar. Son las que, literalmente, tuvieron, o han tenido que vivir, la desaparición de sus hijos, pero no solamente tener ese golpe de desaparición de la noticia, sino es el punto de "venga, yo a dónde voy a buscarlo. Venga yo me coloco mis cotizas, mis zapaticos, mis tenis, lo que buenamente tenga", porque tenemos que entender, también, que la mayoría de personas desaparecidas viven en una zonas rurales o en unas ciudades y en municipios que son de tercera, cuarta, quinta, sexta categoría, ¿sí? [author translation]

sending and receiving visceral emotions centered around pain, the actresses keep the audience connected to the narrative, calling on them to respond empathetically to their testimonies.

Figure 16

Tente actresses during the toast



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In a conversation with Tente actress Alicia, I asked how she could know when they had connected with the audience. She used the following metaphor: "I can feel the warm and the cold places." She explained that warm places are as spaces where the audience is engaging emotionally with the actresses. Crying is an effective way to feel an engaged audience; it means they are paying attention, they care, they are moved by what they are seeing. Additionally, the actresses feel warmth whenever audience members come talk to them after the performance to thank the group, to provide emotional support, or to ask about their creative process.

Figure 17

Audience and actresses



Note. Copyright 2022 by author

CONCLUSIONS

My research shows the historically restricted democracy Colombians have gone through. The Colombian government has repressed the population with the excuse of the political presence of guerillas and has attacked the divergent positions from the official narratives. The people who did not feel represented or were ignored by it, like the peasants and indigenous, chose guns to achieve radical and fast changes. Alternatively, women from rural areas that have experienced indifference and violence from the state have used theater to promote political change.

The role of the United States in the Colombian armed conflict is essential, as the repression from the state of the civil population aligned with the safety doctrine of the United States, which increased the social non-conformity because the national army was constantly attacking the civilian population with the excuse of the doctrine.

The civilian population has been affected by the armed conflict in Colombia through practices of dehumanization and violation of rights such as disappearance, torture, displacement, sexual violence, and confinement. It is the population that already lives in vulnerable conditions in economic, social, and political matters, the same one that is mainly affected by human rights violations. Paramilitarism is implicated in several human rights violations, particularly disappearance.

Despite the violence, the civil population has maintained a long resistance. Human rights organizations play a crucial role by denouncing the abuses of the actors involved in the conflict and fighting against impunity. In addition, urban and rural civil movements have claimed autonomy and justice in the regions (e.g., environmental, women, and young movements)

Since the governmental entities do not seem to care about the human rights of the disappeared people and their relatives, human rights organizations such as MOVICE, Red Cross, and Fundación Nidia Erika Bautista are critical in the search for the disappeared. These organizations provide legal and political resources for their relatives to start and continue their investigation. Furthermore, they offer collective encounters with other victims where collaborative support and strength are essential to maintain the search and the claim of justice for the disappeared.

Tente theater group is a project that started with the support of the MOVICE organization as they provided assistance and support, the official entities such as Fiscalía, Procuraduría, or the Police have never given. The Colombian state does not recognize the disappearances of their loved ones. As Alicia mentioned, the institutional entity in charge of the disappearance of Alberto has not advanced in the 31 years of his disappearance; as Paulina states, the judicial entities refused to take the denunciation of the disappearance of María Cristina until she started the search.

Anunciando la Ausencia shares the personal/collective implications of the traumatic experience regarding the disappearance of a loved one. It is a live event and ephemeral community construction. The theater play has a script highlighting key actions and general moments since the disappearance is a sensitive topic in the lives of each performer, their performance changes based on the emotional state of the actresses, the progress of the search, and the political situation.

I argue that trauma is embodied in Tente actress's actions, words, and affective connections with the objects in the play. The collective encounters in the performance express the collective nature of their testimony as their individual performances highlight personal elements. The disappearance of their children is an overwhelming event with the inevitable

consequence of pain, which the actresses have used as an engine for their creative and political actions. Pain is crucial in balancing the personal and the collective, the private and the public, and the aesthetic and the social.

Tente actresses promote the collective search and turn their pain into political action. They urge society to act even at their personal risk – as Nidia or Paulina have experienced. By doing this in *Anunciando la Ausencia*, they keep the memory of the disappeared alive and their relatives mobilized by a collective/audience that cares about and supports them across different spaces, including universities, art institutions, and activist organizations. Making the pain public encourages the audience to embody it. The embodiment of pain allows the audience to feel the effects of the traumatic event and challenges them to deal with the pain they embody.

In the play, the actress's embodiment of memory, pain, and hope through artifacts, gestures, and collective moments is what allows them to convey their creative and political projects. These elements are the archive and the repertoire they use to interact with the audience.

The play's monologues show the body as the primary communication between the actress and the public, as a statement about the emotional vulnerability the actresses experience and their repetitive actions. They repeat the sequence of movements five times, including picking the clothes, giving them to the owner, hugging and receiving the clothes, talking, and keep walking.

The bodies, following Taylor (2002), are conduits of memory. The author takes up her concept of repertoire, which implies that bodies pass knowledge, build history, and make a memory. Accordingly, The Tente actresses pass the memory of their lives and search for the disappeared through their bodies. As Paulina uses her neck to hold the photo of Maria Cristina or Carmen cries as she recounts why Silvio wore a hat, they pass memories with their bodies beyond the speaking language and include the spoken narrative.

The clothes are artifacts that show the embodiment of the trauma since they belong to the disappeared people and are crucial in the testimonies of the actresses. They help analyze the artistic and political embodiment of the play. Alicia assures that the artifacts of memory, such as the clothes, impact the actresses and the people that witness their testimony. They are sacred to each group member.

For instance, Silvio's hats and clothes are a metaphor for the memory work that Carmen has been doing for decades. Time has impacted the materiality of the objects. The hats and shirts he used while he was with Carmen have been disappearing as the clues of his body have, and they have been damaged and broken. Despite this, Carmen firmly continues in the search, the artistic and political work.

Anunciando la Ausencia is a space full of possibilities. Staging the disappearance of loved relatives implies the creation of worlds that can not only tell but transform past and present events. As the women toast and celebrate their reencounter, they transform the disappearance into an event that brings them to new collective ties. I argue that Tente has been able to build crucial social bonds (with artistic and political implications) from trauma and pain.

By performing the collective search in Anunciando la Ausencia, the group reenacts the bleak process of searching for their loved ones. As Susan Owen (2014) argues, "Reenactments using the body have a powerful and immediate impact on a visceral register and can reveal the past in ways that words cannot." The power of the body lies in its ability to communicate beyond words. The Tente presents the collective aspect of a traumatic event walking together on stage – the disappearance unites them as a group.

Theater makes trauma accessible through symbols, metaphors, and physicality of pain. It can incorporate dreams, thoughts, or flashbacks by narrating events through languages that

escape the day-to-day experience. Thus, the theater is one of the channels the Tente women use to narrate the events and to unlock the traumatic experience. Prior to the play, the group created Memory books, which included drawings, writings, and collages. Those artifacts were a crucial channel the actresses used to access trauma.

The ethics of witnessing concerning the audience of the play, shown in the interviews' fragments, is critical in the execution of Tentes' artistic and political work. That ethic lies in the empathic unsettlement the audience feels toward the actresses. The audience resonates with the testimonial aspect of the play as it represents the survival of the actresses and "supports their sense of subjectivity and positions them as agents rather than victims." The play shares an experience of real pain with the public in a theoretical framework, to which the audience responds viscerally.

Overall, the research highlights the simultaneously private/public nature of the trauma and *Anunciando la Ausencia* as the root for the artistic and activist practice of Tente group. Pain is an effective way to convey their testimony and it reflects the oscillation between the private and the public. Likewise, the artifacts of memory, the collective encounters and the body gestures in the play are key in the actresses' narratives.

In later research, I expect to expand on the broad spectrum of gender performances in Latin America to look closely at the role of women as transformational agents in contexts of violence. The relationship between performance, arts, and women in the region is a field that can tell a lot about the state and social movement dynamics. Furthermore, I am interested in deepening trauma and pain as transversal elements in the region's political aspect of gender performances.

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