Representations of the armed conflict in Colombian cinema

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Abstract: Cinema is an act of representation and it is based on the construction of reality inspired by experience. In Colombia, cinema has not been the product of a structured industry, but rather the effort of some filmmakers who have found different ways of telling stories about topics that are part of the national experience. The armed conflict in Colombia, understood as the confrontation between government forces and organized outlawed groups, has prevailed for more than fifty years and has been present in art forms ever since. This research examines a sample of Colombian films to establish the different ways the subject of the armed conflict has been represented in Colombian cinema.

Key words: Cinematography; Colombian cinema; armed conflict; representation; characters; actions; scenarios.

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1. Introduction

Between 2007 and 2009, the Research Department at the University of La Sabana funded the project "Narratives of the armed conflict in Colombian cinema", initiated by Professor Sandra Ruiz-Moreno and culminated in a second stage by Professor Jerónimo Rivera-Betancur. This project aimed to discover how Colombia cinema has addressed the subject of the armed conflict from the perspective of fiction, based on the analysis of feature films which were produced between 1964 and 2003 and dealt with the armed conflict.

The notion of the armed conflict was limited to the conflict between organized armed groups aiming to seize power. This constraint allowed us to select films that included as actors the guerrilla, the paramilitaries, the army and the government, and whose narrative was related to any aspect of the conflict.
It is important to remark that the investigation does not constitute a social or political view on the armed conflict, but only a view on its representation on cinema.

1.1 Situation of Colombian cinema

The development of Colombian cinema has been irregular and complicated. Since its inception, few years after the invention of the motion picture projector, cinema was considered an entertainment medium or in the best of cases, a lower art form based on eccentric characters that were willing to do everything to produce "their movies".

Even some of the most important Colombian film directors have not gone beyond the exhibition of their *Ópera prima* [1] and have not managed to develop a solid filmography to explore a personal artistic style, and consequently the production technicians and staff of feature films have neither developed an extensive experience, in spite of having experience in the production of commercial advertising and television programmes.

Since the cinema law (Ley 814) came into force in Colombia in 2003, the industry experienced a significant reactivation. The increase in the quality of the film productions can be seen in the following table which shows the number of films produced in Colombia per decade.

Decade	# feature films
1910	1
1920	16
1930	3
1940	10

1950	6
1960	36
1970	44
1980	90
1990	41
2000	79

It is important to note, first of all, that the film production in Colombia in the last three decades amounts 210 movies from a total of 326, which constitutes 64.4% of the total film production throughout history, while the production of the last decade alone (until 2009) accounts for 24.2% of the total production.

Although many Colombian spectators believe they are facing the advent of the national cinema, the reality is that we are just witnessing the birth of a film industry, which brings with it a greater amount of feature films of varying quality. This step is very important because it encourages the public to trust the national film industry and to attend the cinema with an intention that is different from the paternalistic intention of "supporting the national cinema". In recent years, the major national cinema theatres have maintained Colombian movies in their listings even for more than 4 weeks, which is a signal of the growing interest towards the national cinema.

Nonetheless, the government's support to the film industry is not enough from the economic point of view and neither from a thematic perspective because it finances films in a competition-basis that privileges certain themes or treatments that "ensure" a greater level of audience. In this regard, the critic and scholar of national cinema Luis Alberto Álvarez commented that "the state communications policy, which must include cinema, should not only be concerned about which films must be promoted because they are suitable, appropriate and useful for Colombians, but should also try to figure out what type of cinema Colombians are able to view, in their current state of consciousness" (Alvarez: 2001).

This index of production, speaking in terms of industry, still remains quite insignificant when compared to Latin American countries such as Brazil, Mexico and Argentina. The box-office sales are also completely insufficient because, for instance, Colombia's most watched movies ever barely reach a little more than a million viewers and since 1996 (the year this industry took-off) only 19 films reached the small sum of 200 thousand spectators. It is important to note that in 2006, the most successful year in Colombian cinema so far reported box office sales for the national cinema of 2,807,000 spectators of a total of more than 20 million viewers, accounting for only 13.88% [2]. In the same period there are dramatic cases, like in 1997 and 1999 when the tickets sales for the national film industry did not reach 1% of the total audience; a situation that nonetheless had been the constant before 1990, although there are not much data about it.

Anyways, the previous figures suggest that the national cinema is getting stronger and that this has important implications for its industry, market and production system. But is this concept only understood as the existence of a solid audiovisual industry capable of producing and exporting? What about the films that are produced in the country? What is their quality? What are they about? What are they aiming to express? What are the aims of our filmmakers? Can we speak of a real national cinema?

In this regard it is pertinent to once again pay attention to Álvarez who says that "The efforts to establish a Colombian national cinematography have never stopped since the 1920s. These efforts have been polarized almost always towards the creation of an industry, but only occasionally have they sought to apply reflections on an identity or expressions of an aesthetic position". (2005).

1.2. Theoretical possibilities

Regarding the possibilities for studying film, we could go back to the book of Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery "Teoría y práctica de la historia del cine" (Theory and practice of cinema history), where they establish three specific approaches: 1) the theoretical approach, which tries to define film under different perspectives and to establish how it produces meaning; 2) the historical approach, which attempts to explain the changes suffered by cinema and what has influenced its environment in order to understand its present; and 3) the critical approach, which analyses cinema's specific qualities as visual experience (Allen-Gomery, 2001).

Within the theoretical approach it is especially interesting to include the study of film as a language that has the potential to produce meanings and representations of reality, but not in the sense of a copy, which is representing the same object that is observed with its univocal characteristics, but reality as a representation that emerges from its resemblance to the real world and its physical principles, where both are in continuous movement, and the dimensions of space and time and always in present time.

This makes the cinematographic language to be privileged not only to reflect the realities of the world and its societies, but also to create simulations of reality under its rules of time, space, movement and of course of characters, as reflection and creator of models of human behaviour and societies. As the theorist Rudolf Arheim put it in his studies of cinema as an art form, "Cinema is not the imitation of reality but the transformation of the features observed in the form

of expression" (Arheim, 1986).

This is how cinema has been able to give contemporary society the possibility of watching itself in its models of behaviour, generating all the possible *heres and nows*, as a mirror that shows the images of what we are, what we were and what we will be, or as a window that allows us to look at unknown worlds within our own planet. Cinema has shown the desperation and weaknesses of some societies and groups of people, like the drama and ideology of a culture where women are inferior beings in *The circle* (Jafar Panahi, 2000), or the terrible Nazi Holocaust in *Schindler's list* (Steven Spielberg, 1993), or the role of women in 1923, 1951 and 2001 in *The hours* (Stephen Daldry, 2002).

This dramatization of reality is sometimes so vivid that is often confused with reality itself, and instead of being a window or a mirror, it becomes a mirage, an illusion, or a deception to the gaze. Cinema's simulation represents a reality from an ideological point of view, with biases clearly marked by conditions of authorship or nationality. According to Cabrera: "Cinema is the plenitude of the lived experience, including the temporality and movements that are typical of the real thing, and it presents the real with all its difficulties, instead of giving the ingredients so that viewers themselves can use them to create the image that film provides" (2002: 25).

The importance of addressing these issues in Colombian cinema, in spite of the disenchantment of a large sector of the public and critics who are concerned about "the image" of the country abroad, has to do with the possibility of looking ourselves in the mirror to better understand our situation. This idea is reaffirmed by Colombian filmmaker Lisandro Duque when he says that "to deprive a country from cinema is like ordering by Decree the withdrawal of mirrors from all bathrooms and streets so that nobody can see their own reflection. And this generates violence. The "I think therefore I exist" becomes the "I don't see myself, then I am nobody" (Duque: 97).

Taking into account these possibilities of expression and representation of cinema, it is important for the development of cinema in our country to undertake studies of this kind, to determine those visions through which our films have narrated and reflected the experiences lived by our Colombian society. This motivation was behind the research project "Narratives of the Armed Conflict in the Colombian Cinema" [3], which aimed to explore how Colombian cinema has expressed one of the most decisive and painful realities of the country.

The collective imagination can clearly feel that the Colombian cinema, just like the Latin American one, is a medium that favours themes such as poverty, violence and crime and it is there where academics should inquire to reaffirm or refute this widespread belief. In this regard, López (1989: 403) says that "If we are asked a description of the Latin American cinema, we could write one of the suggestive phrases that filmmakers from the region have used to describe their own practices: an anti-aesthetic of the hunger, a cinema of poverty, the camera as revolver, an imperfect cinema, an anti-aesthetic of the garbage" [4].

Studying the image as a mode of representation of reality will enable us to get closer to the construction of cultural imaginaries about Colombians that are suggested by cinema and that can, possibly, act as an inverted mirror, which affects reality through the simulation of images. This mirror can show us an image that perhaps we as a nation do not like, but that certainly could help us to better understand our condition as national beings. Álvarez (1998) firmly affirms that "A cinema that adequately represents this country cannot be a conciliatory formula, or a transverse cut without the taste of the national realities. It is absolutely necessary that this cinema is composed of cultural expressions that are highly differentiated, very strong, uncompromising in their untranslatability and yet, noticeable on a deeper level of perception, the perception of a universal art".

Considering the expressive features of cinema we saw the need to start this study by examining the possibilities of cinema as a language. Thus we began performing a narrative analysis of each film that was produced in our country and that dealt with the current armed conflict, in order to answer questions such as: In what ways has Colombian cinema dealt with the different elements of the armed conflict? What characteristics are given priority? What issues are repeatedly addressed? How does cinema depict the spaces, actions and the various actors of the conflict?

2. Methodology

To start this narrative study it was essential to establish some constraints, in terms of themes, time and format, to start the collection and selection of the sample. Thus, the theme was limited to the conflict, understood as the current armed phenomenon among guerrillas, paramilitaries, army, and State, whose origin goes back to the appearance of the current guerrilla groups in 1964, taking as a point of departure the occupation of the Marquetalia.

On the other hand, the study focused on feature films (which is the cinema format with greater possibilities of exhibition and impact) produced by Colombians [5], from 1964 until 2006, the year in which the research started. These films had to address the conflict and no other phenomena of violence and confrontation (as mentioned in the thematic delimitation), although we acknowledge the connections of the current conflict with the history of violence in the country.

The study of audiovisual narratives, which mark the line for the theoretical basis and methodology of the research, is based on a structuralist view of communications and therefore of the audiovisual language, and it aims to reveal the system of relations between the armed conflict and the expressive or communicative forms of cinema.

We took into account the development of studies on linguistic structures from the formalist school, which were made before the term "audiovisual narrative" was used and before cinema's moving image was studied.

The interesting element of this older approach is its focus on the gap existing between the fable "as an imaginary construct that the viewer or reader creates or abstracts" (Stam, Burgoyne and Lewis, 1992: 93) and the syuzhets as "the artistic organization or the deformation of the causal-chronologic order of events" (Stam, Burgoyne and Lewis, 1992: 95), which marks the importance of the existence of an intentional way to freely organize ideas or stories in the language of the moving images.

This difference is subsequently expanded with the linguistics and semantics Claude Lèvi-Strauss and the syntactical approach of Vladimir Propp. Levi-Strauss argued that movies have a superficial structure that hides a deep structure, which should be studied from the myth to establish contrary signifying categories. Therefore his work aims to break the plot's linear relations of cause and effect to establish new paradigmatic groups, by studying, for example, the symbolisms of the genres and films. (Stam, Burgoyne and Lewis, 1992: 99)

Propp, on the other hand, affirms that the significant function of the cinematographic elements depends precisely on the place they occupy in time (concept of time construction through editing), and therefore when one "forcedly takes the functions out of the temporary sequence one destroys the delicate thread of the narrative, which as a subtle and elegant network that breaks down at the lightest touch" (Propp, 1976: 287).

Bordwell made his narrative studies leaving aside the question of the narrator to offer a more comprehensive process focused on the cognitive and perceptual processes where what matters is cinema's particular method of giving indications to the viewer to make certain assumptions and inferences that are then checked as the film develops and "the spectator watches the film, perceives clues, recalls information, anticipates what will happen next and almost always participates in the creation of the film structure. The film cultivates certain expectations by combining curiosity, suspense, and surprise" (Bordwell, 1986: 60).

This is how Bordwell dissociated himself from the oral processes of literature by privileging the narrator, the chain of information displayed as evidence in cinema, starting from the definition of the narrative as a chain of events in a cause and effect relationship that happens in time and space.

Taking into account the aim of the research, this theoretical structure is very appropriate to be used as its basis, according to the approaches of study that it establishes for the narrative analysis of films.

Thus, it firstly bases the narrative in the principle of causality (cause-effect) that determines a constant movement defined as a series of changes or transformations. This principle undoubtedly draws our attention to the nature of cinema (addressed in the introduction) that enables its features of representation of reality and abstract experiences.

Secondly, based on the same principle of causality, it includes within its narrative study the elements of space and time, but as construction, which greatly enriches the vision of narrative, since it puts in evidence how actions are presented through a mimetic construction of the elements, i.e. as a world, crucial at the moment of determining how our cinema builds an imaginary about a social reality like the conflict.

Third, it manages to see the interrelation between the concepts of history and argument. "The argument presents explicitly certain events of history, so they are common to both domains. History goes beyond arguments at the moment of suggesting some diegetic events [6] that we never witnessed. The argument goes beyond the world of history by presenting non-diegetic images and sounds that can affect our understanding of history" (Bordwell and Thompson, 1997: 63).

And finally, this theoretical structure takes into account the activity of the viewer, by including a section on the flow of information within the story, i.e. the way the information is presented to the spectator.

These same four points were decisive to establish the categories of the narrative analysis:

- The theme: this section includes the definition of the genre, the main and secondary narrative lines.

- The action: through the causality established from the triggering event to the conclusion, passing by the turning points and the construction of time, and determining the order, duration, temporality and continuity.

- The places: starting from the construction of space, and determining the type of angles and shots used, and their combination and rhythms.

- The construction of characters.

3. Results

3.1. Films dealing with the armed conflict

The development of the research started with a first phase of rigorous observation of films produced in the delimited period (1964-2006), through literature review of direct documents and interviews with filmmakers and cinema scholars, which resulted in the determination of the sample of 14 Colombian feature films, fictional and documentary, which addressed in some way the internal armed conflict of the country:

- *El Rio de las Tumbas* (Tombs River) of Julio Luzardo (1965)

- *Camilo, el Cura Guerrillero* (Camilo, the Guerrilla Priest) of Francisco Norden (1974)

- *Canaguaro* of Dunav Kuzmanich (1981)

- *Pisingaña* of Leopoldo Pinzón (1982)

- *Caín* of Gustavo Nieto Roa (1984)

- *El Día de las Mercedes* (Mercedes's day) of Dunav Kuzmanich (1985)

- *La ley del monte* (Bushland's law) of Patricia Castaño and Adelaida Trujillo (1989)

- *Edipo Alcalde* (Oedipus Mayor) of Jorge Alí Triana (1996)

- *Golpe de Estadio* (Estadium Coup) of Sergio Cabrera (1998)

- *La Toma de la Embajada* (The occupation of the Embassy) of Ciro Durán (2000)

- *Bolívar soy yo* (I am Bolívar) of Jorge Alí Triana (2002)

- *La primera noche* (The first night) of Luis Alberto Restrepo (2003)

- *La sombra del caminante* (The walker's shadow) of Ciro Guerra (2005)

The selection of the sample involved a search with interesting results in relation to the topics that our cinematography has been representing. These 14 films represent a small 6.2% of the national film production, which is surprising considering, on the one hand, that the conflict is part of the national daily agenda and, on the other hand, that large number of references to themes of violence in our cinema.

Therefore, as part of this first phase, it was decided to determine what were those other issues addressed in cinema and the percentage they constituted, and also to establish a relationship between themes, historical realities, cinematographic developments, and periods of time between the films included in the sample.

3.2. Recurrent themes and genres

In terms of themes, we found that the two strongest thematic genres within the domestic production and that also remained more or less constant between 1964 and 2006 were action and adventure stories with 24.6% and comedies (sketch of local costumes, both rural and urban) with 18.3%, followed in third place by films about love and romantic relationships with 16.5%.

These three categories cover nearly half of the Colombian film production, without including any topic of drug trafficking, violence or any conflict related to our historical reality.

Topics related to the violence of the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, together with violence resulting from the corruption and lack of opportunities, without directly linking it with the current armed conflict, as it was delimited in the present investigation, occupy 13.4%, which is practically the double of films about the conflict, 6.2%.

This is important when comparing the analysis of causality and the flow of information in the sample, since half of them present references to the violence of these decades and all of them emphasise violence per se because it is the most characteristic feature of the conflict, which suggests, on the one hand, that the cinematic imagery built about violence in general is much more robust and decisive than the conflict as such and, on the other hand, that all violent acts, including those that may be portrayed in films with other themes, are generalized without having certainty of their causes and developments.

Regarding the subject of drug trafficking, it appeared in only 6.7%, but it is highly concentrated from the 1980s onwards when *Drogombia* (Diego León Giraldo 1980) and *Área Maldita* (Damn Area) (Jairo Pinilla, 1980) were produced, and then in the 1990s, when virtually all the other films were produced. This concentration may largely

explain why people insist in the large number of national films about drug trafficking in spite of the low percentage.

The other percentages refer to documentaries of ethnographic and touristic character, with 8%, and movies about sex, with 5.3%.

Based on the previous, we can confirm, like the study undertaken in 2005 by the research body Imago of the University of Medellin, that the main themes of our cinema are not violence and drug trafficking. But at the same time it is important to add that while curiously the everyday themes, and the adventure, police, horror, and love stories (copying the Hollywood style a little bit) have been the mostly addressed themes, we cannot ignore the fact that the themes of violence, conflict and drug trafficking correspond to more than a quarter of the different topics presented in movies that are concentrated in time and generalise the abovementioned violent actions.

3.3. Relationship between the films and historical periods

At this point in the investigation it is also interesting to verify the historical moments of production of films, especially in terms of the reality of national cinema, taking into account the great distances of time between films; but also taking into account that the research does not seek to establish a verification between the reality of the historical moment in which the film was produced or exhibited and its themes or treatments.

Among the first three movies there is a period of 16 years. *Río de Tumbas* is from 1965, *Camilo, el cura guerrillero* from 1974 and *Canaguaro* from 1981. Both *Río de Tumbas* and *Camilo, el cura guerrillero* show elements of the conflict, but thematically do not present it: the first film stereotypically describes a town involved in the conflict without mentioning it and refers to the story of some dead people that appear without justification, while the second is a documentary that ends very focused on the justification of the leftist ideology in Colombia, touching tangentially the conflict.

Rio de tumbas was produced as a personal initiative of its director Julio Luzardo, at the time of the National Front [7] during the Conservative Government of Guillermo León Valencia, when the FARC and ELN formed. All this period continued without presenting films that address the conflict. There are three films that present reference to the violence of the 1950s while the rest were to stories of local adventures or romantic relationships.

The relevance of this film in the universe of Colombian cinema is highlighted by Henry Pulecio (2005) in his work *El siglo del cine en Colombia* (The century of cinema in Colombia) when he says that "the creation of an oppressive atmosphere in an environment of uneasiness and anxiety, with the partisan violence of the 1950s as the surrounding reality, is a form of recognition and reflection on our cinema that has never done before. Instead of focusing on presenting a spectacle of explicit political violence, the film strives to show a collective portrait of a group of threatened people" (Pulecio, 2008).

During the first government that emerged after the National Front, of the liberal President López Michelsen, the film *Camilo, el cura guerrillero* came out with an obvious foreign investment in its production, and it was not until 1981 when another movie that touched the subject of the conflict, this time openly, was released.

It is important to note that the support to film production was limited to isolated decrees, as the 1971 screen share and the creation of the *Fondo de Fomento Cinematográfico* (Film Promotion Fund) in 1977 which did not worked for a year due to the lack of management. It was only in 1978 when the agency of film promotion, FOCINE, attached to the Ministry of communications, appeared to manage this fund and to take charge of the country's film production, which resulted in a clear increase in production.

From 1981, there is a greater production of films dealing with the conflict: for instance, *Canaguaro* (Dunav Kuzmanich, 1981), *Pisingaña* (Leopoldo Pinzón, 1982), *Caín* (Gustavo Nieto Roa, 1984), *La virgen de las Mercedes* (Dunav Kuzmanich, 1985) and *La ley del monte* (1989). Three of these films addressed clearly the conflict, and *Psingaña* and *Cain* in spite of being focused on relationships, crossed their plots, actors, and characteristics completely with the theme of the conflict. The conflict is much more evident in *Caín*, but it is treated more deeply and thoughtful in *Pisingaña*. This idea about the latter film is ratified by Laurens (1988: 108) who says that this is "a Colombian film of modest budget [that] has made the miracle of making us face, albeit briefly, our immediate reality".

After *La ley del monte* (Brian Moser, 1989), there is a period of 7 years without the production of a film dealing with the armed conflict, which coincides with the start of the 1990s which constitutes a sort of breakpoint not only for the film production in the country.

At that moment during the government of Virgilio Barco, the political activity revolved around the seventh art and was looking towards the constitutional reform, the rural guerrilla groups of the FARC and the ELN became highly strengthened after Belisario Betancourt's government of dialog and the M-19 had initiated a political process for the delivery of weapons, the atmosphere was tense due to the systematic attacks to several political leaders, but definitely the strongest problem was drug trafficking with its unquestionable power, the subject of extradition, the figure of Pablo Escobar and the confrontation between cartels which triggered a terrorist war that involved plating bombs in shopping malls and the phenomenon of *sicariato* (contract killing).

The cinema industry saw a FOCINE that was in debt and weakened by the continuous bad administrations, which

resulted in less quantity and quality among its financed productions. Therefore the national cinema was increasingly left in the personal initiatives and savings of producers and directors, who began to figure out the ways to get support and international alliances to be able to produce again.

Barely five feature films were produced in 1990, among which the great success was *Rodrígo D*, a personal initiative of its director Víctor Gaviria, while the film funded by FOCINE, *María Cano* became the worst financial failure. After 1992 there were no more productions.

During this decade the production decreased to an average of four films per year, and films began to be produced with the stamp of their director (largely because directors were the ones behind the whole project) and they were presented and liked in international festivals. Some of these films are: Sergio Cabrera's *La Estrategia del Caracol*(The Snail's strategy)*, Águilas no cazan moscas*(Eagles do not hunt flies)*, Llona llega con la lluvia* (Llona arrives with rain), and*Golpe de estadio* (Stadium Coup); Victor Gaviria's *Rodrígo D* and*La Vendedora de rosas*(The roses seller); and Pelipe Aljure's *La gente de la universal* (People of the universal).

It is interesting to note that during this time there was a transformation in the treatment given to the armed conflict, there was a change from the leftist political tendencies in movies such as *Canaguaro* and *Caín* to much more centrist tendencies in films such as *Bolivar soy yo* and*La Sombra del caminante*, and also a change in the treatments, narratives and production techniques, as it will be seen later.

The only two films produced in this decade about the armed conflict were Jorge Alí Triana's *Edipo Alcalde* in 1996 and Sergio Cabrera's *Golpe de Estadio* in 1998. Curiously each of these films are representative of one of the original genres, comedy and tragedy, although their directors have very specific and sometimes matching personal styles. On the one hand, the tragedy of a Colombian Oedipus fighting for peace in a village full of guerrilla and self-defence groups, and on the other, the comedy of a guerrilla group that makes a peace pact with the local police in order to be able to watch the football match of the national team on the single television in town.

By 2000 things had changed in the national cinema with the creation in 1998 of the Ministry of Culture and its Cinema Directorate, which gave new hope to the creation of a cinema law. The film *La toma de la embajada* (Ciro Durán, 2000), was produced through the co-production allowed by the G3 alliance formed by Colombia, Venezuela and Mexico. The film was a true reconstruction of the real-life occupation of the Dominican Republic's Embassy in 1980 by the then urban guerrilla group M-19. In the film the search for ideological objectivity was privileged over audiovisual style and expression.

In the middle of the peace process of Andrés Pastrana's government, Jorge Alí Triana appeared again in 2002 with a more consolidated style in the film *Bolivar soy yo*, which relies a real-life based story [8], of an actor who believes he is the Liberator Simón Bolívar, to present a series of questions about the violence in the country, with real images of recent massacres across the country.

Then, under the regulations of the cinema law signed in 2003 and the President Álvaro Uribe's government of democratic security, several films were produced: *La sombra del caminante*, the debuting work of the young filmmaker Ciro Guerra (2005), which presented a reflection on the conflict and, Rodrigo Triana's great 2006 production *Soñar no cuesta nada*, which was a recreation of a real event and became the most successful film in the history of the country.

3.4. A long-lasting conflict

A second phase of the investigation involved the application of the matrix of criteria to all the films, which generated a large amount of data concerning the narrative construction of films, which were classified based on their components of action, taking into account causality and flow of information, space-time construction and treatment of characters.

Based on the analysis of the actions and narrative intentions it was determined that there are seven films with fictional stories, five of which make constant references to real contexts as it is the case of *Bolivar soy yo* and *Pisingaña*, which made historical outlines of the real life events occurring in the country with real documentary images from archives. Similarly, there is the comedy in *La Virgen de las Mercedes*, next to *La sombra del caminante* and *La primera noche* with an almost documentary portrayal of the centre of Bogotá, while the other three, *Río de Tumbas, Caín* and *Edipo Alcalde*, describe the reality of the conflict with deaths, confrontations and guerrilla, but without making specific references or mentioning real locations.

In the sample there are four movies that present virtually a reconstruction of real events related to the armed conflict. *Canaguaro* uses a story focused on a guerrilla fighter who is part of a group marked by ideological and characterization differences among its members to express a viewpoint on the emergence of the guerrillas. *Golpe de Estadio* creates a fiction about the conflict based on its actors and a political party that actually existed in order to, through comedy, suggest a utopia that is as beautiful as little plausible: the truce in the conflict to watch peacefully and in complete union one of most important football games in our history. *La toma de la embajada* and *Soñar no cuesta nada* recreated two important historical episodes in the guerrilla war: the occupation of the Dominican Republic's Embassy by the M-19 in 1980 and the finding of a money-filled *guaca* [9] buried in a guerrilla hovel by a group of soldiers. And finally there are two documentaries which talk about the conflict but not examine it in depth.

The interesting thing here is that we found within the same movies a contradiction in their expressive intention: on one

hand, we see how from the thematic and genre point of view the conflict is many times moved to the background after the focus is placed on other types of stories (micro stories of the characters), but at the same time the films show their intention to make references to the reality of the conflict, but these references are little explicit, almost shy, scared and little committed with any of the actors involved in the conflict, including the State.

Regarding the development of the actions, eight films have a structure of tragedy with the presentation of a problem without solution, which is also a characteristic of *Golpe de Estadio* in spite of its elements of comedy that make it more like a tragicomedy; three films have a melodramatic structure with happy endings that are rather forced within their flow of information in *Caín, La toma de la Embajada* and *Soñar no cuesta nada*; there are two epic stories: *Canaguaro* and *La Sombra del caminante*, which focus on people's struggles, one from the perspective of the war and the other from its dignity, with the consequent effect of presenting two heroes: a guerrilla fighter in the first and a poor and hard-working man in the second [10]. In these last two films and in the two documentaries it is common to see the presentation of closed ends, without escape.

These circular, dead-ended, and tragic structures demonstrate that there is a pessimistic representation of the conflict. The conflict is prolonged in time, without clear reasons and without end. These are pessimistic films concerning the possible solutions for the issues of the conflict, their approach to this reality is fragmented and little critical and creative.

This fragmentation is clear from the temporary order of the information flow of these films, which clearly shows two ideologies that are transformed in time. From 1965 with *Rio de Tumbas* to 1989 in *La ley del monte*, the films use a semi-closed structure that is linear but broken by continuous references to the past through flashbacks where the subject of Gaitán's death and the violence of the 1950s become a constant feature, in many cases as a way to justify the behaviour of the characters with the after-effects that violence left on them. And then from 1996 to 2006 there are much more linear constructions, but with references to alternative times that are not about past times but establish worlds, real or not, that are parallel to the present, as in *Edipo Alcalde, Bolívar soy yo, La primera noche* and *La sombra del caminante*.

Thus, based on the analysis of the action, there is a conflict that is closed and prolonged, repeated over time, with very marked historical roots related to acts of violence and unreal alternative solutions.

3.5. Spatiotemporal representation

In terms of the analysis of space-time structures related to the way in which decisions are made in relation to the planning and its order, we observed a constant tendency to the analytical construction, i.e. the films reconstruct the spaces based on their own division in many shots and their subsequent organization, thus the construction revolves around the mid-shots, leaving the long shots for the descriptive and contextual elements, but not for the actions, and increasingly giving a more protagonist role to the close-up, as it is technically refined.

This construction, which allows controlling what and how things are displayed, is very characteristic in these movies especially in the scenes related to the reconstruction of violent acts, many of which are portrayed through isolated shots of drops of blood, facial expressions, and sounds out of frame. There are numerous examples that affirm the previous observation: the scene where the town's silly man finds a corpse floating in the river in *Rio de tumbas*, the assassination of the protagonist's family in *Canaguaro*, the murder of Abel in *Caín*, the rape of the female protagonist in *Pisingaña*, the death of Layo in *Edipo Alcalde*, the abduction of the Americans in *Golpe de Estadio*, the death of a guerrilla fighter in *La toma de la Embajada*, the real archive images used in *Bolívar soy yo*, the death of Toño's mother in *La primera noche*, or the beating the gang gives to Mañe in *La sombra del caminante.*

The same is true in the construction of scenes about armed confrontations, of which we can also find many examples in all films, being particularly interesting the reconstruction of action and space through the analytical editing performed in *La toma de la Embajada*, which used real footage when portraying the outside of the Embassy with the intervention of the national army, shootings and tanks, with reverse angles and closed-ups that were shot and represented by the guerrillas actors who were shooting from windows that were similar to the ones in the real building, achieving a recreation that is very close to the real thing.

This construction leads us to two conclusions: the first is that there is an evident presence of many confrontation actions and irregular actions of violence in these films, which added to their thematic development, shows that the two characteristics of the conflict that are most-represented in the analysed films are terror and criminalization.

The second conclusion is that this type of editing is used in these films specifically to show and make reconstructions of actions from the point of view of the person who gives the orders, but avoids synthetic or rhythmic constructions that allow deepening or reflecting on the developments of the narrative or characters. One could say that these movies are structured with dramatic effects and only in a few cases with narrative events.

That is to say that in spite of dealing with the conflict, whether in the background or as context, and having the clear intention of recreating the real events or the intention of describing the characteristics of the conflict, these films do not portray this subject in any depth. This is also proved by the analysis of depth of the films, which shows that all films follow a scheme in which the information is expanded or remains constant, but is never examined in depth.

At this point it is important to note that in some of the movies produced after 1990s, specifically in *Bolivar soy yo* (Jorge Alí Triana, 2002), *La primera noche* (Luis Alberto Restrepo, 2003) and *La sombra del caminante* (Ciro Guerra, 2004), there is a deliberate planning and a non-constant use of synthetic editing in some parts, which allows us to reflect on the development of the characters and their situations.

Finally, regarding the representation of space, the analysis showed that the first productions were systematically developed in rural areas, while the latest had the city as their main stage, so the process of urbanization of the country is reflected in the treatment of spaces in the sample of movies, which went from being completely rural to predominantly mixed or where their characters appear uprooted in urban contexts due to displacement or migration phenomena, as it happened in *La Primera noche*, for example.

Regarding the use of locations there was not a standardised form of representation that made evident a differentiation between the spaces inhabited by the different characters, although generally the guerrilla was outdoors and the State forces were indoors, while the paramilitaries had no space, this is circumstantial in most cases according to the development of actions and not due to the intention of showing a difference of spaces. Although, in texts and dialogues some movies talk of territorial control, this is definitely not evident in the narrative.

3.6. The actors of the conflict as characters

The spatiotemporal construction, the causality and the flow information clearly show that there is a superficial portrayal of characters as simple developers of actions that do not have clear motivations, characteristics, or a dramatic role within the development of the stories.

For example, *Río de tumbas* does not even identify the dead people or the murders with some of the actors involved in the conflict; in *Caín* the protagonist is on the guerrilla's side but is not a guerrilla fighter, he is the victim who suffers from love failures but kills everyone, even his best friend, who also was the leader of the guerrilla; in *Pisingaña* the guerrilla does not appear and the people who rape and abuse the girl are never identified, although the context incriminates the army; in *Golpe de Estadio* all the characters are friends and in *Bolivar soy yo* everybody dies. The characters are therefore of passive victims of the conflict and have no possibility of action or salvation.

In spite of this lack of characterization, the narrative analysis of characters construction found common elements of transformation between films in relation to the portrayal of the actors of the conflict.

Not all actors involved in the conflict appeared in the films, the most common are the guerrilla and the armed forces of the State and the affected population. Thus, in the movies from 1964 to 1987 there appears a protagonist guerrilla, always weakened by the strong armed forces and affected by past violent events that justify its actions and struggle, its ideological roots are not clear and when its members are presented they are simple harangues devoid of any development or result in the action.

For the 1990s movies, *Golpe de Estadio and Edipo Alcalde*, the concept changes a bit; the guerrilla is formed by good people that playing that role but do not explain their ideologies or their pasts, they are friends of the civilian population and are very close to the representatives of the State authority, with whom they make peace pacts; therefore the enemies are other actors such as the foreigners and the paramilitaries.

Films from 2000 onwards present the guerrilla as an actor that increasingly becomes more diffuse. In *Bolivar soy yo* it is an opportunistic and treacherous group, in *La primera noche* there is a group that dominates the region but has no direct confrontation with the State so there is no clear way to determine who they are, while *Sombra del caminante* and *Soñar no cuesta nada* just mention the illegal armed groups.

The armed forces suffer an even stronger transformation: they go from being the torturers in the oldest sample of movies to friends in *Golpe de Estadio* and the protagonists of *Soñar no cuesta nada*.

A more consistent vision is perhaps that of the State, which always appears as an indolent, absent and pusillanimous agency with no authority, from *Río de tumbas* with a mayor who is always suffering stomach-aches and instead of investigating the deaths throws a party to celebrate his politician friend, to *Soñar no cuesta nada* where the State condemns its army to remain in the forests and face an endless war. This in the only constant idea: the view of State's abandonment as the main cause of the conflict and its lack of solution.

This idea, found in the analysis of films, coincides with Waldmann assertion that "We can see that the Colombian State is present in the general consciousness as a spiritual and physical unit. But it remains being a weak state, unable to impose the laws it has enacted and disciplining its own officials and citizens" (2007: 316).

The same goes for the representation of the population as civilian victims, who suffers the consequences of the absence of the State, and the actions of all the other actors, whatever their role is. However there seems to be a transformation from the population as victim, of the context, in the first films focused on other actors of the conflict, with the exception of *Pisingaña*, to the population as the protagonist in *Bolívar soy yo*, *La primera noche* and *La Sombra del Caminante*.

It is common to see in these films, especially in the most recent ones, the inclusion of predominantly rural characters

which, regardless of whether they live in a city or not, bring with them a marked peasant culture that is added to the uprooting of living in the condition of displacement. This condition is addressed by Waldmann when he says that "there is the predominant vision that many peasant immigrants coming from the lower layers have lived the urbanizing process without much enthusiasm and their mentality is still rural and parish, which can also be said of the other layers. In the city, the class conflicts are still settled with power and ruthlessness, and it cannot be said that they have shifted towards a more symbolic level" (Waldmann, 2007: 320).

Regarding the other actors involved in the conflict, it is surprising to see how despite the fact that the issue of drug trafficking has been one of the most recurrent in Colombian cinema, its linkage with the groups of the armed conflict is not evident in any of the sample of films, and same thing happens with the illegal groups, which do not represent any kind of real character.

In an interview conducted for the research, Víctor Gaviria, well-known as one of the Colombian filmmakers who has addressed the issue of violence in the national cinema, acknowledged that it is easier to make films about drug trafficking than about the armed conflict, because in the first case we can speak of the "phenomenon" in general, without aiming to make a reference to someone in particular, without hurting so many sensitivities. "At the moment of making a film about the guerrilla and the paramilitary we will face the same thing that happens to the farmers who are in the areas of conflict where they cannot speak to any of the actors involved in the conflict because that makes them look as if they are taking sides, i.e. you are in the middle of the cross-fire. If you make a movie where you criticise someone or if you present a detailed judgement about them the paramilitaries will also believe you are on their side… there is a tremendous intolerance, this is a tremendous war where we all have decided not to talk about it" [11].

Regarding the paramilitaries, they appear in the last four films of the sample, but only as ghosts: everybody knows they exist but they are not named or are not related to anything or anybody. Their most important appearance is in *La primera noche*, which suggests that they are those who attack the village and are shown, in an open shot, far away in a van. There is no identification of characters at all. It seems to be a banned topic, although they are often identified with wealth and as having powerful alliances, unlike the guerrillas which even in the years that they have had greater economic power, they always look like a starving group that needs to improve their strategies in order to survive.

Although the sample of movies that throughout the history of Colombian cinema have addressed the issue of the armed conflict is not abundant, there are a few common and especially in-transformation narratives that have identified some forms of seeing and feeling the conflict. It is clear, however, that the directors show certain precaution to deal with the theme. They avoid at all costs supporting one side or another (including the legitimate forces of the State). It is important to clarify that this picture that is so clear in (mostly fiction) feature films is diametrically opposed to the one in documentary films which, given that they do not have, most of the times, the pressure of the commercial exhibition, have portrayed the conflict from multiple perspectives and with high doses of commitment, even taking militant positions on many occasions.

Finally, it is important to highlight the intention and the urgency of telling these realities, even if it is just descriptively and based on actions and the narration of episodic events. According to Alba (2009: 16) "the problem of Colombian cinema is that we are still far from being the storytellers of our history and we have resorted to the description of the succession of some of our small events".

When Colombia man ages to heal its wounds a little and ceases to be a country immersed in an armed conflict that grows day by day, the country will probably have a cool head to tell these stories that have been left in the obscurity and could give us clues to understand what has happened in our country. While this happens, we will continue quite possibly trapped in a period of cinematography which, according to Pepe Sánchez [12], "resembles the Italian neorealism to a greater extent, because we live in a permanent post-war".

4. Conclusions

These are some of the most important conclusions of the project:

The analysed films are mostly structured by dramatic effects [13] and in a few cases by narrative events, but almost never by a structuring plot. The narrative of the films is very traditional and little suggestive. In terms of editing and use of shots the narratives favour the open shots, leaving the close ups for the climax scenes or to be used as reverse angles to present reactions. This condition, however, has changed a little in the last movies.

In the sample of films it is clear that the emergence of narrative categories is directly related to the political stance of their creator. There are changes in political tendencies across the decades, being the leftist tendency very strong at the beginning (1960s and 1970s) and then shifting to the neutral tendency. It is notable, however, that the films do not respond to the political reality existing at the moment of their production, and instead most of the times they recreate previous events.

The growing complexity of the armed conflict, mainly in recent years, has led to the production of films that are not very committed to any of the actors involved in the conflict, even to the government that in all the films of the sample appears as an agency that is indolent, absent and sometimes corrupt. The representatives of the government (police, army, political groups and civil authorities) are presented in the same way.

These films are pessimistic concerning the possible solutions for the conflict, their approach to this reality is

fragmented and not very critical or creative, and the subject of the conflict is often only an excuse for the recreation of other types of stories. In some of the films, the conflict is placed in the background.

It is common that these movies see the death of Jorge Eliecer Gaitán and the rise of the liberal guerrillas as the remote origin and triggering event of the conflict. Frequently, one of these two events is the starting point to tell stories. While the dominant narrative structure in Colombian cinema is linear, these films frequently use the circular structure as a way to justify the behaviour of the characters with the after-effects that the violence has left in them.

The portrayal of the characters in these movies is superficial and they appear as active or passive actors that do not have clear motivations. This situation is evident in the absence of clearly villain characters built as heroes, according to the theories of the narrative.

Pizarro (2004) suggests some categories to describe the armed conflict in Colombia. These two most-presented characteristics in national films are terror and the criminalization of the actors involved in the conflict. This situation is proved when one analyses the narrative representation of the civilian population, which always appears as a passive character, as a victim of the conflict, and with no possibilities of action or salvation.

Regarding the other actors involved in the conflict, we found that the ideological origins of the combatant condition of the characters is not explicitly described and that sometimes their affiliation to armed groups is omitted (probably as life insurance for the filmmaker), and that their actions are often justified by the fact that they have been the victims of violent acts. Moreover, the spatiotemporal location in the stories is diffuse. The guerrilla appears weakened, without funding possibilities, and reduced in size even at the times in which it has been strengthened. The paramilitaries that appear in few films enjoy great resources and are always allied to the power.

Political parties are an object of widespread disenchantment in these films. The parties are absent in the communities and politicians appear there as opportunists who work towards the satisfaction of their personal interests.

The process of urbanization of the country is also reflected in the treatment of spaces of the films which go from being completely rural in the 1960s to being predominantly mixed in the following decades. It is notable, however, that unlike other contemporary Colombian movies, the films dealing with the armed conflict are not fully urban. Similarly, the characters appear uprooted in urban contexts as a result of displacement or migration phenomena.

In our view, it is outstanding that while the issue of the armed conflict is the most sensitive event of our reality, feature films do not address it frequently, contrary to what is popularly believed. It is also interesting to find out that the issue of drug trafficking, which has been one of the most recurrent in Colombian cinema, does not appear linked with armed groups in the sample of movies.

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5.2. Examined films

El Rio de las Tumbas (Tombs River) of Julio Luzardo (1965)
Bajo la Tierra (Underground) of Santiago García (1967)
Camilo, el Cura Guerrillero (Camilo, the Guerrilla Priest) of Francisco Norden (1974)
Canaguaro of Dunav Kuzmanich (1981)
Caín of Gustavo Nieto Roa (1984)
El Día de las Mercedes (Mercedes's day) of Dunav Kuzmanich (1985)
Pisingaña of Leopoldo Pinzón (1982)
La ley del monte (Bushland's law) of Moser Brian (1989)
Edipo Alcalde (Oedipus Mayor) of Jorge Alí Triana (1996)
Golpe de Estadio (Estadium Coup) of Sergio Cabrera (1998)
La Toma de la Embajada (The occupation of the Embassy) of Ciro Durán (2000)
Bolívar soy yo (I am Bolívar) of Jorge Alí Triana (2002)
La primera noche (The first night) of Luis Alberto Restrepo (2003)
La sombra del caminante (The walker's shadow) of Ciro Guerra (2005)

5.3. Interviews

Ciro Guerra - Director of *La sombra del caminante*
Jorg Hiller - Film and television writer
Luis Alberto Restrepo - Director of *La primera noche*

Marlon Moreno - Film and television actor
Jorge Alí Triana - Director of *Bolívar soy yo* and *Edipo Alcalde*
Víctor Gaviria - Director of *La vendedora de rosas*, *Rodrigo D. No futuro* and *Sumas y Restas*
Pepe Sánchez - Film and television actor and director, protagonist of *El rio de las tumbas*
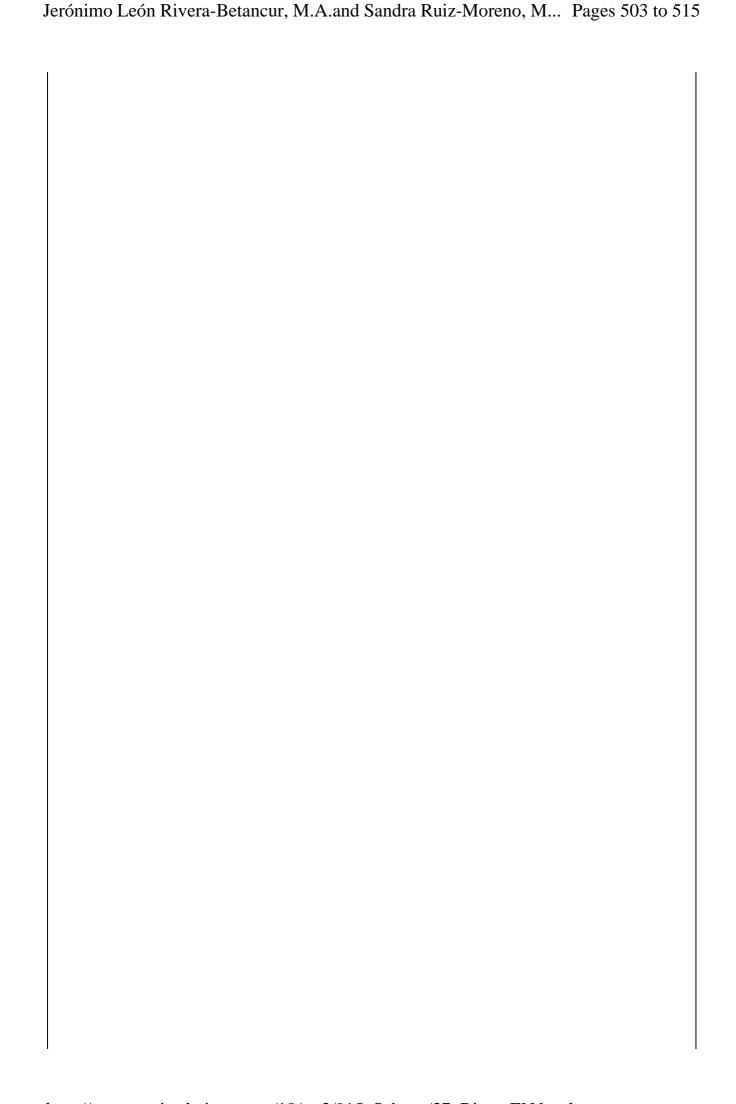Rodrigo Triana - Director of *Cómo el gato y el ratón* and *Soñar no cuesta nada*
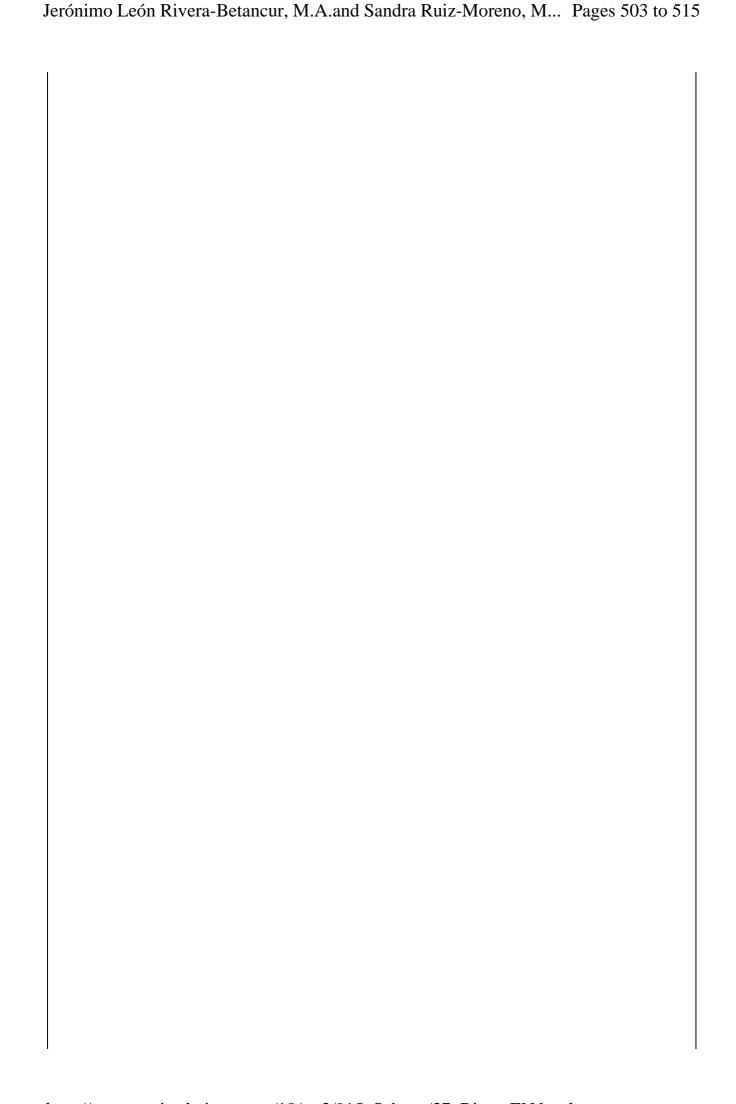Antonio Dorado - Director of *El Rey* and *Te amo Ana Elisa*
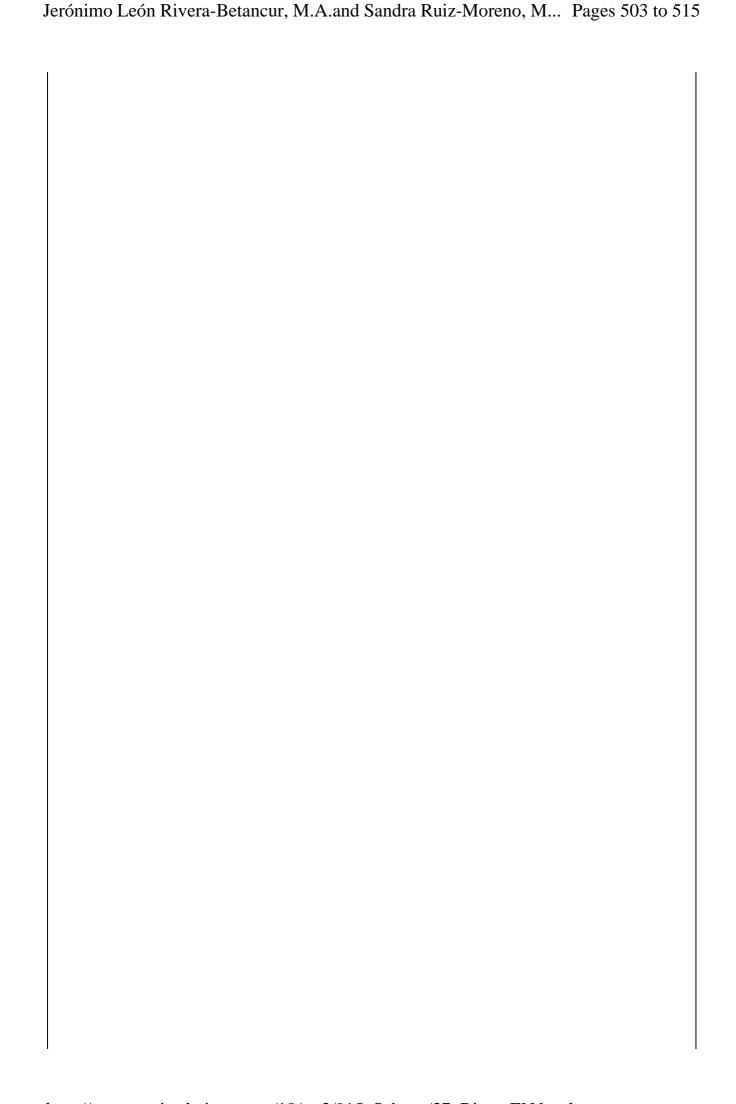Oscar Campo – Documentary maker, director of *Yo soy otro*
Carlos Moreno - Director of *Perro come perro*

6. Notes

[1] In many film festivals the term *Ópera prima* (first work) refers to the first and the second feature films of a film director, regardless of whether he or she has directed many short films; some also even refer to the third feature film as an *Ópera prima*. In Colombia, most of the good directors who made films before the 1990s do not have more than three films in their production.
[2] Data from the *Fundación Proimágenes en Movimiento* (Pro-images in Motion Foundation), which manages the Film Development Fund of the Cinema Law in Colombia. The foundation only includes consolidated statistics until 2007.
[3] Project funded by the Research Directorate of the University of La Sabana and conducted between June 2007 and February 2009.
[4] Free translation of the English text
[5] According to the guidelines of Colombia's Ministry of Culture, for a feature film to be considered Colombian it must have more than 70% of national intervention in the process of production (including creative and technical staff).
[6] Events or elements that are part of the content of the scene.
[7] Form of government agreed by the two political parties existing in the country between 1958 and 1970, which consisted in the alternation of presidents so that each four years a party could dominate the elections and organize them only among candidates from a same political movement: Conservatives or Liberals. In this period the Colombian presidents were: Alberto Lleras Camargo (Liberal), Guillermo León Valencia (Conservative), Carlos Lleras Restrepo (Liberal), and Misael Pastrana Borrero (Conservative).
[8] This film was inspired by the real story of Colombian actor Pedro Montoya, who after acting for many years as Bolivar on Colombian television began behaving like Bolivar to the point of suffering serious mental imbalances and believing that he himself was Simón Bolívar. This actor is currently maintained in a mental hospital of the Department of Boyacá in Colombia.
[9] Term used in Colombia to talk about money or wealth hidden underground. It is like a hidden treasure. This term is permanently used with an almost magical sense.
[10] With an interesting co-protagonism of another character that has a dark paramilitary past and, in a kind of karma, develops a silent and humble work of redemption and purge of his crimes.
[11] Interview with Víctor Gaviria for the research "Narrativas del conflicto armado en el cine colombiano" (Narratives of the armed conflict in Colombian cinema), conducted in August 2008 by Jerónimo Rivera.
[12] Colombian film director and actor. Interviewed by the authors in August 2008 for the research "Narrativas del conflicto armado en el cine colombiano".
[13] According to Robert McKee's screenwriting theory, this is an act of action and reaction, unlike the narrative event that changes a value from positive to negative and from the structured and ideal plot,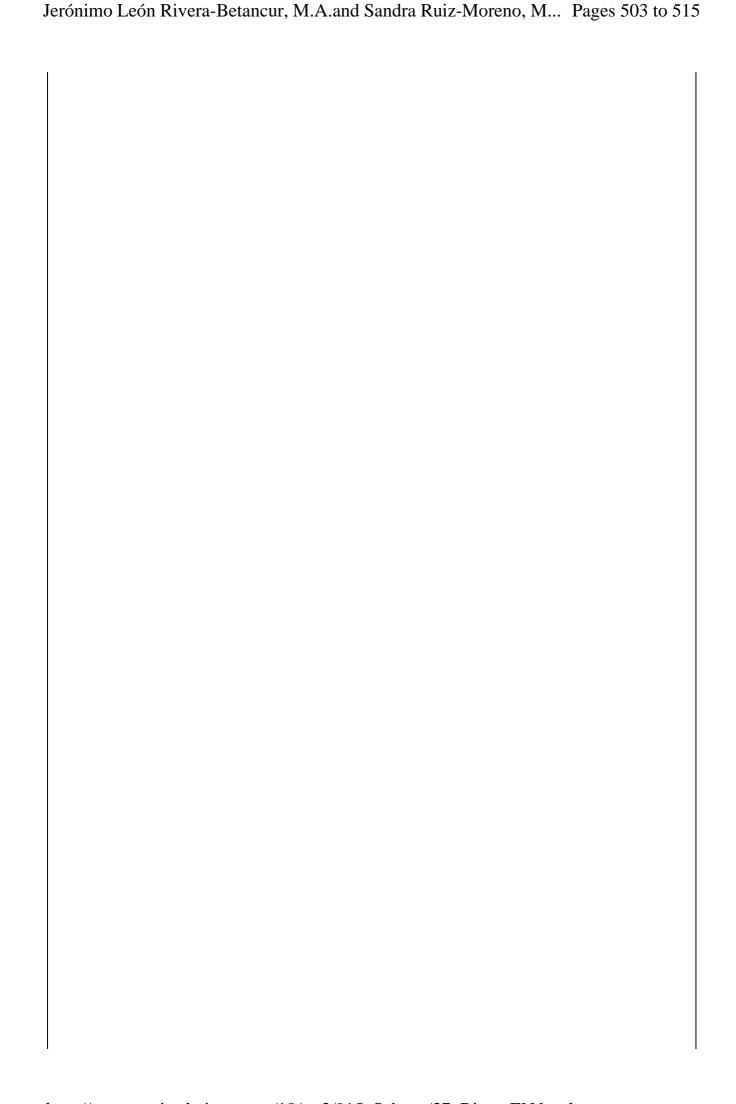 where history is articulated with causality reactions.