

**María Victoria Uribe, *Cuerpos sin nombre, nombres sin cuerpo. Desapariciones en Colombia***

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The extensive work of Colombian anthropologist and historian María Victoria Uribe sheds light on the political, symbolic, and ritualistic aspects of violence spanning from the times of La Violencia (1948-1958) through the present. Uribe examines massacres, its victims and victimizers, as well as the phenomenology of crimes, ranging from emotions and perceptions to the social activities, volition and linguistic communication of the violent subjects. Importantly, her oeuvre also addresses human rights and memory; memory as historical testimony and memory of the victims, largely belonging to the non-combatant civilian population, whose identities have been destroyed post mortem. These are, no doubt, particularly somber topics explored by various institutions in the 2016 peace process which have sought to come to terms with a legacy of violations and abuses. They aim to provide an accountability for crimes, to serve justice, and to fulfill the rights of victims for truth and reparation. Fittingly, María Victoria Uribe served as a member of the Historical Memory Group (2007-2013) tasked to prepare a report on the origins and causes of the armed conflict. This group of experts worked under the auspices of Colombia's National Commission for Reparation and Reconciliation.

Uribe's latest book *Cuerpos sin nombre, sombras sin cuerpo* is the result of decades of research, as it centers on the ongoing enforced disappearances in Colombia committed by various armed actors. (By 2022, 110,000 people were reported forcefully disappeared in Colombia, but the number of victims could be as high as 210,000.) The academic rigor characteristic of Uribe's writing is combined with a clear, accessible language, making this book comprehensible and engaging to readers outside Academia. This, no doubt, is intended to raise public consciousness and to break through the apparent indifference of a great part of society adapted if not resigned to human dramas occurring to marginalized populations.

Forced disappearances tend to impact Colombia's most vulnerable populations, from peasants, miners, and fishermen to ethnic minorities living in the rural areas dominated by the groups warring over resources and drug trafficking routes. They also affect the urban poor (often people displaced by violence from rural areas), the LGBTQ population, the

homeless, addicts, and prostitutes. Apathy towards daily human dramas combined with the lax sentences meted out to the victimizers embolden criminal elements and thus the cycle of violence continues. Giving voice to the voiceless, whose existence has been wiped out, and whose fate in most cases remains unknown, Uribe forces us to confront the systematic atrocities committed on the nation's underprivileged citizens. The four categories of the crimes of "disappearing" explored in the book attest to pervasive social inequalities plaguing Colombia and the ongoing impunity for crimes against humanity.

Uribe begins the victim categorization with people working in the rural service who are "disappeared" by the army or the paramilitaries for the offense of allegedly sympathizing with the guerillas. The author ponders on the absurdity of these accusations, since what the victims are targeted for is talking, being courteous, offering their usual services that constitute their jobs to people who request them (be it various types of transportation, or selling food in their stores, or selling products in various locations). And if those who use such services or briefly interact with the victim are suspected of ties with guerillas, the presumed culprit is added to the death lists carried by the paramilitaries. Such lists were read in public places to sow further terror among the civilians living in the area. Aside from lists that sometimes only indicated last names, thereby putting everyone with the same last name in danger, paramilitaries would carry old photographs of presumed "guerilla helpers," pictures so damaged by use that anyone even close in appearance was also being targeted. Finally, people who despite warnings and threats felt obliged to bury corpses floating in the rivers were also targeted and killed, their houses burned to the ground, and their families silenced through terror.

Other disappeared non-combatants have included those who in some way brought together various communities, either through mobile services or leadership functions. Often it sufficed to be accused of helping the guerillas by one of local spies, people who acted on grudges and sought revenge by proxy. In other words, mere survival in rural communities embroiled in conflict has been a feat, as violence deployed by the state and sundry non-state actors is rampant and haphazard,

destroying the very social fabric of countless populations. As Uribe points out, these types of disappearances are tragically connected to Colombian rivers, veritable liquid tombs that have been carrying fragmented bodies of countless victims for decades. The Dique canal (El Canal del Dique) situated at the mouth of Magdalena River on the Caribbean coast, is a giant tomb according to the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP), an organization that calls for investigating a site where as many as 9000 bodies may be submerged.

Another type of disappearing occurring with frequency is what has been called euphemistically “social cleansing.” This crime perpetrated by paramilitaries targets the marginalized populations mentioned above (and typically urban) whose social status has been determined by the perpetrators as inferior to others. Uribe ponders on the mechanisms that allow one group to consider another as “less than,” speculating on at what point targeted individuals are no longer considered human so that their erasure does not produce guilt, but rather pride in the entrepreneurs of violence. The third group of victims analyzed by the author are the children and teenagers forcefully recruited into the FARC in the areas controlled by the insurgent groups.

Due to space limitations, Uribe focuses on the Cauca region, where the indigenous Nasa population (which constitutes roughly 40 % of the population) resisted the guerillas, refusing to join their ranks. It is estimated that 18, 677 children were forcefully recruited by the FARC between 1996 and 2016, of which 68% were younger than 15. Most of them, to this day, cannot be accounted for. Torn from their homes and neighborhoods, they suffered multiple types of abuse, including sexual violence, forced abortions, and forced contraception. Families of the disappeared children search for truth to this day. Dialogues begin to take place regarding the whereabouts of the human remains and stories behind their children’s disappearances as part of the process of transitional

justice which includes encounters between victims’ families and the FARC ex-combatants, their victimizers.

The final group addressed by Uribe are the so-called *falsos positivos* murdered by the army, meaning, innocent civilians kidnapped to serve, albeit postmortem, to inflate the numbers of enemy combatants killed by the nation’s military forces. This devious practice does away with a human to utilize his physical shell. They are murdered and subsequently dressed in uniforms to simulate their combatant lifestyle. Army agents, in fact, carry such clothes and weapons called “el kit de cuadro” in order to convincingly stage “el paquete” (read the dead) as armed insurgents. The barbarity of this devious practice cannot be overemphasized: not only are these non-combatants innocent victims of murder committed by the state, but their reputation is tarnished after death, requiring arduous efforts by the surviving family members to clear up their names. Statistics have revealed at least 6402 cases of “false positives” between 2002 and 2008 in Colombia.

Uribe’s categorizations are accompanied by specific cases and anecdotes, going far beyond statistics into the deep realms of inhumanity. These stories come from a variety of sources: confessions of convicted military personnel, recorded encounters between the perpetrators and their surviving victims, journalistic research and testimonies, confessions of members of the FARC offered during the process of Justice and Peace, as well as court proceedings. Testimonies coming from the victims and victimizers are both revealing and heart-wrenching, attesting to deep wounds and profound human tragedies. *Cuerpos sin nombre, nombres sin cuerpo* is a unique treasure; it constitutes an effort to name the victims and reclaim the disappeared bodies of people whose voices have been systematically silenced. Its academic precision and objectivity, combined with empathy and deep humanity, make it an invaluable source of information and testimony of war crimes for worldwide audiences.