

# Forensic Notes: Knowledge that Materializes the Enemy's Bodies in Paramilitary Graves and False Positives\*

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**Abstract:** In this article, we focus on the symbolic and practical dimensions of the paramilitary's management of the corporality of the enemy in their

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heyday after the unification of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia and followed by the military in the framework of the Democratic Security Policy of former president Álvaro Uribe. To do so, we approach how these dimensions materialize, become evident, and circulate in the social sphere from the knowledge that forensic anthropologists produce about these bodies, violence, and conflict. The material presented and analyzed here is the result of an ethnographic approximation to the practice of forensic anthropological experts of the Prosecution Office. We present a methodology that we call dialogical and reflexive. It combines a self-ethnographic exercise of Jaime's practice and conversations led by María Fernanda to delve into his experiences, concepts, and practices. We feed this methodology with interviews with three forensic anthropologists, who have similar trajectories to Jaime's. We also carried out an archival research of the years included here. In this article, we present how forensic anthropologists' qualitative knowledge (together with other forensic experts' knowledge) serves both as a testimony of what happened to the bodies and, at the same time, produces the very thing that it studies. To this extent, it co-produces conflict, violence, victims, and perpetrators, shedding light on the political dimension to the practice of forensic identification. Usually, studies on the social effects of forensic sciences present forensic knowledge as a truth-telling and neutral testimony about violent events. Here, we have focused on how forensic knowledge (like any other) co-produces the very thing that it studies. As such, we point out and reveal its profound political implications, and, to this extent, contribute to broadening what is understood by forensic knowledge in contexts of transitional justice and its possible social effects.

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**Keywords:** Body, Colombian Armed Conflict, false positive, forensic knowledge, paramilitary graves, transitional justice.

### **Notas forenses: conocimiento que materializa a los cuerpos del enemigo en fosas paramilitares y falsos positivos**

**Resumen:** en este artículo nos enfocamos en las dimensiones simbólicas y prácticas del manejo de la corporalidad del enemigo realizada por los paramilitares en su auge tras la unificación de las Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, y seguida por militares en el marco de la Política de seguridad democrática del expresidente Álvaro Uribe. Para ello, abordamos cómo se materializan tales dimensiones, cómo se hacen evidentes y cómo circulan en el ámbito social a partir del conocimiento que producen antropólogos forenses acerca de esos cuerpos, de la violencia y del conflicto. El material que aquí presentamos y analizamos es resultado de una aproximación etnográfica a la práctica de peritos antropólogos forenses de la Fiscalía General de la Nación en Colombia. Presentamos una metodología que llamamos dialógica y

reflexiva, en la que hay un ejercicio auto-etnográfico de Jaime, acompañado de conversaciones lideradas por María Fernanda, para ahondar en experiencias, conceptos y prácticas. Esta metodología se complementa con entrevistas a tres antropólogos forenses con trayectorias similares a la de Jaime, así como revisión de archivo de los años aquí comprendidos. Así, el conocimiento cualitativo de los antropólogos forenses (junto con el de otros expertos forenses) no solo cumple la función de ser testimonio de lo ocurrido a los cuerpos, sino que tiene, además, la característica de producir aquello mismo que estudia y, en esa medida, co-produce el conflicto, la violencia, las víctimas y los perpetradores. Esto hace evidente la dimensión política y no neutral a la práctica de identificación forense. Estudios sobre los efectos sociales de las ciencias forenses usualmente abordan y presentan el conocimiento forense como testimonio neutro de verdad acerca de hechos violentos. En este artículo nos hemos enfocado en cómo el conocimiento forense (al igual que cualquier otro) co-produce aquello mismo que estudia. De esta manera, señalamos y hacemos evidente sus profundas implicaciones políticas. En esta medida, contribuimos a ampliar lo que se entiende por conocimiento forense en contextos de justicia transicional y sus posibles efectos en lo social.

**Palabras clave:** conflicto armado colombiano, conocimiento forense, cuerpo, falsos positivos, fosas paramilitares, justicia transicional.

### **Anotações forenses: conhecimento que materializa os corpos do inimigo em fossas paramilitares e “falsos positivos”**

**Resumo:** neste artigo, focamos nas dimensões simbólicas e práticas do lidar com a corporeidade do inimigo, realizada pelos paramilitares em seu auge após a unificação das Autodefesas Unidas da Colômbia, e seguida por militares no âmbito da política de segurança democrática do ex-presidente Álvaro Uribe. Para isso, abordamos como essas dimensões são materializadas, como se tornam evidentes e como circulam no contexto social a partir do conhecimento que antropólogos forenses produzem sobre esses corpos, sobre a violência e sobre o conflito. O material apresentado e analisado é resultado de uma aproximação etnográfica da prática de peritos antropólogos forenses da Procuradoria-geral da Nação na Colômbia. Apresentamos uma metodologia que chamamos de dialógica e reflexiva, na qual há um exercício etnográfico de Jaime, acompanhado de conversas lideradas por María Fernanda, para aprofundar em experiências, conceitos e práticas. Essa metodologia é complementada com entrevistas a três antropólogos forenses com trajetórias semelhantes à de Jaime, bem como revisão de arquivo dos anos aqui compreendidos. Deste modo, o conhecimento qualitativo dos antropólogos forenses (junto com o de outros especialistas forenses) não somente cumpre a função de ser testemunha do ocorrido com os corpos, mas também

tem a característica de produzir o que estuda em si e, nessa medida, coproduz o conflito, a violência, as vítimas e os perpetradores. Isso torna evidente a dimensão política e não neutral à prática de identificação forense. Estudos sobre os efeitos sociais das ciências forenses, em geral, abordam e apresentam o conhecimento forense como testemunha neutra da verdade sobre os fatos violentos. Neste artigo, centralizamo-nos em como o conhecimento forense (assim como qualquer outro) coproduz o que estuda em si. Dessa maneira, evidenciamos suas profundas implicações políticas. Nesse sentido, contribuimos para ampliar o que se entende por conhecimento forense em contextos de justiça de transição e seus possíveis efeitos no social.

**Palavras-chave:** conflito armado colombiano, conhecimento forense, corpo, falsos positivos, fossas paramilitares, justiça de transição.

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**F**orced disappearance is not a recent phenomenon in Colombia, especially considering the country's six-decade armed conflict. It is not surprising, therefore, that certain records refer to acts of forced disappearance as a result of the upsurge in violence between liberals and conservatives that date back to the late 1950s. In the 1970s, forced disappearance was predominant when it was related to militancy in the political left (Castro *et al.* 2008), and it has also been another of the consequences of the Colombian armed conflict through practices such as kidnappings, detentions, illegal recruitments, and the systematic killings of (possible) opponents (Blair 2010; Castro *et al.* 2008; Ruiz 2013; Uribe 2008). The reported cases of disappearance are related to the rise of drug trafficking in the 1980s and 1990s, when many people were disappeared because they sought work in coca cultivation or in businesses associated with this industry (Ramírez *et al.* 2010).

According to the Information System Network of Missing Persons and Corpses (SIRDEC), 79% of the reported cases are “unclassified cases” and 20% are victims of “presumed forced disappearance” (SIRDEC 2017). In Colombia's violent history, disappearance has been a constant with multiple nuances: sometimes it is forced disappearance and underpinned by political purposes and motivations, with clear participation or cooperation by the State or one of the actors in the conflict (Bello *et al.* 2016). On other occasions, disappearances occur in other criminal contexts. However, as Blair points out, “we know that [disappearance] has been a systematic practice used by all the actors in the conflict and by the State's regular forces” (2010, 52), even though this is not the only reason underlying the growing numbers of forcibly disappeared persons.

The numbers of forcibly disappeared persons are neither clear nor definitive. Indeed, underreporting —due to either fear or ignorance— is one of the effects of

disappearance. Lack of clarity is also due to the fact that the idea itself of many cases of disappearance is, precisely, to leave no trace (Blair 2010; Uribe 2008). Nevertheless, in February 2018, the National Center for Historical Memory (CNMH) reported that 82,998 people were forcibly disappeared between 1958 and 2018, as part of the armed conflict (CNMH 2018). The following are the criteria by which a person is considered to be forcibly disappeared:

The presumed or confirmed participation of the actors of the armed conflict [...] in the perpetration of the act. This criterion is extended to other agents of violence such as drug traffickers, “social cleansing” groups, common and organized crime, or other individuals, when and where there is circumstantial or reliable information of the participation of the actors of the armed conflict in the act, either by delegation or by cooperation in its perpetration.<sup>1</sup> (Bello *et al.* 2016, 67)

These CNMH figures include cases of disappearances of people associated with political groups and activities stigmatized by the actors of the conflict (CNMH 2018). In so many years of disappearance, the profiles of both the disappeared persons and the perpetrators of the disappearance have shifted; however, in this article, we focus on the increase in forced disappearance between 1997 and 2010 when “the unarmed population was linked to the conflict not through social adhesion but through coercion or victimization” (Ruiz 2013, 19). This period marked the rise of the paramilitary organization United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), which produced a geography of systematic disappearance-death-disappearance with particular features that extended throughout Colombian territory (CNMH 2012).

We call it the geography of disappearance-death-disappearance because although the practice of disappearing and killing (or killing and disappearing) occurred throughout the national territory, as we highlight below, the geographies in which the practices of disappearing to kill and burying to disappear materialize are particular to and from forensics. This dynamic of disappearing and killing was followed by the Democratic Security and Defense Policy<sup>2</sup> in place during Alvaro Uribe's two presidential terms, from 2002 to 2010. It was under this policy that people were disappeared, killed, and then made to reappear as guerrilla combatants by military actors resulting in what is known as false positives;<sup>3</sup> namely, the extrajudicial executions of innocent civilians to be presented as guerrilla casualties in the midst of an alleged fight against terrorism (Semana 2008; Londoño 2011).

In this article, we focus on the symbolic and practical dimensions of the paramilitaries' handling of the body of the enemy, at its peak after the unification of the AUC, and followed by the military in the framework of the democratic security policy. To this end, we address how these dimensions materialize, how they become evident, and how they circulate in the social sphere based on the knowledge

1 All translations of citations are the translator's except when referenced otherwise.

2 Henceforth, Democratic Security Policy.

3 In international humanitarian law, these executions are known as the “willful killing” of protected persons.

produced by forensic anthropologists about these bodies, violence, and conflict. We argue that the qualitative knowledge of forensic anthropologists (along with that of other forensic experts) both testifies to what happened to these bodies, and at the same time gives rise to the very thing it studies and, to that extent, co-produces the conflict, the violence, the victims, and the perpetrators.

We frame our analysis within two anthropological positions: one is the Anthropology of Science, from which we mainly take the understanding that scientific products, including knowledge, are socio-cultural products that are immersed in specific times and spaces. That is, they do not happen in a vacuum, they are not neutral, and they are not innocent (Haraway 1988; Law 2015; M'charek 2008). The second is Social Anthropology, which approaches the facts, practices, and social objects of the conflict as issues contextualized in a specific socio-cultural and political-historical space (Castillejo-Cuéllar 2014; Uribe 2008).

## Bodies in war

6 ■ Handling the body in contexts of war and conflict has been widely studied by scholars from the different disciplines of the Social and Human Sciences, showing the enemy's body as a territory where war and violence are inscribed (Cortés 2014; Feldman 1991; García 2000; Longerich 2010; Mora 2010; Patraha 1999; Uribe 2004). Such inscriptions can be used to punish, exemplify, humiliate, denigrate, dehumanize, and control the enemy to be dominated, subdued, and exterminated (this is a constant in sexual violence against women). They can also be caused to hide and efficiently disappear the body and the crime (as is the case of some types of mutilation and dismemberment) (Blair 2010; Cortés 2014; Feldman 1991; García 2000; Uribe 2004; Wills 2008). The handling of bodies in war is also understood as an expression of biopower<sup>4</sup> manifested in the bodies of those designated as enemies. As they are identified and constructed as politicized and polarized bodies, they bear the brunt of the violence orchestrated, favored, or supported by the State.

The late 1980s, when the U.S. military circles began to talk about the war against terrorism—which lays the foundations of the National Security Policy—, brought a change in how the enemy has been confronted and fought. The enemy is now “formulated in indeterminacy (anyone can potentially be marked as an enemy), anonymity (it is initially unknown), without location (it can be anywhere), and possessing a potential to cause unquantifiable damage” (Alvarado *et al.* 2013, 106). In this context, and after the events of September 11, 2001 in the United States, the security of democracy expressed in the fight against terrorism was exacerbated (Londoño 2011). In this type of war, we see how “the body of the terrorist admits the possibility of mutilation [...] as a symbolic expression of the defeat inflicted”

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4 Conceptualized by Foucault (1980) as ways in which nation-states discipline their populations through practices that are applied directly to the bodies of citizens.

(Londoño 2011, 123-124) and the growing public acceptance of this occurring in defense of the security and democracy of the States.

In Colombia, the fight against terrorism presented and implemented by Uribe at the beginning of the 2000s was a promise to recover a country that for decades and, more precisely, during the immediately preceding government (that of Andrés Pastrana) had been handed over to guerrilla groups through either action or omission (Galindo 2009). The security policy was implemented at a time of rising violence, resulting from the clashes for territorial power between guerrillas and paramilitary groups. It is through forensic practice that the marks that violence leaves on the bodies of the so-called enemies are made public and can circulate.

## Forensic Knowledge: Producing Worlds (in Transition)

Forensic practice has political-legal, social, and ethical effects and implications. Forensic practice (like any other practice) is neither neutral nor inherently good—or bad—depending on the context in which it arises and the political and social mobilizations it entails. In this sense, knowledge does not account for the world “as it is”; rather, it co-produces the world through knowledge practices (Law 2008; M'charek 2008; Mol 2002). To put it in Butler's terms, “discourse produces the effects that it names” (1993, xii). Thus, knowledge (scientific and otherwise) is performative; it shapes and formats the world, it makes its practitioners responsible for the world they help co-produce (Law 2008).

In this respect, we must pay attention to the role of forensic work, the possible uses of knowledge produced from there and the implications in worldmaking. We must also take into account the ways in which forensic knowledge contributes to scenarios of transitional justice, such as the Colombian case, since the pillars of transitional justice include the rights to truth, justice, reparation, and non-repetition, to which forensic testimony contributes through its expertise (Anstette and Dreyfus 2015; Castillejo-Cuéllar 2014; Crettol and La Rosa 2006; Olarte-Sierra *et al.* 2014; Zarankin and Salerno 2008).

At least four major themes can be discerned from the social sciences that address the role of forensic knowledge in transitional justice processes. First, there is a debate about how problematic forensic experts' statements about the past are, given that they are intended to settle social and political disputes through a discourse of science and objectivity, without recognizing that their interventions help to interpret and shape that same past that they try to present as neutral (Moon 2013). Second, there are tensions and dissonances between the expectations of victims, state authorities, and forensic specialists. The exhumation and identification of bodies have different meanings and implications for the parties involved, with some bodies, for example, being uncomfortable for governments and public intuitions as they evince State-perpetrated violations (Crossland 2000).

Third, a distinction has been made between humanitarian and judicial search, exhumation, and identification practices, especially in cases of forcibly disappeared persons. The former are motivated by the need to help relatives and loved ones reunite with the forcibly disappeared person; while the latter emphasize criminal sanctions of those who practiced the disappearance (without neglecting the needs of the families and the right to be reunited with their loved ones). Forensic specialists' claims about the violent past are more or less controversial, depending on whether they are produced by civil and humanitarian organizations or by State institutions (Collins 2016; Ferrándiz 2013; Moon 2013).

Fourth, the contributions of anthropologists and forensic archaeologists to the reconstruction of the past and the truth regarding violent periods and contexts have been recognized. This is because it is assumed that they can bear witness to the violence by interpreting the inscriptions it leaves on victims' bodies and the landscape, while at the same time, provide knowledge about the destruction of heritage and the silencing of some voices (Gassiot 2008; Quevedo 2014; Zalarkin and Salerno 2008). Based on these approaches, we can see how, broadly speaking, forensic knowledge tends to be privileged as neutral and objective knowledge that can also serve as testimony in juridical-legal spaces, as well as in social spaces of victims' groups, in exercises of reconstruction of the past and of the truth. Forensic knowledge as expert, trained, and political knowledge has been little explored (Douglas 2014; Moon 2013).

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## Methodological Approaches

In January 2017, we engaged in an ethnographic study on the practice of forensic identification in Colombia, carried out by forensic anthropologists of the Attorney General's Office (FGN). We address the scope of the qualitative knowledge of forensic anthropologists in (post-) conflict contexts and we consider that this knowledge is both a product of their practice and a requirement of their profession to make sense of the inscriptions that violence leaves the bodies that they exhume and attempt to identify. We consider that the knowledge of these experts goes beyond the purely quantifiable aspects of skeletal remains and ways of dying and killing, which is why we focus on their work.

Our research exercise involves an autoethnographic dimension of Jaime's experience, in which he reflects on his experiences, field diaries, and the material he has produced over the years: books, training modules for investigators and experts, conference presentations, and articles. These reflections arose in the context of conversations led by María Fernanda intended to clarify concepts and elaborate on specific events regarding exhumation procedures and the practice of forensic identification from an anthropological perspective. This methodology, which we call dialogic and reflexive, is fueled by a series of interviews we held with three forensic anthropologists, Margarita, Daniel, and Arturo,<sup>5</sup> whose trajectories are comparable

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5 All three names are pseudonyms.

to Jaime's, meaning that, as their main actors, they have had first-hand experience in the events we analyze here. Margarita has worked in the central, eastern, and north-eastern part of the country; Daniel had not always worked at the FGN, although he has worked at state institutions and has worked in Bogotá and central Colombia. Arturo has worked primarily in northern Colombia. Jaime worked for many years in western Colombia and has been in Bogotá for almost a decade.<sup>6</sup> We also conducted archival research to contextualize forensic anthropological work within the country's political realities during the years included in the study (1997-2010).<sup>7</sup>

## Forensic Expertise: Co-Producing the Grave and the Body

### Conceal to Control: The Self-Defense Groups' Franchise in Graves

Records of the phenomenon of paramilitarism date back to the mid-twentieth century as a resource of the economic and political elites, along with the mafias, to "achieve power, expand it and consolidate it" (Velásquez 2007, 134), through a discourse of counterinsurgency. It is known to have been established and used in the independence struggles in Indochina and Algeria, where France resorted to paramilitary groups to control subversive forces by means of so-called death squads in charge of torturing and disappearing suspected insurgents. According to the French, "it was better to kill an innocent person than to let a subversive go free" (Velásquez 2007, 135). Thus, it was established that the enemy could be controlled by controlling the population, as the former diminished the support it enjoyed along with its fighting power. The lessons learned from the Battle of Algiers became military models in France, the United States, and several Latin American countries. The Paris War College, the Escuela Superior de Guerra in Buenos Aires, and the School of the Americas in Georgia, United States, were established, at which it is estimated that between 1950 and 1970, approximately 4,630 Colombian military personnel were trained in group formation tactics and paramilitary strategy (Gill 2005; Velásquez 2007).

The consolidation of paramilitary groups and policies in Latin America is based on the Cold War (García-Peña 2004). In Colombia, during the period known as the National Front, the legal foundations<sup>8</sup> were laid for the formation of self-defense groups controlled and sponsored by the Armed Forces (Velásquez 2007). Thus, paramilitarism is not a recent, conjunctural, or isolated event, but a clear and constant State policy in which entrepreneurs; landowners; politicians; and, in the

6 It is important to mention that although the anthropologists interviewed work in specific parts of the country, they are also sent to other areas, providing them with great knowledge of the dynamics that can occur between different parts of the country.

7 At this point we refer to the entire period of study from the rise of the AUC in its connection with the graves, until the end of Álvaro Uribe's second term, which is connected with the appearance of the false positives.

8 Decree-Law 335 of 1965, which became Law 48 of 1968, is known as the Statute for National Defense and was what led to the consolidation of anti-insurgency groups. Although this law was suspended in 1989, no mechanisms were established to dismantle the groups that had already been formed, nor was there any oversight to ensure that no more groups were formed (Velásquez 2007).

1980s, drug cartels, have participated. It is in this scenario of justification for illegal armed groups created to disappear and kill that, in the mid-1990s, Colombia experienced a surge in the paramilitary self-defense movement. Specifically, we must point out that the self-defense groups in Colombia “have not been —nor are they now— citizens organized against common crime or people who spontaneously confront common criminals [...], but groups that exercise a type of violence of a conservative nature whose purpose was to maintain an established socio-political order” (Rivas and Rey 2008, 44). These groups are recognized as paramilitary organizations to the extent that they act under the protection or, at least, with the blessing of the State and the Military Forces (Gill 2005; Velásquez 2007).

In 1997, Carlos Castaño unified most of the paramilitary groups operating in different parts of the country and formed the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), of which he became the political head (Cruz 2009). Their struggle was presented as a response to halt the advance of guerrilla groups such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People’s Army (FARC-EP) and the National Liberation Army (ELN) (Bello *et al.* 2016; Valencia 2007). Carlos Castaño and the AUC were supported by relevant actors who felt that the State had been weak in its efforts to control the subversive organizations. These actors included military officers who rejected subversion, drug traffickers who saw their business threatened by the nascent narco-guerrillas, and economic elites who felt their status quo and their land was threatened by the guerrilla groups (García-Peña 2004).

This unification manifested itself in a systematic model of persecution, disappearance, and death that resulted in one of the bloodiest episodes of the Colombian armed conflict and extended throughout the national territory. The AUC are known as death franchises (Pérez 2010) because the model was based on selling “personnel groups”, equipped with uniforms and rifles, who were trained in specific methods of torture, killing, and burial. In this respect, the AUC always controlled the territories in the same way: through massacres, displacements, and enforced disappearances, which increased dramatically between 1997 and 2002 (Cruz 2009; García-Peña 2004; Uribe 2004; Velásquez 2010, Verdad Abierta 2008). One could be disappeared simply for being suspected of collaboration with guerrilla groups or left-wing political affiliations and, sometimes, for having somehow inconvenienced those who had paramilitary control of the area. Thus, disappearance served as an effective control device:

All you had to do to be disappeared was to be singled out. It wasn’t just the opponents, or possible opponents, or guerrilla collaborators. The information was not confirmed. Often, the finger-pointing was the result of personal quarrels, or for being a newcomer, for being a foreigner that nobody knew [...] in the case of women it was different. They were disappeared for being attractive, or ugly, or for not wanting to go out with a paramilitary [...] it was very easy to be singled out and disappeared. (Conversation #1 with Daniel, September 2018)

Graves provide evidence of this population control through persistent disappearances of people, who were gradually recovered and exhumed by forensic experts of the FGN in ordinary and transitional justice investigation processes. In response to complaints filed with the FGN for civilian disappearances, graves, which revealed a certain pattern, started to be found and exhumed. A systematic method of burial was established as more exhumations were made, finding at least four primary features of these graves: 1) they were bodies buried in shallow graves (sometimes individual, sometimes multiple), 2) by the side of the road, 3) folded in half or dismembered, 4) often (semi)naked:

Between 1999 and 2000, reports began to arrive [at the FGN] of people who got lost and never returned, but there was no sign of what had happened to them. There were many reports. I was working in Cali at that time, I was a human rights investigator and I took those cases on. I remember I dug a grave in 2001. The body was dismembered and naked [...], then I found more graves with similar characteristics. In 2002, I talked to some colleagues, one who worked in Barranquilla and another in Medellín; I asked them about their excavations and we realized that the three of us had found graves with the same characteristics, that these graves had a pattern: bodies that were either dismembered or folded in half and buried in shallow graves on roadsides. (Conversation among the authors, with Jaime speaking, November 2017)

Today, thousands of graves dug by paramilitaries continue to be exhumed in the country as a result of Law 975/2005, known as “Justice and Peace.”<sup>9</sup> By 2017, the official figure was 5,515 graves exhumed and 7,036 bodies found (FGN 2017). This law paved the way for a peace process with paramilitary actors who, in order to have their sentences reduced, had to reveal the whereabouts of the bodies of the forcibly disappeared persons they had buried.<sup>10</sup>

As we mentioned earlier, in war the enemy's body becomes a territory of war (Patraka 1999; Uribe 2008; Uribe 2004; Cortés 2014) and the bodies found in these graves support such a statement as they account for the violence they were subject to as they were disappeared, killed, and buried in secrecy. In this respect, Daniel and Margarita point out the following:

The state in which the bodies are found reveals the indignities of war. The abuse perpetrated by the paramilitaries. Sometimes, the bodies are tied at the hands and feet, naked or semi-naked [...] if it is a question of multiple burials, they arrange the bodies in obscene, sexual positions. As if to mock, to continue mistreating.

9 Law 975/2005 was controversial. For many it did not constitute a peace and justice process because the focus on truth was exclusively judicial. Little or no attention was paid to any truth efforts that were not directly related to a legal process for demobilized paramilitaries (Jaramillo-Marín 2010).

10 There has been a long debate about the way in which the victims depended on the paramilitaries to be recognized as such, as they were subordinated to the memories and will of the paramilitary postulates. For more on this debate see Castillo-Cuellar (2014) and Jaramillo-Marín (2010).

Women, for example, were buried with their genitals exposed and their underwear torn. (Conversation #1 with Daniel, September 2018)

[When I worked] in La Gabarra and Magdalena Medio and Santander, when the paramilitaries were advancing, I found that those graves were systematic, I found them all over the area. They were not very elaborate compared to the other [armed] groups because they were small, shallow graves and the bodies were dismembered. They were intended to violate the body even more. With the women it was different, they pulled down their underwear and in many cases I found women with their underwear in their mouths. (Conversation #1 con Margarita, September 2018)

Thus, based on this forensic interpretation, we know that these graves are evidence of the disappearance and death of thousands of people, and of the systematic method of burial that, with small variations, extends throughout the country. We call this a geography of disappearance-death-disappearance, given its geographic and temporal differences. In other words, the AUC's violence, although systematic and generalized, showed clear differences depending on the area and was modified over time:

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■ Many bodies could be easily located because of the way they were buried, these were still soft, recently executed, and there were even signs that said “this is what you get for grassing.” These were found mainly in places where the conflict was more acute. In Barranca and Cimitarra. (Conversation #1 con Margarita, September 2018)

There were other ways of killing and disposing of the bodies that were related to specific AUC locations and activities. As Arturo specified:

We have been able to see different *modus operandi*. There are small, shallow graves, with dismembered bodies. But we have also seen individual graves, with whole bodies. I led the exhumation in San Onofre. It was three months of continuous field work plus many subsequent visits to the same farm. There were many bodies, of people who had been kidnapped and taken to report to the paramilitary chiefs and killed there and then. They buried them all on the farm. All of them. (Conversation #2 with Arturo, September 2018)

The graves that reveal other ways of disposing of the bodies and the different types of people killed in different ways correspond to particular geographies:

In the farms in Bolívar, Cesar, Sucre, which served as paramilitary bases, we see bodies that are left whole. It was the main transit zone for the drugs that were shipped out by sea. So, they detained people who were in their way, or who were declared enemies for some reason, they took them there and killed them. But they didn't have to bury them quickly. That is why they are different from those in other areas like Meta or Caquetá. (Conversation #2 with Arturo, September 2018)

The public knows little about the type of graves Arturo mentions, because the image that has circulated the most is that of dismembered bodies. The preponderance of a single type of grave detracts both nuance and depth from the ways in which the AUC handled and produced the enemy's body and simplifies the ways in which this armed group killed and buried. Also, the focus on a single type of grave and handling of the body does not account for the fact that graves —of all types— constituted a mechanism of disappearance.

In this context, forensic knowledge can bring us closer to understanding the enemy's body as a particular territory of war. In Margarita's words: "[the graves show evidence] of contempt for the enemy. It is about attacking them, animalizing them, keeping them, hiding them, making them invisible so that they lose their identity" (conversation #1 con Margarita, September 2018). It also provides us with information and nuances about what happened to the disappeared, as it recovers them and makes them visible again. It sheds light on what happened to them and their bodies.

By this means, the testimony is mediated by the knowledge of forensic anthropologists who reiterate, make evident, and co-produce violence by pointing out the marks left on the bodies, the ways in which they were killed and then buried. Also, by determining that these facts account for cases of enforced disappearances in at least two instances: when people abducted by paramilitary members and then when their bodies were buried and hidden. It is then a production of the conflict mediated by what forensic anthropologists know about the conflict and the marks it leaves on the bodies. That is to say, like any other type of knowledge, forensic anthropologists' knowledge is not neutral, it is produced to give meaning to what the record (in this case archaeological) presents and it is precisely because of this that it produces the reality that it documents. This exercise of giving meaning implies playing with possibilities, speculating, and that speculation, as Kruse (2010) points out, is fundamental and necessary to identifying a body. As we read in the quotations above, it provides context and content to the scene in which it is found. In this respect, Jaime points out:

Much has been said about the chainsaw, the truth is that there is no evidence that they used saws to dismember corpses. I have spoken with other colleagues and they have not found evidence of this either. The characteristics of the pits are the nakedness of the body, sometimes, and yes, dismemberment, but the pits are shallow, they are quick burials, to get rid of the body quickly. The chainsaw theory is not convincing. Who would carry the gasoline? Besides, they make a lot of noise and there would be a lot of splashing. On the other hand, we know that those who buried the bodies were not the same people who killed them. So there is no explanation for the cruelty imposed on those bodies...but, on the other hand, we also know that in many of the places where we found graves, like Cesar and los Llanos, there are cattle ranching traditions, and they know how to slaughter cattle and they do it using only one tool. And it makes sense to bury a dismembered body, it is easier because the hole can be smaller. That is what most of the graves are like and that is understandable considering that the AUC was a franchise

and handling the body, the burial, is part of the franchise, of that system. (Jaime speaking in a conversation among the authors, October 2017)

At this point, it is important to clarify that this interpretation of the dismemberment found in the graves is not intended to minimize the atrocities committed by the AUC (Uribe 2004). What we seek to point out is that, from a forensic perspective, an armed conflict is produced in which the atrocity of the graves is not solely limited to the handling of the bodies, as in the case in Daniel and Margarita's quotes, which clearly show the abuses committed against the bodies of the enemy. The viciousness encompasses the fact that systematic disappearance, as a strategy of war to terrorize and control, led to the need to develop another system, one of death and burial that allowed for quick and easy concealment, making it difficult to locate and identify the bodies. It is a system that has spread throughout the national territory and shows the instrumentalization and devaluation of the lives of people who were considered enemies, but it also speaks of pragmatism and the need to hide an increasing number of deaths to keep them away from the public eye and the judicial authorities.

### **Staging to Control: The False Positives of the Democratic Security Policy**

14 ■ Since his first term in office in 2002, former President Álvaro Uribe presented the strengthening of the Armed Forces to fight against guerrillas and insurgency as one of the pillars of his government. In presenting the Democratic Security Policy, Uribe assured that he sought to guarantee that citizens would be protected. He pointed out that “there can only be one response to terrorism: defeat it [...] Colombians will not give in to this threat. We will defeat it together.” And, he concluded by stating that “[t]he legitimacy of our institutions depends on our determination to fight equally against any organization, group, or individual that threatens the security of citizens, institutions, and democracy” (Ministerio de Defensa 2003, 5-6).

This policy is part of a generalized tendency to recover the monopoly of force, and defeat what has been called the terrorist threat. In Colombia and other countries, this struggle has generated a paranoia among States that seek, detect, and declare their own citizens as enemies, thereby increasing control over the entire population (Londoño 2011). Thus, in the quest to reinstate democratic security and defeat terrorism, citizen freedoms and “fundamental rights that had been imposed on the constituted power and that [...] are seen as secondary under the securitarian paradigm,” are curtailed and limited (Londoño 2011, 122).

In the discourse and implementation of the Democratic Security Policy, there is evidence of an imaginary omnipresent, terrorist enemy, who hides easily and represents a constant threat to the existence and survival of both the State and Colombians in general. In a symbolic management of the country's sovereignty, democracy and the values associated with it, all actions aimed at controlling, subduing, and killing this enemy were accepted and even welcomed. Hence, guarantees that existed

for those who broke the law were transgressed and, in the name of the defense of security and democracy, the enemy lost even the mere possibility of being considered a citizen (Londoño 2011; Salamanca 2014).

Given this omnipresent enemy and the need to show that the goals of the Democratic Security Policy were being met, the State itself, through its Armed Forces, turned against its own citizens, especially those whose rights have been violated in multiple instances (Londoño 2011; Salamanca 2014), as in the case of false positives. In 2008, the media reported cases of unofficial executions carried out in Colombia by members of the army, who “in their eagerness to report guerrilla casualties—and thus receive incentives such as vacation days or points for internal promotion— [...] kidnapped young people from neighborhoods in the urban periphery, and then murdered them and reported them as guerrilla casualties” (Pachón 2009, 335). However, it was not only economic benefits and recognition that led members of the military to act in this way:

The army was under a lot of pressure to show numbers and demonstrate success. They were under so much pressure that they saw the false positives as a way out [...] they kidnapped people who were easy to kidnap: addicts, unemployed people, youths, people with disabilities. All poor people. They promised them work, took them away, and then killed them and presented them as guerrillas. (Conversation #2 with Arturo, September 2018)

A manifestation of the war on the body of that omnipresent and insurgent enemy is the fact that, as Arturo points out, the populations that suffered were those already marginalized and in a state of vulnerability. Margarita reiterates:

A case I often recall is that of Argemiro.<sup>11</sup> A 15 year old boy with a mental problem. He spent his time in Rio Negro, Santander, close to the soldiers. He used to go into the base and clean their shoes and run errands for them. One day his mother didn't see him anymore and then we found him dead and buried close by [...] the military passed him off as a guerrilla and reported him as a casualty.

She adds:

The people who died as false positives are people who are not part of the conflict, they are people who were deceived, many of them had disabilities. It was a violation of human rights. (Conversation #1 con Margarita, September 2018)

False positives served precisely that purpose, namely, to demonstrate that the war against terrorism was being won and that the resources, actions, and limitations on the rights of the supposed enemies that such a policy entailed were justifiable. They were, as described in the previous section, bodies on which war and violence manifested:

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11 Pseudonym.

The false positives were a war strategy, a mechanism in which the victim disappeared and then reappeared with a different label, that of a guerrilla. They were trophies that were shown on television for the public to see, covered with sheets, without even a coffin. To show that [the war against terrorism] was being won. (Conversation # 1 with Daniel, September 2018)

Although these executions have been taking place since 2002:

They only became public knowledge in 2007, when the mothers of the Soacha youths denounced that their sons, who had been reported missing, appeared dead in other cities, dressed and declared as guerrillas. They were the ones who insisted that an investigation be opened, establishing that these homicides had indeed been committed. There are more or less 4,000 cases of false positives so far, and more than 1,500 military personnel implicated who have already been accepted by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP),<sup>12</sup> while others have already been prosecuted. Before the Soacha case, however, there were already rumors and suspicions. I remember one time, there were twenty deaths in a place in Nariño that had never had a guerrilla presence, and suddenly these deaths appeared there. Even before that, we had suspicions about the results of some members of the military who reported very high numbers of casualties in areas that did not make sense, such as Nariño, or Orito. Among colleagues, we wondered why there had been so many deaths in Orito if it was supposedly already under control? And it was from there that we began to investigate. (Jaime speaking in a conversation among the authors, October 2017)

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■ Today, almost ten years after these events came to light, we know that a common characteristic of the false positive bodies is carelessness in the staging of the events (Londoño 2011; Salamanca 2014; Semana 2010, 2008):

Their uniforms did not fit, or they had damaged weapons, or even boots on backwards. Or they had mental disabilities that made it impossible for them to be guerrillas. But, above all, one could see that they were set-ups because they were bodies that had nothing of their own. When you find the bodies of guerrillas or paramilitaries, you can see that their clothes are marked —embroidered with their name—, and that they carry their spoon and fork in their uniform. They even have photos or the medications they take. In false positive bodies there's nothing like that, Their clothes are sometimes new, and there's no sign of the person having had a life before that moment. And that's very unusual, that doesn't happen. (Conversation #2 with Daniel, September 2018)

From the forensic evidence, these and other inconsistencies added to the untenability of presenting the bodies of innocent people killed by members of the army and passed off as guerrillas killed in theatricalizations of a war that was supposedly

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12 It is the Justice component of the Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non Repetition, created as a result of the peace agreement between the National Government and the FARC-EP.

being won. But the inconsistencies in the body were not only of this kind, nor were they limited to the very poor staging with wrong clothes or useless weapons. The testimony of the military personnel involved in the alleged combat, the information recorded in the official reports and the state of the bodies found and identified did not coincide either:

We knew they were such cases when we found inconsistencies between the reported wounds and the wounds found by forensics. For example, the report said “wounded in combat” and we found bodies that were still whole and with only one shot... Do you know what a body looks like when it is shot from a distance and with a rifle? The bullet doesn't open a hole, it blows off a leg, a head, an arm. Whatever it hits, it turns to dust. The wounds on these bodies were not from combat, they were from executions; they were wounds from a small gun, a revolver [...] most of them in the head [...] in combat, you shoot anywhere and shooting at the head is not easy and if you do hit it, it doesn't stay whole. (Jaime speaking in a conversation among the authors, November 2017)

In this context, the expertise of forensic analysts made it possible to trace the disappearances of the Soacha youths and other cases of innocent young people captured, disappeared, murdered, and presented as false guerrillas, and to capture those responsible.

Likewise, and following Butler (1993), we can say that the interaction between forensic practice and false positives materializes the bodies of young people violated by the State who, precisely because of their own vulnerability, are susceptible to being performed as false guerrillas in an exercise of abuse of military power and in response to a clear state policy that, once again, violates these young people. In this sense, forensic knowledge constructs the body of the enemy (in this case, supposed insurgents) as a territory of war, in which the enemy does not exist and the State does not protect its citizens. Forensic knowledge also mobilizes another dimension of the geography of disappearance-death-disappearance by establishing part of the routes of people who disappeared in specific areas, marked by marginalization and vulnerability, and who appeared in places where there was alleged fighting against the guerrillas.

## Final Comments

In this text, we have described how the qualitative knowledge of forensic anthropologists is both a testimony of violence and conflict, and a co-producer of the very thing it studies. That is, it is not neutral knowledge; rather, it helps to materialize the conflict, violence, victims, and perpetrators. We addressed the symbolic and practical dimensions of the handling of the bodies of the enemy by the paramilitaries in their heyday after the unification of the AUC and followed by the military during the execution of the Democratic Security Policy, from 1997 (the year in which the AUC was formed) to 2010 (which marked the end of the government of Álvaro Uribe). The starting

point was that forensic knowledge itself produces bodies that are, in themselves, territories of violence and conflict, and that the forensic record can be articulated on the basis of the concept of a geography of disappearance-death-disappearance.

We also review how the increasing number of graves and exhumed bodies share general characteristics throughout the national territory for many of the disappearances carried out by the AUC. However, it is also possible to account for variations in different areas where the dynamics of disappearance and death were different. Addressing and presenting these similarities, mobilized and materialized by forensic anthropologists, reveals that the AUC not only controlled populations through massacres and selective assassinations, but it also —using disappearance as a mechanism of control— produced an incalculable number of bodies that they had to bury to hide (and continue the disappearance), as well as those that they simply had to get rid of.

Thus, forensic knowledge produces bodies of war: dismembered, (semi)naked, buried in shallow graves, or buried individually in land that served as clandestine cemeteries, bodies that had to be buried quickly, that were many, and that had to be hidden; bodies on which the indignities of violence are made real. This dismemberment, this superficiality of the grave is both a pragmatic mechanism of disposition of the bodies that, even when dead, continue to be in the way. That is to say, through forensic knowledge, bodies of the disappeared are materialized in specific and unequivocal ways.

The meaning given to the forensic record was also reflected in the false positives. This forensic knowledge that named them, made it possible to expose, denounce, and hold accountable (in most cases) those who disappeared, murdered, and falsely presented innocent young people as guerrillas. In this case, forensic knowledge not only produced victims in the sense that it was able to identify them as such, but also produced perpetrators among the military who, in some cases, have been tried by the ordinary justice system, which in turn provides inputs and information to support the recently established JEP. In the case of false positives, the body as a territory of war that co-produces forensic knowledge is one in which the State turns against its most marginalized citizens, using them as puppets in a crude staging of a supposed victory against terrorism.

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