THE MARVELOUS REAL: THE CONSTRUCTION OF CULTURAL MEMORY
IN COLOMBIAN LITERARY WORKS

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On struggles to reclaim memory, Noam Chomsky writes “[f]ew topics can be so painful to contemplate as the models of avoidance we construct to protect ourselves from what we don’t want to know.” On the process of reclaiming memory after the Holocaust, Irene Kacandes introduces the idea of the restorative potential of literary texts she classifies as traumatic. Jonathon Crewe builds on this analysis, explaining that cultural memory can be created in literary works because these texts provide a space for “communal fictionalizing” and thrive in a conflicted culture. It follows that cultural memory is potentially restorative in a conflicted nation. Colombia is such a nation in which cultural, restorative memory is staged to impact discourses on peace. I believe that Colombian literary works constitute a way to understand techniques used to create cultural memory and are influential in the cultural production of discourses on peace and peace processes in Colombia.

Colombia is a nation of extremes, a land in which the surreal is often the best and most accurate way to discuss the real, a land in which violence is so much a part of cultural reality that it is rarely publicly discussed and examined. Historian Geoff Simmons calls Colombia’s history brutal, citing examples from its colonial period, to its more recent violent episodes including the internationally infamous bogotazo. The bogotazo, in the most simplified sense, was a result of contentious party politics. Contention was built and bred during the colonial epoch and has continued to be an important political reality. In the face of contentious politics, a painful colonial legacy, narco-warfare and political upheaval, it is important to recognize the potentially important concept of cultural memory. Cultural memory, in Colombia, faces the constant and consistent roadblock of collective amnesia. Many literary works actively remember culturally traumatic events and thus, combat cultural amnesia. I examine many of these works in order to understand the ways in which they create memory, create collectivity and thematically counter balance Colombia’s violent reality.


2 Ibid