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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

## A Discursive Analysis of the Photo Essay *Madres Terra*

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| ABSTRACT

The present work analyzes the representations of the mourning of mothers of Soacha, Colombia, in the series of 15 photographs entitled *Madres Terra*, by the photographer Carlos Saavedra and the anthropologist Sebastián Ramírez, exhibited at the “Centro de Memoria, Paz y Reconciliación”, Bogotá, in 2018. Also called “false positives”, aged between 16 and 33 years old, hundreds of innocent young people were executed by the Colombian army on the grounds that they were in the service of illegal armed groups such as the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia). The analysis pointed to the fact that, in addition to being a space for denouncing state crimes and fighting for justice, the photo essay works as a symbolic place for the elaboration of the mothers' mourning, as well as a way of resistance/persistence of memory, that is, a way of remembering in order not to forget. The theoretical basis is constituted by the Discourse Analysis of a materialist line, which works in the middle between Language, Unconscious and History. Methodologically, the notion of memory, discourse and text (Orlandi, 1999; 2001) are mobilized.

| KEYWORDS

Photo essay; state violence; mourning; discursive memory; Colombia

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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### 1. Introduction

“Este tribunal de mulheres deseja que este país possa chegar um dia, ao dia do NUNCA JAMAIS. (...) Nunca jamais mortes, nunca jamais falsos positivos, nunca jamais massacres, nunca jamais filhos insepultos, nunca jamais violações.”<sup>1</sup>

Carlos Satizábal, *Antígona Tribunal de Mujeres*<sup>2</sup>

This research aims to analyse the discursive representations of the mourning of mothers of Soacha, a city located in Colombia, in the series of 15 photographs entitled *Madres Terra* by photographer Carlos Saavedra in partnership with anthropologist Sebastián Ramírez.

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<sup>1</sup> “This court of women hopes that this country can reach one day, the day of NEVER NEVER. (...) Never ever deaths, never ever false positives, never ever massacres, never ever unburied children, never ever rapes.” (our translation).

<sup>2</sup> Satizábal is a Colombian playwright and poet, author of the play entitled “Antígona Tribunal de Mujeres” (“Women’s Court and Antigona”, based on “Antígona”, by Sophocles).

The photos that make up the series were released on May 31, 2018, at the Mafapo Exhibition, at the Center for Memory, Peace and Reconciliation in the city of Bogotá<sup>3</sup>.

Discursively, the photographic series has worked as a space for the constitution of memory, from which mothers of extrajudicially executed victims have been protagonists of a work that reflects the pain of absence and, at the same time, their search for justice and the memory of their sons killed unjustly by the Repressive Apparatus of the Colombian State.

From the materialist perspective of language, the photographic essay interests me as a discursive object that works based on certain social, historical and ideological conditions, which I briefly comment on below.

The mothers of the victims murdered by the Colombian State were coined as “Madres de Soacha<sup>4</sup>” by Colombian society. They are also known as “Mothers of October” due to the fact that in this month, the group began to form and begin its work in search of denouncement and justice throughout the world, resulting in recognized international awards.

Victims of Colombian state violence, young people between the ages of 16 and 33, are called “false positives”. In the order of legal discourse, false positives are civilians illegally murdered by the State as casualties of the conflict. In other words, a false positive occurs when a civilian is murdered by the repressive state apparatus (in this case, by the Colombian military) and is presented as a “legitimate” death in combat. Also known as extrajudicial executions, this is a crime that represents a violation of human rights law: “The killings, which were falsely presented by the military as “guerrillas killed in combat” (and sometimes as “paramilitaries killed in combat”) were carried out in collusion with paramilitary groups or criminal gangs.” (Amnesty, 2010, p. 3)

It is important to say that, although false positives have been happening in Colombia for over 40 years, the Colombian Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) reported that 78% of cases occurred between 2002 and 2008, that is, during the administration of former President Álvaro Uribe Velez. In other words, the policies practiced by the Uribe government encouraged the murder of Colombian civilians to present them as victims of the conflict with the FARC. As an example, the former Minister of Defense, Camilo Bernal, signed Ministerial Directive 029 in 2005, which was based on the formalization of guidelines for the payment of rewards for each homicide presented as a casualty in combat by members of the military forces of state security. In summary, the death of guerrillas was required as proof of the effectiveness of the Colombian Army, a practice that was encouraged with monetary rewards.

This “policy” resulted in the murder of civilians – mostly peasants – by members of the public forces, who dressed them as guerrillas, pretending to be a “combat scene”. In this fake scenario, civilians were presented as legitimate combat casualties. However, as in every ritual, this one also had holes, gaps, and flaws (Pêcheux, 1997). I explain.

Based on the cliché that the guerrillas wore rubber boots (black boots), after killing civilians, the military dressed the corpses in boots when staging the fake combat scene. The hole in this ritual focused on the fact that, in some cases, state agents put the boots on the victims with the feet changed, which provided evidence to the families that murders had taken place.

There are other cases, such as the son of Luz Marina Bernal, who, in 2008, was murdered by the military on charges that he was a drug trafficking leader of an illegal armed group. Fair Leonardo Bernal was 26 years old and had special needs. His mental age was 9 years old (Agência Brasil, 2013).

In the process of denouncing the crimes and claiming the good name of their dead sons, the mothers of the false positives have suffered harassment and censorship by a state that refuses to accept its responsibility. Who gave the order? This is a question that society has been questioning, but without an answer. Or rather, a question from which an acute silence resounds that, discursively, means producing meanings.

As Pêcheux (1997) states, *there is only cause for what fails* or, in other words, where there is domination, there is resistance, there are several popular manifestations that, when seeking justice for the executed victims, confront the power of the State, more precisely the hegemonic version of the facts that occurred in Colombia and propagated by the corporate press.

The following figure shows an exhibition at the *Memorial de Voces*, which, through a metonymic imagery gesture, recalls the victims murdered by the military. That is, the boots acquire a historical dimension and denounce what they want to hide<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> It is known that the *Centro de Memoria, Paz e Reconciliación* located in Bogotá, arose from the need to create a place to dignify the memory of the victims, contribute to historical memory and build a culture of peace.

<sup>4</sup> The Madres of Soacha.

<sup>5</sup> In the relation part for the whole, the boots metonymically bring out the bodies of civilian victims of the scene set up by the army that subjected them to the place of criminality.

**Figure 1: Botas y Voces**



Source: *Memorial de Voces*

The next figure, family members remember the dead, in a protest in Bolivar square in Bogotá, Colombia:

**Figure 2: A protest in Plaza Bolívar**



Source: DW (2017)<sup>6</sup>

The next figure shows protestors lying down in Bolivar Square not only to remember their family members dead but also to protest against the executions committed by the members of the security forces:

**Figure 3: Tribute to victims of false positives**



Source: Alvarez (2021)<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.dw.com/pt-br/os-falsos-positivos-e-a-busca-por-justica-na-colombia/a-40106135>

<sup>7</sup> <https://listindiario.com/las-mundiales/2021/08/30/686109/rinden-homenaje-a-victimas-de-falsos-positivos-en-colombia>

As we will see, the State's attempt to erase the real execution events produces the possibility of the existence of other ways of formulation from which it is possible to construct an interpretation that displaces the hegemonic interpretation produced by the Colombian State. That is, meanings erupt in other discursive spaces, allowing other ways of enunciation so that the memory of the dead and the beavered may be remembered and honored.

## 2. The mourning

Oh, pedaço de mim  
Oh, metade arrancada de mim  
Leva o vulto teu  
Que a saudade é o revés de um parto  
A saudade é arrumar o quarto  
Do filho que já morreu<sup>8</sup>

Chico Buarque, "Pedaço de mim".

In his seminal work entitled *Mourning and Melancholia*, Freud (2006) states that every loss – which is not restricted to the death of someone – demands mourning. For him (2006, p. 103), mourning consists of the reaction to the loss of a loved one,

[...] ou à perda de abstrações colocadas em seu lugar, tais como a pátria, liberdade, um ideal etc. Entretanto, em algumas pessoas —que por isso suspeitamos portadoras de uma disposição patológica —sob as mesmas circunstâncias de perda, surge a melancolia, em vez do luto. Curiosamente, no caso do luto, embora ele implique graves desvios do comportamento normal, nunca nos ocorreria considerá-lo um estado patológico [...], pois confiamos em que, após determinado período, o luto será superado, e considera-se inútil e mesmo prejudicial perturbá-lo<sup>9</sup>.

In our previous work on mourning in the context of the pandemic of COVID 19 (Mota; Ginach, 2021), we could observe that Freud differentiates between "normal" and melancholic mourning, which involves a slow and painful process and must be elaborated so that the subject finds a substitute object that he lost. Mourning is of paramount importance in reframing the emptiness that the loss creates in the subject.

In the theme of mourning, there is a fundamental point that cannot be ignored: the fact that it does not only involve the loss of the loved object but, fundamentally, that of the subject who is gone with the loss of the object, his invested libidinal representation.

Excerpted from the song "Pedaço de mim", the epigraph above indicates the psychic state of the mourner well: the loss of a loved one is also the loss of the place that the survivor occupied in the dead person's life (a piece went along with the lost object). Here is the difference with the melancholic, who is unaware of both the nature of the lost object and the origin of the loss (Freud, 2006).

Both individually and collectively, all mourning demands the presence of the other, a condition for the ritualization of the loss. According to Penna (2015, p. 17), "[a] loss always needs to be witnessed, recognized by the other to become real" so that the process of its elaboration and historicization begins.

For the psychoanalyst Maria Rita Kehl (2020), in addition to the presence of the other in the mourning process, funeral ceremonies and manifestations are necessary for there to be a belief that a person really no longer exists in the body about to be buried. In the specific case of the deaths of the sons of the mothers of Soacha, there are some complications, as reported by Brazil Agency (2013). The first concerns the fact that they were murderers under the allegation, as we have already said, that the civilians were killed in combat, pretending to be guerrilla criminals based on a fake scene. Second, the bodies of some of the victims were found long after their murders, as is the case of Jaime Stiven Valencia, 16 years old, who died in 2008. Finally, there are cases of mothers who have not yet been able to bury their sons, such as Doris Castañeda; this mother still hasn't gotten her son's body, which is in the hands of the Army. In the latter case, there is an impediment for mothers to say goodbye and bury their dead children, resulting in private mourning devoid of collective rituals that allow the inscription (psychic elaboration) of the experience of loss.

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<sup>8</sup> "Oh part of me / Oh half of me torn away / Take away your shadow / Lonely longing is the opposite of a birth, Lonely longing is like tidying up the bedroom/ of a child who has just passed away."

<sup>9</sup> "[...] or by the loss of abstractions put in their place, such as homeland, freedom, an ideal, etc. Interestingly, in the case of mourning, although it implies serious deviations from normal behavior, it would never occur to us to consider it a pathological state [...], because we trust that, after a certain period, the mourning will be overcome, and we consider it useless and even harmful to disturb it."

According to Rivière (1997), collective funeral rituals play a fundamental role in the process of mourning. For him,

[...] os ritos devem ser sempre considerados como conjunto de condutas individuais ou coletivas, relativamente codificadas, com um suporte corporal (verbal, gestual, ou de postura), com caráter mais ou menos repetitivo e forte carga simbólica para seus atores e, habitualmente, para suas testemunhas, baseadas em uma adesão mental, eventualmente não conscientizada, a valores relativos a escolhas sociais julgadas importantes e cuja eficácia esperada não depende de uma lógica puramente empírica que se esgotaria na instrumentalidade técnica do elo causa-efeito. (Rivière, 1997, p. 30)<sup>10</sup>.

It is worth mentioning that the ritual extends beyond the act itself and acquires important symbolic characteristics fundamental to the elaboration of collective mourning. In summary, it is a mode of socio-historical recognition that enables the necessary work of collective mourning in a country. However, if the mourning becomes obstinate, there is the possibility of the individual being paralyzed throughout life, as Nasio (1997) explains:

Compreende-se que se esse trabalho de desinvestimento que deve seguir-se à morte do outro não se cumprir, e se o eu ficar assim simbolizado em uma representação coagulada, o luto se eterniza em um estado crônico, que paralisa a vida da pessoa enlutada durante vários anos, ou até durante toda a sua existência. (Nasio, 1997, p. 29)<sup>11</sup>

In turn, the absence or denial of mourning can generate a collective trauma in the subjectivity of a whole generation. Attempts to forget collective traumatic events result in social symptoms. In the words of Kehl (2009, p. 29), “[...] when a society fails to elaborate the effects of a trauma and chooses to try to erase the memory of the traumatic event, this simulacrum of collective repression tends to produce sinister repetitions.”

For Pêcheux (1990), where there is censorship, there is resistance. Although there have been attempts to curb the reporting and, consequently, the mourning of mothers, family members and friends, there have been several gestures of resistance to the silencing policy promoted by the Colombian State. One of them is found in the aesthetic, artistic discourse. In this regard, there is the artistic production “Antígonas tribunal de Mulheres”, produced by “a group of Colombian women victims of violence resulting from the Colombian armed conflict as a political space of historical memory” (SANTOS, 2015). The play was inspired by the mythological image of Antigone, immortalized by Sophocles, updated and appropriated by the Colombian political theater<sup>12</sup>.

According to Santos (2015), that play presents issues such as “social dimensions of the experience of pain, loss and death; the political structures and social determinations of a long dynamism in which State terror policies are reconfigured; the genderification of violence in its political form especially by women.”

According to Souto (2021),

[...] se a Antígona original não quer deixar o seu irmão insepulto pois, desse modo, esse nunca poderia alcançar Hades, e ficaria impossibilitado de aceder ao descanso eterno, exposto aos animais e às intempéries, indigno da sua condição, as Antígonas colombianas, impossibilitadas de se despedirem devidamente dos seus familiares, cuja localização desconhecem, e de irem visitar as suas campas, atirados como foram muitas vítimas dos conflitos para valas comuns, partilham com a Antígona seminal a vontade de quererem levar a termo os destinos dos seus amados. Estas Antígonas colombianas não querem deixar os seus familiares “insepultos” de justiça e trazem, por isso, para o

<sup>10</sup> “[...] the rites must always be considered as a set of individual or collective behaviors, relatively codified, with a corporal support (verbal, gestural, or posture), with a more or less repetitive character and a strong symbolic load for their actors and , usually, for their witnesses, based on a mental adhesion, eventually not made aware, to values related to social choices deemed important and whose expected effectiveness does not depend on a purely empirical logic that would be exhausted in the technical instrumentality of the cause-effect link.”

<sup>11</sup> “It is understood that if this work of disinvestment that must follow the death of the other is not fulfilled, and if the I is thus symbolized in a coagulated representation, the mourning is eternalized in a chronic state, which paralyzes the life of the bereaved person. for several years, or even for its entire existence.” (The translation is ours).

<sup>12</sup> An excerpt from the aforementioned piece is in the epigraph that opens the first section of this paper.



palco, transformado em tribunal simbólico, as suas histórias, que tornam possível, não só recordar, mas também dignificar os que perderam.<sup>13</sup>

Below it is possible to appreciate a photo of Lucero Carmona, one of the Mothers of Soacha, a member of an association made up of women who are family members of civilian men murdered by the Colombian National Army after being unjustly accused of belonging to guerrilla groups (SOLTO, 2021). In the play, she represents herself and the image of her executed son is projected.



Source: Palimpsesto, 2021<sup>14</sup>

For this work, I will focus on photography as art and a place of politics, of expression and elaboration of mourning, of testimony and of denunciation.

### **3. Photography, art and discourse**

For Pêcheux (1969), the discourse is an effect of meanings among speakers, a place where it is possible to observe the relation between language(gem) and ideology. This relation constitutes regions of meaning or, as the author calls it, Discursive Formations (DFs), which correspond to the different Ideological Formations of a historical formation. Each DF represents in discourse a domain of knowledge that, according to Courtine (1982, p. 249-250), “[...] works as a principle of discursive acceptability for a set of formulations (determines 'what can and should be said') and also as a principle of exclusion of the unspeakable”. Thus, when enunciating, the subject imaginarily projects himself into the subject-form of the DF that dominates him, assuming its meanings as a system of evidence and perceived, accepted and experienced meanings (Pêcheux, 1988). What is at issue is the subject-position, not “[...] a form of subjectivity, but a 'place' that one occupies in order to be the subject of what one says” (Orlandi, 1999, p. 49).

Although the photographs do not have a linguistic materiality in their constitution, they evoke effects of meaning in the order of discourse of the enunciable (Courtine, 1999, p. 16). It also allows the discourse analyst to understand, based on specific production conditions, the subject-position implied in the gesture of photographing.

From the perspective of discourse, photographs are conceived as a historically constructed discursive object. Taking it as a constitutive part of history means considering it as a symbolic object in motion, that is, as part of a history in which subject and meanings are constructed at the same time.

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<sup>13</sup> “If the original Antigone does not want to leave her brother unburied because, in that way, he could never reach Hades, and he would be unable to access eternal rest, exposed to animals and the weather, unworthy of his condition, the Colombian Antigones, unable to say goodbye properly to their relatives, whose location they do not know, and to go and visit their graves, thrown as many victims of the conflicts were to mass graves, they share with the seminal Antigone the desire to want to bring the destinies of their loved ones to an end. These Colombian Antigones do not want to leave their relatives “unburied” from justice and, therefore, bring to the stage, transformed into a symbolic court, their stories, which make it possible not only to remember, but also to dignify those who lost.” (The translation is ours).

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.palimpsesto.online/ensaios/antigona-o-palco-como-tribunal-historico>

Photography is a good example that what exists is the injunction of the subjects to be in the senses, as Orlandi (2001, p. 72) states: "whether these are made of words or silence. It is not possible not to mean, to interpret."

Photography is always a position taken by a historically determined and ideologically constituted subject. That is, the photographer, far from being neutral and/or impartial, registers his object from a determined socio-historical and ideological place, corresponding to a position taken in history and in the history of the meanings. In this sense, the photographer, when recording a certain event, throws himself and is thrown into the (political) dispute for the senses.

It is in this sense that we are considering photography as text. We remember that, discursively, the text is a unit of meaning; that is, it means within specific production conditions. By working with the notion of text, Discourse Analysis subverts the hegemonic notion of text as a set of organized words. For that theory of discourse, there is no predominance of the verbal plan over the non-verbal one. Both of them mean producing meanings.

Among the types of photography, there is one that works as an art of testimony, and that interests us more closely in this work. We agree with Vieira (2009) when he states that photography as a visual witness attests to the unfathomable experience of pain and suffering.

In her book "Facing the Pain of Others", Sontag (2003) states that photography is a specific way of representing catastrophe. The author poses the problem of otherness in which "we" (observers) are those who observe from a safe position the "others" devastated by catastrophes, tragedies and persecutions.

According to Vieira (2009), both the photographer and the artist act as mediators of this relationship. When speaking of photographs that portray catastrophes, Sontag (2003) writes: "Our eyes cannot deviate from a scene of annihilation and remain fixed until the final outcome" (Vieira, 2009, p. 50). For this theorist of photography, it is not permissible to turn our heads and pretend that nothing has happened, which allows an engagement with the pain of the other that is undone by the perception of our impotence in the face of facts.

In the words of Vieira (2009, p. 4),

A fotografia é o tipo de narrativa testemunhal privilegiado nos discursos sobre as vítimas. O caráter testemunhal da fotografia da catástrofe reside tanto em sua gênese automática e em sua forma indicial, quanto na possibilidade de comunicar, presentificar e atualizar uma experiência traumática. O fotografar revela-se como uma tentativa de tornar o sofrimento das vítimas comunicável através da imagem.<sup>15</sup>

#### 4. *Madres Terra*

[Eu venho falar por vossa boca morta.

Através da terra junte todos

os silenciosos lábios derramados

e do fundo fale-me toda esta longa noite

como se eu estivesse com vós ancorado

conte-me tudo, cadeia a cadeia,

elo por elo, e passo a passo,

afie as lâminas que guardaste,

coloque-as em meu peito e em minha mão,

como um rio de raios amarelos,

<sup>15</sup> "Photography is the type of testimonial narrative privileged in the speeches about the victims. The testimonial character of catastrophe photography resides both in its automatic genesis and in its indexical form, as well as in the possibility of communicating, making present and updating a traumatic experience. Photographing reveals itself as an attempt to make the suffering of the victims communicable through the image." (Our translation).

como um rio de tigres enterrados,  
e deixa-me chorar, horas, dias, anos,  
idades cegas, séculos siderais.  
Dê-me o silêncio, a água, a esperança.  
Dê-me a luta, o ferro, os vulcões.  
Traga a mim os corpos como ímãs.  
Acuda minhas veias e minha boca.

Fale por minhas palavras e por meu sangue.]<sup>16</sup>

Pablo Neruda, *Alturas de Macchu Picchu* (1950)

The photographic essay under analysis is part of the *Madres Terra* project by Carlos Saavedra in partnership with the anthropologist Sebastián Ramírez, and it is based on the interaction between the land and a group of mothers (the mothers of Soacha, as we have already explained), whose children were murdered by the Colombian National Army, with a higher incidence during the government of former President Uribe.

As reported by Barthes (1997), photography is taken to the condition of art, and, like all art, photography disturbs it. In the specific case of our work, the essay *Madres Terra* disturbs and provokes a real stir in the meaning networks of memory.

The memory, understood as a space for development, allows us to see the photographs as a re-elaboration (re-signification) of the narrative of the Colombian State in the case of false positives. The photographic essay enables the elaboration of mourning, as well as the production of an interpretation that contradicts the hegemonic interpretation produced by the Colombian government. In other words, the performative gesture makes it possible for the subject to inscribe himself in another DF, putting in check or producing a shock in the dominant DF, which means the sons of the mothers of Soacha as criminal guerrillas fighters or paramilitaries.

The mothers their gestures, are in a symbolic position that protects and, at the same time, claims the good name of their murdered sons, safeguarding them. In the figure below, there are four photos in which mothers appear with their arms in a receptive position, sometimes close to their lap, sometimes on their chest. Mothers hug their sons in the soil, in the grave, in the earth.



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<sup>16</sup> "I come to speak for your dead mouth./ Across the earth come together all / The silent worn-out lips / And from the depth speak to me all this long night / Like I was pinned down there with you. / Tell me all, chain by chain, / Link by link and step by step, Sharpen the knives which you hid, Put them in my breast and in my hand, Like a river of yellow lightning Like a river of buried jaguars / And let me weep, hours, days, years, / For blind ages, cycles of stars. / Give me silence, water, hope. / Give me struggle, iron, volcanoes. / Stick bodies to me like magnets. / Draw near to my veins and my mouth. / Speak through my words and my blood." From *The Heights of Maccho Picchu*. In: <https://allpoetry.com/From-The-Heights-Of-Maccho-Picchu>





Consisting of performative gestures, the essay brings an important set of meanings established between who is alive and who is dead, between life and death, black and white, light and dark, and presence and absence, in which the two sides interpenetrate each other, producing meanings. In the aesthetic formulation (arrangement), an ambiguity, that is, a contradictory relation, resounds between mother and sons, life and death; one merge with the other, becoming entangled. Contradictory because the gesture of placing mothers on earth denounces not only the death of the sons but also the (partial) death of these women. It is worth remembering that, for the Freudian theory, a piece of himself (of the mourner) went away with the dead (Freud, 2006). Mothers do not only embrace their sons in the ground (in the earth), but they are also in the ground; that is, they are buried in the ground. At the same time, there is the presence of the mother's lap receiving the (absent) son; she is also back in that place: in the womb of mother earth. In other words, they leave the position of living beings, placing themselves as buried bodies to rescue the memory of their sons that the State silenced (buried) arbitrarily.

In addition, the performance scene works with another double meaning: mother and earth, as is also indicated in the linguistic expression *Madres Terra* which gives the title of the photographic essay. Let's not forget: these mothers are a group of Colombian women recognized for keeping alive the memory of their sons and, in some cases, brothers too, who were victims of forced disappearance between 2002 and 2008.

*Madres Terra*, because life begins with the mother's womb, metaphorically, it is represented by the soil. The metaphorical game between mothers and soil is not only present in the title of the essay but also permeates the entire imagistic field in which mothers and soil mix, merging<sup>17</sup>. In the symbolic and ambiguous gesture of placing the mothers in a grave and partially burying them, there is the establishment of a body that, far from being dead, is alive, defying the State violence to which their children were subjected. Therefore, it is not a merely biological body but a socio-historical one. In this sense, we agree with Azevedo (2014) when he states that:

[...] pela filiação teórica ao materialismo histórico, a forma material é sempre histórica. Em outras palavras, tomar o corpo como forma material implica afastar qualquer concepção que o trate como realidade empiricamente compreensível e biologicamente funcional, comuns em áreas como a da saúde, por exemplo, em que o corpo é natural, segmentável, controlável e transparente. (AZEVEDO, 2014, p. 323)<sup>18</sup>

Bodies buried alive do not speak: they mean by producing meanings, disorganizing the Colombian Army's discourse, its version. That is the aesthetic discourse – the performative gesture of the mothers in the grave, the way some of them look at the camera, black and white photos and the presence of the soil – points not only to the tragedy and pain with which they were afflicted, but it makes otherness resound, summoning the nature, motivation and authorship of the extrajudicial executions. In short, the photographs do not allow us to forget the barbarity committed against civilians disguised as guerrilla fighters. They testify it.

<sup>17</sup> Let's open a parenthesis here. It is interesting to notice that *Terra*, besides qualifying the word "Madres" (Mothers), means "soil" and "Planet Earth" simultaneously. Everything happens as if the mothers were not just the Mothers of Soacha, but all the mothers of the Planet Earth.

<sup>18</sup> "...by theoretical affiliation to historical materialism, the material form is always historical. In other words, taking the body as a material form implies moving away from any conception that treats it as an empirically comprehensible and biologically functional reality, common in areas such as health, for example, where the body is natural, segmentable, controllable and transparent." (Our translation).



As we stated, the photographic essay is woven by the ambiguity that the land brings in its discursive memory: it symbolizes death and life at the same time. Mothers throw themselves down to the soil (grave) to bring their sons from the limbo of history to discourse. In other words, it is through the sacrifice (the mourning), throwing themselves into the abyss of pain, that the mothers of Soacha manage to rescue their children. It is not about the living sons but the sons as historical subjects. Through photographic art, sons are rescued from silencing, from the pit of censorship, to which they were subjected by the forces of the Colombian State.

In other words, photographic art metaphorizes this ambiguity: mothers throw themselves into the grave as a way of rescuing the lives of their sons. If they do not reach the living sons, they reach their memory through discourse, through the order of enunciable (Courtine, 1999). All this goes to show the merit and grandiosity of discursive events such as the Mothers of May in Argentina; the Mothers of Acari in Rio de Janeiro; the Mothers of Soacha in Colombia, and many other mothers who are victims of state violence.

It is worth mentioning that it is about rescuing not only the silence to which they were imposed (mothers and sons) but also exposing the manipulation of the State Repressive Apparatus, which produced a fake interpretation that meant and still tries to mean civilians as criminals guerrillas.

Thus, although children are underground since they were forcibly taken from mother earth (from their mothers), photographic art, like all art, has the power to take them out. This is one of the properties of art: bringing what is submerged, silenced, and buried, to life, to the level of discourse. In the work woven through memory, the essay is capable of giving life to dead children.

As Orlandi (2001, p. 193) writes, “[f]ormulating is textualizing words, giving body to the senses”. Photographic art also does the work of formulation, but through an arrangement that takes place non-verbally. In the case of our objective of the study, we consider the photographic essay in its entirety, including its verbalized title: *Madres Terra*. By formulating the case of false positives in an artistic-image arrangement, the photographic essay under analysis gives a symbolic-historical body to the victims and helps the work of mourning, which is necessary to elaborate on the loss.

Vieira (2009) states that photographing is an attempt to make the victims' suffering intelligible and communicable through the image and, we add, in addition to being another way of recreating the lost object from a psychoanalytical point of view. The significant register (click) on the absent can favor the principle of reality that, according to Mannoni (1995), allows the subject to understand that the object really disappeared. The bereaved mothers are strengthened in the re-signification by the performative action of the photographic essay since it works as a place of resistance to the trivialization of death by the Colombian State, to the denial of mourning and to death itself, in addition to acting as a symbolic reparation for the pain of loss.

In this sense, the photo essay is able to break the silence imposed on the victims and the mourning and allows the bereaved subjects to inscribe their dead in a space that, due to the imagist formulation, becomes aesthetic. In summary, the artistic formulation transforms the traumatic experience (the loss of the child), which is symbolically elaborated and acquires psychic and political force and beauty.

Transformar a dor e a ausência em beleza, buscar a estética dos sentimentos por meio das criações artísticas. Utilizar-se das nossas subjetividades, nossas visões, nossa poética sobre a existência e abraçar a emersão de nossas memórias é dar ao tempo a função de gerar um novo significado para o luto, para a ausência. (Cruz, 2020, p. 146)<sup>19</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

This work aimed to analyze the modes of discursive representation of the mourning of mothers of Soacha, Colombia, having as discursive corpus the photographic essay *Madres Terra*. It consists of 15 photographs of mothers who lost their children executed by the Colombian military forces, disguised as “guerrilla fighters killed in combat”. It was one of the perverse effects of the Uribe government policy, as we have already stated.

In our view, in the process of mothers' struggle for accountability and recognition by the Colombian State for the deaths of their children, a space is established that inscribes them in a movement that mobilizes motherhood (the maternal body) as a symbol of struggle, of resistance and political engagement. Therefore, it is not only about the executed victims but also and mainly about the mothers of the young people who ended up being involved in this “armed combat” insofar as, when they lost their children by the military forces of the State, they identified them as those whose practices must be questioned. Questioning the nature of their children, and their names, also implies questioning the character of mothers.

The analysis of the discursive functioning of the photographic essay allowed us to see that, while the forces of the State repress the relationship between the child and the mother through violence, we saw that photographic art, in turn, brings mothers to the public scene where their bodies pass gaining new meanings. Faced with the cut generated by the murder of their children, and the interruption in the bond between mother and child, art is summoned not only to give voice to mothers and their children but also to witness and denounce the action of the State for having forcibly wrested the piece that belongs to them. Thus, the photograph, as formulated in this essay, brings up the struggle of Colombian mothers from a grammar in which the signs “mother”, “maternal”, and “body” are central to the mourning, testimony and political mobilization. Therefore, it is through motherhood that struggles and mourning take place<sup>20</sup>.

Through the photographic essay, the confrontation of mothers in mourning and in the fight for justice is permeated by a gender marker in which two symbolic and antagonistic forces act: on the one hand, there is the State (the Colombian National Army), anthropomorphized by the male figure and, on the other hand, there are the mothers represented by the female figure and by motherhood, which assumes an important political role in the essay.

The only limitation of this study is the fact we were unable to access the book *Madres Terra*, which could expand the analysis.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the aim is to expand the corpus of this research, this time considering institutionalized places like museums where the theme of Madres of Soacha takes place.

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<sup>19</sup> “Transforming pain and absence into beauty, seeking the aesthetics of feelings through artistic creations. Making use of our subjectivities, our visions, our poetics about existence and embracing the emergence of our memories is to give time the function of generating a new meaning for mourning, for absence.” (Our translation).

<sup>20</sup> Let's open a parenthesis here: pulling children by force reminds us, metaphorically, of the cesarean section from which Julius Caesar was taken by force from his mother's womb due to his mother's death. In the case of the mothers in Soacha, their children were forcibly taken from them while they were still alive.

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