



# On the Extension of the Present Time. Accounts for a Temporally Oriented Sociology with Georg Simmel: Insights Regarding a Research Experience

H. Augusto Botia Merchán and Einer Mosquera Acevedo

Volume 24, Number 2, 2020

Simmel in Latinamerica

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1075569ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1075569ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Georg Simmel Gesellschaft

ISSN

1616-2552 (print)

2512-1022 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Botia Merchán, H. & Acevedo, E. M. (2020). On the Extension of the Present Time. Accounts for a Temporally Oriented Sociology with Georg Simmel: Insights Regarding a Research Experience. *Simmel Studies*, 24(2), 119–145. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1075569ar>

Article abstract

*This working paper arises from the conviction that it is possible to propose a temporally oriented sociology with Georg Simmel. From his idea of the extension of the present, which belongs to his philosophy of history as to his sociology and philosophy of life, this paper looks forward to contributing to discussions related to historical experience, as well as collective and cultural memory, and social imagination. Framed within an ongoing research experience on future imaginaries of former guerrilla fighters in process of re-incorporation to the civilian life in the city of Medellín (Colombia), and resorting to other authors with problematizations on the present as a particular mediator between past and future, we state that an extended present in which a fundamentally traumatic past is constantly stalking and conditioned to the expectancies concerning the fiction of the new beginning characteristic of the post-conflictual imaginary is a particular feature of the Colombian temporal regime.*

H. AUGUSTO BOTIA MERCHÁN AND EINER MOSQUERA  
ACEVEDO

*On the Extension of the Present Time. Accounts for a  
Temporally Oriented Sociology with Georg Simmel: Insights  
Regarding a Research Experience*

---

*Abstract This working paper arises from the conviction that it is possible to propose a temporally oriented sociology with Georg Simmel. From his idea of the extension of the present, which belongs to his philosophy of history as to his sociology and philosophy of life, this paper looks forward to contributing to discussions related to historical experience, as well as collective and cultural memory, and social imagination. Framed within an ongoing research experience on future imaginaries of former guerrilla fighters in process of re-incorporation to the civilian life in the city of Medellín (Colombia), and resorting to other authors with problematizations on the present as a particular mediator between past and future, we state that an extended present in which a fundamentally traumatic past is constantly stalking and conditioned to the expectancies concerning the fiction of the new beginning characteristic of the post-conflictual imaginary is a particular feature of the Colombian temporal regime.*

---

Historical time is bound up with social and political actions, with concretely acting and suffering human beings and their institutions and organizations. R. Koselleck

## **1. Introduction**

There has been a more or less explicit detachment between sociology and historical science that to a large extent stimulates our articulation proposal between a theoretical perspective that attends the relation between history and memory, on one hand, and a contemporary research problem. In the resulting debate, sociology

deals with the present time and history with the past. (Elias, 1998: 249) This demarcation of the problem highlights that the socio-historical temporality seems to be attached to the reflections of the historical discipline, as well as to the philosophy of history, but our proposal states that the reflection about time is highly significant for contemporary approaches in sociology that deal with the linkage between the happened and the forthcoming.

Nonetheless, an important emphasis is that we propose higher argumentative importance to our own experience as researchers and as a consequence, a relational approach was put in place in the face of the myriad of sociological problems that come up when past, present, and future converge as dimensions of the social experience. This might be the deep task to which we aim to contribute: a social science that articulates the dimension of time without simplifying the multiple relations between the historical experience, the collective and cultural memory, and the social imaginary.

Georg Simmel's perspective, now regarded as a late classic, (Sabido - Zabudovsky, 2014: 15) allows a mediation between the causation and the duration, between the *chronos* and the *kairos* (Valencia, 2007), through a relational perspective in which the temporal expansivity of the social bonds is an important articulative axis, possibly the main one. This is one of the ways in which the central argument of this text can be stated, i.e, a possibility for thinking in a temporally oriented sociology. It is precisely in terms of social and historical temporality that we can frame our current circumstances, our historical momentum, one in which the pertinence of the simmelian legacy in terms of temporality can be revindicated.

Simmel was an acute observer of the temporal change experience and left important reflections on that movement that, using his own words both as an analyst and as a witness, we might call tendencies of modern life (Simmel, 2008). Nonetheless, we focus merely on a specific matter, which is the consideration of modernity as a present-time phenomenon. We aim towards drafting the current cultural time regime, situation in which, using an

expression from Aleida Assman, makes fundamental part of civilization “shaping its epistemology and its ontology” (Assman, 2013: 42), and locating within this draft the simmelian line oriented towards social temporality.

It is worth locating within this panorama via 5 characteristics that might be intertwined for drawing a wide field of interest about the modern temporal regime: a time constantly breaking up, the constant illusion of new beginnings, the creative destruction, the invention of the historical and the acceleration of change. (Assman, 2013; 2019) Therefore, central matters are temporarily conjugated from modernization theories such as the violent disruption - whether it is a war or a truce- and the tension between tradition and modernity itself.

The sensation of ruptures repeating themselves is essential for the modern notion of progress. More than a characteristic, say Assman and Koselleck (Assman, 2013: 40-43) it is a motor and a historical and conscience specifically modern experience. On the fiction of a new beginning, the current consensus about the place occupied by national ideas must be pointed at, i.e. that agglutinates a collective feeling of loyalty towards an idea that are joined to the multiple re-foundations that collective life has, such as an agreement for the ending of an armed conflict like the one that took place in the Colombian case. This will give us the opportunity, in the fifth section of this article, of discussing our own research experience in the light of the theoretical journey drafted in the second, third and fourth sections.

Our task in this text is proposing some basic elements for a sociology that takes into account, additionally to the past dimension of social life, the future both as an imaginary dimension and a social one based on the present, and we conceive this present as a totality resulting from a mysterious linkage between experiences and expectancies (Koselleck 2004: 3); a sort of extended present time that, according to our observations, belongs notoriously to the simmelian philosophy of history, as well as his sociology and philosophy of life.

## 2. On historical comprehension

In the text *The View of Life* Simmel asserts that the present moment is composed of different levels in which the past and future dimensions of life participate. In the third section, we will tackle more deeply his reflection regarding the transcendence of life. For the time being, and emphasizing on that proposal of the imbrication between past, present, and future, it might be possible to think alongside with Simmel that the past exists for the present as cause and as content. This argument is fundamental for a relational approach in which past and future are put in balance with the present.

Two things might be inferred from the above: that the past exists as content means that exists in and because of the present; furthermore, attending the past as content implies an interest not only for the historical time but for the lived time given that, precisely, for the lived time the past is relevant as content. Initially, we want to attend these arguments from the texts in which Simmel directly and explicitly referred to time, history and comprehension.

Simmel took care of the question on the causality of history, but mostly for that experiential dimension of time in his texts about *The problem of the historical time* and *Of the essence of the historical comprehension*. In the first essay, the realistic position in which an event is considered historical only because it happened is criticized; given that it is only historical as long as it is located in a temporal system (Simmel, 1950: 193; Bevernage, 2015: 153), thus historical time is only possible because of the action of comprehension given that this activity locates time on a succession, individualizing it and locating it on a time frame or period that encompasses it and surpasses it (Simmel, 1950: 200) being History, then, comprehended life (Moya, 2007: 62).

In this same essay, another conclusion is found that links the question for history with the question for the becoming, and gives clues for that vitalist position that Simmel displays in *The View of Life*. The happening becomes history, it means that life becomes a

form and that movement is the realistic dimension of history. Realism is not, according to Simmel, the exact reproduction of what happened, but, as something different from life, it comes from life itself (Simmel, 1950: 208). Thus, in this answer about what constitutes historical life, a vitalist maxim outlines: *Mehr-Leben* und *Mehr-als-Leben*.

On the other hand, in the essay *The historical configuration*, Simmel attends the concept of experience.<sup>1</sup> For Simmel, a state of experience is a pre-theoretical state where our knowledge comes from. It is an original manner of accessibility to the phenomena, being a primary relation with the world. In this phase, life is still integrated into the object; knowledge, at the same time, is a posterior phase in which that vital conditionality has detached. In summary, knowledge is an image independent of its vital content (Simmel, 1950: 210). Building historical series, as a way of knowledge, is not conditioned to the fact of having experienced them, but despite this apparent detachment, there cannot be History without life having created bonds between the elements that belong to that series. To summarize, the problem attended by Simmel is the relation between what happens and life for the possibility of history. The happening, says Simmel, is the object of history and the first one can only be living, but the mere happening is not history; thereby, the main question from Simmel's perspective is, how does the happening turns historical? (Simmel, 1950: 211)

The argumentative line we are interested in highlighting for answering this question, and that is contained in the essay itself, is that in order to have a relation between history, happening and life the integration of an extra question is necessary, i.e. What should be understood as present? For Simmel, the present is a point in expansion from where past and future are constantly summed in an uninterrupted flow of forms. Only the present is reality but present is not static, incessantly generating versions of the present in which past and future are constantly colliding. (Simmel, 1950: 235)

---

<sup>1</sup> Understood here as the vitalist dimension of experience.

From these simmelian reflections, we understand that Life is projectivity and that history is retrospective. Making history is updating a content and giving it a past category. Locating it is detaching it from that prospective course of life (Simmel, 1950: 237) and give it, as have been said, a significance as past forming thus temporal systems in which the lived dimension lessens and the historical forms strengthens. The historical comprehension improves with the knowledge of consequences and knowing consequences is possible when a content of the past is signified as such. "We understand the lived moment (the present) because of its past, the historical moment for its future" (Simmel, 1950: 241); the historical moment will be comprehended when the present develops its consequences, there it is a future dimension of the present that even though fathomless is latent.

### 3. On transcendence of life in Simmel

The first chapter of *The View of Life* is a reflection on time. There, Simmel states that the reality of life concerns only to the present, defining it as the confluence of past and future. Past and future, as we pointed out in the section above, are the only two temporal dimensions, although reality only concerns the present; being this last one, Simmel emphasizes, a little chunk of past and an even tinier of future whether it is about a personal, political or cultural present. (Simmel, 2004: 31)

Thus, temporal dimensions are incorporated into the present. The incorporation of the past to the present happens in two ways: objectified in concepts, which is the incorporation way in historical terms, and the one referred to the incorporation of the past to the present subjective life., this is, in the shape of memory. From this process, Simmel deduces that what is lived is joined to the conscience: is a present life extended towards the past. (Simmel, 2004: 32) At the same time, about the incorporation of the future to the present, Simmel states that the first one is not segregated from the second one given that we live in a frontier territory between both of them; therefore, life goes beyond itself as present

(Simmel 2004: 33), its essence is going beyond its actuality, being this actuality; thus, the present of life consists in transcending the present. (Vernik, 2004: 9)

Is that actuality, precisely, what describes the simmelian idea of self-transcendence. Life, as Vladimir Jankélévitch reminds us, is a constant transcendence and overcoming of limits. (Jankélévitch, 2007: 49) Present, being this one the connection between the simmelian and Bergsonian thinking, is an ideal and timeless limit of the past and the future in which the time lived, as he points out in his historical text as we reviewed them already, is the incorporation of the past into the present and of the present into the future. This is the continuity of the becoming that has been formally or logically divided in past, present, and future; but this continuity means fundamentally that the present of life consists in transcending the present (Jankélévitch, 2007: 53) "We are never completely in the current moment of our life", the french philosopher reminds us. Life is, thus, duration and that is the sense of being *more life*, but it also is *more than life*, it is also the form that encloses it and that will be exceeded. Life is encompassed in the form and exceeds it, undermines what has formed. (Jankélévitch, 2007: 59) Lived life is unity of a form, while at the same time an overcoming of that form. It is drafted, thus, a theory of the limits that sustains itself in an apparent contradiction, i.e. in a principle of constant exceedance. (Vernik, 2009: 113)

Jankélévitch affirms that these lines of analysis are present, as we have tried to show, in those texts referring to the philosophy of History, as well as other Simmel's texts that do not have these kinds of debates as a central point. More recent reviews of the work of the Berliner reaches similar conclusions. Natalia Cantó Milá, for example, points out that on the concept of form in Simmel that *more life* means that life is a continuous flow that connects a moment with the next one and that *more than life* means that life is no such thing as life if it does not transcends the limits and crystalizes in other forms, question that belongs to his sociology, philosophy and cultural studies: (Cantó, 2005: 50)



Simmel by no means rejected Bergson's *durée*, but all the same did not consider that this ever-flowing *durée* alone could adequately deal with life and the modern individual experience. He postulated that human experience is only possible through the mediation of forms and therefore he sought to complement the insufficiency of the concept of *durée* with the conceptualization of forms needed to enable experiences. (Cantó, 2005: 91)

Given that the relation between simmelian life and form allows a linkage with Simmel's sociology, we will try to elaborate a body of arguments in which this idea of an extended present is part of its analysis on the sociation forms: the second-order forms.

#### **4. Sociology of the extension of the present: on second-order forms**

On its digression on fidelity and gratitude Simmel, when referring to the function of the first one, gives clues for the definition of the second-order forms. The function of fidelity is substituting another feeling, that after disappearing has left a print. (Simmel, 2014: 570) Basically, a second-order form reassures the bond when the forces that gave its origin are extinct. They are sociological feelings born from previous reciprocal (a)effects that sustain and maintain the relationship. (Simmel, 2014: 575) Reflections on mobility and stability of social forms can also be found in this digression; for example, fidelity itself offers stability in the face of the mobility of subjective life, because with it the fluctuant interiority of people acquires a fixed form on the relation. (Simmel, 2014: 576) Besides, gratitude is the endurance of a bond by allocating in a point of individuality that remains stable (Simmel, 2014: 583), this is how one of the microscopics threads that keep the different elements of society together and binds them in the common life are configured. (Simmel, 2014: 584)

Recent investigations have tackled the issue of the second-order forms and its importance for the sustainment of society as we know it, emphasizing in that dimension of stability and mobility, but also

going deeper in one of the characteristics that Simmel does not make very explicit on his digression: that the second-order forms are an extension of the present both towards the past as towards the future. Resorting once more to Natalia Cantó Milá, we found that:

Forms of second-order play this special and fundamental role for the existence of society by extending the duration of the relations they contain towards the future as well as towards the past (thereby guaranteeing the continuity of a momentary fact towards a past in the making – that which has just happened, that momentary fact, immediately becomes the past and gains the condition of being a 'memory', and at the same time connects future actions and reactions to come with this set of memories). Thus, while shaping memories, while marking and reinterpreting that which is 'memorable' (also in its most quotidian sense), second-order forms also link us to actions, attitudes, emotions, and plans that we will have and develop in the future.

Second-order forms confer an extension in time to momentary social bonds, to reciprocal actions and (a)effects, and thus allow society to exist beyond the immediate moment, by structurally coupling social and psychic systems, creating a mechanism of inertia that sustains and extends in time those forms of social relation that exist at a certain moment. (Cantó, 2012: 13)

Similarly, in the book *Love and Society: Special social forms and the master emotion*, Swen Seebach points out that second-order forms lead existing forms to another possible future, purpose or project. (Seebach, 2017: 61) Through the second-order forms, society and its institutions become stable because without them the former would collapse.

As an example, and regarding fidelity, Seebach asserts that democracy could not be possible if there was not an extra emotive dimension that does not refer to the same emotive dimension of those that lived directly the past events for the emergence of a Nation. We and our contemporaries do not have that memory but we do have something to do with the traces that those events left

behind. Fidelity precisely makes that social moment have sense and value for us (Seebach, 2017: 62) replacing the original emotions and making that spirit continue. The second-order forms create social memory by being mediators between different temporal dimensions of the social life since they are:

social(ised) time form to other forms, expanding from the past towards the future and back. However, as a feeling, it is also a concrete here and now, a manifestation of an event or a form it begets with time. It is the present, past and possible future of the event or form which is a part [...] we could argue that second-order forms are therefore beyond and in between the classical division of time as a flux and time as concrete past (Seebach, 2017: 63)

On the durability and stability of the social bonds, Seebach emphasizes that the second-order forms are possible because they are mediators between the social and individual level: "for Simmel, our individual life is in constant flow, however, this constant flow becomes fixed by the form giving durability providing character of second-order forms." (Seebach, 2017: 64) By being both forward and behind the individual life flow and the experiential world of the individuals, they allow us to reconnect and reactivate projects, they are forms beyond time as well as beyond feelings and individual experiences. Thus and so, second-order forms renew the common bond recreating a linkage that can guide future events and being potential for action in that same direction.

From what has been said, it is possible to propose a bridge that connects the sociology and philosophy of life in Simmel. By saying that second-order forms are a construction or a crystallization beyond the vital flow, it refers, precisely, to that transcendence or *more than life -Mehr-als-Leben-* in which becomes solid a relation with the past and a projection with those crystallizations or institutions

that we imagined will be present in the future.<sup>2</sup> The second-order forms are a link between the experiential and objectified life, being experiential past, present and future of people (Seebach, 2017: 75) as well as mediators, as was recently said, in the crossings of the social and individual dimensions of life<sup>3</sup>, or as Davide Ruggiere says about the form concept in Simmel, mediations in the constant process of self-exceeding called life. (Ruggieri, 2017: 63)

### **5. “I never imagined myself in these situations”: Consideration for the analysis of social temporality based on a research experience**

The theoretical journey traced has given us the chance of locating a notion of the extended present as a transversal element of the simmelian thinking, this is, as a point of the vital development in which the past and future dimensions of experience converge. In our concrete case, we are interested in identifying crossings between a past and a future of national political present and the personal past-futures of former guerrilla fighters in process of re-incorporation to the civilian life, during the compliance with the compromises acquired after the signing of the 2016 Final Agreement for the Ending of Conflict subscribed by Farc-EP - today a political party called Common Alternative Revolutionary Force (plainly FARC in Spanish)- and the Colombian Government.

The findings here exposed are derived from the interpretation of testimonies and opinions stated, during the work meetings of GLIF<sup>4</sup>, Grupo Laboratorios Imaginarios de Futuro (Future

---

<sup>2</sup> We owe Seebach himself this link based on a conversation with him for the writing of this article.

<sup>3</sup> It is worth remembering that the crossing between the individual and social levels of life is one of the fundamental problems of Simmel's sociology. For further details on this matter: (Ruggieri, 2017: 61; Simmel, 2002: 44)

<sup>4</sup>In these spaces we used as a basic methodological tool, exercises based on Image Elicitation Methods, a group of methods in which images are the focus of semi-structured interviews. From these methods we developed qualitative instruments that promote the identification of images that might be articulated through

Imaginerias Laboratory Group in English) which is a group of ten former guerrilla fighters in process of re-incorporation that are part of the Alternative Force with whom we have been meeting with a certain level of intermittence for more than a year until January 2020. An agreement with the party's directives managed to agree that with our support the group would aim towards the formulation a productive project<sup>5</sup>. Our research partners live in the city of Medellín, some of them very recently arrived to the city and in those work sessions are held activities aiming towards identifying how their present lives condition their expectatives, in which past experiences have still a great importance and increases the discussions on what are the events of the national past that, according to their perspective, should be known.

We believe it is possible to identify a temporal regime of a strong modern accent. On one hand, it is a revolutionary organization whose ideological core, the overtaking of power by an armed popular-farmer party, is prone for a new beginning. The revolutionary thinking contains the notion of creative destruction in the armed struggle, but it is not the place for de-aggregating the utopism on an ideology with a complexity that can be seen by confronting it with its more than 50 years of accumulated history.

---

narration and, thus activate the imagination. It is very important to highlight that the use of these methods as complements to the semi-structured interviews are a great contribution because they ask for the narratives and own voices of the participants. (Boucher, 2018)

<sup>5</sup>At the End of Conflict section: Route for the construction of a long-lasting and stable peace of the Agreements is consigned that the negotiating parts established the reincorporation as a posterior step to the handling of arms and established with two central dimensions: an economic and a social one. These guidelines, besides creating a State agency, the National Council for Reincorporation (Consejo Nacional de Reincorporación in Spanish), force the reincorporated to sort out economic association processes aiming towards planning and executing business ideas to which the agency mentioned above gives money to in order to fulfill the bureaucratic processes. For more information: <http://www.reincorporacion.gov.co>.

Based on the preliminary findings from the Laboratory, convergence forms between the narratives and the biographical trajectories of the participants can be proposed. In them is made evident that the historical temporality and the temporality of the experience (or lived temporality) coexist in the context of a handing of weapons or, if allowed, a new individual beginning with repercussions at a collective level; a fiction of a new beginning, returning to Assman, fed with ideas of their past as insurgents -ideas that recreate and holds them loyal to a compromise established decades ago- and the present life as citizens abiding of the law and respectful of the State.

As we have been stating, this is all about a present particularly extended, a present in torsion of some kind, charged with past in the sense of being saturated with memory, mostly of traumatic memory, thus the limit between experience and expectancies is blurry. Past, present, and future are fissioned and configured constantly. (Assman, 2013: 53-55) This past incorporated as memory to the present that Simmel talks us about, and with a tendency towards the future as a conditioner of expectancies, will be a conductive thread for briefly describing renewal modes of its bonds to an ideal, the particular crossing between the biographies and the recent national history, and the possible strategies for sorting out the uncertainty of the days to come.

*Memories of the armed struggle and fidelity to the ideals*

There are events that created a truth for these people, in the sense explained with second-order forms as mediators and re-creators of the nexus between past and present. This is how GLIF's participants share the conviction that the beginning of their armed struggle is a response to the state violence perpetrated mostly by undercover agents encouraged by the government itself. (Ángel, 2018: 11) The armed response to the Marquetalia Operation in

1964<sup>6</sup>, by self-defense farmer groups commanded by Manuel Marulanda Vélez, eventually, founder of the FARC-EP, is one of the landmarks for understanding the memories of the insurgent group itself about its origin. In its own perspective, FARC stands by the popular farmer project to a point that this political orientation is highlighted as a fundamental characteristic of the initial stage of the farian insurgent movement, it corresponds thus to the premise according to which the more history a movement has, the more legitimacy it has on its present. (Aguilera, 2013 40)

More than half a century has passed from the foundational events of 1964. Nonetheless the zest and the shared conviction of the party members regarding its revolutionary ideals remain in the children and grandchildren of that first generation. For these people, being faithful to the endeavor is being faithful to the trajectories of their predecessors, which allows them besides understanding the national past, giving a purpose to their own trajectories and experiences.

Marquetalia makes part of the present, it does not matter if they were not eyewitnesses of what happened in other points of the regional geography, be it Marquetalia, or even the city they currently inhabit. This was made evident in a statement made in one of the work meetings of the Laboratory: "I don't need to belong to the 13th for understanding the 13th". The reference was about the 13th District, a set of neighborhoods that have particularly suffered the counterinsurgent war in Medellín. Although this participant of the Laboratory did not have a great connection with the 13th district, the organization s/he belongs to did have it, given that since the mid-'90s, FARC had an incidence on the 13th District through militias. (CNMH 2017, 144-145)

---

<sup>6</sup>Military operation executed by the Colombian Army and supported by the United States government in the framework of the Laso Plan for stopping the expansion of communism in Latin America. Further information at <https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/cultura/operacion-marquetalia-53-anos-de-un-mito-fundacional-articulo-695965>

Besides of trying to consolidate the revolutionary project in the city, matter that was already an order of the national commanders since the mid '80s, FARC-EP's intention was to strengthen the neighborhood self-defense groups (García-Domínguez-Burbano-Marín 2018, 40-41) against what they considered were abuses made by the State towards the people that were forced to inhabit the area because they were victims of the armed conflict in their places of origin. In this regard, one of the statements by other of the participants is completely coincident:

Due to threats, many (of my family) had to leave their land and properties around the '90s. Some of them settled in the 13th District and some of them in other neighborhoods. (Participant, GLIF)

The counter-insurgent efforts of the local and national State done through military operations alongside with illegal actions, now completely proved, marked the breaking point between the two centuries. The battle began in 2002 was considered as victorious due to what, according to some perspectives, was the failure of the guerrilla's project of urbanization of the war in Medellín by virtue of the deep impact of the Orion Operation in the 13th District<sup>7</sup>. (Alonso-Giraldo-Sierra 2012, 154)

Our Laboratory partners permanently reflect on these facts. Some of the images that they associate with this event are the footprints left by war which evidence, they consider, must be rescued; postcards of the existence of people they wanted to shut and of the later anxiety, mainly because the high number of people disappeared:

When we were in the jungles we always heard about the existence of oppression against the farmers and that it was

---

<sup>7</sup>Sentence of the Interamerican Court (Of Human Rights) against the Nation for excesses during the Orion Operation Published on 1/10/2017 Available on-line <https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/condena-de-la-corte-interamericana-contra-la-nacion-por-excesos-de-la-operacion-orion/511852>.



happening precisely in the 13th, the extermination of the helpless class. That is what those pictures tell me, that those classes have been silenced forever. (Participant, GLIF)

This testimony is a display of the certainty they share about how the civilian society in many rural areas of the country organized and armed themselves because they did not have another option against "the absence of the State". The State only came, they emphasize, when it wanted to reclaim a space that it no longer had. FARC always wanted to support those people in that endeavor.

Since its foundation, which was something asseverated in the years previous to the beginning of what became the agreements subscribed by the two parties, FARC has nurtured itself with ideas about their position and the contributions for the completion of the conflict. They consider representatives of the people on a long-lasting class struggle; they persist in the right to rebellion as a response to the State, given that this last one as victimizer is fit as responsible for the redress and reparation. (Aguilera 2014, 320) This conviction and fidelity towards this idea is a motive for the social memory of the group and allows them to constantly renew their bonds.

*From personal experience to historical conscience.*

Maurice Halbwachs affirms that to reinforce other's memories and complete ours, the memories of the group must be related to the events of our past. (Halbwachs, 2011: 126) Even the autobiographical memory is served by the historical memory insofar as, the French emphasize, is difficult to preserve a memory that is not located within a wider preoccupation frame. (Halbwachs, 2011: 110)

The annotated events in the prior sections of this text and fundamentally the reflection made about them allows us to evidence how their participation in the armed struggle powerfully conditions

their historical conscience and renew their commitment with the organization and their ideals.<sup>8</sup>

It is not something that only happened in that neighborhood, it is something that happened all across Colombia. We had that same war, but in other places, for example, we were in areas where they wanted to disappear people that fought for what was theirs and for the fact of defending themselves because for them they were dangerous and had to be killed. We were only defending ourselves, it was like an individual fight but shared along with the rest of the fights. That's what needs to be emphasized, and that is why we can narrate it, even if we didn't experience Orion or Mariscal [operations], but we experienced other wars provoked by the same reasons, for surviving. Thus we can prove we were not only victimizers we can help to revive that because in one way or another one lived those things. Our own experiences help us to contextualize. (Participant, GLIF)

These truths have been recreated during the dialogue process around GLIF's images in order to propose a historical tourism project in the city of Medellín in which would be narrated the relationship between the social conflict and the war through the urban space. Besides a productive project, we have managed to profile a truth and historical memory exercise by FARC about what happened in the Valley of the Aburrá. This research proposal later motivated the selection of areas and events in which the civilian population has been abused. About this, the following was said:

We want that in our (touristic) offer an emphasis is made on how unfair is everything that has been done against the people;

---

<sup>8</sup> Here we turn to Halbwachs since, we believe, it is possible to use his insights with the aim of enrich analysis on second order forms i.e fidelity to an idea. The french thinker states not only that the past is the result of a process of active reconstruction which takes place in the present but also that it is shaped by interests and feelings shared by groups. (Jedlowski, 1990: 131) A deeper proposal for continuity between Simmel and Halbwachs is one of our pending matters and one that we intend to address in forthcoming works regarding our research.

people are the ones who have suffered the most by retaliation against their own struggles and resistances: we must emphasize against no more bullets against the people. Showing the victims is showing history.

This crossing between national history and experiences in the same progressive direction as the Agreements allows them to have an opinion regarding the institutions that promote the recovery of memory and allows them to locate differences between the touristic offer that they imagine and the one already offered, for example, by Casa Museo de la Memoria (House of Memory Museum). After a visit to the building of this official institution and as a response to a question that we made them about what they saw in that museum they told us the following:

The museum has very particular things that do not help to know the history. First, they speak very shallowly, second, they do not differentiate actors, the violence contained in our actions is not the same as the violence encouraged by the State. Look at this, one of the guides (at the museum) was telling some foreigners tourists, which grabbed my attention, that the guerrilla caused a lot of damage to many areas of the city when the contrary was the case. With our experience, the true story can be told. We have an advantage, we can look at that time in history from within and now from the outside. To live it before and to analyze it today will give us great potential for telling things. And above everything, we have to start participating in the conversation about all these years of conflict. (Participant, GLIF)

We highlight that, for our own purposes, the fact that the reflection about the conflict years in the city gives purpose to the time spent in the organization and renews the reasons for keeping making part of it. In the collective memory the present is not opposed to the past (Halbwachs, 2011: 132) and the expectations of this group have been reconfigured in that crossing.

I, for example, thought that the situation at the 13th District had been the only complicated one but I soon realized that this wasn't the case. Being in this process has served me for knowing things I didn't know. I enjoy very much knowing the historical and political debate of the organization. I was only in very operative tasks and didn't give great importance to this. Now I see that it is very important. (Participant, GLIF)

### *Memories and expectancies*

An emphasis has been made on the second-order forms for going deeper into the idea of an extended present in Simmel's sociology, nonetheless, we highlight that the temporal dimension of the social forms exceeds these considerations. Another possibility for a reading of the simmelian legacy in that same line is derived from the a priori of sociation, specifically the third one. (Simmel, 2014: 131-134; Cantó-Seebach, 2015; Seebach, 2017: 77)

For society being possible it is necessary, from this premise, the conviction that there is a place for each one of us and that we will continue having such a place in the future. (Cantó-Seebach, 2015: 200) Thus, it is drafted a temporal approach for this analysis on imagination, especially of that "own place" on an inter-relational network. This "special place" might be experienced through the prevalence of any of the three temporal dimensions.

For the GLIF participants, projecting a future labor, as tourist's guides, in this case, is determined by their memories<sup>9</sup>, their past might guide them for sorting out fears that are foreseen today as associated with that labor. Such a situation is evident when they were proposed to imagine themselves directing a tourist's guide and consequently they were asked if they felt prepared for such a task, for which they gave the following testimonies:

---

<sup>9</sup>Although we did not aim to cultivate the body-emotion link, it is essential to quote this approach in the theoretical observation that motivates us: "The possibilities to imagine a future and to talk about this future are regulated and shaped by our bodily and mental memories" (Cantó-Seebach, 2015: 201)

\*I think they will ask us a lot about or quotidian life during the war and that is something we can tell in general with not too much detail; I don't feel prepared because I don't know the city well and, well, you gotta learn about that and you have to figure out how. (Participant, GLIF)

\*(The visitors) will come to us as former guerrilla fighters and that experience is the one that will be interesting to them and we have it and we can harness that; (although) I don't know the city very much. (Participant, GLIF)

\*I know part of the city and know part of its history, that will enrich our script. I am distrustful, actually, about what to tell, I wouldn't dare to tell many things and other things I would only tell them superficially. (Participant, GLIF)

\*That's why I was saying that we can tell things but not too many, but we have to consider that with the Agreement we are here to speak. We already lived this in one way or another. In the first months when we met with the police and the army, for example, they told us that what they were told about us was a thing but what they saw when they met us is a completely different thing. One is afraid of the saboteur of the tour, for example, but in one way or another, we've started to learn how to deal with that during all these years of the process. (Participant, GLIF)

Without a doubt, there is tension or at least a clear expectation towards their responsibilities, besides, they assert in this prospective reflections the contingencies of the former guerrilla fighter, its future place: facing the effects of war with its mortal excess, war crimes after all.

When discussing within the group, during one of the work sessions, the uncertainty lived by the base guerrilla fighters with the negotiation previous to the 2016 signature (which, after all, was a negotiation similar to the one held with the government in 1998) one of the participants pronounced the expression that titled this section: "I never imagined myself in these situations". S/he was

referring to his/her post-conflict, her life in the city, abiding the laws of the State which she was rebelled against, talking about the day one of his comrades told her this time would be different, that this time they were going to sign and that for FARC being guerrilla fighters was in the past and that now the fight will continue but with words, as was publicly said by the leadership and accepted by the vast majority of former guerrilla fighters we have talked to in private. In a way, we think we are sighting that for FARC, the political party, the Agreements are their place in the future, a place that further from to legal considerations there established, is still an ongoing process.

## **6. As a conclusion**

The place sighted as a personal and collective future might be overthrown by the weight of a violent national historical heritage in any given moment. A finding, maybe on deathly uncertainty that threatens the participants of the research, is derived from making explicit a subjective affection, an emotional blow caused by a murder. The selective murder, like a dropper, is a scenario that even though macabre shows continuity with the allegedly overpassed war as if the place in society could not be left like that, signing and complying with was signed. As if death would be inevitably guaranteed in the path towards the future promised by the Agreements. As if death reclaimed a place as well in the future of those that had it very close to them in their past. We aim for making a comment where this mortal contingency, its impact on the general climate of the research process and us as researchers and people close to those threatened by criminal groups on a silent war footing against them, be registered as an ethical and research challenge.

The political violence panorama that was announced as possible by specialists in peace processes (assassination of social leaders and former guerrilla fighter in process of civilian reincorporation) was already established as an alarming tendency, almost as a pre-established condition of our research as a precedent of the recent Colombian history, but overall, this is about a clear and present

possibility, i.e. a configurator element of the individual and collective future of whom for more than year have met with us with the incentive of building a productive project.

On December of 2019, an event profoundly blows the Reincorporation Point of the city of Medellín, from which social base belongs the group we have been referring to: the death of a former guerrilla fighter close to the participants. It is worth saying that this murder darkens the panorama of the re-incorporation by confirming in the most literal sense the risk taken by each one of the former guerrilla fighters: being murdered by paramilitaries or by agents of the State itself.<sup>10</sup> This death, although far from the physical space gives a direct blow to the relational one; the murder of a friend and partner of the participants from the research community corresponds with, as in a macabre self-fulfilling prophecy, the strategy denounced by the community at many public spaces and that was noted in our laboratories as happened in one of our group conversations several months before the tragic incident:

The war is still going and there are no structural solutions. it is easier for the right to kill in a scattered manner that in big operations like the Orion one<sup>11</sup>; in a certain way that same story is still repeating itself. There are no structural solutions and until there are not put in place murders will keep happening.  
(Participant, GLIF)

---

<sup>10</sup> There are members of the Colombian Armed Forces judged and sentenced for this kind of crime. In the most recent and publicized case a corporal of the army admitted having committed a crime against a committed former guerrilla fighter. A member of the military is sentenced to 20 years for the murder of Dimar Torres. Available on-line.: <https://www.elheraldo.co/colombia/condenan-20-anos-militar-por-asesinato-de-dimar-torres-684021>.

<sup>11</sup> According to the former guerrilla fighters, with those structural measures against war the slaughter could be avoided; the scandal of the obvious massacre, which is the *modus operandi* that has shaped the later and current history of the paramilitary counter-insurgent war.

It may for the better to expose what we as researchers have experienced and thus make explicit that as human beings with the tendency of creating bonds with the participants we have been emotionally affected by the impact generated on the research community sphere by means of murder as a form of intimidation that is gradually taking place. Feeling in the tears and cries of family giving farewell to its loved ones the crossings of a historical experience of alleged post-conflict with the condition of being mortal human beings itself, with a limited circumstance of reality, of death as a former of life, is a line of conclusion we want to highlight.

The value of such a conclusion is hard to dimension completely in the middle of the mourning process, but it is impossible not to think that death, that impassable limit, shapes life brutishly (Simmel, 2004: 101; Staiti, 2017: 78) and, in our case, against the project of future that many of the citizens in compliance of their legal and, apparently moral compromise of never going back to arms, abide the Constitution and taking care of their families. Philosophy copies life, life copies the fiction of imagining the process of a sometimes hidden enemy silencing the life of friends, partners and family. The uncertainty as a future on deployment, but with death as the closer destiny, even more than in the previous time of war.

We have tried to highlight some of Georg Simmel's reflections on the experience of creating social bonds throughout time. These particular reciprocal (a)effects -*Wechselwirkung*- that configure themselves while the experience elapses on a present charged with past and thrown towards the future. However, the influx of crosses between temporal dimensions is assumed, there is always an individual in the middle that suffers and rejoices, that calculates or simply reacts in search of his/her survival and dignity. That individual hopes in the simplest and firmest of manners that tomorrow a web of relations will correspond all the effort done towards keeping its validity.

Displaying Simmel's contributions regarding the debate on uncertainty, contingency, and transitions being made by Colombian society, might result beneficial for a sociological approach to a



political organization with FARC's historical background. It would be a great impulse for trying the recognition of specific temporality regimes in which, at the same time, the historicity is produced. (Bevernage, 2015: 177) The findings exposed allows us to affirm that one of the most relevant characteristics of the current Colombian temporality regime is the effort to handle traumas of a threatening past. Simmel precisely reminds us that for the study of social temporality there must be attention to the crossings between past and future in a present in constant deployment.

## References

- Aguilera Peña, M. (2013) *Guerrilla y población civil: trayectoria de las FARC 1949-2013*. Bogotá: Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica.
- Alonso Espinal, M. (2012) “Anotaciones desde lo local al proceso de desmovilización, desarme y reinserción en Antioquia” in: *Ensayos sobre conflicto, violencia y seguridad en medellín, 1997-2007*. Ed. by M. Alonso Espinal; W. Pérez Toro; J. Vélez Rendón. Universidad de Antioquia: Medellín. pp. 305-33.
- Ángel, G. (2018) *Algún día será*. Bogotá: Teoría y Praxis.
- Assman, A; Lorenz, C., & Bevernage, B. (2013). *Breaking up time: Negotiating the borders between present, past and future*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Assman, A. (2019) “Re-imagining the Nation: Memory, Identity and the Emotions” Conference at the European University, St. Petersburg. Available online at [https://youtu.be/jw\\_xR\\_FDTI](https://youtu.be/jw_xR_FDTI)
- Bevernage, B. (2015) *Historia, memoria y violencia estatal. Tiempo y justicia*. Buenos Aires: Prometeo.
- Boucher, M. L. (Ed) (2018) *Participant empowerment through photo-elicitation in ethnographic education research: New perspectives and approaches*. Springer International Publishing.

- Cantó Milá, N. (2005) *A sociological theory of value. Georg Simmel's relationism*. Bielefeld: Verlag.
- Cantó Milá, N. (2012) "Gratitude. Invisibly webbing society together" in: *Journal of classical sociology*. 13(1), pp. 8–19.
- Cantó Milá, N; Seebach, S. (2016) "Desired images, regulating figures, constructed imaginaries: The future as an apriority for society to be possible" in: *Current sociology*. 63 (2) pp. 198-215.
- Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica (2017), *Medellín: memorias de una guerra urbana*, Bogotá: CNMH-Corporación Región-Ministerio del Interior-Alcaldía de Medellín-Universidad EAFIT-Universidad de Antioquia.
- Eliás, N. (1998) *La civilización de los padres y otros ensayos*. Bogotá: Norma.
- García, C; Domínguez, M; Burbano, A; Marín, N. (2018) "Ciudad, violencia, memorias y políticas de seguridad. Medellín 1980-2013" in: *Violencia en 5 ciudades colombianas a finales del siglo XX y principios del XXI*. Ed. by A. Guzmán Barney, Santiago de Cali: Universidad Autónoma de Occidente. pp. 19-190.
- Gobierno de Colombia and Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (2016) Final Agreement to end the armed conflict and build a stable and lasting peace. Available online at <http://especiales.presidencia.gov.co/Documents/20170620-dejacion-armas/acuerdos/acuerdo-final-ingles.pdf>
- Halbwachs, M. (2011) *La memoria colectiva*. Buenos Aires: Miño y Dávila.
- Jankélévitch, V. (2007) *Georg Simmel, filósofo de la vida*. Barcelona: Gedisa.
- Jedlowski, P. (1990) "Simmel on memory. Some observations on memory and modern experience" in: Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science 119. *Georg Simmel and contemporary Sociology*, Eds. by M. Kaern; B.S. Phillips; R.S. Cohen. Kluwer Academic Publishers, pp. 131-154.

- Koselleck, R. (2004) *Futures past. On the semantics of historical time*. New York: Columbia University.
- Moya, L. (2007) “Entre el tiempo vivido y el tiempo histórico. Algunos elementos de la filosofía de la historia en el pensamiento de Georg Simmel” in: *Georg Simmel, una revisión contemporánea*. Ed. by O. Sabido, Barcelona: Anthropos, pp. 61-84.
- Ruggieri, D. (2017) “Georg Simmel and the “Relational Turn”. Contributions to the foundations of the *Lebenssoziologie* since Simmel” in: *Simmel Studies*, vol. 21 (1), pp. 43-71.
- Seebach, S. (2017) *Love and Society. Special Social Forms and the Master Emotion*. New York: Routledge.
- Simmel, G. (1950) “El problema del tiempo histórico” in: G. Simmel. *Problemas de Filosofía de la Historia*. Buenos Aires: Nova. pp. 193-208
- Simmel, G. (1950) “La configuración histórica” in: G. Simmel. *Problemas de Filosofía de la Historia*. Buenos Aires: Nova. pp. 209-255
- Simmel, G. (2002) *Cuestiones Fundamentales de Sociología*. Barcelona: Gedisa.
- Simmel, G. (2004) *Intuición de la vida. Cuatro capítulos de Metafísica*. Buenos Aires: Caronte.
- Simmel, G. (2008) [1902] “Tendencies in German Life and Thought since 1870”. in: GSG 18. *Englischsprachige Veröffentlichungen 1893–1910*. Ed. by D. Frisby. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag. pp. 167-202.
- Simmel, G. (2014) *Sociología. Estudios sobre las formas de Socialización*. Ciudad de México: Fondo de Cultura Económica.
- Staiti, A. (2017) “The moral significance of Death in Georg Simmel’s Metaphysics of life” in: *Simmel Studies*, vol 21 (1), pp. 73-88.
- Valencia García, G. (2007) *Entre cronos y kairós: las formas del tiempo sociohistórico*. Barcelona: Anthropos.

- Vernik, E. (2004) “La vida como instante y devenir” in: G. Simmel. *Intuición de la vida. Cuatro capítulos de Metafísica*. Buenos Aires: Caronte. pp. 9-19
- Vernik, E. (2009) *Simmel, Sociólogo de la Vida*. Buenos Aires: Quadrata.
- Zabludovsky, G; Sabido, O. (2014) “Estudio introductorio” in: Simmel, G. *Sociología. Estudios sobre las formas de socialización*. Ciudad de México: Fondo de Cultura Económica. pp. 11-93