

Existential Trajectories of People from Armero: from Soil Fertility to Uprooting and Marginalization *

[English Version]

Trayectorias existenciales armeritas: de la fertilidad de su suelo, al desarraigo y a la marginación

Trajatórias existenciais de pessoas de Armero: da fertilidade de seu solo ao desenraizamento e à marginalização

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Abstract

Objective: to understand identity configuration features of a group of survivors from the Armero tragedy according to their ideological positions and their memory processes. **Methodology:** information was gathered over a two-year period, using ethnographic instruments such as field diaries, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and documentary reviews. The triangulation strategy was used for the analysis. Thirty-three people from Armero were interviewed nine in person and 24 remotely. In addition, two focus groups were conducted and archival material and information from the Facebook

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social network were analyzed. The purpose of the information gathering was to answer the following questions: Where are the survivors and what is their relationship with the process of memory? **Results:** findings show that survivors of Armero are dispersed throughout different areas of the Colombian territory. Their relationship with the process of memory can be analyzed in terms of two large groups. The first group was excluded from any possibility of social participation due to the conditions which uprooting and poverty have condemned them. The second group, in the work with and through memory, has found the possibility of advocacy with the State to achieve recognition and reparation. **Conclusions:** the dismantling of the territory in which life had been lived until 1985, the inadequate care of survivors, the impact of the catastrophic event on the existence of each person, among other factors, has made overcoming the trauma caused by this disruptive event difficult.

Keywords: memory; tragedy; territory; identity.

Resumen

Objetivo: comprender aspectos de la configuración identitaria de un grupo de personas supervivientes de la tragedia de Armero, en lo relacionado con sus posturas ideológicas y elementos de sus procesos de memoria. **Metodología:** la información se recolectó durante un periodo de dos años, a través de instrumentos del enfoque etnográfico como diario de campo, entrevista semiestructurada, grupos focales y revisión documental. El análisis se llevó a cabo mediante la estrategia de triangulación. Se entrevistaron 33 armeritas; 9 presencialmente y 24 de manera remota. Además, se realizaron dos grupos focales y se analizó contenido de archivo e información de la red social *Facebook*. Todo ello, para responder a estos cuestionamientos: ¿Dónde se encuentran los últimos armeritas? y ¿Cuál es su relación con los procesos de memoria? **Resultados:** en la investigación se encontró que los armeritas se hallan dispersos por diversas zonas del territorio colombiano y su relación con los procesos de memoria se puede analizar a partir de dos grandes grupos: el primero, excluido de cualquier posibilidad de participación social por las condiciones a las que lo han condenado el desarraigo y la pobreza. El segundo, ha encontrado en el trabajo *con y por* la memoria la posibilidad de agenciamiento frente al Estado para lograr reconocimiento y reparación. **Conclusiones:** el desmantelamiento del territorio en el que devenía la vida hasta 1985, la inadecuada atención de los supervivientes, el impacto del hecho catastrófico en la existencia de cada persona, entre otros factores han dificultado la superación del trauma ocasionado por el evento disruptivo.

Palabras-clave: memoria; catástrofe; territorio; identidad.

Resumo

Objetivo: compreender aspectos da configuração de identidade de um grupo de sobreviventes da tragédia de Armero, em relação a suas posições ideológicas e elementos de seus processos de memória. **Metodologia:** as informações foram coletadas durante um período de dois anos, utilizando instrumentos etnográficos como diários de campo, entrevistas semi-estruturadas, grupos de discussão e revisão documental. A análise foi realizada utilizando a estratégia de triangulação. Trinta e três pessoas de Armero foram entrevistadas; nove pessoalmente e 24 remotamente. Além disso, dois grupos de foco foram conduzidos e o conteúdo e informações de arquivo da rede social Facebook foram analisados. O objetivo era responder as seguintes perguntas: Onde estão as últimas pessoas de Armero e qual é a relação deles com os processos de memória? **Resultados:** a pesquisa constatou que as pessoas de Armero estão dispersas em diferentes áreas da Colômbia e sua relação com os processos de memória pode ser analisada em termos de dois grandes grupos: o primeiro, excluído de qualquer possibilidade de participação social devido às condições às quais o desenraizamento e a pobreza os condenaram. O segundo grupo encontrou no trabalho com e através da memória a possibilidade de agência perante o Estado a fim de alcançar o reconhecimento e a reparação. **Conclusões:** o desmantelamento do território no qual a vida foi vivida até 1985, o cuidado inadequado dos sobreviventes, o impacto do evento catastrófico sobre a existência de cada pessoa, entre outros fatores, dificultou a superação do trauma causado pelo evento perturbador.

Palavras-chave: memória; catástrofe; território, identidade.

Introduction

In her ethnographic account of the peasants from northern Tolima, Guzmán-Pañuela (2021) states that walking embodies the action of living, which implies "thinking, living, and working in a concrete world as the same action" (p 66). This involves learning to know the nooks and crannies of the trail, shaping, and measuring one's steps, calculating the steps and distances, making friends with the trail, etc. However, what happens when those traced, known, appropriate, and loved paths become blurred? Do they disappear due to the uprooting caused by violence or a socio-natural disaster? Where do people go when there is no path because it has been wiped out by a socio-natural disaster? What factors affect the fact that the past geography is still attached to one's feet and life, and make it difficult to walk along new paths without falling, falling apart, or getting lost? These are some of the initial questions, partially reported in this manuscript, of this doctoral research.

Before advancing the epistemological configuration, relevant information is provided for the understanding of the social group under research. People from Armero are the survivors of the town Armero, a Colombian municipality located in the department of Tolima, which was destroyed on November 13, 1985, after the eruption of El Nevado del Ruiz Volcano. According to official figures, its geographic area was 166,796 square miles at 352 meters above sea level, and its average temperature was 80.6°F. The National Department of Statistics (DANE), in the census carried out in October 1985, established that Armero had 29,394 inhabitants; 20,962 resided in the urban area and 8,432 inhabitants in the rural area. This figure also accounted for the seasonal population of commercial, tourist and agricultural activities, and an estimate of a 8,000 floating population the night of the tragedy. According to Cruz (2017), experts considered that the volume of volcanic lava that destroyed Armero ranged between 85 and 90 million cubic meters of all kinds of debris and stones that ended the lives of about 22,000 people from Armero over an area of 21.67 square miles. The report presented by Paulsen and Cárdenas (1998) shows the loss of crops, which most likely meant more than just food for consumption: 6.75 hectares of sorghum, 1,633 hectares of rice, 1,298 hectares of cotton, 1,227 hectares of peanuts, and smaller amounts of coffee, soybeans, corn, cassava, sugar cane, and different types of fruit trees, for a total of 11,187 cultivated hectares. Thus, in addition to the precious lives of many Amero's inhabitants, the country lost 31,660 tons of agricultural production from this area.

After this explanation, it is also worth explaining that this research consists of the survey of the *memories* of a group of survivors from Armero to determine

the role of the *territory* and the *social imaginary* in the *ideological* positions which shape their *identity* and account for the struggles for memory that they have been carrying out in relation to the uprooting caused by such a disruptive event. In this sense, the paradigmatic proposal of this research is based on Durand's (2013) approaches of his symbolic imaginary. According to his ideas, humanity dispersed in the social world develops from a mythical structure that preserves a collection of established, preserved, and communicated images thanks to memory and language. These images form a social imaginary in the psyche, shape the collective unconscious, and determine the ideologies from which people act in society.

Accordingly, the notion of territory is problematized as a material and symbolic framework (Bourdieu, 1999) in which human life takes place. In such a way that, based on the particular characteristics of each territory, a model for *being and being* in the world is established. This model is configured depending on the material conditions that determine the forms of production, exchange and consumption of elements within the different social fields in which community life takes place. Therefore, because it impacted the territory directly, the tragedy destroyed the material and symbolic already built, affecting the inhabitants' reality in two ways. It destroyed the material constructions, economic production and all activities aimed at establishing their order and sustainability. It also dismantled the social structure that determines their territoriality. Thus, the territory can be defined as a geographically differentiated, politically delimited, and culturally characterized area. (Bourdieu, 1999; Ochoa, 2017; Mora, 2017).

Now, according to Hall (2003) and Candau (2008), identity is a changing element that is basically configured on the basis of two substrates: one fixed, linked to the tradition of the founding group, and one unstable, linked to the individual's existential journey through the social world. With the rupture of the conditions framed in a territory, of that web of symbolic networks that make up the culture of the social group and that directs the significance on which people build their existence, the survivors must undergo an identity transformation in which their founding substrate struggles not to disappear under the weight of the new identity layers that begin to be part of the ontological constitution of these people in other places. (Ramírez, 2014; Arteaga and Ugarte, 2015; Berroeta *et al.*, 2015; Timo de Vries, 2016; Flores-Cisternas and Sanhueza-Contreras, 2018; Naylor *et al.*, 2020).

Thus, to approach the survivor's identity configuration to identify, among other things, the consequences of the disaster, it is key to access their memory through language within the existential frameworks from which the people from Armero recall their past, become their present, and project their future. Accordingly, this research aims to understand some features of the identity

configuration of a group of survivors from Armero, through the review of aspects of their imaginary that determine ideological aspects and cultural situations linking them to the territory, configure their memory and become perceptible through their discursive constructions. Therefore, memory is assumed as a psychosocial process providing a collection of memories and things forgotten that define people's actions in the present. (Durand, 2013; Serna-Dimas, 2020; Halbwachs, 2004).

This article reports the results of the characterization stage of the survivors who participated in this research – this means that some aspects, as those related to the imaginary and identity, will not be dealt with in depth. The first section describes the methodology used to carry out the first phase of this research. Next, the ideas related to some of the findings obtained during this stage in relation to the categories are showed: *people from Armero at the margin of memory work and those who work with and for memory from the margin*. Then, aspects related to the two sides of the situation are reviewed. The one linked to people from Armero who, due to their current circumstances do not have access to a digital space and the one of those who do have access to it and have become active agents striving to make the dynamics of their daily life visible as a way of resistance of the state's neglect. Finally, relevant elements on the established questions and on this research experience are concluded.

Methodology

By assuming territory as the main articulator of identity, disaster as the disruptive event that fractures it, and memory as the repository for the imaginary, ideology, and other aspects of life that remain, the ethnographic method was considered the most pertinent to investigate the identity of survivors. The above, taking into account that it gives centrality to language and to the individuals who, through it, refer to their existential journey. In such a way that culture is not assumed to be anchored to fixed entities but to language, because linguistic, paralinguistic and extralinguistic codes allow for the informants' memory content and their positionings on the reality of their lives. Thus, in the narrative, the research individuals report their culture, and therefore their identity, and the ethnographer captures aspects of their interest and inserts them into a broader narrative. In this regard, De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2015) posit that through language individuals construct their world image, place themselves in it and negotiate their identity – across different discursive

orders. The stories about personal experiences are constructed from the context in which the present is lived, but and from the reinterpretation of past experiences. Thus, the content of the story becomes a source of great value when working with the uprooted, because it condenses the lived experiences in the lost territory and accounts for the identity configuration of the people in the present. (Fabian, 2012; Pollak, 2006).

The inquiry for the role of the territory in the identity configuration and its relationship with the memory processes in terms of imaginary and ideology implied an initial stage of tracing to ascertain the location of the members of the community that was disintegrated by the tragedy of 1985 that left the people from Armero dispersed in different areas of the national territory. – This vis-à-vis the impossibility of continuing inhabiting the territory that had already been wiped out twice and likewise juxtaposed against any other relocation strategy presented by the Colombian State. – The research perspective is socio-anthropological and appeals to the ethnographic approach, which tends toward an exercise of reflexivity of the subjects who construct knowledge from certain epistemological, political, and ethical positionings. Such an exercise is typical in the field of social studies, as Serna-Dimas (2011) states, since it includes multiple emerging phenomena and vindicates historically marginalized individuals and collectivities, which allows for the rescue of the centrality of the subject and the particularity of the phenomenon addressed.

In accordance with the delimitation of the object of study, individuals over fifty years of age were required; men and women who had been impacted differently by the tragedy. This is based on the assumption that situations such as the loss suffered, the conditions of the new territory inhabited, the length of the life trajectory that took place in Armero, among other circumstances, have a direct impact on the existential reconfiguration and on the processes of remembering and forgetting, as stated by Timo de Vries (2016). In this sense, two questions were formulated for this article: Where are the last survivors from Armero? And what is their relationship with processes of memory?

The information search began in November 2018 and, for the purpose of locating community members, concluded in December 2020. Based on documents such as the Relocation Budget Register, established by the RESURGIR¹ foundation, it was possible to corroborate that there are neighborhoods built in cities such as Bogotá, Cali and Ibagué, and in smaller places as Armero Guayabal, Lérída, Mariquita, Honda, Venadillo, Ambalema, and Cambao. Other survivors were assigned to plots of land for cultivation in the townships of Méndez and San Felipe. Similarly, it was found that there are micro-communities

1. The foundation in charge of the relocation process of the survivors after the tragedy.

of people from Armero in cities such as Medellín, Barranquilla, Villavicencio, Neiva, Manizales, Pereira and Armenia. These small groups have been formed by people who found the best way to *be* and to *be* in the world after the tragedy in these places. In this regard, it is worth clarifying that most of this information did not come from official documents, which, in several cases, were found to be inaccurate, biased, or incomplete, as in the case of the census prepared by Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística in 1985, just a few months before the tragedy occurred.

Thus, one of the first hurdles overcome was related to the incompleteness and dispersion of the information that accounted for the survivors. For example, after a long journey through different DANE offices and agencies, it was not possible to find figures on the number of children living in the municipality at the time of the eruption. In the response received regarding the incompleteness of the disaggregation corresponding to Armero, it is stated that this difficulty is related to the fact that the company in charge of recording the information and later providing it to DANE was unable to deliver it, so part of the information collected was lost during the natural disaster. As already mentioned, according to this census, Armero had 29,394 inhabitants. This figure does not coincide with that stated by González of the Armando Armero Foundation (2021), since testimonies, such as that of the last Armero notary, led to affirm that until 1985 there were around 10,000 births, which would be consistent with the fact that each family had an average of between four and five members. This figure also agrees with the number of neighborhoods and villages that made up Armero.

The researcher found that the memory work carried out by some survivors was an adequate way to keep track of them and discover their locations, as well as their particular situations and interests. So, she began to keep a field diary to record everything that happened in the encounters that took place on the occasion of the commemorations or meetings to discuss dialogues with the administration in power. This was directing the focus toward the virtual space, more specifically toward the social network *Facebook*; however, finding some survivors that were committed to the theme of memory work implied that there were others who were not and it was interesting to discover the reasons they had. This involved, in addition to working on the field diary, conducting face-to-face personalized interviews, establishing focus groups, and document review. All this aimed at achieving an in-depth analysis of the information collected. Table 1 provides more detailed information in this regard.

Table 1. Summary of strategies used to collect the information

Strategy	Objective	Specifics
Field Diary	To register information related to the research process in general, regarding the imaginary that supports the ideologies on which people from Armero support their struggles for memory and recognition, in order to understand their identity transformation.	Carried out throughout the entire process and comprises impressions of what is observed in person and virtually. It constitutes the synthesizing element of the entire investigative process and an essential source for the writing of an ethnographic novel.
Documentary Analysis	To use the file as a primary source that allows for the corroboration of information reported by the interviewees.	To date, a total of 27 documents have been reviewed, including minutes, resolutions, decrees, COMPES and others (found in physical archives in Guayaabal, Lérida, Ibagué, and in private areas). Press articles, audiovisual material, photographic records, research articles (all found mainly on the Internet) and printed books have also been analyzed.
Focus Groups	To identify people from Armero who work for memory, as well as to learn about their ideological positions and the strategies they carry out in order to achieve recognition and reparation.	Due to the contingency caused by COVID-19, only two focus groups could be held; one at the beginning of the investigative process (14/11/2018), in Armero Guayaabal, and another in the middle of it (31/10/2019), in Bogotá.
Semi-structured Interviews	To identify aspects of the identity configuration of people from Armero who have suffered the impact of the catastrophic event in different ways, due to the physical and psychological effects derived from the volcano eruption and due to the treatment received during the relocation.	Nine of the 33 interviews were conducted in person before the COVID emergency, and the remaining 24 were carried out remotely. Each survivor was interviewed on average twice (this due to the peculiarities of work in the social studies of memory).

Considerations on Digital Ethnographic Work with Communities that Have Lost their Territory due to Socio-natural Disaster

According to Pons (2013), in the era of information and communication technologies, all research inevitably begins on the internet. The virtual context allows for the tracking of what others have done in a field of interest, to understand the feasibility, relevance, scope and, even, the usefulness of an investigative process. This author states that in the digital age “Historians should not be analysts of isolated technical problems, drawn from the past, but narrators of worlds in motion, complex, unpredictable, and transitory worlds” (p. 58). This raised referring to history is even more true for the dynamic field of memory. Thus, time and space, as essential elements that frame human existence, converge in the dense digital universe. But neither time nor space are empty concepts; they are social constructions that give rhythm and meaning to the life of communities. These considerations lead to the understanding of virtual communities as places with enough power to approach certain human dynamics that account for the frameworks of meaning that are built around a social group’s situation. Given the impossibility of having a physical territory for interaction and work that brings them together regarding the disaster, people from Armero have found in the digital space a place for reunion and work with memory – which never ceases to exacerbate the sense of frustration and uprooting for coming from a space in which life flowed so closely linked to the materiality of the territory, due to the great agricultural development that characterized Armero.

However, in relation to the usefulness of the digital space as a provider of information for this investigation, authors such as Ñaupas *et al.*, (2013) state that the research carried out from the ethnographic approach privileges work *in situ*, leads to the collection of data that facilitates the interpretation of realities within social groups. This implies a close link with the target community and, through a process of constant recording of everyday situations, the necessary information to analyze and understand social phenomena in specific contexts is collected. Thus, the research design from the ethnographic approach implies a reading of the text and the textualities that constitute the social reality of a group. This reading must include both contextual aspects, which determine the dynamics of people's daily lives, and symbolic elements that are part of their social imaginaries and the representations they have of the world. In this sense, Espinosa (2010) states that this requires a conscious approach to social grammar, understood as the compendium of “implicit norms, rules and principles of community life that make up the territory” (p. 115). According to this author, it is imperative for the researcher to understand the texture (physical

aspects from which a community is structured) and the textualities (meanings with which individuals give sense to aspects of the group's daily life).

As evidenced in Table 1, this involved work that articulated the use of various sources and collection and data analysis instruments to avoid the digital-centrism mentioned by Sarah Pink *et al.*, (2019); this is related to the fact that the researcher should not be astonished at the mass of information and the ease of access to it, but recognize that behind the large volume of information that circulates on the internet, there are corporeal beings who have reasons to inhabit the *web* in one way or another. Ultimately, to access the circumstances that make a reality internalize and mimic itself in one through symbolic frameworks that account for the existential wandering of people through the social world, as Rovira-Rubio and Giraldo-Hernández (2021) propose. In relation to differentiating aspects between the traditional ethnographic method and digital ethnographic practices, these authors state that the most significant change occurs in the researcher's relationship with the members of the community. In this regard, Pink and her colleagues assert that close relationships between the researcher and their subjects, as well as texts and textualities are modified, while other types of artifacts are analyzed, all inserted within broader contexts such as blogs, wikis and groups in social networks, as in this case.

For the analysis of the information collected, a matrix has been established to triangulate the data (Flick, 2014). In this matrix, what the survivors say and do is contrasted with what the researcher observes. This information is complemented with that found in the archives. From the initial work, two categories emerged: *people from Armero at the margin of memory work* and *people from Armero who work with and for memory from the margin*. The analysis presented in this text was divided into these categories. In this way, the findings outlined here are related to aspects such as ideology and the fact that the processes of remembering and forgetting are transitory, and the emphasis is placed on the questions: *Where are the survivors? And what is its relationship with processes of memory?*

Results

People from Armero at the Margin of Memory Work

In the first instance, it is important to mention that the researcher had drawn up an ethnographic work leading to the writing of life stories. Through those stories written by people from Armero, the purpose was to analyze aspects of

their remembering and forgetting processes that would reveal existential trajectories, in order to identify aspects of their identity configuration. Therefore, during the first six months of the exercise, she interviewed nine people, six men and three women, all over 50 years of age and in a vulnerable condition due to their socioeconomic and health statuses. Eight of the nine study participants knew how to read and write, but could not do so because they had problems with arthritis, tremors due to muscle weakness, or vision problems; three participants lived alone and had difficulty even preparing their food – they are men who spoke little, but could not contain their tears when they remembered the life they had in Armero, compared to the conditions of misery and abandonment in which they currently find themselves; two subjects lost their entire family in the eruption and the other was left alone afterward. Five of the nine participants survived and quite possibly still do thanks to the subsidy of the Colombia Mayor program and the charity of their neighbors. Only three people had a cell phone with the capacity for applications such as WhatsApp; and two did not have any type of telephone or device that would allow them to communicate. “What do I need a phone for, if I don't have someone to call me, much less someone to call. Loneliness arrives alone,” (Antonio, personal communication, November 16, 2019). He spoke of loneliness as if it were a person, his eternal companion since the disaster claimed all the members of his family, his material possessions and the symbolic network on which he sustained and projected his existence. Only his deep faith and fear of a superior being had prevented him from ending his life and with it the pain that does not leave the memories of Armero alone.

The other eight people were in similar conditions. How can they remember without hurting, if their current situation has not allowed them to weigh the loss in any way? The shortcomings on which their lives currently exist make remembering an intense, constant, and painful process, because they remember the impairment, the abundance that was lost in a traumatic way. The researcher noted that their memory has been configured around the disaster, that they live in a present time that is perceived as light because the past is heavy and is only a few days away; it cannot be seen far away either in time or in the space. The present life is diluted in a kind of lethargy in which the physical and emotional conditions do not even allow them to envision a path on which to plant traces so that there is a future. Walking is difficult not only because of physical degeneration, but because life has been too short to forget the paths learned in Armero and to grasp and stick to the paths of the new territory. Several of them recognized that they did not make the best decisions when faced with the obligation to continue living. In this regard, Mr. Ricardo, son of one of the founders of the famous orchestra Las Águilas del Norte, and who, without a leg, begs for alms in the streets of the Center-South of Bogotá, stated:

I received a little house in Guayabal, but I sold it. I gave part of it to my children and another part I wasted on alcohol. Understand me, when you get up every day thinking that at any moment death will come, you do not want to cling to material goods, you know that what you enjoy at the moment is the only thing you have ... But sometimes life takes longer and you have to struggle so you don't have to walk around with an empty belly and without a place to sleep. (Ricardo, personal communication, December 5, 2019)

Mr. Ricardo, like other people from Armero, is a living reflection of the poor psychosocial care with which they were received after the tragedy. Many survivors did not receive any assistance because the Colombian State assumed that giving them four walls and a roof was all they needed to get on with their lives. In this regard, in one of the interviews with the secretary of FEDEARMERO², he stated:

Mrs. Dora de Barragán was a successful businesswoman in Armero, she had a Subaru truck, several businesses and a large house. After the eruption, she received a little unstuccoed house in Ibagué, she put a wafer (obleas) stand at the door, until Alzheimer disease and sadness reduced her to the bed from which she can no longer get up. (Secretary of FEDEARMERO, personal communication, March 4, 2020)

As has already been said, adequate psychosocial care would have helped them find meaning in life despite the emptiness left by the disaster; it would have allowed them to recognize and adapt to reality instead of fleeing it or distorting it, increasing the trauma, as proposed by Bernal-Maz and García-Corredor (2016).

After the first group of nine survivors, other people from Armero were approached, who also remember being marginalized from Colombian society. Some of them were contacted by phone and others by internet due to the pandemic that suddenly appeared and prevented physical contact. These 24 survivors are also crammed with memories with which they choke to speak. They fear oblivion because they know how it is to live in it, but also because they see it as a large shadow that threatens to crush them forever and, with them, their beloved Armero. They live day to day, aware that time does not give up or wait, and their bodies deteriorate without pause, without even being able to recognize the twists and turns of the roads in the new territory. It is difficult for

2. Federation of survivors of Armero

their hands, their eyes, and their minds to sow words on paper, but the liveliness of their stories gives a lucid account of their existential trajectories.

Thus, they are left with the word and all the suprasegmental elements of oral communication to empty the content of their memory and bring to the present the remnants of the town, which, although they can no longer inhabit it, has not stopped inhabiting them forever. The survivors drown in their own memories, because, far from being valued and recognized as members of a valuable lineage from which they should not be so painfully uprooted, they are at the margins of a society prone to indifference and injustice, as Aguillón-Lombana (2021a) points out. Table 2 summarizes aspects of the interviewed population.

Table 2. People from Armero personally interviewed

Location	Bogotá	Ibagué	Cambao	Lérida	Guayabal	Villavicencio	Mariquita	Age range			Type of damage caused by the disaster	
Women	3	3	0	3	2	0	1	50-59	60-69	70-80	Physical	Psychological
								4	6	2	3	12
Men	7	2	2	2	4	2	2	50-59	60-69	70-80	Física	Psicológica
								5	6	10	9	21
Total	10	5	2	4	6	2	3					

People from Armero who Work *with* and *for* Memory

The tracking of various groups of survivors established in the *Facebook* social network turned out to be quite fruitful in terms of the conglomeration of survivors and ideological diversity, as will be seen later. Table 3 shows the results of this tracking. The information has been organized taking into account the

Table 3. Groups of people from Armero who work for memory through Facebook

Name of the group	Purpose of the group	No. of members
Armero and people from Armero	To return to Armero through memories	6531
Memories of people from Armero	To establish a place for meeting with the people from Armero	4948
Armero: Unforgettable Friends	To preserve the links with survivors	2068
Armero	To gather the people from Armero for the memory	2665
Memories of Armero	To build up daily life activities	274
Armero: re-birth stories	To review meaningful experiences of people from Armero	1242
People from Armero. What do you think of the Law 1632 of 2013?	To share points of view of law 1632	995
Fedearmero:	To gather people from Armero to standardize ideas	1435
Foundation for building up Armero	To work for the memory of Armero	10000
Lost children from the tragedy. A cause involving everybody	To help in the search of lost children	8568
I also have good memories of Armero, Tolima	To rebuild daily life activities	277
Memorial Museum of Armero	To inform people from Armero about what is happening there	4983
Virtual Armero	To inform regarding the official work of memory	8733
Armero, reunion with the missing people	To provide and look for information concerning the missing people	2162
Armeo, San Pio X school	To find school graduates to remember	325
Colegio Americano de Armero	To find school graduates to remember	595
Born in Armero. People from Armero	To gather people from Armero to remember	1200
Alumni from Colegio Americano de Armero	To find alumni to remember	341
FUNDASED, people from Armero to the world	To gather people from Armero from all over the world	318
Armeronoteolvido	To gather people from Armero to remember	782
We are people form Armero with the same purpose	To gather fellows to preserve identity	1124

Name of the group	Purpose of the group	No. of members
Amero's community	To gather for the reunion and the memories	620
Armero: Non-Governmental Organization (NGO)	To advise on the claim before the State	1724
Memorial Armero Armero's community	To gather with the purpose of remembering the lost life To foster work with the memory	127 376

As can be seen, in these groups there is an eagerness to highlight the centrality of the town by making use of toponymy, but not in all cases is a "surname" added that refers to virtuality, because according to some of the creators, associating the name of the town with the word "virtual" or another that alludes to this condition can generate an association with fantasy, and for them "nothing is more real than Armero". In fact, the only group that uses the word *virtual* is the one created by the person who represents state institutions. It is also important to mention that in most of these groups one observes aspects that were decisive for the location of a broad group of people from Armero, such as the hyperlinkage feature offered by the *web*, but also to understand at the outset some ideological aspects underlying their struggles for memory as a form of recognition. This, since the dynamics exposed therein, has been framed in temporal and spatial conditions that are accounted for through the information provided, and that are part of the communicative and existential ecosystem established in the digital space. Thus, it gathers coexistence relationships in which links and interactions are perceptible, which according to Ramírez-Velázquez and López-Levi (2015) cause the construction, transformation, perception, and representation of a reality.

This implies the characterization of a space framed for remembrance according to certain intentions of the community, spaces for working with memory are framed (Truc, 2011). In this sense, the shared and territorialized virtual space, is set with elements such as photographs, videos, films, audios, press clippings, official, or personal documents such as letters, postcards, banknotes, and invoices. The use of emoticons is also observed quite regularly. Memes, on the other hand, have not managed to gain a significant place in such groups, this may be due to the sacredness with which the images posted there are assumed, even in those in which people who are still alive appear, considerate and respectful comments are observed – a fact that is somehow incompatible with the nature of the meme. This reality tends to be transgressed in times of elections or social upheaval, as is currently the case due to the pandemic, because these are

favorable situations for ideologies and social imaginaries to emerge and generate questions and, almost always, confrontations between some of the members.

Of these struggles for memory it is worth noting that the issue of religion generated a lot of controversy when the tragedy was more recent, but as time went by those detractors began to be less participative or were expelled from the groups because most of their members are older and very religious. Thus, one still finds comments on beliefs such as that the tragedy was the consequence of a curse pronounced by the conservative priest who was murdered by the liberals and other situations that are linked to the so-called "shameful memories" referred to by Connerton (2008). These interactions have decreased in frequency due to the aforementioned actions. Currently, the most controversial ones have to do with images or videos shared by some members in which they claim to observe ghosts or other types of paranormal entities. Similarly, the economic issue is offensive to some survivors who feel that their pain cannot be measured, much less bought. It is also offensive to other people from Armero, because they feel that what they are being offered is very little, "handouts," compared to all that they lost, but, above all, because of the large amount of resources that have been diverted due to corruption; which led to the fact that *not* all the victims were treated fairly.

Finally, there are those who have been swindled by some unscrupulous people who have offered to help them with procedures such as obtaining documents to access the economic reparations contemplated by the State in Ley 1632 of 2013. As previously mentioned, these disagreements have favored the creation of new groups, some of which have the purpose of dealing with specific topics that require a certain rigor in the struggle for memory. Thus, it has been possible to learn about the debates that take place in groups such as *Armeritas: ¿Qué opinan de la LEY 1632 DE 2013?* (People from Armero: What do they think about LEY 1632 OF 2013?) In these debates, positions linked to particular interests become evident, positions of disagreement or approval of the actions of the representatives of state policy or of the "entrepreneurs of memory" mentioned by Jelin (2012), ranging from those who earn their livelihood by selling films, prints and other items in the cemetery, to those who have obtained economic benefits in the political sphere by being people from Armero, but have not defended the interests of the community.

Despite these disputes, there are facts that cross the hearts of all groups and in the face of which prudence and a high sense of sensitivity and respect are evident. Such events have to do with the death of a recognized person from Armero, notices from people who are still looking for their missing persons,

the videos, and images of the commemorations of each November 13, or also due to the insecurity that has occurred in the cemetery due to the lack of state presence. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that, in October 2018 a recognized Bogota radio station planned a Halloween night special from the cemetery and the indignation was widespread and of such magnitude that all groups joined in protest and managed to get the event canceled, although there was no lack of non-conformists who saw in it the possibility of generating "Black Tourism" as Bilbija and Payne (2011) pose. On the other hand, it is important to note that the fact that certain people from Armero are linked to these groups does not guarantee their inclusion or participation in them, since it has been younger family members who have linked them, but they do not know how to use or do not have access to the resources offered by the *web*, so the researcher had to contact them personally or by telephone.

Conclusions

Returning to the idea that to live is to walk and the new paths that the people from Armero have had to walk as a result of the disaster, it can be concluded that there were more of them than those mentioned in the official figures and not all of them succumbed on November 13, 1985. Many have been dying over these 35 years of uprooting, some by physical death and others because the practices of the Colombian State have condemned them to oblivion to devour in pieces the population that they keep in their memory; everything that makes them people from Armero in essence, and that is of little interest before the morbidity caused by the centrality of the catastrophic fact that has been advocated through the media as proposed by Bernal-Maz, García-Corredor (2016). Therefore, several have died for the world because they do not want or cannot talk about the only thing that many people want to hear: what happened during and after the eruption, as if it were so difficult to understand that there are things that need to be forgotten in order to continue living, as Rieff (2017) – although by inverse logic, the more people want to forget an event, the more it remains present.

After the eruption, the nights of the survivors were full of nightmares, everything came but sleep; the sound of the rain on the roof was like the tears of the dead crying for the hell in which their living were left; fear came from the hand of silence and got between the blankets; in the darkness of those nights appeared sockets that searched for their eyes lost under the mud; hands came groping for other hands to pull them back to life; shreds of skin that asked for

their flesh; worm-eaten lips came to kiss them goodnight. How hard it was to reconcile with sleep, to control the sphincters of crying, to taste food, to smile again!

From the research work that has been carried out so far, it can be affirmed that the people from Armero possess a great mnemonic capacity and a deep rootedness to that founding substrate condensed in Armero. They preserve the vivacity and joy of a thriving race, although sometimes after the laughter that comes with the memory of an amusing anecdote, uncontrolled crying occurs because it is impossible to shake off the disaster, and this ambiguity is not understood by other people. The people from Armero are very good communicators, although many can no longer write. They want to talk about their town, their childhood, their adolescence, and adulthood; they want to talk about all that past life that the mud did not take away because, although they inhabit different spatial-temporal frames, Armero has not stopped inhabiting them.

How could the trauma not become greater, when once the tragedy happened, the government of the day decided to distribute the survivors – more than 9,000 – around different areas of the country, as García (2016) and Cruz (2017) expose, and is corroborated by this research. Thus, there were people from Armero to whom the heat gave its last embrace and the cold shook their hands and settled in them forever. So, if for Guzmán-Pañuela (2021) living is walking, for this researcher that walking makes sense because one goes to the encounter with otherness, because at the end of the day and in some corner of the world someone is waiting for us. So that's the destination, but the journeyers are not going to anything, they're going to interact through memory and language. According to Aguillón-Lombana (2021b), humans are MELOS beings, that is, **Memory, Language** (and this allows us) to **Organize Socially**. But where does one go when no one expects it? What does one talk about if what one has to say is of no interest to anyone?

The people from Armero addressed in this research present a strong mnemonic activity because it is the only way in which existence finds meaning after the conditions they have had to face. Thus, those who remember on the margins of society feel the weight of a past that becomes present to indicate that it was always better because it guaranteed the rootedness to a land that, in addition to being prosperous, was known and loved. They no longer have the strength to complain, their daily struggle is against hunger and disease, and remembering what they were and what they had allows them to resist with fortitude "the test of their superior being" and wait patiently for the arrival of the future. These survivors say that initially going anywhere was all the same, especially since the hope of finding loved ones lost under the mud or lost in the great human market that threw children and young people to different parts

of the world was already lost. A situation that corroborates Paltemaa (2017), who states that a socio-natural disaster activates behaviors and attitudes that are contradictory, since, in the realm of chaos that emerges with a disruptive event of such proportions, the instinctive and the rational, the collective and the personal, the private and the public meet face to face. According to this author, a socio-natural disaster is a sort of realm of contradiction, which makes it conducive to understanding a society as a whole.

The desire to return has always been present, to go back in time and try to prove that everything was nothing more than a nightmare. To return to the place, to the territory and fill their existence with sensations that bring back memories of a life that is no longer there, but from which another time and another space have not been able to empty them because they know what they *are* while the past fills them, occupies them, entangles them with its tangle of memories, as Aguillón-Lombana (2021a) asserts. The people from Armero were united by the fertile territory in which they were born and to a certain extent grew up in, one that, when analyzing the existing imaginaries, its historical and geographical configuration, seems to be written in the domains of death. The inhabitants of Armero were children and adults; some were men, others women; some rich, others poor; some from the urban center, others from the rural area; some loquacious, others reserved. In short, *they* were profoundly human and so accustomed to the goodness and abundance of their paths, that in every territory to which the eruption threw them they seek the soil of their people. They are far from each other, but they are united by the disaster that broke them all, they are united by uprootedness and the train of nostalgia passes by every day to remind them that they are alone and that they are becoming fewer and fewer and less strong.

The time that has brought the catastrophe to adulthood has revealed the dimension of trauma in the life that goes on every day. For some people from Armero, there is now a virtual space for remembrance, one that is territorialized as much as possible, that serves as a meeting place and to which each linked person from Armero brings his or her memories and is nourished by those of others. However, they express uncertainty about the durability of these meeting areas in a social network with strong commercial interests, and call for decisive action by the Colombian State, such as the creation of a virtual museum, which in addition to collecting and disseminating the culture of Armero, can preserve it for the future in a convincing manner. The people from Armero who work for the memory have grouped together to fight from the possibilities granted by the digital world, they have built their own spaces for reunion and remembrance about the indolence of a State that has only known how to turn its back.

The people from Armero recognize ideological diversity as a co-natural element in the way the Colombian State dealt with the situation even before the eruption. The segmentation evidenced in the struggles for memory that are currently being waged is nothing more than a consequence of how broken they were, of the cracks that separated them, of a pain that in no way can be objectified or measured, and, therefore, is expressed in different ways. The current fragmentation is nothing more than a consequence of the inequity and harshness with which many were treated, of the corruption that fed and continues to feed at the expense of their misfortune, of the absurd decision to separate them when they should be more united.

It can also be concluded that if it had not been for the possibility of digital ethnographic work, the research would have had to be stopped because mobilizing in times of pandemic for COVID-19 has been difficult. In addition, the quality of the research work has been favored because it has been possible to broaden the coverage of members of the community and, consequently, information has been obtained that transcends the traditionally structured spatio-temporal boundaries.

Finally, it is important to bear in mind that one limitation of the study is linked to the fact that the people selected for the study are over 50 years of age, which leaves out those who, at the time of the occurrence of the disruptive event, were below the age of 15, as is the case of this researcher. From this perspective, it is possible to consider that, although trauma exists, it has been configured by factors different from those that configure the traumatic experience in people who were already adults at the time of the disaster; the experience of a truncated childhood because the schooling process was interrupted and all the social dynamics that occur in the educational institution, for example. This is an area that may be of interest for future research.

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