

Article

And Emotion Becomes Memory—Emotional Energies, Collective Memory, and Religious Celebrations Among Afro-Pacific Migrants in Cali, Colombia

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Abstract

The patron saint celebrations of the *colonias* of Afro-Colombian migrants from the South Pacific region in Cali (Colombia) provide a significant context for understanding the perseverance of *paisanaje* (a shared experience of origin) bonds and ritual vitality in migration contexts. Organized consistently since the 1960s, these celebrations bring together dispersed communities year after year, activating and reshaping memories, emotions, and collective identities. Building on this celebratory perseverance, this article explores the factors that produce and sustain the emotional and social commitments that transcend the celebration itself. Drawing on the theory of interaction rituals, the concepts of collective effervescence, and embodied memory, this study proposes interpreting these celebrations as spaces where emotion, memory, and social time intertwine. This is based on the understanding that the ritual experience enacts the community through a shared repetition that brings the past to life and projects the expectation of reunion. For this analysis, this study draws on research conducted between 2015 and 2018 and a reflective re-examination of this material in 2026, which included participant observation at 10 celebrations and semi-structured interviews with members of 7 hometown communities or *colonias*. The results show that longing—the tension between the joy of reunion and the melancholy for what is absent—acts as a constitutive emotional state and the primary amplifier of the ritual's emotional energy, adding precision to Collins's model of how energy accumulates and enables the continuity of communal bonds.

Keywords: emotional energies; patron saint celebrations; collective memory; Afro-Colombian migrations; Colombian Pacific; collective effervescence



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1. Introduction

Since the first half of the 20th century, the city of Cali, in southwestern Colombia (Latin America), has been the main destination for thousands of migrants from the neighboring region known as *el Pacífico sur* (the South Pacific region). This region is a vast jungle strip bordering the Colombian Pacific coast, stretching from the border with Ecuador (to the south) to the port of Buenaventura, some 300 km to the north. While there are indigenous and mestizo communities there, around 75% of the population of *el Pacífico sur* recognizes itself as *afrocolombianos* (i.e., Afro-Colombians, Colombian nationals whose origins can be traced back to black enslaved peoples brought into the region around the 1680s, to be employed as forced labor in local mining enclaves). Starting in the 1960s, many of these

migrant groups set out to establish hometown communities or *colonias* in Cali, many of which endure to present day (the word *colonia* has several meanings in Spanish, among them “neighborhood” as used in Mexico and Guatemala. To avoid confusion, we clarify that we will use the word in the course of the text with its meaning of hometown communities). Regardless of their varying levels of organization and size, all *colonias* from *el Pacífico sur* include among their yearly plan the celebration of their patron saint, an activity that brings together extensive networks of *paisanos* (fellow members of their home region) and that is perceived by many members as the highlight of the year. With more than 18 active *colonias* in Cali, each one with its own patron saint or virgin, an actual calendar of celebrations of this kind is firmly established in the city, nearly a century after the migration process began.

In social halls, hotels, recreational centers, and even in their homes, attendees recreate and emulate the celebrations with traditional music, culinary practices, and ritual forms that recall their rural homelands. With adjustments made to the celebrations to suit the urban environment, saints and virgins are honored while *arrullos*, a type of lullaby, are sung and marimbas, *cununos* (hand drums), and *güasás* (percussive instruments) are played; and in some cases, the *balsadas*, which in rural areas are boats that navigate the region’s rivers, transporting religious images while the community accompanies them with songs and prayer, are reenacted in the swimming pools of a local community venue, rented for the ceremony (Cano Molina 2019, pp. 219–23). Through these celebrations, traditions are not merely reproduced or served as nostalgic evocations; rather, they create sustained spaces of encounter where communities, fragmented by migration, reaffirm bonds, renew memories, and foster a sense of belonging and collective life in the city.

Similarly, it is noteworthy that these celebrations do not exactly reproduce what Hobsbawm and Ranger ([1983] 2005) termed the “invention of tradition”, as they are not a new practice presented as ancient, but rather ancient practices transposed into a different setting that the community reinterprets. Therefore, the *balsada* in a swimming pool does not pretend to be the river on the Pacific Coast, as it is explicitly acknowledged that it is not, and its symbolic power lies in that acknowledgment. It is a ritual translation (Sevilla and Sevilla 2013) in which the rite maintains its formal structure and emotional charge yet acknowledges that the context has changed and that this change is part of the migrant identity.

Given all of the above, the patron saint celebrations of Pacific migrants in the city are analytically significant due to their perseverance in a geographical, social, and cultural environment that is completely different from their own. This raises the question: What has sustained, for decades, the ability of these celebrations to draw participants from multiple *colonias* and foster a sense of commitment that extends beyond the festive moment? And the answer cannot be reduced to religious devotion, in a context marked by processes of secularization, nor to the simple preservation of traditions, given that these are constantly reinvented in response to urban conditions (Nocera 2009, p. 103). In this sense, the ethnographic material suggests, instead, that the continuity of these celebrations depends on their ability to produce and accumulate lasting emotional energies that motivate the repeated return to the gathering between the *paisanos*, from the region, and the migrant community.

This article sits at the intersection of studies on migration, collective memory, and rituals. From this perspective, research on migration and religion has shown that religious practices are active resources for producing a sense of belonging, community organization, and identity negotiation in contexts of mobility (Tweed 1997; Ebaugh and Chafetz 2002; Levitt 2007). In the Colombian context, studies on Afro-descendant migration to Cali have documented processes of identity formation and community recomposition (Wade 1997; Urrea and Barbary 2004; Restrepo 2013).

However, this body of work reveals two analytical gaps. On the one hand, the aforementioned studies focus on the organizational, identity-related, or institutional dimensions of migrant religious practices and have examined with less depth the microsocial mechanisms that produce and sustain emotional commitment to the celebration. And on the other hand, the study of migrant festive ritual as a device for emotional cohesion, the bodily transmission of memory, and the production of social time has not yet been conducted using the combination proposed here, drawing on Collins's ([2004] 2009) theory of interaction rituals, Durkheim's ([1912] 2007) concept of collective effervescence, and Connerton's (1989) embodied memory.

It should be noted that these concepts have already been used separately to analyze collective processes among migrant populations in different parts of the world. Collins's concept is applied in studies of migrant workers in China (Herrmann Pillath and Guo 2023) and Russia (Ni and Lisitsyn 2017); Durkheim's concept in studies of sporting events as spaces of inclusion in northern Italy (Sterchele and Saint-Blancat 2015) and the analysis of anti-extradition protests in Hong Kong (Choi 2020); and Connerton's concept in a study on religious practices among Karelian Orthodox women evacuees in Finland (Kupari 2011) and another on celebrations among the Punjabi diaspora in London (David 2015).

Consequently, this study engages in a dialogue with three theoretical frameworks that operate at complementary levels: Collins's ([2004] 2009) theory of Chains of Ritual Interaction (CRI), according to which successful rituals generate group solidarity, adherence to shared symbols, moral guidelines, and, especially, emotional energy (EE), the latter understood as a motivational residue that persists beyond the situation of the interaction. Durkheim's notion of collective effervescence helps us understand how periodic gatherings intensify the experience of belonging and reaffirm the group's moral existence (Durkheim [1912] 2007), especially when the daily dispersion of urban life makes the reunion an event. And memory as a bodily and socially embodied practice (Connerton 1989) that allows us to recognize that ritual not only brings bodies together in the present, but bodies laden with the past: bodies that remember through singing, dancing, cooking, greeting, and repeating gestures learned in rural territories. Once these theoretical positions are articulated, they allow us to interpret the ritual of patron saint celebrations as a social function, as a mechanism of cohesion, and as a bodily substrate of memory.

Based on this dialogue, the article proposes a dual reading. The first is interpretive, in that the patron saint celebrations of the *colonias* from the South Pacific region in Cali are spaces where emotion, memory, and social time intertwine in a repetition that brings the past to life and projects the reunion. The second is analytical and constitutes the text's contribution, since in conditions of migration, emotional energy accumulates not only within the ritual but also between rituals. This articulation takes on a specific inflection in migratory contexts when nostalgia and longing, understood as the tension between the joy of reunion and the melancholy for the absent territory (Collins [2004] 2009), which emerge as the emotional state that intensifies the ritual experience and fosters the accumulation of emotional energy, helping to maintain and strengthen networks of *paisanaje* in the city.

Considering the above, this article is structured around doctoral research conducted with members of seven Afro-Colombian *colonias* from the South Pacific region in Cali. However, the text does not merely reproduce the findings of the original doctoral research but proposes a reflective re-reading of the empirical material in light of current questions regarding the relationship between emotion, memory, and temporality. Following this introduction, the text is organized into five sections: introduction, methods, results, discussion, and conclusions.

2. Materials and Methods

The research underlying this article employs a qualitative, ethnographic approach and is based on data collected between 2015 and 2018 for a doctoral dissertation (Cano Molina 2019). The data was collected through fieldwork in seven Afro-Colombian *colonias* from the South Pacific region based in Cali, Colombia. The fieldwork was conducted by participating in patron saint celebrations held by members of the *colonias* from Guapi, Barbacoas, Timbiquí, Buenaventura, Naya, El Charco, and La Tola (all of them, locations in the Pacific region), selected for their diversity in terms of age, size, and level of organization. This variation allowed for the identification of both regularities in the structure of their celebrations and differences, providing a comparative basis for the analysis (Taylor and Bogdan [1984] 1986). Although the article is grounded in this empirical corpus, its development stems from an analytical re-examination of the data in 2026, aimed at delving deeper into the temporal dimension of the rituals and the relationship between emotional energy and memory.

In this manner, the methodological strategy combined participant observation with twenty-two semi-structured interviews conducted with organizers, musicians, leaders of the *colonias*, regular participants, and, in some cases, religious authorities associated with the celebrations. Access to the interviewees was achieved through networks of trust built progressively with the community over the years, prioritizing informants with frequent participation and experience in organizing the celebrations. The interview guide addressed dimensions such as migration trajectories, forms of belonging, meanings attributed to the festival, and emotional experiences associated with participation in the celebration. All interviewees participated voluntarily, with informed consent, and with knowledge of the research objectives and the use of the information. To ensure confidentiality, the quotes used in the analysis are anonymous.

The methodology consisted of a thematic recoding of the empirical material (field notes, interview transcripts, audiovisual and photographic records) based on three categories that appeared as secondary dimensions in the original analysis but which the temporal perspective allowed us to thematize with greater prominence: nostalgia as a shared emotional state, embodied memory as the substrate of ritual repetition, and the temporality of the chain of celebrations.

From an analytical standpoint, the study followed an iterative process that articulated theoretical and emerging categories. This allowed the categories to be refined in constant dialogue with the empirical material, following the principles of reflective thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). The textual quotations appearing in the analysis were selected for their illustrative capacity regarding the central argument, not as statistically representative evidence. In an initial phase, the empirical material was organized based on the components of interaction rituals proposed by Collins (co-presence, focus of attention, demarcation, and shared emotional state), which allowed for the identification of recurring patterns across the different *colonias*. In a second phase, the analysis shifted toward the effects of ritual, particularly the production of emotional energy and its relationship to memory and the continuity of community bonds. This process was not limited to the application of the model but allowed for its refinement, identifying dimensions such as the centrality of embodied memory and the temporal persistence of ritual experience.

Given that this research was conducted in collaboration with Afro-Colombian migrant communities in Cali, the researchers' position (a mestizo woman born and raised in that city) is worth a comment at this stage. Issues of racial identity, self-adscription to ethnic groups or practices of exclusion experienced by members of the *colonias* were not part of analytical categories of the study, and neither did they come up as a relevant element for discussion or analysis. Fieldwork was conducted through prolonged engagement

that combined observation, participation, and the building of bonds of trust with the participants, which facilitated access to sensitive dimensions of the ritual experience and allowed for the development of close ties of friendship that remain up to present times. This closeness was accompanied by a systematic exercise in reflexivity aimed at recognizing the conditions of knowledge production, the asymmetries present in the field, and the site of enunciation from which the participants' experience is interpreted (Blumer [1969] 1982). This positioning constitutes not only an ethical consideration but also a condition for the situated interpretation of the emotional dynamics and memories that structure the celebrations.

3. Results

In this section, we present the results of the analyses organized according to the logic of Collins's ([2004] 2009) CRI framework, distinguishing between the components of the celebration that facilitate the gathering of fellow countrymen and the effects that result from it. This analysis seeks to identify recurring patterns among the various migrant *colonias* in their patron saint celebrations.

3.1. Components of the Ritual: Facilitating the Gathering

The analysis of patron saint celebrations through the lens of CRI allows us to identify a consistent configuration of their components, albeit with internal variations among communities. The first analytical finding is the dual structure of the celebration, which shifts between the religious and festive components; this does not operate as a simple functional division but rather as an indicator of a significant and constant shift in the focus of the ritual. All celebrations are made of two broad and clearly distinguishable parts. The first one, centered on religious practices including a Catholic mass, a procession with the figure of the patron saint or virgin, and a series of hymns to the saint; this one retains its appeal primarily among older participants, particularly the matriarchs and bearers of the religious tradition. The second part, centered on festive practices, is more flexible and participatory due to the dances, the reenactments simulating the *balsadas*, the musical performances; it brings together all generations (particularly the younger participants) and generates the highest levels of emotional connection (Cano Molina 2019, pp. 185–90). While differentiated, both parts remain connected, and thus they allow to see two types of dynamics within the ritual. Firstly, the emergence of a particular kind of celebration that distances itself from other Catholic commemorations of patron saints that are held in the city and in other parts of Colombia; one where strictly religious practices and festive ones can come together, intertwined and not in conflict. Celebrations of this kind are not uncommon among Afro-Colombian Catholic communities (urban and rural), to the point that the term *misas inculturadas* (roughly translated as intercultural mass) was coined to address them. Secondly, and perhaps more relevant to the issue here, some celebrations alternatively shift their focus from the commemoration of the saint (with both its components) to the gathering of fellow *paisanos*, where what is activated is not merely the gathering itself, but a bodily memory expressed through gestures, songs, and forms of interaction (Connerton 1989).

Accordingly, physical co-presence, the first component of the model (Collins [2004] 2009), takes on a particular significance here: it is not merely a matter of spatial coincidence, but of the bodily reconstitution of a dispersed community, as the celebrations bring together between 150 and 450 people for a patron saint celebration (Cano Molina 2019, p. 185). The effectiveness of the celebration does not lie in the number of participants, but in the activation of forms of bodily recognition: prolonged greetings, references to the place of origin, forms of movement, and practices of physical and verbal closeness that reaffirm shared belonging (Cano Molina 2019, p. 190). In this sense, co-presence does not reproduce

collective memory, but rather summons and actualizes it through interaction, due to the intensity of the encounter, which reaches moments of high affective concentration or forms of collective effervescence (Durkheim [1912] 2007).

The second component, the demarcation of the group, manifests itself in a dynamic of controlled openness; although the celebrations are formally public, they operate as spaces for identity affirmation that distinguish between locals and non-locals, between community members and outsiders. However, this demarcation does not imply internal homogeneity among the locals, as hierarchies of recognition associated with specific roles (organizers, matriarchs, tradition bearers, musicians, singers) are observed within the communities, structuring the group's symbolic economy (Cano Molina 2019, p. 196). Thus, it is evident that the solidarity emerging from the ritual, in Durkheimian terms, coexists with internal differentiations that do not weaken cohesion but rather organize it.

The shared focus of attention, the third component of the CRI model, confirms the shift noted between the transcendence of the religious and the celebratory gathering. For while the ritual retains an explicit reference to the patron saint or the Virgin, the actual focus lies in the reunion of *paisanos* and the revival of shared cultural practices that evoke memory and the homeland: music, dance, cuisine, and performances such as the *balsadas* (Cano Molina 2019, p. 204). Accordingly, in the religious aspect, the devotional focus tends to weaken among younger generations, approaching what Collins calls "empty ceremonialism" (Collins [2004] 2009, p. 74). In the festive aspect, however, the focus is sustained through bodily practices that articulate memories and emotions.

Finally, the shared emotional state, the fourth component, presents a specific dimension that distinguishes these celebrations from other ritual forms. Rather than a homogeneous emotion, what circulates in the patron saint celebrations depicted in Cali is an oscillation between euphoria and melancholy, between the joy of reuniting with fellow countrymen and the longing for the absent Pacific territory (Cano Molina 2019, p. 207). This combination is not incidental but rather constitutive of the migrant experience in the city, and it forms the affective foundation upon which the effects of the ritual are produced.

3.2. Effects of the Ritual: The Creation of Bonds and Continuity

In the case of the patron saint celebrations of Afro-Colombian communities in Cali, four of the effects identified by Collins are evident: group solidarity, emotional energy, collective symbols, and shared moral standards, all with specific characteristics determined by the migratory context, which are expressed within the framework of the celebrations.

With regard to group solidarity, which, according to Collins's analytical model, translates into concrete acts of support that are evident in the solidarity networks activated and set in motion by the celebrations. These forms of solidarity, which are fueled by celebrations and gatherings, facilitate the strengthening of support networks, resulting in the circulation of information between fellow *paisanos*, access to jobs, care during illness, coordination with local institutions, support for places of origin and families, etc. (Cano Molina 2019, p. 201). Furthermore, a translocal dimension is observed in which resources generated in the city are sent to places of origin in the form of material aid, creating circuits of reciprocity that extend beyond the urban space. Thus, it is observed that the emotional and economic capital generated during Cali's celebrations, for example, returns to the communities of origin in the form of concrete support (purchase of wheelchairs, roofs for families, agricultural tools, improvements to churches, among others). Thus, we can speak of forms of solidarity where the city supports its people with aid, while it is the people who give meaning to the patron saint festival in the city, and this is what distinguishes the *colonias* of the South Pacific. The festive ritual not only unites the people from the same region in Cali: it keeps the network connecting migrants and their descendants to their homeland alive.

On the other hand, emotional energy (EE), understood as a lasting affective charge that individuals experience (such as enthusiasm, confidence, motivation, or, in its absence, apathy or alienation). This energy is not only experienced during the ritual moment but also drives future action stemming from the gathering and guides the search for new rituals. In other words, it is understood as a lasting motivational residue (Collins [2004] 2009, p. 148), which manifests itself in a repeated willingness to participate in the celebrations. The testimonies collected show that attendance is not solely the result of rational decisions, but rather of a deeply felt need to gather and renew bonds (Cano Molina 2019, p. 205). This energy does not arise in a vacuum: it is fueled by the shared emotional experience during the ritual and persists between celebrations as motivation for the next gathering. Thus, the celebration of the patron saint is a periodic reaffirmation of symbols, shared meanings, and group belonging, where collective effervescence (Durkheim [1912] 2007), that shared emotional intensity, acts as a mechanism of cohesion that encourages future gatherings.

On the other hand, the collective symbols that channel this shared energy during the patron saint celebration are not exclusively religious. While images of saints and virgins maintain a prominent presence at the gathering, the elements with the greatest emotional resonance are those linked to marimba music, *arrullos*, dances, local cuisine, and the *balsadas* (Cano Molina 2019, p. 222). These symbols do not function as abstract representations, but as bodily practices that reproduce memory in the present and activate the desire to maintain the bond into the future (Collins [2004] 2009, p. 114), such that they operate in accordance with the notion of embodied memory (Connerton 1989). In turn, these symbols are imbued with meaning and function as condensers of collective experience; they can be subsequently activated in other social spaces to reactivate the group's emotional energy.

Finally, patterns of shared morality are evident in the way communities organize themselves around valuing commitment to culture and participation in collective life. That is, celebratory rituals honoring saints establish implicit criteria regarding what is right or wrong and what is expected of each participant within the group, generating commitments and behavioral expectations during the celebrations (Collins [2004] 2009, p. 119). Here, attendance at the patron saint celebrations, contribution to their organization, and the transmission of traditional knowledge function as criteria for distinction and internal recognition among community members, while externally they serve as affirmations of cultural identity and the right to difference within the urban context of Cali. It should be stressed, though, that this affirmation of cultural identity conveys both the dimension of Pacific belonging (*la gente del Pacífico*: people from the Pacific region) and the dimension of local belonging to the specific community of origin (people from Barbacoas, Timbiquí, etc.). The latter is reinforced by the fact that each of the *colonias* has a different patron saint, commemorated in different months of the year: El Charco *colonia* (Saint John the Baptist, June), Buenaventura *colonia* (Saint Buenaventura, July), Barbacoas *colonia* (Virgin of Atocha, August), La Tola *colonia* (Saint Raphael, October), Naya *colonia* (Saint Francis of Assisi, October), Tumaco (Saint Andrew the Apostle, November), Guapi (Virgin of the Immaculate Conception, December), and Timbiquí (Saint Barbara, December).

Taken together, these results show that the effectiveness of the *colonias'* patron saint celebrations in Cali does not depend on the centrality of the religious component, but rather on the ritual's capacity to produce and sustain a community-based emotional fabric that interweaves emotion, memory, and a sense of belonging. In this process, nostalgia and solidarity emerge not as side effects, but as specific forms taken by the shared emotional state among the *paisanos* of the South Pacific during their patron saint celebrations. These celebrations are thus the result of a shared emotional state that intensifies the ritual experience and amplifies emotional energy, contributing to the continuity of the community bond over time.

4. Discussion

The findings presented in the previous section allow us to move beyond ethnographic description and develop an analytical interpretation of the patron saint celebrations of Afro-Colombian migrants from the South Pacific region in Cali, as spaces where emotion, memory, and social time intertwine in a shared repetition that brings the past to life and foreshadows future reunions. The results conclude with an idea developed here: longing and solidarity emerge as the concrete form taken by the shared emotional state during and after the celebrations, when those who gather are migrants and their families in Cali. And it is precisely the tension produced by the reunion and the absence that refers back to the Pacific region that intensifies the celebratory experience and amplifies the energy that sustains, year after year, the continuity of the patron saint celebrations.

To understand this process, the three conceptual frameworks that guide the article enter into dialogue: Randall Collins' notion of emotional energy, Émile Durkheim's collective effervescence, and Paul Connerton's embodied memory. The discussion is presented in a two-pronged approach: these concepts are revisited to clarify what is at stake in the celebrations, and alternatively, they are related to the empirical material to identify the potential tensions that the analysis reveals and which structure this section.

4.1. Emotional Energies as the Center of Patron Saint Celebrations

The concept of emotional energy proposed by Collins ([2004] 2009) helps answer the question: What drives people to repeatedly return to face-to-face gatherings that reignite their enthusiasm and sustain the continuity of their bond? It is presented as what a successful ritual leaves in those who participate, a lasting emotional recharge (manifested as enthusiasm, trust, or a sense of belonging) that does not fade with the immediate encounter but extends into future encounters and acts as a constant force guiding decisions about which situations to participate in and with whom to meet (Collins [2004] 2009, pp. 147–50). Accordingly, emotional energy is not just another emotion among many, but the motivational substrate that articulates social life in networks of rituals, all linked throughout time, that nourish the desire to repeat the ritual and return to the gathering with others. Thus, when that energy increases, the motivation to return is sustained and the ritual tends to strengthen.

In light of this understanding of emotional energies, the ethnographic material collected on the patron saint celebrations of the Afro-Colombian *colonias* from the South Pacific region takes on analytical clarity. For example, when a resident of Timbiquí says that “one feels the need and duty to gather in order to remember and see people one hasn't seen in a long time” (Cano Molina 2019, p. 220), he is not describing a passing preference or a more or less intense nostalgia, but rather giving voice to what Collins calls emotional energy. And that same logic appears with greater intensity in another testimony, where it is stated that “this is a necessity for which we are programmed so that at those times of the year we gather to perform our rituals and our celebrations” (Cano Molina 2019, p. 213). This statement accurately describes the process by which the emotional energy accumulated during previous celebrations guides behavior toward the next celebration, even before other reasons to participate emerge.

Consequently, and following Collins, emotional energy does not accumulate solely during the ritual, it also accumulates between rituals in the specific form of absence that longing imposes. That is why the celebrations in the *colonias* are not a succession of equivalent events, for each gathering arrives charged by the anticipation and releases, in the reunion among *paisanos*, an intensity that the anticipation itself had helped to produce. In this way, it is understood that emotional energy is sustained not only by the quality of the most recent interaction, but also by the affective quality of the interval between

interactions, which in this case is precisely longing. This longing to share that emotional recharge, laden with shared meanings and symbols. That is the first insight that the case of these migrants' celebrations contributes to Collins's model.

4.2. Collective Effervescence and Periodic Gatherings as a Sense of Belonging

Societies need to come together periodically to reaffirm their moral existence, and these gatherings produce a state of shared emotional exaltation, which E. Durkheim termed "collective effervescence" (Durkheim [1912] 2007, p. 360). This effervescence manifests as individuals feeling swept up by a force that transcends them and is, at the same time, the force of the group. When this intensification occurs periodically, collective consciousness does not weaken and bonds do not fade. Within this same conceptualization, the author noted that the religious is not, then, the specific content of beliefs, but rather the social operation through which the group convenes itself and becomes visible to itself in a shared ritual act. As Nocera (2009, p. 103) recalls, following Durkheim, this collective effervescence intensifies precisely when group interactions become more frequent and active. And, in this specific case of migrants' lives in the urban space, daily dispersion, far from invalidating the model, imbues it with meaning by making the reunion an event.

Accordingly, the case of the patron saint celebrations in Cali's migrant *colonias* finds immediate resonance in this interpretation. In particular, the emotional and affective density of the high points of the patron saint celebration, such as the start of the dance, the entry of the *balsada* into the pool, and the traditional *arrullo* songs, among others, are exactly the kind of phenomena Durkheim points to: an experience that transcends the individual and which he himself describes as a sense of belonging (Durkheim [1912] 2007). In this sense, we find the description offered by a testimony from within the festive experience: "when you are at these celebrations, you forget what is outside and you feel that you are in your hometown [. . .] it is a one-hundred-percent and total reuniting with our roots" (Cano Molina 2019, p. 208). Thus, the effervescence, in the context of the patron saint celebration, is not an abstract theoretical term: it is what happens when a scattered group of migrant *paisanos* recognizes itself, even if only momentarily, as one.

However, the case of celebrations requires a shift in the concept that is worth emphasizing, since Durkheim conceived of social effervescence in societies where co-presence was a given condition of the social order. Here, however, co-presence is an achievement of the *colonias*, as it depends on their ability to organize, on the community members mobilizing from different neighborhoods of the city (a city with a population of 3 million) and sometimes from other cities, on the celebration being financially sustainable, and on the matrons, organizers, and musicians remaining willing to carry it out. With all these variables, the effervescence does not arise because society is gathered, but because the group has gathered despite the dispersion that defines their daily existence in Cali. This difference is theoretically significant: when the Durkheimian function of periodic reaffirmation of the group is preserved, it is imbued with greater meaning. In other words, collective effervescence in a migrant context is not merely the effect of the gathering; it is also its moral justification and the emotional energy that sustains the patron saint festival and preserves the collective memory.

4.3. Embodied Memory: The Body That Remembers at the Celebration

Singing an *arrullo*, dancing a traditional rhythm or *currulao*, cooking a fish, playing an instrument, offering and receiving a traditional drink, these are acts that draw upon bodily memory. Following Connerton (1989), elements of this memory are activated precisely because they are inscribed in the body and are actualized each time the body performs them. Under this logic, the memory that the ritual mobilizes in people is not discursive but

bodily, since societies remember primarily through commemorative practices and bodily habits. These practices and ways of doing things are transmitted from one community member to another through repetition rather than through explanation (Connerton 1989). Accordingly, culture and its meanings are not inherited as a text to be learned, but as a technique that is incorporated over time.

Thus, the ethnographic material gathered from the patron saint celebrations in Cali's *colonias* serves to illustrate this point. When participants describe the festival, they do so systematically through the body, for example by noting that "when you're at those celebrations, you forget what's outside and you feel like you're in your hometown" or when they say they feel the town's river when they launch the *balsada* into the pool in Cali (Cano Molina 2019, p. 206). This reflects the process by which bodily memory is reactivated through the gesture, and that gesture produces a present imbued with all the past moments in which that same action was performed (Connerton 1989). Similarly, when the adult female singers lead the singing and organize the musical moment alongside young men who gradually join in on the marimba and percussion (Cano Molina 2019, p. 204), this is, in Connerton's terms, a technique of incorporated transmission. There, knowledge passes through the body that remembers, not in classes or in texts. And this occurs at the celebrations, when it is the matrons and the singers who embody moral and symbolic recognition within the community. They are the bearers of knowledge, of the incorporated condition of the ritual's successful execution.

In this line of analysis, the connection with Collins and Durkheim becomes indispensable at this point, as Connerton addresses an omission that the interactionist model leaves open and that the Durkheimian reading presupposes without elaborating: the body that enters the ritual is not a neutral body that could be replaced by another. It is a body laden with memories of the past, and that past is what makes it possible for co-presence to generate effervescence and for that effervescence to accumulate as emotional energy. Without incorporated memory, Collins's ritual chain would lack potency. And likewise, without that same memory, collective effervescence would have nowhere to take root. Consequently, the interpretation proposed by this article is that the patron saint celebrations of the Afro-Colombian migrant communities from the South Pacific in Cali are spaces where emotion, memory, and social time intertwine. This is, in fact, the interpretation that the three authors make possible when they are brought together to discuss this particular case.

4.4. Longing as an Amplifier

Longing, that state that oscillates between the joy of reunion and the melancholy of absence, serves as the connecting thread that links the three levels of theoretical discussion presented above. This longing is the specific form that emotion takes when the participants are migrants, and for that reason, it acts as the primary amplifier of the emotional energy that each celebration generates. When an interviewee states that "he feels great joy and a lot of nostalgia in that gathering" (Cano Molina 2019, p. 207), he is not expressing an emotional contradiction, but rather accurately describing the very texture of the affective state shared with those *paisanos* who come together.

Thus, interpreted through Collins's lens, that longing translates into an emotional reserve that accumulates between celebrations and that each festival releases and redeposits among its participants. Read through Durkheim's lens, it is the quality that imbues the next gathering, the next patron saint celebration, with value, making it an irreplaceable event for the *paisanos*. Read through Connerton's lens, it is the bodily awareness of a distance from the territory that every repeated gesture (singing, dancing, cooking, greeting) attempts to convey. This convergence explains why the ritual chain remains active for decades and why no single factor (neither group solidarity, nor effervescence, nor memory) could explain

it in its complexity. But longing, by operating simultaneously across the three analytical dimensions, links them and projects them over time.

This, conversely, also suggests a difference in emotional involvement between first-generation migrants and their descendants born in Cali. Among the former, the reserve of longing is greater because the distance from the rituals of the place of origin is more keenly felt (Cano Molina 2019, p. 188). However, for those born in Cali, longing operates as an affective inheritance transmitted through the bodily practices of song, dance, and flavors. Therefore, this longing serves as a condition of possibility for their own inclusion in the ritual chain of the patron saint celebration and their sense of belonging to a community.

4.5. Ritual Translation and Secularization of the Center

Finally, two observations deserve to be included in the discussion because of the analytical insight they provide. The first concerns the distance that emerges from the *colonias* regarding the classical concept of the invention of tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger [1983] 2005). This is because when the *balsada* is performed in an urban pool, in the absence of a river, it does not appear as a new practice presented as ancient, but rather as an ancient practice transposed to a different setting, where the community reinterprets it. Thus, the urban *balsada* does not pretend to take place on a river near the Pacific, because it is explicitly acknowledged that it does not, and in that acknowledgment lies its symbolic power. That is to say, it is a ritual translation, in the sense that M. Sevilla and E. Sevilla (Sevilla and Sevilla 2013, p. 31) understand tradition as a creative and autonomous process, not as the preservation of what was, but as the enduring reinvention of what can continue to be.

The second observation refers to the tension, present in all the *colonias* studied, between the secularization of the devotional component and the sustained vitality of the ritual. For the matrons and elders who lead the organization and participate in the festival, the Mass remains the spiritual heart of the festival, but for the younger generations, the celebration has shifted to dancing, socializing, and the symbolic consumption of traditional elements (Cano Molina 2019, pp. 188, 202–4). This should be interpreted as a realignment of the ritual's gravitational center, where devotion to the saint is waning while devotion to the *paisanaje* and Pacific culture has strengthened. This aligns with Durkheim's thesis on the religious function of ritual, where the cohesive force persists, but the sacred content has been redistributed. In this way, what appeared to be a ritual weakened in its liturgical and religious dimensions is revealed, in its interactional dimension, to be fully alive.

5. Conclusions

This discussion would be incomplete without explicitly acknowledging the perspective from which it is presented. The ethnographic material was collected between 2015 and 2018; the analysis offered here is a reinterpretation by the authors in 2026. This temporal distance produces two effects worth noting. On the one hand, on an epistemological level, what was once fieldwork is now an archive. This shift allows us to see patterns that ethnographic immersion rarely brings to the forefront. Among these, the centrality of longing stands out, made visible not only by the way it emerges in the data, but also because, over time, the complete corpus of information on the patron saint celebrations ceased to be a set of living events and became a map of recurring affections. On the other hand, historically speaking, the urban context has changed over time; generations born in Cali have become fully integrated into the patron saint celebrations. At the same time, the political frameworks of ethnic recognition have transformed, strengthening the appreciation of cultural practices. Within this framework, the re-examination does not update the data, nor does it entail a substantive shift in the original research questions. On the contrary, it deepens the

hypotheses that guided the fieldwork, allowing for a clearer examination of the persistence of certain dynamics, particularly those related to the reproduction of ritual life and the affective foundations of the communities in Cali.

From this clarity, it is possible to offer an assessment of these patron saint celebrations in the migrant *colonias* from the South Pacific region in Cali, as it becomes evident that, rather than merely a religious event or a festivity, these celebrations function as rituals of interaction that produce lasting social and emotional effects. They reveal the articulation of the past and future of that community in Cali. There, networks of solidarity are sustained that allow migrants and their descendants to inhabit the city without diluting their collective belonging and identity with the territories of the Pacific. Thus, what appears to persist in its religious form (the festival of the saint or the Virgin) is, in reality, a practice in constant reorganization. In this process, the devotional and religious center remains, albeit weakened, while the center of *paisanaje*, the shared experience of origin, and celebration has been strengthened. In this redistribution, ritual cohesion is not only maintained but, in some *colonias* such as those of Barbacoas, Timbiquí, Guapi, or Buenaventura, has intensified over several decades (Cano Molina 2019, pp. 215–17). In this sense, what persists is not the celebration as a religious or cultural object in its own right, but rather the emotional fabric that binds those who celebrate these festivities year after year.

The question that structured this article, aimed at understanding what generates and sustains the emotional and social commitment that transcends the celebration itself, now allows for a comprehensive answer developed through the discussion. According to Collins ([2004] 2009), celebrations are chains of interactive rituals whose emotional energy is not exhausted by the event itself, but persists as a lasting motivational residue between celebrations. According to Durkheim ([1912] 2007), celebrations are the social process through which a group of migrants scattered throughout the city gathers periodically and becomes visible in the shared effervescence produced by their co-presence and encounter. And through Connerton (1989), these celebrations are the space where a memory incorporated in bodies laden with the past is actualized in song, dance, and flavors, elements that no discursive archive could replace. These three readings converge in the case of Afro-Pacific migrants in Cali through a specific mechanism that the celebrations have made visible. That longing, which functions simultaneously as an affective reserve between celebrations and as a quality that makes the next gathering irreplaceable, also functions as a bodily awareness of the distance that each repeated gesture attempts to convey. It is this convergence that explains the continuity of the community bond under conditions of urban dispersion, the secularization of the devotional center, and generational distance from the territory.

Thus, the patron saint celebrations provide a specific refinement to Collins's model, which constitutes the theoretical contribution of this text. The emotional energy of the migrant participants does not accumulate solely during the ritual, but also accumulates between rituals, in the specific form of absence that longing imposes. Thus, the chain of celebrations is not, in this sense, a succession of events linked by a homogeneous motivational residue, but rather a succession whose intervals are emotionally charged by longing. Hence, each celebration releases a tension that the waiting has helped to produce and, in the same way, recharges the reserve with new emotional deposits. This distinction is theoretically significant, as it shows that the quality of the ritual chain depends not only on the potency of each interaction but also on the affective quality of the interval between interactions. This allows us to point out that, in the migrant condition, that interval is not empty but rather active longing.

As for the limitations of this analysis, two questions remain open for future research. The first seeks to understand how the intensity of longing changes among migrant generations born in their destinations and what implications this change has for the continuity of

community ties. This is a question that the data in this study does not allow us to answer definitively and that requires fieldwork focused on intergenerational transmission. The second question concerns the role that digital communication technologies play in the extension or fragmentation of ritual chains, beyond physical encounters. This question relates to the transformation of the urban context and new technologies, an issue that has become particularly urgent in recent years. This article does not answer these questions, but its framework makes them formulable in analytical terms by laying the groundwork.

Finally, this exercise offers a relevant contribution to the debate on cultural policies. Given that the vitality of the patron saint celebrations in Cali's migrant *colonias* does not depend solely on state recognition (which is important but insufficient), nor on protection of heritage (sometimes necessary but not decisive), these celebrations depend, above all, on the capacity of the communities themselves and their management to sustain ritual chains that generate the emotional energy needed to motivate the participation of new generations. In other words, when that energy circulates, as it still does with great force in the *colonias* of Barbacoas, Timbiquí, Guapi, Buenaventura, and Tumaco, policies can amplify the process. But when that energy wanes, no policy can replace it. Thus, the energy with which the patron saint celebrations draw people in does not lie, strictly speaking, in the saint; it lies in the reunion among *paisanos*, in the memories that the *arrullo* and the *balsada* awaken, and in the longing that sustains the anticipation of the next gathering.

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