



D.P. Snyder · 13 hours ago · 4 min read

# Rescátame del olvido



In La Candelaria neighborhood of Bogotá, the graffitied walls demand. Plead. Mock. Laugh. Hallucinate. Insist. Never have walls had so much to say. Rescátame del olvido, says one, rescue me from oblivion. Not screaming or begging, just a sentence with a period. An extraordinary request in a calm tone of voice. Sober letters, a serif font, neatly stenciled on a field of blood red. I pass this stucco wall every day as I walk to and from the museums and bookstores in Colombia's capital looking for art, for books, for inspiration, searching for Colombia.

Perdón señora, rescátame...

Who makes this request? Not the fortunate who have the orgasmic pleasure of dying naturally in their own beds. It's the unlucky dead who speak on the walls of Bogotá. The 450,000 (or more) assassinated during the armed conflict between 1985 and 2018. The eight in ten (or more) who were civilians. The 50,000 (or more) kidnapped. The 80 to 120,000 (or more) "disappeared" who are now part of the jungle floor, the bed of the Magdalena River,

fertilizing coffee plantations in the altiplano. That's a strong brew. Add eight million (or more) displaced persons. The 6,500 (or more) falsos positivos, citizens targeted as undesirables and assassinated by the military to fill quotas imposed by their commanders, trophies in a macabre human safari to demonstrate progress against the guerrilla to the bosses.

Rescátame del olvido.

Add the rising numbers of indigenous leaders who continue to perish at a truly breathless pace, about one every four days since the 2016 peace accord. Why are peace treaties always so fatal to native people?

Rescátate del olvido.

All the peace Colombia has known fits into the wet heart of a pitcher plant, a swollen vegetable mouth that devours its victims while tourists admire its beauty. Who hears the voices that call out, tongueless and never-ceasing?

Rescátese del olvido.

In Colombia, I eat out because it's cheaper than eating in. The exchange rate is 4,700 Colombian pesos to the dollar. Why bother doing the math?

Are the numbers of the dead, disappeared, and displaced correct? More or less. Probably more. But numbers don't help me grasp the mind-boggling reality. Add to it mothers who die of sorrow, fathers who die of drink, former killers who one day catch their own empty gaze in a crappy bathroom mirror and feel obliged to kill their wives first and then themselves. Would it be illuminating to estimate the sum total of missing limbs, eyes, tongues? Fancy fractions are required: two arms, two legs, a head and miscellaneous bones equal one single individual, or something like that. We have to design a new algebra, seek out the common denominator. We require a high mathematics of murder. An arithmetic of agony. A calculus of cruelty.

## Rescatémonos del olvido

And who shall place a number on the worst possible deaths? Not all violent deaths are equal, that's for sure. Being shot in the head is even a kind of grace given the alternatives. Like being threatened persistently until you die of a heart attack. Like being the judge who was told that her daughter would be raped, her fingers cut off and scattered like petals around her incinerated body if she didn't cooperate, who didn't cooperate and was killed. Should her death count for only one? Does her daughter who now walks, works, eats, and pays rent while half-destroyed appear in the columns of figures? Am I going too far?

## Rescátense del olvido.

Six decades of violence (or more). 30,000 interviews of victims (although no one can interview the dead, let's be honest). 800 pages in the report of the government's Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence, and Non-Repetition. Do these numbers help clarify the situation for you? No?

If you are an American, you can form a personal relationship with Colombia's violence based on the number 8.5 billion. That's the "military assistance" you've paid for since 1999. The War on Drugs and Just Say No were always cheerier slogans than Your Tax Dollars Are Murdering Civilians. Blaming your child's drug habit on Latin American bad guys cut from the pages of a comic book was always simpler than taking responsibility for your lazy politics, your indolent understanding, your underlying bigotry, your studied ignorance, and your iffy, neglectful parenting. How easy it is to forget.

## Rescátame del olvido.

Only the legions of the dead can make sense of these numbers. They see the complex equations with their never-closing eyes and know the truth. They have done the calculus. And still, they wait for us to remember.

---

D.P. Snyder (she/her) is a bilingual writer and literary translator from Spanish. Her translations have appeared in The Sewanee Review, Exile Quarterly, Two Lines Journal, The Southern Review, World Literature Today, and Latin American Literature in Translation, among others. Her story "La puerta secreta" was a finalist in the 2020 San Miguel Writers Conference International Short Story Competition and her essay "The Bone's Story" was a finalist in the 2021 Medium Writer's Challenge, her flash story "The Hot Pink Forest" has been nominated for Best Small Fiction 2023, and my translation of Mónica Lavín's essay, "Coyoacán a la carte", has been nominated for a 2023 Pushcart Prize. Book-length translations: "Meaty Pleasures", short fiction by Mexican writer Mónica Lavín (Katakana Editores 2021); "Arrhythmias", creative essays by Mexican Jewish writer Angelina Muñoz-Huberman (Literal Publishing & Hablemos, escritoras 2022). She lives in Hillsborough, North Carolina. [www.dpsnyder.us](http://www.dpsnyder.us)