

# Terror as a political weapon

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This essay was inspired by Héctor Abad Faciolince's *Oblivion: A Memoir* <sup>[2]</sup>, an eloquent plea against terror as a political weapon, a book full of unethical examples in the political field and not only. The book is at the same time a tribute to his father, Héctor Abad Gómez, and an overwhelming description of the most devastating "plagues" humanity has ever suffered: violence, armed conflicts between different political groups, insane delinquency, brutal riots, and restrictions of freedom of thought and expression.

In 1987, Colombia recorded more homicides than a war-torn country, holding the record as the most violent country worldwide <sup>[1]</sup>. Diseases such as typhoid, enteritis, or malaria were no longer the most common causes of death. At the end of the 1980s, there were systematic ideological wars, acts of violence, and assassinations in the academic world.

Violence was elevated to the rank of state policy in the name of "patriotism" and triggered a long-lasting reflex that was maintained with the help of the armed forces. It began with restrictions and progressed to the abolition of human rights. Academic freedom vanished, and teachers were subjected to ideological surveillance through unannounced visits to classes by the military or threats of losing their jobs. Therefore, the quality of Colombian education at that time suffered. However, the vast majority of the population quickly learned the new way of "living".

In this context, anyone with a different political or religious background had to be eliminated because they posed a threat to the state. This was done through physical and psychological torture, leading to a slow and painful death.

Héctor Abad Gómez, doctor, university professor, journalist, human rights defender, and founder of the Colombian National School of Public Health, was an idealist who sought equal opportunities and decent living conditions and fought for the rights of every Colombian. His seeking for justice led to his violent murder by the paramilitaries in 1987, one of the darkest and most bloody periods in Latin America's modern history. He found a convincing echo in the writings of Marx and criticized the unethical behavior of the Colombian authorities, which the political leaders of the Colombian state used to label him a communist and therefore dangerous. Nearing the end of his life, he turned to politics, becoming a member of the Liberal Party. At first, political leaders tried to manipulate him and use his burning desire to bring about a revolution for the better in the lives of Colombians to achieve their ambitions, but the exact opposite happened. More and more people became aware of the injustices they were facing, which led to a revolt against the leaders of the state. In a last-ditch effort to get him out of politics and shut him up, the state leaders gave the order to kill him.

At the end of the 1950s, he started getting into trouble because of the articles he wrote about various topics. His focus was most on the importance of preventive medicine (for example, the correct pasteurization of milk before selling it) or his personal views on liberalism. It got to the point where he was harshly criticized and publicly shamed for his political and religious beliefs.

Later, he was threatened with losing his job and intimidated by his colleagues because of his beliefs. His teaching activities have been threatened. Its methods of teaching were based on practical activities in state prisons and slums in Medellin. Even if most students appreciated his approach and acknowledged that the knowledge acquired during these activities was enormous, he was forced for several years to give up his job as a teacher.

He was also the initiator of significant changes both for his city and for the whole country (the first appendage, vaccination campaigns, and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases). He promoted equality of opportunity by avoiding any forms of discrimination or unequal treatment of persons based explicitly or implicitly on extra-occupational criteria such as religion, political beliefs, nationality, income, etc.

At one point, his thoughts, words, and deeds did not begin to fade and became a real problem for political leaders and religious groups, whose plans involved the indoctrination of the masses. These positive changes in Colombian society, for which he fought his entire life, eventually led to his death.

Dr. Abad's murder is just one of many violent deaths of people who had the nerve to care about other people, have different beliefs, or even demand that everyone have access to food, clean water, and sanitation. These acts were interpreted as ruthless subversion by Colombian conservatives and the Colombian Catholic Church between the 1960s and 1980s. Anyone who had an impact on the public and managed to rouse the masses and get them to resist political and religious repressions was punished through physical and mental torture.

I consider these to be some outstanding examples of unethical behavior. First, academic and personal freedom and autonomy were not respected by imposing the Catholic faith and conservative political ties. Restrictions on the choice of study and research programs were also implied.

I also believe that one of the most important and influential ethical theories of the German philosopher Kant was violated<sup>[3]</sup>: The morality of our actions is ultimately determined by how we, as rational individuals and beings, relate to others. He argues that there are no people who are inherently of greater moral significance than others, from which we can conclude that utility does not determine a person's worth. The way Dr. Abad was used in political games and then killed when he was no longer needed and became a threat is unethical from this point of view.

Therefore, in order to prevent such unethical examples from occurring today, I believe that the principle of humanity achieved through Kant's theory should be respected, i.e. that through our actions we should treat every human being as an end in itself and not merely as a means.

## References

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- [2] Héctor Abad Faciolince. *El olvido que seremos*. Planeta Columbiana, 2007.
- [3] Robert Johnson and Adam Cureton. *Kant's Moral Philosophy* (Retrieved December 29, 2021). July 2016. URL: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-moral/>.