

## If Gandhi were from Cauca, he would play on the shawm



For some years, approaching the protests in the city of Popayán has led to encountering a rhythmic rhythm that inspires one to walk, adorned with flutes that resemble the trills of birds. This rhythm accompanies the mobilizations of different organizations in the capital of Cauca. At each step we take towards the crowd, we begin to distinguish the TATA PUM TA PUM produced by drums, the CHAAAAAAA produced by the charrasca and the trill of the flutes that interpret bambucos, marches and cumbias.

We have been walking for a few blocks with drums on our shoulders and flutes in our backpacks, water in our briefcases, milk and baking soda in case we get gassed, and a construction helmet to protect our heads in case the situation turns violent. We listen to the melody of the flutes, the hands and arms begin to move to play our instruments and accompany the Rioblanqueño. In the interlude between songs, we greet the compas, pay our respects to the chirimero teachers, and strategically position ourselves in the middle of a highway to cut off traffic on the street that leads to the southern exit of Popayán.

The National Strike in Colombia broke out on April 28, 2021, in reaction to anti-popular measures such as the tax reform promoted by the finance minister and the health reform. The government withdrew the reforms, but the objectives of organized civil society have expanded, and to date (August 4, 2021) we continue to march against the violence in the regions and the mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to favor of free and quality education, and appropriate measures to tackle social inequality.

We know that it is a difficult day, it is July 20, Colombia's independence day, and the central committee of the National Strike issued the directive to march against the government. It is a fact that, on the part of the State forces, and especially the Mobile Anti-riot Squad (ESMAD), there will be a strong repression towards social mobilization. State repression to date has left 4,687 cases of police violence, 84 people killed in the context of the protests, 82 people with eye

injuries caused by the ESMAD, and 25 cases of sexual violence committed by the police (IACHR. 2021. 8 -9).

We start the march, and we are joined by a group, albeit improvised, quite lively and joyful of dance, who dance in front of the shawm inspired by the music. Nothing is spoken, nothing is agreed upon, nothing is organized, it is enough for us to find each other's gazes and begin to produce music to begin to generate dynamics of appropriation of public space, and that through music we line up wills to achieve a goal common. As we move between bambucos and dance steps, it is impossible for us not to perceive how the music unites us and makes us realize that we are not alone, that, at each step, at each note, these elements “allow [them] the construction of a collective identity in opposition to a hegemonic otherness, reinforcing the ties of solidarity and resistance between the popular sectors” (Ortale. 2018. 15).

We continue the march and arrive at the central police station in Popayán interpreting Mi Cafetal, but we know that it is necessary to stop in front of the police and point out the one who has been perpetrating massacres, attacking popular processes since his time as president: Álvaro Uribe Velez. At that moment the repertoire changes, we go from the bambucos where the flute is the one that speaks, to make use of our voices, a drummer marks the change of rhythm and we begin to shout with anger and joy to the rhythm of salsachoke “1.. .2...3... AND STOP ¡Uribe paraco son of a bitch!” The alteration of the lyrics of popular songs is an element that we can find in different processes of civil resistance, from Amish in the United States that change the lyrics to pop songs or popular culture to confront corporations (Safran. 2019), to civil society in Singapore, who change the lyrics to institutional songs to challenge the image of the government (Kong. 1995). In our case, and as a reflection of our own way of assuming misfortunes with joy, the demands made with anger are intertwined with an almost carnivalesque aspect in the demonstrations, an aspect that imbues the demonstration with joy, and invites us to sing and dance lyrics. with profanity against the government. The flag of the Gran Banda Chirimera continues to advance waved by the wind, and behind it we go, with straw hats and reed and plastic musical instruments

walking history. People are happy to see us pass... until at the end of the march the ESMAD appears.

As we were closing the entire mobilization, we began to feel the presence of ESMAD due to the sensation of itching in our noses and eyes produced by the tear gas. It is that moment when we feel a flash of adrenaline that runs through the entire body, and from the stomach common sense shouts "run away!", the legs get ready to act quickly and, quickly, the eyes scan the panorama identifying the source of danger. Gathering sanity and remembering why we are doing what we do, fear is exhaled in a deep sigh, we know that our integrity is in danger, but we insist on not moving and accompanying the marchers and the front line.

"The shawm avoids silence, where shouts are heard due to confrontations, how it encourages one to continue in the fight" (Participant in the demonstrations, June 3, 2021), were the words that we exchanged with a participant of the demonstrations, who extols one of the fundamental functions of music in spaces for the exercise of non-violent action: to make sacrifice more bearable, the tapasya spiritual discipline, which implies non-violence, since - as we are reminded from Puerto Rico -, in our context "Music has invaluable power in our society. It is capable of adapting to situations, changing moods, creating tranquility or reaffirming identity" (Rivera and Vélez. 2019. 77).

The music doesn't stop, we keep playing despite the tear gas grenades buzzing close to our heads and the cloud of gas hanging over us. The flauteros and flauteras continue to inflate their lungs with the suffocating air so as not to let the melody fall; itchy eyes and throat is the price to pay to keep the music from stopping. The music does not stop, and we observe how, with a determined step, Maestro Walter begins to lead the march, getting closer and closer to where the front line confronts ESMAD. Seeing the teacher armed only with his flute stand up to one of the riot squads is inspiring. Master Walter's strength inspires and hints at the commitment and discipline that must be had to commit to non-violent methods of political action, since "as in war, satyagraha campaigns need trained combatants, endowed with a great spirit. of decision towards

the community, capacity for sacrifice, resistance, organization and discipline, qualities without which one cannot win” (López Martínez. 2012. 62).

The shawm backs up and little by little it reoccupies the spaces that minutes before had been occupied by tanks and police, we go back to go forward again, we disperse, we go back and we go forward again. The Sotareño sounds while a block later the tank with pressurized water cannons disperses young people from the front line and the blows on the leather of the drum are confused with the explosions of the stun grenades, we begin to feel the fatigue of having been since 9 am to 5:30 pm accompanying the demonstration. With the arrival of night, and with the horrors committed by the police protected by darkness as a precedent throughout the National Strike, we begin our return to our homes, we take one last look at the compañer@s who remain and ask them that they be careful, they wish us the same and we say goodbye. The fear of never seeing someone again, disappearing or losing an eye in the protests is real, so deep down we thank life for continuing to have another day to converge, walk history, and with our instruments as a weapon and the certainty to fight for what is fair, to change everything that needs to be changed.

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