



# Jaime Garzón's trickster discourse: His messages, social commentary, and legacy in Colombian comedy

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## Abstract

Jaime Garzón was a comic ahead of his time. While his comedy lifespan barely covered one decade (abruptly interrupted by his untimely death), his legacy in Colombian comedy and social activism remains strong. This article, rather than discussing his death, will focus on his life as a comedian who was the quintessential Colombian trickster. Through a framework of what it means to be a trickster in the Latin American and Colombian contexts, this article analyses the social commentary present in Heriberto de la Calle, Garzón's most celebrated alter ego. Through de la Calle, Garzón was able to raise questions about our society and confront politicians about daily issues, both becoming a voice for average Colombians and establishing a new consciousness of comedy as a tool for social accountability. A discussion on the impact of Garzón's legacy today will complete the analysis of his comedy and trickster discourse.

## Keywords

Colombia, comedy, Heriberto de la Calle, Jaime Garzón, social advocacy, trickster

If we want a world with peace and justice, we must decidedly place intelligence at the service of humour. (Jaime Garzón)

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Colombia has had a tradition of jokes and comedy since its own origins and throughout its history. However, the emergence of comedian Jaime Garzón (1960–99) provided a new take on the humour genre in our nation. Although there had been previous moments of social activism in Colombian humour, Garzón was far more direct and innovative in turning comedy into a veritable tool for social commentary, political satire and social activism, placing his brand of comedy ahead of his time. One of his attempts at comedy (*Quac: El Noticero*, Quac: the news programme) is, in hindsight, the Colombian version of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. His main alter ego, Heriberto de la Calle, a representation of a local shoe polisher (or *lustrabotas* in Spanish) who called out politicians and celebrities alike, featured a brand of comedy akin to what Sacha Baron Cohen (Moss, this issue) has achieved through characters such as Ali G and Borat.

Although Garzón was the victim of a sad and untimely death in 1999, it is not my intent to focus on the circumstances of his death. Other authors such as Izquierdo (2009), Salazar-Isaza (2011), and especially Jaime's sister, Marisol (Garzón Forero, 2009), have provided more eloquent and detailed accounts of this tragedy. Instead, this article will engage in a scholarly analysis of Garzón's *oeuvre*, specifically Heriberto de la Calle. Through this analysis, I argue that Garzón, in de la Calle, provided a model for other comedians to shape the figure of the trickster (Babcock-Abrahams, 1975; Carroll, 1984; Lynn, 2005; Mora, 2009; Radin, 1956; Vizenor, 1993, 2005) for years to come. Therefore, this article not only provides an academic reflection on comedy and Colombia, but also pays a heartfelt tribute to a trailblazer, an activist, and an example for advocacy who deserves emulation.<sup>1</sup>

In order to analyse Garzón's work, I will first discuss the notion of the trickster with a specific focus on an Ibero-American historical perspective to illustrate how a trickster is ultimately an *agent provocateur*. Then, I will provide a brief overview of comedy in Colombia, our first approximations to political satire, and how Garzón's emergence produced new ways of envisaging comedy that remain original and fresh today. After the historical overview, I will draw from some elements of critical discourse analysis (Blommaert, 2005; Gee, 2010; Mora, 2006; Mora and Muñoz Luna, 2012; van Dijk, 2008) to discuss how Heriberto de la Calle's approach to conversation with his guests actually became an effective weapon for social commentary and denunciation. In the final section, I will revisit some of the ideas about trickster discourse to explain how they ultimately help to characterize Garzón's work as that of a trickster. I will also discuss how his brand of comedy remains influential today, and how it may set a path for the future of both Colombian comedy and social activism.

## Understanding the heroics of the trickster

Failure fortifies the strong. Humour makes the weak happy. (Jaime Garzón)

Most recent attempts to understand trickster discourse have linked it to Native American narratives (Radin, 1956; Vizenor, 1993, 2005). However, only within a broader historical and cultural perspective can one understand the trickster's wider significance and historical value. In this section, I will first frame the notion of trickster in the literary tradition; then, I will introduce three key elements that characterize the trickster and enable him to become a *provocateur*.

## The trickster as a member of a literary tradition

As different authors (Babcock-Abrahams, 1975; Berezkin, 2010; Dynes, 1993; Radin, 1956) have argued, the trickster has a long-standing tradition in narratives and literature from different corners of the world and distinct historical timeframes. Radin (1956) placed the first literary evidence of the trickster in Roman mythology, showing that the Roman god Hermes had all the characteristics of a trickster; Grottanelli (1983) referenced tricksters in Phaedrus' fables; Dynes (1993) showed that Renaissance literature in England featured prominent examples of tricksters.

Old Spanish literature provided some notable examples of the trickster in the figure of the *pícaro*, a lower-class rogue who engaged in misadventures and offered satirical commentary about the Spanish society of the time. The most notorious examples of picaresque literature appeared in *Lazarillo de Tormes* (Ballinger, 1992; Carey, 1979), *Guzmán de Alfarache* (Ballinger, 1992; Pérez, 1976) and *Don Juan* (Testart, 1981). African narratives are not devoid of references to tricksters (Carroll, 1984; Lynn, 2005; Radin, 1956), both in human and animal (Brooks, 1995) manifestations, especially the spider (Radin, 1956). Native American narratives, the centre of the more recent interest in trickster discourse (Carroll, 1984; Vizenor, 1992, 1993, 2005), have provided a rich layer to an already diverse tapestry of backgrounds and stories around the trickster. While the trickster is an important part of literature, he has permeated other media. Different scholars have pointed out the presence of tricksters in literary and cinematic works (Golovátina-Mora, this issue), sit-coms (Morris, 1999), comedy shows (Weaver and Ozieranski, this issue), and stand-up comedy performance (Deveau, this issue; Jay, this issue; Mora, 2009).

## The trickster as *agent provocateur*

Carroll (1984) argued that, to understand the trickster, one must first situate him as a cultural hero. Specifically, tricksters' heroics place them at odds in a dual nature of being 'selfish-buffoons and cultural heroes' (1984: 125), which ultimately helps create the nature of *agent provocateur* that defines him. In order to achieve this *provocateur* status, there are three basic features of trickster one must consider, as explained below.

### *The trickster is always a marginal figure*

In his discussions of the links between the trickster and the *pícaro*, Ballinger (1992) argued that the *pícaro*, like the trickster, was 'marginal because in background, behaviour, values, personality he doesn't fit society's categories for respectable status' (1992: 22). It is this 'outsider' nature, as Radin (1956) explained, that enabled the trickster to express thoughts and feelings that others were not able to by virtue of not being peripheral actors. It is this marginality, as Babcock-Abrahams (1975) posited, that enables the trickster to appear in certain spaces where it is easier to question the status quo:

Marginal figures also tend to be associated with marketplaces, crossroads, and other open spaces which are 'betwixt and between' clearly defined social statuses or in which normal

structures or patterns of relating break down – with places of transition, movement, and license. (1975: 155)

This marginality, which sometimes may turn to invisibility, is the factor that opens up space for the trickster's provocations. He has access to open spaces where big questions about society sometimes brew yet never become actual statements. Access to these questions is fundamental to make sense of the other two characteristics.

### *The trickster is deft at psychological games*

Deception and quick-mindedness are two traits at the forefront of the trickster persona. The trickster is capable of appearing as a hilarious or ridiculous character at first. Nevertheless, Dynes (1993) warned that such presence is not happenstance. As Grottanelli (1983) explained, while it holds true that the trickster 'never ranks high [in society] his power lies in his witty brain or some strange gift of nature' (1983: 120). Dynes added: '[The trickster] is intelligent, although usually displaying that intelligence as a craft or guile, and demonstrably capable of out-thinking most of the other characters in the play' (1993: 366). This also seems to explain the recurrent theme in trickster narrative where the weak usually trump the mighty (Brooks, 1995).

### *The trickster engages in playful transgression*

Lynn described that one particular feature of tricksters is: 'The way they inevitably are drawn to and create trouble at the fault-lines of [cultural] norms – reinforcing the concept of Tricksters as creatures of the margins – and bring to light some key cultural tensions in the process' (2005: 7). The trickster's ability to operate from the margins, as mentioned earlier, is the factor that fuels his transgression and ultimately works as a societal catalyst:

What is perhaps more unsettling about the Trickster is the extent to which the community thrives because of, not in spite of, his or her activity. In these plays, the Trickster is eventually subdued, but not before the energies he or she unleashes have brought about profound changes.... The Trickster may be expelled or subsumed back into the society, but his or her disruptive energy is always a potent threat. (Dynes, 1993: 382–3)

This particular characteristic, Dynes (1993) espoused, is the one that makes the trickster such an important member of the community. It is also, as I argue, what really gives the trickster its *provocateur* status.

## **The context of Colombian media comedy and satire**

There is something present in Colombians: We don't lose hope that we can do it better next time. (Jaime Garzón)

Colombian comedy in the media belongs to a long tradition present both in radio and on television (Gallo, 2012; Segura, 2012; Serna Espitia, 2008). Comedy tropes have

transitioned from traditional jokes about regional archetypes (Caicedo, 2004), to comedy skits (Unitécnica Students, 2011), to more intense forms of political humour (Artunduaga, 2009; Gallo, 2012; Segura, 2012; Serna Espitia, 2008). This section will provide a brief historical overview of comedy in Colombia from its beginnings on broadcast radio, to the emergence of humour on television in the 1970s, and the rise of the political satire shows of the 1990s. This background, I argue, provides a backdrop to help situate Garzón's brand of comedy both as continuation of the political satire that moved from radio and rupture as a more frontal brand of humour.

## The beginnings: jokes and radio

Traditional forms of comedy first appeared as a replication of cultural and regional stereotypes (Caicedo, 2004). The typical Colombian joke, as Caicedo (2004) described it, included references to regional interactions about four traditional groups of people who represented somewhat universal human traits: cunning (*paisas*, from the central-west coffee region of Colombia), naïveté (*pastusos*, from the southern region of Colombia that borders with Ecuador), calmness (*costeños*, from the Caribbean Coast region), and sophistication (*bogotanos*, from the capital city). As Colombian radio began to expand across the nation, comedy found a perfect niche (Gallo, 2012; Serna Espitia, 2008). As Gallo (2012) explained, between 1940 and 1970, comedy shows covered almost 10 per cent of the entire programming. The first radio comedy shows appeared around 1935 (Serna Espitia, 2008), with different forms of comedy surfacing on the air waves.

Satirical comedy continued growing in the 1980s and 1990s. Two shows in particular became influential. During the 1980s, Antioquian comic Crisanto Vargas started his own show, blending regional comedy with political satire, through his alter ego *Vargas Vil*. In 1992, triggered by a nation-wide energy crisis that caused daily blackouts in the early hours of the day and an ill-fated attempt to institute daylight-savings time, a group of comics led by impersonator extraordinaire Guillermo Díaz Salamanca (Artunduaga, 2009; Gallo, 2012; Segura, 2012; Serna Espitia, 2008) created the radio show *La Luciérnaga* (the Lightning Bug). *La Luciérnaga* both redefined political satire in the country and served as a bridge between the comedy of the 1950s and Jaime Garzón's embodiment of the tradition in the 1990s.

## Comedy and satire move to the small screen

Television first arrived in Colombia in 1954, in the midst of General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla's military regime (Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango, 2005). A few decades later, comedy established its own space in this medium, not as a replacement for radio comedy, but as an extra layer of Colombian comedy tradition. The first comedy show that aired on television was *Sábados Felices*, featuring joke telling and comedy skits. Almost 40 years later, and still on air, *Sábados Felices* not only became an institution of Colombian television but also expanded its comedic role to social labour by helping build schools in every small town they visited (Unitécnica Students, 2011).

Besides Garzón's TV shows, two other comedy troupes were highly influential on our TV landscape. The first troupe comprised a group of actors and comics led by acclaimed

Colombian recording artist Carlos Vives, in a show called *La Tele. La Tele*, and specifically actors Santiago Moure and Martín de Francisco, echoed the sentiments of a young Colombia that had become increasingly dissatisfied with some traditional values and stereotypes that had lasted for decades. Their irreverent style of humour, while angering some adult audiences, showed that Colombians were also ready for more direct brands of ‘in-your-face’ humour. The other show belonged to Colombian comedy troupe Frivolidad, and two of their characters, Tola y Maruja, currently performed by comedian and caricature artist Carlos Mario Gallego (aka Mico) and comedian Luis Alberto Rojas. Tola (Mico) and Maruja (Rojas) represent stereotypical middle-aged Colombian women (Guerrero and Maldonado, 2013), characterized by the scarves (*pañoleta*) they wear around their heads and who are always together, under an umbrella, waiting for the bus. Tola y Maruja first appeared in one of the earliest Frivolidad plays, *Los diez más pobres del mundo según la revista Infortune* (The ten poorest people in the world according to *Infortune* magazine, González Aranda, 2010). In this play, Tola y Maruja appeared between skits, in their traditional setting (waiting for the bus) and offering their social commentary about the country’s events. Due to the public response, Tola y Maruja became a stand-alone act, appearing on different TV shows since the 1990s.

### **Jaime Garzón, a leading figure in Colombian comedy**

The 1990s were, in fact, a fertile ground for political comedy on TV. It was around this time when Jaime Garzón appeared on Colombian TV to provide a more frontal approach to political satire. His first comedy show, *Zoociedad* (loosely translated as ‘zoociety’), appeared in the middle of the neoliberal wave that engulfed Colombia (and most of Latin America), thus offering a critical view of neoliberal policies in Colombia. Its most memorable character was Emerson de Francisco, a cynical newscaster whose news reading always included a poignant remark against the establishment. *Zoociedad* placed Garzón in the collective imaginary as a non-conformist and contestatory comedian willing to take social activism in comedy to another level.

A few years after *Zoociedad*, Garzón returned to the airwaves with his *faux*-news show *Quac el Noticero* (*Noticero* as a portmanteau of the words ‘*noticiero*’ [news program] and number zero [*cero* in Spanish]). Just like *Zoociedad*, *Quac* appeared in the midst of a critical period in Colombian politics, known as the 8000 Process (*Proceso 8000*), where many Colombian politicians were indicted for connections with Colombian cartels during the 1980s. *Quac* featured everyday characters who provided poignant social commentary about the country (Segura, 2012), such as Dioselina Tibaná, a housekeeper at the President’s quarters (Casa de Nariño) or Godofredo Cínico Caspa, an ultra-conservative individual who mocked the government.

### **Heriberto de la Calle, Colombian trickster**

This is what I do on television: I tell the country its own misfortunes. (Jaime Garzón)

Inspired by some of his previous performances, Garzón gave life to his last, and most memorable character of his entire career (Blu Radio, 2014; Ortiz, 2014; Redacción

Cromos, 2014), Heriberto de la Calle. Heriberto, a typical Colombian *lustrabotas* (shoe polisher), provided a very different strand of political satire. De la Calle's experience expanded on traditional examples and took satire to a level that, while being just as confrontational as his previous efforts, did not hide behind the cameras or microphones. During his tenure, Heriberto de la Calle made it clear that, once he started polishing someone's shoes, that person would not be safe. Presidential candidates (interestingly enough, the Colombian President at the time refused to accept Garzón's invitation to talk to Heriberto), senators, priests, ambassadors, imprisoned guerrilla leaders, and celebrities all had their shoes polished and their ideas questioned. He became Colombia's voice before these characters, asking the questions that Colombian folk (people just like Heriberto) wanted to ask (*El Espectador*, 2014; Redacción Cromos, 2014)

Garzón's approach to embodying Heriberto was not the traditional path of a comedian dressing as a character. Rather, Garzón gave Heriberto a life of his own, resorting to methods closer to method acting than comedy, including alterations to his own teeth (Izquierdo, 2009). These physical transformations turned Heriberto de la Calle into a very powerful character. He was no longer Garzón's *alter ego* but a character with a life of his own. Heriberto became his own person, not just Garzón dressed as a *lustrabotas*. Heriberto, in fact, did not *pretend* to polish shoes, he really did it as part of the interviews.<sup>2</sup>

## A critical view of trickster discourse: going through the media

In this section, I will first go over some methodological considerations for the selection and analysis of the media snippets, explaining how I took elements from critical discourse analysis as inspiration for my analysis. Then, I will introduce the narratives about how Heriberto de la Calle embodied the trickster discourse, returning to the ideas introduced about tricksters earlier in the article as the basis of my analysis.

Although there are multiple ways to analyse media, I found that some of the tenets of critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Blackledge, 2005; Blommaert, 2005; Gee, 2004, 2010; Rogers, 2004; van Dijk, 2008; Wodak, 2001) provided a good departure point to discuss how trickster discourse denounces power dynamics and inequality. If, as I argued earlier, the trickster, through his playful transgressions becomes an *agent provocateur*, his use of language is critical by nature. This notion of looking at language as a critical tool is the basis of most CDA scholarship. Gee (2010), for instance, while stating that all discourse analysis is political because language is their object of study, argued that '[critical] discourse analysis can illuminate problems and controversies in the world. It can illuminate issues about the distribution of social goods, who gets helped, and who gets harmed' (2010: 10). Denouncing who gets harmed in these power dynamics fits the social functions of the trickster. Blommaert's (2005) understanding of CDA also provides a powerful connection between the study of language that takes place in CDA and the kinds of messages that the trickster conveys:

It is not enough to uncover the social dimensions of language use. These dimensions are the object of moral and political evaluation, and analysing them should have effects in society:

empowering the powerless, giving voices to the voiceless, exposing power abuse, and mobilising people to remedy social wrongs. (2005: 25)

In this sense, my analysis of Heriberto's comedy and his position as a trickster uses the ideas on denouncing inequality and empowering individuals that Gee and Blommaert discussed. What I do in my analysis is, in light of the three characteristics of trickster that I described above, explore how every instance of Heriberto's broadcasts placed him as a marginal character, literally and figuratively. His position as a *lustrabotas*, right below his interviewees, opened the space for him to actively advocate against inequality.

## Media sources and analysis

I found samples of his most memorable moments and interviews on YouTube. I searched for videos available online using key words such as 'Jaime Garzón' and 'Heriberto de la Calle'. I found a series of YouTube videos ranging from highlights and full interviews to tribute videos about Garzón. Ancillary sources included online newspaper articles and blog entries with quotes and information about Heriberto de la Calle.

I viewed the materials on multiple occasions, focusing both on Heriberto's questions and rejoinders and the interviewee's reactions to the questions. I analysed both the words and the body language, always keeping the conceptual framework in mind to outline the key elements that would comprise my categories. I used the three characteristics that I argued defined a trickster (i.e. marginality, psychological games, playful transgression) to make sense of the kinds of statements that Heriberto would use in his interviews. Three themes are identified:

- *Distrust*. I checked for statements where Heriberto would express his utter lack of trust for institutions or the official establishment, usually expressing moments of accountability.
- *Transgression*. I recorded any statements where Heriberto was playing the role of transgressor, as Dynes (1993) defined it. In this category, I also kept track of any statements that made references to how Heriberto played with his interviewee's words to twist them.
- *Social denunciation*. In this category, I took note of any of Heriberto's statements that questioned inequality or any other form of injustice and his reactions as a marginal character who may have been on the receiving end of such inequalities.

I took extensive notes of the interactions in each video, writing up verbatim all quotes that fitted the categories. I also checked online blogs that featured Garzón's and de la Calle's quotes and different accounts about his performances as a source of polyangulation (Mora, 2014b) that enabled me to develop a composite picture of de la Calle's work. To label the quotes in the vignettes, I made reference to Heriberto's interviewee. As I read the notes, I continually revised my conceptualization of the trickster to develop my narratives in the findings section. To write these narratives, I chose what I thought were the most illustrative vignettes (Stake, 2010). To choose these quotes, I returned to my idea of polyangulation, by comparing my choices to those quotes about de la Calle that

appeared most frequently. I kept some that were etched in the collective memory through blogs to show their influence and I picked a few others that had gone unnoticed. I translated all the quotes into English, attempting to remain close to the spirit of de la Calle's quips.

## Heriberto de la Calle and his distrust of the establishment

From the outset, it was clear that Heriberto was in the margins from that vantage point of a shoe polisher. From that position, however, he was able to express his poignancy and distrust of the government and politicians (Radin, 1956). He always made it clear that, to him, the idea of politicians (and Congress, by extension) was attached to ideas such as corruption and thievery.

The following two vignettes show evidence of such mistrust. On the one hand, in his interview with Congressman Fabio Valencia Cossio, Heriberto remarked:

*Heriberto:* Listen, Dr Mr Valencia, and for example, for example, look, I had to tie the shoe polish cans out of safety, right? Because there are a lot of politicians coming by, so ...

On the other hand, while interviewing Colombian sports broadcaster-turned politician Edgar Perea, Heriberto inquired about wearing expensive jewellery in office:

*Heriberto:* Can you take those golden items to Congress? Aren't you afraid they'll steal them from you?

*Edgar Perea:* No, they don't steal at Congress.

*Heriberto:* [Laughs hysterically]

## Heriberto as a fixture of transgression

Psychological games and transgression are a fixture in a trickster's words and actions (Dynes, 1993). Through the use of words and some elements of theatricality, tricksters playfully break the rules, sometimes placing people above them in a very uncomfortable spot. These games of words and actions became tools of Heriberto's trade. It was his intention, from his marginal position, to break the rules and cause discomfort to those in power or positions of fame.

Each question and each quip always had that strong intent. Some interviewees were more oblivious (or pretended to be to try to 'save face') about it, whereas some others were taken aback by the comments. One example of blissful oblivion before the transgression took place is an interaction between Heriberto and actor Ana María Domínguez, in regard to her family and her choice of acting as a career:

*Heriberto:* And are you an only child?

*Ana María Domínguez:* No, I have a sister.

*Heriberto:* Older?

*Ana María Domínguez:* Yes, older, she is 20, 19 years old.

- Heriberto:* And what does she do?  
*Ana María Domínguez:* She is a college major.  
*Heriberto:* What's her major?  
*Ana María Domínguez:* Production Engineering  
*Heriberto:* So, are you so dumb that you had to become this [an actor]?

The 1998 Presidential Debate was one of those moments when Heriberto was able to display his role as a trickster. He had the chance to interview the main candidates, Andrés Pastrana Arango, Horacio Serpa Uribe, and Noemí Sanín Posada. Each of them had to experience his and her own moments of transgression, where Heriberto poignantly held them accountable for their ideas and movements. In one memorable interaction with Noemí Sanín Posada, Heriberto questioned her about how shallow her spiel seemed to the populace,

- Noemí Sanín:* This would be the first time in history that we can beat the political machine and have a government without any compromises, without deals. We have not made a single agreement; we haven't offered a single job. We are free from any strings, we haven't mortgaged anything, unlike the other candidates, who arrive full of agreements and that prevent them from fortifying our economy.  
*Heriberto:* Don't you get bored from repeating that same bullshit every day?

Horacio Serpa Uribe, another candidate, was also a victim of his transgression (via mockery), while receiving advice from Heriberto about how to introduce himself (Mr Serpa Uribe had been a Minister during President Ernesto Samper Pizano's tenure),

- Heriberto:* How about that ... and you told them, I am not the government's candidate, I am Samper's candidate, which is different. Besides, you should defend yourself and tell them, 'What candidate from which government, if there was *no government!*'

## Heriberto's social denunciation and big questions

Although not always explicit, a trickster's message also denounces injustice and inequality. In the case of Heriberto, some of those denunciations meshed with his expressions of distrust (as was the case in the interview with Mr Frechette), and sometimes in his moments of transgression. Heriberto was not afraid to express either what others were afraid of saying or what others were already saying but was ignored. One interesting example of social denunciation took place in the aforementioned interview with Mr Valencia Cossio:

- Fabio Valencia Cossio:* I heard rumours that they're going to dismiss you.  
*Heriberto:* Yes, that they're going to dismiss me from the news program.

- Fabio Valencia Cossio:* Yes, because you bother people too much, and people don't like that.
- Heriberto:* But here I don't bother nobodies, Dr Mr Valencia ...
- Fabio Valencia Cossio:* No?
- Heriberto:* No, I just tell what I hear in the neighbourhood, on the micro[bus]. For example, in the micro they say that the main electors in the country are [FARC leader] 'Mono Jojoy' and Fabio Valencia Cossio.

Heriberto also questioned the role of the banking system in promoting inequality, in an interview with famous Colombian economist and former Finance Minister Rudolf Hommes (a question that in 2015 seems more relevant than ever):

- Heriberto:* But, for example the 2 per 1000 tax,<sup>3</sup> Dr Fabio Morón asked, how does that work? When banks earn money, they don't share, and now that the banks lose money, they do share ... poverty ... do you agree?
- Rudolf Hommes:* But, you know that Dr Fabio Morón, with all due respect, knows a lot about laws but very little about banking.
- Heriberto:* So, are banks above social laws?

Finally, his interview with the US Ambassador in Colombia at the time, Miles Frechette, Heriberto took the ambassador to task about the seemingly unequal relationships between the US and Colombia:

- Heriberto:* And Dr Mr Frechette, why for example when Dr Mr [President Ernesto] Samper was [the president], and he didn't kneel so often before the *gringos*, he wasn't certified, and this [President Andrés Pastrana Arango] who kneels so much, like this, like this [makes head bow gesture], and anyway there were more coca crops and he was certified. Why? How so?
- Miles Frechette:* No, things are completely different; there is trust in Dr Pastrana, it is a fact that we're partners, that we're working together toward a common goal; it has nothing to do with knees.
- Heriberto:* But this partnership looks like the hen-and-pig partnership, where the hen provides the eggs and the pig provides the bacon.
- Miles Frechette:* [laughs]

## **Discussion: characterizing Garzón as a trickster, his legacy, and the future of Colombian trickster discourse**

- Juan Manuel Galán:* A question for you: What do you remember most about my father?<sup>4</sup>
- Heriberto de la Calle:* What I remember about your father is that a cause is worth giving your life.

What made Heriberto de la Calle (and Jaime Garzón as a consequence) a trickster? My analysis highlighted two specific reasons that enabled him to really embody a trickster. First, and recalling Dynes (1993), nothing in a trickster is accidental or serendipitous. Every feature and move is a deliberate attempt to provoke. Everything in Heriberto is carefully crafted, from Garzón's decision to wear dental implants to the very choice of his surname. De la Calle (which, literally translated means 'from the street') is a play on both a very traditional surname in some political circles in Bogotá and the literal meaning about the marginality of Heriberto's origins.

The other reason that Heriberto was able to engage in the levels of psychological games and transgression that he did in his interviews was actually his choice of profession. I wondered why choosing a shoe polisher was so important. Then I recalled what happens when one asks a shoe polisher to work on one's shoes: While one can remain detached from this person, one is also unable to go anywhere. After all, who would leave halfway through the polish, with uneven shoes or missing one shoelace? At that moment, one is, in a way, at the mercy of the shoe polisher. Jaime Garzón knew this and took advantage of that on every single interview.

Through his characters, Jaime Garzón always used comedy to embody a level of *conscientização* (Freire, 1979; Mora, 2014a), or critical consciousness (Willis et al., 2008), about the situation of Colombia in the 1990s. Heriberto de la Calle became his most meaningful manifestation of this consciousness. Through his role as trickster, a marginal character willing to engage in psychological games and transgression through his questions and sharp remarks, Heriberto was Colombia's voice in times where many felt silenced. His approach as a man of the streets, as a *lustrabotas* who would engage in what first seemed as friendly banter and then became a stronger form of satire, enabled him to frontally engage those whose shoes he shined. Heriberto was, indeed, a trickster, if only because he was, despite his lowly appearance, an intimidating figure. Heriberto forced politicians to behave like him in an attempt to beat him. Many tried to talk back and make jokes to Heriberto; they tried (and failed) to be tricksters themselves. That was Heriberto's biggest triumph: he made them look fake in their attempts to be *provocateurs*. They held the power and thus acting in a trickster-like way was out of context: Heriberto won the game because he forced them to sink to his level. He managed to question the status quo and reminded us that we, as a society, have the responsibility to hold politicians accountable. His comedy and snarky remarks became the ultimate form of accountability, forcing them to confront the realities of our nation.

Jaime Garzón left us too soon. His untimely death, a reflection of the trying times Colombians experienced in the 1980s and 1990s, is still a source of pain to our society (*El Espectador*, 2014; Redacción Cromos, 2014; Venegas K, 2013). The anniversary, 13 August, has become a day of remembrance, a day of celebration (Guzmán Mendoza, 2012). His legacy and thoughts about Colombian society remain strong to this day (Arévalo Rosero, 2013). As Ochoa (2014) explained:

The Colombia that Garzón had to face let him die, but his memory is not dead; today he remains as one of the essential characters in youth protests, at the moment of declaring their rights as students, their rights to eat healthy food instead of genetically modified foods, their right to

express themselves and laugh at political oppression, and he continues to be cited and shared in social network videos and on the street graffiti that speak for the city.

While no comedian has been able to replicate his brand of humour, his political activism remains strong in Colombian comedy. As a recent editorial in Colombian newspaper *El Espectador* recently explained:

Jaime Garzón was a genius comedian, a man who, through his jokes, gave a country, chewed up, the reality of our national politics. Someone who brought Colombia closer to a mirror in which to contemplate itself. Someone who, without reservation, was telling truths that people heard: nobody has forgotten yet (in this country void of a memory) inept reporter Émerson de Francisco, bold [Presidential Nariño] Palace housekeeper Dioselina Tibaná or impertinent shoe polisher Heriberto de la Calle.

In our recent landscape – radio shows such as *La Luciérnaga* or *La Zaranda*, for instance, as well as theatre troupes and, most recently, stand-up comedians – continue to carry that proverbial torch that Garzón left. These comedians have not forgotten that while there are times when the press must be the fourth estate, there are many others when we need those in the margins to rise up and address the big questions others are afraid to ask (Venegas K, 2013). Garzón's legacy will not fade in Colombia because he reminded us in his own way that the trickster nature may very well be in our DNA. The fact that he is a focal point of reference and even a 'threat' (Dynes, 1993: 383) solidifies Garzón's contribution to trickster discourse. He is the gold standard for Colombian comedy and for social activism through comedy.

Almost sixteen years after his murder, Garzón remains an example of why scholars and academics also need to be tricksters. That is a lesson that remains strong among Colombians. The fact that Garzón gave us a blueprint to become activists and he remains to inspire a nation after his death provides the ultimate evidence that he, in fact, was (and perhaps will be) the best trickster we have ever had, and a voice that the country has missed since he left us.

Make your life a comedy and your comedy a dream and your dream a reality. Only then will you smile. – Jaime Garzón Forero (1960–99)

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## Notes

1. A caveat: there may be times when the article takes on what some might consider too emotional a tone for an academic paper. If that is the case, it is simply because writing about Jaime Garzón remains a highly sensitive topic to Colombians, in particular those of us involved in social activism through academia.
2. This is the reason why I make direct references to Heriberto de la Calle and not Jaime Garzón when I present the narratives.

3. The 2 per 1000 tax was a sales tax proposed in the 1990s in Colombia. From every bank transaction, the government would keep 2 pesos out of every 1000 pesos in said transaction.
4. Juan Manuel Galán is the son of slain political activist Luis Carlos Galán Sarmiento, who was assassinated in 1988 at a political rally outside Bogotá.

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