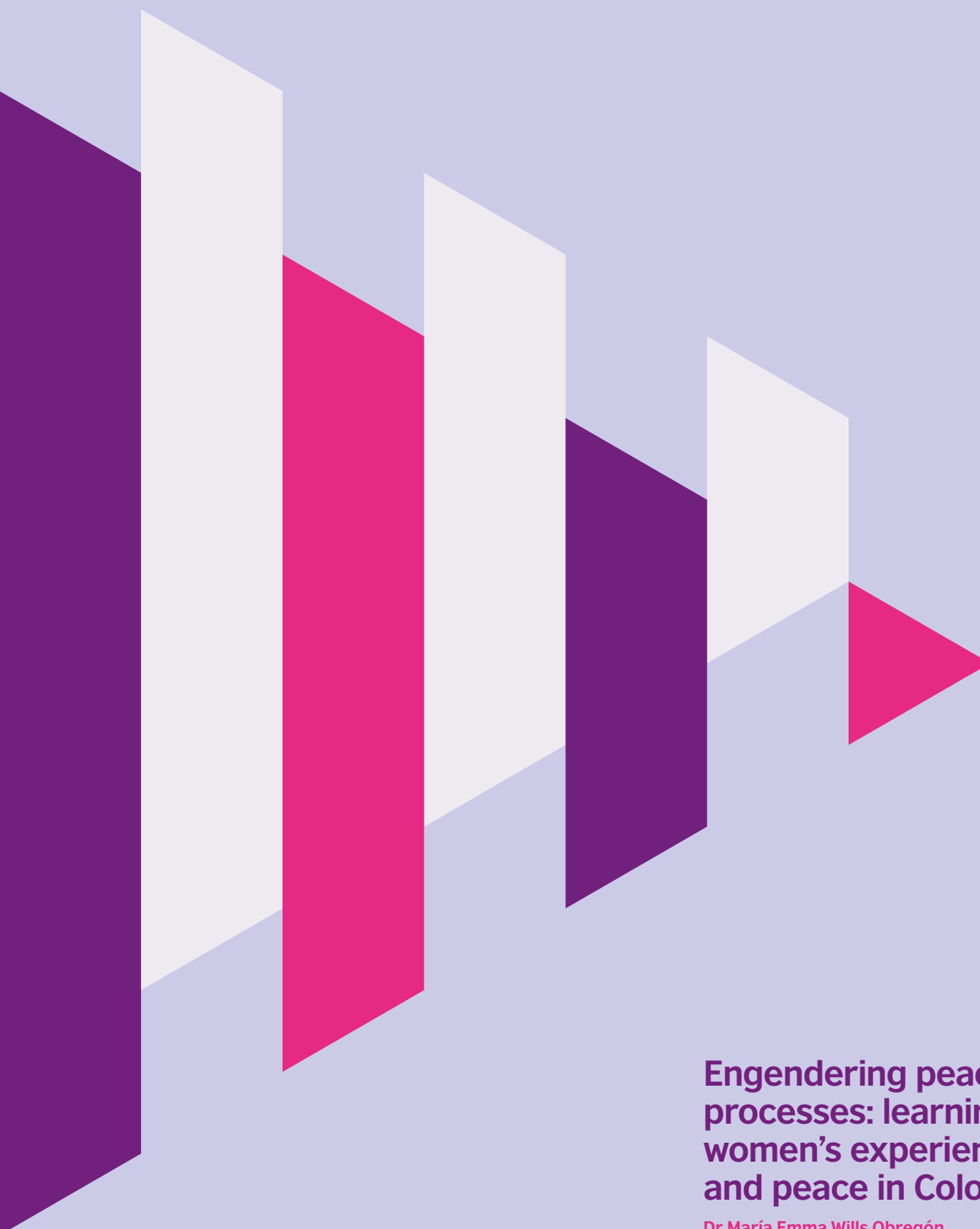


Peace and Beyond



Engendering peacebuilding
processes: learning from
women's experience of war
and peace in Colombia

Dr María Emma Wills Obregón

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In April 2018, I spoke at the Peace and Beyond conference, offering the keynote address at the session 'Engendering the peacebuilding process'. I shared the table with Professor Monica McWilliams, Emeritus Professor, Transitional Justice Institute, Ulster University; Michael Potter, Visiting Research Fellow, School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics, Queen's University Belfast; and Dr Sanda Rašković Ivić, Former President of the Democratic Party of Serbia, and former Commissioner for Refugees, Serbia. Each enriched the conversation with ideas, life experience and comments. I want to thank the organisers once more for an extremely eye-opening opportunity.

In this essay, I offer my reflections on the notion of a gender-sensitive peace, drawing on the Colombian experience in particular to highlight the complexities of the subject. My current experience at Colombia's National Centre for Historical Memory leads me to focus on the role of the past, and the importance of memory in this process, as well as the notion of extending a hand and building a bridge with the other, in order to address past conflict and to move forward.

Academic research has become increasingly involved in trying to uncover the mechanisms and processes that have for so long maintained women's exclusion and subordination in the political arena. Political scientists, sociologists, historians, anthropologists and philosophers have made enormous contributions to our understanding of this long-term process of exclusion in the modern world.¹⁴ Simultaneously, social movement activists have insisted on women's inclusion, not only in party and institutional politics 'as usual', but also at exceptional times: during peace negotiations or transitions from dictatorships to democracy. Academics and social movement advocates have made some progress, and have been able to articulate an agenda that has even been translated into a United Nations Security Council Resolution.¹⁵

However, this advancement has not been exempt of controversies. Although very few people today would deny that women have been excluded from these places for too long, some simplify the solution by thinking that inclusion only refers to a physical process. They believe that by bringing women – their presence – to political parties, parliaments, government, or the negotiation table, the *representation* of women's interests, claims and aspirations will be guaranteed in these political arenas.¹⁶ This plain answer to a complex challenge is based on the false assumption that having a woman's

body by itself implies a political stance towards women's discrimination. However, the presence of female bodies in circles of political power is far from delivering a critical mass defending women's rights to inclusion and non-discrimination,¹⁷ be it 'politics as usual' or at more exceptional times.

Women are far from constituting a homogeneous interest group or a community of values.¹⁸ While some women cringe when confronted by the idea that they face certain specific discriminatory practices exactly because they are women, others accept it and advocate for conservative solutions, while others propose liberal or radical policies to overcome discrimination and exclusion. In the political arena, we have seen both women in power who defend authoritarian policies detrimental to women's equal rights,¹⁹ as well as leaders fully committed to transformative policies.²⁰

With these considerations in mind, it should be clear that engendering peace processes requires more than just bringing women to the table. It alludes to a consistent effort to *represent women's interests* at crucial times, when new norms and social pacts are being drawn to drive societies caught in violent dynamics towards a conviviality based on resolving conflicts through dialogue, imaginative protests and compromise. But, how and where are women's interests shaped?

This shaping takes place in communicative arenas²¹ where women from different paths²² identify some common issues and values through sharing their life experience, and build a minimum set of interests to advocate for²³ as well as a political stance to defend them. This communicative construction is at its best when it combines top-down and bottom-up dynamics, bringing together local women and female leaders, academicians and politicians to discuss and build a common ground for political action.

It should again be noted that this process of agenda construction, by drawing commonalities among some women, simultaneously builds differences with others who advocate for opposite perspectives. In other words: in these arenas, consensuses as well as disagreements are born, and these *contentious interactions* should be welcomed as part of a pluralist process that produces women's interests, their visibility and advocacy in the public sphere.²⁴

14. Phillips, 1996 and 1998; Mouffe, 1993; Fraser, 1997; Young, 1990; Luna and Villareal, 1994; Velázquez, 199.

15. www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/

16. Michael Potter, who shared the table with me, made the same distinction between presence and representation.

17. Wills, 2007.

18. Phillips, 1998; Pitkin, 1967.

19. Blondet, 2002; Jacqueline and Wolchik, 1998.

20. Leon, 1994; Bernal, 2015.

21. Fraser, 1997; Eley, 1990; Wills, 2007.

22. Different either in social, ethnic or religious origins, or sexual orientation.

23. Pitkin, 1967.

24. Mouffe, 2003, 2007; Fraser, 1997.

In the following pages, I want to make two arguments. The first one contends that this representational process of interest building should not only revolve around present-day concerns. The discriminations and exclusions faced by women are best understood when *the past and the memories* it evokes are brought into the discussion and shade light on the *mechanisms* that keep the inequities in place. In other words, conversations around women's interests and aspirations should look not only to the present conditions they face, but also to their history as constructed by professional historians, as well as by women advocates, practitioners and community leaders with their personal and collective memories. This is so because looking at the past from a historical memory perspective allows for a *complex* understanding of the present and opens a door to imagine possible roads to achieve a more inclusive and equitable future, taking into account the entrenched long-term barriers that deter change.

The second argument points at the fact that the process of consensual building of agendas should always remain alert to the perspectives left out and try to maintain bridges and conversations with sectors 'on the other side of the fence'.²⁵ This is so because the conversation by itself has a pedagogical value and crystallises what is at issue in a peace negotiation: the willingness of adversarial sectors to sit down around the same table to discuss and explain their opposing views. When this effort is left out, women's issues run the risk of being manipulated by political sectors and mobilised against the whole negotiation process, as happened in Colombia.

I will undertake the demonstration of my first argument – the value of a historical memory perspective – by drawing extensively from the Colombian case. I will concentrate on issues of gender-based violence (GBV) and particularly sexual violence (SV). I have chosen this specific issue because I believe that during armed conflicts, women suffer from particular repertoires of violence, which they face from specific starting points embedded in *previous* gender inequities that place them in vulnerable conditions. I also concentrate on this issue because it also allows me to tackle complex matters such as the '*continuum*'²⁶ of GBV. To do so, I concentrate on what I learned from women's experience on GBV and SV *before* any of the armed organised actors was present in their lives. Through their child and youth memories, I discover the *hidden* stories of violence I had not seen, neither in the academic accounts of our recent past nor in the media. I share my discomfort of belonging to an academic world that has *failed* to meet the expectations of contributing to a transformative understanding of the inequities and violence faced by my women fellow citizens.

I then turn to the patterns that arise from women's stories of their experience *during* the years of conflict on GBV and SV exercised by the armed actors. I try to answer the following puzzle: *was the GBV and SV performed by the armed actors just the same type of violence women had endured before the war?* Was it just more of the same? Did we see a straightforward magnification of the previous violence? Or did the war bring new ways and meanings to the repertoires of violence against women? In other words, I try to tackle the 'continuum' issue from an empirical and case study perspective (Colombia) and point to the fact that between daily GBV and war-related GBV, there is a strong mediation played by each of the organised armed actors: paramilitaries, guerrillas and state agents displayed, each, *very specific repertoires of GBV and SV. Instead of having a homogenous continuum displayed by all actors, the variations among them are deep and strong, expressing quite specific representations of womanhood and gender in each armed organisation. Hence, GBV, instead of being mirrored in the war scenarios, was refracted through the prism of each armed organisation, giving way to different GBV repertoires.*

As for the second argument, I analyse how the Peace Accord signed between the FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*) and the government was a product of an extraordinary effort of consensus-building in Havana that brought together women from the guerrillas, the government, victims and international facilitators. Such a successful outcome was the result of the top-down and bottom-up process of interests and value-building galvanised by the United Nations Resolution 1325 during Colombia's peace negotiation. However, the Accord was drawn in Havana, far from Colombian public scrutiny. There was little debate over the terms of the Accord during the whole process. Regarding the advocacy of women at the negotiation table, they concentrated on the terms of the Accord, but paid no attention to building the necessary bridges with women and sectors on 'the other side of the fence'. This opened the way for the political opposition, using the inclusion of the gender perspective to mobilise conservative religious sectors against the pact. The plebiscite was lost, and certainly the politicisation of religious communities played a role in this outcome.

25. Identity building is based on constructed similitudes and differences upon which frontiers are drawn. See Mouffe, 2003.

26. The continuum alludes to the bridges connecting the occurrence of violence against women in daily 'normal' life and at exceptional convoluted times of political unrest or war. This is so because in the cultural realm at a global scale there is a normalisation of this violence.

I conclude by highlighting that gender-liberal advancements can trigger fierce reactions from men as well as women, and these reactions can be mobilised against peace accords if no efforts are drawn to expand support for the terms of the negotiation among conservative sectors. Women activists and negotiators need to simultaneously *weave coalitions at the negotiation table as well as alliances with different political forces outside the table* in order to prevent backlashes once an agreement is reached.²⁷

1. A sense of mourning: the hidden stories I had missed

As already said, at the negotiation table, a gender perspective focused on transforming discrimination and violence against women should not only take into account what happened to the women during armed conflict, but should also bring to the fore the entrenched and discriminatory violent practices women and girls suffer in their daily life that have not been sufficiently addressed either by the state, the parties or civil society. This is because negotiations are momentous opportunities, when societies face their own history to reflect on their trajectories and rethink where they have come from and what kind of future they want to achieve.

Some of the hard questions relate to the long-term structures – cultural, economic, political and religious — that might explain why the armed conflict started: was the society as democratic as it claimed? Why did the armed conflict start? What were the unfulfilled promises and grievances that ignited the violence? Why were the conflicts dividing society not being resolved through the institutional mechanisms in place? And what does daily GBV tell us of the entrenched ways of constituting gender power and exerting it in a specific society?

In this section, I want to share with you two different stories that illustrate the normalisation of GBV and SV in daily life in Colombia. These stories bring to the fore how violence related to the armed conflict is not the only one suffered by women and girls.

A must: taking into account the regional variations and identity differences

The first one takes place in Trujillo, a small village that was (and unfortunately still is) coveted by different armed actors because of its strategic position in the Colombian West Cordillera connecting the Valle del Cauca to the Pacific coast.

We had organised a collective historical memory workshop with both women and men. During the different moments of collective memory weaving, all the participants had drawn an idyllic story of their common past: before the arrival of the armed actors, life was easy; there was plenty of food; peasants were organising around co-operatives with the help of an involved priest; and there were no conflicts among neighbours.

I was starting to feel uncomfortable with the narrative of a perfect harmonious past devoid of conflicts, when, during lunch, outside the formal agenda of the workshop, I casually asked about childhood memories, first-time kisses and first love. There were some giggles and surprised faces, and then an older woman started a long remembrance of her childhood that left me aghast:

I remember my childhood as very violent. Since I can remember, I've been a peasant, always working in the field.

I remember my dad: he was a dictator in his own house... I was my dad's worker until the age of 13. I ploughed the land with him, planted corn and beans in the fields...

When I was 15, turning 16, he forced me to marry... Before I got married, no friend could get close to me. My father married me to the man he chose. He was 60 and I had just turned 16. That's how my life started, and what started on a bad foot, could only end badly.

Adult woman, Trujillo, 2008

The woman told her story without flinching, in a neutral matter-of-fact voice, devoid of anger or sadness. Life, it seemed, should be expected to unravel this way for young girls and women.

As a privileged²⁸ academician working on gender and citizenship formation, the stories of women victims of war allowed me to go beyond certain comforting assumptions and understand not only the horrors of the armed conflict, but also the enormous breach between the life conditions of rural and urban women in Colombia, and more precisely between peasant women and professional women coming from privileged backgrounds. It made me aware, from an intellectual perspective and a bodily involved experience, that understanding gender violence in a particular country demands a *regional and even a local community approach*.

27. Dr Sanda Rašković Ivić also made a strong point of concentrating in coalition and alliance's building.

28. My privileges come from my class origins, my race and my heterosexuality. In Colombia, I would probably be seen as 'white' and some would even wonder if I was foreign (I am very tall for Colombian standards). By class, I received private education in the best schools, learned English and French during my childhood years, and had gone beyond a BA to get a master's degree in Montreal and then a PhD in the USA.

As with other political processes, data and sources relating to the national level often lead to generalisations about a country obscuring local and sectorial variations.²⁹ In other words, research has to go beyond the national by bringing data and voices from the regional and local, and should combine quantitative data collection with the careful and empathic listening of local women from different salient groups³⁰ and ages. Numbers, when relating to stories of gender violence, are blurry indicators of what really happens on the ground and can be misleading if not complemented with local participatory memory building.³¹ This is so because GBV and SV is surrounded by 'a structural imposition of silence',³² as victims are often still presumed responsible for this violence, and publicly humiliated and stigmatised when they finally gather the courage to speak up.

Hence, safe spaces, as well as an intersectional approach that takes into account social, ethnic, age differences and subnational gender arrangements,³³ are necessary to uncover what lies hidden beneath the surface.

The reproduction of gender violence as a system: women as enablers

The second story refers to the experience of a young woman who participated in another workshop held in Magdalena, a region on the Caribbean Colombian coast. This time, we were working in small groups listening to different stories of daily life before the armed groups arrived. Again, I asked about relations between women and men, girls and boys, and youths in general, when suddenly a young shy woman who had remained silent all the while, said she wanted to share a story she had till then kept to herself. All the others remained still while she shared with us her memories of brutal years.

With my husband, I had a horrible life. By his side, life was terribly cruel [...] When I married I thought my husband was going to treat me well. At the beginning he more or less treated me well (but) after six months he began mistreating me terribly ... He hit me. I tried to defend myself, but he was 25 or 26 years and I had just turned 15.

One day he went out to collect his salary. I had nothing in the house because it was market day and he went out to pick up the money we needed to buy food. I had nothing to give the children, no sugar, nothing. I was in despair, shut up in my house because I did not like going out. What was I going to do? It was six, seven at night and the children kept crying... I went to my neighbour next door and told her:

–Please, give me a little sugar to feed the children.

–And what about your husband?

–He went to collect his pay but has not returned.

–Ha! He must be drinking.

... This man did not show up till four in the morning. He arrived totally drunk. When I complained, what did he do? He found an electric cable and whipped me... That man spanked me. The blows forced me on my knees. That man left me full of bruises. I screamed and he got even madder. It was terrible.

Of the ten years I spent with him, I cannot remember a single good experience. Look: I am all bruised. My body is full of scars from bites he gave me.

[When I sought refuge in my mother's house], my mother said I had to put up with him, that I had to be there with him because he was the father of my children [...]

We had to obey mums and my mum told me to go back to him.

That's the way life is.

'Laura', woman victim, Magdalena 2008³⁴

Even today when I read the transcripts of this story, I wonder how we, in academia, can talk with such certainty of Colombia as a consolidated democracy. Of course I partly know the answer. Considering indicators of traditional public politics,³⁵ Colombia passes the test. We have a multi-party system; elections are held periodically; we have a free press; and although weak, there is a separation of powers and a shaky but still working rule of law.

29. Gibson, 2005.

30. While in some countries the most prominent differential criteria used to establish hierarchies are ethnic or racial, in others it can be religious or ideological.

31. Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica and University of British Columbia (2013).

32. Roth et al., 2011.

33. Gender arrangements are the cultural, social and political patterns arising from the rules, both formal and informal, applied by societies and communities to regulate the relationships between genders. These arrangements crystallise both in formal rules (i.e. constitutional charts, laws and public policy documents) as well as informal cultural rules and conventions (habits and daily practices) that assign heterosexual masculine and feminine dichotomous attributes, and based in this cultural attribution, impose roles and differentiated places on which power relations are structured. In most pervading societies, the masculine-heterosexual tends to subordinate and devalue the feminine and other genders. These role assignments, although historically constructed and dynamic, ends up being perceived by those enacting them as biologically grounded (natural, normal) and perennial (Scott, 2008). This paper argues that beyond the national gender arrangements, academia, the media, advocates and policymakers should pay attention to gender arrangement variations between regions and communities.

34. For security reasons, all names have been changed.

35. Usual indicators of a democratic regime are: regular elections, freedom of speech and press, multiparty system, rule of law, accountability, and absence of political violence. This latter indicator alludes in most cases to persecution of political militants leaving out GBV.

These indicators show how such standard definitions of democracy centred on public life still leave out a thorough scrutiny of what happens behind closed doors, in the private arena. However, if we continue to use the same indicators to characterise regimes (and name realities), *leaving out of the picture the patterns of daily intimate life*, we are complicit, as scholars, in hiding from public scrutiny this violence. It seems to me obvious that Laura's life is far from evolving in a democratic way. Hers is a story of humiliation and of a constant infringement of her dignity as a human being and her rights as a citizen.

A second awareness emerges from this narrative. GBV, more than a practice between a single man and a particular woman, is really a complex system with many persons being involved playing different roles. In these violent systems, female figures of authority, i.e. the mother or the grandmother, are the *enablers/gatekeepers*. Having a gender perspective demands a complex understanding of the cogs and gears that keep the system in place, including women's complicity and their role in maintaining authoritarian gender-violent world-views and practices.

It also points at the fact that even before a society dives into an armed conflict, the past, often remembered as a kind of lost paradise, is often plagued for women and girls with violent, humiliating gender practices locked in silence and shame. Academia and historical memory practitioners have to develop the tools to allow the 'dark side' of the past to surface so that it can be faced and transformed.

Transitions from war to peace are also periods of reflection about what spurred the war and kept it going. Identifying the causes and delineating the problems that led a society towards armed conflict seems a necessary step to go forward, as it points to the issues that need to be addressed to overcome the violence. Most of the literature on internal wars concentrates on economic, political, institutional or religious long-term divisions and grievances; in other words: it turns its attention towards cleavages and motivations pertaining to the public sphere.

Less consideration has been given to gender issues. Although it might be too soon to think of gender privileges and power as root causes of an armed conflict,³⁶ previous patterns of daily GBV can shed light on the violent repertoires used by armed actors. Hence, certain problems should draw more attention from the academic community: should we expect a high prevalence of GBV in armed conflicts when individuals are socialised to devalue women and girls and previously used GBV in their daily routines? How is a particular armed conflict shaped by the preceding existing GBV?

In the next section, based on the Colombian case, this question will be tackled by analysing the GBV and especially SV repertoires used by the different armed actors.

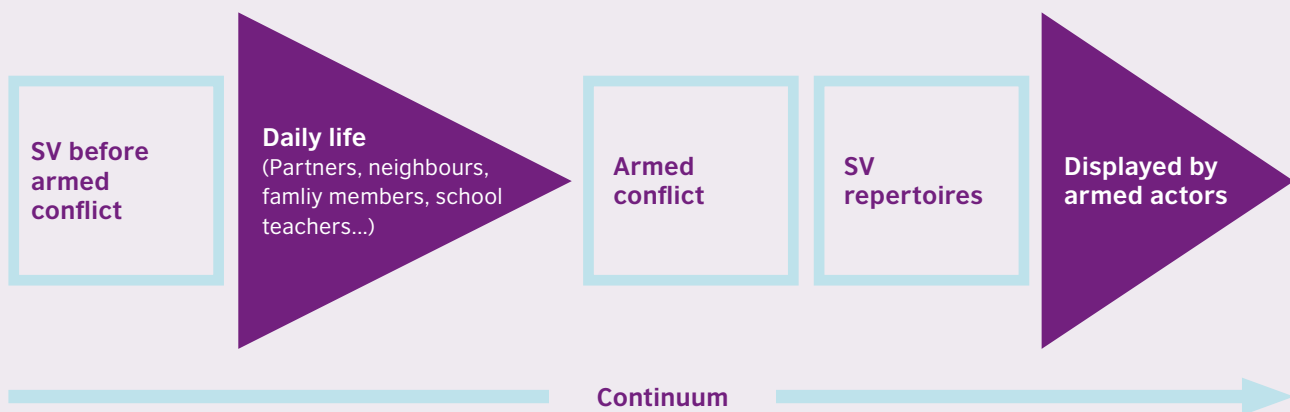
36. Gender privileges and power have and still play a fundamental role in elucidating the repertoires used by armed actors but the academic literature has not been able to demonstrate they have played a part in originating, in modern times, an armed conflict.

2. GBV and SV during war: is it just more of the same? The determinant role of armed organisations

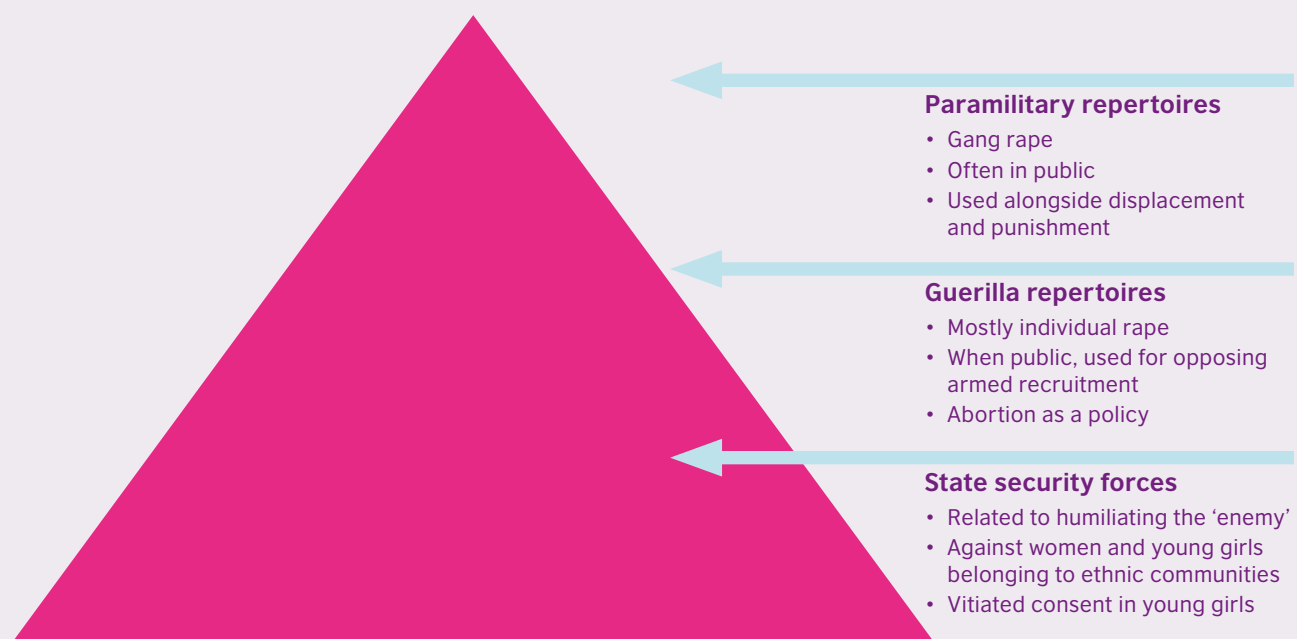
In an armed context, previous GBV, and particularly SV, can simply become magnified (continuum), used scarcely by one party while perpetrated extensively by another; be highly prevalent as a whole, or not featured at all.³⁷

In Colombia, according to the Public Health Surveillance System, between 2015 and 2016, there were 24,819 rape reports, 87 per cent of them against women and 13 per cent against men. In a country where victims are still shamed and stigmatised, the numbers seem high.³⁸

Now, how does this violence translate into the armed conflict dynamics? Do all the groups use GBV and SV in the same fashion and under the same circumstances? With the information we have, the answer is no. The repertoires of GBV used by armed actors vary strongly among them (see illustration).



SV repertoires performed by armed actors in Colombia



37. Wood 2009a; Wood 2009b.

38. There is a lack of comparable indicators of GBV and SV in Latin America, which is a symptom of the lack of attention it has received until very recently.

Starting with numbers, according to the Conflict and Memory Observatory, 15,692 persons reported having suffered sexual violence assaults related to the armed conflict from 1959 till 2017. Although many victims did not identify their perpetrators when giving their testimony, at least 6,226 mentioned paramilitary groups, 4,873 pointed at guerrillas and 332 to state agents.³⁹

However, as said in the previous section, numbers are hazy indicators of what happens to women and girls in a particular war context. In order to uncover the logics of GBV underlying an armed conflict, repertoires⁴⁰ have to be taken into account. The answer to how GBV is used, by whom, when and against whom, constitute the evidence needed to establish those repertoires. In Colombia, listening to women and girls who were victims of GBV and SV and who came from different regions, allows us to draw a preliminary picture of how guerrillas, paramilitaries and state agents practised violence against them in quite different repertoires.

Paramilitary repertoires

From a national perspective, records of paramilitary GBV including SV, revealed patterns: most cases were performed in gangs and either the harmed bodies, or the actual acts were public – or both. In many GBV cases perpetrated by paramilitaries, these events occurred simultaneously with massacres and forced displacements. Women with social leadership, or who occupied certain types of positions (health promoter or teacher, for example), were targeted and stigmatised as members of the enemy ranks, and abused with fierce displays of sexual violence. In such cases, the female body became an analogy of a territory to be colonised and domesticated.

When the paramilitaries became the dominant force in a territory and established themselves as the governing authority, their members boasted of their power by publicly ‘appropriating’ the women and young girls. Sexual violence was also publicly used to punish women who transgressed their social codes in everyday life and break down the spirit of leaders who challenged their authority.

Although these patterns were common among paramilitary structures, there were variations between units displayed in different regions showing again how important it is for research methods to include participatory community storytelling, an analysis of regional gender arrangements and an intersectional approach.

I will give a few examples of these regional and sectorial variations. In the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, under Hernán Giraldo’s control, he, as ‘supreme’ commander, imposed ‘tributes’ to the families in exchange for ‘favours’ and ‘protection’. Ranking high among the tributes was his unquestionable access to the virgins of the community reminiscent of the *‘droit du seigneur’* in feudal Europe. His nickname, ‘The Drill’, accounts for this systematic imposition. The men under his authority replicated this practice following his example. The commander’s behaviour ‘normalised’ this violence.

In Putumayo, in southern Colombia, a coca-producing frontier region, the paramilitaries transformed specific houses into prisons where they kept women as sex slaves. They humiliated families, and in particular young and adult women, forcing them to parade in front of all the neighbours to attend sexually transmitted diseases controls. Through daily references, they established deprecating frontiers between ‘clean’ and ‘contaminated’ women. Their actions and discourse fragmented families and stigmatised women and girls, some of whom were expelled from their own emotional networks, leaving them ‘outside’ and forsaken.

In Montes de María, commanders, in order to establish their hierarchy, organised beauty pageants to choose the girls considered the most beautiful. By doing so, they sent a message not only to the communities, but also especially to other men. Gender hierarchies involve not only power imbalances between women and men, but also among men, and among different sexual orientations and genders.⁴¹

If we bring into account ethnic differences, although Colombia’s armed conflict is not triggered by and perpetuated through the use and abuse of ethnic differences, indigenous peoples do occupy territories coveted by the armed actors, either because they are rich in minerals (gold, coltan, oil and coal) or because they stand along the trade routes of illegal goods. In order to acquire dominance over those territories, paramilitaries targeted women to warn the communities of what they were capable of doing and spread terror among the whole ethnic community. Such was the case of Portete, in Guajira. The Wayuu norms of war prohibit any attack on women and children. However, the paramilitaries strategically targeted the female leaders and authorities protected by these indigenous codes of honour. By doing so, the perpetrators wanted to humiliate the whole community and explode their sense of belonging to a collective body. The violence came with the public exposition of the tortured bodies aimed at producing a wave of terror to control the entire population. It sent the message that the perpetrators had no moral limits and were capable of executing unimaginable crimes from the ethnic community’s perspective.

39. Numbers should always be used cautiously and with a grain of salt because, as said before, victims tend to keep silent in order to avoid revictimisation.

40. Charles Tilly developed the concept to understand contentious collective action. He pointed at the fact that collective actors learn the ways to express their claims in the ‘theatre’ of contentious dynamics, and can and do innovate in each confrontational cycle their learned repertoires. See Tilly et al. (2003).

41. Walker (2009).

As for the women recruited by the paramilitaries, they were few in number, and most of them played traditional feminine roles. They worked washing clothes, cooking or nursing. Some reported that other male recruits simply assumed 'sexual services' were part of their daily chores. A few powerful women played the role of brokers and PRs, and arranged meetings and pacts between the paramilitary commanders and the politicians in the regions under their dominion.

Going back to the effort to infer from all these stories a general characterisation of paramilitary repertoires, it is possible to grasp that these armed structures inculcated in their recruits, through daily training and the use of obscene language to refer to women, a representation of the feminine as either naturally subordinate to men or non-human. Under their rule, women and girls should behave in submissive ways towards men, remain quiet and accept with resignation men's wishes, and keep their place (home and childrearing). Those who resisted their rules were publicly punished. Their bodies were seen either as canvases to send messages to the enemy or the communities under their control, or as objects to carve and boast of their arbitrary and unlimited power. *Through their daily governance habits, a deeply patriarchal social order took shape.*

Alas, the Post-Demobilisation Armed Groups, trained first under paramilitary supervision, continue today with these repertoires and inculcate in the neighbourhoods or territories under their control these patriarchal, despotic and ferocious orders.

Guerrillas' repertoires

Certain patterns also emerge from the analysis of the guerrilla repertoires of violence. In contrast to the paramilitaries, guerrilla recruits imposed sexual violence individually in private spaces, hiding it from the commander's eyes. Most targeted a chosen woman or young girl, flirted with her, and when confronted with a 'no', coerced her to have sexual relations under the threat of forced recruitment of her brothers or herself, or under threat to harm any member of her family.

Sexual violence was also used more openly as a punishment inflicted on women who publicly opposed the recruitment of youngsters from the community. Or in a case reported in Tolima, the woman was raped because she was accused of being a whistle-blower and of collaborating with the 'enemy'. In most of these cases, the threat of reprisals against the family weighed heavy on the victims who remained silent and, as in a nightmare, were later accused by their own relatives of having acquiesced to these relationships. In the worst cases, families retaliated by excluding them.

More recently, there was a massive FARC gang rape reported in 2003 in Guaviare, amid a heavy dispute between paramilitary and guerrilla units. This shows that, in such a prolonged armed conflict, a mimesis effect between different armed actors can occur. Guerrillas from the FARC copied a paramilitary repertoire. In the midst of a scenario of confinement, the women were gang raped by members of this guerrilla group.

As for the women and girls who were recruited, numbers were higher than in the paramilitaries.⁴² Some talk of how they experienced a language of equality unknown to them in their daily life. They emphasise how women and men performed the same chores, carried a gun and went into the battlefield. The darker side of these stories relate to forced family planning and forced abortion. It is important to point out that the application of the norm – not being able to continue with the pregnancy – had variations depending on the place that the woman occupied in the internal hierarchy of the organisation and her class origin.

Police and armed state forces repertoires

In the records gathered in the Magdalena region, we could only identify a case of a woman raped and murdered in a territory presumed under the control of the 'enemy'. All its inhabitants were stigmatised as guerrilla members according to the people who filed the claim and who accused the military of operating hand-in-hand with the paramilitaries in the region. Her tortured body was left on the road to send the message to the entire community.

In the National Report on Sexual Violence, Emberá indigenous women report having been accused of being '*guerrilleras*' or having been the victims of sexual violence when employed as domestic workers by alleged members of the state security forces. Members of these security forces were also often accused of modalities that do not 'leave physical traces', such as forced nudity and touching.

Violence against indigenous women expresses the overlap of gender and ethnic discriminatory degrading representations among state security personnel.

But most reported cases refer to agents who took advantage of their investiture. In precarious and vulnerable contexts, young men wearing a uniform are seen by girls and adolescents as an exit door (even if it is not) of precarious conditions. The men flirt with the young girls, who hope for a long-term relationship. In such unequal and inhospitable circumstances, these relationships should be seen as the product of a *vitiating consent*.

42. Some say that more than 40 per cent of guerrilla members were women.

These events are not only a matter of individual decisions taken by young men with no relation to the institution to which they belong: as soon as the girls or young women become pregnant, their partners are transferred to another battalion. With that transfer, the commander and the institution itself become cogs in this anti-democratic and macho system that celebrates, instead of condemning, these asymmetric relations between men in uniform and girls without hope and with no opportunities of a better future.

In addition, in territories where the state presence is precarious and other armed actors can again exercise dominance, the establishment of a sentimental relationship (forced or not) with agents of the state security forces puts these young women and girls in a place of enormous vulnerability. When the dominant actor changes and the region falls under the control of the opposite armed actor, the women and young girls are stigmatised as being of or belonging to the enemy lines and punished openly.

Recapitulating: from the stories and the numbers, Colombia can be said to be quite a dangerous country for women and girls. However, this violence does not automatically translate into the same prevalence and repertoires among all the armed actors. The striking variations among them show the important role each organisation played. The left-right ideology might explain this variation,⁴³ as well as the representations of the feminine inculcated in daily routines and armed training. In other words, organisations and commanders, through their orders, strategies and example, inculcated different ways of behaviour towards women and girls, and hence should be accountable for what happened to them in the regions under their control.

This means that building an agenda to bring to the negotiation table should take into account both the daily GBV women and girls suffer before the armed conflict intruded in their regions, as well as the mechanisms used by each armed organisation to inculcate in their own recruits the normalisation of specific GBV repertoires. Each organisation should be held accountable for such repertoires.

3. Engendering the Havana talks but leaving out alliances with women on 'the other side of the fence'

When the Havana talks between the Colombian government and the FARC were publicly acknowledged in October 2012, they started from a 'gender-neutral' position. Mostly men made the teams and when women sat at the table, they were located (literally and symbolically) behind the male plenipotentiary.

However, this gender-blind position did not go unnoticed. Feminist NGOs, women victims' organisations and international agencies formed a critical mass of advocates who adamantly demanded the full participation of women at the table voicing their claim: 'Peace without women has no meaning.'

Because of the pressure, a gender sub-commission was finally established in June 2014. The Havana talks brought together the leaders of different feminist currents and social movements, galvanising a critical mass of women with years of advocacy experience. Intergenerational conversations took place between women who had gone through peace processes by the end of the 1980s and women from the FARC and government delegations. Legacies and lessons learned were shared and gave way to a gender-sensitive language and a gender perspective in each of the points of the agenda: rural reform; democratisation; disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration; and victims.

Analysing the content, the Accord did neither address GBV nor SV in daily life in the second point relating to democratisation of culture and politics. On the participation of FARC members in Congress, their newly created party was allocated five seats in the Lower Chamber as well as five seats in the Upper Chamber. There was no mention of quotas for the FARC women, although as already said the guerrilla has an important number of women combatants.

Although these absences can be seen as shortcomings, the fifth point, 'on victims', referred to sexual violence rooted in the armed conflict and demanded the creation of a specialised team to investigate its occurrence. The Accord also mentioned the need to offer 'psychosocial care for the emotional recovery of victims according to the specific damage they have suffered, including the particular effects of victims of sexual violence'.⁴⁴ Amnesties and pardons were explicitly prohibited for sexual violence.

43. Guerrillas adhere to leftist ideologies, while the paramilitaries are pro-status quo and right-wing.

44. Acuerdo final para la terminación del conflicto y la construcción de una paz estable y duradera, 24.11.2016.

Apart from the silence regarding the gender aspects of democratisation and the lack of political quotas for the women, the Accord really included women and girls, as well as LGBTI sectors in the other points of the agreements. The Integral Rural Reform included property rights and access to credit and expert advice for women. The work of the Gender Sub-Commission was celebrated by many liberal and radical activists, and with good cause, as the result was an engendered peace agreement (with the exception on democratisation already mentioned).

However, these steps forward spurred a backlash. Conversations had been held in Cuba, far away from Colombia. Many Colombians had little idea of what had been negotiated between the teams.

When the government called a referendum to endorse the agreement, the anti-Accord forces played on this lack of information and mobilised different sectors to vote 'no' for diverse reasons. One major argument was that the Accord was against the nuclear family and advocated for LGBTI sectors and an LGBTI-inclusive education inspired by a 'gender ideology'. This 'gender ideology ... would be detrimental to the family, nature, religious beliefs and society as a whole'.⁴⁵

To understand why the family and LGBTI rights are such sensitive topics, one has to take into account that Colombia is one of the few countries in Latin America that established a concordat with the Vatican, giving predominance to the Catholic Church over education for more than a hundred years (1887–1993). From a short-term perspective, the Procurator-General of the Nation was in the hands of a far-right man, Alejandro Ordoñez, who mobilised public opinion and members of different churches against the Accord.

On 2 October 2016, the plebiscite was lost. The 'no' vote won by a short distance and the Accord had to be renegotiated. A new text, the 'Accord of the Colón Theatre', was signed a few weeks after, at the end of November. In this new agreement, the Church appeared in different sections: as a community victimised by the war and as an actor playing a role in the rehabilitation process of drug consumers; the nuclear family also had a place as a victim of the war; the gender perspective was replaced by a more individualistic approach; and no reference was made to LGBTI sectors.⁴⁶

One major gain came out of the renegotiation: 'A special instance was created to monitor women's rights; and in the Framework Plan for the Implementation of the Agreements, special treatment should be given to women by creating public policies, programs and reforms that take into account their particularities. The plan includes impact indicators.'⁴⁷

However, these results point at the fact that engendering peace pacts at the negotiating table should also become tuned with society as a whole. Pacts are concerted between negotiating elite teams, and of course women should have a prominent place from the beginning at these scenarios. But these pacts lack the transformative power if social forces do not support and surround them. Alliances 'back home' and bridges with 'women on the other side of the fence' are as important as what happens at the table.

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'Engendering peace processes requires more than just bringing women to the table'

45. Gómez, 2017: 16.

46. *Ibid.*

47. *Ibid.*

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