THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

(Ex)*Guerrilleras*: Women Waging War in Colombia, 1964-2012

being a Thesis submitted for the Degree of

PhD in Sociology and Anthropology and Gender Studies

in the University of Hull

by

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October 2015

To my mom Beatriz Valdivieso, her love and courage helped me to navigate the many oceans that brought me to this shore.

Acknowledgements

Explanatory Notes

Spanish words and key concepts appear in *Italics*.

All women interviewed were given pseudonyms in order ensure their security. I only use their real names when quoting women ex-combatant's publications and public appearances (i.e interviews, conferences, panels).

When making reference to the Collective and the Network of Women Ex-combatants I capitalise the words (Collective and Network).

All the quotes from Spanish were translated by the author of this thesis unless the contrary is stated. In the translation of women's words, I tried to preserve their original words. However in order to ensure that the translation produced was clear and did not alter the meaning of women's' narratives, regional expressions, grammatical mistakes and other characteristics of oral speech were 'cleaned up'.

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Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Spanish Name	English Name
ACR	Agencia Colombiana para la Reintegración	Colombian Reintegration Agency
AD-M19	Alianza Democrática M-19	Democratic Alliance M-19
ADO	Autodefensa Obrera	Worker's Self Defense
ANAPO	Alianza Popular Nacional	Popular National Alliance
ANUC	Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos	National Association of Farmer Users
AUC	Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia	United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia
CGSB	Coordinadora Guerrillera Simon Bolivar	Simon Bolivar Coordinating Board
CNG	Coordinadora Nacional Guerrillera	National Guerrilla Coordinating Board
CNMH	Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica	National Center for Historical Memory
CRS	Corriente de Renovación Socialista	Socialist Renovation Movement
DDR	Desmovilización, Desarme, Reintegración	Demobilisation, Disarmament, Reintegration
ELN	Ejército de Liberación Nacional	Army of National Liberation
EPL	Ejército Popular de Liberación	Popular Liberation Army
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
GMH	Grupo de Memoria Histórica	Historical Memory Group

ICBF	Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar	Colombian Family Welfare Institute
JUCO	Juventudes Comunistas	Communist Youth
MAQL	Movimiento Armado Quintín Lame (Colombia)	Quintin Lame Armed Movement
ML	Marxista-Leninista	Marxist-Leninist
MOIR	Movimiento Obrero Independiente Revolucionario	Independent Revolutionary Worker's Movement
M-19	Movimiento 19 de Abril (Colombia)	19th of April Movement
PCC	Partido Comunista Colombiano	Colombian Communist Party
PC-ML	Partido Colombiano Comunista Marxista-Leninista.	Communist Party - Marxist-Leninist
PRT	Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (Colombia)	Workers Revolutionary Party of Colombia
UC-ELN	Union Camilista-Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional (Colombia)	Camilist Union-Army of National Liberation
ODDR	Observatorio de Procesos de Desarme, Demobilizacion y Reintegración	Observatory of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Processes
FD		Field Diary
FJB		Fieldwork Jotting-Book
TD		Transcription Diary

Chapter One
Introduction

I do not remember where I first saw it, but there is a picture I have carried with me for the last 8 years, the author is Hector Abad Colorado a Colombian photojournalist who has documented the armed conflict in the country during the last two decades. I can almost describe the image by heart (image 1, page 9).

The two main characters are in the centre of the picture, a little boy between 10 and 12 years old and his father or a man I presume is his father. The boy's face is concentrated and determined, he is a young boy and yet he has the appearance of someone older, his mouth squeezed in a gesture I cannot read. The man I assume is the father lays inert on a metal stretcher, like the ones used in a mortuary, his bare white feet are a contrast with the little boy's very old shoes, covered in dirt and battered as if they belonged to someone else in the past. The boy is buttoning up his father's shirt; the eyes fixed on his hands as if he wants to make sure that he is doing a good job. The tension in the standing boy, every inch of his little body stiff, highlights the relaxation of the man lying in front of him, the big belly immobile, the eyes closed, the incipient baldness.

Sometimes I wonder why I have kept this image all this time, and why it moves me so deeply. I try not to look at it very often as it makes me cry, in a rhythmic and noisy way, as if the tears were being squeezed in my stomach. An external observer might think it is arbitrary, and would ask why this photo is linked to my research, why it is part of my archive? The answer is simple, this picture is not about what is visible, a little boy dressing a man's dead body, trying with that gesture to restore dignity; but also about the silences in the image, all that is not visible in it and yet is part of it.

Image 1, Massacre San Carlos Antioquia. Photo Héctor Abad Colorado – October 1998 (Grupo de Memoria Historica, 2013: 319)

It is not fortuitous that in the image the two main figures are male. Despite the efforts that women and feminist organisations have made during the last 20 years to recover women's voices, and regardless of the central roles that women and girls have played in Colombian armed conflict, it is still perceived and recounted mainly as a masculine event. Women and girls, when they appear, are often portrayed as survivors, victims, calling for peace, justice, reparation, and accountability for the crimes committed against others: their relatives, children, husbands, and fathers. But women have been and are members of politico-military organisations and paramilitary groups; they are peace activists and human rights defenders, and they are and have been victims of systematic forms of sexual and gender based violence.

Today it is estimated that between 35 and 40 percent of the combatants of the guerrillas still in arms in Colombia are women (Mercado, 2014; RT, 2013, Grogg, 2012). Which explains the proliferation, during the last twenty years, of academic and non-academic works written about different aspects of female ex-combatants experiences. As a result the story about women's participation in Colombian socio-political violence as actors of peace and war has been (and is) still being written and re-written in different genres (autobiography, testimony, ethnography, critical literary analysis, reportage, monographs) and by different hands: academics, journalists, women's NGOs, critics, postgraduate students working from a wide range of disciplines, and by the women who take part in guerrilla organisations themselves.[1] This work contributes to this growing corpus of literature about women's participation as actors in Colombia's socio-political violence, to the gendered analysis of wars and to the literature on Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration – DDR from a gender perspective.

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[1] Some examples are: Toro, 1994; Sanchez-Blake, 2000; Vásquez, 2005; Lara, 2000; Grabe, 2000; Blair et al., 2003; Leliévre, A., Moreno, G., Ortiz, I., 2004; Navia, 2005; Londoño, L. M, 2005; Londoño & Nieto-Valdivieso, 2006; 2007; Madarriga 2006; Otero, 2006; Rodríguez, 2008; Kunz & Sjoberg, 2009; Claux, 2011; Méndez, 2012; López, 2012; Esguerra, 2013; Colectivo de Mujeres Ex-combatientes, 2012; Dietrich, 2010; 2014. Because of the diversity of the material, the different languages and countries in which it is being produced, and the difficulty to access some of this material due to distribution channels it is difficult if not impossible to provide a comprehensive account here of this diverse literature.

Across the different chapters of this thesis I show that women (ex)combatants' experiences and memories are multiple and contradictory, are lived through different temporalities, and are highly gendered and embodied as becoming a female guerrilla requires, among other things, the transformation of civilian bodies into combatant bodies. A transition that is not experienced in the same way by all women because it is linked to other factors such as generation, education, reasons for mobilisation, and urban or rural origins.

The women interviewed are divided in two cohorts: 1) women from the old insurgencies, who joined guerrilla organisations between the 1960s and 1980s and laid down their weapons in the 1990s in the framework of bilateral peace agreements between the Colombian government and different guerrilla armies. 2) Women individually demobilised. These are women who mobilised into the guerrillas still in arms from the mid 1990s onwards and joined the government's DDR programme as individuals in the 2000s (see Chapter Two). The diversity of the women interviewed allows me to say that they are a reflection of the complexities of sixty years of socio-political violence in the country. They belong to different locations in terms of ethnicity, age, urban or rural background, level of education, and reasons for joining the armed struggle. Their lived experience as *militantes*[2] (members of politico-military organisations) and as *guerrilleras* was moulded by the ideological ties and political agendas of the groups they joined (communist, Marxist-Leninist, Maoist, Castrists-Guevaristm, nationalistic); the interaction between national politics and global metanarratives (Cold-War, war against terror, war on drugs); the contact or not with feminist ideas and the social movement during la *militancia;* and the moment in the lifespan of the organisation they lived by their experiences as *guerrilleras*.[3] Across the thesis I note some of the major similarities and differences identified between the experiences of the two cohorts of female ex-combatants interviewed. Although I do not take a

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[2] I use the Spanish word *militancia* and the verb *militar* as they have no complete equivalent in English. *La militancia* is the term used by the women to define all the activities (political and military, legal and illegal) carried out during their participation in politico-military organisations.

[3] Each politico-military organisation had its own cycle. The M-19, for instance, began as an urban guerrilla force in the 1970s. In the 1980s, as a result of a process of military expansion it began to develop a rural front.

comparative stance my approach looks at experiences of mobilisation, being and life beyond of both groups of female (ex)combatants which covers a gap in the literature reviewed.[4]

(Im)possible memories

The initial objective of this thesis was to explore the possibilities of memory building in Colombia, and the inclusion of female ex-combatants' voices, usually marginalised, in the history and social memory of a country where war still shapes and scripts people's lives. The research was set to answer two main questions, if women ex-combatants from insurgent organisations have had the possibility of developing memory practices and spaces to narrate, elaborate and locate their experiences as agents of proscribed violence in the history and social memory of Colombian socio-political violence. And secondly identify female (ex)-combatant's self-representations of their experiences as (ex)*guerrilleras* (female guerrillas). This is how they (re)interpret, narrate, and transmit in private (i.e. among family members) and public settings (i.e. Colombian public sphere[5]) accounts about their involvement in radical politics. These two broad questions are intertwined, and although I centred my attention on looking at female experiences of becoming, being and life beyond after leaving the politico-military organisation, the question about the possibility of memory building informs the research process from its design and through out the analysis and writing up. Furthermore, by focusing my research on female (ex)combatants' narratives about their lived experiences I was able to look at women's memory practices.

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[4] An exception is the work of Londoño & Nieto-Valdivieso (2006) in which we explore the experiences of *Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration* - DDR of both groups of women. There are some comparative analyses around topics such as: the factors that allow/hinder political inclusion of demobilised guerrilla combatants in the 1990s and *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* - AUC (United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia) demobilised in the 2000 (Guáqueta; 2007); gender performativity of women members of the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* – FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and the AUC who demobilised in the 2000s (Méndez, 2012); and the masculinities and femininities produced in the context of the revolutionary struggle between the 1970s and 1990s (Dietrich, 2014).

[5] In contemporary societies the 'public sphere' designates an institutionalised arena for discursive interaction, a space for cultural and ideological contest and negotiation among multiple publics (Fraser, 1990: 68). It is in this space where social meanings are produced, circulated, contested and reconstructed. (Fraser, 1995: 287; Fraser: 1990).

During the fieldwork two tensions shaping women (ex)combatants' memory work in Colombia came to the fore. In the first place, and despite the proliferation of academic and non academic works about female ex-combatants in the country since the early 2000s, women form the old insurgencies they still feel that their memories remain 'unfinished' (Rita – EPL, Network meeting 21/7/2012) and 'untold' (Cecilia – M-19, Network meeting 21/7/2012).[6] This feeling of neither being represented in the dominant narratives about the Colombian armed conflict nor in the official histories of the different guerrilla organisations was shared by several women from the old insurgencies. The lack of wider representation of female (ex)combatants´ experiences in the Colombian public sphere is linked firstly to gendered stereotypes about women's role in war and peace, and secondly to the context in which memories are produced. In Colombia due to the ongoing socio-political violence the necessity of survival obstructs the elaboration of what has happened in the frame of the violence, shapes the memories that can be shared in the public sphere, and produces and perpetuates certain silences. As a woman (ex)combatant from the *Movimiento 19 de Abril* - M-19 (19th of April Movement) stated during one of the meetings I attended during my fieldwork,

> War is not only made with rifles.
> There are many ways to make war...
> Forgetfulness is a kind of war,
> [forgetfulness] is a very powerful weapon of war.
> And against that weapon we have fought all these years,
> against the weapon of forgetfulness.
> Which is...
> To make that story unknowable, unknown, keep it out of sight,
> that nobody speaks about it.

(Pilar – M-19, Network meeting 21/7/2012)

Pilar's comment highlights that memory building is made of both what we remember and what we forget, keep silent and silenced. Thus the memories available in the public sphere are also constituted by what cannot be said and

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[6] During one of the meetings of the Network of Women Excombatants (20 – 22/07/2012) the women began a disucussion about the existing literature produced in the country about their experiences, althoguh the multiple voices taking place in the discussion are not repoduced here the words of Cecilia and Rita summarise the tone of the conversation.

what cannot be shown. These silences not only set the limits of what can be uttered, but also establish the boundaries within which political speech operates, and the way certain subjects are constructed as viable actors whose lives are considered valuable while others are made innocuous and ungrievable (Butler, 2004: xvii). Furthermore, Pilar's words are a reminder that memory is a field of contestation and struggle not only about *what* happened or the meanings assigned to the past, but also about *who* or *what* is entitled to give her account, and in consequence imagine the future (Hodking & Radstone, 2006: 1).

The second tension was made visible by a paradox encountered while trying to contact women recently demobilised to interview. On the one hand I found that wo(men) individually demobilised were reluctant to take part in the project due to 'interview fatigue'[7] (see Chapter Three). On the other hand, a civil servant working with this population at the *Agencia Colombiana para la Reintegración* (Colombian Reintegration Agency – ACR) stated that his objective was to 'cauterize' the past of former guerrilla and paramilitary combatants (FJB 2, 24/8/2012). This paradox was fuelled firstly by the contradictions generated when in the mid-2000s Transitional Justice – TJ mechanisms where put into motion in the country in a context of ongoing armed confrontation and unclear political transition (Garcia-Godos & Lid, 2010: 488; Hoyos, 2010: 48-50). And secondly by the national DDR policies at play which were conceived as a counter insurgency strategy, that expected from the ex-combatants a moral narrative of repentance and execration of the past (Hoyos, 2010: 21-28, 74-83).

As part of the TJ mechanics mentioned above the government appointed the Historical Memory Group (Grupo de Memoria Histórica – GMH) to build an 'integrated history' of the Colombian armed conflict (García-Godos & Lid, 2010: 507). The creation of the GMH and later the Centro Nacional de Memoria Historica (National Centre for Historical Memory – CNMH) fostered the mushrooming of the field of memory studies in the country. Since 2008 the GMH has published more than 35 reports documenting emblematic cases

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[7] A by product of the mushrooming of research with this population during the last ten years in the country.

and themes of Colombian armed conflict. This is the first time in the history of the country that an official institution makes the state accountable for its responsibility as a belligerent actor in Colombia's long armed confrontation. The CNMH has also become an important voice in current academic debates about memory building in the country.[8]

The tensions outlined above point to the limitations of memory making in the context of ongoing armed conflict and unclear transition from war to peace. In the first place they question whose memories about the socio-political violence are included, shared, transmitted and articulated within the public sphere, and become part of national historical representations. In the second place they signal a potential crisis in the national discussion of 'memory', in the methodologies for memory building, and in the relationship between memory and history. In consequence this thesis aims to contribute to the memory of Colombian armed conflict from a gender perspective and to the academic debates about memory building in the country.

In order to do so I assumed an 'inter-subjectivist' and a 'phenomenological' approach to memory. The idea that memory is intersubjectively constructed recognises that even the most personal memories are embedded in social contexts, are shaped by and build in relation with what has been shared with others. Hence the memory of an intersubjective past is always a past lived in relation to other people (Misztal, 2003: 6). The phenomenological approach aims to capture the ways in which people remember, forget, and interpret their own past (Berliner, 2005: 200). Its focus is on 'history as lived' and the memories that are shared and transmitted among different social groups. Both approaches are complementary, the phenomenological perspective facilitates a *Zoom in* allowing us to look at the small details: the wrinkles and textures of remembering, the lived experience of the subjects, and their relationship with the works of memory. The inter-subjectivist viewpoint facilitates a *Zoom out*

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[8] All the reports can be downloaded from: http://www.centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/informes. Bogotá and Medellin local governments also created spaces for memory building where current struggles and debates are taking place. This are the Museo Casa de la Memoria (Medellin) and the Centro de Memoria, Paz y Reconciliación. I am not aware of any research on the different perspectives adopted by each of this institutions. A detailed analysis of the politics of memory at play behind these organisations is needed.

providing a view of the subjects and the location of their memories in relation not only to other subjects' memories, but also within social and cultural frameworks, and global meta-narratives.

Across the different chapters I show that women (ex)combatants' experiences are multiple and contradictory, are lived through different temporalities, and are highly gendered and embodied as becoming a female guerrilla requires, among other things, the transformation of civilian bodies into combatant bodies. A transition that is not experienced in the same way by all women because it is linked to other factors such as generation, education, reasons for mobilisation, and urban or rural origins.

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[9] I use the Spanish word *militancia* and the verb *militar* as they have no complete equivalent in English. *La militancia* is the term used by the women to define all the activities (political and military, legal and illegal) carried out during their participation in politico-military organisations.

[10] Each politico-military organisation had its own cycle. The M-19, for instance, began as an urban guerrilla force in the 1970s. In the 1980s, as a result of a process of military expansion it began to develop a rural front.

[11] Women from the old insurgencies are those who joined guerrilla organisations between the 1960s and 1980s and laid down their weapons in the 1990s in the framework of bilateral peace

approach covers a gap in the literature reviewed which does not establish comparisons between the experiences of mobilisation, being and life beyond of both groups of female (ex)combatants.[12]

Researcher and participants' memory archives

As authors such as Connerton (1989) and Tonkin (1992, 1990) have suggested, our experience of the present, and expectations about the future are tied to our understandings of the past. The image of the boy and his father is just one of the many images, artefacts, and stories I have collected over the years in my personal archive to tell myself the story of the country I was born in. Unintendedly this personal archive made of my past experiences as a researcher, my own memories of growing up in Colombia, newspapers clippings, different emotions and various forms of contacts (Ahmed, 2004: 13) became part of this research project and dialogues with women's experiences of becoming, being, and life beyond their involvement as combatants in politico-military organisations. Women's voices, affects, emotions, images, and objects, bridge the past, present and future of the women narrators, of myself as a Colombian citizen, and the (his)tory of my country (official and un-told).

During the research process I found that some of the women interviewed also have their own archives around their experiences as guerrilla members and the socio-political violence in the country. These archives take different shapes. They can be old letters and poems interchanged with other political prisoners and family members during their years of imprisonment, now yellow due to

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agreements between the Colombian government and different guerrilla armies. Individually demobilised female ex-combatants are women who joined the guerrillas still in arms from the mid 1990s onwards and joined the government's DDR programme as individuals in the 2000s (see Chapter Two).

[12] An exception is the work of Londoño & Nieto-Valdivieso (2006) in which we explore the experiences of *Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration* - DDR of both groups of women. There are some comparative analyses around topics such as: the factors that allow/hinder political inclusion of demobilised guerrilla combatants in the 1990s and *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* - AUC (United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia) demobilised in the 2000 (Guáqueta; 2007); gender performativity of women members of the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* – FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and the AUC who demobilised in the 2000s (Méndez, 2012); and the masculinities and femininities produced in the context of the revolutionary struggle between the 1970s and 1990s (Dietrich, 2014).

the passage of time (Ruth – M-19). Photos of the militancy stored in a drawer without any sense of order, time, linearity, or importance, where meaning only emerges when accompanied with the oral accounts of the owners (Linda – M-19). Little 'pieces of paper' scattered around women's houses: a love letter sent by a male comrade in the pages of a novel, a drawing made by a comrade killed in combat during their time in the mountains, a newspaper clipping with the faces of M-19 female guerrillas captured by the military, a tiny piece of paper carefully folded containing the speech female members of the M-19 wrote in jail in the 1980s and read during their court-martial (Eloisa – M-19). Even Alicia, who belongs to a different guerrilla generation and demobilised as an individual seven years ago, has her own archive. In a shopping carrier bag she keeps the photographs of the 'life there' in the guerrilla, and the 'life here' after joining the government's DDR program.

The carrier bag, the drawer, the carefully hidden pieces of paper and almost invisible objects, talk about the nature of the archives produced by women ex-combatants about their experience; and the place of their memories, voices, and stories in Colombia's past, present and future. They also speak of the layers of silence, silencing, and selected memories that have been used to 'construct' an official version of the conflict in the country. Women's archives of their *militancia*, and my own archive about Colombia's socio-political violence, are 'unusual archives' (Cvetkovich, 2003: 8), in which memories are not only embedded in narrative but also in material artifacts, whose relation with trauma (in this case with the experience of socio-political violence) could give the idea of arbitrariness, but are imbued with emotional and sentimental value. In the case of female ex-combatants they respond to women's necessity to preserve their stories about both their participation in the armed group, and the transition from armed life to civilian life.

The inclusion of my own archive as part of the thesis is linked to my generational relation with the material and the experiences explored. Born at the end of the 1970s I belong to a generation that has witnessed the transformation of Colombia's socio-political-violence, the rise of the drug-lords and the anti-narcotics war, the assassination of four presidential candidates, the emergence of the peace movement in the country, peace talks

and peace agreements between the government and different guerrilla armies, the charting of a new political constitution and the transition from the Cold-war to the War-on-terror metanarratives (See Chapter Four). My generational position has allowed me not only to witness the changes in the dynamics and actors of the armed conflict in the country, but also the ways in which memory processes taking place are reworking narratives, events, and representations.

By acknowledging the importance of my generational location in the research process I want to make visible that the meanings we assign to our memories (as a community or as individuals) are not the same retrospectively, but are influenced by micro-elements such as our location in the life-course, macro-elements such as historical meta-narratives (i.e the cold-war), and are articulated to endure the changing needs of the times we are living in (Heimo & Peltonen, 2006; Hodgkin & Radstone, 2006: 23; Asplant, et al., 2004; Jelin, 1994). Furthermore, as Jelin and Kaufman (2004) pointed out in relation to personal experiences of state-terrorism, elements such as class membership, age, ethnicity, and gender, are crucial factors that mark not only how we remember, but also how we experience the events, and the meanings assigned to them in the present and at the moment of their occurrence (Jelin & Kaufman, 2004: 100). In this respect one of the contributions of this thesis to the literature produced about memory building in the country is its understanding of the relationality of memory and the ways in which emotions enter into narratives of all kinds.

War(s) and socio-political violence as lived experience

This work is inscribed within the feminist scholarship that understands war as 'lived experience', as embodied, felt (physically and emotionally) and sensed. As such it cannot be separated from everyday life and is experienced in gendered and sex-specific ways (Sjoberg, 2010: 253-286). This approach allowed me, first, to look at women ex-combatants' feelings and emotions, and the impacts that their involvement as female ex-combatants had in their daily life. Secondly it enabled me to locate Colombia's socio-political violence in a continuum that runs across different levels of interpersonal and political interaction, permeates all social institutions (economic, political, technological

and ideological), and runs through women's lives inside and outside the armed confrontation (Sjoberg, 2010: 275-276; Clisby & Holdsworth, 2014: 5).

As Sjoberg (2010: 269) points out the understanding of war as 'felt' requires from feminist scholars a research practice based upon an ethics of care for both the subjects of the research and their feelings. This entails feeling others' pain, establishing a sense of solidarity, and empathy. During the research process I found that in my case listening to the women participants and reading the transcriptions of their interviews became a form of witnessing and is part of this feminist ethics of care. Listening as witnessing required not only listening to female ex-combatants' narratives and acts of remembrance but also listening for their silences, calling for my own experiences of violence (public and private, political and domestic), my feelings and emotions as a Colombian woman, and locating myself in the politically and historically specific relations of power that have shaped the armed conflict in my country (Tagore, 2009: 29; Rosenberg, 1989). Besides, the recognition that the emotions of all the participants in the research process (women interviewed and my own) are important is informed by what Burkit (2012: 458-459) calls 'emotional reflexivity'. This is the acknowledgment that emotion shapes our perception of others, the world around us and ourselves therefore cannot be separated from the process of reflexivity.

Finally, in this work I understand feminism broadly defined as 'the recognition of the systematic inferiorisation of women resulting in women's oppression or relative disempowerment, tied to a strategy for changing that circumstance' (Kaminsky, 1993: 21). As Kaminsky (1993: 21) points out such a broad definition challenges the idea that feminism is linked to the European enlightenment, allows the inclusion of other forms of feminisms that developed outside Europe or earlier than the Eighteenth Century, and includes Iberoamerican feminists such as the seventeenth century Mexican nun Sor Juana Inés de La Cruz. Moreover, it allows me to locate practices and discourses developed by some women from the old insurgencies during their years as guerrilla members inside the feminist tradition.

The main corpus of the thesis is divided in seven chapters. Chapter Two, introduces the women participants, the Collective and Network of Women Ex-combatants as an ethnographic site, and myself as the teller of this story. A full list of women's pseudonyms, and basic biographical data is provided in Appendix one. Chapter Three, presents the ontological and methodological stance of the project, provides a critical account of the multiple-methods approach used to gather information, reflects on the process of analysis and writing, and considers some of the hindrances encountered during the fieldwork. Chapter Four, frames the setting in which women's experiences are located, Colombia, and gives a brief historical account of the development of the socio-political violence in the country. It ends with a discussion around the challenges faced when naming the armed conflict in the country, the belligerent actors involved, and the women participants. Chapter Five, explores women ex-combatants' motives for mobilisation and the different pathways they took into politico-military organisations. In Chapter Six I organise women's experiences of being around the broader thematic fields identified across the interviews and the literature reviewed: gender order in the guerrillas, the tension between symbolic and biological motherhood, empowerment and agency. I look at the Revolutionary Myth as the symbolic framework that gives cohesion and meaning to the experience of being, and argue that all aspects of women's life as *guerrilleras* are demarcated by the organisation values and ethos, and as such regulated by the symbolic framework created by the Revolutionary Myth. Chapter Seven, is divided in two main sections. In the first I explore some women ex-combatants' remembering practices through the images produced in their photo-diaries. In the second section I argue that many of the women interviewed understand their participation in politico-military organisations as a *way of being in the world*. For them the militancy was not conceived as a fraction of their lives but shaped all their existence: family, work, and sexuality (Rayas, 2009: 99). To show this aspect of being I focus on the experiences of women who were urban militants and they described their experience of participation in insurgent organisations as 'the everyday'. I argue that by embracing the militancy as a 'way of being in the world' some *guerrilleras* performed a 'different way of

making the revolution' (Alejandra – CRS, Pilar – M-19)[13] and developed political practices that guaranteed the very existence of the politico-military organisation, and transformed women's 'traditional' roles into political work. In Chapter Eight, I explore pleasure as an overlooked element of revolutionary militancy, and look at how happiness and joy are narrated in the stories of being *guerrilleras* built by the women from the old insurgencies. In Chapter Nine I summarise my main findings, argue that looking at war and violence as felt and sensed contributes to expand our understanding of female (ex)combatants' experiences, and requires from the researcher an ethics of care in which relationality and emotion play a central role.

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[13] Both women used the same words to describe female guerrillas' work.

Chapter Two
Introducing the Landscapes of the Women Narrators[14]

This chapter introduces the women whose voices and stories are part of this thesis, including myself. We belong to different generations, regions, classes, and provenance (urban, peri-urban, rural, semi-rural). Although some are indigenous and Afro-Colombian most of us consider ourselves mestizas (mix-raced), and our different skin tones are the result of the hybridity that characterises Latin America's multi-cultural and pluri-ethnic composition (Cupples, 2013; Luna & Villareal, 1994). From different locations and with different levels of intensity we have lived, experienced, witnessed and sometimes resisted the almost 60 years of Colombia's socio-political and economic violence, as well as the continuum of violence that shapes the lives of women and girls inside and outside the armed conflict. We are an example of the multiplicity and the differences that exist among women and within a woman (Luna & Villareal, 1994: 42).

As women we all have experienced in our daily life the oppressive patriarchal culture of the country, although the shape of this oppression varies depending on elements such as our class, ethnicity, generation, education, and regional precedence. But most of us do not consider ourselves passive victims. As with other women in the country we have resisted and continue to resist gendered socio-economic and political exclusion, inequality, and gender based violence. As we are going to see across this thesis, although the experiences of the women interviewed have continuities and discontinuities depending on their particular locations, all were members of Colombian left-wing politico-military organisations.

This chapter is divided in three sections. The first places the women interviewed into two wider groups depending on, 1) the historical time in which their participation as members of politico-military organisations took place; and 2) the political framework in which they left the guerrillas. In the second part of the chapter I introduce the Collective of Women Ex-combatants and the

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[14] Appendix one provides a list of the pseudonyms of the women quoted across this thesis.

National Network of Women Ex-combatants as the sites where my ethnographically informed encounters with female guerrillas, who laid down weapons between 1990 and 1994, took place. In the third section I locate myself as a researcher and as a woman and reflect on the relationship established between us, the different Colombian women whose voices and experiences you are going to encounter within this thesis.

The women ex-combatants

> During our conversations, their meetings and get-togethers several women stated that there is a particular *Pinta de guerrillera* (female guerrilla look). A look that in some cases, remains after the demobilisation as an embodied inscription of their years as members of politico-military organisations.
>
> The *guerrillera* look entails a particular way of dressing. Short hair, baggy trousers and t-shirts to be able to move freely in the mountains or disguise a weapon in the waist, workers' ankle boots, and the lack of flashy feminine accessories such as big earrings and necklace. Women demobilised in the nineties describe it as the boyish, androgynous look of the female (ex)-guerrilla fighter. The clothes always selected from a dark palette to easily merge in the crowds of the cities, or to camouflage within the greens of the rainforest. Only very recently Eloisa begun to use bright coloured pashminas, but she still dresses mainly in black. A decision she does not attribute to fashion but to her clandestine years, and the need to pass 'unnoticed', and to become 'invisible'.
>
> But there is another element to the *guerrillera* look, a sense that by looking at another woman you can tell from her ways (clothes, gestures, posture) her guerrilla past, a sort of mutual recognition. As if that past has become a mark inscribed in their bodies, gestures, affections and political options, which made them, according to Ruth, 'a different kind of woman'(Research Diary 2014, 03 March).

Between the 1960s and 1980s several guerrilla organisations appeared in Colombia, they had different ideological ties, political agendas, compositions, and regions of influence (see Chapter Three). Although their differences were moulded by the ideological confrontation between China and the Soviet Union, all embraced 'different models of armed revolution' (Hernández, 2003). For analytical purposes and due to historical dynamics related to the long duration of Colombian armed conflict the women interviewed in this thesis are divided

in two groups: female ex-combatants from the old insurgencies, and individually demobilised female guerrillas.

Women from the old insurgencies joined politico-military organisations between the 1960s and 1980s, most of them with the conviction that guerrilla warfare was the only solution available for their generation to end the inequalities, social injustices, and political exclusion that affected the country. They left the guerrilla organisation in the 1990s in the framework of bilateral peace agreements signed between five guerrilla organisations[15] and the Colombian government, the crisis of the socialist block, and the fall of the Berlin Wall. Their decision to be part of a revolutionary army must be read in the light of the historical context from the 1960s to the 1980s, the insurgent struggle they followed was located in the Cold-War period, and their motivations to leave the armed struggle are framed in the socio-political environment of the 1990s (Nieto-Valdivieso, 2010).

It is estimated that between 1990 and 1994 a total of 4,885 combatants collectively left the guerrillas in the framework of peace agreements, 1,183 of them (24 percent) were women (Londoño, Nieto-Valdivieso, Hincapie & Ochoa, 2005: 278-9). Nevertheless the official estimates do not represent the real number of women who demobilised in the country in the 1990s. Firstly, because at the time some of the data was not disaggregated by gender thus there was no information available. Secondly because many female combatants were not included in the demobilisation lists for different reasons. 1) Women like Nelly disagreed with the process and due to security concerns refused to adhere to the peace agreements, they left the organisation alone and did not receive any of the economic and social benefits assigned to the ex-combatants through the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration - DDR programme. 2) Women like Elvira did not have 'legal troubles' and were

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[15] The organisations that signed peace agreements and the day of their official disarmament are: Movimiento 19 de Abril - M-19 (Nineteen of April Movement, 9/3/1990), Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores - PRT (Workers Revolutionary Party, 25/1/1991), Ejército Popular de Liberación -EPL (Popular Liberation Army, 15/2/1992), Movimiento Armado Quintín Lame - MAQL (Quintin Lame Armed Movement, 27/5/1991), Comandos Ernesto Rojas - CER (Ernesto Rojas Commandos, 20/3/1992), and the Corriente de Renovación Socialista - CRS (Socialist Renovation Movement – 9/4/1994) (Reconciliación Colombia, 2015).

asked by the commanders to 'give their place' in the lists to other members of the organisation who 'need it more'. 3) Some women were not at the camps when the demobilisation took place. 4) Finally some combatants had established partnerships during their time in the mountains, when the demobilisation took place only the male member of the couple was included in the list and received the socio-economic benefits assigned by the government (Londoño et al, 2005: 279).[16]

Among female ex-combatants from the old insurgencies are women like Consuelo, Edith and Nelly, who joined the rural troops of the ELN in the mid-1960s, a time when women were still 'forbidden' in the rural ranks (Consuelo – ELN, 2006; Nelly – ELN/M-19, 2006).[17] Although they were performing maintenance and political work in the cities they were not actively encouraged by the organisation to become combatants. They joined the rural ranks by chance after a military operation in which the army had access to their names. As a result they had to become clandestine. By the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s the apparition of urban guerrillas in the country, changes in warfare strategies from the *foco* strategy - which depended on a small group of guerrillas- to a mass mobilisation strategy, fostered women's participation in politico-military organisations across Latin America. From that moment onwards female guerrillas began to be actively recruited (Wickham-Crowley, 1992: 215; Kampwirth, 2002: 9). Women like Pilar, Eloisa, Salome, Ruth, Sol and Elvira joined the M-19 urban guerrillas, and others like María Eugenia Vásquez were among its founding members. Other women like Magda, Lucia and Patricia became members of the politico-military organisation EPL, but although this guerrilla group had a strong rural

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[16] For a gender analysis of Colombia's DDR program see Londoño et al. (2005). As I was part of the research team that conducted this research I am not going to cover women's DDR processes. The research report was published in the book *Mujeres no contadas. Proceso de desmovilización y retorno a la vida civil de mujeres excombatientes en Colombia 1990-2003* (Londoño & Nieto, 2006). I refer to the research report and not to the book to give credit to the research assistants that were part of the process. For an analysis of the DDR process of individually demobilised wo(men) from guerrilla and paramilitary armies, and the collective DDR process of paramilitary in the country, see: Villarraga (2013); Esguerra (2013); Serrano (2013); Nussio (2012); Hoyos (2010); Anaya (2007); Theidon (2007).

[17] Both women used the same word to stress that in the 1960s women were not recruited or allowed into the rural ranks of the the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* - ELN (National Liberation Army).

presence they performed most of their revolutionary duties in the cities or like Eva in small towns. They were living a double life in which their clandestine identity was concealed under the 'normality' of their everyday activities as women, mothers, workers, trade unionists, teachers, professionals (see Chapter Eight).

Carmenza, Claudia and Alejandra became ELN members between 1974 and 1984, but although all of them began as urban militants Carmenza joined the rural troops in the mid-1980s while Alejandra and Claudia kept working clandestinely inside the Colombian social movement. Many of the women interviewed, among them Ignacia, Rita, and Sara, began their involvement with insurgent organisations doing legal political and community work within the social, peasant and indigenous movements in urban, peri-urban, rural, and semi-rural areas. Due to political persecution many of them had to become clandestine or join the rural troops of the guerrillas. Women from the old insurgencies are very diverse, among them were trade unionists, middle-class high school and university students, school teachers, housewives, factory workers, youth peri-urban inhabitants, and in some cases children like Elvira, Sol, Juliana, Lilian and Rocio.

The individually demobilised female combatants interviewed in this thesis joined the guerrillas in the late 1990s and 2000s, most of them as children. Teresa, Lina, Tatiana, Rosa, Mary, Carolina, Melina, Esther, Marta, Lorena and Alicia were between 12 and 18 years old at the moment of joining the guerrilla organisation, from poor rural or semi-rural backgrounds. Most of them did not finish primary education or were functionally illiterate, and had experienced socio-political, economic and visceral violence in their homes since a very early age. As we are going to see in Chapter Five their motivations were not linked to ideological reasons.

Their mobilisation took place during a period of time (1996 to 2005) in which the two guerrillas that remained in arms the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* - FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and The *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* - ELN (National

Liberation Army), and the paramilitary groups operating in the country were going through a process of military expansion. The conflict intensified as the guerrillas and the paramilitaries disputed territorial and political control of different regions in the country using terror as a strategy to control the population (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2012; GMH, 2013: 156). Furthermore, the rise of the global 'anti-terrorist' metanarrative put the Colombian internal counter-terrorist war into the international war theatre by merging the war on terrorism with the war on drugs and the branding of the FARC guerrillas as a 'narco-terrorist' threat to the security of the United States of America (Björnehead, 2004; Friesendorf, 2007).

Women who individually demobilised adhered to the government's Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reintegration and Reconciliation - DDRR program, as individuals, after 'deserting' the ranks of the FARC and the ELN, this is why they are commonly known as individually demobilised combatants. Their demobilisation process was not the result of a peace pact but part of the government's strategy to reduce the military capability of the guerrillas and paramilitary groups (Nussio, 2012: 41; Anaya, 2007: 179). As a result their demobilisation is perceived as a 'conflict resolution method rather than as a post-conflict process' (Anaya, 2007: 180).

According to data from the National University of Colombia's *Observatorio de Procesos de Desarme, Demobilizacion y Reintegración* - ODDR (Observatory of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Processes) between 2002 and 2014 a total of 27,992 members of the guerrillas and paramilitary groups demobilised as individuals, 19 percent (5,460) of them were women.[18] In addition between November 1999 and December 2011 a total of 4,688 child combatants joined the *Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar* - ICBF (Colombian Family Welfare Institute) program for disengaged (*desvinculados*) boys, girls and adolescents from armed groups where 28 percent of them (1,293) were girls and female adolescents. The ICBF estimates

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[18] This information is based on three sources: The Program of Humanitarian Assistance to Demobilised People from the Defence Ministry (GAHD), The Colombian Agency for Reintegration (ACR), And Colombia's High Commissioner for Peace and Reintegration (OACP).

that from 2006 onwards an average of 110 girls joined the program each year (Serrano, 2013: 74) (Image 2).[19]

Image 2. Adapted from the infographic elaborated by the ODDR (2015a)
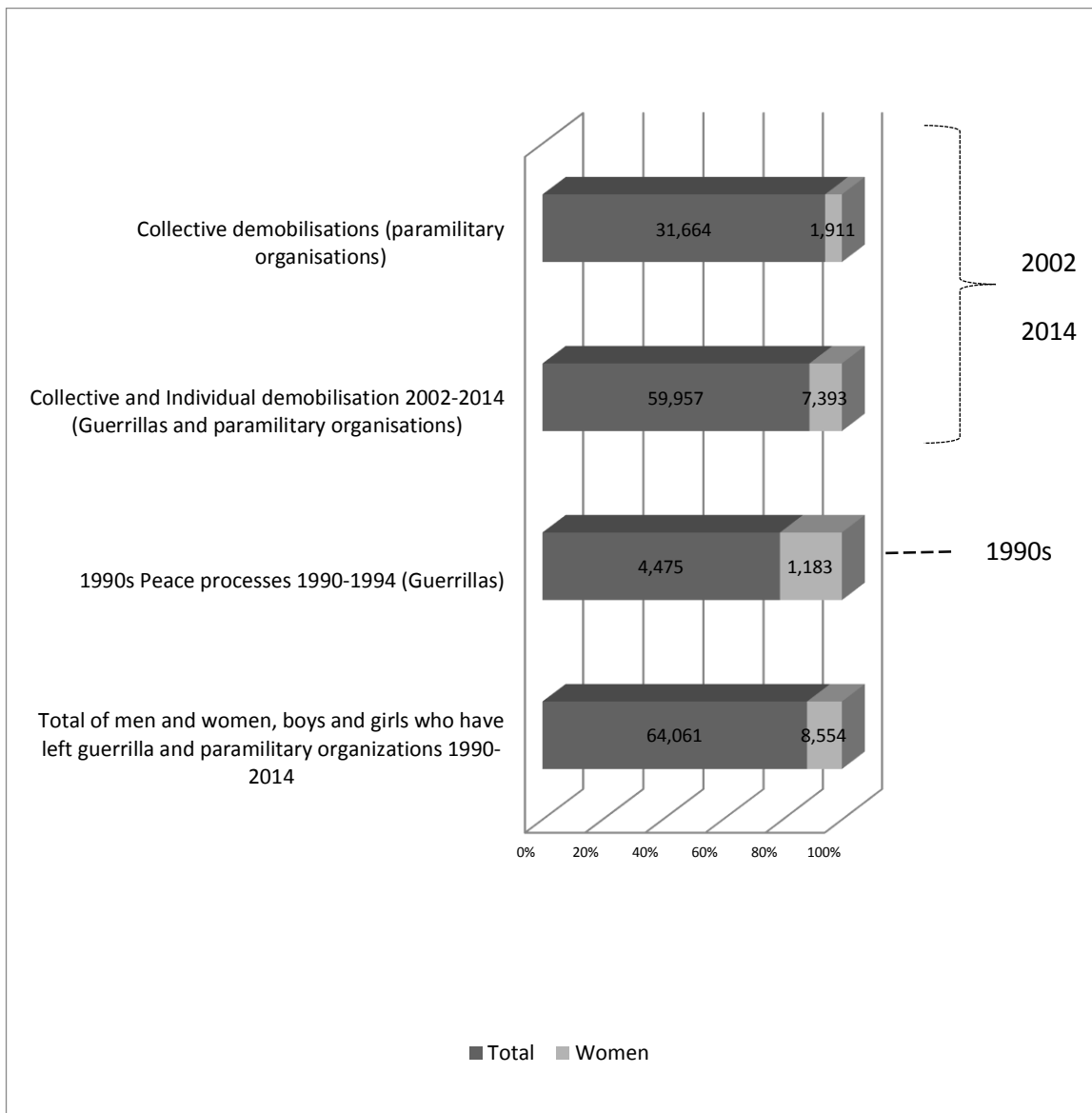
[19] There seems to be a discrepancy in that the total figures provided and the total for women are slightly less than they should be from the other data provided. Also the information in image 1 varies slightly from that offered by Londoño et al., (2005) in terms of the total number demobilised in the 1990s, nevertheless the number of demobilised women in the 1990s is the same. There is not information available about the number of men and women who left the armed organisations between 1994 and 2002 (Londoño et al., 2005)

As we are going to see in this thesis the experiences of both groups of women are determined by their particular locations, the contextual factors in which their participation in guerrilla organisations took place, the historical framework of their process of return to civilian life, and the ways in which gender has changed over time and space (Clisby & Holdsworth, 2014: 2). But there are commonalities of experience between them that, as Stanley & Wise (1990 as cited in Clisby & Holdsworth, 2014: 2) point out does not mean having the *same* experiences. Both groups of women lived the military training, the material, the physical work performed in the rural ranks, the sensuous aspects of being guerrillas such as the long walks endured by the troops, and the corporality of experiences such as danger, fear, and closeness to death, as deeply embodied.

During our conversations both groups of women mentioned the physical changes endured by their bodies. Women from the old insurgencies referred to their periods of amenorrhea while individually demobilised female ex-combatants mentioned how 'good' their bodies used to look 'in everything' they wore and resented the weight gained after the demobilisation. Both talk in positive terms and with a certain pride about the physical strength and skills they gained in the guerrilla ranks. As Alicia put it she became 'very machista' meaning that she was able to perform the same physical tasks as her male counterparts.

The experiences of both groups of women were shaped by the more egalitarian gender arrangements created inside the guerrilla ranks. They were the result of gender relations established inside specific organisations and included: the organisation's internal social structure, conceptions, images and roles assigned to masculinities and femininities, and the ways they were valued (Connell 2002 as cited in Dietrich, 2014: 92). Both groups of women refer to the idea of 'being equal' to men, performing the same roles and everyday activities (cooking for the troops, and carrying the same weight, see Chapter Seven). In consequence, as Esguerra points out (2013: 157), their femininities became 'ambiguous'. On the one hand women had to 'repress' their femininity to become equal to the male combatants. On the other hand, 'traditional'

femininities were exalted when they were functional to the armed struggle (i.e. to facilitate tasks such as espionage and transporting weapons).

But while female guerrillas in the 1970s and 1980s embraced an androgynous look as a way to become equal with their *compañeros* (male comrades); women in the guerrillas today emphasize their femininity by wearing makeup, nail polish, earrings, and long hair tied in elaborate braids. As Rosa said they beautified themselves to 'be admired by the trees'. I venture to say that the incorporation of 'traditional' feminine looks in the guerrillas today is neither the result of the inclusion of 'feminine' values and spaces in the militarised guerrilla environment, nor a widening of women's access to political participation, spaces of decision making or command positions inside the guerrillas. It is linked to the increasingly rural composition of the guerrillas still in arms, and the conservative and traditional values associated with the rural world.

While some women from the old insurgencies were from urban middle-class backgrounds and had some degree of contact with the feminist debates of the second wave, individually demobilised women and girls come from contexts characterised by an authoritarian and oppressive gender order (Esguerra, 2013: 122, 142). Gender orders are defined as the gender patterns that determine the distribution of roles and power between people according to their gender in a particular society and historical time (Connell 2002 as cited in Dietrich, 2014: 91).

Despite their differences women from the old insurgencies and individually demobilised female combatants have the sense that their look, dress, and sometimes body posture differentiate them from civilian women. This feeling was shared by a member of the GHM research team, who in a non-recorded conversation with me about the challenges faced by women after the demobilisation, stated that while individually demobilised men can explain their 'military demeanour' by saying that they were army reservists, women did not have that option (Fieldwork Jotting-Book 2, 31/7/2012).

I call all the women whose stories are part of this thesis narrators because they narrated to me a set of stories about Colombia's socio-political and economic violence, feminism, social movements, that I did not know (Nieto-Valdivieso, 2010). They have a narrative role not only in the body of the text but in the weaving I, as author, built. By calling them narrators I acknowledge their agency in representing their own experiences during the interviews, in the making of the photo-diaries, and in the stories told during the different national and regional meetings sustained by members of the Collective and Network of Women Ex-Combatants. In these different spaces, depending on the audience and the context, the women build a narrative representation not only of their past but also of their present and dreamed future.

In this section of the chapter I discussed the rationale behind the classification of female ex-guerrillas into two main groups: women from the old insurgencies, and individually demobilised female ex-combatants. I state that for both groups of women the experience of being members of insurgent organisations was embodied, not only because of its corporality but also because it transformed them and their way of perceiving the world (Braidotti, 2002: 12). In the next section I introduce the Collective and the Network of Women Ex-combatants which have become spaces where women from the old insurgencies come together.

The Collective and Network of Women Ex-combatants

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It is hot and humid; the meeting is taking place in a Colombian city
located on the Caribbean coast. The women have started to fill the
room after lunch and are in a festive mood, as with every time they
are together. It is the first day of the Second National Meeting of
the National Network of Women's Ex-combatants from the insurgencies
programmed to be held in 2012. Although the Network was created in
2002, it has been inactive during the last ten years. Selena and Lucia
are chatting in the middle of the room and without any warning start
singing the International.

Arriba los pobres del mundo
En pie los esclavos sin pan…

As women keep arriving some of them join the singers, now there are
four women forming a small chorus: Andrea, Lucia, Ruth, and a woman
who militated in the EPL whose name I do not know. They are now
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reaching the chorus but the lyric gets lost and becomes a humming,
until it arrives to the 'Viva la internacional!' Pilar interrupts…

-no, no… that is not accurate…

She takes the microphone, lying on a nearby table and adds the bit of
the lyric that is missing. They start singing again the last part of
the song, in the same joyful mood that has characterised the meeting.
In the past they belonged to different guerrilla organisations: Lucia
and the woman whose name I do not know to the EPL; Pilar and Ruth to
the M-19; and Andrea was one of the Colombian youth who joined the
Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua;

Agrupémonos todos
En la lucha final
Y se alcen los pueblos con valor
Por la internacional!

The women who are not singing are back in their chairs, some smile,
others try to follow the song in a low voice, most remain silent, arms
crossed in a protective gesture, and some - especially the ones who
come from the Caribbean region - look apprehensive. The meeting is
taking place in the conference room of a busy hotel, and next door,
the members of an evangelic church are in the middle of a prayer.
Their concern is understandable. The meeting is not only taking place
near to their hometowns, but also in one of the regions where the
paramilitary control was fully exercised. It permeated the political
institutions as much as the everyday life of all the population (GMH
2011; CODHES, 2009). Most of the women from the Caribbean present in
the meeting were (and still are) displaced from their lands, and some
witnessed the assassination of old comrades and partners after the
demobilisation (Field Diary 2, 26/7/2012).
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When the fieldwork for this thesis began in 2012 the International was still played on the ELN's 'revolutionary radio' stations (FD 3, 18/10/2012). The song has been used by different generations of revolutionaries around the world to call for the unity of the poor, the workers, the students, the peasants in a 'common' struggle to 'win their own liberation'. The women attending the Second National Meeting of the Network of Women Ex-combatants had been members of at least five different guerrilla organisations (EPL, ELN, CRS, M-19, MAQL, and PRT), and all of them were familiar with the song.

The brewing of the Network and the Collective of Women Ex-combatants began in 1999 when women ex-militants from the M-19 and the ELN got together preoccupied by the need to recover the memories of women who

participated in guerrilla organisations (Sanchez-Blake, 2012: 4), and their absence on the political arena (Dietrich, 2010). At the beginning the meetings were a space to talk about themselves, and share their experiences of solving everyday challenges such as raising their children, and getting a job after laying down their weapons (Lozano, 2014). They realised that after almost ten years of the peace process, many women were alone, unorganised, disenchanted by the 'failure' of their political project, and the vacuum generated by their break with the insurgent organisation (Sanchez-Blake, 2012: 4). Furthermore some had lost their family, children, and partners (Sanchez-Blake, 2012: 4; Londoño et al. 2005).

They continued to meet regularly and in 2001 organised the First National Meeting of Women ex-combatants,[20] financed by the World Bank (Collective of Women ex-combatants Meeting, 4/10/2012).[21] A total of 150 delegates from all over the country, and different guerrilla organisations got together in Bogotá to discuss their situation after ten years of laying down their weapons (Londoño et al., 2005; Dietrich, 2010; FD 1 & 2, 2012). Subsequent to the First National Meeting several regional meetings were held to disseminate the results of the event and to prepare the Women's Ex-combatants International Meeting that took place in Bogotá in 2002. The event brought together women ex-combatants from El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Colombia (Dietrich, 2010; Collective Meeting, 4/10/ 2012). It was after the National and the international meetings that the Collective was formally created as a non-profit organisation, responding to the necessity of having legal status to access international funding (Collective Meeting, 4/10/2012). At the beginning their members belonged to different organisations (EPL, ELN, and M-19), but as Dietrich (2010) noted; most of the members were from the M-19, and they were the ones setting the agenda for the Collective and the Network. When I carried out my fieldwork in 2012 they were having strong debates about

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[20] The dates about the creation of the Collective and the Network vary. I cross referenced the data provided by members of the Collective during my fieldwork in 2012, with the data provided by other researchers Dietrich (2012), Sanchez-Blake (2012), Londoño et al. (2005). The small variations on the dates responds to the Collective's lack of a formal administrative structure and their unsystematic archival practices.
[21] From now onwards I will refer to the meetings of the Collective of Women Ex-combatants I attended as Collective Meetings, followed by the date they took place.

'opening' the Collective to women from other organisations by sharing decision-making spaces with women ex-combatants from insurgent organisations other than the M-19.

The Network includes female ex-combatants from all around the country, and from five of the different guerrilla forces that were active in Colombia between the 1960s and 1990s. The words of María Eugenia Vásquez during the 2001 First National Meeting of the Network conveys the diversity of the attendees, and their sense of having shared experiences as *guerilleras*, of the process of laying down the weapons and the life after demobilisation. It is necessary to take into account that María Eugenia's words are part of her own effort to locate her own memories as a female guerrilla 'in a place with dignity. Because we know that our past is not undignified, neither sinful nor horrifying as the official discourse want us to believe' (Focus group 1, 10/9/2012),

> We are contemporary Colombian women, raised and socialised in a culture that taught us to "be for others"; to give up our own desires for the good of others and to give generously without asking anything in return. Women who, when deciding our participation in the guerrillas, had to adapt to perform in a male world, to be valued for qualities attributed to men, such as courage, boldness, leadership, strength, hardness. Women who, within the rebel ranks, participated in everything but our efforts and contributions were invisible and scarcely recognised. Women whose every day emotional and material support was not valued enough. Women that, when peace agreements were negotiated, were not taken into account; that when it was the time to get the "benefits of reintegration" did not receive equal treatment. Women that over time, when the stories of our movements are written, appear barely sketched beside or behind some illustrious man. We are that and more: we are also women with a libertarian vocation (...); women who were not intimidated by the difficulties, women who kept silence and guarded secrets; women who took care of life and affections (...). Women who, after the [peace] agreements, resisted despair. Even though many of us were left alone, we took in our hands the upbringing and care of our families. And we, the ones that could not raise our children, faced with integrity the social and emotional costs this implies. (...) We are alive and remain hopeful (Colectivo de Mujeres Ex-combatientes, 2012: 132).

By 2010 Alix Salazar estimated that the Network had around 526 registered members in different regions of the country (Sanchez-Blake, 2010: 10). Nevertheless, as members of the Collective explained to Lozano (2014), the

number of attendees to the Network meetings varies according to factors such as the security conditions in the regions, women's availability, and resources. Although they are linked the Network and the Collective are different bodies (Dietrich, 2010). The Network of Women's Ex-combatants is an umbrella organisation that includes four regional chapters (Caribe, Nororiente, Sur occidente, and Centro) (Network meeting, 26-27/8/2012). According to Alix Salazar, 'the Collective is the motor, while the Network is the machine that comprises all the organisations. The Network is active or inactive in accordance to the activity of the motor' (Sanchez-Blake 2010: 11).

When I met the Collective in 2012 it was the first time in almost ten years that an international organisation was funding their initiative to revitalize the Network. Many of the connections with the women in the regions had been severed, as they had changed their contact details, whilst others have been displaced from their lands and hometowns (FD 1 & 2; Network meeting, 26-27/08/2012; Collective Meeting, 4/10/2012). Since the end of the fieldwork in January 2013 the Network and the Collective have remained active, they have opened a Facebook page and in October 2014 published the first of a trimestral online magazine entitled *La Trece* (2014).

On 27 of August 2012 during my fieldwork, peace dialogues between the FARC and the Colombian government were announced. The propitious environment generated has allowed the Collective and Network to openly reclaim - for the first time in almost ten years- their past as members of the armed political left as an asset in their involvement in peace building activities, and the importance of including their voices in the peace process. On the 11th February 2015, María Eugenia Vásquez represented the Network in the Second gender sub-committee in Havana (Cuba), in the framework of the ongoing bilateral peace talks.[22] During the press conference she stated that,

> Women ex-combatants, as a political collective, want to be recognised as decisive political agents of peace. Since a long time ago we have been working, not only on the social transformations needed by the country but

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[22] This was the second of the three delegations expected by the Gender Sub-Commissions to visit Havana.

also with the victims [of the armed conflict] (Paz Manuel, 2015, 19:26 - 19:39 min).

The call for the inclusion of female ex-combatants as political and social actors is not new. Women from different regions and backgrounds (class, precedence rural/urban, ethnicity, academics and activists) feel that they cannot disclose they past as ex-combatants in spaces linked to the social, feminist and women's movement. Partly due to security problems but also because, as Dietrich (2010: 78) pointed out, the ongoing armed conflict has shaped the Colombian women's movement, in it female ex-combatants are perceived as part of the warring factors therefore their participation has been hindered. Although the women's movement does not directly reject female ex-combatants from the old insurgencies, it does not welcome them as equal political and social actors either,

> **Maria E:** They asked me to write an article (...)
> I was pondering, what to write, what to write, and what to write...
> Finally, I wrote something ()
> it was about the reinvention of peace
> something like...
> women ex-combatants as political subjects for peace, something like that,
> and the question was... okay, are women's organisations going to...
> **Patricia:** accept us?
> **Maria E:** recognise us?
> And where is [the place for] our words as well?
> ()
> I was asking that because they always exclude us for *being contaminated*[23]
> (...)
> They include us as individuals but exclude us as a collective (...)
> (Focus group 1, 10/9/2012)

Many of the members of the Network have been active in the women's movement, are members of peace organisations such as the *Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres* (The Pacific Route of Women), and are key social and peace actors in their communities, but they do not disclose their past as members of politico-military organisations. As a woman pointed out during a coffee break in the Second National meeting of the Network, 'I see the *compañeras* (female comrades) in other spaces, gender, community work, activism, but not as ex-

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[23] My emphasis. Women ex-combatants mentioned that women and feminist organisations look at them with suspicion because their past challenges the idea of women as pacific.

combatants' (FJB 2, 25/8/2012). The Collective and Network are some of the few spaces where women ex-combatants from the old insurgencies are beginning to reclaim their involvement in radical politics as an important strength for peace building and their involvement in feminist, human rights, and social movements as political agents after laying down their weapons (FJB 2, 25/8/2012).

In this thesis the Collective and the Network are considered both a *mnemonic community* and an *emotional community*. The concepts are complementary and by using the term communities I emphasise the social and relational nature of memories and emotions (Misztal, 2003: 6; Rosenwein, 2006: 25). According to Misztal (2003) mnemonic communities are groups that socialize us to what should be remembered and what should be forgotten, they have a particular cognitive bias that expresses a specific truth about the group, its identity 'and equips the group with the emotional tone and style of its remembering' (Misztal, 2003: 16). The nation is the main mnemonic community but other examples can be the family and a particular ethnic group. As a result inside a single society many mnemonic communities may coexist (Misztal, 2003). Barahona de Brito (2010: 363) suggested that the concept of mnemonic communities should be extended to victims, perpetrators, political parties, and trade unions and in the framework of this thesis female ex-combatants, as they are strategic actors in the field of Transitional Justice. Seeing female ex-combatants as a mnemonic community allows us to see them not only as strategic actors with particular interests, but also as bearers of particular 'constellations of memories and meaning-engendering social narratives' (Barahona de Brito, 2010: 363). This is because diverse mnemonic communities (women ex-combatants, soldiers, human rights, victims) would have 'different memories of their role in repression, different justificatory discourses and different psychological traumas resulting from their participation and responsibility for atrocities' (Barahona de Brito, 2010: 363).

Rosenwein (2006: 2) defines *emotional communities* as groups in which people follow similar norms of emotional expression and value (or devalue), and the same or related emotions. Its members have a common aim, interests,

values and goals. The community could be reinforced by ideologies, teachings, and common assumptions, as well as artefacts such as texts, films, and music. An example being the hagiographies used in the middle ages to provide men and women with models of behaviours and attitudes (Rosenwein, 2006: 25). In the case of women (ex)-combatants these role models could be the lives of revolutionaries and freedom fighters from different times, revolutionary struggles and countries. Rosenwein (2006: 25) stated that emotional communities are akin to what Foucault calls a 'discourse' because they have shared vocabularies and ways of thinking that have a controlling, disciplining function, and similar to Bourdieu's 'habitus' because they had internalised norms which determine how they think and act.

In this section I introduced the Collective and the Network of Women Ex-combatants, most of the female ex-combatants from the old insurgencies who participated in this research were or are members of the Collective and/or the Network, and the ethnographically informed work I conducted was done in their meetings, get-togethers, regional and national events. In Chapter Three I make a more detailed description of the process of participant observation conducted in the Collective and the Network. In the next pages I locate myself as a researcher and as a woman, and the relationship established with the women during the fieldwork.

My/Our/Their/ location as situated knowers

As different authors have suggested the researcher's autobiography is entwined in all the stages of the research and it influences consciously (or not) her decisions, the areas of research, the interview process, the analysis, and the writing up (Stanley & Wise, 1993; Ribbens & Edwars, 1998; Miller, 1998; Mauthner & Doucet, 1998; Holland & Ramazanoglu, 1994). By introducing my own location and narrative voice from the beginning I am, firstly, making explicit the role that autobiography played in my decisions in the field, and my ways of knowing, interpreting, and writing. Secondly, the reader is being informed of my situated identity in the network of relations built before, during and after the fieldwork. And thirdly, I am making visible that my own writing

is situated too. I am aware that locations are not self-appointed, self-defined subject positions but are collectively shared and constructed. As a result in many cases our location is so familiar and close that it escapes self-scrutiny as one cannot even see it (Braidotti, 2002: 12).

I am a mestiza Colombian woman, who has never been a direct victim nor a direct actor of Colombian armed conflict. And by this I mean that neither me nor my immediate family (mother and siblings) have been displaced, massacred, tortured, or exiled for political reasons, as an effect of the armed conflict, or due to socio-economic violence. However we have experienced the consequences of the state's socio-political violence, structural violence and inequalities, chronic-insecurity, gender-based violence against women and children, and 60 years of armed confrontation. In this context I am an insider, I am located within. As an academic woman from the periphery writing this story across the Atlantic Ocean, miles away from the on-going armed conflict, studying at a university in the global-north, I am an outsider. Furthermore, after five years of coming-in and going-out of the country I was not totally familiar with the Colombia I encountered in June 2012 at the beginning of my fieldwork. Likewise the woman who landed in Bogotá was not the same as the one who left in 2008 to study abroad. As an academic homecomer I found that the country, and my way of looking at its reality had been transformed (Oriola & Haggerty, 2012).

When the fieldwork began I became aware that I was perceived by several of the women narrators as a double outsider.[24] Women who militated in old insurgency groups have a strong sense of belonging to a common past, a common family defined by ties of ideological affiliation and shared experience as revolutionary fighters (FD 1 & 2). In some cases this common belonging is passed to their children and in the eyes of some of the women interviewed they are the ones in charge of (re)telling the stories and keeping alive the memory of revolutionary militancy of their fathers, mothers, and relatives. And some of their children are indeed doing this work through art, visual methods such a

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[24] Academic discussion around the researcher's insider-outsider position is part of a wider ongoing debate across different disciplines, see: Griffith (1998) Corbin & Buckle (2009) Merrian, Johnson-Bailey, Lee, Kee, Ntseane, & Muhamad (2010).

documentaries, literary accounts or blogs aimed to 'recover' and preserve the 'memory' of their fathers/mothers/aunts/uncles militancy.[25]

In consequence at the beginning of my fieldwork I was challenged by women from the old insurgencies like Juanita, Rita and Ruth because of my not-belonging to this 'shared past' and my 'rightness' to listen to their accounts was questioned, 'Are you the niece of a comrade?', 'why do you want to know that?', were common interpellations. This questioning of my position was not only related to definitions of belonging to a particular community, but also to security issues related to the clandestine and politically 'subversive' nature of women's experiences. In Colombia total openness about women's experiences as combatants, even those who demobilised almost 25 years ago, is still dangerous. They are stigmatized by some sectors of the population, and looked at with suspicion by the government.

But most women, even those who at the beginning questioned my location, welcomed me with great generosity and warmth. They opened their houses and intimate spaces, introduced me to their families and loved ones, cooked dinners and made coffee. They showed me their pictures and mementos from their time as *guerrilleras* and received me in meetings, seminars and get-togethers, to which only female ex-combatants from the old insurgencies were invited. During our formal and informal encounters we shared fears, pains, tears and laughter. The relationships established during the fieldwork required a strong degree of self-reflexivity, not only of my methods and research practice, but also of my emotions in the field and the recognition that these emotions, as well as the relationships established, produced knowledge (Jaggar, 1989: 164; Mauthner & Doucet, 1998: 125). It also required an ethics of care in which the maintenance and fostering of the relationships in which I

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[25] For instance: the Documentary video *Reveladas* (2010) follows the everyday life of three women members of the Collective of women ex-combatants. In 2010 Maria José Pizarro opened at the *Museo Nacional de Colombia* the exposition she curated about her father's life: 'Hacer la Paz en Colombia, "Ya Vuelvo", Carlos Pizarro'. He was the Commander of the M-19 who, after laying down weapons, was assassinated while running for the presidency. She also has a page on Facebook under the name of her father and keeps a blog about the making of the documentary video 'Pizarro. La sombra de mis sueños' (Pizarro the shadow of my dreams), described as 'her personal search to understand her father's life and violent death' (Pizarro, 2012). The Documentary was finished and launched in 2015 (Vice.com, 2015; Builes, 2015; PACIFISTA, 2015).

was entwined was (and still is) central (Gillian 1982: 19 as cited in Tronto, 1989: 180).

The grammars of difference produced by my/our multiple locations shaped my relation with both women and institutions/organisations. On the one hand, with María Eugenia, Patricia, Fabiola, and Clara -even if they belonged to a different generation- at the moment of the interview we shared similar positions of class, ideology, and education. We had common literature and music preferences, a feminist perspective, and a libertarian conception about love and female sexuality. Even more they are writers/authors. María Eugenia's autoethnographic/autobiographical account of her militancy, *Escrito para no morir, diario de una militancia* (2000/2011) became since its publication in 2001 part of Colombia's literary cannon on women and armed conflict.[26] Fabiola has made poetry of her exile experience, published in 2013 a novelized-auto/biography about hers and her brothers' involvement in the EPL guerrilla. Clara is a historian working in the field of memory studies; and Patricia is currently writing her autobiography, and is also working on the memory of Colombian armed conflict. Clara and Patricia worked together on a 'reconciliation laboratory' in which they brought together women who had been agents of violence on different sides of the Colombian conflict: old insurgents, individually demobilised female guerrillas, collectively demobilised paramilitaries, army officers, and female *sicarias* (paid killers) (FD 1 & 2).

Although a degree of rapport was established with all the women with whom I had contact, our relationship was influenced by our location on the spectrum of what Glucksmann (1994) calls the 'Division of Knowledge'. According to Glucksmann (1994: 156) the *Division of Knowledge* is central to the division of labour in industrial societies, which exists along the same spectrum of other social divisions (class, ethnicity, gender), and constitutes a distinct form of inequality. It expresses the impossibility of totally reducing power imbalances between researcher and researched. While transcribing the conversations sustained with women like Eloisa, María Eugenia, Fabiola, Clara, Salome and

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[26] It has been translated as My life as a Colombian revolutionary (2005)

Patricia, the ways in which our shared knowledge shaped the dynamics of the conversation are evident, other forms of listening are at play, and the dialogical nature of our conversations and contact is reinforced. While in my conversations with other women I try not to interfere, in my meetings with the women listed above my personal voice is ever present. Although the relations built give the sensation of erasing power imbalances, they are still there. I am the one transcribing, analysing, and writing about our interactions. Furthermore I am writing in English, a language that they cannot read, the Division of Knowledge was narrowed but it still exists.

On the other hand, the lived experiences of the girls individually demobilised were alien to me. They were predominantly from rural backgrounds; most of them had not completed primary school before joining the armed group; their lived conditions were shaped by economic misery, disenfranchisement, inequality, constant violation of their human rights from all the actors including the state; and they have experienced sexual violence in their homes and villages. When I interviewed them some were in oppressive relationships with older or violent men, and living in poverty. Only a couple had managed to finish high school in the framework of the government's demobilisation programme, and all were mothers. We only shared two things: our generation, and having experienced to some degree or another Colombia's machismo, and patriarchal oppression.

This research is based on a *relational ontology*, this is the idea that we are 'selves-in-relation' embedded in a complex network of intimate and social relationships (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998: 125). The relations established in the field influenced mine/their/our positions, and generated for me different concerns about power and representation (Birch, 1998; Plummer, 1995). With the women with whom our friendship and shared privileges lessened the power imbalances the questions raised move around intimacy, confidentiality and involvement. Most of the time our conversations took confessional undertones, personal and private experiences of trauma, love, desire, motherhood, that in some cases have never been shared before emerged.

With the women who occupy more vulnerable positions, I was aware that the power imbalances between us influenced our relationship, the research results, and in some cases inhibited disclosure (Holland & Ramazanoglu, 1994: 136). I was able to sense how the women chose, consciously or not, the ways in which they presented themselves, the anecdotes narrated, as well as the silences. Their way of 'conducting' the interviews responded to the particular framework of our relationship. Firstly for all of them I was a stranger asking questions about an experience that is negatively evaluated by the reintegration programme and by Colombian society. Secondly, disclosing their experience entailed security risks as on the one hand they are considered 'deserters' and as such enemies of the armed group they left. And on the other hand the re-armed paramilitary organisations look at them as 'the enemy' and in consequence a 'military target', or as possible recruits due their military training. Finally some of them felt that their legal situation was not totally resolved, thus they were afraid of the possibility of being prosecuted.

Despite the division of knowledge that existed among us the contact established with and the process of listening to the women allowed me to see them as 'reflexive and situated knowers' (Clisby & Holdsworth, 2014: 4). They were able to coherently articulate how their experiences of becoming and being members of guerrilla organisations, the life beyond, and their everyday realities were gendered. Some of the women made very sophisticated evaluations of their lived experiences and have produced knowledge from it (Clisby & Holdsworth, 2014: 4; Holland & Ramazanoglu, 1994).

In this chapter I have introduced the women whose stories are part of this thesis, they as other Latin American women, have taken part in the armed revolutionary organisations that have appeared on the continent since the Cuban Revolution. They are part of our political (hi)stories and (her)stories as a continent and as a country. Although most of the women interviewed did not join the armed struggle with a gender consciousness, this work is an attempt to recognise female ex-combatants as part of mine and other Colombian women's feminine and feminist genealogical tree. Directly and indirectly they have shaped the political history of the country, the social, women's and

human rights movement as much as the women who decided to carry their struggles for peace, gender equality, women's political inclusion, and human rights without weapons. Including them as part of my/our genealogies is also a way of resisting the silencing/forgetting of their political and personal experiences; as well as the political and socio-economic exclusion and the continuum of violence that many of them/us continue to experience today (Lagarde, n.d). The next chapter introduces the methodology and the methods used to build this thesis.

Chapter Three
On Assembling a Meaningful Mess
Methods and Methodology

Stories about entering the field usually start with a journey; this one is no exception. By using this image I am linking myself to a lineage of feminist researchers who use the metaphor of the researcher-traveller to describe their own pursuits (Reinharz, 1992; Behar, 1996; Birch, 1998); by doing so they give a sense of the embodied nature of the research process, and the importance of acknowledging the locatedness of oneself in time and space, central in the process of reflexivity and feminist praxis (Reinharz, 1992: 211). The journey narrative is also useful to highlight that I/they/we, the women on these pages, transit through different positions and spaces. Some are geographical due to the movement of bodies inside and outside the country; others are related to our constant journey back and forwards between privilege and marginality; and to the multiple identities that I/they/we embody: victims and actors; ex-combatants and peace activists; mothers and lesbians; daughters and human/women/indigenous rights activists; writers and academics, among others.

This chapter's aim is to narrate my journey into the field and how I assembled my archive, which at the end of the nine months research in Colombia included: 136 hours of voice recorded material (interviews, focus groups, meetings and seminars of the Collective and Network of Women Ex-combatants); 15 photo-diaries made by the women and one made by me; photos taken (by me) during the Collective and Network National Meetings, and from women's personal archives. I conducted a total of eleven interviews with women ex-combatants (from the old insurgencies and individually demobilised), and as part of my corpus I included 68 interviews gathered in the framework of four research projects carried out (by

me and colleagues) between 2001 and 2010.[27] I also brought back four field-diaries and three notebooks with jottings made in the field.

This chapter is organised in to four sections. In the first part I narrate my entrance into the field and the strategies used to contact the women. In the second section I describe the methods used to assemble my 'archive', which is the result of different emotions and various forms of contact made in Colombia between June 2012 and January 2013. A meaningful mess[28] is the best trope I can use to describe both the data collected, and the different archival practices used by the women to keep their memories of participation in the armed group. In the third section I discuss the process of transcribing and analysing the material, and argue that in this work 'witnessing is a practice of listening' (Rosenberg, 1989: 123). Women's collective and private memories of their participation as members of politico-military organisations intersect with my collective and private memories as a civilian woman growing up in a country in the midst of an armed confrontation. The chapter finishes with a description of some of the obstacles found in the field.

Entering the field

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I arrived in Bogota on the 17th of June 2012. From the plane window I
could see a thunderstorm... the lightening making visible the mountains
and leaving them in shadows again, rhythmically. Several storms were
taking place in the country when I arrived, natural, political and
personal. Maybe I am being melodramatic to grab the attention of my
imaginary readers, or to make the first page of my fieldwork diary look
exciting, as the one of a proper ethnographer (FD 1, 20/6/2012).
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Landing in Bogotá in July 2012 was going back to a country and a city I used to 'know'; the comfort of my mother tongue; and the flow of walking in the streets without having to think twice about the meaning of body languages and traffic

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[27] The research projects are: 1) Women in Times of War (2001-2003), Engendering Reintegration Processes of Female Ex-Combatants in Colombia 1990-2003 (2003-2005). The material was facilitated by the *Instituto de Estudios Regionales de La Universidad de Antioquia* - INER. 2) Fieldwork for my MA in History conducted in 2006. 3) The researcher Luisa Dietrich, who is working on a comparative analysis of wo(men) guerrillas in Salvador, Colombia, and Peru, allowed me to use five interviews she conducted in 2010 with women ex-combatants in Colombia.
[28] Suzanne Clisby described my archive as a meaningful mess, I have embraced this definition as it describes not only the way in which it was created but also the final arrangement of mismatched things I collected.

signs. At the same time I was going back to family expectations of womanhood and daughterhood; the experience of chronic insecurity which covers all aspects of people's lives; ongoing political violence, and the ever presence of fear and violence in the streets of Colombian and Latin American cities. This is a violence which, as Polit & Rueda (2007: 2) pointed out, is no longer distributed between the state and its hegemonic institutions on one side and the armed actors who fight the state on the other, but has become ubiquitous, creating the sense that anyone could be a victim or a victimiser.

I was back in a country where between 2003 and 2013 violence against women and girls increased by 16 percent, while sexual violence rose by 46 percent in the same period, in part as a consequence of the armed confrontation[29] (Navarrete, 2014). During the first nine months of 2012 approximately 11,333 cases of sexual violence against children were documented (83 percent were girls and 17 percent were boys) (ABColombia, Sisma Mujer & The U.S. Office on Colombia, 2013: 8). But due to the sub-register of sexual violence in the country the data does not reflect the whole picture, many cases are not reported, while almost 90 percent of reported incidents remain unpunished (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2014: 4).

That same year Colombia was, according to the World Bank, the seventh most unequal country in the world, and 34.2 percent of its population was living in poverty (ABColombia et al, 2013: 6). In 2011, not without criticism, the Ley 1448 also known as the *Ley de Victimas y Restitucion de Tierras* (Victims and Land Restitution Law) was approved. One year on its implementation was still unclear, and both female and male leaders of displaced peoples organisations, claiming back their lands, were being assassinated by paramilitary groups such as the *Ejército Anti-Restitución de Tierras* (Anti-Law Restitution Army) in different regions of the country (El Espectador, 2012a; Human Rights Watch, 2013).

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[29] The data does not disaggregate if the violence was perpetrated inside or outside the armed conflict.

Television news still divided one hour between reports about the effects of the armed confrontation on the civilian population, football, and lifestyle news. The soap operas, that genre that shapes Latin America's visual culture and popular imagination about love, social mobility, and beauty, had a new sub-genre *narconovelas*. Soap-operas focusing on drug-trafficking which, according to Cabañas (2012: 74), are a dialogue between popular culture, the hegemonic discourse of the War on Drugs and middle-class morality. When I arrived in Colombia *Escobar, el Patron del Mal* (Escobar, the Master of Evil), a soap-opera based on the life of Colombian drug-lord Pablo Escobar was breaking records in television ratings. It was also glamorizing drug-dealers' lifestyles, and its fictionalisation of historical characters and events was flattening the complicated political history of the country (Field Diary 1, 2012, n.d; Luzardo, 2012; Yarce, 2012).

Going back to Colombia was also going back to the feeling that in the country research and art are not merely academic and aesthetic enterprises, but political events in which the researcher, the artist and the activist merge (Rappaport, 2007), as my encounter with Carlos, a visual artist, reminded me. He was filming a video documenting his 14 month old son's process of acquiring language, while contrasting it with women victims' loss of speech. At some point of our conversation about the work of emerging artists in the country he stated, 'in Colombia all art has a political content, or in some way makes reference to the armed violence' (FD 1, 20/6/2012). Although his comment is a generalisation about the artwork produced in the country, I agree with him that art has become a way of narrating what is unspeakable, has become invisible or has been silenced.

Differently to other PhD students who travel elsewhere as part of their research voyage, I was coming back to the country where I grew up, where my family lives, and which history (official and unofficial) is entwined with my personal, political and academic history. In that sense my voyage into the field was to a familiar landscape. This sense of familiarity was augmented by my past involvement as a research assistant (Blair et al., 2003), and as a researcher in the field of gender

and DDR in the country (Londoño et al., 2005; Londoño & Nieto-Valdivieso, 2007). As a result the questions, methods, research decisions, and the contact with the women interviewed during the fieldwork, were informed by my past personal and academic experiences.

<u>Making contacts</u>

All my main gatekeepers, the ones who opened the first doors, and acted as intermediaries between me and my participants, were part of my own social network. They gave me the contact details of people to interview, introduced me to women from the old insurgencies, and to key persons inside institutions and organisations working with individually demobilised wo(men). Women from old insurgent organisations were reached through friends by snowballing and a chain of trust. Even my first links with the *Agencia Colombiana para la Reintegración* – ACR (Colombian Agency for Reintegration), the government's agency in charge of the design and implementation of Colombia's Reintegration policies, were made through friends.[30]

At the beginning of my fieldwork I did not foresee the number of doors I needed to cross to access the women interviewed. Many of them never opened. The process of gaining access to the ACR took almost five months. Although permission to interview individually demobilised women was granted my gatekeeper in the ACR informed me that nobody in Bogotá could give me interviews as their offices were 'too busy'. Other cities were suggested without any consideration of the research plan submitted. Despite the hindrances to access the ACR through them I interviewed four of FARC's female ex-combatants who demobilised as individuals during the last 13 years.[31] Their lived experiences are key to understanding the changes and continuities of women's and girls'

[30] Programs, laws, and government agencies in charge of the DDR of combatants have changed since the first DDR programs were put into motion in the 1990s. See: Herrera & González (2013), Villarraga (2013), Nussio (2012), Palou & Méndez (2012); Londoño & Nieto (2006).
[31] Alicia and Ester were not contacted through the ACR but through Bogota's Major *Programa de Atención al Proceso de Desmovilisacion y Reintegración*.

involvement as guerrilla members during the last 20 years, the transformations of the Colombian armed conflict, and the insurgent organisations still in arms.

Even in spaces such as the Collective and the Network of Women Ex-combatants where I was invited in and bountifully greeted, I did not have total disclosure.

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Despite the privileged access I have to the Collective meetings, making
interviews has not been easy. Ruth is evading me. Every time I ask her
for an interview she answers: 'I am very busy', 'I don't have time this
month', 'I can't…' (FD 1, 25/7/2012).
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Although I was not expecting full disclosure from the women, I became aware that even though participant observation granted me privileged insight into the dynamics and internal discussions of the Collective and the Network I was still an outsider and did not have total access to their discussions and activities. Firstly some activities were part of their internal dynamics, such as the committee to elect the new legal representative of the Collective. Secondly meetings, such as the one organised by Magda to start writing a book about the history of the EPL from women's perspective, were part of their private community of memory, thus only a small group of close friends from that organisation was invited to participate. Besides, due to the 'clandestinity' that shaped the experience of being, some women from the old insurgencies developed a controlled self-disclosure that allowed them to alternate between distancing and disclosure (Mauthner, 1998: 50).

When Soledad González -a friend from Uruguay-, came to give a talk about sexual violence against women as a strategy of state terrorism in Uruguay's dictatorship (González & Risso, 2012), I noticed that there were topics the women from the Collective and the Network did not discuss with me (even when I addressed them directly) but shared with her, such as private stories of imprisonment, disappearance, sexual violence, and torture. None of the women I contacted wanted to talk about their torture and imprisonment with me, as these were not the focus of my thesis I respected their silences. Maybe when the time is right the

initiative to talk about certain aspects of the experience may come from the women themselves, as was the case in Uruguay (Fried, 2007).

In the next section I introduce the different methods used to gather my archive, which is the result of the different kinds of contacts (personal and institutional) made while in the field and my personal and political memories and emotions as a Colombian citizen (Ahmed, 2004).

Using a multi-methods approach

Two factors influenced my decision to take an ethnographically informed, multiple-methods approach: the feminist ontological and epistemological stance of the project, and the aim to build a polyphonic narrative of women's experiences. Since its conception this thesis was grounded in feminist methodology. Different authors have widely discussed the elements that characterise feminist research (Harding, 1987; Stanley & Wise, 1990; Reinharz, 1992; Maynard, 1995; Maynard & Purvis, 1995; Devault, 1996; Kleinman, 2007). They suggest that feminist methodologies do not create new research methods but modifies them in order to ensure that the research has three main components: firstly it has to include women's locations and perspectives in order to give a more accurate view of society (Braiton, 1997; Devault, 1990; Kelly, Burton & Regan, 1995). This first component of feminist research was present in my project since its birth, as my objective is to contribute to the construction of alternative memories and (re)telling of the Colombian socio-political violence from the point of view of women who participated in it as actors/agents of political violence. Secondly, feminist methodologies are aimed to minimise harm and to address unequal power relations between the researcher and the participants (Braiton, 1997; Skeggs, 1995; Maynard & Purvis, 1995). And thirdly feminist research should be of value to women, lead to social change and/or actions directed to improve women's status (Braiton, 1997; Kelly at al, 1995). At the end of this subsection I briefly evaluate how the methods used supported the feminist stance of my research.

The second aspect that informed my multi-methodological stance is connected with the aim of this thesis to build more complex narratives of the socio-political violence in Colombia; which has been described as a 'war of silencing' in which memories had been used as another form of political repression (Wong, 2007: 179). After taking part in three research projects in which the main research method was semi-structured and life-history interviews with women ex-combatants from guerrilla and paramilitary armies, I began to feel that using a multiple-methods approach would add thickness and more strata of information to my research (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Maynard & Purvis, 1995; Reinharz, 1992).

Due to the different layers of silence, silencing, and selected memories that have been used to construct an official version of the armed conflict in the country, I wanted to access stories that have been silenced by Colombian official accounts and (his)tories of the armed conflict, as well as to women's own silences. A multiple-methods approach allowed the contours of women ex-combatants' silences and inarticulations about their lived experiences to take shape; delineates women narrators' multifaceted identities (the ex-combatant, the peace-activist, the mother/grandmother, the artist, the political activist); and reflected back my multifaceted identity as a researcher (Reinharz, 1992: 202). In the following pages I provide an account of the methods used in the making of this thesis: interviews, participant observation, photo-diaries and focus groups.

<u>The interviews</u>

A total of eleven women were directly interviewed in 2012, five from old insurgency groups (M-19 and EPL) and six individually demobilised (FARC and ELN) (Appendix 1). Before beginning the interviews I explained to the participants the aim of my research, asked permission to record the interview, explained that they could stop the recorder at any time and refuse to answer questions they were not comfortable with. With the women from the old insurgencies, Magda (EPL), Salome, Sol, Rocio and Elvira (M-19), our contact was not limited to the interview setting but was sustained through the fieldwork in different spaces (formal and informal meetings and focus groups) and contexts

(i.e. their homes, the meetings of the Collective and the Network). With Ester (FARC) and Alicia (ELN), both individually demobilised and living in Bogotá at the moment of the interview, I sustained the relationship by meeting them once a month after the first interview took place. With Teresa, Lina, Marta and Lorena (FARC), also individually demobilised, keeping contact after the interview was not possible. They were living in an intermediate city, and although I visited the city twice during the duration of the fieldwork, arranging a second meeting was not possible, their mobiles were off, were no longer in use, or they had moved to a different location.

The interviewing process was reshaped several times to accommodate to the realities of the field. Although my aim was to carry out two interviews with each woman, at the end I only completed one with most of them. However it is not possible to say that the women were reluctant to be interviewed. When I asked them for an interview they all agreed, and gave me their contact details. But arranging an appointment for the interview was difficult. Some women cancelled our meetings several times at the last moment, and stopped answering the phone; others kept postponing the date of the interview. As a result not all the women initially approached were interviewed.

Instead of rushing or pushing women into the research it was essential to understand their reluctance to be interviewed. Women's reasons for cancelling the appointments or for avoiding the interviews were varied. Elvira cancelled our appointments four times. When we met she avoided the interview. During one of my last meetings with the Collective I understood why. One of the benefits received by the guerrillas who laid down weapons in the 1990s was access to education. Differently to people demobilised today they did not receive counselling or psycho-social attention to help them deal with issues such as trauma, loss, or the transit to civilian life.

> **Elvira:** the only time I told [someone] that I felt pain about all that I had a bad experience...
> I was studying at the C* University,

And the psychologist who was my counselor was the one that insisted the most
that I was not granted a place [for the next year at the university],
because I was a dangerous element for them.
And they did not allow me to enroll.
(...)
It was precisely...
Precisely when they killed *El Gato*,
I became very unwell,
I was studying at the university.
I think that was the last time I open myself to someone...

Juanita: [El Gato] was the husband of Clara from A*?

Elvira: yes, and I was very appalled
and she [the university counselor] asked me why I wasn't well,
she told me not to worry.
She took me into her consultation and I told her:
-look what happened is that they killed this comrade,
and I don't know what else I said.
And then...
(...)

[She] said that I was a bad element for the university
because of that they didn't allow me to enroll the next semester
(Collective's Meeting, 4/10/2012)

At the end Elvira accepted to be interviewed. She called two weeks before my
return to the United Kingdom and invited me to her place. We spoke on her own
terms, as she had prepared a list of key words she wanted to cover in her photo-
diary: family, neighbourhood, friends, life today, travels, jobs, pains and loves. At
the end of the conversation around the themes she identified to organise and make
sense of her experience she wanted to know the kind of questions I was going to
ask. Elvira's interview took this dynamic because I gave her the photo-diary four
months before the interview took place. Thus she started to reflect upon her
experience before the interview while trying to make *La Tarea* (homework) as the
women began to call the photo-diary. Our conversation was possible because of
the the ties of care and respect I built with the Collective during my stay in
Colombia. Not rushing Elvira but giving her time and space to think about her
participation in my project bridged us. From Elvira's interview I learned about

research practice and methods design, and about the importance of giving women time and tools to think of their experience in their own terms before the interview.

During the process I also encountered women's realities. Making space in their daily routines for arranging a meeting was not always feasible as most of them worked full time (8 a.m to 6 p.m) and commuted two or three hours every day. Others, although unemployed or doing informal jobs, had small children under their care thus their capacity to move was limited. Going to their houses was not always an option, and in some cases they lived in neighbourhoods where I dare not move on my own because I did not feel safe. Furthermore according to a member of the ACR interviewed in the framework of the fieldwork, individually demobilised wo(men) have high rates of mobility and do no stay long in the same city. I was able to corroborate this, Alicia and her partner, both demobilised almost eight years ago, had lived in four different cities since they left the ELN. Ester had lived in two cities and the last day we met was moving to a different county. The high rates of mobility are related to security issues, work opportunities, or relatives living in the area.

The women from old insurgency groups were interviewed in their homes; I was introduced to their personal spaces and in some cases to their family members (children, parents, and pets). They have the tone of intimate conversations, and some, like the interview with Sol took a whole day (not all the interview was recorded). It started at breakfast and was interrupted several times by people coming and going, lunch breaks with all the family, and at certain points her sons joined the audience.

The interviews with individually demobilised female ex-combatants took place in hectic public spaces such as parks, coffee-shops and crowded streets; or in the regional offices of the ACR, that amplified the insecure feeling of the interview situation and give these interviews a sense of uncertainty. They are short and although the women answered the questions, in my field diaries I made notes about the tension in their bodies, the hands making a knot, the woman who spent one hour sitting on the edge of the chair as if she were prepared to run away at any

moment. The women contacted through the ACR arrived for the appointment without knowing they were going to be interviewed, 'they said that a *Doctora*[32] from Bogotá wanted to talk with us' (FD 3, 14/11/2012). The interview was conducted in the offices of the ACR in a small space assigned to us near to the waiting room. Lina and Marta were distressed, they were trying to keep their identity hidden and being seen in the ACR marked them immediately as demobilised.

In order to minimise the harm already caused I told the women that they can refuse to take part in the interview. One woman (who arrived with her little girl) withdrew from the research, not because she did not want to talk but because she did not want to do so in front of her daughter, besides she had left her newly born with a neighbour to attend the meeting. Two women cancelled the interview at the last minute, and another two refused to be recorded. I did not pressure women to cover all the topics in the interview schedule, allowing them to move the conversation onto topics they wanted to address, and considered safe, such as their children, relationship issues, and their lives today. All stressed the desire to forget the past and move on. When a staff member of the ACR offered to organise more interviews I declined the offer, I did not want to put other women into a situation they (and myself) were not comfortable with. After pondering the conditions of the interviews arranged through the ACR I wrote,

> Women's participation [in the interviews] seems voluntary but it was not. It was conditioned by the call of the reintegrador,[33] and to their necessity to fulfill the requisites of the DDR program in order to get their monthly payment. Lorena stated: 'before we were under the orders of the commander, now we are under the orders of the program (...) I am unable to work because here they call you everyday, whenever they want to, and you have to come. I had A job but my boss asked me "why do you need so many hours off?" so I had to resign'. Lorena said that she will feel 'reintegrated'[34] 'the day they don't call me from here anymore' (FD 3, 17/11/2012).

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[32] Although in principle the term Doctor only applies to lawyers and medical doctors, many people refer to anyone with a degree of power or working as civil servant as a doctor.
[33] Name given to the psychologists and social workers in charge of monitoring the demobilised population in the DDR program. Meaning the one that reintegrates.
[34] Term used by the ACR to designate ex-combatants who had completed the 'reintegration route'.

The relationship established with the ACR was bittersweet. Although the organisation provided useful information I did not consider ethical the conditions under which women were contacted. However, as I was concerned with the ACR breaking contact I did not complain about the ways in which the institution dealt with my requests for access (delaying or not attending programmed meetings, asking for research materials and proposals more than three times, changing my research plan without consultation).

On average the interviews lasted between one hour and two hours, with exceptions such as Sol's interview which had a duration of almost eight hours. The interviews were semi-structured and organised around five topics: 1) life before joining the guerrillas, 2) reasons for mobilisation and the process of joining the group, 3) life as a guerrilla woman, 4) the process of leaving, and 5) life beyond. Women from the old insurgencies tried to cover all the aspects listed above, but during the interview process it became evident that many women put more emphasis on their lives today than the past. Individually demobilised women were reticent to talk about their lives in the guerrilla organisation and focused their narratives on the moment of the desertion, the challenges of their lives today as civilians, and evaluated the benefits and services provided by the ACR in the framework of the DDR program. I allowed the women to draw the emphasis of the interview towards the themes that were more important to them. This dialogical dynamic underscored the collaborative and intersubjective nature of the interview as a research method.

Participant observation

After knowing of my arrival in Colombia, Eloisa invited me to the meetings of The Collective of Women Ex-combatants in the framework of the 'fokus project' (as the women used to call it). The project was part of a broader initiative to raise awareness about the importance of the 1325 UN Security Council Resolution on Women Peace and Security among women's grassroots organisations. It was sponsored by the feminist Norwegian NGO Fokus Group and had two components; the first one was aimed to strengthen women's organisations from

within, and was specific to each organisation. In the case of the Collective the project was aimed to 'reconnect' the National Network of Women Ex-combatants from the insurgencies by financing three national meetings.[35] The second was a formative component around the 1325 Resolution directed to provide the grassroots organisations involved with an international framework to place their peace-building activities. A non-explicit component was bringing together women's organisations from different regions, backgrounds, and fields.

In the past I had conducted focus groups with women ex-combatants but had never engaged in participant observation in their meetings. Eloisa's invitation allowed me to follow the meetings of the Collective in Bogotá (I attended 13 of the Collective's meetings), and opened the possibility to attend two national meetings of the Network. I also collaborated with the planning and implementation of a workshop on 'women ex-combatants and peace building', and was invited take an active part in the internal discussions of the book that the Collective had been writing as a form of collective testimony during the last twelve years. In the two national meetings of the Network I was an active guest, I took pictures, recorded the discussions, and helped to put together the memories of the event (Images 3, 4, 5, page 60 - 62).

The Collective and Network became privileged ethnographic spaces in which I conducted participant observation, interviews, focus groups and produced collaborative work. The composition of the Collective, almost all the members were ex-M-19 guerrillas, generated a climate of congeniality and comradeship, as all the women have known each other for more than 30 years. There I was able to observe the dynamics of the group, the tensions and disagreements, the spaces of common remembering and sharing of everyday events. The work with the Network, which brought together women from different regions of the country and old insurgency organisations, permitted encounters with a more heterogeneous group of female ex-combatants (from different regions, cultural

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[35] The First national meeting took place in May (before my arrival), the second in September and the last one in October 2012.

backgrounds, ethnicity and guerrilla organisations such as the EPL, MAQL, PRT, and CRS). The meetings made visible the different trajectories of women's lives before joining the guerrillas and after leaving the armed group; the ideological tensions between organisations; women's sense of having a common past that still ties them together; and their roles today as political agents, members of peace-building initiatives, women's organisations, and community committees. In these spaces the contrast between some women's collective practices of remembering and other women's total silence about the experience made visible how remembering and forgetting are located practices.

The Collective and the Network as ethnographic site

Participant observation in the Collective and the Network was innovative because few researchers working on the topic have had the opportunity to do it, and because I was able to listen to stories and testimonies that are only shared among the women attending these spaces. The meetings were intersubjective spaces of memory building from the bottom up (Miztal, 2003). They underscored the polyphonic nature of remembering as the stories narrated by the women about their becoming, being and leaving the revolutionary struggle were built collectively, continually contested, re-narrated, and reshaped depending on the narrative function assigned to them by the tellers. The meetings were also creative spaces for the construction of a common memory and for evaluating and giving value to the experience.

As I have explained the project funded by the NGO Fokus group in 2012 was aimed to re-activate the Network, thus the planning meetings of the Collective gave me access to their political stance. I witnessed how with the small aid received from an international NGO the women's agency and dormant potential for peace-building began to grow. When the goals for a follow up project to be implemented in 2013 were being set up the objective was no longer to reactivate the *Network* but to strengthen the political agency and peace-building potential of women from the old insurgencies (Ruth - M-19) to make the Network a recognised actor in peace-building spaces, and to reinforce its feminine and gender identity

(Collective Meeting, 1/9/2012). The national meetings carried out in 2012 were designed to make a diagnosis of: 1) women ex-combatants' current involvement in peace-building, women's organisations, and other sectors of the social movement; 2) their perspectives about their role as ex-combatants in peace-building; and 3) design and plan routes for political participation and agency (Images 6, 7, 8, pages 63-65).

In the meetings the women also co-produced knowledge and planned political action, a process not without tensions due to the internal differences between the members of the Network. For instance, when the peace dialogues between the FARC and the government were announced the Collective and the Network prepared a public statement welcoming the process. The terms in which the statement was written were a negotiation between the different views and political stances of the women involved in writing it. In an initial draft Eloisa wrote that women ex-combatants from the old insurgencies 'knowing war have opted for building peace', a statement opposed by Pilar because according to her they waged war 'in order to attain peace'. This discussion not only reflects the different understandings of the experience among female ex-combatants but also the ideological differences of the guerrilla organisations.

> For us, the members of the M-19,
> from the beginning we were thinking that at some point of the confrontation a negotiation proposal may appear
> and we would negotiate.
> Whilst the other organisations were like...
> their policy was, we are going to win the war and there is no possible negotiation.
> Those are the differences (...)
> We did not opt for building peace after waging war,
> the war was part of that construction.
> Without war there would be no [peace] negotiation, no [new] constitution or new [political] institutions.
> (Pilar – M-19, Collective Meeting, 1/9/2012)

During the different get-togethers, meetings, and coffees shared with the women I was able to understand how they conceptualise their own experience and to see their practices of remembering and have a sense of their lives today after almost

25 years of leaving the politico-military organisation. Several times women from the old insurgencies stated that the Collective and Network meetings were the only spaces where they could openly talk about their experiences as 'revolutionaries', or where their stories are fully understood (Network Meeting, 20-22/7/2012).

The national meetings of the Network made visible how the regional differences influenced the patterns of mobilisation in the armed groups, women's experiences as combatants, the process of reintegration to civilian life, and their life today. For instance, some women living in Bogotá, had the opportunity to finish their university education, and joined the Collective of Women Ex-combatants, a space that can be considered a community of memory. There they have been able to reinterpret their militancy with increased gender awareness, informed by feminist thought. In contrast women in the rural areas of the Caribbean, where the paramilitary violence was and still is overwhelming, have not only kept their identities and past hidden (from their community and family members) but became themselves victims. Some had been displaced from their lands; others witnessed the assassination of their husbands, sons, neighbours and comrades; and only a few have been able to reflect upon their experience, and reconfigure their identities outside traditional gender stereotypes that penalise women's involvement in illegal armed groups and by doing so transgressing gender roles.

The Collective and the Network as mnemonic and emotional communities

In many of the Collective and Network meetings photos, letters, poems and songs from their years as *guerrilleras* were spontaneously shared. The two dimensional images in the photos as well as the other cultural artefacts shared acquired meaning and depth with the descriptions, half remembered narratives and anecdotes built by the women. After a workshop with women ex-combatants from the Andean region, I went with Ruth and her partner Clara to Linda's and Julio's house, they had militated with Ruth in the M-19. In the middle of the conversation Linda came to the living room with a drawer full of photos of 'those times'. As we were looking at the pictures in the living room any family member was able to hear

the conversation and look at the pictures. At some point Linda's mother said to Julio:

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-Ohhh you looked so handsome in that pinta de tigre (tiger print).

I asked, -What is a pinta de tigre?

-The uniforms that we recovered from the army after combat, said Julio.
Our uniforms, when we had uniforms, were made of plain olive green fabric,
thus having a pinta de tigre was a treat (FD 1, 19/8/2012)
```

On another occasion, during the first day of activities of the Third National meeting of the Network a space was scheduled for cultural activities. Two women who had not seen each other in 20 years came to the fore holding a picture of themselves. In it three young girls look back at the camera, smiling. They had been in jail together, one a member of the M-19, the other an ELN female guerrilla, the third one (not attending the meeting) was from the EPL. The photo was for them a symbol of a friendship forged in jail, the shared experiences that 'tied' them 'forever' (Network, Third National Meeting, 26-28/10/2012), and the unity sought today by the Network among women who were members of different guerrilla organisations, but were coming together in 2012 as a community (mnemonic, of feelings, political).

Not all the cultural artefacts (photos, poems, songs) shared by the women were self-explanatory, on the contrary they only acquired depth and meaning with women's stories, anecdotes, descriptions, and evaluations (FD 1, 20/8/2012). When conversations of collective remembering took place among members of the same organisation it was very difficult to follow the conversation,

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At some points it is impossible (…) [to] make sense of the telling. We
don´t know the names of the comrades mentioned, the context, let alone
the references to places, military operations and combats (FD 1,
20/8/2012).
```

Participant observation with the Collective and the Network allowed me to sense the living nature of my archive. I recorded a total of 83 hours of interactions in different settings: the Network's and Collective's National meetings; the

Collective's planning meetings; seminars organised by the NGO FOKUS Group in the framework of their project; and the Network's regional meetings. I had access to women ex-combatants from the old insurgencies and was able to witness and understand their practices of remembering and archiving. The meetings of the Collective for instance, always had a space for sharing stories from their times as *guerrilleras*. Women like Ruth, Elvira, and Eloisa stated that their formal and informal get-togethers were very important because each woman had a fragment of the story of the organisation and their years of militancy, hence the conversations sustained in those meetings allowed them to put the pieces together. During their years as *guerrilleras* the compartmentalisation required did not allow them to share any details with other members of the politico-military organisation. It has been only after the demobilisation that open talk among them about their lived experiences as female guerrillas has become possible.

Participant observation gave the research process a collaborative component that transcended the project itself. This collaboration allowed me to contribute to: 1) the production of methodologies used by the Collective in their workshops; 2) gather archival material such as photos and reports of the different national and regional meetings of the Collective and the Network; 3) co-reflect with the women about topics such as memory and peace-building, and 4) contribute with ideas and material to the collective autobiography on which they had been working for the last twelve years. Although my collaboration with the Collective and the Network did not lead to direct forms of political action, activism or co-authorship of academic and written texts, it created a communal environment that shaped my research (Rappaport, 2007).

Image 3 - National Network of Women Ex-combatants Second National Meeting. Photo taken by the researcher.

Image 4 – National Network of Women Ex-combatants Third National Meeting. Photo taken by the researcher.

Image 5 – National Network of Women Ex-combatants regional workshop. Photo taken by the researcher.

Due to the limited resources a limited number of representatives from the regions attended the National Meetings. Women unable to attend the National meetings send written and video letters to be shared in the National Meetings.

Image 6 – National Network of Women Ex-combatants, Second National Meeting. Photo taken by the researcher.
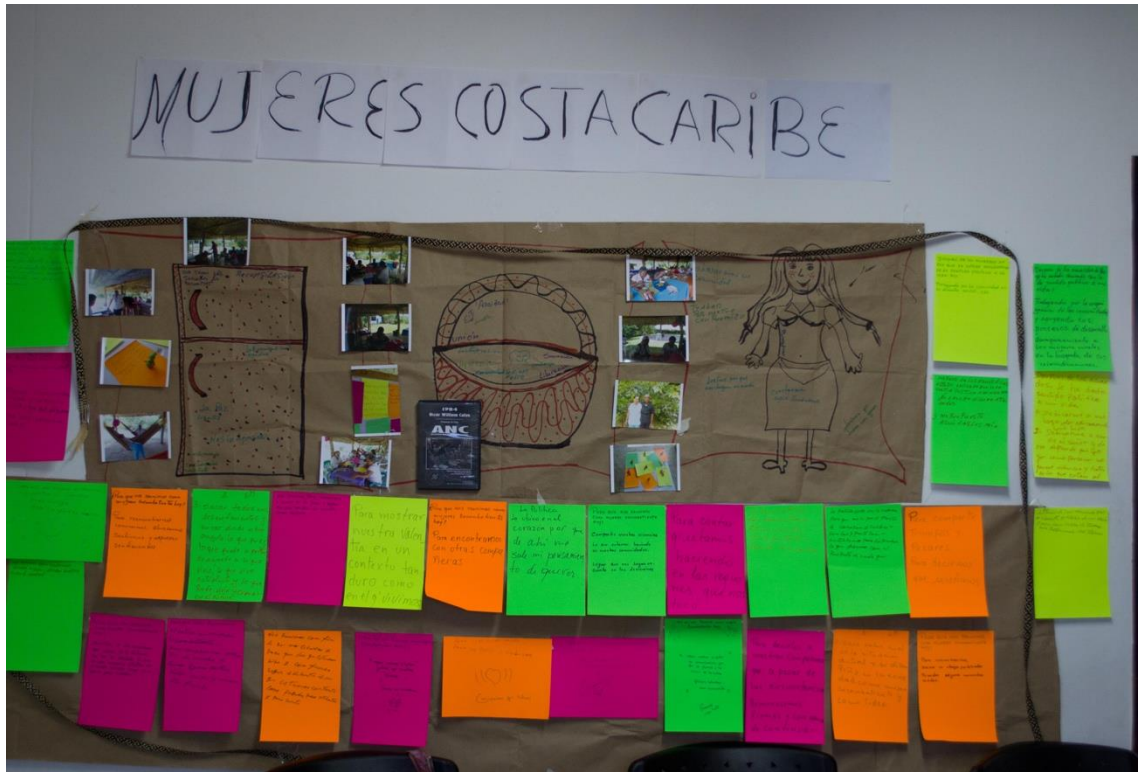
Image 7 – National Network of Women Ex-combatants, Second National Meeting. Photo taken by the researcher.

Image 8 - National Network of Women Ex-combatants, Third National Meeting. Photo taken by the researcher.

Women are identifying the peace initiatives in which they are involved in their regions of origin.

Photo-diaries and focus groups

Some participants were asked to keep a photo-diary, a photo-based form of solicited research diary (Kenten, 2010), about their experiences of becoming and being *guerrilleras*, and their lives beyond the demobilisation process. Although diaries have been used before in qualitative and quantitative research (Kenten, 2010; Allen, 2011), to my knowledge solicited diaries have not been used before with male and female ex-combatants in Colombia. Solicited diaries allow informants to express themselves, and are seen as an empowering method in which the participant is at the same time observer and informant (Kenten, 2010; Allen, 2011; Elliott, 1997). They are collaborative because they are constructed by both the author (participant), and the researcher through her design and analysis (Kenten, 2010). Diaries allow participants to record and reflect upon their own behaviours, needs, and self-perceptions, making it possible for the researcher to understand the informant's priorities (Meth, 2003: 197). Meth (2003: 196) argues that solicited research diaries serve two of the principles of feminist research, they give voice to everyday experiences of sometimes marginalised people; and produce a more empowering relationships between the researcher and the researched.

In this thesis the solicited photo-diaries were conceived as a method to allow women to represent their experiences by using alternative means of expression such as photography and self-writing, and to access their everyday material realities by combining elements from different photo based methods (Banks, 2001; Margolis & Pauwels, 2011; Pink, 2001; PhotoVoice, 2012). The initial plan was to hand over the photo-diary after the first open interview, and sustaining a final diary interview once the photo-diary was completed. The photo-diary interview was directed to clarify diary entries, and frame the socio-economic and political contexts in which the diary was produced (Elliot, 1997; Meth, 2003; Kenten, 2010).

As the progress of gaining access and scheduling interviews with both groups of female ex-combatants was slow, the development of the photo-diaries was

affected. Consequently the sample, the ways in which the women were contacted, and the execution of this method varies. Each woman who agreed to keep a photo-diary was provided with a 'diary-keeping-pack' which contained: a notebook with blank pages, disposable Kodak camera, contact information, and written instructions in Spanish about what to record in the diary.[36] The diaries were unstructured but women were encouraged to write and take pictures around the experience of being a female (ex)combatant, add pictures and other material documents and artefacts from their time as *guerrilleras*, the last photo had to be a self-portrait.

In total 29 photo-diaries were distributed, but only 15 were given back to the researcher. I developed and kept the film and gave the women printed copies of the pictures they took. The diaries were photographed and the original returned to the women who completed the exercise. In order to have a sense of the dynamics of the exercise I kept a photo-diary about my fieldwork.

The collaborative nature of the photo-diary as a research method made it a trial and error process. I encountered the limitations linked to the use of solicited diaries: some participants did not have the skills needed to keep a photo-diary such as literacy and knowledge of how to use the camera; keeping a diary was time consuming, it demanded effort, commitment and time from the respondents. At the beginning many women were very enthusiastic about the idea of keeping a diary but their interest waned with time. Other hindrances such as lack of resources to travel more often to regions outside Bogotá, difficulties in gaining access to individually demobilised female ex-combatants and their high rates of mobility; as well as participant's time limitations and everyday commitments, limited the number of interviews I was able to carry out before handing over the diaries. As a result the development of the photo-diaries was reshaped several times to accommodate the realities in the field. At the end the women kept the diaries following three different routes.

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[36] All the women who took part in the research speak Spanish.

Image 9 - A diary-keeping-pack with a set of instructions was given to each woman.

Route 1

First interview > photo-diary > diary interview

There were women with whom I conducted a first interview and at the end of it I handed them the photo-diary. They were asked to keep the diary for one month. Once they were ready I picked up the cameras, developed the film, and with prints of the photos we did a diary-interview. Although I handed out photo-diaries in this order to ten of the eleven women interviewed the process was completed in this order by two, Rocio and Alicia. Instead of one month the process took around four months in both cases. Rocio's and Alicia's photo-diaries are an example of how aspects such as literacy, context in which their mobilisation, participation in a guerrilla organisation, and demobilisation took place, influenced the contents of the diary, their level of reflexivity, and the evaluation of the experience among other things (images 10, 11, page 84).

Route 2

Photo Diary > diary interview > photo-diary send by email

Due to difficulties experienced with Elvira to conduct the first interview I decided to give her the photo-diary before it took place. Although we had not completed a formal interview beforehand we had had two 'walking talks' (not recorded), I spent two mornings with her in her job, and we saw each other regularly at the Collective's and Network's meetings. When we did the interview she was still working on *La tarea* (homework), and wanted to make the exercise with her own digital camera (she never sent me the final product). During the interview I realised how painful this exercise was for her,

At the beginning I thought that keeping the photo-diary was going to be very easy,
but as soon as I began I realised that it wasn't that easy.
and what is more it moved a lot of things inside me.
()

And I have not made the homework (begins to cry)
I have been like... this last week I have been trying too...
Ummmm

On the one hand writing is not easy.
And I feel that I have... ehhh...
it is like some pieces...
ehhh... I have erased them
()

but not on purpose, because no....
I don't have anything against them
they have just begun to fade from my memory.

In the interview she also talks about the difficulties of keeping the diary, not only because of 'the things' that have been 'erased from her memory' but also because the process of writing about the self and representing her experience,

When I began to write my writing is too muddled
I go from one place to the other and...
and then I say, 'ahhh no I skipped this [topic], I should have told this [episode]'
I was going to talk about my family but...
I mean, I am just touching the surface of things...

Elvira's distress during the process of keeping the photo-diary was related not only to the memories aroused, the realisation of having 'forgotten' details of the experience she considered important, and the laboriousness of representing the wholeness of her experience, but also the sense that the photo-diary was an important exercise. The process of keeping the photo-diary made her aware of the value of her experience, and during our conversation she expressed an interest in using it to write her life story.

Even if Elvira never sent back her photo-diary, our interview, my long engagement with her, the process of keeping the solicited diary, and the themes she selected to tell her own story, generated important data and show how this method allows participants to write about what is important to them, to reflect upon their own lived experiences and to structure the entries as they feel appropriate (Meth, 2003).

Route 3

The third route involved the use of focus groups, instead of diary-interviews. They took place in four cities across the country (Sincelejo, Barranquilla, Bogotá, and Popayán). In Bogotá I invited four women who were members of the Network and were good friends among them. For the other cities I contacted Sol, Rita and Aurelia through the Network of Women Ex-combatants and invited them to be my regional contacts. During the Network's Third National Meeting I explained to them the aims of the project, the objective of the photo-diaries, and the instructions. A parcel containing five sets of 'diary-keeping-packs' was sent to each woman to be distributed in their region. Once the photo-diaries were completed I planned to visit each city, to discuss the process and the results in focus groups. To solve doubts about the progress of the exercise I kept in touch with Rita, Sol and Aurelia by email. The focus groups were planned for January 2013, giving the women in the regions about three months to complete the exercise. The dynamics and context of each city produced different processes and results.

Popayán	Sincelejo & Monteria	Barranquilla
Contact Sol	Contact Rita	Contact Aurelia
'Diary-keeping-pack' send by post		
'Diary-keeping-packs' are not distributed.	'Diary-keeping-packs' handed to four women (contact woman keeps one).	'Diary-keeping-packs' handed to five women.
Eight women attend the meeting. Five women make a 'photo-diary' exercise that day	Women from Monteria refuse to complete a diary. Two women completed the photo-diary.	Three women completed the photo-diary.

Popayán

The first city visited was Popayán. Three of the women who arrived to the focus group were ex-combatants of the MAQL, four from the M-19, and one laid down

the weapons during the CRS process but was a member of the EPL.[37] Three of them were indigenous living in their communities, three were indigenous and identified themselves as such but did not have ties with a *Cabildo*,[38] and the other two were mestizas.

Sol, my contact in the region, was unable to deliver the 'diary-keeping-packs' beforehand because her teenage daughter was seriously ill at the time. Thus the plans for the focus group had to be reshaped. The day the focus group was held the women worked on their photo-diaries, writing and taking pictures. In the borders of this activity we ate together and talked. Once in Bogotá I developed the films without having the chance of doing a follow up focus group, or seeing the results with the women. The photos taken that day by the participants give an account of the different activities and places we visited. Most are photographs of the attendees, the restaurant we had lunch at, our walk together from Sol's house to the restaurant, and places that 'remind' them of activities or spaces of their time in the guerrilla organisation and process of disarmament. Almost all the women took as their first picture a photo of themselves writing in the diary. The photos are a visual representation of the moments and people they considered important during the day.

As I stayed an extra day in the city interviewing Sol, three women took their diaries home to 'finish' them, and brought them back the next day to Sol's house where I was staying. Naira arrived early in the morning with her daughter, before going to her *resguardo* in the mountains. In her diary she added pictures of her family and everyday life (Image 12, page 85). Abigail not only handed the diary the next day, she wanted to read it to Sol and to me. We sat down at Sol's dining table, each one with a cup of tea. Abigail began the reading of her diary page by page. During the reading she corrected her own redaction, explained the full meaning of a sentence,

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[37] Some militants that were not included in the original demobilisation list of their groups and demobilised with other guerrilla armies to access socio-economic and juridical benefits.
[38] Indigenous groups in the Cauca Region are organised in *Resguardos* (reservations) an institution that ensures their collective land rights. The *Cabildos* are the *resguado's* council, which operate as a semi-autonomous entity (Rappaport, 2007: 24).

or gave extra-details about the event she was narrating. At some point Sol was crying silently next to me, Abigail had tears running down her cheeks, and I realised that I was crying too. The emotional charge of the reading was overwhelming. We were three women, sitting together sharing words; words that for Abigail summarised her life, sorrows, hopes, and fears. When she finished she said: 'I have only started, I have much more to tell'. The reading lasted almost three hours (Image 13, page 86).

The writings and photographs taken by the women in Popayán cannot be considered diaries because they were done in one day and not over an extended period of time. Nevertheless they were written in the women's own terms and the environment of respect and care created during the focus group enabled a space for them to think about themselves as women, share and evaluate their experiences with other female ex-combatants who had lived similar processes. In the diaries the women outlined: their reasons for joining the armed organisation and their agency behind that decision; events that took place during their years in the politico-military organisation such as the first combat, their feelings when they were informed about the process of laying down the weapons, leaving the guerrillas, their life beyond and dreams for the future.

Inés' and Abigail's narrations about their lives after the demobilisation are traumatic and give an account of the hurdles these women encountered in the process of going back to civilian life: domestic and gender based violence, poverty, displacement, and catastrophic illnesses. All the diaries finish with an optimistic tone in which they talk about their participation in women's organisations (Gloria - EPL), and their dream to take part in women's self-empowerment workshops (Abigail – M-19, Naira -MAQL), food security and self-building projects in their communities (Gloria –EPL; Malse and Naira - MAQL).

The Caribbean region

Rita contacted women ex-combatants from two cities located in the North of the country in the Caribbean region: Monteria and Sincelejo. When I called Rita to

arrange the last details of the focus group she said that the women from Monteria had refused to keep a diary, but could answer questions in person. The day of the meeting the three women from Monteria phoned to cancel the appointment. Security concerns were their reasons for refusing to take part in the exercise. Sincelejo and Monteria are cities where the paramilitaries imposed a terror regime. All of them have been displaced from their lands, their husbands were killed, and they witnessed the assassination of many of their comrades after the peace process. Furthermore, re-armed paramilitary groups still controlled the area.

Rita, Juliana and Ignacia attended the focus group held at Rita's farmhouse. Catalina joined us at the end of the day as she was busy in a meeting with representatives from the Ministry of Culture, which is founding a craft production project run by her and other women from her community. Rita and Juliana worked on the diary but they did not develop the films beforehand thus we could not see the pictures together. As a result the focus group was not about the photo-diary but developed as an open conversation about their becoming and being guerrillas, the process of leaving the group and the life beyond, with the women diverting the talk towards their interests and gossip, and me trying to pull them back towards my questions. Nevertheless I did ask questions to Rita and Juliana about the process of keeping the diary.

As all the women had known each other for over 20 years the conversation was like a talk between old friends, marked by their playfulness and humour. Even when the conversation took sad and painful turns the women would restore the joyful mood by introducing a joke or trying to laugh about themselves. The meeting took the whole day, we had breakfast and lunch together, walked around Rita's farm, and at the end of the day visited Catalina's house, where we took a look at the crafts her women's organisation was making (image 14, page 87). The time spent with the women highlighted their constant involvement with the social movement in the region, in some cases prior to their mobilisation as guerrillas, their current gender awareness and work on peace-building and other community

based projects, as well as the centrality that access to land tenure had not only on their involvement in radical politics, but also on their lives today.

Barranquilla was the last city I visited. Aurelia was my contact, and when I arrived the photos taken by the women were waiting for me in little packages. Most of the attendees were members of the EPL and it was possible to feel the respect they showed towards Aurelia. Not only because she occupied an important position inside the politico-military organisation, but also because of her age (in her 70s), and the affective ties among them (women in Barranquilla and Sincelejo described Aurelia as a mother like figure inside the EPL).

In Barranquilla it was difficult to talk with all the women at the same time as they were coming and going into Aurelia's house. Aurelia herself was not present when I arrived as she was working, came back for lunch break, went back to work and only returned past four. I made mini-diary-interviews with the women who kept the photo-diary, while the others listened, addressed questions to the one who was being interviewed, and talked in the background. By the end of the afternoon I had managed a brief conversation with all the women present. The majority of the conversations and photo-diaries produced in Barranquilla are neither about women's past as members of guerrilla organisations nor about the process of going back to civilian life. They are focused on their families and their lives today almost 21 years after their laying down the weapons. When I asked why they have concentrated on the present and did not talk about the past, Bella and Vilma answered using the same words: 'the past is in the past'. This does not mean that they regret their engagement in the guerrilla group, or want to leave it behind and forget their past. On the contrary, they stated that the women they are today, their families and political identities are linked to their experiences as *guerrilleras*,

> What one learned [in the guerrillas], courage, bravery,
> I always highlight this,
> That has served us today.
> It made of us women fighters, entrepreneurs...
> Just as we did in the military and political life...
> It has helped us in our personal life (...)

Today I look at the past and I say:
-How did I bring up two children, alone and...[39]
It is about saying, I can.
If I did so many things in my life [as a *guerrillera*], I can,
(...)
I call it courage, bravery, like the warrior attitude not to give up on life.
(Vilma – EPL, FG 25/01/2013)

Bogotá

A final set of photo-diaries and focus groups were done in Bogotá with four women: Eloisa and Patricia who have been interviewed in past research projects,[40] and Magda and Salome who were introduced to me in 2012 thus previous to the focus group they were individually interviewed. All were university educated, feminists, and I sustained regular contact with them during the fieldwork process. The decision to hold a focus group with them responded to the ties of affection that bind them together, their constant reflexive stance in thinking, writing, and talking about their lived experience as members of guerrilla organisations, the process of leaving the group and rebuilding their identities as civilians and as women, and their expertise in topics such as memory, peace-building, and women's empowerment. The meetings took place in my house where each woman used to arrive with delicatessens, cakes, and wine brought for the occasion, which generated an environment of happiness, relaxation, intimacy and trust. The route taken by the diaries kept by these four women varies,

Eloisa & Patricia >interviewed in past research projects > focus group on memory > photo-diary > photo-diary focus group > photo-diary sent by email.

Salome & Magda > focus group on memory > interview > photo-diary > diary focus group > photo-diary sent by email

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[39] The father of the children was disappeared by the military.
[40] Mujeres en tiempos de guerra (2001), Mujeres no contadas (2003-2005). Also interviewed by Dietrich (2010).

Although all received the photo-diary a couple of months prior our meeting none of them had finished it before the focus group on January 2013, when we discussed the process. All of them stressed that when invited to keep a photo-diary they assumed it was going to be easy but to their surprise it was not. All had problems to start the photo-diary, not only because as Magda put it every time she looked at the notebook and the camera she 'got lazy', but also because deciding how to represent their experiences in visual and written terms was difficult. As they collectively reflected during the focus group, in the process of keeping the diary all faced questions around their identities and who they are today. It opened questions that were not new for them, such as the place of their memories in the history of the country; remembering and forgetting in contexts of transition from war to peace; the types of silences they have kept around their experience as female insurgents; and the 'interiorised mechanisms' of the clandestine life that still mark their everyday lives today.

When the focus group took place all the photo-diaries were incomplete. We agreed that they would send a scanned copy of it within a month after the meeting. Only Patricia and Salome sent the photo-diary via email in April and May 2013. To my surprise Salome's was 145 pages long.

Despite the photo-diaries and focus groups following different paths, all the women showed in their diary entries a degree of reflexivity about their lives. Although all participants were asked to think about their lived experiences using the same themes, the ways in which they responded and their styles of keeping the photo-diaries varied (Kenten, 2010). The solicited diaries enabled women to narrate their experiences as combatants and ex-combatants on their own terms. As many of them took the cameras into their houses, they gave information about the materiality of women's lives, their families, and living conditions. It was also an empowering experience. Only Eloisa, Magda, Salome and Patricia have written self-reflexive accounts about their lives as guerrillas before. For the other women, writing about themselves was new, and keeping the diary made them aware of the importance of their lived experiences as *guerrilleras* and as social/community

leaders, and of the possibility of narrating by themselves and not by others. Most of the women expressed their interest in keeping working on the diary and writing their life-histories.

The photo-diaries made visible tensions and cracks within women's political identities, their everyday realities and their understandings of socio-economic and political issues that do not appear in the interviews or the meetings of the Network. Bella, an ex-combatant of the EPL, took pictures of her current business. She is a self-employed sales representative of a multinational company selling wellbeing and beauty products. In the diary-interview she stated that the possibility of a free-trade agreement between Colombia and the USA would be an incredible opportunity to prosper as a businesswoman because the multinational's products will pay low importation taxes, giving her higher profit margins (image 15, page 88). One will imagine that the EPL a Communist-Marxist-Leninist politico-military organisation would have opposed free-trade agreements like the one that was being discussed at the time.

Although we have the idea of living in a 'world made of images' not all the women who participated in the process had visual literacy. Film cameras were not the best technological devices as the wide use of low cost digital cameras and mobile phones has made film obsolete, and the women did not know how to use them. Four women were illiterate, thus for them reading the instructions and writing the entries in the diary was difficult. Two of them were helped by their partners, and two indigenous women in Popayán were helped by other women attending the focus group. Although they took pictures, they were unable to write in the diaries.

en lo personal hay muchas historias que contar cada una tiene un ducación pienso que haci es lo nuestro paso por está tierra con grandes Horizontes. Esta foto me da tranquilidad.

segunda foto Es en yumbo Valle.

Es una foto donde hay unas figuras del EME cuando llegue a ese sitio me remonte al Pasa lleno de alegrias y nostalgia donde recorde cada uno de los que no estaban Jaime bateman, Carlos Pizarro, German Rojas Vera Grave y otros mas donde fui en la puerte de apenas habia una bandera del EM-19 y Estaba diagonal de la policia cuando iba a dentral me senti rara como si estuviera en el monte y me perm todos los lados y cuando dentro solo vi cadaveres por no Estaban vivos y senti una profunda tristeza.

Y lo asocio con lo de hoy en dia creo creo que faltarian muchas cosas que hacerse Porque las personas quieren tener vivo esos

Image 10 – Rocio's Photo-Diary

la vida de hoy es mucho mas   3
diferente porque tenemos libertad pero
sufrimos mucho por no tener un
trabajo dieno para la educación de
nuestro niños y la Educacio para nosotros
no asido completa las oportunidades
San Pocas el gobierno colombiano solo
nos brinda un dedo porque no hay para
Brindar no el Apoyo nesesario que nos
interesamos.

Yo comuder tengo muchos, sueños pero no
tengo los Recursos nesesario para cumplirsos
Porque soy madre cabesa de ogar
Pero, continuo luchano por mis sueño
Al lado de mi Familia

Image 11 – Alicia's Photo-Diary.

Image 12 – Naira's Photo-Diary.

Mi objetivo conseguir una empresa familiar, quemis hijos si realicen profecionalmente y ayudar al más necesitado dentro de lo posible.

Ya que en el momento no estamos sobrados mis conocidos de bien me dan la mano con el vestir y calzar a mis hijos y aqui, ya que habiendo vivido en todos los niveles economicos a veses formal e informal o como la ocacion me lo permita se manejar los diversos medios. a Dios gracias y a todos quienes hacen posible estas nuevas vivencias con   , Johana, mil abrasos y gratitud.

Image 13 – Abigail's Photo-Diary.

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Abigail's photo-diary last page,
I asked:
-What is the meaning of the hands
-Thanks for allowing me to narrate my truth
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Image 14 - Catalina's women's association crafts project.

Image 15 – Bella's Photo-Diary

Image 16 – Woman working on her diary at the Popayán focus group.

Feminist praxis and the research experience

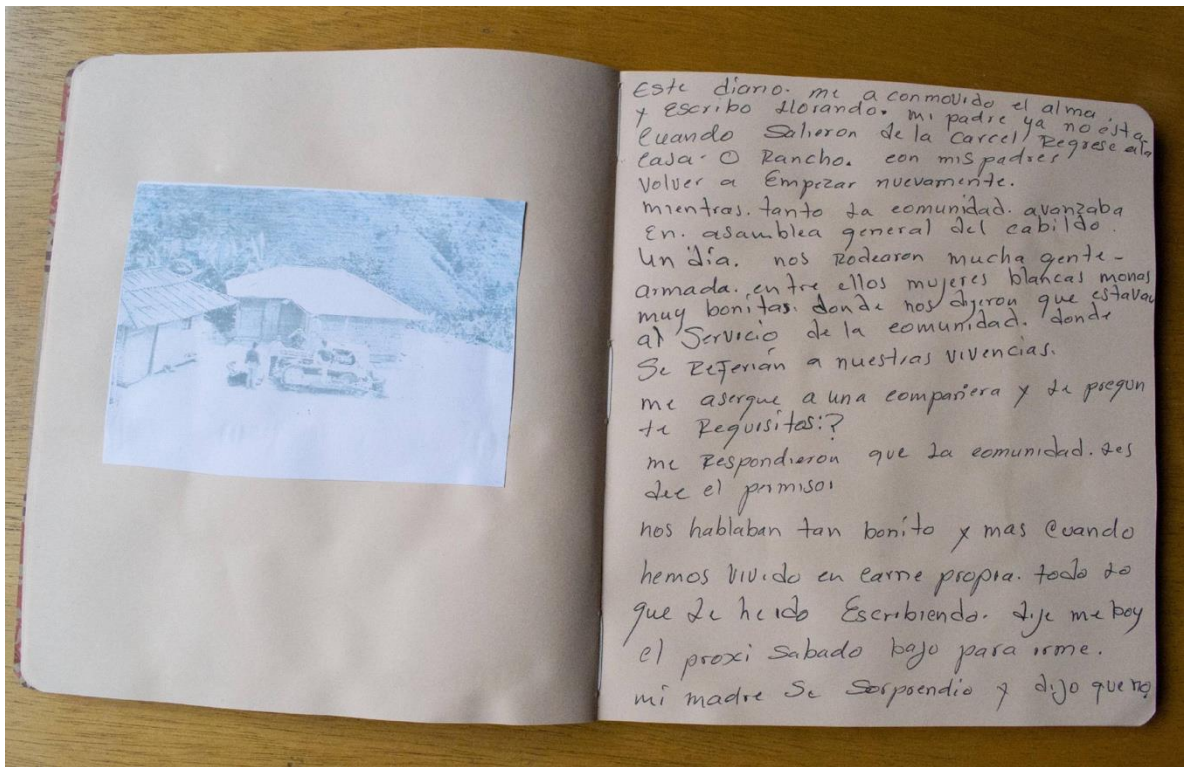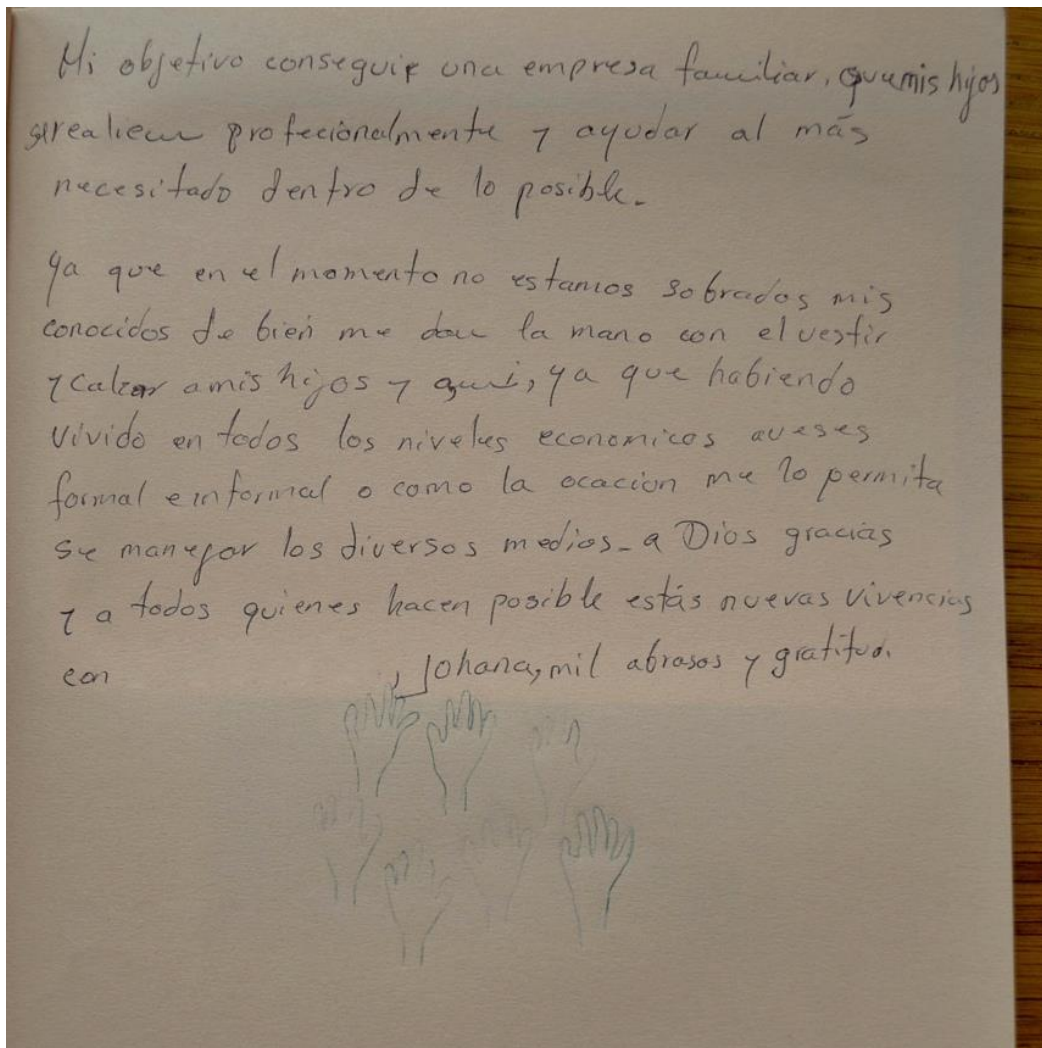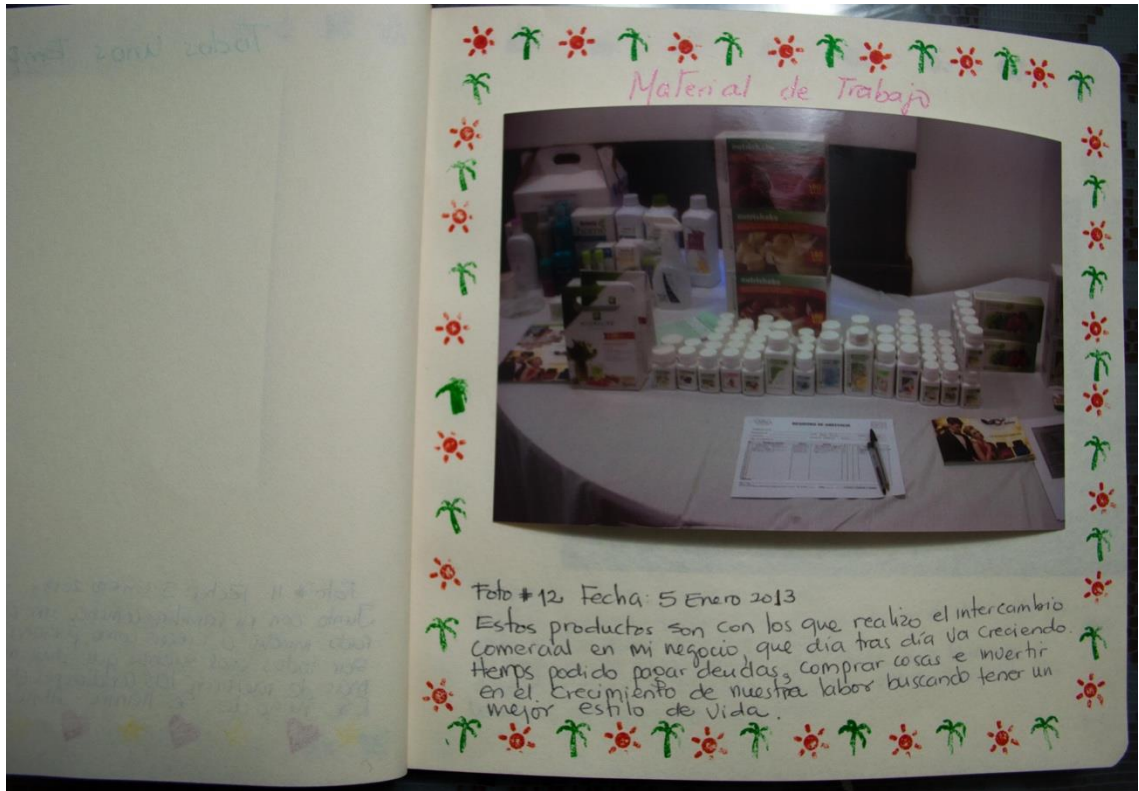During the fieldwork and as a result of the multi-methods approach adopted, the silences, the silenced, the silent, the unspoken, that we (the women and I) 'shared' became evident questioning notions of closure and disclosure. 'Breaking' our shared silences, or 'giving voice' to silenced or silent experiences was not only a matter of establishing or not rapport (Oackley, 1981; Phoenix, 1995; Duncombe & Jessop, 2002). It was neither about designing the research to produce an intimate climate, and assure confidentiality and anonymity (Miller, 1998: 59). Nor a matter of creating spaces for collective dialogue to challenge accepted values, practices, and norms; promote inquiry and deliberation among women; and allow them to break long-term silences (Ackerly, 2000). All these elements were taken into account during the research process. The Collective and the Network are examples of spaces where women could deliberate, exercise social criticism, break long-term silences, and learn from each other (Ackerly, 2000). But our silences are also related to the context in which the research took place, the nature of the topic, the lived experience of the women; my blurred insider/outsider location, the silencing of alternative voices that had characterised Colombian official (his)tory, among others. Being from the same country, we had what I call a shared culture of silences. This made it evident to me that memory, but also silences could be collective.

Although power imbalances were not totally eliminated in this thesis, the ties built and nurtured with the women narrators, and the collaborative relationship established with the Collective and the Network gave the women some control over how they wanted to participate in the research and the terms under which they narrated their experience. The climate generated during our encounters contributed to their empowerment by providing a space where they could evaluate their own personal stories and in some cases collectively reflect on them. For instance, for Patricia and Magda the photo-diary became a useful input to develop their autobiographical writing projects. For other women, like the ones attending the focus groups in Sincelejo, Barranquilla and Popayán, the focus groups created

a space to meet other women with similar experiences of being female guerrillas and rebuilding life after the demobilisation. Many of them have not had the opportunity to attend the national meetings of the Network due to the limited resources of the project, thus the focus groups indirectly contributed to disseminate the Network objectives and discussions.

In the Collective and the Network I contributed to women's discussions around memory, gender equality and the need to enhance the autonomy, confidence, political agency and wellbeing of the women who are part of the Network. As the meetings of the Collective and the Network became part of my corpus, the transcribed material and the visual material gathered during the Network national meetings, was sent back to the Collective and the Network to contribute to their own reflections around peace-building, their own initiatives to recover the memories of participation in insurgent organisations, and to write the reports required by the NGO funding the 'Fokus project'. In that sense this thesis was for women's advantage and tried to follow the feminist principles outlined at the beginning of this subsection.

Making sense of my meaningful mess

Once back from fieldwork I made a thematic index and a first open reading of the field-diaries to identify ideas, themes, and patterns. The data collected was organised thematically around the core themes that informed the fieldwork: 1) becoming a *guerrillera*, 2) the experience of being a female combatant, 3) leaving the politico-military organisation, and 4) life beyond as civilian women.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim,[41] while the focus groups, and the meetings of the Collective and the Network of Women Ex-combatants were selectively transcribed. This means that although most interactions,

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[41] The interviews from past research projects were transcribed verbatim but names of places and people were edited to protect the identity of the participants. I participated in the transcription of three of these data sets thus despite the redaction I am familiar with the context in which the data was produced: Blair et al (2003); Londoño et al (2005) and Nieto-Valdivieso (2007). The only set of interviews that was entirely new to me was the one provided by Dietrich (2010, 2014).

conversations and women's interventions were transcribed verbatim, some excerpts were summarised, as they were not directly connected to the research (i.e conversations about bus routes or the weather). I kept a transcription diary in which I identified emerging themes, repetitions, patterns, relationships, and commonalities; made analytic memos and comments; and took notes about my emotional responses to women's narratives. The diaries index and the transcription diary provided the initial thematic backbones for the process of coding the material. Once the main themes were delineated I identified sub-themes. This process was repeated during the different readings of the data (interviews, focus groups, meetings, and photo-diaries).

I adapted Paul's Gee (1991) units of discourse as transcribing method (Elliott, 2005: 54). Gee divides narratives into four levels from smaller to bigger: idea unit, line, stanzas, and parts or episodes. The idea unit contains a single piece of information grouped into lines. The lines are the smallest units of discourse, each line contains a central idea or topic marked by the speaker with short pauses or falls in the voice. Lines are grouped in stanzas, these are groups of lines marked by longer silences, doubts, or changes of topic which look like poetry stanzas. The episodes are the larger units of discourse, its beginning is signalled by a big number of hesitations and false starts (Elliott, 2005: 54-55). As Elliott (2005: 55) points out applying Gee's typology produces a transcript that preserves some of the characteristics of speech such as rhythm, pauses and structure.

Gee's transcription method was useful to preserve the rhythm of the narrator's speech, and to differentiate the speaker's personal voice. The poetry-like shape of the text makes the reading easier, as well as the identification of topics, metaphors, recurrent themes, silences and the translation from Spanish to English. During the translation process I 'cleaned' some of the hesitations and false starts in the fragments of the women's narrations but tried to preserve elements such as silences, emphasis and hesitations, which were noted down using the following codes,

Transcript code	Meaning
After a sentence ()	Short silence
Underneath a sentence ()	Long silence
…	Hesitation, pause
CAPITALS	Strong emphasis, raise in voice volume
(Laughs)	Additional information about women's narration appears inside brackets, i.e. laughs, crying, whispering.
{Ana: at that time we were Rita: what I was meaning is..}	Women are talking at the same time and their voices overlap.

The transcribed material was printed and bound, leaving large margins on the left and the right for coding. The material was read in tandem at two levels: 1) Identify more themes and sub-themes until reaching the point of data saturation. The process was done manually, I created a codebook in a text processing program where I noted: theme and sub-themes, narrative (summary of what is being told, interview fragment, location of quotation in the wider narrative), memos and comments. 2) 'Listening' to the narrative. The interviews were printed and read as whole, and divided into sets of smaller stories around the four core themes identified above (becoming, being, leaving the group and life beyond). In the left hand side of the page I gave each story a number and a theme. On the right hand side sub-themes were identified. Elements of the story being told such as repeated images, feelings, absences/silences, evaluative comments, conclusions and reflections made by the narrators were underlined using coloured pens. Working at two levels allowed me to identify core themes across women's narratives, and to see women's own interpretation and evaluation of their experiences.

The secondary analysis of the interviews collected in past research projects was performed after reading the primary data. Secondary analysis involves the re-use of pre-existing qualitative data such as semi-structured interviews generated in previous research projects (Heaton, 2008). At this stage I had already decided not

to include in my analysis the process of demobilisation and transition from armed life to civilian life, as it was the topic of past research projects in which I participated. I concentrated on in depth analysis of issues of the data that were not addressed or were partially addressed in the primary studies, and in the aspects I wanted to explore in my thesis (Heaton, 2008).

In terms of archiving the data produced, some women stated that they did not want their interviews to be used in other research projects, and Viviana did not give consent to use her photo-diary in dissemination activities. Although the interviews from past research projects are kept by the *Instituto de Estudios Regionales de la Universidad de Antioquia* -INER, and I still have links with the institution, I do not have any plans to put the anonymised transcriptions of the material gathered in their existing archive (or other archives). This is a decision I can only take after sustaining face-to-face conversations with the INER academic and research committee. The confidentiality agreements signed with ACR do not allow me to use the interviews with women individually demobilised contacted through them in other research projects. The material gathered during the national meetings of the Collective and the Network was anonymised, edited and handed to the Collective. They used it as part of the products of the project sponsored by the NGO FOKUS Group. This was part of my commitment to reduce inequalities in the research process and became a form of dissemination because fragments of the transcribed material were shared with women unable to attend the national meetings.

Weaving the strands

The experiences in the field, and the listening and the reading of the different data sets accentuated the feeling that women's stories and silences are to some extent part of my own story. Colombian armed conflict not only shaped their lives but also my life, the life of my family, and my friends. The emotional strain of listening to women's stories of engagement in radical politics, the effects of gender based, socio-political and economic violence in their lives added to my own experiences as a female citizen of a country engaged in a long standing armed conflict, whose

life has also been marked by gender based violence, and my past work with victims of the armed conflict had a deep impact on me as a woman, and as the writer of this thesis.

My emotions have shaped my fieldwork, analysis, reflexivity, transcriptions and writing. Because we share a similar socio-historic context, women's narratives allowed me as listener/reader to make links between personal, historical, and collective traumas, and experiences of violence, inequality and exclusion. As Tagore (2009: 56) suggests in the act of ethically listening to my narrators I positioned myself in an act of relational witnessing, in which my own stories, or possible stories, were implicated in the stories of differently (and differentially) positioned others. As a result my emotions are located in the context of the social interactions and relationships established during the fieldwork, and my own location as a Colombian citizen.

Writing is an integral part of the different stages of the research process. As a Latin American woman, writing in a language that is not her mother tongue, my writing and voice can be considered marginal (Standing, 1998; Forcinito, 2004). At the same time I am aware; that as the writer of this work I occupy a privileged position, of the imbalances of power I produce and reproduce and of the inclusions and exclusions I perpetuate from my power position as researcher (Forcinito, 2004: 57; Mauthner & Doucet, 1998: 138; Standing, 1998; Holland & Ramazanoglu, 1994).

My writing is also a way of deconstructing the masculine (his)tory about Colombia's socio-political violence. Like the writings of other Latin American women it is the locus of what Forticino (2004: 71-72) calls a 'signifying battle' where traditionally feminine spaces, such as the domestic sphere and the violence that takes place there became political; and where customarily masculine spaces such as the militancy in revolutionary armed collectives became personal and feminine. As Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector stated, the literature produced by the Latin American women writers,

Is a constant weaving and unweaving of her own marginal privileges.[42] While she weaves the representations of other women, unweaves the patriarchal representations of the feminine. (...). While she weaves using foreign feminist threads she has to unweave the limits of the subordinate territory assigned [by western feminisms] to what is Latin American (Lispector, 1984 as cited by Forticino, 2004:72).

My aim is to braid this thesis, and the oral narratives of the women narrators, into the weaving and unweaving of feminine genealogies entwined by Latin American women writers/tellers. The weaving metaphor is central to understand my own writing and research practice. By unweaving cultural representations, official (his)stories, and silences, I have internalised the armed conflict in my country, I weave alternative stories about women's agency in it. I was not alone; friends and the women in these pages became my companions. They helped me to weave the many strands, sometimes broken, I need to bring together to write this (my)story of Colombia. This is why this is a personal journey engaged in the production of 'passionate knowledge' (Jaggar, 1989). As Penelope, in the Odyssey, I have spent many nights undoing the writing done in the daytime, and in the field I spent hours doing and undoing research plans and instruments to accommodate reality.

Dissemination and beyond

One of the aspects in which research inequalities and problems of representation are more acute is the process of dissemination. These questions around research inequalities emerged soon during my research while attending the meetings of the Collective. Women complained about female academics speaking in public spaces for them or as if they 'had been with us there [in the guerrillas], but they were not comrades' (FD 1, 1/8/2012); portraying them as victims and not as agents (Salome – M-19), or putting too much emphasis on aspects of the experience of being *guerrilleras* that they did not consider important such as sexuality in the mountains, motherhood, menstruation and changes in their bodies, while overlooking their political engagement (FD 1, 1/8/2012). Tensions of

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[42] Melissa Dearey pointed out the differences of meaning between weaving and knitting, this helped me to make a more precise description of this process. The weaving metaphor shows the intricate nature of the autobiographical account. See: Hayle (2004).

representation were also present among the women writing the Collective's book: who writes the contextual chapter and from which standpoint? How are peace and war conceptualised, 'the women portrayed are too romanticised', 'many reflections and discussions are not reflected in the writing' (Collective's meeting, 09/8/2012).

These questions are not new to feminist researchers, as Skeggs (1995: 85) points out writing is located within particular histories, academic modes of production, and particular audiences. In order to make my research accountable to the women I interviewed I visited Colombia in August 2013 and arranged meetings with women from the Collective living in Bogotá to make a presentation of my research findings. I was unable to include all the participants in the dissemination process. Firstly, due to time and resource constraints, I did not arrange meetings in the different regions where the focus groups were conducted. Secondly, I have lost contact with individually demobilised women due their high rates of mobility. Thirdly, my research is written in English, a language none of the women can read. Although I am writing a résumé of the thesis in Spanish to be shared with the women who took part in the research, giving them the articles written in English before they are published is going to be difficult. Finally, one of my initial plans was to curate an exposition of women's photo-diaries. Due to the collaborative nature of the process, I think this should be done with the women, but at the moment I do not have funding to carry out such a project. In the next subsection I end the chapter by outlining some of the hindrances encountered during my fieldwork, as they are important to understand the context in which the research was conducted.

Jumping hurdles

At the beginning of the voyage that ends with the presentation of a final thesis you imagine it as a smooth, flowing process of personal and academic growth. In reality it can be bumpy, full of dead ends, false starts, and new beginnings. Understanding the barriers and opportunities encountered in the field is important to grasp the fluid and changing dynamics of the research process. The

hindrances I encountered showed that geopolitical, contextual and personal factors influence (positively and negatively) the development of the fieldwork. In the next pages I make a brief account of some of the hurdles I jumped during my fieldwork.

One of the difficulties was gaining access to government and non-government institutions.[43] My (mis)encounters with government agencies and local NGOs are related to the bourgeoning, during the last twelve years, of academic research about the recently demobilised population in the country from guerrilla and paramilitary armies. Most of the work is being conducted inside university research centres such as the ODDR created in 2008;[44] and by graduate students from a wide range of disciplines.[45] The high visibility and interest reached by the topic is central in the process of healing the fabric of Colombian society breached by years of armed confrontation, facilitating the transition of demobilised people into civilian life, and hopefully it will give a better understanding of the catastrophic events that have taken place in the country in the middle of the armed confrontation.

But the mushrooming of research conducted in the field of DDR became a hindrance for my fieldwork. A psychologist working with one of the NGOs approached pointed to the interview fatigue experienced by some demobilised wo(men). She told me 'I am going to ask the women if they want to speak to you, but frankly they are tired of being interviewed. Some are charging 30 thousand pesos for giving one interview' (FJB 2, 23/8/2012). The same functionary stated that demobilised people are feeling 'used', and have the idea that researchers are 'making money with their stories'. While they gain nothing 'not even changes in the policies of the demobilisation program they criticised during the interviews' (FJB 2, 23/8/2012).

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[43] This affected my access to individually demobilised women because no one in my social network could serve as gatekeeper.
[44] The ODDR is part of the Institute for political and International Studies (IEPRI) of the *Universidad Nacional de Colombia*.(ODDR, 2015b)
[45] Linked to national and international universities.

In order to address these issues I made sure that the women interviewed and institutions approached knew that I did not have the power to make policy changes to the DDR program, and I covered the travel expenses (transport and meals) of the women who attended the interviews and focus groups. When I realised that my writing period was going to take longer than expected I sent emails to the Collective, the Network, the interviewees, and the women who took part in the focus groups informing them about the delay.

Another contextual element that impacted on my research was the announcement of peace dialogues between the FARC and the Colombian government on September 2012, I was four months into the fieldwork and it shaped the rest of it. The interviews, the informal conversations, the contact with institutions and organisations, and the whole environment of the country transformed.

In the meetings of the Collective and the Network, but also in the minds of many Colombians, LA PAZ,[46] was no longer a foggy dream. For the first time in more than a decade it became again a possibility. In the Collective and the Network women's different conceptions about the relation between peace and war appeared. But despite the different and sometimes conflicting views about the meaning of LA PAZ inside the Collective and the Network, for the first time since 2000 women ex-combatants from the old insurgencies were able to articulate in the public sphere the value of their experience.

During the course of my fieldwork I was also reminded of the geo-political marginalities and exclusions that shape the lives of wo(men) from the global-south. On the 7th of August 2012 my Tier 4 student visa was curtailed due to an administrative error made by the university and Shibboleth, the 167 metre crack opened by Colombian artist Doris Salcedo in the floor of Tate Modern's Turbine Hall, opened under my feet (Clusterflock, 2007; Tate.org, 2007). Salcedo's sculpture is a representation of 'the borders, the experience of segregation, the

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[46] I use capitals to accentuate the constructed nature of the concept, and the sometimes contradictory meanings it has in the country.

experience of racial hatred', the experience 'of a Third-World person coming into the heart of Europe' (Clusterflock, 2007). The decolonial feminist Maria Lugones (2010: 746) stated that the 'coloniality of gender', which started during the Spanish conquest of what is today Latin America, is a system that classifies people in terms of power and gender, and entails the reduction of the colonised into less than human. It is not a thing of the past, it is alive and well in the intersection of gender, class, and race and is central for the construction of the capitalist world system. The curtailment of my visa reminded me of my location as a woman from the global-south studying in the global-north. It made me question the ways in which my location within the Eurocentric social sciences reproduces (or not) Eurocentric epistemologies; how the sequels of colonialism are still entrenched in my theoretical understandings and everyday practices (Medina, 2013: 24; Walsh, n.d); the possibilities of contestation; and the advantages of marginality as a site of critical thinking and production of knowledge (Martinez, 2013; Lugones, 2010; Hooks, 1991).

Finally, the fieldwork expenses were financed with my savings but by August 2012 they were running low. To cover the research costs I took a full-time job at the Ombudsperson's office coordinating a project aimed to prevent sexual violence and forced recruitment of girls and boys. The five months I worked with the ombudsperson gave me the opportunity to work with women and girls' victims of sexual and gender based violence inside and outside the armed conflict. The constant denouncements made in front of the ombudsperson against some FARC's commanders practices of sexual violence against women and girls in the ranks and in the territories they control, dismantled my idea that the main perpetrators of sexual violence in the country were the paramilitary. It strengthened the sense that in the country the continuum of violence that shapes women's and girls' lives inside and outside the armed conflict fed from each other.

Working at the ombudsperson office allowed me to pay the fieldwork expenses and travels; cover women's travel expenses to attend interviews and focus groups; buy the 'diary-keeping-packs'; develop the films and print the pictures. I was able

to offer lunch and coffee breaks during the focus groups, and create a nicer environment. But working with the ombudsperson interfered with my interviews and limited the time I could dedicate to my fieldwork. The different obstacles and opportunities encountered in the field were central for the development of my reflections around research practice, my project, and the ethical issues behind it. They were related to contextual and personal factors, and to the self-funded character of my fieldwork.

Conclusions

Listening, transcribing, writing, allowing women's voices and stories to penetrate my body, to engulf me in their sorrows and hopes for the future, to cry and laugh with them and the sound of their voices travelling back in time through the recorder, understanding my own story as a Colombian citizen as part of their stories as rebels, has been part of the process of making sense of the material gathered in the field. It has been through face-to-face encounters with the women participants that I have been able to respond to female ex-combatants' experiences, and to the 'injuries' caused in the skin of our individual and collective bodies by years of armed confrontation, exclusion, inequality, poverty, sexisms, homophobia, and by bearing witness to the different types of violence that shape their/our lives. I have also heard their stories of political struggle, subversion, survival, resistance, and activism. Our contacts reinforced the feminist idea that research practice is a form of political action, therefore we need to look for 'non-conventional' ways to produce and communicate knowledge (Ahmed, 2004: 32, Braitton: 1997).

The ethnographically informed, multi-method approach taken adds complexity to my archive, and points to the connection between material culture and thick description. It comes from a feminist tradition in which the use of multiple-methods is a tool to seek complexity and richness of understanding (Hesse-Biber, 2012: 137). The long engagement with Elvira which included participant observation, the interview and the photo-diary was an empowering experience because it allowed her to build a self-reflexive account and take control of her own

story. It is also an example of women as situated knowers and the use of multiple-methods in feminist research praxis. In future research projects I would like to plan my interaction with the interviewees following that pattern of collaborative engagement.

Although the solicited photo-diaries diaries are attuned to the feminist research principles of giving voice to everyday experiences of marginalised people; and produce more empowering relationships in the research process, they require a closer collaboration with the participants than the one I was able to sustain. For instance having more than one focus group, planning a workshop with the women beforehand to solve technical problems, curating together the results for dissemination. I became aware of this during my fieldwork but was constrained by the lack of funding to carry out these extra activities, I know that by limiting my sample to Bogotá I might have had more resources, but I wanted to reach women in the regions in order to include voices that are generally marginalized or less visible. Furthermore, in a context of ongoing armed violence, the production of written and visual accounts about lived experiences of engagement in politico-military organisations could be dangerous, as the refusal of women from Monteria to keep a photo-diary made me aware of. Thus methods that were suited in Bogotá were not appropriate for regions such as the Caribbean.

Along my research process I encountered similar issues to those outlined by feminist researchers before me: my own relation to systems of oppression, and my positions of marginality and privilege in relation to other women (Marshall, 1995); concerns around exploitative research and the impossibility of totally reducing power imbalances in the process; to what extent my research was an empowering experience for the participants; the kind of interactions sustained with the women generated spaces where the women felt it was 'safe' to disclose personal thoughts, painful experiences and feelings, and wanted in return the same level of disclosure from me (Miller, 1998; Mauthner, 1998). I address these concerns by following similar paths to the ones used by feminist researchers before me: continual and systematic reflection during all the stages of the research

process; adopting a flexible approach in the field and making space for women's lived realities which in many cases act as obstacles for the research plans; self-reflection, self-examination, taking note of my feelings and emotions in order the listen to my own voice; using the concepts elaborated by the women to narrate their own experiences (Miller, 1998; Mauthner, 1998; Birch, 1998; Ribbens, 1998; Glucksmann, 1994; Skeggs, 1995).

Finally, I need to state that this is a collaborative project, it belongs to a 'knowledge network' established across continents and tied by affections. It began while working with Luz María Londoño and Luisa Dietrich with whom I shared research interests, dreams, ideas, and secondary data. It was through this network that I had access to 68 interviews produced in the framework of other research projects. During the fieldwork the practice of sharing research data became a strategy of dissemination directed to reduce power imbalances between (me) the researcher and the women participants, and a form of collaboration and indirect political action. The transcriptions of the meetings of the Collective and the Network of Women Ex-combatants where topics such as their invisibilised role in the amnesty process of the 1980s, and the peace negotiations in the 1980s and 1990s, were sent to the women who took part in those meetings after editing names, places, and personal or intimate details.

This chapter was a description of my research world, the elements that shaped my fieldwork, the methods used, the meaningful mess I brought back in photos, recordings, and notebooks, and the obstacles encountered. In the next chapter I briefly introduce Colombia, the country in which women's involvement in radical politics, and return to civilian life in the midst of an armed confrontation still unsolved, took place.

Chapter Four
Picking Up the Fragments:
Sketching the Colombian Armed Conflict

The coexistence and overlapping of multiple forms of violence in Colombia, the long duration of the armed confrontation, the multiplicity of actors (left-wing guerrillas, paramilitaries, gangs, state armed forces, drug-cartels, common crime), and the particularities of the conflict not only in the rural and urban areas but also in the different geographical regions, has made the boundaries between political and non-political violence porous, and has obscured the social and political causes behind the confrontation (GMH, 2013; Guerrero-Barón 2001; Meertens, 2001 in Moser & McIlwaine, 2004: 3-4).

The objective of this chapter is to provide an outline of the context in which the women's process of becoming members of a guerrilla organisation, being guerrilleras, leaving the revolutionary group, and their life beyond, took place. I use vignettes to show that our lives (both myself and the women who participated in my research) are intertwined both with Colombian political, socio-economic structural inequalities and with the gender order that rules not only the armed conflict but also wo(men's) everyday lives. The vignettes act as fragments, pieces that assembled together cannot tell the whole story but represent the impossibility of such a task in a context of ongoing armed violence (Das, 2007). I do not pretend to draw a complete picture of Colombian (his)tory, this is merely a sketch. I end the chapter with a discussion about the politics of naming the conflict and why naming is an important process.

Unravelling sixty years of socio-political violence

Alíx Salazar and María Eugenia Vásquez, both former militants of the M-19, describe their *memory work*, this is their conscious exercise to reinterpret and remember their experiences of being part of a guerrilla organisation (Kuhn, 2007), as gathering thoughts, names, anecdotes, and ideas in *papelitos* - little pieces of paper (Hoyos, 2006; FD 2, n.d). In my memory the 60 years of no-peace-no-war in Colombia are a scrapbook, made of images faded like polaroid photographs, newspaper clips, personal

diary notes, scattered and unorganised memories. They do not have a teleological order, some are connected with my family and personal history; my academic development; places I visited; wo(men) I met over the years in different contexts; stories of friendship and activism; and with national, international and global events 'witnessed' through the media (television, radio, internet, cinema). The scattered pieces of paper and other memory artifacts that are part of our (the women interviewed and my own) memory archives incorporate both the personal and the public. They challenge dichotomising definitions of memory that separate public/social/collective memory from personal/private/individual/auto-biographical memory. Therefore, this work is located in an intersection of memories, between personal/private memory and public/social memory (Rosenberg, 1989: 120). To show this interconnection this section is divided into three vignettes, each one an entrance point to talk about the Colombian armed conflict.

Vignette 1, *La Violencia* (1948 – 1965) and the birth of the 'revolutionary war'

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Yoana's Photo-Diary, Date: 11 September 2012. Place: Bogotá's old
central cemetery)
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Image 17

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Some of the famous photos of El Bogotazo were shot here… piles of dead
bodies, lined up, faceless… a representation of the chaos. (…). What
caught my attention were the Columbarium and the almost nineteen-thousand
tombs painted as part of the installation made by the artist Beatriz
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Gonzalez. Each tomb was sealed with a tombstone on which the image of two
men carrying a dead body was serigraphed. The artist took her inspiration
from press photographs published in 2003 depicting a group of peasants
carrying the dead bodies of their friends, killed by the FARC, in hammocks
and pieces of plastic tied with rope (Restrepo, 2010).

Image 18

It is near to this structure that the Centre of Historical Memory, Peace
and Reconciliation is being built.[47]

On the 9th of April 2012, for the first time, Colombia commemorated the National
Day of Memory and Solidarity with the Victims. But this is not a day without
history. The 9th of April 1948 symbolises for many Colombians the tragedy of the
country's long armed confrontation. It was 1 p.m. when the liberal populist leader,
and presidential candidate, Jorge Eliezer Gaitán was gunned down in the streets
of Bogotá. In my mind it is a cold, rainy and grey Friday. But maybe I am wrong
and the rain came later to calm down the fires that were consuming the centre of
the city and rendering it to ashes. The pictures of the *Bogotazo* pass through my
mind. I am familiar with the figures in black suits raising their hands in a
combative fist or armed with machetes. Others are still, contemplating what is
left: the trams in flames, the ruined buildings, the piled faceless bodies lying
inert.... It all happens in black and white, as in the photographs of photojournalist

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[47] The Centre of Historical Memory, Peace and Reconciliation was opened in December 2012.

Sady Gonzalez, known as 'the photographer of the Bogotazo' (Banco de la Republica, n.d).

In the national myth Gaitán's assassination triggered a series of popular uprisings in various locations of the country. Different historiographical accounts point out that Colombia was already immersed in a violent confrontation before the ninth of April 1948, and the events of that day only contributed to its escalation (Arias, 1998; Pearce, 1990). Nevertheless that date has been imprinted in Colombia's social memory as the start of *La Violencia* (1948 – 1965), an inter-party clash between Liberals and Conservatives who targeted the militants of the opposite side, their families and territories. It left between 200,000 and 300,000 dead and had its origin in complex political rivalries, political exclusions, failed land reform attempts, and unsolved social conflicts (Schmidt, 2005; GMH, 2013: 112; Pearce, 1990: 49-59).

Apart from the events surrounding the assassination of Jorge Eliezer Gaitán, violence and death were not common in the cities, *La Violencia* was mainly a rural phenomenon. The selective massacres and killings perpetrated by different actors took place in peasant hamlets and the pathways between them, thus most of the victims and victimizers were peasants (Rojas & Tubb, 2013: 132). Due to its excess, its discontinuity across time and geography, the diversity of motives that served as catalysts for violence, and its multiple manifestations, it is difficult to locate the temporality of *La Violencia* (Rojas & Tubb, 2013). However, in the popular imagination it has become a sort of foundational myth of the Colombian armed conflict, to which some wo(men) from the old insurgencies link their memories of injustice, inequality and exclusion (Nieto-Valdivieso, 2010).

Authors such Arias (1998: 40) suggest that by placing the origin of Colombia's conflict on the day of the assassination of the populist leader, and the resulting 'uprising of the masses' directed to mourn his death, the government and the national elites justified (and continue justifying today) the use of armed force and violence to answer the inconformity of those politically, economically and socially excluded, and to depict such subjects as a 'threat' against the established order.

Rojas & Tubb (2013) advanced this point further by looking at the technologies of government over the body at play during *La Violencia*. They argue that by constructing antagonists as 'deviants' and threats to be eliminated rather than as political contenders, the conditions that made possible the emergence of violence, and the imaginary that closed the possibility of politics were created. Peasants, Afro-descendants, indigenous, and rural and urban poor were made 'superfluous or nonexistent',[48] as the colour of their skin or 'the weakness' of their body were deployed as 'reasons' to deny them voice and the space to negotiate their entrance into political debates (Rojas & Tubb, 2013: 127). This analysis is helpful to understand the formation of citizenship in Colombia at the beginning of modernity. In the end, *La Violencia* was a project in which the subalterns were constructed as obstacles to modernity and progress, impossible to govern, dangerous and threatening and in consequence were 'expelled from politics, in the best cases, or deprived from the right to life, in the worst' (Rojas & Tubb, 2013: 150).

La Violencia also marked a change in patterns of victimisation. During the civil wars of the ninetieth century the confrontation was between men in arms and most of the victims were male. During *La Violencia* the civil population was systematically targeted, and massacred. The victims were distributed between both sexes, and entire families of the opposite political side were executed, including women and children (Meertens, 2001: 153). The magnitude of the deaths and the semantic meanings invested in the massacres, killings and display of the dead bodies, were not only strategies of terror deployed to control the population, they altered the ways of life in many rural areas; displaced people from their lands; created new institutions; reconfigured territories; created local identities that undermined the national identity; and engendered memories of hate, cycles of vengeance and mistrust in the new generations of rural population (Uribe, 2004 as cited in Rojas & Tubb, 2013; Meertens & Zambrano, 2010).

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[48] Rojas & Tubb (2013: 130-131) use Arendt's concept according to which through the process of dehumanisation individuals are considered without dignity or agency and as such made superfluous.

The rape and torture of women and girls in front of their families; the castration of young men; the cesareans performed on the bodies of pregnant women, in which the foetus was removed from the uterus and torn into pieces to destroy the possibility of reproduction of the enemy (Rojas & Tubb, 2013), highlight the gendered component of *La Violencia* (Meeterns, 2001; Rojas & Tubb, 2013; Uribe, 1990). In a world where political affiliations were part of family traditions, and constitutive of the social identity, the violent deaths of women fulfilled the symbolic function of 'domination of the enemy and the violation of what we may consider the most constitutive and intimate aspects of their identity' (Meertens, 2001: 154; Meertens & Zambrano, 2010). Rape also served the functions of terror and silencing. Firstly it was directed to make the victims feel 'shameful' so they may never talk, especially in a deeply religious and mainly rural society where women's 'virtue' and 'purity' were tied to the maintenance of the male 'honour'. Secondly it was a way of showing 'how much they were capable of', thus other members of the community were warned (Meertens, 2001: 153).

La Violencia formally ended in 1958 when the two political parties (Liberals and Conservatives) made a political agreement to alternate the government of the country for 16 years. The bipartisan agreement, know as the *Frente Nacional* (National Front, 1958-1974), was based on the exclusion of political forces outside the two traditional parties and contributed to generate further inequalities and exclusions (GMH, 2013: 112; Pearce, 1990: 64-66, 119). The aid provided by the USA to the bipartisan political coalition, in the form of military and socio-economic programs, influenced the concept of security used by the National armed forces which was determined by the logic of the Cold War. As a result anti-communist policies merged the military repression of insurgent organisations with social reformism (GMH, 2013: 115). Some women from the old insurgencies refer to the political exclusion generated by the National Front, as one of the reasons for their involvement in radical politics, and their sense that the armed struggle was the only route available for their generation in order to open up

democracy and make social and economic reforms (Pilar – M-19, Edith – ELN, and Magda – EPL),[49]

> The problem was that...
> when one didn't want to be Liberal or Conservative, there wasn't ...
> There was no option for other interests
> It was later that I understood that...
> The guerrilla in Colombia has a political origin, not poverty or misery,
> no, it is fundamentally political
> (Magda – EPL, 2012)

Although the first guerrilla movements appeared in the country in the 1950s during *La Violencia* as self-defense groups, it was in the 1960s that the first revolutionary guerrilla movements emerged (García, Grabe & Patiño, 2008: 8). They belong to the two generations of insurgent organisations that grew in Latin America following the triumph of the Cuban Revolution (Wickham-Crowley, 1992; 2014). In the 1960s several left-wing movements appeared in the country but only three consolidated as military or politico-military organisations aiming to 'take over' power: in 1964 the ELN (National Liberation Army) with a pro-Cuban direction; in 1965 the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) linked with the soviet-line *Partido Comunista Colombiano* - PCC (Colombian Communist Party); and the EPL the armed wing of the Colombian *Partido Comunista, Marxista-Leninista* – PC-ML (Communist Party - Marxist-Leninist) with a pro-China direction (Hernández, 2003; Wickham-Crowley, 1992: 182; García et al., 2008: 8).

While the FARC, was composed mainly of farmers and peasants, the ELN's and EPL's bases were made up of a wide range of actors: peasants, urban militants such as university students, workers, union members, and catholic 'revolutionary' priests (Hernández, 2003). To this day the FARC and the ELN are the oldest guerrilla armies still active in Latin America. Although these first generation guerrilla organisations did not encourage the participation of women as part of their ranks and did not mobilise them, some women did become *guerrilleras*,

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[49] Many of the women interviewed who joined old insurgent organisations used similar arguments to explain their involvement in radical politics.

both as part of the military units fighting in the mountains, and as members of urban commandos performing maintenance and intelligence work (Nieto-Valdivieso, 2010). In Chapter Five I explore women's patterns of mobilisation in more detail.

During the mid-1970s and the early 1980s new guerrilla movements appeared in the country, among them the first urban guerrillas. They were part of the second-generation guerrilla groups that emerged in other Latin American countries, following new warfare strategies such as the Prolonged Popular War strategy, which required the accumulation of support from different society sectors, and had an important urban component (Wickham-Crowley, 1992: 215; 2014). For them the revolution was not going to take place in the mountains but in the cities by building Popular Power (Pearce, 1990). The violent repression of farmers and indigenous organisations that promoted land invasions such as the *Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos* - ANUC (National Association of Farmer Users), and the *Comité Regional Indígena del Cauca* - CRIC (Regional Indigenous Council of the Cauca) pushed members of these organisations into existent guerrilla groups, or created their own movements such as the *Movimento Armado Quintin Lame* - MAQL (Quintin Lame Armed Movement) which was an indigenous self-defense group.

Divisions inside Colombian Marxist-Leninist groups also led to the creation of new politico-military organisations such as the *Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores* - PRT (Workers Revolutionary Party); the *Comandos Ernesto Rojas* - CER (Ernesto Rojas Commandos), and the *Auto-Defensa Obrera* - ADO (Workers Self-Defense) (Hernández, 2003; García et al. 2008: 8). The M-19 appeared in this period as a mixture of populist, nationalist, Bolivarian, anti-imperialist and anti-oligarchic ideas. The group had an urban orientation and was a combination of middle-class students, urban popular sectors, ex-militants of the FARC, left-wing militants without party, and people looking for 'autchthonous' political alternatives to the international models on which the other guerrillas were rooted (Soviet, Chinese, Cuban) (Hernández, 2003; García et al, 2008: 10).

The new warfare strategies adopted encouraged the involvement of all sectors of mass society, thus women's participation was stimulated. Hence one of the main differences between first and second-generation guerrilla groups was the degree of female participation in them (Wickham-Crowley, 1992; Lobao 1990; Kampwirth, 2002). In groups such as the M-19 women occupied top command positions and women specific issues were discussed. Vera Grabe, an ex-commander of the M-19 remembers that in 1982 during the Eighth National Conference women's participation in the formation of an army was being discussed. One of the male commanders, Jaime Bateman,[50] stated that women should not take part in the army because it caused 'a lot of problems' (Madarriaga, 2006: 127). Women answered that they were already part of the M-19 and pressed for a meeting with commander Bateman to discuss the 'chauvinistic' attitudes of the group,

> A controversial regulation came from this. It included: no domestic abuse, yes to abortion, yes to the right to birth control, egalitarian treatment and education for women in the movement (Grabe quoted by Madarriaga, 2006: 127)

Most of the Colombia guerrilla groups did not include 'women's issues' or particular women's platforms in their political agendas. Feminist ideas brought into the groups were seen as dividing the popular struggle and as merely petit-bourgeois whims. Nevertheless the guerrillas did promote a certain degree of 'gender equality' in their ranks. Women and men were expected to perform the same roles and tasks, received the same military training, and there was the idea of 'equal' division of labour. Differently to Colombia's conservative, machista and religious society, in the guerrilla ranks 'domestic violence' was highly sanctioned; women could not only select their partner but also end the relationship and start a new one (see Chapter Seven) (Dietrich, 2014; Nieto-Valdivieso, 2010; Arias, 2007).

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[50] Jaime Bateman Cayón (1940-1983) founder and commander of the M-19.

Despite the proliferation of different armed organisations the low intensity of the conflict allowed the governments of the National Front (1958-1974) to concentrate on the political and economic changes that the rapid urbanisation of the country was demanding (GMH, 2013: 128). As in other Latin American countries, during the second half of the twentieth century, Colombia was transformed from a rural to an urban country. But the growth of the urban population was not accompanied by employment opportunities, services and housing for the new inhabitants, on the contrary the rapid urbanisation led to the creation of shanty neighbourhoods where lack of opportunities, inadequacy of public services, unemployment, and violence were part of everyday life (Pearce, 1990: 69). As in other Latin American countries migration from the rural to the urban, and the contact of students and trade unionists with new ideas fostered social organisation and created an environment propitious to revolutionary organising (Kampwirth, 2002: 7).

By the 1970s Colombian social movements had begun to flourish and to organise independently from the two main traditional parties. It had a diverse composition: peasants, civic movements, trade unionists, cultural groups, youth and student organisations, women's organisations, black and indigenous organisations (Pearce, 1990; GMH, 2013). The answer from the governments of the National Front to the growing social discontent was a militarised state. In 1978 president Julio Cesar Turbay Ayala (1978-1982) set up the *Doctrina de Seguridad Nacional* (National Security Doctrine), a corpus of norms that curtailed freedoms, gave the military extrajudicial powers to judge civilians, and introduced the concept of an 'internal enemy' to designate any political 'adversary' operating inside the national borders (GMH, 2013: 132; Richani; 2013: 203). The power abuses of the military, tortures, and disappearances that took place during this period were denounced by national and international organisations asking for the protection of human rights and judicial guarantees (GMH, 2013:133), and by the insurgent organisations. Pilar recalls,

When we stole the weapons from the *Cantón Norte*[51] we left a document...
in that document we told the president:
'we are willing to lay down our weapons if three things are guaranteed,
the lifting of the *Estado de Sitio* [state's Siege][52]
the derogation of the National Security Doctrine
and... I don't remember the third one.

The state's siege was a form of government that lasted 30 years.
We say that we are... the generation of the state's siege,
and the generation of the National Security Doctrine (...)
This generation here [making references to the women present in the meeting]
lived in their own flesh the state's siege.
We experienced [arbitrary] detention, interrogations, torture, jail, and verbal court martials.
(Network Seminar 20-22/7/2012)

During the 1980s the different guerrilla organisations tried to seek unity, first through bilateral interaction with other guerrillas in the form of joint forces, training schools, and joint campaigns (Garcia et al, 2008: 14). Later in 1985 unity was sought through the creation of the *Coordinadora Nacional Guerrillera* - CNG (National Guerrilla Coordinating Board), and later in 1987 with the formation of the *Coordinadora Guerrillera Simón Bolivar* - CGSB (Simon Bolivar Coordinating Board). However ideological and political differences, and the need to protect the identity of each organisation hindered unity (García et al, 2008: 14). Differences among guerrilla organisations determined not only their composition and strongholds, but also their goals, and relationships with the state. During the 1980s while guerrillas like the FARC and the ELN were seeking to take power and did not confer any legitimacy on the government, the M-19 bestowed some lawfulness to the government and saw the 'necessity of reaching a negotiated exit to the conflict, and widening democracy' (Chinchilla, 2010: 15, Restrepo, 2008).

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[51] On New Year's Eve 1979 militants of the M-19 raided the *Cantón Norte*, a military garrison in the North of Bogotá. From the weapons cache they took more than 5,700 arms (García et al, 2008: 13).

[52] The *Estado de sitio* was introduced in the 1886 Constitution as an exceptional measure but became a recurrent state in response to the turmoil of *La Violencia*. It allowed Military justice to judge civilians; militarised police forces; and established areas where control of the population was exercised by the military (Leal, 2011: 7).

Some of the women who participated in this thesis repeatedly mentioned the 'differences' between the guerrilla organisations. Nevertheless, during the Network's National Meetings they also emphasised today's need to seek unity by using tropes and stories directed to make visible their belonging to a 'common revolutionary past', similar political ideals, and revolutionary 'dreams', and the shared lived experience not only of making war but also of waging peace. In the meetings they stressed their common experiences, practical and strategic gender needs, and political struggles as women, by using different feminist discourses (Network Third National Meeting, 26-28/10/2012). The passing of time has allowed them to see that the differences between the organisations 'weren't that big' (Magda – EPL, Network Third National Meeting, 26-28/10/2012), as their struggle was based on common demands and aims for social and economic justice, political inclusion, and the end of different forms of oppression (Network Third National Meeting, 26-28/10/2012; Network Seminar 20-22/7/2012). Women guerrillas who experienced jail during the 1980s found these common grounds during their imprisonment, which allowed them to create a common identity as political prisoners (Network Third National Meeting, 26-28/10/2012).

Vignette 2, dirty war and peace dreams

November 1985, two catastrophes of a different kind, one political the other natural, remain imprinted in my memory. On the 13th November the eruption of the volcano Nevado del Ruiz buried under tons of boiling ashes and a mudslide the entire town of Armero, around 23,000 people died (BBC, 1985). It was the worst natural disaster in the history of the country and the second deadliest volcanic eruption in the twentieth century (Rey, 2011). My grandmother was one of the disappeared; with her my dad lost friends and extended family. Just one week before, the 6th of November the guerrilla movement M-19 took over the Palace of Justice in Bogotá. This action marked the end of the peace dialogues between the government of President Belisario Betancur (1982-1986) and the guerrillas. The government refused any negotiated solution and the Palace was recovered by 'blood and fire'. Afterwards the military solution to the country's problems advocated by the political elite and the military prevailed over Betancur's peace efforts (Pearce, 1990: 178). The shock of the events, their scale,

the trauma left behind by the smoke of the volcano and the Palace consumed by the gunfire, silenced many questions about the way in which the government handled the 'recovery' of the Palace of Justice.

The start of peace dialogues with the guerrillas, and the amnesty conferred to political prisoners by Betancur's government were an important change in official security policies and the political recognition of the insurgents (GMH, 2013: 135). Women urban guerrillas, militants, collaborators and sympathisers were central in advancing the peace discussions taking place, and the process of amnesty for political prisoners. However, as Alix pointed out, their efforts are not part of the official (his)tories build by the government and the insurgent organisations,

> How we, the women, were positioned in the peace proposals made by our organisations at the time?
> Lets talk about the unconditional general amnesty.
> It was a political amnesty,
> to free male and female political prisoners.
> But it also was a political amnesty to talk about the country
> and to see how the situation [armed confrontation] could be solved.
> It was also an economic amnesty (...)
> and during that time who are the ones working for the amnesty?
> the women.
> The women were in the streets, they were mothers, sisters, wives, daughters...
> they were organised in the *movimiento de las madres de los chales blancos*[53] [white shawls mother's movement]
> and they disappeared from that political history (...)
>
> During my political campaign for the council
> I dressed in a white shawl.
> And I told people about the struggle led by the women of the white shawls,
> I told them it was a national movement for a general amnesty without conditions,
> but it is not in history.
> It simply disappeared.
> And it disappeared because of the ways women fight their struggles...
> When women's POLITICAL struggles are activated by affection
> they lose their POLITICAL character,
> they are not seen as political
> (Alix – M-19, Network Seminar 20-22/7/2012)

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[53] See Semana (1982)

Although the events in the Palace of Justice marked the end of the peace dialogues, they had encountered several obstacles since the beginning. First they met the opposition and distrust of local and national elites, economic groups, the Catholic Church, and the military which actively sabotaged the process in some regions of the country. Second, the consolidation of the political wing of the FARC, the legally constituted leftwing political party *Unión Patriotica* - UP (Patriotic Union) and its rapid expansion generated concern among traditional local and regional elites, and the military. The political elites perceived the emergent political party as a threat to their interests, while the military saw the UP as FARC's strategy of 'combining all forms of struggle' (GMH, 2013: 135-136).

Third, the official repression sponsored by the previous government and the Law 48 of 1968 opened the space for the privatisation of the counter-insurgent struggle. The international radicalisation and hardening of anti-communist policies during Ronald Reagan's administration (1981-1989), its intervention in Central America, and the legitimacy given by Reagan to the Nicaraguan-contras affected Colombia's internal peace efforts, and were used by self-defense groups to confer political legitimacy to their actions (GMH, 2013: 137, 140). While on the one hand the national government was trying to keep open doors for peace dialogues with the guerrillas, on the other hand a systematic attack directed against trade unions, and political organisations outside bipartisan structures was carried out in different regions. They became the new targets of the counter-insurgent war (Londoño et al., 2005).

During this period the guerrillas also changed. Hardened as a result of the National Security Doctrine, and the triumph of the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua (1979), the FARC adopted an offensive strategy leaving behind the defensive tactics that had previously characterised their actions (Londoño et al., 2005: 23). Guerrillas such as the EPL, ELN and FARC, used the peace process with Betancur's government as a strategy for military expansion, broadening their areas of influence and ranks. As a consequence of the end of peace dialogues the M-19 also changed and privileged military expansion over the political dimension

(GMH, 2013: 137). Many of the political prisoners who benefited from the amnesty went back to the guerrilla ranks. The M-19, for instance, not only gained combatants back, but also its commanders (Londoño et al., 2005: 23).

In her memoirs Leonor Esguerra, a former member of the ELN, synthesises the complicated climate in the country in the 1980s. On the one hand there was the blossoming of the social movement and on the other hand the response of the government and the 'right' was a 'dirty war' and repression,

> The repression is terrible, but the processes that we are living in Colombia are encouraging because the unity is getting stronger, the workers union is getting stronger, the peasants, the masses (…). The different positions are hardening and every day the repression is stronger, the only path they are leaving us is war (…) the people are beginning to understand that nothing can be gained through peaceful means (…) (Claux, 2011: 244).

Members of left-wing politico-military organisations, and the unarmed political left contributed to the consolidation and blossoming of the social and civic movement in the 1980s. Wo(men) guerrillas clandestinely participated in social organisations, helped to organise *paros nacionales* (national strikes) and *Juntas de Acción Comunal* (community boards) (Alejandra - CRS), gave logistic and political support to trade unions (Patricia - EPL) and the peasant movement (Ignacia - EPL), and denounced the human rights violations taking place in the country (Alix, Pilar, Eloisa – M-19). I am aware that by recognising the role played by members of politico-military organisations in the social and civic movement, I legitimise to some degree the discourse used by the military and the government to justify the 'dirty war', according to which social leaders, and trade unionists were 'guerrillas dressed in civilian clothes'. But not mentioning the participation of militants, guerrillas, collaborators, and sympathisers of politico-military organisations in the development of the country's social movement, perpetuates the silences constructed by the official narratives and erases the political and social contributions made by members of opposition and left-wing groups (armed and unarmed).

The 1980s were central in the development of the war-peace continuum in Colombia. From this decade onwards the catastrophic events (massacres, selective murders and disappearances) were directed to consolidate territory and define the borders between guerrilla groups, paramilitary groups and drug traffickers. As the different methods of extermination used by the armed actors were directed not only to gain territory but were also 'punitive' and 'preventative' most of the victims were civilians caught in the middle of the hostilities (Uribe, 2007: 36). One of the worst human rights crises faced by the country took place in this decade. It was the peak of the 'dirty war' fought by the drug barons, sectors of the army, business men, landowners, and political bosses in order to eliminate: the UP; the growing civic and social movement; suspected guerrillas; and left-wing civilian activists. State-sponsored violations such as torture and disappearances were rampant (Carrillo, 2009: 141, Pearce, 1990: 195; García et al., 2008); political assassination and different kinds of violence (organised crime, guerrilla struggle, diffuse social violence) with multiple geographical origins, and strategies, were often entangled (Sánchez, 2001: 3).

The pact between paramilitary, drug-traffickers, and economic elites, produced what Tate (2009: 116) has described as 'one of the most lethal forces in Latin America'. What started as an alliance of counter-insurgency ideology and drug-dealers needing protection from guerrilla's fundraising strategies of extortion and kidnapping, evolved into the phenomenon known as 'paramilitarism'. This is the transformation of self-defence/paramilitary groups into an economic, social and political force that infiltrated all spheres of Colombian society (Theidon, 2007: 70). The links between narcotraffic and paramilitaries made the conflict much more complex as it became difficult to differentiate between political violence and organised crime (GMH, 2013: 145).

Furthermore, in the 1980s violence was no longer a rural phenomenon, it adopted multiple 'urban faces'. In cities like Medellín and Cali the *sicarios* (killers hired by the drug cartels) 'made of death an industry' and encouraged a culture of 'No Future' in which life (their own and that of the victim) was disposable (Sánchez,

2001: 7). 'Popular militias' often, but not necessarily, linked to the guerrillas appeared in the poor neighbourhoods of cities like Bogotá, Cali, Medellín, in order to 'eliminate the gangs that plague such neighbourhoods' (Sánchez, 2001: 7). And 'social cleansing' operations, some of them carried out by police or ex-police members against prostitutes, beggars, homeless people and street delinquents became common on the streets of different cities (Sánchez, 2001: 7).

Peace agreements and new constitution

The disenchantment produced by the failed peace dialogues during Betancur's administration, affected the peace policies of the following government. According to the GMH (2013: 137-138) Virgilio Barco Vargas (1986-1990) adopted a depoliticised, technocratic peace policy known, as the *Plan Nacional de Rehabilitacion* - PNR (National Rehabilitation Plan) mainly based on infrastructure investment in order to break the isolation and marginalisation of the regions affected by the armed confrontation. Although Virgilio Barco recognised social inequality and poverty as structural problems fuelling the conflict, his government closed the possibility of negotiation with the insurgents unless total demobilisation and disarmament was agreed (Londoño et., al: 2005: 37).

The PNR's lack of results, the intensification of political violence and the paramilitary offensive in different regions as a result of the process of political decentralisation that started in 1988 with the 'popular election' of mayors, the kidnapping of the conservative politician Álvaro Gómez Hurtado by the M-19, and the growing social discontent claiming for changes to the state's institutions, influenced the change in Virgilio Barco's peace policies during the second half of his mandate (Londoño et al., 2005; GMH, 2013: 148). In 1988 Virgilio Barco's government launched the Initiative for Peace. The answer from the different guerrilla organisations was not homogeneous and evidenced the lack of consensus within the Simón Bolivar Coordinating Board. The MAQL and the PRT pointed out that the initiative did not consider the real dimensions of the armed conflict, and did not include other actors such as the paramilitary and the armed forces. The M-19 and FARC showed

their interest in looking for approaching dialogues. The ELN and EPL suggested that the only aim of the peace initiative was the elimination of the insurgency and did not take into account the economic and social factors of the violence, nor the lack of political freedom (Londoño et al., 2005: 41-42).

At the end of this decade women guerrillas like Lucia (EPL) and María Eugenia (M-19) began to feel the exhaustion of the armed struggle, and became discontented with the prevalence of the military option towards politics. Some of them decided to distance themselves from the organisation. That was the case for María Eugenia,

> There was a tiredness of war for me in 88, 89,
> that made me think of alternatives
> I saw that the armed struggle no longer had the same power to locate a vindication and a voice with political sense.
> This is when I realised that guns are not longer in the service of politics
> but guns were taking their own dynamic...
> hiding, veiling the voice of politics.
> Like my real interest was [making] political changes, I decided to retire
> (...)
> (Interviewed by Humanas Colombia, 2014)

In 1989 the M-19 began exploratory peace conversations with the government, and on the 8th March 1990 they became the first guerrilla organisation to lay down their weapons. The M-19's shift from 'political armed struggle to legitimate political struggle' (Garcia et al., 2008: 18-20) was influenced by factors such as the expansion of drug trafficking. The government was fighting two parallel wars (one against the armed insurgencies and another against drug-trafficking) and needed to solve at least one. This enabled the possibility of opening peace negotiations with the guerrillas even if it implied deep political reforms. Secondly, during the peak of the dirty war more civilians were killed than guerrillas and army members, in part because the paramilitary focused their attacks on the political bases of the guerrillas and not on the guerrillas themselves. As a result the M-19 realised that the armed struggle was negatively affecting the civilian population. At the same time social mobilisation for peace that questioned the use of armed violence to achieve social transformation increased at the end of the

1980s. Finally, the transitions taking place in the Southern Cone from dictatorship to democratic regimes, and the participation of the Colombian government in the Contadora Group which was looking for a negotiated solution to the conflicts in El Salvador and Guatemala, opened the question: 'if a negotiated solution was favoured in Central America, why not also in Colombia' (García et al., 2008: 20).

Simultaneously, and to some extent influenced by the peace negotiations between the government and the M-19, the movement asking for a National Constituent Assembly resurfaced. It began during the 1984 peace dialogues, and in 1990 it brought together university students, leaders from the modernising currents of the liberal party, religious communities, and members of the newly formed party *Alianza Democrática M-19* - AD-M19 (Democratic Alliance M-19). In March 1990 the call for a National Constituent Assembly was voted during the presidential elections (GMH, 2013: 149). Before the end of Virgilio Barco's presidential term the EPL, PRT and MAQL expressed their wish to take part in peace dialogues. Their decision was motivated, to some extent, by the prospect of taking part in the writing of a new political charter. It was seen as an opportunity to reform the state and make the changes necessary to solve some of the problems that fostered insurgent struggle in the first place (Londoño et al., 2005).

The 1991 Constitution represents for the members of the politico-military organisations that laid down weapons in the 1990s a peace pact. It was the first political constitution in the history of the country forged as a result of peace agreements and not a war armistice. Due to space constraints it is difficult to make a comprehensive analysis of the changes introduced by the 1991 Constitution in the country. But its importance was summarised in the words of a rural, Afro-Colombian woman – typically discriminated against – who militated in the PRT, she stated that the 1991 Constitution was 'the first little taste' she had of democracy (FD 2, 26/2/2012).

The new Constitution answered to some extent the demands for widening democracy. It ended the dominance of the two main political parties and expanded political rights beyond the right to vote, including mechanisms like

consultations, referenda, and legislative initiatives (Gallo, 2010: 426). It put limits on the exceptional state that gave autonomy to the military, ratified the rights of the indigenous communities, recognised the communal land tenure of Afro-Colombian communities, and gave them autonomy in the government of their territories according to their culture and traditions (GMH, 2013: 149-150). It also established for first time that men and women had equal rights.

The end of the 1980s marked a change of global paradigms, and although the women interviewed followed different paths outside the revolutionary group, they were influenced by the global climate of the 1990s: the collapse of the socialist field, *Perestroika*, and the peace negotiations of the FMLN in El Salvador. Alexandra who was a member of the CRS, the only guerrilla group that demobilised after the 1991 constitution, comments,

> The 1990s branded us
> And widened the contradictions we already had because
> when we saw on TV
> That the real socialism was falling down
> That the Soviet Union was no longer the Soviet Union,
> but I don't know how many countries.
> And the Berlin wall was being pulled down
> not for the right or the reaction
> but for the young people of those countries!
> (Alejandra – CRS, 2006)

Despite the hopes of peace awakened by the peace agreements, and the new political pact that proclaimed Colombia as a social, democratic state, the end of the armed confrontation did not materialise. The attempts to negotiate peace in 1992 with the FARC and the ELN failed in the initial stages. While both organisations focused on gaining control over the territories left by the demobilised insurgent organisations and military expansion, the government declared 'total war' (Isacson & Rojas, 2009: 21). The paramilitaries also began a process of re-accommodation, transformation and growth. Many of the paramilitary leaders were central in the regional political and economic opposition to the democratic reforms introduced by the 1991 constitution. Hence in the 1990s and 2000s the armed confrontation reached it maximum levels in the history of the conflict (GMH, 2013; Londoño et al., 2005).

In the 1980s and 1990s peace activism in Colombia was almost non-existent, to some extent because at the time the guerrilla organisations were less visible, their forces were smaller, and did not have the capacity to carry out large-scale operations (Isacson & Rojas, 2009: 21). The escalation of the armed conflict in the mid-1990s, the expansion of the guerrilla and the paramilitary groups, and the declaration of total war from part of the government, fostered the emergence of a wide range of peace-building organisations and Colombian society's peace-movement (Rettberg, 2012; Isacson & Rojas, 2009). Women's peace organisations gained visibility in the country and became a place for resistance, agency, and empowerment. They are very diverse in composition (feminists, trade unionists, members of grass-root organisations, mother's of disappeared people and kidnapped soldiers), location and methodologies (Rojas, 2009: 208-209). Although authors such as Ibarra (2008) contrast women's political participation in insurgent organisations and women's peace activism, for many of the women who demobilised in the 1990s these two political experiences are not opposed. Many women from the old insurgencies joined the women's peace movement after laying down their weapons, but just a few disclosed in those spaces their past as *guerrilleras*. They feel that in the polarised climate of the country the women's peace movement looks at them as carrying a 'stain' impossible to clean due to their past as armed insurgents (Lucia - EPL, Eloisa M-19, Patricia - EPL). It is important to note that the three women quoted have been working with women and feminist organisations during the last 20 years and all described their past as an indelible mark that makes them suspicious, among other things because of gender stereotypes that describe women as pacific by nature.

Vignette 3, Transitional Justice without transition

Two research projects overlap in my memory in 2007. In one I am part of a team looking at initiatives of reconciliation between demobilised paramilitaries and communities affected by paramilitary actions, where demobilised combatants have settled. Many of them were the sons of neighbours; others, due to the kind of control excised over the population married local women and became 'members' of the community.

Project 1, a workshop conducted in August 2007 with members of a community where the paramilitary displaced and massacred the population (Image 19, page 120).

Image 19 – Researcher's personal archive.

In the other one I am working on a project aimed to determine the situation of women and girls demobilised from the paramilitary. I am in a little village that was the centre of operations of the paramilitary unit Elmer Cardenas.[54] Here is an extract from my research notes;

Of her 30 years Rosalba has been involved for 16 years in the war. When she was 14 years old she joined the FARC, but as she was sexually harassed by one of the commanders, deserted and surrendered in front of a

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[54] The Elmer Cardenas paramilitary unit began in the mid 1990s and operated in approximately 15 municipalities (Verdad Abierta, n.d).

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paramilitary Unit. Since then she began to 'work' with the Elmer Cardenas.
(…). Rosalba has four children, and lives with two of them, a newly born
baby and an eight years old boy. She is unemployed and cannot study
because in the village where she lives the government program does not
offer primary studies for demobilised people. Her family lives in another
department. She is alone and without support networks. More than once she
has thought of going back to the war, because of the difficult economic
situation she is in. (…). Guilt is a common word in her narrative: "I DID
kill", "I did a lot of things", "I don't want to tell the truth because
I don't want to go to jail for all the things I did" (FD INER 3,
11/6/2007).
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My participation in the two research projects mentioned above made visible the escalation of the violence exercised against the civilian population from the mid-1990s onwards, the blurred boundaries between victims and perpetrators (particular among the combatants without rank), the particular challenges of implementing DDR programs, memory building initiatives, and accountability for the victims in the middle on an ongoing armed confrontation.

In 2005 Transitional Justice - TJ mechanisms were put into motion in Colombia. Differently from other Latin American countries that in the 1980s and 1990s introduced TJ procedures as part of their transition to democracy, or to deal with the violations committed during authoritarian regimes (Truth Commissions, criminal prosecutions, reparation programs, and institutional reforms); Colombia started the TJ process in a context of ongoing socio-political violence. While in countries such as Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, and Guatemala such processes began after a transition had taken place, in Colombia to this day there were/are not signs of political transition (Garcia-Godos & Lid, 2010: 487-488).

The main aim of the TJ process in Colombia was to achieve partial peace by focusing in the DDR on only one of the multiple armed actors involved in the conflict: the paramilitaries (Garcia-Godos & Lid, 2010: 488). It is estimated that between 2003 and 2007 in the framework of the paramilitaries' demobilisation more than 30,000 persons joined the process, but not all the paramilitaries put down their weapons. Successor groups to the paramilitaries have emerged in different regions of the country and are operating in 29 of 32 Colombia's departments; demobilised paramilitary mid-rank commanders mostly lead these

groups. They are engaged in drug trafficking, recruitment of combatants, killings, torture, rape and other forms of sexual violence such as sexual slavery, forced displacement, forced disappearances, death threats and attacks against human rights defenders, trade unionists, and victims seeking justice and land restitution (HRW, 2010; 2011; 2014; Mesa de Trabajo Mujer y Conflicto Armado, 2012: 29).

All the armed actors are involved to different degrees in abuses against the civilian population. These abuses include internal displacement of millions of people; since 1985 more than five million Colombians have been forced out of their lands, the overwhelming majority are women between 15 and 45 years old (Meertens & Zambrano, 2010: 194; Bouvier, 2009b: 4; HRW, 2014: 234). According to HRW (2011: 228) successor groups to the paramilitary are the actors behind forced displacement, and 'State agencies often refuse to register people as displaced if they say paramilitary successor groups forced them to flee'. As a result the data held by the government and NGOs in the estimates of Colombia's internally displaced population is considerably different. While the government registered 154,040 newly displaced in 2009, and 150,000 in 2012; the Colombian NGO CODHES listed 286,389 persons displaced in 2009, and 260,000 in 2012 (HRW, 2011; 2014: 234). Although the Victims Law, approved in 2012, contemplates a program of land restitution its implementation has been limited. By September 2013 only three families had returned to live on their lands (HRW, 2014: 234). Besides it is seen by some sectors, as a strategy to legalise the violent land usurpation that took place in the 1990s in different regions of the country.

Another common violation are the attacks and threats from the armed actors to human rights defenders, journalists, community and peasant leaders, trade unionists, indigenous and Afro-Colombian leaders (HRW, 2011; 2014). Between 2007 and 2011 a total of 126 human rights defenders, leaders belonging to victims and displaced people organisations, women's associations, Afro-Colombian and indigenous organisations, and communities seeking land restitution, were assassinated in different regions of the country, especially in places where successor groups of the paramilitaries operate (Indepaz 2010, 2011; HRW, 2011).

The Ombudsman's office monitors the human rights' situation and issues regular 'risk reports' warning about threats to communities and individuals, but the response of government institutions to prevent abuses is low and the level of impunity high (HRW, 2011). Although demobilised people from guerrilla and paramilitary armies are not included in the report, different researchers have shown that this population is also subject to threats and attacks from different armed actors (Londoño & Ruiz, 2010; Theidon, 2007). In 2007 a demobilised man from the paramilitaries reported his fears about the *plan pistola* (pistol plan), in his words: 'We know that we're tracked down by the armed groups. They send murderers. That's why I can't just (…) Show my face around town because they'll kill me' (Theidon, 2007: 83-84). A women individually demobilised from the guerrillas, interviewed in the documentary video From Diverse Edges (2010), manifested similar fears: 'I cannot walk in the streets without watching over my shoulder because in Bogotá the head of a demobilised person has a price: 100,000 pesos'.

The military are but another actor in the conflict involved in human rights violations and sexual violence. Between 2004 and 2008 the military carried out extrajudicial killings of civilians known as *falsos positivos*, they were performed by members of the military who in order to 'show results' killed young civilians and presented them as combatants 'fallen' in action. By June 2013 the Human Rights Unit of the Attorney General's Office was investigating 2,278 cases of extrajudicial killings, carried out by state agents. Although the number of extrajudicial killings committed has dropped from 2009 onwards there are still denouncements of isolated cases (HRW, 2014: 232). According to the ombudsman office members of the police and military forces have interrupted meetings of popular organisations in spaces where the communities get together, generating fear among the people (Defensoria del Pueblo, 2011: 52, as cited in Mesa de Trabajo Mujer y Conflicto Armado, 2012: 30). Members of the military and the police force have also been involved in sexual violence against women and girls in different regions of the country, especially where military bases are located and in zones under military dispute (Amnesty International, 2004; Mesa de

Trabajo Mujer y Conflicto Armado, 2012). At the moment of writing it emerged that members of the USA army raped 54 Colombian girls between 2003 and 2007, filmed the abuses, and sold the video recordings as pornographic material (El Tiempo, 2015; El Espectador, 2015; BBC, 2015).

In the 1980s new social representations of women became available, transforming the 'cultural dynamics of war' (Meertens, 2001: 155), since then women are no longer seen purely as mothers and wives but also as social leaders and political actors of the social and peasant movement. Violence against women (from all armed actors), is no longer linked to their reproductive capacity but to their roles as social leaders (Meertens, 2001: 155), their activities as peace activists denouncing human rights violations, and leaders of victims and displaced people organisations (Mesa Mujer y Conflicto Armado, 2012: 48).

In March 2012, the *Mesa de trabajo Mujer y conflicto Armado*[55] (Women and Armed Conflict Working Group) denounced the extreme cruelty with which women are being killed, and the symbolic meaning these killings carry as the objective of the perpetrators is to cause suffering not only to the victim but also to women in general (Mesa de Trabajo Mujer y Conflicto Armado, 2012: 5-6, 28-29). They pointed out that violence against women and girls is structural; it is not episodic or casual but is part of social structures of domination and subordination favoured by the patriarchal system; violence against women and girls is not isolated but follows systematic patterns of action, and is deliberately perpetrated by all the groups involved in the hostilities (Mesa de Trabajo Mujer y Conflicto Armado, 2012: 59-60).

In the last two decades the Colombian conflict has acquired an international scope as a result of the introduction in the 1990s of neo-liberal economic reforms which enacted a series of laws favourable to capitalist globalisation (Aviléz, 2006: 5); the growing economic interests of multinational and transnational corporations in

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[55] From 2000 onwards they have documented and denounced, from a feminist perspective, the impact of Colombia's socio-political violence on women's and girls' lives.

the country, which has been involved in financing paramilitary organisations (Martín-Ortega, 2008; Richani, 2005); and the framing of the Colombian armed conflict in the global war against terrorism (which merged counter-insurgency and anti-narcotic operations) (Bouvier, 2009b).

Naming the conflict

From my position as a researcher and as a Colombian citizen naming the events that are the object of the politics of memory in Colombia (war, internal armed conflict, state-crime, structural violence, 'terrocracy'), is a deeply located and political decision. As Bhatia (2005) suggests in contemporary armed conflict 'names' matter, thus the importance of examining the politics of naming by analysing how names are made, assigned and disputed, and the ways in which this process is affected by global dynamics (Bhatia, 2005: 5-6). For instance, in January 2005 President Alvaro Uribe (2002-2010) stated that in Colombia there was not an armed conflict but a terrorist threat fuelled by drugs trafficking. From June 2005 until the end of Uribe's second presidential term in 2010, the terminology used in national and international documents was 'internal violence generated by illegal armed groups' (Meertens & Zambrano, 2010: 1995). Butler (2004: 4) has pointed out that, the framework to understand violence develops in tandem with the experience, and thus it is used to exclude certain questions and historical inquiries, and provide a moral justification for retaliation.

By stating the inexistence of a civil war, and declaring that Colombia was a 'democracy threatened by narco-terrorists', Uribe legitimated his *Política de Seguridad Democratica* (Democratic Security Policy); refused to follow the International Humanitarian Law principle of distinctions between combatants and non-combatants (Orozco, 2005: 172); placed the events in Colombia in the international meta-narrative of the 'war against terror' led by the USA; and disallowed the political character of the guerrillas' struggle by reducing them to 'terrorist groups'. Naming the events as 'terrorist acts' affected the legal framework under which those crimes were judged. As a result the normative standards used to judge crimes committed in the framework of armed conflicts were put aside, and most of the events were processed by using criminal law (Céspedes-Báez, Chaparro & Estefan, 2014: 29).

In terms of memory building this narrative constructed the state as a victim threatened by an 'in-human terrorist-victimiser'; it cloaks the associations between some sectors of the military and the paramilitaries; and obscures the extermination of left-wing grassroots, and political base organisations carried out by the paramilitary (Orozco, 2005: 173). As Orozco (2005: 173) pointed out the act of naming the Colombian armed conflict from the presidential power position was a way of building a politics of memory and forgetting, that shaped the discursive images of the 'enemy' and the state. In contrast by acknowledging the existence of an armed conflict, and the damage produced by it (Céspedes-Báez et al, 2014: 29), current president Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2014, 2014-2018) was able to introduce the Law 1448 of 2011, known as the Victims and Land Restitution Law, and initiate peace talks with the FARC on November 2012.

The lack of consensus about how to name the 60 years of armed confrontation in Colombia is not new, and it is at the centre of the current memory debates. The report *Basta Ya!* (2013), produced by the Historical Memory Group, organises the narrative around the concepts of violence, war, and internal armed conflict. Its critics recognise that *Basta Ya!* (2013) is, to this day, the most important state initiative for studying the causes, origins, and dynamics of the armed conflict in the country. They also value its effort to document the involvement of Colombia's national army in massacres and human rights violations. However, they find problematic that the report does not analyse the role of the state and the different governments in the configuration of organised violence, 'when it appears' they point out, it is presented as a contextual factor under the expression 'precariousness of democracy' (González, 2013: 6).

In this thesis the 'catastrophic events' taking place in Colombia are seen as the result of *socio-political violence*. The term has been used by women's and human rights organisations to describe all the events that negatively disturb the life, integrity, and personal freedom of people; and that are originated in the state's abuse of power, in political reasons, derived from discrimination against socially marginalised people, and caused in the framework of the armed conflict (Mesa de Trabajo Mujer y Conflicto Armado, 2012: 28). As we are going to see later in this thesis women's narrations about their participation as members of guerrilla organisations, and their lives after laying down

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the weapons, make visible that the socio-political, and socio-economic violence in the country has been systematic, as it has been sustained during the 60 years of duration of the conflict through the use of different strategies of control of the population (González, 2013). Moreover it is closely connected with multiple forms of oppression, and because of the constant presence of multiple forms of violence in people's experiences of everyday life, violence has become invisible and normalised or 'banal and ordinary' (Pecaut, 1999: 142 as cited in Moser & McIlwaine, 2004; Céspedes-Báez et al. 2014).

I argue that in Colombia war and peace are not experienced as separated, easily distinguishable moments but as leaking realities, part of a continuum that comprises political and non-political violence. I assume the ethnographic approach taken by authors such as Robben & Nordstrom (1995), and Richards (2005) who point out that war and peace are not exceptional events but social projects made and moderated through social action (Richards, 2005). Moreover, the armed confrontation between the different actors, as well as the systemic violence in the country, is not experienced in the same way for all the population, the repertoires of violence used by the armed actors not only have changed with time, but are also determined by factors such as the type of armed organisation, the region of the country, urban/rural location, ethnicity, gender, and class (GMH, 2013). As a result the lived experience of the armed confrontation is not the same for all Colombians.

A middle class woman living in Bogotá is more likely to directly experience violence in the form of chronic insecurity and fear. Most of her knowledge about the armed conflict will be meditated by media reports, and rumours. She is more likely to experience petty crime and gender and sexual based violence in everyday life than the armed confrontation between the military and the guerrillas. For the young boys and girls with whom I worked in Arauca in 2012, life takes place in the midst of the armed confrontation, and is shaped by socio-political and socio-economic violence. In little villages like Arauquita, Puerto Jordan - or Pueblo Nuevo as the FARC renamed the town, people try to make social life, and live within the armed confrontation (Image 20, page 134). There violence is 'the ordinary' and it can be read in the small details that speak about the militarisation of everyday life (Enloe, 1988).

Image 20 - Yoana's Photo-Diary

'Here many things happen but we have to pretend tranquility' (Secondary school student, Arauca).

An example of violence as 'the ordinary' is the paramilitary control exercised in the hamlet of Libertad, where the regulation and control of the population was evident not only in the massacres, tortures, and disappearances committed by paramilitaries, but also in the way war was installed in the everyday life of the civilian population. This was done not only through armed force but also through methods directed to change and affect people's customs, and daily practices such as the establishment of 'norms of conduct' that regulated the cleaning of the streets, disputes between partners, domestic violence; punishment of behaviours such as infidelity and gossiping with public beatings and whippings (directed particularly against women); regulation of local festivities; and control over funerary rituals by ruling who can be mourned (GMH, 2011; Céspedes-Báez et al, 2014).

Framing Colombian socio-political violence in a peace-war continuum in which people might experience moments of peace followed by times of war; or where the experience of the armed conflict and the different overlapping forms of violence became part of the

everyday, allow me to look at the transformations of the conflict over a long period, the waves and discontinuities of it, and the changing positions of the actors involved. In contexts of prolonged and degraded armed conflicts, such as the Colombian conflict, in many cases victims became victimizers and victimizers became victims, hence the boundaries between positions of victimhood and perpetration, 'the bad and the good', the 'ally and the enemy' are blurred (Orozco, 2005: 172).

Naming the women

In 2013 after reading one of my drafts Luisa Dietrich called my attention to the politics of naming in my writing. While I had incorporated the official discourse of 'legal' and 'illegal' armed groups used in Colombia to name the different actors involved in the armed confrontation, she described the guerrillas as politico-military organisations, or as insurgent/subversive organisations. Luisa made me realise that as a Colombian citizen, I had internalised dominant discourses used in the official narrative to talk about the conflict. Luisa, as a Peruvian/Austrian citizen was able to detach herself from the patterns of representation dominating Colombian public sphere.

The names applied from above to armed organisations and its members have changed over time. The process of naming has been influenced by national and global politics, changes in the DDR policies and programs, and in the dynamic of the confrontation. The political prisoners released in the 1980s in the framework of the amnesty between the guerrillas and Betancur's government were called *amnistiados*. In the 1990s the guerrilla members who signed peace agreements were named 'rebels', 'ex-combatants', reintegrated, or demobilised. From 1994 onwards combatants from the guerrillas still in arms who joined the program of reintegration to civil life as individuals, or as a result of the disarmament program with the paramilitary (2003-2005), had been called: *reintegrados* (reintegrated), 'individually demobilised' combatants, *beneficiarios* (beneficiaries), and *desvinculados* (detached) when making reference to children (Villarraga, 2013). In 2012 the ACR changed the name to *participantes* (participants), an aseptic term that erases any political agency behind both, the reasons for waging war (economic, political, and social structural violence) and the decision of leaving the armed organisation and choosing peace (FJB 2, n.d).

Wo(men)'s experiences of DDR has been mainly named by the state's programs and practitioners, academics, and national and international NGOs working in the field. Some of the population that signed peace agreements, and who 'benefited' from the DDR programs in the country since the 1990s to this day assumed the labels applied to them from above, others refused to use any of those labels and tried to leave their past behind and start afresh sometimes by denying their old identity. Few of them have had the opportunity to narrate and name the experience in their own terms, or to contend those labels in the public domain.

As Dale Spender (2000) points out in her feminist analysis of naming:

> Those who name the world have the privilege of highlighting their own experiences - and thereby identify what they think is important. Thus, groups that have a marginal status are denied the vocabulary to define (and express) their own experiences (...). Naming is the means whereby we attempt to order and structure the chaos and flux of existence which would otherwise be an undifferentiated mass. By assigning names we impose a pattern (...) which allows us to manipulate the world (Spender, 2000: 195 as cited in Bhatia, 2005: 9).

During the meetings of the Network definitions such as 'demobilised', 'ex-combatant' were constantly contested and re-negotiated. In the Third National meeting of the Network (26-28/10/2012) some women addressed the necessity of questioning the 'language imposed' from power positions, as the people who put down the weapons in the 1990s, and made peace agreements, 'are not reinserted nor demobilised', but signed a political pact in which five politico-military organisations and the government agreed to achieve through democratic not armed means, changes in Colombian institutions (Chinchilla, 2010: 8).

During the meetings of the Network another field of contestation emerged when several women started to challenge the name 'ex-combatants'. According to Alix Salazar they decided to call themselves Collective of Women Ex-combatants in order to acknowledge their past and their role in Colombian democratic transformation, which for their generation was impossible without weapons (Restrepo, 2008). But almost 25 years after the demobilisation some women from the Network disputed the concept 'ex-combatants', as it does not define their current identities, personal and political struggles. Others pointed out that they are still 'fighting' (without weapons) not only pursuing the old

revolutionary dreams but also for everyday survival and because of that they are 'combatants'. Besides the boundaries of who is considered an 'ex-combatant' have expanded during the last fifteen years. The 'individual demobilisation' of male and female soldiers of the FARC and the ELN, and the disarmament of paramilitary units has made the population of 'ex-combatants' much more complex in composition (Network Third National Meeting, 26-28/10/2012).

Debates around naming are central when discussing identity. Firstly, many women made reference to the importance or/and the difficulties of 'recovering' their 'real' names during the transition from armed to civilian life. Secondly the definition of who was considered a member of the politico-military organisation and named as such is a discussion that, as the Collective highlighted, was influenced by patriarchal conceptions of what counts or not as 'political work'. Thus although men and women performed similar roles and tasks as militants, militias, collaborators, and combatants, women's political work was in many cases invisible when it was performed in spaces considered private or intimate. In consequence during the process of disarmament and transition from armed to civilian life many women whose work was fundamental for the survival of the guerrilla organisations were left outside the DDR benefits as they were not considered 'combatants' (Colectivo de Mujeres Ex-combatientes, 2012: 17).

During the last ten years women from the Collective and the Network have began to call themselves *insurgentas* (female insurgents) as a way of acknowledging their rebel past as armed insurgents, and their present inconformity and struggles for a more egalitarian and fair society as unarmed insurgents. In this context *insurgencia* (insurgency) is understood as a 'feeling and way of thinking that promotes action, political thinking, and the search for an inclusive society, with social justice, respectful of human rights and responsibilities', a way of 'conceiving and living politics' (Colectivo de Mujeres Ex-combatientes, 2012: 12). In addition, by naming their memories as insurgent memories they want to make visible that memory is a site of resistance and political contestation. Women ex-combatants such as María Eugenia Vásquez advocate for the construction of multiple memories that challenge official versions of the socio-political violence in the country, and in which women's experiences as *guerrilleras* have a place (Colectivo de Mujeres Ex-combatientes,

2012: 135). This construction entails including marginalised voices and versions of what had happened; and questioning the names and labels that have been applied from above to the events, its roots, and the people who took part in the confrontation.

In this work I privilege the use of the names and concepts used by the women to describe and conceptualise their experience of being part of a guerrilla organisation, and the life after laying down the weapons. I use the term militancy (militancia), to make reference to women's experience of participation (armed or not) in politico-military organisations. By acknowledging the names and words women use to refer, narrate, describe their experiences, and problematising the politics of naming used by governmental, national and international groups and organisations, and by the guerrillas themselves, I want to make visible the inequalities in representation and how they permeate discourses in the public sphere, and as a result impact on the politics of memory.

Writing this account of Colombia's almost sixty decades of armed confrontation was a draining and emotive process. The accumulation of events, actors, the changing dynamics, the devastation, grievances, and pains, as well as the catastrophic nature of the events compelled me to accumulate facts and explanations in order make sense of what had happened, producing (in the writer and the reader) a sort of exhaustion. While writing this chapter I wondered about its effectiveness, and the place of us (me and the women), our voices and stories in it. The little pieces of paper, the fragments, that are part of the archive we built about the armed conflict are not pieces that, assembled together, may contain 'the imagination of the whole' (Das, 2007: 5). On the contrary, what these fragments made evident is the impossibility of such imagination. They allude to a particular way of inhabiting the world in which the bits of bodies and material, the rubble, the pieces, are picked up in order to find out how or whether to go on living after devastation and catastrophe (Cavell, 1994: 75-76 as cited in Das, 2007: 5-6). This account about Colombian socio-political violence is incomplete and made of fragments (vignettes), not only because of all the voices that are absent but also because the flux of time and events constantly reshape the landscape of the confrontation. I am aware that this account is centred on the affectations of the socio-political violence and the patterns of victimisation. The same story can be told in different ways depending on

the perspective of the narrator, female ex-combatant, peace activist, human rights defender, political scientist and the different fragment he/she will put together. By writing it I wanted to give the reader a feeling of the socio-political violence taking place in Colombia, and the complexities of the peace-war continuum in the country. In the next chapter I look at women's experiences and narratives of mobilisation and becoming members of politico-military organisations.

Chapter Five
Women's pathways of becoming *guerrillerras*

I'm a woman, I am poor, I'm Colombian, I'm from a region, I'm old
and I didn't choose any of those things, Imagine!
I didn't choose any of those.
but my political stance, that one I DID choose
(Elena - ELN, Fokus Seminar 29/08/ 2012)

*

Let me see, I left when I turned 15, I turned on January six
I went [to the guerrillas] mainly because of all the problems in my house,
I'm not the daughter of my parents,
they are parents, but only adopting parents,
and it upset me that everybody knew I was not their daughter and I was the last one to know
Anyway I knew, but I wish they had sat down with me to tell me

And problems
They scolded me for nothing, for nothing they scolded me, beat me...
Well with a cousin, two girlfriends and a boyfriend we went
We had talked about going

Yoana: Why did you decide to go?

Because one does the first thing...
to leave the house you do the first thing...
And as they [the guerrillas] stood there
You like... you don't...
'Look I'm going there, because that's the only way out'
And you don't see other methods (...) but you go straight there
(...)

Yoana: You knew people from the organisation?

Yes, because they used to come to your house:
'Give me water', 'sell me this sell me that'
(Carolina – FARC, 2004)

This chapter looks at Colombian women's pathways into politico-military organisations, how they make sense of their decision to mobilise into a guerrilla army, and the main elements around which they arrange the lived experience of becoming a *guerrillera*. I do not build an explanatory theory of Colombian women's mobilisation into revolutionary groups,[56] my focus is on the narratives

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[56] Florez-Morris (2007) explores Colombian wo(men)'s reasons for mobilisation into revolutionary groups.

women build about their reasons for becoming. These narratives are central in women's processes of making sense of the experience, their *memory work* (Kuhn 2000), and they allow us to see the interactions between the individual and the social (Personal Narratives Group, 1989: 6). Understanding women's narratives of becoming as part of their memory work, which according to Kuhn (2000: 284) takes an 'inquiring attitude' about the past, in which what is remembered is not taken as the transparent or authentic 'truth' but as a material for interpretation to be interrogated for its meanings and possibilities, allows us to see narrators' self-definitions, and the importance of the context (political, institutional, and personal) in which the narratives are produced and interpreted.

Although, for analytical purposes, women's accounts were separated into becoming, being, leaving, and life beyond, this division does not necessarily reflect their personal narratives about the experience. Some women have a seamless narrative of insurgency in which these four moments are different stages in their political and social militancy, and being *insurgentas* (female insurgents) is part of their core identity. For women from the old insurgencies the separation between becoming and being a *guerrillera* is sometimes blurred and is presented as a shift of intensity of their involvement in radical politics, usually narrated following three routes: the entrance into the mountains to join the rural ranks, running away from the family home against their parents' will, and performing the first task as militants. In the case of women individually demobilised interviewed in this thesis, becoming and being are two distinct moments usually marked by the act of leaving their family or community to join the guerrilla ranks, thus they make a strong separation between the life 'here' (as civilians) and the life 'there' (in the guerrilla ranks). The narratives articulated by the women were produced in the context of unstructured and semi-structured interviews, as a result the fragments presented here are not necessarily answering a particular question, but they are threads that have been pulled out of the broader tapestry of their telling for analytical purposes.

Understanding women's pathways into revolutionary organisations

Various authors have approached mobilisation into terrorist organisations (Dearey, 2011), high-risk activism (Viterna, 2006), and revolutionary activism (Kampwirth, 2002) from different perspectives (criminology, sociology, revolution theory). But all of them point to the limitations of causal and functionalist approaches to explain radicalisation or participation in political violence (Dearey, 2011), and Latin American women's mobilisation into politico-military and revolutionary organisations (Viterna, 2006; 2013).

Kampwirth (2002), in her study of women's participation in revolutionary movements in Central America, explains women's mobilisation into revolutionary activism as the result of the combination of four factors: (1) Structural changes, such as land concentration and augmented insecurity for the rural poor that spawned patterns of migration to the cities. (2) Ideological and organisational changes, like the emergence of Liberation Theology, and changes in guerrilla warfare tactics which in the late 1970s resulted in the active recruitment of women (Kampwirth, 2002: 14, 135; Wickham-Crowley, 1992). (3) Political factors, such as the repressive responses from the state to social organisation and protests which led many women and men into more radical activities. And (4) personal factors like year of birth, family background of involvement in political and resistance movements, or participation in social networks (student groups, grassroots organisations, trade unions, church groups) (Kampwirth, 2002: 14, 135). Kampwirth (2002: 6) concludes that women joined guerrilla organisations for the same reasons men did: to end dictatorships or authoritarian regimes, create more just countries for their children, put an end to the exploitation of the poor and indigenous peoples.

Viterna (2006; 2013) points out that one of the weaknesses of macro and meso level explanations of mobilisation is that they assume that mobilised individuals are a homogenous group who follow one path into participation (Viterna, 2006: 1-2). Macro level explanations include: the existence or not of revolutionary potential activated under certain political, historical or economic conditions;

network analysis which connects macro and micro (personal) levels, and social psychological theories founded on 'identity based mobilisation' (Viterna, 2006: 5). She advocates the use of 'micro level theory' in tandem with macro and meso level explanations of women's mobilisation into high-risk activism. Both Viterna (2006, 2013) and Kampwirth (2002) show that women's mobilisation in El Salvador was the result of multiple causes that, combined, led (or not) women into the FMLN guerrillas. Viterna (2006) concludes that women embedded within similar identity-producing networks and structural contexts took three different paths into political participation: Politicised guerrillas, women who joined the revolutionary struggle because of their total conviction to the political reasons for it (Viterna, 2006: 21). Reluctant guerrillas, women who were 'pushed into the guerrilla camps because a crisis left them with no other options' (Viterna, 2006: 24-25). And recruited guerrillas, women who lived in guerrilla strongholds or areas of influence and were 'persuaded' to join the organisation. They adduce two common reasons to mobilise: the search for adventure and retribution (Viterna, 2006: 30).

The interviews conducted in the framework of this thesis and research work on the topic led by different scholars in Colombia – using gender as an analytic category – (Dietrich, 2014; Esguerra, 2013; Medina, 2009; Ibarra, 2007, 2008; Londoño et al, 2005; Leliévre, et al., 2004; Blair et al, 2003; Sanchez-Blake, 2000), allow me to draw similar conclusions to the ones reached by Viterna (2006) and Kampwirth (2002). Firstly, women (ex)combatants are heterogeneous; secondly women's mobilisation into politico-military organisations is the result of multiple, interrelated factors and cannot be reduced to a single vector; thirdly Colombian women have followed different paths inside and out of the politico-military organisations; and fourthly the historical and cultural context in which they joined and left the organisation, and the moment in which the narration took place, are central to understand their experiences and stories. In the next section I explore in more detail how women's narratives of becoming make visible these four interrelated elements.

The heterogeneity of women combatants and ex-combatants

The dynamics of the socio-political violence influences the process of becoming and being female guerrillas and the life beyond, thus the historical moment in which mobilisation and demobilisation takes place is an important and sometimes overlooked factor (Viterna 2006; 2013). As stated in previous chapters women from the old insurgencies broadly fit in two generations defined, among other factors, by the tactics employed by the politico-military organisations (*foco* strategy and Prolonged Popular War strategy), the 'spirit of the times', and the cultural shifts that influenced their mobilisation (Wickham-Crowley, 1992; Kampwith, 2002; Amizande & McAdam, 2001). In this section we are going to see how pathways of becoming are influenced by generational differences, geographical and class locations.

<u>Urban women from consciousness raising to guerrilla life</u>

Some women were university students, from working and middle class backgrounds when they became involved in radical politics. They were among the hundreds of young Latin Americans who gained access to University education from the 1970s onwards (Pearce, 1990; Kampwirth, 2002). Some of these women began their process of becoming before leaving high school or at public universities where they made contact with the student movement and different branches of the left that had 'study groups' at universities, popular neighbourhoods, or towns.[57] Women like Diana, Lucia, Sara, Claudia, and Magda among others link the start of their political and social activism to their secondary school and university years. It was while engaging in student activism that many women got in touch with armed collectives, and after sometime dropped their university studies in order to become guerrilla members. To the question `tell us about your armed experience` Sara (EPL), answers,

> Since a very young age I was inclined towards things of that sort
> and I began with a group of friends from a *barrio popular* (working-class neighbourhood), here in [name of the city]...

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[57] Marxist-Leninist, Maoists, the Trotskyists, anarchists, among them.

By 'things of that sort' she means that she was 'inclined' towards social and communitarian work. At 17 she began to do grassroots organising with a group of friends, particularly with a girlfriend from secondary school with whom she shared similar interests. It was in the process of creating a *nocturna*[58] that she started 'in that stuff'. Once the school was put into motion after several 'fights' with the local education board she combined her work as a teacher with other activities in the community,

> [I worked] with the community board.
> I was part of the cultural committee, of the work committee, the building...
> I was doing *barrial* [neighbourhood] work.
> As you are active
> people from the politico-military organisations start seeing you,
> and start courting you.
> One of the boys working in the neighbourhood began to tell me that there were other study groups...

Once at university Sara began to 'feel the necessity of having a stronger commitment, more serious'. In an evaluative tone she links this search with the times she was living in,

> Now I can see that you lived and you live in the midst of an ongoing war.
> But at that time you felt the necessity to directly take part in that war,
> With a very altruist, messianic attitude, and you almost programmed periods...
> Because in the literature you used to see experiences where the revolution triumphed
> And insurrectional moments took place...
> And for you to take part more directly, to go to the monte,[59] to take the weapons, it was to have a more serious commitment
> At that time we viewed all the ones going [to the mountains] with great admiration.
> (Sara – EPL, 2004)

Feelings of admiration towards the 'ones in the mountains', as well as religious and spiritual feelings such as altruism and messianism, feature prominently in the narratives of some women from urban and middle-class backgrounds who joined revolutionary organisations. As the revolutionary project was not only aimed to

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[58] *Nocturnas* are primary or secondary schools for adult's education, they run at night time between 7 p.m and 10 p.m.
[59] *Irse al monte* (to go to the mountains) means joining the guerrilla rural ranks.

transform society but also the revolutionaries themselves, the feelings expressed by Sara placed the revolutionary struggle and her decision to go to the mountains within a higher moral framework that fostered her mobilisation and strengthened her commitment.

Other women like Lucia, stated that although they began to attend study group meetings since high school, at that moment they did not have a deep political understanding. It came later as a result not only of the readings, central in the consciousness raising process, but also of the affect ties that began to grown with the comrades and the organisation. When asked `Why you joined the EPL' Lucia started by making reference to a school's friend who had contact with the organisation,

> I looked at what she was reading and we summarised it.
> I was studying with nuns, and I thought that the [revolutionary] readings had certain magic, certain charm
> Simply because of that affinity with her.
> And we joined a study group, and well...
> I... I did not have a great clarity in terms of political opinions or settings
> in the same way I arrived there [EPL] I could have arrived somewhere else and I would have stayed.
> And when I had gained a consciousness about the different [ideological] stances, I had so many affective ties...
> That was my life, my purpose, and leaving to join a different one... no
> (...)
>
> I think you arrive very fortuitously at that experience
> But I did, I don't know if after, before, or during
> You build an entire social sense, the commitment to change, to transform.
> I cannot tell whether it was prior or simultaneous
> But it began to be built around my life project.
> (Lucia – EPL, 2004)

Lucia makes visible that affective ties and emotions are as important as ideology and politics in the creation and preservation of networks of insurgent organisations, and in the process of collective and individual mobilisation (Amizande & McAdam, 2001; Goodwin, Jasper & Polleta; 2001). The bonds of trust, loyalty, affection, and alternative kinship relations, are tied -in some cases- previous to women's total commitment with the guerrilla group (Goodwin et al;

2001). Furthermore, as Amizande & McAdam (2001: 21) suggest emotional ties and commitments help to understand the willingness of people involved in high-risk activism to endure suffering, self-sacrifice, torture and death. It was during the process of socialisation that many members of politico-military organisations received ideological training about inequality, injustice and revolutionary ideas (Florez-Norris, 2007: 620).

Claudia, who joined the guerrillas in 1972, was 17 years old and was studying Economics. Like Sara, she believed that the revolution was going to take place in the mountains. But while Edith, Consuelo and Nelly joined the guerrilla army in the framework of the triumphant environment generated by the Cuban revolution, Claudia joined in the middle of the grieving atmosphere generated by the assassination of Salvador Allende in Chile (Valencia, 2010). A feminist activist, member of the Colombian women's movement, Claudia is one of the few women who recalled the influence of second wave feminist debates on university female students who began their militancy during the 1970s,

> All those [university] Marxist groups
> and the women that came from that university practice...
> were more free thinkers
> influenced by all the social debates
> and the new world paradigms:
> the feminism that was born in the 70s
> the struggle for sexual freedom,
> all that permeated to some extent
> the women who were there
> (Claudia – CRS, 2006)

For women who were urban students the role of friends and contact with other people, and ideas were central in their process of mobilisation. The affinity and affective ties created with future comrades also played an important role on women's narratives of their early contacts with left wing politics and ideas.

Most of the urban women interviewed were already militating and doing political work in left-wing legal collectives and study groups, and some had considered the armed struggle as the only path to follow. But the highly clandestine nature of the

politico-military organisations meant that they were not always aware in which branch of the left-wing political spectrum they were located, that they were being recruited, or that they had been already admitted as members of a guerrilla organisation (Florez-Norris, 2007: 625). That was the case of Salome. When narrating her entrance into the M-19 she states that she was coming from the Marxist-Leninist field, and was doing political work with the father of her two baby daughters. A friend 'invited' them to a meeting with a group of workers, popular sectors and intellectuals; as a result they created a cell in which Salome was the only woman. After a year of doing political work in order to gain their entrance into the M-19,

Saul arrived with another comrade and announced that, better they warned us, that we were an M-19 cell. Surprise, happiness, and fear all at once, arrived without notice into my disconnected body (Salome, Photo-diary).
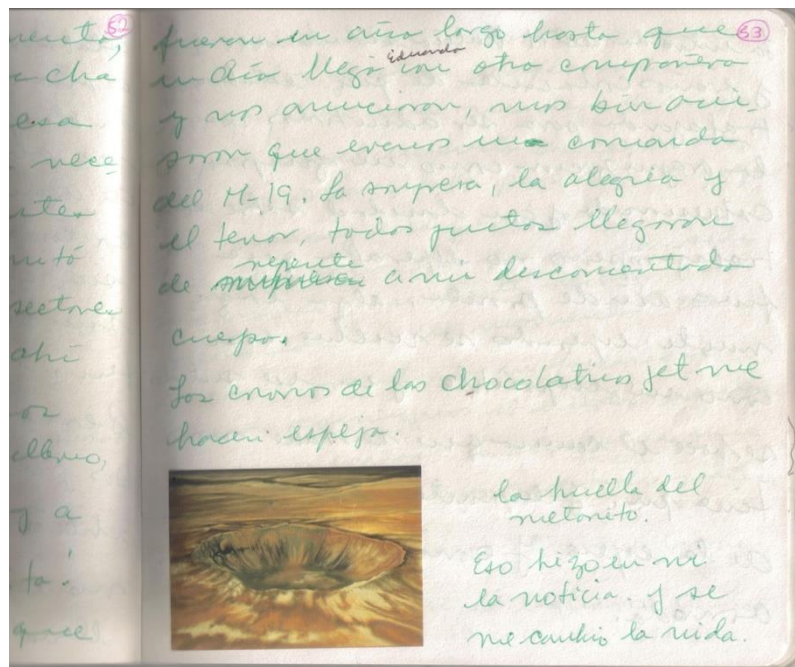

Image 21 - Salome's photo-diary.

(…) The footprint of the meteorite, that is what the news [of being part of an M-19 urban Cell] made in me, and my life changed.

Salome's surprise does not come from being unaware that she was part of an urban cell, but because of the short-time (one year) it took them to become members of the M-19. For urban militants in the 1970s and 1980s, entrance into the armed organisations was not a straightforward process, but they had to pass through different stages before they 'proved' that they could be trusted and were suited to begin their armed life as guerrilla members, a moment Salome had been waiting for so long that it 'seemed impossible' (Florez-Morris, 2007).

Political persecution a way into the mountains

Semi-rural women also began their process of becoming due to contact with new people, ideas, readings and other cultural artefacts such as music. In 1977 Patricia, aged 17, became a rural teacher in a hamlet near to her home town. There, after attending a teacher's assembly, the representative of the teacher's trade union 'introduced' her to Marxist-Leninist readings and the ideas of Oscar William Calvo, the commander of the EPL. Readings were central in the process of becoming and consciousness raising, and are at the centre of many women's stories of becoming. Rita was also in her late teens and recently graduated as a *Normalista*,[60] she started working as a teacher in a village where the EPL guerrilla had influence, it was there where she became involved with the politico-military organisation,

> When I went to the guerrilla I went...
> I abandoned...
> I have been appointed in a school
> And while being there in the school I abandoned...
> I left my post (laugh)
> And I left
> And my mom believed I was at the school
> But yes, I was appointed... and I left...
> Because that little village, it was really influenced by the presence of the guerrillas
> (Rita - EPL, focus group 26/1/ 2013)

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[60] The *Escuelas Normales* are schools directed to educate 'future' teachers. They were created in 1821 as part of the republican project after the country gained independence from Spain. Although they have endured several reforms over the centuries they still exist today (Zuluaga, 1996).

Rita's narrative has two sides, on the one hand it can be read as a counter-narrative because she defied gender norms by not acting as she was supposed to, instead she rejected normative constructions of what it meant to be a good daughter and employee, and defied the political and social order by joining the guerrillas (Personal Narratives Group, 1989: 7). On the other hand her narrative is an account of the ways in which politico-military organisations influenced the dynamics of rural communities in the 1970s and 1980s. In the village where Rita was a teacher the EPL 'persuaded' the mayor to appoint members of the party or the politico-military organisation as teachers, and covered the role of the state by sending educators to rural schools,

> As there were not appointed teachers the [organisation] negotiated with the owner of the *Finca* (estate) ()
> With... the *gamonal*, the landowner.
> And the teacher had to live THERE, teaching, first with the community...
> What did they used to do?
> During the day they worked with the children, and during the night they did all the alphabetisation work with the adults,
> the [political] study circles...
> (Rita – EPL, 2013)

During the day time Rita taught the children in the school and during the night she did literacy workshops with people from the community, and was in charge of 'visiting different villages' 'doing intelligence' work. Rita like many other teachers, students, trade unionists, and members of grassroots, peasant and community based organisations, started their militancy doing 'legal' political work. But repression and persecution from the state, landowners, and local elites pushed them into the military rural ranks of the politico-military organisation.

> The majority of the teachers, we, the ones who took the risk of going and doing that at that time,
> ALL of us we had to... we had to...
> we were in their sights, and we had to go to the *monte*, we went inward [to the guerrilla ranks]
> (Rita – EPL, 2013)

This pattern was repeated in other Latin American and Central American countries (Kampwith, 2002). Other women interviewed in this thesis who were

part of the social movement in the 1970s and 1980s took the path into the mountains due to similar reasons. Ignacia, whose father was a small land tenant, became involved with the ANUC and the struggles of the *recuperadores de tierra* (land recoveries), but she had become too visible, 'they put a price on my head' (Colectivo de Mujeres Excombatientes, 2012). As she was 'more burned than a newspaper' she had to fly into the rural ranks.

A different pathway, followed by semi-rural women in the mid-1980s, is outlined by Eva. Being twenty years old and the single mother of two children she got a temporary job in one of Uraba's banana plantations, where she began to hear about the EPL, about the trade union, and 'people talking about the revolution'. Trade unions, student associations, peasant organisations and other types of social organisations were some of the spaces where guerrilla groups would look for new members, as this guaranteed that the person was interested in social issues (Florez-Norris, 2007: 624). But the banana trade union was not the only place where the EPL had influence, they were also known by the peasants of the region, thus when Eva finished her contract and went to work for her aunt on a farm she met people from the organisation,

> At the time…
> The EPL used to go a lot to the *fincas* [farms] …
> Military people used to go to the farms to organise meetings with the people
> To explain the reasons for the war and all that…
> And one night I met them.
> I met the commanders, I met the militants.
> And that same night I decided to join them.
> (Eva – EPL, 2004)

Eva was not accepted by the guerrillas at the time because, as one of the commanders told her, there was the possibility of having a clash with the army as she did not know 'how to handle a weapon' the EPL did not want 'innocent women to die'. A couple of years later she managed to make contact again with the EPL and in 1985 became a *miliciana* (urban militia). Eva's narration is interesting not only because it delineates the path followed by women workers in regions such as Urabá but also because of tensions in the narrative in terms of gender

constructions, and the multiple explicative strings of becoming she pulls into the story. For instance, in her relationship with weapons and the idea of women as innocent she reproduces stereotypes about women's place in war, and depicts tensions between the armed way and politics.

Not all the women who mobilised into revolutionary organisations became rural guerrillas. Like Eva many of them lived their militancy in the urban areas as *milicianas*. Urban and semi-urban women who joined the rural ranks, at the beginning of the militancy or later because they were *quemadas* (burned or discovered) and had to become clandestine, build richly descriptive narratives about their 'entrance' into the rural world. They talk about how different it is from the 'normal' world, the landscapes, green colours of the jungle, the romanticised encounter with the peasants and the rural militants, the first march/walk, the arrival into the camp. They stress their 'unpreparedness' for that world by talking about the inadequacy of their bodies, clothes and shoes. Others centre their attention on the hardships of the new life, the difficulties of transforming a civilian female body into a warrior body, and the new everydayness: cooking for the troops, bathing in the river, guarding the campsite. Although sometimes this transformation is traumatic due to the nature of the experience of forging a new body, a warrior-body, it is endured as part of the sacrifice needed to become proper revolutionaries.

Changes in revolutionary strategies and women's mobilisation

In the 1980s, when women such as Carmenza, Alejandra and Eva joined the ELN and EPL guerrilla, the Cuban revolution (and revolutionaries) was surrounded by a mythical aura. Che Guevara was immortalised in popular culture by Ernesto Korda's photos (Nieto-Valdivieso, 2010), and in songs such as *Hasta siempre Comandante* (which still to this day is sung by university students). He was the incarnated symbol of the revolutionary ideal, the 'New Man', which men and women taking part in revolutionary movements across Latin America aspired to become. Thus when the women mentioned above joined the armed struggle in the early 1980s the 'spirit of the times' had changed.

According to Carmenza she and other people of her generation were influenced by the Nicaraguan revolution. For them it was essential to strengthen the mass movements, the new social movements, and build *Popular Power*.

> At that moment we were clear that
> We had to put all in the cities
> In the political movement
> ()
>
> we had all that Salvadorian and Nicaraguan influence
> the combat in the streets
> the barricades
> the popular *paros* [strikes]
> thus it was like a fever for the cities
> (Carmenza – CRS, 2006)

But not all women mobilised into insurgent groups in the 1980s did it for political reasons. Juliana joined the EPL in the 1980s when she was 14 years old and had no previous involvement in political or communitarian activities. She went straight into the rural ranks as a base combatant and trained as a nurse once in the guerrillas. As in the case of other children her motives for joining the organisation were not linked to left-wing ideologies but 'the problems at home', the term she used to describe the domestic violence she received from her mother.

Rita is aware of how generation shaped the patterns of mobilisation into the EPL,

> I think you have to look at this with an intersectional gaze
> (...)
> Ignacia belongs to a different generation
> [She] belongs to the generation of the *luchas campesinas* (peasant's struggles)...
> The struggles of the land takings...
> She was part of that organisational process
> in my time I went to teach literacy, and then I went to...
>
> (...)
>
> However Juliana... she went straight into the militia, right?
> There are three different profiles
> (Focus group 26/1/2013)

Although Rita (55 years old), Ignacia (late 70s), and Juliana (38 years old), were from a peasant background, lived in the same region and joined the EPL, all followed different pathways, which were to some degree determined by their generation. Rita and Ignacia began their militancy, as stated before, doing legal, political and communitarian work, but had to become 'clandestine' and join the rural ranks. In contrast Juliana's motives for mobilisation were not ideological. She joined the EPL in a period during which the organisation needed more combatants to strengthen its military capacity. Like other rural militants recruited during this period (i.e Bella and Viviana – EPL) she did not have to pass through different stages in order to be accepted or prove her capacity as a combatant, among other things because in the rural areas the process of recruitment was more open and straightforward (Florez-Morris, 2007: 626). Her motives for joining the guerrillas (as we are going to see in the next subsection) are close to the ones used today by girls and women individually demobilised: looking for adventure, liking weapons and military life, revenge, escaping poverty, domestic and gender violence, or established presence of the guerrillas in the community. Aurelia is aware that some EPL ex-combatants' lack of political consciousness is linked to the recruitment process during the military expansion of the organisation, especially in rural areas, where young girls and boys were 'invited' to join the ranks without previous political preparation (focus group, 25/1/2013).

Other rural and semi-rural women and girls followed similar pathways to the ones taken by Rita, Ignacia and Juliana. When looking at the experiences of the different interviewees it becomes clear that women who mobilised for ideological reasons were more likely to engage in social, political, and community organising once they left the politico-military organisation. Despite belonging to different generations (old insurgents and individually demobilised) women and girls who joined the guerrillas for non-ideological reasons do not necessarily participate in political, social, cultural activities as civilians; some did not have a critical stance on the socio-political and economic forces at play in the country at the moment of the interview.

In this section I have argued that women from the old insurgencies came from diverse socio-political and economic backgrounds. Some were middle and working class university students; others were trade unionists or members of left-wing political organisations such as the Communist Youth and the Communist Party. Others were rural or semi-rural young women who had contact with or were members of social and peasant organisations such as the ANUC; rural teachers or girls growing up in areas with connections to the social movements and different guerrilla organisations. Most of them joined the politico-military organisation in their teens or as young adults, although a number of them joined the group in their mid-twenties, early thirties. Five of the women interviewed across the different research projects joined the organisation as children aged between nine and thirteen years old (Elvira, Leticia, Lilian, Sol, Rocio – M-19). Three women who participated in the focus groups in the Caribbean were between twelve and fourteen years old when they joined the guerrilla organisation (Bella, Viviana and Juliana – EPL). And a few of them belong to ethnic minorities (indigenous and afro-Colombian). Their militancy took place in both urban and rural locations and their becoming, as well as their life after leaving the organisation, was shaped not only by their gender but also by their generation, geographical location, class, and the 'spirit of the times' they lived by.

Girls and the guerrilla's military expansion

The individually demobilised women interviewed are more homogenous. They were rural or semi-rural, from very poor families, with low education levels (none of them had completed secondary education), and lived in militarised areas occupied by guerrilla or/and paramilitary groups. Most of them were children or teenagers at the time of joining the guerrillas, mobilised for non-ideological reasons, and had run away from the organisation or had been captured by the military. Their militancy took place in the rural ranks and some had never been in a city before their demobilisation.

All of them joined the guerrillas between 1996 and 2005, in the context of what the Historical Memory Group (2013: 156) has called *Los años de la tragedia*

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humanitaria (the years of [Colombia's] Humanitarian Tragedy), as the Colombian conflict not only escalated but also degraded. Their becoming is linked to FARC's strategy to strengthen its military power and territorial expansion which started in the mid-1990s. The need to increase the number of fighters resulted in the recruitment of women and children to occupy low rank combatant positions. In 1991 the FARC had 48 military fronts and 5,800 combatants, by 2002 the organisation had 62 military fronts, 28,000 combatants, and controlled 60 percent of municipalities in the country. Although the ELN did not have a military expansion like the one shown by the FARC, it had been able to sustain military actions and recruitment of combatants in several regions of the country (GMH, 2013: 162).

I am aware of the limitations of my sample. There are other reliable sources that make reference to female (and male) university students who are urban and rural militants of the FARC and the ELN (FJB, 15/11/2015). The books and news articles written about Tanja Niemeyer, known as FARC's Dutch girl (Botero, 2014, 2011; Valencia & Zumpolle 2010; BBC, 2013), and the interviews with Laura Villa (Duzán, 2013), and Sandra Ramirez (Grogg, 2012) part of the FARC peace delegation in Havana, allow us to have a glance at ideologically mobilised active female guerrillas.[61]

Laura Villa is an example of the presence of middle-class, university students in the FARC today. Laura, was studying medicine at the *Universidad Nacional* and left her studies to join the guerrillas in 2002. She gave similar reasons to those used by women from the old insurgencies to join political-military organisations: 'to change things', the total conviction that the 'armed struggle was the only way to do it', and the impossibility of bringing change about through 'political means' (Duzán, 2013). When questioned about how she encountered the realities and 'degradation of war' (landmines, kidnappings) Laura answers,

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[61] These interviews are possible due to the historical and political context in which they are framed: the ongoing peace dialogues between the FARC and the government, which started in 2012.

I'm no fool. When I joined I knew it was for life. And that it was not going to be easy either physically, psychologically or militarily. When you go to the FARC you are given ideological training and you are taught that it is a political organisation, and that the rifle is a necessity because political means failed. (…). I do not regret having entered the FARC.
(Villa Interviewed by Duzán, 2013)

Similarly to Laura, Tanja's reasons for becoming are alike those used by politicised militants across Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s,

I was 21 (…)
I saw the poverty in Colombia and I was really impressed by that.
I started to question the capitalist system
I started to question everything around me…
(BBC, 2013)

Tanja goes onto say that the armed struggle was the only option available,

I didn't choose to use violence
I chose to do politics in a country where doing politics implies violence
(BBC, 2013)

Finally Sandra Ramirez, made visible women who have been members of the FARC for more than thirty years. From a peasant family, Sandra joined the organisation aged 17 (Grogg, 2012). She sustained that according to calculations made by the organisation 'at the moment more than 40 percent [of its combatants] are women. There are not women in the national directorate, but there are some in the Central High Command and intermediate echelons. And at company level, there are women in leadership positions' (Grogg, 2012). Alicia (2012) who was a member of the ELN gives a similar proportion of women in that organisation, and talks about the presence of middle-class, university women in the rural ranks 'working with the computers', and 'teaching' literacy to the combatants that 'didn't know how to read'.

It is important to remember that Tanja, Laura and Sandra are active guerrillas and are part of the FARC's delegation in Havana, thus they are spokespeople of the organisation. They are aware that their answers are going to circulate in the

public sphere, therefore in the interviews they reflect not only on their personal views but also the group's ideology.

In this section I argued that the historical moment influenced women's pathways into revolutionary activity. Women from the old insurgencies interviewed in this thesis are diverse in generation, ethnicity, political stance, education, and class, among others. Individually demobilised women were more homogenous due to the limitation of the sample, and because the rapid military expansion of the guerrillas in the 1990s influenced the patterns of 'recruitment'.

Multiple factors leading to mobilisation

A second common finding is that women's mobilisation into politico-military organisations in Colombia, like in other Latin American countries, is the result of multiple, interrelated factors. This is why, when looking at women's narratives of becoming, disentangling structural, contextual (political, ideological, and cultural), and personal/biographical elements is difficult. As stated before, they are interrelated and it is the combination of all of these that could fully explain women's mobilisation as *guerrilleras*.

But while in most of the narratives built by women from the old insurgencies these four factors have similar weight, and are part of the analysis and evaluation they made about their experience; for individually demobilised women personal factors outweigh other motives of mobilisation, and in most of the cases are not linked to ideological reasons. It is my location of the narratives in the frame of Colombia's socio-political violence that makes visible the political factors, as well as the structural, ideological, and organisational changes influencing their process of becoming *guerrilleras*. Let me illustrate this point by looking at two becoming narratives: Elvira who militated in the M-19, left the organisation during the 1990s peace agreements and is a member of the Collective of Women Ex-combatants, and Alicia who joined the ELN at 17 years old in 2001 and 'deserted' in 2007.

The conversation with Elvira took place in her house, and instead of following an interview guide we talked about the themes she identified to tell her story in the photo-dairy.

> I made a list of the photos
> Ahhh, of course, one was the *barrio* (neighbourhood) G*,
> because it was in G*'s hills where I started my life with the eMe.
>
> Ahh no, first is my family, the eMe's friends, the exhibition.[62]
> the exhibition is the life today,
> the travels I did with women,[63] and the jobs I have had [after laying down the weapons].
> the pains, loves and joys,
> hope.

Elvira does not give a reason for becoming a member of the M-19 and narrates the experience in present tense. Past and present are intertwined in her narration which has one starting point, her 'first contact' with the M-19 aged nine years old. In her narrative of becoming she presents some of the structural changes that were taking place in Colombia due to the rapid urbanisation fostered by the arrival of rural migrants, the processes of land invasions, and the creation of shanty neighbourhoods on the outskirts of Bogotá (Pearce, 1990: 119-164).

> I arrived in the *Sur Oriente*[64] in the 80s, in May 1980
> I arrived there in the neighbourhood, in G*
> I was nine years (…)
> And at that time, I estimate that around June, July… the people from the eMe[65] appear.
> At the beginning I didn't know that they were from the eMe.
> They appear invading the houses in G*[66]
> (Elvira – M-19, 2012)

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[62] Since 2009 each year in April a group of women from the Collective and other ex-M-19 members, organise a photography exhibition about the history of the organisation in Bogota's main square (Plaza de Bolívar) (Collective's meeting 04/10/2012)

[63] She is making reference to the trip she made in 2000 with the Japanese NGO Peace Boat.

[64] Bogota's South West. From the 1950s onwards the population of the area grew when peasants, displaced by the bipartisan violence, started to arrive and settle in shanty neighbourhoods. As a result, the *Sur Oriente* has been marked by poverty, unemployment, lack of basic utilities such as electricity and sewerage (Alcaldía de Bogotá, 2014).

[65] The militants of the M-19 call the organisation the eMe.

[66] The houses were part of a program of social housing and most of them were empty, as they had not been yet assigned to any family.

As stated before, mass mobilisation was one of the ideological and organisational changes in guerrilla warfare tactics that fostered women's participation at the end of the 1970s and beginning of 1980s. Elvira's narration of her 'first contact' with members of the M-19 gives the reader details about how mass mobilisation was done: the methods used by the militants to enter the communities and gain their favour, the kind of social and community development work performed by the militants in the neighbourhood, and the 'cover stories' used to conceal their belonging to a guerrilla movement.

> Among the young people who stayed [after the invasion] was a couple.
> Their names were Andrea and Antonio.
> And they began to organise the people,
> the invaders... they started organising like...
> Some things.
> They organised a choir () and we joined it, with other children.
> And that's how it all starts.
> (...)
> [They] gathered the children to sing around the nativity
> And that was their excuse to organise the people [of the neighbourhood]

Elvira's experiences as a child growing up in the outskirts of Bogotá underscores the importance of left-wing politico-military organisations in the rise of Colombian social movements. Her narration gives an account of the role of M-19 militants in the process of land invasions made by the *Destechados* (people without roof) movement in the 1970s and 1980s in Bogotá (Colectivo de Mujeres Ex-combatientes, 2012). In her description of the dynamics of the land invasions she analytically reflects upon the role of children in the process:

> We understood that children were very important in the invasion,
> because it was with the children that it was possible to occupy those lands.
> They always took children to the invasions
> (...)
>
> Yoana: What was the role of the children?
>
> We arrived in the neighbourhoods and while the parents and all...
> (...)
> We [children] would stand around and sing while they quickly armed the things,
> they put on the piece of plastic, the four wooden posts, and made their house

That way if the police arrived the children were almost the first line that was…
It was assumed that [we were] protecting the grownups
[children's presence] appeased the environment because [the police] couldn't mess with them
(Elvira – M-19, 2012)

As with other women who joined old insurgent organisations as children, Elvira invests her childhood with a strong sense of agency, political and personal factors are merged in her narration. Elvira's mother was the neighbourhood's *capitana* (captain/leader) of the ANAPO[67] party, and it is through that political activism that she 'met' the comrades of the M-19. She sums ups her first encounter with the organisation as the result of two factors, the arrival of the comrades with the invaders and the encounter with members of the *anapistas* who were at the same time militants of the M-19. In Elvira's words her house became 'one of the eMe houses', this means that comrades from the organisation who needed a temporary place to hide, or were doing grassroots and political work in Bogota's *Sur Occidente* lived there. She constantly repeats that her first encounter with the organisation took place when she was nine years old, and that is the age of becoming around which she built her auto/biographical account.

Elvira's story of becoming encapsulates her encounter with the M-19 and the social, economic, political and personal context in which the story took place. The political is present in small details of the everyday: her mother's political options and how this shaped hers and her siblings' life; the revolutionary messages in the lyrics of the carols they sung in the choir led by the eMe comrades; the process of organisation of the neighbours to solve their basic necessities or invade lands to make their houses. It is not only her story as a child whose life was touched and changed by a politico-military organisation, but also the story of her *barrio*

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[67] The ANAPO was a legal political party founded in 1965 by Gustavo Rojas Pinilla as an answer to the growing discontent with the National Front. It almost won the presidential elections in 1970, but a legitimacy crisis was produced when members of the ANAPO accused the state of manipulating the results to benefit the conservative candidate Misael Pastrana (1970-1974), who was declared the winner (Londoño et al, 2005:18). One sector of the ANAPO interpreted this event as an expression of the closeness of the political system and a justification for the armed struggle. This sector was expelled from the ANAPO and became the socialist ANAPO, which later, with a group of urban guerrillas and other popular sectors, formed the M-19 (GMH, 2013:129-130).

(neighbourhood) and the impact of the organisation on it. In her story the personal is not only political but also communal, the self is built around the biological family, the *barrio*, and the 'big family', which is the revolutionary organisation.

Like Elvira, Sol and Rocio joined the eMe at a young age. They experienced domestic violence, in the case of Sol, and sexual abuse, in the case of Rocio. Nevertheless both of them articulate the story of becoming not around their abuse but around the rise of their political consciousness. Rocio's narrative is framed by the trauma of the sexual abuse she was a victim to since she was five years old, being an unwanted child, and extreme poverty. In her account she tries to identify in her childhood self the 'values' of the politico-military organisation,

> At school... Despite all the things I was living I had a very noble heart
> (...)
> At that time they distributed little cards, this size (...)
> and with that you could get school meals, but you had to go to claim the meal cards.
> And the Catholic Church used you,
> because to get that meal card you had to go to mass every Sunday.
>
> But [at school] there was a boy who always caught my attention, he was very...
>
> He was [an indigenous] peasant, and he didn't speak Spanish[68]
> And he never ate anything
> And I wondered,
> -Why does he never eat anything?
> So I used to give him my meal cards
> And mom beat me because... I gave away my meal cards.
> (...)
> then the child could always eat and I always helped the one who was more...
> who was suffering more (...)
> (Rocio – M- 19, 2012)

Like Elvira, Rocio confers a sense of agency to her child-self, and introduces some elements to allow the reader/listener to comprehend the narrative world she builds to make sense of her experience as a member of a revolutionary

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[68] Rocio has an indigenous background and grew up near to indigenous communities. Although she called herself indigenous like, her ethnicity is not an identity she claims.

organisation (e.g. revolutionary values such as self-sacrifice). As in Elvira's narrative for Rocio the personal is a political construction that not only reflects her own story but gives a sense of collective experiences of poverty, hunger, injustice, solidarity, struggle to survive, and resistance. Elvira and Rocio are examples of narratives of becoming in which women from the old insurgencies merge personal, political, ideological elements with Catholic values/imaginary and structural elements to build an explicative framework of their decision to join revolutionary organisations.

Alicia's story is a different kind of becoming narrative, usually employed by women individually demobilised who joined guerrilla organisations as children. These narratives are mostly centred on personal reasons for joining the guerrillas. I describe these narratives as non-ideological because these women do not frame their reasons for becoming using left-wing ideological frameworks. Nevertheless, as we are going to see, the living conditions they and their families endured (poverty, exclusion, discrimination, unemployment, lack of access to education and decent housing), were not only push factors into the guerrilla ranks, but are the result of governmental policies, state abandonment of the rural areas, structural socio-economic and political inequalities, and the dynamics of the armed confrontation, thus the conditions under which they became mobilised are deeply political. Besides the structural sexual, gender and domestic violence that shaped their lives is a political issue linked to the gendered dynamics of the armed conflict and Colombia's patriarchal society. As Forcinito (2004) suggests in Latin America State repression and domestic violence are juxtaposed. Women ex-combatants' bodies have not only survived political violence but also domestic, sexual and gender violence. Although most of the women individually demobilised have a certain degree of awareness about the inequalities and injustices that shaped their lives and the lives of their families (Mary – FARC), in their stories of mobilisation they do not make connections between the personal aspects and the political aspects of the experience of becoming (i.e narco-economics, land distribution, corruption, socio-economic inequalities).

I contacted Alicia through the person in charge of the jobs area at Bogota's Mayoral Program of Assistance for Demobilised People. We met on a Saturday in what I thought was a central location, easy to find for any person living in Bogotá. But Alicia, who had arrived in the city just six months before with her partner and three children, did not have a single idea of where the *Museo Nacional* was located. A friend loaned me the keys to her office and at ten in the morning we sat down in the empty building with two cups of instant coffee in front of us. Alicia spent the whole interview hugging her bag very tightly against her body and sitting on the edge of the chair, as if she was ready to stand up and run away at any moment (FD 2, 29/9/2012). She narrates her decision to join the ELN in a few sentences, the narration lacks context and details, and is full of silences:

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Yoana: tell me about your life before joining the group
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My life... I left the house...
I left the house when I was 12
Because of problems ... I didn't live with...

That is it, I didn't grow up with my dad.
but with a stepfather.
Then as he tried to...
To...

abuse me and I didn't...,
and I didn't share that.
And I told my mom and she didn't believe me.

From then onwards I started working alone, at my grandparents.
And... there appeared... someone... who...

That is it, at the moment one doesn't know that.
I mean at that time one doesn't know who he is.
Then he fell in love...
I mean, we both fell in love and he inv...
and then I went there to... the savannah, which is in S*.
And from there I went and entered the *Sur de Bolivar*,[69] working.
And in the Sur de Bolivar I fell in love with a boy and...
()

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[69] *Sur de Bolívar* is a geographical region located in the foothills of the San Lucas mountains range. 40 percent of gold exploitation in the country is performed in the *Sur de Bolívar* (Restrepo, 2012: 6).

and I joined the guerrillas, and he is the one with whom I live right now.

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Yoana: and he was a guerrilla member?
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Yes ()
()

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Yoana: and he is the father of your children?
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Yes, [the father] of my children ()
()
(Alicia – ELN, 2012)

Alicia's narrative of becoming not only conceals the personal, social and political framework in which she joined the guerrillas, but also attempts to explain her decision in what she thinks is the 'right' moral framework to tell her story to a total stranger. Although at the beginning she tries to articulate the sexual abuse she was a victim to, at the end she centres her story on the tropes of 'falling in love' with a man, being unaware of his involvement with the ELN and of the full meaning of her decision to join the guerrillas. Although later in the interview she stated that her father's family had relations with the guerrillas, it was in the photo-diary interview that took place six months later, when a more complex story emerged (Image 22, page 166).

```
Yoana: tell me about the photos
```

This... is an uncle
He was killed.
He was killed by...

I mean, he worked with the guerrillas, he was the one that...
He carried weapons for them...
and...
and the *paracos*[70] investigated him, and caught him, and killed him.

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Yoana: One of your uncles?
```

They killed him
The day he was killed the *paracos* pretended they were guerrillas
and arranged a meeting with him, where he used to meet with the guerrillas.

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[70] Colloquial term for the paramilitaries.

And he went, and he had a horse, and he went on his horse, and the horse came back alone.
Afterwards the family went looking for him... and he was there
They had killed him.

Yoana: When that happened you were in the guerrillas?

Yeah, I was inside

```
Yoana: the first contact you have with the group was
through your family?
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 Yes, through my family.

The silences and the silenced in Alicia's narrative hint at the personal details of her reasons for becoming, the sexual abuse of her step-father, her desire of revenge for that, and her family's relations with the ELN guerrillas. But the contextual elements that give depth to her lived experience and mobilisation are concealed.

Alicia does not show in her narrative a political understanding or awareness of the different factors that shaped her life and territory. Hers is an individual narration, isolated from the structural changes that shaped her community, the ideological elements that generated not only changes in the guerrilla strategies of recruitment but also the entrance of paramilitaries in the region, and political factors such as the long story of social organisation and mobilisation in the *Sur de Bolívar* (Duarte, 2011; Restrepo, 2012). Although Alicia tells us that her father's family used to collaborate with the ELN guerrilla, she does not link their involvement with the organisation with the fact that historically the *Sur de Bolívar* has been a stronghold of the ELN (Restrepo, 2012).

Image 22 - Alicia's photo-diary

The picture Alicia is making reference to in the interview is the
photo of a portrait hanging on the wall of her relative's house.
It is the kind of paid family portrait people from popular, and
rural backgrounds take in local photography studios.

Other individually demobilised women interviewed used similar narratives. Most of them appeal to traditional gender constructions that 'justify' women's and girls' violence, falling in love, foolishness, being misled by the guerrillas with false promises, liking weapons but being unaware of what guerrilla life was about. Even though some like Mary show awareness of how their families and communities struggled to survive picking coca leaves, they seem to read their lack of opportunities and the impunity of their sexual abuse, as personal catastrophes rather than as political issues, and do not reflect about the impacts of the coca-economy and the war on drugs in their lives.

Otero (2006: 180) has also pointed to individually demobilised girl's lack of ideological reasons to explain their mobilisation into guerrilla organisations. Instead they appeal to feelings such as being 'bored', search for 'adventure', the 'desire of being respected', and liking the militia. Otero (2006: 182) suggests that young people's use of emotions such as boredom to justify their mobilisation is the result of structural social relations, and a way of expressing their disillusionment with the lack of prospects for personal growth and social mobility offered by Colombian society. In this sense, despite their reasons for mobilisation not being articulated in left-wing ideological terms, they are linked to political, social, and economic issues, and show the agency behind rural women's and girls' decision to join the guerrillas.

There is not a single explanation behind the differences identified in the stories of both groups of women. Nevertheless a central factor that influences their narrative is the framework in which their process of demobilisation and reintegration took place. Hoyos' (2011) ethnographic analysis of the life-histories built by individually demobilised men and women in the context of the reconciliation program funded by Bogota's Mayoral office gives some clues in that respect. According to Hoyos (2011) the life stories built in the framework of the reconciliation project are influenced by the tensions in which the narrators are immersed. As a result their narratives are framed in the particular setting established by the current national policies of DDR and influenced by two main

moral frameworks: first the military narrative deployed by the Colombian army in its media campaign directed to promote the 'desertion' from the guerrilla ranks, which 'execrates the past, showing the demobilised person as deceived by the armed groups, and now reconstituted in productivity and family' (Hoyos, 2011: 48). Second the local government narrative '*explaining* the past, that shows a subject conditioned by the social [environment], who joins the armed groups as an option and is now in a present in which the civilian social links have been restored' (Hoyos, 2011: 48).[71]

Different pathways

Most of the women from the old insurgencies interviewed joined revolutionary organisations for ideological reasons (i.e., to transform Colombian society, to widen democracy, to take over power and put into motion a socialist project). But some of them, particularly rural women and girls who joined the guerrillas as children like Juliana and Rocio, did it for non-ideological reasons such as survival, or escaping domestic and gender based violence. Thus it is possible to say that their reasons for becoming are closer to the ones adduced by individually demobilised women like Alicia, and they fit in with what Viterna (2006, 2013) calls *recruited guerrillas*. Although their motives for mobilisation are not articulated around left-wing ideological discourses they cannot be considered apolitical. This is why women's mobilisation in this thesis has been organised, as we are going to see in the next subsections, around two pathways: politically mobilised female combatants, and recruited or non-ideological female guerrillas. Although in Colombia girls and boys are forcedly recruited, none of the interviewees (even the ones who were children at the moment of mobilisation) explain their lived experience by using that category.

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[71] Italics in the original.

<u>Politically mobilised female combatants</u>

Politically mobilised women joined the revolutionary organisation for ideological and political reasons. They performed political and military tasks, were urban and/or rural militants, and came from different backgrounds. Some like Edith followed the whole route as sympathiser, collaborator, pre-militant, before becoming an ELN guerrilla (militant).[72] Others were doing legal work but had to join the rural ranks in a rush as a result of state repression. It is important to clarify that becoming narratives of politically mobilised women have different levels of elaboration depending on their degree of political understanding, education, and class background. Although in their evaluative remarks many women highlight the political aspect of their involvement in the organisation, affective ties with comrades, family members and friends, as well as emotions such as anger, hope, admiration towards revolutionary men and women, and romanticism play a central role. This is because friendship ties between members of an organisation, and feelings such as frustration, anger, hope, the search for happiness and personal realisation could foster collective action (Amizande & McAdam, 2001). Furthermore, as Bolívar (2006: xviii) points out in contexts of armed confrontation political identities are invested with emotional charge.

Sjoberg & Gentry (2007: 33) stated that women who engage in proscribed violence are portrayed as joining 'terrorist' organisations for emotional reasons. Many of the women interviewed in this thesis give emotional and political reasons to explain their participation. As recent studies (Amizande & McAdam, 2001; Elster, 2001; Goodwin, et al, 2001; Della Porta, 1998) about the role of emotions in social movements argue, emotions are not limited to the realm of the intimate and apolitical, they are also the product of social interactions and express common meanings, cultural values, and beliefs that influence collective action, and play a central role in the individual and collective level of social mobilisation. Besides, the emotions deployed in the stories of becoming provide insight into the sensual

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[72] The name given to these different stages and the process of becoming a member of the politico-military organisation varies depending on the group.

and seductive aspects of engagement in radical politics and proscribed violence, and the moral emotions (i.e humiliation, righteousness, arrogance, ridicule, vengeance, defilement) linked to the process of mobilisation (Katz, 1988).

I argue that in some cases women's ideological, 'rational' political arguments are not only linked to feelings but emotions are a way of putting into words political experiences such as exclusion and the search for democracy. For instance, one individually demobilised woman adduced seeking revenge against the state as her reason for joining the FARC at the age of 18. Her partner and father of her children was, according to her, one of the victims of the *falsos positivos* (extra-judicial killings) perpetrated by the military. In her case I read 'revenge' and 'rage' as political because her emotions are informed by the awareness of the violation of their human rights and the injustice they were subjected to, allowing her to frame her mobilisation and participation in the guerrillas as a righteous cause (Katz, 1988: 23). Women's political emotions make visible the feminist assertion that the personal is political, the link between politics and affection, and the embodied character of politics. The emotional character of women's political narratives requires further analysis because as Kaminsky (1993: xv) points out, for us, Latin American women, the political is also personal due to the ways in which state power, and unofficial and official policies are played in our bodies and expressed in our individual lives. Hamilton (2010) made a similar finding in her study of ETA members.

For politically mobilised women, networks were central in the process of becoming, there could be existing networks like family ties with left wing parties and social organisations: Ruth's father and Elvira's mother were members of the ANAPO political party, both women militated in the M-19. Carmeza's uncles were members of the Marxist-Leninist political party MOIR, she became a member of the ELN; Naira's parents were *recuperadores de tierras* (land recoveries) and fighters for the rights of indigenous people, she joined the indigenous guerrilla Quintin Lame. This is because sometimes political family histories could lead to one or all of their members involvement in radical politics, in this thesis it was

possible to link in some cases families' political activism and women's mobilisation into the guerrilla group (Dearey, 2010; Florez-Norris, 2007: 262-268). As Dearey (2010: 285, 290) points out families play an important ideological role in society because they can reinforce, reproduce and transmit (or challenge) traditional cultural values through mechanism such as the socialisation of children, and patterns of daily interaction.

Family ties made visible the political power of affection in political mobilisation and the weight attributed by many women from the old insurgencies to the 'Christian values' of their catholic families, which they equated with revolutionary values such as their commitment to social justice, sense of solidarity, and sacrifice with the poor and the 'weak', and the importance of stoicism (Hamilton, 2010: 87). Magda is an example. She started her process of political awareness being 14 years old with her siblings. To the question `why did you join the EPL and no other organisation?' she replies,

> I can't say like people who studied at the *Nacional*[73]
> Who had [contact with] the whole spectrum [of politico-military organisations].
> We lived in a village where we [she and girlfriend], and the boys [her brothers], moved all the cultural activity.
> (...)
>
> It was like when you fall in love for the first time, the one [you fall for] is the one you have in front of you,
> You don't have the possibility to choose among twenty, right? Maybe yes maybe no.
> But really it was like love at first sight.
> And the lack of a range of different possibilities.
> It was later that I discovered the existence of other organisations.
> And I believe that the emotional and affective side was very important, thus ehhhh...
>
> I saw my brother as a hero.
> My brother was a hero and the people who were there [in the mountains] giving their lives to change this country, for the poor... Imagine!
> Thus really...
> Later I began to understand the differences among the organisations.

[73] Universidad Nacional.

> But I believe that if my brother had joined the ELN, I would equally be in the ELN.
> (Magda – EPL, 2012)

In this fragment Magda gives us several elements to consider. First, she frames her decision to join the organisation using metaphors of love. Other women from the old insurgencies used similar tropes to build counter-narratives that destabilise traditional accounts of women's participation in politico-military organisations, such as falling in love for a man. Secondly, Magda states that during the militancy she understood that the origin of the guerrillas was not linked to poverty and misery but to political exclusion. This political understanding was built during the experience of becoming and being and not a pre-given condition for her militancy. Finally, like other women from the old insurgencies like Lucia and Nelly she did not actively 'choose' the organisation she 'ended' up in it. In many cases the decision was, as Lucia put it 'fortuitous', they joined the organisation that was 'close' or 'available' for them. What they chose was to make the revolution, an experience that was shared and articulated around metaphors of love for the people, and lived in tandem with the construction of friendships and solidarity networks. Thus in some cases the choice for mobilisation cannot be completely separated from the intimate bounds created in the process.

The only woman interviewed who refused to adhere to other armed collectives where mobilisation was easier, as they were closer to her, was Alejandra. She joined the ELN in 1982 at 19 years old, because ideologically it was 'the most radical' organisation, the one that wanted to make 'bigger changes',

> The ELN captivated me in many ways
> One,
> I think it had a socialist horizon,
> That the M-19 didn't have,
> (...)
> And I thought it was not worth making...
> a revolution to make very small changes,
> like conquering a very imperfect democracy (laugh).
> But the revolution must be done to change everything,
> the structures the ways in which we relate everything.
> (Alejandra – CRS, 2006)

The ELN was not 'available' (having established presence) in the university where Alejandra studied, thus she actively 'looked for them'. As a result her narrative of becoming mirrors the plot of the search for the Promised Land and like Magda uses tropes of affection and romantic love,

> I said
> This is the organisation I like.
> Although I didn't know anyone,
> I mean someone in flesh and blood.
> I knew the ELN after years of loving them.
>
> It was 1981 when my platonic love began,
> and I started the search for the ELN.
> In all the discourses I tried to...
> figure out whom in the region could be...
> But like the ELN was the most clandestine of all,
> at least in my university,
> that mystery halo
> increased my passion
> (Alejandra – CRS, 2006)

Magda and Alejandra, like many politically mobilised women who joined 'study groups' at university were already members of social organisations, trade unions, study groups, or were doing cultural activities when they came into contact with more radical activities in those spaces. In the 'study groups' they 'read philosophy, politics and literature, watched movies, and listened to music; [we] debated, and learned to understand the world with different eyes' (Colectivo de Mujeres Ex-combatientes, 2012: 75). In the case of rural and semi-rural women the contact with the guerrillas took place in their homes, farmlands, or hamlets, where the guerrillas used to do political work. In that sense geographical and ideological proximity, are important elements in their narrations. Their process of becoming cannot be separated from the lived experience of consciousness raising that *contact* with new ideas, readings, and people generated. It is not surprising that many women do not frame their becoming in a set of articulated political theories but using tropes of affection, emotion, and 'interest' in social and cultural activities.

Finally, Magda and other women from the old insurgencies root their social consciousness, and their option for the poor and the disadvantaged in the Christian values of their upbringing. They link the revolutionary values with Catholic values, compare the militancy to monastic life, and narratives of becoming such as the one built by Sol resemble the hagiography of martyrs I imagine she read at the nun's school. In the case of the ELN liberation theology and Christian Base Communities were central not only in the process of mobilisation but also in maintaining the organisation going through hard times (Nieto-Valdivieso, 2010). Edith, Claudia, Nelly, Alejandra, Consuelo, all ex-members of the ELN talked about the role played by clergymen and women, and laypersons, in that politico-military organisation. In a critical reflection about the experience Fabiola states that in the guerrillas that appeared in the country in the 1960s 'Marxism was taken by the revolutionaries as dogma, not as a theory with a development and a dialectical application, it was not difficult to swap the bible for the theories born in Europe' (Colectivo de Mujeres Ex-combatientes, 2012: 138). Florez-Norris (2007: 623) also found that wo(men) ex-combatants pointed to the similarities between guerrilla and religious movements (rituals, messianic leaders, desire to make the word a better place) (Florez-Morris, 2007: 623).

Most of the women were involved to different degrees in semi-clandestine, or unarmed 'revolutionary' activities, and had been in contact with revolutionary groups, before the moment they signal as their 'official' entrance into the different guerrilla organisations, however they tend to build the moment of becoming around three main events: the first entrance into the guerrilla camp in the mountains; the moment of leaving the family home and in some cases breaking relations with the family; and the first operations and tasks performed as members of an urban cell (Nieto-Valdivieso, 2010).

Recruited or non-ideological female guerrillas

Non-ideological female guerrillas, are women and girls who were 'pushed' into the insurgent organisations by motives other than explicitly ideological ones, such as survival, lack of resources and opportunities, attraction towards the military life,

looking for adventure, running away from domestic, gender, sexual violence; or seeking revenge.

> I think that you end there because of the situation you are living at the time.
> I used to live in Quindío
> I lived with my mom and my step-father.
> And I didn't like the life my mom gave me.
> I mean, after she moved with my stepfather she began to beat me,
> she gave me a horrible treatment
> (…)
> My dad used to live in *Los llanos*[74]
> And I told my mom 'I want to go to my dad'.
> Because I didn't want to live with her and my stepfather any more.
> (…)
> But in Quindío we knew nothing of the guerrillas, nothing, nothing.
> (Lina – FARC, 2012)

Most, if not all 'un-political' militants, were children or teenagers at the moment of mobilisation and lived in guerrilla strongholds. In this sense geographical proximity was central to their involvement with the politico-military organisations. Lina is a good example, from living in a county with little guerrilla presence she went to live with her dad in an area controlled by the FARC, it is there where she began to be recruited at the age of 14,

> I went to *los Llanos*, my life was nice with my dad, with my dad and my stepmother I had a very nice life.
> But the *guerrilleros*[75] used to come to the house every day,
> My dad collaborated with them,
> And they invited me every day: 'let's go...'
> And I, 'no! I'm not going with you, I'm not going, I'm not going.
> And they insisted so much that my dad said to me:
> 'You're going back to your mom, I'm sending you to Quindío'.
> (Lina – FARC, 2012)

Most of these girls were recruited by members of the organisation, or in their own words they were 'persuaded' to join the guerrilla. Mary who joined the FARC aged

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[74] The *Llanos Orientales* are a geographical region on the border with Venezuela.
[75] Male guerrillas

eleven said that the guerrillas *le endulzaron el oído* (approached her with sweet promises).

> First of all, the initial contact was…
> there were three *guerrilleros*, and they made me sweet promises.
> [they said] that life there was very nice, that there I was never going to have bad times,
> So they said.
> And you know that when one is a kid, when one is a young one…
> One believes everything.
> (Mary – FARC, 2004)

Some of the women who joined the guerrillas being girls use verbs and expressions that in Spanish make reference to courtship to describe the relationship established with the group and its members, which contrast with the lack of care (emotional and structural) experienced in their families and communities. For instance, a central feature in the narrative of some of them is the lack of motherly love as a reason to join the organisation. Fathers are usually absent and when they appear they are the figure of the 'molester' step-father thus sexual violence at home is another common reason for becoming. By explaining their mobilisation using feelings of isolation, lack of affection, and violence at home, girls made visible that some privations experienced by Colombian youth are not necessarily economic. As Otero (2006: 185) points out these emotional explanations are not banal, nor do they lack political grounds; on the contrary they are an indicator of children's and adolescents' lowest status and power in society, and their need to solve other human necessities beyond survival.

Lack of resources, extreme poverty, and gender and sexual violence are elements shared by all the women interviewed in this thesis who followed that pathway. According to the study *Como corderos entre lobos* (Springer, 2012: 11, 20-21) boys and girls recruited by guerrilla and paramilitary groups in the framework of Colombian armed conflict are from more vulnerable segments of the population, and their families were directly affected by the socio-political violence. Among the different structural variables that shaped their vulnerability are, illiteracy, being school drop outs, adolescent pregnancies, poverty, hunger and malnutrition, lack

of infrastructure to answer children's needs, domestic violence and sexual abuse, and abandonment (Springer, 2012: 11). A pattern shared by child soldiers in other conflicts across the world (Dupuy & Krijn: 2010).

Forcefully recruited women and girls are those who joined the organisation against their will. This is a very difficult definition to use, especially when making reference to women who joined the guerrillas as children. I do not use this category in relation to the women interviewed in the framework of this thesis because they were categorical in stating that they followed the group by their own volition. I know this is a risky decision, particularly when making reference to women who joined the guerrillas as children. They were living in highly militarised zones - some of them controlled by guerrilla organisations. They, their families and communities were not only close to the group but immersed in its dynamics of cultural, political, and military control. I am also aware that some girls were 'groomed' and 'courted' by the guerrillas until they finally 'agreed' to join the organisation, which suggests a level of coercion. Lina is a good example,

> [The guerrillas] invited me, invited me, and I said I'm not going, I'm not going.
> At the end I say okay I'm going.
> They were a mixture,
> they were rank guerrillas, commanders… they used to go to [father's] house, when they saw a girl then they went more often!
> Every single day they came for sure.
> -'The *paisa's*[76] daughter arrived, we're going to take her with us'.
> And I [said] 'no, I'm not going'.
> In the end I said that I will go [with them].
> I told my dad, 'Daddy I want to go with them' and he said that he wouldn't let me go.
> He said: 'darling you're very little, you…'
> And I was like 'no, I want to go, I want to go, and I want to go'.
> And they [the guerrillas said] 'we aren't taking you…'
> That is why I say that it isn't truth that they [the guerrillas] take them [girls] against their will.
> I mean in the front where I was it wasn't like that.
> They told me,
> 'if your dad let you go, as you're under age, if your dad let you go we take you with us, if not we don't touch you, we don't take you'.

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[76] Name given to people from the coffee area (Antioquia, Caldas, Quindío, and Risaralda)

After a while of me doing so much crying, and pestering [saying] that I wanted to go with them my dad told me,
'look my child' – he said this crying...
He said 'you're old enough, you know what you're doing', he said.
He said, 'if I tell you not to go sooner or later you will do it, without my permission you will go. Thus this is your decision'.
And with my dad's consent they took me.

That night we walked all the night
All the night
And on the way I cried, cried, and cried
They told me 'if you want we take you back to your home'
And I [replied] 'no, I want to go with you'
I don't know why I was crying if I wanted to go.
(Lina – FARC, 2012)

In her narration Lina portrays herself as an 'agent', she was the one who made the decision of becoming a member of the FARC. Even though she stated that she was willing to go with the guerrillas, her story of mobilisation ends with her crying during the walk to join the troops in the mountains. Lina's tears contradict her story of agency, maybe deep in her soul she 'knew' that she did not want to become a *guerrillera*. Her story points to how concepts such as 'grooming' (children, family and communities) (MacAlinden, 2006) when looking at children's mobilisation and children's conscription (Dupuy & Krijn, 2010), complicates the notions of children's agency (Oswell, 2012), and makes visible the different ways in which children and young adults' capacity of consent can be exploited and manipulated (Pearce, 2013: 53).

Most of the women interviewed in this work who joined the guerrillas as children build similar narratives of agency and repeatedly stated that they were not forced into the guerrillas. This is why I decided to depict them as non-ideological or recruited militants and not as forcefully recruited. As Carlos Otalora, a civil servant of the ICBF, pointed out not all the children were forced into guerrilla and paramilitary organisations, some of them joined because of 'invitations' made by their peers (FJB 3, 23/11/2012). The words of Carolina used to open this chapter illustrate this point. Melina who joined the FARC being 12 years old with her two best girlfriends is another example,

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Yoana: why did you join [the FARC]?
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I was studying, third year of primary school,
And I have a couple of girlfriends and they had boyfriends there [in the guerrillas]
And I was their best friend; I was the youngest and their best friend.
And they began to invite me, to tell me that the life there was very nice, that their boyfriends were going to help us.
That as soon as we got bored of it we can come back.
(Melina – FARC, 2004)

Nevertheless, forced recruitment of children by all the actors of the armed conflict (State's armed forces, paramilitaries and guerrillas) has been denounced by different governmental and non-governmental organisations such as the ICBF, the *Coalición Contra la Vinculación de niños, niñas y Jóvenes al Conflicto Armado en Colombia* – COALICO (Coalition against the involvement of boys, girls and youth in the armed conflict in Colombia), and the Ombudsperson. Otalora also highlighted the lack of reliable statistics about the real scale of child-soldiers in the country (FJB 3, 23/11/2012). Springer (2012: 30-31) states that 81 percent of boys and girls interviewed in her study reported joining the organisation voluntarily, while only 11 percent said they were forced into the armed organisations. I make reference to armed organisations because the study includes boys and girls recruited by the guerrillas, and the paramilitaries. Interestingly it does not offer data about adolescents recruited by the Colombian army.

In legal terms the 2008 Colombian Constitutional Court stated in the Auto 251 of 2008 that children's recruitment is always forced and as such constitutes a crime. According to the GMH (2013) voluntary recruitment is only 'apparent' as the different organisations in arms take advantage of children's vulnerability, their poverty, and lack of access to basic rights (GMH, 2013: 36). The GMH (2013) considers that the violent conditions under which children are recruited and kept in guerrilla and paramilitary organisations: 'mostly against their will, with no right to express their opinions, and forced to become victimisers are enough reasons to dismiss the idea of boys and girls joining these organisations by their own will' (GMH, 2013: 36).

Despite the arguments presented above the scope of this thesis does not allow me to go into a deeper analysis of boys' and girls' recruitment in the country, nor develop a more elaborated discussion about the forced or not character of girls' participation.[77] All the individually demobilised women interviewed, who joined the guerrillas as children, were adults when our encounter took place and as such their account of the experience is narrated from a different subject position to the one they had when they joined the guerrillas. Their view is retrospective and in some cases evaluative, thus it is mediated by their experiences after leaving the organisation, the context of the DDR program, Colombian political environment, and the moral frameworks available to them. Besides, as Sjoberg & Gentry (2007: 16-17) point out, feminists' understandings of responsibility recognise that choices are constructed by context, and as such are complex and sometimes involuntary. In this framework of 'relational autonomy' the analysis of wo(men)'s, as well as children's decision to join politico-military organisations, need to take into account that choice is not completely free, and that autonomy is tied to relations of interdependence, intersubjective construction, and power.

Moreover, as Dearey (2010: 161) points out, children are aware to some extent of the political circumstances they live in. Many women politically mobilised were children when they became involved in radical politics. Magda stated that she and her brothers were 'just children' and the revolution was 'like a children's game'. Although in their evaluative accounts of becoming many women from the old insurgencies narrate with a sense of surprise their age at the moment of becoming, and use metaphors in which the revolution, or their first steps in the politico-military organisation are like a 'children's game', their telling is influenced by their present location: their children are adolescents or young adults, and some of them have become grandmothers. Women like Sara who became involved in radical politics at 17 years old (the same age as her eldest daughter at the moment of the interview) stated that her teenage daughters belong to a different generation not

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[77] During the past decade literature on children's recruitment and DDR in Colombia has mushroomed, see: Springer, 2012; Y Care International, n.d; Bjorhaug, 2010; Montoya, 2008; Moreno, Carmona & Tobón, 2010.

prepared for such engagements. With these narratives women from the old insurgencies not only assign political significance to their childhood as the locus of their radical future (Dearey, 2010), but also make visible that the concept of the child-soldier is historically, contextually and politically located and constructed, and linked to the development and implementation of international humanitarian and human rights laws and treaties (Rosen, 2007: 296).

Furthermore, I believe that the image of the forcibly recruited child has been used to de-politicise the socio-political violence and obscure questions about children's and young adults' lack of opportunities, access to resources and basic services, and poverty (just to name some) and the responsibility of the state and Colombian society at large behind them.

Conclusions

Pathways of becoming are helpful to understand women's fluid and multiple locations in Colombian socio-political violence. In this chapter I have shown that, first Colombian women who became members of politico-military organisations are heterogeneous, and their different locations influenced their process of mobilisation and their possibilities and resources to re-signify the experience after demobilisation. Second, women's motives for mobilisation are the result of multiple interconnected factors. Third, not all of them joined guerrilla organisations for political reasons and their choices need to be understood in a context of relational autonomy. Finally although the historical context plays a central role in the pathways of becoming and the reasons for mobilisation, aspects such as class, place of residency and generation are also central to understand women's reasons for mobilisation and the factors that pulled them into radical politics.

The women interviewed in this thesis fit into two main categories, politically mobilised and recruited or non-ideologically mobilised women. Although most of the women from the old insurgencies fit in the first group, in many cases political reasons for mobilisation were not pre-given but were 'built' along the path into

the guerrillas. Readings, music, study groups and contact with other people and ideas, as well as the affections generated in the process are central in women narratives about the experience of political mobilisation. The way in which women re-narrate and re-interpret their experiences as well as the explanatory framework they build are linked to the historical location in which the narrative takes place; the moral frameworks available; the changes in the armed conflict and DDR policies; the composition of guerrilla armies; and the national and international discourses available to explain the exercise of armed violence.

Poverty, scarcity, and difficult living conditions are central in the narratives of many of the women interviewed, both rural and urban, from the old insurgencies and individually demobilised. But their interpretation of poverty is different. Women from the old insurgencies tend to politicise their lived experience of poverty, and make it not only a reason for becoming but a trope to narrate injustice, inequality, and the process of consciousness raising. They also use poverty and scarcity as a trope to invest their childhood with a sense of agency, making visible the presence of the values of the organisation in their childhood, or presenting themselves as different from other people from their generation. In contrast individually demobilised women narrate poverty as part of their everyday life, with little articulation of the political, cultural, and structural, elements that shape their lives. Poverty is not a situation that can be overcome but a condition they and their families had to endure.

In analytical terms these narratives point to the different political locations in which both groups of women are located, and the changes that have taken place in the socio-political-historical, national and international arenas where Colombian conflict is located. While the first ones, during their processes of becoming, and being, developed a strong oppositional consciousness (Mansbridge, 2001), and look at their lives as the result of multiple oppressions; individually demobilised women do not have a strong oppositional consciousness (although some of them developed a sense of the injustices that shaped their lives), which limits their possibility to link their experiences of structural violence

and inequalities with the reason for mobilisation. Besides, individually demobilised women have a narrow moral frame to reinterpret their experiences. In order to be 'welcomed back' as civilians they need to show repentance for their past as guerrillas, erase the agency behind their decisions and present them as 'mistakes', 'bad judgements', lack of opportunities, or appeal to the traditional tropes used to explain women's engagement in violence: falling in love, or being a fool. Having explored some of women's reasons for mobilisation, in the following three chapters (6, 7 and 8) I focus on women's experiences of being members of politico-military organisations.

Chapter Six
The 'New Wo(man)' and the Revolutionary Myth

The aim of this chapter is to introduce women's experiences of being *guerrilleras*, around three broader thematic fields identified both within my corpus of interviews and from literature reviewed: gender order in the guerrilla, the tension between symbolic and biological motherhood, empowerment and agency. I start by looking at the *Revolutionary Myth* as it is the symbolic framework that gives cohesion and meaning to the experience of being. I argue that all aspects of women's life as *guerrilleras* are demarcated by the organisation's values and ethos, and as such regulated by the symbolic framework created by the *Revolutionary myth*. The female body as the site where the experience is lived through is a constant presence traversing across the different topics. The body is the axis around which women guerrilla's experiences are articulated (Londoño, 2005), as it is in the body where the concepts 'woman' and 'motherland' come together (Sanchez-Blake, 2000). When relevant I delineate points in which the experiences of being of women from the old insurgencies and individually demobilised female ex-combatants touch, allowing the emergence of common gendered experiences, or when significant discontinuities appear.

The place where *la militacia* (participation in a guerrilla group) took place (urban units, rural ranks or both) is a central element influencing women's experiences of being. It determined the roles performed by the wo(men), the experiences of the everyday, the kind of relationships and intimacy ties established with other militants, collaborators and civilians, and the ways in which the politico-military organisational ethics and values were embodied and performed. As women's narratives around being a *guerrillera* took place after the demobilisation they are influenced by the context in which the telling took place, the audience, by the evaluation that the women themselves make of the experience and their location in the life course.

The revolutionary myth

The experiences of being of wo(men) who were part of the old insurgencies are framed in what I called the *Revolutionary Myth*, a set of values, systems of representation, heroes, and morals directed to create a common oppositional consciousness[78] with shared rites and ideas. This *Revolutionary Myth* reinforces the revolutionary group cohesion, and the organisation's gender order (Nieto-Valdivieso, 2010). Although the ideas and images of the Revolutionary Myth vary depending on the woman narrator, the revolutionary organisation in which they participated, the context, generation, and education, some elements of the myth are shared not only among the women interviewed but with militants from other revolutionary organisations and revolutionaries across the world (i.e. guerrilla armies in Central America, and European Marxist militants) (Dearey, 2010; Harlow, 1987). For instance, the myths talk about heroic stories of revolutionaries in other countries and times;[79] resistance against fascism, injustice, oligarchy, and capitalism; the clandestine life and tasks linked to the insurgent struggle; the hero or heroine who left home to fight against the oppressors and defend the oppressed (Passerini, 1990: 54). These elements of the myth circulated through cultural artifacts such as autobiographies, songs, poems, cartoons, revolutionary newspapers and magazines (Dearey, 2010; Harlow, 1987).

The *Revolutionary Myth* has a particular temporality that juxtaposes an extreme sense of present, here and now in which life can be lost at any moment, with a strong futurity - making the revolution to create different futures, be that bringing down the established order, a socialist country, or a wider democracy. This temporality produced by the *Revolutionary Myth*, and lived and embodied by wo(men) insurgents is akin in some aspects to the concept of queer temporality

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[78] Mansbridge (2001) states that it is possible to talk about oppositional consciousness when members of a traditionally marginalised group, claim their subordinate identity as a positive identification to 'identify injustices done to their group, demand changes in the polity, economy, or society, to rectify those injustices, and see other members of their group as sharing an interest in rectifying those injustices' (Mansbridge, 2001: 1)

[79] The revolutions in Cuba, Nicaragua and Vietnam. Revolutionary heroes such as Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, Lenin, and Tania.

outlined by Halberstam (2005). It challenged the logic of production and reproduction in the mountains (Dietrich, 2014); its emphasis in the here, present and now, influenced guerrillas' experiences of love and intimacy, and allowed the creation of alternative methods of alliance among comrades. However the *Revolutionary Myth*, did not develop in opposition to institutions of family and heterosexuality.

As myths are highly gendered, they could mediate the traditional and the new, reality and imagination, individual and collective (Passerini, 1989: 191). Hence looking at these symbolic and mythical constructions is central to an understanding of women's experiences of being guerrilla members. The *Revolutionary Myth* has two interrelated components: the revolutionary ethos, and the revolutionary morality. The revolutionary ethos are the symbols and values that the ideal guerrilla fighter should have: sacrifice, high morals, solidarity. It is embodied by mythic revolutionary figures such as Che Guevara, Camilo Torres,[80] and Tania the 'unforgettable guerrilla'[81] (Rojas & Rodriguez, 1971). The revolutionary morality makes reference to the set of norms directed to regulate the lives and bodies of the members of the insurgent organisation, in aspects such as the daily routines of the guerrilla camp, relations among comrades, civilians and 'las masas' (the masses), sexuality, and partnerships. It is rooted in the ideological ties of each guerrilla group (Maoist, Marxist-Leninist, Castrist-Guevarist) and as a result it varies depending on the organisation. The revolutionary ethos and the revolutionary morality are not the same, but some women use these terms interchangeably. Although some individually demobilised women also make reference to the revolutionary morality of the organisation their use of the term rarely includes the ethics and values embodied by the ideal

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[80] Camilo Torres (1929- 1965) is considered the precursor of the dialogue between Christians and Marxism in Latin America. He joined the ELN in 1965 and died in a combat with the army (Broderick, 1987).
[81] Tamara Bunke (1937-1967). Of Argentine-German nationality Tania arrived in Cuba in 1961 'to work for the revolution' and died in 1967 in Bolivia fighting under the command of Che Guevara. By the end of the 1970s she was already a reference for women who joined revolutionary armies in the continent (Rojas & Rodriguez, 1971).

revolutionary fighter. They equate morale with the heavily policed military discipline of the guerrilla army that rules combatant's bodies and minds.

However women from the old insurgencies and individually demobilised female combatants use the term morale to make reference to the 'emotional' state of the guerrilla member, and see it as an indicator of her/his engagement with the cause and the organisation. Having a 'high morale' means, among other things, being ready to go into combat and to give one's life for the cause. It is demonstrated through corporal and mental discipline: keeping the weapons clean, the uniform tidy, and the military equipment ready. A 'low morale' or being 'demoralised' is equated with lack of revolutionary spirit, and being unhappy or discontent in the organisation. Combatants suspected of demoralisation are policed by the rest of the group as they are a threat to the security and the morale of the collective, and are seen as potential deserters. In the guerrilla organisations still in arms a 'low morale' could lead to a court martial. Militants who are found guilty of demoralisation receive different sanctions. According to Mary in the FARC there are two kinds of 'demoralisation': 'surmountable' and 'insurmountable'. The first one is punished with physical tasks such as carrying one hundred journeys of wood, digging one hundred meters of trenches, or cooking for the troops for one month.[82] 'Insurmountable' demoralisation can lead to a death penalty.

In the next section I consider the place assigned to women in the *Revolutionary Myth*. As women have been traditionally defined by their maternal identity I focus on the tensions between symbolic and biological motherhood, and the roles assigned to women *guerrilleras*.

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[82] The FARC use physical punishments to sanction 'misconduct' such as: low morale, disobedience, for domestic violence between partners, and pregnancy (although men and women are sanctioned women are more likely to be punished than men, or endure forced abortions). When the sanctions involve tasks such as carrying 100 journeys of wood the task is performed in different shifts, usually during the little spaces for leisure available in the ranks.

Female heroism and motherhood

The Revolutionary Myth is governed by the 'phallocentric logic'[83] that characterises heroic myths in which the male hero is celebrated for his courage, strength, independence, determination and willingness to engage in forbidden behaviour (Samuel & Thompson, 1990: 17). In contrast women can become heroines only by following two paths: embracing and defending the values of Womanhood or becoming a 'warrior virgin' (Joan of Arc, the Amazons). The first one is admired for defending the patriarchal order (being an obedient virtuous wife; giving her children for the cause). Or being a 'good mother' by transforming maternal grief into armed motherhood and fighting in the name of her fallen children (Bayard De Volo, 2001: xxvii). The images of a Salvadorian *guerrillera* shouldering a rifle while carrying a baby, or the photographs of older Nicaraguan women dressed in military uniforms and carrying Ak-47s are examples of the 'combative motherhood imaginery' that shaped idealised notions of revolutionary masculinities and femininities in Latin America[84] (Bayard De Volo, 2001: xxvi).

By contrast the 'warrior virgin' wins her heroism by renouncing her 'womanhood', this is being a mother and a wife, only by so doing does she gain the 'freedom' needed to become a heroine (Summerfield, 1998; Nieto-Valdivieso, 2010). It is not by chance that many *guerrilleras* renounced their own possibility of becoming mothers or perceived motherhood as an obstacle for the militancy,

> If you are giving yourself for a cause
> You can't have children
> forget it.
> If you have children
> they are your Achilles' heel,
> because you negotiate with the enemy

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[83] In a phallocentric logic women are imaginary and symbolically represented as the 'other' to the rational man of Western thought, 'as the lack which forms the necessary and negative opposite of the plenitude of masculinity' (Alsop, Fitzsimons & Lennon, 2008/2002: 188).
[84] Nevertheless as Franco (1985, 1996) and Bayard de Volo (2001) pointed out, in Latin America from the 1960s onwards the family and particularly the mother became 'institutions of resistance' as an answer to the increase of state-terrorism. Mothers used the immunity assigned to them in Latin American culture and ex-changed the refuge of their homes for the *plaza* (square). They became the champions of the disappeared, the political prisoners, and the dead ones 'whose existence nobody wanted to know about' (Franco, 1996: 85).

you surrender everything.
That is why I never had children there [in the mountains]
and after [the demobilisation]
I liked not having children at all.
(Carmenza – CRS, 2002)

*

[While I was in the mountains]
I got pregnant
And I tried to have an abortion
But at the end I carried on with my pregnancy.
Although I felt that it was an obstacle for my life.
I felt that my militancy was turned upside down.
It changed my life because I wanted other things,
I wanted to be doing military actions.
And the pregnancy closed those doors to me.
I was feeling all that frustration,
because I wanted to be
A full time *guerrillera*
(Claudia – CRS, 2006)

In order to become a women-warrior the ideal *guerrillera* cannot be a mother, to become 'the New Man' they had to choose between 'the revolution and their children' (Toro, 1994). The impact of the phallocentric elements of the *Revolutionary Myth* in the everyday and embodied realities of women guerrilla fighters resulted in the tension between symbolic and biological motherhood. While the first one was praised in the revolutionary imaginary the second one was discouraged, even stigmatised, and seen as an obstacle for the militancy.

The symbolic motherhood promoted by the *Revolutionary Myth*, and its metaphor of the revolutionaries as giving birth to a new order, gave moral value to the struggle (even women and mothers fight for it), and refers to the image used in western thought of men giving birth, particularly in relation to war, not only as a patriarchal appropriation of female's reproduction, but also as a metaphor to justify and naturalise belligerent ideologies (Hamilton, 2007: 927). It also plays with the grammatical femininity that the word *Patria* (fatherland) has in the Spanish language. According to Kaminsky (1993: 6) while in English the semantic content of the word is masculine, linked to fatherland, patriarchy, and a particular

set of political and gender relations, in Spanish the semantic content of the word *Patria* is masculine (as in English) but its lexical gender is feminine *La Patria*, making it possible to privilege the grammatical femininity of the word, over the semantic connection.

As an example of the political implications, in symbolic terms, of shifting the meaning of *Patria* from masculine to feminine Kaminsky (1993: 6) refers to the song *Madre* (mother)[85] by the Chilean singers Isabel and Angel Parra in which the word mother is used to embrace both nation and revolution: *madre patria y madre revolución* (motherland and mother revolution). The full political meaning of the song becomes clear when knowing that mother is not only a metaphor. Violeta Parra, the mother of Isabel and Angel Parra, was the mother of the *Nueva Canción* (New Song) [86] movement in Chile. Due to the political content of her music Violeta was branded as 'subversive' by the Pinochet regime, and she and her children had to perform in exile for many years (Kaminsky, 1993: 17). The song was popular among revolutionary young across Latin America and as such was part of the imaginary that fuelled the *Revolutionary Myth*.

Although motherhood and motherland have an important political and symbolic content in the *Revolutionary Myth*, and *la militancia* (the act of being member of a politico-military organisation) was feminine, this does not mean that biological motherhood had a place in the concrete, everyday practices of revolutionary organisations. On the contrary, the ideal communion between motherland and mother revolution was not a reality for most of the women who joined guerrilla organisations (Dietrich, 2014; Londoño et al., 2005; Blair et al., 2003; Vásquez, 2005; Toro, 1993).

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[85] See: http://www.youtube.com/wacht?v=GnaItAghZUE [Accessed 15/12/2014]
[86] *Nueva Canción* emerged in countries such as Argentina, Uruguay and Chile. It rejected U.S. imperialism, valorised folk traditions, indigenous and other marginalised people, and campaigned on social issues pertinent to them (Moore, 2003: 5). It influenced the *Nueva Trova Cubana* movement also important in revolutionary cultures across the continent. Both were examples of a wider movement know as the *Canción Protesta* (Protest Song) movement that developed in different countries across the world and was united in the denunciation of abuses of their own regimes, and saw music as an instrument for social justice (Graper, 2014: 18).

Combatants, particularly women, were expected to postpone their motherhood until the revolution had succeeded. It is necessary to remember that the politico-military organisations were different. For instance, in the ELN, the idea of the nuclear family was valued, thus women's pregnancies were not completely forbidden. In some rural structures couples who had been married for at least three years by the guerrilla law, could apply for permission to get pregnant. If the consent was granted they were put on a 'waiting list', 'because everybody can't get pregnant at the same time' (Carmenza – CRS). In the EPL, which adopted a Prolonged Popular War strategy, some women had their children inside the guerrilla environment (Colectivo de Mujeres Ex-combatientes, 2012: 68), a practice also reported in the ELN. Edith's older son grew up in a guerrilla camp and became a member of the organisation at a young age. Carmenza and Consuelo remember that at some point combatants' children were living like 'little guerrillas' near to one of the ELN's campsites, which generated ethical questions among some women, who began to wonder about the implications of raising their children in that environment.

Some women interviewed suggest that in the guerrillas' rural ranks symbolic motherhood was embodied by women who assumed nurturing roles. They became 'carers', 'counsellors', 'confidants' (Consuelo – ELN, old insurgencies), and 'mothers of the combatants' (Carmenza – EPL). They acted as core conduits, sustaining informal social networks and facilitating spaces that maintained and reinforced the group cohesiveness. These roles assumed by the *guerrilleras*, or 'women's everyday heroic acts' as María Eugenia called them, included: taking care of others health and spirit; keeping others secrets; sharing their 'food ration, shampoo, soap or the warmth of their bodies' in the cold nights; keeping their own pain and the longing for their children in silence before a combat to preserve the group morale (Colectivo de Mujeres Ex-Combatientes, 2012: 135).

The tension between symbolic motherhood and biological motherhood was a source of pain, frustration and contradiction. Many of the women interviewed stated that pregnant women were 'downgraded' or considered a discharge from

the organisation (Pilar and Eloisa – M-19, Claudia and Carmenza – CRS). In many cases their 'degradation' to lower ranks was not official but performed by assigning them less important tasks and roles in the structure (Pilar – M-19). As a consequence women who wanted to attain command positions or advance in the structure of the organisation had to renounce motherhood. That renouncement could take two forms, not having children at all,

> About motherhood....
> I had three pregnancies but I did not keep any of them thinking that I can't...
> My life was not suited for...
> To take care of babies, because that was a betrayal to the movement,
> it was betraying the motherland, betraying myself because of the compromises I had made to...
> To give something to humanity that was the right path that was the struggle...
> (Nelly ELN/M-19, 2002)[87]

Or leaving the baby once it was born in the charge of family members (grandparents, aunts, uncles) or collaborators. To go back to the front Edith left her son under the care of a collaborator family,

> That was one of the biggest sacrifices
> a woman had to make in the organisation.
> Leaving the children, only four or five months old,
> under the care of another family...
> I left Carlos with a collaborator.
> Since the beginning you knew...
> During all the pregnancy
> you were already carrying that pain,
> you chewed it during the pregnancy.
> I'm going to leave him... with whom?
> That pain is inexplicable,
> I have never been able to explain that pain.
> Because it is like a scale,
> on which you put both things
> your son and the motherland.
> And the motherland wins
> (Edith – ELN, 2006)

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[87] Nelly was one of the first women admitted into the rural ranks of the ELN in the mid 1960s. In the 1970s while the ELN was going through an internal crisis she was in Cuba waiting for the organisation to contact her. There she met members of the M-19 and decided to join that guerrilla army.

Edith was not the only woman for whom 'motherland came first' before herself and the children. The strong futurity of the *Revolutionary Myth* allowed them to think that by giving their lives and their motherhood they will be able to build alternative futures for their children. Patricia, who as other urban militants lived her militancy with her children, and made them part of the '*operativos*' (military and logistic tasks) stated,

> If there is an example of higher revolutionary ethos,
> it is the enormously courageous women, whom I deeply admire,
> who had the strength to leave their children in a house, under the care of others,
> and sacrifice themselves in order to be able to make their militant life and leave their children sheltered.
> For doing that you need an unmeasurable courage that society does not value
> (Patricia – EPL, 2010)

After the return to civilian life the women tried to recover their sons and daughters, and 'that was another pain', because in many cases the children did not recognise them as their mothers (Consuelo and Edith – ELN, Eloisa – M-19, Claudia and Carmenza – CRS).[88] In other cases as 'the carer of the children did not have time to play with them and provide stimulation during the developing process' (Alejandra – CRS) some were ill or have developed permanent disabilities (Carmenza and Alejandra – CRS, Eloisa – M-19).[89] This became not only a source of pain but also of guilt and moral judgement over the women 'who were in the mountains thinking that their children were growing and developing' but who came back after the demobilisation only to find that was not the case,

> I was in jail with a woman from the M-19 who recovered her little boy.
> He was born healthy, but when she got him back the boy had a disability for life,
> he was severely underdeveloped because of the undernourishment,
> because of awful things,
> the woman who was his career was unable to give him attention,
> she fed him when she could and was out all day to work.
> And the boy, for instance, couldn't move his head; he couldn't even turn it, because no body exercised him.

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[88]All the women referenced used very similar words to narrate the experiences of the women who tried to recover their children after the demobilisation. All of them describe it using words that denote a painfull process, full of grievances, and still unhealed.
[89] Different women mentioned such cases.

They boy was invalid, he couldn't walk.
When she got him back he was three years old (...)
(Alejandra – CRS, 2006)

Renouncements of parenthood affected female and male guerrillas as well as the children. A deeper analysis of how men experienced fatherhood during their years as guerrillas needs to be done, not only because their gendered lived experiences are different but also because cultural expectations of motherhood and fatherhood influence how their decisions are judged, lived through, and self-interpreted. For instance, while some revolutionary men could justify giving up fatherhood in order to become the fathers of the nation and the new order, women's renouncement of motherhood is seen as unnatural and a proof of their deviancy.[90]

In some cases, as Alejandra and Consuelo pointed out, the affective link with the children 'was never restored'. Some women left their children with their grandparents, who disapproved of women's militancy and nourished children's animosity against their mothers. As a result when they came back the children did not recognise them as their mothers (Alejandra – CRS). Due to the clandestinity and the security of the children, caring for them meant not to call them, not to visit them, thus many children never understood why their parents had left them.

I met a teenager who told me:
-I want to talk to you.
She told me:
-I want you to explain me (...) what is the big reason behind a woman's decision to risk her life and leave me without enjoying a mother.
I almost died when she asked me that.
It is so difficult to explain to a daughter what reasons there could be for one to say:
- I'm leaving, I'm risking my life (...) despite that I love my children so much.
[I tried to explain to her] with loads of clichéd sentences (...)
But it is very difficult to answer that (...)
At that moment we were convinced that it was worth it, I told her:
-The only answer I can give you is that, obviously, nothing compares to the joy of seeing your child growing up, I recognise that.

---

[90] Melisa Dearey pointed out that in his autobiography Nelson Mandela uses the trope of renouncement of fatherhood as a justification mechanism. By stating that he sacrificed being a father to his children in order to become the father of the nation, Mandela used the father trope to clear his 'terrorist'/deviant/violent past contrasting it to one of love and sacrifice for the people.

But I also want you to know that even if you don't understand it now,
your mom was trying to make this society different for you.
(Alejandra – CRS, 2006)

Finally Alejandra and Eloisa report cases in which women's children were 'stolen' by their male partners who had given the children to their 'official wife' in the cities. Once the demobilisation took place they refused to give them their children back arguing that the children already had a mother, and that because of their armed militancy they were not suited to be mothers.

There was the case of a commander who had a child with one [guerrilla] girl and took the baby from her.
It was premeditated because he wasn't able to have children in his marriage, and he took the child as a present to his wife.
When the guerrilla girl, after so much time, leaves the organisation, she discovers that her son was given to the main wife.
She was only a womb, while she was all the time believing that she was the partner of that man, but no.
After the demobilisation the man went back to his wife.
[The girl] was only the mistress during the time in the mountains.
That's okay, many women endured that kind of pain, like:
-okay now I go back to my family and you get lost.
-okay, but the child? The child is not a gift, the child is mine.
-no you are not able to take care of him, besides this woman has taken care of him all his life, this woman is his mother.
With which arguments are you going to say that you can raise him better if you have been a *guerrillera* who doesn't know how to raise children, the other woman has given him all.
(…)
You don't know how many women experienced the same,
women whose children were stolen, because that is stealing.
(Alejandra – CRS, 2006)

Despite the questions raised around real embodied pregnancies and parenthood these matters were 'never seen as important for the revolution but as secondary issues' (Alejandra – CRS); and were not included in the main agendas of the politico-military organisations. After laying down their weapons women who renounced motherhood and partnerships to give 'the revolution all they had' found themselves alone, and excluded from DDR benefits and projects which were designed thinking of single mothers or families. Thus in some way they were punished for not being mothers (Eloisa).

A few women, among them Alejandra, Claudia, Pilar, Patri, and Lucia refused to choose between their children and the revolution, or being downgraded because of it. They combined motherhood with their militancy embodying a sort of 'combative motherhood', and sometimes embracing alternative femininities and family constructions to the ones available for most women in Colombian society. As a result they began to question, as we will see in Chapter Seven, the division between political militancy and everyday life.

But in order to be able to embody a 'combative motherhood' these women had to assume a triple burden (motherhood, work, and militancy), which was ignored by the phallocentric logic of the organisations,

> I felt that my first battle was won every morning as soon as I put my first foot in the street with my baby in my arms.
> I had to wake up at four in the morning, wash the nappies,
> prepare the compote, make the soup, boil the milk and the water, all that.
> And put everything in the same changing bag where I carried the radio and the gun.
> Then I organised my daughter, bathed her, fed her, and bathed myself.
> I think she could feel my anguish because she cried all the time [while I was getting ready] (…)
> When I finally grabbed my changing bag, opened the door and was outside she would fall asleep.
> It was as if she could feel that finally! We were outside.
> (Pilar – M-19, 2010)
>
> *
>
> There was something we called the *mística* (ethos)
> the ethos was the ability to arrive at the appointment amid the worse downpour.
> Many women didn't meet the ethos
> because in the middle of the dreadful downpour they have to stay with their children.
> And of course they were [accused of] having 'ideological problems',
> petit bourgeoisie [problems] generally
> (Patricia – EPL, 2010)

Women's experiences of motherhood during the militancy are an example of how the *Revolutionary Myth* failed to acknowledge female militants particular realities, created an idea of equality based mainly on masculine values, attributes

and aptitudes, and did not challenge the material advantages of male supremacy (Kaminski, 1993: 16). In contrast male combatants are not seen to challenge the traditional fatherhood dominant in Latin American societies. Women describe them as 'irresponsible fathers' (Eloisa; Pilar). In retrospective, when evaluating their partners' reasons to have children, women like Nelly and Eloisa suggest that they only wanted children in order to 'possess them', 'to tie them forever' or when they saw that they were gaining empowerment inside the organisation (Eloisa – M-19, Nelly ELN/M-19).

Many male urban militants retained their gender privileges. They could have a wife who provided all his necessities and raised his children. As Pilar put it 'they only have to get dressed' in order to attend a meeting. In an evaluative comment Patricia suggested that the revolution and the politico-military organisation did not include the private/intimate spheres, and urban male comrades embraced a revolutionary political discourse without making changes in their private world,

> I answer as they used to answer:
> -don't mess with my family. With my women, and my children I do what I want to.
> They could make a public discourse where they demand democracy,
> where they demand socialism, solidarity, guarantees [for political participation].
> Where they demand human rights, where they demand all that...
> But don't touch my... I don't want that to touch my private, intimate sphere (Patricia – EPL, 2010)

In conclusion the politico-military organisations were born inside a patriarchal logic they did not want to challenge or transform (Dietrich, 2014), the spaces assigned to women's heroism in the *Revolutionary Myth* (and the left in general) were akin to the roles assigned to them by the Catholic tradition, which alternated the combination of motherhood, virginity and the negation of either of the above (Forcinito, 2004: 151). Thus women could be mothers but not virgins, virgins but not mothers, or neither mothers nor virgins and these women would thus be whores, and finally mothers and virgins (reserved for the mother of God) (Franco, 1985: 422, Forcinito, 2004: 151).

For many women *guerrilleras* motherhood represented an important change in the temporalities of war in two ways: first the importance of creating different futures, and second, it fractures the sense of here and now. Pilar, states that after she had her daughter 'the future became very important', as well as the necessity of building a different future for 'all children' not only their own. At the same time motherhood changed her perceptions of risk and security. It was her daughter who 'pushed' her 'towards life', gave her the awareness needed to perceive danger and go out of dangerous situations. Pilar describes it as a kind of sixth sense that was developed after she became a mother.

In the organisations still in arms pregnancies are 'forbidden' and sanctioned as Lina and Mary former members of the FARC stated. Practitioners, human right defenders, and women's organisations working in the country have repeatedly denounced the forced contraception and abortions performed by the guerrillas on women's and girls' bodies (Amnesty International, 2004: 50-52; ABColombia, et al, 2013). Women's interviews corroborate the practice of forced abortions, however some were able to 'hide' their pregnancy (Lina – FARC), or were unaware of it, until it was too late for an abortion thus they were allowed to have the baby but sanctioned afterwards (Mary – FARC). Other women were able to avoid taking the contraceptive pills distributed in their units, or 'trick' the nurse in order to not have the injection (Teresa – FARC).[91]

For the individually demobilised women interviewed, motherhood became a pushing factor outside the organisation. Most of them stated that their reason for taking the risk to leave the guerrillas and becoming a 'deserter' was their children. They wanted to be reunited with them as they were with civilians who did not provide the right care for them, or they did not want to leave their baby in the hands of collaborators, or they did not want to have an abortion.[92]

I took that decision [deserting] because I thought I was pregnant.

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[91] The contraceptive used varies from camp to camp: the pill, injections, Norplant, and the intrauterine device are some of the methods used. There were not reports about condoms being distributed among male guerrillas.

[92] Some of them had already had one or more D & C procedures.

[my period] was three months late and...
and I said... No, I have to escape
I have to escape (whispering) ()
(...)
Because I had already had an abortion and I said, another abortion, in such little time?
Nooo, I will die
(Tatiana – FARC, 2002)

*

I did not came here [demobilised] because I was bored there [the guerrillas]
it was because of the children (...)
The boys are the reason I left.
I said, I have to be...
I'm leaving with my child.
Because my boy was very ill, he was with some civilians,
but the civilians had pigs, hens, and the child played with the excrement of the pigs, the hens, then I said no.
He was very skinny, he was covered, covered in pustules (...)
he was very depleted, underdeveloped (...)
(Mary – FARC, 2002)

After having her first child Mary got pregnant again in the ranks, this time she was going to be forced to have a D & C procedure. She was separated from her partner and because it was her second pregnancy was going to face a court martial. Lina's pregnancy was too advanced for an abortion, she and the father of the child received physical sanctions and were send to separate units. As she did not want to give the baby to civilian collaborators once it was born, she decided to leave the guerrillas. The hardening of the position of the guerrillas still in arms in regard to pregnancies and motherhood could be related to their increased militarisation, and their necessity to keep every single combatant focused on the war effort. Furthermore, partnerships and the prospect of having a family could be read by the commanders as a menace to the group cohesion and combatants' loyalty with the organisation. It is not by chance then that when a couple get pregnant one of the sanctions is to separate them (Kunz & Sjoberg, 2009).

Individually demobilised women's and girls' experiences in the ranks show that when reproductive rights such as 'free' distribution of contraception, and abortion are articulated to a phallocentric agenda, these rights became but another form of

oppression, power and control over women's bodies. Practices that were seen as a liberation and a source of empowerment for women guerrillas in the 1970s and 1980s are not experienced as such for women guerrillas today. Among other things because in the 1970s and 1980s some of the women joining the guerrilla ranks were urban women who brought with them more liberal, modern conceptions about sexuality to the rural ranks (Alejandra – CRS), and many of them were fighting to be treated as equals by their male comrades. In contrast women individually demobilised come from rural backgrounds where more traditional conceptions about womanhood and motherhood apply. For them contraception and abortion are not lived as an autonomous decision but as an imposition from the organisation, which is not linked to feminist discourses of self-choice, and women's right to decide over their bodies.

In this section I explored the places assigned to women in the *Revolutionary Myth*, and the tension between symbolic and biological motherhood. I argue that while symbolic motherhood was encouraged through different cultural artifacts and a reason to make the revolution, biological motherhood was discouraged and even sanctioned. In the next section I address the gender order created inside the guerrillas and the idea that in the guerrilla ranks male and female combatants experienced more egalitarian gender relations based, among other elements, on a system of roles distribution that privileged skills and political capacity over gender.

Gender order and equality

Despite the limitations of the phallocentric logic of the *Revolutionary Myth*, Rayas (2009) and Dietrich (2014) point out that guerrilla organisations in Latin America changed traditional masculine and feminine constructions, even if just temporarily (Dietrich, 2014). Che Guevara's 'New Men', the ideal all revolutionaries aspired to become, was a combination of masculine and feminine attributes. On the one hand he was characterised by his courage, unbreakable discipline and convictions, serenity and skills in the arts of disguise and ambush (Robledo, 2002). The ideal guerrilla fighter has to be 'capable of facing torture

and jail, and enduring physical and emotional pain without complaining' (Claudia – CRS). On the other hand, he has to be self-denying, obedient and sensitive to human sufferings and poverty. He was expected to leave behind his egoism and be ready to offer his life for a noble cause, and for others; to renounce his own desires and pleasures on behalf of the vulnerable, and the dispossessed, which required self-sacrifice (Rayas, 2009: 22, 99).

In her comparative study of insurgent organisations in Peru, El Salvador, and Colombia, Dietrich (2014) discusses how politico-military organisations created a particular gender order that not only promoted more equal relations and role distribution between men and women, they also actively shaped femininities and masculinities with strategic purposes in order to make them functional for the armed struggle. Women militants were socialised into a 'new way of being a woman', that is being a 'female insurgent' (Dietrich, 2014: 91). She was a politically active subject, formed in revolutionary values, trained for combat and political action, and ready to fight side by side with men to change the *status quo*. As the guerrilla gender order had to accommodate to give space to this 'female comrade' women had wider spaces of action, participation and agency than in the civilian gender order, and more egalitarian gender relations in terms of role distribution, access to resources and power positions (Dietrich, 2014). The 'totalitarian' nature of the politico-military organisations, and the control they had over the lives and bodies of their members, allowed insurgent organisations to create alternative gender arrangements functional for the armed struggle, and to manipulate gender constructions in order to distance the masculinities and femininities of the insurgent project from the ones lived in the wider social order (Dietrich, 2014: 95).

Gender-based role distribution allows us to look at patterns of inequality and gender hierarchy, not only between men and women, but also between men and men, women and women (Kleinman, 2007), consequently the roles assigned to female guerrillas are one of the aspects covered widely by the literature produced on the topic (Dietrich, 2014; Esguerra, 2013; Berge, 2011; Kunz & Sjoberg, 2009;

Blair et al., 2003). Women *guerrilleras* had performed diverse roles inside revolutionary organisations. They have been combatants, urban militias, radio operators, political leaders, nurses and doctors. They have performed intelligence work, taken care of hostages, written in revolutionary newspapers, created and distributed propaganda, and taught literacy to the troops and members of the communities where the organisation had presence. They were central in doing support work both for the rural troops and the urban units, and very often they were in charge of running security houses, visiting political prisoners, hiding combatants, and finding resources to support the organisation and its members. Thus women like Elvira, Pilar, Rita, Giselle, among others, emphasise the important role played by women 'collaborators' and 'sympathisers' from the communities in which the organisation had an active presence. After the process of DDR some women like Elvira and Pilar began to challenge the boundary between what it means to be a collaborator and a militant.

In the everyday life of the camp women and men perform the same chores: chopping wood, carrying water, building camp facilities such as latrines, opening trenches, cooking for the troops, guarding the camp, among others. This equity of roles gave women a 'fiction of equality'. A fiction that according to Alejandra was lived in the middle of real discrimination because although men and women received the same military instruction, and maintenance responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning and carrying wood, women rarely attained power positions. Besides, added to the basic labours some guerrillas had additional activities or responsibilities depending on their rank in the military structure. In this case the roles assigned to women reproduced gender stereotypes. Women were given what were perceived as feminine tasks such as radio operators, nurses, and community work (which entailed building solid relationships with the settlers of the area where the guerrilla camp was placed) (Carmenza and Alejandra – CRS; Blair et al., 2003: 92).[93]

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[93]Women interviewed and researchers working in the field mentioned the gendered nature of some of the tasks assigned to women in the rural ranks. When I reference one or more of the women interviewed and

For rural and semi-rural women the 'denaturalisation' of roles traditionally assigned to them, the equal distribution of domestic duties among male and female comrades, and learning new skills such as Morse code, radio operation, and basic medical training had an empowering and emancipating effect (Carmenza – CRS, Blair et al., 2003: 94).

> In that sense the guerrilla
> did unchain women from the pan,
> especially the peasant women.
> And gave to them other ways to be women
> Machista and militarised,
> but gave them freedom
> (Consuelo – ELN, 2006)
>
> *
>
> For the rural women who came from poverty...
> [in the mountain they] had the three meals secured
> Uniform, boots...
> Good boots not broken ones.
> All that improved their living conditions.
> The rural front gave them the opportunity
> to exercise rights that they didn't have in their families,
> such as participation and being recognised
> (Alejandra – CRS 2006)

For urban women the militancy in the rural front was contradictory in terms of empowerment. There the militancy was a highly embodied experience where the bodies and minds of the militants 'were domesticated', full of 'restrictions', and marked by 'collective life' (Carmeza – CRS, Eloisa – M-19). The lack of intimacy of communal guerrilla life and of personal determination in decisions that affected the private, the loss of freedoms that were taken for granted in the cities, were experienced by women like Carmenza as a regression in their personal rights and agency. On the other hand urban women also discovered or developed new abilities, and had the opportunity to enter fields and roles seen as traditionally

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an author it is because women's narratives about the experiences of being a female guerrilla contribute to the argument being made.

masculine, being recognised in those roles, and attained middle power positions (Blair et al., 2003).

The conviction that the main contradiction in society was the 'class struggle' affected everyday insurgent practices and the logic behind aspects such as role distribution among its members. By privileging 'class' over other markers of difference such as gender and ethnicity, politico-military organisations in Colombia, and other Latin American countries, apparently distributed roles on the basis of merit and skill rather than gender (Dietrich, 2014). Pilar stated that the armed struggle generated more egalitarian relations because in that space 'what was at play was life' thus 'all merits were earned'. During a military operation, when roles and responsibilities were distributed 'if it is a woman or a man, that doesn't matter, what matters is if that person is going to be able to take us out of trouble'. What matters as Pilar put it is 'who is the most capable', 'who can inspire us', 'who can give us confidence', 'who is not going to get cold feet'.

Although in most organisations the class differences were 'diluted', wo(men) from middle-class backgrounds were more likely to attain political command positions due to the value of their skills. Consuelo, who was educated in the United States and fluent in English, was in charge of the ELN's international relations in the 1960s and 1970s. She created an urban cell to recruit young university students, transported weapons and smuggled Russian communication equipment inside the country. Vera Grabe who was fluent in eight languages and Nelly Vivas (a biologist educated outside the country) became members of the leadership of the M-19, in part due to the skills that their class position gave them (Eloisa – M-19). Lucia, who worked in a factory in order to become proletarian, remembers that middle-class women were welcomed and valued in the EPL because they were scarce, and due to their education were useful for the organisation's political and communitarian work.

Women from the old insurgencies like Carmenza, Nelly and Alejandra suggest that in the rural ranks the tensions were not between male and female comrades, or related to ethnicity, but among urban and rural militants. In her narrative Nelly

depicts the conflict between the 'peasants' and the 'citizens' by stating that in the 1970s urban militants (men and women) were feminised, ridiculed, and bullied due to their lack of skills to survive in the mountains (Nieto-Valdivieso, 2010). The urban/rural tension reflect the cracks in the figure of the 'New Man' the militants aimed to become, and the contradictions of the gender order created in guerrilla organisations.

Firstly, it makes visible the practical difficulties of reconciling the 'feminine' values assigned to the 'New Man' which was built around sacrifice, tenderness and resilience to face the 'political geography' of the mountain (Rodríguez: 1996: 32), and the heroic masculine attributes needed to endure the harsh conditions of the warzone, where 'you can't show weakness' (Eva – EPL). Thus while peasant combatants (men and women) had the physical skills and 'masculine' values needed for guerrilla warfare, they were ridiculed and seen as 'too plain' in the urban units where values such as 'rational strength' were more valued (Carmenza – CRS). In contrast the bodies and abilities of urban militants were inadequate for the life in the mountains. They did not know how to walk in the foothills or they used to get lost in the rain forest.

Secondly it shows how the attributes assigned to the ideal guerrilla fighter were destabilised outside combat, in the realm of intimacy and love, where the differences between urban and rural masculinities became a source of tension in the 1970s and 1980s. Lucia and Eloisa recall that urban men were more 'desirable' as partners or were 'more successful' among women not only because they were more likely to hold command positions, but also because they used other 'strategies' for courting them. While rural men will just 'do their business', sexual intercourse with urban men it was more likely to involve playfulness, love words, and a 'romantic' approach to sexuality.

Finally in the *Revolutionary Myth* the mountain was the 'political geography' of the revolution (Rodríguez, 1996: 33). It was in this space outside the traditional old regime of the nation-state, that the new revolutionary subject was being forged. As a result the perception that urban militants were not 'proper' guerrilla

fighters as 'it was believed that the real *guerrilleros* were in the mountains', and 'if you were in the city you were less than the shoes' sole' (Consuelo – ELN), is a constant in the narratives of women who were part of politico-military organisations through the 1970s and 1980s.

> At that time being in the mountains was the best
> There you were a combatant, in the city you were...
> *Militante* if anything! (Laughs)
> That was an experience in terms of..., how can I rationalise that militancy?
> Until I start thinking:
> Ok, here [in the cities] we are also combatants,
> And if anything here [in the cities] we are more vulnerable than there [in the mountains].
> Why am I going to be sad because I can't be there if I can be a combatant here as well?
> (Consuelo – ELN, 2006)[94]

Although the 'New Man' was to be found giving his life in the mountains, the apparition in the country of urban guerrillas at the end of the 1970s and early 1980s, and changes in guerrilla tactics such as the introduction of the Prolonged Popular War, conferred a new importance to the logistic and support tasks performed by urban militants, and required the active mobilisation of women (Kampwirth, 2002; Wickham-Crowley, 1992). As the war strategy changed urban militants clandestinely working in logistics, support, resource finding, and political work in the bourgeoning social movement began to be valued and recognised.

Carmenza who joined the ELN in the 1980s gives a sense of this change. Although she joined the rural ranks this decision responded to personal circumstances (her partner was promoted to a command position in the rural ranks) and not to the conviction that the rural troops were the vanguard of the revolution. For her, as for other revolutionaries of the time, the final insurrection was going to take place not in the mountains but in the streets of the cities. This displacement in the geographies of the revolution also changed the value assigned to the tasks

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[94] Consuelo left the organisation in the 1990s outside the oficial DDR programme.

performed by the militants, the definitions of what constitutes 'revolutionary work', distinctions between collaborators and militants.

However, as Eloisa narrates, the male rural combatant and the mountain as the place where the revolution takes place never lost their centrality in the imaginary of the *Revolutionary Myth*, on the contrary it was reinforced depending on the life cycle of the organisation. She was a member of the M-19, an organisation that was 'fundamentally urban',

> When the mobile units and the war fronts are created the eMe began to grow.
> And the importance of being a good soldier began to grow.
> And the military ranks began to be more valued (…)

Although the eMe commanders never told its combatants to go to fight in the mountains the factors of power in the organisation changed and the grades began to be distributed depending on combat and military skills,

> Let's say that [the emphasis on military skills] reactivates the myth of the heroic guerrilla fighter that has always existed in society and that for the women… for ourselves…
> That myth of the heroic guerrilla fighter, the myth of Che Guevara,
> the myth of *the hombre enguerrillerado* [guerrilla man fighting in the mountains]
> is the patriarchal myth of the armed man.
> (Eloisa – M-19, 2010)

As being in the mountains and the military aspects gained weight, rural/militarised masculinities began to gain importance in the different levels of an organisation that used to be mainly urban in composition and action.

Despite the dominance of the male centred heroic guerrilla myth, changes in the value of the work carried out by the guerrillas in the city led to the feminisation of some urban guerrilla units in terms of composition of the ranks and ways of making the revolution. First in the 1980s the number of women in the urban units of different guerrilla organisations increased. Alejandra, member of an ELN urban cell, recalls that in her structure between sixty and seventy percent of the militants were women. Whereas Pilar, an urban militant of the M-19, stated that during her

urban militancy she worked with 'many, many women' but was able to count with her fingers the men she 'brought into the struggle'.[95] Secondly, in *la urbana* (the urban space) women were more likely to attain middle rank command positions than in the rural ranks. Pilar pointed out that in the mid-1980s three of the most important echelons of the urban command of the M-19 in Bogotá were women. In Alejandra's unit it was a period of time when the military and political commanders were women.

Alejandra and Pilar, also give a sense of the 'alternative' power constructions and command styles embodied by women in these urban cells. Alejandra highlighted that in her unit, as the women who were part of it 'did not believe in hierarchies' all the militants rotated the internal tasks and responsibilities (logistic, finances, military, health, and political). But she also recognised that her structure was '*sui generis*' and that was not always the case. Claudia, who was also a member of the ELN but lived her militancy in a different city, had a dissimilar experience. She, as other women from different guerrilla groups, stated that in the city as in the mountains women had to fight for their place in politico and military spaces,

> We women had to fight for a place,
> we had to fight for not having to cook,
> And we always said let's rotate that labour.
> We fought for gaining spaces,
> but if you fight for a place
> you have to be there
> If not they put you in the kitchen
> And in caring tasks.
>
> Many women assumed those roles
> But we didn't accept that
> We said
> I want to help in the planning…
> I want to take part in that [military] action
>
> Even when I already had my baby

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[95] Pilar's responsibilities included 'identifying' potential militants and 'incorporating' them into the M-19. She did not describe her work using the term 'recruiting', which has a military meaning. The people Pilar 'invited' to join the organisation were not only admitted into combat roles. They were sympathisers, collaborators, doing political, logistic and support activities, who shared the ideological and political stance of the M-19.

I was always there
I used to go with the baby-bottles and everything
But I was there.
(Claudia – CRS, 2006)

Nevertheless Carmenza and Pilar, who were urban militants and belong to different organisations, recognise that while in the rural ranks the 'value was to obey not to debate', in the cities it was the other way around, as a result the urban units were more flexible in terms of structure and hierarchies. This allowed some urban guerrillas to experiment with alternative family constructions and partnerships. Magda who lived all her militancy in the urban front recalls,

I think that for the times...
Our team... we were a very interesting gang...
All were comrades from the university.
And I think that for the times we had very advanced conceptions,
which was not what happened inside the Party.
I think that in the Party there were very conservative positions about many things hmmm?

And we really, I BELIEVE that we did try for other things...
Other things much more advanced...ehhh

For instance, in terms of the love relationships, the partnerships, ehhh...
the relation with the children.
I think those things that are missed [today]
And at that time there was not enough time to focus on them neither to...
There were more important things at the time.
(Magda – EPL, 2012)

Some urban militants like Magda and Alejandra belonged to urban units in which the militancy was understood as part of their everyday life, thus the search for new social constructions and relations in the 'private', 'intimate' world was part of the political search. Nevertheless, this exploration for alternative constructions did not permeate all the structures of the different organisations because, as Magda stated, 'there were more important things' at the time. Furthermore, as indicated before, the 'left' was not interested in dismantling its patriarchal privileges. Thus some female urban militants whose partners were also their comrades experienced more oppressive relationships than the ones taking place in the rural

ranks. At the end in the *monte* (mountains) the organisation served as a moderator of the relationships between its members (Dietrich, 2014).

In the cities the oppressive constructions of the wider gender order remained unchallenged, and were reproduced or even exacerbated. As a result some female urban militants experienced symbolic and visceral violence from their partners. Drawing on Bourdieu, Clisby & Holdsworth (2014: 5-6) define symbolic violence as the violence that is exercised through symbolic means of communication, cognition, (mis)recognition and feelings, thereby can be invisible and imperceptible even to its victims. Structural violence is deployed systematically against people within a given social order, and built upon structures of poverty, social inequality (among them racisms and gender inequality) and oppression. And visceral violence is physical harm caused through gender-based-violence (Clisby & Holdsworth, 2014: 6).

During her urban militancy Sol was recurrently a victim of marital rape and other forms of domestic abuse. She described her marriage as a 'submission regime', as her husband used his knowledge about her revolutionary militancy in order to 'keep her' with him,

> [He] threatened me with saying [to the police] that I belonged to X cell that I was in the eMe…
> [To prevent that] I have to give him certain 'benefits', I mean, sleeping with him, I mean to fulfil my…
> Fulfil my…
> How do you call it?
>
> Yoana: marital duty?
> (Sol – M-19, 2012)

Sometimes this violence was related to men's difficulty to accept that their partner had a higher position in the hierarchy of the revolutionary organisation, and used violence in order to 'recover' symbolic power.

Finally, it is important to remember that the urban militancy was characterised by a 'double life'. On the one hand was the political, clandestine life, which

required the construction of alternative/false identities. It was marked by secrecy and sometimes isolation. On the other hand being an urban guerrilla was not experienced as a strong separation between the life in the organisation and the 'normal' everyday life.

> My [political and cultural activity] was open.
> The militancy was clandestine, it was ALWAYS clandestine.
> One never told ANYONE where one belonged, what one did.
> If I belong to a cell, a circle, a direction unit,
> If I am an echelon, if I am professional, all those were different concepts.
> I was an echelon and professional, but nobody knew that.
> (Magda – EPL, 2012)

Although I do not have enough empirical material to draw a more conclusive assessment it seems that from the 1990s onwards there has been a re-ruralisation of the guerrilla organisations still in arms, and a privileging of military action over politics. The military expansion of the organisations that remained in arms required a wider mobilisation of wo(men) as combatants, most of them from rural or semi-rural backgrounds. All the individually demobilised female ex-combatants interviewed were part of the rural structures, few of them attained middle rank command positions but all were active combatants and had participated in high profile military operations. However during my fieldwork credible sources made reference to university students who had become members of FARC's and ELN's urban cells (FJB 3, 15/11/2012).

Finally, the tension between the rural pre-modern values, and urban modern values also influenced women's experiences of their time in the mountains, and the sense of empowerment and agency they gained from it. Between the 1970s and the 1980s the women who joined the rural ranks of guerrilla organisations across Latin America came from rural and urban areas. As we saw in Chapter Five many urban women were middle-class university students who became involved in radical politics through their participation in study groups, and had contact with more liberal, individualistic constructions of the self. The rural women had a conception of womanhood more linked to maternity, care and service (Rayas,

2009: 78; Carmenza and Alejandra – CRS).[96] I agree with Dietrich (2014) that the guerrilla organisations created alternative gender arrangements, but these arrangements were not completely 'new', they were a mixture between traditional and modern principles. As a consequence the experiences of the *guerrilleras* in the rural ranks are contradictory, especially in relation to issues such as sexuality, abortion, partnerships and the body.

As Alejandra pointed out women still experienced inequalities and limitations due to their gender inside the guerrillas, and in many cases this more balanced gender order was 'a fiction'. This is because although the insurgent organisations were opposing the *status quo* not all the elements of the dominant order were challenged, on the contrary some patriarchal, machista arrangements were rarely defied: homosexuality was sanctioned; wo(men)'s sexuality was judged using different moral standards; the nuclear, traditional (hetero-normative) family was still seen as one of the basic institutions of the future society; reproductive control and children's care were considered women's responsibility (Dietrich, 2014). Despite that politico-military organisations opened new spaces for women and generated a more balanced gender order than that of traditional Latin American societies, they were still part of what Rodríguez (1996: xix-xx) calls the 'Patriarchal Vanguard' that subordinated all social conflict to the 'great struggle', this is the class struggle. At the end it was the guerrilla-man the one who was going to rescue society from all the ills of capitalism (Rayas, 2009: 99), and 'take the people to the promised land of socialism' (Consuelo – ELN).

The new spaces opened for women's action and agency (Dietrich, 2014), the broadening of masculine repertories which included attributes such as tenderness, endurance, and resilience (Rodríguez, 1996: 32); the more balanced gender arrangements created in the politico-military organisations which allowed the emergence of the 'female comrade' (Dietrich, 2014), generated among women's combatants the illusion that they were conquering more egalitarian

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[96] When I reference one or more of the women interviewed and an author it is because women's narratives about the experiences of being a female guerrilla contribute to the argument being made.

gender relations. But as we are going to see in the next pages, the ideal guerrilla fighter was still defined in masculine terms.

When asked if there was a model of the ideal guerrilla fighter for her to imitate Patricia, remembers that the EPL's anthem talked only about men's heroism,

> Through savannas and mountains free guerrilla men walk (…)
> And in the clandestine [life] traveling by night I dreamed of seeing them walking,
> In the edge of the mountains.
> It was like a golden dream (…)
> But it talked about men doing heroic actions and the women were invisible.
> But alongside that, even if they were not part of the organisation [there were] stories about women who have done heroic acts of war.
> There was the case of a compañera in Urabá, I think,
> She was wounded and in order to allow the other ones to leave she activated, when the soldiers surrounded her,
> She triggered a grenade.
> She died and killed the enemies.
> Let's say that that told me…
> I never heard stories of men like that.
> (Patricia – EPL, 2010)

Alejandra recalls that in the ELN women militants were trapped between two poles: Camilo Torres' romantic vision according to which virginal and tender women 'were the heart of the revolution'; and 'the inexistent Che Guevara's women who needed to be equal to men to be able to become the New Man'. Like Patricia, Alejandra states that women in the organisation did not have any references because 'all the stories', 'all the landmarks', 'all the heroes were masculine'. 'We [women] inserted ourselves in that history as appendices' (Alejandra – CRS). As a result in the process of becoming heroines many Colombian women, from different guerrilla armies became masculinised (Robledo, 2002; Blair et., al, 2003; Londoño et., al, 2005; Vásquez, 2005). They discovered that the equality promoted by the organisation was not gender neutral but was built around the masculine ideal of the *heroic guerrilla fighter*.

While a man's capacity for heroism was taken for granted, women had to 'prove' that they were as capable as their male counterparts, and had to assume masculine

values and bodily attitudes in order to be equal to their male comrades. However, at the time many women did not see this equation in masculine terms as a problem,

> In the organisation
> the myth that the class struggle is divided if women began to pull out other vindications was very strong until the 80s (...)
> As a result rural women and older women used to say that [women's issues] were petit bourgeois whims.
> Any attempt to say
> –'let's talk about women, let's talk because this body is not casual...'
> It had a very strong opposition among men, and also among many women...
> For them it was not....
> -'I don't want to be treated as a women, I don't care,
> I'm a comrade, I'm a combatant, I'm not interested in talking about that'.
> The same happened to many women in other organisations,
> for them it was the same, it was a stubborn defence of neutrality in war.
> [They said] that it was the same [being a man or a woman]
> and I think that it was because the equation of roles give you the fiction of equality.
> (Alejandra – CRS, 2006)

Only after the leaving the organisation and returning to civilian life women begun to re-evaluate the equality promoted in the politico-military organisation. As Alejandra suggests the temporal gender arrangements produced in the guerrillas: equal division of labour, being 'treated like men', having more balanced partnerships they were able to break, sanctions against domestic violence, and the possibility to have abortions, among other factors, made some women believe that they were conquering spaces denied to them in society.

> At the beginning you have the fiction of equality
> one used to say: its the same,
> the New Man can be a male or female,
> it doesn't matter,
> in the generic they are including us!
>
> Most of the militancy in the ELN was like that,
> we women hiding that there we have to fight the differences.
> [We used to think] why are we going to fight for differences?
> if at the end being treated equally is a gain?
> (Alejandra – CRS, 2006)

In reality what happened, according to Alejandra, was that the organisation itself was masculinised because all the relationships, structures, and values were masculine. But once women began to make a deeper analysis, they began to wonder why while they have to become a *compañero* (male comrade), their male peers do not have to become *compañeras* (female comrades),

> They [the men] were not *compañeras*,
> We were the ones who have to prove that we were another fighter comrade.
> That is very hard because during war it is very difficult to understand that when you are equated to the masculine they are curtailing many things to the one and the other…
> (Alejandra – CRS, 2006)

The equality promoted in the ranks not only shaped the roles performed by the guerrillas but also permeated the body practices, 'weakness was seen as an ideological, petit bourgeoisie limitation', a 'failing in the revolutionary ethos' (Alejandra – CRS). Men and women's bodies were treated equally even in issues related to personal hygiene. Carmenza and Alejandra give an example. In the rural ranks of the ELN toilet paper and sanitary towels were seen as a 'necessity created by the consumer society'. But due to the lack of these 'luxury items' female combatants suffered constant urinary infections. Carmenza with two *compañeras* (also from urban backgrounds) organised the women in the front to stand up. They argued that if the smokers received cigarettes, the women had the right to have toilet paper and sanitary towels, at least once a month. Although at the end their vindication was accepted by the commanders, they were first 'broke' in a 'machista way'. They were assigned physical tasks, which Carmeza describes as 'forced labour', in order to prove 'that we were equal' to men. As a result many of the women 'stepped back and renounced the toilet paper'.

A final element that makes visible the fiction of equality was the 'double standards' of the revolutionary morality in relation to men and women's sexuality, as we are going to see in the next subsection.

The double standards of the revolutionary morality

The experiences around sexuality are one of the most contradictory topics addressed by the women. They oscillate between two poles. On the one hand is the empowerment generated by the possibility to decide over their own bodies and the wider sexual freedom experienced in the guerrillas. On the other hand, is the realisation that the revolutionary organisations had a 'double morality' to judge men's and women's sexuality (Nieto-Valdivieso, 2010). These experiences vary depending on the guerrilla group (they had different moral values linked to their ideology), the place of the militancy, and the generation. Nevertheless, there are some similar features in the experiences of women from different organisations as in all of them men's and women's sexual behaviour was judged and valued with different standards.

Although sexuality in the politico-military organisations was organised around heterosexual monogamy many women found that the relationships established in the mountains and in some urban guerrilla units were a break from Latin American traditional conceptions articulating female identity: monogamous sexuality 'till death do us part' (Alejandra – CRS), maternity as women's destiny, virginity as the measure of women's 'purity' and value, and the idea that a 'good woman' was in charge of 'stopping' man's uncontrollable desire by restraining her own (Rayas, 2009: 83). As in the 1980s women were scarce in the mountains, Claudia and Lucia suggest that female combatants had a 'comparative advantage' (Claudia – CRS) over men, as 'they have the luxury to choose with whom they wanted to be' (Lucia – EPL).

Both sexuality and partnerships were experienced through the particular temporality of the warzone, as a result 'emotional life' changed 'very rapidly' (Lucia – EPL), and generated loads of emotional mobility and transience which is described by Lucia and Alejandra as 'successive monogamy'. In organisations such as the EPL, the ELN and the FARC, couples were regulated by the organisation through rituals that formalised the unions. Although each organisation had its own rules they followed a similar pattern. Generally, the first step was asking permission to establish a partnership. Once the permission had

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been granted the unions were formalised, and in organisations such as the EPL and the ELN a 'guerrilla wedding' was performed in front of the troops (Carmenza – CRS, Edith – ELN, Rita – EPL).[97] If the union was not formalised minimum acts of intimacy such as 'eating from the same pot' were socially censured (Carmenza – CRS).

Domestic violence and equal division of chores once the couple was established was one of the aspects regulated by the guerrillas. But from women's testimonies it is possible to see that despite the control exercised by the organisations the continuum of violence experienced by women in their civilian life was sometimes reproduced in the ranks. This point is particularly prominent in the narrations of women individually demobilised.

Francisca joined the indigenous guerrilla MAQL escaping the gender-based violence she experienced in her community (she was forcibly married to a man who was a violent, irresponsible father and husband). In the organisation she was able to choose the man she wanted, but he was also violent, and got her 'into troubles' as he would appropriate the work she did in the guerrillas as his own.

> In the guerrillas I found myself a partner, but he gave me a bad life,
> he threatened me, he used to tell me:
> -Don't talk to them [comrades], because I'll beat you (...)
> And I was sanctioned because of him, for things he lost (...)
> Once... we had to clean the gun, and I didn't clean [his] gun, and because of him I was sanctioned.
> He took my clean gun and left me with the one [he] hasn't cleaned (...)

One picture in Francisca's photo-diary shows the scar that runs down her neck towards her bosom. When I asked if it was a war scar she shook her head, 'it is from my partner in the guerrillas'. I asked her if he was sanctioned. She shook her head again. The fights would take place in their *cambuche*[98] in silence to avoid

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[97] Many women made reference to the 'guerrilla weddings'. Depending on the organisation the ritual varied slightly but in all cases it followed a similar pattern to the one used by the catholic church and in civil weddings.

[98] *Cambuche* is a makeshift shelter built with rustic or waste materials. It can be a provisional house quickly erected. *Cambuche,* is used as a slang word to call the place where you live or where

being discovered by the commander. Lina, an individually demobilised woman, tells a similar story of domestic violence in the ranks,

> I asked *asociamiento* [coupling] with the father of my daughter,
> we lived together, but he was... he had a very bad character.
> Rude! Hmmm... awful
> And he beat me... noooo! It was... horrible, horrible, horrible
>
> Yoana: and he was not sanctioned?
>
> They sanction that kind of things there, what happened is that we can't make trouble.
> If we were fighting, we will fight in silence and... we managed...
> Ayyy but if they had discovered us they would make us carry wood and open trenches.
> I stayed with him four years,
> but it was awful to live with that man.
> (Lina –FARC, 2012)

As in the warzone the boundaries between coercive and consensual intercourse are blurred (Tushen, 1998: 13 as cited in Sammuelson, 2007: 841), the level of freedom in women's decisions to take a male partner in the ranks is another ambiguous element of the experience. Alejandra stated that a single woman in the mountains was 'unthinkable', thus taking a partner was almost an 'obligation', even though there was not an open rule about it,

> It was even censured.
> You always had to be with a partner,
> with someone.
> And I think that many women
> assumed that like a protection,
> because in that way nobody else chased her.
> (Alejandra – CRS, 2006)

Furthermore for rural girls, coming from homes characterised by abusive fathers and lack of affection, the attention received from the male comrades made them feel desired and loved,

> Many rural girls

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you sleep. 'To make' a *cambuche* is to adapt a place or space to sleep. It is in this last sense that women guerrillas use the term.

came from families with a huge lack of affection, of love,
and in the front all those guys told her that she is beautiful, desirable...
Then you began to question until what extent
they were taking free decisions about their sexuality,
or just accepting male's desires.
(Alejandra – CRS, 2006)

Finally, sexual harassment has been a constant. Women from the old insurgencies like Edith did not recognise it. When asked if she had been harassed in the organisation she stated 'never'. But immediately she narrates an episode in which a commander tried to force her to become 'his woman'. As she refused she endured ill treatment and forced labour. Other women from the old insurgencies point out the harassment exercised by men in command positions,

The sexual harassment
was very subtle,
in the sense that it was also
permeated by all the ideology.
It was a kind of coercion.
And the idealisation made you
keep your mouth closed.
After the demobilisation
I spoke with many women
and all of them passed through
similar situations of sexual harassment.
They didn't want to have sex with the man
but finally they had sex with him
because he was the chief
THE COMMANDER!
(Claudia – CRS, 2006)

Individually demobilised women talk about sexual harassment from the commanders as a common experience. Alicia who left her home to join the guerrillas due to her stepfather's sexual abuse, stated that 'what discouraged' her in the guerrillas and influenced her decision to desert was the attempt of the commander to rape her. She also stated that a female comrade who refused to have sexual relations with the same commander endured a court martial and was sentenced to death. When I asked if the Central Command of the organisation sanctioned the commander she stated that it is very difficult for rank combatants to contact them. And 'it is better not to have contact with them' because those

guerrillas who know the commanders are never going to leave the group alive, as they can become defectors and provide information about the guerrillas' leadership to the army.

Another change identified in the politico-military organisations still in arms is linked to the kind of relations established among comrades. Women from the old insurgencies, Elvira, Juliana and Rocio among others, describe the organisation as a 'big family' and the *compañeros* (comrades) as brothers and sisters. They also stated that when planning military operations friendships were valued as 'among friends missions were better accomplished because of the link between affection and protection' (Colectivo de Mujeres Ex-combatientes, 2012: 90). In contrast individually demobilised women do not use kin and kinship metaphors to refer to the relations established in the ranks, the word *camarada* (comrade) does not carry kin connotations but is used to refer to a fellow combatant.[99]

Individually demobilised women, like Tatiana, Alicia, Ester and Mary, describe the partnerships established with men as a 'help' against demoralisation, and the partners as 'the only person you can trust in there'.[100] Children who joined the guerrillas with friends or siblings, such as Carolina, stated that she joined the organisation thinking that she was going to be with her friends only to discover that after the first training weeks they were separated. Furthermore women like Tatiana recount that one of the tasks she was assigned was 'intelligence'. Meaning to 'spy' on other guerrillas suspected of being infiltrated soldiers. Individually demobilised female combatants are pointing towards a subtle shift in the economy of affections in the guerrillas. Although they made reference to ties of solidarity, friendship and camaraderie among the members of the organisation (Otero, 2006), it seems that these ties and affective relations are controlled and policed by the organisation.

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[99] In english both words *compañero* and *camarada* are translated as comrade.
[100] All the women mentioned stated that their partners were the only people they could fully trust in the guerrillas as the comrades could be potential traitors working for the military, or internal spies who would inform them to the commanders.

The revolutionary morality and women's sexuality

Women from the old insurgencies discovered that different rules applied in the city and in the mountains. While in the mountains sexuality and partnerships became part of the public sphere and were regulated by the organisation, in the cities the compartmentalisation of everyday life enabled the existence of a wider sexual freedom that allowed women to live their sexuality 'without guilt' (Alejandra – CRS), and the emergence of 'clandestine relationships' among comrades (Eloisa – M-19). The relations established were temporary and without promises which generated a 'liaison without complications' (Alejandra – CRS).

Sex among comrades was not necessarily seen as the seal of a permanent partnership but as an indicator of the levels of intimacy developed between fellow revolutionaries. Eloisa stated that sometimes sex with her male comrades 'was like caressing', and 'showing fraternity'. She remembers that in many cases she had sex with a comrade as a form of bonding in the middle of a 'work'. 'We are alone, we are in the middle of a mission, and we can be killed at any moment'. Though for Eloisa sex became an 'extension' of her nurturing role, a way of 'caring' for others, she stated that she always enjoyed it, and this kind of intimate bonding was not with everybody. It had to be with a *compañero* with whom she had empathy, with whom it was a pleasure to have long conversations, or with whom she had risked her life the day before.

Despite that the organisation opened some spaces for women to enjoy their sexuality, they discovered that men and women were judged with double moral standards. On the one hand the *compañera* in the mountains was never going to be a wife. She could be the lover, the revolutionary female comrade, but was 'too free' to be the mother of the children, or the 'official' partner after the demobilisation (Eloisa – M-19). On the other hand although infidelity was forbidden by the revolutionary moral code, women and men accused of it were judged by different measures. Alejandra recalls that one of her *compañeras* was accused of infidelity by her partner who was well known for 'flirting with every woman'. He was spying on her private correspondence and found a love letter sent

to her by another comrade declaring his love. She endured a revolutionary trial but the violation of her privacy was never brought into question.

Claudia faced a revolutionary trial under the charges of 'promiscuity'. She had a relationship with a man, but while he wanted to have a permanent relationship she 'did not fall in love with him'. When she refused to become his partner, he accused her of promiscuity. Five men and one women judged her case. Claudia's narration of the episode is full of rage and contempt for the men involved in the trial. She did not narrate the outcome of it, but described the sense of impotence, humiliation, and the incapacity to defend herself. In the trial she tried to expose the 'promiscuity', machismo and the double moral standards of the men who were studying her case in order to demonstrate that she was not being judged for her sexual behaviour but because she was a woman exercising the feminist command 'my body is mine' (Claudia in Nieto-Valdivieso, 2010).

Women from the old insurgencies began to realise that although the guerrilla gender order opened wider spaces of action and empowerment, these were limited, and were not directed to dismantle men's privileges. Consequently, some of them, even before the demobilisation, began to question the 'fiction of equality' created in the politico-military organisations, and understood that they were enduring an 'unmerciful equality' built around masculine values and privileges (Alejandra – CRS). In the mountains and in the cities some female insurgents resisted masculinisation and equation in masculine terms by assuming small feminine practices (Blair et al., 2003; Londoño et al., 2005). And although most of them adopted the model of the 'New Man' which according to Rodriguez (1996) was a sort of feminised masculinity in order to be able to participate in the war, some women embraced 'feminine values' such as nurturing, caring, cultivating social informal networks, showing their feelings and giving emotion a place in the warzone (Colectivo de Mujeres Ex-combatientes, 2012; Rayas, 2009: 119; Blair et al., 2003: 138-9, Patricia – EPL). Others, as we are going to see in the next subsection, began to look for heroine models.

In this section of the chapter I looked at how the more even gender order created in the politico-military organisations created what some women called 'a fiction of equality'. This equality was not gender neutral but built around a masculine ideal that did not dismantled the patriarchal myth of the armed man, and maintained men's privileges.

In search of the 'New WOMAN'

In this subsection I argue that despite the phallocentrism of the *Revolutionary Myth* women from different guerrilla organisations, especially in the late 1970s and the 1980s, began to look for symbolic references and role models in heroines from other historical periods (such as the struggles for independence from Spanish rule in the 1800s), and in the existing literature, songs, poems and other revolutionary cultural material. Claudia and Magda, remember that search,

> What wrote Clara Zetkin?
> What wrote Alejandra Kollontai?
> What wrote Lenin about women?
> What were their roles?
> What did the Nicaraguan *guerrillera* do?
> The *guerrillera* in El Salvador.
> Even the Chinese…
> In other words we started a search of all the literature.
> (Claudia – CRS, 2006)
>
> *
>
> ```
> Yoana: and did you have [at the time] contact with Marxist-
> feminist authors?
> ```
>
> Hmmm we read Kolontai.
> But of course, I have already heard about… eh… Simone de Beauvoir.
> I read loads the Chinese magazines, *Reconstruye*,
> *Albania Hoy* [Albania Today].
> There appeared very empowered women,
> women leading communes, women leading the activities, and that really…
> Rosa Luxemburg, Clara Zetkin, those were the readings at the time.
> What happened is that I did not have… ummm…interlocution.
> (Magda – EPL, 2012)

Many of these references were shared despite the ideological differences of the organisations. Magda and Claudia are also pointing out the relationship between the rise of second wave feminism in Latin America and the 'New Left' that shaped the type of feminism that developed in the continent (Rayas 2009; Gonzalez & Kampwrith, 2001; Stephen, 1997). Many women from politico-military organisations in Colombia and Central America became feminist only after the end of the armed struggle, and were 'created' by 'decades of armed and unarmed social struggle for reasons that originally, had little to do with gender interest' (Kampwirth, 2004: 7). However in the early 1980s many Colombian feminists came from a 'Marxist militancy' or were 'socialist feminists' (Claudia – CRS). Therefore some women urban militants such as Claudia, Alejandra, Magda, Sol and Elena had contact with feminist ideas during their militancy.

Other women recall that the politico-military organisations began to create, in the mid-1980s, 'feminine' legal organisations such as the *Unión Democratica Revolucionaria* – UDR (Democratic Revolutionary Union), which became part of the Colombian social movement. About these organisations Patricia remembers,

> There were feminine organisations inside the [politico-military] organisation on several occasions.
> At the beginning [of the EPL] was the *Destacamento Maria Cano*,
> They were women that at the beginning of the organisation came out running with the children because of the sieges in Urabá.
> And the men came out, a few with shotguns, many of them with machetes, and mainly with their feet, to face the siege.
> And what the *Destacamento Maria Cano* did?
> They picked up the children, found food, and led…
> They were the spike to break the siege.
> The children and the women in the front and the men behind them.
> The roles of these women were very traditional (…),
> that is why they were feminine and not feminist.
>
> There was an attempt to include feminist considerations during the 84 truce when the UDR was assembled.
> Around the *Union Democratica Revolucionaria* a feminine detachment was created,
> but this women's organisation was functional to the political structure, and it was not intended for women.
> Then [in the UDR], it was possible to wear skirts, to beautify oneself a little,

to take care of ones manners...
Let's say that with a utilitarian aim, functional to the war effort...
(Patricia – EPL, 2010)

Although groups such as the UDR did not have a feminist agenda, in retrospect Magda, who was one of the women in charge of its organisation, recognised that to some extent they were working for women's practical and strategic gender needs[101] 'without knowing'. Magda became aware of how this work was related to feminism once in exile, when she had contact with 'other documents, materials, people...',

> Here we worked for women's right to organise.
> For women to get involved in political life.
> I worked without knowing... one right,
> it was the right for women's political participation.
> The right to organise, to go out of their houses,
> not to be only in the domestic chores but to study.
> To get involved in the debates, to organise in the trade unions, in the peasant associations...ehhh
> And always taking as a starting point the rights that [at that time] we CONSIDERED we should have.
> And among those rights was the right to... ehh...
> Equal work equal pay.
> The right to political participation.
> The right to have crèche facilities, kindergartens, nurseries
> in order for them to be able to do things.
> (Magda – EPL, 2012)

Like Magda, other female ex-combatants who militated in insurgent organisations in the 1970s and 1980s only became aware of the links between their political work and everyday practices during the militancy and feminist ideas after laying down their weapons, this is why many of them define themselves as 'self-crafted' feminists or feminist 'without theory'.

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[101] Practical Gender Needs are the needs identified by men and women in the framework of traditional gender roles. They arise from an immediate perceived necessity and are usually related to inadequacies in living conditions (access to health care, education, sanitation). Strategic Gender Needs challenge customary gender roles, relations of power and control between women and men, and women's subordinate position in society (equal pay, equal legal rights, equal access to employment) (March, Smyth, & Mukhopadhyay, 1999: 124).

Finally by the end of the 1980s some urban women like Claudia, Sol and Alejandra who belong to different organisations such as the M-19 and the ELN were taking part in the feminist debates of the moment. Sol, attended two Latin American and Caribbean Feminist *Encuentros* (Encounters), with expenses paid by the M-19. There she had her first contact with the feminist debates of the time such as the differences between Latin American and European feminism. It was there where for the first time she met women who identified themselves as lesbians and claimed that identity as political; and Cuban women who were questioning the phallocentric logic of the revolution and the guerrilla organisations.

The clandestine nature of the politico-military organisation did not let these women take part in the feminist and women's movement as *guerrilleras*.

> You have to be camouflaged any way
> One could not say,
> -I'm from the eMe or from this [organisation], one didn't say that.
> (…)
>
> ```
> Yoana: and other women from the eMe were being permeated
> by these debates?
> ```
>
> There were… Vera Grabe.
> Women from el Valle, the *Caleñas* were there, there was…
> (…)
> Really I cannot tell you [about other women] because we didn't identify ourselves [as members of the organisation]
> It was very clandestine.
> (Sol – M-19, 2012)

Most of the women from the old insurgencies who participated in the feminist and women's movement were doing undercover organisational work in the *barrios* (neighborhoods), community boards, and other instances of Colombian social movement. It was this encounter with feminism and the women's movement that opened to some urban militants spaces for questioning the hard masculine values of organisations like the ELN and EPL where sacrifice was the higher value of the guerrilla cadre, and put them in contact with other debates such as identity politics,

> In our cell was very important the encounter with the women's movement.
> There were loads of women coming from the *negritudes* movement for instance.
> That opened our panorama, and we began to see beautiful things,
> to prepare the eighth of March, to organise gatherings.
> We worked together organising women, *madres comunitarias* (community mothers), popular women.
> Working together was a very joyful and feminine view of the organisation.
> (Alejandra – CRS, 2006)

For Alejandra and her female comrades the encounter with the women's movement opened questions about the ways in which the militancy was lived by,

> We began to think that with the men we cannot dance Celia Cruz, give each other a massage, and bake a cake…
> [in the meetings with women organisations] people arrived with food…
> and we worked very, very hard, but it was also a very joyful work.
> It was not sacrifice that dominated but the contrary [damage in the recording]
>
> Women's rights were to be enjoyed here and I think that was very important,
> because in our cell we already had very beautiful things, I told you,
> as we had a security house full of children running around, the unit had to become flexible, and began to reflect [about its own practices].
> [We started thinking] that the militancy did not happen distant from the rhythms of life but it happened there, with the children, the [female] neighbours asking for things, and you going out to talk with them.
> (Alejandra – CRS, 2006)

Alejandra is pointing not only to the questioning that some female urban militants began to make of the revolutionary project but also to the alternative practices that some of them began to install linked to the understanding of the militancy as the 'everyday', and not as separated from everyday realities and practices (see Chapter Seven). Once again it is necessary to remember that these organisations are not homogeneous, for instance all guerrilla organisations did not understood sacrifice in the same way (The M-19 is described as a feminine, joyful organisation in which pleasure had an important part) (Sol – M-19, Madarriaga, 2006). As a result the degree of influence of feminist debates and the contact of their militants with them vary.

Conclusions

The Latin American left, and its revolutionary projects emerged inside patriarchal and phallocentric logic. Although left-wing politico-military organisations in the continent produced more egalitarian gender arrangements and opened spaces denied to women in the wider society, it did not change the symbolic gender order of Latin American societies. Thus women who participated in guerrilla organisations as combatants were expected to go back to the traditional roles assigned to them once the group demobilised.

In terms of the gender order in the guerrillas still in arms the interviewees tell us that there is still a more balanced gender order than the one operating in Colombian society. The women interviewed value 'learning to stand for themselves', and the more egalitarian role distribution. While women from the old insurgencies had to prove that they could be trusted with simple duties such as guarding the camp, individually demobilised women recount this duty as one of the tasks they disliked but did not make any reference to 'having to prove' that they were able to perform it. Besides, as the organisations still in arms have grown in terms of number of combatants, military units, and geographical expansion, they have become more hierarchical and decentralised. Thus the main differences are not between men and women, urban and rural combatants but between commanders and rank militants.

Today women guerrillas are more likely to take part in active combat, and to occupy low and middle rank military leading positions. In its official discourse the FARC has included issues related to gender equality, women's rights, and in the webpage *Farianas* (2015) women from that organisation not only write about their experiences and interests but also link themselves to feminist figures and women revolutionaries from across the world. Additionally, differently to the earlier peace negations with the FARC known as *El Caguán* (1999–2002), in the current peace negotiation taking place in Havana (Cuba) women have become visible as part of both negotiating teams (Verdad Abierta, 2015). Nevertheless women are still scarce in the top leadership of the guerrillas, where the important political and military decisions are made (Grogg, 2012). Machismo, sexism,

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gender based violence, different standards for male and female sexuality, and the idea that gender inequality will be solved by challenging the capitalist order are still prevalent in the organisation (Kunz & Sjoberg, 2009; Berge, 2011); and of the 17 women representing the FARC in Cuba, only one is in a plenipotentiary capacity (Verdad Abierta, 2015).

To some extent women's experiences of agency and empowerment are linked to the evaluation they made of the experience, the motivations for joining the organisation, the value assigned to the armed struggle and their participation in it, and the context in which women's evaluation of the experience took place. Thus, while women from the old insurgencies value their time as guerrillas in positive empowering terms, individually demobilised female ex-combatants are more likely to have made negative evaluations of their experiences. Firstly because most of them joined the organisation for survival motives and not due to their ideological conviction in the armed struggle; secondly because, as stated in Chapter 5, the framework in which the narration of the experience takes place (government's DDR program), requires from them repentance and negation of their past in order to be 'accepted' again as 'useful' members of society. As a result the skills learned in the guerrillas are not valued as positive. And thirdly because of the hardening of the guerrilla organisations, the privileging of the military over the political, and the degradation of the conflict that makes it much more difficult for women to feel 'proud' of the struggle they were pursuing.

Most of the women individually demobilised interviewed in this thesis were combatants, and only two of them attained low and middle military command positions. All of them describe equality in relation to roles and physical tasks, but not in relation to power positions. Although the *Revolutionary Myth* is still central in the imaginary of the guerrillas its symbolic power does not seem to dominate women's narratives about their experiences of being. None of the individually demobilised interviewees make reference to the 'New Man' or the ideal revolutionary fighter as a model to follow. They do not make reference to having to fight for equality as all the roles, even combat roles, are distributed

'equally'. However, they mentioned that their male comrades used to mock and bully women (or feminise other men) if they showed physical weakness during a long walk or fear in the middle of a combat.

While some women from the old insurgencies were fighting for the idea of gender neutrality, even if it was built in masculine terms, individually demobilised women are ambiguous when evaluating the physical equation of male and female combatants. On the one hand they feel proud of being able to do the same tasks performed by men, and stand 'by themselves' against men's bullying and harassment. Some like Alicia value 'the things' learned 'there'. On the other hand, they resent and dislike being physically equated to men translated into exerting 'brute force, just like a man' (Alicia – ELN). Coming from a rural world where in many cases they performed the same material work as their brothers and endured the same hardships, the physical equality in the mountains was not necessarily experienced as betterment of their position as women.

In the 1970s and 1980s the blurred boundaries between guerrilla life and 'normal' life experienced by urban insurgents allowed the emergence of more feminine spaces and ways of making the revolution. It required women's social reproductive work, such as managing resources and provisions; and women's community management work, which is defined by Clisby & Holdsworth (2014: 28-29) as 'the work that is done building and maintaining both kin and non-kin networks'. This includes maintenance of good relations among family, working towards community development, voluntary work, emotional labour, and provision of skills among others. In the next chapter I explore some of the strategies used by women from the old insurgencies to transform women's work into political work during their militancy.

Chapter Seven
Mundanity/Liminality and The Militancy as Everyday

In this chapter I look at the experience of being a member of a politico-military organisation as a 'way of life'. As we discussed in the last chapter the project of guerrilla groups such as the EPL, the M-19, and the ELN was aimed not only at transforming the socio-political order of the country but also its militants. As the revolutionary ethos, values and principles ruled all the relations among comrades and with society, the militancy was not conceived as a segment of the *guerrilleras* lives but it shaped all their existence (family, work, bodies and sexuality) (Rayas, 2009: 99). This is why many of the women interviewed, particularly politically mobilised militants, understood their participation in the armed group as a *way of being in the world*. Their experiences of *being* flux between the mundanity of the events that comprise their everyday life as guerrillas and the liminality of an experience that is socially and structurally ambiguous, as it is located in the cracks of the social structure (LaShure, 2005).

I draw on Turner's (2008: 95) definition of liminal entities and individuals as located in a threshold between the positions designated and ordered by law, custom, convention and ceremony, to define the militancy in insurgent organisations as a liminal space. Firstly, guerrilla militants deploy some of the characteristics attributed by Turner (1967: 94-103; 2008) to the 'liminal *personae*': they are structurally or physically invisible; symbolically androgynous and sexless; and have nothing (no status, no property, no insignia, and no kinship to differentiate them from their fellows). The liminal individuals are subjected to the authority of the elders (in this case the party, the Central Command), which represent the 'common good' and the 'common interest'. Secondly, the guerrilla organisation can be seen as 'liminal group', 'a community or comity of comrades' (Turner, 1967: 100; 2008: 109-113). Thirdly, guerrillas are located in a 'betwixt and between' (Turner, 1967: 93), neither *here* (in the dominant socio-economic and political order they were fighting to replace) nor *there* (in the 'new order' that will be established after the triumph of the revolution).

The everyday is broadly linked to the experiences and dynamics of Western modernity, particularly the logic of production and consumption, and separated from the liminal time and space of the sacred (Reis, 2002: 726-731; Lefebvre & Levich, 1987). In this project the everyday is understood as a changing, fluctuating feature of social life, where the local, familiar, and material universe of human labour,

cooperation and consumption takes place (Ries, 2002: 728; Lefebvre & Levich, 1987: 9-10).

The ways in which the duality of the everyday and the liminal are experienced by women guerrillas, take particular shades depending on the place where their revolutionary activities were located: the mountain or the urban units. In the first part of this chapter I introduce some of the elements of the everyday life in the rural ranks narrated by the women, and look at the mountain as a 'liminal' space in which the processes of production and reproduction were put on hold allowing the emergence of an alternative gender order (Dietrich, 2014: 103). I centre my attention on the *memoryscapes* built by some women to narrate the experience of being in the mountains. These *memoryscapes* link past, present and future, allowing women to negotiate the new ways of being a woman they learned in the mountains with the mandate of going back to normal after the demobilisation.

In the second part of the chapter I focus my attention on the experiences of women urban militants who lived the militancy as 'the everyday' in which the mundanity of everyday life merged with the liminality of the clandestine life. Their understanding of the militancy as *a way of being in the world* allowed them to develop 'different ways of making the revolution' (Pilar), defined by Pilar as *la politica Chiquita* (the little politics) or 'the politics of the everyday'. Women's little politics was translated into alternative ways of arranging power, and an understanding of women's reproductive and domestic work as political work (community management, reproductive labour). As a result some urban *guerrilleras* bodies, works, material actions and networks, became *embodied infrastructures* of the politico-military organisation that facilitated access to services, enabled help and support, and the maintenance of kin and non-kin networks (Clisby & Holdsworth, 2014).

Everydayness in the mountains

For wo(men) who expended most, if not all their time, in the mountains the organisation ruled every-single aspect of the experience of being. The group acted as an infrastructure that provided basic and emotional needs, identity cohesion, and a life purpose around a common oppositional consciousness that was strengthened through rituals such as commemoration of foundational moments; and cultural artifacts (i.e music, readings, poetry). The seclusion of the mountain allowed the emergence of strong intimacy and non-kin bonds

among comrades, which in some cases survived the process of demobilisation. For instance, friendships forged in the mountains were carried through into civilian life in the form of godfathering former comrades' children (Pilar).

In the rural ranks the everyday was located outside the rationale of production and reproduction, dominating the wider social order (Lefebvre & Levi, 1987; Dietrich, 2014). As a result, in the *political geography* of the mountains the spaces and temporalities of the everyday, life and death, production and consumption, work and leisure, were disrupted. The mountain became a liminal space, a 'communitas' (Turner, 2008: 96), characterised by the communion of 'equal' individuals united in a common struggle, a common interest, and submitted together to a general authority (i.e. the Party in the case of the EPL, or the commander's father/mother like figure in the case of the M-19). As in the liminal groups described by Turner (1967) the comradeship created in the mountains loosened distinctions based upon rank, age, kinship position, and even sex.

Entering the *political geography* of the mountain was seen, by some members of politico-military organisations as a 'rite of passage' required to become a 'real' guerrilla (Eloisa, Giselle). The new members of the troops (men and women) had to learn and get used to what I call *the new quotidian*[102] which entailed not only physical and military training, but also learning the disciplined rhythms of the campsite (waking up, physical training, the first coffee, news reviews and discussion, breakfast, etcetera), and how to perform the everyday material activities: cooking, bathing, hanging the hammock or making a *cambuche*. It is not by chance that many women build transitional narratives that feature the entrance to the mountain and learning to live by it rules,

> The first months were very hard because of the collective life,
> To learn that you can never have a bath nude, you always have to bath in public, in knickers and bra;
> The menstruation became a problem because there were not sanitary napkins;
> To urinate was also a problem because there was not toilet paper.

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[102] Quotidian is used as a synonym for everyday, mundane or ordinary. Its use is linked to the Spanish word *lo cotidiano*.

All those things of the everyday life are a bit overwhelming.
Sex... I mean because everything is communicated, you have the hammocks
but sleeping in the hammock sometimes...
I mean, you have to learn things like that.
And all privacy is crossed by the group.
I mean there is no life as a couple, there is no intimate life,
everything, everything is collective,
and that overwhelmed me the first few months (...)
(Carmenza – CRS, 2006)

Pilar, who was an intermediate echelon in an urban unit, joined the rural troops in the mid-eighties due to security issues. It was her first time in the rural front and due to her rank it was decided that she be appointed as the commander of the camp for one day. Unaware of the rhythms of the mountain, Pilar was helped by rural comrades who instructed her what orders to give,

I remember that [a comrade] told me:
-*Compañera*, you have not called for breakfast and it's time, and everyone is without breakfast.
If you do not make the call nobody eats breakfast.
Then I say:
-Breakfast time.
And a female comrade told me:
-*Compañera* there are comrades in the outposts. You have not ordered the breakfast for the outposts.
There was an incredible amount of things that you have to do and I didn't know.
And I learned.
In a notebook you have to make a note of all the comrades that were out of the campsite on assignments,
Thus you always knew how many troops you had (...).
Not everybody can be having a bath at the same time,
and if this person had a bath yesterday she can't have a bath today.
There were so many things to do, that it was an art (...)
(Pilar – M-19, 2010)

Women from the old insurgencies built elaborate narratives about how the imagined landscape of the mountain was undone once faced with its reality, the inadequacies of their bodies and the necessity to learn to be in there. They built sensuous narratives in which colours, sounds and smells are used to describe the encounter between the imagined bucolic landscape and the harsh reality of the jungle with its precarious conditions.

Although narratives about entering the mountain ranks are built by women from the old insurgencies and individually demobilised female ex-combatants,

the divergences on the themes and figures used to narrate the experience of joining and being in the mountain show the changes lived by the guerrillas still in arms and its impact in the everyday of being a *guerrillera*. In the narratives built by women from the old insurgencies the mountain was a *political geography* in which politics and affection came together in the communal life of the group of revolutionaries, 'equals' in the pursuit of a common cause. As a result despite its constraints the mountain was lived as a place of freedom and joy.

Their narratives about the everyday describe the body's pain after the long walks and the military training, the strength and skills they lacked and needed to develop in order to be able to carry out tasks such as opening trenches, digging holes for the latrines, or carrying their military equipment, as well as the emotional strain generated by the lack of intimacy, the solitude of the mountain, the impenetrable green of the jungle 'that could drive people mad' (Nelly – ELN/M-19). Problems to adapt and limitations to perform the physical tasks were seen as ideological limitations, lack of revolutionary spirit and a sign of low morale (Alejandra – CRS). Despite the difficult conditions, and sometimes monotonous life of the rural ranks, most women from the old insurgencies remember their time in the mountains as a 'beautiful' fulfilling experience (Silvia – EPL).

In contrast the narratives of individually demobilised female combatants portray the mountain as an oppressive, highly hierarchical space which in the words of Mary and Lorena 'you can only leave in death'. Women individually demobilised such as Mary, Tatiana, Teresa and Lina centre their narratives of entering and being in the mountain on its hardship, and the military training they went through. This is no longer an idealised landscape but a geography of pain, fear, and hard, meaningless corporeal tasks, where life could be 'a little unpleasant' (Alicia – ELN). The organisation is not portrayed as a 'big family'; the *camaradas* (comrades) are not necessarily friends neither brothers/sisters in arms (all equals in the search of a common good), but possible defectors or traitors (Tatiana – FARC); and the commanders instead of being depicted as tender mother/father like figures, are seen as tyrannical, sometimes corrupt characters (Alicia – ELN). Nevertheless the mountain also has its joys and

moments of relief and bonding. For instance, both females from the old insurgencies and individually demobilised talk of the 'killing of the cow' almost as a ritual carnival, in which food is abundant and all the comrades work together to kill, skin, and cook it.

Memoryscapes and the everyday

Viviana's photo-diary is an exploration of her life in the guerrilla ranks through the everyday activities, objects, and landscapes of her life today. The images she produced are carefully staged, each one a portrait of her taken by her current partner in different locations and situations. In Viviana's photo-diary past and present, the mundanity of domestic chores and everyday guerrilla activities overlap. The familiar landscapes of the village where she lives, and the patio of her house are transformed into *memoryscapes* of the life in mountains, in which space and time are mingled (image 23, page 237).

In oral histories *Memoryscapes* are defined as the fusion of space and time, they make visible that places are not just dots on a map but exist in time as well (High, 2010: 109). Riaño & Baines (2011) stated that *memoryscapes* are landscapes and material markers of memory and belong to the different types of acts that are part of *emplaced witnessing*. *Emplaced witnessing* is defined as the 'plural, place-based imaginative strategies and embodied acts of transfer through which an individual or a collective creates a safer social space to give testimony and re-story past events of violence or resistance' (Riaño & Baines, 2011: 413). Viviana's images in her photo-diary, where domestic activities, scenes and spaces are 'compared' to the spaces of her life in the rural ranks, act as a *memoryscapes*. Unable to talk about her militancy in the EPL with family members, or disclose her guerrilla past in her community *memoryscapes* became Viviana's way of articulating what has been silent and silenced for more than 20 years. Her room is a reminder of the lack of privacy and the comforts she did not have in the mountains (image 24, page 242). Daily chores and routines such as cleaning the house, washing clothes, cooking, walking in the forest, are a mirror of the same activities performed in the guerrilla ranks (Image 25, 26, pages 243-244).
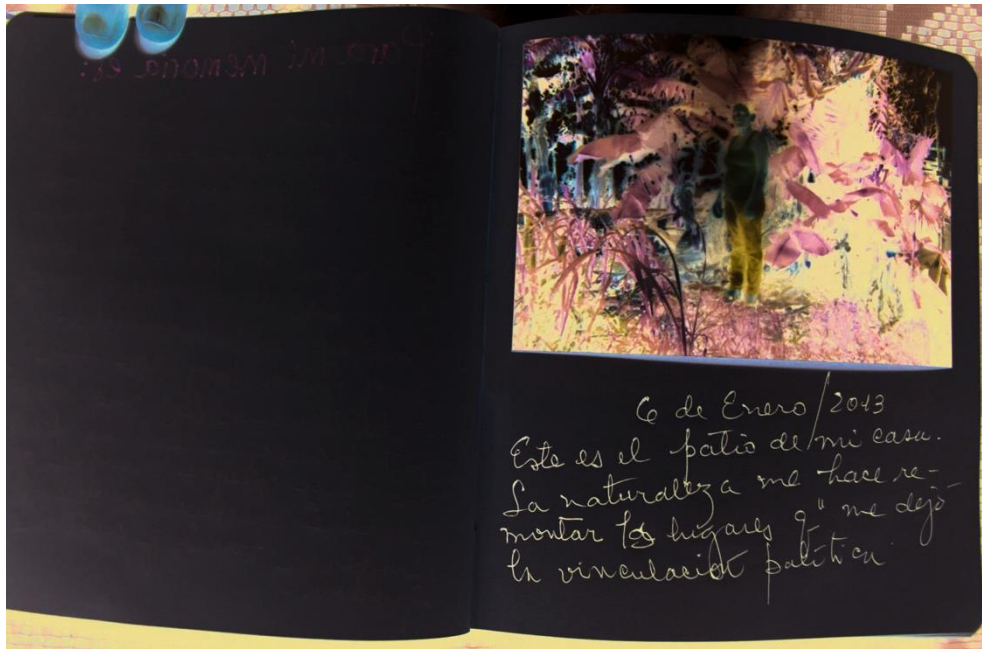
Image 23, Viviana's photo-diary.[103]

6 January 2013

This is my backyard. Nature takes me back to the places where political participation led me.

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[103] Some images, including this one, have been altered to protect women's identities.

The images are a replacement of all the experiences that cannot be conveyed into words,[104] and that are summarised in statements such as 'all the things', 'all the events', 'some of the aspects', 'lived there'. In the pictures different temporalities, spacialities and *ways of being in the world* collide and dialogue. Past and present landscapes are contrasted and the differences/similarities noted. In her *memoryscapes* the lived experience of being a female guerrilla is kept, re-told, and compared with the new landscapes she inhabits today (image 27, page 245).

Many women, especially the ones who lived moments of their militancy in the rural ranks, create similar *memoryscapes*. Some are crafted oral narrations, delineated with words and coloured by using different figures of speech, which give a sense not only of the landscape inhabited but also of the material work, the everyday, and the sensuous aspects of the militancy. For instance, Carmenza's narration of how a permanent campsite was built allows the listener to feel the physicality of the task, the scale of both the project and the place, and the phallocentric logic ruling guerrillas' everyday life,

Once we consolidated the political work [in the area][105]
We began to build a huge campsite, it was a mammoth task,
And that was the hardest task, building a campsite
Ahhh... it was a horrible, horrible work...
Do you know what it is to reach a dense jungle and begin, those poor men,
Knocking down the trees with a chainsaw and then cutting them into pieces,
Then clearing all those trunks, pulling out the roots with crowbars,
Then filling with land [the holes] where the roots had been and flattening [everything] to make a football pitch?
Because [the campsite] even had a football pitch.
In all camps the first thing you built was the football field to play.
[Building] that was horrible.
And that campsite [we made] was so big and so beautiful,
although it had a big problem because it used to get very muddy, but it was beautiful.
And it lasted so little because the army entered again [in the area], and all that work...
We had just finished it.
But you cannot imagine [it], it was huge, huge, it was for four hundred people,

104Not only because some of the experiences were unspeakable but also because Viviana is illiterate.
105 Before building a permanent campsite the guerrillas had to consolidate their presence in the area, this required transmitting the ideas of the organisation and creating ties with the local communities.

it was a huge thing made with palm trees,
it had benches…
to go to the creek to bathe, as it was so far because the campsite was on the top of a hill,
we paved the path with rocks, we paved the path!
I mean, all about it was colossal, well not as the pyramids of Egypt, but it was a colossal task,
yes, very hard (…)
(Carmenza – CRS, 2006)

Other *memoryscapes* are built of juxtaposed images and words in the photo-diaries. The landscapes of the militancy cannot be photographed today, because they are not part of the places women currently inhabit, they have changed due to the passing of time, cannot be revisited because they are located in a different region, or are difficult to access due to their remoteness or security problems. Thus a transposition needs to be made. The *memoryscape* is staged by using narrative devices that mimic, compare, and bring together the places of the past in the places of the present (Images 28, 29, pages 246-247). These fictionalised *memoryscapes* (oral and visual) are used to talk about significant moments of the militancy, the life there and life now, the body and the physical aspects of being like walking in beautiful but very demanding mountains, the meaning and evaluation of the experience, and traumatic aspects such as a moment when they encountered danger and possible death.

In the case of women who lived the militancy in the urban units, and still live in the same city today, streets, neighbourhoods, university campuses, museums and official buildings, even bus routes, became emplaced sites of memory. Sometimes these memories are part of their personal story as insurgents and as women (image 30, page 248). For example, during a car ride crossing the city of Bogotá with Magda and Eloisa there were moments in which they would point to a street while saying,

> 'There… two blocks from here my brother was gunned down…' (Magda – EPL, FJB 3, 26/10/2012).[106]

> 'Hmm I recognise this place… I used to guard a revolutionary jail around here' (Eloisa – M-19, FJB 3, 26/10/2012).

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[106] Magda had four siblings. Two of her siblings were members of the politico-military organisation she belonged to.

In other cases, the places where memory is emplaced are part of the collective history of the politico-military organisation and the country (image 31, 32, page 249). Different layers of memory, the official and the silenced, and the everyday routes of the commuter overlap. In one of the meetings of the *Collective of Women Ex-combatants* Ruth stated that she was unable to go to the *Museo de la Independencia*,[107] located in one of the corners of Bogota's main square (Plaza de Bolívar). For her it does not represent the country's struggles for independence from Spanish rule in the 1800s and the formation of the nation-state, but the people who were disappeared in November 1985 by the military during the recovery of the *Palacio de Justicia*. The Independence Museum becomes a site where the told and untold, state terrorism and proscribed violence, the revolution for independence and the struggles for wider democracy, the body of the motherland and the bodies of the disappeared come close and touch each other.

Memory and the everyday

Viviana's photo-diary, has a powerful materiality, the immaterial aspects of her past are rooted and embodied in the domestic objects, spaces and practices of the present. Her domestic life illustrates the sense of everydayness that framed the experience of being a guerrilla member in the rural ranks. The link made by women like Viviana, Bella, Gloria, Flor and Salome between their mundane domestic chores (cooking, cleaning, feeding and taking care of the family) and the spaces and everyday activities of the militancy can be explained by the link between remembering and the specifically social spatial gendered framework they inhabit. According to Connerton (1989:37) 'we conserve our recollections by referring them to the material milieu that surrounds us'. In the case of women from the old insurgencies, as the politico-military organisation no longer exists, the group cannot provide a space for remembering.[108] Furthermore as their experiences are stigmatised and viewed with suspicion by the government, and Colombian society at large, in many cases their

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[107] Museo de la Independencia http://www.quintadebolivar.gov.co/Es-es/Paginas/default.aspx
[108] Not all the women interviewed had access to the spaces of common remembering provided by the Collective and the Network.

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memories are kept in silence, not even in the privacy of their homes nor with their family members do they dare to speak about it. In some cases they are kept in non-verbal and non-cognitive acts such as nightmares, illnesses and aches which are the result of the harsh, demanding life in the jungle (damp, tropical illness such as malaria, the long walks carrying the more than forty kilos of the military equipment) (Hoffman 2004: 9-10 cited in Hirsh, 2008: 112). It is not surprising that when asked to narrate the experience some women like Viviana anchor their memories in the everyday spaces they occupy today in civilian society, and others like Patricia, Eloisa and Juanita narrate them through the pains experienced in their bodies (Patricia – EPL, Eloisa and Juanita – M-19).

Although not all the images are necessarily tied to the domestic realm, Bella took pictures of her work as an auxiliary nurse (a skill she learned as a child, perfected in the mountains and became a way of earning a living after the demobilisation, image 33, page 250), the house and its inhabitants are central in women's photo-diaries. Domestic tasks feature prominently and the gendered nurturing activity of feeding and cooking for the family is linked to the feeding and cooking for the troops (Flor, Viviana, Bella, Gloria, i.e. image 26, page 244). As Kirby (1993) suggests the house is the target of state initiatives and apparatuses concerning economics, reproduction, and political representation. In the visual and oral narratives of women such as Gloria, Patricia, Salome and Alicia the house not only connects the interlocking systems of cultural and political representations (Kirby, 1993: 183), it is also a vessel of the memories of the militancy, the embodied representation of their current struggles to survive and the site of imagined futures for themselves and their loved ones. Juanita's refusal to take part in the research is an example of the importance of the house as vessel of women's memories. After coming back from more than ten years in exile she was temporarily living with her sister, and refused my invitation to be interviewed and keep a diary because as she explained to me 'this is not my house, I'm not with my daughters and my grandchildren, thus I can't do that [keep the photo-diary]' (FD 2, 20/9/2012).

Image 24, Viviana's photo-diary.

January 8/2013

This is my room, before, in the mountains I didn't have one it was just one plank, the difference is that today I have privacy. Before the cambuches were uncomfortable and small.
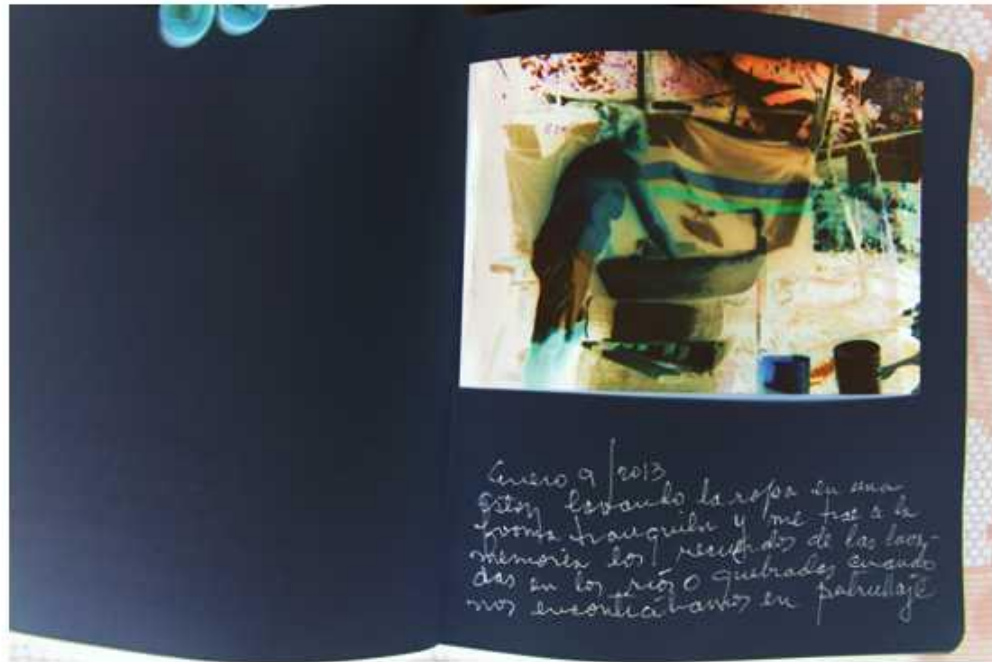
Image 25, Viviana's photo-diary.

January 9/2013

I am washing the clothes in a tranquil way and it brings to my mind memories of [when] we washed in the rivers or streams, when we used to meet while patrolling.

Image 26, Viviana's photo-diary.

January 13/2013

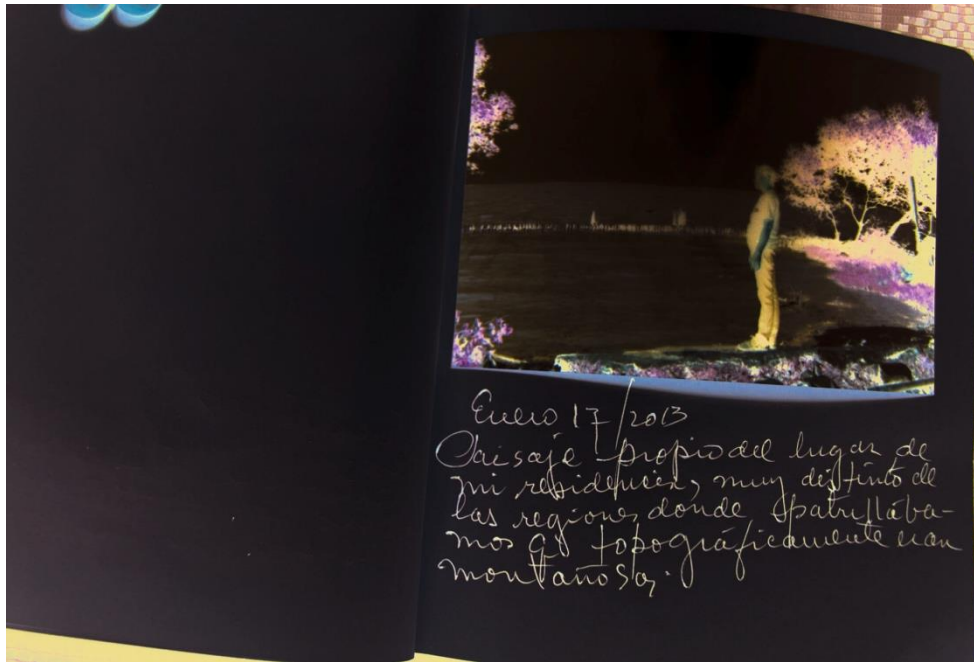*I am in the kitchen of my house; there I share loads of experiences linked to the rancho.*

Image 27, Viviana's photo-diary.

January 17/2013

Characteristic landscape of the place of my residence, very different to the regions we used to patrol. They were topographically mountainous.
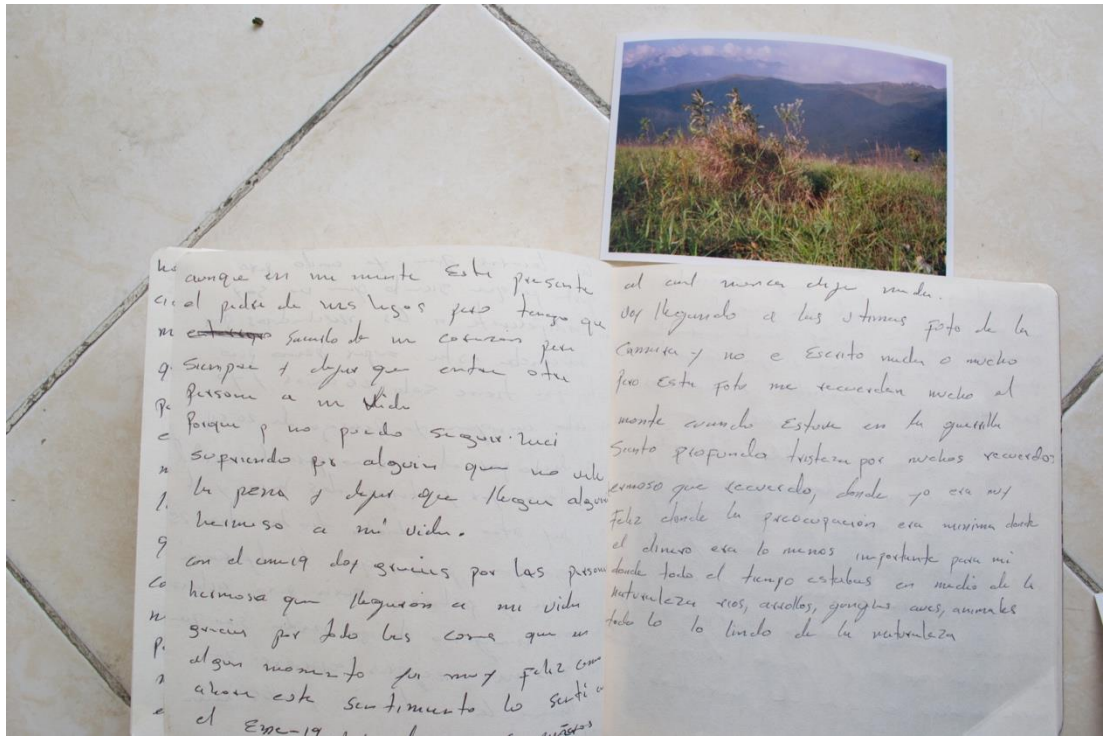
Image 28, Rocio's photo-diary.

(…) this photo reminds me of the monte when I was in the guerrilla

I feel deep sadness for all the beautiful memories I remember,

Where I was very happy where the worries were minimum when money was the least important for me where all the time you were in the middle of nature (…).

Image 29, Gloria's photo-diary.

The photo of my pets

it reminds me of some of the houses we visited in the countryside with their animals and plants.

When I listen to vallenato music I also remember [the days in the guerrilla] the places and many memories come to my mind, of nostalgia and joys.

Image 30, Patricia's photo-diary.

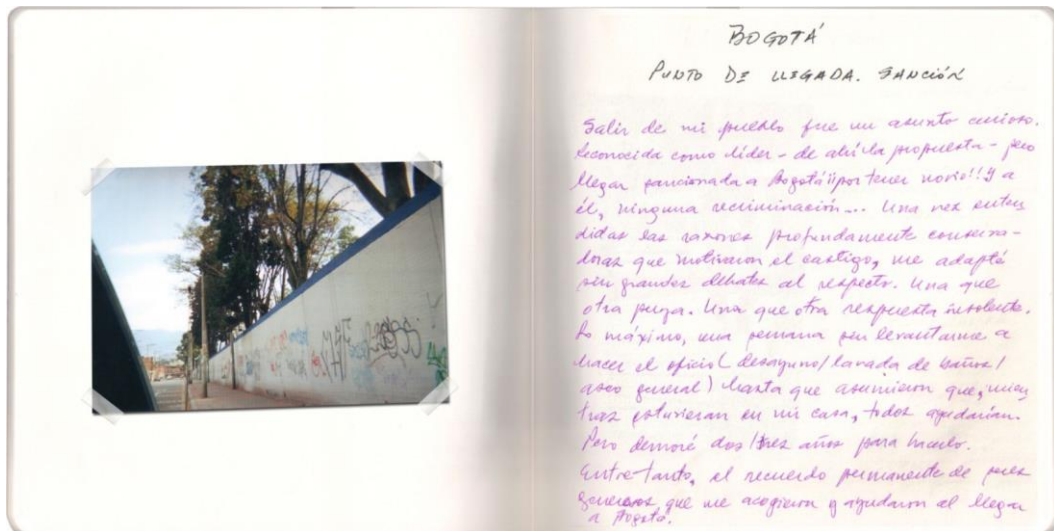[I began to think about] how to make this memory exercise,
and I began to search for... things that could be intersected
I determined themes and I tried to search for a photo for each theme.
(...)

I went back to my first arrival in Bogotá.
I'm in Bogotá, where I arrived in Bogotá?
I went to look for the house but I couldn't find it.
I wanted to take a picture of the first house where I stayed.
I think... I think I know which one is the house but there aren't...
there are...

Very near to it is a new avenue that did not exist before.
I think I found the same tree I used to look at, but I'm not sure because now there are
tyres, and more trees, and a children's playground and loads of other things.
I was left with the feeling that... I didn't have the certainty.

[I feel] deep gratitude with the people who welcomed me [in that house].
My deep affection, infinite and manifest towards them, but I don't have the picture of
the house.
Besides I thought it was disrespectful to just go there and take a picture of the house.

I end up taking the picture of a wall ()
A very long wall that covers more or less ten blocks (...)
That was the wall where we used to hide and write graffiti.
(Focus Group, 30/1/ 2013)

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Image 31, Salome's photo-diary
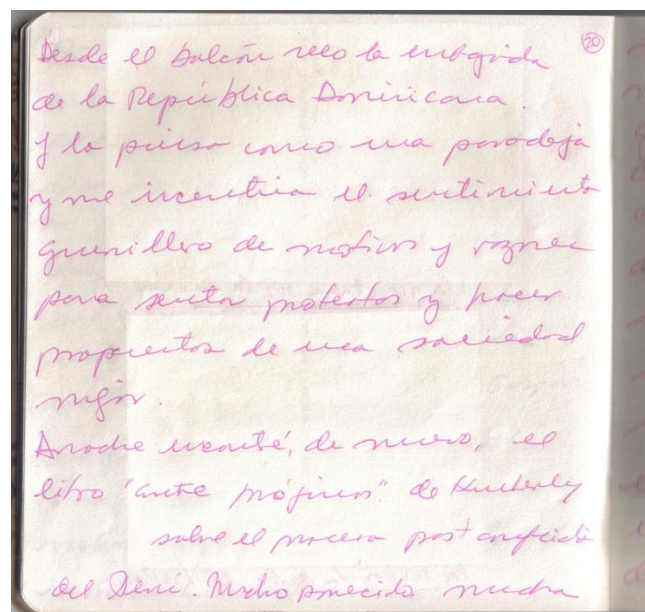
Image 32, Salome's photo-diary

From the balcony I see the embassy of the Dominican Republic and think of it as a paradox and it awakens the guerrilla sentiment of motives and reasons to protest and make proposals for a better society (...)
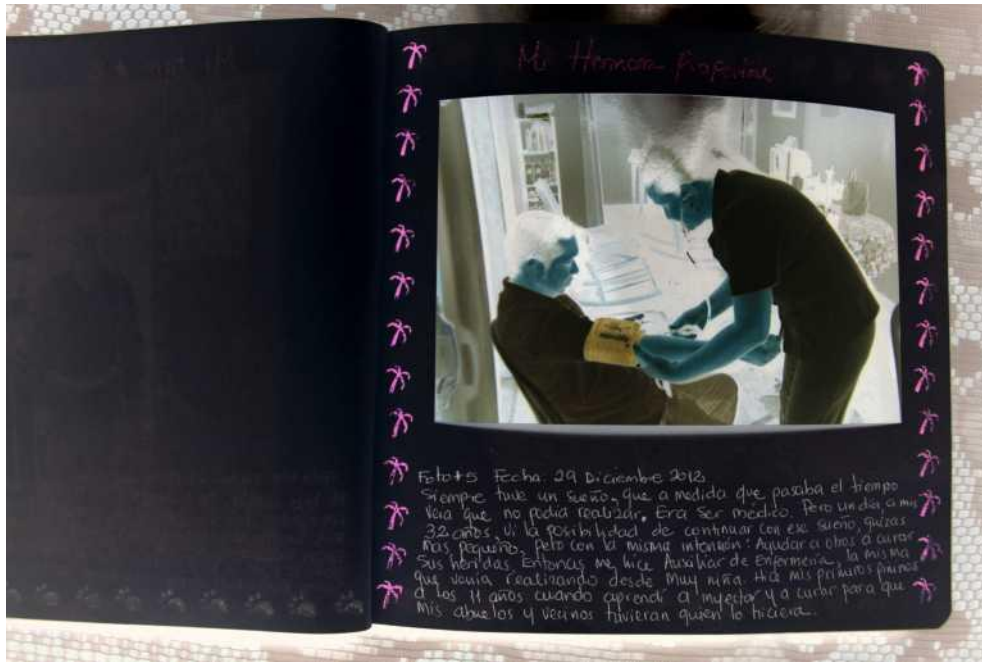
Image 33, Bella's photo-diary.

Photo N 5, Date 29th December 2012

I always had a dream, but as the time passed I was unable to fulfil it. It was being a doctor. But one day, when I was 32 years old, I saw the possibility to carry on with that dream, maybe in a smaller scale but with the same aim: helping others to cure their wounds. Then I became an auxiliary nurse, it was the same tasks that I performed when I was a child. I made my first steps when I was eleven and learned to heal and give injections for my grandparents and neighbours.

Image 34, Rita's photo-diary

Photo N 3 'The Window'

Looking at life from behind a window with the eyes of a grieving woman. For a while she was a spectator.

Image 35, Viviana's photo-diary.

11 January/ 2013

This is my children's room, it reminds me of some aspects related with guarding [the camp] and the security in the group.

Image 36, Salome's photo-diary

(…) what I am today is the result of my insurgent self the work with memory my affective relationships my partnership

my relationship with my family my way of standing in the world insurgency as a way of being.

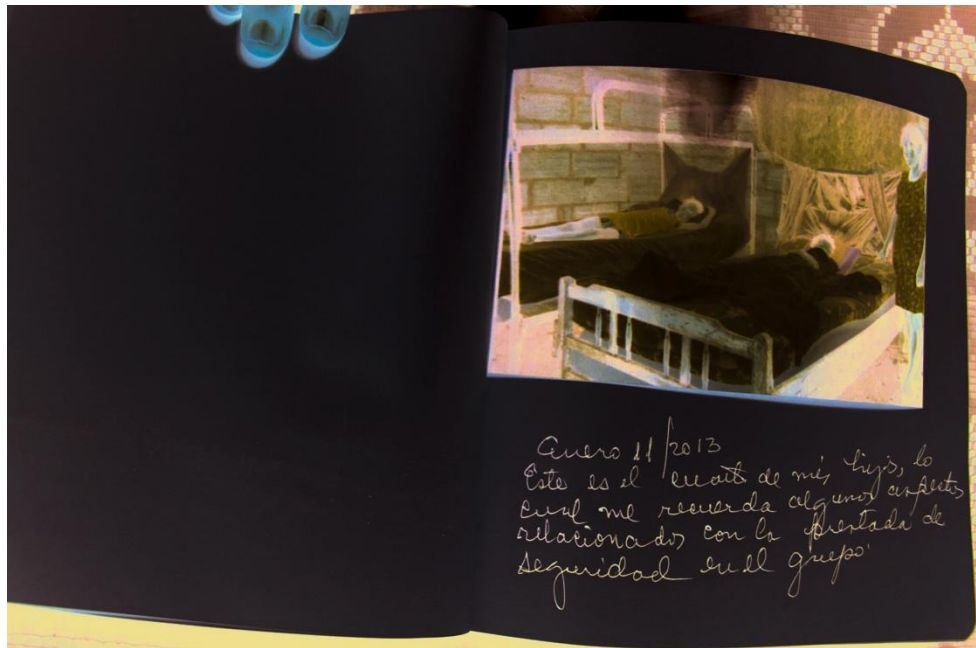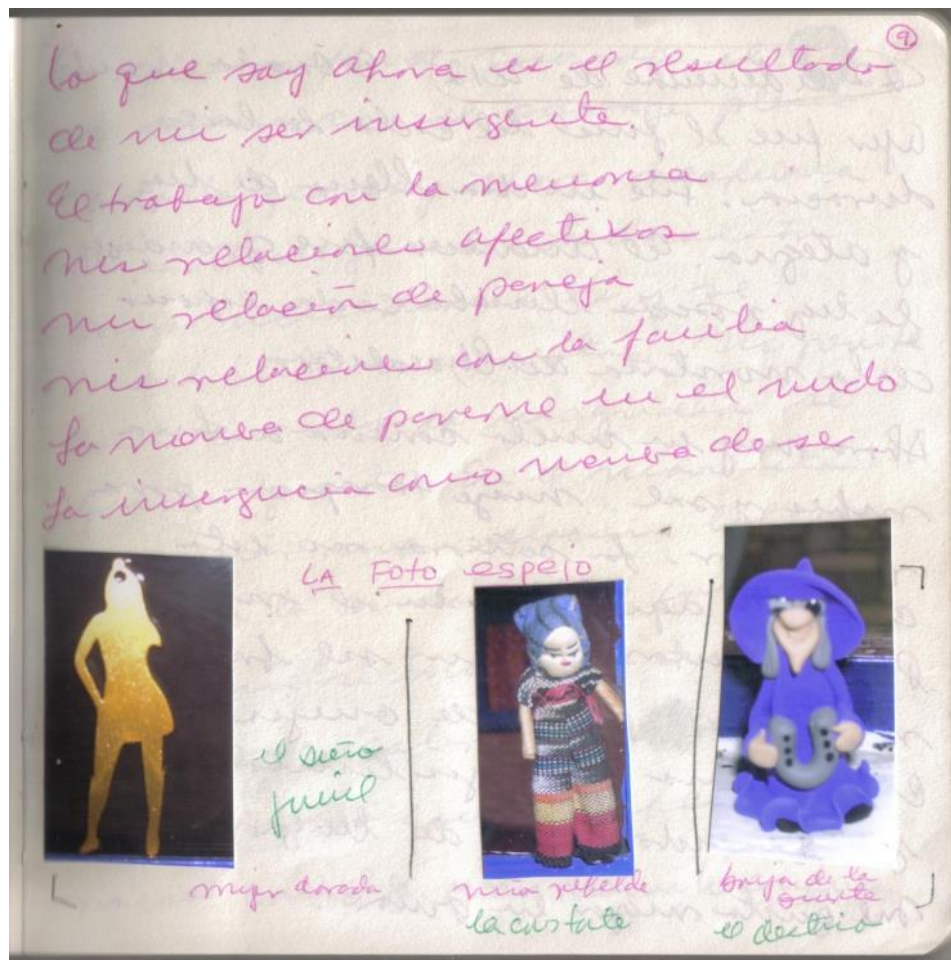Additionally, as Franco (1996) points out, in the 1970s some Latin American houses became spaces of resistance. In Colombia urban houses were turned into security homes for the militants in need of medical assistance or a place to hide, bomb factories, revolutionary jails, meeting points, revolutionary radio stations, and operative centres run by urban guerrilla units disguised as 'families' (Franco, 1996: 88, Eloisa, Elvira and Pilar – M-19, Alejandra – CRS, Patricia – EPL).[109] Elvira whose house was one of the M-19 security houses remembers,

> In that house I lived a little over 27 years, and through it all passed ()
> All my life passed through that house.
> Yes, all my childhood, adolescence, youth, everything happened there.
> EVERYTHING happened!
> There I met... I say,
> I met my best friends, the people from the eMe, ehhh
> My loves, my pains, ALL (...)
> (Elvira – M-19, 2012)

In the rural areas the relationships established between the guerrillas and the communities allow us to see the leaky boundaries of the house/community, domesticity and insurgency, politicised collaborators and civilians, the private and the public. In the mid-1980s Giselle paid her first visit to rural communities where the *MIR-Patria Libre* had influence, with the commander Enrique Buendía.[110] People from the community 'welcomed him, very effusively', killed hens and made a *Sancocho*[111] while Enrique played football with the children (many of them were his godchildren),

> When I arrived in [name of the county]
> And because of the stories Enrique told me
> [I understood] that during the day they were peasants and lived in peasants' houses and concealed the weapons.
> They had them hidden in the *monte* (scrubland).
> And in the night all of them will get armed, the peasants.
> That's why all of them have their women, family, and children.

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[109] When I reference one or more of the women interviewed and an author it is because women's narratives about the experiences of being a female guerrilla contribute to the argument being made.

[110] Carlos Manuel Prada González (a.k.a Enrique Buendía) was a funder member of the the Mir Patria-Libre. In 1992, after the division inside the UC-ELN that resulted in the conformation of the CRS he became the military commander of the newly formed CRS (Corporación Nuevo Arcoiris, 2013).

[111] Sancocho is Colombian soup made with different kinds of meat, tubers, plantains, potatoes, carrots and corn. It is usually eaten for lunch and popular celebrations.

It was a very interesting way of working because they were not like the militias that were all the time in the guerrillas,
They were working during the day with the communities, in the fields with the machetes.
(Giselle – CRS, 2010)

Guerrilla organisations such as the *MIR-Patria Libre*, the EPL and the ELN had strong links with the *movimiento campesino* (peasant movement) and in many cases membership to the organisation was a constant trespassing between the rhythms of everyday community activities and the actions linked to radical politics (legal and clandestine).

Making sense of the experience after laying down the weapons

Like in other revolutionary wars across the world (Negewo-Oda & White, 2011; Barth, 2002; Farr, 2002; Mulinary, 1998; Shayne, 1999; Luciak, 2001), after laying down the weapons women were expected to go back to the confinement of the private spaces of the traditional house seen as non-political, and resume their former gendered roles as if nothing had changed during their participation as members of politico-military organisations (Dietrich, 2014; Londoño et al., 2005; Blair et al., 2003). In this transition female insurgents followed different paths, and their possibilities to re-build their lives and make sense of their experiences were influenced by wider national politics, their particular locations, and the personal networks and resources available (Londoño et al., 2005).

After demobilisation some women from the old insurgencies were able to re-signify the experience of armed insurgency into a new identity as *Insurgentas* (female insurgents), in which they transformed their political inconformity into activism and work in different spheres and spaces of the social movement. This process was informed by different feminist discourses, among them Iberoamerican feminist ideas that defined feminist women as *subversivas* (subversive), 'dissatisfied with the world but with a desire to transform the established order, review dominant values, and beliefs of the traditional order' (Lagarde, 2005). An example are the women from the Collective who for the last ten years have been engaged in writing a collective autobiography,

The process [of writing the book] allowed us to set up a mirror
The stories served as a provocation [to open] a wide range of reflections
That COMPLETELY changed the four or five women who were part of that process,
because through those stories they THOUGHT ABOUT THEMSELVES!
They thought about war and thought about peace,
they thought about motherhood.
And all those reflections were fostered by the stories [of other women they recovered].
For instance, through the story of Nadia,
that comrade who lost her jaw in a combat,
They thought about beauty and the importance of having a full body [and the consequences of] mutilation (…)
(Eloisa – M-19, Collective Meeting 9/8/2012)

Nevertheless, this process was not straightforward, as María Eugenia Vásquez (2014) points out, after the peace agreements women *guerrilleras* who have been political and military protagonists disappeared from the public scene. It was only ten years after the DDR process that a group of women from different organisations came together and began to reflect on their experiences of becoming members of politico-military organisations, the difficulties of going back to civilian life, and the reconstruction of their life projects. Despite the hindrances and lack of resources they are still together in the Collective and the Network of Women Ex-combatants.

While some women living in capital cities like Bogotá had the opportunity of rebuilding their lives in dialogue with other women and feminist collectives, women living in intermediate cities and rural areas, 'continued their process alone, detached from all kind of political and collective participation, which has generated many pains, absences and grievances' (Andrea, Collective meeting, 28/6/2012). [112] Members from the Collective and the Network gave different explanations for this phenomenon. Firstly, according to Aurelia, it is related to the patterns of mobilisation into some politico-military organisations, which incorporated combatants who did not have 'class consciousness, even less political consciousness. And THAT is still alive TODAY' (Network meeting, 21/7/2012).

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[112] Andrea is a feminist activist and historian who during the past decade has been working with the Collective giving them advise on gender perspective and feminist theory.

Another explanation for women's isolation from political activities is linked to the eight years of Alvaro Uribe's two presidential terms (2002-2006, 2006-2010) characterised by 'authoritarian, conservative and traditional values' which produced not only a higher stigmatisation of the social movement and social protest, but also of women's past experiences as members of politico-military organisations (Elena – ELN). Many of them became victims of the continued armed conflict and ended among the internally displaced population living in the peri-urban areas of intermediate cities (Collective meeting, 28/6/2012). The historical context is another factor influencing women's isolation from political, social and community activities after the DDR, as Elena pointed out, at the beginning of the 2000s the bilateral peace agreements were still fresh as well as the euphoria of the demobilisation, 'and people were still clapping' (Collective meeting, 28/6/2012). During the last decade a memory that was heroic has become shameful, due not only to the political climate mentioned before, but also the changes experienced by the guerrillas still in arms and the degradation of the armed confrontation.

One *memoryscape* produced by Rita is a representation of women's isolation during the years after the demobilisation, in a region where the paramilitary excised full control over people's lives and the local institutions. The NGO founded by demobilised people from her organisation in the area closed down, and 'many comrades had to leave the region or the country due to political persecution while others joined the paramilitaries' (Image 34, page 251). Rita's image of the window of her house is a reference to her peasant origin and 'the land you have not detached yourself from', and to her past as a *guerrillera* (Rita – EPL). It is also a metaphor for the years during which the paramilitaries entered the region. The window becomes a way to narrate what is unspeakable, the act of witnessing massacres, forced displacement, and selective assassinations,

> One was looking at things through the window,
> and one wasn't the protagonist of the events.
> There was a moment during which one was the protagonist,
> but in other moment one was just...
> looking through the window.
> Watching those happenings, those events... watching.

And it is that looking, that seeing things passing by, and that ()
()
In that exercise one is confronted
And you…

[You need to] take decisions,
or you keep going or you are swallowed,
or you keep going or you stay looking through the window.
(Rita – EPL, focus group 26/1/2013)

Once Rita decides to stop looking through the window she and other 'non demobilised people' created an NGO, but in order to be able to work they 'took a low profile',

We didn't talk about anything [human right abuses taking place].
We took children as our working aim, childhood.
Our pretext were the canteens [for malnourished children] but…
But through that route we were able to accompany people [surviving victims of massacres, and forced displacement].
Because nobody could talk, nobody could… denounce…
Because people…
IT WAS SILENCED.
What I am telling… it was totally silenced.
It was the indifference of a county that knew that the massacres were happening…
That knew what was happening …
(Rita – EPL, focus group 26/1/2013)

Other women, particularly *campesinas* (peaseant women) or peri-urban women, with limited spaces for political participation made of the domestic and community realm a geography of resistance. The experience of participating in insurgent organisations 'branded them forever… they are in an exercise of permanent transgression… and [have] a revolutionary identity…' (Andrea, Collective meeting, 28/6/2012). Some, like Ignacia, Catalina, Gloria, are leaders of their communities, working in the defence of their territories, organising women from their communities in small cooperatives and food security initiatives, involved in projects of self-building, and as part of Colombia's social and human rights movement. It is important to make clear that many of these women cannot claim their past identity as female insurgents in the public sphere. For many of them the first opportunity to re-claim such identity was the National Meetings of the Network of women's ex-combatants

held in 2012, almost 25 years after the old insurgencies signed peace agreements.

After laying down the weapons many of these women have made motherhood an important part of their political identity, and see their children as part of a different generation of resistance that is continuing, through peaceful means, the struggle they began.

> I have two sons, they are university graduates, and one of them is an anthropologist.
> And both of them are involved in community development work.
> They are still part of this process [political insurgency]
> They are eMe's sons, they are sons of April.[113]
> (Sol – M-19, Network Third National meeting, 26-28/10/2012)

Women's understanding of their domestic roles as carers and nurturers as political brings us back to the photo-diaries and *memoryscapes* produced by women like Viviana. In this section of the chapter I argued that female ex-combatants' *memoryscapes* bring together the material and the abstract of their experiences of being and life beyond, and transform space in a medium for articulating different aspects of their subjectivity (Kirby, 1993). The images produced by some of them point to the link between visualisation and the organisation of the experience of being in the world (Knowles & Sweetman, 2004). Some of the women interviewed in the framework of this thesis, as well as the ones whose voices were listened to during the national meetings of the Network, and the focus groups did not have spaces or resources to value and make sense of their experiences of being members of politico-military organisations. The meetings organised by the Collective in 2012 gave to many of them the opportunity not only to meet female comrades they have not seen since the demobilisation but also to openly talk about their experiences, and evaluate them in a positive light linked to political agency and peace-building efforts.

In Viviana's visual and written narrative past, present and future are intertwined. She is not simply narrating the past by portraying herself in the present, she is looking backwards (Love, 2009: 148). In some pictures she is

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[113] The full name of the M-19 is 19th April Movement.

showing us her different identities, the ways in which her past as a *guerrillera* made her the women she is today. She is a wife, mother, grandmother. She is rural, illiterate, and poor. She is politically conscious and a member of a local fishing cooperative. She cultivates the land and is still 'fighting' (without weapons) for a different future, and 'becoming a better woman'. One particular picture (image 35, page 252) brings together the different identities, tempos, spacialities, Viviana conveys in her photo-diary. In the staged photo she is standing in her pyjamas near to the beds where her two younger children sleep. Her eyes are not looking at the children, her gaze is somewhere else. While the image of her children allow us to think of futurity and the adults they may become, the caption on the picture talks about the past and the comrades' lives she used to protect, some of them lost on the way. Again the domesticity of women's caring work is overlapped with the military task of guarding the campsite.

Viviana, as many other women, had not had the opportunity before to openly talk about her experience. By anchoring her memories of the militancy in the everyday of her present civilian life and reproductive labour (housework, management of household resources and provisions, the maintenance of the vegetable patch she keeps in her backyard) (Clisby & Holdsworth, 2014: 28), Viviana is able to negotiate her identity as a *female insurgent* and her identity as a 'normal' woman. Authors such as Dietrich (2014), Negewo-oda & White (2011), Rayas (2009) have shown that women who joined revolutionary and liberation armies were able to embrace different ways of being a woman to the ones assigned in the wider social order. But after laying down weapons they were asked to go back to their traditional place in the domestic realm. In this first section I stated that some women ex-combatants have had limited spaces to evaluate and narrate their experiences as members of politico-military organisations during the last twenty-five years. These women, when asked to narrate their involvement as combatants, used *memoryscapes* linked to their current place in society, the liminal geography of the mountain with the everydayness of domestic activities.

I began this chapter by looking at women from the old insurgencies' narrations of the everyday in the rural ranks. I said that female combatants' experiences

in the mountains created a strong separation between the liminal political geography of the mountain and the civilian world. In the rural ranks they learned what I have called the 'new quotidian' in which the rationale of production and reproduction, work and consumption were interrupted. For women from the old insurgencies who lived their militancy in the urban areas these dual logics of the everyday were not interrupted, and many of them had to juggle the mundane of everyday life in the civilian world and the liminality of their clandestine political identities. In the next section of the chapter I focus my attention on their experiences.

Urban women and 'the little politics' of everyday

For urban militants the experience of being members of insurgent organisations is a constant trespassing between mundanity and liminality. Their experiences are marked by the clandestine nature of their militant work and the encompassing nature of their participation in radical politics. Although urban female guerrillas were fighting to change the economic, socio-political order, the spaces and temporalities of the guerrilla life were not experienced as a total separation from the mundane activities and spaces of the civilian world. Their daily life was, to some extent, organised around the rhythms of the wider socio-political and economic order they wanted to transform, and did not necessarily break up the logics of production and reproduction, work and consumption of the wider order. In this section of the chapter I focus my attention on female urban militants from the old insurgencies such as Magda, Elvira, Patricia and Pilar who described their militancy as part of their 'everyday', and as a 'way of being in the world'.[114]

I argue that the liminal and mundane aspects of the experience were lived as leaking realities, intermingled spaces of personal and political action and agency. As a result some female urban insurgents became *embodied infrastructures* of the politico-military organisation (Clisby & Holdsworth, 2014). According to Clisby & Holdsworth (2014: 7),

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[114] All the women mentioned used the same phrase to describe the experience of being part of a político-military organisation.

Women and women's services act as forms of *embodied infrastructure*. By this we refer to the ways that women's bodies and material actions themselves become the vehicles, the catalysts, the embodied infrastructure, facilitating access to services and enabling change and support through women's networks. This infrastructure is created through a range of encounters, from those women who act as mentors to other women within their working lives, to the services and formal and informal networks women have established that serve to provide a framework, an infrastructure of support for women.

By understanding women's *reproductive labour* and *community management work* as political work women urban militants performed a 'different way of making the revolution' (Alejandra – CRS, Pilar – M-19),[115] and developed alternative political practices that guaranteed and make possible the very existence of the guerrilla organisation. R*eproductive labour* makes reference to women's roles in childrearing and 'early nurturing of infants' as well as social reproductive chores such as 'house work and the management of household resources and productions' (i.e washing and ironing, cooking, taking care of the health, education and socialisation of children, and caring for the sick, the elderly and disabled members of the family) (Clisby & Holdsworth, 2014: 28). Women's *community management work* is a 'critical element of the embodied infrastructure of society and refers to the work that is done building and maintaining kin and non-kin networks' (Clisby & Holdsworth, 2014: 28). It includes maintenance of good relations among family members, friendship and community circles; working in community development, improvement of social services, taking part in community and neighbourhood committees, engaging in voluntary community work, and supporting each other during periods of emotional need (Clisby & Holdsworth, 2014: 29).

Female urban guerrillas performed all these roles in the context of their politico-military activities. As a result they developed multiple micro-political practices of daily activism directed to intervene the everyday realities they inhabited as women (Braidotti, 2012: 287). Just as women's work in maintaining the family and supporting the capitalist economy does not fit into prevailing notions of work and production, in most cases the politico-military

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[115] Both women used the same phrase to describe the work performed by female militants.

organisations failed to recognise women's particular way of doing the revolution. Their political work was not only domesticised and seen as not political, but sometimes was seen as not work at all (Rowbotham, 1973 cited in Clisby & Holdsworth, 2014:29). In the words of Alejandra, *la militancia* 'it's like domestic work, (...), you don't work but you are all the time busy'.

Militancy as the everyday

> I feel that all my youth, and I don't say this in a negative way,
> ALL MY YOUTH is there [in the politico-military organisation], ALL
> ()
> When you ask me what was the most difficult moment [of my participation in the EPL]... NO
> I lived it as you live the everyday.
> It was PART of my daily life.
> Not even a part, it was my every day, because everything in my home,
> all was involved [in it]
> Absolutely everything.
> Our life as a couple, the children, friendships, the days out, the political work, the work with social and political organisations, my professional life
> All was...
> entangled
> (Magda – EPL, 2012)

As stated earlier in this chapter, politico-mobilised women tend to narrate their identity as female insurgents in the present tense. Most of them continue to see themselves as revolutionaries, opposed to the current socio-political and economic system in the country, which they still perceive as socially unjust, and politically exclusionary. As a result most of them describe their engagement in radical politics as a *modo de vida* (a way of living) that links their multiple identities, past, present and future; shapes their relations with others, their community, and with social and political institutions; and informs their current locations. It is necessary to make clear that this position as *insurgentas* has not been embraced loosely nor is it a mere continuity of their participation in radical politics. On the contrary, it is the result of some female ex-combatants reflections (collectively and in solitude) about their own locations 'in the company of women who have endured the same war, from different locations and perspectives' (Vásquez, 2014).

Magda's words at the beginning of this section are an example of how female urban militants experienced their participation in politico-military organisations as an integral part of their identities. The narrations about the experience of being female urban guerrillas made by women like Salome, Lucia, Alejandra, Eloisa and Claudia, to name some, enmesh the mundane realities of earning a living, being a mother, a wife, a university student, a trade unionist; struggling to make ends meet at the end of the month, and living in the midst of poverty and scarcity in the peri-urban neighbourhoods of capital cities; with the activities and tasks of the militancy, juggling different identities, doing 'intelligence', taking part in military operations, running security houses, making propaganda, organising meetings with collaborators and sympathisers, finding resources to fund the organisation and the loneliness of the clandestine life.

Sol remembers that her commander in the M-19 told them that 'revolutionary practice started in the everyday actions (…), it was not done by great heroes or heroines but was located in the quotidian spaces of the house and the street where you lived'. In consequence one of her first actions as an urban *guerrillera* was getting involved in the 'problems' of the neighbourhood, and in the leadership of the community boards. There she realised that the women from the *barrio* were the ones engaged in solving the issues around schooling, water, electricity and even transport. So one of the problems in Sol's *barrio* was the lack of spaces for the youth to practice sports part of her unit's work was to start a sports club,

> We woke up at five in the morning went jogging and played basketball.
> Later we became very good at playing basketball and we began to attend competitions,
> we began to organise the basketball team in the adjoining neighbourhood.
> And that was connected with the M-19.
> (Sol – M-19, 2012)

Pilar and Alejandra stated that building Popular Power in the cities as a revolutionary strategy not only included the combination of 'all forms of struggle' (political and military) and strengthening mass political organisation; but also building strong links with people from the communities and social organisations (Alejandra – CRS). Urban militants from different guerrillas

clandestinely joined bourgeoning Colombian social movements in the 1970s and 1980s. Their insurgent activities were not limited to military actions and *recuperaciones*[116] (recoveries) but included community and cultural work (writing newspapers, organising theatre and sport groups).

In the urban unit Alejandra helped to create all the members were activists with links in the social movement (i.e. students, trade unionists). Putting into motion an urban cell involved innumerable little tasks, but a great part of the work was making 'contact' with leaders of the social movement and people from different sectors of society and nurturing those links. The urban guerrillas would visit people, arrange one to one meetings, follow people in their daily routines, talk with leaders from the social movement and spread their ideology among them. For instance, when Alejandra's unit began to work with the community mothers, [117] they visited them at their houses and 'offered to help with their training spaces' by giving talks and other kinds of non-material support.

If the person was a trade unionist Alejandra or her comrades would pay them a visit in the trade union, get to know what they was doing, and volunteer to help with the work. Although at the beginning urban militants could not disclose their identity or links with insurgent organisations these labours were aimed at creating a strong political organisation to support the guerrilla group. On top of the clandestine work performed with leaders and the social movement, each member of the urban unit had a role inside the organisation (i.e. finance, politics, military, and logistics).

Other tasks were related to the maintenance of the organisation, like distributing propaganda, the revolutionary newspaper and pamphlets to make visible the presence of an urban unit in the region and their actions. Finances involved organising and carrying out 'operations' to acquire money to sustain

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[116] *Recuperaciones* were military operatives directed to obtain resources to support the organisation (i.e. bank robberies, stealing trucks with food and other goods to distribute in poor neighbourhoods). *Recuperaciones* were seen as a valid and necessary strategy to 'finance the revolutionary struggle. What differentiated these operations from robbery was the ideology supporting their actions (Colectivo de Mujeres Ex-combatientes, 2012: 83).

[117] *Madres Comunitarias* (community mothers) are part of a government project directed to guarantee care during early childhood for children from disadvantaged neighbourhoods. They are not educators but members of the communities (ICBF, 2015; Londoño & Romero, 2007).

the organisation, or picking up a money transfer to cover some of the expenses of the urban unit,

> Picking up a money transfer implied building up a whole identity,
> Stealing an identity card (...) and building a whole identity around that girl.
> Even trying to look like the [person] in the picture, more or less the same age,
> and [sustaining that identity] to be able to keep receiving the money transfer.
> (Alejandra – CRS, 2006)

As the guerrilla organisation had limited resources many urban guerrillas had to become 'professionals' at some point. This meant that in order to support themselves and the other members of their unit they needed to get a 'normal' job. Depending on their level of education women worked in factories, in the service sector, or as graduates. Pilar was a school teacher during most of her militancy, Patricia worked in different jobs depending on the region where she was allocated, Magda was a journalist and her work was directed to denounce state terrorism and other social and political problems, thus she considered her job as part of her militant activities. The structure and the names given to the different tasks performed by urban militants vary depending on the guerrilla group, nevertheless many of these 'maintenance' jobs were similar.

Urban units as family units

The dynamics of each urban unit were unique, and varied depending on the organisation, the tasks and responsibilities assigned to its members, the composition, and the gender arrangements established among the comrades that lived in that common space. For instance, Patricia became in the late 1970s the only female member of an EPL urban unit composed of five members. She recalls that the male comrade in charge used to knock on her door every day at five in the morning saying 'comrade wake up to accomplish your historical mission. It was to cook breakfast' (Patricia – EPL). She never rebelled against this instruction and when evaluating the incident she stated that it was a symptom not only of women's socialisation and the reproduction of the wider gender order in the guerrillas, but also of the way in which militants assumed directions as if they were 'what is correct, and should be done'. In contrast, in Alejandra's ELN urban unit where more than 60 percent

of the members were women, all the hierarchies, tasks and roles (domestic, political and military) were rotated and distributed evenly among male and female comrades. As abortion was illegal in the country they even devised a special 'operation' to help the female comrades who decided to interrupt their pregnancies to do it safely in local hospitals assisted by medical student sympathisers.

In some cases members of an urban guerrilla cell lived in the same house presenting themselves in front of the community as family members (brothers and sisters, cousins, couples).

> We assumed what we used to call an alibi in front society,
> he is my partner, the other is my cousin, and the other one is my brother…
> And each of us adopted…
> I think that we were good actors because we managed to convince, seriously,
> We managed to establish a family that was united,
> that sacrificed together, that risked [life] together and all that.
> (Patricia – EPL, 2002)

In some guerrilla cells urban militants not only established non-kin communities but also included their family life as part of the militancy. Differently to men, who in many cases forbade their wives from taking part in guerrilla life, and kept them aside as carers of 'the family, children and the private world outside the guerrilla ranks' (Eloisa – M-19), women's partnerships were established with male comrades. 'Outside the organisation there was no couple, among other things because not a single man was going to allow his wife to be a *guerrillera* if he was not a member too' (Pilar – M-19). Another reason for establishing relationships among comrades was the necessity of keeping the compartmentalisation of the guerrilla unit, and avoiding security problems (Patricia – EPL). When these partnerships had children the guerrilla unit intuitively developed practices of childrearing in which the responsibilities for caring and nurturing were shared among the different members of the security house (mainly the women) to enable both parents to perform their politico-military activities.

In other cases the militant houses contained all aspects of life (the arms, the logistic work, the partnerships, and children), and women's sons and daughters (some of them just newly born) became part not only of the security

houses but also of the military operations, mainly doing intelligence work. Retrospectively some women stated that they were so immersed in their politico-military commitment that at the time they did not assess the risks of living the militancy with their children (Diana – EPL).

> The first thing I did after the demobilisation was ask forgiveness from my children.
> And I asked for their forgiveness because the first thing I used to do, when no one could take care of them, was dragging them with me.
> For instance, when I was in the Magdalena Medio, at 11 p.m., in the middle of an area controlled by the MAS,[118] in the countryside,
> we were loading a car with weapons, and my two little children were helping us to carry the weapons,
> five, six year olds helping to carry the weapons to the car and asking me 'what is this?'
> I think of that and I still can feel my soul shivering.
> (Patricia – EPL, 2010)

Some of the ties created in the 'family units' that resulted from the shared life of the urban cell are still alive today. Sol, who was rejected by her biological family after the demobilisation, stated that the ex-comrades of the M-19 and their families are the extended family of her children. During my fieldwork with the Network I was able to see how the non-kin ties, developed among women who together endured the militancy, exile, political persecution, and jail, are passed to their children, who have grown up together as 'best friends' (Magda – EPL) or 'are like siblings' (Salome – M-19).

Although in many cases the inclusion of the children in the revolutionary struggle was the result of the lack of a clear separation between the mundane and the liminal spaces of being a guerrilla member and not a conscious decision, some female militants like Pilar, Salome, Claudia, Alejandra, Lucia, among others, consciously refused to live their motherhood separated from the militancy, and devised different mechanisms to keep the children with them,

> When I got pregnant I started wondering 'what I am going to do with this child?'
> And I saw the women who had children and left them with their mothers, aunts,

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[118] *Muerte A Secuestradores* - MAS (Death to kidnappers) was a paramilitary, anti-guerrilla group financed by the Medellin drug Cartel.

they were the ones raising the children to allow the female [comrade] to carry on with the struggle (...)
And in [the organisation] when the eMe male commanders had children, they left them with their wives, who have also been militants of the JUCO[119] and all that.
But the men were distant from their children.
[The children] were outside the risks [of the guerrilla struggle].
And I began to argue that we have to keep the children with us, that I wanted to have my daughter with me, and that was a very, very, hard struggle.
(Pilar – M-19, 2010)

These women made of militancy and motherhood a political choice that reflected their understanding of the revolution as linked to the everyday and not as separate spaces in which politics and the personal occupied different spheres (Salome – M-19). Alejandra remembers that two interrelated elements changed her understanding of the relationship between revolutionary politics and the everyday: the arrival of a family with children in her unit, and the refusal of Carmen (the woman who became her commander) to separate the political and the personal,

A very important moment was when a family arrived in the security house,
And the security house became the home of that family.
And that was new for us because we didn't have children around us,
and with children in the house [we had] to learn new codes to protect the house in a different way,
changing the paradigm that children...

Because they brought a very nice environment, more relaxed,
I think that at that moment things changed a lot.
And also the attitude of a woman who said:
-I don't allow anyone to make me choose,
It is not the organisation or the family.
She never allowed, never allowed any one to put her in that dichotomy,
or to tell her that she was less revolutionary because she had her children with her,
or to say that [the children] were going to take the time from the organisation.
For us [women] it was a paradigm shift.
We said, the revolution is to be inserted in our lives,
Not us to get out of life to make the revolution.
(Alejandra – CRS, 2006)

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[119] *Juventudes Comunistas* (Communist Youths)

As Alejandra pointed out children brought new dynamics in security houses. They gave women access to different spaces of the community and the neighbourhood, allowed them to approach old people and female neighbours, and connected them with community problems and their solutions. As Patricia points out women assumed the military and the quotidian, they (and sometimes their children) were central in keeping the 'screen' of the security house,

> Who do you think the neighbours approach to ask,
> -where is your cousin?
> [Whom do they approach] him or to her?
> They approach her.
> [To whom do they ask]
> -how are you, someone told me that you were sacked…
> To whom do they ask, him or her?
> To whom do they say:
> - water and electricity bills are very expensive, don't you think?
> Who goes to buy the bread and the milk, him or her?
> The one who cares for the collective is fundamentally her,
> she is the one who takes care of the house and of the…
> Of the screen that [the urban unit shows] in front of society.
> (Patricia – EPL, 2002)

But although some women's perception and experience of how to make the revolution changed, the guerrilla organisation was still a phallocentric organisation where male comrades never questioned their privileges or made attempts to accommodate to their female comrades' realities. While some women were attempting to live the revolution in the everyday and keep their children with them by assuming all the responsibilities (economic, care, military), Eloisa and Pilar pointed out that most men were irresponsible fathers completely absent from their children's lives, leaving all the nurturing and care responsibilities to their female partners. As an example Pilar describes her partners' relationship with their daughter,

> He did not assume any responsibility towards her,
> not the clothes neither the food, nothing.
> Sometimes he took her out, he took her for a walk,
> and that gave me an idea of his care.
> The girl used to wet her clothes, and she was not a toddler (…)
> For him it was like carrying a book under his arm, I used to tell him that.
> He used to bring the girl back with her shoes full of urine, the clothes, everything.

Besides her skin was burned (…)
He did not care for her.
He was on his own thing, talking about politics, and the little girl didn't even
have a good communication with him.
(Pilar – M-19, 2010)

As stated in the last chapter motherhood changed for many women the temporalities of the revolution. Although they were prepared to give their lives for the cause becoming a mother introduced, for the first time, questions about the tangible future,

When I had my daughter the future became very important for me
I have this girl, what will become of her?
Who is she going to be?
Who is going to raise her?
Who is going to take care of her?
Who is going to educate her?
What is going to become of her life?
Then all children became the same,
not about the present but the future, who [this child] is going to be?
Then it was that necessity to build not for today but for beyond.
 (Pilar – M-19, 2002)

It also changed their perceptions of risk, security and 'fear', not only because the children became 'a force' that 'pulled' them 'towards life' (Pilar), but also because their children could be used as a weapon against them,

To be honest with you my biggest fear…
I felt that I was so committed [to the struggle]
that I used to think that they would never make me speak,
if I was detained I would never…
I was so convinced.
My only fear was that one, that they could use me through my girl,
and every time I had the slightest suspicion of a security problem I would
send the girl to my mother's house, I said:
-I can't be detained with her, don't let them do anything to her,
That really… yes… that…
That was my only fear.
(Luisa – EPL, 2004)

The children, the fear to leave them 'without a mother' (Magda – EPL), or the possibility of their sons and daughters being used as a weapon sent women like Magda, Salome and Juanita into exile. There is not enough space in this thesis to address the particularities of the life as political exiles for the women and their children and more research needs to be done on the matter. I will only

say that one of the great aches generated by an experience that was already painful was trying to explain to their children the reasons for leaving aunties, grandparents, friends, and life as they knew it behind. Women tried to negotiate exile in different ways, Fabiola for instance wrote a poem for her six year old son as an attempt the answer his question 'mom, what does it mean going into exile?'

The women who decided to live both motherhood and revolution were expected to accommodate their needs to the requirements of the organisation which were defined in masculine terms. They not only had to be militants but also were expected to carry all their other responsibilities, which were not seen as part of their revolutionary work by their male comrades. Patricia gives a very telling example. In 1981 her unit was in charge of supporting a trade union strike. She was pregnant and her toddler daughter had hip dysplasia, she was in charge of giving support to the strikers' cultural and operative committee,

> I coordinated all the [cultural] events, the food, and the *rancho*,[120]
> We used to leave the house at six in the morning, all of us,
> [In the security house] we were three men, my children's dad and two male comrades,
> my toddler and I.
> We used to have lunch in the tent [the spot where the strikers had a permanent post] when we came back home [at night], I arrived to cook our food, wash nappies,
> organise the house, bath, feed and put my little girl in bed,
> and at that point, while I was making the food,
> one of the comrades always wanted to hold a meeting to make a balance of the strike.
> One day they told me:
> -If you are not going to attend the meeting let us know that you are not going to do anything, you are throwing away your responsibilities,
> And I was doing all that.
> I told them,
> -From now onwards the one that does not help with the house does not eat.
> (Patricia – EPL, 2010)

Patricia held her own strike. She began cooking, cleaning, and washing only for herself and her daughter. After eight days her male comrades approached her and asked how to cook breakfast. After ten days her strike ended. Although

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[120] Communal kitchen in which the food for the strikers was made. Organising shifts for cooking, serving the meals and washing up, was part of the responsibilities of the operative committee (Patricia 2002).

the gender arrangements in the house did not change dramatically, and Patricia 'went back to being a kind of mother, who directed a collective that was trying to be a family in front of everybody else, but under different conditions', because this time each member of the unit assumed a role in the everyday chores of the house. Patricia's reproductive labour was not recognised as political and central for the maintenance of the urban structure and the revolutionary effort, and from her evaluation of the event it is possible to guess that if there was any transformation in her male comrades it did not transcend the closed space of the urban unit.

Today some women laugh at their naivety and question the credibility of their 'cover' story for the security houses, as the militant 'families' were a mismatch of comrades from different ethnic backgrounds and regions in the country that clearly defied kin and kinship codes. Elvira, who lived in a security house of the M-19 stated that after the demobilisation one of the neighbours, who was a policeman, told her,

> - Your mom was the only one who believed...
> She believed that she was convincing us with that story, that she had so many nephews.
> She had loads of nephews, some black others white...
> And the first thing they used to do in the mornings was reading the newspapers and watching the national news...
> Or going for a jog at three in the morning (laughs).

Although the neighbours were aware that they were members of the M-19 they never denounced them and, according to Elvira, they looked at them with admiration. In some way the practices developed by the urban units which entailed building strong relations with the communities, getting involved and helping in the solution of their problems and needs, contributed to the blurring of the threshold between the everyday and the clandestine, liminal nature of the militancy.

Being invisible, becoming other and the clandestine

An important element that shaped the everyday of the urban guerrillas, and that conveys the blurred boundaries between the mundane and the liminal, was the clandestine nature of their life. Compartmentalisation of one's identity

was ensured through daily practices. From keeping multiple identities, never disclosing one's actions, moves and everyday routines to other members of the organisation, to bodily practices such as changing ones hair and features, using balaclavas when visiting other militants, holding meetings in the dark, bandaging one's eyes to be transported to a meeting, and only knowing comrades' code-names. In many cases women only discovered that neighbours, co-workers, even family members were also part of the politico-military organisation after the demobilisation process, or after their deaths during a military operation.

Diana portrays the highly compartmentalised life in some urban units. At the beginning she and her partner worked in a big city, she combined her university studies and motherhood with the militancy, 'I worked with the student movement', made 'armed propaganda', 'but was still living in my house', and all the comrades knew where they lived. When her partner was appointed to carry out political work in a different region the character of the militancy became strongly clandestine, 'nobody knew where we lived, the neighbours didn't know who we were, and [we were] totally clandestine',

> That was very strong for me because…
> In *la costa*[121] we are used to sitting down outside at the front door of the house to talk with the neighbours (…)
> All open, with the neighbours, all open…
> And to come here, to lock yourself in the house, going out only to attend pertinent meetings,
> getting to know only the pertinent comrades, getting to know only their pseudonym,
> only sharing with them the collective meetings because there weren't…
> There was no other… other kind of…
> I mean, you can't share with them other kinds of things because it wasn't possible, because of the rules,
> the security rules, all compartmentalised.
> (Diana – EPL, 2002)

Clandestine life is usually an experience evaluated as ambiguous, it 'gives and takes' things (Pilar). For Pilar, becoming clandestine meant gaining elements of military work, and learning to work in small spaces with few resources. But as a result she lost the possibility of doing open political work with the

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[121] The Colombian Caribbean coast is known as *la costa*.

community. Although during her clandestine life she developed an almost photographic memory, she lost her ability to write because during those years 'you can't leave papers, you can't carry anything with you'. Other women describe clandestine life as a very isolating experience, where they lost their individuality and identity,

> The clandestine situation is very hard, very hard
> Because one can't be one, one has to become other...
> (...)
> and to be another,
> You have to stop being you in order to be able to become someone else in order to have an alleged security.
> It is a very hard experience,
> it is to disown yourself, it is that strong.
> It is to lose your personal history,
> it is to take your personal history into forgetfulness for the sake of your own security, [the security of] the organisation, and your family.
> (Sara – EPL, 2004)

As clandestine practices were not only limited to the political meetings but became engraved in the everyday it is not surprising that today almost twenty-five years after the demobilisation many women still compartmentalise their lives. During our focus group about the photo-diary Salome, who is a very close friend of Magda, stated,

> This lady [Magda] is so clandestine, so clandestine,
> that you can't ask her which part of her body is aching
> because she keeps clandestine the organ in pain.

It took Elvira almost ten years to recover her own birth name.[122] It was only during a trip and 'nurturing' discussions with Colombian feminist women from the *Peace Boat project[123]* that she decided to 'rescue it',

> I was called Carolina
> And I only responded to that name, Alejandra was another alias.
> And I understood two things,
> I mean, I am happy being Carolina and all that.
> And sometimes I say,
> -that woman is more courageous than Elvira
> Elvira is plaintive, quarrelsome, squeaky.

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[122] After joining the organisation guerrilla militants took a pseudonym. Sometimes they had more than one.

[123] The Peace Boat project is a Japanese – based international and Non-governmental organisation.

Instead that woman [Carolina] is braver.
But finding myself again and saying,
-I am Elvira
And I'm also brave, and well I'm like this...
It was very important to recover my name (...)
At the end of that trip, in the last days I was Elvira again.
(Elvira – M-19, 2012)

The lack of a clear separation between the mundane and the liminal aspects of being a *guerrillera*, in which the belonging to a politico-military organisation was entangled with every single aspect of female urban militant's identities and daily lives created a sense of integration into the wider social order. It is not surprising that when the politico-military organisations signed peace agreements and the DDR process began many urban militants did not see the need to join in, in their view they had 'all the time been inside civilian life, inside everyday life!'. Some militants who had 'the right conditions' and did not have judicial charges against, were able to 'silently move to the sides' and carry on with their political and communitarian work, 'from the everyday, without raising the flag' of the insurgent organisation (Elvira – M-19).

At the beginning Elvira did not see the necessity of joining the DDR program, later she began to realise that they were not as integrated into wider society as they thought,

[During the process of laying down the weapons]
I argued... What reinsertion?
People used to say,
-What reinsertion, we are from the cities, we can just carry on [with our work]
Lies!
It was not the same, I mean
We were not normal! (Laughs)
I mean it, we weren't normal (laughs)
I look at all these things [photos from her teens] and I say,
off course, I was not a normal girl.

Three years ago we had a reunion with our classmates
And one of them said ()
He said ()
They asked for someone ()
And he said
-It's her [Elvira]
-She was the *guerrillera*?
And I did not have a clue,

how they would know at my school [that I was a *guerrillera*]?
-You had strange ideas.
And I swore that I was normal.

When I show you this photo...
I only realised yesterday,
I had not noticed it before but look.
One believes that is normal and all that,
In this photo I'm with my cuddly toys,
I look very cute with my teddies.
But look at my room!
I'm with [posters] of Bateman and Pizarro[124] and with graffiti
'Justice is the fruit of ...' I don't know what else.
Then one says I wasn't normal.
[At school] I used to write slogans on the blackboard,
of course they noticed I had strange ideas (laughs).
I was the only one who believed that I was normal.
(Elvira – M-19, 2012)

In this section I looked at female urban militants experience of the militancy as *the everyday*. I sustain that liminal and mundane aspects of their involvement in radical politics were not lived as separate spaces but as merged realities, shaping their everyday as women and their political and military work. As a result some urban militants describe their engagement in radical politics as a *way of life*. At the moment of the demobilisation it created the illusion of not needing to join the reintegration program in order to go back to civilian life, as they had all the time been working with their communities and the social movement. I have also explored the experiences of some women who refused to detach motherhood from militancy, revolution from the everyday life. Many of them developed practices of daily activism, agency and political action that transformed reproductive and community management work into overtly political work. But the politico-military organisations and their male comrades not only ignored the importance of the work performed by women, they also invisibilised it and considered it not work at all. In the next section of the chapter I focus my attention on 'women's little politics' (Pilar), this is the politics of the everyday, and their role as *embodied infrastructures* of the politico-military organisation.

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[124] Jaime Bateman Cayon (1940 – 1983) and Carlos Pizarro (1951 – 1990) founder members and commanders of the M-19.

Women as embodied infrastructures of the guerrilla organisation

In this subsection of the chapter I focus on female guerrillas as *embodied infrastructures* of the politico-military organisations. I argue that by making their *reproductive labour* and *community management work* political revolutionary practices, some women developed a different way of making the revolution, defined by Pilar as *la politica chiquita* (the little politics) or the 'politics of the everyday'.

When asked by her comrades how the *little politics* was done Pilar struggled to define it, 'I didn't find words to explain it, you have to do it with the people'. Instead of explaining in a few words how the politics of the everyday is done Pilar builds detailed narratives and stories describing the work she did with the teacher's trade union, people from the communities, and the female guerrillas under her command. What is clear from the testimonies of female insurgents such as Pilar and Patricia is that *the little politics* was rooted in women's everyday practices and activities. Female urban insurgents worked silently and diligently 'as little ants' getting ready for the rainy season (Patricia – EPL), weaving and maintaining very fine networks (Pilar – M-19, Patricia – EPL).[125]

The first aspect of the *little politics* is linked to women's reproductive labour and social reproductive work (childrearing, caring, nurturing, housework, management of resources and provisions). This work sustained, as we saw earlier in this chapter, the 'cover' of the security houses and its members. Women's social reproductive skills were central in political spaces of the militancy such as logistics, planning political and military actions, intelligence, and building solid relations with the communities. For example, female urban militants were very good at military tasks such as intelligence, surveillance and operative tasks. Not only because, as Pilar suggests, a group of women standing in a corner is less suspicious than a group of men, but also because they are more meticulous, and 'look at things in a different way' (Pilar – M-19).

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[125] Both women used the same phrase to describe the work performed by female militants.

But while in the mountains 'housework' (cooking, cleaning, maintaining the campsite) were seen as part of male and female combatant's political tasks sustaining the revolutionary effort (Pilar – M-19), female urban militants' reproductive work was domesticised and as such disregarded by male comrades as not work at all. Women who shared the same spaces of the militancy with their partners are an example of how the political work performed by female insurgents was not recognised. Teresa's husband was a renowned political activist who 'didn't have time' to do all the work required to organise the meetings (Pilar – M-19). Teresa was the one in charge of sending the invitations, calling people, preparing the documents and taking the materials to the meetings, 'all that political work became part of her domestic chores' (Pilar – M-19). On top of it she would organise her children, take them to school, make lunch for her husband, prepare his clothes, do all the housework, and get ready to go to the political summit. Nevertheless, all this political work performed by Teresa was never considered part of her political commitment as *guerrillera*. While her husband climbed to higher positions in the structure of the organisation because of *his work* (my emphasis), Teresa's work was never mentioned or recognised by her husband in the intimate spaces, neither was she recognised in public by the guerrilla organisation. Teresa was not the only one, as Pilar states women's political work disappeared as they began to be seen and valued in relation to their partners and not as independent political subjects (Dietrich, 2014: 109), thus they became the 'wife of...' or 'the lover of...',

> Women's political labour was not recognised,
> their political work disappeared.
> Juanita for instance, who in the end was exiled,
> took care of the children of other female comrades,
> helped to make and distribute propaganda (...).
> I mean these women were in function of doing political tasks that nobody else was doing.
> Besides they had to nurture and care for the husband and the children.
> And earn money to sustain [the family] and allow that husband to do his political work.
> (Pilar – M-19, 2010)

While men could count on their female partners' reproductive and productive labour to help them to accomplish their political functions, women had to

juggle all their responsibilities and accomplish all their tasks 'no matter how' (Pilar – M-19). As women did not have anyone else to support them they become, through their bodies and creative labours, their own 'platforms for living' (Johnson, 2013:18-19 as cited in Clisby & Holdsworth, 2014: 10), *embodied infrastructures* for themselves and the politico-military organisation (Clisby & Holdsworth, 2014: 10).

The lack of recognition of women's reproductive and community management labour had different consequences during their participation in the guerrillas, and the return to civilian life. Firstly, as women performed these tasks in the frame of intimate spaces it was invisible for the wider politico-military organisation, and many men were able to 'appropriate women's work' (Pilar – M-19). Therefore, some female militants like Pilar, who occupied command positions in the city, decided to remain alone. In other cases, the recognition of women's work by the organisation became a source of 'constant clashes' in the relationship because some men were unable to accept their affective partners as superiors (Dietrich, 2014: 110),

> My partner was my subaltern,
> he was very bruised because he had joined the organisation before me and I had been promoted first.
> That became a source of constant disputes (…)
> He torpedoed everything I did for the organisation, he torpedoed everything.
> Hence I had to be doubly good in order to minimise the impact in the house and in the organisation (…)
> But he pressed me, he blackmailed me with the children.
> He used my children in the most disrespectful way (…)
> For instance, he would leave them alone during the night, and go to see his lovers while abandoning them (…)
> (Patricia – EPL, 2010)

Secondly, some women consider that in terms of security, female urban militias and their children were more exposed (Pilar – M-19, Sara and Lucia – EPL). While the man could leave the house and hide for a while, she was the one 'putting the face' in front of the death threats, state armed forces and military raids performed in the houses, and the community (Pilar – M-19).

But if women's reproductive labour was important for the politico-military organisation women's *community management work* was indispensable for

the survival and success of the guerrilla organisation in the cities. Even more it was central in the development of what women called the *little politics of the everyday*. During their participation in insurgent activities some women politicised tasks such as building and maintaining networks, participation in community development projects, voluntary work, and emotional labour. The words they use to describe this work are akin to the language of reproduction, caring, nurturing, and affection.

Part of women's *community management work* was securing places where the revolutionaries could hold clandestine meetings, thus at any moment, if asked, they could 'give place', this means to assign a house from where to hold a clandestine summit. The site had to be 'clean' or not visited before; could not be 'burned' or 'hot', which meant that many members of the guerrilla had visited it previously and as a result it was deemed dangerous. That required a lot of 'previous political work' such as talking with the people, 'listening to their problems', and even helping them with everyday chores and needs (Pilar – M-19). Only after creating that 'political relation' with the owner of the house, 'which took a very long time', would women ask them for permission to hold a revolutionary meeting in their home. Then people would state their conditions: 'no, not at that time because my husband is here', 'okay but you cannot smoke because my daughter has asthma', 'you can come here but speak in a very low voice because my neighbour is too nosey' (Pilar – M-19). When the place had been secured part of the labour was taking care of the security of the militants attending the meeting,

> You have to go and pick them up because you can't give the address to everybody.
> You have to go earlier to the place, take a look, and see how it is.
> And [when the meeting is finished] you have to take people out,
> and make sure they don't know where it took place.
> (Pilar – M-19, 2010)

Pilar and the members of the structure under her command (most of them women) were experts in building relations with the community, as a result she was able to provide many places for the organisation to hold meetings. Nevertheless, her male comrades did not recognise that this was the result of hard, detailed, and continuous work of building networks with people in the

communities. A telling example is her story about the creation of a revolutionary radio station she began in order to be able to communicate with women from a sector in the city where she had political work and was unable to visit due to security issues. Through a female comrade Pilar contacted a couple who had worked in the radio stations of the *Montoneros* in Argentina.[126] Thanks to a 'donation' made by an upper-class widow who 'had been all her life a housewife' but 'felt an affinity towards the eMe', and knew Pilar's political work they were able to buy the first recorder and cables to build the radio aerials. After a couple of months they had installed six aerials in different places of the neighbourhood, and were transmitting every day at five in the morning. As Pilar was pregnant she was absent for ten days after delivering her baby. During that time, a male comrade who liked the idea took the aerials to his unit, but he was never able to find places to locate them, or to transmit the programme as 'they were not disciplined to wake up at five in the morning' (Pilar – M-19). When Pilar began the radio a very important part of the work was caring for and nurturing the relations with the inhabitants of the houses where the aerials were located, and the old couple living at the house from where the transmission was done every morning,

> That implied talking with them, drinking chocolate,
> To be with them.
> That work was done by the women of my structure, they used to go and spend time with the oldies.
> One day the old man died, and Belén went the next day to see his widow.
> She was ill, so I took her to the doctor.
>
> That kind of leadership [taking care] of people's lives,
> and allowing that old couple to feel happy because they were part of the M-19,
> because that was their way of taking part in the revolutionary struggle.
> They used to wake up very early, which was a great effort for them,
> but they felt happy because they were taking part in the struggle.
>
> I think that only a feminine idea of revolutionary work allows that,
> people can take part [according to their own capacities].
> The masculine idea of political work is more operative
> (Pilar – M-19, 2010)

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[126] *Montoneros* (1970-1979), Argentinian guerrilla movement linked to the Peronist left.

When evaluating this episode Pilar concludes that neither her male comrades nor the commanders understood the dimension of all the effort and time women put into building networks and securing spaces for the organisation.

> They have this concept that women 'have' (…)
> [my commander] once told me
> -You have loads of godfathers (…)
> It is not about 'having',
> it is about working, caring and nurturing relations and contacts.
> (Pilar – M-19, 2010)

In many cases male guerrillas were careless with the spaces and relations women had so carefully built. They did not 'take enough care' of the security, or did not respect the conditions set by the inhabitants of the houses such as not smoking. As a result, women's work was impacted negatively, and relations that took months to build were broken as a result of males comrades 'misbehaviour'. Pilar concluded,

> During our political work there was a time when the men came and spent all our savings.
> All we had nurtured, built, and handled (…)
> Hence I really think that men don't take care of things as much as women.

Pilar's examples of how the *little politics* was 'made' allows us to see women's way of making the revolution as an embodied, material practice, in which they became 'bridges' between the politico-military organisation and the members of the communities. When evaluating their everyday political practices women show a gender awareness of how cultural practices, and gendering processes shaped their participation in guerrilla organisations (Clisby & Holdsworth, 2014). Moreover, through their political and everyday practices some *guerrilleras* became informal embodied support networks or infrastructures in the communities where they operated (for civilian women) and inside the politico-military organisation (for female sympathisers, collaborators, and for other female insurgents) (Clisby & Holdsworth, 2014: 164).

Female guerrillas as mentors of other women

Some female urban guerrillas became mentors, supporters or role models for other women inside and outside the politico-military organisations. As such

they allowed them to imagine different futures, contributed to their career development (inside the organisation), allowed them to recognise patterns of inequalities in their life course and inside the guerrillas, and provided support to women whose lives were affected by visceral violence (Clisby & Holdsworth, 2014). Most of the time female urban militants performed these roles without a 'theoretical' feminist approach they were 'feminist without theory' (Pilar – M-19), or 'artisan feminists' (Alejandra – CRS).

An example of female urban militants as mentors and supporters of women of their community is given by Patricia. In the mid-1980s she was sent to do political work with the trade unions in a very dangerous region. As her political work was clandestine she and her husband got a job in the oil refinery and joined the workers' social club. It was in this context that Patricia decided to organise, with one of the male trade unionists' wives, a basketball group,

> In two months we had organised a group of 15 women, trying to do sports,
> If we had filmed those first days that would be moving, deeply moving
> Especially for those women.
> Some of them were obese, not fat, obese,
> They had never practice exercise before.

As Patricia was well known among the women's husbands and was recognised for being 'unsubmissive', taking part in the trade union meetings, and in many cases publicly challenging her husband in political meetings, some men forbade their wives from talking with Patricia, from welcoming her into their homes, and in many cases from playing basketball,

> I highly value the effort made by those women.
> One woman for instance, her husband was very aggressive with her,
> And one day at five o'clock I was picking her up [to go to play basketball] (...)
> He never arrived at that time, but that day he did, and he saw me.
> And he beat her up, there in from of me.
> And she... she didn't... I don't....
>
> With her bruised eyes, her bruised legs, she said:
> -I'm leaving.
> And she left, and sat with us for a while and we cried together, and then she said:
> -I'm not going to stay here sitting, I'm going to play.
> That was a great achievement for those courageous women.

The basketball team helped the women involved to go through the triad of violence that shaped their lives (symbolic, structural and visceral), and to establish a different relation with their bodies, contributing to their overall well-being, leading to self-empowerment and pride in themselves. When the basketball team started they were obese and their partners would look at them with scorn and make nasty jokes about their cellulite. After a year the team 'had discipline', trained every day with a coach they paid for with kitty money, 'the women were no longer obese, just a little fat', and became the champions of the area, after 'defeating the teenagers' of a local school'. According to Patricia that was her first 'military triumph'. After three years in the area she was transferred by the organisation to a different city, she stated that 'with great pain' she had to recognise that the initiative finished as soon as she left because 'she was the motor' behind it. When evaluating the experience, she concludes that she left the region with a great admiration for those women who were able to 'oppose everything'.

Women like Pilar and Alejandra stress the important role of other female insurgents in command positions as their mentors, role models and source of emotional support inside the guerrilla organisation. These women had a 'no masculine way' of handling power, were open to talking and listening in affectionate ways, and would not 'judge' women's behaviour with double standards, or use their personal intimate lives as political arguments against them (Pilar – M-19). Some female commanders established informal spaces of mutual care, where intimate and personal issues were as important as the political discussions,

> Silvia was my first woman commander.
> And with her we built a space I didn't have with anyone else,
> it was a women only space.
> We spoke about love...
> that was a topic I have never discussed with anyone else during my political life.
> We spoke about our relationships with men.
> With the men I never drank alcohol
> because there were always possibilities...
> [With them] I was always taking care of my political image,
> not giving them any reason to question my [integrity],
> or becoming vulnerable to their attacks (...)
> With Silvia that never mattered.

> We would go into a pub and talk, and drink, and cry together (…)
> It was a completely different command relationship.
> (Pilar – M-19, 2010)

Alejandra portrays a similar relation with Carmen, who became her commander at the end of the 1980s. Carmen built with the people under her direction a relationship in which she did not separate the political-military problems from the lives of the members of the unit, and where the political and the personal were equally important. In top of her politico-military responsibilities she would listen to other militants' romantic problems, and give advice. During Alejandra's pregnancy she,

> would drop her girls at the school at 7 am
> and come to my house to teach me how to breathe, how to push, and measure my belly to check my development.
> (Alejandra – CRS, 2006)

As in the case of other female mentors, women commanders like Silvia and Carmen were important in the 'career' development of other female militants and helped them to question and in some cases overcome the patriarchal practices of the organisation which privileged maleness (Clisby & Holdsworth, 2014: 166),

> [Carmen] gave us women a great support to study,
> to promote ourselves [in the structure of the organisation]
> She used to tell us:
> -The only thing we cannot afford is being men's carbon paper,
> even if it is very hard we need to have our own criteria,
> we can't be afraid of confronting their ideas,
> we can't become the shadow of a man.
> And that was wonderful because she lived it in her own life.
> She always had very distant political positions with her partner,
> and she was able to separate (…) [she would say]
> -I love you my dear, I love you, you are my partner, but I don't agree with this…
> That gave us very important references…
> Although she didn't have a feminist education
> we had an intuition about things we still needed to conquer,
> and about complicities that we needed to build among us [women]
> (Alejandra – CRS, 2006)

Many of these women's role models were central in the development of the understanding of the revolution as the everyday, and helped to 'temper' other female insurgents' political radicalism (Alejandra – CRS). Through their

everyday practices and encounters with other women who had lived similar experiences of sexism inside the politico-military organisations some women were able to start questioning their own realities, even if at the time they did not have a gender or feminist discourse to support their discontents. Alejandra recalls that it was the contact with Julia, the only female insurgent in her organisation who had attained a high military command position, that confirmed their suspicions about women's difficulties to climb in the hierarchy of the organisation. It is necessary to point out that most of the women interviewed only began to reflect about their gendered experiences of inequality as members of guerrilla groups after the demobilisation.

In this subsection of the chapter I have shown how some female urban militants developed a 'different way of making the revolution', which was performed in the everyday through small acts of solidarity, and nurturing relations among comrades and with members of the communities where they worked. Women's 'little politics' allowed the introduction of affection and did not separate the intimate from the political. For them,

> The revolution was with the everyday life, the family, everybody.
> It was a vital revolution which was not separated from joy,
> neither from the possibility of building loads of affections…
> On the contrary it was based on affection (…)
> (Alejandra — CRS, 2006)

This is why, almost twenty-five years after the demobilisation, while talking about the peace negotiations that had just begun between the FARC and the Colombian government, Patricia stated,

> One of the things that can't be repeated [in a future DDR process]
> is the invisibilisation of what is left after the war,
> the networks.
> And those are networks that are generally caressed and nurtured by women.
> They are generally networks of affection.
> And although they are built to go beyond the everyday [for political aims]
> they are built in the everyday.

Conclusions

The everyday and the mundane are central in women's narratives of being members of politico-military organisations, nevertheless the place where their

experience was lived (rural ranks or urban units) influenced female guerrilla's daily lives. The break with the tempos of production and reproduction, work and consumption that took place in the mountain allowed not only the emergence of a different gender order but also a different experience of time and its rhythms of guerrilla life. Wo(men) in the rural ranks had to learn 'the new quotidian' which encompassed all their lives and blurred the separation between intimate and communal spaces, and temporarily relaxed distinctions based on ethnicity, class and even gender. Women who were urban guerrillas lived the everyday and the liminal as parallel realities, mingled and difficult to separate. The mundane activities of a 'normal citizen' and the clandestine militancy were lived as leaking spaces and times, this is why many women describe their time as *guerrilleras* as *a way of being in the world*.

Framing participation in radical politics not as an exceptional event that happens outside society, but as a flux between mundanity and liminality that takes place in the cracks of the everyday, or in the case of urban guerrillas becomes the everyday, questions the boundaries between the war zone and the civilian world, and sharp distinctions between combatants and collaborators of the revolutionary organisation. I am aware that blurring the boundaries between guerrilla members and civilians is a double-edged, sometimes dangerous position. Not only for me as a researcher but also for people from communities where the guerrillas have presence and influence. Many people in these communities have been targeted and massacred by state forces and paramilitary armies, who accused them of being 'guerrillas dressed in civilian clothes'. But my argument here, and what I want to make visible, is that in order to build a strong post-conflict society we (Colombians) need to question and defy the stories we have learned about the socio-political violence in the country.

We cannot ignore that the left and in some cases the armed-left (as much as the armed-right in recent years) has been involved in the Colombian social and human rights movement. As discussed in Chapter Five some armed fighters were part of the social movements and joined the guerrillas because of political persecution. Later, after laying down the weapons, many went back to political and social activism and became targets of paramilitary activities. And that this

happened because for many years the closed political system of Colombian society did not allow other forms of political participation for those outside the bipartisan system. Thus by dismantling the rationale of enemy/friend, the good/the bad, combatants/collaborators, we may be able as a society to start taking responsibility for our actions (or lack thereof).

In this chapter I have also stated that after the demobilisation some women ex-combatants reflected on their everyday practices and realised that they were aligned with a feminist ontological stance. As Eloisa points out, although Pilar developed a gender consciousness only after leaving the guerrillas, during all her militancy she questioned the gender arrangements of the organisation, and its parenting model. Thus it is possible to say that women guerrillas like Pilar, Patricia, Claudia and Alexandra, are examples of women as *situated knowers*. In the next chapter I explore women's militancy as a joyful period of their lives, where they were valued and learned new skills.

Chapter Eight
The Joy of the Militancy: Happiness and the Pursuit of Revolutionary Struggle

Pleasure and joy have been an overlooked aspect of the experience of female participation in guerrilla groups and politico-military organisations. This is because the idea of women narrating their involvement as actors of violence, using tropes of pleasure and happiness can be considered a taboo for different reasons. Firstly, women as perpetrators of violence contravene official discourses of Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reintegration, Reconciliation and Transitional Justice that expect repentance and the search for forgiveness from former combatants. Secondly, women's participation in revolutionary struggle brings into question traditional views about women's (and girls') engagement in armed violence, in consequence destabilising both the gender order and the political, social and capitalist order. Both orders are related to normative moral ideas of what is happiness and how it can be attained by following 'the right path' so to this extent these 'violent' women also bring into question the whole quest for happiness (Ahmed, 2010: 2).

In contexts of ongoing armed confrontation and transition from war to peace, as in Colombia, looking at women's experiences of engagement in politico-military organisations as a source of joy and happiness is innovative and contributes to the process of memory building from the bottom up. It problematises official narratives about the motives, dynamics and development of the armed violence that criminalise and/or silence women ex-combatants' memories of participation in revolutionary organisations and problematises narratives that look at fe(male) ex-combatants with suspicion, posing security threats to them and their families. Furthermore, female ex-guerrillas narrations' of their experience using tropes of pleasure and joy create complex questions for feminist scholars because women's violence challenges traditional feminist analysis of violent practice (Fitzroy, 2001: 12).

In this chapter I focus my attention on pleasure as an element of women's participation in politico-military organisations. I look at how happiness and

joy are narrated and constructed in women's stories of being *guerrilleras* and at the sources of happiness they identify in their experience of being part of politico-military organisations. Most women from the old insurgencies do not narrate or interpret their period of participation in the guerrillas as traumatic, although they experienced traumatic incidents or periods, quite the contrary. Some of them talk of the militancy, as a joyful period of their lives fuelled by the revolutionary dream, and the promise of different futurities. I want to show how some women ex-combatants like Elvira, Olga, Silvia, Rita, to name some, narrate the experience of being female insurgents using tropes of intimacy, love, and pleasure, and evaluate it as the 'happiest time' or as 'the best life' they have had. Women like Rita, Ignacia, Patri and Aurelia stated that despite the losses and hardships endured during and after their involvement in revolutionary organisations they do not regret their decision to join the guerrillas. If presented with the same option they 'will do it again but earlier' (Rita, Ignacia and Aurelia – EPL).[127]

Sources of joy and happiness in guerrilla life

Definitions of happiness are ambiguous not only because happiness invokes transitory and sometimes fragile states of being (Colson, 2012: 8), but also because they are rooted in culture, and linked to normative and moralistic connotations of what a 'happy life', a 'happy woman', a 'happy person' should be (Ahmed, 2010; Colson, 2012). Instead of using a fixed definition I look at how women talk about happiness in relation to their years as *guerrilleras*. At a first glance their accounts of happiness are built from contrasting, contradictory elements. On the one hand, happiness is bound to a state of pleasure, a sense of joy and satisfaction generated by their identity as *guerrilleras*, and the intimate communal life experienced in the organisation. On the other hand, happiness is defined by being free of suffering and sorrows, despite the discomforts and losses linked to guerrilla life. Their accounts about the joy of the militancy are articulated around three main factors: firstly, the group as a place of affection; secondly, the guerrilla experience as a place of learning new skills and values such as solidarity, independence, courage; and

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[127] All the women mentioned used the same phrase.

a site of blossoming, empowerment and positive improvement of the self where they were recognised and valued. Thirdly, the joy of pursuing a just cause despite the sorrows and hardships it entailed.

<u>Happiness as lack of lacking</u>

Juliana's photo-diary illustrates the juxtaposed nature of joy and happiness in an insurgent organisation. A former member of the EPL Juliana was 37 years old when we met. Juliana joined the guerrillas aged 14 due to what she called 'problems in her house', which in her case meant a fragmented family in which she did not feel welcomed, or loved. She experienced domestic violence from both her stepmother, and her biological mother who she describes as an alcoholic, and had an abusive stepfather. Her childhood and life after demobilisation have been lived through a continuum of violence that takes three key forms, symbolic, structural and visceral (Clisby & Holdsworth, 2014: 5).[128] In her diary Juliana wrote,

Image 37 (page 307), Juliana's photo-diary,

> *My life in the organisation was very happy, I had everything, and everything in abundance, and I did not lack anything.*
> *One day an old man we used to bump into him very often [he was on] a donkey we arrived in his house and he told me that he had cut his arm and he had lost loads of blood and he was feeling very weak but his wound was already healing then I gave him a vitamin serum and wherever he saw me he would say to me many thanks doctorcita. Many times. That made me very happy.*

In her photo-diary Juliana continually states that there, in the guerrillas, she was happy and makes an attempt to describe the things that made her happy. As in the case of other women the motives for her joy are multiple. They are built around the contrasts of the life before, during and after her participation in the organisation. In the first place Juliana states that in the guerrillas she

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[128] Clisby & Holdsworth (2014: 5-6) draw on Bourdieu to define symbolic violence as the kind of violence that is imperceptible and almost invisible even to its victims and is exercised through symbolic channels of communication, cognition, recognition or even feeling. Structural violence is characterised by poverty, social inequality, racism and gender inequality. Visceral gender-based violence is physical harm.

had 'everything, and everything in abundance', as the guerrillas provided not only the infrastructure to satisfy her basic needs such as food, clothes, basic education and training as a war-nurse, but also the filial love she did not have and still does not have from her mother and siblings. As other rural and peri-urban women and girl's lives before and after the experience of being *guerrilleras*, Juliana's life is marked by scarcity of both resources and affection. Thus, it is not surprising that for women like Juliana happiness in the politico-military organisation can be seen as a lack of lacking. Other women from the old insurgencies like Rocio, Lilian, Inés, Nelly who after the demobilisation came back to a life of harsh living conditions characterised by poverty, internal displacement, exclusion, disenfranchisement, and domestic violence, also portray the guerrilla as a place where they had 'everything'.

The contrast made by some women ex-combatants from the old insurgencies between, the lack of material and affective worries during their years in the organisation (despite the poorness of the guerrilla life), and the scarcity of emotional support and resources to cover structural and basic needs experienced after their participation in the armed organisation, is a result of women's experiences of DDR and return to civilian life. Some of them are aware that after laying down the weapons their living conditions and their position as women did not improve. On the contrary, in the transition that took place after leaving the revolutionary organisation some female ex-combatants such as Nelly, Lilian, Rocio, Abigail, and Inés were '(re)-integrated' back in to the structural economic, political, social, and cultural violence experienced by members of their communities and a wide sector of Colombian population. It is not surprising then that, when evaluating the experience, women like Nelly state that, coming back to civilian life gave her the sense of not having changed anything, not even for their own families,

> It made me very sad to see my mom even poorer than before [I joined the guerrillas],
> I said, we had advanced nothing,
> not even within our own families.
> Because one says, if one is there [in the guerrillas] at least…
> [I do not mean] having privileges, but not having anything to eat…
> That [having access to food], is not a privilege.
> (Nelly – ELN/M-19, 2002)

They also found that, as women, their position within society did not improve, female ex-combatants were expected to go back to 'normal' and fit in the traditional gender roles assigned to women in Colombian society (Dietrich, 2014; Londoño et al, 2005). They were doubly stigmatised: because of their ideological ties, and because they dared to engage in political activities (i.e. proscribed violence) usually allocated to men (Dietrich, 2014; Londoño et al, 2005; Blair, 2003). An example of the lack of changes of women's position within society are the hindrances encountered by female ex-combatants in electoral politics after the DDR process. As Pilar pointed out, during their militancy female guerrillas became used to participating as equals in political debates and roles inside the insurgent organisations, and some gained recognition and command positions through their political work. As a result, they were not fully prepared for the Colombian male dominated political system that excluded them because of their gender (Pilar – M-19).[129]

Although the 1991 Constitutional chart established that women and men were equals, and instructed the application of gender equity as a principle inside political parties, in reality women ex-combatants found that a wider democracy did not mean wider democratic spaces for women. Pilar, Eloisa, Patricia, Rita, Aurelia pointed out that while some male ex-combatants successfully transitioned from armed politics to legal political life attaining positions in local, regional and national offices, female ex-combatants struggled to be included inside their own parties among the list of candidates running for local and regional constituencies. In many cases, their male ex-comrades were the ones obstructing their participation or 'dissuading' them to step down in order to privilege 'more suitable' male aspirants because it was assumed that 'nobody was going to vote for a woman' (Pilar and Eloisa – M-19, Patricia – EPL).[130]

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[129] According to the *Observatorio de Asuntos de Género* (OAG) (Gender Issues Monitory Board) by 2011 only the 12 percent of the members of both parliamentary houses were women, a number that has not changed for the last 13 years. This placed Colombia among the Latin American countries with the lowest female representation in its National parliaments (OAG, 2011: 12).

[130] Both women reported being told by their male comrades that no one was going to vote for female candidates.

Even though in their stories about happiness and joy during their years as guerrilla members many women, especially those who live today in precarious socio-economic conditions, emphasise the lack of worries during the militancy, the poverty endured then is a recurrent trope in women's narratives. In this set of stories, particularly built by middle-class and urban women, poverty is imbued with transformative power and is narrated as a source of agency and happiness because it was self-chosen as part of their revolutionary militancy. It is also a way of narrating their unconditional compromise with the cause and their sacrifice and solidarity with Colombians who endured very poor conditions as their everyday. Patricia who, during her urban militancy, lived a long period of paucity (at the time she was pregnant and had a small child) stress that she and her partner were very poor but it was the happiest time of their live together, because it was filled by the exhilaration of their revolutionary compromise. In the present moment, poverty is a metaphor to narrate their strength, endurance, courage, and solidarity as well as the siblinghood and affective ties created among fellow comrades during the militancy (Patricia and Lucia – EPL, Pilar, Ruth and Elvira – M-19, Alejandra – CRS).[131]

Happiness as affection

Happiness involves affect and intimate contact (Ahmed: 2010: 21-23). It is not surprising then that in women's stories about the guerrillas as a happy time in their lives affect, love, friendship and comradeship are featured prominently. Rocio, who joined the organisation aged 11 running away from sexual abuse and economic misery, states that in the guerrillas she was 'loved', 'cared for', 'protected' and 'taught'. There she learned to read and write, she was never abused, and found maternal love among the comrades. This pattern is common across the stories of the women who in the 1980s joined guerrilla organisations as children. All of them stated that the comrades became siblings, while the commanders are portrayed using mother and father figures. In the words of Lilian,

They [the comrades] are still my family.

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[131] All the interviewees listed contributed to this particular narrative.

My *compañeras* [female comrades] were my mothers, my *compañeros* [male comrades] my fathers.
Each December I used to ask Pizarro or the commander of the moment for their blessing,
he was my dad, my *compañeras* my mothers.
Today I can't live without my comrades, I can't.
When I go to the meetings I don't understand anything about politics,
I don't know anything about politics.
But this has allowed me to attend the women ex-combatants meetings,
and there I had the happiness of seeing the *compañeras*, and remembering [the life there in the guerrillas],
because I feel very lonely,
even though I have my daughter and all that, I feel very lonely at the moment.
(Lilian – M-19, 2004)

As Mansbridge (2001) points out a common oppositional consciousness turns strangers into brothers and sisters, and can transform the feelings towards strangers from indifference to love (Mansbridge, 2001: 5),

The militancy made us siblings
And you receive, welcome, love, care for your siblings.
You protect them, accompany them, save them, support them, advise them.
Lets say that they were the extended family (…)
(Patricia – EPL, 2010)

It is not surprising then that some women ex-combatants portray the guerrillas as a 'happy family' in which solidarity, sisterhood, brotherhood, and care for each other are central values. The bloodline ties of the failed biological families are replaced by the physicality of the blood and the life they are willing to give for each other, for the people, and the cause. As Patricia and Eloisa put it, the 'powerful' and 'deep' character of the shared experiences, living between life and death, is what creates a sense of *hermanamiento* (siblinghood) that is not created in other spaces. This alternative bloodline made of the shared experience of being an 'insurgent' a 'revolutionary' does not die after laying down the weapons.

To some extent guerrilla organisations can be read as *emotional communities* (Madarriaga, 2006), a group of people 'animated by common or similar interests, values, emotional styles and valuations' (Plamper, Reddy, Rosenwein & Stearns, 2010: 252), but ones which are not free from conflicts and internal differences (Madarriaga, 2006: 120). Shared feelings and affective

bonds (Plamper et al., 2010: 252) such as loyalty and love between comrades, love for the masses and the cause sustained guerrillas' emotional communities. These shared feelings became an instrument for accomplishing the political goals of the insurgent organisation, and a 'way of being together that improved the self' (Madarriaga, 2006: 120). An example is the relationship established and nurtured inside the M-19 among comrades to which their members refer as a *cadena de afectos* (chain of affections). A network of emotional ties that guaranteed the cohesion of the movement through difficult periods (Madarriaga, 2006: 120) and is still alive today after almost 25 years after laying down the weapons (Pilar, Elvira, Ruth, Lilian and Sol – M-19).[132]

The intimacy created by the everyday of the enclosed and deeply compartmentalised guerrilla life, and the particular temporality of the war-zone in which life was always on the line, strengthened the communal feelings and the deep ties of affection created among comrades in insurgent organisations,

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Yoana: where did you join the organisation?
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Juliana: in Bolívar, El *Sur de Bolívar*
So many memories, ufff, so many things
For what… what can you do to live them again…
it is no longer possible, it is already lived.
And what is left is the great joy that one lived and was happy there [in the guerrilla]
The time one was there.
Because there I never had sorrows.
Sometimes, when something happened to the comrades… but aja…
We were doing what we were doing
()

But I was very happy
(Juliana – EPL, 2013)

Juliana's brief reference to the 'things that happened to the comrades' allow us to sense that she, as other women who remember the experience with joy, also endured difficult, traumatic moments as members of the politico-military organisation: the death of comrades, combat with the army, scarcity, the physical pain and changes endured by the body in the war-zone. Besides, the

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[132] All the women listed contributed to this particular narrative.

particular temporality of the war-zone intensified the different emotions related to the experience of being a female guerrilla member. Several women stated that all aspects of life, sexuality and love but also death and grief, were lived at an accelerated pace. As a result all emotions were strengthened: love was deeper, and it finished as it started, in a second (Lucia – EPL); sex was a mixture of Eros and Thanatos (Salome – M-19);[133] crying for the dead ones was not possible (Eva – EPL), there was not time for funerals let alone tears. Grief was expected to be transformed into courage and was a reason to continue the struggle in the name of those who had lost their lives while pursuing the revolutionary ideals. Insurgent organisations did not necessarily forbid mourning the death of comrades, but most of the time the guerrilla members self-censored the open demonstrations of such feelings due to the 'demoralising' effect they had on the troops. Instead, grief and mourning were replaced by the 'happiness of seeing each other alive' every time they met. Several women talk with fondness about those moments of joyful reunion, because as they said they never knew if there was going to be a next time. Aurelia, for instance, stated in one of our walking conversations that she had never experienced again, after the demobilisation, the kind of hugs they used to exchange among comrades on those occasions.

Thus although in many cases women's accounts of the experience are romanticised, idealised portraits of the participation in the politico-military organisation and can be seen at first glance as nostalgic views of a lost past, these are not necessarily naive accounts of the experience that overlook the traumatic and painful moments in order to privilege a 'lost paradise' narrative.[134] On the contrary, these are complex, multi-sensorial, and deeply affective narratives in which pain, poverty, danger, loss and 'negative feelings' such as rage, revenge and guilt share the stage with 'positive feelings' such as love, solidarity, identity affirmation and pleasure. Some women, particularly the ones who have had the support and the resources to re-signify the experience, did make critical and reflexive accounts informed by feminist thought about their being *guerrilleras*. An example of this is the collective

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[133] In Freudian psychology, Eros and Thanatos are part of a dual system in which Eros is linked to the life drive (love and creativity) and Thanatos to the death drive (destruction).
[134] Some women do build romanticised accounts of their life as *guerrilleras.*

autobiography on which some members of the Collective of women Ex-Combatants have been working during the last eight years.[135] What is lost or missed is not necessarily rooted in a nostalgic past (belonging to an insurgent organisation), but the promise of a future that is no longer possible: that might be the revolution, a socialist country (Alejandra – CRS), 'peace with social justice' (Pilar – M-19), a space in the political system, or the very promise of what Ahmed (2011:30) calls happy futurities.

As stated in previous chapters the Collective and the Network of Women Ex-combatants are both a *community of memory* and a *community of emotions*. The women attending the meetings of the Collective and the Network stated that their shared emotions, ideology and values, as well as their common past and experiences as members of guerrilla organisations tied them forever. They also point to the 'instant connection' that links them not only with women who belonged to the same politico-military organisation but also to other female insurgents they had never seen before,

> **Eloisa:** There is this very strange thing about the networks of affection.
> It is not only with the [women] I know...
> ()
>
> It is just as..., you met Periquita,
> and she was a jail comrade of my friend Patricia,
> and immediately Periquita juasss [sound of fast movement] enters in my heart, with open doors.
> **Patri:** and she stays
> **Eloisa:** without any mistrusts... she is integrated immediately [in the group]
>
> That's what happened the other day we got together.
> We are... four comrades who had been in the Mira.[136]
> We were in jail together, three of us, the other one was in a different prison.
> Then the one who was in a different jail invited another comrade we didn't know,
> but who has been with her in jail.

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[135] The book is an example of female ex-combatant's memory work. In the book women from the Collective reflect, from a gender perspective, about their identity as insurgents, and the importance of including their stories in the memory of Colombian socio-political violence. During my fieldwork, the Collective invited me to read the different drafts and to contribute to the book with suggestions, comments, and information.
[136] The Mira was an M-19 military operation carried out in 1981. It took its name from a river located in the county of Nariño. After an intense military siege, the surviving M-19 guerrillas were captured, incarcerated for three months in a concentration camp, and then sent to different prisons (Vásquez, 2000: 122-135).

And it was as if she were a sister...
Besides we began to tell stories and to rebuild moments that the secrecy didn't allow us to rebuild [before],
and you began to know pieces of the story of the organisation that you didn't know.
(Focus group Bogotá, 10/9/2012)

As Rosenwien (in Plamper et al., 2010) explains *Emotional communities* are not fixed but change with the passage of time, and members from one emotional community can move to another one as long as the emotional norms and values are not radically different. Today the *Network of Women Ex-combatants* has become an *emotional community* where women who belong to different revolutionary organisations can claim their common identities as revolutionaries, draw on emotional ties based in their common belonging to insurgent organisations, and come together 25 years after their demobilisation. The Network is also a site where they can build alternative collective memories of the conflict and their belonging to politico-military organisations, and actively transform their experiences into a political force for peace building. The Collective and the Network are not the only communities of emotions maintained among women ex-combatants after the demobilisation, as I was able to observe during my ethnographic fieldwork they are multiple and coexist in different spaces, some of them overlap. Women who spent time together in jail as political prisoners are not only members of the Network, they also established mnemonic and emotional communities among them. The ties that began during prison had been kept alive over the years, and extended to their family members (mothers, siblings, and children).

The joys of agency and empowerment

As mentioned before another element around which women built their sense of pleasure and joy in the experience of being *guerrilleras* is the sense of empowerment and positive improvement of the self it generated. Different authors studying women's experiences as members of guerrilla organisations[137] have pointed out that insurgent organisations offered women

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[137] In Colombia, Latin América and Africa. I am only referencing authors working in Colombia.

and girls wider spaces for participation and agency (Dietrich, 2014; Colectivo de Mujeres Ex-combatientes, 2012; Londoño et al., 2005; Blair et al, 2003). In the words of Consuelo,

> The guerrilla did unchain women from the pan,
> especially the peasant women.
> And gave them other ways of being women.
> Machista and militarised but gave them freedom.

Even though women's experiences as *guerrilleras* took different shades (depending on markers of difference such as class, ethnicity, education level and age, rural/urban precedence, rank occupied inside the organisation), it is possible to say that most of them identify at least three sources of happiness and joy: 1) learning new skills (nursing, radio operators, snipers), 2) developing talents and abilities they did not have before (physical endurance, a cool head in dangerous situations, spying aptitudes), and 3) the recognition they gained not only among comrades but also in the communities where the organisation had presence or influence. It is not by chance that in Juliana's photo-diary two of the stories she narrated are linked to the medical help she gave to people from the 'masses' and the love she got in return. To some extent, the pleasure she gained from her identity as a nurse in the guerrilla ranks and the joy she attributes to her years as a militant are linked.

Several women centre their narrations about the joy of the militancy on their achievements in the militia such as 'being the only woman doing risky military operations' (Leticia – M-19). Inés and Francisca, are indigenous women from the same county but belonged to different guerrilla organisations. Both relate with pleasure the recognition they gained in the troops due to their physical achievements and being 'good' combatants. I remember Inés because of her sad eyes and the life narrative she built during the one-day ethnographic encounter we had in the city where she lives. In it she depicted herself as helpless victim, of the multiple violence she has endured through her life, of poverty, of political exclusion, of internal displacement, of different forms of oppression and discrimination due to her ethnicity, and other catastrophic

events.[138] In her narration about herself there was not a single moment of agency or empowerment.

But at some point during the day the women attending the meeting started telling anecdotes of their militancy. Inés eyes lightened for the first time in the whole day, her body posture straightened and her voice intonation changed from a low lament to a cheerful flow of giggles as she narrated an episode in which she was 'cleverer' than the army, 'braver' than her comrades. She gave a detailed account of how she was able to escape a military raid of the 'security house' where she was delivering medicines for comrades wounded in combat. The story is narrated as a set of obstacles and dangerous physical tasks (jumping from a fifth floor while hanging from a rope) that she had to overcome, her awareness of danger and her 'intelligence' to recognise that something 'was not right'. It finished with the recognition of her courage by the commander in front of her comrades.

Inés' shift from victimhood to agency is an example of the importance of women only spaces where female ex-combatants can re-signify,[139] retell and evaluate their experiences as members of insurgent organisations, while giving them a political meaning.[140] Besides the joyful recounting of her story of bravery and courage allowed Inés to regain today some level of agency and is a result of the pleasure she found in her identity as a *guerrillera*. A time when she was not a marginal, poor, uneducated, indigenous, woman, struggling to survive as a single mother but the member of a collective fighting for a common good, welcomed and respected by the community (Inés – M-19).

Urban women from middle class backgrounds also talk about the physical and military achievements as a source of pleasure during the militancy. But for some women like Elvira, Lucia and Olga the pleasure and the joy gained from their years as *guerrilleras* is related to the 'positive changes' in the self

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[138] Following the demobilisation Inés was diagnosed with cancer. She was raped and her son was killed by armed men whose affiliation (guerrilla or paramilitaries) she does not know. As a result she was displaced from her land. She lives in an intermediate city with her two younger daughters, is unemployed and unable to go back to her land.

[139] Among women with similar experiences, and with other women who had experienced the conflict from different sides, both spaces offer different possibilities.

[140] The mood of the focus group (relaxed, happy, and friendly) made it possible for the women to narrate moments of recognition and joy in the organisation.

produced by the experience, which in some cases according to Elvira and Ruth led to social mobility after the demobilisation. The years of the *militancia* allowed them to visit new places, gave them elements to become (during and after demobilisation) autonomous, disciplined, and compassionate human beings. The intensity of the experience linked to the particular temporality of the war-zone, the kind of intimate relations created between comrades, and the articulation of all aspects of everyday life around the revolutionary ethos created a sense of wholeness among the members of the different organisations.

> For me joining the EPL was improving all my life, as a person, academically, all.
> I mean even...
> Even one's physical appearance changes.
> You became organised, you became punctual,
> you began to have the discipline and the stiffness you needed to have in the compartmentalisation...
> (Olga – EPL, 2002)

Furthermore, the revolutionary ethos -the set of ethical, and physical, values that ruled the guerrilla organisation as well as its 'political' and 'revolutionary' ideals-, gave the militants a sense of purpose and pride due to the higher moral value of their struggle. Thus it is possible to say that in Colombia, as Nordstrom (2012: 14) has pointed out in the case of countries such as Sierra Leone and Sri-Lanka, happiness in the war-zone was also linked to the pursuit of justice, standing against abuse of power and oppressive relations. As members of the Collective of Women ex-combatants wrote in their collective autobiography:

> [We knew that in the book we] were not going to tell heroic acts, neither the laments nor sorrows of poor mistreated women. Because although the search for respect and women's participation was one of our reasons to join the armed insurgencies, [other reasons were our] consciousness, [the struggle for] social justice, freedom, political participation, *and the search for happiness,*[141] as an objective strong enough to take the weapons (...) (Colectivo de Mujeres Ex-combatientes, 2012: 18).

Many female guerrillas from the old insurgencies saw in the 'revolutionary ideal' promissory forms of happiness. The pleasure they drew from their identity as revolutionaries is linked to their awareness of the suffering

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[141] My emphasis.

generated by capitalist and neo-liberal policies, political exclusion, and structural inequalities endured by great parts of the Colombian population. The process of consciousness raising generated by their participation in guerrilla organisations was central for wo(men)'s political subjectivity and agency, and in some cases allowed them to transform negative feelings such as anger and frustration into solidarity, compassion for the pain of others into joy and happiness. Today this oppositional consciousness is still central in women's identities and their practices of resistance to the status quo, the political, economic, capitalist and patriarchal order. Some of them claim their location as non-armed *insurgentas* (female insurgents) as a way of 'conceiving and making politics', which is expressed in their 'individual and collective efforts to transform, [and] revolutionise the world', and a rejection of power and hierarchies (Colectivo de Mujeres Ex-combatientes, 2012: 12).

It is not surprising then that some of the women interviewed describe the process of laying down the weapons as a 'painful path' (Rita – EPL), as a moment of fragmentation of the self and of the guerrilla organisation, to which some of them refer to as the BIG family (Elvira, Sol and Lilian – M-19, Patricia – EPL).[142] The feeling of loss and pain was aggravated in the case of women from the rural ranks who did not always have a strong political understanding of the reasons behind the demobilisation, and who as stated before had to go back to the *status quo* before their mobilisation into politico-military organisations. In her photo-diary Juliana (image 38, page 307) gives a sense of the way in which many women experienced the announcement of the disarmament process (which was the result of bilateral agreements between the commanders of the politico-military organisations and the government). And of the changes the demobilisation process brought into their lives,

> *When the reinsertion arrived nobody asked me [what I thought about it] my son was fifteen days old they took me to sign the reinsertion agreements with the reinsertion I woke up from the beautiful dream of a dusk and dawn without problems. The father of my children began to change. And I began to lose all I had without noticing it.*

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[142] All the women listed contributed to this narrative.

Women like Juliana not only lost the physical and emotional infrastructure provided by the guerrilla organisation, but also had to go back to traditional gender roles, lack of opportunities and recognition, stigmatisation, economic hardship, the intensification of the continuum of violence, or to face the losses that the guerrilla life entailed (children, family, un-mourned deaths). It is then not surprising that the memories of their life in the organisation are wrapped in a sense of 'nostalgic happiness' (Ahmed, 2010: 160). A happiness located in the past that not only speaks about what is lost but also of the dreams that are no longer possible.

Unhappy transitions

During the transit towards civilian life that took place after laying down their weapons some wo(men) guerrillas lost the sense of possibility that was at the core of revolutionary struggle and as such a central part of the identity of members of insurgent organisations. Firstly, with the demobilisation differences among fellow comrades (gender, class, ethnicity, urban/rural precedence) resurfaced. During the armed struggle, these differences were overlooked as the division between oppressors and oppressed came to be seen as the main contradiction within society. As a result, insurgent organisations were able to create a more egalitarian gender regime, and built alternative ties that gave their members a sense of belonging and common identity in order to make the revolution (Dietrich, 2014: 98).

The re-emergence of the differences noted above, after laying down weapons, became for many women a source of unhappiness and discontent in the life after. Some women like Patricia, Rita and Abigail, to name some, suggest that this was one of the factors leading to the separation of the revolutionary family, the end of solidarity and comradeship. During the *Network* meetings some women referred to the negative 'changes' in their male comrades (in some cases their partners), who 'became greedy', 'only wanted money, rumba, and women' (Rocio – M-19). Others like Eloisa stated that 'you can forgive a civilian for his lack of solidarity, but a comrade… never'. The grief and painful undertones used by the women to talk about the years of transition between guerrillas and civilian life underscores female ex-combatant's lack of closure.

In the 25 years that have passed since the DDR process, some of them have not been able to mourn the unfinished revolutionary dream, the death of fellow comrades, and the death of the collective body that was the guerrilla organisation.
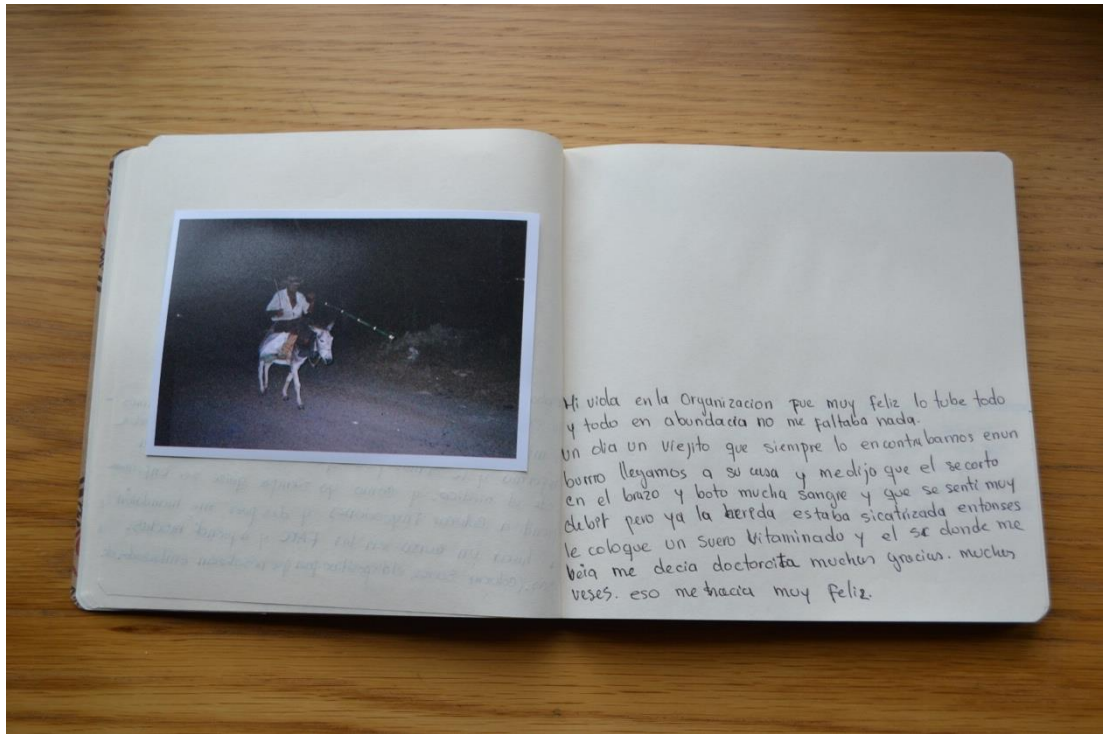
Image 37, Juliana's photo-diary. 'My life in the organisation was very happy...'
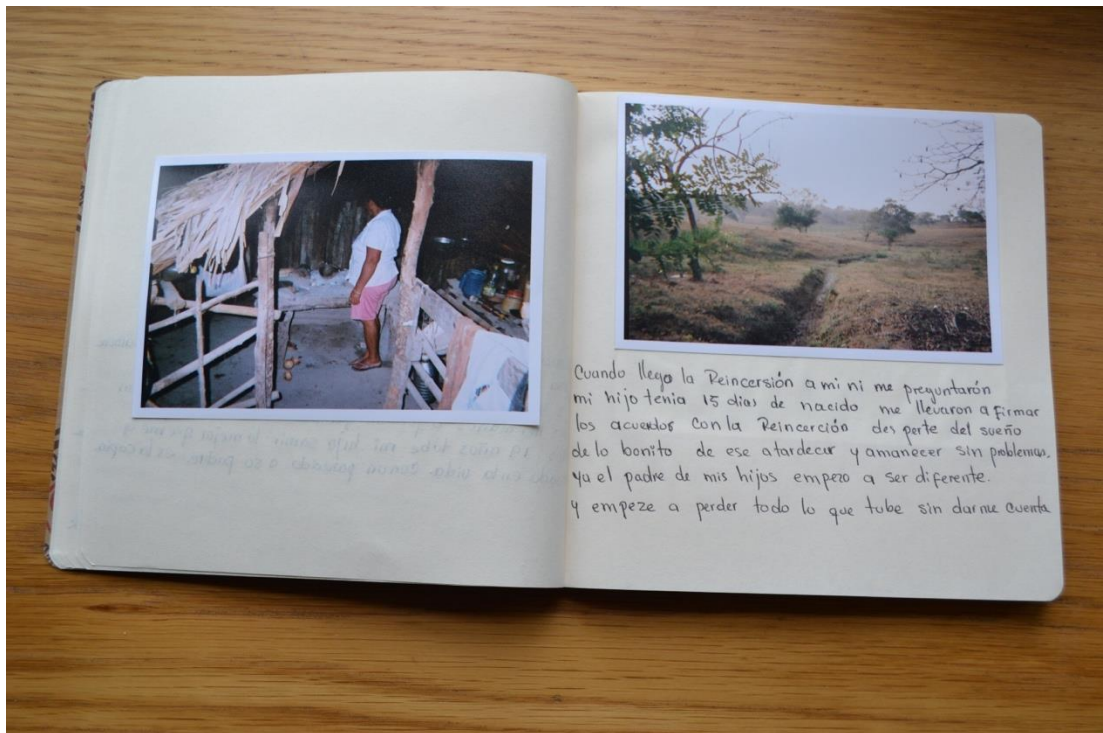

Image 38, Juliana's photo-diary. 'When the reinsertion arrived...'

Secondly, as stated before, inside the insurgent organisations women had spaces for empowerment and agency they did not have in Colombia's machista, unequal, politically exclusionary, and discriminatory society. Thus to some extent the joy of the militancy is linked to the powers of affirmation that the experience had on women's lives. However, like female ex-soldiers from other contexts (i.e Africa and Central America), they found that after demobilisation gendered differences resurfaced. In a context of ongoing armed conflict such as Colombia, they not only had to conceal their past and in some cases ideological affiliations, but were also perceived as 'odd', 'abnormal' women who did not fit in with traditional 'feminine' ideals (Ruth – M-19). This is why many women who demobilised in the 1990s experienced the process of returning to civilian life as a trauma and/or in some cases as a 'disappointment' (Barth, 2002; Londoño et al, 2005).

What is more, as a result of the patriarchal understanding of the roles performed inside the politico-military organisations, which domesticised women urban militant's work and did not recognise it as political (see Chapter Seven), women like Elvira found that after the peace agreements their identity as *guerrilleras* was questioned by her own comrades. They looked at her as a collaborator and not as a 'proper' militant, which she read as a downgrading of her commitment to the organisation. Finally, as historian Clara Inés Guerrero[143] points out, with the demobilisation women needed to go back to think of themselves as individuals,

> [In our workshops] we worked on the idea of the individual within a collective.
> We asked who I am as a person, and who I am as a collective,
> because it was very difficult not being a collective anymore.
> And that is related with the patriarchal society.
> I mean, in the family you are around the father, the mother...
> And afterwards you are around a husband, and all that...
> Hence [the women] used to go from a machista family environment into a machista collective [guerrilla] environment (...)
> And during the demobilisation the confrontation was:
> I am a person, I am not a collective
> I am a female individual.

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[143] Clara is member of the Collective and the Network. She designed and conducted the memory workshops used to gather material and information to write the Collective's book.

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Yoana: Many women said that one of their big pains during
the demobilisation was the loss of the collective body,
and talk of it as a betrayal from the comrades and the
collective.
```

It is the same process...
If you are in a wonderful relationship and one day your partner, man or woman, leaves you
The feeling you have is of betrayal, it is the same, is the same
()
Because all of them talk about the happiness, the plenitude of being there [in the guerrillas].

As the Colombian conflict continued, and the peace and demobilisation processes have taken place in the midst of an ongoing armed confrontation, the promise of integration into the country's political life, and continuation of the pursuit of the revolutionary dream through political means was not fully attained. During their return to civilian life the 'new citizens' faced assassination for political motives, disappearance, forced displacement, political exclusion and in the case of the women symbolic, structural, and visceral violence.

Besides, even if most of the women from the old insurgencies interviewed in this thesis refuse to convey the experience of being female combatants as trauma, the traumatic nature of it cannot be overlooked or denied. It can be felt in the silences, the failures in the speech, the cuts and false starts when they are narrating some aspects of their lives as *guerrilleras* such as the death of a comrade, the separation from their children to follow the revolution, the experiences of torture and imprisonment. When evaluating these events women try to come to terms with them by stating that in the end they 'knew' the risks they were taking. Furthermore, the high moral value attributed to the armed struggle, the idea of fighting for a better future allows them to negotiate some of the losses. As Elvira points out there are still many pains that need to be mourned, grieved and put into words,

[I had this experience], with Pilar we went to see this theatre play[144]
And Pilar cried and cried.
And I was like but Pilar don't...
And Pilar said,

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[144] The play was partly based on Pilar's life-history.

-What happened is that I have never talked about jail ()
And of my [name of her daughter] ()
But that day she couldn't stop crying, it was like...
And I was also crying because I also lived that experience of the jail and

But like we are always in a rush ()
And as we are so brave, so self-sufficient,
we talked a little and then we took public transport and didn't talk about that anymore because...
-uchhh How come I crumble like that because of a theatre play? (...)
But we have not talked about those pains that we have.

And also about the joys!!
I mean we have not talked.
I mean we talk, but very little and sometimes I say,
-I already know that story.
Because we always retold the same stories because we were afraid to go deeper (...)

In her evaluative comment about the silences over the pains and joys women ex-combatants still keep today Elvira summarises the contradictory nature of being a female guerrilla, the challenges faced by them in the process of recovering their memories of participation in politico-military organisations and the different shapes of their silences. Her comment raises pertinent questions for both DDR policy makers, and the institutions engaged on building the historical memory of the Colombian armed conflict.

Conclusions

In a society polarised by years of war, marked by inequality and low levels of social and economic justice, in which war has degraded and escalated, one might ask, what are the 'right emotions' for women ex-combatants to use to narrate and frame their experiences as members of politico-military organisations? Happiness and joy, as well as pleasure in one's identity as an *insurgent* do not seem to be appropriate emotions, at least not the ones that are expected to be deployed in the public sphere, nor in the construction of official memories and histories about the socio-political violence in the country. Nevertheless, these emotions are at the core of some women's identities, and have played a central role in their reconfiguration of self after the process of laying down the weapons.

These female ex-combatants' narratives of their lived experiences as guerrilla members suggest that the powers of affirmation and positive feelings such as joy and happiness generated among members of politico-military organisations need to be taken into account in the process of memory building, the construction of polyphonic memories about Colombia's 60 years of armed violence, and in future DDR processes.

Chapter Nine
Conclusions

Through this thesis I have explored Colombian female (ex)guerrilla's lived experiences of mobilisation, being and life beyond after leaving the politico-military organisation. For analytical purposes the women interviewed were divided into two main groups: women from the old insurgencies, and newly demobilised female ex-combatants. This division responds to the long duration of Colombian socio-political violence and makes visible; the changes in the dynamics of the armed conflict and in the guerrillas still in arms; the interrelation between Colombian internal politics and global metanarratives, the ways in which these factors affect female ex-combatants' everyday lives and their process of DDR, and the need to build more complex narratives about the socio-political violence that not only challenge official versions about the armed confrontation but also listen to the silences we share as a society.

The women who joined revolutionary armies in the 1970s and early 1980s did so in the context of the Second Wave feminist revolution (Andrijasevic, Hamilton & Hemmings, 2014). Although in many cases they did not establish dialogues with the feminist movement during the militancy their struggles against the double standards of the revolutionary organisation in judging men's and women's sexuality, occupying the same politico-military spaces as their male comrades, their right to embrace biological motherhood AND the revolution, are akin to those fought by women across the world who were claiming their right to be mothers and to work, increase their roles in society, women's participation in politics (armed or not), and alternative ways of living, sexualities and partnerships. One way to view this difference is that while second wave feminists had an oppositional consciousness based on their identities as women, female guerrillas tried to accommodate their struggles inside the patriarchal logic of the organisation, believing that by changing the political and economic order women's interests and necessities were going to be solved.

Individually demobilised women in their majority came from gender oppressive/authoritarian regimes that operated in their households,

communities and Colombian society at large. Their lives have been shaped by the continuum of violence that affects women's everyday lives in Colombia, and have not had contact with feminist ideas before, during or after their participation in the guerrilla organisation. The contrast between the women who demobilised in the 1990s and those who have individually demobilised illustrates the significance of diferent political temporalities on the process of memory making and building new subjectivities after years of militancy in politico-military organisations with varied ideologies, behaviours and goals.

Due to the many different strands that the research process drew out, I would briefly summarise some of my main arguments. Firstly, I look at the Collective and Network of Women ex-combatants as mnemonic and emotional communities bearing particular constellations of memories and social narratives of Colombian socio-political violence. As they carry different memories of the armed conflict they are strategic actors in future processes of memory building and Transitional Justice. Secondly, I considered women's pathways of mobilisation into politico-military organisations from the mid 1960s to the 2000s. This enabled me to identify similarities and differences in women's mobilisation patterns, and how they were influenced by elements such as the historical and political context, generation, urban/rural background, and the life cycle of the guerrilla organisations among other factors. Thirdly, I found that in the rural ranks the interruption of the logic of production, reproduction and consumption made possible the emergence of alternative gender arrangements, and created a particular everydayness ruled by communal life. In contrast women urban militants did not experience their time as guerrillas as a strong separation between mundane everyday activities and realities and the roles and tasks performed inside the politico-military organisations. This is why many of them describe the militancy as 'the everyday' and as a 'way of life'.

Another important finding is that although the guerrillas created a gender order that opened new spaces for women's agency and participation, and established more egalitarian gender arrangements, it was still dominated by a phallocentric logic. Thus although politico-military organisations temporarily opened space for more feminine values, it was still ruled by a masculine ideal.

This is evident in the tension between symbolic motherhood and biological motherhood. While the Revolutionary Myth praised symbolic motherhood and encouraged the revolutionaries to give birth to the new order, the new man, it sanctions and devalues female combatants' experiences of biological motherhood. I also argued that some women developed a different way of making the revolution which they refer to as *la política chiquita* (little politics). By including their *reproductive labour* and *community management work* as part of their revolutionary practices these women became *embodied infrastructures* of the politico-military organisations. As such they were central not only in sustaining and caring for the material and emotional needs of the revolutionary organisations and its members, but also in building strong ties with the communities where they operated. The findings enumerated above make an important contribution to the historiography of the Colombian armed conflict by capturing the experience of women (ex)combatants in the guerrillas as a feminine experience. In the next pages I discuss some of the analytical and methodological elements that shaped the making of this thesis in connection with women's lived experiences as ex-*guerrilleras*, the gendered analysis of war, and memory building.

Socio-political violence as 'lived experience'

By looking at war (and socio-political violence) as lived, felt and sensed (physically and emotionally) (Sjoberg, 2010: 268), I was able to approach women's participation in insurgent organisations as an experience that is entangled in the fabric of the everyday and not as a separate event. This approach allowed me firstly, to look at female ex-combatants' domestic and quotidian practices as political, and to argue that their *reproductive labour* and *community management work* was central in the maintenance of the revolutionary organisation, its militants, and the insurgent struggle (Clisby & Holdsworth, 2014). Secondly, the understanding of wars as felt destabilises one-dimensional explanations of mobilisation into guerrilla organisations, highlights the importance that factors such as contact (with people, ideas, members of the organisation) and feelings have in the process; and made visible that in many cases emotions are a way of putting into words political

experiences (inequality, disenfranchisement, lack of opportunities, injustice) that cannot be articulated otherwise.

Thirdly, by using the concept of 'lived experience' in relation to war and violence I make visible that in such contexts people's choices are the result of what Sjoberg & Gentry (2007:17) call 'relational autonomy'. The concept of *relational autonomy* expands the notion of agency by recognising that people are in part defined by their experiences, that choices are constructed by context, and located in the framework of power disparity and intersubjective construction, therefore human choices are neither entirely free nor entirely constrained (Sjober, 2010: 182, 270; Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007: 17). Consequently, it could be of use in approaching topics such as women's and children's mobilisation into armed organisations, processes of radicalisation and experiences of sexuality in the warzone.

Fourthly, acknowledging that wars are embodied, felt and sensed calls for alternative research practices that take into account the role of emotions in knowledge production (Jaggar, 1990: 164). It requires empathetic research practices that begin with an ethics of care for the research participants (researcher and interviewees) and their feelings, and an awareness of subjectivity, relationality, diversity, value differences, positionality, changes occurring over time and gender subordination (Sjoberg, 2010: 269).

Accordingly, the idea that we are selves in relation informed both my ontological and epistemological stance. It is perceptible in my awareness about how my location (as a researcher and as a woman) influenced the relationship established with the women interviewed, the contacts made in the field, and the research process. In analytical terms it is linked to the understanding that listening to others' experiences of violence is a form of bearing witness (Tagore, 2009: 16). It helped me to reflect upon my emotional responses to women's narrations and to negotiate the deep feelings they awakened. While transcribing a conversation sustained among women from the *Network* about the assassination of Carlos Pizarro, I wrote in my transcription diary,

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We talk a lot about the need to remember, but too little about the
pain of remembering, the unrest it causes to the soul, the heaviness
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that falls on the body (…). While transcribing the conversation about
the assassination of Carlos Pizarro I can't stop crying… women's burden
became also mine… and then I understood why we need to remember, why
we need to bear witness, why for some women ex-combatants refusing to
forget has become a form of resistance (TD 8/2/2014).
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By acknowledging my feelings as a researcher, a woman, and a Colombian citizen in the research process I understood that in this research project public and private (women interviewed and myself) memories are interrelated, and challenge dichotomising hegemonic notions that divide memories between public/private, social/individual, collective/personal (Rosenberg, 1989: 120). In our personal archives about Colombia's socio-political violence, personal memory and social memory intersect. Besides, in the case of women ex-combatant's memories that should be social/public/collective/popular (due to the political and historical importance they bear) yet they circulate within a limited number of spheres. Which perpetuates well established silences, keeps marginal accounts of the armed conflict in the realm of the personal/intimate, and in the words of Sol has sent many wo(men) ex-combatants from the old insurgencies into a 'social death',

> Social death is not that someone you love has been killed.
> It means that you are alive but you are not recognised.
> Our struggles, our chains of affections, our sororities are not recognised.
> We live isolated.
> That is the worst death,
> That is our death.
> (Sol – M-19, 2012)

Sol's statement brings me back to some of the questions I scribbled at the beginning of this project. Do female ex-combatants' experiences have a place in the history and social memory of Colombian socio-political violence? Have they developed memory practices and spaces to retell and memorialise their past? These questions are particularly pressing today in the framework of the peace negotiations taking place in Havana (Cuba) between the FARC guerrillas and the Colombian government at the moment of writing this thesis in 2015. As Shaw (2013) points out memory practices are part of the process of future making and as such central in post-conflict reconstruction and Transitional Justice mechanisms. We may need to think about which kinds of memory practices but also which types of forgetting (Connerton, 2008) are required in

Colombia in order to imagine alternative futures. Furthermore, as the Colombian anthropologist Maria Victoria Uribe stated *Memory is the subversive version of history*,[145] thus depending on the politics and the polyphony of memories in play, memory has the potentiality of subversion, not only because its meaning remains in constant tension but also because the works of memory allow us to dream of a *forgotten future*.[146]

In the following pages I argue that some of the women interviewed in this work have begun to address (individually and with other women) the questions addressed above. As situated knowers (Clisby & Holdsworth, 2014: 4) they have been able to situate themselves and their experiences in relation to both themselves and other knowers. In this process they have produced evaluations about their experiences as female ex-combatants; analytical accounts about their own practices of remembering and the place of their memories in Colombia's public sphere. Moreover, they developed everyday practices to resist both erasure from the political history of the country and the organisations they belong to, and the continuation of socio-political violence, injustice, inequality, and gender based violence.

Insurgencia as a way of being in the world

In earlier chapters I stated that women's possibilities for building reflexive accounts about their experiences and to re-build their identities as women after laying down their weapons (or leaving the guerrilla organisation as individuals) depends on their particular location and resources. While some women from the old insurgencies living in Colombia's capital city had the opportunity to reflect upon their experiences in dialogue with other women (ex-combatants, victims, academics, peace activists, artists) and feminist

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[145] The statement was made in the framework of the *Primer Encuentro de Estudios Críticos de las tradiciones políticas: violencia, sociedad y memoria*, Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá, 5-7 April, 2011.

[146] According to Adrienne Rich, 'Poetry has the capacity to remind us of something we are forbidden to see. A forgotten future: a still uncreated site whose moral architecture is founded not on ownership and dispossession, the subjection of women, outcast and tribe, but on the continuous redefining of freedom – that word now held under house arrest by the rhetoric of the "free" market' (Rich, 2006 quoted in Arsenijevic, 2010: 11). I think that by allowing the emergence of polyphonic memories about catastrophic events such as the Balkans war, the holocaust, state-violence in the Southern Cone, and the Colombian armed conflict, we might be able to both deal with the past and remember that forgotten future.

organisations, many women living in rural areas and intermediate cities not only had to keep their experiences silenced but also became victims of the armed conflict after their DDR process. In the case of individually demobilised wo(men) forgetting their past as guerrilla members seems to be encouraged at the institutional level (FJB 2, 24/8/2012). A silence that is strengthened by fears for their own security, and is articulated around a logic of concealment, shame and negation of their past (FJB 2, 31/7/2012). However, as a member of the GHM points out individually demobilised people have created alternative spaces of remembering that are not articulated in the official DDR route (FJB 2, 31/7/2012). This signals future routes for research exploration.

I want to centre my attention on women from the old insurgencies (most of them members of the *Collective* and the *Network* of Women Ex-combatants) who, 25 years after laying down their weapons, are embracing the concept of *insurgencia* (insurgency) as a political force that links their revolutionary past, their un-submissive present, and their imagined futures. During the national meetings of the *Network,* women from different regions and organisations (EPL, CRS, M-19, PRT) stated that the concept of insurgency was a political force still alive today in women ex-combatants' lives and everyday practices. For the women coming together in the Collective and the Network, their unconformity with the *status quo* and their opposition to inequality and political exclusion, which influenced their decision to join armed insurgent organisations between the 1960s and 1980s, is very much alive. Today, they hold similar demands, this time informed by feminist thought which is articulated in their current identities as non-armed *insurgentas* (female insurgents).

In the image of the *insurgenta* (female insurgent), women from the Collective and the Network are figurations, bringing together the quotidian, body, nation, and the revolution. Braidotti (2002: 2) defines a figuration as a politically informed map that outlines our situated perspective, which is empowering or affirmative. Looking at the female insurgent as a figuration situates women ex-combatants from the old insurgencies as in revolt, rebellious, insubordinate, insurrectional, against injustice and oppression (Colectivo de Mujeres Ex-combatientes, 2012; Marcos, 2008). Furthermore, it locates their past, but also

their present and future as bearing an insurgent memory that questions power structures, memory practices, and official versions of the socio-political violence.

It is not surprising that women ex-combatants from the old insurgencies have extended the concept of *insurgencia* to their processes of memory building. According to Marcos (2008: 1) building insurgent memories articulates different oppositional elements, calls for new forms of remembering and remembrance that transgress not only institutionalised and official ways of remembering and forgetting, but also the ways in which social organisations and groups remember and forget. So insurgent memories must bring into question hegemonic structures of power and knowledge in order to build alternative structures, social relations, and ways of knowing. Besides, an insurgent memory that transgresses and questions official histories and memories stands against forgetfulness, impunity and social injustice (Marcos, 2008: 3).

When I carried out my fieldwork in 2012-13 women ex-combatants' memories were still marginal, and circulated mostly within close mnemonic communities (the Collective and Network, and sometimes women's families). However female ex-combatants such as María Eugenia Vásquez have addressed the necessity of developing memory practices directed towards reclaiming their place as insurgents in Colombian society, making visible their contribution as women to the guerrilla organisations and peace building and challenging official memories written by the elites directed at erasing or discrediting their motives for first pursuing the revolutionary struggle, and later signing peace (Colectivo de Mujeres Ex-combatientes, 2012: 133).

In May 2013 the *Network* published the first number of the virtual magazine *La Trece*, a trimestral publication that can be seen as a space for building insurgent memories for several reasons. First, its aim is to recover 'the voices and memories' of women who 'were raised in arms and are now cultivating peace' from a 'humanist, transformative, and creative' standpoint. The range of topics addressed by *La Trece* and their use of different forms of expression (writing, graffiti, photography, and audio) allow the reader to see the diversity

of voices these women are trying to bring together. Second, *La Trece* opened a process of intergenerational dialogue among women, that includes the daughters and nieces of the women ex-combatants. They are part of the journalist team writing articles and photo-reportages. Third, it is a space of auto-representation, where women link themselves to other initiatives and ways of thinking that today are trying to transgress, change, and transform structures of power and knowledge.

A more complex analysis of the magazine and its contents, and of the changes that have taken place in the Network and the Collective during the last three years is beyond the scope of this thesis. I just wanted to point out that since I carried out my fieldwork the Network has begun to fulfil their objective of positioning themselves as actors in the process of peace building in the country. In 2012 most of the activities were carried out mostly by members of the Collective in Bogotá, and financed through self-funding and crowdfunding strategies. But now the reactivation of the Network of Women Ex-combatants, as well as the space opened by the peace dialogues taking place in Havana, opened in the last three years a window for female ex-guerrillas to put their insurgent memories into the public arena. During the last three years they have participated in different peace building initiatives within the women's movement using their identity as Ex-combatants; in early February 2012 they were among the social organisations that participated in the Gender Sub-committee that took place in Havana in the framework of the peace dialogues, and in August 2015 they were among the organisations coordinating a talk about the learned lessons and challenges for women combatants DDR processes. Despite it being possible to say that the members of the Network and the Collective are beginning to position themselves as political actors in the current peace negotiations and that today they are working with the wider women's and peace movement, they still depend on international aid to run their activities and are not self sufficient (Eloisa – M-19, 12/8/2015).

Women's insurgent memories are not limited to the sphere of the state and the political parties but are linked to new ways of exercising politics (Marcos, 2008: 1), and to women ex-combatant and feminist calls to politicise the quotidian, María Eugenia and Alix among them. This is a process that, as I

argued in previous chapters, began during the militancy but was not recognised by the revolutionary organisations and in many cases neither by the women themselves. It was only after laying down the weapons and having contact with women coming from other spaces and locations that some women ex-combatants began to link their practices with feminist ideas.

To politicise the quotidian means understanding politics as embodied and embedded in materiality, something that is *made* in everyday activities, through the networks of affection we build, reproductive activities such as nurturing and taking care of others, and women's community management work. Women ex-combatants' understanding of politics as made and embodied became evident to me during one of the workshops of the Network. This was while discussing the place of politics in their lives today and the possible roles they could play in the ongoing peace dialogues. Many of them stated that their political work was done with their feet (during the militancy and in the life beyond) walking in the mountains or in the streets of Colombian cities (planning activities, talking to people, getting involved in the problems of the everyday), and with their hands as it involved loads of material work. A couple of them stated that their uterus was also part of their political work because their maternal practices are informed by their political identities. For these women politics is not something that belongs to the realm of ideas but it is a practice that is lived through their bodies and is part of 'what we are' (Network meeting, 12/8/2012). The different processes of self-transformation they have lived through from inside and outside armed insurgency, and into peace activism and feminist consciousness, their rejection of social norms and embrace of alternative politics allows us to see the links between revolution and gender (Andrijasevic et al, 2014).

This understanding of politics brings me back to the importance of relationality and affect in the analysis of war and violence, but also in memory building and the construction and implementation of DDR policies. For policymakers and researchers working in the field of gender and DDR it implies rethinking gender not as a set of tools to 'include' men and women in the programs and benefits designed to help the ex-combatants in their transit from armed to civilian life. But as a transformative concept that needs to be

articulated in those processes of self-transformation, and the imagination of alternative futures. For researchers it implies understanding of the research subjects as situated knowers, and the research process as a collaboration and coproduction of knowledge.

To conclude I want to underline two of the main contributions of this work to the fields of memory, DDR and TJ. Firstly, by exploring the process of memory formation of women excombatants I have shown that the notion of relational autonomy and intersections between social and personal memories are important in political contexts where some memories matter more than others. Secondly, by discusing how women from the old insurgencies re-discovered agency through the collective process of re-encounter and building a network I have made visible the relationship between memory and agency. In recent years this rediscovery has begun to be translated into new forms of public agency such as women old insurgents' participation in the peace dialogs taking place in Havanna since 2012, pointing towards future research on the topic.

Appendix One
Women's Names

Most of the names of the women whose stories are part of this thesis were changed. I only keep the real names when referencing published and public material. The list does not include all the women whose stories were analysed in the framework of this thesis. I have only included the names of: 1) women who directly participated in my research (interviews, focus-groups, photo-diaries, Collective and Network meetings) and whose words are quoted or referenced in the corpus of the thesis. 2) Women who were interviewed in the framework of other research projects and are quoted in this thesis. The pseudonyms are presented alphabetically and where available basic biographical data is provided. The interviews were carried out in the framework of different research projects so the data available varies. This is why the age of mobilisation into the politico-military organisation is not provided for all the women interviewed.

Name	Biographical data	Research instruments
Women ex-combatants from the old insurgencies		
Abigail	Organisation: M-19 Urban militant Education: Secondary complete	Interviews: 2004, Londoño & Nieto-Valdivieso Focus group (13/01/2013) Photo-diary
Alejandra	Organisation: CRS Urban militant Commanded an urban cell Education: BA & MA in Social Sciences Feminist and peace activist.	Interviews: 2004, Londoño & Nieto-Valdivieso 2006, Nieto-Valdivieso
Alíx María Salazar	Organisation: M-19 Urban militant Commanded an urban cell Education: BA and MA in Social Sciences.	Meetings of the Collective (28/6/2012 – 30/10/2012) Network meeting (20-22/07/2012)

Name	Biographical data	Research instruments
Andrea	Historian and feminist activist who gives academic support to the Collective since the early 2000s.	Meetings of the Collective (28/6/2012 – 30/10/2012)
Aurelia	Organisation: EPL Urban militant Occupied an important position in the PC-ML Education: BA in Law.	Network meeting (20-22/07/2012) Focus group (25/01/2013) 2nd and 3rd National Meeting of the Network.
Bella	Organisation: EPL Age of mobilisation: 13 years old. Rural ranks Education: trained as an auxiliary nurse.	Photo-diary Focus group (25/01/2013) 2nd and 3rd National Meeting of the Network.
Carmenza	Organisation: ELN Rural ranks Education: BA Humanities	Interviews: 2002, Blair & Londoño 2006, Nieto-Valdivieso
Catalina	Organisation: PRT Rural Ranks Ethnicity: Indigenous and Afro-Colombian. Part of the women's movement but does not describes herself as a feminist.	Focus group (26/01/2013) 2nd and 3rd National Meeting of the Network.
Cecilia	Organisation: M-19 Rural Ranks Part of the women's movement	Network meeting (20-22/07/2012) 2nd and 3rd National Meeting of the Network.
Claudia	Organisation: ELN Rural militant but got pregnant and became an urban militant Education: BA & MA in Social Sciences Feminist activist	Interviews: 2006, Nieto-Valdivieso.
Consuelo	Organisation: ELN Age of Mobilisation: 30 Urban militant	Interviews: 2002, Blair & Londoño 2006, Nieto-Valdivieso

Name	Biographical data	Research instruments
	Occupied command positions Feminist activist	
Diana	Organisation: EPL Urban militant Education: BA Social Sciences.	Interviews: 2002, Blair & Londoño
Edith	Organisation: ELN Attained low rank positions of command. Education: Secondary School and incomplete university studies.	Interviews: 2006, Nieto-Valdivieso
Elena	Organisation: ELN Urban militant Education: BA Social Sciences Feminist and peace activist.	Meetings Collective of women Ex-combatants (28/6/2012 – 30/10/2012) 3^{rd} National Meeting of the Network.
Eloisa	Organisation: M-19 Urban militant Occupied command positions Education: BA Social Sciences Feminist activist	Interviews: 2002, Blair & Londoño 2004, Londoño & Nieto-Valdivieso 2010, Dietrich Photo-diary (not Submitted) Focus group (10/09/2012; 30/01/2013) Meetings of the Collective (28/6/2012 – 30/10/2012) 3^{rd} National Meeting of the Network
Elvira	Organisation: M-19 Age of mobilisation: 9 years old Urban militancy / collaborator family Education: incomplete Technical degree.	Interviews: 2012, Nieto-Valdivieso Photo-diary (not submitted) Meetings of the Collective (28/6/2012 – 30/10/2012) 2^{nd} & 3^{rd} National Meeting of the Network. Network regional Meetings
Eva	Organisation: EPL Age of mobilisation: 25 Urban militancy Ethnicity: Afro-Colombian	Interviews: 2004, Londoño & Nieto-Valdivieso

Name	Biographical data	Research instruments
	Part of the women's movement but does not describes herself as a feminist.	
Flor	Was not an active guerrilla, but is the widow of a guerrilla commander (The organisation is not disclosed as she could be recognised)	Focus group (25/01/2013) Photo-diary 2nd National Meeting of the Network.
Francisca	Organisation: MAQL Education: Illiterate Ethnicity: Indigenous	Focus group (13/01/2013). photo-diary (photos only, unable to write).
Gloria	Organisation: EPL Urban militias in semi-rural towns. Education: Secondary school Part of the women's movement but does not describes herself as a feminist.	Interviews: 2004, Londoño & Nieto-Valdivieso Photo-diary Focus group (13/01/2013)
Giselle	Organisation: MIR-Patria Libre, UC-ELN, and CRS Occupied middle rank command positions. Education: BA and MA Social Sciences.	Interviews: 2010, Dietrich
Ignacia	Organisation: EPL Education: illiterate	Focus group (26/01/2013) 2nd National Meeting of the Network.
Inés	Organisation: M-19 Age of Mobilisation: 15 years old Education: Primary complete Ethnicity: Indigenous	Photo-diary Focus group (13/01/2013)
Juanita	Organisation: M-19 Education: unfinished university studies.	2012, Conversation with the researcher (not recorded) Meetings of the Collective (28/6/2012 – 30/10/2012) 2nd and 3rd National Meeting of the Network.

Name	Biographical data	Research instruments
Juliana	Organisation: EPL Age of mobilisation: 14 years old Education: Technical degree in dress making.	Photo-diary Focus group (26/01/2013)
Leticia	Organisation: M-19 Age of mobilisation: 13 Ethnicity: Indigenous Education: was finishing an university degree in Social Sciences when the interview took place.	Interviews: 2004, Londoño & Nieto-Valdivieso
Leonor Esguerra	Organisation: ELN	Published testimony
Linda	Organisation: M-19 Rural Ranks Education: BA in Health Sciences	No recorded conversation Network regional meeting 2nd and 3rd National Meeting of the Network.
Lilian	Organisation: M-19 Age of mobilisation: 13 years old Education: Secondary completed Ethnicity: Afro-Colombian	Interviews: 2004, Londoño & Nieto-Valdivieso 3rd National Meeting of the Network.
Lucia	Organisation: EPL Urban militant Occupied command positions Education: BA & MA in Social Sciences. Feminist activist.	Interviews: 2004, Londoño & Nieto-Valdivieso Network meeting (20-22/07/2012) 2nd National Meeting of the Network
Luisa	Organisation: EPL Urban militant Education: Incomplete university studies.	Interviews: 2004, Londoño & Nieto-Valdivieso
Magda	Organisation: EPL Urban militant Occupied command positions Education: BA & PhD Humanities. Feminist activist.	Interviews: 2012, Nieto-Valdivieso Photo-diary (not submitted) Focus group (10/09/ 2012; 30/01/2013) 3rd National Meeting of the Network.

Name	Biographical data	Research instruments
Malse	Organisation: MAQL Rural ranks Education: Illiterate Ethnicity: indigenous	Focus group (13/01/2013) Photo-diary
María Eugenia Vásquez	Organisation: M-19 Education: BA in Anthropology. Feminist activist and gender adviser for national and international NGOs.	Published autobiography and other published academic articles, conference papers, and interviews. Focus group (10/09/2012)
María	Organisation: ELN	3^{rd} National Meeting of the Network.
Naira	Organisation: MAQL Education: BA in Education. Ethnicity: Indigenous	Focus group (13/01/2013) Photo-diary 2^{nd} & 3^{rd} National Meeting of the Network.
Nelly	Organisation: ELN, at the end of the 1970s joined the M-19. Age of becoming: 15 years old Rural and urban militant. Occupied low and middle rank command positions Education: Secondary. Trained as a cobbler.	Interviews: 2002, Blair & Londoño 2006, Nieto-Valdivieso
Olga	Organisation: EPL Urban militant Education: BA in Social Sciences.	Interviews: 2002, Blair & Londoño.
Patricia	Organisation: EPL Urban militant Attained command positions in the political structure of the organisation. Education: BA and MA in Humanities.	Interviews: 2002, Blair & Londoño 2004, Londoño & Nieto-Valdivieso 2010, Dietrich Photo-diary Focus group (10/09/2012; 30/01/2013)
Pilar	Organisation: M-19 Urban militant Attained middle rank command positions. Education: BA and MA in Social Sciences.	Interviews: 2002, Blair & Londoño 2004, Londoño & Nieto-Valdivieso 2010, Dietrich

Name	Biographical data	Research instruments
		Meetings of the Collective (28/6/2012 – 30/10/2012) Network meeting (20-22/07/2012) 2nd & 3rd National Meeting of the Network. Network regional Meetings
Rita	Organisation: EPL Rural ranks Education: BA in Law. Feminist and peace activist	Focus group (26/01/2013) photo-diary Network meeting (20-22/07/2012) 2nd and 3rd National Meeting of the Network.
Rocio	Organisation: M-19 Age of mobilisation: 11 years old Rural ranks Education: Secondary school. Was studying a Technical degree at the moment of the interview.	Interviews: 2012, Nieto-Valdivieso Photo-diary Focus group (13/01/2012) 3rd National Meeting of the Network.
Ruth	Organisation: M-19 Urban militant and rural ranks Education: BA & MA in Social Sciences. Feminist and LGBT activist	Meetings Collective of Women Ex-combatants (28/6/2012 – 30/10/2012) Network meeting (20-22/07/2012) 2nd and 3rd National Meeting of the Network. Two walking interviews (not recorded)
Salome	Organisation: M-19. Education: BA & PhD in Humanities. Feminist activist	Interviews: 2012, Nieto-Valdivieso Focus group (30/01/2013) 3rd National Meeting of the Network

Name	Biographical data	Research instruments
Sara	Organisation: EPL Age of mobilisation: 17 Rural ranks Education: BA & MA in Humanities	Interviews, 2004, Londoño & Nieto-Valdivieso
Sol	Organisation: M-19 Age of mobilisation: 13 Urban militancy Education: BA & MA in Social Sciences. Feminist activist	Interviews: 2012, Nieto-Valdivieso Focus group (13/01/201) 2^{nd} and 3^{rd} National Meeting of the Network
Vilma	Organisation: EPL Urban and rural militancy	Photo-diary (not completed) Focus group (25/01/2013) (arrived at the end). 2^{nd} National Meeting of the Network.
Viviana	Organisation: EPL Rural ranks Age of mobilisation: 13 years old. Education: Illiterate.	Photo-diary Focus group (25/01/2013). 2^{nd} National Meeting of the Network
Individually demobilised female ex-combatants		
Alicia	Organisation: ELN Age of mobilisation: 18 years old Rural ranks Demobilised in 2007 with her partner. Education: Secondary (incomplete)	Interviews: 2012, Nieto-Valdivieso Photo-diary Several ethnographically informed encounters were sustained across the duration of the fieldwork.
Carolina	Organisation: FARC Age of mobilisation: 15 years old Education: Secondary (incomplete)	Interviews: 2004, Londoño & Nieto-Valdivieso.

Name	Biographical data	Research instruments
Esther	Organisation: FARC Age of mobilisation: 16 Urban militias and Rural ranks Demobilised with her partner. Separated due to domestic violence after the demobilisation. Education: Secondary School and Technical degree as a beautician attained through the DDR program.	Interviews: 2012, Nieto-Valdivieso Photo-diary (not submitted) Several ethnographically informed encounters were sustained across the duration of the fieldwork
Lina	Organisation: FARC Age of mobilisation: 14 Rural ranks Demobilised with her partner. Due to domestic violence broke up after the demobilisation. Education: Secondary (incomplete) through the DDR program.	Interviews: 2012, Nieto-Valdivieso Photo-diary (not submitted)
Lorena	Organisation: FARC Age of mobilisation: 13 Rural ranks Low rank command position. Education: Secondary completed through the DDR program.	Interviews: 2012, Nieto-Valdivieso (not recorded) Photo-diary (not submitted)
Marta	Organisation: FARC Age of mobilisation: 11 Rural ranks Education: Primary (incomplete) through the DDR program.	Interviews: 2012, Nieto-Valdivieso (not recorded) Photo-diary (not submitted)
Mary	Organisation: FARC Age of mobilisation: 12 Rural Ranks Occupied low rank command position. Ethnicity: Indigenous	Interviews: 2002, Blair & Londoño 2004, Londoño & Nieto- Valdivieso
Melina	Organisation: FARC Age of mobilisation: 12 Rural Ranks	Interviews: 2002, Blair & Londoño
Tatiana	Organisation: FARC Age of mobilisation: 11 Rural Ranks	Interviews: 2002, Blair & Londoño

Name	Biographical data	Research instruments
Teresa	Organisation: FARC Age of mobilisation: 13 Rural ranks Did not occupy command positions. Education: Secondary education (incomplete) through the DDR program.	Interviews 2012, Nieto-Valdivieso Photo-diary (not submitted)

Appendix Two
Colombia's conflict time frame[147]

Year	Line of events
1947	Increased polarisation in the country and rising levels of violence between the Liberal and Conservative parties (Pearce, 1990: 26).
1948	Assassination of Liberal populist leader and presidential candidate Jorge Eliezer Gaitán. Uprising in Bogotá known as *El Bogotazo*.
1948-1953	First Period of *La Violencia*.
1953	General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla led a Coup d'état supported by Liberals and Conservatives.
1953-1957	Rojas Pinilla's military government. An amnesty directed to disarm and demobilise the Liberal guerrillas and peasant self-defence groups was offered. While the former accepted the amnesty the latter rejected it. Many of the guerrilla leaders who accepted the amnesty were killed thereafter.
1958-1974	National Front Governments. Alternation of power between Liberals and Conservatives. With the help of USA agencies, the different governments adopted anti-Communist strategies framed in the logic of the Cold War.
1958-1965	Second Period of *La Violencia*. The National Front officially brought *La Violencia* to an end. However, it continued in a different form. The guerrillas who refused Rojas Pinilla's amnesty, became bandits and did not depend on national political leaderships.
1964	The ELN is established.

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[147] This is not a comprehensive review; its aim is to give the reader a basic chronology of events connected to the research topic. Sources: CNMH (2013); Londoño et al., 2005; Pearce (1990); www.verdadabierta.com.

	The Plan Laso (Latin American Security Operation) is designed and put in motion. It gave autonomy to the military to manage public order issues.
1964-1966	The Communist peasant self-defence groups are transformed in the FARC.
1964	Gustavo Rojas Pinilla establishes the urban political movement Popular National Alliance – ANAPO.
1965	The Colombian Communist Party Marxist-Leninist (PCC-ML) is founded by dissident members of the Communist Party – PC and Communist Youth – JUCO.
1967	The EPL is created as the armed branch of the PCC-ML.
1970	Rojas Pinilla loses the presidential election. The victory of the conservative candidate Misael Pastrana Borrero was read by some sectors of the population as an electoral fraud.
1973	Creation of the M-19 by former members of the FARC and members of the ANAPO.
1974	The Worker's Self-Defence – ADO appears.
1978-1982	During Julio Cesar Turbay Ayala's Presidential term the National Security Doctrine was put into motion.
1981	The 'Death to Kidnappers' (MAS) armed group appears. It became the backbone of the nascent paramilitary presence in the country.
1982-85	President Belisario Betancourt began peace dialogues with the M-19, FARC, EPL, and ADO, including unconditional amnesty and a ceasefire.
	The MIR-Patria Libre, PRT and the ELN formed a coalition of guerrilla groups opposed to the peace process known as the *Tripartita Guerrillera*.
1982	The PRT is created as a result of a fractioning inside the PCC-MLat the beginning of the 1970s.

1983	MIR-Patria Libre appears as a result of a fractioning inside the PCC-ML at the beginning of the 1970s.
1984	The FARC and the government sign a ceasefire agreement. As part of the agreement the FARC gain a negotiated political space to launch an electoral campaign.
	The indigenous guerrilla MAQL becomes public. It had begun operations at the end of the 1970s as a self-defence organisation.
1985	The Patriotic Union – UP political party is launched, in which former guerrillas, members of the Communist Party and its sympathisers took part (Pearce, 1990: 176).
	Creation of the National Guerrilla Coordinating Board – CNG
	6 November, M-19 takes over the Palace of Justice. With the 're-taking' of the palace led by the military ends the cease fire and peace dialogue agreement.
1987	Creation of the Simon Bolivar Coordinating Board - CGSB.
	The ELN and the MIR-Patria Libre merge and form the UC-ELN.
1989	The M-19 and Barco's government begin peace talks.
	President Virgilio Barco acknowledges the existence of paramilitary and anti-communist organisations.
	Fusion of the ELN and the MIR-Patria Libre into the UC-ELN
1990	9 March, M-19 Laid down its weapons.
	28 December, the PRT and the government sign bilateral peace agreements.
	During the parliamentary elections a referendum about the possibility of holding a Constitutional Assembly was carried out. The proposal was widely accepted.
1991	25 January, PRT laid down its weapons.
	15 February, EPL laid down its weapons.
	27 May, MAQL laid down its weapons.
	August, the UC-ELN splits into the CRS and the ELN.

	February – July, National Constitutional Assembly is held and a New Political Constitution is issued.
1994	9 April, CRS laid down its weapons.
1996-2005	The armed conflict reached its peak due to the extension and levels of victimisation. Massacres and forced displacement characterised these years (GMM, 2013).
1997	Consolidation of the AUC. They presented themselves as a national organisation with a political platform.
1999 – 2002	Peace Dialogues between the FARC and Andres Pastrana's Government.
2000	The *Plan Colombia* is approved and put into motion. It was a US aid package directed to combat illegal drug trafficking. It included aid for drug crop eradication, military assistance, alternative development projects and aid for displaced people.
2001	After the 9/11 attacks the Colombian conflict is internationalised. The guerrillas still in arms and the AUC began to be seen as terrorist groups financed by drug trafficking. The resources of Plan Colombia are used in the antinarcotic war and in counterinsurgency operations.
2003 - 2005	2003, Signature of the DDR pact between the AUC and Alvaro Uribe's (2002 – 2010) Government. Between 2003 and 2006 the AUC partially demobilised.
2006-2012	The rearmament of paramilitary groups in different regions of the country began.
2012 ongoing	– September, exploratory peace dialogues between FARC and Juan Manuel Santos' Government began.

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