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Peace in Colombia Is also a Women's Issue

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Peace in Colombia Is also a Women's Issue

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Abstract

In this article, we show the ambiguous relationship between the Colombian state and civil organizations in an analysis that examines the motives, methods, and form in which women's organizations that have mobilized for peace in Colombia have benefited from the structure of political opportunities during the two-term government terms of democratic security (2002-2010). For this purpose, it was very important to follow the press and the means of information diffusion on the Web by the women's organizations, interviews with leaders, and what accompanied their actions over more than 10 years. The main conclusion drawn from this work is the identification of new methods of leadership that have structured activism around peace and human rights, thus contributing to the emergence of a new political actor and the transformation of the political culture of Colombia.

Keywords: collective actions, mobilization, peace, women, Colombia

La Paz en Colombia también Es un Asunto de Mujeres

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Resumen

En este artículo se muestra la relación ambigua entre las organizaciones estatales y civiles colombianas en un análisis que examina los motivos, los métodos y la forma en que las organizaciones de mujeres que se han movilizadado por la paz en Colombia han beneficiado las oportunidades políticas durante los dos períodos de gobierno de seguridad democrática (2002-2010). Para este propósito, era muy importante seguir la prensa y los medios de difusión de información en las Webs de las organizaciones de mujeres, las entrevistas con los líderes, y lo que acompañó sus acciones durante más de 10 años. La principal conclusión de este trabajo es la identificación de nuevos métodos de dirección que han estructurado el activismo en torno a la paz y los derechos humanos, lo que contribuye a la aparición de un nuevo actor político y la transformación de la cultura política de Colombia.

Palabras clave: acciones colectivas, movilización, paz, mujeres, Colombia

The rights of citizenship are not acquired without tensions between those who claim them and the state. They are not simply conceded to "the helpless", nor is it a basic struggle taken up by organizations without resorting to other mediations. Dispute is inevitable, and it allows citizens to progress as the tension between the pursuit of the private interests of individuals and the common good is reconciled. Individuals form new social ties and establish progressive political institutions that attempt to counteract the accumulated deficiencies in their relationship with citizens and, above all, with the victims of the armed conflict in Colombia.

Women's organizations gained a valid position in the political imaginary in the two-term terms of democratic security, that is, during the two administrations of President Alvaro Uribe Vélez (2002-2010). The broad spectrum of organizational forms and collective action that were promoted gained visibility, although the scope of this visibility varied and was often fragile. According to Pearce, "One can assert that what has helped to maintain the vitality of these new forms of action and their most radical potential has been the emergence of networking, which has grown in a manner parallel to neo-liberal globalization itself" (Pearce, 2006, p 24). In this activism, women understand that the State has ceased being the only focus of social action and that political parties are only one means for this type of action.

For this reason, women who know the power imposed by armed actors upon their territories and bodies reclaim authority from the hands of the state and mobilize in nearly all corners of the country, demanding the rights of citizenship. In the terminology of Fraser (2008), their demands have incorporated calls for redistribution and recognition, including requests for more and better representation, uniting their struggles against local patriarchal practices with campaigns for the reform of international laws.

The leadership modes that emerge are distinct, but here, we highlight two. In the first, the women who display leadership belong to social organizations, and through their efforts, they connect to institutions as representatives of victims, thus creating an intermediary zone between society and the state, that is, a fusion/tension between institutions and those whom they represent. Government officials accuse them of being too critical of the establishment; those whom they represent accuse them of having been

coopted by the government (opportunists), even though these women do not relinquish their social responsibilities.

In the second type, we locate those leaders who stand out nationally and internationally through their work with victims in regions of intense armed conflict and whose paths are presented in the mass media through articles and stories or their public appearances in the company of important functionaries and diplomats at events promoted by the government or international bodies. We refer to this female prototype when we speak of the representatives of women.

With respect to the relationship between victims and the state, we intend to show the differences in the interactions between the victims and each of the three branches of government during the period under study. The relationship with the executive branch is ambiguous, given that it did not reach an appropriate definition of the victims as subjects of intervention. Despite delivering economic benefits to them, it ignored women's demands, using the women's appeals to gain electoral support or create opposition to the government. By contrast, the judiciary gave evidence of a full understanding of the women's vulnerability and, through its jurisprudence, resolved failures in justice and issued numerous orders favoring their claims.

In the same manner, the office of the Attorney General and that of the national Ombudsman initiated disciplinary control measures against the arbitrary actions of some officials, in the first case, and for the protection of victims, in the other two. Today, citizens have fast-moving mechanisms for the legal protection of their fundamental rights and have established institutions to promote and protect human rights at both local and national levels. The jurisprudence of the Constitutional Court was definitive in the protection of the rights of excluded sectors, and it oriented the design and execution of public policies with several areas of focus, especially women, children, the elderly and the disabled, afro-descendants, and indigenous groups. Accordingly, it follows that state commitment to the victims was not uniform and that it depended more on the officials than on the institutions created to serve them. This study intends to show that the state-society relationship has shown enormous complexity in its attention to victims. The victims are clear that the problem is not the absence of the state but instead precarious and unequal management.

Research Strategy

As a study of what occurred while a national government was in power for two presidential terms, we concentrate on the variation in some contextual dimensions that seem to be the most relevant for peace activism: the vacillations in political violence, the changes in alignment between economic elites and political circles, the availability of domestic and international allies, and access to the mass media on the part of those who were mobilized against the war or its effects and mobilized for peace. In this manner, we observe the following ranges for the dimensions shown in Table 1.

Table 1.
Range of variation in political opportunity structures

Variable	Dimension	Ranges of variation	
Political opportunity structures	Political violence	High	Low
	Alliances among elites	Stable	Unstable
	Availability of allies	Scarce	Abundant
	Access to media	Difficult	Easy

Monitoring the press (two Colombian dailies – El Tiempo and El País) provided the basic information of the project. The monitoring was accomplished through annual inventories of facts (and events) for each dimension of the political opportunity structure. The frequency distributions or scales of attributes were generated for each dimension over an observation period of 10 years. Paradigmatic cases, moments, or situations in each dimension were isolated and analyzed in depth, with complementary information extracted from daily newspapers and materials compiled during the researcher’s more than 10 years of following the organizations’ actions through interviews, informal conversations, and attendance at their events. All the written and visual documentation archived by these organizations

and networks on their websites, such as the *Iniciativa de Mujeres Colombianas por la Paz- IMP*, *Ruta Pacífica*, *Organización Femenina Popular*, *Red Nacional de Mujeres*, *Mesa de Mujer y Conflicto Armado*, and *Liga de Mujeres Desplazadas*, were also important.

The text is structured in four sections. In the first, we present a brief review of the main facts that may have inspired the mobilization of women interested in defending their rights. In the second, we present the modalities of collective action that the women's organizations employed to express their grievances. In the third, we analyze the political opportunity structure in which the collective actions of these groups are supported, and lastly, in a section on final reflections, we show the primary conclusions that can be drawn from this research exercise.

Motives for mobilization

When the number of violent incidents that occurred during these years (2000- 2010) are compared with that for the prior decade (1990-2000), the former shows a significant decrease in attacks on electricity and oil infrastructure in the country, kidnappings, massacres, attacks on public security force buildings, and clashes between this force and irregular armed actors. However, this trend does not indicate that respect for or the guarantee of human rights and international humanitarian law (IHL) has increased or that attention to the victims has been adequate. On the contrary, complaints grew, above all because organizations learned to utilize institutional channels to demand their rights. Thus, they achieved a response from the state through the sheer force of records, which, in many cases, are published by their own offices, aid agencies, international organizations, and consultancies, with investigations conducted by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, among others. According to the review of the press and other documentary sources and the testimony of some women's organization leaders and whistleblowers, the major violations of human rights that mobilized women are, in order, the following:

a) Forced displacement, in three forms: individual, family, and collective. b) Physical, psychological, and sexual torture. Most tell of cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment, such as death threats, witnessing acts of torture, harassment, and molestation. c) Material losses, as direct destruction

of their goods and property, sometimes by raids on their homes or simply through the brutality of armed groups conducting interventions on their property. d) Arbitrary detentions, hostage-taking, and the forced recruitment of children and family members. e) Cross-fire and being used as human shields. f) Attacks on their organizations and their leaders. g) Crimes of extrajudicial executions using fictitious mechanisms to cover up the illegality of the acts. These "false positives" using young rural people and people from poor urban areas have led to numerous demonstrations led by their mothers, wives, and relatives. One outstanding case is the mothers of Soacha, who received the support of human rights defenders in their claims and calls for justice. h) Forced disappearances. i) Sexual violence, including rape, forced prostitution, and abortion, is one of the most frequently denounced crimes in public demonstrations. j) Kidnappings.

As can be deduced from the above, Colombian women have had more than enough reasons to mobilize. In general, activists have organized to denounce the violence produced by the armed conflict and, above all, the consequences that it produces in the social fabric and in their families, naturally leading them to keep alive the memory of what happened and mourn for the departed. Therefore, their demands were best framed in the slogan *truth, justice, reparation, and no repetition of the violent acts*. It is noteworthy that a good proportion of the victims represent more than the crimes against and allegations of rural women, with those from the inner-city also experiencing the "impacts of the rural armed conflict" as violence moves into the urban world.

As recently proposed in the *Basta ya* report by the Historical Memory Group ([Grupo de Memoria Histórica - GHM, 2013](#)), the impacts of this violence "are complex, of diverse kinds, magnitudes and natures", with several features affecting its structure. First, there is variation in the characteristics of the violent events suffered. Whereas in some, there is evidence of a high degree of cruelty and an intent to produce fear in individuals and the community, in others, the events occur in an untimely manner. Second, the perpetrator is not always the same, nor is the modality with which damage is inflicted or the profile of the victims (their age, gender, ethnicity, disability status, organizational experience, or political and religious affiliation). Third, the type of support received during and after the events occurred (from family, community, and institutions) is also uneven,

as are social responses to the events and the victims (demonstrations of solidarity or rejection) and the actions or omissions of the state, especially the armed forces and the police and judiciary as the bodies responsible for providing protection to citizens.

This situation allows us to conclude that the effects are unquantifiable and even intangible. These damages have changed the life plans of thousands of individuals and families, curtailed future possibilities for one part of society, and disrupted democratic development. Victims experience situations of extreme horror in conditions of great helplessness and humiliation because their perpetrators were arbitrary and knew no bounds (GMH, 2013).

Regarding the actors who inflicted harm, the information provided by victims is unclear. These women speak of the violence but are inhibited in referring to the perpetrators. With testimony from nearly 1000 women consulted by Ruta Pacífica (2013) for the book *The truth of the women victims of armed conflict in Colombia*, the authors note the material and intellectual difficulties experienced in clarifying the acts perpetrated in their community. However, other research on the reconfiguring of local realities has determined that armed organizations, despite their reduction, maintain certain distinctive behavioral peculiarities and that it is therefore important to differentiate them (Guzman & Rodriguez, 2014).

Undoubtedly, however, the major adversary whom they face is the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia- AUC and the groups that their members formed after demobilization. The methods that they used to impose local order and the brutality of the violent acts that they perpetrated as they passed through communities partly explain the intense activism that occurred in the regions in which their fronts operated. The guerrillas and the army also provoke protests and acts of civil resistance. Allegations against these agents have included the disproportionate use of force, the intimidation of residents, and, in recent years, extrajudicial executions.

Despite the fear, the intensity of circumstances has led a significant group of women to act on behalf of their family or their community. Various examples have been illustrated in the books by the Historical Memory Group (GHM, 2010, 2011a and 2011b), in similar reports published in the media, in testimonial literature, in some academic research (Ibarra, 2011a and 2011b), and in both the print publications and virtual documents of the women's

organizations. Newspaper records also demonstrate that there are thousands of anonymous women who face pain and go out in public to demand their rights.

Although most of the victims suffer in silence, a few women challenge their own communities to defy the armed actors and demand that the state let them live in peace. Perhaps, what most motivates them to escape their captivity is their concern over safely returning to the routine of their lives and traditional gender roles, but on the way, they meet with other women who insist on politicizing that transgression. This act has allowed them some small measure of freedom and the time to take care of themselves. These anonymous individuals proceed to transform their own lives, and without feminist pretenses of eliminating gender inequality or changing the patriarchal culture, they become public subjects and leaders in different arenas. Their activism has them assume new roles and obliges them to develop new strategies with their families for maintaining their public presence without neglecting their domestic responsibilities.

In studies on collective action, there is always the idea concerning how many actions are produced and what number of people is mobilized. The reasons always seem obvious, but what we have found in this case is that, despite the existence of sufficient motives, a large proportion of victims are not mobilized. Therefore, for these women, forming organizations or joining existing organizations might not necessarily imply a consciously formulated plan, given that they only have a very limited range of available strategies. On the contrary, as Ann Swidler proposes (1986), the decision references a general manner of organizing their action. It is an action that includes prior habits and representations that constitute their repertoire or toolboxes and in which "conflicting symbols" are contained, given that, in working for the community, they may be postponing dreams, desires, and personal projects. Nevertheless, from this subjective perspective, they give meaning and coherence to their lives and justify their actions due to the violence suffered.

The most interesting thing about these activities is that the initial motive has been reconfigured much in the same way as their lives. Their actions are oriented, as we shall now see, by a plurality of ideas and values, and they often have a pragmatic orientation and pursue institutional reforms that broaden systems of participation in decisions that have a wide impact (Offe, 1985). These actions have a broad political significance: "they imply a

dynamic of democratization” of everyday life and the expansion of the civil dimensions of society, as opposed to the expansion of those linked to the state. It is clear that not all the initiatives emerge in the heat of conflict and that many of the women had previous experience in other organizations, whether political, productive, or cultural. It is because of that experience that several become targets of armed groups.

Modes of Collective Action

The solidarity of women's organizations and feminists with victims of the armed conflict has mobilized a broad contingent of activists whose social origin is rooted in a broad range of social statuses by age, origin, ethnicity, religion, and membership in a professional sector, among others. However, one group of leaders stands out from the others: They support the voiceless and join with the clamor of those who hold to the hope of finding truth, justice, and reparation. These are consummate activists, with extensive experience in social organizations and movements of feminists, workers, peasant farmers (*campesinos*), and ethnic groups (black and indigenous). As we have stated in other writings, this type of personal trajectory is an element that favors participation in activism for peace. For some of women, a personal adherence to leftist ideology or religious beliefs, in addition to their social class, ethnicity, or sexual orientation, is fundamental to their connection to forms of resistance that strengthen these attachments. Thus, the methods that small collectives use are enriched by cultural and symbolic elements that fit necessities and contexts.

The range in which they use conventional repertoires is evident, but even more so is the use of some novel and original components, to which are added the female imprint of collective actions designed and oriented to reach objectives or simply to call for attention and energize the citizenry. As Melucci states (1989), the claims of the women and their factors for mobilization tend to concentrate on cultural and symbolic matters related to problems of identity rather than economic grievances. Their actions are produced in association with the beliefs, symbols, values, and collective meanings linked to the sentiments that are relevant to a distinct group, with the image that their members have of themselves and with new meanings

that they contribute and construct collectively to give meaning to their everyday lives.

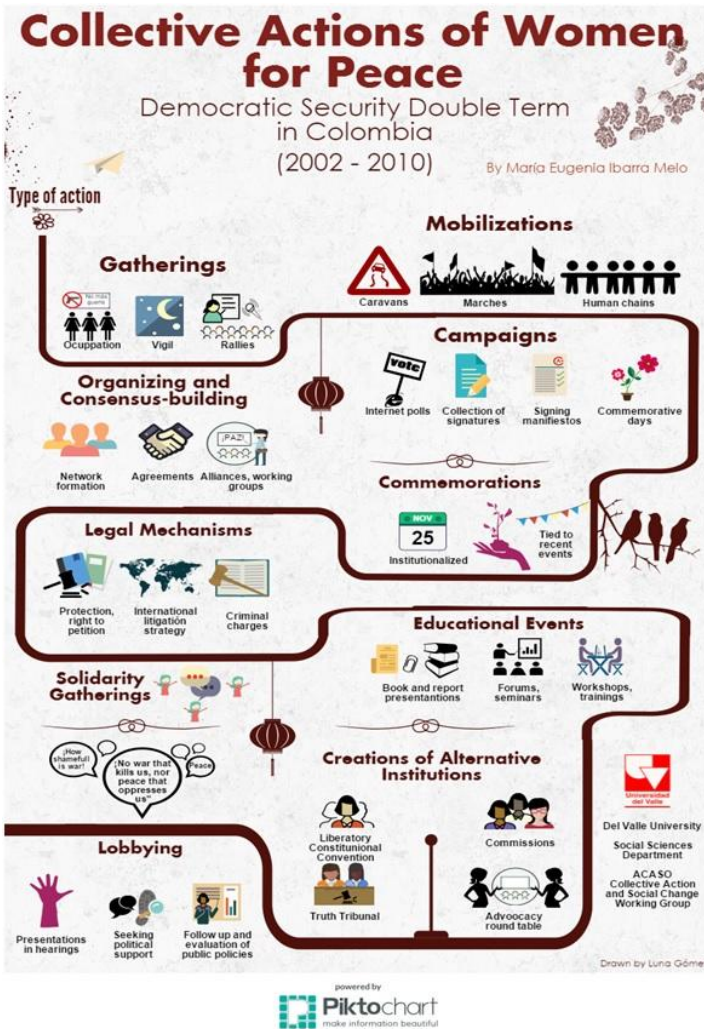
Through their actions, the relationship between individual and group blurs, precisely as is expressed in the slogan *the personal is political*, which emerged as a consequence of the interpenetration of these two spheres. Their actions become the source of particular definitions that members ascribe to themselves, (black, indigenous, young, victim, displaced, feminist, *campesina*), and their activities consist of a complex combination of self-affirmations and identities, both individual and collective. They also involve intimate aspects of human life.

The women employ guidelines for mobilization that are characterized by non-violence and civil disobedience that often represent a challenge to prevailing behavioral norms through dramatic representation. Their repertoires are not confrontational. On the contrary, they avoid violence and promote the creation of a culture of peace, using sit-ins, occupations, boycotts, vigils, and other methods of garnering attention.

The proliferation of these organizations is related to the credibility crisis of conventional channels for participation in public life in a democracy such as that in Colombia. They distrust traditional parties and despise politicians. Their organizing tends to be diffuse and decentralized. There is a considerable degree of autonomy among local organizations and, in many cases, a range of efforts that sacrifices the creation of more forceful actions that generate larger impact. However, the leaders promote their own mobilizations and also the repetition of institutionalized actions on a local level.

More than a recounting of collective peace actions undertaken by women during this period, in this article, we show how some of these have become institutionalized. Infographic 1 shows a synthesis of the primary actions and repertoires that these organizations use. Among these actions, marches, sit-ins, rallies, and the lobbying for oversight stand out; however, that is not to say that these were the only types of actions drawn upon. The women also do the difficult work of organizing and coordinating with other collectives that strive for peace, while advancing the internal work of training members and political discussion, which makes significant demands of time on them, especially because this work will be replicated in other regions.

Infographic 1



In addition to these forms of activism, the leaders are dedicated to complementary tasks that include case research: searching for testimony, facts, and figures to support the interpretation of violence. Naturally, this

research also includes writing various types of reports: some for contributors, others designed to dispute the information that the government gives to international human rights organizations, and others for sharing through their campaigns. Other activities that demand time are the preparation of legal arguments, the comparative study of cases, and the search for academic partnerships, institutional support, and solidarity links with other organizations and movements.

The Political Opportunity Structure that Allows the Mobilization of Women

The legislative, judicial, and political outcome favorable to the women during the two terms of democratic security helps recognize the major progress made in attracting attention to their concerns, in terms of not only the number but also the quality of the laws, verdicts, and public policies to be implemented. However, for the regulations to take shape, certain events needed to occur, and certain practices and actors had to come together at certain times. For this reason, it is important to realize the political opportunity structures that make it possible for the women's organizations to claim rights and induce institutional actors to respond.

At some opportunities, the government responds to legal provisions and, in others, to the need to comply with signed treaties and international accords that lead to gender equality, the prevention and eradication of violence against women¹, and the protection of the rights of female victims². It expanded spaces of participation, formulated social and public policies, or provided simple recognitions that made requests advance toward becoming new claims. In this process, women's organizations gained strength as political actors, valid interlocutors, and legitimate actors listened to in a range of scenarios.

As an actor recognized by the state, the women's movement undertakes strong collective actions, issuing complaints and claims. Presently, there already exists an organizational framework that is solid and articulated via various modes of expression, demanding the guarantee of human rights, humanitarian accords, and a political negotiation of armed conflict with the ultimate goal of peace. These organizations are led by professionals with extensive experience and now have a large social base that increases with the

waves of political violence produced by irregular armed actors in their confrontation with the state. They have established simple hierarchical structures that permit them to maintain cadres dedicated to their operation, obtain resources, and keep their membership informed. In that sense, these forms of social interaction are shaped to the social environment as they modify their relationships with the state, which they continually confront.

Regarding the *availability of allies* needed by this actor to pursue its objectives, it is important to note that, until 2002, the national government was still negotiating with the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia- FARC. That process had gained a broad backing and international participation, nurtured by constant visits from diplomatic delegations, functionaries, and international consultants, among other public personalities interested in contributing to a solution to the armed conflict in Colombia. This situation helped women's organizations to more strongly issue complaints and position their discourse as coming from victims of the armed groups and state neglect.

Observing their actions during the eight years of the Álvaro Uribe government, it is clear that women's organizations sponsored all types of academic and diplomatic meetings that were attended by the UN High Commissioner of Human Rights, refugees and women, delegates of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), members of the European Parliament and the U.S. Congress, ambassadors from the Netherlands, and numerous representatives of various governments, including prime ministers, presidents, and ambassadors. Before these officials, they explained the situation of women in communities affected by the armed conflict and delivered reports confirming human rights violations in Colombia. They also allied themselves with various national and foreign organizations from different countries that supported their claims on the platforms to which they had access.

All these actions provided more visibility to the women's struggles and increased the leaders' access to areas that had hitherto been restricted to the diplomatic staff of the state. With this visibility, their organizations positioned themselves as an actor that could demand to be heard in settings where policies were debated, and in general, they succeeded. This success can be seen by the presence of two main representatives of victims in the National Commission for Reparation and Reconciliation (Comisión

Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación - CNRR). Other examples include their presence in public hearings and the permission they gained to meet with demobilized groups.

This development would not have been possible without the growing worldwide awareness of the issues confronting women in Colombia and the comprehensive monitoring by the international community to ensure the fulfillment of the Millennium Development Goals and the provisions emanating from global settings for the reduction of gender inequality and the increased participation of women in broader arenas of society and the state. In this manner, international agencies favor actions that defend human rights and incorporate a differentiated gender lens, which becomes an opportunity to position the women's movement as a political actor. Their proximity to these agents allows them access to resources of cooperation for development and for advancing projects in training and entrepreneurship. Meanwhile, this experience in interlocution has trained them in lobbying, advocacy, and the ability to make authorities listen.

In these interactions, both local activism and its methods for claiming rights were nurtured by criticism from experts, international agencies, diplomats, and members of other organizations. This criticism, in turn, led to demands for the application of international standards of justice, such as United Nations Resolution 1325/2000. This reflection, coupled with diagnoses of similar situations in other countries that had successfully negotiated a demobilization of irregular armed forces, constituted two powerful reasons to more emphatically claim positions on peace negotiation teams.

Peace activism was very dynamic in the first years of the decade of 2000. Day by day, activist groups created websites, held events, worked to advance accords and agreements, designed strategies, formed action fronts, and made appeals for the continuation of the peace process through media announcements and posters referencing the need for reconciliation, among others. Thus, different sectors of society became linked with victims' claims. During the peace process in the Caguán, the use of female human resources yielded significant results in learning the situation of those kidnapped by the FARC. From 2002 to 2010, those human resources would become more refined to improve their approaches to these forces and to the state.

One question that remains in the background for these organizations, in their analysis of context, is that of the achievements in justice, reconciliation, and peaceful coexistence obtained by Colombians in the 10 years of the Political Constitution that was supposedly the primary Colombian peace accord. The conclusion was clear-cut: these matters were pending. Thus, collective actions should focus on Article 22 of the Charter, which reads as follows: "Peace is a duty and a right that must be enforced". Thus, their actions were to render visible the humanitarian disaster the country was living through and to demand a negotiated solution to the armed conflict. Appeals for truth, justice, reparation, and no repetition of the violent acts would be added later. In this regard, they would be diligent, creating unofficial memory initiatives.

We do not discount the capacities acquired by the women's organizations in adapting themselves to the social structure, a factor that is fundamental for understanding contentious collective action; however, we also highlight that those who mobilized did so within the conditions of that context. Those who became the most versatile in designing actions to achieve their objectives did so through the use of varied cultural repertoires.

During this period, support grew significantly from dissident parties, some that were more identified with the left, in addition to the nation's labor unions. In Congress, their most notable allies were the senator Piedad Córdoba and the representative Iván Cepeda, two opponents of the national government. These two politicians, from their participation in Colombian Men and Women for Peace and the Movement of Victims of Crimes by the State (*Colombianos y Colombianas por la paz y el Movimiento de víctimas de crímenes de Estado - MOVICE*), successfully grouped some of these organizations into joint collective actions during 2007 and 2009. Furthermore, one cannot discount the support obtained from the two ex-presidents Ernesto Samper and Alfonso López, both promoters of humanitarian exchanges. Their appeals were echoed by the mass media and the Liberal party. The lobbying with senators Rafael Pardo and Gina Parodi was also important, allowing the incorporation of five articles related to gender status in the justice and peace project.

The most important ally throughout this entire period, however, was the judiciary, especially the High Courts. The magistrates gave substantial judicial support to the victims' cries, especially those of indigenous peoples,

afro-descendants, the displaced, and women. The Constitutional Court defended the rights of those collectives through different rulings and judgments that became precedents, thus offering victims improved legal arguments for claiming their rights.

Another significant component in this political opportunity structure, *instability in the alignment of the elites*, is reflected in the breaking off of negotiations with the FARC and the launch of the presidential campaign, in which the discourse on peace and the end of armed conflict in Colombia became polarized. Calls for democratic security triumphed, and this fact would become a trigger for social organizations to demonstrate against Álvaro Uribe. The organizations questioned his political orientation and the actions of the armed conflict and exposed themselves to his stigmatization of human rights activists. They also protested against irregular armed groups (guerrilla and paramilitary) through small acts of civil resistance and by denouncing their violent actions to authorities.

As we have noted in a previous study, (Ibarra, 2011a and 2011b), the activism that resulted from two large joint women's efforts (IMP and la Ruta) during the processes of transitional justice and the implementation of the Law of Justice and Peace (975 in 2005) was one of the most important occurrences in the movement during the years of the two-term government of democratic security. This activism occurred during a brief period (2003-2006), but it kept national politics and the press in suspense with the events that it triggered: There was an unexpected increase in the number of demobilized fighters from both the AUC and the guerrillas and in the number of victims demanding reparations. The number of people contacting the state overwhelmed the state capacity, in terms of financial and human resources. Provisions enacted for reintegrating former members of armed groups operating outside the law so that they could effectively contribute to achieving national peace and foster the conditions for fulfilling humanitarian accords were possible because the government gave the heads of the AUC privileged extradition to the United States. With this decision, sentencing for domestic crimes committed was postponed. Furthermore, with the increase in criminal groups formed from the ranks of the demobilized, the possibilities for reducing violence against civilians began to shrink. These groups reclaimed drug trafficking routes and created cartels against the

reclamation of land, sowing terror in the different areas to which *campesinos* had returned.

Access to the media by women's organizations was restricted. However, despite their precarious position in the press that covered their collective actions, the women devised increasingly novel repertoires to capture the curiosity of journalists, opinion makers, and, above all, ordinary citizens. In many cases, their persistent creativity made citizens and authorities attend to their demands. The closed doors of the "official" media to government detractors and, above all, the obsequious indulgence toward President Uribe in the mainstream press and television, as Lopez has noted (2014), led to the display of a bipolar and Manichean view of national problems.

The organizations countered this journalistic trivialization through an intensive use of the Internet to spread information on their events, campaigns, and actions, both within Colombia and without. Online, they constantly offered denunciations and actions, with social networks such as blogs and Twitter becoming their primary channels of communication; they circulated photographic material, videos, interviews, reports, and communiques. Political analysts may suggest that, in light of the unanimous congressional support of the presidential figure of Álvaro Uribe, his favorable ratings in the polls, and the support of trade unions, social organizations were being excluded from all the stages from which they could push for their demands to become laws and public policy. Nevertheless, a review of the press has shown that they took advantage of spaces beyond the legislative arena to render visible their disagreement with the executive branch.

Final Reflections

One of the primary conclusions drawn from the study of the peace activism undertaken by the women is that it constantly integrated a broader variety of individuals with a range of social origins. Feminists, unionized workers, *campesinas*, grassroots groups, black and indigenous peoples, lesbians, students, and artists converged in this movement, at times, in claiming one of these identities or simply as victims of the armed conflict. These labels become strategic for collective action in moments when the group warrants attention from the state, especially given the pressures exerted by

international organizations to prevent the violation of their rights and to ensure their protection as civilians. A huge majority is composed of those who continue affirming themselves only as women, thus aligning themselves with the established feminist networks.

The protagonists are recognized leaders who stand out in the political settings in which efforts are undertaken for the defense of human rights and the pursuit of peace. In their daily movement through institutions, the public eye, and auditoriums, they have become celebrities who draw the attention of their adversaries, some sectors of opinion, and, naturally, new audiences, to use the terms of Hunt, Benford, and Snow (2001). This attention has been achieved through their capacity to understand the needs of victims and organize individual demands as collective demands. They use their theoretical and disciplinary knowledge to understand their claims; they know the structure of the state and its functioning; they know how to process and file a legal appeal, present projects, and solicit resources. They study legislation and are attentive to national and international debates concerning peace, human rights, or the rights of women. They have learned to interact with international networks, traveling continually in the country and throughout the world to inform themselves of new experiences and learn to renew the forms of mobilization and management. These actions, in addition to their constant writing of technical reports and communications, have allowed them to develop skills to both denounce and call for a wider audience.

Naturally, the points made above refer to professional activists. Others, such as direct victims, despite years of connection with these groups and with their constancy and commitment, manage to climb only slightly from their positions as militants, although it is sometimes entrusted to them to represent their group. For these individuals, small organizations are structured more similarly to a permanent school in which they secure knowledge to share it with less specialized audiences. However, some victims have become emblematic figures who are highlighted in the mass media.

Nevertheless, if the desire to stop the conflict unites them, the ways in which they believe peace should be achieved, and what that means, distance them. Thus, not all their collective actions succeed in being massive; in very few cases have minimal agreements been reached for the mobilization of

organizations. As in other social movements, this movement's identity is under construction. The alleged gender solidarity is brewing amid the contradictions generated among some of them in fighting against a sexist culture rooted in their minds and bodies.

For these women who operate on the margins of politics and who attempt to transgress the established social order through small transformations, their efforts have not been made to convince their fellow women who serve in traditional political parties or who hold seats in Congress, high government positions, or positions in the judicial branch to be more attentive to their claims and to reach the gender equity they so desire. In Colombia, the presence of women in these spaces has not been a genuine guarantee of the advancement of the transformations required by society to avoid gender discrimination, overcome female subordination, and eliminate patriarchal domination.

The women's struggles for peace can generally be framed as the claim for a guarantee of human rights and the truth, justice, reparation, and negotiation of the armed conflict that would bring a lasting peace. Most of their claims can be classified into these three large categories. What distinguishes them from other victims and activists is that these women adhere to a differential focus on sexual and reproductive rights, abortion, and the eradication of violence against women.

Another preliminary conclusion that this study provides is the sense of growing qualifications within political culture that are being achieved by individuals who hitherto had no interest in participating in the public arena. Although further investigation regarding the type of citizenship being created is required, it is currently possible to observe *campesinas*, the wives and mothers of persons disappeared and kidnapped, women of indigenous or black ancestries who have witnessed armed groups recruiting their children, the family members of those murdered in massacres, and women who have been raped now becoming leaders of organizations and being able to confront seasoned political party leaders, public functionaries, diplomats, and famous academics. In their activism, they appropriate the language of human rights while supporting their claims with the dignity conferred upon them as mothers, using the Marianist tradition of female ethical superiority. This type of mobilization has been interpreted as an alternative to the masculine model of citizenship and may be creating a collective citizenry

that recuperates feminist values and deconstructs the rigid limits between the public and private spheres. The danger is that this argument could reduce the political to a moral position.

Another aspect that emerges from knowledge of their personal paths is the influence exerted by their itinerant presence between the third sector, the state, and the academy in achieving their objectives, which, in this case, are linked to the resolution of armed conflict through the attainment of peace. Their connection to the state in executing programs and projects cannot be interpreted simply as the cooptation of the movement by the political elite. A deeper analysis may allow the recognition that their movement between civil society and the state has been productive for the attainment of both short-term and long-term goals partly because they succeed in permeating the institutions and functionaries through the use of inclusive language, making them more likely to understand the demands of women, despite their resistance to accepting the large changes required. Simultaneously, this migration between executive agencies and their own organizations helps the militant among them better comprehend the obstacles in negotiating with the state and recognize the landscape to propose stronger arguments for deliberations.

However, based on empirical observation, our perspective is that the intrusion of international agencies in defining the objectives of the women's organizations has not been helpful in advancing what the feminist movement considers to be its strategic objectives. These bodies impose their agendas and force them to change priorities. The same applies to state action in local areas. This intrusion further divides the relationships between the women's movements and feminist movements, which had reunited to undertake joint actions for peace at the beginning of the period under study.

Finally, one of the most significant contributions of the women's presence in the organizations for peace and against the war in Colombia is the value it has given to the lives of anonymous people. They find meaning through a public mourning that might well have remained an intimate act of weeping for the dead, kidnapped, and disappeared had the women not decided to carry it into the public sphere. Initially, they do it to value these lives, allowing a type of heightened awareness of the precariousness of those lives and the need to protect them, to understand them beyond their country's borders. They are clear that they cannot escape death, but the fact of

accepting this precariousness, this finitude of the human condition, is perhaps the main political alternative they offer (Butler, 2004). For this reason, for these women activists, making the loudest noise, calling attention, leaving a trace, making noise, and exploding authority are of the utmost importance. Their noise is folkloric, full of symbols and slogans that emphasize the feminine condition.

In this exercise, similar to Touraine (1986), we attempt to examine the conduct of the women who belong to social organizations and who question the social situation and forms of domination and, thus, the mechanisms of the production of social and cultural practices, normative orientations, and core conflicts. To the extent possible, we intend to extract and elaborate the meaning of the practices, not to separate the meaning of an act from the consciousness of the actor but to analyze the self-analysis that the protagonists produce. We hope that we have succeeded.

Notes

¹ In the article "*Violence against women: a public matter*", Ibarra and García (2012) historically and sociologically reconstruct the process of state intervention in the prevention, attention to, and eradication of violence suffered by women in Columbia from the 1995 signing of the Inter-American Convention for the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence Against Women, Belem do Para, to 2010, when the National Defense Ministry enacted the public policy that includes, as its guiding axis, gender violence. This document reviews legal regulations, national public policies, reports from women's organizations, and the conventions and reports of international bodies to determine the manner in which what is considered a private matter acquires a public character and is incorporated into the political agenda – something that emanates from the state, as opposed to from the individual sphere. This process is delimited through various levels of context, one being global, which permits the comprehension of the historical trend of feminist efforts to render the problem visible, in addition to how international organizations allow us to understand the historical trend of feminist vindication by rendering visible the problem and how international bodies attend to the situation. At local or national levels, it covers the particular dynamics of both collective and institutional action.

² In this aspect, government reports demonstrate that women comprise a slight majority of the beneficiaries of programs created for humanitarian assistance and the restitution of their rights.

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