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Paving the path for the resolution of the Colombian armed conflict: An analysis of the impact of alliance-building and women's contribution to peace

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PAVING THE PATH FOR THE RESOLUTION OF THE COLOMBIAN ARMED CONFLICT

An analysis of the impact of alliance-building and women's contribution to peace

Cumbre Nacional de
Mujeres y Paz
COALICION 1325

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INTRODUCTION

After more than five decades of armed conflict, several failed peace processes, and four years of negotiation, in November 2016, the Colombian Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia- People's Army (FARC-EP) signed the Final Accord for the Termination of the Conflict and the Construction of a Stable and Durable Peace. The Agreement put an end to the longest internal armed conflict in Latin America and hoped to initiate a new era of peace. The creation of a Gender Subcommittee to incorporate a gender perspective into the Agreement has set a precedent for future peace processes and the Agreement has subsequently been heralded as the most gender-inclusive in the world, with over one hundred provisions relating to women's rights and gender equality. Amidst all the praise, however, it is often forgotten that the first two years of negotiations were marked by the absence of women and the prospect of considering a gendered agenda for peace, was not on the radar of the men who occupied all the seats at the negotiating table. Women in Colombia have occupied many roles throughout the course of the armed conflict; peacemakers, care-givers, armed combatants. However, is it their status as victims which receives the most attention. The conflict has, undeniably had differential impacts on men and women; women have been subject to forced displacement, acts of sexual violence, rape and forced labour at levels disproportionate to men. Therefore, when President Santos announced the beginning of peace talks with the FARC in 2012, Colombian women refused to be left in the margins as men held a monopoly over decisions which would affect their future and the future of their country. Women across the country mobilised, formed alliances and established agendas with the aim of securing participation in the official negotiations and ensuring a final peace agreement which acknowledged their disproportionate suffering throughout the armed conflict.

With a focus on the four-year period during which negotiations were held (2012-2016), this research will attempt to formulate a response to the following research question: how have women contributed to peacebuilding in Colombia? To do so, the research is structured around the following three sub-questions: what impact did women's organisation and mobilisation for peace have on the creation of the Gender Subcommittee and the inclusion of a gender perspective in the Final Agreement? What strategies did women's organisations employ to secure representation in negotiations in Havana? What was the impact of forming alliances both nation-wide and with the female plenipotentiaries? These questions will support the main objective of the research, which is to determine the role of Colombian women in peacebuilding processes. Throughout the thesis, 'women's movement for peace' and 'women's movement' are used interchangeably to refer to the homogenous groups of women and feminists who mobilised in the pursuit of peace.

The following hypotheses are proposed in relation to the research questions: women have contributed to peacebuilding by advocating for their rights and needs and leading community-based initiatives which promote peace by reducing inequality. Women's organisation and mobilisation for peace in Colombia influenced the creation of the Gender Subcommittee and the inclusion of a gender perspective in the Final Agreement by exerting sustained pressure on the government. Women's organisations publicised their exclusion from negotiations and organised a National Summit in an effort to secure representation in the official negotiations. Furthermore, the formation of alliances between diverse women's groups and with the female plenipotentiaries served to strengthen and legitimise the claims of the women's movement for peace.

In order to understand women's contribution to peacebuilding in Colombia and how such an inclusive peace agreement emerged from negotiations which began in the absence of women, the methodological approach consisted of an in-depth analysis of academic literature, media reports, publications from women's organisations and international bodies. Due to the global Covid-19 pandemic, it was not possible to travel to Colombia to carry out fieldwork, which made the task of establishing contact with women's peace organisations, very challenging. However, several semi-structured interviews were conducted over the Zoom Video Communications platform between February and June 2022. Participants included researchers for national think tanks and NGOs; Colombian female scholars; the director of a community-based peacebuilding organisation; and a member of the government's negotiation team who also served as co-Chair of the Gender Subcommittee. The data collected from these interviews thus provides a diverse range of academic, institutional, and societal perspectives, which collectively contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of women in the Colombian peace process. The information collected from the interviews, in combination with analysis of the aforementioned literature, publications and media reports form the bases of this research to formulate an answer to the main research question.

The first chapter presents a critical analysis of existing academic literature relating to the concepts of conflict resolution, women's participation in peacebuilding, and alliance-building. The second chapter will present a historical reflection of the mobilisation and advocacy efforts of Colombian women in the pursuit of peace, illustrating their incremental accumulation of political agency. The third chapter consists of a comprehensive analysis of the information collected during the semi-structured interviews which will address the participation of Colombian women in the official negotiations and the construction of a gender-inclusive peace agreement and women-led peacebuilding initiatives. Finally, the conclusion will discuss the findings of the three chapters, formulating a response to the main research question.

CHAPTER 1

THE PURSUIT OF PEACE: A THEORETICAL APPROACH

The concept of contemporary conflict resolution emerged following the end of the First World War (1914-1918) and was initially understood as the elimination of violence. Conflict resolution has since expanded to incorporate peacebuilding, reconciliation, the pursuit of justice and peacekeeping. As evidenced by the outbreak and persistence of interstate, interregional and international wars since the end of WWI, the field of conflict resolution is continually evolving as scholars, politicians and civilians in conflict societies around the world embark on the long and arduous journey to establish and maintain peace. This chapter will first explore the importance of adopting a culturally conscious approach to conflict resolution in section 1.1. Then it will illustrate the potential of conflict resolution for effecting social change. Section 1.2. will discuss the development of peacebuilding, its role in abolishing structural violence and the connection between the participation of women in peacebuilding and the sustainability of peace. Section 1.3 will explore alliance-building among women's organisations to secure involvement in official peace negotiations. Finally, the conclusion will address the main findings of this chapter.

1.1 From culturally-void to culturally conscious: conflict resolution as a vehicle for social change

Many of the early conceptualisations of the transformation from war to peace equate conflict resolution to problem-solving. According to Burton, conflict resolution is an interdisciplinary process of analysis and intervention concerned with identifying the problems at the root of the conflict and developing solutions to eliminate those problems (1990a). However, the complex, multi-faceted and distinct conflicts of the 20th and 21st centuries in Colombia, Libya, Northern Ireland, Sierra Leone (to name a few) and more recently, the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian war, serve to expose this approach as reductionist and overly simplistic. The roots of the analytical problem-solving approach to conflict resolution can be traced to Burton's basic human needs theory, according to which conflict is the result of 'frustrated needs' and in order to resolve the conflict, these needs must be satisfied (1990b). The formulaic, rational nature of this problem-solving framework fails to consider the cultural and personal elements which shape conflicts. LeBaron offers a convincing argument that conflict cannot be resolved 'durably nor respectfully' by following a strategy centred on problem-solving alone as it is 'insufficient to bridge cultural or worldview differences' (2002:1). Many of the early scholarly approaches to conflict resolution were developed in individualist Global North cultures and promote a generic practice which cannot be successfully “exported” to conflicts in collectivist societies in the Global South (Abu-Nimer 2013: 171). This one-size-fits-all approach illustrates a common limitation of many conflict resolution theories: the failure to consider the socio-cultural context in which the conflict takes place.

A culturally conscious approach to conflict resolution is more likely to provide a multidimensional perspective of the conflict. This would enable a profound understanding of the roots of the conflict and how it affects communities. Abu-Nimer (1999) and Lederach (1995), who acknowledge the diverse complexities differentiating one conflict from another, emphasise the importance of placing local cultural practices at the centre of conflict resolution. A collective consciousness of socio-cultural attitudes, traditions and practices may also offer a forecast of how conflict is likely to develop in the future. Transitioning from analytical, mechanical and rational approaches to conflict resolution to a more personal, localised approach which is sensitive to culture and human emotions seems more likely to procure a peace which is satisfactory to all. Throughout conflict resolution processes, critical consideration should also be afforded to the effect of protracted violent conflict on societal cultural attitudes where there is a risk of violence becoming an accepted cultural practice. Conflict does not occur in a vacuum between the protagonists and antagonists waging war but rather has a disastrous knock-on effect that extends beyond the physical. The normalisation of violence at the individual and community level, resulting from sustained violence at the national and international level could pose a threat to the transformation from war to peace after the armed actors have agreed to a ceasefire.

Extending conflict resolution processes beyond the mere cessation of violence to foster broad social change, is therefore crucial to tackle the normalisation of violence. Conflict resolution should be approached as an opportunity to construct an improved and equitable society. Kelman (1986), Scimecca (1987), Doob (1970), and Burton (1988) all link conflict resolution to social change. On the broader socio-political level, Kelman claims that conflict resolution requires structural and attitudinal changes which should be reflected in concrete policy (3). Scimecca argues that conflict resolution ‘has potential’ to drive social change and peace-making, particularly in protracted conflicts. In his paper ‘Conflict Resolution as a Political System’, Burton argues that the goal of conflict resolution and practice is problem-solving which should lead to policy making to drive lasting social change (1988).

Many traditional approaches to conflict resolution reinforce elitist practices (Burton 1998; Doob 1970). As conflict is so often caused and sustained by underdevelopment, victims and marginalised populations should be at the forefront of conflict resolution processes. This is supported by Azar who substitutes Burton's profile of the "necessitous *man*" for the victimised and marginalised, stressing that victims of a conflict should always be given the highest priority in governments' developmental policies (1990: 131). Negotiation processes driven by the political and military elites, and which pay no heed to victims or the marginalised, risk the production of an outcome which is neither reflective of, nor accepted by society. These processes should, instead be guided by the principles of justice, empowerment and freedom (Abu-Nimer: 2013: 169).

1.2. Women and (post-conflict) peacebuilding

Dominant scholarly conceptualisations which designate peacebuilding as a post-conflict process, serve to undermine the efforts of people on the ground who have been engaged in peacebuilding initiatives long before the military and political elites take their seats at the negotiating table. Galtung coined the term "peacebuilding" as the process of abolishing structural violence and tackling power imbalances and inequality of opportunity (1975: 288). Since intrastate violence became 'an unfortunate but familiar feature' of the post-Cold War global landscape, peacebuilding became a common lexicon within the UN (Paris 2004: 1). The term was included in the 1992 Agenda for Peace presented by the then Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali who outlined peacebuilding as a process of 'rebuilding the institutions and infrastructures of nations torn by civil war and strife; and building bonds of peaceful mutual benefit among nations formerly at war' (1992:4). The aim of post-conflict peacebuilding, according to Boutros-Ghali is 'to prevent a recurrence' of conflict by addressing humanitarian problems and executing cultural, economic and social development plans (1992: 15). This solidified understandings of peacebuilding as a 'post-conflict' concept.

Assertions of peacebuilding as a post-conflict process imply that it is contingent on a peace agreement. In contexts of prolonged negotiations and failed agreements, this systematic approach could serve to neglect and prolong the human suffering from the direct effects of the war. Lederach supports Harbottle's thesis which emphasises an interrelated, coordinated and multi-professional approach to peacebuilding (Harbottle 1979: 217). Peacebuilding, according to Lederach, 'is more than post-accord reconstruction', it is 'a comprehensive concept that encompasses, generates, and sustains the full array of processes, approaches, and stages needed to transform conflict towards more sustainable, peaceful relationships' (1997: 20). This holistic approach to peacebuilding which involves the activities and processes that not only follow formal peace accords, but also precede them, would prioritise victims and those most affected by conflict.

The conceptualisation of “post-conflict” peacebuilding is also problematic for women, who suffer disproportionately from the effects of war. Porter asserts that the term “post-conflict” overlooks the gendered violence which remains in a militarised culture following the official end to war (2016:210). McWilliams argues that the term “post-conflict” is a ‘misnomer’ as it implies the restoration of society to its previous state (2015: 234). What should be pursued, is the recreation of a society based on the respect for human rights standards that may never before have existed (2015: 234). Feminist researchers have long argued that the end of armed conflict does not automatically translate into improved security for women and that a meaningful peace must take women’s protection and women’s rights into account (Chinkin 2003; Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen 2001; Pankhurst 2003, 2008) Selimovic et al., identified a connection between ongoing domestic violence in the post-conflict phase to war-related gender-based violence, highlighting ‘the continuities of violence that blur the line between war and peace’ (2012: 112). Selimovic stresses that a deeper understanding among all actors in the peacebuilding arena of the interrelations of domestic violence and violence in the streets is ’imperative’ to the pursuit of substantial social change in post-conflict environments (2012: 112)

Selimovic et. al. found that most cases with little or no involvement of civil society actors in the peace process relapsed into conflict at a later stage. “One stands to lose much by excluding civil society from peace processes” (2012: 5). One may stand to lose much more through a failure to acknowledge that civil society is gendered. However, to reduce women’s capacity for peacebuilding to their “innate peace-loving nature”, or their instinctive capacity to build peace is not only a patriarchal tendency which strips women of their recognition as subjects of political rights but it also reinforces the ingrained and outdated concept of war as a man’s issue and peace as a woman’s project (Galtung 1996: 40; Weber 2006). This perpetuates a discourse of masculinisation and feminisation that defines men as soldiers and women as victims (Selimovic et al., 2012: 8). As with all stereotypes, they may be used to oppress as well as to claim power. The image of women as victims has been reinforced by the international efforts to recognise the violence perpetrated against women (9). In conflict situations, women tend to argue that human rights relating to women, including health, education, political rights, and equality should be recognized. However, following peace agreements, the focus is on the removal of arms and the disbandment of armies or paramilitary groups rather than on these issues. When issues are prioritised for implementation, it is the militarists who win out while the women's interests are marginalised. (McWilliams 2015: 236). As Marie Smyth notes, what is needed is "demilitarisation at a cultural and ideological level (2004: 548).

A range of obstacles persist for women seeking to influence the design and implementation of peace agreements. These include difficulties gaining access to the talks, as well as achieving material gains for women (Bell 2018: 1). In response to the advocacy of international women's organisations, the UN Security Council published Resolution 1325 which was widely praised as a watershed for security policy and peacebuilding as it explicitly called on states to protect women in conflict zones and commit to their inclusion in peace processes (UN Security Council, United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR 1325 2000). Porter asserts that UNSCR 1325 is 'historic' in recognising women's rights to protection from violence (2008:632), whereas Ní Áolain argues that it reaffirms the 'victim-centred discourse' which undermines the agency of women (2012: 215). Despite UN Security Resolutions, creating 'a political climate that endorses women's equal participation as an outcome of peace agreements, remains a significant challenge' (McWilliams 2015: 235).

Much of the focus on women's contribution to peace is on processes which occur outside of the state-centric formal processes which are often monopolised by men. Bell points out that, despite the fact that peace initiatives will often have been promoted by women, it is often only at the stage where the main protagonists to a conflict – primarily men – come together in a formal attempt to mediate an end to the conflict that a formal peace process is considered to exist (2013: 2). Therefore, a peace process is only considered a peace process once the main protagonists to the conflict (mainly men) come together to mediate an end to the conflict. The very definition of 'peace process' indicates the exclusion of women (2).

According to Paffenholz et al., early inclusion in the peace process can set a precedent that then ensures the continuous involvement of women's groups and increases their ability to make meaningful contributions. Early women's involvement—preferably in the pre-negotiation phase—has often paved the way for sustained women's inclusion throughout subsequent negotiations and agreement implementation processes (2016: 8).

Steinberg (2014) argues that the silencing of women's voices in peace negotiations means that issues such as sexual abuses by government and rebel forces and the rebuilding of social services and girls' education go unaddressed. The result is that such agreements are far less likely to succeed since the process is viewed as serving the interests of the warring parties rather than the people (McWilliams 2015: 236). Bell argues that the idea of a "gender perspective," as required under resolution 1325, 'goes beyond addressing issues of apparent relevance to women' (2018:4). How ceasefire agreements differentiate between civilians and combatants, and the extent to which they make socioeconomic provisions, while not overtly presenting as "gender" issues, are of particular concern to women, who in all conflicts are overrepresented as "civilians," and tend to 'bear the brunt' of socioeconomic hardship (4).

An important finding by Paffenholz et al. was that a strong presence of women, even directly at the negotiation table, does not automatically translate into their ability to assert a strong influence. Rather, it is the level of influence that women can assert on the process that makes a difference, not only their presence by numbers (2016: 55). Given the central focus of peace agreements on some sort of constitutional road map, if women can influence these negotiations, they can influence the structures that can 'enable or prevent their participation in public life for the indefinite future' (Bell 2018: 6). Involvement at this stage enables women to mould government structures and influence the nation's concept of inclusion. Bell highlights a need to approach peace processes as gendered from the outset (9). First, women must be involved in negotiating, reaching, and implementing the peace agreement, and all mediators need to be aware of how the conflict and the peace process affect women. Second, the substance of the peace agreement must take into account the particular needs of women and girls and adopt a gender perspective. Third, feminist advocacy must include a long-term commitment to sustaining the efforts for peace long after the peace agreement is signed (9).

Women often argue for inclusion based not just on capacity to improve awareness of the gendered impact of conflict, but because they feel their experience of conflict brings wider insights into the business of ending it. Women may have an interest in all aspects of peace agreements, and they have multiple identities that put them on different "sides" of the conflict on key issues (Bell 2018: 11). Mass mobilisation and mass action by women before and during negotiations can serve as a direct legitimising factor leading to women being subsequently invited to participate in the official process (Paffenholz et al. 2016: 57).

Statistical analysis carried out by Krause shows a 'robust relationship' between women signatories and the durability of peace, with peace agreements signed by women showing a higher number of provisions and a higher rate of provision implementation ten years after agreement, than those not signed by women (2018: 987). Krause therefore concludes that women's participation in peace negotiations positively impacts the quality and durability of peace (987). Krause further identified gender inequality to be a strong predictor of armed conflict, which suggests that there is a connection between women's security, the political participation of women, and durable peace (990). Gender equality has been shown to be a strong indicator of a state's peacefulness (Hudson et al. 2012, 2009) and gender inequality a strong predictor of civil war onset (Caprioli 2005; Melander 2005). Selimovic et al. support these findings, affirming that the chances of lasting peace increase dramatically when there are women present at the negotiating table (2012: 5). Furthermore, peace agreements lacking a gender perspective often do not consider women's human rights and peace is short-lived (2012:5). Selimovic et al. draw a close connection between gender, peace and power; arguing that power relations shape and define political processes and that 'men and women are differently affected by war – and peace' (2012: 7).

According to McWilliams, given the adversarial nature of mainstream politics, there is often not just one peace process going on but instead a whole range of processes in which women play an active part and without their role, lasting change is highly unlikely (2015: 232). However, Selimovic et al., find that women are often not recognised as relevant actors in peace processes, and the multifaceted peace work that they perform is 'neither noticed nor recognised' (2012: 11) The power over negotiations is therefore placed in the hands of persons and groups without any peacebuilding experience, which Selimovic et al., consider 'a dangerous practice'. Since nearly half of all wars relapse into further wars, it is a practice that needs to be seriously questioned (11). McWilliams asserts that women's perspectives, women's agency, and particularly women's ways of promoting peace make a significant and positive difference in conflict resolution, and conflict transformation (2015: 233).

The civil society rebuilt after war or tyranny seldom reflects women's visions. McWilliams argues that a paradigm shift is essential if gender justice is to be understood as an important feature of democratisation in a deeply conservative society (2015: 237). If the post-conflict phase becomes narrowed to security sector reforms then transitional justice measures such as proposals for affirmative action and temporary special measures will get lost. Without strong enforcement mechanisms, 'women will disappear from the process' (237). Robust language in a peace agreement that promotes gender equality and women's participation needs to be bolstered by specific responsibility and an allocation of resources to facilitate implementation (238). The involvement of women in peace processes opens up a space for political transformation but this space needs to be sustained. It requires the support of political leaders (238)

Selimovic et al., assert that post-conflict contexts are ‘sites for power struggles’ and if women are to gain access to and be able to fully participate in peace processes, there is a need to develop an understanding of the power dynamics that fuel exclusions and how such exclusions are upheld by multifaceted obstacles (2012: 13). Selimovic highlights the significance of ‘claiming space’ as a powerful base from which women can set their own agendas and exert influence from outside the official negotiations (2012: 107). From these spaces they gain legitimacy and have an opportunity to ‘circumvent’ formal power structures (2012: 111).

1.3. Alliance-building between women in the quest for peace

Collier defines alliance building as the establishment of a ‘united front’ (2003: 2). Benjamin Broome expands on this arguing that parties to an alliance cannot achieve their goal without depending on one another (2003: 290). There is a consensus that alliance-building between women’s and feminists organisations in conflict settings, improves the legitimacy and visibility of their objectives in terms of peacebuilding (Harcourt, Rabonivich and Allo 2002; Bell 2017). The multi-year “Broadening Participation” research project led by Dr Thania Paffenholz found that pre-existing groups, networks, and movements resulted in women being able to draw upon existing experience and resources to push for women’s inclusion through mass action, facilitate the start of negotiations, and raise the funds necessary for continued involvement. The strength of women’s groups can also be increased through regional and international women’s networks (2016: 53).

Paffenholz et al., also concluded that coalition-building allows women, under a collective umbrella, to mobilise around common issues and negotiate as a ‘unified, representative cluster’, which increases the chance of being heard. Overcoming differences and sharing grievances was often a precondition for these coalitions to function (2016:9). Krause supports this, arguing that linkages between female signatories and women civil society groups contribute significantly to the quality of accord content and to its implementation (2018: 987). Alliances between female signatories and women civil society groups result in more accord provisions aimed at socio-political change and greater provision implementation rates due to ‘sustained advocacy’ by well-informed women groups, thus making durable peace more likely (990). Women’s participation as signatories allows them to establish and strengthen linkages to women civil society groups with strong connections to the grassroots level (991). Krause affirms that women signatories can become “brokers” who connect local-level women civil society networks to track-one negotiations (991). Alliances between women with access to the negotiations and a diverse set of women civil society groups not only broaden societal support for the peace process. They also inform the negotiations on specific issues and agendas that can lead to the inclusion of provisions for shaping socio-political reform (Krause 2018: 991).

Paffenholz et al., found that where women had access to the negotiation table, they had much higher chances of exercising influence when they had their own independent women-only delegation, and/or when they were able to strategically coordinate among women across delegations in order to advance common interests, such as by formulating joint positions on key issues and/or by forming unified women’s coalitions across formal delegations (2016: 7).

Conclusion

Presenting discussions in the fields of contemporary conflict resolution and peacebuilding, this chapter has illustrated how the two are interdependent and continually evolving as new challenges present in our modern world. The resolution of conflict is not a generic formula which can be applied to solve problems of personal and structural violence in any given place. Each conflict presents different and varied problems which must be addressed with different and varied responses. Perception to local cultural and social norms must be at the heart of any attempt to resolve conflict and build peace; with sensitivity shown for those most affected by violence in all its forms. The end to conflict presents an opportunity to dismantle the power structures which perpetuate the struggle and to create positive social change. Social change beneficial to all is that which reflects the aspirations of all members of society.

Wars often begin at the hands of men and are often considered a man’s issue. This patriarchal ideology has also pervaded theoretical approaches to conflict resolution as many scholars failed to consider the pertinent role that women as a heterogenous group can and do play in building peace. Where women’s role in peacebuilding is considered, it is often groups under the broad category of ‘civil society’. Furthermore, much of the scholarly approaches to women and peace are oversaturated with romanticised ideas of victimisation and essentialist feminist theory which reduces women’s peacebuilding ability to their innate peace-loving nature. Further research and analysis on women’s autonomous, and active engagement in peacebuilding as subjects of rights, is crucial to developing a robust roadmap out of conflict and a holistic, inclusive approach to pursuing sustainable peace. As men have taken their seats at the official negotiating tables to analyse the problems created by the conflict, women on the ground have been mobilising and setting their own agendas to build peace as war raged on. International standards for the inclusion and participation of women at all stages in peace processes are strengthening the position and legitimacy of women peacebuilders, however many barriers remain. Through the creation of strong, intersectional alliances, women have confronted these barriers and their contribution has proven essential to lasting and sustainable peace. In the following chapters, female peacebuilding and the power of alliance-building among women will be further addressed in the context of resolving the Colombian armed conflict and the ongoing peace process.

CHAPTER 2

FROM EXCLUSION TO INCLUSION AND BACK AGAIN: A HISTORICAL REFLECTION OF WOMEN'S MOBILISATION FOR PEACE IN COLOMBIA

Introduction

In order to comprehensively analyse the impact of women's mobilisation on the peace negotiations of 2012-2016 and the Final Agreement signed by the Government of Juan Manuel Santos and the FARC-EP, first it is essential to retrace the path which led to these negotiations and the steps taken by Colombian women over the preceding decades to ensure the incorporation of their demands. This chapter will begin with a historical reflection in section 2.1. of the shifting global socio-cultural environment of the mid-seventies and eighties; the conversations this provoked among women in Colombia regarding their place in the public and private arenas and how this led to their unprecedented inclusion in the peace process initiated by President Belisario Betancur. Section 2.2. will illustrate the growth of women's organisation and advocacy efforts to impose their gendered agenda on the peace pact presented by the 1991 Constitution. Section 2.3. will address the strength of women's political agency and their mobilisation efforts for peace, fuelled by their exclusion from official talks between President Andrés Pastrana and the FARC-EP. Section 2.4 will outline the women's movement's steadfast commitment to peace; combining mobilisation with legislative advocacy efforts to confront the threat posed by the socio-political environment procured during the Uribe administration. The conclusion will present the main findings of the chapter, highlighting the most important advancements achieved by Colombian women through persistent mobilisation and advocacy in the pursuit of peace.

2.1. Creating space for female participation in Betancur's peace negotiations during the decade for women (1975-1986)

In the 1980s, Colombia, like many countries in Latin America, experienced a fundamental shift in terms of governance, advocacy, and political participation. This can be attributed in part to the external debt crisis, development processes in the pursuit of "modernity", and the domino-effect of a global civil rights movement, which called into question existing power structures and discrimination on the bases of class, gender, and sex (Lamus 2010). Rising insurgency, political stagnation and repressive governance which characterised the political landscape of Colombia at the beginning of the 1980s, elicited widespread demands for a change to the status quo (Velásquez 2009). By the late 1970s, guerrilla groups were operating in the nation's largest cities and in almost every department of the country. Betancur's assumption of the presidency in 1982 marked a watershed event in the nation's political history, but not just because it was the first Conservative triumph over the Liberals in fully competitive elections since 1946 (Bagley and Tokatlian 1985: 30).[1] Receptive to growing public fatigue with the repeated failure of militant approaches to guerrilla violence, Betancur called for national dialogue to address the "objective causes of the conflict" (poverty and exclusion) and the initiation of a peace process, fostering a climate of "democratic openness" (Chernick 1988: 53). Women were appointed to the highest positions within the political arena and for the first time, women were present at the negotiating table, setting a precedent for future Colombian peace processes (Chaparro-González and Martínez-Osorio 2020).

Upon taking office, Betancur appointed eleven women to vice-minister positions and two women as government ministers, marking one of the greatest levels of women's political participation in Colombian history (Torres Mateus 2020). This inclusionary trend extended to the negotiating table and Betancur's agenda for peace. In 1984, the government signed agreements with four guerrilla groups: the FARC-EP, the Popular Liberation Army (EPL), the Communist Party of Colombia – Marxist-Leninist (Liga M-L), and the Workers' Self-Defence Forces (AUC). These four agreements included 52 men and 4 women (26 men representing the guerrilla groups and 26 representing the government, and 1 woman representing the guerrilla groups and 3 representing the government). Furthermore, the government-created commissions responsible for presiding over the various stages of the peace talks, were composed of 158 men and 17 women (Chaparro-González and Martínez-Osorio 2020: 24). Colombian women therefore represented 7.14% of all signatories of the peace agreements and 9.71% of peace commission members (Villarraga 2015). Although numerically low, these figures are symbolically significant as, for the first time, women had been invited to participate in discussions aimed to end a conflict of which they had long been the primary victims. This shift from total exclusion to partial inclusion was the culmination of women's mobilisation within a favourable international climate despite adverse conditions at the national and local levels.

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[1] The 1950 presidential elections were brought forward to November 1949 due to the outbreak of la Violencia following the assassination of Jorge Eliecer Gaitan in 1948 but the Liberals refused to participate and Laureano Gómez was thus elected unopposed. Elections were suspended in 1954 due to the Rojas Coup. The creation of the bipartisan National Front arrangement with its requirements of presidential alternation effectively restricted electoral competition at the presidential level until 1974. In the first two post-Frente presidential elections (1974 and 1978), the Liberals won. (Bagley and Tokatlian 1985).

As the second wave of feminism was rising across Europe and North America in the 1970s, the depreciation of the female gender in Colombia was worsening in the context of an ever-increasing violent conflict. Colombian women became spoils of an androcentric war, subjected to sexual violence, marginalisation, and discrimination. Furthermore, the Colombian State, appropriating the global discourse on gender and economic development, exploited female workers, who made up a high percentage of the informal sector (Talcott 2004). This climate of brutality, exploitation and repression provoked a quiet revolution among women across the country who began to construct a collective identity as "subjects of social change" in the face of the patriarchal system enforcing their subordination (Luna and Villareal 1994: 171). The demand for "democracy in the country, in the home and in bed" expressed by Julieta Kirkwood and Margarita Pisano in Chile, reverberated across the region and in 1970, feminist groups began to emerge in Colombia, placing issues such as abortion, sexuality and domestic violence into the public arena (Gómez Correal 2011). Feminists initiated a struggle to change their position of exclusion and subordination in both the public and private spheres. Simultaneously, urban, and rural popular women were organising; presenting demands based on their conditions of exploitation, exclusion and inequality. Women linked to formal and traditional spaces of political participation, such as parties and trade unions began "a broad process of questioning and autonomous organisation within these male-dominated spaces" (Vargas 2002:307). The independent mobilisation and organisation of these groups collectively represented the women's movement, which despite violent and oppressive conditions at the local level, reacted quickly to exploit a growing global dialogue on gender.

At the first world conference of the International Women's Year in Mexico City in 1975, the United Nations designated the period 1975-1985, the "Decade for Women". Although initially received with cynicism by feminist groups, the conferences held during this period (1975 in Mexico City, 1980 in Copenhagen and 1985 in Nairobi) sought to open a worldwide dialogue on gender equality (Lamus 2010: 72). Three objectives were highlighted at the first conference, namely "1) full gender equality and the elimination of gender discrimination; 2) the integration and full participation of women in development and 3) an increased contribution by women towards strengthening world peace" (United Nations 1976). Towards the end of the decade, a strong sense of optimism pervaded the third UN Women's Conference in Nairobi, which was perceived by the women's movement as the beginning of an "irreversible process" of the abolishment of the patriarchy (Zinsser 1990: 24). The designation of a Decade for Women, was intended to lift the invisible cloak under which women had been placed, legitimising their demands and elevating women's issues to the international level of diplomacy. Far more significant than what Tinker and Jaquette reduce to an "entrée into the male club of international policy making", the development and promotion of a strategy for women, equality, and peace, provoked a global reflection on and questioning of a woman's place in society, legitimising women's claims for inclusion, equality, and security (1987: 419). This served to empower the women's movement in Colombia, propelling the construction of women's networks. This UN initiative constituted an important advancement in the visibilisation process of the female population, particularly the most vulnerable rural working classes, urban poor, indigenous, Afro-descendants and those displaced by violence and internal conflict (Álvarez 2000: 30). As the international community cast an eye over the treatment and condition of women, pressure rose on the Colombian State, which was both active and complicit in their oppression.

The grievances and claims of Colombian women were vindicated in 1981 when the government ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence against Women (hereafter CEDAW). CEDAW represented a victory for Colombian women in confirming their equal status and indirectly condoning their subjection to violence and oppression. Colombian women were henceforth equipped with an international legal norm in defence of their rights (Lamus 2010). The institutionalisation of the discourse on women and equality translated pressure into legal obligations on the Colombian State to address violence and discrimination against women which was exacerbated in the ongoing internal conflict. These international advancements were indicative of a global reckoning which set the stage for Colombian women to congregate and mobilise. Following the ratification of CEDAW, women's advocacy in Colombia accelerated. The extent of growing resistance became evident in 1981 when feminist groups from Bogotá, Cali, Cartagena, Medellín and Manizales attended the First Latin American Feminist *Encuentro* (Meeting) in Bogotá (Luna and Villareal 1994). This meeting served to prove Melucci's hypothesis that "the movement is present before the mobilisation becomes visible" (1998: 379). Harnessing the energy produced by the 1980 international conferences on women, this meeting exposed a movement which had been gaining traction in the home and in the community as women united to generate social and political change in Colombia.

This meeting sparked the formation of organisations, collectives and alliances of women and feminists who exploited international recognition of their right to equality, non-discrimination, and security, to advocate for an end to the armed conflict through peaceful means. El Colectivo Nacional de Mujeres (the National Women's Collective) was established in 1982 to lobby before

Betancur's peace talks (Chaparro-González and Martínez-Osorio 2020: 27). Organisations such as *Casa de la Mujer* (the Women's House), *Grupo Amplio por la Liberación de la Mujer* (the Broad Group for the Liberation of Women), *Organización Femenina Popular* (the Popular Feminine Organisation) and *Grupo Mujer y Sociedad* (the Women and Society Group), to name a few, mobilised on a national level advocating for peace and the inclusion of women into the political arena (Jaquette 1994). A constellation of local, national, and international factors including pressure exerted by CEDAW; a global call to include women in all decision-making spaces and nation-wide mobilisation for peace, resulted in the incorporation of women into Betancur's peace process.

2.2. *Nosotras el pueblo de Colombia*: imposing a feminist agenda on the 1991 Constitution

The siege of the Palace of Justice by the M-19 guerrilla group in November 1985 marked a breakdown of the fragile peace process initiated by Betancur. This event sparked mobilisation among women and feminists, who responded by taking to the streets to demand peace, a demonstration strategically organised for the 25th November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (Luna and Villareal 1994). The peace processes initiated by President Virgilio Barco (1986-1990) with M-19 saw a regression in terms of women's representation. Although one woman was appointed to one of the peace commissions, women were excluded from negotiations and of the twenty-nine signatories to the joint declarations between the government and M-19, none was a woman. These agreements were devoid of any gender provisions and any consideration of women's rights (Chaparro-González and Martínez-Osorio 2020: 28-29). This trend continued into the peace processes of the Gaviria administration (1990-1994). Of the eighteen agreements signed during this period, just 1.91% of signatories were women and none of the documents addressed gender-issues (ibid: 32). From the margins of the peace negotiations, a transition process can be observed within the women's movement from the mid-eighties, from a focus on radical social transformation through consciousness-raising and popular education to "democratisation, policy intervention and interlocution with the State" (Murdock 2008: 3). While excluded from formal peace processes, women focussed their efforts on shaping the "peace pact" presented by the National Constituent Assembly (Chaparro-González and Martínez-Osorio 2020: 32). Colombian women and feminists seized the window of opportunity presented by the constitutional process, which proved to be a motor for mobilisation and the construction of a shared agenda to ensure the incorporation of women's rights in the new Constitution (Wills 2007).

On 23rd March 1988, the women's collective with contributions from seventeen women's organisations, submitted a proposal entitled '*Nosotras el pueblo de Colombia*' - we the people of Colombia (in the feminine) to the House of Representatives for the reform of the 1886 Constitution. These groups were composed of trade unionists, liberals, conservatives, communists, socialists, feminists, and independent and social leaders, reflecting the heterogeneity of this collective of women united to ensure recognition of their demands in the new constitution (Montaño and Aranda 2006: 270). These women proposed the abolition of all forms of inequality and discrimination, recognition of diverse family structures, protection for children and human reproduction, labour rights, and political rights (Morgan and Buitrago 1992: 370). In addition, women's groups from Cali submitted a comprehensive document of proposed constitutional changes, calling for the use of inclusive language mentioning both ciudadanos y ciudadanas (the masculine and feminine forms of "citizens"). They also sought to prohibit discrimination based on 'economic, social or cultural grounds; ethnicity or gender; religious or political affiliation; or sexual orientation' (Wills 2007: 219). In response to increasing societal violence, the women of Cali also proposed the addition of clauses guaranteeing a "right to peace, personal security and prohibiting torture and physical or psychological cruelties" (Morgan and Buitrago 1992: 370).

The approval by Colombian voters of the convocation of a constitutional assembly sparked a new process of alliance-building and networking among women's and feminist groups in Colombia who coordinated action to ensure that women's rights, as defined by the movement, would be explicitly incorporated into the new Constitution. In October 1990, women joined together in Bogotá for the National Women's Summit, to discuss the women's agenda for the constituent assembly, which aimed to "drive structural change which would promote gender equality" (Wills 2007: 220). A key issue for debate during this conference was whether the women's groups would each present their own independent candidate lists to the assembly or would present one joint list in alliance with political parties or leftist organisations (Chaparro-González and Martínez-Osorio 2020: 37-38). This question of whether to pursue "double militancy" exposed internal tensions of the movement and in the end, the women candidates' list received one thousand votes with only four women elected to the constituent assembly (Luna and Villareal 1994). Low representation intensified the need for strong advocacy by the women's movement and strategic alliance-building with constituents. In April 1991, in an attempt to garner further support and expand the movement, the women of Cali published an open letter to the nation's women, lamenting "the grand absence of women" in the national debate and inviting them to meet in Cali on 4 May to "discuss strategies" to ensure that specific rights related to women would not go unaddressed (Morgan and Buitrago 1992: 378).[2] Shortly before the meeting, a manifesto was created under the slogan "Democracy in the country and in the home", which was signed by thirty-five organisations and published by one of the country's leading newspapers (El Tiempo 1991).

Women from across the country responded to the call to meet in Cali on 4th May, where they united efforts and formed the Woman and the Constituent Assembly National Network (Red Nacional Constituyente). The aim of the Network was to exert pressure on the Constituent Assembly to incorporate the UN CEDAW principles of equal rights, equality of opportunity and equal participation of women in decision-making and conflict-resolution processes (Morgan and Buitrago 1992: 378). As "an expression of zero discrimination", the network also demanded that the Constitution be drafted in both feminine and masculine language (Luna and Villareal 1994: 190-191). The growth of this network from an amalgamation of ten women's groups to seventy-five reflects the rapid growth of the moment and their successful capacity for harnessing support (ibid). From this meeting, networking, and alliance-building with both constituents and other women's groups accelerated. The network executed comprehensive lobbying tactics such as breakfasts with delegates, working meetings with diverse women's groups, press releases, radio advertising, meetings with individual delegates, letters to the Assembly and the publication of a newsletter (Lemaitre 2019: 260)

The 1991 Constitution which emerged from this process presents a feminist success story and a victory for women who despite exclusion from the formal processes, harnessed alternative forms of participation, demonstrating their capacity as political actors and vehicles of citizen representation and participation. The new Constitution included a right to equality and the prohibition of discrimination (Article 13); women's right to participate in decision-making levels of public administration (Article 40); equal rights and duties in couples (Article 42); equal opportunities for men and women (Article 43); special protection for pregnant women and heads of families (Article 43); divorce and the end of Catholic establishment (Article 42). Colombian women recognised the law as a powerful instrument for social change, ultimately making immense contributions to "a new political order conducive to all Colombians living in peace" (Gaviria, El Tiempo 1991). The Constitution-making process exposed the strength of the women's and feminist movement who successfully carved out a space for women when the political opportunity arose. By adopting a human rights frame to exclaim their demands; tapping into national networks, establishing strategic alliances, and harnessing the power of the media, the women's movement demonstrated a broad repertoire for contentious action which prohibited the Constituent Assembly from ignoring their proposals. This process of organisation and construction of shared agendas saw the birth of the National Network of Women (Red Nacional de Mujeres), (Chaparro-González and Martínez-Osorio: 36). Under this umbrella organisation were women's groups, feminist, and non-feminist groups, united around a political approach to women's citizenship and a negotiated end to the conflict.

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[2] From a letter from Maria Ladi Londofio E., Clara Eugenia Charria Q; and Carmen Eliza Alvarez, on Si-Mujer letterhead (Apr. 19, 1991) quoted from Morgan and Buitrago (1992).

2.3. Political agency from the side-lines: Pastrana's Peace Process and UN Resolution 1325 (1998-2002)

The cautious optimism which the 1991 Constitution fostered for a "new peaceful political order" soon faded under the Samper administration (1994-1998). Low legitimacy marked Ernesto Samper's term from its inception due to alleged links with drug traffickers, which limited his bargaining power for effective peace talks (González 2014: 421). The four peace agreements signed during this period did, however, mark an advancement in terms of women's representation and inclusion. Of the seventy-five signatories to the agreements, seven were women. Furthermore, the Presidential Council for Peace, tasked with overseeing the talks, was composed of thirteen men and two women (Chaparro-González and Martínez-Osorio 2020). Although these figures are low, they mark a progressive step forward in comparison to previous administrations, demonstrating that women's gradual participation in peace efforts was not a linear process. As the FARC, ELN and AUC continued to wage war throughout the nineties and as military confrontations escalated towards the end of the decade, society's desire for peace intensified (Rojas 2004: 12). The late nineties could arguably be considered the peak of the peace movement and central to this process were Colombian women. Ana Teresa Bernal led the Mandate for Peace, Life and Freedom, the product of an alliance between País Libre (Free Country) and REDEPAZ (National Network of Peace) and which collected 10 million votes for peace. The campaign galvanised peace marches in 1998 and 1999, with high levels of participation from women's groups such as Ruta Nacional de Mujeres (the National Women's Network) (Rojas 2004: 12). It was pressure exerted by women on the warring factions that created the momentum for the Pastrana-FARC peace talks initiated in San Vicente del Caguán in January 1999. Although this dialogue has been recognised as “talks about talks” as conflict raged on, women actively exercised participation in both (limited) official and (extended) unofficial capacities.

Women’s official representation in the peace process of 1999-2002 was low but their impact was mighty. There were just four women who held official negotiating positions during the Pastrana-FARC dialogues. María Emma Mejía was (briefly) appointed as a member of the President’s first negotiating team; Ana Mercedes Gómez was involved in the Notables Commission to draft recommendations for a ceasefire; Ana Teresa Bernal was appointed to the Thematic Commission as a representative of the National Peace Council and Mariana Páez was appointed to the Thematic Commission on behalf of FARC, as requested by Ana Teresa Bernal and María Emma Mejía (Velásquez 2009: 34). Furthermore, the peace commissions were composed of more women than men, marking an important precedent (Chaparro-González and Martínez-Osorio 2020). The most significant advancement in terms of women’s participation was the creation of the Women’s Special and Public Forum. In a coordinated effort, the National Women’s Network (RNM) requested and succeeded in holding a Women’s Forum in Caguán on 25th June 2000 to “declare to the people of Colombia, the world and those involved in the armed conflict that without women, there will be no peace and with women, a sustainable peace can be achieved” (Martínez and González 2001: 87). The Forum at El Caguán was perceived as an opportunity to advance the gender agenda. The announcement of the forum generated organisation among women, creating the impetus for the development of more women’s networks to consolidate and articulate their vision for peace (Paarlberg-Kvam 2017: 162). After three months of intense preparation, approximately 600 women attended the forum, representing the “cultural, sectoral and regional diversity of the women’s movement” (Díaz et al. 2001: i).

The forum was a demonstration of women’s political agency. In a public expression of their commitment to peace, the women’s movement asserted not only their demands but also their position as key actors in the resolution of the armed conflict. In emphasising the importance of social justice, democracy and sustained dialogue, the women at Caguán claimed peace as a women’s project. The participants spoke of deepening economic, social, political, and cultural divisions and the pressing need to address “ethnic, gender and generational dimensions of the conflict” (Rojas 2004: 20). The absence of Government officials reinforced the long-held assumption of war as a man’s issue; exposing low levels of political will to acknowledge women’s agency and to pay heed to women’s proposals. The absence of government representatives did not however preclude the forum from public recognition. The high levels of organisation and participation in the forum attracted national media coverage, with two of the country's most esteemed newspapers, *El Espectador* and *El Tiempo* producing reports on the event and the statements presented by attendees.[3] This served to increase the legitimacy and visibility of the movement, propelling "women's issues" and visions for peace into both the public and political arenas. The forum also highlighted the root causes and underlying socio-dynamics of the war, surpassing common discourse which repeatedly focused on paramilitaries, drug-traffickers, and terrorism. Four months after the forum in Caguán, in October 2000, the United Nations launched the Women Peace and Security (WPS) agenda with the adoption of Resolution 1325 (Yoshida and Céspedez-Báez 2021: 19).

This landmark Resolution reaffirmed the important role of women in "the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and post-conflict reconstruction".[4] It stressed the importance of women's equal participation and full involvement in the maintenance and promotion of peace and security. Resolution 1325 urged all actors to increase the participation of women and incorporate gender perspectives in all peace and security efforts. The UN Security Council also called for an end to impunity for gender-based violence during and post-conflict, acknowledging the differentiated ways in which wars affect women (S/RES/1325). This international framework further legitimised a woman's place in the Colombian peace process, bolstering their status as political agents. In the national context of the Pastrana-FARC dialogues, this international call for women's participation fell on deaf ears. Official negotiations remained exclusive to male actors and sessions held by the Thematic Commission in addition to the public forums, were marked by state absence (Rojas 2004: 22). From the margins of the official negotiations, Colombian women responded quickly to the developing global dialogue on women, peace, and security. In 2001, the Colombian and Swedish trade unions jointly established the Women's Peace Initiative (IMP) "as a space where women from various social sectors could unite to design a shared agenda for peace" (Rojas 2009: 212). This demonstrated that despite repeated ignorance from government officials, Colombian women and feminists continued to strengthen their operations and increase both their legitimacy and visibility as a political force in pursuit of peace. When talks between the Government and the FARC broke down after a forty-month period, many sectors of civil society experienced disillusionment with the prospect of a negotiated settlement, and public opinion grew favourable of a military solution (González 2014: 447).

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[3] Thomas, F. (2000, 21 June). *Las Mujeres al Caguán*. El Tiempo. https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-1258491
Castrillon, G.(2000, 26 June). *Las Mujeres al País Presentaron Más de 700 Propuestas de Todo Tipo para la Paz*. El Espectador.

[4] S/RES/1325. Security Council Resolution on women and peace and security. https://peacemaker.un.org/node/105

The Colombian women's movement however, remained steadfast in their demand for a settled negotiation to the conflict so when the peace talks collapsed, women's political mobilisation surged. Following President Pastrana's announcement of the termination of the peace process in February 2002, a coalition of women's networks organised a rally for peace to be held on July 25, 2002 (Rojas 2009: 218).[5] This alliance was called the Movimiento Nacional de Mujeres contra la Guerra (National Women's Movement against War) and encompassed IMP (the Women's Peace Initiative), RNM (the National Women's Network) Pacifist Route, Women's National Consensus Table and the OFP (Popular Feminine Organisation) (ibid). Following four months of preparation, some forty thousand women and men took to the streets of Bogotá to raise their "long-silenced voices" in a resounding 'no' to the war and to confront "the power that excludes, marginalises, and eliminates" (Sánchez et al. 2002: 104). The peace rally of July 2002 exposed the ever-growing political accumulation of the women's and feminist movement for peace and was an active demonstration of their leading role as peace builders. Following the march, the Women's Peace Initiative established the Constituyente Emancipatoria de Mujeres (Women's Emancipatory Constituent Assembly) to assert influence and secure their participation in future negotiation processes. Through the establishment of the Constituent Assembly, IMP proved itself as a trailblazer for their "innovative" approach to constructing a shared agenda for peace (Rojas 2009: 212). The Constituent Assembly united nearly 800 women, including 300 Colombian female delegates - from various regions, social classes, and ethnic groups - who together produced a "Twelve-Point Agenda for Peace" (ibid).[6] The capacity of women's groups to organise, create strategic alliances and mobilise during this period is a testament to their unwavering commitment to peacebuilding.

2.4. Addressing the deficit between women's legal rights and lived realities under Uribe's parapolitical state (2002-2010)

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[5] El Ejército colombiano bombardea 85 objetivos de las FARC en la zona neutral. Pastrana rompe el proceso de paz tras el secuestro de un avión en el que viajaba un senador (2002, 20 February). El PAÍS. https://elpais.com/internacional/2002/02/21/actualidad/1014246002_850215.html

[6] Agenda de las Mujeres Por la Paz. (2003). Iniciativa de Mujeres Colombianas por la Paz. Available at https://repositorio.unal.edu.co/handle/unal/54001

The biggest threat to advancements made by women in terms of participation, representation, and the pursuit of lasting peace over the course of the 80s and 90s emerged in May 2002 with the election of "ultraconservative" Álvaro Uribe as president of the Republic (Jones 2009:360). It was the favourable popular opinion to a military solution to the armed conflict, fostered by expansion of guerrilla and paramilitary operations during the Pastrana administration, that ultimately laid the foundations for Uribe's ascension to power. An electorate that previously voted for peace through dialogue, now voted "for peace through war" (Ibid). In order to understand the socio-political culture procured by Uribe during his time in office, which posed such a threat to the women's movement for a negotiated, sustainable peace, it is essential to review the circumstances (and actors) which (who) helped him secure the presidential title. Uribe's public and fierce opposition to the Pastrana-FARC peace talks and the open endorsement he received from the AUC during the presidential campaign, cast a foreboding shadow over his approach to widespread insurgency and devastation (La Silla Vacía 2021; Verdad Abierta 2010). This signalled the commencement of a transactional arrangement between the State and the paramilitaries, which Uribe would prove committed to fulfilling. "Armed preaching" exercised by paramilitaries in favour of Uribe's presidential campaign set the tone for an eight-year tenure of parapolitics, impunity and widespread human rights violations (El País 2002).

The Uribe administration's course of action in the face of "the challenge of a few terrorists" induced a shift in the relationship between the State and civil society as it limited civil liberties and the guarantees of fundamental rights in a quest to strengthen military apparatus and improve security efficiency. The three-pronged "Defence and Democratic Security" policy included negotiation with paramilitaries, assaults on the FARC and legal and constitutional reform (Hanson and Romero Penna 2005: 23). The negotiations initiated between paramilitaries and the Uribe administration was marked by the absence of women which may explain the lack of attention afforded to victims in the route sketched out to demobilisation and reintegration. The negotiations yielded a unilateral ceasefire, commencing in December 2002 however, the persistence of atrocities perpetrated by these groups in violation of this agreement exposed the farcical nature of each party's commitment to peace (ibid). The support Uribe enjoyed among Colombian congressmen and -women facilitated reform which enabled the President to dress civil rights violations up in a coat of legality. On 10 December 2003, Congress approved a reform which would allow the military to detain people for up to 36 hours, search homes and intercept communications without warrants or other judicial orders. The reform also granted judicial police-powers to the military, to collect evidence and interview suspects at the scene of violent events (Hanson and Romero Penna 2005: 24). This bill, which was ironically approved on International Human Rights Day, exposed the authoritarian tendencies of President Uribe who was willing to manipulate the law and subordinate civil liberties for political gain.

Uribe's strategy of securing congressional backing and legal reform to validate and legitimise political tactics which straddled the line between legality and illegality was particularly evident in July 2005 when he signed the Justice and Peace Law (Law 975). This law stirred controversy and elicited criticism as it revealed disturbing links between lawmakers and the paramilitaries and promoted a high level of impunity which created a legal-political landscape more favourable to the perpetrators of human rights violations than their victims (Villarraga 2015). In principle, the Government can only pardon political crimes, but Article 71 of the Justice and Peace Law categorised all crimes committed by paramilitaries as "political" (Burbridge 2008: 563). Therefore, in the framework of Law 975, and in exchange for demobilisation and disarmament, ex-combatants convicted or charged with committing "barbaric or ferocious acts of atrocity" including extrajudicial killings, torture and kidnapping could avail of the new alternative penalties regime. Those charged or convicted of committing rebellion or sedition were eligible for amnesties or pardons (Law 975/2005, Article 69; Carillo 2009: 144). The Law was received with condemnation from human rights groups for whom it represented a "mechanism to persecute and stigmatise human rights defenders" (Sisma Mujer 2010: 26). This act exposed Uribe's disregard for the rule of law and the ongoing humanitarian crisis. It also revealed the strength of alliances forged between legal and illegal actors, sending out a strong message to the people of Colombia that the President would be governing "with two armies: the regular army and the paramilitaries" (Robles 2002).

Uribe refused to acknowledge the existence of an "internal conflict" and in contrast to previous administrations, adopted a heavy-handed militant approach to confront what he tarred over with the broad brush of "terrorism" (Villarraga 2015). In the absence of an armed conflict, feminists' calls for recognition of the disproportionate effects of the war on women were therefore "null and void" (Chaparro-González and Martínez-Osorio 2020: 60). This official discourse of denial of an "armed conflict" rendered the 1949 Geneva Convention inapplicable thus denying civilians protections guaranteed under international humanitarian law and hindering recognition of human rights violations (Mutchler and Lari 2005). This served to stigmatise human rights defenders and fostered a dangerous and hostile environment for peace activists. Those who continued to favour peaceful solutions were widely dismissed as "guerrilla sympathisers", which heightened the already-precarious security threat facing female peace activists by presenting these women as legitimate targets of violent opposition (Bouvier 2016: 18).[7] Uribe's approach earned him the reputation of a "hard-liner" among the international community, which favourably served to legitimise the claims of those opposing his policy and lobbying for a negotiated peace settlement.[8] Within an adverse national climate, the women's movement placed their hopeful bets on the attention of the international community, to hold the government to account, organising national marches to keep their demands for peace in the public eye (Bouvier 2016: 18).

On November 25, 2003, approximately three thousand women from across fourteen departments of Colombia arrived in the cocoa-growing region of Putumayo to oppose the "criminal treatment" of the people; to express criticism of the government's military approach and the Colombian state's neglect of chronic poverty (Rojas 2009: 218). This demonstration was a testament to the resilience of the women's movement which, despite the danger such activity attracted, continued to insist on a political solution to the conflict. Women peace activists denounced and publicised the increase in human rights violations under President Uribe's 'democratic security' programme. In alliance with IMP, the Organisation of relatives of the police and military held hostage by guerrilla groups (Asfamipaz) initiated 'Operation Siriri' to execute strategies in defence of their right "to live in a country free of violence" and to pressure the National Government and armed actors into humanitarian agreements (Barros Navarro et al. 2021: 31). Furthermore, in 2006, a group of women led by IMP published a report revealing the "devastating effects" of the return of the demobilised combatants on women in Santander, Antioquia, and the Caribbean (Rojas 2009: 213).[9] In an organised act of defiance, IMP submitted a report to Congress entitled "Violence against Colombian Women and Their Rights to Truth, Justice, and Reparation: Against Impunity and Silence", which recommended a gender perspective in the legal framework for the demobilisation and reintegration of armed groups (ibid). The proposal invoked international humanitarian law to support their demands. This legislative advocacy strategy carefully executed by the women's movement in combination with active mobilisation proved effective. The final law approved by Congress included five points from the women's proposal relating to sexual violence against women and children, the protection of victims and witnesses of sexual aggression, representation of victims' organisations and the inclusion of women in the National Commission for Reparations and Reconciliation (CNRR). Furthermore, Uribe responded with the appointment of two women, Ana Teresa Bernal and Patricia Buriticá as commissioners to the CNRR (Rojas 2009: 213).

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[7] By 2002, 17 percent of assassinated and disappeared leaders and activists throughout Colombia were women and this figure increased throughout Uribe's presidency (Rojas 2005:12).

[8] Miami Herald. (2002, May 27). *Colombians elect Hard-Liner,* Uribe; The New York Times (2002, May 27). *Hard-Liner elected in Colombia with a Mandate to Crush Rebels*. https://www.nytimes.com/2002/05/27/world/hard-liner-elected-in-colombia-with-a-mandate-to-crush-rebels.html

[9] Mesa Nacional de Incidencia, "Por el derecho a la verdad, la justicia y la reparación con perspectiva de género" (Documento Publico no. 2), Tregua Incierta (Bogotá, August 2006),

UN Resolutions 1325 and 1820 proved fundamental to women's anti-war activism in Colombia throughout Uribe's presidency. Colombian women employed these international frameworks as "mechanisms of accountability" to the Colombian state (Bouvier 2016: 37). The arrival in Colombia of Susana Villarán from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in 2005, to raise awareness of the situation of women's rights in Colombia, affirmed the successful reach of their advocacy strategies. This generated increased "dialogue and coordination between women's movements across the country" who thereafter adopted a more vigorous rights discourse to demand cultural and social change (Sisma Mujer 2010: 31). In 2008, the Constitutional Court ordered in favour of protecting the rights of women victims of forced displacement, and declared sexual violence against women as "a regular, systematic, and invisible practice" in the Colombian armed conflict (ibid). This was a triumph for the women's movement, demonstrating the meticulous level of their political and legislative organisation. On the 30 March 2009, as the humanitarian crisis in Colombia worsened and political polarisation intensified, a network of women's organisations for peace and human rights organised the forum "Peace is a right of women / "La Paz es un derecho de las mujeres". As a resulto of this forum, the group ¡Las mujeres por los acuerdos humanitarios YA! Women for humanitarian agreements NOW! was born (ibid 28). This group sought to unite all women in the movement for peace and advocated for a negotiated political solution to the armed conflict and a humanitarian agreement.

Conclusion

Sexual violence, marginalisation and discrimination were the side-effects of an androcentric armed conflict which plagued Colombian society. The violence, repression and brutality which characterised Colombia by the mid-seventies were also the impetus for social mobilisation for change. An international climate which cracked open the conversation on gender equality thrust women to the front and centre of the campaign for an inclusive and just negotiated settlement which acknowledged the differentiated effects of warfare on women. This growing global dialogue, initiated in 1975, served to empower the women's movement in Colombia who responded by building alliances and constructing a collective identity as political subjects to challenge their imposed positions of subordination and victimisation. The inclusion of women at the negotiating table between the government of Betancur and the armed groups is a result of their persistent activism; however, the fluctuating levels of female representation in subsequent negotiations is a reminder that although social change may be incremental, it is not a linear process. The mobilisation of the women's movement did not occur in a vacuum and the ability of these groups to adapt to changing national and international contexts throughout the 80s, 90s and early-to-mid 2000s, is a testament to their political agency. Faced with marginalisation during the peace processes of Presidents Barco and Gaviria, the women's movement pursued legislative advocacy as an alternative form of participation to successfully impose their demands on the 1991 constitution.

The late nineties saw the peak of the peace movement and leading this march were the women of Colombia who successfully pressured the Pastrana administration into talks with the FARC-EP. The extent of women's political accumulation was revealed when the talks broke down in 2002 and women's networks led a massive peace rally through the streets of Bogotá as an expression of their rejection to the war. The presidential denial of the existence of an armed conflict by the 2000s undermined women's claims of violence and discrimination however the movement responded by documenting and publicising human rights violations and equipping themselves with international legal frameworks to protect their rights and appeal for change. The construction of strategic alliances, public marches, legislative proposals, and lobbying techniques all made up the broad repertoire of contentious action exercised by the women's movement which forged ahead in the face of adversity. The groundwork laid throughout these decades would ensure that their claims would not fall from the radar when Juan Manuel Santos assumed office in 2010.

CHAPTER 3

FROM THE PERIPHERY TO THE NEGOTIATING TABLE: SECURING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AND GENDERED GAINS IN THE COLOMBIAN PEACE PROCESS

The peace process and subsequent agreement signed in 2016 by representatives of the Colombian government and the FARC-EP has been lauded internationally for the inclusion of women. The Gender Subcommittee created in 2014 to ensure the incorporation of a gender perspective into the final accord, was a global first. Amidst all of the praise, however, it is easily forgotten that the first two years of these negotiations were marked by the absence of women. This chapter will engage with findings obtained during qualitative interviews with Colombian peacebuilders, experts in gender and conflict resolution and one of the female plenipotentiaries who co-chaired the Gender Subcommittee. The chapter will begin by examining, in section 3.1, the response of Colombian women to the male-dominated peace negotiations which began in 2012 and the tactics they employed to challenge their exclusion. Section 3.2 will demonstrate how diverse groups of women from across Colombia united to articulate a collective call for inclusion; deploying international legal frameworks to bolster their claims and exert pressure on the national government to appoint two female plenipotentiaries to the negotiating table. With a specific focus on the Gender Subcommittee, section 3.3 presents an analysis of the impact of forging alliances between women's organisations and the female plenipotentiaries to influence the course of the negotiations and the Final Agreement itself. Section 3.4 presents an analysis of women's role in building peace at the community level which contrasts with political and scholarly understandings of peacebuilding as a 'post-conflict' process. This section also analyses the effect of the protracted conflict on the cultural normalisation of violence and how Colombian women have sought to combat this. Section 3.5 addresses challenges to women's sustained participation in the peace process and the impact of the global Covid-19 pandemic on the implementation of the agreement. The conclusion will present the main findings of the chapter, highlighting their political agency and strategic mobilisation tactics in defence of their right to participate and in pursuit of peace.

3.1. There will be no peace without women: demonstrating agency and confronting exclusion from the 2012 peace negotiations

The women of Colombia did not play a role of passive observation in the face of an armed conflict that has lasted more than fifty years. Women have played multiple, often overlapping roles, related to war and peace in Colombia; they have been combatants, victims, peacemakers, peacebuilders, caregivers, and active agents of change (Bouvier, 2016: 6). Over the course of the conflict, women have been subject to forced displacement, acts of sexual violence, rape and forced labour at levels disproportionate to men (Meertens 2001, 2012; Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2017). “The acts of violence have left deep and differential traces on the bodies and minds of women" (Centro de Memoria Histórico 2013: 305). This reflects Cockburn’s assessment of the gendered continuum of violence, whereby “men and women die different deaths and are tortured and abused in different ways in wars” (2004: 35-36). And yet, when President Santos announced the commencement of peace negotiations with the FARC-EP in September 2012, the women of the country were presumptuously expected to spectate from the side-lines. As national and international media covered this development, what was striking was the “masculine monopolisation” of these negotiations (Olga Velásquez Ocampo, in interview with author, 2022). “The women of Colombia saw photographs in the press of the men who were going to negotiate peace. Absolutely everyone who was going to participate in the official negotiations was a man” (ibid).

Once more, women found themselves left on the periphery as men in suits met with men in uniform in an attempt to treat the plague of war with the same poison that had caused and sustained it. The government’s official negotiating team was composed exclusively of men; only two women were designated as alternate negotiators.[10] Similarly, five men formed the FARC negotiating team, with two women presented as collaborators.[11] Thus, even when women were granted access, their position was subordinate to the position of men. Céspedes-Báez and Jaramillo Ruiz identified that the original negotiation team had strong historical connections to Colombia’s armed forces and defence sector. Two of the government-appointed negotiators, Jorge Enrique Moral Rangel and Oscar Adolfo Naranjo Trujillo were retired generals and Sergio Jaramillo Caro had formerly served as an adviser to Colombia’s Ministry of Defence (2017: 93). The very composition of the negotiating team reinforced the ingrained belief that “war was a men’s affair, and that the negotiations to pave the way to its end only pertained to them” (ibid). This sparked another nation-wide process of alliance-building and mobilisation among women’s organisations who sought to publicise their exclusion and to challenge the power dynamics which exacerbated their suffering.

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[10] Lucía Jarammillo Ayerbe and Elena Ambrosi Turbay.

[11] Tanja Nijmeijer (Dutch national, alias Alexandra Nariño) and Shirley Méndez.

With three decades worth of activist experience in their pocket, the women's movement for peace had fine-tuned their organisational capabilities and had developed robust political agency. This was evident from their rapid response to the announcement of the peace negotiations. In October 2012, in direct contrast to the homogenous, elitist, and exclusive composition of the official negotiating teams, diverse women from all sectors of Colombian society united under a common platform, *Mujeres por la Paz* (Women for Peace), to draft their own peace agenda (Phelan and True 2022: 180). The manifesto clearly conveyed a collective sentiment shared by the diverse web of networks which made up the women's movement for peace. Women of African descent, Indigenous, urban, rural, young, adult, women of art and culture, women's organisations, feminists, socialist, popular, women of political parties and from the LGBTIQ community joined forces "to shape a society" in which they would be recognised as "subjects of rights in public and in private" (Manifiesto de Mujeres por la Paz 2012). The women's movement for peace highlighted the differences and inequalities which characterised them, demonstrating their ability to develop a negotiated agenda accepted by all. In this manifesto they expressed their resolute commitment to the pursuit of peace, in a paragraph which is worth quoting in full:

> We reaffirm our ethical and political commitment to the construction of peace and a political end to the social and armed conflict; we declare ourselves insubordinate to the patriarchy and to capitalism and we refuse to continue to be spoken for in a patriarchal culture; we want to be party to the new social contract which will emerge from these dialogues' (ibid).

This eloquently expressed their critical stance to the existing social order. The movement identified the patriarchal and capitalist culture of Colombia as an aggravator of the conflict and called for social and attitudinal change. This mirrored many scholarly reflections linking sustainable conflict resolution to social and cultural transformation (Burton 1990; Doob 1970; Kelman 1986; Scimecca 1991). By demanding acknowledgement as subjects of rights in public *and* in private, these women challenged their position of subordination in both the public and private arena. This also drew attention to gender-based violence which occurred beyond the battlefield. The women's movement articulated the interconnected nature of organised and intrafamilial violence, emphasising that peace can only be achieved by eradicating both.

The Manifesto of Women for Peace established a clear link between gender relations and a conflictual society. The women's movement emphasised that successful resolution of the conflict required demilitarisation not only of the territories but also of the mind (Manifesto Por la Paz 2012). Rojas suggests that an understanding of gender's role in conflict can unlock a deeper understanding of the conflict itself (2009: 222). The Women's Movement for Peace was therefore challenging the conventional methods of conflict resolution which had been employed over the years and which had repeatedly been dominated by men. The women's movement declared themselves as "protagonists" of negotiation, peacebuilding and decision-making processes and supported this assertion by reminding the government, the armed forces and the people of Colombia that "problems which affect women, have implications for society as a whole" (Manifesto Por la Paz). Employing international legal discourse, the women's movement framed peace as a right to be enjoyed by all Colombians. The manifesto was an articulate and comprehensive expression of women's stake in the peace process. With the endorsement of nearly 100 diverse organisations from across the country, fourteen proposals were submitted for consideration at the negotiation table. A strong message was conveyed to insurgents, politicians and society at large: there will be no peace without the contribution of women.

3.2. *I am a woman and peace is mine:* Penetrating the patriarchal arena of the peace process between the Santos administration and the FARC-EP

The Women, Peace and Security (hereafter WPS) Agenda was gaining traction throughout the 2000s, with the introduction of five additional resolutions between 2008 and 2013.[12] The importance of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 was stressed in multiple interviews as Colombian women deployed this international framework to support their claims for recognition and to articulate the disproportionate effect of the conflict on women. The promotion of the rights of women in conflict and post-conflict settings from the international political arena, created space for women's advocacy at local levels and the women's peace movement in Colombia claimed this space. The National Summit for Women and Peace, which took place in Bogotá from the 23rd to the 25th October 2013, was the culmination of sustained efforts from women's and feminist organisations and their persistent engagement with the peace process. The women of Colombia understood that there is no strength without unity, particularly when asserting their position among the political elite. The National Summit was a grand demonstration of this unity; a public rejection of their imposed position of subordination and an irrefutable declaration of their status as political subjects and peacebuilders (Muñoz Pallares & Ramírez Cardona: 2014). The summit was organised collectively by nine women's organisations, with the support of UN Women and united over four hundred people from across the country to promote the inclusion of women in the peace process.[13] This was thus a public affirmation of women's "collective worthiness" as credible political players (Zulver 2022: 59). Vera Samudio emphasised that the support from the UN was "fundamental" as it both raised the profile of the women's movement for peace and legitimised women's claim to enjoy their right to participate in the official peace process (in interview with author, 2022).

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[12] S/RES/1820 in 2008 which recognised sexual violence as a weapon of war; S/RES/1888, which called on leadership to address conflict-related sexual violence, and S/RES/1889 in 2009; emphasised women's participation in all stages of the peace process; S/RES/1960 in 2010 which reiterated the call for an end to sexual violence in armed conflict, and S/RES/2122 which set out concrete methods for addressing women's participation deficit https://www.peacewomen.org/security-council/WPS-in-SC-Council#:~:text=The%20Security%20Council%20has%20adopted,%2C%20and%202493%20(2019).

The summit was, by all accounts a peace process occurring parallel to the formal negotiations. The summit provided a space for dialogue between diverse women from across the country, to share their peacebuilding experiences and to consolidate a common agenda (Phelan and True 2022: 182). According to the published record of the proceedings, there were three main objectives of the summit. The first objective was to create a space of critical dialogue to discuss the role of women as political actors in peace negotiations, post agreement and the preparation for the post-conflict stage. The second objective was to outline agenda items from a woman's perspective, asserting their ability to think of a country not only for women but for society as a whole. Finally, the third objective was to promote dialogue between territorial, national and international peacebuilding experiences to identify challenges and lessons learned. (Muñoz Pallares & Ramírez Cardona 2014: 17). This final objective was echoed nine years later by Sergio Jaramillo Caro, who expressed "two pleas" for future peace processes. The first was to appreciate the value of lessons learnt from other peace processes and the second was to prepare for negotiations as seriously as soldiers prepare for combat.[14] Having participated in the official negotiations in Havana from their inception in 2012 to their conclusion in 2016, the former High Commissioner of Peace was speaking from hindsight. The foresight exhibited by those at the National Summit in 2013, is therefore a testament to women's political capacity as peacebuilders and agents of change.

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[13] The women's groups which organised the National Summit were Casa de la Mujer, Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres, Red Nacional de Mujeres, Mujeres por la paz, Colectivo de Pensamiento y Acción Mujeres, Paz y Seguridad, Grupo de Seguimiento de la Resolución 1325, Conferencia Nacional de Organizaciones Afrocolombianas - CNOA -, Iniciativa de Mujeres Colombianas por la Paz - IMP - y la Asociación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas, Negras e Indígenas de Colombia - ANMUCIC

[14] A recording of this speech can be viewed from the following link https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bVF9CIDIjs0&list=PLLvMXj5O_FLgVO-wrTa8hzPd7y-67D9PI&index=2

Three fundamental points were agreed upon at this summit: firstly, that the women of Colombia supported the peace process and demanded that the parties did not leave the negotiating table until they reached an agreement; secondly, they insisted on the presence and participation of women during each stage of the process, including the official negotiations and thirdly, they insisted on an agenda which addressed the needs and interests of women and how the conflict had affected their lives (Muñoz Pallares & Ramírez Cardona 2014: 10). Following the summit, Women for Peace organised a public demonstration in Bogotá. Over 8,000 women claimed the streets under the rallying cry "I am a woman and peace is mine" to demand inclusion in the formal dialogues (Semana 2013). The efforts of these women's organisations succeeded when in November 2013, Nigeria Rentería and María Paulina Riveros were appointed as plenipotentiaries with full negotiating power on behalf of the Colombian government. Reflecting on her appointment, Riveros explained:

> It was the women's civil society movement, which was very strong in Colombia and very prepared, with extensive expertise, that demanded that the agreement must have a differential approach with respect to women. It was in response to this, that the President agreed to take into account the differential impact of the conflict on women and to do this, he nominated Nigeria and I (interview with author, 2022).

While numerically it may seem insignificant to appoint just two women among approximately twenty negotiators, this was an important victory. The negotiations which began in 2012 and progressed into 2013, projected an image of the peace process as a patriarchal arena. It seemed that the door had been closed on women's participation, but through persistent engagement with the process and public advocacy efforts at the national level, the women's civil society movement managed to pry this door open.

3.3. Building alliances to impose a gender agenda on the Final Agreement

The appointment of two female plenipotentiaries was the fruit of the sustained labour of the women's movement and an important step forward in the advancement of their struggle. Learning from previous experience, however, the women's movement for peace understood that one bold stride forward, does not a journey make. A process of what Schädel and Dudouet term "vertical inclusion" was necessary in order to incorporate the diverse needs and demands of women from all sectors of Colombian society, particularly the most marginalised (2020: 20).[15] Through a process of nation-wide alliance-building, women's organisations successfully united women from all backgrounds, races and classes under the one struggle, creating a collective identity of women as peacebuilders and active agents of change.[16] The women which made up this movement for peace, were adamant that they, themselves, would negotiate their desired political outcomes. In response to the male-dominated peace talks initiated in 2012, Irma Perilla from the *Red de Iniciativas de Paz desde la Base* (Network of Grassroots Peace Initiatives) asserted: "We have created our own agenda, a woman's agenda and we will not deliver this to anyone to negotiate on our behalf. We will negotiate ourselves".[17] The Colombian women's movement for peace recognised that the two female negotiators were, in effect, "gatekeepers", through which women civil society actors could gain access to the official negotiations.

In order to secure vertical inclusion in the negotiation process, the women of Colombia appealed directly to the female negotiators. Based on the proposals and priorities articulated at the National Women's Summit for Peace, Colombian women's organisations presented their proposals which situated their demands on gender-sensitive measures in relation to each item on the negotiation agenda (Meertens 2019: 159). Kara Ellerby argues that a women-inclusive peace agreement requires more than mere presence; it requires the active participation of women as well as institutional support for that participation (2016). The Colombian women's organisations seemed to understand this; their cry for inclusion did not cease upon the appointment of two female negotiators, instead it intensified. They began to form alliances with the female delegates so that from their position in Havana, they could cultivate political will among the remaining negotiators to incorporate the demands of the women's movement. Reflecting upon her nomination as a plenipotentiary, María Paulina Riveros explained that her appointment to the negotiating table was due to her "very fluid, permanent and deep relationship with civil society". This "close bond of trust" which she had established with women's civil society organisations, would ensure the "reflection of women's rights in each aspect of the agreement" (interview with author, 2022). The alliances formed between women's civil society organisations and the female plenipotentiaries served to legitimise the claims of the women's movement and provided a solid platform from which women in civil society exerted constant pressure for greater access to the negotiations.

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[15] 'Horizontal inclusion' refers to the participation of groups and individuals from the political, military, economic, social, or cultural elite whereas 'vertical inclusion' aims to include and empower marginalised groups more directly through access to decision-making processes. (Schädel and Dudouet 2020:20)

[16] See Pacto Ético por un País en Paz. https://www.c-r.org/resource/manifesto-ethical-pact-country-peace

[17] Redacción CI. (2012, November 10). *Encuentro de Mujeres Red de Iniciativas de Paz desde la Base*. [Video]. Youtube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EAWU5O_FwV8&t=105s

The Gender Subcommittee, which was formally installed on 7 September 2014, was the result of this sustained pressure exerted by women's organisations (La Vanguardia 2014). The creation of the subcommittee was a breakthrough insofar as it formally guaranteed the participation of women civil society actors in the official peace process. This marked a historic milestone, not only in Colombia but also for peace processes around the world because it was the first of its kind. The women of Colombia successfully challenged the idea that the peace process was an exclusively androcentric affair. The objective of the subcommittee was "to include the voice of women and a gender perspective in the agreements which had already been reached and in the final agreement which would emerge from the peace dialogues" (Noticias RCN 2014). This echoed the explicit demands articulated by women at the National Summit for Peace. The subcommittee was thus a strong example of the transformative force of the women's movement and its immense capacity to influence the course of official negotiations despite its initial exclusion. The subcommittee was an advisory body composed of five representatives from the FARC and five representatives from the government but "the truth is, none of the delegates really understood what it meant to include a gender perspective in a peace agreement" (Riveros in interview with author, 2022). It was with the advice from gender experts from Cuba, Norway, and Spain in addition to a "very strong relationship" between the subcommittee and women's civil society organisations that they began to establish a solid conceptualisation of the inclusion of a gender perspective. Riveros further emphasised that civil society organisations working on women's rights "were a permanent source of advice to the subcommittee".

The Colombian women's movement for peace was persistent in its public assertion that gender equity and "redress for the specific forms of violence inflicted on women" were necessary for building a more inclusive democracy in a post-conflict society (Meertens 2019: 6). From 2014 to 2016, eighteen representatives of women's organisations participated in the peace deliberations through direct engagement with the Gender Subcommittee.[18] Five delegations of victims were also invited to participate in hearings with the negotiating team, 60% of whom were women (Céspedes-Báez & Jaramillo Ruiz: 2018: 98). The subcommittee presented a "critical outlet" through which women could present their experiences and insights of the armed conflict to the negotiating teams (ibid). As a result of the contributions from victims and women's organisations, over one hundred provisions relating to women's rights and equality were written into the Final Agreement. The subcommittee ensured the incorporation of a gender-based approach, addressing Comprehensive Rural Reform, Political Participation, Solution to the Problem of Illicit Drugs and Victims of the Conflict.[19] With the intention of reducing the imbalance of power and inequality of opportunity which had long been built into the structure of Colombian society, these provisions address what Galtung identifies as "structural violence" (1969: 170-171). These measures aimed to weave peace into the structure of Colombian society and institutions by eliminating or, at least reducing indirect violence perpetrated against women. The final agreement reflects Boutros-Ghali's conceptualisation of peacebuilding as a process of "rebuilding the institutions and infrastructures of nations torn by civil war… and building bonds of peaceful mutual benefit" (1992: 4).

The proof of the effectiveness of alliance-building among women's groups for peace is in the final agreement itself which echoes the proposals articulated at the National Peace Summit in 2013. The above-mentioned measures respond to "specific materialisations of historical demands raised by women and feminists in previous Colombian peace processes" (Gómez & Montealegre 2021: 451). In all of the interviews, it was stressed that the final agreement and the inclusion of a gender perspective was the result of a long process of networking and political lobbying which can be traced back to the eighties. By the time Santos announced the beginning of peace negotiations in 2012, the women's movement for peace was "mature, organised and had accumulated allies and agency throughout the course of the previous three decades" (Vera Samudio, interview with author 2022).

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[18] Among them were organizations such as Asociación Amanecer de Mujeres por Arauca, Red Nacional de Mujeres, Iniciativa de Mujeres por la Paz, Ruta Pacífica de Mujeres, Coordinación Nacional de Desplazados–Departamento de Mujeres, and Asociación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas, Negras e Indígenas.

[19] El Espectador. (2016, July 23). Los logros de la Subcomisión de Género en tres acuerdos de La Habana. https://www.elespectador.com/colombia-20/paz-y-memoria/los-logros-de-la-subcomision-de-genero-en-tres-acuerdos-de-la-habana-article/

3.4. From the political to the endogenous: women building peace in the midst of war

The final peace agreement acknowledged women's role in peacebuilding in the post-conflict stage. In August 2018, as the Colombian peace accord was still in its infancy, the former High Commissioner for Peace during the negotiations (2012-2016), Sergio Jaramillo Caro proclaimed that peace can be agreed on at the table, but that peacebuilding comes after the agreement.[20] This has long been the approach to conflict-resolution and echoes many conceptualisations from international bodies and scholarly understandings of peacebuilding as a "post-conflict" process (Paris, 2004; Boutros-Ghali 1992). There are two main flaws with filing peacebuilding under the 'post-conflict' category. Firstly, it reveals a common discrepancy between political understandings of the construction of peace and peacebuilding on the ground, which often begins long before the warring factions agree to take their seats at the negotiating table. Secondly, 'post-conflict' is often referred to as an elusive period which follows from the politically agreed upon end to violence which has been perpetrated by armed parties to the conflict. Post-conflict peacebuilding undermines the revolutionary role that local communities have played in peacebuilding pre-accord and fails to acknowledge the task of addressing violence beyond the battlefield, which is perpetuated by cultural attitudes, influenced by the normalisation of armed conflict.

As politicians and international actors have inferred that peacebuilding is contingent on the existence of a peace agreement, the women of Colombia have been actively engaged in peacebuilding initiatives in the midst of raging conflict and in the absence of a peace treaty. San Andrés de Cuerquia has been an epicentre of violence in the context of the armed conflict, where local communities have long lived under the shadows of paramilitaries.[21] Lady Acevedo, the coordinator of *Paz A Bordo*, a peace organisation in San Andrés de Cuerquia, emphasised that local women, including victims and farming women, have united to form associations and organisations in resistance to the violence. She stressed that they alone, without institutional support, began to construct a community of peaceful coexistence; "these women organised themselves and took the reins to build peace" (interview with author, 2022). Another such example of a female-led, independent peacebuilding initiative is the *Asociación De Mujeres Creativas Y Emprendedoras del Municipio de Rovira Tolima* (the Association of Creative and Entrepreneurial Women of Rovira, Tolima, hereafter, the Association). This Association, founded by local women in 2001, precedes the 2016 agreement and promotes and supports women's engagement in economic activities in production lines such as clothing, coffee crops and farming (Sanabria, 2022; Solorzano, R, 2020).

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[20] The full speech can be accessed via the following link https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aZnpa419PVc

[21] http://rutasdelconflicto.com/convenios-fuerza-justicia/node/371

The interdependent relationship between social equality and peace was expressed by all interviewees but concisely articulated by Acevedo: “social inequality guarantees poverty, and that which guarantees poverty, is always going to guarantee violence” (interview with author, 2022). Women’s led organisations have engaged in processes to break this vicious cycle. Similarly, the association in Rovida, *Paz A Bordo*, organises sewing and entrepreneurial workshops for women in which they learn to make bedding, curtains and clothing which they then sell. Acevedo explained that this is part of the process of peacebuilding as it helps women to become financially independent and improve their living conditions, which in turn reduces the level of social inequality. These locally driven projects are an example of women’s protagonistic role in peacebuilding. Women have challenged and transformed their positions of subordination and victimisation which did not stem solely from physical acts of violence inflicted during conflict, but also from the oppressive power structures which governed their lives. Engaging in productive projects and revenue-generating activities, women have, of their own accord, challenged their assigned positions within society and sought justice, empowerment and freedom, which Abu-Nimer identifies as the three ‘guiding principles’ of conflict resolution (2013: 169).

Acevedo highlighted that there are two elements to the peacebuilding process which must sustain and complement each other. The first concerns peace building from the “endogenous”, which she defined as “the strength from within the local communities” (interview with author, 2022). The second concerned peace as a political project. The coordinator emphasised the importance of integrating the two and transforming peace from a “political issue” to a practical process. This mirrors Lederach’s approach to peacebuilding whereby the elites of society (high-level politicians; military leaders); engage with and support grassroots leaders; and intellectual and social leaders to construct peace (1998: 72). Acevedo explained that the broader institutional structures have failed to understand and articulate the relationship between the two, but that women’s groups, organisations and associations have developed their own understanding of peace, based on lived experience and have united to actively build this vision into their communities (interview with author, 2022). In relation to the “endogenous”, all interviewees highlighted the relationship between the armed conflict and the normalisation of violence in everyday life. Acevedo asserted that “peace stems from our everyday routine” but violence is ingrained into the everyday lives of women as the armed conflict has perpetuated violence in the home and in the community. “Here, a woman is beaten for the simple fact of being a woman” (ibid).

Such gender-based violence has been exacerbated by the violent conflict and pervades all aspects of society. Acevedo remarked that violence has become a way of life in San Andrés de Cuerquia. “Many of the jokes the local people make are related to violence or are made in direct reference to the armed conflict… the people have normalised it to the extent that it has become anchored in our culture” (interview with author, June 2022). This serves to strengthen Selimovic et al.’s assertion that a profound understanding of the interrelations of domestic violence and violence in the streets is “imperative” for substantive social change (2012: 112). Culture cannot be omitted from the conflict resolution equation if peace is to be achieved at all levels of society. Riveros noted that all the parties at the negotiating roundtable collectively “established the aspiration of a country that consolidates a culture from which gender-based violence is eradicated” (interview with author, 2022). Beyond the mere aspirational, grassroots women’s associations and organisations such as those in Rovida and San Andrés de Cuerquia have been actively working at the community level to change perceptions of violence in society. Since 2001, the Association in Rovida has organised workshops to reflect on domestic and sexual violence in efforts to dismantle the ingrained belief that violence against women is normal (Sanabria 2022). Paz A Bordo works with women, young people and people with disabilities to build peace from a more personal level. The motto of the organisation is “Peace is when you go to sleep calm and wake up with a purpose”, which seeks to promote and normalise peace through eliminating everyday sources of violence (interview with author, 2022).

3.5. Sustained struggles for inclusion: Covid-19 and the transition to the digital world

The global Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated poverty and widened inequality, rendering the social and economic reforms of the Agreement more urgent than ever (Heinzekehr, 2020). Despite this, the Kroc Institute’s most recent report on the implementation of the Final Agreement presents slow rates of implementation, particularly of the provisions with a gender focus (Echavarría Álvarez 2022: 20). This is consistent with the concerns expressed by the interviewees who asserted that following years of struggle to secure participation in the peace negotiations, the women of Colombia are now facing a renewed struggle in terms of maintaining this participation throughout the implementation processes. Every interviewee acknowledged that the inclusion of women in official negotiations and the incorporation of a gender perspective are essential for sustainable and durable peace. However, they stressed that this is not sufficient; such parity of inclusion and participation must extend beyond the negotiating table throughout each phase of the peace process, particularly throughout the implementation stage.

The effects of the pandemic on women's sustained participation in the peace process are manifold. The academics and researchers interviewed asserted that the transition to the digital world during the pandemic, created new forms of exclusion for women who do not have access to a computer, to the internet or who are not technologically literate. The director of Paz A Bordo, however, insisted that inaccessibility to the internet in rural and impoverished areas had compounded women's exclusion *prior* to the pandemic. Acevedo did, however, contend that Covid-19 presented an excuse for extended state absence in rural areas most affected by the pandemic. There was consensus among the interviewees that Covid-19 resulted in a diversion of human, social and economic resources from peacebuilding initiatives and the implementation of the Final Agreement. Although this was necessary to confront the public health crisis, the interviewees stressed that this has had a negative impact on women's suffering from violence.

"*No hay plata, no hay plata, no hay plata*" (there is no money) was repeated by four of the six interviewees when asked of the biggest challenges to ensure the implementation of the peace accord and women's sustained participation in the process. All of the women interviewed stressed the importance of education as a tool to protect the gains made and the crucial role that young people play in holding the government to account in the pursuit of a peaceful, just and equal society. Despite the setbacks and challenges, every interviewee expressed hope in the peace process and attributed this hope to the gains women have consistently strived for in the face of adversity. "The women of Colombia have had enough of this violent narrative. There is no turning back now" (Acevedo, interview with author 2022).

Conclusion

The male monopolisation of the peace negotiations from 2012 to 2013, sparked a nation-wide process of mobilisation and alliance-building among women across all regions of Colombia who refused to accept their exclusion. In an immense demonstration of their organisational capacity and political agency, women of all backgrounds, races and classes, united to collectively express their rejection of the patriarchal and capitalist culture which had enforced their position of subordination. They asserted themselves as subjects of rights in public and in private; affirming their commitment to building peace and ending the conflict which manifested in each aspect of their lives. The women's movement for peace challenged the conventional methods of conflict resolution which had historically been dominated by men. They called for demilitarisation of the mind, not just of the territory and declared themselves "protagonists" of negotiation, peacebuilding and decision-making processes. The women's movement capitalised on the WPS Agenda, which was gaining traction in the international arena in the 2010s, by leveraging international legal frameworks to bolster their claims and publicise their grievances. These advocacy efforts culminated in the National Summit for Women and Peace in 2013 which garnered the support of UN Women. The summit served as a platform from which over 400 women could project their collective call for inclusion upon the Colombian government. The summit marked a turning point in their campaign as it provoked the appointment of two female plenipotentiaries in the midst of an elite bargaining process.

In an effort to pursue their remaining objectives and to ensure that the voices of popular and marginalised women were not lost among discussions of the political elite, the women's movement sustained their advocacy by forming strong alliances with the women at the negotiating table. These alliances served to legitimise the claims of the women's movement, cultivating political will for the creation of the Gender Subcommittee. This was an unprecedented advancement in the history of peace processes, reflecting the transformative force of the women's movement and its immense capacity to influence the course of official negotiations. Preceding their participation in official negotiations, Colombian women had been leading peacebuilding initiatives throughout the country. Through creative, educational, and entrepreneurial workshops in communities entrenched in violence, women have been tackling socio-economic inequality to dismantle the institutional structures which perpetuate violence. Many projects were established by grassroots women's organisations who, in the absence of a formal peace agreement, began to build peace themselves.

Since the signing of the Final Agreement in 2016, women's sustained participation in the peace process has been placed under significant strain. The Covid-19 pandemic has had implications for peacebuilding in terms of limiting inclusion to virtual events, extended state absence and the reallocation of resources. However, the optimism expressed by the interviewees in the face of these challenges is a testament to the resilience and resourcefulness of the women of Colombia who have consistently managed to overcome obstacles to their inclusion and threats to the sustainability of peace.

CONCLUSION

The women of Colombia defy many scholarly conceptualisations of a woman's role and place in war and peace. Sexual violence, marginalisation and discrimination were the side-effects of an armed conflict which plagued Colombian society for more than fifty years. However, the violence, repression and brutality which characterised the country were also the impetus for social mobilisation for change. An international climate which cracked open the conversation on gender equality in the 1970s thrust women to the front and centre of the campaign for an inclusive, negotiated settlement which acknowledged the differentiated effects of warfare on women. This growing global dialogue empowered the women's movement in Colombia which responded by building alliances and constructing a collective identity as political subjects to challenge their imposed positions of subordination and victimisation. The precedential inclusion of women at the negotiating table between the government of Betancur and the armed groups is a result of their persistent activism; and served as a catalyst for their sustained demands for inclusion in the peace processes which followed.

Women's mobilisation for peace did not occur in a vacuum but the consistent ability of these groups to adapt to changing national and international contexts throughout the 80s, 90s and the 2000s, is a testament to their political agency. In the three decades and the four peace processes which preceded the negotiations between Santos and the FARC, the women's peace movement of Colombia, consolidated a broad repertoire of contentious action which would lay a strong foundation from which to challenge male monopolisation of the 2012 negotiations. Women's contributions to peacebuilding in Colombia have thus presented in many ways. Since the mid-1980s women have publicly rejected the violent conflict and campaigned for a negotiated settlement to the war through the construction of strategic alliances, public marches, and national summits. Their documentation and publicization of human rights violations, challenged the normalisation of violence by institutionalising peace. The women's movement for peace in Colombia remained attentive to their expanding rights under international law, engaging in legislative advocacy to protect their rights, promote peace and appeal for change.

When the negotiations between Santos and the FARC commenced in 2012, women reacted quickly to challenge the gender deficit and to prevent a peace treaty which would be characterised by gender blindness. Women of African descent, Indigenous, urban, rural, young, adult, women of art and culture, women's organisations, feminists, socialist, popular, women of political parties and from the LGBTIQ community joined forces as *Women for Peace* to express their commitment to ending the armed conflict and to publicly denounce the violence which stemmed from the capitalist and patriarchal structures of Colombian politics and society. The peace agenda produced by this diverse alliance of women in 2012 was the first call for their direct participation in official negotiations and the inclusion of a gender perspective in the peace process.

Building upon their experience over the preceding decades, the formation of alliances between diverse civil society groups of women and feminists increased the visibility of the movement which helped to garner the fundamental support of international bodies. The alliances formed locally, nationally, and internationally strengthened the credibility of their claim for inclusion. The strength and value of alliance-building is evident in the organisation of the National Summit for Women and Peace. The vast web of networks which had been constructed over the decades facilitated the delivery of news of the event which solicited high levels of participation. The summit was a grand demonstration of the unity of the women's movement for peace which lay in stark contrast to the increasing polarisation of Colombian society as conflict intensified. The Summit was a platform for women to publicly reject their imposed position of subordination and to declare their status as political subjects and peacebuilders. Through the cumulative foundation of alliances built over time, women's civil society organisations were able to interact with the female plenipotentiaries. The consolidation of the relationship between these women served to legitimise their claims among the political elite and opened an entry to direct participation in official negotiations.

As Colombian women have frequently been denied access to formal negotiation spaces, they have pursued other paths to build peace in their communities. These peacebuilding initiatives have often developed in the midst of war and as the political and military elite have taken their seats to discuss an end to the conflict. Women peacebuilders such as those in San Andrés de Cuerquia and Rovido undermine many scholarly and political approaches to peace which insist on placing peacebuilding on a shelf until an agreement has been reached to settle the conflict. Contrary to repeated scholarly affirmations of women's innate ability to build peace, this research demonstrates that the role of Colombian women as peacebuilders stems from their status as subjects of political rights; from the robust political agency which they have accumulated through contentious action and their direct involvement in peace-building initiatives.

APPENDIX: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Name	Profile	Date and Place
Dr. Olga Patricia Velásquez Ocampo	Professor of Law at Los Andes University in Bogotá, Colombia; former Legal Adviser to the Ministry of Justice; expert on law and gender, transitional justice, and constitutional design	24 February 2022, Zoom
Isabela Marín Carvajal	Researcher for Colombian think tank Fundación Ideas Para la Paz (FIP); and independent consultant for conflict and gender	28 April 2022, Zoom
Dr. Vera Samudio	Colombian lawyer and researcher for Colombian think tank Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular/Programas Por la Paz (CINEP/PPP). Since 2016 Dr Samudio has been accompanying the implementation of the Fifth Point of the Colombian Peace Accord: Agreements Regarding the Victims of the Conflict	28th April 2022, Zoom
Valeria Quintana	Assistant researcher for Colombian NGO and think tank Instituto de Estudios para el Desarrollo y la Paz (INDEPAZ)	21 May 2022, Zoom
Dr. Lady Acevedo	Director of peacebuilding organisation, Corporación Paz a Bordo	1 June 2022, Zoom
Dr. María Paulina Riveros	Negotiator for the Colombian government in Havana 2014-2016, co-Chair of the Gender Sub-commission and former Deputy Attorney General of Colombia	3 June 2022, Zoom

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