# Born of War in Colombia:
# Narratives of Unintelligibility, Contested Identities, and the Memories of Absence

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**Abstract**

This thesis addresses the production and reproduction of narratives about people born as a result of war-related sexual violence in Colombia. I focus on the social processes through which these individuals have become part of the realities of the armed conflict that are apprehended by the Colombian government, human rights organisations and transitional justice agencies, the media, and the communities. My project draws on ethnographic content analysis of media, legal documents, and ethnographic research conducted between December 2015 and June 2016 in a rural Afro-descendent community in Colombia that was occupied by paramilitaries for approximately five years. Paramilitaries systematically used sexual violence against women and girls and, because of those abuses, children were born and later single out by members of the community as *paraquitos*, "little paramilitaries".

I conclude that people born as a result of war-related sexual violence have not emerged as subjects within the realities of the armed conflict that are apprehended by the discourse of transitional justice and human rights. Although information about them has circulated, it has done so within the framework for understanding wartime sexual violence. As a collective subject, they have gained a place in the imaginary of human rights organisations through naming practices that assume they are defined by the violence that conceived them. At the local level these children's identities are dynamic and their experiences are connected to the experiences of their mothers within their cultural and moral system. For the community, these people do not belong to the collective narratives of the violence of the past. Their absence needs to be understood in relation to gendered notions of identity and reproduction that have denied women's experiences of the armed conflict, while imposing motherhood. Although the life of people born of war starts as war-affected children, as they grow older their identities and opportunities are under constant negotiation that embody different forms of gender, economic, and social violence and resistance that challenge static notions of victimhood.

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**List of Acronyms**

Colombian Family Welfare Institute (*Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar familiar*): ICBF

National Liberation Army (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*): ELN

United Self-Defenses of Colombia (*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*): AUC

Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*): FARC

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**Introduction**

Growing up in Bogota in the 1980s and 90s as part of a working class family with no practical interest in politics meant that, for the most part, my connection to the armed conflict happened through the news. I do remember, however, the omnipresent threat of Pablo Escobar's bombs in the city. The police and military checkpoints in the streets, the spine-chilling silence that came after the explosions in the recognition that those people who were covered in dust, sweat, tears, and blood, who were being carried out of the wrecked buildings or who were looking for their relatives or friends, could have been any of us. But even those images that still today make my body tremble, I recall from the news. It was through the news, then, that I learnt that I lived in a country that was at war, although I do not remember people referring to it in those terms. It was not war that was being covered but the regular killings, massacres, shootings, and ambushes. I must have been ten years old but I still vividly remember footage from what was probably the aftermath of a confrontation between guerrillas and soldiers somewhere in the countryside—always through that imagined sense of distance; a dump truck filled with dead bodies with traces of blood and wearing camouflage, close-up images of entangled arms, feet, and torsos that resembled humans but lacked any sense of humanity. I do not think it was the horror of the footage, though, that has granted those images such a vivid place in my mind, but the memory of the ten-year-old me thinking that it was just another group of dead bodies. Nothing out of the ordinary.

I did not know back then that I was living in a country that had made a state of emergency its regular law: between 1970 and 1991 we lived 206 months (17 years) under on and off enforced official states of emergency. And yet, through the news and the everyday policies of control, I grew up accustomed to the feeling that terror—in the somehow familiar distance of rurality but also in the militarised city—was part of the

everyday; terror as usual, as Taussig (1989) calls it. In that routinized horror that was officially framed as exceptional but that was clearly the norm, we articulated into the everyday the policies and practices of terror. There is state, economic, and militarised power concealing its logics and technologies of violence towards specific groups of people, but there is also concealment through the everyday naturalisation of violence. And the news, in its morbid and dehumanised way, did a fine job there. In the overlapping presence of those institutionalised dynamics of the normalised state of emergency we witnessed how the social landscape was being transformed. We got accustomed to knowing, hearing, and imagining bodies—distant poor, rural, feminine, ethnic bodies—being removed and intervened, and as those policies of removal and intervention became part of the normal, the country—proudly calling itself the longest democracy in Latin America—kept at its usual business while more than 47,000 people were being disappeared, a whole political party, the *Union Patriótica* was being exterminated, more than 7,000,000 people were being displaced, and more than 1,900 massacres were being committed.

At some point during the early years of my adulthood, those imagined reconstructions of the country assumed a different form, this time not only through the news, but through the arrival to Bogota of thousands and thousands of women, men, boys, and girls who were fleeing the violence in their hometowns. Although displacement was not something new in the dynamics of the armed conflict that started in the mid 1940s, it was in the late 1990s and early 2000s that those policies of terror and control reached unprecedented levels that transformed the social landscapes by moving physical (and cultural) bodies from the countryside to the cities. We learnt, in the city, that the logics, policies, and technologies of terror that most of us had watched in the news and that had transformed the social collective body of the country by marking and removing

the individual physical bodies of people had also the power to add physical bodies to the urban space. Unlike those women and men who arrived in masses to the cities and who, through the different social tensions and disruptions they represented to the imagined social order, assumed a visible place in what eventually also became part of the normalised terror, other bodies emerged to fall in the shadows. Those were the bodies of the generations of boys, girls, and teenagers who have been born through the use of sex as part of the technologies of terror.

Sexual violence perpetrated against women, girls, men, and boys as practices to control, subjugate, and dominate the social and physical bodies of persons and communities occupies a very distinct place in the consolidation of the social order of terror. Although it has been systematically committed all across the country by paramilitaries, guerrillas, and armed forces (estimates shows that between 2001 and 2009 94,565 women were raped (Oxfam, 2010: 15), different layers of silence and concealment have been installed around it—some of which I will address throughout this thesis. It was not until the mid 1990s that, as a result of the struggle and pressure of local leaders, feminist activists, scholars, and policy makers, the Colombian media started including in their coverage stories about the ways in which the logics of violence operated against women and their bodies (GMH, 2011). Through the cracks of those stories it was possible to read mentions of the children who were being born, imposed on women through the reproductive capabilities of their bodies and their expected social roles as mothers. However, about the children themselves, there was nothing. They were being born and yet, at the same time, through an almost complete lack of information about them, they seemed to remain unseen. In the context of their physical presence, institutional invisibility, and the social tensions they embody, my research seeks to understand how those children and teenagers that have emerged through war, that have been added to the

social body of the country through the logics, policies, and technologies that combine sex and terror, have become part of the intersubjective realities of Colombia.

It was not until 2014 when I was looking for a suitable place to do fieldwork for this research that I found one online magazine article that directly addressed their existence. *Los paraquitos*, the little paramilitaries, was its title (*Semana*, 2010). The article introduces the situation of one hamlet somewhere in the department of Cauca, where paramilitaries settled an operations base from which they terrorised that part of the country for almost five years. The article—written in 2010 after five years of the paramilitary demobilisation—starts by saying:

In a municipality of the department of Cauca, around 30 women raise the children that violence gave them. In that place, without being aware of it, the children of victims and executioners are growing up together. This is one of the biggest challenges of the post-conflict.

It refers to the children born as a result of paramilitary sexual violence. The children of local women who endured the regime of terror that paramilitaries imposed on the community and who, in most cases, do not know the context of their conception, who their fathers were, or where they are. And yet, the children are introduced as the 'executioner's' and their positionality as problematic. Why is the situation, in the storyline of the article, presented as a challenge? Although my intention is not to provide a thorough analysis of the text, it is worth mentioning some aspects that caught my attention. From the very title the article embraces the label *paraquito* when referring to these children. By highlighting this, it directs the attention of the reader to this label that, as an attribute, has been imposed on the children, almost suggesting that who they are can

be explained in terms of the violence that conceived them. At some point, when describing the case of a seven-year-old boy whose mother was repeatedly raped by the same paramilitary until the day he found out she was pregnant, and then never came back, the article notes: 'But he [the child] is not the only *paraquito* [in the community], as they are called in their families.' Throughout the storyline, the article naturalises and reproduces the local logics that single them out, while creating in the reader a sense that legitimises the label. Further, it overlooks the implications that social control and terror imposed by paramilitaries had on women, and describes them either as victims without agency or love partners. At the same time, through the story it presents, the article creates the illusion of an enclosed community with a duality between victims and perpetrators, seemingly associating the children with the violence their fathers committed. When describing the case of a girl who does not have any information about her biological father other than his war alias, the article says:

> Her father was killed when she was 5 years old. She is now 12, and what she remembers about him is that he never slept at home. She doesn´t know that many of her classmates are orphans due to her dad's deeds.

While reading the article I felt I was navigating through restricted and static experiences of the armed conflict that rendered visible cropped fragments of the stories of violence, surviving, and resistance of the community.

In the intersection between the visibility of the label of *los paraquitos* and the general absence of information about the plight of those children conceived through war that I had identified, my interest was placed in understanding the institutional and local frameworks of explanation through which the presence of those children was being

addressed at the local level, by the national media, and by human rights and transitional justice agencies and actors. In that sense, the absence of information about their physical presence in their communities and about their own experiences while growing up, contained as much social meaning as the categories that were more visible. In this context, my research addresses the production and reproduction of narratives about people born as a result of war-related sexual violence in Colombia. In particular, my research inquiries about the social processes through which information about them has become part of the institutional and local narratives that seek to grant with meaning the world that emerges from war. As I will develop in the methodology chapter (chapter 2), this implies that my research does not focus on the embodied experience of these people and, therefore, their voices are not present—or represented—throughout my thesis. Instead, my research focuses on the narratives through which their presence has become part of the intersubjective realities of their communities and the discursive realities where the human rights discourse and the discourse of transitional justice operates.

My initial assumption was that the label at the local level and their invisibility in the institutional discursive realities corresponded with framings of explanations that legitimised discrimination against the children based on who their biological fathers were. The children, according to this assumption, would be understood as continuation of the violence their biological fathers represented. However, throughout my research I have unveiled how the political economy of victimhood, gendered politics of identity and reproduction, and struggles over memories of the past have converged to create invisible and marginal subjects. As these children have grown older and the social order where they exist has been reshaped, the symbolic presence of the biological father, as I will develop in chapter 4, has become but one of the many layers that have, under different frameworks, render both visible and invisible the presence of the children.

The first chapter discusses and describe the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that guided my research. In the intersection between the sociology of knowledge that acknowledges the construction of intersubjective social realities and the anthropology of violence, in Chapter 1 I introduce narratives about people born as a result of war-related sexual violence as social attempts to produce the everyday inter-subjective realities that have been re-shaped by war. This chapter places my research within studies on violence as a continuum of historical processes of oppression that are, in essence, gendered. In the conversation between gendered violence in contexts of war and politics of childhood, this chapter addresses scholarship on sexual violence as a weapon of war and the multidisciplinary field of children born of war.

Chapter 2 presents the methodological approaches that guided my research in the specific landscapes where it took place. It critically discusses the methodological implications and limitations of the different tools that I used to conduct research in contexts framed by war with its gendered policies of terror. In this chapter I develop how ethnographic content analysis of Colombian media and legislation, semi-structured interviews with representatives of the Colombian government, NGOs and scholars, and ethnographic fieldwork in one particular region of the country where I had identified the presence of the collective subject of children fathered by paramilitaries, allowed me to identify the social processes through which information about these children has become part of institutional and local narratives. I adhere to an ethnography of violence that does not focus on the violence itself, but that seeks to understand the human experience of war, survival, and resistance within the entrenched web of economic, cultural, and moral systems where it takes place. In accordance with that, in this section I present the methodological tools that helped me approach silence and absence as sites of meaning, allowing me to read its content instead of seeking to break it in the name of research. This

chapter also discusses the ethical challenges that I encountered while doing research about people born as a result of war-related sexual violence, especially considering that their mere existence occupies a blurred place in the realities of the Colombian armed conflict. In a conversation between the imagined geographies that I configured from the distance of my desk and the lived landscape I experienced during fieldwork, in this chapter I also present the specific social and historical site where my fieldwork took place. This allows me to reflect on the situated contributions and limitations of the different methodological approaches and tools that I used, and critically reflect on my own positionality throughout the research process.

The three following chapters present the analysis of the data collection in conversation with more specific literature on victimhood, politics of reproduction, and the labour of social memory. Chapter 3 draws mostly on ethnographic content analysis of online media, legal documents, and legal testimonies of sexual violence survivors. Establishing a conversation between those sources, ethnographic notes, and interviews with human rights practitioners and people working in the field of transitional justice in Colombia, I propose a discussion on the production of socio-legal discursive realities. I discuss the lack of inclusion of the category of children born of war within the human rights and transitional justice discourses in Colombia, and argue that it corresponds not so much to silencing practices but to social unintelligibility. People born as a result of war-related sexual violence have emerged as a collective phenomenon in the imaginary of human rights organisations and transitional justice agencies through a static notion of victimhood. The socio-legal production of what I call a 'cropped identity' does not correspond with the way their identities are under constant negotiation that embodies different forms of gender, economic, and social violence and resistance.

Based on my ethnographic fieldwork, ethnographic content analysis of online media, and available research conducted in other war-affected regions, Chapter 4 proposes a discussion on politics of identity and reproduction. I state that while available literature on other contexts argues that these children are discriminated against based on the symbolic presence of the father (as a perpetrator of violence), in my research I found that *not knowing who the father is* (although the father was a paramilitary), is also part of the coproduction of biology and culture that produces marginalised identities. In the rural Afro-Colombian context of my fieldwork, these children are discriminated against because they represent failed local notions of motherhood and the disruption women caused to the social reproduction and stability of the group by having a child of an unknown father. Disclosures about the absence of the father in the configuration of the child's identity, in this context, reveal intertwined forms of violence that impose roles and expectations on women, and claim control over their bodies and reproductive capabilities.

Chapter 5 draws on social cartography workshops and ethnographic fieldwork to discuss struggles over memories of the past and the absent presence of these individuals born as a result of war-related sexual violence. Within the architectures of transitional justice operating in the country, these individuals are categorised as war-affected children. However, the dynamic experiences and identities of these individuals born of war do not correspond with harm-centred logics and technologies through which transitional justice addresses the realities of the armed conflict. These people emerged from the violent past but did not inhabit it, and their testimony of war is not given with words but with their bodies. These subjects do not appear in collective memories of the past; their absence in those narratives unveils gendered power relations that deny women's experiences of the armed conflict while imposing static notions of victimhood on children born of war.

# Chapter 1

## Children Born of War and the Production of Gendered Social Realties Through Terror: Theory and Literature Review

My research is framed by the sociology of knowledge (Berger and Luckmann, 1971; Schutz and Luckmann, 1973) that identifies the 'objectivations of subjective processes (and meanings) by which the intersubjective common-sense world is constructed' (Berger and Luckmann, 1971: 34). Informed by the anthropology of violence (Scarry, 1985; Das, 2000; Castillejo, 2000), my project acknowledges that violence and oppression destroy common contexts and social maps people use to interact in their everyday life. When facing the destruction of familiar social landscapes, a negotiation of meanings and reinterpretation of signs takes place (Das and Kleinman, 2001). Building on this, my research acknowledges that the logics, policies, and technologies of war that have sought to transform the social collective body by marking and removing the individual physical bodies of people, and have also, through the use of sexual violence, added physical bodies to the social landscape. My research understands narratives about those subjects who are conceived and born as a result of war-related sexual violence—or the absence of such narratives—as social attempts to produce intersubjective realities by creating categories to explain the everyday world that emerges during armed conflicts.

Michael Taussig (1987) describes terror as a social space in which victims and perpetrators, oppressed and oppressors, become compliant to the logics of violence and give birth to social realities. Terror, argues Taussig (1987), transforms meaning and blurs the boundaries of reality. While doing so, it merges the cultural signifiers that are part of the social orders to which the oppressed and the oppressors belong. Horror, violence, and fear permeate the social order that they seek to dominate and, through them, a culture of

terror is born, and truth and reality are objectivised. Truth and reality, under those conditions, are co-productions of the collision of social orders through violence and horror. Informed by this production of social reality, in my research I understand the people who are conceived and born through war as belonging to a social order that have resulted from the violent blend of universes of meaning. The framings and socio-historical political processes for apprehending their presence, in that sense, encompass the system of terror that conceived them and the cultural moral values of the social group in which they are born. Throughout my research, in that sense, I understand that narratives about people who are conceived and born through sexual violence as a policy and technology of control and domination, correspond with constant negotiations to grant their physical bodies with social meaning through a normalised culture of terror, and in the attempts to subvert it.

Cultures of terror, Taussig (1987) argues, are also nourished by silence. Silence, however, takes different shapes and the truth that lies behind it encompasses different dimensions of the human experience and its political, cultural, and economic struggles. Reflecting on the presence of silence in relation to the human beings who are born of war-related sexual violence requires reflecting on the different forms that silence assumes around women and their experiences of the armed conflict, as the experiences of mothers and children are closely connected. Literature addressing the several dimensions encompassed in the production of those silences—that will be discussed in detail in chapters 4 and 5—has shown how in the gendered experience of war-related violence, institutionalised silence produced through weapons and fear is consolidated through impunity, shame, and discrimination (HRW, 1996; 2002). In a different dimension, for women silence is also present when the understanding of their experience is based on static categories of victimhood that obscure other forms of structural violence while

reducing their experience to sexual violence (Theidon, 2007; Theidon, 2013), while normalising sexual violence that happens outside the context of war (Baaz and Stern, 2013). When, in the context of war and oppression, women have been deprived of their bodies and sense of humanity, silence, however, can also be an act of conscious agency through which women refuse to grant words to certain experiences (Das, 1996; Ross, 2001). Narratives about the conception and existence of the human beings who become part of the social realities of war-related sexual violence survivors and their communities appear in the intersection of the overlapping silences that surround the experiences of war, survival, and resistance of women.

Informed by Taussig's (1999) conceptualisation of defacement and public secrecy, I do not understand the lack of public information about boys, girls, women, and men born as a result of war-related sexual violence as the result of a veil of secrecy imposed on their individual existence by their mothers and closest relatives. After all, as Kimberly Theidon (2015) notes, in their communities these individuals are *hidden in plain sight*, as part of the information that is known by everyone but acknowledged by no one, and that has granted life—and power—to the configuration of typologies of gendered experiences of the armed conflict, within which sexual violence, as a policy and technology of control and domination, has been used against women and girls. When reflecting on the production of social realities with their objectivised culture of terror—like the ones that armed groups have imposed in many communities in Colombia—what could be understood as a secret is granted with power to produce social orders through its public dimension (Taussig, 1999). Those truths that lie behind silence—and that are named as secrets—are commonly known for people who share the same social order but, recognising the logics and meanings of the installed culture of terror, cannot articulate its presence on the surface of the everyday acts of living. Those public secrets, which

Taussig describes as 'knowing what not to know' (1999: 2), represent the most important kind of social knowledge there is as they are at the core of the intertwined relation between power and knowledge in social institutions, not so much because knowledge is power, but because 'active not-knowing' (Taussig, 1999: 7) renders that knowledge powerful. Borrowing from Walter Benjamin, Taussig argues that 'truth is not a matter of exposure which destroys the secret, but a revelation which does justice to it' (Taussig, 1999: 2). Defacement of the public secret, through the arranged process of revelation of the routinized *knowing what not to know* within the culture of terror, argues Taussig (1999), does not destroy the secret, but rather makes it more powerful, as knowing becomes as important as concealing. Following this approach, my research does not focus on the exposure of the secret but on the understanding of the different social processes through which the public secret is conversely concealed and revealed. In this sense, my research reflects on the culturally produced truth, the dimensions of social reality, that are being revealed through silence and concealment in relation to those people who are conceived and born of war in Colombia.

**The gendered continuum of violence**

The foundational basis of my research is the recognition of the diverse human experiences of suffering, endurance, and resistance attached to war. I do not, though, understand localised war with its policies and technologies of violence as isolated events but instead as exacerbated continuums of the historical processes of oppression guided by colonialism and capital, which are, in their essence, gendered. My research, in that sense, is framed by Johan Galtung's (1969) assertion that peace is not the absence of physical violence. Violence is present, Galtung argues (1969), when human beings have unequal life opportunities that restrict them from achieving their potential. When life expectancy

is higher in the upper classes than in the lower, when some people are starving when starvation is avoidable, violence has happened. In this sense, violence is also committed even when personal violence that is visible through intended concrete actions, or the threat of them, is not taking place. Violence, Galtung argues (1969), is built into the structure of the social order that holds at its core the unequal distribution of power, and it is also exercised in the absence of war. In the distinction between personal and structural violence, the former appears to be more visible as it represents disruption and is made visible in actions that the recipient can identify and locate. Structural violence, on the other hand, is silent, stable, and tends to be naturalised as part of the social order. There is, nevertheless, a crossbreeding between the two, as emphasised by Galtung (1969).

Building on Franco Basaglia's notion of peace-time crimes (1987), a framework that points to the continuum between the violence that is normalised and naturalised in everyday life and the violence that appears extraordinary in times of war, Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1997) notes that the violence committed in the context of war is the systematic and amplified reproduction of the violence that takes place in the everyday life of people. With the acknowledgement of the existence of everyday violence—defined as the 'implicit, legitimate, organised, and routinized violence of particular socio-political state formations' (Scheper-Hughes, 1997: 471) —Scheper-Hughes argues (1997), there is the realisation that the sense of peace and stability that is often present in the absence of war is gained at the expense of normalised and routinized violence against specific groups of people. That violence, which Scheper-Hughes (1996) refers to as small wars and invisible genocides, has become invisible not because it is hidden but because it has been legitimised when it is directed towards categories of humans that have been de-humanised, objectivised, marked dispensable and as an acceptable sacrifice in the name of the survival of the group and its social order. It is the naturalisation of the everyday

violence, argues Scheper-Hughes (2002), that makes outbreaks of radical violence committed by the state and its armed forces, or by any other groups, possible and acceptable.

In the context of patriarchal social orders and its power relations, violence is a gendered phenomenon (Kelly, 1988). Following Cynthia Enloe's (1987) feminist understanding that peace for women constitutes gaining control over their lives, and that this requires a recognition of the various ways in which constructions of gender converge with historical patterns of colonialism, militarism, and capital to oppress women, Liz Kelly (2000) argues that a meaningful peace would imply not just the absence of armed confrontations but the absence of gendered institutionalised violence in different social spheres—including the household—and the eradication of poverty and of the conditions that reproduce it. Kelly argues that sexual violence in the context of armed conflicts is a manifested expansion of the forms and intensity of other conflicts women experience in their everyday lives, that include sexual violence but are not restricted to it, and that are defined through gender power relations. In this sense, Kelly argues, gender relations converge with the policies and practices of war to create a continuum of violence against women that, under the conditions of large-scale violence, are exacerbated by militarised masculinities and the instauration of regimes of violence. In the social negotiations that entail transiting from war, the centrality that has been granted to notions of masculinity and nationhood within the warring discourse has implied that the end of the confrontations is not accompanied by a redefinition of gendered power relations. Framed by a gendered conceptualisation of the continuum of everyday and structural violence and the violence of war, my research understands that the end of armed confrontations does not correspond with the absence of violence towards women—in the particular case of

my research sexual violence survivors—and the boys and girls who were born as a result of policies of terror and control.

Following this, my research is framed by an approach that challenges the pre-existence of political communities as moral unities of harmony (Schaap, 2005) and understands them as the outcome of encounters among different perspectives and experiences of the world (Arendt, 1970). Andrew Schaap (2005) understands political reconciliation as a process of striving 'for a sense of commonness that might be disclosed from the clash of perspectives we bring to bear on the world in our historical relation to each other' (Schaap, 2005: 4), and argues that the end of armed confrontations, as historical political moments, could be vehicles to challenge relationships of power and reconfigure plural and political inter-subjective realities in the transition from widespread violence (Schaap, 2005). If the end of widespread violence is thought as a means to heal the nation-state, however, this might deny the existence of plurality within the larger society, while at the same time potentially naturalising the conditions that caused the association-dissociation of the society and the widespread violence (Schaap, 2005).

In this sense, Schaap (2005) contests an understanding of the end of widespread violence as a historic political moment to restore harmonious relationships between groups within the affected society, for that kind of restorative approach does not consider that systematic violence is often perpetrated against specific categories of people who, under specific social orders, were not acknowledged as part of the political community or were subjugated to, for example, the values of capital or patriarchy. Moreover, Schaap (2005) argues, a restorative approach does not differentiate between the political and the moral. In this sense, it assumes that there is a set of moral norms that binds all members of the political community, not recognising that power relations manifest themselves not just in the application of norms but also in the very *definition* of norms. In this context,

Schaap (2005) notes, a restorative approach does not consider that what is often required when facing the possibility of the end of armed confrontations or authoritative regimes is the reconfiguration of the moral order rather than its restoration. Building on this, and informed by Veena Das and Arthur Kleinman's (2001) statement that reconciliation 'is not a matter of confession offered one and for all, but rather the building of relationships by performing the work of the everyday life' (Das and Kleinman, 2001: 14), my research understands that what Das and Kleinman (2001) call the making and remaking of the world does not have the shape of one grand narrative but rather of multiple inter-connected narratives through which people negotiate social maps to live together.

In the name of rebuilding the political community, Kelly argues (2000), women's experiences of violence are subordinated to the idea of healing the society and its male combatants. Veena Das (2007) notes that when the political community is being redefined—like in the aftermath of armed confrontations, in postcolonial settings, or with the fall of oppressive regimes—the reproduction of the population does not just entail questions about bare life but implies questions on the reproduction of the social body of the political community itself, who belongs to it, and under which conditions. Yasmin Saikia's (2007) work on the production of foundational national narratives in post-independence Bangladesh describes the different policies of silence that women sexual violence survivors experienced. In the name of the reproduction of the imagined social body of Bangladesh, the 1971 postliberation Bangladeshi government mandated abortion—without exemption, regard for women's agency, or the stage of the pregnancy—for all pregnant women who had been raped by Pakistani men. Also in the name of the reproduction of the imagined political community, Bangladeshi men who committed sexual violence against Bangladeshi women, and who were included in the foundational national narratives as heroes, were not mentioned as perpetrators. In the

official account of the experience of women during the war that was produced in post-independence Bangladesh, neither internal perpetrators of sexual violence nor the children fathered by Pakistani men had a symbolic function in settling the foundations of the imagined future society. While men were removed from the narratives and foetuses from women's bodies, they both served the purpose of creating a unified notion of the social body and the consolidation of the "other" as an enemy with no place within the political community. Framed by this scholarship, I approach narratives about people born as a result of war-related sexual violence as belonging to the constant negotiations between entrenched webs of narratives such as the ones in which transitional justice agencies operate and the ones communities use to apprehend the everyday world that emerges from war. In this sense, the state is an agent not just through the actions of its representatives—for instance, the soldiers who have raped or the soldiers who have been used as bait in combat—but also through its power to produce national narratives of the imagined political community with its economic, moral, cultural, social order.

**Sexual violence as a weapon of war**

Rape, enforced pregnancy, and sexual slavery—among other practices—have been used to control, oppress, and terrorise women and men (particularly targeting women) and their communities throughout history and around the world. However, it was not until the wars in Rwanda (1993) and in the former Yugoslavia (1992-95) that sexual violence in the context of armed conflicts became a significant topic of discussion for the international community and within the human rights agenda (Buss, 2009). It was then recognised that sexual violence is routinely used with strategic purposes to achieve military and political objectives (HRW, 1995), and war-related sexual violence went from

not being perceived, to being perceived as a regrettable but inherent aspect of war, to a strategy, tactic, and technology of war.

The conceptualisation of the current dominant discourse of sexual violence as a weapon of war has involved different dimensions that reflect gendered political struggles. Inger Skjelsbek (2001) identified three broad approaches as essentialist, structuralist, and social constructionist conceptualisations. An essentialist approach, argues Skjelsbek (2001), would say that all women in conflict zones are targets of sexual violence and that sexual violence happens to assert violent masculinities. This approach notes that gender power relations in the context of war cannot be understood without considering the ways gender relations are configured in the absence of large-scale violence, for they represent a continuum that becomes accentuated during war. This conceptualisation argues that in patriarchal societies sexual violence—in the context of war as well as in the absence of armed confrontations—manifests hierarchical power relationships between men and women. This conceptualisation understands all women in the war zone as potential targets because it focuses on the notions of militaristic masculinities rather than on the targeted women. Skjelsbek (2001) points out that this conceptualisation does not account for why some groups of women are more often the target of sexual violence, overlooking aspects of, for example, race/ethnicity and class. The role of militarised masculinities cannot, on its own, account for why women, and in particular certain women, are more affected by those policies. This conceptualisation, furthermore, assumes a narrow understanding of patriarchy as the perpetuation of men's supremacy over women. Similarly, it offers an essentialist understanding of masculinity through which men are depicted as being sexually violent in nature, but whose violent masculine instincts are constantly being suppressed and, in times of war, released. Along those same lines,

Skjelsbek (2001) argues, this approach does not consider men as victims of sexual violence.

In the structuralist conceptualisation of sexual violence as a weapon of war, Skjelsbek (2001) argues, the focus shifts from violent masculinities to the female victim and the way that various socio-cultural structures configure her identity and positionality within the social order. As with the essentialist conceptualisation, Skjelsbek (2001) notes, this approach also acknowledges that in contexts of war patriarchal gender relations are accentuated, but the structuralist conceptualisation adds that some groups of women are attacked because they represent a female embodiment of their socio-cultural identities. This conceptualisation, then, assumes an understanding of patriarchy through which men's position of power requires of them to protect "their" women and (potentially) attack other women based on a positionality granted by their class, ethnicity, religion, or political affiliation. In this sense, Skjelsbek (2001) notes, this approach recognises that different dimensions of someone's identity mediate in the dynamics of sexual violence as a weapon of war.  The occurrence of war-related sexual violence, from this perspective, takes place within systems of meaning that confer to the female identity the ultimate characteristic of life-givers, while at the same time associating the male identity with life-taking. In this sense, sexual violence is used to attack the reproductive capability of the collective. Criticisms to this approach, identified by Skjelsbek (2001), include that what is discussed is women's protection under men's terms and patriarchal social orders. Weight is more heavily placed, for instance, on women's *honour* than on women's *rights*. Additionally, this conceptualisation does not account for men as victims of war-related sexual violence. Finally, in the social constructionist conceptualisation, Skjelsbek (2001) argues that the focus is placed on how sexual violence, both in the context of armed conflict and in the absence of it, is driven by power relations, the gendered construction

of identities, and the transactions of identities between those who commit and those targeted with sexual violence. According to this approach, through the logics, policies, and technologies of war, sexual violence is used to assert hierarchical power relations that subordinate feminised identities to masculinised identities. In this sense, 'the perpetrator, and his (potentially her) ethnic/religious/political identity becomes masculinised, while the victim's ethnic/religious/political identity becomes femininised' (Skjelsbek 2001: 226).

Scholarship on the human rights situation of children born as a result of war-related sexual violence shows that their plight is closely connected to the experience of their mothers (Carpenter et. al 2005; Carpenter 2007; 2010). If sexual violence survivors are, for example, denied access to resources and the means to guarantee their own well-being, they are less likely to provide a healthy and safe environment for their children (HRW, 1996; 2002). Research conducted in the contexts of the 1994 war in Rwanda or in the war that led to the independence of East Timor illustrate these dynamics; there are documented stories of women who, after facing ostracism by their communities, have been forced to depend on charity to survive. As a result of this, women have abandoned their children or have given them for adoption (Mukagendo, 2007; Harris, 2007). Likewise, women who survive wartime sexual violence often have physical and mental health injuries as a consequence of the violence they have experienced (Amnesty International, 2011). Although there is not a single response to war-related sexual violence and every survivor has different strategies to cope with her experience (Skjelsbaek, 2006), these women have higher probabilities of suffering depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem that, in some cases, could result in suicide (Amnesty International, 2011; Guarnizo, 2011; Bergoffen, 2012). If these survivors do not receive adequate support through their social networks and health care, their experience could

also compromise the welfare of all their children but in particular those born as a result of the sexual abuses (UNIFEM, 2003; Carpenter 2007). Research indicates that under those circumstances, children are at risk of being abandoned, punished, and mistreated, as they are assumed to be a continuation of the violence their mothers suffered (Carpenter, 2010). Also, there are reported cases of death by neglect or infanticide. For instance, in relation to children born out of rape during the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Daniel, 2003; 2007).

Informed by Patricia Weitsman's (2007, 2008) argument that the production of discursive realities around war-related sexual violence unveils the logics that imbue children born as a result of those practices with meaning, my research seeks to understand the relations between the framings for understanding the experiences of women survivors of war-related sexual violence and children born as a result of that violence. Weitsman (2007) argues that institutional structures such as armed groups, human rights and transitional justice agencies, the academy, and the media play a part in both producing and disseminating discourses around notions of gender, identity, and sexual reproduction that underpin policies of war-related sexual violence. The dominant discourse of sexual violence as a weapon of war that has gained a privileged place in the way that media reporting and policy analysis are understood, thought, and written is guided by a gendered approach to sexual violence that challenges the idea that rape responds to the heterosexual biological needs of male bodies. In accordance with the more structuralist conceptualisation described above, the focus of attention has shifted from female and male bodies to the social production of violent militarised masculinities and subjects who, under the circumstances of warring but within the continuum of socio-cultural structural gendered violence, commit sexual violence. Practices of war-related sexual violence within this framework of explanation, Maria Eriksson Baaz and Maria Stern (2013)

emphasise, are not assumed to be the natural consequence of someone's biological needs, but of specific militarised gendering processes. Drawing on Judith Butler's (2004) argument that experiences of violence come together with the emergence of framings for understanding and apprehending such violence, Baaz and Stern (2013) revisit the discourse of sexual violence as a weapon of war and argue that as a framing of explanation, it has produced specific categories of subjects at the same time that it has silenced others, dictating moral, political, and cultural responses towards them. Baaz and Stern (2013) argue that men have dominantly been depicted as 'heterosexual masculine citizen-soldiers [and] women (and the "feminine") are stereotypically associated with a need for protection, with peacefulness and life-giving' (Baaz and Stern, 2013: 20).

Criticisms to this dominant conceptualisation highlight the ways in which, by producing these subjects, the same framework that has sought to tackle violence against women and girls during war has also reproduced gender power relations that impose on women and men restricted and static roles. At the same time, it reduces the war-related experiences of women to sexual violence and naturalises sexual violence that occurs outside the context of war (Theidon, 2007; Theidon, 2013). In the storylines provided by the explanatory framing for apprehending war-related sexual violence—in particular within the discourse of sexual violence as a weapon of war—women and men have been predominantly depicted in the roles of victims and perpetrators. Framed by this scholarship, my research recognises that narratives about people born through wartime sexual violence can be part of broader networks of narratives that seek to explain and understand sexual violence in the context of war. Instead of emerging as main characters within the framings for understanding the experience of war-affected children, children born of war have emerged as secondary characters within the grid of explanation that sexual violence as a weapon of war provides.

**Childhood and children born as a consequence of war-related sexual violence**

Informed by Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Carolyn Sargent's politics of childhood (1998), my research understands that childhood is a coproduction of biology and social processes with political, ideological, and social uses and expectations. Building on W. Penn Handwerker's (1990: 1) statement that the 'birth of a child is a political event', Scheper-Hughes and Sargent (1998) argue that childhood is the main site of cultural learning within specific social orders, and that it is central to the production and reproduction of notions of genetics and identity. Through the social site of childhood, the authors note, it is possible to identify 'the cluster of discourses and practices surrounding sexuality and reproduction, love and protection, power and authority' (Scheper-Hughes and Sargent: 2) that different social orders value. Although my research is driven by an interest in the social experience of those human beings who are conceived and born through policies and technologies of war-related sexual violence in Colombia, it is not, at least at this stage, centred in their embodied experience. With this I mean that my research focuses on the production and reproduction of narratives *about* them, and the social processes and negotiations that the production and articulation of those narratives into the social realities that are emerged from war entail.

In the context of the fall of military governments and totalitarian regimes in different global contexts and regions, the 1990s was the decade that saw the rise of what Scheper-Hughes and Sargent (1998: 7) describe as a 'Western-based but international discourse on human rights'. In the case of children, this discourse is represented in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child that came into force in September 1990 and that has been ratified by all the member states of the United Nations, with the exception of the United States. When used to address the situation of children, this rights

rhetoric that seeks to disseminate a universal approach to individual rights presents tensions, as notions of childhood are deeply shaped by local universes of meaning (Scheper-Hughes and Sargent, 1998). Here the authors are not defending a relativistic approach that would argue in favour of cultural practices—like sexual exploitation, toddler malnutrition, or female genital amputation—that jeopardise the body and lives of specifics groups of people. Instead, Scheper-Hughes and Sargent (1998) argue that the risk with rights rhetoric is that it may overlook the combination of socially constructed categories such as child, mother, or parenthood, and the ways in which the violence of the neoliberal global economy transforms local economic, moral, political, and cultural contexts. Furthermore, Scheper-Hughes and Sargent (1998) note, a critical analysis of the localised experience of children and the ways it is interpreted through dominant discourses like the one of human rights involves an acknowledgement of the transformations that the social value of children has undertaken in different economic and moral orders throughout time.

Framings for understanding the social site of childhood, in the case of those born through war, collide with framings for understanding gendered experiences of war. Each of those framings come with their own understandings and expectations of notions such as *child*, *victim*, *parenthood*, *identity*, and *sexuality*. In this context, I understand the production of narratives about those human beings born as a result of war-related sexual violence as the manifestation of constant negotiations of different framings—each with their own categories, power relations, and values—for apprehending their presence within specific social realities.

**Understanding the category of Children Born of War**

The concept of "war children" was first used to refer to 'a child that has one parent that was part of an army or peace keeping force and the other parent a local citizen where the weight is on the stigma these children can be subject to as a result of their background' (Grieg 2001: 6). This conceptualisation was part of the "War and Children Identity Project" and represented the first attempt to define this particular group of war-affected children, present an overview based on different contexts, and provide an estimate on the number of children born in different conflicts (Mochmann, 2017). The report acknowledged that the experiences of these children cannot be understood as homogenous, and that they have been born of consensual and non-consensual relationships. The report shows that the presence of these children is not restricted to one specific time, place, or type of armed conflict, and in order to provide an idea of the extent of their presence, it gives estimates of numbers of children born in different conflicts. Some examples are as follows: In War World I, 15,000 children were fathered by French and UK soldiers and German women; in War World II 12,000 were fathered by German soldiers and Norwegian women; in the 1971 war that led to the independence of Bangladesh from Pakistan 25,000 children were born of rape in Bangladesh; in the 1993 war in Rwanda 5,000 children were born of wartime rape; in war in the former Yugoslavia 4,000 children were born of wartime rape committed by Serbian soldiers against Bosnian women; and between 1992-1997 25,000 children were fathered by members of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) (Grieg, 2001: 9).

Although Kai Grieg (2001) is clear to note that his aim is to focus on the plight of children, the report acknowledges that their situation is often closely connected to the experience of their mothers. Independent of whether enemy soldiers or allies fathered

these children, and whether they were conceived through sexual violence, these children very often face stigmatisation. To illustrate this, the author notes how after World War II, in countries like France and England, children fathered both by allied and German soldiers were stigmatised and discriminated against. This stigma, Grieg argues, has to be understood in relation to who the father is and what that represents to the community, but also in relation to the role women are granted within each society. In the above-mentioned example, children faced a vulnerable position not just because of the role of their fathers in the war but also due to other factors, such as being children of single mothers (Grieg, 2001). Although the report does not elaborate on the dynamics and implications that could be embedded in being the child of a consensual or non-consensual relationship, and while the report does not provide specific information about this, Grieg's analysis of the plight of these children allows for the opportunity to reflect on how the positionality of women within the society and their experience of the armed conflict is intimately connected with the experience of their children and the process through which their identity is shaped.

Building on Grieg's report but focusing on children born as a result war-related rape and sexual exploitation (non-consensual relations), between 2004 and 2005 Charli Carpenter coordinated a project that sought to work with humanitarian agencies and local NGOs in order to assess the state of knowledge and practices of protection of these children in war-affected areas (Carpenter et al., 2005). Here, the term "children born of war" was used for the first time, and in the report it was stated that due to the context and circumstances of their conception, these children tended to be stigmatised as both being illegitimate and as children of the enemy (Carpenter et al., 2005). Following the conceptual framework proposed by Grieg's and Carpenter's reports, in a meeting held in 2006 with the objective to define a future interdisciplinary research agenda, the term

"children born of war" was proposed to be assumed for 'all children of foreign soldiers and local mothers' (Mochmann, 2017: 323), regardless of whether the sexual relation was consensual. In that meeting four categories were then defined by Ingvill Constanze Mochmann and later developed by Mochmann and Stein Ugelvik Larsen (2008) and Mochmann and Sabine Lee (2010) as follows: children of enemy soldiers, children of soldiers from occupational forces that can be seen as enemies or allies, children of child soldiers, and children of peace keeping forces. The authors argued that there was a need to conduct further comparative research regarding discrimination and stigma of children born of consensual and non-consensual sexual relations in order to be able to support differences in their plight and life opportunities (Mochmann and Larsen 2008; Mochman and Lee, 2010). They noted that it might be assumed that the experience of children born of war-related sexual violence could not be compared to the experience of children born of consensual relationships. The authors argue, however, that examples like the one presented above in Grieg's report on children fathered by allies and German soldiers in France and England in WWII, and examples from other countries like Norway and Denmark where children fathered by German soldiers were discriminated against even when they were conceived in consensual relationships, place the weight of the analysis not so much on the conception but on the identity of the father as belonging to foreign forces (Mochmann & Larsen, 2008) understood as "the enemy" or the "other" (Mochmann and Lee, 2010).

In the conceptual development of cross-disciplinary studies on children born of war, and with the purpose to enhance a comparative approach, the initial framework that was largely based on cases related to War World II and the war in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, was enriched with case studies that presented different cultural contexts and warfare dynamics. On the 10th anniversary of the research programme on Children born

of war at the University of Cologne, the conceptual framework was reformulated as 'children who, in the context of an armed conflict, have a local civilian woman as a mother and are fathered by a foreign soldier, paramilitary officer, rebel or other person directly participating in hostilities' (Mochmann, 2017: 325). The acknowledgement that in the context of war or authoritarian regimes children are conceived as a result of consensual and non-consensual relationships, and that depending on the cultural, political, and economic background these individuals may experience different levels of violence and discrimination was accompanied by an acknowledgment that in those contexts of war sexual violence is strategically used to accomplish political and military goals, and that under those conditions, there can be a blurred line between consensual and non-consensual sexual relations as sex can also be, for example, traded for goods and safety as a survival strategy (Mochmann, 2017).

Continuing her line of inquiry into children born as a result of war-related sexual violence, in 2007 Carpenter contributed to the conceptual framework by providing a definition of "children born of war" as 'persons of any age conceived as a result of violent, coercive, or exploitive sexual relations in conflict zones' (2007a: 3). By not emphasising the individual identities of the parents in the definition (for example civilian woman or foreign soldier), but instead highlighting different dimensions of violence embedded in sexual relations in war-affected regions, this approach benefits my research by allowing me to place the weight of the analysis not in who the biological parents are, but on the entrenched socio-economic, cultural, and political system that on one hand enables the occurrence of war-related sexual violence and, on the other hand, grants social meaning to the presence of those individuals born of war. Carpenter noted that these children are part of the larger category of war children defined by Grieg (2001) and introduced at the beginning of this section, and that through this conceptualisation the aim

was to focus on understanding the 'social stigma that attaches to children whose fathers are perceived to come from outside a conflict-affected community' (Carpenter, 2007a: 3). In the context of political, cultural, and economic violence, I understand that in the narratives produced about children born of war the identity of the biological parents, and what is believed to be transmitted from parents to children, is but one of the elements that defines the way that societies understand these people and their positionality.

**Understanding the situation of children born as a result of war-related sexual violence**

Although governments, NGOs, the international community, and civil society have made efforts to address the impact of war-related sexual violence on women and girls, the magnitude and outcomes of these policies and practices remains underestimated. In contexts where sexual violence has been systematically used as a strategy of terror and control, boys and girls born as a consequence of such practices emerge as generations conceived from violence. Although their plight remains largely unattended within the research and lobbying agendas of scholars, governments, and organisations working with war-affected populations (Grieg, 2001; Mochmann, 2008; Lee, 2017), available literature argues that they represent a social tension (Wax, 2004; McEvoy-Levy, 2007); on one hand, they symbolise the terror inflicted upon their mothers and communities, while on the other hand, as part of the youngest generations, they symbolise the endurance of sexual violence survivors and of their communities. Considering that, due to the circumstances surrounding their conception, from the moment of their birth these children face the risk of being discriminated against, ostracised, and having their human rights highly compromised, this tension has major implications for the well-being and life

prospects of children and women, and also for the different possibilities societies have to construct their futures (Carpenter et al., 2005).

Historical approaches represent a large part of the research done on children born of consensual and non-consensual sexual relations in war contexts (Harris, 1993; Greig, 2001; Ophaug, 2003; Ericsson and Simonsen, 2005). In particular, on Norwegian and Danish people fathered by German soldiers in the context of World War II (Mochmann and Larsen, 2008; Mochmann et al., 2009; Mochmann, 2008; Mochmann and Lee, 2010). Within this scholarship, issues concerning identity and stigma have been discussed, particularly from international relations (Carpenter, 2010; Seto, 2013) and human rights approaches (McEvoy-Levy, 2007; Mochmann and DeTombe, 2010). This scholarship has shown that the stigma associated to these children has compromised the well-being of the child and his or her opportunities in life from WWII (Mochmann and Lee, 2010). The case of forced impregnations during the war in the former Yugoslavia (1991-2001) and the case of Rwanda (1994) have provided important insights to research seeking to understand the lack of attention that this category of war-affected children has received within the human rights agenda. It has revealed how the production of public narratives about them has prevented their emergence as independent subjects of concern and redress (Carpenter 2005, 2007a, 2007b, 2010). Through the dissemination of narratives that depict these children as symbols of otherness and atrocities like ethnic cleansing, this scholarship has explored the role that the media and human rights and transitional justice agencies—among other institutions—has played in reproducing the same logics that underpin wartime sexual violence, creating the idea of a tension between the children and their mothers and communities (Weitsman, 2007, 2008). Within frameworks of legal analysis these children are conceptualised in terms of secondary rape victims, and scholarship has discussed issues such as membership rights (Qin, 2003), legal citizenship,

and how the Convention on the Rights of the Child can be applied to this category of war-affected children (Daniel, 2007; Mochmann and Lee, 2010). The intergenerational effects of war-related sexual violence have also been explored, with contributions to a policy-oriented discussion with recommendations in terms of attention to both the child and the mother (Van Ee and Kleber, 2013; Denov, 2015; Shanahan and Veale, 2016). Few studies, though, have been done with children themselves. Some notable exceptions are research conducted by Denov and Lakor (2017) in northern Uganda with children born in the context of the abductions of women and girls perpetrated by members of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), Mochmann and Larsen's (2008) analysis of the life courses of Norwegian people fathered by German soldiers and local women in the context of World War II, and research conducted by Erjavec and Volčič (2010a, 2010b) in Bosnia and Herzegovina on the self-representation of adolescents born of sexual violence the context of the war in the Former Yugoslavia.

In addition to the complicated situation experienced by all children in war-affected regions or in post peace agreement situations, children born as a result of wartime sexual violence also have to cope with the psychosocial, political and economic implications brought with their conception (Grieg et, al, 2005). Available information from different contexts shows that the future of both mother and child vary depending on a range of aspects, including the conditions under which they were conceived, the cultural background of the community, the characteristics of the armed conflict, the level of the state's presence, and the strength of its institutions (Carpenter, 2007). However, international literature indicates that due to the context of their conception children born of war-related sexual violence have their human rights compromised in a number of ways (Grieg, 2001). These children are more likely to be abandoned, neglected, discriminated and ostracised (Carpenter, 2010). They often face lack of access to food, health,

education and housing (Carpenter et. al, 2005). As an outcome of all of this, they are at great risk of becoming street children, being trafficked or facing early childhood mortality as a consequence of discrimination or infanticide (Mochmann and Lee, 2010). Although this may be true for many children during conflicts and in post peace-agreement scenarios, the facts surrounding their conception place them in a particularly vulnerable situation. Lack of access to health, education or shelter, together with high rates of abandonment and neglect, jeopardize the individual well-being of these children and their possibilities to develop life projects in conditions of equality.

In Northern Uganda, for instance, children whose mothers were girls abducted by members of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) experience particular circumstances depending on whether they are still held in captivity, they were returned to freedom with their mothers, or they were born after their mother's release. Generally speaking, children born under LRA captivity suffer severe lack of access to basic needs like food, medical attention, water, clothing, and shelter (Apio, 2007). They face starvation from the moment of their birth due to lack of food for them and their mothers. Medical attention is also scarce, and so diseases like diarrhoea, cholera and malaria are hardly treated. Furthermore, although they are exposed to diseases such as tuberculosis, poliomyelitis, diphtheria, tetanus, hepatitis B and measles, very few of these children are immunized. In addition, these children have been conceived and born inside an outlawed group, which means that from the moment of their conception their security has been compromised due to confrontations with national troops of the Uganda People's Defense Forces (UPDF), other LRA enemies like the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and sometimes Sudanese troops. During these clashes many children have lost their lives and many others have been injured or become lost in the jungle (Apio, 2007).

Research that has addressed the notion of stigma in relation to children born of war-related sexual violence describes the ways in which these children face different dimensions of stigmatisation. First, being the child of a sexual violence survivor. Second, having as a father someone who is considered an enemy by the community. Third, the stigma attached to humans as symbols of collective trauma. As they grow older, marginalisation produced by stigma often becomes part of their identity and they have to deal with being the embodiment of the violence suffered by their mothers and communities (Daniel, 2003). These children are usually raised unrepresented, voiceless, and marginalised. While facing a lack of supportive family and community networks, stigma also plays a role in the way these children understand themselves and the place they believe to occupy within their communities. One of the main and first elements that define someone's identity and self-representation is their name (Daniel, 2007; Weitsman, 2007; 2008), and naming practices are developed both by whoever gives them an official name and by the community that labels them. In the case of these children, as I will describe in chapter 4, naming has been used in different contexts to signal the trajectories of violence of their parents (Mukangendo, 2007; Apio, 2007).

In this context, scholarship notes that they often grow up unable to participate in matters regarding their social, economic, religious, cultural, and political life (Erjavec and Volcic, 2010a, 2010b)[1]. One of the Bosnian adolescents interviewed as part of Karmen Erjavec and Zala Volcic's (2010a) research on self-representation of adolescents born from sexual violence during the war in Bosnia states that she feels she is a "shooting target" in her everyday life in school (Erjavec and Volcic, 2010a: 530). The language these girls use to describe themselves, their experiences of everyday life and their social relationships abound with metaphors associated with the war. They picture themselves as

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[1] I have included the work of Karmen Erjavec and Zala Volcic (2010a, 2010b) as it is part of the available literature on children born of war. However, I have kept its contributions to my thesis to the minimum as their research is undergoing a process to verify its legitimacy.

"shooting targets" and the verb "to attack" is common when describing other people's behaviour towards them. Due to the conditions under which they have grown up, they have constructed a victimized and powerless identity. Even though most of these girls live with their mothers and very few were at some point institutionalised, they understand themselves as "excluded", outsiders to their own community (Erjavec and Volcic, 2010a). Another metaphor used by some of these girls to describe themselves is that of "cancer"; one interview subject says 'I see myself as a cancer … as a cancer that divides weak and sick cells in the blood, and destroys all the strong, the good cells. Yes, the malignant cells destroy the good ones' (Erjavec and Volcic, 2010a: 534). They do not represent themselves as being part of the future of the society but as an element of destruction within that post-war community. However, a small group of girls in Erjavec and Volcic's study (2010a) showed a different construction of their identity. These children represent themselves as "fighters" and "peacekeepers" on the basis of their "mixed blood" (Erjavec and Volcic, 2010a: 536). The conditions of their conceptions were not represented as a mark of stigma; instead, they transformed the violent event into a possibility to build peace between ethnic groups that have suffered the consequences of war. One extract illustrates this perspective: 'I perceive myself as a fighter for peace, I think that's me, I think I need to be that, because as a child who has blood from two different groups, I am able to negotiate more, and act as a peace keeper between both nations in order to overcome divisions and conflicts' (Erjavec and Volcic, 2010a: 536). Erjavec and Volcic (2010a) note that different elements can be identified behind this discourse. These children have been raised with a political conscience of the facts of their conception. In this sense, they do not picture their mothers as powerless victims but as empowered survivors. Discussions about rape for these children are not a taboo, and they have grown up with family support and have developed social networks. Of significant relevance is

the fact that their mothers have had access to economic, educational and cultural resources. This scenario has allowed them to provide basic needs for their children and assume dynamic roles within their society (Erjavec and Volcic, 2010).

In the case of Colombia, I have no found previous research on the positionality or experience of people born as a result of war-related sexual violence. Based on the characteristics of the ongoing conflict—that I will discuss in the next chapter, the lack of presence in the institutional public realm of the category of children born of war, and the tensions their physical presence may represent in their communities, my research frames the emergence of narratives about them within the consolidation of the culture of terror, the continuum of violence against women, politics of childhood, and the social meaning associated to the identity of the biological father.

# Chapter 2

## Dialogical Landscapes and Social Sites: Methodology and Context

Very often research starts with something that we saw, something that we experienced, and then, it is throughout the ethnographic exercise that we encounter the many silences that are, in different levels and with different intensities, embedded in the research. The story of my research starts not with something that was seen or said, but with silence. Back in 2011, when the Colombian media was somehow more willing to cover news about wartime sexual violence in the country, I was reading one of the many stories of women and girls that appeared in the newspapers. Although the particularities of the story escaped my memory long ago, what I do remember is that the rape of one of the women resulted in pregnancy. It was most probably not the first time that I had read these mentions as part of the testimonies of women, and yet it was the first time I realised that I had never seen any stories about children born of war in Colombia. With time, that lack of coverage, together with the many silences that I have found around these children over the years, have turned those initial thoughts into an academic question that has presented many methodological challenges. How to approach the gendered human experiences of suffering, survival, and resistance without creating other forms of violence? How to do research with and about people whose existence seems to be surrounded by silence, invisibility, and concealment? In this chapter I present how my research has been shaped by absences, emotions, ethical concerns, and an ethnographic conviction. This chapter is a dialogue between the imagined geographical and social landscape of my research that I configured from a distance, with the lived landscape I experienced during fieldwork, my interpretation of it, and the methodological tools that help apprehend those historical and social sites.

I used a multi-methods approach in order to identify and understand the different social processes through which information about children born of war has become part of local and institutional narratives in Colombia. Between December 2015 and June 2016, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in two rural Afro-Colombian communities located in the north of the department of Cauca. In these communities, paramilitaries operated for five years and children were born as a result of war-time sexual violence. While in the communities, I conducted participatory observation, semi-structured interviews with men (n=6) and women (n= 17), and five social cartography workshops with women (n=21) and men (n=7). Bearing in mind that my research is not about the embodied experience of children born of war but about the narratives that are produced and reproduced about them, I did not work directly with the children. In that sense, their voice is absent from my analysis and writing exercise. I also conducted ethnographic content analysis of the following written sources: Colombian online media, Colombian legislation that guides transitional justice processes, and legal and institutional documents such as testimonies of war-time sexual violence survivors and official reports issued by government agencies. I complemented the ethnographic content analysis with semi-structured interviews with scholars and representatives of the Colombian government, NGOs, and agencies whose work address the war-related experiences of women and children (n=13) at the local, regional, and national level.

In the combination of written, oral, and graphic sources that I consulted throughout the research—and in the specific absences I encountered in them—I found traces of the emergence of children born of war in the social realities that are produced through war. However, the sources I approached through ethnographic content analysis had a more central role in my understanding of the institutional explanatory framings that configure the realities where the discourse of human rights and transitional justice

operate. The ethnographic fieldwork in the communities, in that sense, was fundamental in my understanding of the social processes and frameworks through which the physical presence of children born of war, and their identities, has been granted meaning at the local level. The conversation between the different methods allowed me to identify the emergence of information about the children within different framings of explanation in both the public institutional realm and at the local level. At the same time, I was able to place those pieces of information—and in many cases the absence of information—within the various tensions and negotiations among the cultural, political, and socio-legal dimensions that define the logics, categories, values, and technologies that people use to apprehend the world around them.

With the purpose to establish an active conversation between the ethnographic exercise, the methods that I used throughout the research, and the social, institutional, and geographical landscapes that those tools helped me address, in the first part of this chapter I introduce the local and national contexts in which I conducted fieldwork. I continue by placing myself in the field to discuss the challenges I encountered in the process of finding access to the information, my own positionality in the field, and the ethical implications of conducting research in contexts shaped by economic violence and the violence of the armed conflict. I adhere to a reflective practice that acknowledges that research can also produce and reproduce violence by approaching people's testimonies as commodities and not being willing to read the meaning that is embedded in silence. As part of this, I present the methodological strategy that I assumed to explore narratives about children born of war without single them out or drawing attention to them that could represent a risk to their well-being or their mother's, and the limitations this brings to my research. In the next section of the chapter I introduce the ethnographic tools that allowed me to place myself in the social spaces of the communities and, instead of

looking for fragmented information, how I sought to understand experience and meaning. In that section I also develop how ethnographic content analysis helped me approach the narratives produced in the institutional public realm where the media and the human rights and transitional justice actors operate.

**Reading the cartography of the Colombian armed conflict and locating Buenos Aires**

The flag of Buenos Aires is composed of two horizontal bands. The upper band is divided into three perpendicular equal parts. The first is green and, in the description offered in the official website of the municipality, is said to represent hope for a better future. The second is white and it symbolises the peace that should govern all national territory, and the third, which is yellow, represents the mineral and vegetable wealth of the soil. The lower band is all red. In the description presented in the official website of the municipality it is said to represent the love people have for their hometown, Buenos Aires. In a different narrative, red in the national flag symbolises the blood offered during the independence campaign against Spain. I cannot tell when or how the flag in Buenos Aires was presented in terms of ideas of hope, peace, and love. However, as a symbol of the constant negotiations that political communities undertake in the definition of their foundational narratives, the flag of Buenos Aires can be read as a collage of the historical tensions and processes that underpin people's struggles to narrate their own story. Altogether, the flag—with its narratives—represents the past, the present and the constant configuration of the imagined future of this heterogeneous community with the overlapping histories of extractive economies, state abandonment, the violence of war, and their struggle to survive and resist.

Map of Colombia with the department of Cauca in red. Image taken from google maps.

Map of the department of Cauca with the municipality of Buenos Aires in red. Imagen taken from Wikipedia.

Buenos Aires is a municipality[2] located at the north of the department of Cauca. It shares borders to the East with the municipality of Santander de Quilichao, to the West with the municipalities of Suarez, Lopez de Micay, and Buenaventura, to the North with the municipalities of Jamundi and Buenaventura (both belong to the neighbour department of Valle del Cauca), and to the South with the municipalities of Suarez and Morales. Administratively, Buenos Aires is divided into eight rural areas: El Ceral, El Porvenir, Honduras, La Balsa, Paloblanco, San Ignacio, el Naya, and Timba. Its average temperature is 22º C and its administrative centre, the town of Buenos Aires, is located at 1200 above sea level. The distance between the town of Buenos Aires and Popayan (the largest city of the department of Cauca) is 115 kilometres, and the nearest city, Cali, in the department of Valle del Cauca, is 64 kilometres away. Although Buenos Aires is connected to the neighbouring municipalities by roads, access to the area is restricted by the poor state of the infrastructure and limited public transport. During the rainy season landslides are very common and only since 2015 has the main road of access to the

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[2] Administratively, Colombia is divided in *departamentos* and each of those is divided in *municipios,* municipalities. In total, there are 32 *departamentos* and 1.123 municipalities across the country.

municipality been paved. From the moment of the foundation of Buenos Aires in 1536, gold mining attracted Spanish colonisers and *mestizos*, and with them, this land witnessed the arrival of thousands of African slaves brought to work in the gold mines. Nowadays, Afro-Colombians are the largest part of the population in Buenos Aires, followed by indigenous Nasa Páez, and *mestizos*. In 2016 the total population of Buenos Aires was estimated in 32,645, from which 1,863 lived in the administrative centre and 30,782 in the rural areas (Buenos Aires, 2017).

Economically, gold mining remains one of the main sources of income for the municipality, together with agriculture (Buenos Aires, 2017). With multinational corporations disputing access to mineral resources since the first decades of the XXth century, and a state that although absent has imposed macro projects like the construction of the Salvajina dam in 1985, struggles for land have defined the history of Buenos Aires (Ng'weno, 2007). Indigenous Nasa Páez and Afro-Colombians have fought against the dispossession of their territory and the recognition of the rights they are entitled to as ethnic groups according to the 1991 Colombian Constitution. Social and political organisation has advanced historical claims over ancestral land, and in the case of indigenous Nasa Páez it has resulted in the recognition of two *resguardos* (autonomous indigenous territories): La Paila-Naya and Las Delicias. In the case of Afro-Colombians those political struggles have resulted in the recognition of territories like Alsacia and in the recognition of *Consejos Comunitarios* as local bodies of governance.

The chain of mountains in the north of Cauca, and Buenos Aires in particular, has historically had the presence of different armed groups. Due to its strategic geographical location, the absence of the state, and the poor infrastructure to access the region, the mountains of Buenos Aires have been used as a mobility path to transport war-supplies and traffic drugs (Muñoz, 2010). In order to understand the dynamics of war and

resistance in the area, Guzman and Rodriguez (2014) propose a framework that focuses on three moments in history. First, from 1990 to the mid-1990s; this moment relates to the geographical expansion of guerrilla groups, in particular the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN), and the increase of coca crops in the region. The second moment, between 2000 and 2004, was defined by the consolidation of a paramilitary regime and the arrival to the region of the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC), Bloque Calima* (United Self-Defenses of Colombia (AUC), Calima Bloc). Finally, the middle of the first decade of the XXI century to 2010, was framed by the overlapping activities of guerrilla, paramilitary organisations that emerged after the 2004 demobilisation of the AUC Calima Bloc, and the increasing presence of the state and social movements (Guzman and Rodriguez, 2014).

Interactions between the communities and armed groups in the 1980s and 90s were of different natures. On the one hand, in 1986 FARC perpetuated the first massive displacement in the region, and extortions and threats were common practices, especially against owners of large tracts of land. On the other hand, FARC also sought to assume the role of authority in the public realm of the municipality by regulating local dynamics. In this sense, they intervened in aspects of social life like disputes between neighbours and took on governmental roles such as the regulation of public transport costs. Through the use of violent coercion against members of the local government, FARC fostered the development of public works, strengthened oversight of public spending, and stood against the intervention of multinational mining (Guzman and Rodriguez, 2014). At the national level, the end of the 90s witnessed the transformation of the paramilitary organization in Colombia. It went from referring to armed groups operating at the local and regional levels, to the configuration of a national project with political, social and

economic goals. This was evidenced, for example, in the involvement of the paramilitary organisation in politics supporting candidates through local and national elections, its increased influence in the public administration of education and health programs in different national territories, and in the geographical expansion towards the South-western part of the country—traditionally controlled by FARC and where Buenos Aires is located (GMH, 2013). This gradual growth of the paramilitary project, together with the continuity of guerrilla presence across the national territory, and a constant struggle among the different armed groups to consolidate control over strategic paths, made 2002 the year in which the armed conflict reached its highest level of expansion (GMH, 2013).

As part of the project of paramilitary expansion, between 1998 and 2002 the AUC Calima Bloc disputed FARC in its control over the regional chain of production of cocaine in the South-western part of the country (GMH, 2013). In the context of these disputes, both organisations committed atrocities against the population, and among those, paramilitaries perpetuated the 1999 El Tigre massacre in the region of Putumayo, the 2000 Llorente massacre in the region of Narino, and the 2001 Naya massacre within the territory of Buenos Aires (GMH, 2013). On the 11th March 2000, Cesar Negret Mosquera, then Governor of Cauca, received a statement from Ever Veloza, alias H.H., paramilitary commander of the Calima Bloc, announcing the beginning of their operations in the region (Muñoz, 2010). In that context, there are reports that in May 2000 a group of 54 paramilitaries marched from the department of Valle del Cauca, through the town of Timba, towards Buenos Aires, to install their training base from where they operated to the north of Cauca (*Verdad Abierta*, 2012). Their arrival in the region marked the beginning of years of selective assassinations of members of the community who were thought to be aligned with guerilla groups, widespread sexual violence, impositions of curfews, restrictions over people's mobility, among other forms

of violence and terror. Between 2000 and 2005 paramilitaries, who by then were around two thousand combatants, imposed economic, political and social control over the region and the population, causing the displacement of an estimate of 8,000 people (*Verdad Abierta*, 2014).

After the process of paramilitary demobilization between 2004 and 2005, guerrilla groups (FARC and ELN) reassumed their presence in parts of Buenos Aires (Guzman and Rodriguez, 2014), disputing control with new forms of paramilitaries organizations (Unidad de Víctimas, 2013). At the same time, gold extraction, and weak institutions to control it, drew illegal and legal organizations to the region (*Verdad Abierta*, 2014). However, Afro-Colombian and Indigenous Nasa Paez have strengthened their own agendas and resistance strategies, in particular in relation to land-related issues (Guzman and Rodriguez 2014) and gold mining (*Verdad Abierta*, 2014).

In the following part of this section I will introduce the two communities in Buenos Aires where I conducted ethnographic fieldwork. The community of Honduras and the community of San Miguel. Although these two rural Afro-Colombian communities are part of the municipality of Buenos Aires, their experiences are defined by different ecological, economic, cultural, and political relationships.
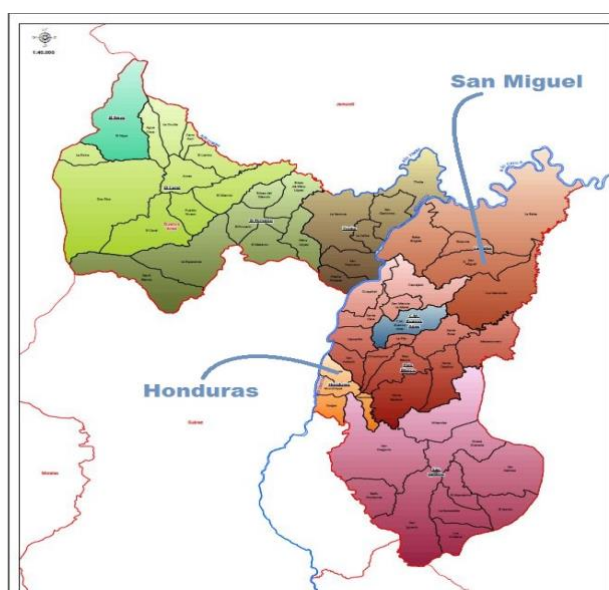


Map of the municipality of Buenos Aires with the communities of San Miguel and Honduras

Honduras, Buenos Aires (Cauca), 2016

Honduras is located in the mountains very close to the border between the municipality of Buenos Aires and the municipality of Suarez, and in the vicinity of the main gold mining area in Buenos Aires, Cerro Catalina. Its proximity with Cerro Catalina, also known as Cerro Teta, has made gold mining one of the central economic activities for Honduras. Because of the great richness of rivers and creeks emerging from Cerro Catalina, traditional mining is done by men and women by panning, and in the mountains through *filón*, when gold is found attached to rocks.
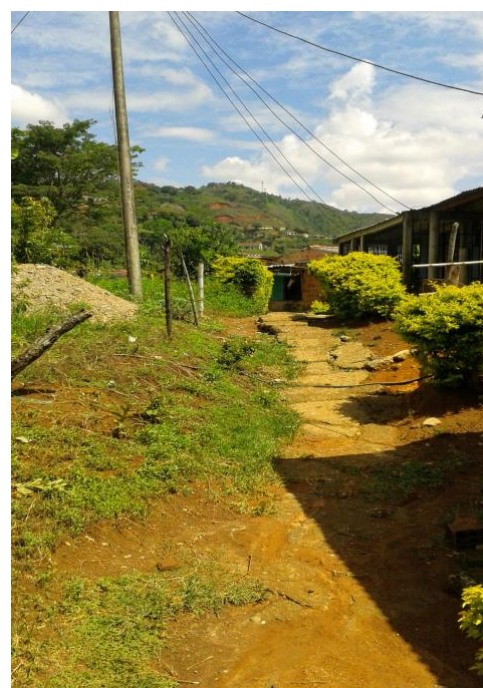


Honduras, Buenos Aires (Cauca), 2016

Nowadays, the presence of multinationals mining in the area has had devastating cultural and ecological consequences, and has transformed the social relationships and practices

in the community; as traditional mining is made more difficult young people, especially men, have found in the mines of the multinationals their main opportunity for jobs (Quintana, 2015). Agriculture is the other main economic activity for the community. It is developed by men and women and it takes place in the *fincas,* which are the family lands located deeper in the mountains. Among the most common crops are corn, coffee, cassava, plantain, avocado, and cacao. This traditional system of farming has been affected by industrial mining, the expansion of the monoculture production of sugar cane in the valleys, and illegal coca crops. At the time when paramilitaries had a strong presence in Buenos Aires, they established a base in the neighbour community of Munchique at the top of the mountain. Honduras was in the transit path paramilitaries used to access their base, and although the community was in constant contact with them, their everyday life and relationships were not as disrupted by their presence as other communities in the municipality.



Honduras, Buenos Aires (Cauca), 2016.

San Miguel, Buenos Aires (Cauca). Bus Stop to the main entrance. 2016.

San Miguel is located on a different mountain, at approximately 1000 metres above sea level, on the way to the administrative centre of the municipality, the town of Buenos Aires. Thanks to the recently (2015) paved access road from Santander de Quilichao to the administrative centre, the distance of 10 kilometres between San Miguel and the town of Buenos Aires can be travelled by bus or car in 20 minutes. The size of San Miguel is estimated at 627 hectares and its population is of around 350 people. Gold mining is an important economic activity in the community.



San Miguel, Buenos Aires (Cauca). 2016

Throughout fieldwork I did not find references to traditional mining but heard about two sites of illegal mining owned by outsiders that hired men and women from the community. However, traditional farming in the mountains remains the main economic

activity with crops like cassava, plantain, coffee, and sugar cane. Another economic activity in which a large part of the community is involved is burning wood and selling charcoal. Small scale pig breeding is common and is usually done by each family outside their house. Fishing used to be done mainly for the consumption of the household, but mining has had devastating consequences on the fish population and the quality of the water. At the time of my fieldwork, one source of concern for the community was the construction of a large chicken farm. The owner was an outsider who had slowly bought land from locals and was building a farm to raise around 5000 chickens. With the construction of the farm locals had seen the diversion of the creek and people were afraid of the negative consequences that such a large amount of chickens could have on the quality of the air and water. In terms of educational availability, San Miguel has a rural school that covers primary education.



San Miguel, Buenos Aires (Cauca). Main access road. 2016

To access the school from the main road that connects San Miguel with the town of Buenos Aires, and where the bus stop is, people must walk for 20 minutes on a dirt road. At the time of my fieldwork around 50 children attended classes with three teachers in charge of all the levels and subjects. However, one of the teachers had been on sickness leave for a couple of months leaving the other two teachers in charge of all the courses. After graduating from primary school, most of the boys and girls register at the school in La Balsa, approximately 15 minutes by car from San Miguel. The school is located in front of a small store and el *quiosco*, which is a space for social gathering—mainly on Sundays, where people drink, dance and where cockfighting takes place—whenever it is organised.

Those three places represent the main points for social gathering. The school is often used for workshops and meetings; despite not being in the best of shape it provides the best conditions for a more formal or comfortable setting. The bamboo benches under the trees in front of the store are often used by people to rest when coming back from work. San Miguel is divided in different rural areas that are connected by dirt roads. In the rainy season it is common for the dirt roads to become inaccessible and for the community bamboo made bridges built to cross the two creeks to fall.



San Miguel, Buenos Aires (Cauca). Bamboo-made bridge. 2016.

In July 2000 a group of the AUC, Calima Bloc established the training and storage base in the rural school of San Miguel from where they would operate to the north of the department of Cauca. At first, paramilitaries were from other regions of the country; mainly rural *mestizo* and Afro-Colombian communities. With time they recruited men, women, and children from area, including people from San Miguel. From the moment of their arrival until their demobilisation in December 2004, paramilitaries imposed a confinement in the community; people saw their mobility restricted and were forced to live under paramilitary ruling. With the purpose of assuming complete control over the population, the groceries, and the medicines that accessed the community, from the beginning of the occupation they militarised the landscape by installing checkpoints in the main entrance to the community and in the dirt roads that connect the different rural areas. As part of the total control they assumed, paramilitaries imposed rules on what kind of medicines people could carry, restricted the amount of food and supplies people could buy, and imposed a curfew. Forced nudity and mistreatment with racist language was common in the checkpoints for women and men, as well as the detention and disappearance of people who did not have their national identity cards with them or who were suspected of being guerrilla sympathisers. Paramilitaries gave the order to sleep with the doors of the houses open so that they could come inside to make use of the place as if it was theirs. People tell stories of paramilitaries sleeping in the houses, watching TV, eating their food, destroying their crops, killing the animals, burning fences to make bonfires. Teachers in the school received the order not to interrupt the classes. However, they had no autonomy over the space and they were under constant surveillance. Every day, teachers had to ask for permission so that they could open the classrooms and classes took place in the midst of armoury and military training. Paramilitaries assigned tasks to boys and girls who were attending the school at the time,

like transporting weapons and other supplies, bringing messages between groups of paramilitaries, or watching roads. Women and girls, for their part, were forced to cook for paramilitaries and wash their clothes. Many children were forced to drop out of school as a result of fear, threats, and displacement of their families. Sexual violence, and the threat of it, became part of the everyday life of people, especially women and girls. Besides the forced nudity that happened primarily at the checkpoints, other forms of sexual violence that have been reported are rape and forced partnership. Sexual harassment was part of the everyday interaction women endured inside their houses, on the dirt roads, in the creeks where they collected water and took baths. As a result of this regime of violence that lasted almost five years, some people managed to flee and the ones that were around stopped working the land and raising animals; hunger became part of the everyday life of families.



San Miguel, Buenos Aires (Cauca), 2016

**Placing myself in the field: On access, positionality, and ethics**

The widespread occurrence of sexual violence associated to the armed conflict across Colombia, together with the lack of information on people born as a result of that violence perpetrated by paramilitaries, guerrillas, and government forces, represented the first challenge in terms of identifying one place to conduct ethnographic fieldwork. In order to solve this situation, I turned to reports issued by governmental institutions and NGOs working with war-affected populations (especially children and women), and conducted a preliminary review of online newspaper articles from 1997 to 2014 in *El Tiempo*, one of the two national newspapers. The aim was not to conduct a thorough analysis of the media, but to gather initial information that would allow me to get a sense of the type of coverage that the plight of people born as a consequence of war-related sexual violence was receiving, and to map potential places to conduct fieldwork. Although based on this review I could not identify information I could use as a criterion to prioritize one particular place over another, this review led me to the article published by *Semana* magazine in 2010 titled '*Los Paraquitos*' (The Little Paramilitaries) that I presented in the introduction. Although the article does not disclose the specific name of the town, it included information that allowed me to unveil the setting: the municipality of Buenos Aires. As this place was the only clear reference I had found until that moment of the presence of these individuals as a collective subject that emerges from the realities of the armed conflict, I decided to pursue that clue.

In the initial stage, my instinct was to contact local organisations and NGOs working with armed conflict-related topics in that specific part of the country. The plan included starting a conversation with them that would allow me to be part of the organisations' activities and, from there, employ a research strategy based on participant observation. However, the lack of presence of NGOs in this specific municipality,

together with a very poor communication infrastructure, prevented me from initiating a substantive dialogue from England. In December 2015 I arrived in Bogota, Colombia's capital city, and once there I was able to talk with two NGOs whose headquarters were in Bogota and that at some point had projects with sexual violence survivors in Buenos Aires. Our initial exchange was not very promising: 'Excellent idea for research. Unfortunately, at the moment you won't be able to travel there,' I was told. The situation preventing my travel was that there was a rumour; paramilitaries had come back to recover weapons and money they had hidden in *caletas*. They had given an ultimatum to people they did not recognise as locals and forced them to leave; rumours were people were terrified.

Fear shaped my research in ways that cannot be underestimated. Geographically, it prompted me to live in Cali and not in Buenos Aires. The implications of this decision imposed a limit on the ethnographic exercise of the everyday life of the people I worked with. Although I travelled regularly to the communities—almost every day by the end of the five months of that part of fieldwork in June 2016—there is a clear limitation to the familiarity I could obtain due to not spending the night and the fact that people did not have a place to easily find me. The journey from my house in Cali to Buenos Aires, nevertheless, was enlightening. It unveiled isolation, fragile infrastructure, militarised landscapes, and the transit from the white/*mestizo* urban to the Indigenous and Afro-Colombian rural. Under those circumstances, commuting takes a toll that also affects research. Waking up at 4 in the morning, embarking on three hour journeys (each way), and changing transportation several times without having clear timetables under the sun and rain is exhausting, and at points, it affected my personal wellbeing and interactions with people. The rumours that I had heard in Bogota about the return of paramilitaries were not a reflection of the experiences of these communities when I was doing

fieldwork. They were a reflection of dynamics and experiences of the recent past, and the constant expectation of people from these communities that the nightmare of those years could come back unannounced.

It was not until about a month after my first visit to the municipality of Buenos Aires that I travelled to the specific communities where I conducted most of my fieldwork. Through a human rights lawyer who was based in Bogota but who had lived and worked extensively in the region of Cauca I met Ruth, one of the women who, because of her active role in the local scenarios that belong to the architecture of transitional justice in Buenos Aires, has gained regional recognition as a leader in the struggle to seek redress for women victims of the armed conflict. The few references I had found about children born as a result of war-related sexual violence in that part of the country—like the magazine article that led me to the location of Buenos Aires—included mentions of the local organisation Ruth represented and to their efforts to raise questions about the situation of stigmatisation those children were experiencing. I met with Ruth several times throughout that first month of fieldwork. We met in her family house—that was located in a community in the valley, in the town of Buenos Aires that works as the administrative centre of the municipality, in the nearby town of Santander de Quilichao— the second biggest urban centre of Cauca after Popayan. In our long conversations Ruth shared with me stories of violence, resistance, and political organisation. Stories of how, since she was very young, she found inspiration in the struggle of others to resist the violence of the government—illustrated in her story in the dispossession of land to build the Salvajina Dam—and the violence of the armed groups to gain control over land, resources, and bodies, particularly women's bodies. Since the moment of our first encounter she explained that she was not from the same community where those children labelled as *paraquitos* were from. She knew them well, however, as her organisation, that

is constituted by people from different communities in Buenos Aires and with different experiences of the armed conflict, had done close work with two national NGOs that had implemented projects with women survivors of war-related sexual violence from that community.

She made it very clear from the beginning that we had to be careful on how to approach that community; their experience of paramilitary confinement had made them suspicious of outsiders and their experience with the bureaucracies of transitional justice had made them sceptical of the purpose of sharing their stories. My conversations with Ruth, in this sense, were conversations about the ethical and political questions on what social sciences could offer to people whose stories are framed by historical, economic, and armed oppression. In the face of the violence imposed by capital and state abandonment, I was reminded that the production of knowledge does not alleviate the everyday struggle of people to feed themselves and their children, to afford medical attention in a neoliberal system that understands health as a commodity while silencing rural and traditional practices, or does not bring justice for the years of suffering and impunity. This recognition calls for a reflective practice that beyond conforming with ethical requirements of the University[3], is committed to avoiding the reproduction (or production) of violent dynamics and relationships. Informed by what Alejandro Castillejo (2005a, 2005b) calls extractive industries of testimonies, in what follows I address how I sought to assume a methodologically critical reflexivity that did not seek to "break" the silence but to read its different textures.

The development of an economy of extraction of testimonies, Castillejo (2005a, 2005b) notes, is mobilised by groups of intermediaries who have claimed expertise in the studies of phenomena of violence and the effects it has had on individuals and

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[3] I obtained Ethical Approval of Research Involving Human Participants from the University of Essex in November 2015, before the beginning of fieldwork in Colombia.

communities. Histories of violence and oppression produce and perpetuate different kinds of silences that can be entrenched in people's bodies and universes of meanings, and that can be installed around events, relationships, individuals or groups of people. Silence, argues Castillejo, can also be the reactive agency of people in response to subtractive practices that extract testimonies from their owners, their sites of experience, and assume ownership over them—as if they were commodities—in the name of, for instance, production of knowledge or dissemination of hidden information. In his research on the apartheid in South Africa and the reconstruction of memories of emblematic cases, Castillejo (2005a) describes how the interactions between people who have endured violence and "experts" were assumed to be an act of social empathy that could acknowledge the historically denied pain people had experienced. However, the 'irony of recognition,' as Castillejo (2005a) calls it, is that "experts" have the power to re-inscribe violence through research practices that are unable—and unwilling—to read the fabric of existential silences and that, at the same time, fragment people's narratives and extract those fragments as commodities.

Guided by this approach, while in the communities I did not interview children born of war but focused on the narratives that were produced about them in the everyday local context. To date I have not found any other research in Colombia that focuses on the specific experience of children born of war. However, studies from other contexts show that they are often stigmatised and that their human rights are compromised in a number of ways due to the circumstances of their conception (Carpenter, 2010; Mertus, 2007; Goodhart, 2007). With this in mind, seeking to involve these children in the research under the criterion of "being born of sexual violence" could have singled them out, reinforced stigmatization and put them at further risk. In addition, during the first stages of their life these children often do not know the context of their conception (Mertus,

2007). Although in the case of Buenos Aires I had found the aforementioned magazine article exposing their presence and revealing how they were being labelled as *paraquitos* (*Semana*, 2010), some of them–who are now between 11 and 15 years old–are not aware of who their father is or the circumstances of their conception. In other cases, the mothers do not want to draw any attention to them. With the commitment to avoid research practices that could represent violence or any form of harm to the children, I guided my fieldwork through the category of "war-affected children" instead of "children born of war".

In the case of sexual violence survivors, and particularly in the case of the mothers of people born as a result of war-time sexual violence, understanding silence as a constitutive part of social remembrance, storytelling, and their agencies, prompted me to extend to them the invitation to share their stories with me, and respect their decision to not participate in the interviews. In this sense, I must state that the voices of people born as a result of wartime sexual violence do not appear in the text of my thesis, nor do the individual voices of their mothers. I acknowledge that any research that seeks to understand the experience of people born as a result of wartime sexual violence is incomplete without the presence, in first person, of these individuals. To explore the ways in which these individual's identities are negotiated it is essential to acknowledge their experience and agency. However, committed ethical research must not impose its own pace on the communities, and I believe that the participation of both the mothers and the individuals born of war should be the result of long-term participatory research. I then recognise the limitations of what Castillejo (2005a) refers to as a non-polyphonic research and writing style, and I emphasise that at this stage of my research I am interested in understanding the social construction of knowledge about these children.

In terms of anonymity, and following Nancy Scheper-Hughes's (1992) decision to not use a pseudonym for the *Alto do Cruzeiro* because the social oppression of shantytowns makes them already socially invisible, I do not anonymize the municipality of Buenos Aires nor the communities of San Miguel or Honduras. Structural socio-economic oppression has imposed anonymity on these communities and, at the same time, those structural systems have endorsed years of impunity and terror. By not using a pseudonym I attempt, at least to the extent of my writing exercise, to be aware of those power relations and avoid reproducing those forms of violence. In one of the first meetings I attended between the *Unidad para las Víctimas* and the community of San Miguel, *Don* Efraín[4], who is the brick maker of the community, raised his hand and made a demand that I would hear many more times from different people during my stay there: 'We want people from outside the community to know that this is a different time for San Miguel. That we are good working people. We want people to come.' As I would learn throughout my interactions with people from this part of the country, the years of paramilitary occupation in San Miguel and operations in the area tainted the representation of this community and its people with an association with paramilitaries and the violence they imposed. In the case of Colombia, a history of impunity and negligence has created static images that, as with the stories that circulated in Bogota about paramilitaries coming back, prevents people from the possibility of re-writing their present and future. Using the actual names of these places responds to an ethical commitment to show that the realities of these communities are dynamic and they are not restricted by the violence they have experienced. However, I do not use the real names of people I worked with. The presence of armed groups in this region has been severe and has left marks on the population and the social and geographic landscape. Although the

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[4] *Don* Efraín explicitly demanded that I used his name and information in the document that I wrote for the *Unidad para las Víctimas* and in my thesis.

situation of violence has changed, its presence remains embodied in men and women, and also in dynamics associated with, for example, illegal mining and coca production. In relation to people born as a result of war-related sexual violence and their mothers, and with the purpose of avoiding further violence or of singling them out, I do not provide precise information about how many they are or details about their conception.

Historical processes of state and economic violence, combined with the violence imposed by armed groups, find in the political economy of victimhood another layer of aggression. In the social strains that are fuelled by the overlapping presence of all of those forces with their machineries, at some point within my first weeks of fieldwork I understood that the relationship between Ruth's organisation and some local leaders in San Miguel—the community Ruth was referring to—was underpinned by tensions and economic and political interests. It was through Maria Fernanda Tovar, newly appointed director of the health department in Buenos Aires, that I found a path to the communities where I conducted most of my fieldwork. With an interest in encouraging research in the municipality, Maria Fernanda suggested that I should visit communities with diverse experiences and located in different areas of Buenos Aires. She contacted me with Hernan, one of the leaders of the *junta de acción comunal* (local unity of governance) of the community of Honduras, and with Astrid, one of the leaders of the *junta de acción comunal* of San Miguel.

**The living fieldwork and the tools to approach it**

Within a self-reflective sociological practice, and acknowledging the limitations that my stay of over 5 months in Buenos Aires implied, I sought to engage in collaborative spaces of exchange with the communities of Honduras and San Miguel, an exchange that did not necessarily focus on their experiences of violence and that

respected the pace, agency, and silence of people. Following the idea of becoming an "ethnographer of violence" (Goldstein, 2014), I guided my ethnographic exercise not by a quest for violent events, but instead a search to identify community narratives—or the absence of those—logics, and dynamics around people who were born as a result of war-related sexual violence. This approach allowed me to assume a broader framework in my attempt to understand the experience of the communities. Instead of assuming research practices that "squeezed" fragmented information about individuals born as a consequence of war-related sexual violence, my ethnographic practice was focused on identifying presences and absences in the narratives that were produced about those individuals, and reading both as part of the interconnected fabric of relationships and meaning to which presence and absence belong.

With this in mind, I conducted participant observation framed by Pilar Riaño-Alcalá and Erin Baines' conceptualisation of the living archive (2011), which claims that the archive goes beyond evidentiary documents and it 'is embedded in the day-to-day lives and surroundings of the survivor-witness and inscribed on the bodies of tellers and listeners' (Riaño-Alcalá and Baines, 2011: 413). In contexts where war has cracked and reshaped the social order, the aim of gaining access to social relations through participant observation (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; O'Reilly, 2012) requires a conscious attempt to perceive beyond words and see outside the frames of legal documentation. In historically situated processes people become 'living sites of storing knowledge about the past through their bodies, storytelling, performance and movement' (Riaño-Alcalá and Baines, 2011: 416). In this sense, Riaño-Alcalá and Baines (2011) argue, people document and communicate their experiences of violence and resistance through emplaced acts of witnessing—like songs, scars, and memorialisation of places—that do not transfer fragmented information but meaning. Through participant observation, in this

sense, I was not seeking to position myself in the communities so that I could have access to specific groups of people—for example women who gave birth to children conceived in the context of paramilitary sexual violence or the children themselves—but I sought instead only to place myself in a social space that allowed me to reflect on the experience and meaning that is emplaced, embodied, and inscribed in the landscape.

My involvement with the communities of Honduras and San Miguel was of different natures. In the case of Honduras, I participated with the NGO *Tierra de Paz* and local leaders from the *junta de acción communal* of the community in a transgenerational project that sought to involve children and teenagers with the re-appropriation of different sets of traditional knowledges. With San Miguel, I collaborated with the process of collective reparation that the community is undergoing, and that is coordinated by the governmental agency, the *Unidad para la Atención y Reparación Integral a las Víctimas* (Unity for the Attention and Integral Reparation of Victims, hereinafter *Unidad para las Víctimas)*. As part of the process of collective reparation, the *Unidad para las Víctimas* needs to produce a document with a reconstruction of the dynamics of the armed conflict in the community and its consequences for the people of San Miguel. In that sense, my collaboration consisted of working with the community to produce an initial version of that document that could then contribute towards the advancement of the process. At the end of my fieldwork I handed that document to Jimena Yasno, the *Unidad para las Víctimas* employee who is in charge of coordinating the process in San Miguel, and with whom I worked closely throughout my fieldwork.

Although I conducted fieldwork in both communities, and my involvement with both contributed to my understanding of the narratives that are produced and reproduced about people born as a result of war-related sexual violence in Buenos Aires, I based most of my analysis on the experiences and interactions I had with people in San Miguel; it

was there, after all, that the collective subject, labelled at some point as *los paraquitos*, had emerged. The experiences of the multiple forms of violence that combined in San Miguel have not been the focus of academic research, the stories of its people have received very limited coverage in the national media—with few exceptions like the magazine article I presented in the introduction. National and regional NGOs working with war-related issues have also not prioritised the community to implement projects—also with some exceptions, like two national NGOs that have implemented psychosocial and legal projects with women. However, in relation to the official policies of redress in Buenos Aires, through the implementation of the process of collective reparation, San Miguel has been placed at the core of the architecture of transitional justice and its bureaucratic pace.

Participant observation helped me explore the emergence of narratives and the social relationships that take place in both communities in different ways. To begin with, it made me visible for the communities, and although at the beginning of my stay I presented my project and people knew about my research, I was able to engage with activities that did not necessarily have anything to do with my specific project. As I was familiarising myself with the material landscape and the social relationships, my presence was also becoming more familiar for people. This dynamic helped me identify, in a way that sought to be as undisruptive as possible, historical, cultural, social sites that could store knowledge about individuals who were born as a result of war-related sexual violence, and the different shapes that communicating that knowledge could assume. In this sense, by participating in the organization and delivery of activities in the communities, and through my interactions with people, I was able to explore some of the dimensions of the local framework of meaning for understanding key elements in my research such as gender relations, identity, notions of family, war-related sexual violence,

and negotiations about narratives of the past, present, and future of the communities. In that context, I was able to start contextualising the emergence of information about people born as a result of war-related sexual violence—or the absence of that information—within the local universe of meaning.

Considering the sociological and ethnographic nature of my research, and acknowledging that research in other contexts shows how the circumstances—and political and cultural policies—surrounding the conception of these people have fostered violence towards them (Mertus, 2007), I sought not to guide my interactions in the communities by a specific interest in "children born of war" but by the intersection between "the experiences of women in the context of the armed conflict" and "children affected by war." Participant observation, in this sense, allowed me to approach some of the diverse experiences of children and their families in the context of the armed conflict, and to explore the emergence of narratives about people born as a consequence of wartime sexual violence without drawing the kind of attention to them that could signify a risk for their well-being or their mothers'. Following this, while in the communities I did not initially enquire directly about the presence or plight of people born of war. When I identified individuals who were born as a result of war-related sexual violence (as a consequence of my observation or because people explicitly stated so), I did not foster interactions with those children outside of their group nor did I formulate questions in the context of the activities that could place further attention on them. Further, participant observation, and my involvement with local leaders, the NGO, and *la Unidad para las Víctimas* created an initial social network from which I was able to develop further relations with men and women of different ages in both communities. This allowed me to assess whether contacting certain members of the community—like the mothers of these

children—could have negative implications for them, and under which circumstances it could take place (Mertus, 2007).

Semi-structured interviews in Buenos Aires were an extension of participant observation (Goldstein 2014). This implies that interviews were 'a more formal kind of conversation that occurs in the context of an ongoing relationship between interviewer and interviewee' (Goldstein, 2014: 11). Furthermore, they were attempts to understand how members of the community experience their world and, as such, they were informed by information collected in advance and my own observations while in the field (Bourdieu, 1996). With this in mind, semi-structured interviews allowed for a more flexible agenda than structured guides, which is essential when exploring sensitive issues. Being able to shape the questions and the rhythm of the interaction to the specific context of each interviewee contributed to the trust relationship, the well-being of both the interviewee and interviewer, and the gathering of better data. This required being attentive of boundaries and when it was, for example, better to cut the interview short and, if appropriate, propose a follow-up (Goldstein, 2014). Considering that knowledge in everyday life is socially distributed among different individuals and social groups, and that different stocks of knowledge translate into different sets of practices at various levels (Berger and Luckmann, 1971), I conducted semi-structured interviews (Plummer, 2001) with women (n= 17) and men (n=6) from both communities, and I guided five social cartography workshops (GMH, 2014) with women (n=21) and men (n=7) from San Miguel. Interviewing, as a social relation, produces an impact in the context where it takes place and in whoever participates in it. However, reflexivity throughout the process helped me mitigate the effect this kind of social interaction can have in the information I have collected, in the individuals who participated, and in myself (Bourdieu, 1996).

Semi-structured interviews with members of the communities were mainly guided by the categories of "everyday life" prior-to, during and after the paramilitary occupation, "consequences of the armed conflict," "war-affected children," and "imagined future." In the case of sexual violence survivors, the emphasis of the interactions was placed on their experience as women in the context of the armed conflict and their life prior, during, and after the paramilitary occupation. I did not include the specific topic of "sexual violence" in my guideline and only talked about it if women brought it to the interaction. Through this approach, I intended to avoid reducing women's experience of the armed conflict to sexual violence (Theidon, 2007), while other forms of structural and everyday forms of violence are being normalised (Baaz and Stern, 2013). Furthermore, by not including the category of "sexual violence" in my interviews map, I sought not to impose specific language to describe the experience of women, but instead I allowed them to frame their own experience according to their logics and meanings.

Informed by the work that the *Comisión Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación* (CNRR) and the *Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica*[5] (CNMH) have developed in Colombia in relation to the reconstruction of collective memories of the armed conflict, I guided social cartography workshops in the community of San Miguel. The initiative to conduct the workshops in San Miguel was the result of participatory observation and the understanding of the inhabited landscape as a site of experience and knowledge. The workshops allowed me to approach the social struggles and negotiations the community engages with when narrating the violence and terror they have experienced (GMH, 2013), and identify the emergence of narratives about people born as a result of war-related

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[5] The *Comisión Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación* was created by the Colombian government in the context of the legal framework for the demobilization of paramilitaries (Law 975 of 2005). The commission operated until 2011, when it was replaced by the *Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica*, created in the context of the Victim's and Land Restitution Law (Law 1448 of 2011).

sexual violence—or the absence of them—within those reconstructions. With the purpose of not imposing geographical boundaries on the narratives, and instead aiming to identify the way this rural Afro-descendent community inhabits the territory, I did not provide scale maps but large pieces of paper and other materials (such as colours, markers, magazines, and stickers) for people to create their own narratives of the territory (Chauca, Bustamante and Oviedo, 2004). In addition, acknowledging gender power relations and the history of wartime gender-based violence in the community, I organized workshops for women and men separately (GMH, 2011a). Seven men participated in the creation of one map, and twenty-one women—organized into four different groups—participated in the creation of four maps. Workshops were initially guided by three questions: What is the period of time that you want to reconstruct in the map? What has happened in San Miguel? What are the places/events most significant to understanding the experience of San Miguel? (GMH, 2011b).

The snowballing technique (O'Reilly, 2012) proved to be effective in contacting people within the local and national government, NGOs, and the academy. However, that was not the case with members of the two communities. Throughout their history, armed groups have imposed terror by forcing people to turn on each other. In a context in which pointing at each other has caused suffering and cost human lives, people are suspicious of naming names and it would have been reckless of me to not acknowledge this. In addition, although many people from these communities have already given testimonies as part of their process of individual reparation, people do not tend to talk about that violent past in public. There is fear that that terror can come back again, and people would say 'walls have ears' to refer to the feeling of constant surveillance they have experienced for so many years. There is emotional turmoil and uncertainty about the present and future. During one conversation with Rosario, a woman from San Miguel

with whom I had a very friendly relationship from the beginning of fieldwork, I asked her if she felt I was missing talking with someone. To that she said: 'I could tell you who you should talk to, but it is not my place to tell you. How could I know if they are ready to talk? If they even want to talk? I wouldn't like to know people are talking about me. People don't like that'.

With the aim to explore the construction of discursive realities, the ways they are produced and reproduced, and how they define social realities, I approached official, institutional, and dominant public narratives about people born of war. Weitsman (2007) argues that institutional structures such as armed groups, the media, human rights and transitional justice agencies, and the academy produce and disseminate discourses that through language and narrative, in the case of people born of war, disclose social, cultural, and political negotiations about their identity and positionality. Considering the lack of attention that the situation of people born as a consequence of wartime sexual violence has received among organizations and agencies working with war-affected children and women at the regional and national level, I interviewed representatives of human rights agencies and NGOs operating in the country. In this context, I conducted interviews with scholars and representatives of NGOs and government agencies whose headquarters are based in the cities of Popayan and Bogota, and with representatives of international NGOs and institutions whose work addresses the armed conflict in Colombia (n=13). The semi-structured interviews with them were guided by the categories of: "Consequences of the armed conflict," "Addressing the consequences of the armed conflict," "War-affected children," "Sexual violence survivors," and the specific category of "Children born as a result of sexual violence." These interviews were complemented with the analysis of legal and institutional written sources.

Ethnographic content analysis (Altheide, 1996; Plummer, 2001) allowed me to approach the written sources of online media, legislation, and legal and official documents. Considering that I was looking for information about a subject whose conceptualisation, as a category, remains blurred both for the general public and for people writing and thinking about war-related populations, I placed my attention on the language, subjects, and relationships presented in the bodies of texts. To address the challenge presented by the non-existence of a dominant category to refer to the experience of children born as a result of war-time sexual violence and the lack of coverage about them, I used ethnographic content analysis to contextualise fragmented mentions to the children born of war-related sexual violence. In this sense, for the analysis of the documents my attention was placed on the framework for explanation that was used to construct the storylines where children born of war were included, the way those were constructed, the different subjects that were part of the storylines, and the language in which such subjects and their relationships were represented.

Building upon the preliminary review of online media I conducted in the first stage of the research, and that I presented in the second section of this chapter, I reviewed newspaper articles from 1997 to 2014 in *El Tiempo*, one of the two national newspapers. I selected *El Tiempo* over the other national newspaper *El Espectador* for various reasons. First, *El Tiempo* has not interrupted its daily publications since its foundation in 1911, while in 2011 *El Espectador* went from daily to weekly publications due to a financial crisis, not again becoming a daily publication until May 2008. Second, online access to *El Tiempo*'s articles was comprehensive because the newspaper digitalised its printed publications from 1911. In terms of approaches, both newspapers share similar perspectives as they have traditionally belonged to families closely related to the political and economic elites of the country (Fondevila et.al, 2012). In the preliminary review of

the material I had found that most of the mentions to the children appeared in the section of "politics," in particular in the coverage the newspaper has done on women and the armed conflict. With that in mind, I focused on this section of the newspaper to define the universe of texts[6]. The articles included in the universe of texts were selected through the following combination of words in the title, subheading or main text: *Mujeres* and *Paramilitares* (women, paramilitary), *Mujeres* and *Guerrilleros* (women, guerrilla), *Mujeres* and *Militares* (women, military). In total, this led me to 147 articles, from which 11 articles included mentions to children born as a result of war-time sexual violence.

In terms of legal documents, I also used ethnographic content analysis (Altheide, 1996; Plummer, 2001) to approach, review, and analyse the following documents: first, transcripts of the sessions held in the Colombian Congress and Senate through which the 2011 Victim's and Land Restitution Law was created. In particular, I focused on how the category of "children born of war" was included within the official definition of victim. Second, *informes de riesgo* issued by the Ombudsman's office in relation to Buenos Aires from 2001 to 2009. Third, transcripts of the committee of transitional justice of Buenos Aires from 2008 to 2015, in which actors from different public and private sectors, together with representatives of victim's organizations, discuss issues related to the impact of the armed conflict in Buenos Aires and how to address them. Fourth, testimonies that women from San Miguel have given as part of their process to have access to individual reparations. Those reports, transcripts, and testimonies have given me information to reconstruct part of the background of the history of violence that has taken

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[6] This preliminary review was the basis for a mixed methods review that combined extensive content analysis using MAXQDA 12 and ethnographic content analysis of newspaper articles published in *El Tiempo* between 1990 and 2015. I worked in this project with Dr. Sergio Lo Iacono and the findings are presented in the article 'Start Spreading the News: Children Born of War in Colombia and their In-between-lines Presence, that was submitted for consideration to the *Bulletin of Latin American Research* on the 24th November 2017.

place in Buenos Aires, and have allowed me to identify relationships and the way children born of war have emerged as part of institutional narratives.

**Final Thoughts**

Before travelling to Buenos Aires, in my imaginary of the social geography of the place, I represented the landscape with its historical, political, and economic processes as part of a homogenous category. It is not that before travelling to Buenos Aires I ignored that there were different communities with diverse ethnicities, struggles, and political claims but that when situating the collective subject I had conceptualised as "children born of war" or *los paraquitos* in my imagined cartography of the place, I reproduced my own notions of space and rurality. I was thinking of Buenos Aires through restricted frameworks that homogenised the social relationships that—based on preliminary research and literature review—I had assumed took place within them. The subject I had conceptualised as "children born of war" inhabited the representation of the imagined homogenous and cropped map of Buenos Aires as a hidden and static subject within a defined space. Instead, my imagined cartography was contested by the tension between the immensity of the red soil mountains that are covered by hundreds of greens and by the localised dynamic embodiment of the people that experience the landscape. I am aware that the research practice imposes frames on the social and material landscapes experienced by people. I hope, however, that by instigating a reflexive conversation among different cropped cartographies of Buenos Aires I have enriched my analysis and challenged—to a certain extent—the fragmentation that research enacts on people's relationships and identities.

Important as this is in the case of all researchers working on sensitive topics, I believe my own positionality as a Colombian researching the human experience within the Colombian armed conflict has required conscious reflexivity throughout the process

(Bourdieu, 1996). Although I am not from the region I conducted fieldwork in, and the place I consider home in Colombia has not been exposed to the same levels and dynamics of the armed conflict, I am aware that in my case the distinction between fieldwork and home is not so evident. With this research I have, in many different ways, merged the two while unveiling layers of my own history that until very recently I did not know. However, being aware of my positionality also implies acknowledging that although we (people I have met in the communities and I) share a common sense of being Colombians, we are not the same and being Colombian has different meanings for us. Following Scheper-Hughes's work on child mortality (1992), in order to understand people's actions, their meaning and respond ethically, I must recognize that narratives and practices about people born as a consequence of war-related sexual violence have a social history and cannot be interpreted outside of their own moral order; one that has been constantly transformed by war and resistance.

**Chapter 3**

**The Hollow Shell: The Category of Children Born of War and the Political**

**Economy of Victimhood**

There is an estimate that between 2001 and 2009 more than 489,687 women and girls were victims of at least one form of sexual violence during the Colombian armed conflict (Oxfam, 2011: 11). According to the records of the *Unidad para las Víctimas*, the governmental agency in charge of articulating measures of redress, 24,284 people have been recorded as victims in relation to 'harms against their freedom and sexual integrity' (Unidad para las Víctimas, 2018). Considering that pregnancies are a possible outcome of sexual violence one could expect that there is a significant presence of boys, girls, and teenagers born as a consequence of those practices in the country, and yet, the official records present a number of 533[7]. I do not intend to introduce these figures to discuss problems of underreporting and how official and quasi-official figures may not represent the reality of the sexual violence committed against women and the children born of that violence. Instead, I want to start with those figures because they reflect tensions and dynamics involved in configuring those individuals born of war as victims of the armed conflict in Colombia. This is not a story of silence, for silence requires knowledge and the power of concealment. The story of the category of children born as a result of wartime sexual violence in Colombia is one of unintelligibility; their physical existence has not been objectivised in the intersubjective reality in which the human rights discourse and the technologies of political transition operate.

World-wide, children born of war have not emerged as independent subjects of concern and redress among the categories of war-affected children. In the case of Colombia, however, these children were included as official victims of the armed conflict

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[7] Interview, Diana Tamayo, Bogota, 10 June 2016.

under the 2011 Victim's and Land Restitution Law. Nevertheless, they have not been prioritized by human rights' organisations nor by the institutions implementing transitional justice mechanisms in Colombia. They have not gained a place in any of the victims' agendas and have instead fallen into a grey area between networks working with war-affected children, and networks working on gender-based violence in the context of the armed conflict. In this sense, although the realities of wartime sexual violence in Colombia are evidence that these children's physical presence in the country cannot be underestimated, that they appear in the testimonies of wartime sexual violence survivors, and they have been officially categorized and named by the Colombian state as victims, these boys and girls born of war remain socially invisible to the institutions and agencies that seek to address the consequences of the armed conflict.

In this chapter I explore some the social processes through which children born of war in Colombia have become part of the realities of the armed conflict that are officially addressed and institutionalised. The fact that these children are recognized as victims under Colombian legislation could be seen as an attempt to break the silence imposed on wartime sexual violence survivors and their sons and daughters through impunity, state negligence, and fear. This attempt contrasts with an almost complete lack of initiatives by private and public sectors to address their experience. In this context, I argue, the lack of attention to the plight of these children by the media, scholars, government agencies, and human rights organisations reflects not so much a desire to hide a topic but an inability to see it. The official category of children born of war was created and yet these children are not part of the reality of war that is subjectively meaningful for those public and political actors; it is empty of social meaning and as such, it has not been apprehended by those actors.

Nevertheless, the physical existence of these children in war-torn communities and their mention in the testimonies of sexual violence survivors represent a tension in this argument; how can these children be invisible when we know they are part of the realities of the Colombian armed conflict? The argument then is that political and public discourses have incorporated into their operational reality information about these individuals through processes that have prevented the emergence of those children as independent subjects of concern and action. Information about these children has indeed circulated. The processes through which it has circulated, however, have restricted their configuration as independent subjects within the explanatory framings for apprehending the experiences of war. On the one hand, the collective phenomenon of children born of war has appeared in the imaginary of human rights organisations and agencies in Colombia through stories about how these children are being stigmatized in their communities. This static notion of victimhood—represented in the label of *paraquito*—has restricted the understanding of their dynamic experience as war-affected people, while denying that they are not just defined by the violence that conceived them, and that their identity transforms as they grow older. On the other hand, they have not emerged as subjects within the explanatory framing for understanding the experience of war-affected children. Instead, they have emerged as subjects within the framing for understanding wartime sexual violence, playing a role in reinforcing social representations of their mothers—as victimized subjects—and their biological fathers, with their ability to reproduce violence beyond their own corporality.

**Living in the Shadows**

In a ground-breaking decision, the 2011 Colombian Victim's and Land Restitution Law included children born of war in the definition of the category of victims

of the armed conflict. Through this legislation the state of Colombia acknowledges that due to the circumstances of the conception of these children, they experience specific harms and types of violence, and as a result, they are entitled to redress. Although there is this official recognition, and human rights advocates working with women and children's organisations further highlight the importance of focusing efforts on understanding the situation of children born of war, there are no official programmes addressing their plight or NGOs working to raise awareness of their situation. In a 2015 visit to the country, Zainab Hawa Bangura, former United Nations Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, manifested her extreme concern about what she called 'the silent issue of children born out of rape' (UN News Centre, 2015). That same concern seems to be a constant that has appeared throughout the several meetings and interactions I have had with members of the government and human rights activists. In an interview with representatives of UNICEF Colombia, and while talking about the different challenges in terms of providing mental health and psychosocial attention to the victims of the conflict, Child Protection Officer Rocío Mojica mentioned how among all the issues that were still lacking attention, 'the topic of children born of war seemed to be the most *hidden* one'.[8]

In a broader context, the lack of attention to the situation of children born as a consequence of wartime sexual violence is by no means unique to Colombia. Indeed, these children have remained unattended by the international community and official global human rights discourses (Grieg, 2001; Carpenter, et. al, 2005; Mochmann, 2008; Seto, 2013; Theidon, 2015; Lee, 2017). Although there are groups raising awareness of the situation of these children and developing academic research like the War and Children Identity Project (WCIP) in Norway and the International Network for Interdisciplinary Research on Children Born of War (INIRC), these children have not

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[8] Interview, Rocío Mojica, Bogota, 7th March 2016.

gained a place within the official umbrella of children's rights nor in the agenda of transitional justice processes. In fact, when the subject appears it usually does so in the language of gender based violence, specifically in relation to sexual violence and women's rights (DeLaet, 2007; McEvoy-Levy, 2007; Weitsman, 2007). In relation to war-affected children in general, since the early 1990s different transnational networks have raised awareness about the impact of war upon children and have succeeded in placing the issue in the international human rights agenda (Grieg, 2001). The emergence of categories such as "child combatant" and "refugee children" is understood within the human rights discourse as an achievement in the struggle to protect children from the impact of violent conflict and oppression. Nevertheless, the human rights agenda does not cover the whole reality of war and it is not neutral and apolitical. Charli Carpenter (2010) notes that the human rights network, rather than a horizontal community of like-minded activists linked by their commitment to human rights, is a 'hierarchy in which many issue entrepreneurs agitate for their causes to be heard, and a few leading organisations in any issue area determine, through their natural agenda-setting process, which causes belong on the global agenda' (Carpenter, 2010: 45).

In this sense, it is not the nature of the problem in itself that makes for an issue of concern. Neither is it the existence of committed advocates raising awareness about it. According to Jutta Joachim (2003), the fact that some topics are included in the human rights agenda and some others are not, depends initially on how easily the new topics can be presented through already existing issues and existing institutional discourses. The topic must also fit already existing legal and political norms, and at the same time there needs to be transnational networks willing to invest resources in order to ensure visibility and dissemination. In addition to this, some perspectives suggest that new subjects would fit more easily if they could be clearly framed into what Carpenter (2007) calls a

"victimhood scheme," which includes clearly defined roles of "victim," "perpetrator," and "rescuer." At first sight, children born of wartime sexual violence could fit as a category of concern within the child protection network. However, Carpenter (2010) notes there is something about this particular issue that has 'convinced activists at many locations in the child rights network that the political and normative risks of advocacy outweighed the possible benefits' (Carpenter, 2010: 52).

One perspective within the global advocate network is that raising awareness about the plight of these children might put them at further risk (Apio, 2007; Mertus, 2007). The argument is that by creating this specific category of concern children could be singled out and the risk of stigmatization and discrimination on that ground could increase, together with a concern that in many cases children might not know the context of their conception. Although these are legitimate concerns, Carpenter (2010) argues that they do not explain why this issue has been neglected. First, Carpenter (2010) notes, this perspective is not prevalent within the child protection networks and second, there is also a counter argument that says that if the category is not clearly established and discussed, it is impossible to design public policy and programmes to accurately address their needs. Further, although it is true that in many cases children do not know the circumstances of their conception during the first stages of their life, it has been identified that this reality is often presented to them through practices of discrimination and labelling within the community (Mertus, 2007). Finally, the risk of increasing stigmatization applies to other populations which have gained a prioritised place within the human rights advocacy networks like children affected by HIV and AIDS or child soldiers (Carpenter, 2007).

Using the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a case study, Carpenter (2010) argues that the lack of attention the international community has manifested towards these children does not have to do with their actual plight but with the narratives that have

been produced about them. In this line of argument, the sets of knowledge that lay underneath the category of children born as a result of wartime sexual violence have disabled the international community from picturing them as war-affected children. Instead, they have become symbols of crimes against women, genocide against ethnic and national groups and diversions from the path towards an imagined civilised global community (Carpenter, 2007; 2010). Playing an important role in the mass media and news coverage, these children were named as children of atrocity rather than human beings entitled to rights and protection. This scenario creates the idea of a conflict of rights; on one hand, between the child and the mother and on the other, between the child and the mother's community. Likewise, it creates ambiguity about what kind of organization or network should assume this cause (Carpenter, 2010).

The inclusion of these children in the Colombian victim's legislation implies that these children are being recognised as victims and as bearers of rights within the political community of the nation state. According to Pablo de Greiff, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence, state recognition of victims is a normative-based conception of recognition 'since recognising victims as right-bearers involves recognising the norms that establish a regime of citizenship' (De Greiff, 2012:44). Questions about the construction of the human rights agenda and policies of political transitions, and why some topics are included whereas others are not, are deeply related to socio political negotiations about reconciliation as a vehicle for social stability (Short, 2008). Within those negotiations the categories of "victim" and "perpetrator" are not factual and apolitical notions, but the outcome of debates on what past societies are going to acknowledge, who is going to be part of the political community, and what future is going to be constructed (Castillejo, 2009). In that sense, what is at the core of those negotiations is a ratification of the

political community and its norms, and a question about who belongs to it and which role those individuals are being granted. When discussing notions and definitions of "victims" and "perpetrators" one needs to bear in mind that 'under different political circumstances these subject positions would have been occupied by different individuals' (Moon, 2006: 261). Within the regime of citizenship, the recognition of someone as a victim is also given in terms of normative notions, as it is not suffering but notions of harm what is acknowledged (De Greiff, 2012). This normative approach to people's pain creates legal categories through which it aims to account for people's experiences of violence. That implies that the focus is not on the extensive and complex ways in which violence shapes people's lives, but on legally defined understandings of suffering. Thus, categories of "victim" and "perpetrator" restrict the experiences of violence and suffering of people legitimising some experiences over others (Moon, 2006).

In the case of Colombia, the inclusion of children born as a consequence of wartime sexual violence in the definition of victims in the 2011 Victim's and Land Restitution Law represents a landmark in the jurisdiction to address the plight of war-affected children. It acknowledges their existence as subjects that emerge from war and that have a place and role in the present of the political community. However, different than other categories of victims that were also included in the definition such as forced disappearances or child combatants, this inclusion was not the result of a political negotiation around children born of war as war-affected children but the result of decades of women's struggles to make visible the existence of gender-based violence and the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war. Although including these generations of children in the legislation opens the door for opportunities in terms of truth, reparations, reconciliation, and accountability, the fact that they have not been part of the social and political negotiation about the consequences of the armed conflict and how to address

them implies that the category is empty of social meaning; there is an absence of frameworks of explanation to understand the effects of the armed conflict on these individuals, the possibilities for redress, and their role in the imagined future of the society.

**On static identities and "cropped" experiences**

My first encounter with Ruth happened in her family house. She invited me to have lunch and taught me how to cook *sancocho de pescado*. We had talked over the phone several times but a poor telephone signal had prevented us from having any conversation that lasted longer than a couple of minutes. The day before our meeting she gave me the directions I needed to make the three-hour journey from Cali to her house in one of the rural *veredas* of Buenos Aires; 'Tell the helper of the driver that you are going to San Francisco, ask him to leave you in front of the football court, and don't let him charge you more than the bus fee I told you'.[9] I had read the name of the organisation Ruth represents in the magazine article that led me to the location of Buenos Aires, and the very few mentions I had found of the situation of children born of war in that region often included mentions of this victim's organisation. Among all the pieces of the puzzle that led me to Buenos Aires, Ruth's name had a central place in my research even before I had set foot in the land of Cauca. While chopping onions she told me how she engaged with the stories of children born of war. Her organisation was working in a project with a women's national NGO; Ruth was the link between the NGO and sexual violence survivors in the community of San Miguel. It was, in fact, someone from that NGO who put me in contact with her. One day, Ruth was sitting in front of the school in San Miguel—the same school that functioned as storage and training base for paramilitaries

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[9] Telephone conversation, Ruth, Buenos Aires, 14th January 2016.

for over five years—talking with one of the women from that community. One of the kids came out of the school crying and sat on a rock close to them. Ruth moved next to the child and tried to console him. When she asked what was happening, the boy told her that the other kids kept calling him *paraquito*, and that he did not want to go back to school. Ruth stopped chopping onions and lowered her loud and determined voice—as if that could prevent her 6-year-old daughter who was playing on the concrete floor of the kitchen from listening; 'It's very sad', Ruth said to me, 'that situation of *los paraquitos* it's very sad'. Later during fieldwork I understood that this story Ruth shared with me took place at some point around 2010. As I will discuss in following chapters, in the current context of the community, the label of *paraquito* was hardly ever used. That day with Ruth, however, was the first time that I heard a reference that I would indeed encounter over and over in different situations and locations: *las mujeres de San Miguel* (The women of San Miguel). That category was used by locals and human rights activists to configure a rigid and oppressive imaginary of a homogenous collective of raped women.

As I would find out later during fieldwork, there was a very tense relation between Ruth's organisation and local leaders from San Miguel. *La junta de acción comunal* (local unity of governance) did not feel that Ruth's organisation represented the interest of the community and that their members had tried to use the experience of San Miguel to somehow find profit within the bureaucracies of transitional justice and reparations to victims. Among the different controversial topics, the one of *las mujeres de San Miguel* was passionately presented to me by Astrid, one of the leaders of San Miguel. She told me how at some point she thought that joining Ruth's organisation would be a good idea. When they presented the idea of creating an organisation that would bring together victims from the different rural areas of Buenos Aires it sounded like a good

strategy to negotiate with the government. 'It's always better to be organised', she said. However, Astrid said, 'it did not work because in the very first meeting they started telling lies about us. The meeting was in another *vereda*. I think they didn't know there were people from San Miguel in the meeting, because one of them said in front of everybody that we had to organise ourselves to make the government compensate us for cases like *las mujeres de San Miguel*; that because they had all been raped their husbands had been forced to leave'.[10] With time I also became more familiar with the geographies of Buenos Aires; the landscape has played an essential part in framing different experiences of the armed conflict. Displacement, confinement, and massacres are part of the history of violence of Buenos Aires, but the dynamics of the armed conflict have imposed different forms of oppression to different communities. People from the valleys and on the strategic paths for the trafficking of drugs and weapons, like Ruth, were among the first groups of mass displacement in that region; the mountain in which San Miguel is located—together with lack of infrastructure to access the area—provided a better opportunity for surveillance and training, and so came years of confinement in a paramilitary stronghold.

People's experiences of the armed conflict are not just defined by armed groups; they are also shaped by the same policies that aim to address the consequences of violence. In the case of sexual violence survivors in Buenos Aires and their children born of gender-based violence, the architecture of transitional justice—represented in the possibility of the implementation of a collective reparation, individual compensation for victims, and non-governmental projects with legal psychosocial aids—has contributed to the creation of two cropped identities of war: *los paraquitos* and *las mujeres de San Miguel*. Ruth's organisation, and their attempts to render visible both experiences have

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[10] Personal conversation, Astrid, Buenos Aires, 4th March 2016.

played a part in the process of configuration of those subjects. Around 2010 that organisation was involved in two different projects with two well-known national women's NGOs. Those projects were not implemented at the same time but they both sought to address the plight of sexual violence survivors in San Miguel from a legal and psychosocial approach. What they also had in common is that their link with the community was Ruth—although she is not from that community—and that, for safety reasons and with women's well-being at heart, they did not hold any sessions in San Miguel. One third element they both have in common is that when I asked about them, neither *la junta de acción communal* from San Miguel nor the *Unidad para las Víctimas* had heard of those projects having taken place.

Public stories among organisations working with victims about women and children born of war from Buenos Aires come mainly from the time those projects were implemented; that was approximately five years after the paramilitary demobilisation in a moment of economic, social, and political transition in the region. Paramilitaries had demobilised but still had a very strong presence in the area, the first paramilitary's trials took place—one of them for sexual violence, and there were initial signs of governmental presence—after a long history of state negligence and abandonment—under the umbrella of transitional justice promises. Although stories come from those years, they are told in Bogota in present time; individuals who were born as a result of sexual violence are still addressed as children, they are believed to be called by the community *paraquitos*, and their identities are assumed to be defined just by stigmatisation. Women are referred to as *las mujeres de San Miguel*; their experiences are assumed to remain those of rape and fear. Both NGOs have tried to continue their projects with the community but funding is scarce and they have prioritised other regions. The dynamism and realities of war, resistance, and endurance at the local level are not necessarily in conversation with the

economies of the human rights system. Stories told in present time about heterogeneous experiences of sexual violence against women, and children labelled as *paraquitos* are snapshots of people's experiences of war that contribute to the configuration of static notions of victimhood. They represent arrhythmic notes in relation to the realities of the communities, but they are embedded with a symbolic power of social and political negotiation within the human rights discourse.

Like in the case of Buenos Aires, what there is known about children born of war in Colombia comes mainly from women's organisations that work with gender-based violence in relation to the armed conflict. After the paramilitary demobilisation in 2004 some of those organisations started to hear stories on the ground of naming practices towards sons and daughters of sexual violence survivors. In their communities, these children were being called *paraquitos*. These stories spread as rumours throughout women and children's organisations and agencies that work in armed conflict related topics, while raising some awareness about stigmatisation and violence towards these children. It was the label which brought attention to these children, who until then had been invisible among the human rights' concerns. Ana María Jimenez, a human rights lawyer with expertise in war-affected children mentioned during our conversation: 'I think it is very pertinent that you are working on this topic. For example, in terms of reconstruction of collective memory and the debates that are yet to come. Because in the case of those children many people have used adjectives, calling them *paraquitos,* [and this] has been the most dreadful thing. It was that which really made the topic visible'.[11]

Labelling practices, coupled with the reference to 533 children that I introduced at the beginning of this chapter, portray a social dilemma about whether these children are associated with the mother or the father, with the victim or the perpetrator. Within the

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[11] Interview, Ana María Jiménez, Bogota, 13th April 2016.

realities in which the policies of transitional justice operate, the intelligibility of subjects as victims of the armed conflict is also given in relation to familiarity and expectations. The system of values of the political community is projected onto an imaginary of "ideal" victims and perpetrators whose silhouettes are apprehended within the already established social, political, and legal order. During my conversation with Ana María about the different obstacles war-affected children face to have access to redress, she told me the story of a young man whose biological father was a paramilitary: 'While I was working on a report about access to reparations for children, we found the testimony of a young man whose access to compensation had been denied because he was fathered by a paramilitary commandant. The discourse behind this is very complex because he was not assumed as a victim but he was associated with the perpetrator'.[12] The testimony of the young man presented in the report Ana María mentioned says:

> My mum tells that she wanted to testify and she went to one of the offices of the government, but no one listened to her because she had been the woman of a paramilitary and had a child of his. The person who talked to her said that we were not victims but perpetrators. He said there was nothing to do. I don't understand that, because we haven't hurt anyone (Testimony taken from Lizcano et.al, 2015:30).

Although the report does not specify the context of the relationship and the conception of the child, and neither provides further development on the situation of children born in the context of war, it does raise questions in terms of transgenerational reconciliation and the challenges when it comes to children fathered by members of

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[12] Interview, Ana María Jiménez, Bogota, 13th April 2016.

armed groups (Lizcano et.al, 2015). In terms of the social tensions the woman and the child represent, the testimony raises questions about the expectations society has of those subjects named as victims. The English and Spanish words for victim come from the Latin word for sacrificial animals, *victim*a. Van Dijk (2009) has tracked this reference of victims as the "sacrificed ones" to an association of the plight of victims with the suffering of Jesus Christ. Although the term fosters compassion, the author says, the label also imposes a social role of passivity and unconditional forgiveness. For subjects to become intelligible as victims, their experience of suffering and oppression is filtered through legal categories, and their response to that violence is assessed through the moral system of the political community; ironically the same political community that allowed their suffering to take place. Stories of endurance and survival are understood as part of the victimhood narrative as long as they are in conversation with the dominant economic, social, and political values of society and do not challenge the social order. Following Neocleous (2013) approach to resilience, the dangers of the kind of resilience that is valued within the political economy of victimhood is that it wants compliance, not resistance. This kind of resilience, as Neocleous notes, 'does demand that we use our actions to accommodate ourselves to capital and the state, and the secure future of both' (2013: 7).

Beyond the legal argument of whether children born of war are entitled to redress, the testimony presented above illustrates the social negotiations that shape the subject and identity of children born of war through notions of gender, sexuality, and reproduction. Depending on how those negotiations take place, children born of war are presented as subjects in relation to sexual violence survivors, or subjects in relation to perpetrators of wartime sexual violence. These narratives that aim to make intelligible the armed conflict and its consequences, have restricted the emergence of children born of war as

independent war-affected subjects whose life experiences are related but not completely defined by the experiences of their parents.

As Ana María mentioned, the collective phenomenon of children born of war has appeared in the imaginary of human rights organisations in Colombia mainly through stories and rumours about children being labelled in their communities as *paraquitos*. In the headquarters of human rights organizations those stories are told in present time—not knowing whether that situation persisted in the communities or the ways it has changed— and through those narratives, a static notion of the identity of these children is produced and reproduced. That "snapshot" of the story of children born of war creates a very restricted approach to them as war-affected children. It assumes that children are defined just in relation to the violence that conceived them, and it fails to understand the dynamism of their development as human beings within their cultural socio-political context.

**Existing without Content: Children Born of War in the Human Rights Agenda**

Although naming practices made the existence of children born of war in Colombia visible, neither women's organisations nor organisations working with war-affected children have included them in their agendas. The former has their efforts on gender-based violence and the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war, and the latter have built their networks and infrastructure around child recruitment. This scenario has translated into an idea that the situation of children born of war is an essential, sensitive topic to address, and of paramount importance for their future, their mothers, and the future of their communities, together with an almost complete absence of debate and of official and private programmes and strategies working with them. In an interview with

Unicef Colombia, Child Protection Officer Esther Ruíz, she addressed the lack of initiatives and actions towards children born of war:

> We've been trying to propose a project for over a year now but it's proven to be very difficult. Our idea was to assess at a national level the extent of the presence of children born of war. Of course without stigmatising them but acknowledging that the first problem we need to solve is the institutional invisibility of these children. And we don´t want to expose them, but we do need to understand the kind of expert attention those children require. We know there are cases in different regions, but there is no clarity at all about their situation, if there are more cases in some specific regions than in others, or if they are mainly fathered by paramilitaries. We believe that to start thinking about this will contribute to the work of the Truth Commission in the future, because otherwise this topic will remain hidden and won't be part of the truth the country aims to reconstruct. Also because we don´t know if those children are receiving the reparations they are entitled to. There is a matter of lack of information because often their mothers don't know children born of war are entitled to redress. Just last week we received information that the ICBF [Colombian Family Welfare Institute] is planning on developing a very small project on this topic but that they have a very reduced budget to do so. I think this is just happening now, because we've talked before with people from the ICBF about the need to do work about these children but no one had any information or knew anything about it.[13]

Coverage in the media of the plight of children born of war has been very limited and mainly shaped by coverage of sexual violence in the context of the armed conflict. As a result of the struggle and pressure of local leaders, feminist activists, scholars, and policy makers, since the 1990s the Colombian press has been more open to spreading news and increase coverage about the effects of the armed conflict on women living in war-affected regions, in particular in relation to sexual violence (CNRR, 2011). However, the attention granted to wartime sexual violence in the online and printed media is

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[13] Interview, Esther Ruíz, Bogota, 7th March 2016.

accompanied by an almost absolute silence around children born as a result of those gender-based practices. In order to explore in a more systematic way the emergence of narratives about children born of war in the Colombian online media, I worked with Dr. Sergio Lo Iacono on a mixed methods review that combined extensive content analysis using MAXQDA 12 and ethnographic content analysis (Plummer, 1983) of newspaper articles published in *El Tiempo* between 1990 and 2015.[14] The almost absolute lack of emergence of these children in the storylines is evidenced in the fact that out of the 1,101 articles that we included in our body of analysis, just 11 included mentions to children born of war. Throughout those 11 articles we found that children appeared as secondary characters in the storylines within the framework of sexual violence as a weapon of war, and only to contribute to the representation of women as passive victims of sexual violence or mothers, and to a less extent, of perpetrators of sexual violence as constant presences in the life of women and communities. In relation to women, information about pregnancies and children born as a consequence of war-related sexual violence is used to emphasis suffering, vulnerability, and victimisation. This can be illustrated through the following fragment in the article 'The damages of sexual violence in the context of the conflict:'

> Mariana, a young woman marked by sadness and the knives of her victimizers, is part of the 94,565 women who were abused between 2001 and 2009 as a consequence of the armed conflict. And worse still, she is at the top of the list of the 26,353 victims who became pregnant and, despite the circumstances, had their children. In the case of Mariana, she still hasn't found the right words to tell her little child why the AUC acronym is marked on her forehead. The paramilitaries of the Nutibara block that raped her, for considering her friend of the FARC urban militias, in addition to sexually assaulting her in broad daylight and in front of several men, marked her in the thighs and face (Bedoya, 2010).

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[14] The findings are presented in the article 'Start Spreading the News: Children Born of War in Colombia and their In-between-lines Presence, that was submitted for consideration to the *Bulletin of Latin American Research* on the 24th November 2017.

Further illustration of the use of the character of children born of war as a symbolic adjective to stress the victimisation of women, while never questioning or providing more information on the situation of the children themselves, can be found in the newspaper article 'Sexual violence made 2 out of 10 displaced women to flee, the Ombudsman's Office reveals:'

> She became pregnant. And in September, when she was in her seventh month, paramilitaries returned. Her mother in law begged them not to do anything to her because she was expecting a child, but it was for nothing. She was raped a second time. Today, while the woman begs on the streets of Pasto with her son by the hand, sexual violence against women as an instrument of war still remains a nightmare for hundreds of uprooted families (El Tiempo, 2008).

In relation to the representation of the perpetrator of war-related sexual violence in the storylines, there is in the construction of the narratives a constant association of the child with the perpetrator. This can be illustrated in the article 'Paras of Catatumbo (North of Santander) had sexual slaves:'

> The tragedy for another of them started when she was a child. One of the "paras" of the Catatumbo Bloc started threatening to mutilate her if she tried to escape. "It was as if he had bought me", she told the prosecutors. Now she has a *son of his victimiser* and lives in a different region of the country for fear to meet his nightmare (*El Tiempo*, 2011, emphasis added).

Or in the article 'The born children of paramilitary abuses'—one of the two[15] articles that, based on the headline, suggests that the article is going to address the situation of children born of war, and yet they appear only as secondary characters.

When Marcelino [the husband] finished speaking, Rosa announced: "I am pregnant and it happened that night", she said. Marcelino froze. "That was … terrible. That man couldn't understand it. He told me I was crazy, that *he could not have a son of those men*, that I had to take him out of me". Rosa did not accept. "I decided to carry on. He told me that he couldn't live with me and one month after being in the house he packed his staff and left. I've never seen him again" (Sarralde, 2014, emphasis added).

Despite the lack of information about children born of war and the absence of social movements leading a struggle that represents them, these children were included in the 2011 Victim's Law as victims of the Colombian armed conflict. However, this official acknowledgment has not been enough to place them as a category of concern and action within the human rights agenda. María Eugenia Morales, former director of reparations of the *Unidad para las Víctimas*, described as a great achievement the fact that these children were now recognised as victims. However, when I asked about the lack of attention that remains around the topic, María Eugenia said: 'The inclusion of these children in the definition of the category of victims happened at the very last moment of the debates. That was not part of the previous discussions and was not foreseen. It was [Julissa Mantilla] the representative of UN women, who had been also part of the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission, who pushed the topic onto the agenda. She insisted and insisted. It was in the very last minute. Before that the topic was

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[15] The other article I refer to is titled: The damages of sexual violence in the context of the conflict—The offspring of war (Bedoya, 2010).

completely invisible. I would say that in part that explains why the topic has had so little diffusion'.[16]

Debates about war-affected children in Colombia have focused mainly on displacement and child recruitment (Lizcano et.al, 2015), and that focus is illustrated by academic debates, NGO reports, and inclusion in the legal framework of the country. For example, in 2008 the Constitutional Court stated that child recruitment of children from poor backgrounds has been a systematic practice of all armed groups throughout the national territory, and that it is closely connected to forced displacement (Correa et.al, 2014). Among all the categories of war-affected children, child recruitment has gained a privileged place in the social maps of the human rights networks when thinking about relations between childhood and armed conflict. Throughout my interactions with activists, scholars, and public policy makers working with human rights related topics while conducting fieldwork, people very often assumed that I was researching child recruitment—even after I had presented the research project and directly asked about children born of war. In many occasions, I found myself trying to lead the conversations out of the framework of recruitment and use of children, and interviewees often reminded themselves as they were speaking that "that" was not the main topic of conversation.

**Shaping the Category of Children Born of War and the Discourse of Sexual Violence**

While reviewing the testimonies given by sexual violence survivors from Buenos Aires as part of the legal process of reparations, an aspect that captured my attention was that when women were questioned about the consequences of the sexual abuse, they were

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[16] Interview, María Eugenia Morales, Bogota, 10 June 2016

asked about pregnancies immediately after being asked about sexually transmitted diseases. When discussing the negative burden implied in the collection of testimonies, Julissa Mantilla, who was in charge of the gender team of the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission and who played a key role in including the category of children born of war in the Colombian Victims' Law, said:

I believe that in this topic what is missing is a previous debate. The interviewer knows that he has to ask about pregnancies but he doesn't know why. I mean, he might know that he has to ask in order to know how many children, but there was no previous discussion about why we care about that. Is it because otherwise the feminist will yell? No! Why do we care? Is it because it will contribute to redress, to guarantees of non-repetition, to understand the harm? Just when you understand the purpose of a question you understand where to include it and how to make it. (…). This is why the issue of these children is so fascinating. It challenges everything, and no one has really thought about them. That's why the issue of "the invisible generation"[17] is so telling; because they are there, but we don´t see them.[18]

On the 27th September 2010 the initial draft of the Victim's Law was presented for the first time in the Colombian congress (Gazette 692/10 Congress of the Republic of Colombia). The initial document of the law addressed the plight of war-affected children (Chapter XIII) and stated their right to truth, justice, and integral reparations (Article 107). Although it referred to all children and teenager victims of human rights' violations and International Human Rights Law violations, the document highlighted the right to

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[17] In this interview Julissa Mantilla refers to Kimberly Theidon's paper "Hidden in Plain Sight: Children Born of Wartime Sexual Violence" (2015).
[18] Interview, Julissa Mantilla, Skype, 19th February 2016.

integral reparation of some categories of war-affected children: orphans as a consequence of the armed conflict (Article 114), victims of landmines and unexploded ordnance (Article 115), and victims of recruitment and use by armed groups (Article 116). Although throughout the several debates that defined the final document of the Victim's Law the inclusion of children born of war was not considered, the advocacy of UN women in the last moments of discussion managed to ensure the topic's inclusion in the Law. This inclusion was reflected in the document of the Victim's Law published on the 1st of March 2011 under the section devoted to war-affected children (Gazette 63/11 Congress of the Republic of Colombia: 44-45), as follows:

Title VII. Integral Protection of Boys, Girls, and Teenagers Victims

Article 174. Rights of boys, girls, and teenager victims. This law will understand as a boy, girl, and teenager every person under the age of 18. Boys, girls, and teenager victims of Human Rights' violations and violations of International Human Rights Law will enjoy all of theirs social, cultural, political, and economic rights, and in addition they will have access to:

1. Truth, Justice, and Integral reparation

2. The restitution of their rights

3. Protection against all forms of violence, damage or physical and mental abuse, ill treatment or exploitation, included recruitment, forced displacement, landmines and unexploded ordnance, and sexual violence.

Paragraph. For the effects of this Title it will also be considered boys, girls, and teenagers conceived as a consequence of sexual violence in relation to the internal armed conflict.

Through that final paragraph, children born of war were acknowledged in the Victim's Law. Their inclusion was different, however, than the inclusion of other categories of war-affected children like orphans, victims of landmines, and victims of recruitment; children born as a consequence of wartime sexual violence were not defined in an independent article but just added without any development of the category itself or the way they were going to be addressed. As for the other categories of war-affected children, their early addition to the document of the law, together with already active advocates of their situation and existing discussions about their plight and their best interest, allowed for a more comprehensive inclusion in the final document of the Victim's Law. Articles intended to address those war-affected children sought to cover the particularities of the experience of each category, providing normative definitions of harms and showing understanding of aspects like the entity that should address their situation and technical guidelines to do so. In the case of orphan children, for instance, it states that any national, regional, or local authority that receives information about children who lost one or both of their parents due to the armed conflict has the obligation to immediately inform the Colombian Family Welfare Institute (ICBF) so that they can initiate the process of reparation (Article 188). To further illustrate, in the case of children victims of landmines, unexploded ordnance, and improvised explosive devices, the law considers elements that represent discussion around the full rehabilitation of victims. In that sense, it says that considering scientific assessment, the victim has the right to receive medical treatment, prosthesis, orthoses, and psychological assistance free of charge and for as long as necessary (Article 189).

The presence of children born of war in the social reality of communities and wartime sexual violence survivors has been incorporated in official and public discourses through the somehow more familiar language of gender-based violence. Instead of

emerging as subjects within the framing of explanation to conceptualise children affected by war, children born of war have emerged linked to a discourse that aims to understand and address sexual violence in the context of the armed conflict. Baaz and Stern (2013) claim that the same frames of explanation we use to think of, analyse, and write about wartime sexual violence produce specific subjects, silence others, and shape the way we attend to those subjects. This has predominantly happened within the dominant discourse of sexual violence as a weapon of war that has sought to challenge the idea that rape responds to the biological—heterosexual—urge of male bodies over female bodies, and instead has proposed to focus the attention on the production of notions of femininity and masculinity through which men are primarily depicted as heterosexual masculine citizen-soldiers, and women are associated with a passive role that implies life-giving and protection (Baaz and Stern, 2013). Although the topic of children born of war in Colombia has not gained a place in any of the human rights' agendas, it is the discourse of gender-based violence in the context of the armed conflict, and of sexual violence as a weapon of war, that has started to render those children visible within the public realm beyond their communities. Within the legal normative system, the mere existence of these children is defined by sexual violence conceptualised as a harm against women and girls, and their existence is irrefutable evidence of that harm. Beyond the normative framework, children's experiences cannot be understood outside their mother's experiences of violence; it is sexual abuse and notions of reproduction and parenthood that first shape the child's identity and interaction with his or her mother and community. In the words of Julissa Mantilla:

The issue of sexual violence has the complexity of the new born human being. Because a forced disappearance of a loved one is terrible, but that human rights'

violation takes human beings away from you; it disappears someone or kills someone. Sexual violence, instead of removing human beings, adds human beings. It is very complex. And if it adds to you a human being that you didn't plan, and you end up loving him, and you want to raise him, it creates a series of doubts, especially for women. Women are forced to put their body in two ways, first through the sexual abuse and second through motherhood.[19]

Within the explanatory framework of sexual violence as a weapon of war, the subjects of "victim" and "perpetrator" are reinforced by the emergence of the subject of "children born of war", whose inclusion in the public discourse reproduces—and also depicts—notions of gender, sexuality, reproduction, and parenthood (Weitsman, 2007). The relations between wartime sexual violence survivors and their children born as a result of the abuses emerge as a tension between two different but inextricable connected topics: the naturalisation of gender based violence—not just in the context of war (Baaz and Stern, 2013)—and the best interest of the child. When I asked Julissa Mantilla about the purpose of shaping the definition of the category of children born of war based on the circumstances of their conception, instead of doing it based on their positionality as war-affected children whose mothers are sexual violence survivors, Julissa highlighted how this category of war-affected children represents an intersection between debates on the best interest of the child and debates on sexual and reproductive rights of women, as follows:

Imagine that you are a woman who has children, you are raped, and have a child as a result of rape. The first child is part of your decision of being a mother, of having a child. That makes part of your own life project. The second child is completely unexpected, something you did not plan. That is the first difference. It

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[19] Interview, Julissa Mantilla, Skype, 19th February 2016.

is not a difference that aims to stigmatise, but that seeks to highlight that not all maternities are wanted. It is not just about assuming that there is no issue because the woman might raise all of the children. No, here the issue is that the woman did not want to be a mother or that she did not want to have any more children, and that maternity is imposed on her. On the other hand, it is also important to highlight that there are a number of children born as a result of wartime sexual violence—some of them stayed with their mothers and so many others didn't, and no one knows anything about their plight. They have been abandoned and neglected. Naming them renders them visible, and that is related to the possibility of addressing their situation, and also to the responsibility of the state to assume their obligation towards them.[20]

The conceptions of gender, genetics, and identity that underpin policies of wartime sexual violence, argues Weitsman (2007), are in part produced and disseminated in the discursive narratives of social institutions. That entrenched system of meaning, suggests Weitsman (2007), translates into normative regulation over sexuality and reproduction that imposes roles and expectations on women and men, while negotiating membership and positionalities within the political community. In the context of war-torn societies, this implies negotiations about imagined futures for the society in which women's bodies, with their reproductive capability, are the target of control as they become a symbol of national reconstruction according to specific political and social orders (Das, 2007). In the 2011 Colombian Victim's and Land Restitution Law, in the section that addresses the situation of war-affected children and teenagers, is stated that victims are also going to be considered 'boys, girls, and teenagers *concebidos* (*conceived*) as a consequence of sexual violence in relation to the armed conflict' (Art 181, Paragraph 1°). I highlight "*concebidos*" because despite the fact that this paragraph is contained in the section about war-affected children, the wording of the category frames it within

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[20] Interview, Julissa Mantilla, Skype, 19th February 2016.

debates on women's sexual and reproductive rights. In the case of Colombia, the normative definition of the category of children born of war, and therefore their configuration as subjects within the intelligible reality of the armed conflict in which the official public discourse operates, represents a battlefield between patriarchal structures of violence against women, struggles to subvert them, and attempts to come to terms with the experiences of the armed conflict of women and children. The category of these children is incorporated into the social reality of the normative system through the existing language of sexual and reproductive rights. In this context, any attempt to offer insights on the social processes that frame the tensions that have made the category of children born of war unintelligible, would be uncomplete without addressing the legal and social framework that seek to regulate women's sexual and reproductive rights in Colombia.

Since 2006 the Colombian Constitutional Court decriminalised abortion under three circumstances: when the pregnancy constitutes a danger to the life or health of the pregnant woman, when there are serious malformations that make the foetus non-viable, and when the pregnancy is the result of sexual violence, incest, artificial insemination or embryo transfer without consent (Colombian Constitutional Court Ruling C355). The implementation of court ruling has faced several obstacles that have restricted women's access to their right to abortion. According to a report issued in 2011 by the Guttmacher Institute, in Colombia there are an estimated 400,400 abortions per year, and as of 2008, just 322 of those took place within the context of the C355 court ruling (Prada et.al, 2011: 6). Women seeking to have access to legal abortions, particularly in poor and rural areas of the country, are likely to face cultural, economic, institutional and bureaucratic barriers that continue to endanger their health and life. In that context, induced abortions outside the law represent great risk for women as one in three women who had a clandestine

abortion experienced complications that required medical attention—or should have required medical attention—leaving lifelong consequences and deriving in an estimate of 70 women dying per year from unsafe abortions (Prada et.at, 2011: 34).

The armed conflict radicalises the conditions that interfere with women's autonomy over their sexuality and reproduction. According to Martínez and colleagues (2016), in the case of Colombia in addition to the general barriers of access to abortions presented above, two other elements need to be considered when addressing the intersection between access to legal interruptions of pregnancies and the impact of the armed conflict upon women. First, the overlapping existence of the armed conflict and the negligence and abandonment of the state in rural regions translates into a very limited access to basic health services for the population. Under these circumstances the supply of gender sensitive specialised services for women are very limited, manifested in absence of infrastructure to implement legal abortions and also in lack of training of health workers to provide non-biased attention (Médicos Sin Fronteras, 2010).

Second, armed groups have imposed and consolidated social orders in the regions with specific consequences for the bodies and lives of women (Martínez et.al, 2016). According to Martínez and colleagues, although wartime sexual violence is at the core of these systems of violence, those social orders also impact differently upon women's sexual and reproductive autonomy and access to rights in relation of other forms of violence like displacement and forced disappearance. Patriarchal sociocultural contexts materialise in obstacles for women to exercise autonomy over their sexuality and bodies. In the context of the armed conflict, gender-based violence is exacerbated through stigma, silence, and discrimination, but also through the regulations armed groups have imposed on women regarding how they are expected to behave (GMH, 2013). Likewise, there is a very close relationship between sexual violence and displacement, with sexual violence

used as a strategy to impose terror on the population and force women and their families to leave, and also throughout the unsafe and unstable journeys women have to follow (Guarnizo, 2011). Under those circumstances access to sexual and reproductive services is very limited. In addition, the forced disappearance of members of the family make women assume roles—like searching for their loved ones and seeking justice—that further expose them to the violence of armed groups. Those dynamics place them in contexts of great fear, risk and instability that can make them the target of retaliations of sexual violence and at the same time can prevent them from accessing legal procedures in relation to sexual violence itself and the unwanted pregnancy (Guzmán and Prieto, 2013).

Within this context of gender-based violence against women and girls and debates on sexual and reproductive rights, and while the Victim's Law was under debate in the Congress, in 2011 the Colombian Conservative party—supported by some sectors of the church and Opus Dei members within the government—led an initiative to dispute the C355 ruling of the Constitutional Court and so go back to the complete penalisation of abortion in the country (Jaramillo, 2011; *Semana*, 2011; *El Espectador*, 2011a; *El Tiempo*, 2011). Although this initiative was not successful (*El Espectador*, 2011b), it does represent debates about and tensions between notions of gender, sexuality, reproduction, and identity.

The wording of the inclusion of the category of children *concebidos* of wartime sexual violence in the 2011 Victim's law illustrates how the framing for understanding the plight of children born of war is not the one of war-affected children but one that continues to understand women's bodies as objects of reproduction that need to be regulated and controlled by the state. When asked about the terminology used in the inclusion of children born of war in the Victim's law, Julissa Mantilla, who has raised awareness about this tension from the moment the law was published, noted: 'Our

proposal was "children born as a result of sexual violence", and those were the terms we used throughout our interventions. However, when the law was approved they changed *nacido* (born) for *concebido* (conceived). That modification happened unnoticed and no one called attention about it'.[21] Through this change in language the recognition to the right of redress—and therefore to the belonging of the political community through the notions of victimhood—was granted to the foetus instead than to the child. The framing for understanding the experiences of those subjects also shifted; from a children-centred approach to one that sought to enforce control over women's sexuality and reproduction. Julissa points at two aspects that jeopardise women's sexual and reproductive rights. First, the risk of rejection of abortions for the pregnancies of sexual violence survivors— that is already high in the country—could increase on the basis that under the Victim's law the conceived foetus is also considered a victim and therefore entitled to redress. Second, considering that women face high levels of discouragement when they attempt to have access to their right to legal abortions, there is a possibility that the argument of receiving "double reparation" will be used to try to convince them to give birth to the unwanted child (Mantilla, 2012).

In practice, the implementation of measures of redress in the case of children born of war has not been affected by such conceptual debates. In that sense, Julissa—who continues to follow this topic closely—told me that she has asked people working in the *Unidad para las Víctimas* about the consequences of the wording of the category and, to this day, it has not been an obstacle regarding the rights of women or the rights of children. Julissa notes: 'So far the argument of the *concebido* has not been used to interfere with legal abortions or with reparations, or at least those situations have not been

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[21] Interview, Julissa Mantilla, Skype, 19th February 2016.

documented'.[22] However, the fact that the argument about the *concebido* has not been used in relation to legal abortions or access to "double reparations" says less about achievements in the context of women's sexual and reproductive rights, and more about the absence of public debates and negotiations seeking to understand the plight, needs, and roles of children born of war.

**Final Thoughts**

The category of children born as a result of war-related sexual violence is part of the normative framework that seeks to address the consequences of the armed conflict in Colombia, and yet, it can be understood as the shell of a subject that remains to be filled with social meaning in order to be intelligible within the realities that are apprehended by human rights and transitional justice architectures. The almost absolute absence in the public realm in Colombia of discussions surrounding and about individuals born as a result of wartime sexual violence, together with a lack of social movements representing their interests and fostering political negotiations on their positionality, has prevented the configuration of a framing of explanation and understanding of their specific experience of violence, and of their role in the imagined future of the society. There is circulation of information about them, but that information has not configured a meaningful category on its own. This lack of conceptualisation within the framework for understanding the experience of war-affected children, together with the production of the imaginary of the static identity represented in the label *paraquito*, has prevented broader discussions on how the wartime gender-based violence that conceived them combines with other forms of structural violence fuelled by capital and patriarchy, to shape the life and possibilities of these subjects as they grow older. In this sense, these individuals—as independent

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[22] Interview, Julissa Mantilla, Skype, 19th February 2016.

subjects—remain unintelligible to the reality of the armed conflict that is seized by the human rights discourse and the discourse of transitional justice.

In the social reality in which those discourses operate, understanding and addressing the plight of girls, boys, women, and men born of war represents the challenge to see beyond a political economy of victimhood and the moral system of the political community that frames the everyday life of sexual violence survivors and their sons and daughters, as independent subjects. To understand their positionality and role, transitional justice frameworks must contest the normative approach to harm, for as these individuals were conceived by war but are not defined by it. Silence around and about their experiences transcend stigma and fear, and in the case of Colombia, the label of *paraquitos* represents but a snapshot of their trajectories. Unintelligibility, in their case, is the result of overlapping forms of violence; the violence of war, the violence entrenched in the patriarchal moral system, and the structural violence of capital. In the case of these individuals, to think of redress requires subversion of the social order, otherwise transitional justice mechanisms would be accommodating to the dominant economic, social, and political values of society.

Although their life starts as war-affected children, as they grow older their identities and opportunities are under constant negotiations that embody different forms of violence and resistance that do not correspond with static notions of victimhood. Just as the label refers to one moment in the positionality of these young women and men, the category of "*children* born of war"—that in the case of Colombia still remains to be filled with socio-legal meaning—is not devoid of the moral socio-political values of victimhood. Creating the category and making it intelligible in the public institutional realm could advance institutional capabilities to offer a better answer to the experiences of violence of these boys, girls, and young adults. However, addressing the category as a

subject of sociological study in itself allows me to question the expectations that are imposed on the group of people placed—from a legal and political framework—within it. In this particular case, those frameworks of explanation are guided by a construction of childhood that might not recognise the dynamic experiences of these people within their concrete ecological, cultural, and economic background. In the case of Colombia, the category of "children born of war" combines the question of what is expected from people categorised as victims within the political community, with specific understandings of childhood. Weitsman (2007, 2008) points at how the language we use in the academic process plays a role in the production and dissemination of notions that legitimise practices towards people born as a result of war-related sexual violence and their mothers. For instance, the access to redress discussed in this chapter. With that in mind, and with the purpose to reflect some of the dynamic socio-cultural negotiations that I have found in the narratives produced about young people born of war at the local level, throughout the writing exercise of the thesis I will avoid the use of the category of "*children* born of war" when referring to the narratives that I reconstructed in the communities. Instead, I will make use of words that reflect their positionality within the group, such as *people* or *young adults*. I will use "children born of war," nevertheless, to refer to the socio-legal category that is used within institutional discourses.

**Chapter 4**

**Contested Identities: Gender, Reproduction, and War**

'I don't know if you've heard about that boy who attacked his little brother with one *machete*',[23] *Doña* Clemencia asked me while we were resting in the shade under a tree in front of the school. Clearly inspired by the background of the loud sounds of one group of boys and girls who were engaged in what seemed to be a game that shifted between simulated and real pushes, screams, and tears, *Doña* Clemencia told me a story that became recurrent throughout my fieldwork. It was the story of a teenager who was 'out of control'; whose behaviour was both representative of the aggressiveness of the current times and escalating in a worrisome and unpredictable way. People would often use the story to illustrate the change of times and the violence they found characteristic of the youngest generations. It was not until later during fieldwork, in one of the long conversations with Astrid about the story of San Miguel and their struggles to advance the process of collective reparation, that I understood that the person in those stories was fathered by a paramilitary. He was, indeed, part of the group of people who, at some point in their lives, had been associated with the label *paraquito*, a label that was hardly heard nowadays. Astrid was telling me how young people in San Miguel had more access to primary and high school education than people in the past, and yet their opportunities for making a living seemed to be more restricted and exploitative. As part of her reflections on the youngest generations she brought the story of the teenager to the conversation. 'It backfired at her, you know?' Astrid added after a short pause. 'All this time his mum has been yelling at him, mistreating him, telling him to stand up for himself against the world, has backfired. She tells him to defend himself because he is the son of a *paraco*

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[23] Conversation, *Doña* Clemencia, San Miguel, 5th February 2016.

(paramilitary*)*, and now we see the consequences'.[24] When thinking about the imaginary of those subjects I had initially conceptualised as "children born of war" and their association with the label of *los paraquitos*, in San Miguel I encountered a fracture in the narrative about their identities. The biological and cultural input of the mothers—so absent in the content of the stigmatising label—had assumed an active role in the configuration of an identity that was not shaped just by the terror the father represented but also by the violence entrenched in local expectations on gender and sexual reproduction, and the active processes of resistance to that violence. Those boys, girls, and teenagers were no longer refer to as *paraquitos*, and yet, their identity was understood as problematic.

At first sight, teenagers born as a result of paramilitary sexual violence were no different than the other children and teenagers in San Miguel. Time and again people in the community would tell stories about this generation—referred to in abstract general terms—of young people and children who were babies or had not been born during the paramilitary confinement; their violent behaviour, their loss of values, their lack of attention in school, their lack of interest in working the land. In the specific context of this community, with its historic struggles and social negotiations to endure the presence of guerrillas and paramilitaries, and after years of confinement and state abandonment, the new generations embody transgenerational processes of both violence and resistance. And yet, in the different experiences of violence that all children and young people embody some of them represent a clear trace to war, for as they were conceived by it. In order to reflect on the positionality of these children and young women and men within the community, in this chapter I explore tensions and negotiations in the social processes that contribute to the configuration of their identity and role within the system of meaning

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[24] Conversation, Astrid, San Miguel, 25th May 2016.

they belong to. I argue that seeking to understand their identity by focusing on narratives about the stigmatising label that reproduces the association of these individuals with their biological fathers, obscures the gendered politics of reproduction that underpin logics of violence against women and girls. Assuming that approach to the understanding of the positionality of people born as a result of war-related sexual violence within the social group, reduces their experience and possibilities to the experiences of war of their biological parents. The social meaning that is transmitted from parents to children, I argue, combines the continuum of forms of violence against women and the different shapes it assumes in the negotiation of social orders. With the purpose to discuss how notions of gender, reproduction, identity, local biologies, and transmission unveil the overlapping forms of violence that have shaped the lives of people born of war, in this chapter I propose a conversation between my fieldwork in Colombia with some of the available literature from other countries.

**On the presence of the father**

What made the existence of children born as a result of sexual violence committed in the context of the Colombian armed conflict visible to people outside their communities was naming practices. Although sexual violence has been committed by all armed groups and, therefore, there are children fathered by paramilitaries, guerrillas, and the military, it was the label of *los paraquitos* that appeared in the imaginary of public opinion as the representation of a homogenous group of children who represented the horrors of war and the devastating marks it had left in the fabric of society. The clear association that the label suggested between the children and their biological fathers in contexts in which paramilitaries committed all sorts of atrocities, was taken by outsiders—particularly those coming from disciplines and fields that have claimed

expertise in the understanding of war and its consequences—as a sign of stigmatisation imposed on these boys and girls by their communities. Building upon Goffman's (1963) conceptualisation of stigma as a process attached to the social construction of identity framed by the association between what is understood by social groups as a negative attribute and a stereotype, Kleinman and Hall-Clifford (2009) draw attention on the importance of going beyond the psychosocial approach that studies the way stigma is internalised and shapes people's behaviour, to address the moral processes that underlay stigma and how economic, social, and political relationships influence the distribution of stigma within social groups. Emphasising that stigma are not attributes of people but something attached to individuals by others, Link and Phelan (2001) propose a conceptualisation of stigma through a model of interrelated components, as follows: identifying and labelling human differences, association of labelled people with socially and culturally undesirable characteristics, categorisation of labelled people that creates a distance between "them" and "us," and finally, loss of status and discrimination against those who have been labelled. The components of stigma, argue Link and Phelan (2001), reveal specific power relations and, at the same time, they have the power to converge to be part of someone's construction of identity precisely because they occur within those economic, social, and political relations.

Although the label represents but one of the aspects that is encompassed in the positionality granted to the children and young women and men born of war within their social groups, its symbolic power has played a significant role in making visible the complex relations that these individuals represent. Just to mention some examples of the broad diversity of experiences that labelling practices unveil; in France, after WWI, children born as a result of rape committed by German soldiers were referred to as *enfants du barbare* (children of the barbarian) (Harris, 1993: 179), and after WWII

children fathered by German soldiers during the occupation were referred to as *enfants maudits* (cursed children) (Mochmann, Lee and Stelzl-Marx, 2009: 265); after WWII children fathered by Canadian soldiers who were left in different countries in Europe were referred to as war leftovers by Canadian authorities (Grieg, 2001: 17); also in the context of WWII in Norway, children fathered by German soldiers were referred to as German kids (Mochmann and Larsen, 2008: 357); Rwanda children born as a result of forced pregnancy and rape during the genocide were collectively referred to as *les enfants mauvais souvenir* (children of bad memories) and *enfants indésirés* (unwanted children) (Mukangendo, 2007: 40); in Northern Uganda, children fathered by members of the LRA have been registered at the moment of their birth with names that compile the experience of the abducted women and girls, such as *Komakech* (I am unfortunate), *Anenocan* (I have suffered), *Odokorac* (Things have gone bad), and *Lubanga Kene* (Only God knows why this happened to me) (Apio, 2007: 101); in Sierra Leone's ten year conflict, children were referred to as rebel babies (Baldi and MacKenzie, 2007: 91), and in Peru, children have been referred to as *chatarra* (stray cat), *hijo de nadie* (nobody's child), and *los regalos de los soldados* (the soldier's gifts) (Theidon, 2015: S193). In Colombia, there is no systematic research about the labelling process or its implications on the individuals who are being named, and yet, studies from other contexts reveal how discourses that represent the children through either narratives about the biological father or the sexual abuse influence, mostly negatively, the self-representation of the children and the role they believe to have within their social group. Those narratives also legitimise practices and policies towards them that jeopardise their well-being, exposing them to mistreatment, abuses, and deprivation that compromises their emotional, mental, and physical state and, in some cases, have led to infanticide (Grieg, 2001; Carpenter, 2010). The positionality that these children have been granted within their social groups has, in

many cases, marked them as ostracised and marginal subjects, and has manifested in later stages of their lives through aspects like lack of access to food, land, housing, education, health, and even citizenship (Carpenter et al., 2005; Mochmann and Lee, 2010).

Driven in great measure by naming practices like the ones referred to above, the concept of stigma—and in many cases the imaginary of the concept—has been linked to attempts to understand and conceptualise the experience of people born as a result of war-related sexual violence as individuals doomed to ostracism and suffering. However, "stigma", refutes Kimberly Theidon (2015), provides a narrow frame to reflect on the experience of these individuals for it does not account for the gendered power relations that are anchored in specific systems of meaning, and that are both reproduced and contested in the context of war. Naming, Theidon argues (2015), reveals social negotiations on memory and memorialisation, and on theories of transmission between parents and children. The presence of the label of *los paraquitos* within social groups and also as part of the discourse of the political economy of victimhood represents some of those negotiations that cannot be understood outside the historic, social, and political context in which they emerged. However, within the different realities of war-related sexual violence in Colombia and the people born as a result of those gender-based practices, the label accounts for only a snapshot of the construction of identity of some of those individuals, obscuring gendered politics of reproduction and identity, and the ways those have been reproduced and contested in the context of the social orders of terror that different armed groups—not just paramilitaries—have sought to impose with the use of sexual violence. Besides the label of *los paraquitos*, throughout my research in Colombia I have found that language and naming practices have assumed different forms in the active processes of identity construction of individuals born as a consequence of war-related sexual violence. In relation to how transmission from their biological fathers can

be culturally understood—named—and reproduced by public discourse, the case of the paramilitary commander Hernan Giraldo gives important insights.

Giraldo was the head the paramilitary group that operated in the Caribbean region of La Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta since the 1980's until the group's demobilisation in February 2006. Among the many names he has been called by his troops, one accounts for the systematic sexual violence that he committed against women and girls in the region, in particular girls who had not had previous sexual relationships (GMH, 2014); *el taladro* (the drill) (*Semana*, 2017). Following those stories, the media gave him another name; *el papá de La Sierra* (the dad of La Sierra) (*El Tiempo*, 2011a; *El Tiempo*, 2013). When paramilitaries hearings started in regard to the 2004 Justice and Peace demobilisation law, Giraldo acknowledged that he had officially recognised fatherhood of more than twenty children (*El Tiempo*, 2014) and reports issued by NGOs and the government have found references to at least thirty-eight of his sons and daughters (GMH, 2011). In relation to the women and girls Giraldo abused, he has argued that although 'he regrets his behaviour they weren't that young and it constituted part of the traditional practices of rural areas' (*El Tiempo*, 2009). In relation to the children, he has claimed that 'they are all registered as his, and that he has always seen for them' (*El Tiempo*, 2011b). Although there are not academic studies or reports seeking to understand the plight of this particular group of people, some information about them can be found in the coverage that the media has given to Giraldo's public hearings and the sexual violence committed by him and his troops, and on reports about women's and girl's experiences of war in that region; what has been highlighted in the public domain is how Giraldo's offspring—described as a homogenous abstract category—was described by people in the communities as '*piojos* (lice) spread throughout the region' (GMH, 2011: 284), and how, following their fathers' legacy, these men and women have joined

parramilitary structures that remained in the area after 2006 (*El Tiempo*, 2010; *El Espectador*, 2011). Research is yet to be done if we seek to understand the specific experiences of people fathered by Giraldo within his social order of terror, in particular research that includes them as active actors and not distant subjects. It is truth that there are references of some of Giraldo's sons and daughters operating within paramilitary structures. However, their individual trajectories cannot be approached and explained on the name of the biological father; they need to be considered in relation to the social order that Giraldo imposed, with its culture of terror (Taussig, 1987), and the overlapping violence and resistance that frame the political, economic, ecological, and cultural contexts in which they have grown up.

Hence, I do not suggest that the case of Giraldo and his sons and daughters can be extrapolated to explain the positionality of people born as a result of war-related sexual violence in other regions of Colombia, for it needs to be addressed within the dynamics of war and the entrenched social control that Giraldo imposed in La Sierra for over decades. According to a report issued by the Group of Historical Memory (GMH) (2011), Giraldo consolidated his regime of social control throughout decades of violence and intimidation built upon patriarchal notions of gender and extended family; in the context of state abandonment and violent economies, he traded women and girls for food and protection for their families, and sought to expand his own network of loyalties by fathering children with different women across the territory. However, I do assert that the case of Giraldo and the sons and daughters he has recognised as his, exemplifies the social imaginary reproduced in the media and the public discourse of children born as a result of wartime sexual violence as extensions of their biological fathers and the violence they represent. In the production and reproduction of those narratives, the symbolic weight of the father, as Veena Das (2007) calls it, challenges the notion of bare life as paternity is granted with

the power not just to reproduce the population but the social body and its political community. Although there is still research to be done on the plight and positionality within their communities of young women and men fathered by Hernan Giraldo, there is in the language used in public discourse a reproduction of the same logics one could guess lie behind Giraldo's exercise of naming the children as his: perpetuating his presence on the region beyond his own physicality. The label imposed on these individuals by Giraldo through his surname has been presented in the public and official narratives through an idea of a homogenous group of people who are loyally and unquestionably fighting to protect their father's domains (*El Tiempo*, 2011c; GMH, 2011). Following a conversation with chapter 3, in the configuration of an imaginary of this category of young women and men as "perpetrators" we can find the structural legitimisation of discriminatory practices that have, for example, obstructed their access to redress.

In the case of San Miguel, I did not find the reproduction of narratives about the symbolic presence of the father imposed—through naming practices—as an attribute on the children. Unlike those people fathered by Giraldo and those children in contexts like Rwanda and Northern Uganda, in San Miguel young women and men born as a consequence of paramilitary sexual violence do not carry in their individual or in their collective name the experiences of war of their parents. In what follows, I will discuss how stories about *los paraquitos* had vanished to disclose the less evident entrenched gendered politics of identity and reproduction.

**On the absence of the father**

The story of Rosa[25] is no different from the stories of many women in San Miguel. She met the father of her son in the rural school of the community when she herself was a child. They were classmates and, at some point before graduating, they started dating. 'I was very young and he was very sweet and handsome. I was very attracted to him! Next thing I knew; I was already pregnant! Rosa tells me while laughing. As her mum and dad refused to send her back to school, Rosa had to start working to pay for her expenses and to save money for the baby. Despite the family's disapproval of her situation, she continued living in the family house with her parents, sisters, and her boyfriend, who moved in with them soon after she started working. After the baby was born Rosa and the father of her child—who at that point in her recollection she started calling husband—continued to stay with her parents until one day, before the baby was six months old, he left to start dating another woman. 'He got tired of my mum nagging all day long, and who wouldn't?' Rosa emphatically added. For some months after he had left he brought her milk and food for the child, but by the time the baby had turned one-year-old he no longer represented any kind of emotional, moral, material, or economic support. On the contrary, Rosa remembers how painful it was for her to see him dating another woman—who was Rosa's close friend—and having a child with her. Although Rosa's son has his surname and they refer to him as "dad"—no longer as husband, he is never around and plays no active role in their lives. 'Sometimes, when my son needs to buy things for the school, I ask him to tell his dad. "What for?" He says, "He is very stingy!" Later in that conversation, after Rosa had shared some of her own experiences of the paramilitary abuses she endured—experiences that, as in many other cases, included sexual violence—and how she survived and resisted them, I asked her

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[25] Interview, Rosa, San Miguel, 20th March 2016.

what had happened to the children who were born of the abuses committed against women. 'I feel very sorry for them' she said, 'they have no father to look after them, just a mum. And that makes me very sad.' Time and again I encountered that reference to the absent father in relation to people fathered by paramilitaries. In a context where the presence of the biological fathers seems to be flexible and war-related sexual violence systematically targeted women and girls, that ongoing reference to "a lack of dad"—when the dad was part of a system of terror and social control—linked to the configuration of the child's identity, reveals negotiations about gendered politics of reproduction anchored within specific systems of social meaning.

Margaret Lock's (2001) concept of local biologies refutes the assumption that the physical material body is universal to argue that embodiment is constituted by both the biological and the social, which in turn, are coproduced and reproduced in the self that is experienced by each individual and represented by the individual and others. The coproduction of biology and culture, argues Lock, configures subjective embodied experiences and discourses about the body. At the same time this coproduction is internalised and individualised—creating unique individuals—embodied experiences are shared among groups of people. Building upon Lock's local biologies, Kimberly Theidon (2008; 2015) conceptualises biology as a system of signification that, in this case through sexual reproduction, has the capability of producing not just bare life but meaning. Beyond a static idea of a stigmatising identity imposed on people born as a result of war-related sexual violence, reflecting on the configuration of their embodied experience requires an understanding of the entrenched systems that provides with meaning the genetic composition of their biological body. To reflect on their positionality, identity, and roles within their social group requires understanding that their biological body represents the cultural reproduction of their parents' own identities and roles as part of

that system of meaning. Genes, in this sense coproduction of biology and culture, cease to be a distinct sequence of nucleotides inside a chromosome, to be the vehicle for social meaning that is transferred from parents to offspring and that shapes the way they are rendered visible—or invisible—within their social group. Narratives about the materialisation—in the inter-subjective reality of people—of this transmission within specific systems of local biologies can be illustrated with the case of Nigeria and the children born of abducted women.

In the context of the ongoing conflict in northeast Nigeria, hundreds of women and girls have been abducted, forcibly married, enslaved, and raped by fighters of *Jama'atul ahl al-sunnah li da'awati wal jihad* (JAS), known internationally as Boko Haram. The Nigerian Armed Forces' efforts to regain control of territories held by JAS has come with the release of large numbers of men, women, and children who are being placed in internally displaced camps, host communities, or sent to their local government areas (Toogood et al., 2016). Many of the women and girls who managed to escape or who were released by the military are coming back with their children, children born as a result of war-related sexual violence. Research conducted by International Alert and UNICEF Nigeria (Toogood et al., 2016) has found that discrimination and marginalisation in these cases, has been shaped by cultural notions of gender and sexual violence, but also by the fear that the mothers were indoctrinated and radicalised in captivity, and the children have, inside them, dormant *juju* (charms) of JAS that could be activated, any minute, from the group in order to turn the child into a militant. Rumours of abducted women and girls going back to their families and murdering their parents have spread among communities. The research notes that among other names, they have been referred to by local people as "Boko Haram Wives," "Boko Haram Blood," and "Annoba," which means epidemics and reflects the belief that their supposed

radicalisation can spread to others. The children, on their part, are described as "hyenas among dogs" and the notion of "bad blood" is commonly used to describe the deterministic relation between the biological father and the child (Toogood et al., 2016: 15). Women and girls, state the report, are more likely to be accepted back in their social group as the assumption is that they can be "cleaned" and the relationships restored. Children, on the contrary, are believed to carry what people refer to as Boko Haram's genes in their blood (Toogood et al., 2016). The findings presented in this report illustrate how the coproduction of biology and culture configures the subjective embodied experience of the sons and daughters of abducted women with members of JAS, and the discourses about their bodies. Within that system of local biologies the identity of the father is transmitted to the children—providing him or her with meaning and positionality—whereas the mother's genetic and social characteristics are disregarded in their power to shape their children's identity. Women's identities, on their part, are assumed to be susceptible of being erased and re-written. In the intersection of local biologies with regimes of violence in which sexual violence has been used, we find the reproduction not just of the population but of specific understandings and experiences of fear and suffering. The case of the children fathered by members of JAS is a reminder of how notions of genetics and identity cannot be understood outside their own cultural systems of meaning, which in turn, are simultaneously reproduced in war and transformed by it.

    As the dynamics and policies of war change—with its constant threat of ending material and social life—so do the imagined ideas of the future of the political community. The question about the reproduction of the material and social body is, after all, a question about who belongs and the social negotiations that belonging to the political community entails. Just as children fathered by members of JAS and abducted

women and girls are not understood as being part of their mothers' social group but to contribute to the reproduction of a different social body with its regime of violence, the case of Hernan Giraldo and the consolidation of his power in La Sierra over decades gives us insights on the intertwined relationship between sexual reproduction and reproduction of specific imaginaries of the social body. One of the practices that took place during those years and that has been presented in reports and highlighted by the media is how fathers, in many cases, offered their daughters to Giraldo in exchange for money and protection (GMH, 2011). Although it has been presented as part of the argument of traditional patriarchal rural relationships operating in complicity with a system of violence—that includes blurred representations of Giraldo as a benefactor with a "hand of steel" (GMH, 2011)—those practices provide insights on the effectiveness of terror working in conjunction with state abandonment and capital to produce and reproduce specific social orders (Taussig, 1987). When the consolidation of a regime of violence has been so systematic and it has assumed the absolute power to rule, the notions of the political community and the possibilities of the imagined future are restricted by it. While overlapping forms of violence assume control over the past, present, and future, its perversity is manifested in the transformation of the moral order and the drive of surviving within the available possibilities of the social body; women's bodies, within this system, have been imposed a biological and social reproductive role.

In San Miguel, with the transformation of the dynamics of the armed conflict has come a transformation of people's experience of the present and of the possibilities of the imagined futures. The notion of the social body in which people saw in children born as a result of the sexual abuses committed by paramilitaries the presence of their biological father's identity—*los paraquitos*—has changed. The reproduction of the material, individual body, is no longer understood as the reproduction of a social body where

paramilitaries represent a constant presence. And yet, the bodies of these people born of war are understood as problematic for the reproduction of the imagined political community. In San Miguel, the symbolic weight of the father within the system of local biologies that grant the children with meaning, seems to be more related to the absence of the father than to the violence he represents. Time and again in my conversations with people, the lack of the father was identified as an issue, provided as an explanation to what was understood as unacceptable behaviour on the part of these children fathered by paramilitaries; their aggressive attitudes, their poor performance at school, their lack of interest in working the land. During WWII, in countries like Norway and Denmark, children fathered by allies or German soldiers were discriminated against not just because of who their biological fathers were but also because they were sons and daughters of single mothers. Under that moral order, those children were labelled as "bastards" and their legitimacy was questioned based on gender expectations imposed on women (Monchmann and Larsen, 2008). The story of Rosa that I presented at the beginning of this section, which is shared by many women in San Miguel, suggests that under the moral order of San Miguel women—and their children—are not judged based on the presence of the biological father; being a single mother in San Miguel is culturally accepted as part of the dynamics of reproduction of the social body of the community. In San Miguel, absence, in relation to the biological father and his role in the child's life, does not necessarily refer to their physical presence.

The context of Nigeria presented above resembles other cases like the war in the former Yugoslavia where policies of forced impregnation were underpinned by assumptions that identity was defined by the paternal line and largely disregarded cultural and biological transmission from the mother (Weitsman, 2008). Unlike these cases, German policies of reproduction during WWII serve as an example of a system that

understood identity to be transmitted by both parents. Based on that system of beliefs, sexual relations were forbidden between Germans and groups of people considered to be of an inferior race (Weitsman, 2007). In contrast with that, sexual relations were encouraged with groups of people that were considered of racial value. In this sense, during the German occupation of Norway (1940-1945) German soldiers were encouraged to start relationships with Norwegian women and conceive children. As part of the policies that were put in place to encourage reproduction, Norwegian women received financial and material aids to support them during the pregnancy and after giving birth. As a result of the occupation, there are records of between 10,000 and 12,000 people fathered by German soldiers (Mochmann and Lee, 2010: 275). In San Miguel, identity is transmitted by both father and mother. In this case, it is not a question of belonging as in their system of transmission the mother grants the child with a place within the political community. Children fathered by paramilitaries are not understood as belonging to "the other." In his research on slavery and families in the South Pacific of Colombia, Romero (1998) studies the system of slavery and how it has shaped relations of territoriality, extended family, and identity. Belonging, Romero argues, is defined by the maternal line and by being positioned in a web of relationships anchored in the territory and defined by economic activities. This implies that the responsibilities in terms of raising the child are nor just his or her mother's but they fall upon an extended social network that includes uncles, aunts, cousins, and grandparents from the side of both biological parents. In conversation with this, in contemporary San Miguel family,[26] as an institution shaped by the economic and political context within a particular moral order, relies on the reproductive capability of women and on their social networks not just to maintain but to reproduce the social body of the community. The maternal line provides the reliable

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[26] I have not found research on family configuration and ties in the particular area where San Miguel is located. However, to see research on Afro-Colombian families in diverse regions of Colombia see for example: Arocha (1986), Motta (1995), Romero (1998), Urrea et al., (1999).

matrix of entrenched relationships through which the social body expands. Couples'
partnerships are mediated by a notion of collaborative work in the land and in the
economy of the household—which does not entail equal distribution of labour inside the
household, which is understood to be women's responsibility. As such, those partnerships
are dynamic and move around women's family house and land. 'It seems that women
have more ownership of the land,' I mentioned to Rosa after she explained how her
parents live in the land that her mum inherited from her parents and how Rosa herself is
buying bricks and storing them with the plan to build a house on the land that she bought
with her savings from working in family houses in Cali. 'It might be because men come
and go, and if the house is theirs, what would we do? As long as they are willing to help,
they are welcome to stay. Support; that's the point of having a husband, isn't it?' [27] Rosa
replied.

In my conversations and interviews with people in the community it was not
uncommon for women to mention stories about the fathers of their children not having
recognised other children or their own. In addition to an official name, children in
Colombia are legally registered with the surname of the father and the surname of the
mother. Unlike other contexts where the surname of the father signals belonging and
legitimacy—of both the child and the mother—in San Miguel it is common for people to
have just the surname of the mother. 'Whose surname do those children born of the
abuses have?' I shyly asked to people who mentioned the children to me based on my
own paradigm of a Catholic family. 'Their mum's, of course!', they replied every time,
speaking from a moral order that does not allocate shame on the lack of the father's
surname. As part of my involvement, as a third actor, in the process of collective
reparation of the community, at some point during fieldwork I was asked by the *Unidad*

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[27] Interview, Rosa, San Miguel, 20th March 2016.

*para las Víctimas* and local leaders of the *Junta de Acción Comunal* to help collect the information for the census that was part of the administrative requirements at the stage of the process in which they were. For days I walked around filling lists with people's names, national ID numbers, number of people in the household, and ages of the members of the nuclear family. As part of the not-so-clear lines between whose household people belonged to and the notion of nuclear family that is imposed on local systems of meaning in the interactions with the nation-state, family networks unveiled through the surnames of the region: Carabalí, Popo, and Larrahondo among others. Within that landscape of family constellations, it was more uncommon to find surnames that signalled connections with other regions than to find people registered with just one surname. Although I did not ask whose surname those were, by that point I already knew many of the people whose name I included in the lists, and I was able to trace that surname to their mother. In few cases, though, I can only assume it was their mother's instead of their father's.

Within this moral order, and in this flexible and dynamic constellation of relationships, *knowing* who the father is has been granted with more power than *naming* the father. The father, in this case, contributes to this reproductive system of meaning by anchoring the child to a broader network of social ties, and knowing who the father is— even if the child has not been recognised—grants him or her with access to that social, cultural, and sometimes economic support. For the reproduction and maintenance of the social body of San Miguel, "being from there" is presented as an essential attribute. Many times, particularly in relation to people aspiring to positions of social and political power, I heard the reference of 'not being from here' used negatively to describe the person, to

signal unreliability and unpredictability. 'Who were those men?' I asked *Don* Claudio,[28] referring to the paramilitaries who raped and abused women,

- DC: That's hard to say; those men were not from here, they came from other corners of the country. Some of them were bad, some of them were good people, he replied
- TS: What about the children who were born of those abuses? I continued the conversation
- DC: Those poor kids, just with a mother, you see them around causing trouble, not knowing where they came from or where they are going, he added.
- TS: Do you think they have something of their fathers? I risked asking
- DC: Of course! He laughed. They are humans, aren't they? They were bandits. But among them you could find good and bad people. Because they were always around, sometimes they would sit with us to chat, to tell us about them. They were nothing but humans.

In order to understand the implications of the absence of the father in the configuration of the identity of these individuals born as a result of paramilitary sexual violence, further research needs to be done on family ties and parenthood in this Afro Descendent community. We cannot forget that those fathers, who are contributing to their children's identity through their absence, imposed a regime of violence in the community. Despite that, when people in the community talked about them in relation to the children they were described in terms of their paternal dimension, leaving aside the violence they committed against the community and, in this particular case, against women and girls. Disclosures about the absence of the father in the configuration of the child's identity, in this context, reveal intertwined forms of violence that impose roles and expectations on women, and claim control over their bodies and reproductive capabilities.

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[28] Interview, *Don* Claudio, San Miguel, 5th April.

**On the presence of the mother**

I ran into *Don* German in the community-built bamboo kiosk that served as a bus stop. Placed at the entrance of the dirt road that led to the school, and in front of the recently paved for the first time main road that connected San Miguel with the urban settlement of Buenos Aires (15 minutes by car) up the mountain and, in the other direction, down the mountain, with the second biggest urban settlement in the department of Cauca, Santander de Quilichao (40 minutes) and the nearest city, Cali (1hr and 30 minutes), this long covered bench provided the shade that made the usually long wait for the bus, under the hot sun of the mountains, less slow. While *Don* German waited for someone who was coming to visit him from Cali, and I was waiting for my bus to take me back to that city, he told me the story of how, during the paramilitary occupation, he and his wife managed to flee to Cali. They found a place in a shantytown and they tried to make a home out of it. However, he said, they did not have a job and making a living was very difficult in that unfamiliar urban place. He tried for a year to get used to it, but he could not bear the idea of their house in San Miguel abandoned, with their crops and animals, so he decided to go back to their land and endure the presence of paramilitaries. His wife stayed; she felt it was too risky to go back and, until that day *Don* German and I waited for different buses together, she had not done it. When he asked me about details of my research I told him of my interest in the experiences of children in contexts of war; 'children who were displaced, recruited, children who were fathered by paramilitaries', I described.

> - DG: There are many of those [children fathered by paramilitaries] around here. But that comes as no surprise; they [paramilitaries] established their base in the school so we had hundreds of men everywhere. They were single men, just normal that their presence dragged women! In those days you could see women

from different places coming here looking for them.[29] Also women from here were after them. Just think about it; where there is a man, there is a woman

- TS: But there were abuses, weren't they? I asked *Don* German

- DG: Those were violent times, and there was violence, but women fell in love. I don't want to say that there weren't abuses, but in general, they fell in love, he continued his explanation

- TS: What about the children who were born, I asked him

- DG: Imagined the problem, without a father![30] He replied.

Narratives about people born as a result of war-related sexual violence, in the case of San Miguel, intersect with the configuration of typologies of gendered experiences of the armed conflict. In order to understand the former, it is necessary to address the ways in which, in the case of women, gender representations are reproduced in contexts of war and underline the different shapes that violence against women and girls assumes. Weitsman (2007) argues that policies and practices of war-related sexual violence are driven by the intertwined notions of gender, biology, and ethnicity, which can be identified in the discourses about sexual violence and in the legitimisation of practices towards women and their children conceived and born as a result of those abuses. Those gendered representations, of particular importance when reflecting on the contribution of the parents in shaping their children's identity, also dictate the social and cultural expectations imposed on women in relation to aspects like motherhood and sexuality, within the moral system of the political community. The category of *las mujeres de San Miguel,* introduced in chapter 3, as a homogeneous group of women who endured deprivations and sexual violence committed by paramilitaries, is contested and negotiated by local discourses. Although within the community there is recognition that paramilitaries raped women and girls, local representations of women and sexuality—

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[29] In other war-affected regions of Colombia there are references to dynamics of forced sex work, abductions, and sexual slavery (GMH 2011). However, in the case of San Miguel I did not hear of any.

[30] Interview, *Don* German, San Miguel, 18th April 2016.

outside the context of war—represent tensions when reflecting on women's embodied experience of paramilitary violence and the possibilities to subvert that violence and redress it. To think of the embodied experience of women in San Miguel, however, requires understanding their Afro-Colombian bodies as sites of historical, cultural, and political struggles.

In her review of the state of research on Afro-Colombian women in Colombia, Juana Camacho (2004) problematizes the representation of Afro-Colombian women as an imaginary embodiment of multiple and contradictory stereotypes produced in opposition to feminine white, urban, and Catholic ideals. Historically, Camacho (2004) notes, the body of Afro-Colombian women has been seen as merchandise and a source of profit within the economic system in both its productive and reproductive capability; an object of male domination and pleasure constrained by the legal system, Christian morality, and the economic system of slavery. During colonial times, Afro-Colombian women's sexuality was regulated as part of the needs of the economic system that understood their bodies as commodities to serve both the system and the white and *mestizo* population. In this sense, for instance, reproduction was incentivised during the 16th and 17th centuries when demand for slaves was high.[31] Historic, political, and cultural processes have configured imaginaries of these women as subjugated within the economic and moral system, which is understood as predominantly white, and to have produced an objectification of their bodies through servile associations with male desire and pleasure (PCN, 2012). Lozano (2010) argues that the identity of Afro-Colombian[32] women assumes different shapes—in what is a non-homogenous category of women—in the

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[31] To see research on resistance through the use of abortions on the part of slaves women see Spicker (1996).

[32] Lozano (2010) questions the use of the category Afro-Colombian, instead of Black, to consider it an euphemism that obscures the fact that discrimination against Black women and men perseveres and it has been historically entrenched in the capital economic system. However, for the purpose of consistency and because I do not discuss the category of race/ethinicity in depth in my analysis, I will use the category Afro-Colombian.

intersection of the oppressive systems of class, capital, and patriarchy that exclude and subordinate on the basis of ethnicity. Through the historic reproduction of these intertwined racist systems, Lozano (2010) maintains, the imaginary of a subordinated homogenous Afro-Colombian woman has been produced and her identity assumed to be fixed as maids, matriarchs, or sexualised objects.

In the context of war, the stereotype of these women as sexualised beings, in combination with racist and classist paradigms of social orders that deem rurality and Afro-Colombian culture as inferior (Viveros, 2000; Arocha, 1998), underlie policies and practices of war-related sexual violence that have sought to impose fear and control over the population (GMH, 2011; PCN, 2012). In the language that surrounds rape in contexts of war, Weitsman (2007) argues, we can find the discursive reproduction of specific imaginaries of social orders with their gendered notions of identity, biology, and ethnicity. As part of the stories that women in San Miguel decided to share with me during fieldwork about their experiences during the paramilitary confinement, and in the narratives produced by others about those experiences, I encountered the discursive reproduction of a social order that naturalised and normalised sexual violence against women, and through its moral system, made women bear the blame for it. Time and again, when I enquired about the gendered dimensions of those years of confinement, I heard mentions—mainly coming from men—of women 'falling in love', 'being attracted to paramilitaries', and 'putting themselves at risk by walking alone'. As if being in the company of other people could have protected them from the abuses they had to endure. In the stories told by women, language described the heteronormative objectification of their Afro-Colombian identities as sexualised and subordinated bodies. The conversation in which Rosa[33] told me about the day she was raped is illustrative of many other

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[33] Interview, Rosa, San Miguel, 20th March 2016.

conversations I had with women. Rape was not only a physical violation of their bodies but a discursive production of domination over their identities and sexuality. Rosa remembered how the day she was raped, and every day afterwards, paramilitaries would yell at her things like 'this *negrita* is very good at making love', 'this *negrita* is very sexy, 'I've heard this *negrita* likes making love, I should try her sometime'. 'I felt so much shame and fear!' Rosa emphasised. Shame, was a constant reference in my conversations about rape with women.

As notions of gender, identity, and sexuality lie behind the logics of perpetrators of war-related sexual violence, local notions of those categories also shape the different explanations and responses that people from the community have assumed towards those violent practices. In the case of San Miguel, through the overlapping discourses that seek to grant with meaning what people endured during the years of the paramilitary confinement, it is possible to recognise a process of naturalisation of the abuses committed against women and girls through which heteronormative masculinities are reinforced by the domination of female Afro-Colombian bodies. Under this logic, it is in women's nature to accommodate to men's needs. Naturalisation in San Miguel, however, was also consolidated through the normalisation of the paramilitary social order of terror. After more than four years of occupation, what was understood as out of the norm— including all forms of sexual violence like forced nudity, forced partnership, or rape—had permeated the social reality of the political community and became part of the normalised routines of social control people had to endure. This is not to suggest that people agreed with those norms imposed through the use of force, but that they became familiar with the system of terror that reshaped their everyday life and their imaginary of the future. In the normalisation and naturalisation of gender-based violence against women and girls the reproduction of patriarchal notions of gender disregarded the context of war and projected

their forced expectations of women into the dynamics of those regimes of terror. As within that social order women were expected to cook, do household related labour, and among other tasks, fulfil men's "sexual needs", the imposition of those activities by male combatants was interpreted within that patriarchal framework as "natural" and expected. Motherhood, I suggest, emerged as part of the embodied labour of women's experience and children born of war became part of what Taussig (1989:8) describes as the 'normality of the abnormal.'

In conversation with the emphasis on the paternity dimension of the representation of paramilitaries discussed in the previous section, in the case of women the symbolic weight of their role as mothers overpowered their experiences of violence. Narratives about children born as a result of paramilitary sexual violence emerge in the tension between local frameworks for understanding gender and sexual reproduction, and the ones for understanding violence against women; in the reproduction of the naturalisation of both sexual violence and motherhood, time and again in my conversations with men and women in the community I encountered the assumption that children fathered by paramilitaries were the result of consensual relationships. Gendered politics of reproduction within this system of local biologies naturalised women's role as both reproducers of the social group and mothers, obscuring the overlapping forms of violence that lie behind the conception and birth of the child, and the nurturing expectations.

In the various trajectories of women's experiences of the paramilitary occupation, moreover, those cases that could be interpreted as consensual need to be read within the dynamics of war, endurance, and resistance of women. Within the dynamics of that regime of terror that sought to constrain women´s power over their bodies and sexuality, some women in San Miguel may have assumed the role of partners of paramilitaries.

Different levels of strategic decisions are involved in the trajectories of those partnerships; in a context where access to food and medicines was very restricted, some women traded themselves in exchange for protection and basic needs for their families; in the face of the constant threat of sexual violence, some women preferred to be associated with the one paramilitary that had already raped them or that at least presented himself in friendly terms; in a reality where paramilitaries represented the absolute power and where the imaginary of the future was completely constrained by that social order, some women fell in love. In conversation with Theidon's (2015) conceptualisation of strategic pregnancies in Peru as ways in which women reclaimed some control over their bodies by deciding to get pregnant by someone from their community instead of risking pregnancy by a soldier in gang rape, some women in San Miguel also sought to, as Theidon calls it, ensure the name of the father. Different in this case, however, ensuring the name of *that* father, a paramilitary, represented for women their association—and their children's—with that reality in which paramilitaries ruled. Bringing back the case of Hernan Giraldo and the families that offered their daughters to the paramilitary commander, we find another case of how the consolidation of the social order of terror tore and reshaped the fabric of society and its moral order.

Returning to local biologies as systems of meaning, the question of what has passed from those men—who were not from *there* and who, as paramilitaries, imposed their idea of social order through terror in the community—to the children that were born as a result of the violence they perpetrated, remains unanswered.[34] However, the effectiveness of the consolidation of the paramilitary regime as a social order can also be

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[34]Based on my conversations and interviews with women, as well as the review of their testimonies to have access to reparations, it appears that infections and sexually transmitted diseases to women is one of the unspoken and yet to be fully addressed reminders of the abuses paramilitary committed. Although it is not a subject that I frequently encountered during fieldwork and that I have not explored in depth, this kind of transmission—infections—is also mentioned in cases of children who were in their mother's womb at the moment when they were raped. For more on this trajectory of transmission see Kimberly Theidon (2008; 2015), and the Peruvian film *La Teta Asustada* (2009).

seen in the transformation of the system of local biology, for it was not just culture that coproduced it, but the culture of terror. Myriam Denov and Atim Angela Lakor´s (2017) conducted a research in northern Uganda with 60 teenagers who were born in the context of the abductions and rape that their mothers experienced by members of the LRA, and whose formative years took place in the bush witnessing and enduring profound violence and deprivations. For the teenagers in Denov and Lakor's research (2017: 263), 'war was better than peace' because at least during captivity they grew up with a sense of belonging, with a protective father, and with the social power and status that came from their father's rank inside the LRA. In San Miguel, the story of the teenager who used a *machete* against his little brother, who has been told throughout his short life by his mother to stand up for himself because he is the son of a *paraco*, comes back as a reminder that status, no matter whether it is driven by fear, can also be transmitted from parents to children. Within that social order that normalised terror, some women in San Miguel recognised the contribution of the father to their children´s identity in terms of positionality.

These cases illustrate how, framed by the complicit violence of patriarchy, capital, and the armed conflict, for women and their sons and daughters born of war agency is often restricted to choosing between the lesser of two evils. In the attempts to grant with meaning the realities that emerge from war we find one of the hypocrisies of patriarchy; the same values and notions that make war-related gender-based violence, including sexual violence, possible and expected, operate also to blame and judge women for having to endure their experiences of violence. Through the naturalisation and normalisation of sexual violence during the paramilitary occupation, and the reproduction of patriarchal notions of motherhood, we can perceive the cultural and moral overlapping burdens imposed on women; sexually and emotionally having succumbed to

paramilitaries, having denied their children knowing who the father was, and not having being able to raise the child according to the social norms of the political community. In the reproduction of structural systems of violence, the agency of women is conveniently demanded on the name of the preservation of the moral order that is cherished by the political community. Violence against women, in this sense, appear as a continuum—in times of armed conflict and in the absence of it—that has claimed their bodies and reproductive capabilities and, disregarding their experiences of violence, has imposed on them the duty to raise desirable subjects for the reproduction of the social group. The presence of the mother in shaping their children's identity, although active, has to be understood coming from the positionality that women have been granted within the social order.

**Final thoughts**

Within the system of local biologies that grants social meaning to the bodies of people who were born as a result of paramilitary sexual violence in San Miguel, the indication that their identity was defined by the historic, political, and cultural presence of their fathers in the social body of the community and in the genetic composition of their bodies—represented in the stigmatising label of *paraquitos*—has shifted to reveal that meaning, in this case, is transmitted by both mother and father. In this system of meaning, what has been transmitted from fathers—paramilitaries from other parts of the country— and mothers—local women—to shape the children's identity unveils gendered politics of reproduction that seek to exert control over women's identities and bodies through the use of weapons and fear, but also without their use. The symbolic weight of the absence of the father combines with the positionality that the mother occupies within the patriarchal social order of the political community to produce—through sexual

reproduction—a marginal and ahistorical subject. The story of the teenager that used a *machete* against his brother that I introduced at the beginning of the chapter is illustrative of how these children and young women and men in San Miguel may be born of war, but it is the combination of that violence with the violence of patriarchy and capital in their concrete rural and ethnic context that has shaped their identity, positionality, and possibilities.

The consolidation of the paramilitary social order redefined the meaning of agency for women and men. People were not locked, and yet they lost their freedom and autonomy. Although they were living in their territory and sleeping in their houses, the social maps they had traditionally used to interact in their everyday life were destroyed and replaced by the categories and rules of the culture of terror. For women and men, that implied living under fear and the constant threat of being labelled as a sympathiser of guerrillas, of being killed, disappeared, or tortured. It implied everyday checkpoints, curfews, and limited access to food and medicines. For both women and men, it implied hunger, sleeping with the doors of their houses opened, seeing paramilitaries assume possession of their animals, crops, and lands. Within the social order, men were forced to participate in the maintenance of the regime in the public dimension that their gender role, within a patriarchal system, allocates them; running errands such as going to neighbouring towns to buy credit for the mobile phones of paramilitaries, taking messages from one place to the other, raising and butchering livestock to feed the hundreds of men who were always around. 'Sometimes the commander would let me have some of the meat, very often I'd get the tail of [the cow]',[35] *Don* Efraín once shared with me. Within the social order, women were also forced to participate in the maintenance of the regime through the reproduction of their patriarchal gender roles;

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[35] *Don* Efraín, Interview, San Miguel, 15th May 2016.

cooking for the troops, washing their clothes, fulfilling their heteronormative "sexual needs." In the normalisation of the paramilitary social order and the reproduction of the gender roles, the routinized violence people had to endure became part of the ordinary. Violence against women, however, continues in its more structural forms when in the negotiations between social orders, their experiences of the paramilitary occupation are judged through the moral values of patriarchy. My research did not explore notions of masculinity within the community. Based on my fieldwork, I cannot offer an interpretation on whether, for example, there is an assumption of failed masculinities that failed to 'protect their women' and a process of reinforcing those masculinities by denying paramilitary sexual violence. However, my research does unveil how through the normalisation of paramilitary sexual violence and the reproduction of patriarchal expectations of gender roles, women have been blamed both for the paramilitary abuses over their bodies and identities and for having endure them. Children born of war, in that sense, become part of the intersubjective reality of the political community through the labour of motherhood and not through the experience of war.

During fieldwork women shared with me their own stories and the stories of other women in their families. Experiences of sexual harassment in their houses, dirt roads, and fields, experiences of forced nudity in the recurrent checkpoints spread throughout the territory, experiences of rape and children born as a result of the abuses. As I developed in the methodology of the thesis, I did not, however, formally interview any of the women who gave birth to those children. That does not mean that I did not interact with some of them, as we shared moments, walks, and conversations about the past, the present, and the future of San Miguel. Although they knew about my research and the commitment I had acquired with the community and the *Unidad para las Víctimas*, in which I was to contribute to the advancement of the process of collective reparation by

providing a document with a narrative of different experiences of violence the community had endured, they decided never to mention their children as being born of war. I can only but venture interpretations on why they did not share that part of their experiences with me. Fear, protective silences, lack of trust in me, in the process of collective reparation, or in the nation-state that has failed them over and over are of course possible explanations. There is, nevertheless, the possibility that the categories through which my research and the 2011 Victim's and Land Restitution Law have sought to understand the experiences of these women and their children do not represent them. As discussed in chapter 3, women have often been named responsible for their children not being included in the *Registro Único de Víctimas* (Unified Record of Victims)—whether for lack of information on legal frameworks and its bureaucracies or because they do not want to reveal the information to the child. In the context of reflections on the presence of the father in the children's identities through naming practices and the unintelligibility of the category of children born of war within the realities in which transitional justice operates, I would like to add another layer to the attempts to understand how people born of war have become part of the realities that emerge from war. When women's agency has been restricted to choosing between the lesser of two evils, I suggest that their agency over their bodies, sexual reproduction, and identity can also take the shape of refusing to name their experiences as sexual violence or their children as 'victims'. In the following chapter, I will discuss how silence, as argue by Veena Das (1996), can be a form of agency by refusing to allocate words to experience.

## Chapter 5

## The Archive of Silence and the Ghosts of Children Born of War

On a Sunday afternoon in July of 2000 Astrid stepped out of her mum's house with the idea to visit a friend who was sick. The journey from Astrid's mum's house to her friend's was no different from all the other journeys people walked every day; dirt roads across the green landscapes immersed in red soil mountains, unmarked paths through cassava, plantain, and coffee plantations, community made bamboo bridges across creeks. That day, when Astrid started walking her familiar paths, the forest started moving with her, slowly coming alive. She did not see it at the beginning, but she could feel the trees waking up around her with her every move. That day, Astrid left her house and fell down the rabbit's hole, just to find out that everyone she knew was falling with her. That was the first encounter she had with the hundreds and hundreds of paramilitaries from the Calima Bloc who, dressed in green camouflage, were moving across mountains and forests to set their base in San Miguel, from where they would operate to the North of Cauca for the next five years. What happened in Buenos Aires during those years has gained a place in the country's collective reconstructions of the armed conflict through the Naya massacre, when between the 10$^{th}$ and the 13$^{th}$ April 2001, during *Semana Santa* (Easter), a group of 500 paramilitaries from the Calima Bloc marched to the Naya region from Timba,[36] burning houses, torturing and killing over 100 people, mainly Afro-Colombians and Nasa Indigenous people, and displacing around 3.500 people (Jimeno et al., 2010). Among all the experiences of violence that the municipality of Buenos Aires witnessed during those years, the story of San Miguel is yet to be told.

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[36] Some people in San Miguel claim that although it is believed that paramilitaries marched from Timba to perpetuate the Naya massacre, they actually did it from San Miguel.

'What happened after they [paramilitaries] arrived?' I asked the seven men who participated in a social cartography workshop that Astrid and I organised, '*el terror, muchacha, el terror*', said *Don* Efraín.[37] The constitution of the everyday reality of violence that people experienced for around five years, with its events that disrupted the ordinary, its new dynamics that did not have a place within people's universe of meaning, and the complete abandonment of the institutions that were supposed to protect them, appeared—somehow suddenly—as a different world from the one they grew up in. The contradiction of living in their familiar landscapes and yet not being able to quite apprehend it, brought with it a world that had blurry boundaries and was perceived as surreal—with very real consequences. As such, it is very often described as a bad dream, one that lasted years; 'It was like having a nightmare', *Don* Efraín continued, 'but instead of waking up, we were living in it'. Time, within that world, has its own rules and pace; recollections of the moment when paramilitaries arrived are easily defined and everyone has their own narrative of the first interactions with them. This is not the case with the moment when it ended. It has to do in part with the fact that paramilitaries did not retreat at the same time but maintained a constant—although less dominant—presence in the territory even after their demobilization in December 2004. Some stories even talk about their return in 2010 to collect weapons and money they had hidden in *caletas*, and there are always whispers of people who saw *them*—described as an anonymous collective presence—in towns nearby. However, the perception of time and the blurriness around this is also shaped by the different ways in which that reality, through different traces in the social and material landscape, inhabits the present. During the social cartography workshop that we organised with women *Doña* Miriam[38] said: 'it really was like a

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[37] Social cartography workshop, San Miguel, 1st May 2016.
[38] Social cartography workshop, San Miguel, 28th April 2016.

nightmare', and while briefly looking down she added, 'sometimes it feels like we are still living in it'.

Collective memories of the past are anchored in people's experiences and in material markers (Jelin, 2003: xv); some of them bring back specific events while others refer to patterns of violence that reshaped the everyday life during those years of paramilitary confinement. When talking about that time, people very often refer to the story of the young man who was killed because when asked to play a song in a party, he had not done it fast enough. Or the day of *la balacera* (the shooting), when a group of guerrillas tried to ambush a unit of paramilitaries, resulting in a confrontation from hill to hill that, in what people describe as a miracle, did not kill anyone from the community. 'That day my aunt tried to hide under her bed but she didn't fit', said the youngest of the seven men in the workshop while everyone nervously laughed. Within the almost five years of paramilitary occupation, those events—that happened during the early stages of the arrival of paramilitaries—occupy a distinctive place in people's active recollection of those years. There are other markers that do not have the same type of discernible boundaries but that gained a place in people's memories because they disrupted the ordinary and became a constant presence in the social order that was imposed through fear and violence. The school, as one of the primary places of reunion for this rural community, was transformed into a storage and training centre. From the very first day of confinement paramilitaries assumed control of the school, painting the walls with the acronym A.U.C,[39] storing weapons and supplies in the three classrooms, sleeping in the corridors, performing military exercises in the premises, lurking around with their weapons, forcing teachers and children to be part of that social order of terror. Curfew, checkpoints, destruction of crops, struggling to get food and medicines, and having to

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[39] United Self-defenders of Colombia, in Spanish: *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia.*

leave the doors of the houses open for paramilitaries to come in and dispose of everything and everyone that was inside as if it was theirs, are also common references when people talk about that past; 'we were prisoners, prisoners in our own land', people would often say.

Narratives of those years, as all narratives of the past, are constituted of presences and absences; what is said, what is not said but we can nevertheless perceive, and what is not said at all. In this chapter I argue that in Colombia it is in the space of absence, between silence—with its power to conceal—and unintelligibility—with its lack of frameworks to understand—that narratives about children and young women and men born of war exist. Following Elizabeth Jelin's (2003) conceptualisation of collective memories, memories—as subjective processes—are the constant object of interpretation and struggles. It is people, in this context, who produce meaning of the past, but that meaning cannot be understood outside of the power relations in which people's actions take place in the present. Memories, claims Jelin (2003), must be looked at historically, in the sense that meanings of the past change according to broader social and political scenarios, and the place allocated to specific memories or narratives of memories is constantly being negotiated through socio-cultural and ideological elements. Individual memories, according to Maurice Halbwachs (1992), are always socially reconstructed within specific networks of social relations and cannot be understood outside those. People's recollections and silences are framed by the social frameworks to which they belong to—like family, religion, rurality, ethnicity, and social class—and it is precisely within those frameworks that memories are the object of labour and are provided with meaning. The imaginary of children born as a result of war-related sexual violence, within those narratives of the past and of the armed conflict, appeared momentarily in one given time through naming practices. In this chapter I suggest that their presence within

and throughout the dynamic storylines of San Miguel, however, represents a phantasmagoria of a collective subject that has assumed different shapes under different social orders. This phantasmagoria appears as a fragmented sequence of images defined by the experiences of violence of their mothers, the symbolic presence of the biological father, and their embodied experience of the present.

**The configuration of the spectre**

I travelled to Buenos Aires following whispers of stories of *los paraquitos*. I had found them in a 2010 magazine article and in a footnote of an ombudsman's report. I had found them in conversations with the very few people who, at some point when it was safer to travel to the area, had been part of the implementation of projects in San Miguel with very concrete actions oriented towards sexual violence survivors, *las mujeres de San Miguel. Unidad para las Víctimas* former employee Gisella Olaya,[40] who was in charge of the first stage of the pilot for collective reparation in Buenos Aires, explained how they had prioritised San Miguel for the implementation of the pilot when they learned about their experience of confinement, but particularly, the widespread sexual violence against women and girls during those years; 'It was through our interactions with women that we heard that people were calling those children *los paraquitos'* Gisella explained, 'and although I have personally tried to call attention to their situation, we started working with San Miguel because of what happened to the women, and they were our priority'.

I knew about the existence of those children—described as an anonymous collective presence—but their existence through the label was all the information I had been able to gather. As I mentioned in the methodology section, through my ethnographic approach I refused to use the label or the category of "children born of war" to guide my

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[40] Interview, Gisella Olaya, Cali, 9ᵗʰ May, 2016.

search. Instead, I used the category of "war-affected children" and my conviction that the information I was looking for had assumed different shapes that did not necessarily need naming. My ethical concern was not to draw the kind of attention towards those children or their mothers that could translate into further forms of violence. My sociological concern was not to impose categories upon my interactions with people, within the limits of the research, that would not allow me to see the emergence of narratives—or the absences of those narratives—around children and young women and men born as a result of war-related sexual violence. In San Miguel I started talking with people, I started walking the dirt roads and identifying the traces of violence in the social and material landscapes, I read testimonies of sexual violence survivors, and yet I could not see the collective presence that had brought me to Buenos Aires. I knew they were there, I could feel their symbolic power, and yet I could not find them. I realised, at some point during my stay in San Miguel, that I was not following whispers of a subject but the presence of a spectre; the spectre of *los paraquitos*. I had to understand the label and the narratives that included it in the context of the subjective process that had produced them; once the presence of paramilitaries was not so dominant in the area people had to re-learn and name the world that was left after years of living in a regime of terror. The timid appearance of the subject of *los paraquitos* within the collective memories that I had encountered, and that had led me to this community, was the reflection of constant struggles and negotiations framed—in a specific time and place—within particular power and social relations. *Los paraquitos*, as a collective phenomenon, did not seem to inhabit the present from which I was seeking to understand the past.

Questions about memories need to be formulated within specific representations of time and space. The time frame of memories is by no means linear; memories take place in 'that present where the past is the space of experience and the future is the

horizon of expectations' (Jelin, 2003: 4). In the present time, it is not the past that is at stake but instead the struggles over meanings of the past in relation to a desired future. In this sense, it is not just about who produces memories, but is also a question about what, how, and when memories are being produced. Remembrance and forgetting are triggered by social frameworks and they work together to configure memories in the present time. In that present time that I shared with people in San Miguel, the presence—in itself—of young women and men born as a result of paramilitary sexual violence did not allocate the subject of children born of war—or the subject of *los paraquitos*—a place in the social reconstructions of the past. Jelin (2003) argues that for things to be remembered, they need to be granted with meaning within the social frameworks people inhabit. For things not to be lost or forgotten, people need to grant them with meaning in the present in relation to the expectation of the future. In that present time where I existed for the people of San Miguel, young women and men conceived by paramilitary sexual violence were not included in the collective reconstructions of the past. It was not, however, that they were lost or forgotten, for they *never* belonged to those reconstructions. Those who belonged existed under the label of *los paraquitos,* and that subject materialised in one particular socio-historical moment, in the negotiations between social orders, and was now long gone for the social reality that has meaning for the community.

In the non-linear movement that involves past and present, there are social negotiations about the present and future of the community as a political entity. In that sense, producing narratives of the past are attempts to provide past experiences with meanings in—and from—a present moment. Narratives of personal reconstructions of people's own past experiences cannot be understood outside collective narratives, as it is within those collective narratives that past events find their place in the present. Through narratives, with their presences and absences, the past intersects the present, and because

reconstructing narratives is a subjective process, it represents a dialogue between personal experiences and collective frameworks. Remembering, as an action, implies activating an experience of the past in the present. It does not mean, however, that the events we recall are significant in their own. It is when we understand remembering as a process that is collectively framed that those events acquire a meaning and gain a place in the present. The existence of people born of war as part of the experience of the armed conflict of San Miguel, and therefore negotiations around constructions of narratives that include them within the social memories of the community, has assumed different shapes throughout time. In the present that I spent in San Miguel, struggles over memories of their conception, birth, and early years were no longer given in relation to the symbolic weight of the biological father. Instead, as I discussed in the previous chapter, those struggles were framed in relation to the mother and patriarchal expectations on gender, reproduction, and motherhood. *Los paraquitos*, as a collective phenomenon, became part of a phantasmagoria in the social universe of meaning of the community configured by images of the experiences of violence of their mothers, the terror imposed by their absent biological fathers, and their own embodiment. The presence of people born as a result of paramilitary sexual violence in the present—mine and theirs, and their absence in the reconstruction of collective memories, was concealed behind the moral values of the political community that denied paramilitary sexual violence and imposed motherhood on women.

**On the intrusion of the past and the impossibility of testimony**

'Why do we want to remember that?' *Doña* Teresa asked rhetorically to the other women in her group. 'We could have drawn something else. What's the purpose of going back to the past?' None of the five women replied to *Doña* Teresa. Briefly, they directed

their gaze to the social cartography map with drawings *Doña* Rosa was using, a moment ago, to narrate the story of her pregnant daughter and how she killed herself by drinking a bottle of *aguardiente* with pills after paramilitaries had killed her partner. 'We didn't make it to the hospital, she died on my lap', *Doña* Rosa had just said when *Doña* Teresa pointed at the blurred relation between past and present. One of the younger women in the group broke the silence; she turned to me and whispered 'there is a lot of fear among us. Here we don't speak; we don't know if those people are coming back'.[41] Oral and written testimony, as a methodology, has gained a privileged place within the architectures of transitional justice in their attempts to understand the past and address the consequences of mass violence. In the legal, psychosocial, and academic systems of knowledge that claim expertise in the understanding of mass violence, suffering, and trauma, making visible narratives of the experiences of those subjects who are understood and accepted as victims within the political community, has been naturalised as the privileged strategy for societies to unveil roles, responsibilities, and harms—what has been referred as coming to terms with the past, and for survivors to engage in what is expected to be a cathartic process of healing (Obradović-Wochnik, 2013).

This strategy relies on the emotional, social, and physical willingness, ability, and capacity of people to communicate their experiences, and it depends on the social, political, and economic contexts in which that communication could take place. Giorgio Agamben (1999) notes that in Latin there are two words for witness. *Testis*, from which the word testimony originates, describes a person who represents a third party and, in the case of a trial or lawsuit, can remain non-biased without aligning to any of the parties involved. The second word, *superstes*, describes someone who has lived through something, who has experienced an event and can bear witness to it. The testimony of the

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[41] Social cartography workshop, San Miguel, 28th April 2016.

survivor, warns Agamben (1999), is not neutral and does not pretend to be. This testimony surpasses the legal boundaries of the definitions of harm and responsibility, and as discussed in chapter 3, is cropped and filtered on the name of reaching the ultimate goal of providing legal judgments. The testimony of the survivor of violence and atrocity is, in this sense, a reminder that the ultimate aim of law is the production of judgements but not necessarily the establishment of justice and truth. This is not to say that a judgement is not desired, for that is a political and ethical responsibility within political communities claiming the status of nation-states, but that when understanding and addressing contexts of violence and oppression, law does not exhaust the question (Agamben, 1999).

The stories of San Miguel that I have reconstructed have at their core testimonies of survivors; some come from stories people decided to share with me and some others come from legal declarations of women to have access to individual reparations. Primo Levi (1988) talks about the role of the witness in giving testimony, and he refers to the witness-as-participant and the witness-as-observer. Reflecting on his own experience in Auschwitz, Levi (1988) talks about the witness-as-participant—the *Musselmann* in the jargon of the camp—as 'the true witness'; the one who lost humanity and life within the architecture of atrocities. The impossibility of the testimony of the true witness, argues Jelin (2003) is that, by definition, she or he cannot bear witness and, therefore, their experiences cannot be reconstructed through their own testimonial narratives. Agamben (1999) points at how no one has returned from the gas chambers in Auschwitz, and Jelin (2003: 61) complements this by saying, 'as no one has returned from the death flights in Argentina'. The witness-as-observer, those who survived, can bear a double testimony; they can narrate how they saw others reach the point of no return, painfully losing their humanity, and they can narrate their own experience of violence (Levi, 1988). Agamben

(1999) argues, however, that this testimony contains a lacuna that is placed in the intersection of two impossibilities; the first has already been mentioned and has to do with narrating the experience of someone who cannot bear witness. The second impossibility refers to the language of testimony and presenting through words experiences that cannot be known and represented in common language (Langer, 1991). This testimony, 'in order to bear witness, needs to present through language what is, in essence, senseless' (Agamben, 1999: 39).

In what Alejandro Castillejo (2005) calls the development of an industry of extraction of testimonies, there are groups of intermediaries whose job is to collect those narratives of traumatic events and suffering, and turn them into products with life on their own: news articles, documentaries, academic papers, legal documents. In the case of Buenos Aires, and particularly in the case of San Miguel, this extractive industry has been led by the *Unidad para las Víctimas* and has been shaped and fuelled by the promise of redress, collective and individual. Different than in other regions of Colombia where the armed conflict has been part of the realities of the everyday life of people, San Miguel has not appeared on the radar of academic or legal 'experts' and NGOs,[42] with the exception of the two projects that I referred to in previous chapters. 'The story of San Miguel started in August 2012',[43] was the first thing that Gisella said to me in the conversation where she kindly tried to walk me through the very complex bureaucracies of redress. And although the multiple stories of San Miguel clearly did not start in 2012, it was not until then that the *Unidad para las Víctimas* reached to the community, bringing with it the promise of acknowledgement of their experiences and of reparations. For the architecture of transitional justice that was put in place to operate, however,

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[42] Most of the research that has been conducted in Buenos Aires in relation to the armed conflict has taken place in the Naya region. See for example: Jimeno et al., (2010) and Molano (2009). Other exceptions are the work of Ng'weno (2007) in the area of Alsacia and Muñoz (2012) in relation to displacement.

[43] Interview, Gisella Olaya, Cali, 9th May, 2016.

people needed to come forward and offer their narratives. People, who until then had remained invisible to the eyes of the government—as a timeless abstract entity—were invited to join the political community of the nation state by applying to the *Registro Único de Víctimas* (Unified Record of Victims) and officially assuming the label of victims. Within the political economy of victimhood, the extraction of testimonies was an essential part of the transaction between promises and expectations. In the contexts of historical economic extraction, Castillejo (2005) argues, the extractive industry of testimony reproduces other forms of violence by demanding of people to put into words their experiences of suffering in exchange of symbolic and material benefits.

If *Musselmann* are Levi's true witnesses with their impossibility to narrate their own story, children born of war appear as *impossible witnesses*. Although they have emerged from the past, they do not belong to it. They cannot reconstruct, in first person, the story of violence of their community nor the distinct violence through which they were conceived and in relation to what they are, under legal frameworks, officially recognised as victims. They were conceived in war and by war, but the reconstruction of the testimony of the violence that conceived them falls upon other people. In San Miguel people have become familiar with the bureaucracies to be included in the *Registro Único de Víctimas* to have access to individual redress. Through the process of collective reparation that the community is undergoing, the architecture of transitional justice has gained a place within the universe of meaning of the community. And yet, children and young women and men from San Miguel who were conceived by paramilitary sexual violence are not among the 533 people included in the *Registro Único de Víctimas* that I have referred to in a previous chapter. The impossibility of their own testimony, together with their unintelligibility within the realities in which transitional justice operates that I

have discussed in chapter 3, adds another layer to the already complex politics of victimhood and the bureaucracies of redress.

## The gendered politics of memory

'We are going to need more paper, colours, and markers when we do the maps with women', said Astrid when we were planning the social cartography workshops through which we sought to reconstruct collective stories of the period where paramilitaries operated in San Miguel. Her expectation was that women were going to be more receptive to our invitation and that men would be more reluctant to the idea of joining the conversation we were proposing. Astrid's understanding of the social dynamics of the community was, as it was always the case, confirmed by people's response to the invitation, and while in the case of women we were able to work in four different maps, with men we worked in one. Consistent with literature on the gendered dynamics of testimony (Ross, 2003; Theidon, 2007; Baines and Stewart, 2011; Jackson, 2012; Jelin, 2012), this was not, however, the only difference we encountered in the social negotiations people engage with when bringing the past into the present. Constructing those maps was a reflection of the gendered politics of testimony and the labour of memories through which narratives of people's experiences intrude the present in the shape of words and in the absence of them. Questions about the purpose of remembering were constantly raised among women as a constant reminder of the blurred relation among past, present, and future. In their expectation of this exchange in which they were sharing their stories and I was producing a document that both the community and the *Unidad para las Víctimas* could use as input to advance the process of collective reparation, what mattered for them was the experience, as a community, of San Miguel. This is not to say that they did not share personal stories, but that those personal stories

were always framed in the context of broader common experiences. Men, on their part, briefly visited the question of why to remember at the beginning of the session and did not come back to it. Their answers were defined through the language of reparations and what is known within the victimhood discourse as harms. In the construction of their map, what was placed at the core were their personal experiences, and it was through the narrative of their own stories that they found common ground (See Appendix 1).

Women who accepted our invitation to explore the cartography of their collective story embodied different experiences of the paramilitary occupation and what has happened since. They all, however, experienced the constant threat of the omnipotent presence of paramilitaries and their gendered logics of social control. Carmen, who was a teenager during those years and who was one of the many students who were forced to drop out of school because of the dynamics of violence, pointed at the drawing of one of the houses and explained, while the other women nodded:

> We had to live together with the fear and with *them* [paramilitaries]. They made you leave the door of your house open so that they could sleep inside. There was nothing we could tell them. How could we have dared telling them otherwise? We had to cook for them and wash their cloths. They were in our crops, in the forest, in the creek where we fished and took baths, in the roads around every corner. To the will of Lord Jesus Christ; whatever they said was what happened.[44]

Among the different experiences of violence and gender-based violence, sexual harassment and the threat of other forms of sexual violence became part of women's everyday life. In the context of the production of these cartographies of memory,

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[44] Social cartography workshop, San Miguel, 28th April 2016.

however, those stories assumed the shape of absence. In contrast to this, the configuration of the static and homogenous category of *las mujeres de San Miguel* that I have discussed in previous chapters has fed on essentialised stories of rape, imposing on women an active role in the extractive industry of testimonies and demanding of them a constant engagement with those fragments of their past. In this sense, actions such as collection of legal testimonies, psychosocial workshops, and delivery of economic compensation have prioritised women and what is understood to be their particular *harm*, sexual violence. This priorisation in the context of the bureaucracies of redress might have expedited the delivery of economic compensation for some women. It also implies, however, that women were dragged into this administrative system with its bureaucratic pace, endless forms, and power to fragment people's identity. Within this system, women have been forced to repeat over and over the same fragments of their stories, and through this reproduction and production of violence, these women have joined the system—on the name of effectiveness of the process—through a specific category of harm that essentialises and reduces their identity.

Silence, in the realities in which transitional justice operates, is often understood as an obstacle to redress experiences of mass violence, and it is assumed that there is a moral and political responsibility on the part of social institutions—and people—claiming expertise in the understanding of human suffering to break it (Nowrojee, 2005). However, silence, understood as a historical and cultural artefact (Castillejo, 2005), with its own boundaries and contents, unveils the different shapes that memories assume in the present and under particular circumstances. As there is not one universal form of silence, its content reveals the social negotiations that take place within people's universe of meanings. In this sense, for instance, Lawrence Langer (1991) argues that silence can emerge in the absence of words to express what is senseless, for some forms of violence

have the ability to make experiences un-representable through language. Veena Das (1996) argues that silence can also represent agency in an active attempt to refuse certain experiences an existence through words. In women's recount of their experiences during regimes of violence and oppression, Fiona Ross (2001) suggests, silence is in itself a form of language that does not necessarily need to be translated into words but that has meaning within its own historical, cultural, and political context. The women of San Miguel who participated in the social cartography workshops did not narrate stories of sexual violence. This does not mean, however, that they concealed their specific experiences of violence as women, for they indeed shared stories in which it was precisely the reproduction of their gender role within the social group what put them in a position in which paramilitary brutality towards them was possible and, as presented in chapter 4, often not understood as violence.

Following Ross' (2001) research on the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the active search that has prioritised narratives about the bodily experience of sexual violence has disregarded other dynamics of violence embedded in women's words, which do not necessarily fit the legal mandates to reconstruct narratives of harms. In the case of South Africa, Ross (2001) argues that through their testimonies women spoke about how Apartheid imposed violence upon domestic life and family, intergenerational relations, and gender roles. Building upon this, in her analysis of the testimonies of women in the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Kimberly Theidon (2013) argues that by pursuing specific categories of victimisation—that in the case of women were defined by sexual violence—the commission produced other forms of silence that disregarded the gendered dimension of war. 'There is a bit of irony', Theidon (2013) notes in that 'commissions are charged with investigating the truth, and yet the broader truths that women narrated were too frequently reduced to the sexual

harm they had experienced' (2013: 140). The logics and techniques that sought to address women's experiences of war and oppression obscured narratives of women's struggles to survive, resist, and endure. At the same time, those systems of extraction imposed other forms of violence by focusing on breaking the silences that could reveal stories of rape. As part of this problematisation, Theidon (2007; 2013) asks, why is there an expectation of women to come forward and narrate their stories of sexual violence even when they have chosen not to? Why does the right to reparations impose an obligation to speak?

The presence of silence, as a present absence and as a socio historical artefact, problematizes the logics and techniques that have gained a privileged place within dominant academic and legal systems of knowledge that claim expertise in the understanding of mass violence, trauma, and suffering (Castillejo, 2005). Although testimonies of survivors have been presented as attempts to challenge the power structures that oppressed victims, naturalising the role of this kind of testimonies has also placed the burden of bringing the past into the present upon those who survived, at the same time that tends to ignore the non-nameable layers of the experiences of violence (Castillejo, 2005). In San Miguel, among the women who participated in the production of cartographies of their past there were relatives of children and young women and men born as a result of paramilitary sexual violence. However, stories of their conception and existence fell into the same fabric of absence that contained experiences of sexual violence. There were not, in that sense, any explicit mentions of either those experiences of women nor of the individuals who were added to the social landscape through the use of sex as a strategy in war. Silence, in this context, has meaning on its own and is part of the labour of memories and the agency of women, who as members of the political community, are constantly negotiating their experiences of the past in relation to their future. In Colombia, the gendered politics of the extractive industry of testimony has

imposed on women the role of advocating a place in the political community on behalf of their sons and daughters born of war-related sexual violence. For those children to be included in the *Registro Único de Víctimas* as victims—and not just as sons or daughters of a victim—and, therefore, have access to reparations—their mothers are expected to offer the narrative of their own case and, through their stories of sexual violence, give testimony on behalf of the child. When the head of *Unidad para las Víctimas* national team for gender and ethnic inclusive approach, Diana Tamayo explained in our conversation how the topic of these children, as victims, has become part of some of the recent discussions within the national office of reparations, what she unveiled was a discussion about the gendered politics of extraction of testimonies. Diana said:

> We asked ourselves, why up to 2015 there haven't been any cases of children and young women and men born as a result of wartime sexual violence being discussed in the Main Office of Reparations? And the truth is that until then we hadn't received any cases. What we realised later is that there were some cases, but those few cases had been stored in a separate database and the office in charge of gathering the information did not know what to do with those. Because in their testimonies women say "my son or my daughter was born as a consequence of what happened to me, but they are never going to find out. I do not want them to find out". So the issue there is confidentiality. What do we do there? Do we include that child or not? Because his or her mum explicitly says that she doesn't want the child to find out. And if I include the child, how do I do it without going against the will of the mother? [45]

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[45] Interview with Diana Tamayo, Coordinadora de Equipo Enfoque Diferencial y de Género. 10 June 2016.

In the wide spectrum of women´s experiences in San Miguel, some sexual violence survivors whose children are the result of paramilitary sexual violence have decided not to talk in their testimonies about their children. Very often, this is because they have not told them the story of their conception or because they understand this concealment as a form of protection from the community and the biological fathers. Those decisions need to be understood in relation to the psychosocial state of women within the moral system of their community. However, there are other approaches to giving testimony on behalf of their sons and daughters. In San Miguel, some women have been told that through their own testimonies their children have already been included in the *Registro Único de Víctimas*. Other women have been told that they need to bring the children with them and ask them to sign the declaration. In a reminder that sex in the context of war can also be used as a strategy to survive, some other women do not believe that their children fit into the category of "conceived as a result of wartime sexual violence". In acknowledgement of the political economy of victimhood, Gisella pointed out in our conversation that one of the pending tasks in relation to the children was to make sure that they were included in the *Registro Único de Víctimas* as victims so that they could have access to the economic compensation that they are entitled to once they reach the age of 18. In relation to this Gisella said:

When the testimonies of San Miguel were taken women were included in relation to sexual violence. Those women appear [in the *Registro Único de Víctimas*] as victims of sexual violence, and you know that many of them have already received financial compensation, but their sons and daughters were not included as victims. And the law says that they need to be registered as victims. Here our struggle should be on the name of the rights of children in the context of the

legislation. And if you ask me, in the case of San Miguel that acknowledgement needs to be translated into money. Because you know the hardship people in San Miguel endure.[46]

The regular procedure to collect testimonies of war-affected children, explained Gisella, is to interview the child in the presence of someone from the ICBF [Colombian Family Welfare Institute]. The mother of the child can be present, if that is what the family consider to be in the best interest of the child. However, Gisella noted, 'no one knows how to proceed with these children. Who gives the testimony? Do the children need to consent to the declaration of their mothers? Can their mothers give testimony even when the child does not know that their father is a paramilitary? I haven't heard of any training or protocol about this'. Driven by a gendered political economy of victimhood and constrained by the bureaucracies of transitional justice, with its specific logics and technologies, the transaction between sexual violence survivors' testimony and the promise of redress contains intermittent images of the subject of children born of war. Those images, however, represent flashes of a fragmented subject that assumes different shapes throughout the transaction, never configuring one whole subject on its own. The configuration of this phantasmagoria in the archive of transitional justice challenges essentialised, static, and past oriented approaches to people's experiences of violence and oppression that struggle to recognise meaning in silence. To think of children, and young women and men born as a result of war-related sexual violence as *impossible witnesses* of their own foundational narrative of violence does not mean, however, that they cannot bear testimony of the experience of violence that produced them—as subjects, but that their experiences of those atrocities are not grounded in the past and do not assume the

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[46] Interview, Gisella Olaya, Cali, 9th May, 2016.

shape of words. Instead, it is constantly anchored in the present through their bare presence and manifests through their self.

**The contested self**

The first time I met *Doña Gladys* was in the meeting where Jimena Yasno, as newly appointed representative of the *Unidad para las Víctimas* to lead the process of collective reparation of San Miguel after almost a year of uncertainty, introduced herself to the community. The meeting took place in the school, as was customary for this rural community in the absence of other spaces that could provide a roof and enough chairs for a group of people. To an eager but sceptical audience, Jimena apologised for all the delays, explained the stages of the process, the steps to follow, and went through some of the information they already knew in relation to what a collective reparation was under the Victim's Law. Although my face and presence was already familiar to some of the members of the community, that day we also agreed that I, as an actor within this extractive industry of testimony, was going to produce a document reconstructing '*the story* of San Miguel and the different *harms* that the community endured as a result of the paramilitary confinement'.[47] Even though the document was not going to focus on individual experiences but on the collective experience of San Miguel, Jimena took the opportunity to remind people of what was understood as individual harms: 'threats, terrorist attacks, forced displacement, anti-personnel landmines, sexual integrity, torture, forced disappearance, murder, massacre, kidnapping, recruitment, plunder and land grabbing'. At the end of the meeting *Doña* Gladys approached me and said: 'when I gave testimony they told me that my illness was not a harm. But I got sick as a result of those

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[47] Notes from meeting held in San Miguel, 25th February 2016.

years. I've never been able to sleep well again. My body hasn't been the same'.[48] Whether manifested in high blood pressure, sexually transmitted diseases, missing body parts, constant unease, or chronic fear, it was the body, with its embodied experience, that appeared over and over in the conversations I had with people as a constant reminder that life was not as they once knew it.

Social experience, as an assemblage of social processes, is dynamic and under constant transformations. The self, Arthur Kleinman and Joan Kleinman (1994) argue, with its multidimensional capacity to apprehend reality, is one of the axes through which social experience manifest and where social processes aggregate. To think of the space of violence starts with understanding the body as the primary frontier of experience. In this sense, symptoms of social distress are lived memories manifesting in the self—body and mind; the shapes those lived memories assume and the transformations they undergo reveal the fabric of local worlds and the overlapping effects of violence. Kleinman and Kleinman (1994: 717) emphasis how 'bodies transformed by political processes not only *represent* those processes, they *experience* them as lived memory of transformed worlds'. This corporeal memory, that is constantly disrupting the present, serves as testimony of a local reality that was distorted and whose social meaning was challenged by violence. The past intrudes and makes its appearance in the present through mnemonic traces that can assume different shapes (Ricoeur, 2004). In the present, the body of those who survived, with its embodied experience of symptoms of social violence, are mnemonic traces constantly manifesting through the self. In the geographies of war, however, social processes aggregate in the self to transform it but also to configure, through technologies of violence and terror, material and social landscapes. In the process, the removal of bodies and the emergence of them appear as mnemonic traces that constitute part of the

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[48] Conversation, *Doña* Gladys, San Miguel, 25th February 2016.

active production of social realities. For those traces—with the absence and presence those bodies represent—to be apprehended as memories—and not just ephemeral agentless intrusions in a given present—they need to become the object of labour (Jelin, 2003); it is through social negotiations, symbolic transformations, and production of narratives embedded in specific social systems that those mnemonic traces cease to be presences without agency and are granted with agency—meaning—on their own (Jelin, 2003).

In Buenos Aires, missing bodies and the technologies paramilitaries used to remove them from the social landscape have slowly gained a place in the political and social struggles over memories and people's attempts to translate them into narratives. The Cauca River and the many stories of paramilitaries throwing bodies from the bridge in La Balsa—20 minutes away from San Miguel, are a common reference when people recall the dynamics of terror of those years and its techniques of social control. One of the days that Javier,[49] a young man from San Miguel who found a job in the sugar cane plantations that represent the main economy in the region and the monopoly of land in the valleys, was giving me a ride to La Balsa on his motorcycle, he pointed at the bridge over the Cauca River and said what many other people had told me before: 'in those days, in the evenings, you could hear the screams of people that *those men* were throwing. But no one dared talking about that. Everyone knew where the missing bodies were. The river dragged them with it'. As the absence of bodies, in their capability of mnemonic artefacts, materialise in the social fabric of San Miguel as memories of the armed conflict, the new bodies—those of children born as a result of wartime sexual violence—appear in the geographies of war as artefacts without agency—meaning—on its own. Within the dynamic negotiation of social memories of San Miguel, those subjects, with their

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[49] Conversation, Javier, La Balsa, 25th May 2016.

embodied testimony of past atrocities, have been granted with meaning—in different moments, in relation to their biological fathers and mothers. Once the rumour of me writing a document with *the story* of San Miguel spread among the community, people would often take our interactions to give me pieces of information about their personal story or the story of people they knew. In conversation with the arguments presented in chapter 4, one day, while I was buying a bottle of water in the *caseta*, the small store in front of the school and where most of the social gatherings took place, one man from the community whom I was chatting with, pointed with his lips to a woman who was coming back with other women from burning wood to make coal. '*Her case* was indeed terrible' he said lowering his voice, 'because she *really* didn't want to be with them. I don't think she ever recovered. I can't imagine what she must feel like waking up to that child every day for the rest of her life'.[50]

The body aggregates traces of pain, resistance, and surviving; it is through that process of accumulation that bodies become historical processes and sites (Theidon, 2008). For women's bodies, as axes of social processes and conceptualised by Theidon (2008) as historical sites of political and cultural struggles, sexual violence in the context of war is one of the diverse sources of embodied memories. For children's bodies, the spectre of *los paraquitos* has joined the gendered expectations of the patriarchal political community—discussed in the previous chapter—to produce an ahistorical subject with no place in the reconstructions of the memories of the armed conflict; a child who was born of sexual violence not in the context of a social, political, and military regime of terror, but one who was born of isolated cases of rape and whose existence, as a mnemonic trace, speaks just to the victimised woman. In this sense, the bodies of children and young women and men born as a result of wartime sexual violence in San Miguel are mnemonic

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[50] Notes from fieldwork, San Miguel, 23th May 2016.

artefacts that are yet to be included in the struggles of memory against memory and, of particular importance, in the struggles to subvert the timeline that reproduces the moral values of the patriarchal system and that places the emphasis of the reconstruction of collective memories in the past rather than in the present and future.

**On the geographies of ghosts**

'This is the river and we need to cross it to go pick up the chickens', said one five-year-old little girl in the playground of the school in San Miguel to a group of her classmates. While she drew the river on the soil with a stick, a little boy who was also playing with the group screamed at them, 'I don´t want to cross! If you do it, I'll kill you with my gun and throw your bodies in the crops.' With him in the background mimicking the motion of firing a weapon with a branch he had just picked up from the ground, *Doña* Rubi, one of the teachers in the school, told me something that, as I mentioned in chapter 4, people tended to repeat when referring to the children in the school and the new generations:

- DR: These children are very aggressive; it's not like before

- TS: Why do you think that is? I asked

- DR: Because these children have seen the horror, they are also victims

- TS: But when paramilitaries were here these children hadn't been born, I said

- DR: It doesn't matter; they know because they are from here[51]

In a given present, the bodily experience transcends the individual as it is shared among specific groups of people embedded in concrete local contexts. Kleinman and Kleinman (1994: 714) refer to 'local contexts of social experience as both shared and

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[51] Conversation, *Doña* Rubi, San Miguel, 5th May 2016.

fragmented', for as local contexts are distinctive forms of experience that are inhabited by the manifested everyday subjective plurality configured by the intersections of aspects like gender, class, ethnicity, and age. Social experience, Kleinman and Kleinman (1994) argue, interconnects social and subjective suffering as an interactive process in which subjective and collective pain merge, as well as social and individual strategies to cope with it unite. In this sense, when people in San Miguel who experienced the paramilitary occupation reconstruct narratives of their individual embodied memories, they are also reconstructing the experience of other members of the social group whose bodies, as historical sites of struggles, aggregate similar social processes. However, the individual experience of belonging to a group transcends the present and defines the active labour of people's memories. In the historically transgenerational process of belonging, Paul Ricoeur (2004) suggests, the mnemonic phenomena of recollection and recognition work together through the testimony of others to configure shared memories that individuals access by being members of that group. Those collective memories have not been lived by all members of the group and yet, they are reconstructed by some members and pass to others, and they become part of the social frameworks of interpretation. It is within those collective narratives that personal lived experiences and language, in the form of narratives of the past, are interpreted and find their place in the present.

The generations of people born after the end of the paramilitary confinement did not experience with their own bodies that system of violence. However, by belonging to the political community, those experiences became part of their framing of interpretation of the social reality. Although they do not have the embodied experience of those years, in their self we can see the dynamic social experience of the group aggregating through a historical interactive process that reproduces the framing of interpretation and reinforces the sense of membership. They are part of the community not just because they inhabit

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the common material landscape, but because they experience it through similar systems of meaning—in which collective memories materialise—and they are able to find themselves, with their own embodied living experiences, within the social cartographies of the group. Children and young women and men born as a result of wartime sexual violence, as part of the new generations, also share the collective memory of the community. Unlike the experience of the other children, whose bodies are not mnemonic artefacts of the violence that other members of the community have experienced, these individuals born of war-related sexual violence do not recognise themselves in the recollections of the collective narratives of the community. Although they exist in the present, narratives of their past have been contested and concealed in the shadow of notions of local biologies and fragmented identities. Their absent presence in the reconstructions of the social memories of the past represent different layers in the configuration of these subjects as spectral entities in the present of the social and material landscape of San Miguel; the collective that do not find them in its recollections and recognitions of the story of the community, and the individual embodied experience of each child and young woman and man who struggles to find his or her origin story and past within shared memories of the group. People born as a result of wartime sexual violence, as part of the community, share memories of that violence they did not experience but from which they have emerged; as they look for themselves within the shared past, their sense of belonging to the group—in the present—might weaken, become translucent.

At the times when I was a regular visitor in San Miguel the school had three classrooms that accommodated over 60 children from the ages of 3 to 11. The two teachers the school had, and who were expected to cover all the levels at the same time with the use of outdated materials and their creativity, had planted in front of the

classrooms ornamental and edible plants to use in their activities with the children. There was, in one of the walls, a colourful mural with smiling children and a very green landscape that welcomed people to a *community of peace*. The school of San Miguel, the same one that paramilitaries used for years as their storage and training base, was in *this* present a place of constant movement and social life. It was always difficult for me to imagine this space inhabited by fear, tents, and weapons. With paramilitaries training in the back of the school while others stood by the windows and doors of the classrooms, watching, always watching, and imposing their idea of social order. 'They used to lean by those windows, outside the classrooms', said *Don* Carmelo[52] in a lowered voice while I was helping him pile the plastic tables of the room where he teaches. 'Sometimes, when I'm teaching, I feel they are watching me. I turn and there isn't anyone, but I can still feel them'. The armed conflict, and the system of oppression that operated in one particular time, has left marks in the material landscape. Following Michael Bell's phenomenology of place (1997), those markers are not just inert objects, they are alive with a spirit that grants them agency in the present; they fed themselves with the power of terror of which they were part, and they keep feeding through their interactions with the survivors. Some of those are invisible to an external eye but, for those who are familiar with the social experience of violence, those markers remain visible, as a constant presence that also belongs to the present. Familiarity, nonetheless, is not enough to sense the spirits of that past. Familiarity with the stories could allow us to believe in the presence of those mnemonic traces, could allow us to seek to understand their place in the present, and yet, it is the self, with its embodied experience and web of social relations, that is able to sense those markers as active presences in the material landscape. It is not just about knowing, it is about the human experience of sensing. Those markers of suffering and

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[52] Interview, *Don* Carmelo, San Miguel, 31st May 2016.

atrocities can be found in the human and social geographies that people inhabit, and there is, in that sense, an embodied experience of those shared inhabited landscapes. Where do we find in the material landscape of the present the traces of the presence of children who were labelled and discriminated against because their biological fathers were paramilitaries who committed sexual violence against their mothers?

Bell (1997) notes that the ghosts of place are the ghosts of the dead but also the ghosts of the living; more precisely, 'the ghosts of the past lives of the living' (Bell, 1997: 823). In this sense, the ghosts of places 'may also include our own ghost, the ghost of our own past lives' (Bell, 1997: 823). In the same sense, Bell (1997) argues that the ghosts of place include the ghosts of future lives. The self, as an axis of social experience across time and embedded in place, is connected also to its ghosts of the future; there is a sense of belonging to the place and there is a shared framework that makes possible for the self, in the present, to imagine a future. Belonging, however, is not an isolated expression but has meaning in relation to others. Bell (1997) notes that our ghosts of the past, the present, and future are part—and have meaning—in relation to a dense social network of ghosts. If they appear, if we are able to sense them, it is because they are part of a broader narrative that is both collective and individual. In San Miguel, the ghost of the past lives of people born as result of wartime sexual violence take the shape of *los paraquitos*. The nature and limitations of my own ethnographic research—within the extractive political economy of testimony—adds another layer to this spectral configuration. Here I am, discussing their absence in the collective memories of the community and their presence in the current material landscapes without having talked to them and basing my writing exercise on what other people have said—or not—about them. I suggest, however, that if we approach women and men born of paramilitary sexual violence as historical sites of social struggles, we might perceive the ghost of *los paraquitos* as part of their

accumulative experience. This is not to say that the spectre defines who they are and their possibilities, but that our inability to see it does not mean that it does not make part of the multi-layered traces that configures the embodied experience of these subjects.

**Final thoughts**

Children and young woman and men born as a consequence of war-related sexual violence cannot be remembered nor forgotten for they did not inhabit the past. And yet, in the concealment around sexual abuses there are hidden traces of the emergence of these individuals as subjects that emerge from war. The invisible presence of the subject of children born of war within the collective narrative of the armed conflict needs to be understood within the social frameworks that have rendered their bodies unintelligible. Wartime sexual violence against women and girls is part of the collective memories of the armed conflict. However, its presence in those collective memories—that by no means represents a comprehensive account of women's experiences of the armed conflict—is the result of women's struggles and, its incorporation in those collective narratives, challenge several layers of everyday, war related, and structural violence. Information about conceptions and children born of war breaks through the cracks of silence imposed on women's experience of the armed conflict and their forced disruptive motherhood. Narratively, these children appear as whispers of the stories of sexual violence.

I went to Buenos Aires looking for a subject whose boundaries had diluted throughout time. And yet, in the present that contains the absence of *los paraquitos*, the body of people born as a result of paramilitary sexual violence with their embodied experience as historical sites of social, cultural, and political struggles that aggregate different forms of violence, presented me with questions about the non-visible layers of

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social reality that we might not see and yet we can sense. Informed by Justin Armstrong's (2010) proposal to conduct a spectral ethnography that explores the absence through an archaeology of the emptied present, I suggest that the ghosts of *los paraquitos* still haunt the material landscape of San Miguel and the contested sites of the bodies of people born of wartime sexual violence. The inability to see them should not question the historical aggregated dynamic experience of people born of war and their possibilities to assume different positionalities in the future, but our—meaning intermediaries working in fields that have claimed expertise in the understanding of suffering and violence—lack of skills and frameworks to perceive the resonances—or traces—of human experience and social processes throughout time and space.

## Conclusion: Between the Presence and the Spectre

'How many children born of war are there in San Miguel?' Time and again I have been asked by people who, with an institutional, academic, or just a general interest, are trying to produce an imaginary map of the geographies of war and violence in Colombia. The magazine article that led me to Buenos Aires and that I presented in the introduction of the thesis refers to 30 (*Semana*, 2010), a footnote in a report from the Ombudsman's office notes the presence of 17 (Defensoría del Pueblo, 2009), people in San Miguel would say *muchos*; a lot. As I noted in the methods section, with the intention of maintaining the anonymity of people whose voices are not represented in my writing exercise and with the commitment not to single them out, I am not going to disclose the actual number that I reconstructed throughout my fieldwork. I do believe, however, that in my attempt to offer an interpretation of how these individuals born as a result of war-related sexual violence have become part of the different realities that are shaped by war in Colombia, questions about the revelation of *the number* provide important insights into the logics, categories, and technologies that people use to apprehend the world around them. Within the architectures of transitional justice, the number is part of an exercise of naming and organising the world through the categories of victimhood; it offers a sense of intelligibility, order, and stability to a world that has been shaken and reshaped by violence and terror. It serves a purpose in the aim to break the silence around impunity, injustice, and oblivion. And yet, as I have discussed throughout this thesis, in the search for that sense of order, the human experience of war, survival, and resistance is cropped, reduced to legal harms, and fixed in an imaginary linear time. *Muchos*, is what people in San Miguel would say to refer to the boys, girls, and teenagers who are fathered by paramilitaries. And through this category, one that might seem blurred for official discourses, people are describing what we—intermediaries working in fields that have

claimed expertise in the understanding of the human experience of war—have not perceived.

In the social realities that are discursively produced by human rights and transitional justice architectures, people born as a result of war-related sexual violence have appeared in public narratives through fragmented images that oscillate between invisibility, the symbolic presence of the father, and the expectation imposed on women to reproduce the physical and social body of the political community. In the overlapping presence of these images, I have found in the public realm the shell of a subject that remains to be filled with social meaning. There is a lack of framing for understanding their specific experience as people who were born through war but whose experiences are not defined by it, and whose positionalities and trajectories combine the terror that conceived them, with the forms of violence that are fuelled by capital and the moral values of the patriarchal social order. Their unintelligibility as individual subjects within the realities in which the discourses of human rights and transitional justice are produced is shaped by the social processes that have rendered visible information about them; in the public realm—of actors such as the media, government agencies, and national NGOs—they have appeared through the framings for understanding war-related sexual violence, and only to reinforce a representation of women as victimised subjects, life-givers, and mothers, and of the biological fathers granted with the power to reproduce violence beyond their own physicality.

There is a tension between the imaginary of a stigmatised homogenous group of children labelled as *paraquitos*—a category that persists within the public institutional national realm—and the boys, girls, and teenagers from San Miguel who were conceived through paramilitary sexual violence but who are not understood by the community anymore in terms of the symbolic presence of the father. The former exists in a social

reality that is not embodied but that is discursively produced through gendered categories of victimhood and framings for understanding war-related sexual violence. The latter exists in a social reality that is embodied but in which women's lived experiences of paramilitary violence, survival, and resistance are denied, and the bodies of the people born of war are understood as ahistorical disruptive identities. The disembodiment of the former, however, does not make it any less real, for in the discursive production of realities we find the frameworks—and moral values—through which we apprehend inhabited geographies.

As I have described throughout this thesis, at a national level the collective subject of children born of war has become visible through naming practices; the label of *paraquito* has become part of the imaginary (static) geographies of war. However, the production and reproduction of that collective subject that refers to children fathered by paramilitaries and non-combatant women obscures the complex dynamics of war-related sexual violence in Colombia, adding more layers to the unintelligibility of children born of war and their dynamic experiences. The social landscapes that are shaped by war in Colombia include children fathered by members of all armed groups involved in the armed conflict; guerrillas, paramilitaries, armed forces, and foreign troops. It also includes, as coverage on the recent 2017 demobilisation of FARC has shown, children born within the armed groups (Brodzinsky, 2017; Houghton, 2017; Mojica Patiño, 2017). Due to the socio-historic dynamics of war that have taken place in the specific place where I conducted fieldwork, I did not encounter the presence of those subjects and cannot, therefore, offer further interpretation on their experiences. However, the limitations of my own fieldwork and the lack of emergence of other collective naming practices—at least in the national public realm—cannot be taken as an assumption that those individuals do not represent tensions in their communities, that their identities have

not been contested, or that their positionality does not embody different forms of structural violence. To account for a more comprehensive understanding of the way people born of war have become part of the intersubjective realities that emerge from war, it is essential to explore the production of narratives about them in relation to the different cultures of terror in which they were conceived, born, and have been raised. I suggest, then, that a future agenda should include those different experiences, accounting also for the complex dynamics of mass displacement in the country; displacement has been used by economic and political powers to remove physical and cultural bodies from their territories. In Colombia this accounts for a population of 7.4 million, making Colombia the country with the largest overall number of internally displaced people in the world, followed by Syria and Iraq (UNHCR, 2016). Women and girls have been strategically targeted with sexual violence in order to achieve those policies of control of the population (GMH, 2011). And at the same time, the conditions of displacement increase the risk of sexual violence throughout the journeys they are forced to undertake (Guarnizo, 2011). Children have been added to the geographies of war of the country through the same policies of terror that have sought to make invisible the bodies of their mothers and their communities. How do those children become part of the intersubjective realities of people that have been forced to leave their hometowns, never to come back?

In the case of San Miguel, the label of *los paraquitos* appeared as part of the social negotiations to give meaning to the reality that was produced through terror. Its inclusion in the social cartography to apprehend the intersubjective reality in which people lived after five years of a paramilitary regime of violence needs to be understood as the result of historical processes through which terror collided with particular cultural, economic, and moral systems; after five years of complete paramilitary control—with its own social order, values, and imaginary of the future—news of the demobilisation of

paramilitaries and their slow retreat from the social landscape represented for people in the community the remaking of the world. The label of *los paraquitos* appeared in a socio-historical moment of negotiation between social orders; it named a collective subject whose embodied presence represented the reproduction of the regime of violence and the distrust that a different social order was possible. After 10 years of the demobilisation of the paramilitary bloc that operated in San Miguel, the label of *los paraquitos* has vanished and uncovered the less visible gendered politics of identity and reproduction. Through those politics of identity and reproduction, women's experiences of violence, survival, and resistance have been denied, obscured by their cultural role as life-givers and reproducers of the social collective body. People born of war are no longer named after the violence that their biological fathers represent, and yet their presence is understood as problematic. Unlike other contexts of war, these children are not believed to represent "otherness" and yet, within their social order their identities are contested.

Through the coproduction of biology and culture—including the culture of terror installed by paramilitaries—the bodies of people born of war are given meaning within the social order of the political community. Within the system of meaning that local biologies belong, the label of *paraquito* indicated that identity was transmitted by the father. In the negotiation of social orders, the system of meaning—one that is still shaped by the violence of war but that has challenged the culture of terror—has shifted to show that, in the case of San Miguel, both parents grant identity. In the case of the father, the symbolic presence of the violence he represents as a paramilitary/perpetrator of sexual violence has been written over by his symbolic absence as a father. In a cultural context where men, in their roles as partners and fathers, are mobile while women represent the entrenched web of physical and social reproduction of the group, the absence of the father/paramilitary does not refer to his physical absence. For this community, knowing

who the father is and having access to the social networks that this knowledge entails—even in the very common cases of men not giving their surname to the children and offering no economic or emotional support—is part of the process of granting the child identity and positionality within the social group. In that sense, the symbolic absence of the father is understood as a disruption of the reproduction of the social body of the political community.

The active role of women in giving their children meaning and positionality needs to be understood in relation to the construction of women's bodies—and embodied experiences—as sites of historical, cultural, and political struggle. During the paramilitary regime of terror, notions of gender, identity, and sexuality that represented Afro-Colombian women as sexualised and subordinated bodies underpinned policies of sexual violence. The consolidation of the paramilitary social order merged the heteronormative sexualised objectification of women's identities with local notions of gender, identity, and sexuality that assume motherhood as part of women's natural labour. These logics have disregarded women's experiences of survival, resistance, and violence within that regime of terror, and have imposed on them the expectation to raise their children as desirable members of the political community. As this gendered labour is imposed on women, children fathered by paramilitaries have become part of what Michael Taussig (1989:8) refers to as 'the normality of the abnormal'. Those boys, girls, and teenagers, with their aggregated experiences of violence and resistance, have been concealed behind the naturalisation of sexual violence in everyday life during the paramilitary confinement and the cultural assumption that children are part of women's labour. Their identities are contested not because they symbolise paramilitary violence, but because they represent failed local notions of motherhood and the disruption women

caused to the social reproduction and stability of the group by having a child of an unknown—*absent*—father.

My research has unveiled some of the dimensions of the presence of the mother, the meaning of absence, and the role of the father in contributing to the production of the marginal identity of the child. However, in order to advance towards a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of violence of women and children born of war, further research needs to be done on notions of identity, family, sexuality, and parenthood in this Afro-Colombian context. Understanding the experience of people born of war and the ways in which they have become part of the realities of their communities requires challenging a harm-oriented approach and broadening the scope of analysis to the economic, cultural, and moral orders that have granted them with meaning, shaping their positionality and opportunities as they grow older. By focusing on essentialising experiences of sexual violence or fixed-in-time notions of stigma, transitional justice architectures—represented in, for example, institutions that administer redress—also contribute to the production of marginalised subjects. Expanding on the entrenched web of cultural notions that explain and frame the presence of the children represents the opportunity to go beyond ideas of stigma and legal harm to unveil how their existence, as they grow older, is negotiated through the intersubjective processes of the remaking of the world. Furthermore, a research agenda that seeks to challenge the gendered extractive logics of testimonies must engage with a thorough reconstruction of not only the social order of terror, but also of the social orders that have been transformed and shaped by war. It is through the understanding of power relations that women's words become testimonies of overlapping violence, survival, and resistance, and it is through the understanding of power relations that silence and absence become intelligible. For women, the continuum of everyday structural violence and the violence of weapons takes

place as part of the consolidation of different social orders with their own cultures of terror and patriarchal moral expectations of gender, identity, and reproduction. In the social order that emerges from war, the political economy of victimhood and the bureaucracies of transitional justice have added another layer of violence against women; they have been given the obligation to label their children as victims and the responsibility to give testimony on their behalf.

In order to understand how people born of war have been invested with meaning within local contexts but also within national narratives, it is necessary to expand the scope of research to the perpetrators of war-related sexual violence, the system of local biologies that was part of the culture of terror they imposed, and the shapes that that system of meaning has assumed in the negotiation of the social orders that emerge from war. In the case of San Miguel, the absent father, we cannot forget, is not just any other inattentive father; for in this case he embodies a regimen of violence and its culture of terror against women and the community. A research agenda that includes the perpetrators of war-related sexual violence would not only contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the logics that underpin sexual violence (in the context of war and in the everyday life of women), but would also contribute to answering the question of what is being transmitted from *absent* fathers to children raised outside the reach of the fathers. Exploring the system of local biologies through the line of the father requires conducting research with the perpetrators themselves. A future research agenda, I suggest, should inquire into the symbolic role that children have in the narratives produced by perpetrators about the configuration of their social order and the legitimisation of sexual violence. In the context of the 2004 demobilization of paramilitaries and the 2016 peace accords between the Colombian government and FARC, hearings on war-related sexual violence are an important source of information.

Further, following Kimberly Theidon's conceptualisation of redistributive justice (2007) as one in which the shame associated to sexual violence is also redistributed, actively including perpetrators of war-related sexual violence in the research agenda can also contribute to challenging gendered extractive logics of testimonies. Theidon (2007) argues that through the logics and techniques of transitional justice that have focused on extracting women's testimonies of sexual violence—while at the same time overlooking the stories women narrate of survival, resistance, and structural violence—women have exposed the abuses they have endured, but also the embodied shame that has been culturally imposed on them. Perpetrators, on the other hand, Theidon (2007) notes, have historically been released of the moral shame of narrating, in first person, the abuses they have committed.

I have argued that the embodied experience of people born of war is silenced in the reconstruction of the collective memories of the past. This corresponds less to an attempt to conceal their existence than to the ways in which the naturalisation of paramilitary sexual violence against women has combined with patriarchal gendered moral values. The absent presence of children born of war in the reconstructions of local memories of the past does not question their emergence from war or their (contested) existence in the present. Instead, it raises questions about the socio-historical political struggles over meanings of the past in relation to the imagined future of the political community. The question of how people born of war have become part of the intersubjective realities that emerge from war is not just a question about their bare life; their bodies are sites of socio-historical struggles that reflect the negotiations that have granted them with meaning under different social orders. In the embodiment of what I have called in chapter 5 'impossible witnesses' of the violence their community experienced, and of the violence that categorised them, under legal terms, as victims of

the armed conflict, children born of war offer testimony through their own bodies and their aggregated experiences of overlapping forms of violence, survival, and resistance. No committed long-term research agenda would be complete without them being at the centre. To address the ways in which these individual's identities are negotiated it is essential to acknowledge their experience and agency. In this sense, it is fundamental to shift the scope of research from inquiring *about* them to working *with* them. For the harm-oriented logics and policies of transitional justice this represents a challenge; how to address the effects of war when is not terror and death but life what is at stake?

After months of fieldwork, I became familiar with the militarised journey from Cali to Buenos Aires; the military checkpoints on the roads, the demobilisation campaign banners placed in strategic points reminding guerrillas that it was mothers' day or that the national football team was playing, the soldiers standing next to the roads showing their thumps-up to the cars, pretending that there was no war but just business as usual. In San Miguel, I learned to identify some of the mnemonic traces of the culture of terror; the main entrance to the community where during *those* years there was always a checkpoint, the school that was turned into storage and training centre, the house where a man was killed for not playing a song fast enough, the dirt roads where women were raped, the hills where the first shooting took place. However, unlike the visible military uniforms and weapons I saw in my everyday journeys, the markers of violence in San Miguel were not visible at first sight. It was through inquiring about social relations, universes of meaning, and through the human experience of sensing the place that, slowly, they started to become visible. The subject that I had initially conceptualised as 'children born of war' and that I believed to have clear boundaries, did not appear in the reconstructions of the geographies of war of the community. The less I looked for *them* (as a category), the more I could perceive their presence as historical sites of social struggles; the gendered

content of silence. In the space between the socio-legal categories that seek to impose order on people's experiences of terror—with the revelation of *the number*—and the presence of *muchos*, I found the embodied aggregated experience of boys, girls, and teenagers fathered by paramilitaries and local women. I suggest that in the case of people born of war in Colombia, a sociology of knowledge that seeks to reflect on how they have become part of the intersubjective realities that emerge from war needs to embrace the space of absence and the texture of silence; it is there that we can find the different shapes those people have assumed throughout time and how their embodied existence has been shaped by overlapping forms of violence and resistance.

# Appendix 1

Two of the maps produced by women

Map produced by men, and detail of one of the individual maps
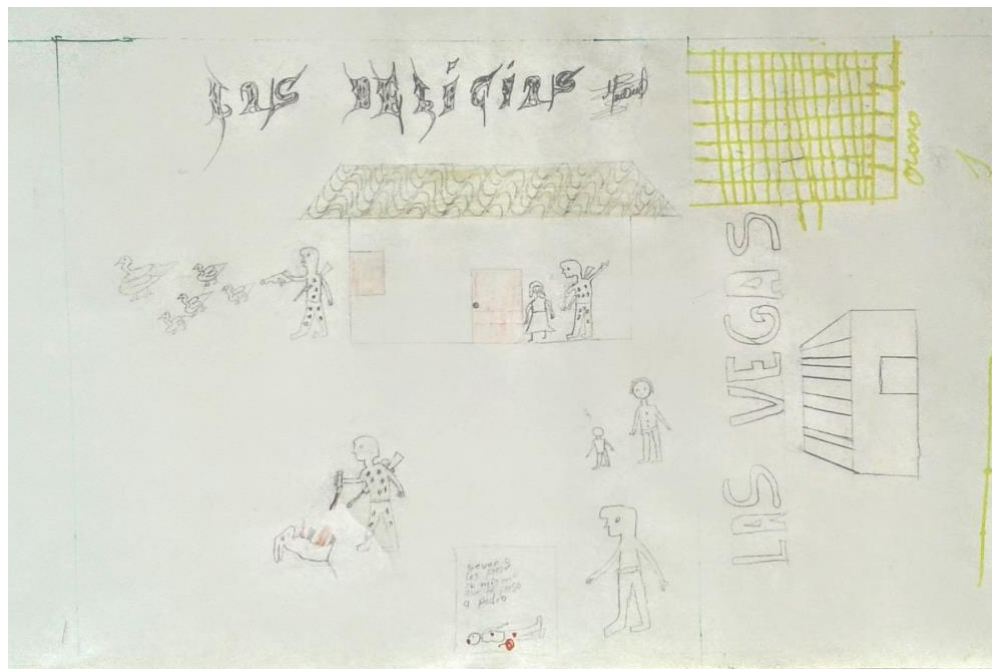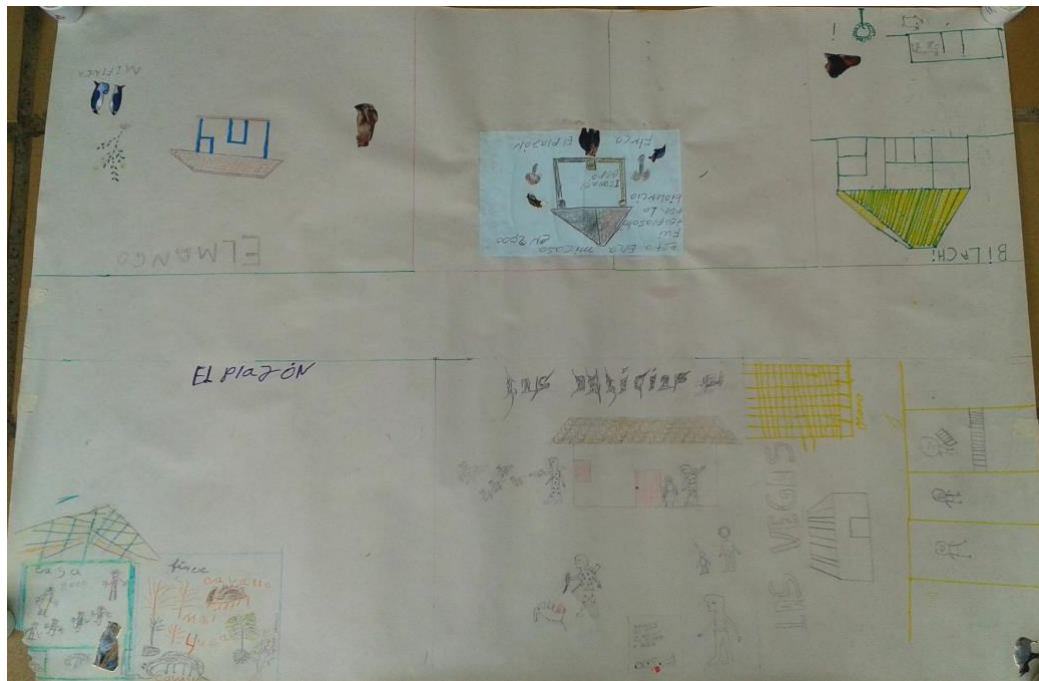
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