

**THERE IS A FUTURE  
if there is truth**

**FINAL REPORT**

---

Commission for the Clarification  
of Truth, Coexistence and  
Non-Repetition.

# **MY BODY IS THE TRUTH**

**Experiences of Women and LGBTIQ+ People  
in the Armed Conflict**

**THERE IS A FUTURE IF THERE IS TRUTH – FINAL REPORT**  
*COMMISSION FOR THE CLARIFICATION OF THE TRUTH, COEXISTENCE  
AND NON-REPETITION OF EVENTS*

**Commissioners**

Francisco José de Roux Rengifo, President  
Alejandro Castillejo Cuéllar  
Saul Franco Agudelo  
Lucía González Duque  
Carlos Martín Beristain  
Alejandra Miller Restrepo  
Leyner Palacios Asprilla  
Marta Ruiz Naranjo  
Patricia Tobón Yagarí  
Alejandro Valencia Villa  
Alfredo Molano Bravo (r. s. p. d.)  
María Ángela Salazar Murillo (r. e. f. r.)

**General Secretary**

Mauricio Katz García

**Management team**

Gerson Arias Ortiz, director for Social Dialogue  
Diana Britto Ruiz, Knowledge Director  
Sonia Londoño Niño, director of ethnic peoples  
Juan Carlos Ortega, administrative and financial director  
Tania Rodríguez Triana, territory director

**General editing and editorial coordination**

Karim Ganem Maloof

**Communications Coordination**

Ricardo Corredor Cure

**Editorial assistance**

Sofia Libertad Sánchez Guzmán and Andrea Jiménez Jiménez

Bogotá, Colombia, 2022

**MY BODY IS THE TRUTH.**  
**EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN AND LGBTIQ+ PEOPLE IN THE ARMED CONFLICT.**

**Editor-in-chief of this volume**  
Alejandra Miller Restrepo

**Gender Working Group Coordinator**  
Salomé Gómez Corrales

**Research coordinators**  
Tatiana Pedraza Vargas, Marcela Rivera Ospina, and Juliana Rodríguez López

**Advisors**  
Martha Lucía Peña Duque, Olga Lucía Ramírez Ramírez and Gloria María Bustamante Morales

**Research team**  
Alejandra Londoño Bustamante, Remedios Uriana, Clara Inés Valdés Rivera, Marcela Amador Ospina, Luana Gallo Arango, Diana Mantilla-Raad, and Yuliana Vélez Guzmán.

**Editing and proofreading**  
Gabriela de la Parra Morales, Adriana Gómez Arbeláez and María del Mar Escobedo Remolina

**Analytical team**  
Juliana Guerrero

**Photographic curation**  
Santiago Escobar-Jaramillo

**Cover design**  
Paula Velásquez Molinos

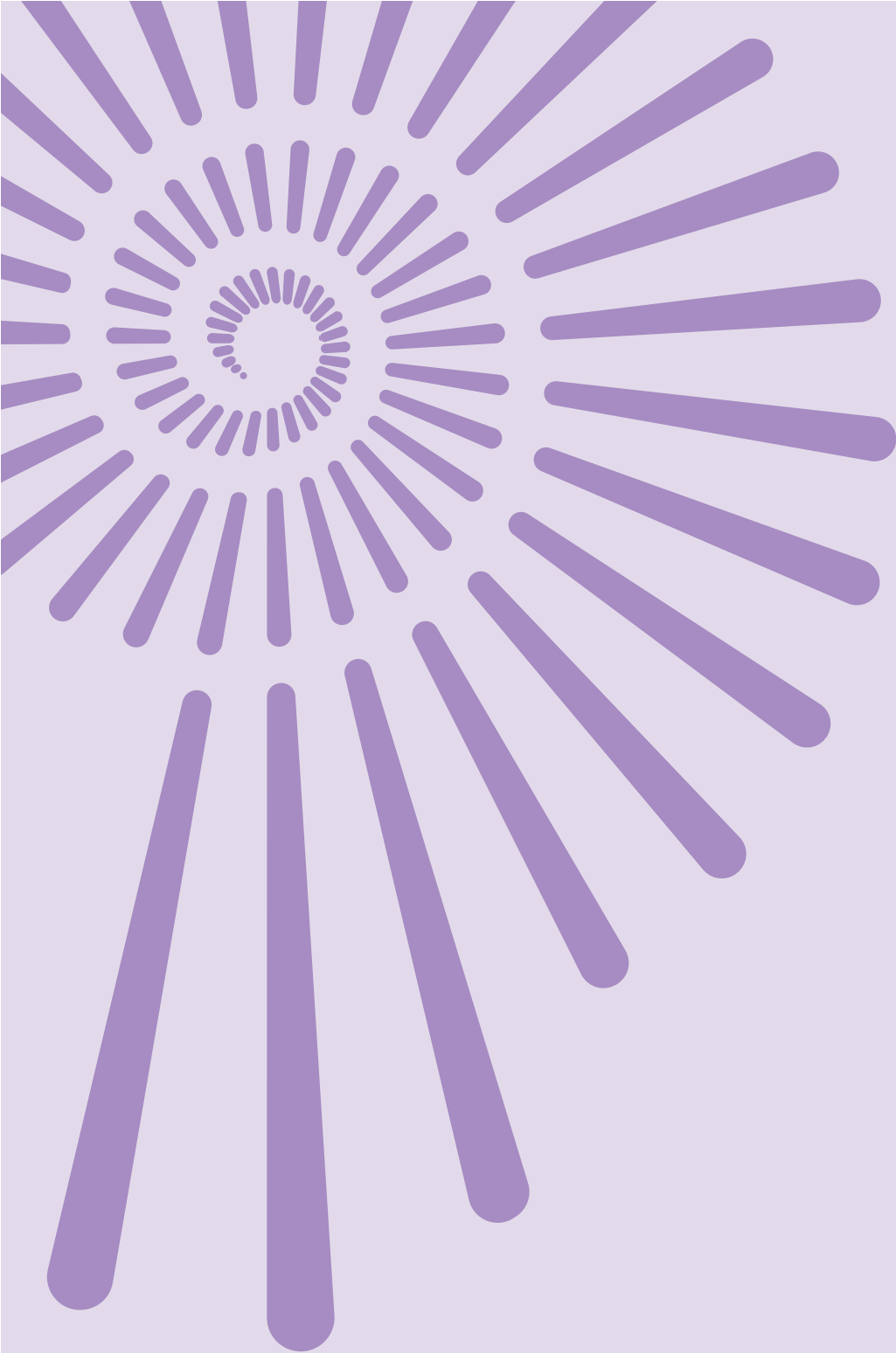
**Graphic Design**  
Andrea Leal

**Translation**  
Diana María Salcedo López  
Laura Andrea Sánchez Rincon  
Claudia Marcela Albarracín  
Silvana Suárez Pérez  
Anna Gorter

“This document was possible thanks to the support of UN Women. The translation was possible thanks to the support of Global Survivors Fund and LIMPAL Colombia. The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of UN Women, Global Survivors Fund or LIMPAL Colombia.

Reproduction of the contents of this document is authorized to the media, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions and other public entities and individuals, provided that due credit is given to the authors and the contents are not altered in any way.”





### 1.1.3. Indigenous, black, afro-descendant and peasant women braid memory from their territories.<sup>1</sup>

*If we talk, they kill us.*

*If we don't talk too.*

*So, we talk<sup>2</sup>*

Cristina Bautista

Ethnic, racial and territorial identities have made the experience of being a woman more complex, given the differentiated violence's against them, which responds to stigmatization, discrimination, and forms of exclusion and segregation by the actors of the armed conflict. This also affects their ancestral community fabric.

#### *Women and their relationship with the territory.*

For black and Afro-descendant women, the territory is the place to weave history and memories. It is the place of the struggles of their ancestors, who were stripped of their entire existence by the slave trade, as well as the place for healing of memories, dignity and persistence of the people.

All this that we have experienced has been because of the love that we have known in our territories, the love of seeing a banana palm tree grow, of a sunny day of fishing, of feeling close to our family, of defending our permanence there where we have grown up and of where we don't want to leave, because the land of our grandmothers and grandfathers can also be the land for our granddaughters and grandsons. Our land is the place to dream our future with dignity. We left running and hiding, without owning anyone, for denouncing the abuses that black, indigenous and peasant communities in the northern Cauca suffer day by day, due to the economic interests in our territories.<sup>3</sup>

---

1 The Colombian countryside is extensive and diverse in ethnic and racial terms. Therefore, in both sections on women and LGBTIQ+ people, the Commission recognizes that there are differences between indigenous and black peoples, and that the farmers are also heterogeneous.

2 Words of Cristina Bautista, Woman of the Nasa indigenous authority from Cauca, murdered on October 29, 2019 along with other fellow indigenous people. *Semana*; If we talk, they kill us.

3 Words of Francia Márquez, legal representative of the Community Council of La Toma. Mina-Rojas et al., «Struggles of Good Living», 168.

For indigenous women, Mother Earth and the territory are at the center of life care, autonomy and the reproduction of cultural identity. This is where the battle stories waged to defend and recover the places that have been taken from them since the Spanish invasion are updated.

Territory for indigenous women implies a spiritual and cultural relationship with mother earth, where women fulfill a special and vital mission to guarantee their balance through payments<sup>4</sup> and other rituals. Therefore, the permanence and protection of women in the territory are essential<sup>5</sup>.

Peasant women, for their part, have become politicized in the struggle for land and in the midst of the resurgence of violence's suffered. This was stated by Marina, a leader:

We are women, we have had a major impact on cultural changes in our society. There is a persistence that transcends the women who have been involved in the conflict, in the protection of the environment, in the preservation of seeds, in the care of the countryside, a deeply rooted culture... We are persecuted for being against chemists, for defending seeds, water and the environment.<sup>6</sup>

In their testimonies before the Commission, black, Afro-descendant, indigenous and peasant women stated that their territories have been disputed and that they have been dispossessed of them through violent practices, ethnic and gender discrimination, as well as structural racism<sup>7</sup>. Among the actors they identified there are: Spanish colonizers, slavers, missionaries, extractives companies, insurgent groups, paramilitary groups, public forces, landowners and drug traffickers, among others.

They also declared that the Colombian State has enhanced the dynamics associated with forced displacement and territorial dispossession, on one hand, with a deficient action to guarantee the rights of rural population and remote regions of the country, and on the other, with the enactment of laws that favour a development perspective that is detrimental to peoples wellbeing and feeds the interests of those who dispute their political, economic, social, and military control.

The following testimonies show how women and communities began to lose their territory, their social fabric and their culture.

Regarding the contemporary armed conflict, particularly the period of its upsurge in northern Cauca at the end of the 1990s, Nayibe, an Afro-descendant leader, expressed:

---

4 «For the indigenous communities, the payments have to do with «the need to act with a principle of reciprocity, and always give something in exchange for what is obtained, whether it is something material or a service». Humboldt Institute, «Payments»

5 ONIC, «Protection programme for indigenous women».

6 Truth Commission, «Rapporteur of National Meeting of Peasant Women»

7 For further information on this concept, please refer to the Glossary.

«That was when the machines began to arrive. We didn't know about backhoes here. Along-side the paramilitaries, the backhoes arrived to dig huge holes in our territories, to destroy rivers, and well, in the presence of armed people, who would dare say something? Women lost their autonomy on traditional mining. Before, people would go and work on river shores, anywhere, I mean, that was a communal place where anyone could go anywhere and extract gold. Now they no longer can work there, because it is now privatized».<sup>8</sup>

Tatiana, an indigenous Inga from the Calentura reservation, narrated the impact on how nature, spirituality and food sovereignty<sup>9</sup> was affected by armed confrontation between FARC-EP and paramilitary groups in the municipality of Puerto Guzmán (Putumayo):

«Right now, we find ourselves in a bad situation; because we don't have our lands to grow. We are even losing our traditions. We no longer have plantain. We used to get yucca from there, but we no longer have that tradition. Now I must buy the yucca, the panela; while back then, when we were in the reservation, we had natural drinks, we used to get them from plantain, yucca, chontaduro. Now we don't. It is hard for the community! On the spiritual side it has affected us a lot. Since we are no longer in the reservation, each person goes their own way. Traditional medicine is being forgotten; they used to take yagé<sup>10</sup>, but yagé<sup>11</sup> is no longer available here».

Carmen, a Nükak indigenous woman, victim of forced displacement in the urban center of San José del Guaviare, broadened her view on what the armed conflict has meant for the last nomadic hunter-gatherer people, who remained in isolation until the 1970s and since then, has had to face the contact process<sup>12</sup>.

«Since 2015 we have had many problems in the community with our young people in the community, because they have picked up the bad habits of white people. They are very different: they no longer pay attention to the family, they go out at night, they steal, they damage other people's things, they arrive at their mother's side after two days, parents try to talk to them, but they don't pay attention to anyone. So, today, in the community of Aguabonita we are very sad, we feel very weak, we feel bad, because there are other groups that say they

---

8 Interview 070-PR-00891. Woman, Afro-Colombian, leader, victim.

9 The concept of food sovereignty for women is fully explained in the conceptual annex. Friends of the Earth Association Peoples Rights.

10 This plant is an important source of knowledge and is the link between the worlds of the living and the sacred. The loss of medicinal knowledge and ritual practices threatens the social and cultural foundations of the Inga people.

11 Interview 978-VI-00001. Woman, Inga indigenous, urban.

12 The Nükak people are the last of the nomadic tradition in Colombia and were officially contacted in 1988. Before that date they lived in isolation. In Guaviare, communication with the local eastern groups occurred following the arrival of the New Tribes mission in the late 1960s and early 1970s, while in the case of the local groups on the western side it began with the arrival of the colonization front that was encouraged by the advance of coca cultivation for illicit use, which put great pressure on their ancestral territory. In 1997, a new stage of the armed conflict for territorial control and the drug trafficking business began in the center of Guaviare, which pitted the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP), paramilitary groups and the National Army against each other.

want to go to the land, because they have nowhere to put us, because the settlers around the community threaten us. The young people are using drugs, they arrive with knives to threat family and children, and it scares us, sometimes they come out with a weapon in their hand like a machete in order to end their family<sup>13</sup>».

For peasant women, the armed conflict has led to displacement, dispossession and abandonment of their places of origin, destruction of their future possibilities therefore, the productivity of the Colombian countryside, identity, culture and territoriality of the peasantry were affected, which led to the replacement of the forms of production in many territories by extractive economies or megaprojects, such as the palm and banana agroindustry, in which paramilitarism has played an active role. Gladys, a peasant leader from Tolima, referred to the change in their ways of living and producing:

«Where there were gunfire and confrontations, it was difficult to farm. Not all peasants had land: many of them were employees and worked other people's land. It is not a secret that peasants have no land. Peasants were not always persecuted, but they left anyway. The issue of displacement is not only forced displacement; in many cases their lives are threatened –as collateral damage– and it caused for them not to work the land. They stopped doing the mingas, because there was no longer a way to get together. The palm crops were already possessed by armed conflict, there was already territorial control. For many women and their children, it was a threat to go out to work, to look for a living: it meant losing your life or being recruited<sup>14</sup>».

In terms of their production systems, victimization generated by conflict affected taking care of their families, animals, land, food crops and, with it, food sovereignty. In addition, the blockades carried out by armed actors prevented the entry and exit of products, which endangered the populations that depended on its exchange. «The paramilitary actions didn't allow food access to many peasants. It was essentially an attack against women, because they were the ones remaining in the territory»<sup>15</sup>.

From the north of the department of Atlántico, Hilda, mentioned above, called on the State to fulfill its duty to guarantee the right to food and nutrition of Colombians, including the peasantry:

«There were times when we had to confront each other. What weapons did the peasants have? The only ones were the machete and the calabash to be able to work and live, because that's what we lived for: subsistence crops (pancoger, in Spanish). Here, in this territory of the department of Atlántico, we rely on them to send us water, because we don't have water here, we don't have irrigation. The irrigation request was made, but some entities listen, and others don't. That is why we ask the State to take more care of the countryside, because

---

13 Interview 321-VI-00003. Women, indigenous Nükak, victim, Guaviare.

14 Truth Commission, «From Silence to Truth», May 26, 2021, 1h 13 min 12s.

15 Truth Commission, «Rapporteur from the National Peasant Women Encounter. »



everything is in the countryside: there is culture, intelligence. Everyone feeds from it: white people, rich people, black people, we all live from it. If we went on strike, they would die. We would all starve to death<sup>16</sup>».

The work of peasant women in defense of their territory and for wanting to keep the countryside alive has turned some of them into military targets. Persecuted and stigmatized by governments, armed groups, and society, they continue the struggle so, as they say, it doesn't happen to anyone again.

Rural areas and the collective territories of indigenous and black populations have been objects of dispute between actors who seek, on one hand, to own energy, mineral, and environmental sources, and on the other hand, to have control over geostrategic corridors, which has led to an increase in military presence.<sup>17</sup>

Berenice, a Wayuu leader, referred to the presence of the police in indigenous territories in the mid-1980s:

«I remember that there were many militaries. There was a time of fear when the Mano Negra entered. People use to say: “The Mano Negra is coming.” Indeed, they arrived wearing black gloves and balaclavas. I believe the Wayuu were very afraid of them because of that story, because they were terrifying. I remember a time when the police arrived, looking for...-that coincided with the marijuana era in La Guajira-, and I imagine they were looking for stashes of marijuana, but they ended up assaulting people<sup>18</sup>».

Likewise, the Commission observed militarization triggered pregnancies among young women of indigenous and black communities, and subsequent abandonment due to transfer to other regions. Additionally, the instalment of military bases facilitated and intensified aggressions against women, especially sexual and maternal assaults.

Elena, from Buenaventura, recounted how in the year 2000 terror was written in black women bodies:

«In the neighborhood there already were paramilitaries, militiamen and those who were becoming paramilitaries. The only ones who got in there, were the parish and the Army, who did the same as the others: they used children or women as snitches. They started to hang out with girls, and they would write: “This is the bitch, I don't know who, look for her to fuck her”, that's no secret, that was and is written on the walls of La Capitana ware-

---

16 Interview 483-PR-00246. Mokaná indigenous woman, victim of threats.

17 Militarization is considered as the incursion of armed groups, including the security forces, into a territory. With the State it specifically seeks to reestablish control, regulate the presence of a group outside the law or drug trafficking, and even to guard transnational companies in the exploitation of agricultural, mining, energy and port resources.

18 Interview 089-VI-00022. Woman, indigenous Wayuu, teacher.

house. When they changed companions, they already knew with whom. Many of the girls that dated guys from the Army and the Police are now dead, because they were killed by the others, because they were pointed out as snitches. I testify because we had a child that the Army and the Police used as an informer and then was shot in front of his sister, all of this is registered<sup>19</sup>.

Bela, Carmen, Gladys, Verónica, Berenice, and Elena agreed that in their places of origin there were economic, military, and geostrategic interests, which have motivated processes of displacement and dispossession. By making a parallel between their lives before, during, and after these events, it is possible to emphasize that their way of being, seeing, and acting in the world changed and that these changes have threatened their cultural identity and their survival as communities or peoples.



María Beatriz is an indigenous woman of the Nasa people from Tierradentro, Cauca. Through her leadership, she has worked to recover the ancestral rituals of her people in order to seek balance and face adversities, 2022. Truth Commission Archive. Photograph by María Paula Durán Rubiano

---

19 Interview 417-VI-00001. Woman, black, agronomist.

## *Disharmonies and affectations: violence against indigenous women*

Ingas, Yukpas, Emberas, Nükaks, Nasas, Yanaconas, Kamentsás, Wayuus, Misaks, Zenúes, and Amazonian women, provided to the Truth Commission testimonies that bring back not only their memories but also the interpretation and meaning they give to their individual and collective experience, as well, as their resistance and coping strategies. From their perspective, their experiences are part of what is known as the consecution of violence's, it is expressed in three areas. The first refers to the long-term violence's that dates back to the times of Spanish colonization. For them, the current armed conflict has its roots in exclusion and racism in the Colony, which has been observed in the modalities of the most recent war. Gilma, a Zenú leader expressed:

<<This was a territory. There were three big provinces: Finzenú, Panzenú and, Zenufana, each with its own chief or leader. We were settled in the Zunefa. The Spaniards arrived with the *encomenderos*<sup>20</sup>. We already had traditions and customs, language, and a way of speaking, but those men came from out there, they invaded us, they brought us all the behaviors, and there the Indian always remained in an inferior position<sup>21</sup>.>>

The second area addresses the violence's perpetrated against them within families and communities. These precede to the aggressions committed by armed actors. This was stated by Graciela, a Nasa community member from the Tierradentro area, who referred precisely to the spiral of interwoven violence's that has been experienced in her community:

<<I want to put an end to this story that hurts me so much. First, I was abused at the age of six by my mother's relative. I was the youngest and I was always abused. At the age of 15, I made the worst decision of my life: I left home and met the father of my children. I had four children with him: two girls and two boys; I love them with all my soul, they are not to blame. When I decided to live with him, I told him what they did to me as a child, because I had never been able to speak about it. I thought it was the best decision and it was the worst thing that could have happened to me. At the age of 18 I got pregnant with my first child, and I was being abused the entire time, there were murder attempts against me and my children. I suffered a lot. We lived near a military base. The military always asked us to let them do the laundry. Sometimes they bought groceries, but they never crossed the line with me or the girls. One day, in 1992, I was alone at home. I was doing the laundry when a tall, blond, green-eyed soldier came. I was with my two-year-old girl, he asked for a glass of water, and I went to the kitchen without thinking about what this man would do to me. The man grabbed me from behind and dragged me across the kitchen as I was serving a glass of water. He put a rifle to

---

20 Translation note: The "encomienda" was a Spanish labor system that rewarded conquerors with the labor of indigenous people. The "encomenderos" were conquerors who had the right to extract labor and tribute from natives who were under the Spanish crown rule. There isn't an exact translation for "encomenderos," but encomendero was responsible for the care of his Indians, as well as for their correct Christian doctrine.

21 Case 462-CI-01424. <<Case #18 formless: Trenzar memory>>. s. f.

my head, started taking off my clothes and raped me. He began hitting my legs with the rifle and saying things to me»<sup>22</sup>.

Finally, the third area describes the violence's committed by armed actors. The testimonies demonstrated multiple forms of violence's that became part of their day by day. Some indigenous women suffered forced abortions; forced displacements to the city to work in family homes; sexual violence –even against girls–; seduction practices<sup>23</sup> by armed actors in order to use them as an intelligence service; submission to trafficking and prostitution networks; disruption of ancestral traditions and ways of life, as well as threats and assassinations of traditional doctors, midwives, men and women leaders, among others. Marisol said:

They entered the reservation almost violating the rights of the Yukpas. You felt forced to let them in. One couldn't take food to the reservations, because paramilitaries claimed that it was to give to the guerrillas. They asked you to be identified to know where you came from. The guerrilla attempted to enlist the young Yukpas to take them to war. They were dropping bombs close to the reservations, many people died. Both FARC and ELN guerrillas and other groups took over our territories to grow marijuana; that's why fumigation and violence arrived. There were government actors fumigating in the territory, when the crops of the peasants, and the Yukpas were damaged. There were many women who aborted within in the territory; there were also children who were born malformed due to the fumigation and due to all of this violence, that entered our territory, because these types of abortions and malformations didn't happen in the past.<sup>24</sup>

The indigenous women who told their stories to the Commission<sup>25</sup> reported forced displacement in 31.6% of violent events; threats, 18,8%; sexual violence's, 7,2%; and dispossession, at 3,21%. Regarding forced displacement, a report presented to the Commission, supported by various testimonies, showed that the dispossession of the territories has implied a significant loss of identity of these communities. As Carmenza stated:

When a woman has to leave her territory, her culture, her relationships network, and her community fabric and has to move to another place where she doesn't find these conditions, she is no longer a Nasa woman [...] for an Indigenous woman, deterritorialization encompasses all the meaning that safeguarding her culture, her ancestral and traditional practices have for her, because her priority in the city is her own and her family's survival. The constant

---

22 Interview 070-VI-00041. Woman, Nasa indigenous, domestic employee.

23 The Constitutional Court, in Auto 004 of 2009, on Protection of the fundamental rights of individuals and indigenous peoples displaced by the armed conflict or at risk of forced displacement, refers to the war processes that actively involve indigenous peoples and communities and their individual members in the armed conflict. In this regard, point 2.2.10. refers to "Forced prostitution, sexual violence and enamoring of indigenous women and young girls as a war tactic, mainly by illegal armed actors". These patterns materialize the special gender risks of indigenous women in the armed conflict, as documented in the Constitutional Court's Auto 092 of 2008

24 Truth Commission, "The Indigenous Truth", October 23, 2020, 1h 34 min 10s.

25 Individual interviews with victims, family members and witnesses. Date: June 9, 2022.



struggle for economic income has created a destabilization in their role as women in community spaces, they recognize themselves as women who have worked for hand in hand with the community, and hand in hand with their own authority, exercising and supporting their autonomy and of their people; suddenly, and abruptly, they must abandon everything to take refuge in places where they don't understand themselves<sup>26</sup>.

This has serious consequences for cultural survival, as Pastora, a member of the Nasa community related:

«Exactly! This fight is against oblivion, because we cannot forget these women, to continue with this fighting force, to ensure that our children keep their cultural identity; if we women lose a story, a memory, we lose everything. Our children lose everything, because there are many women who have been raped, or mistreated by armed actors or by society itself. They have left the territories and they don't want to know anything about indigenous or cultural identity and go to the city. Many indigenous comrades have gone through that»<sup>27</sup>.

Luisa, an Emberá-Chamí<sup>28</sup> from Apartadó (Antioquia), spoke of the impacts on her daily life and her identity:

«Well, it changed our lives, because we had to leave behind the things we loved, like nature. We are no longer the same as before, we are already becoming part of another culture, with other customs. And the fear that remains in you, for your whole life, marks you; your whole life is marked by the fear and the nostalgia that you will no longer see the people you loved»<sup>29</sup>.

Forced displacement interrupted life cycles, broke the family, social and community fabric, and affected the generational transmission of culture, in which women play a fundamental role. This, as a whole, creates a great risk of physical and cultural extinction, as the Constitutional Court warned in Auto 004 2009. The indigenous women who testified to the Truth Commission also maintained that territorial dispossession is not only configured when access to collective ownership of the land is denied, legally or materially, but also when, through various economic, legal, and military devices, access is abusively and arbitrarily to the assets of nature existing in an area, threatening Mother Earth and jeopardizing their existence as peoples. Rosalba, a Nasa indigenous leader from the north of Cauca, put it this way:

«First, for us, all beings are living beings. Nothing is dead as they teach in school; that beings are like stone, for us the stone has life, so the territory is a person; the territory, for being a person, has life, it means we embody it, we embody everything. When a person dies, blood flows, and we say that blood is like negative energy, it is dirty, so if a person dies those

---

26 Report 262-CI-00973, Corporación Justicia y Dignidad, "Mujer nasa", 103.

27 Interview 070-PR-00900. Woman, Nasa indigenous, leader.

28 An ethnic group of Colombia.

29 Interview 040-VI-00047. Embera-Chamí indigenous woman, teaching assistant.

negative energies contaminate and cause imbalance and disharmony. Many of these groups are usually in sacred or energetic locations; so, they are contaminating, they are attacking nature. But we also say that, as we are part of nature, our navel is sown right in nature, that is when one is born, the placental is buried somewhere or in the woodstove; then we have that connection with nature, so any aggression against a human being is an aggression against nature and the territory. Knowledge and wisdom are present on the territory, interpreted by human beings, and attacked by these groups. Logically, this is where it is always said: We need a collective reparation since they violently destroyed the spirituality, which is the most sacred thing of our people»<sup>30</sup>.

Since 2000, several indigenous communities have formed 'permanent assembly sites' (generally located in schools) as a protection and resistance strategy against war. It was a political decision to remain on the territory, embodied in the 'minga plan in resistance', in which community sites marked with flags were agreed so that, in the hardest moments of the confrontation, families could go there and take refuge while the confrontations persisted, and then return to their homes once the threat ceased. Women played a fundamental role in taking care of children, elderly, and community itself, during the settlement in these shelters that have been spaces for collective reflection, training, and thought. Traditional medicine, orchards, songs, dance, and word circles have all been ways of resisting during events, of healing individually and collectively.

The indigenous women who gave their testimony to the Commission have defined sexual violence's as acts of disharmony, which affect not only their bodies and lives, but also their territories, communities, and organizational and political processes. Additionally, these practices, were used as punishment against women who were identified by the aggressors as collaborators of one or more-armed actors. The database of the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC, by its acronym in Spanish) reported 127 incidents of sexual violence against indigenous women between 1986 and 2016<sup>31</sup>. Regarding responsibilities, the same source indicated that these acts of sexual violence were attributed in 40,2% to guerrillas; in 28.3%, to paramilitary groups; in 19.7%, to the public forces; and in 11.8% of the cases, no responsible party was identified.

Romina, a 59-year-old indigenous woman<sup>32</sup> born in La Pedrera (Amazonas), who lives in La Chorrera, after working as a housekeeper for several years in Bogota, also gave her testimony about the sexual aggression of which she was a victim by the FARC-EP guerrillas:

<<Yes, doctor, they raped me. That man took me right there on the road, when I was coming from chagra<sup>33</sup>, under the small hill. That's where I was taken. I didn't like going there>><sup>34</sup>

---

30 Interview 070-PR-00985. Woman, Nasa indigenous, leader.

31 ONIC, "Database. Affectations to indigenous peoples".

32 The Commission's Mission Information System (MIS) interview form does not record the town to which it belongs

33 It refers to the extent of land for food production, where traditional crops are found.

34 Interview 461-VI-00023. Woman, Amazonian indigenous, peasant.

These situations affected the experience of women's everyday places. In tears, she reported that she and her mother live uneasily, in fear, due to all the acts suffered in her territory.

Sexual violence against Wayuu women was committed mainly by the army and the paramilitaries. With these they violated a fundamental principle in the logic of warfare of these people: women and children are not to be touched. This was explained by Berenice, the aforementioned leader, who identified the cultural damage caused:

«Before, the warfare codes were very clear among the Wayuu clans: women were not to be targeted; that was a principle of warfare, I believe. In inter-clan conflicts there could be killing, there could be the bloodiest of wars, but neither women nor children were targeted. That's why we had attributed roles: when clans faced each other, us women could go to collect the dead, because there was a war code, which in the framework of the conflict changed completely, for example, when they broke into the culture, when the entire Wayuu legal system was broken into»<sup>35</sup>

Examining the presence of armed actors is essential to understand the ways in which they have tried to dominate the territories. What happened to the Nasa women of northern Cauca illustrates what happened in diverse indigenous territories and how it affected them specifically. During the 1970s and 1980s, the FARC-EP exercised social control through the use of armed justice administration practices that had a significant impact on the regulation of social relations. In the words of Jenny, a Nasa leader from the Tierradentro region (Cauca):

I have only heard of the FARC abusing or raping people in Caldono and Toribío; I have never heard of it in Tierradentro. I felt safer when it was said that the guerrillas were around, because in the meetings they said «We won't admit thieves, rapists or, cowboys». That was their control, so they were afraid of them. When people didn't pay attention, they turned to them<sup>36</sup>.

Rosalía, leader of the Huellas reservation, in Caloto (Cauca), added:

«At certain times, these issues of sexual violence did not arrive to them, in other words, these issues were not taken on by the indigenous authority. When the command of the FARC discovered that some members of the group or comuneros<sup>37</sup> had sexually abused women, they killed them. That's why people say, even now: "If someone rapes me, my son, or, my daughter, I'll go and tell the FARC". Here in Huellas, there was a time of rapes, and they say that the family would go and warn the FARC and they would kill them; if the commander realized that the rapist was a member of the FARC, they would kill him as well»<sup>38</sup>

---

35 Interview 089-VI-00022. Woman, indigenous Wayuu, teacher.

36 Amador, «De tulpas, mojanos, vacas y justicia», 62.

37 Translation note: 'los comuneros' were persons who were not members of the FARC, but supported them.

38 Interview 070-PR-00886. Woman, Nasa indigenous, leader.

However, towards the end of the 1980s, along with the process of strengthening the indigenous cabildos<sup>39</sup>, the relationship with the FARC-EP changed and they entered into a dispute for authority in the territories. In 1985, 45 indigenous cabildos of Cauca enacted the Vitoncó Resolution<sup>40</sup>, in which they demanded that the armed actors respect their autonomy and leave their territories, and that the Colombian government dismantle their repressive policies, and the clarification of the motives and the responsibility for the crime of Father Álvaro Ulcué Chocué. With the arrival of drug trafficking, the intensification of war dynamics and the growing political and organizational consolidation of the Nasa people, tensions between them and the insurgent groups increased.

Regarding the Army, Julia narrated how several of its members broke into a house where they physically and sexually assaulted the women who were there, after accusing them of belonging to or collaborating with the guerrillas. She did not specify the date of the event or which division they belonged to, perhaps because the testimony was shared in the middle of a process of psychocultural support provided by a member of *Tejido Mujer* of the *Asociación de cabildos* of Northern Cauca (ACIN):

I have also been assaulted; I have also been a victim. Knowing Nasa Yuwe<sup>41</sup> is fundamental, I barely remember my grandmother's stuttering and tried to put it in order when she said: «Here, where I live, those armed groups came and lowered remittance sacks. They left here, packed up and left». She saw that they were ordinary people and often acquaintances, but she did not know what would happen after all that. She said that there were moments of heavy fighting and that they would have to spend the entire time hiding under their beds. She never left because she had animals to take care of. The others did emigrate, but she stayed with her daughter, and it happened that those who called themselves "heroes of the motherland!" arrived, but I don't think they are heroes at all. She said with tears in her eyes, that at five o'clock in the morning a large group of them arrived, kicked in the door, came in and asked: "Where are these insurgents or subversives?". She did not understand, because she knew little of the language. Then the daughter came out: they had been told that the house was occupied by guerrillas, they said. The last thing I remember is that they hit me on the head, they threw me into a big hallway; I heard my daughter screaming and she was being raped. I went to defend her, and the grandmother was also abused. They stayed there for three days, scared in a corner over there. Who could we ask for help if people in the midst of fighting had been displaced? She prayed to God that they would not be killed. The only thing they told them, as they abused them, was «snitches», «guerrilleras»<sup>42</sup>.

---

39 they are a special public entity, whose members are members of an indigenous community, elected and recognized by it, with a traditional socio-political organization, whose function is to legally represent the community.

40 Superior Council of the Judiciary and ONIC. "Compilation and Selection of Judgments," 46.

41 Nasa Yuwe is the language spoken by the Nasa people in Cauca.

42 Report 263-CI-00218. ACIN and Tejido Mujer Çxhab Wala Kiwe, "Tejemos historia," 49.



The grandmother's poor knowledge of Spanish, who communicated in Nasa Yuwe, made it difficult for her to understand what they were saying, and this became a source of mockery and discrimination.

Regarding the violations committed by the paramilitaries against Nasa women, they recounted events that occurred in the village of Lomitas, a rural area in the municipality of Santander de Quilichao (Cauca), where the Calima Block of the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC), was established in 2000. Rosa, native of the Pioyá Reservation, in the municipality of Caldon (Cauca), suffered the murder of her sister and also sexual violence. She told the Commission that, while she was working selling cholados<sup>43</sup> on the Panamerican highway, four men put her in a van and with denigrating words asked her questions and accused her of being a FARC-EP collaborator. They drove her to Lomitas, where there were around one hundred men dressed in camouflage and carrying long arms. There she was held hostage for three days and raped. From then on, other paramilitaries went looking for her at her workplace to abuse her.

<<They did not tie me up there, they let me go, but I was in a room, secured and all that. He would only come at night and say: “I’m going to sleep here; you can’t wake up alone because more than one person will get in here. Or do you want more than one man to get into your room?”, and I would say no. Then he would say, “It is your turn to sleep with me. You are going to have sex with me,” and I agreed, but I felt like I was throwing up...just feeling him touch me made me want to throw up. I wanted to die, and I might as well, and it was like that for those three days. With Pacho, I woke up once; then he took me another night with someone else. The night was always with someone different, in other words, I was a whore to them<sup>44</sup>. Houses were not the only places where armed actors violated women. Other testimonies pointed out that the roads were also the scenes of fear and violence: <<Women are more at risk on roads and highways; they can rape us and take us upstairs, because they want us in the kitchen or for sexual services>><sup>45</sup>.

---

<sup>43</sup> Translation note: Cholados has no translation but it is a traditional dessert from Valle del Cauca, Colombia.

<sup>44</sup> Interview 232-VI-00033. Woman, Nasa indigenous, urban.

<sup>45</sup> Report 262-CI-00601. ACIN and Tejido Mujer Çxhab Wala Kiwe, “Tejemos historia,” 87.



Bibiana, a black Afro-descendant woman, maintains: «Our concerns neither began nor ended with the armed conflict in Colombia; we have history that has been sustained, some aggressions and violence that have been sustained from the time of colonial enslavement until now, which is perpetuated and recreated». Racism and Armed Conflict in Colombia: Approaches to the truth. 2022. Truth Commission Archive. Photograph by María Paula Durán Rubiano.

### *Racist violence against black and Afro-descendant women.*

In the footsteps of black, Afro-descendant, Raizal, and Palenquera women walk peoples who have resisted historical violence thanks to the maroonage, playing drums, preserving their spiritual practices, interlacing memories and transmitting, from generation to generation, the legacy of their ancestors. For black women, the violence did not begin with the armed conflict, and, therefore, neither did their stories of emancipation and resistance. In the midst of the war, they have suffered many forms of violence, such as displacement, sexual violence, and dispossession.

In this regard, Nayibe, the aforementioned leader, said: «I think that discrimination and racism come from there, because they believe in the collective imaginary that the country still has: that black people are inferior, that black men and women are inferior, so they also want to treat us in the same way»<sup>46</sup>.

Racism is a historical power structure that organizes social, cultural, and economic relations based on principles of superiority and inferiority, which it classifies and ranks according to racial values. This is how Natalia, a black woman from Arjona (Bolívar), referred to it: «My husband was killed by the Gaitanista Self-Defense Forces in 2014, and after that, they started coming to my house and ask me to keep guns for them. Then they told me they were going to stay and they forced me to wash their clothes soiled with blood, and at night they came and forced me to be with them; they wouldn't let me out, day or night. They kept me as a slave and they told me: "damn black woman, you are good for this». I rested when they put him in jail»<sup>47</sup>.

Sofía, a native of Buenaventura, alluded to the presence of racist prejudice and discrimination: «We know that having a port, people from outside the country come to the city and they bring their prototype of women. We've been sold the idea that black women are the hottest, are good for sex, or are good for cooking; they are the ones who cook the best, and they are the ones who do the tasks in the house best. So they have us as cooks, as housewives, and as sexual objects. But we also know that this comes from colonization, it is already there, and we are resisting it»<sup>48</sup>.

Natalia and Sofía do not know each other. However, in their voices, as well as in the voices of many other black and Afro-descendant women<sup>49</sup> who gave their testimonies to the Commission, there is a thread that weaves a common story; it speaks of the armed conflict and of a seemingly distant past, of previous violence that is still occurring. Rebeca, like many of her ancestors who were enslaved, was forced to serve for many years to armed men who came to her home in Buenaventura in the late 1990s. These men acted according to their military, economic, and political objectives, including expanding their military capacity, exercising dominance, and gaining control of the seaport and arms-trafficking processes:

[...]some men came to offer me to work for them, well I thought about it a lot because the truth is I didn't really know them, and they didn't give me a good feeling either. But when they saw my face, they felt that I was going to say no, and their faces and expressions changed. In a few words, they changed from asking me to forcing me. It was my turn to be there, to serve them [...]. Some were heard saying, "That's why these black women were enslaved, because they are the way they are, I would like to take one home with me, because if

---

<sup>46</sup> Interview 070-PR-00891. Woman, Afro-Colombian, leader.

<sup>47</sup> Interview 414-CO-00091. Women, black, Arjona (Bolívar).

<sup>48</sup> Interview 256-CO-00386. Women, black, Buenaventura.

<sup>49</sup> As for Palenquera and Raizal women, the Truth Commission has less information on the analysis of racism in the violence of the conflict, which is why more emphasis will be given to women who identify themselves as black and of African descent, who gave their testimony to the Commission and are located in different parts of the country.

she cooks like that, how will she be in bed [...]. At night they would wake me up with screams, laughter, and seeing the threatening weapons. [...]. It is something that no one can imagine that your whole-body trembles, you feel like going to the bathroom all day long, you feel like crying. It is very hard, very hard [...]. Thinking about when we are not going to be useful for them and they are going to bury us by some mountain, or that they are going to rape us full of rage and shoot us in the process<sup>50</sup>.

The armed actors also violated them, by reproducing stereotypes through phrases and insults that represent what many Colombians still think, even today, about black people: that they are less, that they are dirty, that they smell bad, or, as Rebeca says, that they are only useful for domestic services. These ideas reveal racism that has become normalized and encourage the continuation of this type of violence with impunity. Lola is a black woman who was born in Montes de María, in San Onofre (Sucre). At a young age, she began training as a boxer, a very important cultural sports practice in her territory, which for years brought the community together. In 2002, Lola was forced to participate in the fights imposed by Marco Tulio Pérez Guzmán, alias the Bear, former commander of the Golfo de Morrosquillo Front, Heroes Block of the Montes de María, of the AUC, and to win under threat of death in a ring built by the paramilitaries. The purpose was not only to amuse men at arms but also to stage the torture and punishment of women and homosexual men in the community, in an exercise of appropriation and use of a cultural practice of the black communities of the Caribbean. This is how Lola narrated it:

One day my coach said to me, «Lola, the paramilitaries are planning a boxing event in Alto de Julio, which is a township in San Onofre [...] and it is an obligation. They want there to be female fights, male fights, they want there to be gay fights, they want there to be fights of old people and of children, so you have to participate [...]. I didn't resist at any time and I wasn't comfortable either, but it was worse if I resisted because they would mistreat me [...]. I was sexually abused by a paramilitary from the first day the coach sent me. But, in addition, after the first fight, and for six months, he abused me [...] every time he wanted to, he would send for me with his workers and his escorts, then they had some camps far away, and I had to go.<sup>51</sup>

The use of ancestral knowledge and practices of the black people, through violent strategies, has caused deep damage in communities and in the social fabric. Leidy, a black woman from Cauca, narrated the torture she was subjected to in 2012, because of her skin color, by the guerrillas:

Once a wounded man arrived at the health post and many people surrounded him; my partners, out of fear, did not know what to do. I don't know if it was fear, but I told him that I would take care of him, that was the worst thing I could do, they went to my house and ordered me to take care of someone else in a place in the jungle of Cauca, a day's walk away.

---

50 Case 262-CI-00783, "Case #4: interview of the Red Mariposas Nuevas, s.f.

51 Report 110-CI-00221, Movimiento por la paz, "Cicatrices de la guerra", 56.

My children were in the care of a lady who was with them. I was left for four days [...]. This lasted for almost five years, not to mention that it was not only to take care of the sick, but also to serve those bastards sexually, many men were in my body, and I had to resign from the health post, they gave me so-called money for what I served to the sick, not to mention that my children were already violent at school, I went out several times, and I was sent back, I don't know how they realized it. I have my legs marked, and my vagina with marks, it was the worst thing I could have experienced. I don't know why a creature is born to suffer so much; I said: why didn't my mother abort me [...]. I was the only black woman, and the one who was raped the most because they said that black women resist, and are dry and hotter. They made me bathe more because they said my smell was stronger. They forced me to have my hair straightened because my natural hair disgusted them. They told me to eat more because that way my buttocks could grow, and that gave them pleasure [...]. This country is racist, and sick, and the people in the institutions are bad [...]. But no, here I am in economic need, with terrifying fear but happy to see my children alive, to no longer feel like a hot object for the pleasure of those men, they said that for being a hot black woman I could be with four or five people».<sup>52</sup>

Some black and Afro-Colombian women told the Commission how they experienced forced displacement in the cities, where one of the few labor options was poorly paid domestic work, often involving humiliating treatment. Coral, a black woman who arrived in Cartagena 25 years ago, after being displaced from Curbaradó, Riosucio (Chocó) with her family, in 1996, was raped by a FARC-EP guerrilla member and was raped again later in the center of Cartagena, which she links to her skin color and her work as a human rights defender. Her story exposed some of the ways in which racism is interwoven with other forms of violence, producing historical inequalities and discrimination: «Displacement marked my life completely. Why? Before leaving my territory, I was a victim of sexual violence, abused by a guerrilla fighter [...] who has already passed away, and also after arriving in the city of Cartagena, where there was the contrast of arriving in a city where you don't know anyone, where you have to start from scratch, where everyone rejects you because of your skin color. But in addition to being black, you have a stigma of being displaced, and victimized. I suffered another rape in the middle of downtown Cartagena».

«Racism affects us in a very different way than other ethnic groups [...], we come from an ancestral and cultural territory, we have cultural richness. We began to suffer the whole issue of slavery, mainly because we are black women»<sup>53</sup>

The armed conflict forced many women like Coral to move from their territories to unknown places, without having connections that would allow them to cope with poverty, hunger, and lack of protection.

---

<sup>52</sup> Report 262-CI-00873. Red Mariposas de Alas Nuevas Construyendo Futuro, “Las espinas del racismo”, 6.

<sup>53</sup> Interview 468-VI-00001. Black woman, urban, accounting assistant.



The forced domestic and sexual labor performed by black women, among other social hierarchical practices, are based on racist prejudices that have prevailed since the colonial period: ways of dressing, religious practices, trades, and forms of entertainment alien to their culture were imposed on Afro-descendants. The stories of Rebeca, Lola, Leidy, Coral, and other black women not only speak of the patriarchal forms of violence in the present and recent past. They also show that these abuses are loaded with historical and normalized racism and, in the context of the armed conflict, they reappeared in discourses and practices that punished them. Violence, in these cases based on racist principles, jeopardized the very existence of a people. It was a message through which black and Afro-descendant women were forced to remember that their lives, their bodies, their communities, and their territories were spaces of domination by those who believed themselves to be their owners and saw them as inferior beings. In this regard, the Truth Commission shared the analysis presented on the conflict in Chocó:

The impact of this violence against women lies in the fact that it was planned and perpetrated as another mechanism of terror and control, and given the magnitude, they had the effect of disintegrating and modifying fundamental practices and customs for black people. [...]. A particular element of the violence perpetrated against women in Chocó, especially against black women, has to do with a characteristic of racism, namely the generalized belief that their sexuality is, in addition to being exotic, exuberant. A belief that comes from the times of slavery. This historical and sociocultural element, which is a reproduction of racism, “justifies” the unjustifiable, and enables even greater cruelty against women.<sup>54</sup>

Black and Afro-Colombian women also told the Commission about the violence they have experienced at home, with their husbands, relatives and neighbors. This is how Libia related it: <<[...] my partner beat me and I said “I asked for it”, right? “He’s right!” So... psychological abuse and, well, he was right. He beat me because I, being a leader, was going to open some streets in a bulldozer, even though I got up and did all my work, and I went because I liked the community work. So I asked for it because I didn’t have to leave my house alone to go there, he beat me up and well.... And I also had a psychological problem, I had a physical problem because he bit my nose, and I am chubby. My body doesn’t matter, but my face was the cutest thing I had; he bit me on December 26, 2001. I had six surgeries and my nose was never the same as before, I felt self-conscious when I looked at myself in the mirror, and I cried a lot. But I asked for it, didn’t I? And it was hits, words, everything. So, I naturalized it because the man is the one who rules and I asked for it>><sup>55</sup>.

The mistreatment received by Libia because of her leadership and for not complying with her “duties as a woman” evidences, once again, the extent of the violence experienced in the private and public spheres.

---

54 Report 119-CI-00345. Comisión Interétnica de la Verdad del Pacífico, “Impactos étnico-territoriales”, 31.

55 Interview 256-CO-00386. Women, black, Buenaventura.



Libia grew up between the sounds of the Sumapaz Páramo, where the army harassed, imprisoned, and displaced the peasant community. The conflict led her to defend the ecosystem, empower peasant women, and build peace to ensure non-repetition. 2021. Truth Commission Archive. Photograph by María Fernanda Arévalo Salas.

### *Violence, stigmatization and political persecution against peasant women and their organizations.*

Peasant women have played a fundamental role in the construction of the social, community, and family fabric. Therefore, to continue thinking of them exclusively from the domestic sphere is to ignore their struggle, their political and productive participation, as well as the contributions they have made to the economy and their defense of the territory.

The peasantry hasn't been seen as a political subject and as a heterogeneous group<sup>56</sup>. Its members have been called «agrarian producers», which ignores the diversity of activities that make up peasant economies and cultures, especially those carried out by women. In the construction of the peasant identity, women have been responsible for reproduction, caring of the family, and bringing water to the home and food on the table. During the war, they lost the possibility of producing and accessing food, and a part of their sense of life was taken away from them. In Bertha's words:

---

56 National data on the number of rural women are scarce. Neither the database nor the form for the 2018 Population and Housing Census contain information on peasant self-recognition. However, in 2019, the Quality-of-Life Survey included identification variables of the peasant population, where it was estimated that 26.5% of women over 15 were identified as such.

DANE, «Proyecciones de población». This, taken to 2019 population projections, could approach 6,697,079 women in the national total, with 2,516,980 residents in urban areas and 4,464,406 in rural areas. DANE, «Screenings of population».

The community in the peasantry, in the school, in the minga, and in the church has been broken by the conflict. Women are fundamental in the collective or community sense, because they are the ones who transmit culture, by teaching their children.<sup>57</sup>

Many of the women who offered their testimony to the Truth Commission have become politicized in the middle of the escalating violence. Their struggles were born in their houses, but spilled over the walls of their homes and reached a place within mixed and peasant organizations, which meant them being victims of war. Alcira, a leader from Cauca, recounted: «We work in numerous actions to vindicate our rights as peasant women, but we also fight to see when we will be able to own the land to work it, we defend the territory, we take care of ourselves and we protect ourselves, because the State doesn't protect us. The fact that we are women has brought us many more complications because, first of all, we are not safe in our own homes; we are living with men who were raised in a patriarchal and sexist way, and life itself is a risk in our own home. It is not easy to move across the territories because, if they are not militarized by government forces, they are militarized by insurgent groups»<sup>58</sup>. 68,53% of all the women victims who spoke with the Commission are peasant women<sup>59</sup>. Forced displacement, threats, and sexual violence have affected them the most. For several decades, the stigmatization of peasants as collaborators of one side or the other, as well as the attempts to transform their forms of production, have aggravated the impacts of the armed conflict on their future plans and political projects. The acts of violence have been accompanied by the lack of protection and reporting by the State. Several activities of rural women became a matter of suspicion: bringing food, making handicrafts or going out to other communities. This happened to Judith, displaced in 2008 from Samaniego (Nariño) by the FARC-EP:

*«The Army took my bag and I didn't realize that I had some unexploded bullets. I mean, half of them were shells that were no longer useful and the other half were useful. They told me to "come here", and they took me to where they were holding several people. I was the only woman. I said "how? if I like the crafts and carry those shells, it is to see if I can do something with them". "And what are you going to do with that?" they asked me, "nothing, you are the one who distributed that stuff to the guerrillas over there", they told me, and they abused me as they pleased. And I said "I come here scared and at the same time I am happy that I was able to survive and make it this far, and you are waiting for me like this? That's when I started crying. My baby was crying too, because they separated me from her and my husband, and I said "This is as far as I've come, they've left me here, and now they're going to accuse me of being a guerrilla".»<sup>60</sup>*

The stigmatization was also experienced in the town of Sumapaz. Because of its strategic location as an access point to Bogotá, in the transition between the 1980s and 1990s, it became a battlefield

---

57 Truth Commission, "Relatoría Encuentro Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas".

58 Interview 110-PR-02127. Woman, peasant women, leader, victim of attack with explosives.

59 Estimation from the methodology «Peasant the big loser. Identification and characterization of victims Commission interviews» Mission Information System (SIM), Analytical Group. December 2021.

60 Interview 225-VI-00030. Women, indigenous Pasto, urban, leader.



between FARC-EP and the Military Forces. In the midst of this conflict, the peasant people were greatly affected. In addition, paramilitaries, drug trafficking, and local tensions converged in the area. Murder and persecution of peasant leaders, accusations, and permanent feelings of fear and displacement were some of the aggressions against women, which caused a rupture in the construction of life linked to the territory, the social fabric, and the sense of community.

The historic labeling of the Sumapaz peasantry comes from long ago, due to processes of agrarian struggles for access to the land and their resistance since the time of 'La Violencia'<sup>61</sup>. Their history is marked by conflicts associated with land ownership; economic interest in the paramo ecosystem, their water resources, the importance of their soils and subsoils, and geostrategic political interests, given its location near the capital.

This practice had a strong impact on organizations such as the Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos (ANUC, by its acronym in Spanish), which was the target of attacks aimed at its disappearance. Since its creation in the early 1970s, it has carried out processes for the recovery of unproductive lands, under the slogan "the land is for those who work it", in defense of land distribution and use in opposition to corporate proposals. For these and the following years, peasant women fought for leadership spaces inside the organizations, and defended life and the land despite suffering persecution. This was explained by Clemencia, a leader who belonged first to ANUC and then to the National Association of Peasant, Black and Indigenous Women of Colombia (Anmucic, by its acronym in Spanish), and ended up in exile because of persecution: «This combination of the struggle for the land, women's land rights, and the agrarian reform led to the organizations being declared a military target. First, because the strengthening of women's leadership in the country was impressive in the rural areas where all armed groups operated. And second, because our primary objective was women's right to land ownership and that affected many interests in the country, not only of the landowners who, in some way, had the support and armed wing of the paramilitaries, but also of multinationals and projects that dispossessed, such as Cartón of Colombia, hydroelectric projects and others in the regions»<sup>62</sup>.

This led her to earn the enmity of landowners and representatives of these interests, who accused her of being a criminal<sup>63</sup>. With the arrival of drug trafficking, land disputes intensified, and with them dispossession and displacement. Likewise, the discourse of the war against drugs, which flooded the national and international scene, led to the peasants, particularly the ANUC, being considered drug traffickers and collaborators of the guerrillas, which legitimized the attacks on the association, in confluence with the policy of «social cleansing» led by the AUC since its creation, in the mid-1990s<sup>64</sup>.

---

61 La Violencia (The Violence) was a ten-year civil war in Colombia from 1948 to 1958, between the Colombian Conservative Party and the Colombian Liberal Party, fought mainly in the countryside.

62 Interview 101-VI-00005. Woman, peasant, exiled.

63 Machuca, *The Impact of the Insurgency*, 65.

64 Ferro y García, "Final Report", 16.

For peasant women, this meant punitive action, not only for defending a project and rights that were opposed to the political and economic interests of the armed group in the territory, but also for being women who occupied leadership positions, visible in the public sphere, usually occupied by men.<sup>65</sup> In fact, the Constitutional Court, in the Auto 092 of 2008, recognized the risks they ran because of their gender. Among the ten factors identified that placed them in conditions of special vulnerability were membership in social and community organizations, occupying leadership roles, and defending human and territorial rights<sup>66</sup>.

Those who were labeled as guerrilla collaborators became enemies of the public forces and, therefore, had to be eliminated. Frequently, the punishments imposed on them were executed in public places, in front of their relatives or other women, in order to harm the community, to remind them of the place they were assigned, and the consequences of transgressing it<sup>67</sup>.

The stigmatization and persecution experienced by peasant women often led them to renounce their political and leadership activities, and as a result, the decision-making places were becoming increasingly devoid of women. Estrella, leader of ANUC, recounted:

*[...] I was the only woman on the Municipal Council <sup>68</sup>.When we presented something, they did not know that I belonged to ANUC, so I said: I belong to ANUC. And for having said this, they let me finish my intervention. At that moment the president of the Council stood up and told me: «You cannot be here, because you belong to the ANUC and they are guerrillas, so I think you should leave and you are not a welcome person in our town.»<sup>69</sup>*

In exclusively women's organizations, such as Anmucic, women were also persecuted and, in many cases, had to go into exile as the only way to survive. That was the case of Clotilde:

*«I continue with my organizational work in Anmucic, but the attack was against all the women of the organization and the main leaders, in 2003. In 1996 I made a very strong complaint, I think it was in April, about what was happening with the Convivir, and I denounced that at the Rural Social Summit, at Luis Ángel Arango library, I denounced there and also in the Rural Women newsletter that we produced. I think it was the last or penultimate one we were able to produce. Based on these denunciations, the threats against Anmucic increased, to the point that we had to hold an emergency meeting at the end of that year, 1996, near Ráquira, Boyacá, to release a national statement declaring independence and autonomy from all the armed groups in the country, because, in the regions, the armed groups wanted to use the organization and link women to the conflict»<sup>70</sup>.*

---

65 Report 110-CI-00528. ANUC and CITpax Colombia, "Resistance and Persistence", 80.

66 Constitutional Court, Republic of Colombia, Auto 092 of 2008 in Report 180-CI-01167, Asociación Campesina del Valle del Río Cimitarra, "Nos quisieron acabar", 18.

67 Report 110-CI-00528. ANUC and CITpax Colombia, "Resistance and Persistence", 77.

68 The name of the municipality is withheld for security reasons and at the request of the witness.

69 Report 110-CI-00528. ANUC and CITpax Colombia, "Resistance and Persistence", 80.

70 Interview 101-VI-00005. Woman, peasant, exiled.

In this way, the struggle of peasant women to have a voice in the private and public spheres, individual and collective, was marked by the fear of losing their lives and those of their families. In Clotilde's words: *«I think there is a very important element there, and it has to do with gender and the fact of being a woman. We could look at others, but, in the political sense of gender and women, it is we who do not easily leave the environment without our offspring, without our children. Let's put it another way: the fact that our children are at risk forces us to make decisions, to change our personal project; I would say that not so much the community project, because the stake, wherever one arrives, is going to be the work for women's rights. But the personal project that I wanted in the country I hide it, because my children's lives are at stake. There is an element there»*.

In the same way, Constanza, a peasant leader from Nariño, narrated the family breakdown when they didn't approve of her leadership, expressed: *«It's hard, because my husband left, he left me. A year ago I also lost a son, and I believe it is because of the social work we do.... I don't want to blame myself...It is hard for one to keep up the community work despite the family and it's worse for women. Yes, it has affected me a lot, but at this point in my life, it is useful for my children. I have three children: two who have been with me and another who is already in heaven. I will continue as far as God allows»*<sup>71</sup>. Despite the violence, peasant women have resisted with political commitments such as the defense of territory and food sovereignty. Building a political agenda, in a context of increasing violence and constant harassment at home, has been the result of a struggle of many years, in which work, love for the land, and defense of life prompted them to weave or integrate themselves into a collective, and to claim the rights that have been denied them for years.

---

<sup>71</sup> Interview 749-PR-0080. Woman, farmer, leader.

