

Women's Narratives: Care as Mediation for Peace*

[English version]

Narrativas de mujeres: el cuidado como mediación para la paz

Narrativas das mulheres: o cuidado como mediação para a paz

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Abstract

Objective: To reveal the role of women from the municipality of Ovejas, Sucre, as peace weavers during times of armed violence and transition in Colombia, based on the recognition of care as a comprehensive category. **Methodology:** The research was qualitative, employing a narrative approach. Ten women from eight local initiatives participated. The selection of the information unit was done through non-probabilistic sampling. The technique used was the semi-structured in-depth interview. **Results:** Through practices of self-care and care for others, the women of Ovejas demonstrate novel aesthetics that contribute to peace in a territory long affected by armed violence. Caring for others, through the protection

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of life where fear, protection, responsibility, and love intersect, and caring for oneself, driven by trust, security, the desire to overcome, and forgiveness as a means of reconciliation, emerge as self-affective expressions of recognition and resistance in support of peace. **Conclusions:** The care promoted by women during times of armed conflict and transition serves as a mediation of recognition, safeguarding, and binding through love and solidarity. Through caring for themselves and others, women demonstrate their creative capacities that contribute to peacebuilding. In this sense, the experiences of mediation through care demonstrate that when women participate, reconciliation processes become more visible and likely.

Keywords: women; peace; care.

Resumen

Objetivo: develar el papel de las mujeres del municipio de Ovejas, Sucre como hiladoras de paz en tiempos de violencia armada y de transición en Colombia a partir del reconocimiento del cuidado como categoría comprensiva. **Metodología:** la investigación fue cualitativa y el método la narrativa. Participaron diez mujeres vinculadas a ocho iniciativas locales. La selección de la unidad de información se realizó por muestreo no probabilístico. La técnica utilizada fue la entrevista semiestructurada en profundidad. **Resultados:** mediante prácticas de cuidado de sí y para otros las mujeres de Ovejas demuestran nuevas estéticas para aportar a la paz en un territorio afectado por la violencia armada durante un largo tiempo. El cuidado de los otros en virtud de la protección de la vida —en el que se cruza el miedo, la protección, la responsabilidad y el amor— y el cuidado de sí —a través de la confianza y la seguridad, el deseo de superación y el perdón como reconciliación— emergen como expresiones autoafectivas de reconocimiento y de resistencia a favor de la paz. **Conclusiones:** el cuidado promovido por las mujeres en tiempos del conflicto armado y de transición es una mediación de reconocimiento que a través del amor y la solidaridad protege y vincula. Las mujeres a través del cuidado de sí mismas y de los otros dan cuenta de sus capacidades creadoras que aportan a la construcción de paz. En este sentido, las experiencias de mediación desde el cuidado muestran que cuando la mujer es partícipe, los procesos de reconciliación son más visibles y probables.

Palabras clave: mujeres; paz; cuidado.

Resumo

Objetivo: revelar o papel das mulheres no município de Ovejas, Sucre, como fiandeiras da paz em tempos de violência armada e transição na Colômbia, com base no reconhecimento do cuidado como uma categoria abrangente. **Metodologia:** a pesquisa foi qualitativa e o método foi narrativo. Participaram dez mulheres ligadas a oito iniciativas locais. A seleção da unidade de informação foi realizada por amostragem não probabilística. A técnica utilizada foi a entrevista semiestruturada em profundidade.

Resultados: por meio de práticas de cuidado consigo mesmas e com os outros, as mulheres de Ovejas demonstram uma nova estética para contribuir com a paz em um território que tem sido afetado pela violência armada há muito tempo. O cuidado com os outros em virtude da proteção da vida - na qual o medo, a proteção, a responsabilidade e o amor se cruzam - e o cuidado consigo mesmo - por meio da confiança e da segurança, do desejo de superar e do perdão como reconciliação - emergem como expressões autoafetivas de reconhecimento e resistência em favor da paz. **Conclusões:** o cuidado promovido pelas mulheres em tempos de conflito armado e transição é uma mediação de reconhecimento que, por meio do amor e da solidariedade, protege e cria vínculos. Por meio do cuidado consigo mesmas e com os outros, as mulheres demonstram suas capacidades criativas que contribuem para a construção da paz. Nesse sentido, as experiências de mediação por meio do cuidado mostram que, quando as mulheres participam, os processos de reconciliação são mais visíveis e prováveis.

Palavras-chave: mulheres; paz; cuidados.

Introduction

The experience within the context of the armed conflict in Colombia and the transition to peace demonstrate that women have played a significant role in both private and public spheres. Despite not being acknowledged, women have contributed through care practices that, as stated by Comins-Mingol (2003), enable the maintenance and promotion of life, along with the development of capacities in their family members. This is achieved through the enhancement of skills such as commitment, responsibility, tenderness, autonomy, and resilience.

While women have played a fundamental role in peace-building processes (Comins-Mingol, 2003), the incorporation of the sex/gender framework has led to a concentration on women's perspectives regarding peace-building processes. This is particularly evident in the effects they experience, such as violence, displacement, persecution, sexual aggression, murder, or exclusion from political decision-making contexts. These experiences, while valid, often highlight positions of victimization rather than agency.

This text portrays the experiences of a group of women from the municipality of Ovejas, Sucre, situated in the Montes de María sub-region within the Colombian Caribbean. This region has been profoundly affected by the armed conflict, characterized by victimizing incidents and economic as well as social repercussions that have left the population in conditions of poverty and vulnerability, straining the social fabric. Within the municipality, the spotlight falls on the experiences of local initiatives spearheaded by women. These initiatives have given rise to the establishment of social organizations with the goal of enhancing living conditions. This improvement hinges on both asserting rights and fostering capacity development. As a result, the women of the municipality have succeeded in integrating the gender perspective into local policy actions by shedding light on the discrimination and vulnerabilities they encounter in Montes de María (Grupo de Memoria Histórica, 2010, p. 336).

Regarding the overarching goal of the project «Hilando capacidades políticas para la transición en los territorios»¹ the research's objective guiding the content of this document is to *uncover the peace initiatives advanced by the women of the municipality of Ovejas, Sucre. This investigation encompasses both the period of armed conflict in the region and the transition era, as the residents confront the challenges posed by the pursuit of peace.* The concept of “care,” in any of its various forms, emerged explicitly in women's narratives as a means of mediating peace-building.

¹ The project's objective is to foster political capacities for transitions in the territories through democratic mediations of social conflicts, aimed at establishing stable and enduring peace.

Peace, to rephrase the words of Muñoz and Martínez (2011), stands as a fundamental and inherent reality of the human condition, intricately linked to conflict as an inherent facet of life. It encapsulates the intricate web of relationships formed by individuals. In this context, peace does not signify the mere absence of war, but rather the establishment of relationships grounded in recognition amidst differences. This aims to identify, coexist with, and manage conflicts. From this viewpoint, the notion of “imperfect peace” is embraced (Muñoz & Martínez, 2011; París-Albert, 2009; De Vera, 2016). It's understood as a collection of inventive human and social capabilities that emerge within the realm of conflict and violence. As López (2011) proposes, the task at hand is to move toward perceiving peace as the sought-after conditions or situations that pave the way for its attainment. This approach bridges the gap between peace and justice (p. 88).

The epistemological shift doesn't center around the absence or eradication of conflicts². Instead, it fosters an appreciation for the empathic capacities and inherent competencies of individuals, aimed at proposing constructive regulations and transformations for societal, political, cultural, and environmental contradictions. Peace (embracing a polysemic and diverse spectrum of meanings) takes shape within the realm of relationships and can manifest as either tangible or symbolic. It is, much like its imperfect nature, entwined with conflicts and violence. Imperfect peace encompasses a wide array of experiences and interventions that enable "the transformation of conflicts to discover alternatives that nurture life and cultivate novel ways of engaging with others. This, in turn, promotes psychological, social, cultural, and political coexistence" (Sánchez-Jiménez et al., 2021, p. 93).

In this context, it's worth noting that in Colombia, due to the pervasive presence of violence and armed conflicts that have deeply impacted the regions (marked by instances of death, displacement, poverty, persecution, political exclusion, sexual aggression, and more) the perceptions and depictions of peace (Muñoz & Martínez, 2011) often revolve around the resolution of conflict. This perspective often overlooks the fact that violence is deeply ingrained within social structures, extending beyond warfare, and that all manifestations of violence invariably impact development across its various domains. This is evidenced by the fact that even after the signing of the Peace Agreement in 2016 (during the transition period), the endeavor of peacebuilding continues to pose a challenge within the regions. The aim is to secure a steadfast and enduring peace that safeguards the rights and dignity of life. Concerning the populations victimized

² "Conflicts are neither positive nor negative in themselves, but their character depends on the means used for their regulation" (París-Albert, 2009, p. 13).

by the armed conflict, the shift toward peace can materialize through structural reforms within conflict-affected regions. This transition hinges on fostering social transformation under the umbrella of political, economic, cultural, and environmental conditions that foster equity.

It is evident, therefore, that constructing peace rooted in acknowledging the interconnections among individuals – while also acknowledging tensions and conflicts – necessitates the involvement of both men and women equipped to foster fresh modes of interaction, even amidst differences. Experience, particularly within the context of the armed conflict in Colombia, underscores that women, far from solely being victims (Correa, 2019; Parra & Gutiérrez, 2019; Sauterel & Sepúlveda, 2016), also play active roles in reshaping the landscape of peace scenarios.

Women's contributions expand the scope of how peace is conceptualized and constructed. Such contributions should encompass various domains, including both the private and, notably, the public spheres. These peace-building ideas have predominantly been manifested within formal structures (public), yet acknowledging those informal practices that have historically been undervalued and disregarded within the private sphere (often seen as a space of lesser influence) is imperative. (Rojas, 2018, p. 263).

As Ariza (2020) notes, during periods of armed violence in Colombia, women were the highest proportion of individuals compelled to relocate, often accompanied by their sons, daughters, and other family members. A significant number of them were confronted with experiences of death, forced displacement, family separation, and other circumstances that etched indelible imprints in their memories and bodies. These encounters profoundly influenced their day-to-day existence and their perceptions of the future. As highlighted by Garrido (2020), during periods of transition, women have assumed the responsibility of fortifying family bonds, advancing life endeavors for their family members, and initiating local organizational efforts aimed at safeguarding their rights and enhancing their living conditions.

As a result of this, it becomes evident that women dedicated themselves to resisting, safeguarding familial connections in support of their loved ones, and transcending their own suffering. Additionally, they took charge of steering community initiatives centered around reconciliation, as well as social and economic progress. In doing so, they established themselves as catalysts of change, playing a pivotal role in peacebuilding within their regions. Therefore, as stated by Urrutia (2017), women transform their adverse experiences into

opportunities to confront novel circumstances and provide enduring and viable solutions.

In this regard, the acknowledgment of women's presence in the peace-building landscape is illuminated by Resolution 1325 of 2000 (UN Security Council). This resolution underscores women's pivotal role in conflict prevention and resolution, thereby emphasizing the imperative for their equal participation in endeavors and procedures aimed at ensuring peace and security. The document also emphasizes the necessity of embracing a gender perspective across all dimensions of peacekeeping and the importance of providing training to personnel on matters related to women's rights. In the year 2020, in direct alignment with ongoing studies on gender, women, peace, and conflict, the United Nations entity UN Women (2020) indicated that, despite discernible signs of advancement between 2019 and 2020 regarding women's recognition, there remained a need for heightened endeavors. These endeavors encompass the promotion of women's empowerment to solidify the legitimization of their rights and their direct involvement in driving social and economic development.

Similarly, the 2021 UN Women report states that the international community highlights the participation of women as an essential aspect to achieve lasting peace. Women have proven to be agents of change and should have the opportunity to work even harder for this goal. In this order of ideas, researchers such as Trujillo-Gómez (2013), Gizelis (2011), DeMeritt et al. (2014), Erzurum and Eren (2014), and Veneranda et al. (2020) coincide in affirming that women, regardless of their ethnicity and religion, organize themselves and adopt discourses of respect for life and human rights, contributing an ethical position to political discussions on violence. Likewise, they expose that thinking and acting in favor of sustainable peace must include women and their narratives.

The role of women in the field of conflict and violence – and their consequent capacity to act in favor of peace – reveals how they achieve transformative actions through care practices. The woman-peace-care triad is, therefore, a matter of special interest because of what it represents. For example, violence and conflict are not topics that have been studied in depth. The work of Comins-Mingol (2003) and Londoño and Hincapié (2016) help to understand the relationship of care and justice in coexistence with pluralism and equity, since care is a human right, both for those who receive it and those who deliver it, and is part of a beneficial daily life for the construction or strengthening of ties among the subjects. In short, *caring is a social relationship*:

An activity that is characteristic of the human species that includes everything we do with a view to maintaining, continuing or repairing our world, in such a way that we can live in it as well as possible. This world includes our bodies, our

individualities (*ourselves*), and our environment, which we seek to weave together into a complex, life-sustaining web. (Tronto, 1993, p. 103).

Under this conception of care, a responsibility for the other is identified that is present in various ways and includes solidarity and compassion, while healing wounds and helping to resolve different situations that affect the human condition. In line with a series of authors such as Comins-Mingol and París-Albert (2019), Domínguez-Alcon (2020), Molinier and Legarreta (2016) and Tobio et al. (2010), it can be understood that through care practices, actions are materialized from which the central element is the relationship with others in the face of the dominant notion of rights and obligations, just as these actions are essential for sustaining life and the well-being of people.

An understanding of care as an action proper to human beings is perceptible from the social and cultural roles in which care representations are anchored and go beyond a gender bias. However, as expressed by Comins-Mingol and París-Albert (2019), it is pertinent in signifying the role that women have historically played in matters of care, not to legitimize their status as women but to highlight their place in the private and public spheres, assuming representative tasks for the human dimension, such as the production and reproduction of culture, socialization processes, domestic economy, and involvement in community organization processes. Thus, women have acted in the construction of new citizenship scenarios with "a political activism, contemplating the existence of being subjects of rights with a political identity and subjectivity that justifies their social actions" (Urrutia, 2017). Under these approaches, along with those of Londoño and Hincapié (2016), the relationship between care, women and peace emerges:

Women and girls, before taking care of themselves, take care of others, even if they are the injured ones and, through this work of care, they maintain the cohesion of the family and the social fabric. They reproduce the culture of peace in their daily lives and educate men and women for reconciliation. (p. 264).

Having said this, addressing the issue of care from a woman's perspective, as expressed by Barreto (2007), "presumes to deconstruct the myths that have sustained the expanded reproduction of violence in its different forms and expressions" (p. 240), both structural and structuring, legitimized in daily life or among people, as is the case of the armed conflict in Colombia, which interferes with both spheres. In the particular case of violence and conflict, it is then a matter of situating the place that women have occupied as agents in the construction of peace (Andrade et al., 2017), either from their family life experiences, in the

community context and, although not with such visibility, in spaces of political order, facing the processes of violence in which they have been involved.

In the same way, based on the results of their research, Correa (2019), Bautista-Bautista and Bedoya-Calvo (2017), Campo and Giraldo (2015), and Vargas (2014) agree that even in times of conflict – with difficulties, denials, insults and exclusions – women in Colombia have been resilient and have built peace initiatives through different means, whether in the family or in the community: attention to life, emotional support, maintenance of material conditions, defense of the permanence of the territory, organizational work, and political and productive formation. These actions have been significant for peace and reveal the role of women in "living for others" (Jelín, 2002, p. 108).

As found in the ethnographic data and the narratives present in the research by Arias-López (2015), daily life is where care actions are undertaken, which become increasingly creative according to the uniqueness of the experiences that, in the case of the armed conflict in Colombia, allow:

Recognizing the endogenous knowledge and resources with which communities have faced their suffering and articulating a dose of uncertainty to the practices themselves, not only for more creative care, but for care that deals with the dignity of people. (Arias-López, 2015, p. 13).

In short, peacebuilding in times of armed conflict and transition must help resolve structural issues of inequality and promote or strengthen the role of women as protagonists of peace, taking into account the restoration of their rights as victims, as well as their role as builders of peace.

Methodology

This research was carried out through the narrative method that, following Ricoeur (2000), allowed: a) to preserve the breadth, diversity, and irreducibility of words, thoughts, feelings and interactions of women about their contributions to building peace; b) bring together the dispersed ways and modalities of narrating, each based on their own experiences and life circumstances that, although in common times, are different from each other and together create a shared discourse without spirit or claim for truth; and c) relate the times (during the conflict and after the signing of the peace agreements) and the narratives to select and organize the testimonies in discourse units that revealed how care is a peace mediation used by women.

The information unit was made up of 10 women linked to eight women's organizations in the municipality of Ovejas, Sucre. The inclusion criteria were defined based on their experience in the territory in times of the armed conflict, as well as the fact that they currently live in the municipality. Non-probability sampling was used (Hernández-Sampieri et al., 2014). Likewise, the approach to women (individually) and attention to their narratives was carried out through semi-structured in-depth interviews that favored conversation and contextualized analysis.

The construction of information, as Rorty calls it (quoted by Botero, 2006), was carried out thanks to the conversation with each woman. In addition, for the analysis, the proposal of Quintero (2018) was implemented, namely:

- *Coding record*: transcription of the constructed information and definition of typification codes.
- *Textual level*: identification of the narrative plot recognizing the experiences from the facts and temporalities.
- *Contextual level*: assessment of the narrative forces where women ponder with their language.
- *Metatextual level*: reconfiguration of the narrated experiences also taking into account the interpretations made in the previous moments and their relationship with the theoretical referents studied to create a story of social life.

Results

As part of the research findings, identifying that the women of the municipality of Ovejas, Sucre, contribute to the construction of peace through care of the other and self-care practices is possible, both during the armed conflict and after the signing of the peace agreements. The expression of these forms of care is related to the times in which the discourse is related: caring for the other is situated in the before and now, and caring for oneself becomes visible and conscious after the experience of the armed conflict. In accordance with the above, care – associated with women as agents of peace – is assumed as a practice of recognition: a binding connector of responsibility, solidarity, identity, and love for others and for themselves.

Caring for Others as an Expression of Recognition

The care of others corresponds to the connection that women establish with their families, other women, and their territory to preserve, guard or assist in their human, cultural, and patrimonial condition. This process of participation "with, by and for the other, requires us to be involved in solidarity in that relationship of alterity, free of domination, exploitation, mistrust and paternalism" (Vásquez, 2006, p. 138).

According to the women, caring for others is a task they have learned throughout their lives as a result of the family responsibilities assigned to them from childhood. A similar occurrence also develops with feelings. These feelings have been the product of recognition and the links the women have forged with others who, in the case of this investigation, were identified as their families, other women and their territory. However, these women also express the challenges they have had in terms of care, visible in the experiences of the armed conflict and those they had to assume in times of tense calm (referring to the time after the signing of the Peace Agreement).

The Protection Their Family Lives as a Care Mediation and Resistance Strategy

The fear of death – especially, of dying from stray bullets in the midst of the armed conflict – caused women to assume a role of care oriented toward the protection of life in their figure as mothers and daughters. In addition, for being the ones who stayed in the house the longest. They invented different ways to avoid or elude the armed actors' persecution of their children, among which are: bringing the family into the houses early, not sending the children to school or leaving the territory – either the whole family or sending the children to other places where they would not face the armed conflict. All this, to avoid death or avoid recruitment, especially of male children. Below are testimonials from women³ who exemplify this resistance:

I was very frightened. I was frightened of losing a loved one, I was very afraid of that. At any time, a gunfight started and people thought they heard a bomb. Thus, I was afraid of not being alive the next day and concerned about who would protect my children. (María, Personal Communication, May 22, 2020).

3. For ethical and identity protection reasons, women's names have been changed.

I knew I had to get the children home early, at six o'clock everything must be silent ... not going out. One option was not to go out because you could meet somebody who would take you. They could take you away home or, I mean, you know that they have no compassion and they can kill anyone easily; the only way to take care of ourselves was not to leave home, to be locked up. [pause] It was the only way and I kept my children locked inside and I was very attentive. (Isabel, Personal Communication, June 24, 2020.)

According to Londoño and Hincapié (2016) to protect and to maintain life in the midst of armed conflict is a caring for peace practice. The particularity of women's narratives from the municipality of Ovejas reveals that the protection of life links privacy (mainly, the house that provides security and peacefulness) with the public (that, most of the time, is adverse and unpredictable). The protection of life as a way of care is engendered by the recognition of the family and its members as legitimate others for whom it is necessary to take care of who they are and what they represent in the lives of women. Life-care practices in times of conflict evoke fear, protection, responsibility, and love to lead women to make decisions to face reality. For instance:

I was kidnapped with my three eldest children and my husband in 1999. We were kidnapped for twelve hours, my husband was caught up and told that if he took another step he would die, they checked the hammocks where my children were asleep and handled their weapons; and if the child whispered, they mocked them and "Shut them up or we will shut them up." I volunteered to cook so that they would be calmer and more kept busy. (Isabel, Personal Communication, June 24, 2020.)

There were a lot of fears ... we did not sleep much. It panicked us and it made me feel a little traumatized. I was more attentive, maybe I was leading by fear. I was sending the kids somewhere else or we left. People said that we were cowards; but we were not, we did not let ourselves be killed. (Carmen, Personal Communication, May 10, 2020.)

According to the narratives and Comins-Mingol (2003), this does not deal with caring for children by maternal instinct that erroneously had been assigned to women, but the recognition of the other in a binding commitment. In this context, love is a way of recognition committed through care to the physical integrity of others who need it; it is the possibility of being oneself in the other (Honneth, 1997, p. 25) and the need is permanent and develops under any circumstances. Thus, the care of life promoted by women, as Niño (2017) and Fernández and

González-Martínez (2019) state has an important role in the analyses of the theory of imperfect peace, since “it is not the confinement, the displacement or the refuge that they promote in the midst of conflict, but what is relevant is what these actions meant for resistance”.

The protection of life as a mediation of care for children and the family is maintained in times of transition; not in terms of avoiding death. Keeping life from the practical identity that, as Palazzani (2008) states, demands the recognition of the other and their need for training to be maintained in time. It is important for women to foster and help their children, families, and the community to move forward and to have a better future; it promotes moral and ethical behavior based on improvement as a way to surpass their past that forces them to rebuild their lives.

I want to move my family forward and I'm doing it. I wanted my three children to be professionals, and I'm doing it. There are ways of living differently ... of living in peace. I hope to see my community rising economically, morally, and free without coffins or stigma. (Margoth, Personal Communication, June 29, 2020).

Before we did not get a high school diploma, now I have a high school diploma. Although I have been a passive person, I like to advise; I like that, if there is a fight, I look for ways to make peace, although I have nothing to do with it. But if they say to me, "Things are like this," it makes my life different and I teach my children that, because that is the only thing you should give your children: knowledge, guidance, and good examples. (Julia, Personal Communication, June 3, 2020).

Violence generates more violence. I tell my children that we have to improve ourselves, that we need to be more tolerant and that none of us are perfect and we must accept ourselves as we are. We can contribute a little bit to improve that. Less weapons less conflict, but one's words, love, and trust give the power to build peace, the kind we want. To build trust, weave this fabric and make it solid lead us to peace. I must work in a good way, every time we do it, we are contributing to peace, the transformation of our country. (Angela, Personal Communication, June 11, 2020).

Finally, it can be said that the protection of life as a mediation of care offered by women expresses solidarity and social appreciation (Honneth & Rancière, 2016) toward those who are their legitimate others. This includes emotional references to the cognitive component of recognition of rights. Women thus legitimize that these forms of care – such as life protection – constitute self-esteem as a way of self-recognition.

Self-care as an Expression of Self-recognition and as a Mediator of Peace.

In women's narratives, *pre-care* for oneself (dedicating time to physical, emotional, and occupational activities) is a way of self-caring or self-recognition Honneth (2009). This allows women flexibility and the ability to feel comfortable, to overcome situations and to rebuild their lives after traumatic experiences that, although have left a profound impact, did not lead them to victimization. Additionally, the experiences forced them to rethink their position as women. According to Foucault (1987), women taking care of themselves redirects their attention and shifts their perspective outside of themselves, and, in this way, makes them subject to their own actions. In this *pre-care*, care makes sense.

Self-care as a way of dealing with life after the complex times of armed violence is understood as an attitude of self-respect. It includes confidence and security, the desire to overcome and forgive as reconciliation.

In this way, confidence and security appear as self-affectionate expressions of women, recognized in talents, virtues, and skills. According to women, these qualities have developed after living in conflict and allow them to feel calm afterward. It means that, during the armed violence, the main concern was to stay alive and survive; there was no time for self-care and to value one another.

Now I am a joyful and enthusiastic woman with a desire to live, a struggler, a warrior, of a strong character, in love with life and family; in love with social processes of helping others. I describe myself as a lover of music, of parties (ha, ha, ha), in love with my job. (Ana, Personal Communication, June 22, 2020).

At the beginning, confidence and security made it easier for them to communicate among themselves, to focus on their emotions and to become aware of themselves, which was impossible to do in times of conflict. Then, the confidence and security allow them to communicate with others more calmly, because they believe in the reliability of what they provide and what they can discern. To feel safe goes hand-in-hand with understanding that peace is inside them, within their calm and the recognition of what they are and what they can do for their environment.

Another way of expressing confidence and self-confidence is by caring for the body. This favors the transition from personal existence to coexistence with the other. In peaceful times and with psychosocial support, women even manage to recover dominance over their bodies that, in some way, may have been lost for the traditionally considered weaker gender that marked their socialization processes.

Now I feel that I have my space, I care for my skin, I care for myself; I give myself time to look at myself, to go to bed, to say to myself, "I am more beautiful today" or "I'm skinnier today;" or "Today I have this, I will try to improve this." I didn't pay attention to that before; I would go to the bathroom, take a shower, and I was ready; I was not a woman who was going to check "what do I have here, what do I have there." I have learned about my body from personal self-care; I take care of my body and then I suggest to other people to also take of their body; or that there are ways of taking care of oneself, that one must first be there for oneself to then be there for the other person. You have to be healthy to help others; you have to know first what you are doing to transmit that to others. I have learned that difference now. (Lina, Personal Communication, June 16, 2020).

According to the narrative, the concern for the aesthetics of the body helps women recognize themselves in beauty, as well as to realize they are present. Self-care is a way to approach themselves, but also to recognize that their body is link to others though beauty. As Lina states, "You have to be there for yourself and then you can be there for the other." This demonstrates that "to exist is to coexist. My body and the body of others coexist subjectively. It makes a self, living in community as united people, but each one embodied in an existential concrete" (Cervantes, 2015, p. 2).

Alternatively, "the desire to overcome" is understood as a way of self-care that enables women to self-distance and to understand the possibility of being different from what they were, in addition to being aware of the opportunities and possibilities of improving themselves and projecting that in their being. This is to see the future hopefully. Under this understanding, aspirations to learn, train, and obtain knowledge are identified. It promotes personal improvement and contribution to their families and communities.

I received training after signing the agreement because when people are trained or learn new knowledge, they adopt a different mentality. They are no longer aggressive as a result of the conflict. At this moment, help begins by listening, and providing psychosocial assistance. One starts changing the way of thinking while the aggressiveness decreases. This shift aids the peacebuilding process. The high visibility of matters and the increased emotionality are addressed differently with established principles. There was a time, when some women came in, and one couldn't even talk to them, because they were inclined toward physical aggression. As the process of transformation was occurring, they received training and psychosocial assistance, resulting in a positive behavioral change. They are now different people. (Ana, personal communication, 22 June 2020).

I am also a different person due to the acquisition of knowledge. Part of the transformation is the training process for our rights in the context of the preceding era and the modern moment in which we now live. We have gained knowledge, and we no longer perceive ourselves as individuals beholden to an external entity dictating how to do things. Consider that the *law is this*: we have a different way of thinking and defending ourselves, and if we say no, we have the right to do so. (Olga, personal communication, 27 May 2020).

As per De la Ossa and Rendón's findings (2021), participating in training initiatives, organized by various institutions subsequent to the signing of the Peace Agreement empowers women to acknowledge their inherent capabilities to grasp new ways of life, comprehend and assert their rights, as well as foster local initiatives aimed at self-governance and human, social, and economic development within the designated territory. Hence, the desire for personal improvement manifested as self-preservation, facilitated through involvement in training processes, empowers individuals to deploy their competencies whenever and wherever infringements may arise, be it in their own actions or in support of others.

This desire arising from participation in training processes stands as a manifestation of self-care, particularly when viewed as a means through which women acknowledge and highlight their capabilities to surmount their residual fears inherited from times of harassment and tension intrinsic to the armed conflict. In summary, these women exhibit heightened composure, decreased hostility, and an augmented capacity for expressing their emotions. These emotions contribute to the peacebuilding process.

"Forgiveness, as a precursor to reconciliation", assumes the role of a mediator between the recollection of past events that have disrupted peace and the act of reconciliation, which serves as a mechanism to face the future with peace and without resentment. After experiencing the horrors and rawness of the conflict, feelings of pain, hatred and guilt arise, which hinder the building of trusting relationships with themselves and their counterparts. These emotions, however, are reevaluated by the women themselves, who assert that harboring such emotions would curtail their potential for renewal. Thus, they must view forgiveness as the possibility to transcend and relinquish the past, thereby affording themselves the freedom to live in peace.

As forms of self-preservation, the narratives suggest two distinct categories of forgiveness: self-forgiveness and forgiveness directed toward others.

Primarily, the narratives exhibit self-forgiveness as the possibility of acknowledging and comprehending their actions, undertaken in a bid to shield

their families, particularly their children, from the violent acts experienced during the armed conflict.

I was a fierce woman; I was submissive but at the same time I was fierce because I protected what was mine and I showed my claws. From the same fear, I found a fury to protect what was mine, or what I believed to be mine, which are my children. During a certain period, my children and I had to lock ourselves in a room at four o'clock in the afternoon as a measure of safeguarding. Subsequently, upon recognizing the violent nature of my actions, I sought their forgiveness. Sometimes, I had to tie them to a seat or a stationary object like a pitchfork to prevent their departure toward the hillside or shoreline as a measure to keep them from handling an abandoned object, thereby averting potential harm or death. This was the reason I sought their forgiveness. (Maria, personal communication, May 22, 2020).

“Seeking forgiveness from one’s children” primarily constitutes an act of self-forgiveness, as it comprises a form of caregiving intended toward internal reconciliation. This process enables them to recognize themselves within the actions undertaken in the midst of the tensions of the conflict and the *raison d'être* of the same (Arendt, 2005). In other words, this entails a journey toward their inner selves to comprehend the motives behind their actions, consequently facilitating the process of “reparation and empowerment of their innate human agency” (Madrid, 2008, p. 5). This leads to a sense of hopefulness for their own lives as well as the well-being of their families.

Additionally, testimonies concerning women's own freedom depict “forgiveness directed toward others”. At some point, Women's own freedom led them to exercise violence against their families and communities, leaving them with human and material losses, and taking away their hopes and possibilities for a promising future. This act of forgiveness does not imply forgetting or rationalizing the violent actions, nor does it entail disregarding the prevailing circumstances that occurred. This would likely lead to a form of shielding indifference.

I have personally engaged in a self-reflection process. I keep confronting each moment I have experienced, firmly confronting it and establishing a resolute emotional barrier within my heart, thereby working for that: to successfully release anger and hatred, to get rid of the pain through tears, an introspection process toward forgiveness. I had no idea where I was going or what I was going to do with my three children when the guerrillas killed my husband. I resorted to selling magazines and bottled water, being resourceful to provide sustenance for my children. At that moment, I was able to overcome the grief that before I had

been unable to. Confronting reality became paramount to overcoming this grief. I did many tasks to raise my three children and help my father, children, and nephews. Because of my brother's departure, I had to become their inspiration. (Lina, personal communication, 23 June 2020).

Embracing forgiveness leads to contributing to the peacebuilding process. Forgiveness aids in the peacebuilding process, as the attainment of peace is inherently intertwined with the concepts of forgiveness and reconciliation. So, if Carmen, within her social settings, openly exhibits forgiveness, she enhances her work endeavors. I establish a social environment by refraining from discussing their father or seeking vengeance. When I teach the lesson to my son that "one has to forgive, because certain individuals must be released according to their volition and entrusting their well-being to our Lord Jesus Christ, "I start a transformative process and significantly contribute to peacebuilding. (Carmen, personal communication, May 10, 2020).

In the midst of painful memories, forgiving others becomes a personal decision and a symbolic endeavor involving care for others, their families and themselves. This choice prevents fostering hatred and resentment which leads to revenge and new types of violence. Forgiving others cultivates a feeling that nurtures trust within personal relationships, while comprehending the complexities inherent in the human condition lays a foundation for a potential path toward renewal. From this perspective, it is interpreted as a caring practice. According to Arendt (2005), forgiveness is characterized by being "the only necessary corrective for the inevitable damage resulting from the action" (p. 259) and is attained not through solipsism, but rather through the interplay of relationships and acknowledgment of the bond. This entails separating connections with the past while maintaining its memory, thereby envisioning collective actions toward reconciliation. In this context, through the act of forgiveness, women take care of themselves and the well-being of their counterparts. Furthermore, they relinquish their roles as victims and position themselves as transformative agents, fostering inclusive relationships that validate difference.

In consideration of the preceding information, drawing from the insights of Muñoz and Martínez (2011) and as an extension of this paper's thesis, the cultivation of self-care and the nurturing of care for others encompassing physical or emotional dimensions by women from the municipality of Ovejas weave pacifist relationships within the midst of prevailing violence. Taking care of themselves is a political issue of transforming their own privileges into proactive political actions that serve the betterment of themselves, their families, their communities, and their territory.

Conclusions

Within the narratives of the women from the municipality of Ovejas, Sucre, the concept of self-care emerges as a symbolic protective intermediary, enabling resistance amidst adversity inherent in their endeavors toward peacebuilding throughout periods of armed conflict and transition. Hence, self-care becomes a means of nurturing relationships characterized by mutual recognition, both for themselves and their counterparts.

Acknowledging women's pursuit of self-care – as exemplified in the context of the municipality of Ovejas – as a mediating force in Colombia's peacebuilding efforts becomes a contemporary and creative reading. This interpretation demonstrates how their care-oriented practices offer different aesthetics for the reconciliation process. The action of care directed toward others, encompassing the preservation of life, coupled with self-care motivated by the concepts of trust and security, alongside an enthusiastic aspiration for improvement and the pursuit of forgiveness as a pathway for reconciliation, whether amidst periods of armed conflict or transition, serves as a testament to the creative capacities exhibited by women in the peacebuilding process.

Furthermore, women demonstrated symbolic discourses and practices of self-care that facilitated, on one hand, their confrontation of the armed conflict through varied means; and on the other hand, their contribution to fostering relationships characterized by the concepts of trust, optimism, and fairness during periods of transition. The self-care fostered by women as symbolic mediation emerges as a metaphorical act of resistance that imprints itself on the memory. This imprint evidences its significance in terms of survival and a valuable lesson in the process of understanding non-repetition. Similarly, during periods of tranquility, this phenomenon engenders the re-creation of experiences, encouraging changes in the ways in which women perceive their own identity in relation to others and successfully engaging in peacebuilding based on the application of values such as commitment and solidarity.

Finally, the peacebuilding process becomes important in the lives of women when the narratives woven from past and current experiences facilitate the discernment of their inherent capacities. As these capacities become assimilated, their individual resources and opportunities are recognized. Additionally, the environment provides supportive provisions that encourage changes in interpersonal interaction. These changes serve as examples to educate others about the need and possibility of adopting new paradigms of renewal. Self-care practices woven by women from everyday life are associated with the inherent essence of humanity, serving as tangible manifestations of changes and constructive and immediate prospects in the realm of peace.

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