Peace-building Women Leaders in Medellín's *Comuna* 1: A Grassroots Approach to Establishing Daily Peace*

⸢English Version⸥

Mujeres lideresas constructoras de paz en la comuna 1 de Medellín: una aproximación a las paces cotidianas construidas desde abajo

Mulheres líderes construtoras de paz no setor 1 de Medellín: uma aproximação aos passos diários construídos a partir de abaixo

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Abstract

Objective: to analyze the contributions of peace-building women leaders from Medellín's *Comuna* 1 in the exercise of their community leadership, which contributes to the consolidation of a grassroots peace-building concept and a critical and relational perspective of human rights. **Methodology:** research of a socio-legal nature with a qualitative approach, developed from a case study with peace-building women leaders of Medellín's *Comuna* 1. In the execution of the research, documentary (analysis of concepts and specialized literature), conversational (semi-structured interviews) and interactive techniques (field work in

the territory) were combined. **Results:** regular, i.e. daily evidence of peace at the territorial level by women leaders were found, in addition to various expressions of resistance and re-existence aimed at reaffirming human dignity and collective action through ethical-political stakes in building peace in *Comuna* 1. **Conclusions:** women leaders who build peace in the studied territory are one step ahead of the hegemonic theory of human rights and the postulates of liberal peace, their understanding and interpretation of society and its conflicts is advanced. This exemplifies very well how one can continue to fight in the socio-political sphere for a more just and peaceful society from a grassroots perspective, to materialize continued peace in their neighborhood and community contexts.

Keywords: Grassroots peace-building; Peace-building women leaders; Everyday peace; Female peace; Research on peace; Consolidation of peace.

Resumen

Objetivo: analizar las contribuciones de las mujeres lideresas constructoras de paz de la Comuna 1 de Medellín en el ejercicio de su liderazgo comunitario, que aporta a la consolidación de un concepto de construcción de paz desde abajo y desde una perspectiva crítica y relacional de los derechos humanos. **Metodología:** investigación de carácter socio jurídico con enfoque cualitativo, desarrollada a partir de un estudio de caso con las mujeres lideresas constructoras de paz de la Comuna 1 de Medellín. En la ejecución de la investigación se combinaron técnicas documentales (análisis de conceptos y de literatura especializada), conversacionales (entrevistas semiestructuradas) e interactivas (trabajo de campo en territorio). **Resultados:** se encontraron manifestaciones de las paces cotidianas a nivel territorial por parte de las mujeres lideresas, además de diversas expresiones de resistencia y re-existencia encaminadas a resignificar la dignidad humana y la acción colectiva a través de apuestas ético-políticas en la construcción de paces en la Comuna 1. **Conclusiones:** las mujeres lideresas constructoras de paz en el territorio estudiado van un paso adelante de la teoría hegemónica de los derechos humanos y de los postulados de la paz liberal, su comprensión e interpretación de la sociedad y sus conflictos resulta de avanzada; esto ejemplifica muy bien cómo se puede continuar luchando en el ámbito sociopolítico por una sociedad más justa y en paz con una perspectiva *desde abajo*, para materializar esas paces cotidianas en sus contextos barriales y comunitarios.

Palabras clave: Construcción de paz desde abajo; Mujeres lideresas constructoras de paz; Paces cotidianas; Paz femenina; Investigación sobre la paz; Consolidación de la paz.

Resumo

Objetivo: para analisar as contribuições das mulheres líderes construtoras de paz do Setor 1 de Medellín no exercício de sua liderança comunitária, o que contribui para a consolidação de um conceito de construção da paz desde abaixo e de uma perspectiva crítica e relacional dos direitos humanos. **Metodologia:** pesquisa de natureza sócio-jurídica com abordagem qualitativa, desenvolvida a partir de um estudo de caso com as principais mulheres construtoras da paz do Setor 1 de Medellín. Técnicas documentais (análise de conceitos e literatura especializada), conversacional (entrevistas semiestrusas) e interativa (trabalho de campo em território) foram combinadas na execução da pesquisa. **Resultados:** se encontraram manifestações de ritmo diário no nível territorial por mulheres líderes, bem como várias expressões de resistência e re-existência destinadas a ressignificar a dignidade humana e a ação coletiva através de apostas ético-políticas na construção da paz no setor 1. **Conclusões:** as mulheres líderes construtoras de paz no território estudado estão um passo à frente da teoria hegemônica dos direitos humanos e dos postulados da paz liberal, sua compreensão e interpretação da sociedade e seus conflitos estão avançados; isso exemplifica muito bem como podemos continuar a lutar na esfera sociopolítica por uma sociedade mais justa e pacífica com uma perspectiva *desde abaixo*, para materializar esses passos diários em seus contextos de bairro e comunitário.

Palavras-chave: Construção de paz desde abaixo; Mulheres líderes construtoras de paz; Passos diários; Paz feminina; Pesquisa da Paz; Construção da paz.

Introduction

This article was derived from the Master's research focused on what is called peace; an ambivalent concept around which discourses can also be built to justify violence and conflicts, paradoxical as it may seem.

Peace has multiple manifestations, dimensions, expressions and fields of study: education and pedagogy (for peace), culture and construction (of peace), peace as a right and as a duty, peace studies, pacifism, antimilitarism and non-violence are some examples, but everything mentioned suggests a fundamental human need: to put at the center of academic, political and societal discussions what we call peace.

The history of the last decades in Colombia has as one of its crudest faces violence in its multiple manifestations, or rather, violence in the plural in the terms of Galtung (2016), who proposes three typologies: direct violence, structural violence and cultural violence. These concepts will be addressed later. In the Colombian context, it is imperative to ask why peace seems so elusive when it is constituted in the longing and clamoring of many.

Methodology

The methodology developed in this research is of a socio-legal nature and is located in the qualitative method, which must be understood beyond a simple set of information gathering techniques. In this sense, Galeano-Marín (2011) affirms that it is a way of facing the world based on social subjects among them and their relationships with their contexts. Therefore, it is considered that the qualitative method addresses subjective and intersubjective realities, focuses on the actors, seeks to understand from different perspectives and subjects, is based on the everyday to understand that reality and emphasizes the local, the micro, and the regional (Galeano-Marín, 2011, pp. 16-24). That micro and regional look (or territorial in this case) was the course for the field work.

Thus, this text was articulated from theoretical reflections on the concept of human rights (condensed in other products derived from the aforementioned research) hand in hand with a case study with peace-building women leaders (MLCP) of Medellín's *Comuna* 1 from Medellín. In the execution of the research, documentary techniques (analysis of concepts and specialized literature), conversational (semi-structured interviews) and interactive (field work in the territory) were combined.

Regarding the focus on legal research, Villabella (2015) mentions that it can be classified as theoretical, empirical and mixed (p. 926). In that order of concepts, this research was carried out from a mixed approach, because it combined a robust theoretical component with the empirical dimension derived from the interaction with women in the territory to, later, contrast said theoretical proposal of daily peace with the form in which it is related, stressed and experienced by the community.

Now, in general, this article develops, at first, a succinct contextualization of the armed conflict in Colombia and Medellín. Then, it addresses the concept of peace-building women leaders (MLCP) and its relationship with female peace. Subsequently, it articulates the theoretical reflections with the fieldwork developed in Medellín's *Comuna* 1 with the MLCP. For this purpose, peace is analyzed beyond the mere absence of war, peace from the symbolic and peace from community organization. Finally, it presents a section of final considerations, which, rather than reaching conclusions, aims to generate questions and possible lines of research for the future.

Results

The main findings are condensed into the following ideas: first, it is necessary *to de-legalize* and *to de-state* human rights[1] to the extent that these are made and undone every day as sociocultural products that they are, despite the influence legal-norms, on which they rest.

Second, the reconceptualization of peacebuilding in a critical human rights aspect must assume a double dimension, since the collective action and peace-building women leaders agency are not enough in themselves, however laudable they may be. Therefore, their proposals and particular experiences should influence and impact the institutional designs of public policies, which allow, for example, the full guarantee, specifically, of the rights of women leaders and of vulnerable and victimized populations in general.

And thirdly, the construction of daily peace in a critical human rights key, combining the previous elements, will allow a shift toward a relational vision (Sánchez-Rubio, 2018a), in which the normative instruments that enshrine hu-

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1. Another product of the research referred to here deals in a particular way with the review of International Human Rights Law instruments from a socio-critical perspective. The article will be published in the next few days under the title: *"Los derechos humanos en disputa: una lectura crítica en clave relacional"*

man rights or commit peace as a right and duty, but rather focus on the subjects who build these human relationships day after day.

Context and Generalities of the Armed Conflict in Colombia and Medellín

On the War, that Bleeds a Suffering Society.

According to the Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, CNMH, (2018), in Colombia between 1958 and September 2018 the armed confrontation left 261,619 fatalities, of which 214,584 were civilian victims and 46,675 people who participated directly in the hostilities[2] (CNMH, 2018, p.1). The foregoing indicates that only 17.8% of the fatal victims had taken part in hostilities in the armed conflict, while 82% of the victims were civilians who did not participate directly in it. According to the preceding lines, it is a fact that in the military confrontation in Colombia more than 8 out of 10 fatalities have been civilians.

Betting on peace from all possible scenarios, be it in the family sphere, in social relations or, even more broadly, supporting organizational and community processes, articulating with political movements that defend said flag or joining efforts in the academic context to build an intellectual gamble linked to an investigative agenda. These are necessary steps to consolidate the construction of peace in the country and must operate with synergy and not as ethical and political projects isolated from each other.

On Peace in the Post-Agreement and an Armed Conflict that Persists.

Restrepo (2016) recalls that peace in Colombia is not a military victory for any party or government, but simply the recognition of the human right that has already been achieved that belongs to all the country's inhabitants to live in peace and with dignity; Thus, "Peace is not a concept that is accommodated with a decree, or the signing of the agreement, nor is it resolved by voting yes" (Restrepo, 2016, p. 59). In other words, peace cannot be imposed as a rule, since it is evident that its consolidation implies a greater and substantial complexity.

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2. The Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, CNMH, (2018), calls them "combatants," however, in strict legal rigor, the combatant category, according to IHL, is only applicable to International Armed Conflicts (CAI), Therefore, it was decided to use the term of direct participation in hostilities set forth in Article 3 Common to the Four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and in its Additional Protocol II of 1977, relating to Non-International Armed Conflicts (CANI).

For this reason, groups of women, young people, victims, displaced people, ethnic populations and, of course, the academic community, must bet on the consolidation of that long-awaited peace, since, as Lederach (2008) states, "The difficulties of achieving a lasting peace in processes of prolonged violence indicate that we know a little more about how to put an end to something painful and harmful for everyone, but we know much less about how to build something desired" (p. 80).

Despite the horizon of peace derived from the signing of the Final Agreement, the obstacles to the consolidation of a complete peace, with social justice and equity for Colombians, suggests that such a purpose will be a long-term task. From 2016 to August 2020, more than 224 homicides were counted against peace signatories, formerly members of the defunct FARC-EP (records that are systematized by the same Political Party).

Meanwhile, from the signing of the Final Agreement until August 21, 2020, there already have been 1,000 women leaders and social leaders assassinated (Instituto de Estudios para el Desarrollo y la Paz [Indepaz], 2020). Leaders such as those who participated in this research, men and women whose lives extinguish by the bullets of the armed actors, while they put all their efforts into building a better country, in peace, and to defend the causes of their families, their communities and their territories. Lives cut short by violence in a paradoxical way, by crying out for peace.

Female Peace and Peace-building Women Leaders (MLCP)

Before developing these two fundamental concepts, it is worth noting that the United Nations (2000) at the head of its Security Council[3] issued Resolution 1325 of 2000, approved in session 4213 on October 31 of the same year. Said Resolution on "Women, Peace and Security" recognizes that women and girls are subjects of special affectation in the framework of armed conflicts, but at the same time urges the member states of the UN (of which Colombia is a party) to adopt decisions and institutional mechanisms that prevent aggression and gender-based violence, as well as allow the participation of women and girls in

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3. The United Nations Security Council is one of the six main organs of the Organization, and its fundamental purposes are to guarantee international peace and security, which in turn constitute the pillars of the Charter of San Francisco of 1945, instrument by which the Organization is constituted. In recent decades the discussion in the area of International Law on the binding nature of the Resolutions issued by this Body has gained relevance, which is considered a fact if articles 39-45 of the Charter of San Francisco are taken into account.

the resolution of conflicts and the peace processes derived from them (United Nations Organization, 2000, pp. 2-3).

The above is a relevant international precedent insofar as the Resolutions of the Security Council are considered mandatory for the States belonging to the UN. However, in the framework of negotiations with the defunct FARC-EP and the national government, the plenipotentiaries appointed by the Presidency of the Republic were all men; In this sense, the government in power denied that women had experienced the armed conflict in their daily lives, their bodies being a territory in which a part of that conflict had developed (Fernández-Matos, 2019, p. 116).

Faced with this deliberate exclusion of women in the negotiation, at the National Meeting of Women for Peace held in Bogotá in 2012, the women gathered there published on December 4th of that year a Manifesto called: Peace without women does not work! (Mujeres por la Paz, 2012), the Manifesto opened with the following sentence:

> In these two days of debates, meetings and sharing experiences, we reaffirm our ethical and political commitment to building peace and a political solution to the social and armed conflict; We declare ourselves insubordinate to patriarchy and capitalism and we refuse to continue being those agreed upon by patriarchal culture, we want to be covenants of the new social contract derived from the dialogue process (Mujeres por la Paz, 2012, para. 2). [Own translation]

And later on they broaden the discussion on the content of the human right to peace in a relational and not exclusively legal context, since they point out that it is not enough to silence the rifles or pacify the zones of armed conflict, but that "Peace means demilitarizing the territories, the minds and the word" (Mujeres por la Paz, 2012), which was sentenced by women in this Manifesto:

> Peace is not the silencing of rifles in public and private matters. Peace implies making social justice a reality for all without distinction of ethnicity, sex, religion, political position or economic condition; it means guaranteeing the rights to truth, justice and reparation for all victims; eradicate violence as an exercise of politics and the denial of the other as a daily practice (Mujeres por la Paz, 2012, para. 5). [Own translation]

However, in the workshops carried out within the framework of this research it was evidenced that the participation of women in local and neighborhood peacebuilding scenarios is greater than that of men. Such a statement is made from the particular experience in the field work and in the community

interactions that supported this project (this will be expanded in the following lines).

This level of participation of women in community spaces related to peace was one of the early findings of the research, which is consistent with the experiences mentioned in the preceding lines to the extent that during negotiations of the Final Agreement and at the deliberate exclusion that had been made regarding the role of women in these spaces was evident, this precipitated their demands for greater possibilities of real participation and fueled their interest in the coming years (2012 - present) to take the voice in the different processes of construction of daily and territorial peace that somehow have an echo and contribute to the peacebuilding project on a national scale.

Leading Women as *Theoretical Referents* in Themselves

Based on the above, women leaders became the center of the investigation and, to that extent, an ethical, political, academic, epistemological and methodological commitment was made, considering such participation of women not as an accidental element within the investigation, but as the *theoretical referents* of the project in and of themselves. Women, from their places of enunciation and from their accumulated popular, community and ancestral knowledge, offer a lesson to the academy about the validity, and transcendence of their reflections, which have been elaborated from the role they play in their communities and could well suppose a break or an imbalance with the formulations about peace that are erected from universities and research centers due to the evident distance between the theory of peace studies and related areas with respect to what happens in the territories.

Those leading women are an authorized voice in their neighborhoods for taking the initiative and leading the processes of claiming rights before different institutional and non-institutional actors; also, by replicating the successful experiences of their formation and training processes as leaders with other women and members of the community, serving as true multipliers of popular knowledge and articulators of the organizational processes.

To exemplify the above, the Leader Woman (hereinafter ML) 2 pointed out:

"The academy has its discourse for academics, I have been very resistant to the universities that bring their discourse, here I handle the discourse of the territory, that what you are telling me is the reality of what is happening in the

territory (…) In the role of women, participation [is] very important, because a swallow does not make a summer. If women unite, we leave that selfishness and we unite to build peace, [is] through dialogue and agreement in the territory" (Interview with a Leading Woman 2, 2019).

The leading women who coexist, and resist and re-exist in *Comuna* 1, were the protagonists of this research that sought to make visible how they, from the collective, bet on the construction of scenarios of daily peace. And despite the fact that the research, when developed within the framework of a Master's program, followed a conventional academic logic regarding the formulation of the project, its execution sought to place women in the center not for instrumental or exclusively methodological purposes, but as an acknowledgment of their exercise and their role as crucial political protagonists for the peace-building processes that are beginning to take hold in the city.

To conclude this section, it is pertinent to approach the concept of re-existence that will be worked on in later text and that has been developed, among others, by professors Adolfo Albán and José Rosero (2016), who understand the concept as an expression of dignity itself, as the communal way of recreating life, which

> has to give us the basis so that what is culturally sustainable is the conception of life itself in conditions of dignity, not negotiable with capital, but that definitely the conception of the world does not correspond to the extreme benefit of nature and is constituted in a long-term guarantee enabler of all living species, including humans (Albán and Rosero, 2016, p. 39). [Own translation]

Hence, the existence, resistance and re-existence of peace-building women leaders participating in this research is a political commitment not only for peace, but also for a life in dignified conditions.

Female Peace

The authors Díez and Mirón (2004) mention that the way of naming people, things and situations can entail different prejudices and stereotypes. In this sense, the study of the category of women reveals a vast semantic field that even begins with the denomination in the singular (woman) and in the plural (women); in the first case, it involves talking about an ideal prototype or a general and abstract idea, while the use of women is intended to highlight their uniqueness as individual subjects, the authors also mention the classic association

between women and peace and between men and war, which allows us to think about the ancient relationship between war and peace, but without falling into reductionism or biological determinism:

> Traditionally, Peace has been associated with and demanded by women. The reason for the association of women with Peace is found in the idea of abundance and fertility that will remain a constant throughout history, both for Peace and for women. Peace is fertile, it generates abundance, in the same way that the role that has stood out for women has focused on their fertility and on being a generator of life (Díez and Mirón, 2004, p. 72). [Own translation]

Inés Sánchez-Díaz (2017), who reviews and recovers the investigations of the authors cited above and incorporates other female voices into her reflections agrees with the above; thus, Sánchez-Díaz (2017) states that:

> Peace, therefore, is not a specific domain of the female gender, nor do women have a natural predisposition for it, but its construction is a task that concerns both sexes equally. However, it is undeniable that women's mobilizations have very often included peace among their demands, as evidenced by the alliance between suffragism and pacifism first, and the recurring unions between feminism and pacifism later (p. 269). [Own translation]
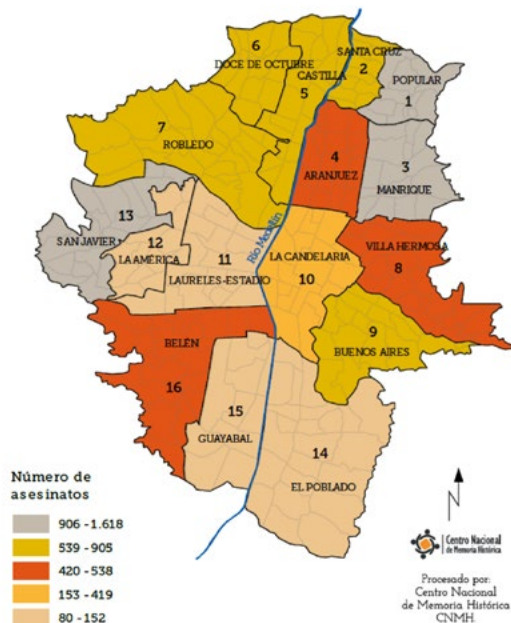
There is something very interesting that emerges in the joint and harmonious reading of the authors or researchers that we could name, academic with respect to the authors or popular and community researchers; in other words, women leaders who are peace builders and central participants in this research.

This emergency indicates a relationship and almost a correspondence between the concerns or reflections of the academic researchers and those of the leaders or popular women of Medellín's *Comuna* 1, the female peace – or feminist peace – agendas seem not to vary substantially, since the demands and flags for inclusion, equity, opportunities and, in a broader sense, that women are heard and their voices resonate and are taken into account when making decisions in the public interest, it is a coincidence that it is accidental. This correspondence or dialogue between academic researchers and female feminist activists and leaders points to a particular harmony between women's agendas despite the differences between the academic field and community activism.

The northeastern zone, in which *Comuna* 1 is located, represents a particular territory of Medellín due to the high levels of violence that were experienced at certain times; thus, these women leaders exercise their roles in highly conflictive contexts. To illustrate this, figure 1 lists the selective murders associated with

the armed conflict, which were mainly concentrated in three *Comuna*s: *Comuna*
1: Popular; *Comuna* 13: San Javier; and *Comuna* 3: Manrique, registering these
3 *Comunas* between 900 and 1,600 homicides between 1980 and 2014 (Centro
Nacional de Memoria Histórica [CNMH], *et al.*, 2017), it should be noted that
both *Comuna* 1 (Popular) and *Comuna* 3 (Manrique) are part of the northeastern
zone in the administrative division of Medellín.

Figure 1. Selective Murders by *Comunas* of Medellín, 1980-2014

Source: CNMH, et al. (2017)

Returning to the discussion, the reference to the *academic* authors cited
above connects precisely with the reflections of the Leading Woman 2, who
commented that "It is women who lead [us] the initiative in these [peace] pro-
cesses, it is our maternal instinct, we have more instinct to defend life, and not
only mine, but also that of the people around" (Interview with Leading Woman
2, 2019, p. 2). [Own translation]

Of course, women leaders may view with certain skepticism the role of
academia in general, and in particular, of researchers who are interested in their
community processes within research. In the same interview, LW2 notes that:

The academy has its discourse for academics, I have been very resistant to the universities that bring their discourse, here I handle the discourse of the territory, that what you are telling me is the reality of what is happening in the territory (...) In the role of women, participation [is] very important, because a swallow does not make a summer." (Interview with Leading Woman 2, 2019, p. 3). [Own translation]

Beyond this kind of distrust or skepticism - extremely legitimate due to the instrumentalization of communities by researchers for decades - LW2 accepts that sometimes the behavior of the same women leads to divisions or tensions within community spaces in which they participate and, therefore, advocates for a more united women's movement in Medellín to achieve peace in the territories, a peace that has a feminine stamp and that responds to the particular needs of women in convulsive and complex realities such as that of Medellin:

"In the role of women, [participation is] very important, because a swallow does not make a summer. If women unite, we leave that selfishness and we unite to build peace, [is] through dialogue and agreement in the territory" (Interview with a Leading Woman 2, 2019). [Own translation]

LW10 also recognizes the crucial role of women as agents and builders of peace, taking into account that before building peace, it is necessary to analyze the conflict and seek its transformation:

"Women have always stood out in mass in the resolution of conflicts, but we still need a lot of preparation. It is very positive that women are mobilizing and leaving the house for the public stage [but] the issue of empowerment takes time" (Interview with Leading Woman 10, 2019, p. 5). [Own translation]

Rather than revive a biological determinism that reduces the equation to women equal to peace and men equal to war, what must be strengthened is the "feminization of peace," which goes in two ways: first, society must internalize the traditional practices and peaceful feminine attitudes incorporating women in this exercise of active peace building. This is what Ivonne Wilches affirms in her research for UNIFEM and UNDP called "Peace with female gender":

The inclusion of women in peace processes points directly to a requirement of justice, a feminine right and the possibility that the equality demanded by

the gender approach supports a process of building social democracy (Wilches, 2010, p . 91). [Own translation]

Second, it must be understood that structural peace - where men and women participate in similar degrees of freedom and equality to build a true culture of peace - is only possible if there is gender peace; In short, the traditional men-war and women-peace pairing must be transformed into a culture of peace in which everyone participates (Díez and Mirón, 2004, pp. 88-90). The concept of feminine peace gives way to the approach to the category of Leading Woman Builders of Peace (MLCP).

Female Peace and Peace-building Women Leaders (MLCP)

In the documentary analysis, it was evidenced that the concept of a Leading Woman Builder of Peace (MLCP) does not appear expressly in the literature consulted, although there are other similar formulas such as a peace builder woman. However, in fieldwork and in community interactions, the concept of MLCP emerges implicitly in the dialogue with women, since their feminist, community and political agenda is framed in their leadership to build territorial peace. To this extent, the women participating in this research not only contribute to the construction of peace or daily and territorial peace, but also claim their role as women leaders as articulators of these peace processes.

Even concepts such as peacebuilding (as action) have been profusely approached by the literature as verb or action (to build peace), but the same volume of information is not identified in front of the subject who builds it; in other words, it has been a concern in the academic world during the last decades to ask: how is peace built? But to the question, who is the subject that builds that peace? It lacks further development.

Today women are the architects of multiple organizational and community advocacy and peace-building processes; but one should not be lost sight of the fact that their corporality has historically been a disputed territory and a spoil of war. In this vein, the Argentine feminist Rita Segato (2013) refers to the corporality of women as a zone of dispute and as a war strategy in itself, recalling the atrocities that occurred in the armed conflicts in Rwanda (1994) and Yugoslavia (1992-1995) where sexual violence appears no longer as mere incidental damage, but as a weapon whose lethal damage is simultaneously material and moral: "The impression that emerges from this new war action is that aggression, domination and sexual prey are no longer, as they were before, complements to war, collateral damage, but have acquired centrality in the war strategy" (Segato, 2013, p. 19). [Own translation]

Anabel Garrido, for her part, expresses how even after the signing of a ceasefire or a peace agreement, thinking about the Colombian context, it is possible that violence – or violence in the plural – will endure against women, she expresses this by stating:

> The territory is found as a dispute over the conflict by armed actors, where women are shown as part of the territory of conquest, which is possessed, in both cases, by men. This violence is one of the key elements in the Colombian conflict, and shows dynamics that can remain after peace agreements (Garrido, 2019, p. 119). [Own translation]

At this point it is relevant to approach the category of social leader, appealing to the professor of the Universidad de Antioquia James Granada, who points out that "the definition of social leader [or woman leader] gives it the same activism and not so much the leadership that is exercised within an institution" (Granada, 2019, p. 9). This is clearly evident in this research, as participating women leaders have an empirical accumulator given by the territory and not by bureaucracy or exclusive participation in institutional spaces. Professor Granada complements his definition of leader or social leader arguing that:

It is anyone who exercises leadership in the field of an organization, a community or movements of various kinds: social, political and even religious. This is commonly found in neighborhoods and towns, where the base work makes them leaders. Sometimes these are highly visible activists, who exercise their leadership away from certain centralities and are therefore more exposed to threats and attacks (Granada, 2019, p. 9). [Own translation]

This approach is closed, thus proposing a formulation of this concept of a leading peace-building woman, which is constituted as that woman who in the exercise of her neighborhood or community leadership works to regenerate the social fabric and heal the physical and psychological consequences of armed conflict, to stop being appointed exclusively as a victim of that confrontation and transform that condition into actions aimed at becoming an active part in the search and peacebuilding, building it in the different dimensions of the territory.

The Role of Peace-building Women Leaders

Think of Human Rights and Peace-building Beyond the Liberal Register.

In order to think and re-think about peace-building as proposed in the research from which this article is derived, it is essential to overcome the paradigm of liberalism in which human rights or peace are possible only to the extent that private property is privileged and the free market prevails. This beneficiary subject of rights in the modern Eurocentric liberal tradition must be overcome in order to achieve *other* approximations to the struggles for dignity, that because of the Western heritage received in Westernized countries such as Colombia, they are expressed under the formula (or suit) of human rights, on the basis of this, it is pertinent to think of human rights and peace beyond that recipe of liberalism as advised by the jurist Ratna Kapur (2018) in the most recent work: *Gender, Alterity and Human Rights: Freedom in a Fishbowl*; Professor Swethaa Ballakrishnen writes in her outline of the text:

> If meaningful freedom is what we are after, she counsels, we need to look past the language of human rights towards the transformative potential of other, non-liberal registers. Extending her own metaphor, it is not just about changing the water or the container, reward lies beyond the fishbowl altogether (Ballakrishnen, 2019, p. 2). [Own translation]

Indeed, thinking beyond the liberal register makes it possible to fight for dignity, even in languages other than human rights or liberal peace, because these but powerful concepts represent the historical process of the West and the victories achieved by eurocentrated male elites, so without changing the vessel (the fish tank of human rights and peace) , we must go beyond the fish tank to achieve dignity, maximum, in contexts of societies not industrialized and impoverished by the processes of colonial domination of the past such as Colombian, and in the case of the common woman of those societies considered inferior.

In this particular case, these are women leaders who on a daily basis must deal with stigmatization, persecution and the multiple forms of violence (direct, structural and symbolic), that the exercise of their leadership causes in those political and armed sectors that live by and for war, and that as soon as their interests are compromised, they resort to direct violence generating threats, intimidation, displacement and even, are able to extinguish the lives of those whose purpose is nothing more than to contribute to the construction of peace in the country.

This woman leader builds in the different dimensions of the territory: the spatial dimension in her neighborhood, her commune and her city, the relational dimension that evokes the way that woman leader interacts with acquaintances and strangers, neighbors and family nucleus, in short, in her relationship with others, and finally the body and personal dimension, understanding that the female body again punished and violent by war, is the first territory in which the woman leader must build peace so that she can reproduce and multiply it in the relational and spatial dimensions.

Max Yuri Gil (cited by Rendón, 2019) coordinator of the Antioquia and Coffee Axis macro-region of the Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Cohabitation and Non-Repetition, mentions: "Antioquia is a zone where the war happened and continues happening, continues being the department with the greatest number of assassinated leaders, with serious problems of threats and extrajudicial executions" (Rendón, 2019, p. 1). [Own translation]

Indeed, the department of Antioquia and its capital Medellin have been the epicenter of some of the most degrading, aberrant and dehumanizing manifestations of armed conflict, the conflict happened, continues to happen and will continue to happen as long as peace does not become the priority point on the agendas of institutions because peace-building women leaders, as well as other social movements and population groups – usually those most vulnerable, considered inferior, or those who have suffered directly from the conflict – cannot swim upstream to generate possible pace scenarios as long as local administrations and the national government continue to turn their backs on peace, not only with a passive or improper attitude, as there are also clear manifestations of hostility that prevent achieving this longed-for full peace.

Peace: Beyond the Absence of War

With all of the above, something seems to emerge that literature may not have sufficiency addressed. While negative peace has been associated and studied from the perspective of the absence of war, the silence of rifles and the overcoming of violent deaths associated with direct violence; positive peace holistically understands all the basic needs that must be met in order to achieve peace, since in addition to the cessation of armed confrontation, this positive peace will also require achieving, in the terms of Galtung (2016) previously explored, a structural peace in which no human being is exploited and is guaranteed the material conditions of existence and in turn , a cultural peace shall be required in which symbolic violence is not exercised by any member of society establishing hierarchies of gender, class, nationality or race.

This complex theoretical and practical fabric of the relationship between direct peace (such as negative peace) added to positive peace (such as structural peace and cultural peace) exposes that unmet basic needs are a first factor that does not allow this society to achieve complete peace.

Overcoming direct violence and making people no longer die as a result of gunfire would certainly be a great achievement for Colombian society, however, remembering something said by LW2, "What's the point of talking about peace when you have an empty stomach?" Peace, in that order of ideas, begins with something simpler and probably easier to eradicate than direct violence itself.

Ensuring that no Colombian and no Colombians go hungry is a first step toward overcoming violence and achieving true, complete and integral peace, that is just what it mentions between LW2 lines (LW2, Field Diary: April 29, 2019, p. 17): "Peace is felt from the stomach, from our womb."

Peace from the Symbolic

Figure 2 shows bracelets made with mustards, which have woven the word *PAZ* (peace) with various colors. The bracelets were handed over to the women leading the research participants in the form of gratitude and recognition of their leadership work, and also, as a way to seal our commitment between academy and community to defend and build territorial peace, for which, as mentioned above, the active role of women to such laborious enterprise is crucial.

Figure 2. the Bracelets of Peace

Source: Author's

Peace from Community Organization and its Drive for Leading Women

Peace is not just an abstract or theoretical concept despite the abundant literature that is existing. Peace is lived, done and remade daily by social actors, peace requires and specifies women, but it is also necessary to abandon the idea of masculinity associated with the warrior because it is absurd to maintain that vision. For this reason, both men and women in a society, such as ours, must strongly support peace-building processes at the territorial, city and national levels. To paraphrase an expression spread by feminist groups throughout the world, *peace will be feminist or not be.*

Human rights and peace, beyond their legal-normative dimension as rights, have a high political content that is not exhausted in the mere formal recognition of their existence. On the contrary, their permanent reconstruction and reformulation in the political scenario is what endows them with value, because it must be the social actors, representatives of this abstract idea of

civil society that can influence the construction of an idea of non-state peace, localized and that is nourished by the permanent fluctuations that we have as a society.

For this reason, peace is not a given fact or right, its content is constantly at issue and, for that reason, social actors, from their life experiences, their daily struggles and their victories in the socio-political sphere can contribute greatly to de-legislating the right to peace to begin to recognize that as a right, it is civil society that must and can establish its scope with the aim of building peace scenarios in a country bloodied by war.

The role of the MLCP demonstrates that these women have an ethical and political vocation for the construction of territorial peace scenarios in their neighborhoods and communes; however, this peace for which they advocate is characterized by being much more complex than the mere equation of macro-conflict: absence of armed conflict equals peace. This conception of peace from women leaders understands that there are priorities for existing and coexisting, inhabiting and cohabiting their territories to re-exist; silencing rifles is necessary, but not enough.

To paraphrase LW2 again, how can I talk about peace if I am hungry? This simple, every day and at the same time heartbreaking expression exhibits the manifest inequalities of a society like Colombia. Indeed, with hunger there can be no peace, let alone in a scenario like that of some peripheral districts of Medellin in which armed violence does not cease. These manifestations of micro-conflict go unnoticed in the great media where it matters more who dies from direct violence than the survival of those who resist it and advocate for complete peace.

Now, weapons may be put down, bullets destroyed, and the violent ones reincorporated into life in the political community, but as long as the material conditions of existence for the majority of society that today suffers the dire consequences of raw capitalism that governs the country as unquestionable sovereign are not guaranteed, that peace will be nothing more than fictional.

The mustard bracelets drawn with the word peace in the center is a simple and at the same time profound expression, of how peace goes beyond an agreement between the confronting parties, the persecution of armed groups or the capture and disarticulation of gangs in the city. Peace that is longed for is part of a concrete assumption: peace begins with ourselves and that bracelet is a symbolic expression of how women leaders, as they navigate all the daily adversities that this society imposes on them, are working from being and doing for their families, communities and territories by building peace, by building another possible and better world.

Conclusions

As announced, the research from which this article is derived sought to weave a relationship between the accumulated academic knowledge on peace-building, with the popular and local knowledge of peace-building women leaders who from their particular place of enunciation as articulators of the territories in which they inhabit or exercise their leadership, work for and promote a society at peace. The sayings, knowledge, expressions and analysis of the women leaders expressed throughout the workshops, community interactions, spontaneous conversations and interviews, show in practice that these women leaders are taken into account within the research as *theoretical references* in themselves.

Likewise, the idea that peace exists only to the extent guaranteed by the State, must be detached, because while it plays a fundamental role in creating peace scenarios, it is only one of the actors that must add to the equation because peace-building is at the forefront of a greater extent of subjects both male and female, whose particular and community experiences can lead to ways toward peace and consolidate it in the territories.

In both domestic and international law, the claims regarding the guarantee and consolidation of peace and human rights are vast; however, translating these consecrations or demands for social justice, equity and respect for life will only be possible if society is aware of its role as a political actor in materializing this catalogue of rights, since:

> The creation of [national or international] standards does not solve the structural problems of a society that is afraid of difference and repudiates otherness; for this reason, the processes of political, institutional and citizen transformation have been slow to address the legal and cultural obstacles posed by the realization of rights of vulnerable population groups. While [the issuance of legal rules] is a relevant tool for achieving these claims, it is not sufficient as long as mobilization processes do not occur to convert consecrations of abstract standards into [political] transformations of particular realities (Acosta-Navas, 2019, p. 57). [Own translation]

The relationship between human rights in critical aspects, peace as a human right and the construction of grassroots peace driven by social movements and, in this case, by the leading women of the *Comuna* 1 participants in this research, becomes evident after the above. A hegemonic theory of human rights based on Eurocentric provincialism to justify the existence, elements or conditions

of (liberal) peacebuilding leaves out other epistemologies, understandings and conceptual constructs of what peace means.

Wolfgang Dietrich categorically mentions that "Peace cannot be produced or exported, peace that does not relate to specific places will never have any social power and will remain an abstraction in the minds of peace researchers" (Dietrich, 2006, p. 454). [Own translation]

The Leading Women of Medellin who participated in this research are the best evidence of the need for a rereading of peace in the context of human rights, as well as outside the liberal recipe book and the colonial matrix in which the historical origin of the Western concept of human rights is embedded. Leading women in northeastern Medellin build peace from what can be called the microphysics of emancipation (Sánchez-Rubio, 2018b). [Own translation]

To that extent, they are small actions in actuality, but gigantic in scope and in the political gamble they represent. Peace is not built with the signing of documents or ratification of international instruments; peace is built by walking the territories, mediating in community conflicts, respecting and listening to each other, exercising empathy and building trust in communities, remembering the words of Eduardo Galeano (2015): "Many small people, in small places, doing small things, can change the world" (p. 1). [Own translation]

Peace-building women leaders in *Comuna* 1 are one step ahead of hegemonic theory of human rights and liberal peace. They consciously or unconsciously implement the postulates of critical theory by placing human beings at the center of the discussion without the legal norms that claim to protect these subjects. The academy, like the social elite it represents, still has much to learn from junior political subjects like these leading women; the exercise of their community leadership is probably not based on an endless list of authors, philosophies and political theories, critical currents or specialized legal literature, but its understanding and interpretation of advanced society well exemplifies how one can continue to fight in the socio-political sphere for a fairer and more peaceful society.

The reconceptonalization of peace-building in critical human rights is summarized in the following elements: first, *delegalizing* and *deescalating* human rights, understanding that human rights emerge, consolidate and reform day by day and on a small scale, heterogeneous communities across the globe set their agendas for fighting for fairer societies in terms where their particular socio-political contexts, religious or economic demands it. This involves thinking of a human rights agenda beyond the state formula and the international legal system at the head of this fiction called the "international community" and international organizations such as the UN at the global level, or the OAS at the regional level (and the respective bodies of both).

Secondly, the reconceptaization of peace-building in critical human rights, particularly in societies with long-standing conflicts such as Colombia, begins by recognizing the exercise of collective action by communities as a real and legitimate way of exercising democracy outside the state structure, but which may and should well translate those demands or fighting flags into the language of public policy and enter the bureaucratic game to achieve them and make them effective before the political subjects who claim them.

Third, human-rights-critical peace-building can only be reconceptualized when those human rights as liberal discourse that the West has flown (stronger since 1948) recognize the previous two elements as a starting point for turning the state-ist vision to the truly relational human rights view (Sanchez-Rubio , 2018a). This recognition of relational vision as the basis of non-particularistic human rights with emancipatory possibilities allows us to understand a concept of peace-building seen from the needs and interests of communities that have suffered or become potential victims of armed conflict as members of the civilian population.

The leading women who participated in this investigation made it clear how peace as a human right must be reconceptualized so that increasingly the positions that make peace from a militaristic approach to the ultimate end to show state sovereignty through a monopoly on the use of force and the hegemony of the state in the various territories that are disputed with organized or criminal armed groups.

It is precisely this militaristic approach that was intended to detach the concept of human rights and peace in this investigation; participating peace-building women leaders made it clear that there are "other possible worlds" when peace emanates from a territorial, local and contextual perspective. When working for peace-building and the guarantee of human rights from an evoking point and are not intended to impose an unequivocal vision of peace or human rights by state institutions and, on the contrary, it is based on other accounts and discourses that allow democracy to be expanded and nurtured with the recognition of other actors, which from collective action and popular mobilization can give *other meanings*, to such concepts as peace and human rights that have historically been servile to hegemonic power in local, national and global contexts.

Being a woman in a country like Colombia embodies many challenges in multiple dimensions; however, being a woman leader, who inhabits a conflicting territory, who exercises her community leadership in these scenarios and who works tirelessly to achieve peace, resizes the mere challenges of existence in an unequal society like this and places them in a context of resistance and re-existence.

To be a woman leader in this convulsed Colombian socio-political reality is to exist, to resist, but in particular to re-exist, as this implies that:

> (...) the devices of knowledge, making, thinking, feeling and acting from differentiated historical experiences, to ensure living conditions dignified by self-knowledge, [should] creatively address devaluation, cover-up and silence in order to position political, ethical and epistemic places through the unpacking of an "other-agency" (Albán and Rosero, 2016, p. 37). [Own translation]

In this area, struggles for the dignity of women leaders cannot be reduced to mere existence, their role is crucial for the consolidation of a solid, robust and lasting peace. Peace is built from these small scenarios invisible to institutionality and the media; the practice of liberation begins in the embodiment of these women as the first territory of pacification, and extends to family, social and community settings like other fields of peace-building.

Indeed, peace (in its liberal sense) has been elusive for decades, but it is clear that this complete peace is not the Final Agreement between the State and the defunct FARC, nor is it the demobilization or subjugation of members of organized armed groups. Peace is also expressed in these small daily manifestations of listening to each other and generating empathy. Peace is a call to action more than the outcome of a negotiation. To be a leading peace-building woman in Medellin means putting one's own interests before and prioritizing collectives, because that *common good* that is peace cannot under any circumstances endanger those women who are convinced that another world, better of course, is possible. Therefore, it is worth concluding with an idea that radiates through this investigation: peace without women is a nonstarter!

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