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REGULATION AND CONTROL OF SUBJECTIVITY AND PRIVATE LIFE IN THE CONTEXT OF ARMED CONFLICT IN COLOMBIA[1]

A qualitative study was carried out in four municipalities in four different conflict zones in Colombia. Intrafamilial violence and gender violence are studied through the testimonies of the people interviewed. The impact was analysed in terms of the exercise of control over the civilian population by paramilitaries in relation to subjectivity, the family, social networks and the prevailing moral order. In effect, the strengthening of barriers between traditional gender identities has enabled a de-structuring of traditional masculinity through moral co-optation, the reinforcement of traditional feminine identity and the objectification of the sexuality of young women, at the same time as they are manipulated sexually and emotionally. In general, strong legitimation of the model of the armed fighter as a paradigm of masculinity is found in children. In addition, the de-structuring of the family and its manipulation as a means of influence over civil society is one of the strategies employed for the installation of a regime of terror that fractures social networks. It does this through the erosion of confidence and the legitimation and mystification of the power of an actor whose mediation in inter-family and micro-social conflicts has been legitimated, instrumentalizing and scaling up traditional violence, taking advantage of the power vacuum and moral weaknesses in local culture.

Keywords   Intra-familar violence; gender; armed conflict; private life

A partir de la investigación cualitativa adelantada en cuatro municipios ubicados en cuatro diferentes zonas de conflicto en Colombia. Se estudian tanto la violencia intrafamiliar como la violencia de género a través de los testimonios de las personas entrevistadas. Se encontró como resultado emergente el control hegemónico por parte de los paramilitares del territorio urbano, se analiza el impacto que está teniendo el ejercicio de control sobre la población civil, en relación con: la subjetividad, la familia, las redes sociales y el orden moral imperante. En efecto, el fortalecimiento de las barreras entre las identidades de género tradicionales ha permitido una desestructuración de la masculinidad tradicional debido a la cooptación moral, el reforzamiento de la identidad femenina tradicional y la objetivación de la sexualidad de las mujeres jóvenes, al tiempo que se las manipula sexual y afectivamente. En general se encuentra en altísima legitimación del modelo del guerrero, como paradigma de masculinidad entre lo niños. De otro lado, la desestructuración de la familia, su manipulación como estrategia de incidencias sobre la sociedad civil, hacen parte de las estrategias empleadas para la instauración de un régimen de terror que desestructura las redes sociales mediante la instauración de la desconfianza y

la mistificación del poden de un actor que ha logrado legitimar su mediación en los conflictos intrafamiliares y microsociales instrumentalizando y escalando la violencia tradicional, aprovechando los vacíos y debilidades morales de las culturas locales.

Palabras clave   Violencia intrafamiliar; género; conflicto armadò; vida privada

> . . . look, I'd say that the armed conflict, or the armed conflict [in this town], as we'd say in working class circles, has been put into the families' kitchens, put into our beds, and has been put into our being, into the clothing, put so much that there isn't any space left for the family and for the women to determine what women are in [this town]. . . . I'd say that the woman allowed herself to be influenced by the ease of the [use of] the gun.
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> (EINB4)[2]

This paper is based on a study of intrafamilial violence and gendered violence against women in the context of armed conflict, carried out in four Colombian municipalities: Barrancabermeja (Santander department), Puerto Asís (Putumayo), Santander de Quilichao (Cauca) and Turbo (Antioquia).

In these four urban contexts, each based in a different conflict zone, the paramilitary forces had, at the time of the fieldwork, a hegemonic control over the territory.

The action strategies of those involved varied with the depth of their local roots and the different ways links with local populations have developed. Care must be taken not to generalize across different actions, but rather to highlight the specific differences between the action of each of the armed protagonists.

Although each town in this study has its own historical and social dynamic, it was a conscious decision to look for more general and theoretically more consistent tendencies to describe the ways everyday life and family dynamics were affected under the influence of the armed conflict. For this reason, rather than separately different territories, the experience accumulated in each municipality fed and permitted theoretical construction[3] with a certain degree of generality, which in each case meant maintaining an internal tension between the aim of generalization and the restrictions imposed by the size of the study.[4]

In an effort to make a contribution from a social psychological standpoint to a wider understanding of the dynamics of the conflict, the study focused particularly on the psychological effects of the dynamic of armed conflict, that is, on the effects on subjectivity and private life. This not to deny the importance of structural factors in Colombia's armed conflict (Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo [PNUD], 2003), but to accept with Pécaut (2001) that these have not only lost explanatory force, but that they also are not sufficient to understand the complexity.

The epistemological perspective from which this research was done is social constructionism in social psychology, more specifically the proposals of Kenneth Gergen (1982, 1990, 1993). He proposes a critique of culture and building new worlds from the amplification of others' voices. The goal then, is to take theorization forward by questioning and identifying the issues taken for granted in the culture, as

well as stressing the voices of those who have been excluded by scientific method. Without doubt this is a pioneer effort in a country where research on violence has been traditionally approached from a macro-social perspective.

We believe that this is an innovation in a country that requires a perspective of acceptance and tolerance on the part of researchers who have traditionally studied the phenomenon from a macro-social viewpoint.

From a theoretical point of view, political violence, in many of its principal variants, shares two common factors with domestic violence:

1   Physical and emotional violence is perpetrated by agents whose responsibility it is for social and legal protection, the care and preservation of order and predictability in the lives of the victims.
2   The transformation of role from protector to perpetrator takes place in a discursive context where that change is denied.

These factors together contribute to the devastating and persistent effects on the victims. Moreover, irrespective of the particular type of violence, the boundary between violence at the micro and macro levels is blurred, which allows for the examination of a wide spectrum of situations (Sluzki, 1994).

In this general framework, understanding the specificity of violence against women implies understanding and making visible the imagery that legitimates and maintains it, in the same way as the specific forms of emotional discourse evidenced in the narratives of these women.

So, it is possible to accept that gendered violence (against women) exists, given the evidence of acts of violence committed against women, as women. It involves forms of violence that impact on their sexual identity such as rapes and sexual assaults [among others]. It also refers to violent acts against women for not conforming to restrictive social norms.

In the framework of the present paper, gendered violence is taken to be synonymous with what researchers such as Gilberti and Fernández (1992) termed 'invisible violence'. This makes reference to the cultural devices by means of which subjectivities prescribed in the matrix of relations between the sexes are produced and reproduced, within the framework of power relations that delimit the exercise and subordinate the status of the roles of each gender. In this way, there is legitimation of forms of subordination, discrimination and the exercise of control of subjectivity that include acts of physical and emotional violence.

Making visible the cultural constructions sustained by the male appropriation of women's freedom constitutes a key to the politics of cultural transformation that might allow the creation and consolidation of other representations, as mainstays of patterns of relations not marked by violence. Such cultural constructions lead us to consider gendered violence, not just in its symbolic dimension of support for intrafamilial violence, but also as an axis for interpreting the spectre of extreme violence that affects our prospects as a nation.

Gendered violence against women is practised in both macro and micro contexts; in the latter case, a particular form of violence against women is articulated: domestic violence. Given that that the family is configured as a social institution that looks after

and protects its members, any form of physical, emotional, economic or sexual abuse that any of its members exercise over others is considered as *domestic violence*. Within this type of violence it makes sense to emphasize sexual abuse as one of the principal manifestations of violence against women, given that it represents an element of male domination mediated through sex (Corsi, 1994).

So, what can be termed 'violence against women' can take place in different areas of social life. It is understood as

> ... *any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.*
>
> (United Nations, 1994)

Cultural mechanisms that sustain violence

In the search for wider explanatory frameworks of domestic violence in the context of armed conflict, this paper is concerned with the analysis of the particular cultural mechanisms that sustain violence in the particular subcultures studied here. It involves making visible those complex mechanisms that configure the power regimes that sustain certain patterns of relationship within which subjectivity is produced and reproduced. In other words, the study is concerned with understanding those common-sense shared meanings to which the new practices of armed groups can be articulated, making easier their insertion into the life of the communities.

These mechanisms are not specific actions or processes, but rather an interwoven network of imagery and representations, anchored in the intersubjective structures that sustain ordinary life, of forms of action and interaction in the everyday, and of particular technologies of self-regulation and subjectivity. On the other hand, a large part of the regulatory power that characterizes them comes from its invisibility through conversion into the accepted meanings of the local culture. This means that these cultural mechanisms are characterized by a high degree of complexity.

In any particular case the cultural mechanisms involve a diversity of operators in the following two dimensions.

1   *Gender images:* for instance, evocations of gender that legitimate violence within the family and violence against women, as naturalized conceptions of femininity and masculinity, subjecting them to differentiated positions of power.
2   *Models or patterns of gender socialization* conceived in this case as the combination of practices and behaviours that are differentiated for, and/or attributed to, girls and boys in the relationships between parents and children or between members of the family (including violent behaviour).

Gender images

Images of gender, and of the relations between the sexes, play a central part in the mechanisms by which subjectivities are regulated, since they sustain positions of power and no power.

Although these images are considered as socially produced phenomena, they are kept in force by maintaining their dominance in conversations (Shotter, 1989). In fact, these images become limits to the construction of personal identity. The regulatory power of these representations comes from the naturalization that we give to them in social practices.

Being naturalized, these images operate in the deep structure of our personal identity (Harre, 1989), that is, they become attached in an unconscious way to our auto-narrative, delimiting what is possible for (among other things) female and male identity, and in partner relations.

> . . . the rights of us as women are, primarily to respect [the men], to be able to speak well to them, and to obey them. Now, if they said 'throw yourselves over a cliff' we wouldn't do that, you have to see what you have to obey, and at least if the man comes home drunk, don't say anything about it, but wait 'til the next day, when he's well and good, because if you provoke him it's like disturbing a wasps nest, you do that and the wasps will get disturbed, and go and sting you, it's the same with the drunks, although not every drunk is the same, but they all get drunk.

> (GFMP)

Models or patterns of gender socialization

To investigate the types of relationship between violence within the family and armed conflict requires the characterization, first, of the patterns of intrafamilial interaction most firmly rooted in the culture. On that basis it is possible to approach the question of how such patterns are transformed in the face of the presence of the armed protagonists that affect the order of private relations.

Authoritarian and abusive patterns of relations, and those characterized by emptiness and emotional distance play their part in the traditional interactions of our families, although there do exist alternative models of gender socialization. In effect, although the men are allowed greater freedom of action and of choice, a detailed control is exercised over the women's behaviour and they are severely restricted in exercising and experiencing freedom of choice. In this way they become docile and shut themselves away from public affairs.

> . . . well in my childhood, it made me very sad because, as a child you are beginning to experience life and you want it to be open, so you get the opportunity to run and skip, to play . . . and to feel free. Despite being brought up within a marriage, my father was, as is commonly said now, very machista, so we felt restricted.

Everything was forbidden to us . . . if a family group came to the house, at once they'd almost imprison us, not letting us participate as children. We didn't play, like other people, but away from the house, like little hermits. People would come and we'd be taken to see them, but just for a glimpse, as if through a grill.

I managed to understand since very young that it was like machismo, with my mother . . . subservient there to what he'd say, well he ran the show . . . my father was in charge, a machista, imposing, and we didn't have a chance to feel like we were somebody, but instead everything was very restricted, despite living in our own place — he had property, his farm and we began to see that we didn't lack anything . . . well in terms of food no, but the rest yes, like clothes, those things . . . he'd sell two or three animals, go off and sell, and go with women from elsewhere, and we as kids were forgotten.

We wanted to go out to do further study, and it was a big effort on the part of my mother and us sisters . . . since being a little girl I've felt shy, bashful, repressed. INT: *Did you have brothers?* PART: *Yes he was the same way with my brothers. He was very machista with them, he treated them like that, with indifference, as if they were two men from a very young age, you there and me there (cries).*

INT: *That's very sad, was it painful?* PART: *Yes (they left at that time of life losing many things) [speaking while crying]. . . .*

INT: *Do you remember your mother? What was your relationship with your mother?* PART: *She was very gentle, very straightforward, very loving, she loved us as children, she'd give us the best she could, like if she attended to us she'd treat us with that kindness. But my dad never; we couldn't approach him like a child and hug him, no; he was always separate, separate, as strangers . . .*

(GFMT2)

Authoritarianism and emotional emptiness, as perceived in this interview, as patterns of relations nevertheless reach levels of affection as much in men as in women. In effect, the subservient uncritical learning of moral norms contributes to the lack of ability for tolerance, deliberation and respect, and instead generates the kind of obedience in which the person doesn't develop the capacity to take responsibility for their actions. Such learning facilitates the insertion of military structures such as those imposed by the protagonists in the context of the Colombian armed conflict (Lira & Castillo, 1991).

The phenomenon just described sounds like something from the past, now totally superseded. However, it is a condition which still characterizes the lives of many men and women in different regions of the country.

In the private sphere, authoritarianism, which reproduces unquestioning submission and obedience as well as intolerant and disrespectful attitudes to difference, is a structural condition that facilitates the militarist control over everyday life. This has its analogue in the public sphere with the absence of institutionality and the lack of real inclusion as citizens, circumstances that leave open the way to social intervention by the illegal armed protagonists.

Three powerful patterns

Our attention is powerfully drawn to certain patterns of family relations. First, the high levels of physical violence that characterize the means of control and discipline by parents over their children. It is the same violence that the males also exercise over their partners, apparently so configuring an exercise of masculinity that affirms the subjugation and obedience that some of them expect of the women.

> *So the blows happen pretty much everyday . . . they become normal. It isn't as if anyone questions it . . . that's how it was for my mother, and so they tell me my grandmother, and it's the same for my neighbour. . . . at least the opportunity doesn't arise to change, to do something so it stops. What's more the other reason that violence within the family continues is that 'Oh — and if I were to leave, then what would happen to my children?' . . . Yes, because of economic dependency, and because of such low self-esteem, they think, behave and feel like that, as if they aren't capable of living on their own and facing life alone. . . . But also that emotional dependence 'if I were alone . . . oh no', that maintains the violence . . . Even as little girls the lesson is interiorised, that the woman is the victim, who puts up, 'what a pain, that my neighbours should know that there are problems, because it's better not to make the problem bigger' . . . And also, sometimes my mother explained it to me, like a traditional mum, 'Oh but understand this, know this you poor thing; look, its because of his work, look he's very tired, so that makes him aggressive, don't make problems, . . . why make it into a disaster?'*
>
> (EIMB)

Secondly, from a very early age, and throughout their youth: within the father/daughter or stepfather/daughter relationship, the women learn to belong to the other and to be available sexual objects. In many cases, jealousy and possessive behaviour that requires submission appears in the guise of expressions of love and protection, in a context in which masculine sexuality is represented principally as abusive and unrestrained.

> *She [the mother] made us underwear like this, with laces to tie; they were good because, once someone tried to rape me, and then having that kind of underwear that she'd made me out of canvas, a tough cloth, well the lad struggled to part my legs and covered my mouth and couldn't rape me because this underwear was so resistant.*
>
> (GFMT2)

In effect, the life of many girls and young women is an almost constant struggle to avoid the sexual abuse that father, stepfather and close male relatives try to commit. At the same time, the abuse that they practice, as has been seen, leads to a context of practising prevention against possible sexual offences that other men might commit. Many women don't achieve this objective and their stories are marked by painful and repetitive episodes of sexual abuse.

> *. . . once, when I was already quite big, an aunt was taken ill, and this is something I'll never forget . . . and my mother sent me to be with her; she was ill, but nothing serious because she could walk and so on, and this was the first night that I'd been to sleep there.*

Well, when we went to bed: I told her I was going to bed, then she [the aunt] said I should sleep with her, and I said why with her if there was a hammock, that I'd sleep comfortably in the hammock, then she said no, I should sleep with her, then she went to bed and me too, and then her husband in the same bed. Well ... before I was 11, you know I was innocent, innocent because I'd never seen: my mum treated us very well and never set us a bad example, well after a bit ... [details of sexual assault]. ...

Well the next day I told her I was going home, and she said no 'you're silly, look, if he tries again ... tell him that if he gives you 300 pesos', so well I told her no, and she said 'well with me that's what happened', and before virginity was protected so much then my mother told me a lot, taught me, and said don't let a man touch you, and how men were abusers and all that. She taught us everything.

(GFMT2)

However, the harshest thing in all this panorama, and that which stands out most, is that the strategies that are outlined to prevent abuse imply the acceptance, in many ways, that this pattern of relations is culturally as inevitable as the male sexuality that causes it.

The third pattern of relations identified is the lack of affect that the women show in their conversations, like a painful mark in their story that appears to structure their personal projects. The women frequently, in response to this absence, express the intention of not reproducing those patterns that they consider negative in their own family history (their wish to give affection to their children, independent of whether they are boys or girls, for example) and to obtain for their children developmental goals that they themselves haven't obtained (educational aspirations for the next generation, among other things).

... and he was the sort who put obstacles in our way. He never allowed us to hug him, never. He brought us what he brought us but he was kind of distant. He didn't like to cuddle a child, it is clear that he wasn't brought up like that, or that my mother should cuddle a child either. INT: That was seen as a lack of respect? — PART: Yes, I'm sure that's how he was brought up, or that's how he still lives. With my children we play, and we pinch each other, and my father tells me that I'm not making them respect me, but I tell him that when we are playing it's one thing, and when we aren't, it's another altogether.

(GFMP)

Articulation between the armed conflict and everyday life

The regulation and control that the paramilitaries exercise in the towns, based on both the social order and patterns of private life, have of course a direct impact on subjectivity. As was mentioned at the beginning, this analysis was carried out assuming a gender perspective, which is manifest in making the effects that take place in the subjectivity of men, women and children, and as a result also in the everyday practices and interactions among them.

Creation of vulnerability in young women

In developing our analysis of the ethnographic material, the young women emerged as one of the most vulnerable social groups in the context of the armed conflict. This section examines this in more detail, with the aim of calling attention to their critical life situation and to the consequences that through processes of primary socialization and reproduction of the family, bring this human drama to a new generation of women.

The traditional subjective subcultural context where female socialization takes place, and the gendered cultural mechanisms elaborated in the first part of this paper, constitute a very propitious terrain for new and more violent authoritarian practices: throughout the process of female socialization the young women are taught to 'lose their voice'. In other words, in the process of socialization they have learnt to neither refer to nor take account of their feelings, their dreams or desires as crucial criteria in decisions with their partners.

> *... Another thing that draws your attention when you arrive here, is that the girls ... don't want, for example to study, don't aspire to go to University, no ... here many of them aspire to get themselves a [man with prestigious employment in the community] who might support them: and that has become a career here. Well for the girls, this being a lover of a [man with prestigious employment in the community] gives them status, gives them a solution to other problems they have, economic and everything. This is very typical of the industry here. What's more, this is supported by their families too. That's to say, become a lover, and in turn not only is she supported but so is her family ... buy them a house in that area, a house could cost two million, he could do that. And enable her younger brother to continue his studies, and help the girl's father subcontracting with small projects that the firm might have, and many other things ...*
> (GFNB)

Certainly both the lack of employment opportunities and the economic problems have a bearing on this form of submission to patriarchy of girls by their parents, who stimulate and approve a construction of self in terms of dependency, and the establishment of marriage arrangements motivated by practical questions, economic ones especially. This situation affects the family of the young women who participate in such pacts; it also exposes the women to an enormous degree of vulnerability. Such is the cultural context with which is articulated the manipulation of young women by the armed protagonists:

> *... And now they [the young women] sleep with them [the paramilitaries] or that's to say 'while I go to bed with him, the others keep guard'. They quickly give some money or a tip for that, so they don't tell any one about it. One of those cases was known about by the authorities, and the girl said 'no, leave me alone' she said she wanted to, because her mother never allowed it in the house and she can do what she wants and what's more has the support of the paramilitaries, even though they beat her up.*
> (GFNB)

As a result, it is understandable that given the lack of voice and for young women, the fact of obtaining backing to exercise some authority and control over the adults of the community constitutes a compensatory strategy through which the armed actors then manipulate the population taking advantage of its cultural fragility:

> . . . Yes, some have them [paramilitaries] as lovers, walking hand in hand, going on their motorbikes, those girls are from here, from the barrio [neighbourhood]. Yes many of them react afterwards, because many of them have married [leftist] guerrillas or in one way or another go with the [leftist] guerrillas, they react. And many of them end up leaving [the town] . . . Now, what one can see is that in this problem of the violence, the woman has been very much used sexually, and she herself has collaborated in making things worse.
>
> (GFNB)

Collaboration with the armed protagonists or their participation in these groups doesn't follow any political or participative interest on the part of these young women, and indeed their activities as members of the organizations are limited to the supply of domestic services:

> . . . On the other hand, the youngest, newest woman, she gets involved in this sphere but in a different way. I'd say that she's still radical; that was one of the things one could see in many girl guerrillas and that [now] you can see in many girl paramilitaries, they are strong. For example, at the moment I see many girl paramilitaries moving about in this sector and it disgusts me to see them on a 175 motorbike distributing the food to the paramilitary youths; you can see the lines of her body, you can see the overalls, and I see that she's a high school graduate, I'm certain, she's a student of mine — : I know that at [name of college] she took some accountancy courses, and I can see her now as a servant of the paramilitaries, heh. I don't see her exercising that same leadership that the older women [of the town] assume and play in their relationship with men.
>
> (EINGB)

Integrating oneself in this way into the armed groups is not the only way in which the young women seek recognition and respect in their social contexts. Establishing relationships with fighters belonging to one of the armed bands is also a way of obtaining recognition and 'respect'; that is going from being unnoticed to being women of social standing:

> . . . Because of the conditions of poverty, I'd also say that being the girlfriend of a guerrilla also gave her social status, that she hasn't planned, nor fought for, nor constructed, but to be girlfriend of the paraco [slang for paramilitaries] commander, or of a soldier, or corporal, or formerly of a guerrilla, gave her a social status in the barrio that she hadn't fought or struggled for, or planned but instead just happened, and though that made her look like a tart, in a way she was also the vice-commander.
>
> (EINB)

In addition to the regulation of female subjectivity already discussed, the paramilitaries also exercise their sexuality in relation to the young women in the framework of relationships where services are exchanged (in which the women receive money),

whilst the women establish a cycle of complicity with the armed protagonists. It is not difficult to imagine how these youngsters discover that their bodies and their sexuality have an exchange value that guarantees them some benefits and enables them to enter into another kind of relationship with the man of violence, and it is this, from which some aspects of feminine socialization are derived. The morality of these actors has multiple facets. Although there is a discipline imposed on the female body and sexuality in both public and family contexts, at the same time the prostitution of young women is economically convenient.

> ... I'd certainly say that to get ahead, a girl of 15 will sleep with a man from one of the armed groups without much difficulty ... as to whether they enjoy this I don't know, but what I would go so far as to say is that the fighter does guarantee the welfare of the girl: in this sense prostitution does exist, in that logically if she does sleep with a fighter today but their commander removes them from the town, he [the fighter] is not going to take her with him. Then what can she do? Well sleep with another fighter or with someone from the same armed group, and if he is rotated or removed, or dies, well she'll find another and so on. So when she sleeps with the others what does it guarantee? She is guaranteed food, and soon the rent for the house, soon a mobile phone for her, trousers, blouse, soon she'll be going to a disco, a girl who is looked after, with a bottle of whisky or brandy.
>
> (EINB4)

Another situation, that puts the young women at risk, is experienced by those that try to maintain a distance from the armed groups, resisting being subject to manipulation or seduction by the power of armed men:

> ... they [the armed men] chase them so much, that here there are quite a lot of displaced girls, because they don't want to be with the paramilitaries, just as before they didn't want to be with the guerrillas. And here there's a girl, a well known case in [the town], the daughter of a journalist who was competing to be a beauty queen here, a very beautiful girl, very fine featured; well a guerrilla was in love with her and he pestered and pestered her, and the girl ran and ran and managed to seek refuge in the parish church, and a priest stopped the guerrilla. But the man said, 'Don't worry father, I'm not going to have her [literal trans. eat her] to day, but another day I will', and the girl's father had to take the whole family away to save the girl.
>
> But today what's happening is that now we have those blokes from the autodefensas [paramilitary groups], it's just the same, like an imitation (...). ...
>
> That is the other reason for people being displaced; I also understand that, well, that some girls get harassed so much, they are so bothered by it, that they give in to them, but that doesn't mean they want to live with them. Because firstly these men don't want to stay with the women, they only want the luxury of 'Me, I've eaten that woman', that kind of thing, but he really doesn't want to say he is not looking for her to be his permanent partner. Instead it's the bloke's whim, after all he's got the power, and can force the girl. ...
>
> (EINB4)

As discussed, there seem to be certain cultural conditions that facilitate intervention by the armed protagonists. In this case, it seems that there is a long tradition of female socialization through which the women learn that to succeed, their life projects have

to be enacted via men. It could be said that the girls learn to be silent, not finding a suitable social space where they can express themselves. This problem, which is not exclusive to the dynamic of armed conflict in Colombia, has been identified in the work of Gilligan and her colleagues (Debold, Wilson, & Malavé, 1994; McLean, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995), which has developed models of discourse analysis and intervention strategies to make heard the voices of young women.

There is no doubt that terrorism and authoritarianism applied by these armed groups to their relations with civil society are some of the factors that determine the modes of relationship established by the young women with the paramilitaries. In such extreme circumstances of the lack of both freedom, and cultural and material resources, it is easy for them to conclude that the best that can be done is to establish the kind of pattern of relationship where they are least vulnerable. Nevertheless, such patterns form part of a cycle of terror that at any moment can end up making them more vulnerable.

The intervention of the armed protagonists in the life of young women can have a definitive impact on the orientation of their life plans, every time they take decisions that have a bearing on the life they will lead as adults. In the following account a mother experiences her rejection of the pain she experiences as a result of the paramilitary intervention in the life of her daughter:

> I can say this because my daughter was taken by them [the paramilitaries], because the mother of a lad who supposedly was the boyfriend of my daughter, and she who was glad that the boy was with my daughter, sent the paracos to me and they threw me out of the house. When she still hadn't returned she went from house to house, but a year after her leaving the house and being returned; her studies had been damaged — everything was damaged, because she was in middle school, she only needed fifteen days to finish and she dropped out. And now, well she's returned, and I've decided to give her a new opportunity. Yesterday I kept coming and going to keep her at her studies, but they've practically destroyed her life, and I just think that isn't right: they [paramilitaries] have laws for some things and some people but for others do not. . . .

(GFNB)

For the armed bands these relations with young women are a military strategy to destabilize the enemy. All the armed protagonists victimize young women, murdering them because of their relationships with the enemy. Each armed actor tries to regulate the choice of males with whom it is seen as legitimate to form relationships.

> . . . something that was very painful for me happened in [town]. That was the guerrilla army. You know what they do. There were at least five murders, if not more, of girls aged 15 or 16, because one was the girlfriend of a soldier, or because another spoke with a policeman, I thought 'why don't they take them away if they think they are informers, make them go, but do not kill them'. They killed them like that, right under our noses. . . . There [in an organisation] they said that there wasn't any right to love. INT: You mean they tell them whom they should and shouldn't fall in love with? PART: Yes, in its time the guerrilla organisation killed women for being linked with policemen, and they were just youngsters. INT: And now the paracos do just the same? . . .

PART: *I don't know, I haven't evidence, I know that many people have died or left just for being under suspicion of having been collaborators, but I can't be certain, not having had experience. . . .*

<div align="right">(GFNB)</div>

Legitimation of the model of the fighter in the socialization of children and the familiarity of young children with death

It is important to emphasize the impact that the militarization of daily life has over the life and socialization of both boys and girls in these parts of the country. The presence of the illegal armed protagonists is accompanied by the imposition of norms and strategies of control, tempting children with the benefits of the militaristic life at the same time as making them involuntary witnesses of violent death.

As can be appreciated in the following quotation, they also impose a curfew on the presence of minors on the streets and require their registration in school. This control doesn't just refer to normative requirements, but also to sanctions that are applied to infringements. If the children stay out beyond the established hour, or don't attend school they are detained. As has been noted above, the lack of a contrastive cultural reference is generating a structure of meanings about norms that is very different from that expressed in Colombian law.

> *. . . the armed groups, the AUC[5] . . . make moral rules for living together, a guide . . . many things like: opening and closing times of places of recreation, times after which children should not be in the street, and for those that aren't studying — well it is compulsory that they are in school, and if they aren't — well they'll be detained too.*
>
> <div align="right">(GFNB)</div>

The following quotation presents the analysis of a schoolteacher, in which she makes explicit just how far the boys, the new generation of males, are constructing their subjectivity based on the model of the man of violence. Whether they belong to one group or another does not appear to be relevant. What's important is the male model of power that has been legitimated in the culture: 'he who kills wins'. It implies a model where power is based on the carrying of a gun, wearing a uniform and membership of an armed group:

> *. . . what I notice is that in the school when the guerrillas were here, . . . the children from elementary school played at being fighters: who killed won. When a group of thirty children were asked to draw what they wanted to be when they grew up, one boy drew a car, one girl a nurse's uniform and the other boys drew kids in military uniforms. But I can't say that they were soldiers, nor guerrillas, only that they wanted to be soldiers, to be armed. And among the girls, what was most frequently depicted was to sell fish or pies like their mothers did. So among the aspirations of these children there was only one girl who wanted to be a nurse and one boy who drew a car . . . the paracos had recently arrived, and one day a girl, whose family had been displaced from [name of town], a girl who was quite*

shy and didn't say much, 'miss, miss', 'what's the matter?', 'this boy is calling me a paraca'. And then I said 'And what does that mean?', and she said 'not them that go on motorbikes, and have mobiles, I'm not one of them miss, I'm not one of them'. That's to say, she understood that this nickname wasn't a good thing.

(GFNB)

The models of masculinity that are dominant in the local cultures we studied are losing options as they get restricted to a militarization of identity empty of all political significance. The option of the war is beginning to install itself as an articulatory axis for a masculine subjectivity (Gilmore, 1994), whose demonstrative acts, known to be necessary in the exercise of masculinity, are represented as the annihilation of others: to be a man is to win in armed confrontation. Meanwhile, as already noted, traditional femininity, linked to domestic work, continues to be reproduced.

Notwithstanding the above, the children did make some references to personal motives for aspiring to become fighters. Vengeance, a principal motivation sustaining the armed conflict in Colombia, appeared very clearly in the account of one woman as she described the behaviour of her seven year old, who witnessed the murder of his older sister by the guerrillas.

My son says 'I'm going to kill all those that are guerrillas, I'm going to kill them with two pistols.' He says to my grandson 'Hey little one, us two are going to fight [them].' I tell him that those men are already dead, but he says no they're not . . . Yes I say that we aren't going to kill anyone, that we are going to face our difficulties, which is a good thing to do, and struggle on, and look after the little one, and do you know what the little one does at one year old? The older one taught the little one [the grandson] to say 'ta ta ta', and then the older one falls to the ground . . .

(GFMP)

In effect, the proximity of the children to death raises very serious professional and ethical questions about both the capacity to respond and the responsibility of social scientists in the face of the serious problem of the childhood trauma. The following testimony is of a woman whose house was next to the place chosen by the paramilitaries to carry out extra judicial killings, experience that became a daily one for her children. She, although lacking conceptual categories to describe it, knew that her youngest son suffered a very profound emotional impact that will certainly have considerable consequences in his future life, which she can hardly anticipate:

. . . look at the consequences of the people [living through] the problem of violence, both in the home and in the street, and it frightens me that they carry out shootings there of the people they bring there: the first time I was ill there, because that's where I live . . . they took people there to kill them . . . immediately. It's knowing that they are taking someone there to kill them! My heart is . . . the children were being made ill by it. The boy is ten; they saw that they were bringing someone in the car and they said 'they are going to kill, going to kill' and they all went out to watch, not because if they watch they wouldn't kill, and when suddenly 'pa-pa-pa!'. INT: There in the neighbour's house? PART: Yes, there they killed up to four or five per day. Because we made a fuss and put forward the chair of the resident's association to speak and we called them [paramilitaries] and they were told

they shouldn't do that, and there were lots of children who watched and I told them that these children were becoming ill, and don't do this terrible thing. INT: In what way were the children being made ill? PART: Now? ... when that happened they became nervy.

For example, it made my son nervous to see that: he went running to see, you know that a child is curious, them killing someone and the child running and watching that, all bloodstained sprawled on the ground, and it made him cry 'Oh mum, they've killed him, poor thing and his mouth is open!', and it made him distressed, and he was crying. I shut all the doors and put on a tape or the T.V. very loud, so as not to hear the shots, because the children were already ill from it, from so much violence with them killing so close to here.

My son, more than anyone, my little boy, and him seeing those things, he also took those sticks and pretended they were guns, playing 'I'm going to kill you.' And I told him 'That is bad; don't play like that.' I never bought them toy guns, or any other war toys, because I don't like them, and he looked and used the sticks like guns and went out to play with all the children, playing war, with one dying and falling down and everything and I said to him 'don't play like that, I'll buy you other things to play with'.

... Sometimes I'd go to work, I'd go to the company to work and he'd stay with his little brother, and of course they killed those people in the afternoon and he went out to watch and when I got back in the evening he said 'I saw a death, it was horrible, and those paramilitaries killed, they killed him, and I also wanted to kill him.' Oh my God, he spoke like that 'No don't talk like that, because it's horrid to talk that way.' No but why do they have to come and kill them here?! Will it have affected him in some way? He went out, once he went out, those people came to kill and he went out with the stick and went 'pa-pa-pa', he threatened them with his pretend gun, and they went on by quietly. They didn't care because seeing that he was just a child with a stick threatening them: I, me, oh my God, they'll come back and they'll finish us off here!

(GFNP)

Recruitment by any one of the armed groups operating in the country can powerfully affect the lives of both the boys and the girls. The following testimony is from a displaced peasant woman, who in a dramatic account explains how, having good material, social and cultural circumstances, she found herself facing the need to flee to prevent the recruitment of her 14-year-old older son by the guerrillas (the FARC[6]). The recruitment strategies, which could be described as strategies of seduction, indicate what the model of the fighter means for a youth of a certain age, suggesting very concrete limits to the notion of voluntarily enlisting. At the time of the interview the woman was almost destitute along with her husband and five children. The testimony also provides evidence of the cruelty with which government officers can act.

... What happened was that a member of the local council joined them, and ... all the doors were opened to them, they came, took over the school, and started to give orders 'next Saturday everybody must attend the meeting'.

... That day I left the meeting and went outside, and one of them was there, and he had all the youngsters around him, and according to him he was giving a class to the children, and at that moment it made me nervous, frightened, because of what I'm going to tell you, and my two boys were there, and then, the older one looked at me and whether

that frightened him I don't know; it was surprising but he withdrew, but the other no, and he was still there, the [guerrilla], put the cap on them, another passed him the kerchief, and the other passed him the gun, and I didn't know how much cunning they used on them, and my older son looked at me and I at him and the boy came to me and then I said to him 'What are you talking about?' 'Nothing.' He said it to me just like that: 'Nothing' . . . Days later I stayed with the middle one and then he said to me, my son, 'Mum, do you want me to tell you something?' and I said 'What?', and I went to do the washing and then he said, 'But Mum, don't tell [the older brother] because he'll beat me up, look mum, he [the older brother] is going to join the guerrillas . . . One day he'll go to school and not say anything, and in the afternoon he won't come back.' . . . I didn't know what to do, whether to shout or cry, to call him or not; well it was the easiest pretext for him, going off to school and not coming back. . . . I said to him 'My love, why is he going to go?' . . . 'That day the guerrilla chief was talking to us, that we were very poor, that we didn't have money, and he said "perhaps your father would support you to finish elementary school, but then what? With us you'd go and complete high school, go to university, if you want a career, then you can choose it, and on the other hand your fathers, what can they offer you?"'

'Now there's another thing, if your dad went to the market and perhaps got a mango you'd have to share it among you, but with us if you want to eat a whole box of mangoes, you could do that and nobody'd say anything, and you there, you would eat what you want and nobody would tell you what.' INT: *How old was your son?* PART: *Fourteen years old.*

. . . But look we bought five changes of clothes for the younger boy, and for the older one I'm telling you about, I brought two shirts and trousers, and in a little bag because we didn't bring a suitcase so nobody would tell, and we came. Nobody told me to leave, or evicted us. But once we were here they sent a certain person to me, to say we should do ourselves a favour; if we wanted to stay alive we shouldn't go back there, giving me a reason. Nobody told me, it was just to save my children, and they [guerrillas] think that it was my husband. They don't imagine that it was me, and already there is gossip, that he [her husband] was a paramilitary, who went around in a car, and that is what's said over there: he still hasn't returned. My displacement was kind of straightforward, but real . . . Soon afterwards I asked my son 'is it true that you wanted to go?' and he told me 'no it's a lie' and cried. Nowadays when I say to him 'is it true that you wanted to go?' and he knows to tell me 'yes mum, I did want to go but I didn't tell you to avoid tears' . . .

(GFMP)

The family and the woman as strategic units of manipulation by the armed actors

The organization by the paramilitaries of a forced strike against the creation of a demilitarized zone for the ELN[7] is particularly illustrative of the manipulation of the family and women by these actors. In this episode, the civil population was the object of coercive measures to participate. The family was used as the focus of pressure, the

control of the population being obtained thanks to the participation of young women that had established relationships with members of the armed group.

> ... they came up to the young women to (****) and everything, for example when they were opposing the [creation of the zone], those in charge, those in control were those girls, ... they said that one member of each family had to go compulsorily there, ... and those that didn't go, they'd take them by force, and there was a series of threats. For example, I intended to not go down there, but I said: that is because I had been going through a crisis at that time, and I said 'I'm not going. Why should we go down there to support them?! I'm not going down.' And they came to my house and 'You, how many people are there in this house?' and I said 'there are four children, all minors and I am the only one to support them'. 'We need you to come down.' 'I'm not going, I can't go down, I've got to go to work. I'll have to ask permission.' 'It's compulsory that they give you time off', I said 'OK, I'll go there now, and ask for time off', and I went and hid myself where my mother is, and in half an hour another arrived at my mum's. And with this pressure I had to go. On arriving there it was very surprising, and one of the girls said, 'and you, why haven't you come down — do you want to mess about with us?'
>
> (GFNB)

The impact of the paramilitary presence on the life of the women and their families is enormous both in its private and its public aspects. It is worth noting that the completely arbitrary and imposed eruption of force within the intimate space of the home constitutes a threat to the right of intimacy that of course affects the family in a very profound way, generating strong tensions that don't appear to find a distinct place for elaborations other than in the private world itself.

> ... Well, in a change of authority that there was ... they have prohibited many things that they tried to make it a matter of principle when they came in. They would arrive and interfere with you: they came into the houses and who was going to tell them to leave, and you couldn't say anything because of who they were.
>
> (GFNB)

The manipulation of women as collaborators and the personal tensions that this gives rise to are covered in the following testimony:

> ... and they (those women) are those that most serve to carry information, they are those that bring and fetch. When you say that you are going tomorrow to [an organisation], for example, to them, the problem that they had in that house in [neighbourhood] and all that, for them the way of monitoring what happened with them it wasn't the men that went there to ask for things — that's to say they sent spies to [an organisation]. But in a very simple way, for example [an organisation] has grants for the children of the women from there that are with [a support group] so they went to request grants for their children, but only in order to see where it was based, it's the women.
>
> What makes one sad is this conflict in which we are living, in that the woman plays a role but doesn't know she's playing it. So she's being used, I don't know if she feels used.

> *She feels that she is surviving, that it's a way of being able to face up to one's family, in other words they aren't aware of the use that is being made of them. 'It's just that I have to find a way to make a living' ...*

<div align="right">(GFNB)</div>

The analyses that the women participants in the study contributed were particularly thought provoking in relation to the differences that they experienced in everyday life, firstly under the guerrillas and now under the paramilitaries. In addition, the participants analysed the transformations resulting over a period of time from the action of the paramilitaries.

> *What I find is that the guerrilla army didn't make links: at least I'd have to say, that they didn't make links with the family: the paracos yes — you understand? There was a participation of the men with the guerrillas but not the women or the children. Why is that? Because the work of the guerrilla group is more clandestine, because it means more risks in being public because the government and state don't permit it, [while] now with the paracos there certainly is the permissiveness from the others [government], so that facilitates the participation of the women and children.* INT: *What you are saying is: we are talking of three armed forces, the guerrillas, the paracos, but also we are talking about the army and the police, of the state; they also have had different behaviours ... in relation to the guerrillas and the AUC [paramilitaries].* PART: *No, the police and army don't hesitate to act against the guerrillas, but the police don't take any action against the paracos, it's an open road for them ... that's why it is less risky for the family, and the women participate in.*
>
> *On the other hand, it was more difficult — I'm not saying it didn't happen, I wouldn't go so far as to give details, I think that [an organisation] does have facts and figures about that, concerning women. What you find here is that even at times it is the women that participate most in the business of stealing the petrol, the women is the one who is always with the kids, while before you didn't see as much of that. It was [seen as] much more sinful, it wasn't that it didn't exist but it was more hidden. And the guerrillas didn't allow the children to be there, because for the child for whom it was seen that their parents gave them that freedom to be there with the petrol they'd have given them a thrashing and call their parents, and tell them — we don't want, we don't want any children in the chimbre[8] — , while now you see the whole family [involved]. That's why I say, the difference now is the nucleus that they want to affect, it doesn't matter to them, for example when they [paramilitaries] assign turns to go to the chimbre, it doesn't matter to them which member of the family goes. The others weren't able to organise like that, there were some who were favoured ... This would seem to be what they would say: there is more scope because they [paracos] have fewer problems, while the others [guerrillas] treated things less openly, more clandestinely ...*

<div align="right">(GFNB)</div>

As can be seen, the intervention of the armed actors, who control the urban areas involved in the study, uses the family and women as privileged spaces and subjects to achieve their objectives. The magnitude of the personal tensions stirred up within the family can hardly be imagined. The co-opting of the ethical conscience of the women,

when facing the need to survive, is resulting in a devastating loss of moral freedom at the family and societal levels.

The participation of the children in activities of family survival, controlled by an armed actor outside the law, is also generating a context of socialization in which the conception of a normative order based on legality has been eroded. The dominant militaristic norms, imposed by force of arms, annihilate the possibility of experiencing the minimum freedom necessary for the construction of an ethical conscience in new generations of Colombians. In the absence of a history that permits them to contrast a before and an after, they lack a point of reference by which to evaluate the significance of the loss of liberty as a brutal onslaught on their fundamental rights.

Instrumentalization of intrafamilial violence through the armed actors

In the structural context of a tradition of domestic violence so marked as that exposed here, it is not surprising that the armed sectors, in the intimate space of the family and of family relationships, should have reached as far as the mediation of internal conflicts, both between partners as well as for all other family relationships.

In effect, it could be said that the intervention of the armed actors has been articulated with the traditional patterns of domestic violence, instrumentalizing them, escalating their intensity and militarizing intrafamilial relations.

> ... a very grave problem in the neighbourhoods is that at the slightest quarrel or problem between neighbours or households, one [side] will call in the autodefensas[9] (lit. tr. throw the other to the autodefensas). 'Well I'm going to get the autodefensas onto you!' And they go and look for them, not only the husband, the neighbour, whoever might have the problem; they [paramilitaries] are the authority.

(GFNB)

In the process of gaining hegemonic control over the territories (in conjunction with the army), the strategies of the paramilitaries change over time. This is apparent in all the towns in the study. The strategies include a normative control of public and private [spheres] that has direct impact on the culture. Their intervention in the regulation of the way people live together is direct. Such regulation, in the private sphere, ends up being transformed into a form of domestic violence mediated by the intervention of the armed actor.

One of the conflicts of private life that, according to the research participants, the paramilitaries are trying to sort out is infidelity in marriage. It is important to consider that the way of settling these conflicts is through the application of solutions that threaten peoples' rights. Sanctions such as torture — tying up the accused woman — public ridicule — exhibiting the woman naked, tied up with a placard that says 'I am unfaithful to my husband', as much as being forced to clean the streets and public places, or domestic labour of all sorts — washing clothes and cooking for the troops — are all ways of intervening in marital conflicts.

What is noteworthy in the following quotation is how dialogue as a strategy of conflict resolution and the idea of 'applying correction' are made synonymous. In other words, 'dialogue' means any mode of communication in which each obtains the desired effect on the other:

> . . . in relation to life in the home and in their relationship with the husband, when there is unfaithfulness or something, they [the paramilitaries] punish them. INT: Infidelity of the woman against the man, or of the man against the woman? PART: The same, the same each way, but what is noticeable is on looking at these kinds of roles, I'd say because of what was told to mothers and fathers in school, people feel that they do come to impose order, and that they permit 'dialogue' in inverted commas: that they do permit it '. . . see that with them there certainly can be dialogue, with them there certainly will be corrective action'. For example, there is a [woman] that, for example they take her out, tie her up and put a placard on her back, saying 'I'm unfaithful to my husband', and they make her walk through the neighbourhood.
>
> (GFNB)

These armed actors are also intervening in a direct way in parent—child conflicts, assuming the responsibility for sanctions delegated by the parents. The expressions 'they were thrown out' or 'for the paramilitaries to throw someone out' suggest that a father or mother solicits their intervention and delegates to them the resolution of the conflict, which as has been seen, is represented exclusively as a punishment or a sanction. As will be analysed in detail below, these acts are very clear indicators of the penetration that the armed actors, as agents with authority to intervene in private life, are gaining in the moral conscience of the public. The people thereby lose abilities to exercise agency in the treatment of private conflicts.

> . . . our school isn't enclosed, so the children those who go to the afternoon session, in the morning they hang around together [during the break]. One day a mother went and threw them out and they [paramilitaries] took them to where all the neighbourhood throws its rubbish, they took them right from here. A place which is a rubbish dump. Then they made them clean all the streets round here.
>
> (GFNB)

A further area of problems in relationships is that between fathers and teenage daughters, particularly in reconstituted families in which it would be anticipated that authority is something to be negotiated, a matter always complicated and full of tensions. In this context very violent forms of militaristic delegation are found, which erode family ties. Violent sanctions by the armed protagonist over his daughters are acts whose cause is attributed socially in the first place to the behaviour of the teenagers. The delegation of conflict resolution makes evident the incompetence of the parents and the need for an external third party that in this case enacts domestic violence, [therefore] militarizing the relationship:

> In the [neighbourhood] there were several cases of girls who had stepfathers, that spent a lot of time in the street because their mother worked in the day. Well, the authority is paramilitary, and so the mother sought their help in controlling these girls so she doesn't

have problems. Well, of course they went to the houses and punished them horribly! Today it upset me to go to a school where a girl was crying because her feet hurt so much, and really they were very painful: great weals streaked with blood because she'd been beaten. In no way does this help the girl, because in fact it makes her more aggressive, spending more time in the street, and puts her against her mother and stepfather, and also because it was them that allowed this to happen ...

(GFNB)

Social traditions that facilitate violent action: towards a cultural critique

Going deeper into influences and dynamics of the armed conflict over the phenomena of domestic and gendered violence against women required and offered us the opportunity to characterize the structures of feeling of the cultural traditions themselves that maintain legitimacy and sustain personal identity.

To examine the impact of armed conflict on everyday family conflict in the localities strongly affected by this scourge implies an analysis of specific cultural strategies for the structuration and differentiation of subjectivity. The notion of cultural mechanism (Estrada, 2002), seems useful to us to understand the complex strategies by means of which not only is subjectivity structured, but also to understand that on locating places differentiated by power or no power, practices are legitimized that exacerbate the violent interactional dynamic.

From a perspective that reconstructs gender images and places them in relation to models and patterns of socialization, it is possible to analyse cultural strategies for the production of subjectivity. This enables the articulation of the invisible violence of the symbolic order of the culture with the violent practices that are activated in processes of socialization. This then allows us to understand the dialectic between these dimensions and the mechanisms of production and differentiation of subjectivity.

The processes of gender socialization, articulated with imagery of the same type, are so generalized and so naturalized in the culture that it seems legitimate and sensible to affirm that the armed actors are, in terms of their subjectivity, a possible construction in the context of our culture. They are the sons of this land that has obscured a cultural incompetence to express affection and establish deep affective bonds and that has become habituated to the vulnerability of human beings within the intimate dynamic of the family.

The influence of the armed conflict, and specifically the action of the paramilitaries in the localities under their control, is based on marking the transition from the guerrilla presence to paramilitary rule by generating terror and seeking its legitimization in the new territory through intervention in conflicts in the private sphere. This involves the militarization of those traditional family patterns of interaction, with their ancestrally violent dynamics.

Paramilitary intervention on the family and local neighbourhood dynamic brings some disastrous consequences such as the escalation of physical violence and the military resolution of interpersonal, family and marital conflicts. In addition, it

debilitates the psychological and social resources for self-resolution of conflict, something desirable in a modern society where the intervention of the state in private life should be the exception rather than the rule.

Control over private life that the paramilitaries exercise as part of the legitimation of their presence in the municipal sphere, penetrates the most intimate and personal dimensions of subjectivity. By means of symbolic acts of control of the people and dissemination of their own normative codes (euphemistically termed 'manuals for living together', they simultaneously generate a parallel set of norms that delegitimize the dominant constitutional framework. Every such episode reproduces gender images that contribute to the discipline of the female body and female sexuality and establish very tight boundaries to the transformation of a masculine and emotionally spent cultural model.

Such practices not only reify and inform the images of gender that naturalize domestic and interpersonal violence, but through paramilitary intervention they increase the levels of physical violence with which private conflicts (marital and parent−child) are dealt with. In this way a military logic is legitimated in the realm of private life, that undermines people's moral, social and emotional resources. Under its influence, and specifically through the power of terror, the population is seen to be forced to cede space to the armed actors in the most intimate aspects of family and personal life. The contradictions of the control of everyday space by the paramilitaries are articulated perversely in the lives of young women and children.

The familiarization of children with death and the lack of a cultural experience of an alternative political order, exercise a highly distorting socializing power over the new generations. The legitimation of the model of masculinity in the subcultures studied is a factor that contributes to the guaranteed perpetuation of violent interaction patterns as well as the war itself. This happens every time that male power is signified by the armed band, the only thing to which the new male generations appear to attribute credibility and effectiveness. The girls for their part prepare their identity as future companions of the fighters.

Other wider consequences of the presence of an illegal armed actor such as the paramilitaries in the local sphere highlight the disruption of the culture's moral order. Although also rooted in a history of illegality, the presence of the illegal armed actors undermines the moral resources of the population, given that their tolerance of illegality is demanded and their passive acceptance is required as a merely adaptive mechanism.

On the basis of this emergent analysis, and the conclusions drawn, this paper intends to contribute to the strengthening of a critical perspective on our Colombian culture, particularly in revealing the patterns of interaction particular to private life as characterized by coping, not only in violent contexts, but also through physically and psychologically violent actions. In this, it has the goal of seeking alternatives for its transformation, in obtaining new conditions for coexistence.

To do this we have used a social constructionist framework, adopting a cultural point of view to understand the dynamic emergence of meanings in those particular contexts from which the reconstruction of subjectivity could begin. This implied a non-reductionist psychosocial view that sought to contribute explanatory interpretations for some of the cultural patterns that facilitate and reproduce violent action and interaction on the everyday stage of public and private life.

Notes

1   This paper is based on the final report of a study for the Make Peace Policy of the Presidential Council for Social Policy, with the support of the Japanese Corporation JICA. The study was carried out by a team directed by the first author, which included the authors of this paper and Marcela Rodríguez Díaz (Universidad Javeriana, Bogotá) as co-researchers, and the students in the Master's degree in psychology at the Universidad de los Andes, and Teresa Salazar and Diana Potes as assistant researchers. Translation by Mark Burton and Carolina Ibarra. An early version was presented at the Fifth International Congreso de la Psicología Social de la Liberación, Guadalajara, Mexico, November 2002, and published in Spanish in *Revista de Estudios Sociales*, *15*, 133–149, 2003.

2   The codes which identify the quotations included in this paper correspond to the classification of field material, enabling both an adequate cataloguing as well as the preservation of anonymity of our informants.

3   This study developed a qualitative approach that focused on the following dimensions: a conception of knowledge that maintains emancipatory ideals, the use of a gendered perspective in the study of violence against women in the context of armed conflict, methodological criteria for work with women that makes use of the metaphor of conversation and emphasizes respect for the participants, and a model of qualitative analysis that seeks the construction of 'thick theory' from the voices of the others. Analysis made use of the NUD*IST software for qualitative analysis.

4   The transcription of the material and its systematic analysis followed the model of grounded theory (Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) allowed us to construct a point of view of the women that went beyond mere description, mediated by a coding process that allowed the construction of an increasingly wide analytic network.

5   In each town the voice of women of different ages was given priority. The study involved the participation of 47 female victims of intrafamilial violence and various levels of political violence, the majority linked with or served by organizations specializing in these problems. In the case of Turbo, the majority of the women were widows, some of whom had been forcibly displaced, or Afro-Colombian women from rural areas. In Barrancabermeja, the majority were community leaders, many displaced by political violence, who had personally, or through family background, a history of migration, in many cases linked to processes of colonization specific to the region. In Santander de Quilichao all the participants were indigenous women belonging to indigenous reserves in Cauca province. Finally in Puerto Asís, the participants were women, some in a situation of displacement and/or with family histories of migration linked with the process of colonization. Others were of indigenous origin.

6   Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia: paramilitary organization that accounts for the majority of the right-wing paramilitary groups.

7   FARC-EP: Fuerzas Armardas Revolucionarias de Colombia — Ejército Popular (Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces — People's Army), the largest left-wing guerrilla army in Colombia.

8   ELN: Ejército Nacional de la Liberación (National Liberation Army), the second largest (after the FARC) of the leftist guerrilla armies in Colombia.

9   Chimbre: perforation along the pipeline to steal petrol.
10   Another term for the paramilitaries of the AUC.

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