

Rural Women in Colombia From Victims to Actors

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TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMNUCIC	Association of Peasant, Black and Indigenous Women's
CGR	Comptroller General of the Republic
CVIH	Centre for Historical Memory
CNRR	National Commission for Reparation and Reconciliation
CONPES	Council for Economic and Social Policy
DANE	National Department of Statistics
DAWN	Development Alternatives with Women in a New Era
DNP	National Planning Department
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
ELN	National Liberation Army
ENUT	National Survey on the Use of Time
FARC	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
GBVAW	Gender-Based Violence Against Women
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IMP	Women for Peace Initiative
LGTBI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual and Intersex
RUV	Unified Victim Registry

INTRODUCTION

The Colombian conflict is frequently described as complex, long-lasting, and therefore, difficult to define in simple words. Even now, when the peace process advances shifting between successes and failures, analysts still have very different interpretations of its causes and dimension, as well as of the costs of the war and the benefits of peace. However, there is no dissent concerning women's situation in the armed conflict. In this aspect, Colombia seems to follow the book; their experience is strikingly similar that of women in other wars around the world. Negative gender bias on female war victims, on their contribution, the costs they have assumed, their new roles, and certainly, their needed but often ignored involvement both in war and peace are part of the universal inequality that prevails all over the world between women and men. Nevertheless, a deeper analysis of this conflict allows to identify specificities of women's participation in the Colombian case.

Stewart [2010b] reviews the numerous and complex ways in which women engage in and are affected by armed conflicts. These are often ignored by analysts, who limit their view to the role of women as a *weapon of war*, and referring almost exclusively to the sexual abuses they are subjected to. The economic, social, and political conditions in which women live are usually set aside under the covert hypothesis that they play a minimal role in their societies.

Many documents have been written about this nation's armed conflict, not only by Colombians but also by international experts. But only a few —not even those written by women's organizations— analyze the intrinsic causes of *gender-based violence* in the armed confrontation. They diligently describe violence within the traditional definition of *sexual violence* —rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, etc.—. Although some research recognizes that women play a very important and sometimes unrecognized role, very few consider *Gender-Based Violence Against Women* (GBVAW) in its widest conception. In consequence, they overlook economic, social, political, and cultural aspects related with the situation of women in war.

Therefore, throughout the peace process with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)¹ and the beginning stage of the dialogues with the National Liberation Army (ELN),² it is difficult to understand why women barely partook in the negotiations despite representing 50% plus of the victims; thus, female leaders are absent from the front line of post conflict actions, or are marginally included in follow-up and evaluation



¹ The FARC is known as a leftist guerrilla group founded in 1964, and as the largest insurgency in the country.

² The ELN is a Marxist guerrilla group, the second largest in Colombia.

of this accord's³ implementation. Their absence comes as a product of systematic disregard for their importance during the conflict, the role they can play during transition from war to post conflict, and their potential contribution to peace.

The main hypothesis of this chapter is that only when widening the spectrum of analysis of violence against women in the middle of the Colombian conflict, and only if including the nation's economic, social, and political factors of the time, can one determine the costs for these women and their contributions to peacebuilding during the war. Only then, will GBVAW be fully understood and women's role in the conflict will be truly valued. Thus, it is key to identify all the roles females played during the conflict as combatants, civilians, victims, and even perpetrators.

One of the most significant conclusions of this research is that Colombian women are not only victims —as they are exclusively considered—, but in fact, crucial actors within the conflict. A role that may also be unknown in other armed conflicts around the world, given that the most outstanding similarity in all of them is the historical underestimation of women's situation.

Unquestionably, a key deduction is that only when adding the GBVAW's Political Economy perspective —which entails a broader analysis that includes economic, political, and social variables that may lead to violence— a better understanding of gender violence is achieved not only during conflict, but in times of peace.

This chapter has been organized in six sections. After this introduction, section two will summarize the main characteristics of the Colombian conflict; section three is an analysis of the role of men and their contribution to GBVAW in Colombia; section four analyzes the role of women as actors and victims; the fifth refers to the *Political Economy of Violence Against Women* in this nation's conflict; the sixth discusses the role of women in the peace process; and the seventh presents final thoughts on this important issue.



³ The *Peace Accord* is how this study will reference the 2016 peace agreement signed between the Colombian Government and the FARC. The 310-page document was initially rejected by a popular vote in October 2016, after which, the government invited opposition parties to weigh-in on its content. Some changes were accepted by FARC and the final text was signed by the parties, and ratified by Congress in November 2016. The *Peace Accord* includes a series of compromises for reforms on land, political participation, anti-drug policies, and other points. A six-person committee is in charge of supervising compliance; only one member is a woman. However, the committee has publicly stated that they will permanently consult women's organizations in order to guarantee the reforms will incorporate women's needs [El Espectador 2016].

THE COLOMBIAN CONFLICT IN A NUT SHELL

Amidst the worldwide coverage on the newly signed Peace Accord with the FARC, Colombia began its long walk towards peace with few focusing on truly understanding the war's context, its roots, its actors, or how deeply all its facets hurt Colombians, and especially how it impacted women. Interestingly enough, they are not alone for the "Colombian Society has not established a consensus on the nature and origins of the armed conflict" [González 2004, 11]. What seems to be indisputable is that it is long, very complex, ever-changing, and with so many actors it is difficult to grasp.

Colombians still struggle through "the intricacies of a sixty-year-old internal conflict where drug trafficking and terrorism act as one, where a significant change in values of the population goes hand in hand with government corruption, with countless national and international actors involved, and with considerable economic and political interests at play... issues never seen all at once in the history of any other country" [Cueter 2015, 24]. All key reasons to appreciate the hard road ahead for peace in Colombia, one where women will play a definite role towards its future sustainability. Therefore, to fully contribute to this new-born peace, one must begin by understanding the past.

WHEN DID IT ALL REALLY BEGIN?

Perhaps one of the most controversial issues surrounding the conflict is on when it started. A central factor for only through precise timing, the reasons behind the war can be identified and truly resolved [Call 2012]. Moreover, to understand this country, one must start off by recognizing the violent nature of Colombia's past. For instance, the XIX century was characterized by numerous civil wars between the Liberal and Conservative¹ political elites. In fact, the transition to the twentieth century endured the *War of a Thousand Days* (1899-1903) where the "economic malaise and dissension within the Conservative camp emboldened Liberals to launch another uprising [that] lasted three years..." [Library of Congress 2013, 34]. Independent of that history, today, most believe that Colombia's current war lasted fifty years, while few others uphold that it is rather a sixty-year conflict. Neither is correct, for the latter links the beginning of the war to the founding of the FARC (1964) as a revolutionary communist group, and the former associates it to the end of *La Violencia* (1948-1958).

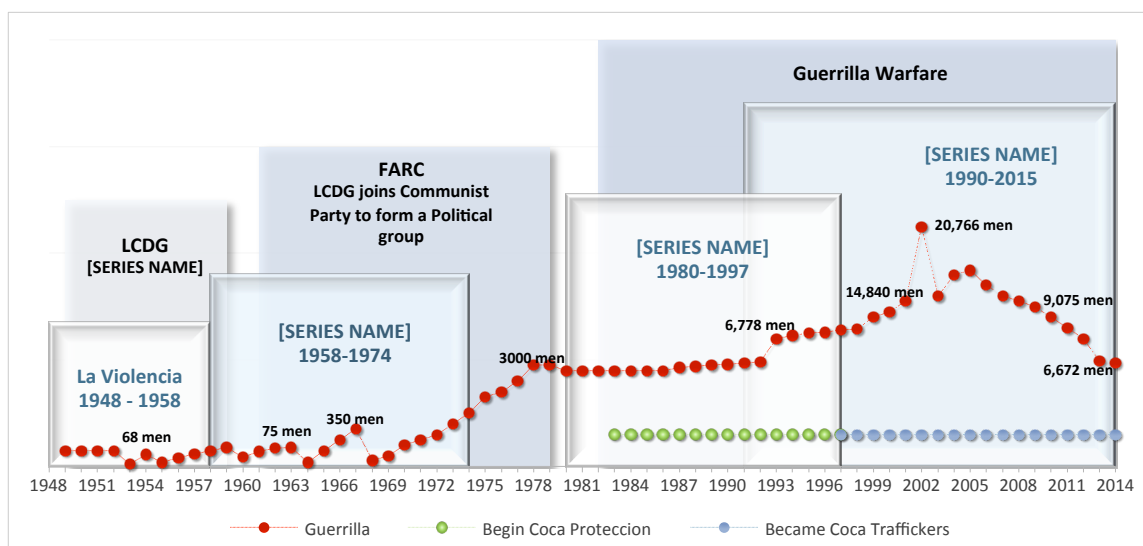
The truth is that guerrilla groups in Colombia arose as a result of the ferocious attacks by *Chulavitas*, the Ospina Perez Conservative Government's secret Military Police squads, which gave birth to *La Violencia*. To face them, simple Liberal peasants joined forces, and armed themselves to protect their communities and lands; but they were not guerrilla groups per se. Guzmán Campos et al. [1962, 405] describes this period as "... a time of

¹ To help the reader realize the political confrontation among parties, the Colombian Liberal party resembles the American Democratic Party and the Conservative is ideologically close to the Republican party.

bipartisan cruelty where violence became a social process; where political elites ... eliminated those who disagreed with their views." This war, the first seed of the current conflict, ended as most modern wars end today, through the signing of a Peace Agreement between the parties in conflict. An agreement that few recognize as a peace treaty, Frente Nacional (1958-1974), signed by the Conservative, and Liberal political leaders, who bluntly agreed to share power for sixteen years, excluding any other ideology from even participating in the political arena.

Cueter [2015, 19] believes that during that time, "the actions of Conservative and Liberal elites, supported by the Catholic Church, turned violence into a social process that abandoned traditional moral values —such as the respect for human life, freedom of expression and ideology, and all those principles that are required in civilized societies— just to remain in power; ... politics became a weapon of war to justify mass murders as the Military Forces of the nation executed the orders coming from the highest ranks of the Colombian Government."

FIGURE 1. THE FARC'S PRESENCE THROUGH COLOMBIA'S RECENT HISTORY



Source: Cueter [2015]

A time highly influenced by the American Cold War against communism, where the ideology was marginalized at any cost, all around the world. It was no different in Colombia. Despite President Lleras Camargo (1958-1962) turning Liberal peasant armed groups into rural military police during the first *Frente Nacional* government; under the Conservative rule of Guillermo León Valencia (1962-1966), a ruthless attack by 16,000 American and Colombian soldiers devastated Marquetalia, the town where the entire combatant leftist group resided, a total of fifty men and two women [Verdad Abierta 2013]. The five survivors fled to return a few months later, fully armed, and with as many as seventy-five men, to announce their newly formed revolutionary forces group named the FARC. The year was 1964 (Figure 1).

When looking into the violent past of this tortured nation, one thing becomes clear. *Political Exclusion* has been and continues to be at the center of Colombia's politics. It all boils down to the efforts of the party in power to exclude any other; a characteristic that still prevails today. Therefore, indicating that the Colombian war is ongoing for either sixty or fifty years is incorrect for it is imperative to remember here that, [1] "political exclusion and governmental persecution of an ideology does not mean the country is at war" [Cueter 2015, 190], and [2] those dates fall within the timeframe of *Frente Nacional*, a peace process that lasted sixteen years. *Political Exclusion* is not commonly used to explain why peace has been more an exception than the rule in Colombia. Given this important misjudgment, it would be a mistake to undermine other historical facts that prove the malleable nature of the nation's conflict, and therefore, the vastly different roots fueling this ever-changing war.

Soon after their announcement, the newly named the FARC seemed to disappear from the face of the land for there are no known or registered acts of war from 1968 to the beginning of the 1980s. The reason for their believed demise was a lack of funds coming from communist countries that supported this kind of revolutionary forces. Yet in 1982, the FARC came back stronger than ever, with 3,000 men in their ranks, and ready to take on the Colombian Military. However, the reason was no longer an ideological difference but rather the need to guard its financier's business, drug trafficking, and its valuable routes out of the country. From this moment on, protecting coca routes became the reason behind their survival and newfound strength. A different conflict was then born; one no longer political, but rather financially motivated, that lasted thirty-five years. This change in the conflict is better known around the world, and there is general consensus as to when it began and why [Cueter 2015].

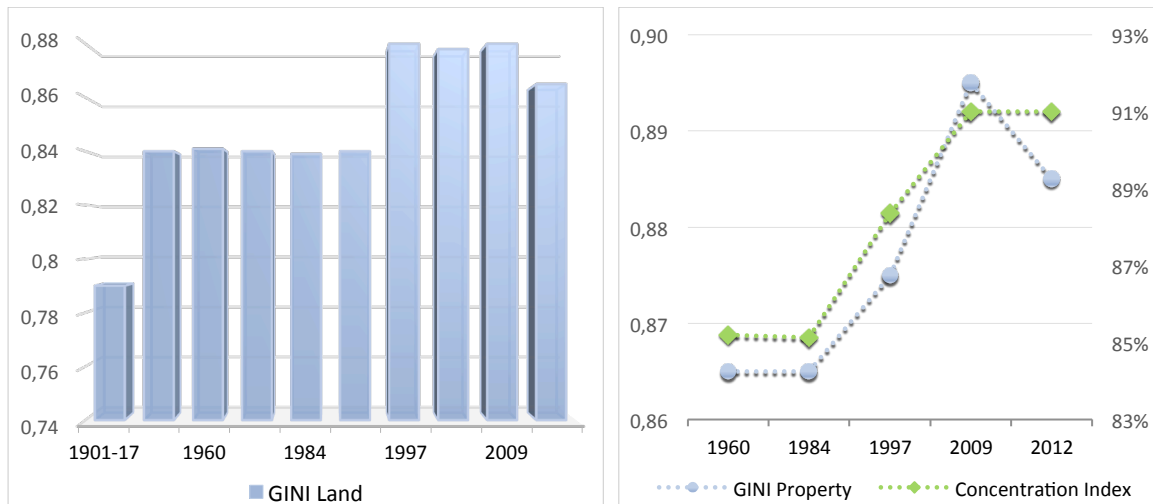
While identifying the different stages of the Colombian conflicts, it becomes clear that the most coherent explanation for why it is so difficult to agree on when the war began rests in one constant actor throughout different historical moments of violence in the country: guerrilla groups. Very few see the changing nature and characteristics behind the actions of the guerrilla, and even less so, the changes within this group that went from Liberal armed peasants, to rural military police for the government, to finally, a revolutionary group that survived thanks to drug trafficking.

Analyses from other experts add fuel to the confusion for some truly believe disparity within the Colombian society is a determinant of the confrontation. "Inequality is a widely-cited cause of the Colombian conflict, from economists and academics in international institutions to the average Colombian" [Colombia Reports 2015b]. Furthermore, because the rural areas are the war's battle ground, land is considered the root behind the long-lasting war.

For instance, Stewart [2002, 9] believes that, "... land is of huge importance where

agriculture accounts for most output and employment, but gets less important as development proceeds," further emphasizing that access to land is not only imperative to the welfare and sustainability of individuals and their social group, but most importantly, that such disparity can contribute to prolonging a conflict. Although her theory seems to apply to Colombia, long before the start of the conflict, in 1901-1917, the Gini index for *land ownership* was exceptionally high, and remained in similar levels until 1984 (Graph 1). Therefore, the barely modified Gini Land contests that belief. On the other hand, to refute that rural land is always in the middle of all debates in the country is a travesty; but a few myths as to the reasons why it is not central to the conflict must be debunked. To begin with, inequality and land concentration in the hands of very few are characteristics intrinsic to Colombia from the beginning of time, yet not the cause of the conflict. A bold statement by any standard; one that will be realized by grasping the behavior behind the actions of key factions at the core of this war.

GRAPH 1. EVOLUTION OF LAND OWNERSHIP IN COLOMBIA 1910-2012



Source: Cueter [2015]

"The answer is in differentiating *land ownership* from *territorial control*. The lack of State presence gave guerrillas unrestricted access over its baldios, but those lands still belong to the State. In the same way, guerrilla, and paramilitary groups exerted *territorial control* over vast extensions of land; their reason to do so was not land appropriation but safe passage for cocaine shipments. Constant military pressure forced both groups to shift coca routes often to evade raids. *Land ownership* was detrimental to their goal of moving swiftly and safely from one area to the next. Their need for *territorial control*, however, is what truly ignited the ongoing conflict" [Cueter 2015, 192].

WHO IS FIGHTING WHOM?

A very simplistic and generalized approach establishes that the enemy in the Colombian war is only one, the guerrilla, all of them. The good guys are also one, the Colombian Military Forces. Yet another misconception that hides the reasons behind the pain of

many. Crandall [1999, 223] correctly claims that, "even those who make a career out of tracking events in this Andean country are often unable to clearly differentiate between the currently active belligerent groups, let alone their goals, funding sources, and degree of popular support." That is why, perhaps one of the most difficult issues to grasp in this conflict is not only the role of the multitude of actors involved, but especially, how each of them swiftly shifted from friend to enemy and back, depending on the geographical location or social status of who is asked. Interestingly enough, they all share one characteristic, the number of victims they left behind.

A key and somehow unrecognized perpetrator in this war is the Colombian Military. From the times of La Violencia when the Ospina Perez Government formed secret military police groups to defeat Liberal peasants, to the second stage of this long-lasting war when the enemy became the drug-route protecting guerrillas, victims recount that Military Forces also perpetrated heinous crimes against the rural population without valid reasons or given explanations.

However, the most ruthless group emerges when important sectors of the elites, including multinational corporations, chose to finance paramilitary forces to protect their lands and activities from guerrilla's tax, or to avoid kidnappings. The hidden truth is that paramilitary groups are even older than the oldest guerrilla in the world since throughout time, these private guns for hire have adopted different names and territory, yet who they protect, and the cruel methods used to control the population changed very little.

Clearly establishing that the guerrilla is not the only enemy in this war, is paramount to fully understanding violence against women in the Colombian conflict for they endured cruelty and different forms of brutality at the hands of at least two other armed forces. Therefore, given the unspoken differences and relationships between these three-armed groups, this study will split them into two specific groups of GBVAW perpetrators. The Military Forces and the paramilitary shared their support for the establishment, but most importantly, it is in their action where patriarchal values are most prominent. In contrast, the guerrilla not only opposed the government but promoted a more gender equalitarian speech, not always supported by their actions.

PATRIARCHAL MEN, FACELESS WOMEN

The meaning of patriarchal social structures takes an entire new dimension when it comes to the Colombian rural areas. Historically, as in many other places around the world, in rural Colombia men are providers and women caregivers. Nothing novel in that statement. Yet two new elements unrelated to the conflict are intrinsic to ordinary living in those faraway lands. The first one is the unusual levels of intrafamilial violence that became a norm for most *campesinas*.¹ The second one is the government; its laws, social and economic policies, and its institutions' narrow-minded understanding of patriarchal values.

The extremely common intrafamilial violence that exists in rural homes, is definitely systematic, and effected in private, behind closed doors. Unfortunately, from a very young age, rural women withstand some form of physical transgression from fathers, brothers, husbands or other known males [INML 2015]. Hence, in their minds, the abuse they receive is somehow normal, a lesser kind of violence; one that nonetheless creates angst and does not provide a space to deal with the physical or mental consequences. In its own, this acceptance is already quite serious, however, when the second element enters these scenarios, the lives of rural women become even more invisible and their pain non-existent.

Up until 1988, rural women could not own land by themselves. Law 30 of that year established that although women could not be sole proprietors of any rural land, their names could be added to a parcel's deed next to their husbands' name as co-owners of the said plot [Senado de la República 1988]. To make matters worse, despite existing policies and laws to facilitate women's production, in reality, the institution's rarely —if ever— facilitate women's economic activities in those areas. As such, loans are given to men, not women, technical assistance ignores the possibility that women may also require it and may be interested in getting it, etc. In others words, rural institutions are as patriarchal as rural men. For these reasons, "Colombian rural women are the poorest of the poor in the country" [López M. 2011]. Furthermore, much like economic strategies, public social policies also emphasize the role of women as weak and defenseless caregivers *who cannot fend for themselves without their men*, while simultaneously reinforcing men's role as needed protectors. As a result, very few rural women are in the agricultural sector (See Annex A), but rather performing the most basic and limited informal services [DNP 2015].

This entire context becomes incredibly relevant to understand GBVAW in times of conflict not only because women arrive to the conflict vulnerable and as easy targets for perpetrators, independent of who is that armed group. However, in Colombia, rural

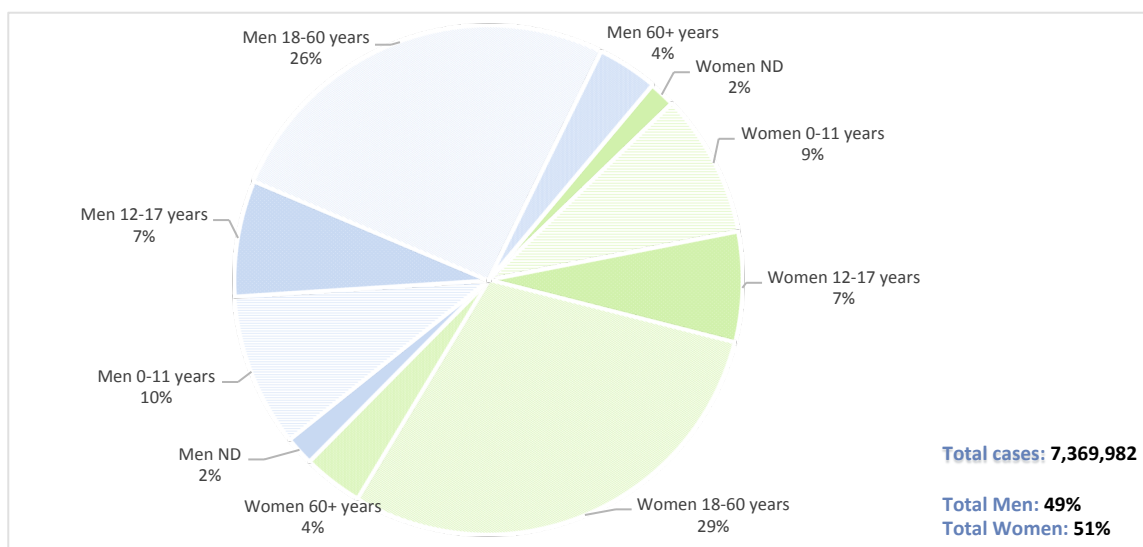
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¹ For ease of reading this study will indiscriminately use the term *campesinas* in reference to *rural women*; therefore, both terms should be understood as referring to the same group of women.

women are not weak, and they are not targeted simply because they are women or casual bystanders. Unlike in other conflicts, these *campesinas* are the most efficient weapon available to destroy their patriarchal men and communities [Acosta H. 2015, 217]. Another seemingly bold statement, yet one that can be easily explained. Albeit rural men are also perpetrators at home, the vital characteristic of their masculinity is their role as protectors. Their inability to stop public acts of GBVAW against their women, in front of their entire community, destroys their male ego, and their masculinity. In essence, from respected protectors they coward becoming weak, and worthless. Legal and illegal armed forces understood early on that women are the *Achilles Heel* of rural men. As such, to take control of entire areas of the country, all they had to do was to publicly expose how feeble and unable to protect their women men were. That is how Colombian rural women became reliable and effective *weapons of war*, the only one capable of destroying men's masculinity and pride. Many figures of the conflict prove this theory, among them the equal participation of men and women in displacement, and receptors of threats.

RURAL WOMEN, THE EPICENTER OF A WAR?

Perhaps one of the better known and most bewildering tragedies in Colombia is the immense number of internally displaced people as a result of the war. Almost seven million affected, making Colombia's the second largest internally displaced population in the world [NRC 2015]. However, according to the Registro Único de Víctimas (RUV) [2017], women account for 51.3% of the total displaced population, a small difference with regards to men, and not enough to speak about a systematic persecution against civilian women nor to consider displacement a GBVAW crime.

GRAPH 2. FORCED DISPLACEMENT BY GENDER AND AGE, 1985-MARCH 2017

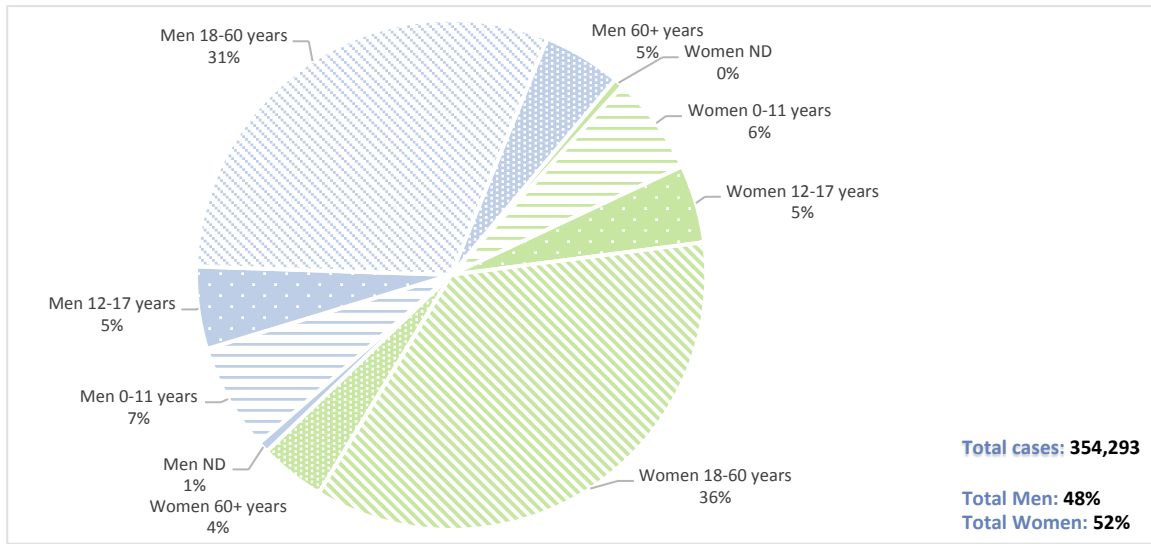


Source: Registro Único de Víctimas RUV [2017]

Some analysts argue that the larger percentage of displaced women is a consequence of men being killed by one of the victimizer groups, yet the variance between genders, 1.4

pp, counters the belief, indicating that other underlying factors are behind displacement figures. In fact, age disaggregation of the displaced population categorically evidences that entire families, as a group, were forced to leave it all behind to flee violent areas affected by the war (Graph 2).

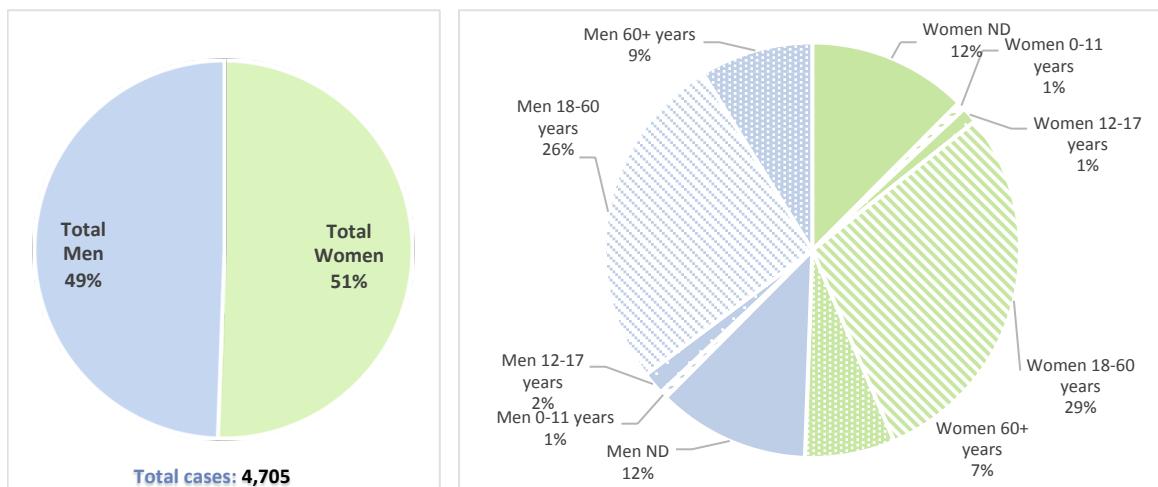
GRAPH 3. THREATS BY GENDER, 1985 TO MARCH 2017



Source: RUV [2017]

In search for an explanation, *Threats* became a key victimizing factor for it may be linked to familial displacement (Graph 3). Although men and women were threatened in seemingly even proportions, the gigantic number of reported displacement cases compared to the rather small number of reported threats shuts down the former as a viable cause for the latter [CGR2015].

GRAPH 4. LAND DISPOSSESSION BY GENDER, 1985 TO MARCH 2017

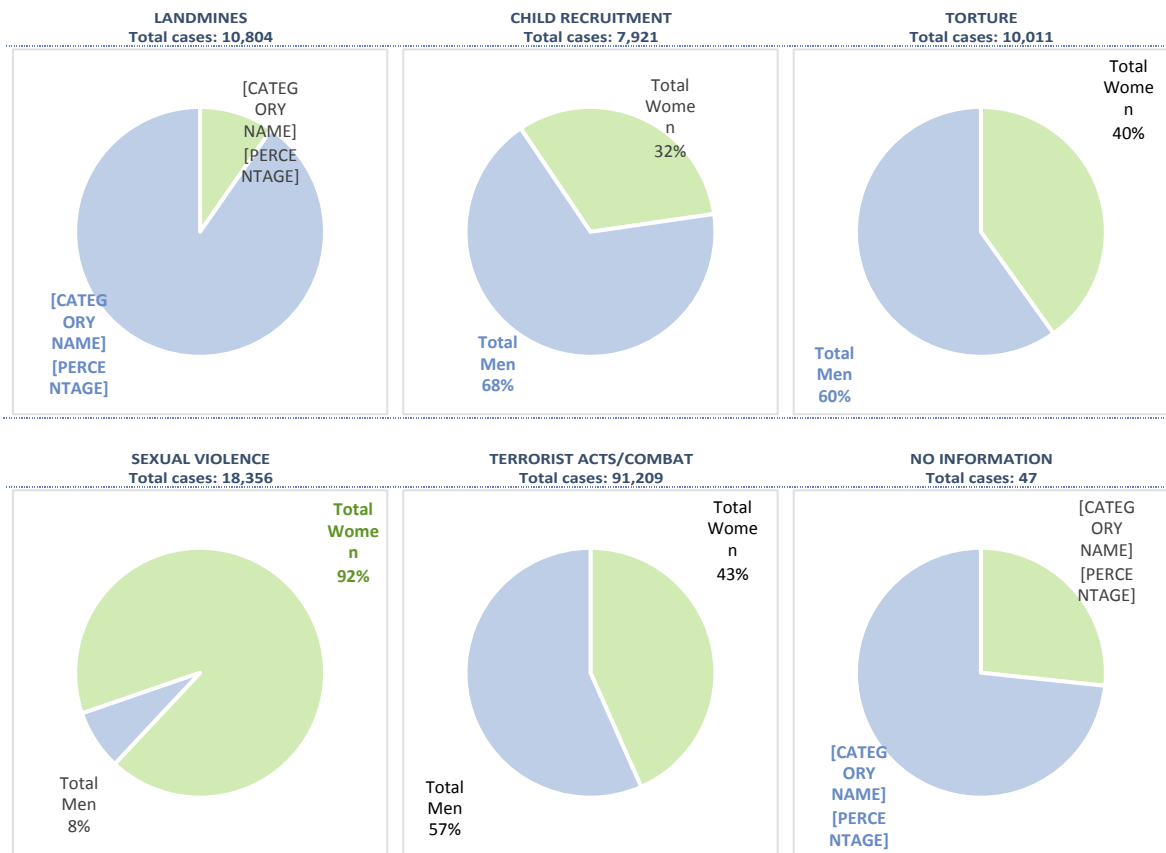


Source: RUV [2017]

This pattern repeats itself when looking at *land dispossession* figures by gender (Graph 4) as a reason for displacement. In this comparison, the extremely low number of *land*

dispossession reports versus the high displacement unequivocally confirms that land is not at the root of the conflict. These 4,705 reported cases highlight one of Colombia's oldest problems: the informal access to land prevailing and the well-documented lack of land titles in rural areas. Therefore, once again, how can it be a conflict for land when *land ownership* cannot be proven or is clearly in the hands of wealthy landowners who do have deeds for their possessions, whether legally or illegally acquired?

GRAPH 5. OTHER VICTIMIZING ACTS BY GENDER, 1985 TO MARCH 2017



Source: RUV [2017]

The same phenomenon perseveres throughout all other victimizing factors,² unambiguously proving that men and women suffered as much, except in four types of factors: [1] men endured more IED related injuries, [2] torture, and [3] forced recruitment. However, when it comes to [4] *sexual violence* in all its forms, the crimes were primarily and explicitly perpetrated against women (Graph 5).

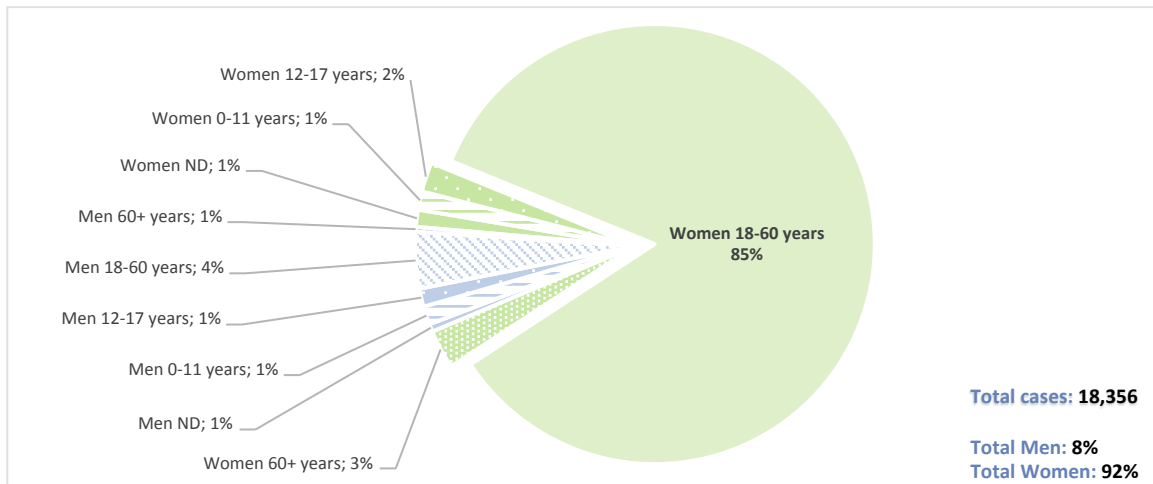
Perhaps the most important caveat that must be noted here is that in Colombia the understanding of *gender-based violence* is limited to *sexual violence* and associated acts. As a consequence of this short-sided view, and given the way in which data is collected,

² Information on homicides, forced disappearances, and kidnappings is available, but this research is unable to use it because the *Victim Registry* includes both direct and indirect victims for these three victimizing factors. For instance, there are 166,592 victims of forced disappearance; a figure that includes both those forcibly disappeared (direct victims) as well as those within their family circle (indirect victims). Similarly, the Registry does not provide further data on the indirect victims' gender.

the figures used in this section are limited to statistics related to acts of *sexual violence* and exclude others that may fit into the broader definition.

It should surprise no one that in a war with too many armed groups, most of them with strong patriarchal views, rural women account for 92% of all sexual crimes recorded as a result of the conflict (Graph 6). Of those, only 1% are girls ages 0-11 and 2% ages 12-17.³

GRAPH 6. SEXUAL VIOLENCE BY GENDER, 1985 TO MARCH 2017



Source: Registro Único de Víctimas (RUV) [2017]

More often than not —a key caveat that affects recorded statistics—, rural women victims of *sexual violence* do not report the crime, nor undergo medical or psychological treatment to overcome the grueling experience [Corte Constitucional 2015]. Colombia's *sexual violence* against women is intrinsic to the culture and not just derived from war. That is why, in many cases, not only are *campesinas* blamed for the abuse if they choose to report it, but the perpetrator expects that they continue complying with their *sexual duties*. In fact, this cultural bias is so widespread that Colombian Human's Rights Ombudsman reported that in Cartagena, GBVAW is a generalized practice, not necessarily linked to the conflict, but that takes advantage of the idea that a woman's body is an object that belongs to men [UNSC 2012, 6].

It should be no surprise that UN Women [2012] corroborates the use this type of violence as a low-cost, highly effective weapon against civilians of by armed groups. A loose generalization that not only lumps all victimizers into one group, clearly veiling the extent of the horrific acts of violence against rural women, but most importantly, one that overtly conceals how and why women shifted from victims to actors in this conflict.

According to the Prosecutor General, 45.8% of *sexual violence* cases are caused by paramilitary offenders, with 19.4% committed by public forces, and 8.5% by the guerrillas

³ The legal age for marriage with parental consent and the nation's sexual consent age is 14 years old. However, the range structure used in the collection of data caps the definition of girls at 11 years old. Therefore, for this analysis, girls will be split into ages 0-11 and 12-17.

[Colombia Reports 2015a]. The staggering difference of *sexual violence* cases perpetrated by each armed group indicates discerning motifs and *modus operandi*.

Unquestionably, paramilitary forces used diverse forms of *sexual violence* against women. Chief among them where rape as mere form of pleasure, to punish those who disobeyed the backward rules they imposed, or to make an example of those who dare stick their neck out to lead other women. All despicable crimes that cannot be ignored, but that must be set temporarily aside in order to disentangle the purpose behind their practice. This illegal group was traditionally associated to multinational corporations, to wealthy landowners, to the extreme right ideology, but also, to archaic values on the roles of men and women in society. Therefore, rather than seeing men as providers and women as caregivers, paramilitaries redefined those roles as protectors —the men— and as the protected. With that idea in mind, commanders realized very early on that women were a very effective weapon to debilitate their male enemies, to assert control over entire communities, or the perfect tool to heighten cohesion and ferociousness within their troops. In essence, for paramilitaries, *sexual violence* was a method and women the tool to enforce it. There was also a difference in the type and degree of *sexual violence* they perpetrated. In towns considered their own, commanders clearly divided women between mothers and prostitutes. The former raped to procreate, and the latter sterilized, raped, and then, forced into prostitution to satisfy lower rank members of the troop. Their viciousness and cruelty moved their chauvinism to pure misogyny when their method was employed against their enemy. The adversaries' women were not only gang-raped, but especially subjected to physical mutilation, disfigurement, dismemberment, and in many cases, slow painful deaths witnessed by their loved ones [Corte Constitucional 2015].

However, paramilitaries where not alone in that type of behavior. Reports on the Colombian Military Forces using *sexual violence* against civilians keeps rising in numbers. In most cases, it appears to be perpetrated against women deemed complicit with guerrilla groups. Colombia's forensic authority confirms that in over 50% of the 219 rape cases officially reported between 2008 and 2010, victims indicated that the offender was either a police officer or an army soldier [Ibid.]. Surprisingly, not all soldiers are Colombian, for fifty-three girls came forward to report being sexually abused by US Military personnel stationed in Melgar, a small town near Bogotá [Time 2015]. Independently of the degree of violence used, sexual attacks by these soldiers are conclusively more harmful and damaging for women, for these men represent the highest authority; men that once vowed to protect civilians with their own life. Their sexual abuse has deeper connotations as well for it increases a woman's vulnerability and fear, quickly equating the transgression with having no one left to protect or defend their lives. Perhaps the most important reason to explain why *sexual violence* at the hands of Military Forces is a crime still rarely reported; never mind that the brutal wrongdoing also counts with plenty of powerful influences trying to keep it under wraps.

When looking into the actions of guerrilla forces against civilian women, the findings are unexpected. The reports on *sexual violence* attributed to the group are isolated cases and do not follow any specific pattern or reason. Unlike other groups, guerrillas did not "use *sexual violence* to impose social and territorial control over everyday activities of women" [CNMH 2013]. Nonetheless, the lesser actions against civilian women does not mean the FARC was blameless when it came to GBVAW crimes.

Most studies that look into *sexual violence* crimes by the guerrilla groups, point to women in their ranks as the victims of their abuse, a fact that brings about some very interesting questions. What protected civilian women from *sexual violence* from the FARC? Perhaps the answer is in the 40% female combatants living with males in a supposedly more gender equalitarian armed force, the only one that incorporated women. The answer may be twofold. In one hand, freedom of sex helped maintain discipline within their troops. On the other, given that *guerrilleras* were charged with the relationship with communities, to partake, condone, or ignore *sexual violence* against civilian women would jeopardize that role. Can this mean that having women be part of a combatant group in a war softens the traditional *sexual abuse* endured by civilian women? Perhaps.

A question worth investigating, but then again, one that should not deviate attention from the fact that *gender violence* is a fact in the Colombian war. Notwithstanding that GBVAW was already deeply ingrained in Colombian society before the start of the conflict, what changed during the war was that the phenomenon moved from being a private family matter to become part of the public sphere, a successful technique to instill fear and to reassert power over entire towns. Then again, the violence against *campesinas* or their condition as *victims* should not take precedence over the important role they played to introduce long-lasting change for all Colombian women.

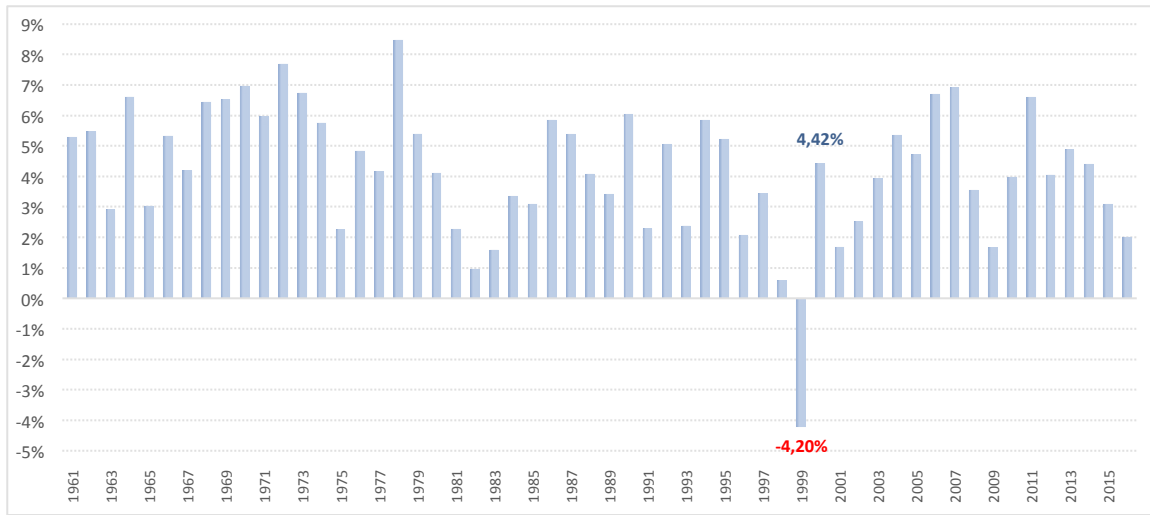
THE GAMES MEN PLAY

Gates et al. [2012, 1720] believes that, "conflict has clear detrimental effects on the poverty, hunger, or primary education, on the reduction of child mortality, and on access to potable water." However, unlike in any other war, Colombia's economic behavior throughout those years is paradoxical for this nation's economy experienced continuous economic growth (Graph 7), except for one year [BanRep 2016].⁴ But it does not stop just in terms of macroeconomic indicators for social advances were significant as well, even in the rural sector where poverty decreased from 61.7% in 2002 to 38% in 2016 [DANE 2017a]. This does not mean that the different facets of this long period of confrontation did not affect development in the country because it definitely did. Perhaps the most noticeable economic impact is the evident widening of the rural-urban gap, which speaks directly to how much faster urban centers developed and grew not having to battle with ferocious

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⁴ In the year 1999, Colombia's GDP fell by 4.2% [BanRep 2016].

actors threatening the livelihood of urban Colombians.

GRAPH 7. COLOMBIAN GDP GROWTH, 1961-2016



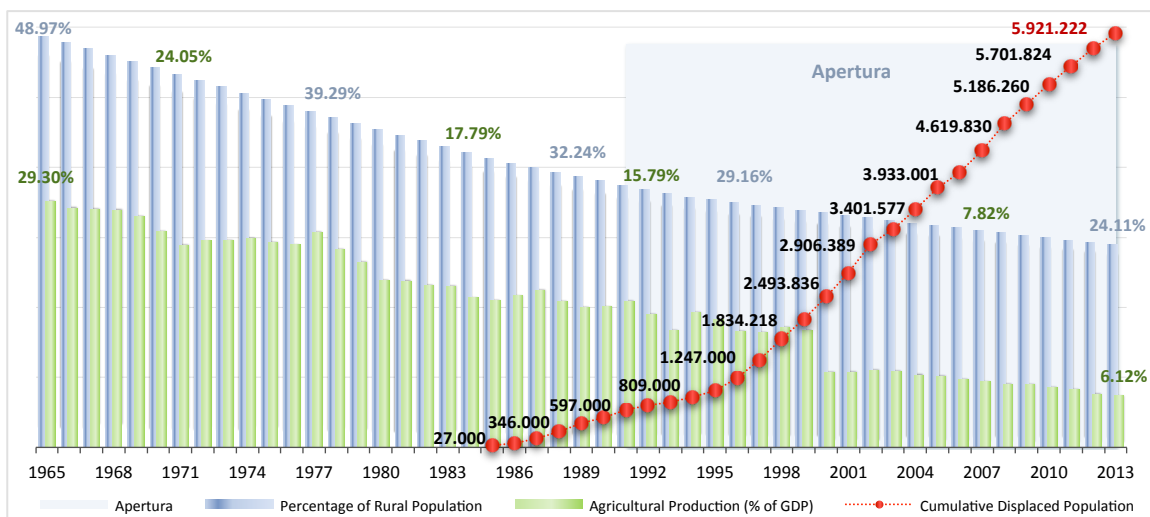
Source: TWB [2016] and DANE [2017b]

Nonetheless, to place all the blame for the rural sector's deficits only and exclusively on the war is simplistic. The truth is that two economic decisions joined forces with the conflict and these are equally at fault for the devastation endured by the population living in rural Colombia. More importantly, those influences were key contributors to the worst period of GBVAW this nation has ever seen.

AGRIBUSINESS WEAKENED RURAL MEN'S MASCULINITY

Cueter [2015] explains that "globalization touches the heart of the conflict [for] the 1990 *Apertura*, the country's globalization initiative, was a process that forced Colombia out of its self-contained economy into the open market."

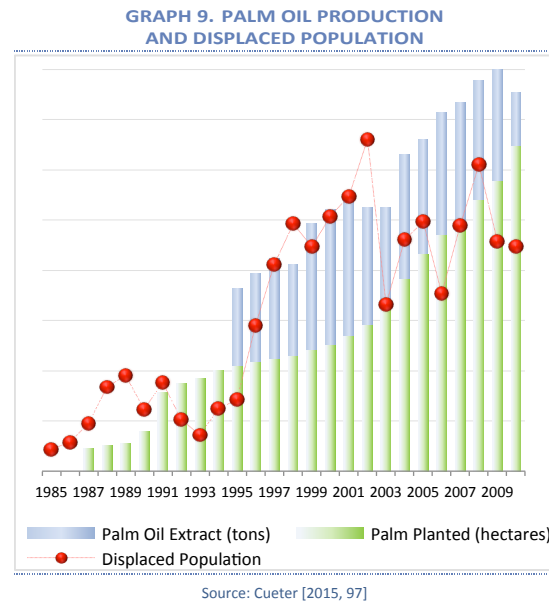
GRAPH 8. GLOBALIZATION JOINS THE CONFLICT IN THE COLOMBIAN RURAL SECTOR, 1965-2013



Source: Cueter [2015, 94]

Following Washington Consensus doctrines, President Gaviria (1990-1994) completely ignored the realities faced by the productive base of the country when implementing a rather quick and unplanned *Apertura*. He grossly underestimated the difficulties for small campesino production who failed to compete when confronted with low-priced-food imports invading national markets. Up until the 1990s, 60% of Colombians vegetables and fruits national demand was provided by this sector [DNP 2014, 14]. The result was devastating. During its first years, one million hectares worked by small producers were lost while large-scale agriculture spread over the land peasants lost.

Although imperceptible to most, there is a clear connection between the *Apertura* and the growth of paramilitary forces, the most violent perpetrators of GBVAW in this conflict. To understand this symbiosis, it must be said that while irreparably wounding small producers, the *Apertura* also encouraged large landowners to enter into agribusinesses. These landowners quickly realized that, "... the trick of the trade was in defeating the [agribusiness'] extensive nature by increasing the original size of their farms," and who better to help them with the task at hand if not for well-known old associates [Cueter 2015, 94]. This new endeavor changed the already "existing relationship between landowners and paramilitaries [that] evolved from protection to expansion" [Ibid.].



Their method of choice to force *campesinos* out of selected lands was effective and fast: strike hard *campesino's* masculinity and ego by showing them how incapable they were when it came to protecting their women from the abuse, and by publicly exposing such weakness. Therefore, the worst and more violent forms of GBVAW stemming from paramilitaries turned woman into the most effective *weapon of war* against men. Final confirmation of the method's effectiveness is in the comparison of an area's displacement figures for while equal numbers of men and women leave it all behind, agribusiness production flourished.

DECENTRALIZATION FORTIFIED MACHISMO RULE

Decentralization is not new to Colombia for the process was adopted in the 1970s. However, the *Apertura* changed which State resources were to be managed by regional governments. For the first time, and following globalization's promotion of a smaller Central Government in favor of more equitable societies, the national administration transferred all public resources assigned to covering health, education, and public

services to regional administrations.

Mantilla V. [2012, 55]. believes that "decentralization plays a very important role when it comes to the escalation of the Colombian conflict." The reason is now clear. As of 1991, Majors and Governors were no longer designated by the President but now elected by popular vote. Given that, this decentralization became twofold for it also transferred political power to the regions. Knowing well the areas without State control and having the support of the local and regional elites, it was easy for paramilitary groups to impose their own candidates to manage small towns and to take over decentralized funds sent from the National Government. Having political and fiscal control over many towns surrounding areas of interest to them and their partners derived in a second form of GBVAW. Their power over women in their towns imposed harshly old patriarchal values, which included restrictions on how women dressed, the length of their hair, but especially on their sexual conduct, and whether they would be sterilized to serve the troops or would become mothers of their children by force.

Even though this new form of GBVAW cannot consider the woman a *weapon of war*, it did serve several purposes in the conflict. First, it maintained cohesion among troops; second, it provided a clearly defined line between "my women" and "my enemies' women;" and third, through the control of all women, paramilitaries reinforced archaic patriarchal, and religious values.

The suffering and violence rural women endured is the most known aspect of what happened to them during the war. They lived unfathomable and horrific attacks and abuse. In the eyes of the world, they were undeniable victims of GBVAW; yet despite the classification, a new *campesina* emerged in Colombia.

FROM VICTIM TO ACTOR

All throughout the history of conflicts around the world, women are identified as victims. The loss of husbands, children, and even material possessions are reason enough to label them as such. However, it was only in 1995 as a result of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action that the concept of GBVAW as a weapon of war became visible. A declaration that although well-meaning and important continued to portray women as *casualties of war*; a term indicating "temporality in the victim's condition, ..., with a hidden message that conveys that innocent citizens are victims 'by chance, accidental[ly], without much thought or premeditation..." [Cueter 2015, 81]. Nothing further from the truth, at least not in the case of Colombia where the actions against women during the war were neither accidental, nor fortuitous, and even less unintentional.

One of the problems of limiting the condition of women during times of conflict to that of *victims* is the implication that women —and the abuses against them— are nothing more than *casualties of war*; yet, the crimes against them are not simply "an unfortunate collateral damage of war" [Oxford English Dictionary 2015]. The undertones behind the term *victim* imply weakness, defenselessness, and characterize women in a diminished way. More importantly, the inference hides their strength, their drive to survive, and how those up in arms used women to achieve political, economic, and territorial control of their communities. Although the Colombian conflict is the perfect war to show that different ways to interact with women did not always produce change in their favor, but rather ratified traditional patriarchal beliefs, better known as that "... structure that gives some men power over other men, and all men power over women" [Game & Pringle 1984], Colombian women in the conflict became crucial actors before victims.

That is the reason why although in most studies, combatant groups directly fighting the war are referred to as *actors*, this analysis identifies those armed groups as *perpetrators* or *victimizers*. Here, women are actors first, to honor all women affected in one way or another by the war, but specially to give women the recognition and respect each of them deserves.

WOMEN IN ARMS

A very common stereotype is that when it comes to war, "all the men are in militias, all women are victims" [Enloe 2004, 99].¹ This is not the case in Colombia, for the existence of female combatants in guerrilla groups is feebly documented since the 1970s, and women

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¹ This stereotype stems from the idea of patriotism, which emerged when armies ceased to be led by warlords and became professional organizations. There are two distinct notions in this concept: the nation, which is a family-like structure that must be *preserved and reproduced* [Wills 2005, 74]; and the fatherland, which represents the ultimate sacrifice in order to protect the nation. Women were assigned the conservation and reproduction of the nation, and men were expected to be willing to die for the fatherland. In this way, the professionalization of armies led to a reinforcement of gender roles that still continues in modern-day conflicts [Ibid.].

entered the Colombian Military Forces in 1976 [Ejercito Nacional de Colombia 2015]. Granting that by worldwide standards Colombian women arrived to combat quite late, there are more revealing aspects with regard to their role as members of different armed groups for each group managed a different gender speech; yet, in the end, even those most forward-thinking reverted to traditional patriarchal behaviors and patterns.

Albeit there were many guerrilla groups following varying leftist ideologies challenging the State during the 1960s, the FARC was who opened the doors to women the most, allowing them to enter their ranks in two ways; either [1] by force, when girls were kidnapped to be indoctrinated early on; or [2] by buying into a very equalitarian speech that promoted equal rights and tasks for both men and women combatants. It is quite easy to understand why some *campesinas* bought so quickly into the equalitarian sales pitch, for historically, rural women have endured verbal and even physical aggressions within their family. To finally be on *equal footing as men* was probably very appealing not just to stop the abuse from men in their lives, but because it also entailed a newfound freedom to decide, to fight for a cause, and to improve their lives' opportunities. Interestingly, even those who coercively entered the group as children found some sense of fulfillment in guerrilla ranks [Herrera & Porch 2008]. In contrast, paramilitary groups were — and continue to be— reluctant to incorporate women in their forces, for in their view, femininity is at odds with a military life [Otero B. 2006]. Remarkably, the Colombian Military had a gender oriented discourse very similar to that of guerrillas'; yet in practice, their actions were closer to those of paramilitary groups.

Despite the enormous differences in the reasons and tactics for these three-armed forces to incorporate females to their ranks, a common characteristic was that these *women in arms* were charged with care² and communications duties, roles traditionally assigned to them. Aside from cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the ill, women in armed groups also managed the relationship with the civilian population, for they were perceived to be harmless, gentle, compassionate, and friendly, which facilitated recruiting efforts. Of course, there are differences worth mentioning.

For the FARC care tasks were said to be split equally among men and women. Be that as it may, the analysis of combat rules and permissible sexual behavior is where the greatest differences in the treatment and role of women become evident among guerrillas, paramilitaries, and the military.

For instance, paramilitary forces completely rejected the idea of women in combat, a very patriarchal position, reinforced by their skepticism about women's ability to fight fearlessly; reason why they encourage those interested in joining their ranks to "choose another job [for] this is war... War isn't a fun job" [CMH 2012, 53]. Therefore, only a handful of

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² Care tasks focus on providing for the individual's physical, social, and emotional wellbeing; tasks that society has traditionally assigned to women [López M. et al. 2015].

paramilitary women became commanders, and were charged with controlling other women in those towns [Acosta H. 2015].

On the other hand, only in 2012 the Colombian Military finally authorized women to partake in active combat [Vergel 2012, 236]. To date, high-ranked officials maintain that women should have "a special kind of treatment. Fortunately, vanity will always be present. We don't want them to look like men" [Vélez 2013]. Reading between the lines with kindness, it may all boil down to protecting their female soldiers from the *sexual violence* that other women are subjected to during war. A very noble thought, not very gender equalitarian, yet definitely one that members of the military did not uphold when it came to civilian women in rural areas.

Unquestionably, the most forward-thinking group on both issues was the FARC, for they believed that a gender equality based enrollment policy "increases the quantity and quality of the FARC's recruitment pool" [Herrera & Porch 2008, 613]. For them, ability rather than gender is the main criterion to assign tasks between *guerrilleros* [Otero B. 2006]. However, their gender equalitarian speech ended where sexual behavior began. The FARC women participated not only in active combat, but where also sold on enjoying some sort of sexual freedom for they could choose their partners, as long as they clearly understood their key duty was providing men with sex to stop desertion. In other words, *guerrilleras* were the most able "supply of sexual partners to what would otherwise compose a corps of forlorn, largely celibate male [soldiers]" [Herrera & Porch 2008, 613].

By society's standards, the sexual duties imposed on *guerrilleras* become evidence of the existence of acts of *sexual violence* against them. Reason why society also identifies them as victims of sexual slavery, rape, forced abortion, sterilization, and recruitment. However, by guerrilla standards and based on interviews with these women, the abuse was not necessarily so in the eyes of female soldiers. The first indication comes from Londoño & Nieto [2006] who survey men and women on the reasons to enlisted in the FARC. Of those who joined to escape intrafamilial conflict 46% are women and 26% men; of those citing economic betterment 48% are women and 26% men; for resentment towards another armed group 56% are women and 7% men. Interestingly enough, of those who joined for political affinity 28% are women and 26% men.³ These figures counteract the idea —often promoted in demobilization campaigns— that girls were *always* torn away from a safe family home and forcibly coerced to become soldiers. Their voices explain that entering the guerrilla was also a chance to escape economic and social vulnerability for many. Therefore, most FARC women made at one point or another, a very conscious decision to enter the FARC's ranks, confirming one more time that not all female recruitment was forced.



³ The percentages of answers from men versus women do not add up to 100% because participants were allowed to choose more than one reason for joining the FARC.

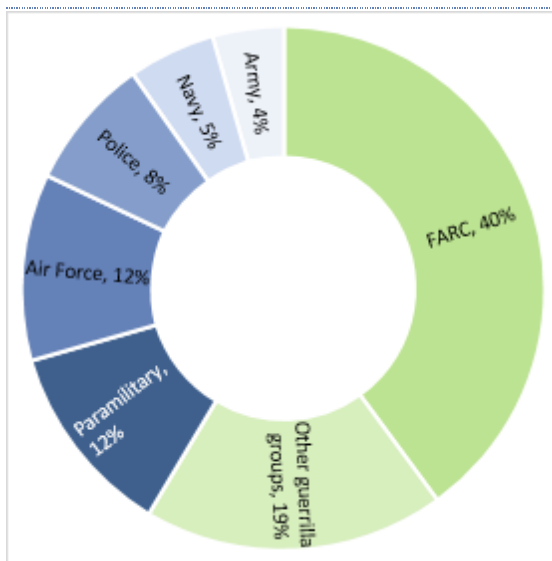
Society's use of the term *forced* before conscription, conceals women's freedom to select a professional path that is traditionally masculine, and how they choose to deal with other challenges that may threaten their selected career. Victoria Sandino, the most visible FARC woman during the Havana peace negotiations, clarifies misconceptions regarding rape, sexual slavery, abortion, and sterilization within the ranks. "When birth control fails and pregnancy happens, *guerrilleras* confront a decision between having an abortion or having a baby, which clearly translates into continuing their chosen career or abandoning it to become mothers" [Castrillón P. 2016]. Her words rebuff stereotypes about women's inability to freely chose different sexual partners, whether to be mothers or not, or even their right to place their career above having a family. More importantly, what becomes clear is that combatant women cannot be measured by the same standards of civilian women, for their choosing to be a warrior entails making other choices that move them further away from traditional female roles and lives.

In the end, the differences in the percentage of women combatant within each armed force (Figure 2) is a symptom of each group's perception towards women, its explicit policies, and implicit norms on female participation. What is indisputable is that independent of how forward-thinking or not the group's speech on gender equality is, in the end, they all fall back into traditional patriarchal values that control what women can or cannot do, especially when it comes to their bodies. For instance, although the FARC women carry guns to actively participate in battle and care duties are distributed equally among men and women, the only ones with a mandatory

sexual duty are females, a directive tantamount to rape all over the world. Similarly, the guerrilla and paramilitary forced abortion and sterilization practices for women are not just cruel but an unquestionable violation of women's rights over their bodies, a method deeper than birth control, and not always applied evenly, for both groups allowed pregnancies that were conveniently their own. Although this was not a practice of the Military Forces within its structure, the sexual atrocities military personnel perpetrated against civilian women are as or even more cruel.

Independently of how women were treated as members of the armed forces, legal or illegal, the way in which society perceives *women in arms* speaks volumes about how their lives will be once they become civilians again. A very noticeable case is that of FARC

FIGURE 2. PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN IN ARMED GROUPS



Source: Vergel [2012] for the FARC and Paramilitary data, and MinDefensa [2010] for the Armed Forces.

women —in the eyes of society always forced to be part of the guerrilla group— for it is unfathomable to accept that some *guerrilleras* chose that life and willingly participated in combat. A bias that took financial and social benefits received by male combatants away from most women in illegal groups during previous guerrilla and paramilitary demobilization. Inexplicably, only those females who carried guns and participated in combat were accounted as members of the group. All others, usually charged with care, logistics, or communication duties were deemed *collaborators*, of course by force, and therefore not part of the group demobilizing. Notwithstanding the classification, the Colombian society labels all these women as victims, completely diminishing that by choosing to partake in the war as soldiers, they "overcame feminine stereotypes and breached unsurmountable frontiers previously forbidden for [them]" [Wills 2005, 63]. *Women in arms* are perhaps the best example as to how women moved from victims to actors in the Colombian conflict, but they are not the only ones who did so.

THE QUIET RISE OF RURAL WOMEN

The Registro Único de Víctimas (RUV) [2017] shows that rural women are roughly half of the registered casualties in this war. For that reason, they are always portrayed as powerless victims of the conflict, yet again, despite their suffering they are inaudible heroes. Their struggle began long before the war given patriarchal values still uphold where they reside. As a result, women are often excluded from productive decisions [DANE 2015], and have less access to resources [Zuluaga G. 2015].

Although rural women are more dependent on men and are less financially autonomous, they are not powerless, and even less so weak. An analysis of different types of GBVAW endured by these women during the conflict clearly demonstrates how instead of succumbing to tragedy, they found strength in their pain to change important dynamics, quickly moving from the stereotype of victims to stand tall as crucial actors in the Colombian conflict. Sadly, an important shift still unacknowledged by those with the power to change their future.

Despite historically having a role during *campesino* mobilizations to defend care activities, rural women were underestimated and openly ignored as political subjects [Defensoría del Pueblo 2014, 21]. After struggling to be included in men's movements, during the harsher conflict with the FARC in the 1980s, rural women finally got to play vital roles. Their involvement increased and became more visible during the 1990s when paramilitary's cruelty openly began using women as a method to control men and their communities. For these reasons, to continue denying that rural women are the actors of change during the hardest moments in Colombian history is a deep injustice that will deny this nation significant gains that can only be achieved with the active participation of women in the design of post conflict Colombia.

The leadership of rural women did not stem from the violence they endured for it began

decades before. Unquestionably, the increasing viciousness of the war fortified their voices, rose their exposure to show that the State left them to fend for themselves to protect their loved ones and their communities. At first, these movements seemed to line up with the struggles of men who claimed political and economic rights. Interestingly, the government's response finally recognized the need to formulate strategies specifically geared towards rural women [DNP 1984]. As a result, even the possibility of female ownership of land in a country where property titles fell only on men, further drove women's movements. After four years of endless pressure, the Agrarian Law 30 of 1988, restated in 1994, records the government's mandate for men to include women's names as equal owners in rural property titles. Men did not react well to the ruling and tried to discourage women's participation in peasant associations [Defensoría del Pueblo 2014, 33] but the negative atmosphere was not enough to dishearten or discourage women.

The cruelty of paramilitary crimes, strengthened the will of rural women to demand concrete actions from their government. Its delayed response and the violence instilled by the military sent to protect them, awakened women to the power that *political status* will offer them. Afro and Indigenous women became the first female groups who formally participated in the drafting of the 1991 Colombian Constitution. Unfortunately, their noticeable steps forward slowed down when paramilitary forces strategically silenced their voices by targeting their movements and forcing their decline. However, to single out those directly involved in the war as the only culprits for the demise of *campesinas'* movements would not honor the lives of the women who died fighting for their rights, families, and communities. Their tragedies also taint the Colombian Government, and a heartless urban society who dismissed their suffering because they only saw the horrors of the war through their television at home.

Rural women did not give up. In fact, they quickly reorganized, and led resistance groups focused stopping paramilitaries' land expropriation. Nothing deterred them from the goal, not even the danger of being identified as the FARC's sympathizers, whether true or false, which guaranteed violent torture, and a death sentence at the hands of paramilitaries. On the contrary, aside from being targets of the worst cases of GBVAW, and despite public institutions' abandonment, *campesinas* still found the strength "to report violence against themselves and their families" [Ibid., 36]. Their courage moved the Colombian Constitutional Court to finally censor the State, 20 years too late, for the unconstitutional manner in which it approached aiding displaced people.

Their achievements continued. The enactment of Law 731 of 2002 granted rural women access to public goods, coverage under agrarian benefits, and opened a real space for their political participation [Senado de la República 2002]. However, the most important accomplishment is the enactment of Law 1448 of 2011, for it finally acknowledged Colombia's long-lasting war and the existence of victims as result of the confrontations

[Senado de la República 2011]. Unfortunately, this Law fails to recognize the crucial role of rural women as the force behind vital State mandates that could transform the lives of all Colombian women. Through these achievements, more than victims, they became genuine agents of change, and today, rural women must be saluted as essential actors in the war.

WOMEN, THE ROAD FOR A RURAL WAR TO ENTER CITIES

It is well-known and widely accepted that the rural areas were the battle ground of this long-lasting conflict. This study has even stated that one of the reason for the detachment of urban Colombia is because it never felt its ferocious impact or consequences. This is true; however, although the gun fights, bombs, and mass murders stayed behind in rural Colombia, the conflict did come to the cities, quietly, undetectably, and through a very unexpected channel: women.

FROM CAMPESINAS TO DISPLACED URBAN WORKERS

A known characteristic of displacement is that people tend to flee to urban centers first. It was no different in Colombia, when almost seven million rural men, women, and children suddenly, and consistently arrived to towns and cities unprepared to receive them. This was not an easy transition for those rural families who abruptly found themselves empty handed, in the middle of fast moving cities, way too different from their rural origin. Although the government's initial emergency response was relatively quick, finding long-term solutions to integrate them to urban life or to help them return to their land are still slowly worked out.

The way in which women and men tackled the challenge speaks one more time about women's innate flexibility to adapt to harsh environments and new situations. Men struggled because their expertise was not required in urban centers, women rose to the occasion quickly taking advantage of the high demand for their field of knowhow: care services. Surprisingly, women confronted a new wave of GBVAW when frustrated and unemployed displaced rural men saw empowered *campesinas* gaining economic autonomy, and swiftly taking on the role of providers, leaving men behind. In fact, statistics show that domestic violence among displaced people is higher than for those who still live in rural areas [Ibáñez et al. 2011]. Then again, instead of diminishing women, these new scenarios brought out the best in them, and they quickly stepped into leadership roles not just at home but also within their new community. Today, roughly 39 to 46% of displaced households in the cities are led by women [DNP 2013]; almost twice as much than the 27.8% led by females in rural areas [DANE 2015]. Even more, despite the increasing dependency rate, these women still found time to lead or partake in female organizations forcing the government to add their informal neighborhoods to the public services network [CNRR 2011].

Although the massive arrival of displaced people to urban centers does not mean that the

war moved to the cities, their tragedy was a wake-up call for the Colombian urban society albeit the struggles of displacement remained foreign to them.

COCA AND BEAUTY, UNLIKELY ALLIES

In Colombia, drug trafficking has always been analyzed and perceived as a self-contained problem. An issue running parallel to the war, limiting its association to illicit crops and coca routes, managed by guerrillas and paramilitaries sole culprits for the conflict. For most, drug dealers' actions were limited to urban distribution centers and their participation in the world market. That is a big misconception. The connection between drugs and war runs deep, and the impact was not just economic or urban. Drug trafficking changed an entire society, especially the women.

Drug dealers led lavished lives, where money was king, and everybody had a price. In a very class-conscious society, drug dealers were at the bottom, at first, but they quickly found that money was the way to climb the inaccessible ladder into the highest spheres of the cities they lived. Faster than one could expect, "...drug dealers entangled themselves with only powerful elites in the country —the wealthy and the politicians, often one and the same— simply by dangling money in front of their eyes. These new mergers triggered a sequence that rapidly tore down traditional moral and ethical values across the nation; and just like that, a *drug culture* was born in Colombia" [Cueter 2015, 105].

Although there are many aspects to the *drug culture*, one of its most devastating effects was felt by women. Drug dealers surrounded themselves with beautiful young women whose only job was to please and serve them. In return, the women lived surrounded by riches, as long as they were flawless, and not just in terms of their behavior. "The perfect female form adopted by *narcos* replicated the looks of the 1970s American prostitutes — blond, very voluptuous, and highly sexualized women—" [Yagoub 2014]. Not precisely a characteristic of Colombian females, yet one that encouraged drug dealers to pay plastic surgeons to turn their women into that prototype. Unnoticed but rather quickly, "the perception of beauty shifted when Colombian women ... began to associate physical enhancement with a better life. Even more damaging was that as beauty changed in Colombia, so did the way in which men viewed and treated women" [Cueter 2015, 112].

Furthermore, "the darkest side of *narco-beauty* gave rise to an inexplicable form of *human-trafficking-by-consent* when ... 'girls and young women from rural villages, or even lower-class neighborhoods of cities, [are] taken by force or in agreement with prospect less parents to be "pimped" to perfection; or when they themselves take the initiative to go to the big city in an attempt to "make it big",' ... to eventually have their economic issues resolved by a rich man'" [ibid.].

In essence, "the drug culture's legacy intended to lose *the woman* by making women more invisible, to induce men to see objects with curves first, to replace education with

beauty.... The *narco-lifestyle* tried to swiftly squash and reverse gender equity advances previously achieved" [Ibid, 113]. In a country where intrafamilial violence is a norm, the *narco-lifestyle* perception of women can help explain the GBVAW rise across the nation. Since not many see *narcos* as key victimizers in the war, very few realize how their role in changing the perception of what is acceptable for a woman to look like to be considered pretty or desirable, is one of the ugliest and most aggressive forms of GBVAW.

Fortunately, many did not fall for it and urban women also became actors despite the *narco-lifestyle* influence. As in any war, there were casualties for many young women were lost to that foreign ideal prototype, but many more still fight today to uphold that women are first and foremost human beings with rights independent of how they look or behave, where they live, or how poor, or wealthy they are. Most of all, many continue to stand up to old patriarchal values that still prevail not just on their behalf but for rural women young and old. Colombian women, both urban and rural are still in the fight and for that reason they are crucial actors of this war now ending.

RURAL WOMEN, COLOMBIA'S STRENGTH

Consensus around the world is clear; the devastation left by any war is excruciating. There is also agreement on who the *casualties of war* are, men usually become the majority of the deaths, too many children are left orphaned and scared, and women — portrayed as defenseless victims— suffer greatly the loss of their loved ones while enduring profound deep violence. As explained throughout the text, this study takes issue with limiting the analysis of GBVAW tinted by the lens of traditional bias, for it ignores key roles played by women, more definitive and complex than just being victims struggling to survive.

Colombian rural women are a great example to show that, despite great suffering, they stood up and effected great change across the nation. For them, the Colombian conflict cannot, and should not, be compared to other armed confrontations. This war "... is not only the oldest one in the Western Hemisphere, [...] but also one that [in 2008] produced the biggest humanitarian crisis in the world" [Manrique C. 2008, 1]; both reasons enough to consider it unique. Still, what really differentiates the Colombian conflict from any other is its shifting nature in the hands of the same group of perpetrators who swiftly change goals while maintaining their methods and cruelty through time, and the strength of its women. A war where only the poorest population is directly involved for the rural areas are center stage of the confrontations, while the urban country ignored their struggle and misery. A conflict that fits no category or theory, with multiple ever-changing enemies, varying economic incentives, all complex scenarios that demand an open mind to realize the relationship between Political Economy and GBVAW.

MERGER VERSUS TRUE

There are two mainstream approaches to tackle this new relationship. The first one forces a better understanding of the "contextually specific social, cultural, political and economic determinants that inform the conflict and give meaning to violence" [Mejer 2016]. In contrast, "a feminist political economic approach attends to the local and global contexts in which violence against women occurs. As a method, it broadens both the explanation and the solutions to violence against women" [True 2010, 4]. The unusual characteristics of the Colombian conflict, and the idiosyncrasies of those involved in one way or another, are central to truly arrive to the core of the relationship between Political Economy and GBVAW. Therefore, any thorough analysis must take all those elements and both approaches into account. It should surprise no one that has read the previous sections of this chapter, which one of these two theories fits best the GBVAW analysis of this nation's war.

True's framework is immediately contrary to the realities of Colombian rural women, for she defines that, "there is a relationship between women's access to productive

resources such as land, property, income, employment, technology, credit, and education, and their likelihood of experiencing *gender-based violence* and abuse" [True 2012]. It was already established that the plots of the very few Colombian rural women whose name appears next to their husbands' as landowners are the smallest parcels possible, and that most *campesinas* do not own any land. Similarly, these rural women are not likely to access grants, loans, or technical assistance received by men. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why only a small percentage of women work in the agricultural sector, and rather do so in the most precarious activities of the service sector in rural areas. Therefore, *campesinas* living circumstances immediately tear down True's basic premise whereby their situation makes them more at risk of suffering GBVAW during times of war. Additionally, she sustains that the inequalities between men and women also make *campesinas* more vulnerable to GBVAW during times of war. Another premise not applicable to rural women for intrafamilial violence is intrinsic to the patriarchal values of rural Colombia and sadly accepted as their *normal*.

In contrast, Merger's framework finds some interesting coincidences with aspects of the Colombian conflict, which could provide an explanation for the GBVAW experienced by the nation's *campesinas*. Chief among them is her definition of *women as a weapon of war* for Meger [2016, 93] links the concept "to the strategic ends of an armed group," and describes "... those forms of *sexual violence* [as] perpetrated systematically, publicly, on a mass scale" fitting perfectly the actions of paramilitary groups against their enemies. However, upon a deeper look, a coincidence of terms does not mean that the meaning used in her analysis falls completely into the specificities of the GBVAW experienced by *campesinas*.

Nonetheless, the most significant difference between True and Merger is the place given to women in their frameworks. The former focuses on the woman as the specific target for GBVAW adapting political, social and economic factors to the reasons that make women more or less vulnerable to *sexual violence*. In contrast, Merger defines wider spectrum whereby political, economic, and social variables of the war may or may not have an incidence on *sexual violence* against women. Conceivably, the biggest difference between these two authors is their flexibility, for Merger's framework recognizes that each conflict is potentially dissimilar from the next, where key aspects, outside of the control of women, like culture, internal politics, and economics may influence the reasons and motifs fueling a war, and therefore, the causes behind GBVAW.

After understanding basic elements of the *Feminist Political Economy* of GBVAW in two mainstream opposite frameworks, what becomes evident is that the causes for GBVAW against Colombian women in the midst of war follow the exact same pattern found when trying to explain the Colombian conflict by itself. In other words, GBVAW in Colombia does not fit any theory or framework for it is as particular and unique as the war.

Therefore, the only way to arrive to a clear understanding of the Political Economy of GBVAW in this country is by analyzing first the roots fueling the conflict, and then, the Colombian men.

CAMPESINAS TEAR DOWN PARADIGMS

Like in any other war in the world, this nation's conflict brought great pain, countless losses, and deep sorrow, but what was unusual in Colombia is that rural women emerged from the devastation stronger than ever. They did not simply survive, *campesinas* rose from the ashes to defeat invisibility, domination, and why not, men in different spheres.

To realize this unexpected conclusion was only possible as a result of decisively setting aside traditional methods to analyze their struggles and the offenses against them. The demanding framework of *Political Economy* as a means to understand women in war opened an entirely new spectrum of possibilities, not just to recognize factors but also to link issues previously not associated to the GBVAW they endured. Even more bewildering were the great coincidences emerging from analysis introduced throughout this chapter with factors used by *Feminist Political Economy* to explain its relationship with GBVAW — culture, gendered labor roles, neoliberal and competitive globalization, and politics—. However, it must also be acknowledged that there are major differences in the effect of those variables in the lives of *campesinas* as well.

Religious bias, patriarchal values, moral canons, societal gender roles, and even geographical specificities, all aspects intrinsic to a nation's culture, influence greatly the type of woman that enters war scenarios. For that reason, there are significant behavioral differences on how urban and rural populations respond to turmoil in their lives. It is well-known that all over the world, the population of rural areas is always a step behind urban development; their cultural change is neither swift nor decisive. Colombia's war took place precisely in the most underdeveloped areas of the country, its rural sector. Long before the war began, the *campesinas'* world was very small and limited for they lived under the rule of men's authority, confined to cooking, cleaning, and caring for their husbands, the children, the ill, and the elderly, and most of all, with no possessions nor rights. They were invisible to urban and rural societies alike; not to mention their indiscernibility within their own group as well. Given their precarious circumstances, rural women in Colombia entered the conflict not just vulnerable but deeply undervalued; the perfect profile to become victims; the indisputable target. Then again, what propelled these women to become actors rather than mere victims? The explanation is as complex as disentangling the many facets of a very long-lasting conflict.

During the Colombian conflict, *campesinas* managed to tear down five different paradigms. Their strength and resolve in doing so is what moved them from *just victims* to key actors.

FIRST PARADIGM: SEXUAL VIOLENCE DESTROYS WOMEN. This refers to the physical, psychological, and social devastation endured by women as a result of sexual abuse. According to Josse [2010, 179], "in many societies, victims of *sexual violence* are blamed for their fate; ... whether in war or peace, they are 'buried alive' by society". The behavior of Colombian rural women who lived through sexual abuse by either group of perpetrators is a statement that defies the psychological and social effects felt by other women during times of war. *Campesinas* stood up quietly but decisively against violence, and they were responsible for "complex networks of pro-peace movements" [Stewart 2010b, 2]. Today, the insights of the horrors of war are known through these women's voices. Obviously, this is not to say that *campesinas* were not affected or suffered greatly as a result of sexual abuse, but rather to show that their social and political reaction is what sets them apart. Perhaps, the intrafamilial violence intrinsic to their lives may be the reason behind their strength; although a seemingly cruel statement, that patriarchal and rather violent atmosphere may be what prepared them to confront the violence of the war. Rural women are no longer invisible in Colombia for their achievements during war are measured by the numbers of national laws enacted on their behalf.

SECOND PARADIGM: CONFLICT DOES NOT AFFECT GENDER ROLES. A very unusual fact in the Colombian conflict is that patriarchal norms worked harder against rural men than against *campesinas*. In an environment where masculinity is characterized by a man's unquestionable authority and control within the family, the self-imposed duty to protect and provide for them speaks about their honor and bravery, the rights they claim over possessions and women defines their dominance, and their sexuality represents their freedom. Any failure to fulfill their role impairs them, driving them to self-destruct productively and socially. Their power is their greatest weakness as well, for an absurd paradox in rural men's definition of masculinity is *women*. Paramilitary forces quickly understood the high and low points of rural masculinity given the extreme patriarchal values they also upheld and turned women into *weapons of war* that quickly and effectively destroyed rural masculinity and entire communities.

THIRD PARADIGM: ECONOMIC POLICIES ARE NEUTRAL IN TERMS OF GENDER AND GBVAW. An issue vastly analyzed by Elson & Cagatay [2000], refers to the accepted neutrality of economic policies in terms of its social impacts, and among them its detachment on gender and therefore on GBVAW. The irony of a steadily growing economy and improvement of overall social indicators in the midst of war conceals the possibility that governmental policies and decisions may be decisive in fulling the war. In Colombia, globalization, the opening of the economy, *Apertura*, undeniably *joined forces* with the conflict, clearly redefining agricultural production. Although *campesinos* "were those most affected by

outrageous *horizontal inequalities*,¹... and despite very real injustice, it is not them, the forsaken, who ignited this conflict but rather the ones still most victimized by it" [Cueter 2015, 89]. The extensive nature of newly introduced agribusinesses renewed old alliances between landowners and paramilitaries. The economic viability of large-scale agricultural production depended greatly in the paramilitaries' ability to extend landowners plantations. Therefore, the reason behind violent displacement is economic interest of a few; the instrument to achieve it was *women as weapons of war* to weaken masculinity.

FOURTH PARADIGM: THERE IS NO GENDER OR GBVAW CONTENT IN PUBLIC POLICIES. In the middle of armed conflicts, political factors especially ignore the gender content of public policies. Decentralization —globalization's second economic issue that joined forces with the war— impacted rural women with a different form of GBVAW. Fiscal resources and political power moving to local and regional governments, reinforced paramilitary control over specific areas of the national territory. The change from nomination to election by popular vote of regional authorities opened a window of opportunity for paramilitaries to impose their own candidates that once elected, guaranteed access to significant State funds assigned to health, education, and public services. As a result, the rural population not only saw the quality of social services diminish rapidly, but also, how these perpetrators freely enacted even more archaic patriarchal values over the women of towns under their hegemony. Decentralization took away the few freedoms *campesinas* had over their lives and bodies, when fortifying the power and financial paramilitary base. Their authoritarian rule forced them to become objects of reproduction or pleasure for commanders and troops.

FIFTH PARADIGM: GENDER ROLES RIVALRY STEMS COMPETITIVE GLOBALIZATION. This phenomenon starts when international companies entering open economies choose to hire women for their lower labor cost instead of men for it creates societal rivalries between genders, which in turn increase GBVAW. In Colombia, multinational corporations landed mostly into the nation's rural areas due to their interest in Colombian minerals and oil; the same reason for how they became a source of finance for paramilitary forces as well. However, given the rural nature of the war and *campesinas'* low participation in the labor market, *Competitive Globalization* is only seen among displaced populations who flee to the cities. This type of gender rivalry derived from the services in demand by the cities and what the displaced could offer. And who would have thought that the undervalued, unrecognized, and often dismissed duty of women in rural areas would turn simple caregivers into providers? The high demand for care services in urban Colombia is what propelled former *campesinas* into the labor market. Unfortunately, the lack of demand for rural men's abilities crushed their masculinity one more time. And then, again, weakened masculinity became the reason behind the GBVAW endured by displaced *campesinas* living in urban

¹ Stewart [2010a] defines *horizontal inequalities* as "negative growth —economic, social and political— impacting only certain sectors of society, which in turn incentivizes political instability."

areas.

This analysis brings about only one conclusion: despite surviving heinous abuse from known and unknown men, abandonment from those who vowed to protect them, ignored by the State, and under harsh economic odds, *campesinas* tore down archetypes that portray the suffering of women as debilitating. These amazing Colombians took their lives into their hands and without any help, support, or guidance, forged their own future. In doing so, they influenced change in an entire nation, not just for themselves but for future generations of rural and urban women alike. Today, Colombia's peace process is just beginning; however, the strength and voices of rural women already achieved what urban women hope for.

COLOMBIA'S PEACE AGREEMENT

A nation's move from war to peace may be very dangerous at any given time, but it is even more so in highly patriarchal, religious, or stratified societies. The first stage of transition is usually quite difficult but of great importance for it will drive the rest of the process. Its vital purpose is to "... allow for transformation and reconstruction to take place" [Jaramillo 2013] across all sectors, and including all individuals.

The Colombian Government-FARC peace negotiation took four long years; the agreement was signed twice since the first attempt was defeated in a referendum. By November 2016, the long war against the FARC was finally ending. Throughout the chaos that followed the first *Peace Accord* signing, half of Colombia rejoiced, tears of relief and happiness rolled down most faces. Nevertheless, the photo of that momentum loudly spoke about the role of women in the process; of the nine-people sitting at the table, only two were female. Even the FARC's delegation, with twenty women out of forty members relegated most of them to managing social networks, producing newscasts, and dealing with reporters. Only a few of them participated directly in the talks [Semana 2016].

Victoria Sandino joined the guerrilla in 1992, and she was a member of the FARC's negotiating team. In September 2014, two years after the negotiation began, she and María Paulina Riveros, a Colombian Government representative at the table, founded a Gender Sub commission [El Tiempo 2016]. By then, two of the six agenda points were already agreed upon, and transitional justice talks were well underway. The sub commission focused on incorporating women's needs into what was already agreed upon. The possibility of including substantial improvements to what was already sealed, limited their input to simply add the expression *gender-based approach* to every point, trying to force considerations for "the specific needs and circumstances of women, according to their life cycle, issues, and requirements" [Colombian Gov. & FARC 2016, 10]. Albeit the circumstances, the presence of a *gender-based approach* is an accomplishment for it recognizes among other topics, the rights of women to asset ownership, equal access to productive resources, and political power.

Worldwide experiences keenly highlight the fundamental contributions of women to post conflict in security, governance, socioeconomic development, justice, and reconciliation [iKNOW 2013].¹ The lessons drawn from other peace processes stress the importance and urgency to define the role Colombian women will play during this transition period; but especially, the space for them to confront and overcome the great challenges still ahead



¹ For instance: [i] In Sri Lanka, women defended the establishment of a sub commission focused on gender issues [Jayasundere 2009]. [ii] In Ireland, they worked as go-betweens in discussions concerning human rights, inclusion, and equality. [iii] In Haiti, they were key actors for the establishment of a disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration program. [iv] In Rwanda, they set up the first groups of senators including both Hutus and Tutsis. [v] In Sierra Leona, they helped design the Commission for Truth and Reconciliation, as well as the unit that investigated war crimes [iKNOW 2013].

in terms of gender equality. Unfortunately, once again in Colombian, women were invited too late into the discussion, and for that reason, the inclusion of a *gender-based approach* is an abstract addendum that policymakers will likely fail to apply, making it even harder to implement, and therefore, not really a step towards women's rights and autonomy.

The loose way in which the concept was thrown into the agreement served well those who fought against its signing. The rights of women became part of an absurd definition, *gender ideology*, whereby the rights of the LGBTBI community interlinked with those of women. Colombian Catholics and Christians² who still backwardly promote that the only acceptable relationship in the eyes of God is between a man and a woman obviously rose up against the accord's *gender-based approach*. Ignorant, definitely; archaic, absolutely; a huge mistake, categorically. Nonetheless, the damage was done; one that is making *gender inequality* a delicate topic in the country simply to avoid further misunderstanding.

However, not everything was lost in translation for the sub commission and a group of women's organizations achieved that within the agreement's *Transitional Justice*, *sexual violence* is judged as a *crime of war* not subject to amnesty. Araújo H. & Salazar [2015] highlight that, unfortunately, there are few incentives for victims to denounce the GBVAW against them, reason enough for many cases to remain under wraps and for perpetrators to remain unpunished. Going forward, women's organizations must continue to come to the forefront of the agreement's implementation to guarantee that GBVAW's underlying causes are addressed. In this effort, they will face great challenges; especially when making visible all prevalent forms of *gender-based violence* in urban and rural societies.

A *gender approach* used only as an expression may well become the underlying danger that turns well-meaning proposals in the agreement into meek intentions repeated throughout, but without ever leading to tangible *gender equality* in terms of equal rights and opportunities for women. Yet, the notion of *gender approach* has the potential to transcend the impact of public policy for *gender equality*. Decisively managed it can force the strengthening of the *Women's Agency* as an implicit objective of all programs; a crucial aspect not found in the *Peace Accord*, but key to women's future development. In their *Agency*, "women are increasingly seen, by men as well as women, as active agents of change: the dynamic promoters of social transformations that can alter the lives of both women and men" [Sen 2000, 189]. Therefore, a *gender approach* based on this *Women's Agency* leads to increased economic and social freedoms for all, while entrusting women with their own development, as well as that of their society. An added benefit of this *Agency* is that it forces public policy out of its damaging assistance-based attitude as well. Therefore, constant political control is essential to guarantee that the agreement's

.....
² In Colombia, the term Christians differentiates Protestants from Catholics.

gender-based approach does not remain an abstract concept when drafting the policies derived from the *Peace Accord*.

The success or failure of this newfound peace in Colombia will define the nation's future, one where its brave women must play a crucial role to truly achieve long-lasting peace. Although the signed document dealt with most of the crucial reforms needed, the majority already postponed for centuries, it does not include all the required changes this nation needs to become a more equalitarian and modern society. The inclusion of an integral rural reform will finally address one of Colombia's weakest issues and the biggest gap: the rural-urban differences, and the vast inequalities in income, gender, regions, and *land ownership*. The structural political reform, the inclusion of communities in the decision and planning process for the nation, and the recognition of drug trafficking as a major threat are long overdue issues that the country still needs to resolve.

On June 27, 2017, after complying with all previously required steps, the FARC delivered their last weapon. As of that day, the group was no longer a guerrilla movement, but a group striving to succeed as a new political party. Colombia's history is now divided in two. While the world rejoices for the nation's chance for peace, inside Colombia, the original pessimism, incredibility, and fear felt by Colombians slowly began decreasing when seeing the FARC *guerrilleros* promptly arriving to their designated confinement areas, renouncing all their arms, but specially, when the entire country began realizing that the FARC forces are also simple men and women happy to end the long confrontation, and ready to take back their law-abiding civilian lives. Of course, the loud opposing voices of the extreme right continue trying to take central stage to devalue the achievement. Until now, the political opposition has been very successful in generating a negative atmosphere, but an indisputable fact remains: the oldest guerrilla force in the world changed their bullets for words. Indeed, Colombia is at a historical crossroad, the transition from war to peace, a process that will likely be even more complex than the long-lasting war.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Many researchers would stand against any analysis that dares associate the historically growing Colombian economy with the cruelty of its long-lasting war; yet none of them understands or can explain how this nation's economy still grows in the midst of conflict. A very complex matter that requires further analysis, more so since Colombia also benefitted from a *commodities*' boom throughout the last decade. What can be said is that while the change in agricultural production —from temporary to permanent crops— did not affect economic growth, it indisputably impacted the conflict. The substitution of small agriculture with agribusiness likely explains why the loss in *campesino* production was not reflected in growth figures, for the income and investment brought about by agribusiness easily swallowed the low levels of income produced by the temporary crop loss. This governmental decision was a key driver of GBVAW. The expansive nature of the business is what induced paramilitaries to use women as a *weapon of war* against men's masculinity to force their displacement. Sadly today, Colombia's agribusiness is not the economic driver that the *Apertura* promoted.

Similarly, traditional feminist would reject from the get go any analysis that focuses on men to explain what happens to women. Lack of gender equality all over the world is the driver behind most feminists' research focused on understanding women's circumstances in different areas as the priority. Many believe that the study of men's situation will not reveal nor contribute to advancing women's struggle for equal rights. This study is proof of the contrary. The Colombian rural women astonishing shift from victim to crucial actors in the conflict would have never been fully understood nor realized if not for the contribution of men's weaknesses.

Perhaps one of the biggest accomplishments of this research is in the realization that, once again, Colombia does not follow the book in terms of the study of conflicts around the world, but most importantly, less so when it comes to the Political Economy of GBVAW.

Colombian women experienced all possible dimensions of *gender-based violence* at the hands of three different types of perpetrators: the most brutal and inhumane paramilitary forces; the FARC who neglected the rights of female combatants in spite of their equalitarian gender discourse; and the National Military Forces that not only failed miserably their vow to protect the population but whose members also partook in heinous crimes against women. And yet, rather than simply surviving like victims, *campesinas* rose up to become the crucial actors that drove change for the entire Colombian society. A vital role, often unknown and unrecognized; but one that surprisingly, not even women's organizations, who have fought tirelessly for the rights of victims, realize.

These important changes in families and societies catalyzed by women's actions opened new opportunities for a more gender equitable Colombia. Overlooking these key achievements coming from traditionally silent voices may help explain, yet not excuse, women's lack of prominence as negotiators of the Colombian *Peace Accord*. However, once acknowledged, this terrible oversight also becomes a loud warning bell and a call to all women to demand significant roles during post conflict. Without their spirit and unique insight, the chance for long-lasting and sustainable peace in Colombia will be weakened.

The entire nation must now understand that the transition from war to peace cannot become a lost opportunity for all Colombians. Indeed, the way in which *gender approach* was incorporated into the *Peace Accord* overlooked an array of critical issues holding back women from gender equality. Rather than the problem that it is, perhaps Colombian rural and urban women should see in that void an amazing opportunity to fill the gap; more so now when the increasing number of femicides all across the territory claims for a better understanding of GBVAW, and strong actions to defeat it.

The starting point is definitely in the drafting of public policies, which must definitely undergo a complete overhaul to stretch beyond health and education, still needed, but not the sole issue when it comes to changing women's lives. Today, the priority for women must be conquering their economic autonomy. Once achieved, and only then, assistance-based approaches that diminish women and that have traditionally dominated public and private actions can be replaced by real opportunities for women to grow. It is time that policymakers, most of whom are men, accept that those archaic social strategies reinforce the role of women only as care givers, when the truth is that all working women around the world, educated or not, need care services to be distributed among the State, the market, and other members of the family to fulfill their duties as members of a nation's labor force. Only then, the eternal struggle of women to be able to participate in the same conditions as men in the labor market will end. Perhaps then, women's well-deserved and earned economic autonomy will emerge as the strongest and most undefeatable weapon against GBVAW.

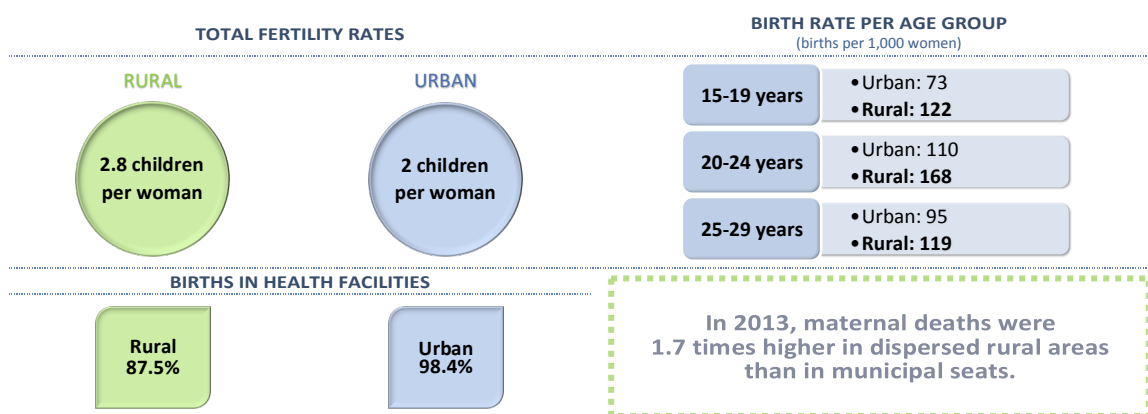
Unquestionably, this analysis of the *Political Economy of Violence Against Women* in the Colombian conflict brings about very important paradoxes. In spite of historic barriers heightened by the conflict, this nation's women, rural and urban, overcame many difficulties and great odds that moved them from victims to vital actors of this long war. Their strength proves that in Colombia GBVAW was truly not a form to control women, but rather the weapon of choice to force men into submission. As a result, the real and very unexpected casualty of this war was *men's masculinity*. Moving forward, the next step in the future of this nation's women is to become agents of positive change for them, their children, and the overall society, present and future.

ANNEX A. CHARACTERIZATION OF RURAL WOMEN¹

Rural women represent 47.14% of the total rural population, whereas rural men represent 52.86% [MinSalud 2015a]; their key characteristics are:

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE. Rural and urban women have not yet reached the same *demographic transition*² level (Figure 3), given the previously high rural fertility and maternal mortality rates, and less institutional attention during birth in rural areas.

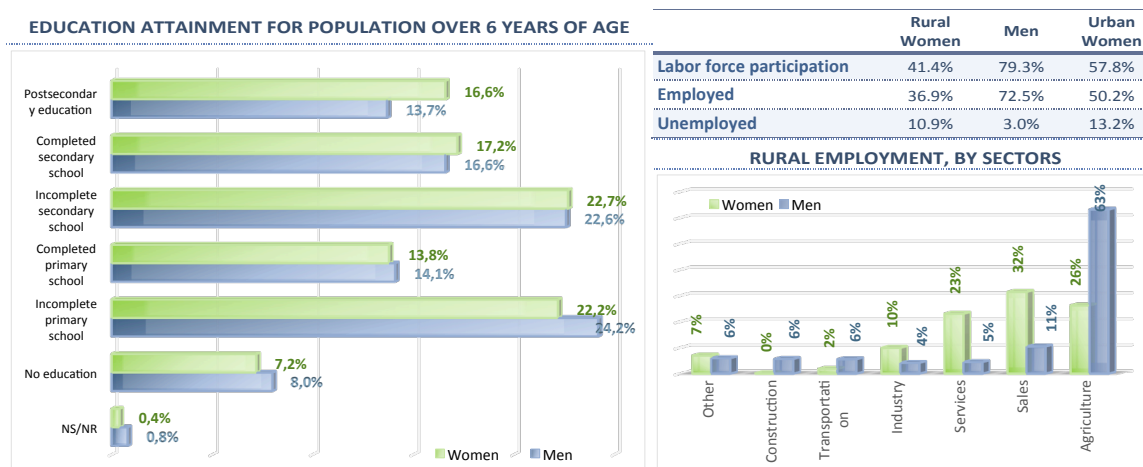
FIGURE 3. RURAL WOMEN'S DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE



Source: ProFamilia [2016]; [MinSalud [2015b]

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT PROFILE. Rural women are more educated than rural men,³ however, the gap in the rural labor market for them persists, not just when compared to rural men, but also to women living in urban areas (Figure 4).

FIGURE 4. EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT INDICATORS



"The greatest gender inequality in the labor market is seen through the wage gap: in urban areas, the wage gap was 27.2%, whereas in rural areas it was 47.8%."

Source: DANE [2015]

¹ This characterization is taken from López M. [2017] and is added to this chapter to provide for a better understanding of the situation of Colombian rural women.

² According to a report by [MinSalud [2015b)], "Colombia, as well as the majority of Latin American countries, is undergoing the second stage of demographic transition, with decreasing birth rates and moderate or low mortality rates"

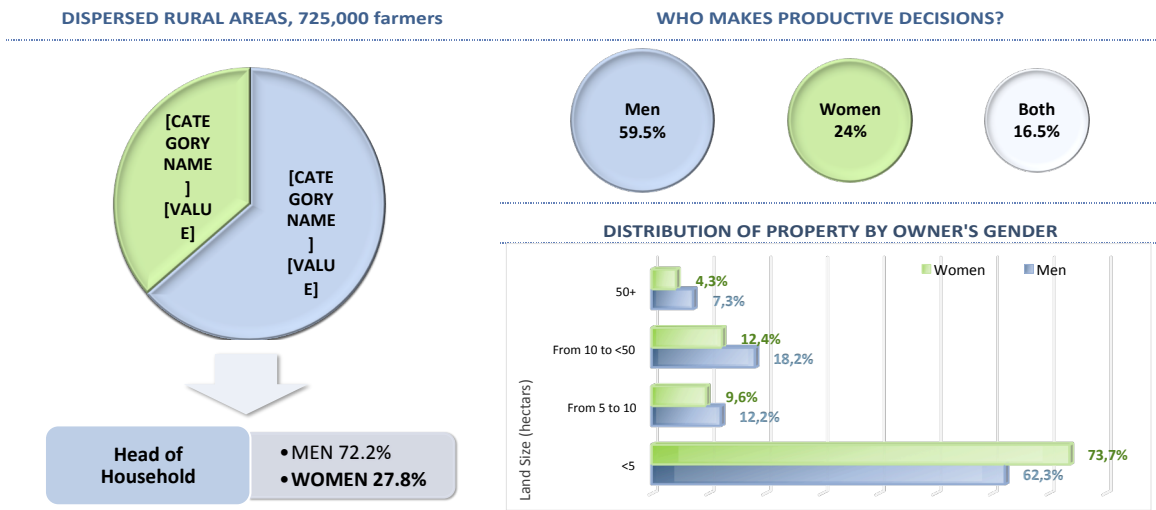
³ According to the Asociación Probienestar de la Familia Colombiana (ProFamilia) [2011, 2016], women attended school for 6.3 years, whereas men attended school for 5.6 years (based on the median).

Additionally, when it comes to education, there are significant differences between urban and rural women, which accentuate as they grow older. For instance:

- "Urban women ages 14 to 17 receive at least eight (8) years of education, whereas rural women complete only seven (7),
- Urban women ages 18 to 25 receive eleven (11) years of education, although rural women receive only seven (7); and lastly,
- Urban women ages 26 to 35 receive eleven (11) years of education, while rural women receive six (6) years" [Arias et al. 2013].

PRODUCTIVITY PROFILE. Because rural women rarely participate on decisions regarding land production and have a disadvantaged position regarding *land ownership*, these women are less likely to achieve their own *economic autonomy* (Figure 5).

FIGURE 5. RURAL WOMEN'S PRODUCTIVE PROFILE



Source: DANE [2015]

Rural women are also 30% less productive than men because they dedicate a larger portion of land to crops for household consumption, and they have less access than men to fertilizers and equipment [Zuluaga G. 2015].

Furthermore, the amount of time women spend on care activities is significantly greater than men's, and for that reason, these women have little time for other activities, including those productive in nature. As per the *Encuesta Nacional de Uso del Tiempo (ENUT)* [National Survey on the Use of Time], women spend twice as much time on household chores than men do [DANE 2014].

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