

Resistance and Resilience: Grassroots Peace Activism in Colombia

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Global Studies Honors Thesis

March 2017

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To the Colombian men and women whose
unwavering fight for peace in the midst of
conflict is nothing short of heroic.

To the Carrillo family—for your strength, your
resilience, and your authentic desire for a
better Colombia.

Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my deepest appreciation to Dr. Jonathan Weiler, who guided me through every step of this research process—I would not have been able to complete this thesis without your guidance, support, and inspiration. Thank you for your continued mentorship.

I would also like to thank Dr. Gabriela Valdivia and Dr. Elizabeth Olson for serving as my advisors throughout this process. Your knowledge and expertise has been invaluable.

To Chris Courtheyn: thank you for challenging me to understand the Colombian conflict in more complex ways. Your passion for Colombia inspired me to take the plunge into this journey.

My most heartfelt gratitude to the courageous and awe-inspiring members of Colombia's civil population who give their lives for peace and the defense of human rights every day. Thank you for sharing your stories with me. I hope I did them justice.

Lastly, this thesis could not have been possible without my parents' unending patience and support. *Gracias por enseñarme que una bomba hace más ruido que una caricia, pero por cada bomba que destruye, existen millones de caricias que construyen la vida.*

This project was supported by the Tom and Elizabeth Long Excellence Fund for Honors administered by Honors Carolina.

Abbreviations

| | |
|----------------|--|
| FARC | <i>Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia</i> ; The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia. Leading leftist guerilla forces in Colombia. |
| ELN | <i>Ejercito de Liberación Nacional</i> ; National Liberation Army. Created in 1964 with the support of Castro's regime, mainly by university students who desired to impose a revolutionary Marxist liberation movement. |
| EPL | <i>Ejército Popular de Liberación</i> ; People's Liberation Army. Established with the desire to recruit power from rural areas and peasant communities under the principles of the Chinese leader Mao Zedong. |
| M-19 | <i>Movimiento 19 de Abril</i> ; 19 th of April Movement. Insurgent group was created in response to alleged fraud in the presidential elections of April 19, 1970. |
| AUC | <i>Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia</i> ; United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia. Paramilitary confederation united in the 1990s. |
| ONIC | <i>Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia</i> ; National Authority for Indigenous Government. |
| CRIC | <i>Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca</i> ; Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca. |
| IMP | <i>Iniciativa de Mujeres Colombianas por la Paz</i> ; Initiative of Colombian Women for Peace. |
| ANMUCIC | <i>Asociación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas, Indígenas y Negras</i> ; National Association of Rural, Indigenous, and Afro-Colombian Women. |
| CONPA | <i>Consejo Nacional de Paz Afro-Colombiano</i> ; Afro-Colombian Peace Council |

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

“The Colombian people want and deserve to have peace. Violence should already be a finished moment in their development as a democratic nation, because so far, violence has been the impediment to building a society with equity and equality, with freedom stopping being a word, and starting to be a way of living.”

-Stella Sacipa-Rodriguez

(Psychosocial Approaches to Peace-Building in Colombia)

For over fifty years, the Colombian nation has endured the longest-running internal conflict in the Western Hemisphere, which has resulted in an insurmountable loss of life with almost a quarter of a million killed and more than 5.7 million forcibly displaced (Human Rights Watch, 2014). The vast dimensions and intricacies of the Colombian war have helped to further intensify the human rights abuses perpetrated against civilians, which are fed by drug production and trafficking, illicit trading, arms proliferation, and contending political ideologies (Bouvier, 2009).

After over four decades of internal conflict, human rights atrocities, and violence, the Colombian government has sought to develop comprehensive laws and policies in order to address the protection of at-risk populations; however, the rights of Colombia's civil society population and its minority members are far from being adequately defended. Although many marginalized Colombians, largely as victims of their circumstances, joined the fighting forces of rebel alliances, many others chose to establish alternative peace movements free of state cooperation. Because the Colombian state has failed to adequately protect women, rural communities, Afro-Colombian individuals, and indigenous populations, among others, these

groups have been forced to design and develop autonomous ways to safeguard their communities, particularly through models of self-protection based on practices of disarmament, autonomous self-governance, neutrality in conflict, and the denunciation of human rights abuses by armed forces.

This research analyzes peace building in Colombia in contrast to the culture of violence typically associated with Colombia's history. Through oral history interviews and specific case studies of civil society peace activists, I discuss the Colombian population's struggle for peace in the midst of war and how the concept of peace is constructed and interpreted in different sites and scales. Through the implementation of a wide range of alternative techniques of non-violent resistance—grassroots cultural identity assertions, promotion of human rights, protective accompaniment, peace culture pedagogy, and defense of territory, among others—I analyze communities' complex search for peace. Under these practices, I argue that victims of Colombia's conflict and members of social movements have found empowerment, support, and the promotion of personal identity as members of minority communities. Primarily, however, my analysis focuses on how Colombia's broader culture of peace is developed by these social leaders.

The Colombian Armed Conflict

Colombia's infamous armed conflict began with communist-inspired uprisings that quickly gave way to a prolonged civil war between the Colombian government, paramilitary groups, crime syndicates, and the leftist guerilla group, *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* or FARC, who all primarily battled each other to

increase their influence on Colombian territory. The country's upheaval was born out of the social and economic inequity that plagued the voiceless populace, particularly the one-third of inhabitants that subsist in strained housing conditions in poor rural areas. *Campesinos* in these regions found themselves in fierce competition against agricultural enterprises over land and limited available resources. Because land possession in Colombia was not formerly or properly documented, territory from campesinos was easily seized and lacked protection from the national government (Hwang & Cerna, 2013). Disputes arose from deep-seated rivalries for land control, particularly between large landowners and *campesinos*, many of whom were farmers deprived of their land.

These confrontations over land control provided a breeding ground for guerilla movements in the mid-1960s. Meanwhile the underpopulated agricultural zones and dense jungle allowed them to find shelter from adversaries (Hwang & Cerna 2013). Guerilla groups composed of local *campesinos* who desired agrarian and land reform provided essential political and armed support to the small Communist Party groups that existed in Colombia during the mid 1940s. Beyond the fight for land reform, however, the central objective of these united radical organizations centered on the desire to overthrow the existing democratic government so as to establish Marxist ideals centered on anti-imperialism.

Throughout the 1960s, three other guerilla groups were formed under ideologies of communism and the example of Fidel Castro in Cuba. These included the *Ejercito de Liberación Nacional* or ELN, created in 1964 with the support of

Castro's regime and led by university students who desired to impose a revolutionary Marxist liberation movement (Hwang & Cerna 2013). Additionally, the *Ejército Popular de Liberación* or EPL was established to recruit power from rural areas and peasant communities under the principles of the Chinese leader Mao Zedong. Lastly, the *Movimiento 19 de Abril* or M-19 insurgent group was created in response to alleged fraud in the presidential elections of April 19, 1970. This group was known by the Colombian population for their grand-scale terrorist attacks, such as the 1980 storming of the Dominican Republic embassy and the siege of the Palace of Justice in Bogota in 1985 (Hwang & Cerna 2013).

During this time, many citizens including elite landowners and drug traffickers, believed the Colombian state and its security forces were not able to appropriately protect inhabitants from communist uprisings and began civilian initiatives to defend right-wing interests from the intimidation and violence exerted by the guerillas. Paramilitary groups arose out of a desire by civilian militants to take justice into their own hands, which led to a chaotic struggle between factions through the use of mutual intimidation, extortion, and violence (Hwang & Cerna 2013). This movement was further proliferated by the passing of Decree 48 by Colombian state forces, which gave "legal foundation for the flourishing of paramilitary groups in Colombia" (Hwang & Cerna 2013). Although the state did not support communist movements, it supported the formation of paramilitary groups and allowed not only for the creation of civil patrols, but also for the Defense

Ministry to “provide them with weapons restricted to the exclusive use of the armed forces” (Human Rights Watch, 1996).

Rather than ending injustices, however, paramilitary forces simply augmented the internal conflict and increased human rights atrocities through the adoption of guerilla warfare tactics. Paramilitaries did not solely focus on guerilla groups as their enemy targets. They besieged civilians who they considered sympathizers particularly in guerilla-infiltrated agricultural areas (Hwang & Cerna 2013). These right-wing militias united in the 1990s to form the paramilitary confederation named the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* or the AUC. Under this name, the militia was divided into blocs that sought to protect various economic, social, and political interests through attacks against guerillas or targeted sympathizers. Despite finding its main enemies in the FARC and ELN, the AUC was also responsible for copious attacks against civilians. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights released a 2005 report that stated:

The AUC was responsible for 342 cases of violations of the cessation of hostilities. These include the presumed reincorporation of demobilized persons into its ranks, massacres, forced displacements, selective and systematic homicides, kidnappings, rape, disappearances, threats, intimidation and lootings. These actions took place in 11 departments and targeted the civilian population, in many cases indigenous communities (UNHCR, 2005).

After three years of governmental peace talks, the AUC was officially demobilized in 2006. However, in 2008, reports by human rights agencies claimed that the AUC reemerged and was attacking civilians, although the Colombian government denied

these accusations. Regardless of the state claims and official demobilization, many members have still declared themselves as active in the AUC (Cassman, n.d.).

The Colombian conflict was further intensified by drug cartels that became responsible for over eighty percent of the cocaine and half of the heroine consumed in the United States, making this market almost a third of Colombia's foreign income (Hwang & Cerna 2013). In 1981, a secret national convention of the illicit drug industry was held in Colombia during which death squads and paid assassins were recruited. These have since killed a significant percentage of innocent civilians, state officials, contending drug dealers, and guerilla troops. This alliance was formed so as to protect drug lords' individual security and economic interests, particularly with respect to the FARC's newfound entrepreneurship in coca cultivation, which aided in providing guerilla organizations the crucial source of income they previously lacked.

Beyond drug production and trafficking, Colombia's history is afflicted by stories of violence, meriting it the title of the "kidnap capital of the world," with more than seventeen thousand people kidnapped in the past seven years (Bouvier, 2009). On average, from 1996 to 2005, someone was kidnapped every eight hours in Colombia, while each day at least one person was killed as a result of anti-personnel mines, which are explosive devices meant to kill or disable their victims (The Guardian, 2013). Over the past 25 years, anti-personnel mines have killed or injured over 11,000 Colombians, 40 percent of whom are civilians in rural areas, particularly in the Colombian department of Antioquia (Otis, 2015). The conflict has

thus endured as one of the principal obstacles in reducing extreme poverty and inequality, fostering socioeconomic development, and strengthening democratic systems and civil society.

While the FARC lost many of its principal military leaders and experienced a weakening of its central governance in recent years, it is the only guerilla group remaining with significant military capacity to “seriously threaten public order in Colombia,” ensuring that human rights violations and endemic violence remain (Hwang & Cerna 2013). However, it is important to note that human rights violations have been perpetrated by all of the actors involved in the Colombian armed conflict and include unlawful killings, the use of illegal weapons such as land mines, recruitment of child soldiers, forced displacements of the civilian population, kidnappings, rape, and harassment. Further impediments to this conflict have been created as well as a result of social inequality, crime, and governmental impunity, which are pervasive throughout the nation (See Figure 1).

State-Led Negotiations

Although several of Colombia’s past six presidents attempted to end Latin America’s longest running insurgency, a significant breakthrough was made under President Juan Manuel Santos whose administration announced in September 2012 that his government had been undergoing secret negotiations with the FARC and had agreed on the configuration of future resolutions. After 54 months of negotiations, the FARC and the Colombian government reached an agreement in August 2016 with President Santos declaring:

Mothers should not bury their children. Our children, our *campesinos*, our soldiers, should not keep suffering the mutilations of antipersonnel mines. We don't want more young people as cannon fodder in an absurd and painful war. We Colombians have the right to recover hope in a better future. With this accord we will stop being viewed as a dangerous country, and more investment, more tourism, and more employment will come. With this accord I leave in your hands the opportunity to end the war with the FARC (WOLA, 2016).

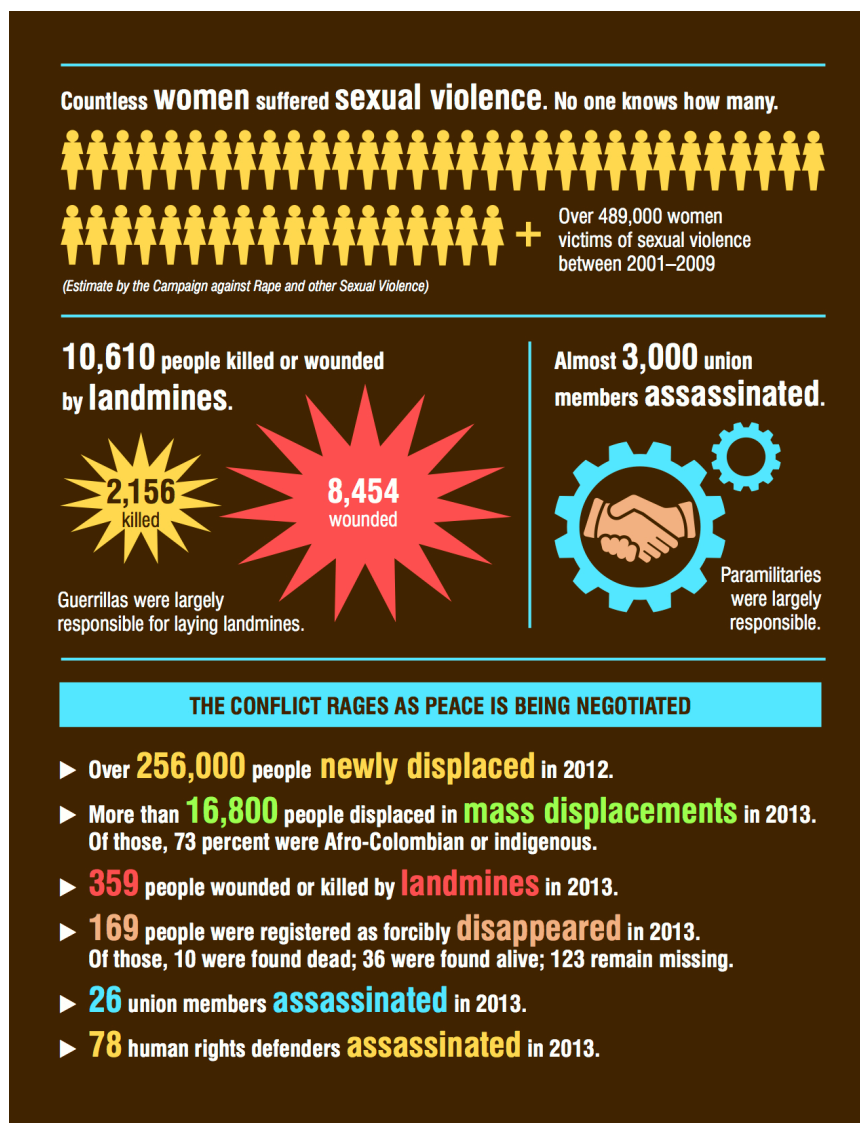


Figure 1. The Human Costs of the Colombian Conflict.

Source: Colombia's National Historical Memory Center, 2013

The agreement was comprised of commitments on five primary agenda points,

including: governmental commitment to making substantive investments in the rural economy; reforms that will ease the participation of previously excluded political movements; a new approach to illicit coca cultivation based on governance and assistance; a truth commission and transitional justice arrangement as an alternative punishment to those who confess to war crimes; the surrender of all weapons to a United Nations mission; and mandatory reintegration programs (WOLA, 2016).

Regardless of the governmental accord, however, the Colombian people disapproved the accords in a plebiscite on October 2016 with 50.2 percent of votes rejecting the agreement. Colombia was divided regionally with most of indigenous, afro-Colombian, and *campesino* (rural workers) areas voting in favor of the peace process and those within major cities inland voting against it (See Figure 2). For instance, Choco, one of the regions most highly affected by conflict, voted 80 percent in favor of the peace deal. Individuals in areas such as Antioquia who voted “no” to the agreement believed that accepting the peace agreement was letting FARC rebels “get away with murder” (BBC News, 2016). While some believed that they did not trust guerrillas to keep their promises of disarmament, others did not support the agreement because the FARC was guaranteed 10 seats in the Colombian Congress as part of the 2018 and 2022 elections (BBC News, 2016).

Although many Colombians welcome the idea of peace for our nation, many are also weary of rebels’ motives and are critical of the government’s willingness to make concessions. Many victims were particularly disapproving of the peace treaty,

as it sets free thousands of combatants with little to no repercussions or jail time. Additionally, this also means re-integrating thousands of revolutionaries into society with the help of governmental services like psychological assistance and vocational training under tax dollars, which are programs that many of the victims themselves were not offered or provided (Buschschluter, 2014). Although the supporters of the “no” vote insist on corrections to the agreement, such as barring those found guilty of crimes from running for public office, forcing the FARC to pay their victims compensation, and prison time for FARC leaders, leaders of the opposition have not made any efforts to renegotiate the deal or formalize talks with the FARC (BBC News, 2016).

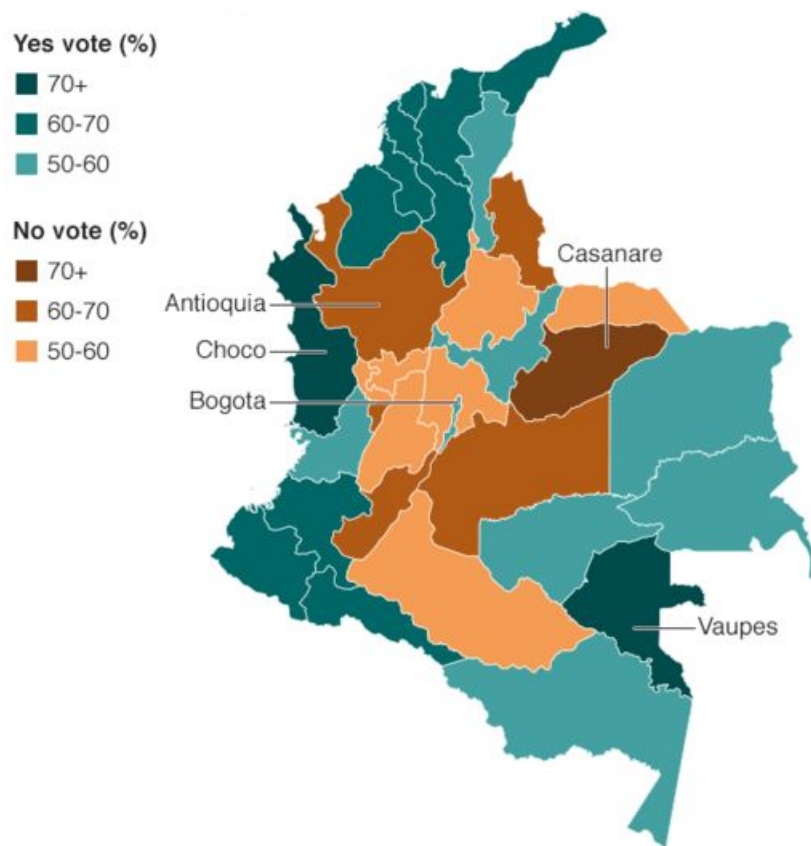


Figure 2 How Colombia's Provinces Voted
Source: National Civil Registry

With the past six presidential administrations that failed to properly bring peace to the country and an increase in skepticism towards government competence, many civil society leaders have sought peace and empowerment for their communities on the bases of their own capacities by way of non-violent means, such as demands for the preservation of human rights, the recovery of collective memory, solidarity, the development of autonomy, and the revealing of truth and denouncement of perpetrators, among many others (Sacipa-Rodriguez & Montero, 2014).

Given Colombia's history of violence, it is not surprising that within the relative lack of attention that Colombia receives by Western media, the limited headlines published are dominated by stories relating to themes of internal conflict, violence, and drug trafficking. Colombia's drive for peace, particularly by civil society groups and social grassroots movements has been largely ignored, while analyses regarding state-level peace initiatives have focused on the ineffective and futile attempts by a succession of government leaders to negotiate a peace agreement. Limited research and attention has been devoted to studying and supporting nonviolent actors in Colombia pursuing peace initiatives, many of whom are marginalized minorities that hold high stakes within the resolution of the war.

The invisibility of Colombian peace leaders is due in part to "the general invisibility of the sectors of the population that have been most victimized by violence, economic policies, and discrimination" (Bouvier, 2009). Among the groups disproportionately suffering are indigenous communities, Afro-Colombians, rural

populations, women, and children. The World Bank estimates that approximately 80 percent of Colombians in rural areas live in poverty, while 42 percent live in extreme poverty and 15 percent of inhabitants are forced to survive with less than two dollars per day (Hwang & Cerna 2013). For the duration of the war and beyond, these populations have endured displacement, illiteracy, food insecurity, and lack of state policies and infrastructures to uphold and defend their basic human rights.

Response by Minority Social Movements

“To think about the country we want so dearly: a Colombia at peace, with solidarity and kindness for our children; a Colombia that we sadly do not have, due to our own inability to resolve our differences.”

-Permanent Assembly of Civil Society for Peace

On July 30 and 31, 1998, over 4000 Colombians met at the Luis Angel Arango Library in Colombia’s capital to participate in the Permanent Assembly of Civil Society for Peace. This congregation marked the beginning of “a new level of organizations of Colombia’s civil society for peace,” as led by an assortment of representatives from all corners of society: business leaders, prominent politicians, church hierarchs, academics, union organizers, international accompaniers, indigenous leaders, and *campesino* delegates (Bouvier, 2009). Although this meeting ultimately did not create a detailed roadmap for peace in Colombia, it nevertheless marked the beginning of similar gatherings throughout the country.

Four years later, another milestone congregation occurred in which actors met for Bogota’s National Congress for Peace and Country. Unlike the Permanent Assembly, however, this meeting did not host any elite actors, such as politicians and business leaders, markedly creating a different atmosphere from the

Permanent Assembly of Civil Society for Peace. The central purpose of this gathering focused on a desire to restart dialogues for negotiations after the collapse of government-led peace talks. During times when citizen efforts were small in magnitude and even smaller in public visibility, such meetings provided spaces for actors to engage in discourse previously absent in Colombia's political sphere (Bouvier, 2009). This movement also aided in linking activists across the country that might have otherwise been isolated in their efforts. Until this wave of activism, civil society engagement had been largely nonexistent. In fact, peace talks by former presidents including Belisario Betancur (1982-1986), Virgilio Barco (1986-1990), and Cesar Gaviria (1990-1994), spanning over a decade, lacked citizen representation.

During the beginning of the 1990s, however, Gaviria's government formally declared total war against FARC and ELN guerilla groups, and Colombia's state of violence became virtually impossible to ignore. Aided by the external context of public opinion, civil society organizations began guiding pacifist negotiations. Peace activists helped push for a national agenda of renewed dialogues and witnessed an overwhelming response by secular citizen groups desiring to join the movement. Although these organizations struggled to demonstrate how peace would be tangibly carried out, they nevertheless demonstrated to the Colombian government that public and civil support would lie first and foremost on open negotiations.

As a response, former President Ernesto Samper's administration (1994-1998) passed a new law created the National Peace Council with the objective of

bridging the gap between governmental institutions and peace groups. This council was designed to meet once a month to assist the government's peace policy, as well as channel civil society's demands and recommendations (Bouvier, 2009). With public opinion and government support on their side, large peace gatherings became a frequent tool for activists. In fact, the country saw an increase of peaceful demonstrations and hosted some of the largest peace protests that Bogota had seen in decades, as evidenced when two prominent human right activists were assassinated in 1998 and activists rushed to the streets to protest injustices. Alongside Andres Pastrana's presidency (1998-2002), peace activism continued to surge, as his administration sought to ensure the success of state-led peace talks with the FARC.

During this time, the Permanent Assembly of Civil Society for Peace began to hold recurring "convergences," which included multi-day, multi-sector meetings where peace promoters would gather to discuss negotiations and seek consensus on a common strategy (Bouvier, 2009). Although these significant meetings brought together activist representatives from all sectors of society, helped to ease networking, and encouraged free discourse, directors quickly found that the conferences lacked coherence and were plagued by chaos. Consequently, they failed to produce detailed recommendations regarding how to achieve goals of human rights protection and more equitable development (Bouvier, 2009).

Civil society's ephemeral rise began to deteriorate through structural setbacks and ultimately fell as a collateral victim to the FARC's kidnapping of a

Colombian senator, with peace talks coming to a screeching halt. Peace activists quickly lost Colombian public opinion, as politician Alvaro Uribe, one of Pastrana's most vocal critics, moved into first place in the election polls in the 2002 presidential election. The space for activism shrank dramatically as a result of public skepticism and hostility. In fact, when peace activists assembled in February 2003 to demonstrate near the site of Bogota's El Nogal social club, where a guerilla car bomb had killed dozens, they were harassed and shouted down by public gatherers (Bouvier, 2009). No longer was peace seen as a noble cause, but was rather seen as "soft" on the guerillas—or even in support of them. What can be arguably categorized as a Colombian anti-peace movement was further sustained by the election of President Uribe whose "strong hand" politics made it clear he would not negotiate with armed groups. Prospects of peace negotiations appeared weak.

Although certainly less than in the peak years of the 1990s, civil society activism nevertheless remains "vibrant and creative with hope of a renewed citizens' movement of peace" (Bouvier, 2009). Peace movement efforts exist most visibly at the local and regional levels, but continue to gain national recognition by saving lives through dialogue with armed groups. Across the country, communities have witnessed women's organizations demanding gender equality and greater leadership participation, indigenous communities seeking the defense of ethnic groups' autonomy and territory, and children and youth groups leading communities toward positive change particularly through fighting for an end to domestic and gang violence (Bouvier, 2009)

Although peace activism has been less vocal at a national level, I would nevertheless argue that Colombians are in dire need of civil society peace movements that are ready to help lead the charge toward a more peaceful and just country, regardless of the outcome of state-led accords. These renewed peace movements have learned from past challenges in order to lead a movement that is “more pragmatic, more proposal oriented, more mature, more politically astute, and ultimately, more successful in its endeavors” (Bouvier, 2009).

Methodology

The main victims of the country’s pervasive violence are Colombians who suffer on account of armed groups and who must profoundly endure the scars and damage of a war they have not created. I am among the millions of Colombians both directly and indirectly affected by the war. Growing up in Colombia amidst fierce violence and an adverse environment, I became aware of plaguing conflicts and an asymmetric war between governmental and rebel alliances at a young age.

Although the vast majority of my childhood memories are inundated with nostalgia and unconditional love, the deaths of friends and the violation of basic human rights of relatives were also a significant part of my normal life as a Colombian youth. In spite of the realities of war I endured, I am marked far more by the words of Carl Gustav Jung: “I am not what happened to me, I am what I choose to become.” It is this resilience and the deep hope that the country I love will one day find true peace that embody the person I have chosen to become.

This thesis seeks to rectify the neglect of active proponents of peace initiatives with the aim of considering how amidst Colombia's culture of violence, the Colombian population's non-violent resistance and resilience has allowed them to both transform and maintain their identity. Through discussing vulnerable populations' and civil society peace movements in Colombia, I elaborate on how forms of nonviolent resistance have shaped both collective and individual identities in the midst of conflict.

Such initiatives are described in the interviews I conducted for this thesis with peace activists and leaders of various civil society movements, including women's alliances and indigenous and ethnic groups, who have sought their own forms of peace demonstrations through grassroots level activism. These groups yield particularly important insights on the conflict given that they have been disproportionately affected by violence, but both in spite of and as a result of this injustice, they serve as prime illustrations of sustained promotion of social justice and the advancement of a culture of peace within their communities. This activism has played a major role in challenging Colombia's broken sociopolitical system, protecting the environment, promoting equality for women, opposing injustice, and defending the rights of minorities. Through these movements, groups affected by violence are given the opportunity to protect their own communities in the midst of state failure and neglect. After suffering the brunt of a cruel war, these communities have found that peace is the essential system to develop a more just, equitable, and inclusive society.

Women's organizations, such as the Initiative of Colombian Women for Peace (*Iniciativa de Mujeres Colombianas por la Paz*) or IMP, Women's House (*La Casa de la Mujer*), and National Network of Women (*Red Nacional de Mujeres*) are the central focus of my study on women's grassroots movements. These groups focus on achieving gender equality, ensuring the support of victims of violence, and fostering women's political representation and fair inclusion. The examination of women's movements dedicated to ensuring the social, political, and cultural positioning of women of ethnic and racial minority centers on the study of the National Association of Peasant, Indigenous, and Black Women of Colombia (*Asociación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas, Indígenas y Negras de Colombia*) or ANMUCIC. In spite of the peripheral status these groups must withstand within Colombia's *machista* culture, these movements persist in the development and implementation of prevention, protection, and reconciliation initiatives. Throughout the civil war, women have been victimized and silenced through exclusion, violence, and prejudice. These organizations are working to address the pain caused by war in order to move forward.

As a secondary case study, I analyze ethnic and racial groups, centering on the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (*Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia*) or ONIC, as well as the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (*Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca*) or CRIC. These organizations represent indigenous communities across Colombia and call for the defense of indigenous autonomy, territory, and culture, while demanding the protection of

indigenous rights. Additionally, I examine ethnic minorities that have organized under the support of the Afro-Colombian Peace Council, or CONPA, which is a distinguished coalition of ethno-territorial and civil rights leaders. Because Afro-Colombian persons also include a disproportionate number of victims and displaced communities, under this organization, Afro-Colombian leaders have launched a non-governmental, ethnic commission of the basis of their own autonomy to progress peace processes and territorial rights (Sanchez-Garzoli, 2016). Lastly, I study Puente Nayero Humanitarian Space in Buenaventura, an Afro-Colombian community that enables local people to continue to live on their land. Through case studies and oral history interviews with victims of Colombia's armed conflict, I analyze the concept of resilience through studying the experiences of Colombians deeply affected by the results of war and violence, while further elaborating on approaches to peace-building and identity formation.

The theoretical framework for this thesis includes the formation of a culture of peace as a contrast to the history of violence conventionally portrayed as a part of Colombia's roots, particularly through how the concept of peace may be variously constructed and interpreted according to different sites and scales. I use a bottom-up approach to discuss the participation and innovation of civil society groups and how these groups have helped to foster the country's complex search for peace in the midst of conflict. Through literary research as well as oral history interviews, I analyze a wide range of techniques of peacemaking that will be significant to understanding the various peace movements that have developed in Colombia, such

as diplomatic state-led initiatives, grassroots cultural identity assertions, boycotts, protective accompaniment, and imperial boundary making practices, among others (Megoran et al, 2014).

Primarily through literature reviews and studies of organizational projects, I examine peace building in a time of war and how different actors in Colombia's struggle for peace and security engage in preventing state failure. Additionally, through the use of individual interviews, I discuss the distinctive contributions of social movements, and how various entities define peace, both as an ideology and in practice, and how they desire to see these movements actively realized within their communities and throughout Colombia. Lastly, through conversations with peace activists, I examine how Colombians' genuine search for peace has impacted collective and individual identities.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

“It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.”

-Robert F. Kennedy

Understanding Peace

A largely contested and elusive concept, peace is fundamentally understood and defined through the reflection of a population through social construction. A community's social environment legitimizes norms about what peace is as well as provides for the opportunities and tools to mobilize support for nonviolence (Lupovici, 2013). Therefore, rather than viewing peace as a condition, the practice of peace is a dynamic social construct that is shaped by the space, place, and time through which it is made. The concept of building a culture of peace is understood as a class of human behavior, which relates to processes of community coexistence (Sacipa-Rodriguez & Montero, 2014). Because peace requires ongoing work and constant progressive change within communities, it is important to view this concept beyond the idea of a signed declaration, as peace can never be truly finalized—this ethereal concept is thus the personification of harmonious relationships and coexistence between communities and individuals, rather than the idea of an end goal or formalized outcome. Although a ceasefire agreement is a starting point for reconciliation, peace emerges out of relationships, rather than documents and policies, as these only allow peace leaders the space to further their vision.

A peace building approach beyond policy and law is particularly significant in Colombia's case study. Although Colombia's government has laws against violent behavior and homicide, the state's inability to enact and implement these laws requires a deeper analysis on how to target the underlying causes violence. Because rules and expectation of behavior within a culture are highly influential in molding behavior, including exacerbating and encouraging violence, community interventions are often fundamental to challenge societal norms to alter and correct the misconceptions that individuals might have regarding the behavior of others. Not only can cultural acceptance of violence normalize violent patterns, but it can also support the use of it. Under these conditions, using violence to resolve conflict can help to explain why certain countries that experience "high levels of one type of violence also experience increased levels of other types" (World Health Organization, 2009). In response, community approaches that seek to teach healthy relationships and a more realistic sense of positive behavioral norms from the bottom up have found a reduction in violence (World Health Organization, 2009).

The ultimate purpose of nonviolent resistance exists as a way to confront violence in order to strengthen social justice without the use of direct violence (Woon, 2014). As such, nonviolence exists beyond a belief system, but is rather an effective technique of political behavior that can help enact *anti-geopolitics*, which exists as a challenge to the geopolitical power of states and the political systems that they impose on its people in order to serve their geopolitical interests (Woon,

2014). Nonviolent action can serve as an effective means for challenging oppressive and violent relationships.

Despite the ever-changing nature of peace, the creation of a peace culture crucially relies on establishing common behaviors and attitudes that reflect principles of freedom, justice, democracy, civil rights, and tolerance (Sacipa-Rodriguez & Montero, 2014). Commitments to non-violence inspire social interaction while preventing conflicts through dialogue and negotiation. These approaches help to ensure the preservation of full human rights of all parties involved. Although peace is built through social interactions, lasting peace is not merely the absence of direct, physical violence established through ceasefires, accords, and mutual agreements, but it is rather sustained through “ethical, harmonious interactions in situations as small as personal relationships and as large as the global system of nations” (Barash, 2010). Consequently, as human interactions occur over time and space, it is necessary to focus on how relationships are continuously reconfiguring themselves so as to redefine peace and its goals. Under this understanding, many of the community leaders I study seek to establish peace by rebuilding the social fabric in their communities through principles of empathy, solidarity, dialogue, and reconciliation—fundamental to bettering communal relationships.

To construct a culture of peace, communities have developed resources to empower victims of conflict. Through methods such as international accompaniment, social techniques, coping strategies, and the recovery of collective

memory, survivors and activists find dignifying ways for reclaiming their self-esteem and re-signifying feelings from trauma. By creating communities around traumatic experiences with other individuals that have suffered in the same way, individuals are able to develop a sense of being useful as well as develop hope in the future. Rather than working on violent solutions, communities use discourse to declare violence as the underlying problem. Through these techniques, peace practices are seen as a class of human behavior. For instance Campesino University in Colombia, established in 2004 by the first peace community, San Jose de Apartado, began a project in which community members shared experiences of suffered trauma as a result of permanent threats by armed groups and their responses through non-violent resistance to war (Sacipa-Rodriguez & Montero, 2014).

Peace education has also become an established practice to build sustainable peace. The proposals under peace education view schools as vitally interconnected with the community, as the community itself is a context for learning through daily activities. Under psychosocial approaches to building peace, these education systems “evoke active, creative, and transformative paths to knowledge” (Sacipa-Rodriguez & Montero, 2014). Education is thus essential to form Colombia’s peace culture to ensure teaching peaceful conflict resolution, responsible citizenship, and the promotion of tolerance and respect (Underwood, 2015). Through the active formation of a peace culture, more inclusive identities are constructed that abandon division and social conflict (Sacipa-Rodriguez & Montero, 2014).

The ethics of positive peace incorporates eight extensive areas identified in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which center on the conditions for a just and sustainable peace, extending beyond simply non-violence. This includes the use of education to socialize individuals into forming pacific communities formed under an emphasis of negotiation, resolution, non-violence, and dialogue; gender rights and equality, which are assessed through the degree to which women's voices, opinions, and public power are honored; respect for human rights of all population groups; the advancement of international peace and security over the procuring of arms and power; the promotion of tolerance and solidarity as reflected by a country's expanse of internal displacement; measures of democratic participation; and the presence of equitable, sustainable development allowing for the implementation of personal welfare (Sacipa-Rodriguez & Montero, 2014).

To ensure the development of more inclusive societies and peaceful cultures under conceptions of positive peace, public leaders must forgo contentions of division and social confrontation that are reflected in public discourse. Instead, they must work to establish extensive and inclusive identities and eliminate notions of "good" and "bad" Colombians. This allows for the establishment of social categories that welcome all citizens—even those who are armed actors in Colombia's conflict (Sacipa-Rodriguez & Montero, 2014). Under these ideals, alternative movements towards peace have sought to create a culture that advocates for a set of objectives and systems that directly incite conscious behavioral change. This style of peace generated by social mobilizations seeks to redesign society and express forms of

non-violent actions on cultural, political, economic, and social dimensions. Such a construction of a culture of peace values discourse and humanizing practices as a supreme good, while committing to reconciliation and the protection of all citizens through non-violent means, particularly those most vulnerable in society.

Theoretical Framework: Geographies of Peace

The theoretical approach of geographies of peace serves as a basis for understanding grassroots peace activism in Colombia, as this framework exposes the ways in which peace is constructed, interpreted, and experienced in distinctive spatial, cultural, and temporal contexts (Megoran et al, 2014). This geographical approach aims at understanding concepts of peace under “a broad umbrella rather than a narrow dogma” and contends that peace is not simply a matter of territory, but rather is shaped by the space through which it is made (Megoran et al, 2014). This framework argues that geography can be used to build peace, not as an endpoint or static achievement, but as an ever-changing form of socio-spatial relations (Koopman, 2011).

Because “much can be learned from the different discussions about what peace means in different places and spaces, and the ways people there are trying to build it,” geographies of peace examines sites of peace-building to understand how peace is essentially constructed and interpreted by various alternative peacemaking efforts (Megoran et al, 2014). This understanding allows for the re-creation of political geography and how it can contribute to peace. Activists and community members are actively constructing peaceful geographies within their communities

through the practice of acknowledging the physical, structural and cultural violence that is pervasive in Colombian communities; nonetheless, they continue to dynamically focus on actively constructing peaceful geographies as a contrast to the aforementioned structures of violence.

An understanding of human rights is a crucial tool for building such peaceful geographies, as this composition allows for the implementation of technical practices that promote peaceful, more fruitful social relations. Human rights offer a normative, pro-positive vision of peace as they can be used as a measure for realizing less violent and oppressive community and cultural relations. Under this understanding, the promotion and successful implementation of human rights is an essential means to achieving sustainable peace. The social movements I study use discourse and the promotion of human rights to develop understandings and frameworks of continual peace building (Megoran et al, 2014).

Geography's contribution aims at understanding peace in expansive and multidimensional terms as well as "offers the possibility of capturing the complex reality of peace both through the discipline's integrated approach and the foregrounding of concepts of space, place, and scales" (Megoran et al, 2014). This theoretical understanding focuses on grassroots peacemaking practices and how geography can be used to build peace, as peace is "inherently special." Rather than a matter of territory, peace is made and shaped through the space where it is practiced. For instance, in the case of protective accompaniment, a grassroots peace-building strategy, space is shaped by the companions—through their practices of

wearing a uniform, carrying a white flag, or the performance of presenting their notification letter—but also by the practices by other actors, such as the Colombians they are accompanying and the armed actors that are threatening them (Megoran et al, 2014). Under this example, alternative peacemaking efforts are used as a way of re-imagining political geography and how it can contribute to peace (Megoran et al, 2014).

Because it seems that peace is not evenly distributed nor does it occur the same everywhere, rather than being understood as an endpoint, peace is also shaped through the scale and place through which it is made (Koopman, 2011). Scale analysis in this sense is a fundamental geographical concept not only to understanding how conflict is initiated and sustained, but how conflict is resolved through peace building. For instance, a study of intrastate local variations in wealth distribution found that the risk of violence exponentially increases in areas with low income, particularly in developing countries with significant income inequality (Kobayashi, 2012). While at local scales, conflict is often waged against individuals, households and communities, at a global level, terror and violence are most significant within countries ranked as least developed by the United Nations Human Development Index (Kobayashi, 2012).

Movements and ideas for peace involve a wide range of thinkers and activists that must lead the shift into a culture of peace (Megoran et al, 2014). This process stems from the recognition and valuing of identities, territories, and alternative forms of development and cultures (Rojas & Meltzer, 2005). Conflict-ridden areas in

Colombia are exceptionally in need of reconstruction of identities led by mobilizations that favor peace and value life. In order to challenge structural violence, Johan Galtung, founder of the discipline of peace and conflict studies, argues that four steps are ultimately necessary to ensure grassroots development. These include confrontation, struggle, decoupling, and recoupling. Step one, confrontation, involves clearly selecting issues that encapsulate the broader conflict, and then stating the desired outcome. Step two, embarking on a struggle, focuses on overcoming repression and exploitation by means of nonviolence. Nonviolent struggle is a technique to address conflict and devising an alternative to violence. Decoupling, which is step three, centers on noncooperation, which is a common form of nonviolent resistance that involves breaking relationships with the oppressor at a social structure level in order to build autonomy and the capacity for self-reliance. The final step, recoupling, is the final goal of this framework, which focuses on “achieving a horizontal structure, one with human rights instead of repression, equity instead of exploitation, autonomy instead of penetration, and solidarity instead of fragmentation” (Achankeng, et al., 2015). Galtung’s framework regarding the transformation of structural violence for peace allows for the conceptualization of “practical avenues of peace” (Loyd, 2012).

Scale and place can also be examined through a gendered perspective, which will be fundamental to this thesis’ analysis of women’s peace movements in Colombia. Because men and women experience the effects of war in vastly different ways— men tend to be killed and wounded as a result of engaging in direct battle,

while women are more often victims of crimes of rape, mutilation, and forced displacement—warfare is “profoundly changeable in response to changing conditions” (Kobayashi, 2012). Likewise, nonviolent resistance to war and the creation of peace-building conditions is contingent on the conditions of the space in which it is made. Feminist geographers have developed the term *antiviolence*, which is synonymous to the contemporary movement to end violence against women, including domestic violence and rape, among others, as a way to study violence outside of nation-state frameworks. Women’s movements for *antiviolence* allow for a broader understanding of how various groups of people experience violence uniquely and seek to transform it (Loyd, 2012).

Under Galtung’s aforementioned framework of conflict transformation, women’s movements’ selection and identification of the issue, in this case, domestic violence, allows for the encapsulation of broader themes of gender and sexual oppression. As I will discuss in my research, these movements have been able to form their own institutions and communities to create horizontal structures for more community and local accountability outside of state reliance.

The groups featured in this thesis search to reduce violence while creating spaces for peace building. In the case of Colombia, sub-alternative movements have provided a space for public debate, discourse, and social and political awareness, which has contributed to the formulation of peace agendas for these communities (Rojas & Meltzer, 2005). Although all the communities I examine are looking for vision of positive peace, each community has its own understanding of what peace

and justice means within their own context and culture, depending on varying goals and priorities. The contributions that each civil society group has furthered deepens the understanding of what peace means to different communities, what methodologies should be employed to achieve peace, and how we might theorize peace. Consequently, this research aims at understanding peace in more expansive and multidimensional terms.

Understanding Resilience

Because intense suffering and constant abuse can create the psychosocial belief that peace is unattainable and inaccessible for victims of war, individuals that strive to overcome or mitigate the effects of violence through resilience tactics demonstrate a notable step towards constructing a culture of peace. These approaches for resilience, as exemplified in the case studies I will discuss, include the idea of building consciousness in favor of a peace agenda; proactively objecting to violence; promoting pro-peace conditions such as coalitions, marches, and strikes; and seeking social action regarding peace and conflict resolutions within local communities and other organizations.

Viewed by the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction as “more of a process than an outcome,” resilience exists as a transformative process of strengthening the capacity of individuals or communities to manage and recover from shocks (Kindra, 2013). Although every individual experiences stressful events in his or her life, resilience is “the capacity and dynamic process of adaptively overcoming stress and adversity” (Wu et al., 2013). Resilience occurs as a

fundamental protective system for human adaptation and development and takes multiple forms, including stress resistance, recovery, and positive transformation. The concept covers three specific kinds of phenomena: overcoming the odds in high-risk groups of people, maintaining effective functioning under highly adverse conditions, and regaining normal functioning following the exposure to traumatic experiences or conditions. Resilience in this sense involves positive transformation patterns in which an individual improves in the course of a crisis (Masten & Obradovic, 2008).

Researchers of resilience argue that just as “all disasters are local,” at least in the short term, human resilience appears to be local, as it emerges from individual and small community action. Resilience is found in relationships within microsystems, which include family members, peer groups, and school systems. Larger “exosystems”, though they may facilitate resilience, are not as likely to be available during a major conflict or disaster. In turn, the functional presence of values, memories, and cultural knowledge that individuals and families carry with them all the time acts as a secure-base for positive development (Masten & Obradovic, 2008). This research furthers the understanding of how victims of conflict develop and enhance resilience through positive coping mechanisms and the mitigation of stress responses. This ability is used in a variety of different ways by the case studies in this research through various strategies, including problem-solving approaches to difficulty, ability to adapt to change, drawing on a range of strategies to cope with conflict and trauma, the recovery of collective memory, and

the denouncement of abuses through truth commissions (Braddell, 2015).

Chapter 3: Research Design

“There is a huge social movement and it is growing. They are women, youth, children, communities, the non-traditional sectors—this is where the hope for a change in Colombia resides these days.”

—*Ana Teresa Bernal, civil society leader*

Method

To establish a comprehensive analysis of peace building in Colombia, I examined peace initiatives by non-faith based civil society and minority peace movements. Primarily, I focused on marginalized and vulnerable communities that have been significantly affected by Colombia’s armed conflict and widespread violence. My study defines peace initiatives through peace studies theories established by Angelika Rettberg, Director of the Peace Building Research Program in Colombia, which defines these movements as “collective initiatives structured around the purpose of identifying and laying the foundations for a lasting peace in Colombia by way of non-violent techniques” (Rettberg, 2006). To distinguish and select pertinent case studies, initiatives had to fit one or more of the following criteria: (1) carry the label of “peace” within their name, (2) emphasize peace within their organizational mission, (3) implement tasks related to peace building among their mission, such as human rights promotion, local development, or democracy advancement.

Such an intentionally broad criteria allows for the inclusion of a variety of experiences, objectives, cultures, geographical spaces, social classes, and gender affiliation (Rettberg, 2006). The broad social, economic, and cultural affiliations of civil society members are grouped for the purpose of this study in terms of their

social and/or ethnic affiliation, which resulted in two main case studies—women’s contributions to peace building and local and regional peace initiatives by racial and ethnic groups. The main theoretical principles put in practice by peace initiatives that I study include initiatives for indigenous autonomy, non-violent resistance to conflict, peace development and support, peace education, and resilience as a means of empowerment. As such, these organizations are recognized as initiatives that engage in an intentional search for peace.

Because regional and local populations in Colombia often find themselves at the mercy of guerrillas and paramilitary forces while enduring the burden of excessive force and violence outside of government assistance, individual communities have established their own systems of support for survival through measures that ensure security, justice, and governance. Women in Colombia are often seen as passive victims and little regard is given to their roles in fostering peace and justice in Colombian society; however, women, along with ethnic and racial groups are at the forefront of non-violent resistance efforts (Rojas, 2004).

Women’s groups are creating a unique peace constituency in Colombia because they have sought to unite common agendas for peace building that unite marginalized Colombians across racial, geographical, and class boundaries (Rojas, 2009). They are active in all levels of society, ranging from local community organizations to national coalitions representing the needs of women countrywide. Alliances such as Casa de la Mujer (Women’s Home), Iniciativa Mujeres por La Paz (Women for Peace Initiative), Red Nacional de Mujeres (National Network of

Women), Mesa de Incidencia Política de Mujeres Rurales Colombianas (Advocacy Table for Rural Women of Colombia), and Asociación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas, Indígenas, y Negras de Colombia (National Association of Peasant, Indigenous, and Black Women of Colombia) illustrate a wide diversity of perspectives within women's groups that are fighting for the ultimate goal of durable peace and justice.

The methodologies presented by these networks vary widely and include advocacy efforts to raise awareness and protect the rights of victims, promotion of women's participation in the national arena, arrangement of public debates and discussions, and participation in decision-making in regards to issues of peace, reconciliation, and security (Rojas, 2009). Despite the various approaches seen across gender activists, all of these groups actively work with community-based organizations to provide support and solidarity for individuals in the country's most war-affected regions. Examining women's activism is crucial to understanding peace building in Colombia, as it "adds to the understanding of how gender has shaped women's relationship to conflict and peace—both as victims and protagonists for change" (Rojas, 2009).

My second case study analyzes resistance by ethnic and racial groups as a tool for peace building in Colombia, as witnessed through organizations like Consejo Nacional de Paz Afrocolombiano (the Afro-Colombian Peace Council), Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia (the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia), and Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca (Regional Indigenous Council

of Cauca). The primary goal of these groups center on the resistance of “widespread physical, economic, and political aggression” that continue to threaten the lives and livelihood of Colombia’s racial and ethnic minorities (Wirpsa et al, 2009).

Indigenous people in particular have been disproportionately affected by war with over 30 percent of Colombia’s indigenous battling the effects of violence and war, with 67 percent displaced in the Cauca Department of Colombia. Because indigenous culture, society, and ultimate survival are deeply rooted in land and territory, indigenous peoples are particularly vulnerable to the wide scale displacement that has occurred as a result of Colombia’s armed conflict. As such, indigenous health, education, and subsistence are severely threatened.

Comparably, 70 percent of Afro-Colombians live in urban and peri-urban areas across the country and often serve as the “natural custodians of the country’s biodiversity on which they depend for their subsistence and the maintenance of their cultural identity” (Minority Rights Group, n.d.). Black communities also practice a wide variety of agricultural tasks, including crop diversity and animal husbandry. Consequently, they have often found themselves in a struggle for control of territory over the armed forces’ exploitation of collective lands. Afro-Colombian political consciousness has also developed to serve as black resistance against oppression, ethnic discrimination, and cultural hegemony.

However, in spite of such complex systems of oppression hindering progress of ethnic and racial minorities, indigenous communities and Afro-Colombians continue to advocate for autonomy/self-determination, protection of territory,

environmental and economic sustainability, and peaceful coexistence. Such movements play a fundamental role in influencing and structuring institutionalized peace strategies across the nation that continue to denounce political, economic, and violence by armed actors. Because indigenous peoples and blacks have been “innovators of grassroots organization, resistance, and peace initiatives,” understanding the dynamics within these communities allows for holistic appreciation of the complex systems of minority resistance and community activism for peace (Wirpsa et al, 2009). The education for the promotion of a culture of peace that these groups provide directly promotes the development of knowledge, attitudes, and abilities related to a peaceful coexistence. Additionally, the promotion of the participation of democracy empowers the most excluded sectors of society to transform their environments nonviolently (Chaux & Velasquez, 2009).

Through civil society participation, the formulation of peace agreements and processes will have greater legitimacy and a greater likelihood of implementation. Because of historical state inability to conduct successful negotiations with the FARC, local and regional movements continue to “fill the gap at the grassroots level” (Bouvier, 2006). With over 30,000 peace initiatives across the country, local groups find a home principally in regions of violence and conflict that have been largely ignored by state institutions. Through the formation of networks and coalitions of a diverse variety of actors, peace activists have succeeded in bringing together leaders across the country to create an agenda for peace. In the words of Virginia Bouvier, senior program officer at the U.S. Institute for Peace, “the more

organized a community, the less vulnerable it is to violent conflict and the more capacity it has to present nonviolent alternatives to reconfigured social relations” (Bouvier, 2006).

The approaches undertaken by these organizations are particularly significant because to move forward towards meaningful solutions, national frameworks must take into consideration the root causes of the conflict so as to better address systemic elements of violence (Lederach, 2005). Peace initiatives in Colombia promote the inclusive participation of communities, democracy, the protection of human rights, nonviolent resistance, and the transformation of social conflicts. Through these coalitions, social leaders work to protect their community from corruption and violence, satisfy the basic needs of their population, and empower citizens through inclusion (Bouvier, 2006). All of these organizations ultimately serve as networks of solidarity that incorporate the inclusion of all actors in society to participate in sustainable and lasting peace (Abozaglo, 2009).

Data Collection

The data sources used for this research include books and commentaries on the topics of peace building and the development of geographies of peace, as well as interviews with various peace activists and civil society peace leaders across Colombia. The extensive interview processes I conducted of individual case histories were particularly essential to developing this thesis (See Figure 3). I originally conducted interviews with 31 groups, including indigenous organizations, women’s organizations, Afro-Colombian organizations, leaders of the Colombian Children’s

| Type of Organization | Name of Organization (English) | Name(s) of Interviewees |
|-----------------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| Women's Organization | Women's Peace Initiative/ <i>Iniciativa de Mujeres Colombianas por la Paz</i> (IMP) | Angela Ceron Lasprilla |
| Women's Organization | Women's House/ <i>Casa de la Mujer</i> | Diana Quigua |
| Women's Organization | Women's National Network/ <i>Red Nacional de Mujeres</i> | Beatriz Quintero |
| Women's Organization | National Association of Peasant, Indigenous, black Women of Colombia/ <i>Asociación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas, Indígenas y Negras</i> (ANMUCIC) | Nelly Antonia Velandia |
| Indigenous Organization | National Authority for Indigenous Government/ <i>Organización Nacional de Colombia</i> (ONIC) | Alexander Dora & Gilberto Arlan |
| Indigenous Organization | Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca/ <i>Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca</i> (CRIC) | Maria Ovidia Palechor |
| Afro-Colombian Organization | Afro-Colombian Peace Council/ <i>Consejo Nacional de Paz</i> (CONPA) | Richard Moreno |
| Afro-Colombian Group | Puente Nayero Humanitarian Space/ <i>Puente Nayero Zona Humanitaria</i> | N/A |
| Survivors | N/A | Laura Ulloa |
| Survivors | N/A | Diana Gomez |
| Survivors | N/A | Carlos and Paola Carrillo |

Figure 3. Table of Interviews

Peace Movement, non-governmental organizations for peace, academic leaders who shared their research regarding peace studies, and individual victims of violence in Colombia. I was personally moved by each of the stories that the interviewees shared, but because of space and time constraints, I chose primarily to focus on women's organizations and ethnic groups for this thesis.

During the interviews, I collected audio recordings that were later transcribed. I personally translated all the quotes included in this thesis from Spanish to English. I used ATLAS.ti as a coding software, which allowed me to categorize my data. I coded each interview individually and highlighted patterns across the transcriptions, with code words such as: *transformation of a culture of violence; beyond ceasefire; human rights protection; defense of territory; pacifism*, etc., most of which are outlined as subtitles within the examinations of the case studies in Chapter 4.

Although the questions and topics covered during the interviews varied across organizations and specific cases, the line of questioning I conducted centered on how individuals and organizations understood the ideology and construction of peace. I also focused on how a lifelong search for peace had impacted individual identities, values, or beliefs. Additionally, I examined how programs and practices were developed under territoriality for peace and what resistance techniques were crucial for this progress.

To converge various understandings and approaches of peace I focused on three main themes as discussed by Megoran et al (2014) under the interpretation of

geographies of peace, which included contesting narratives of peace, techniques of peacemaking, and practices of coexistence. The approach of contesting narratives of peace allows us to examine how the idea of peace may be variously constructed and interpreted within a variety of sites and scales, potentially producing different kinds of peace.

The second theme focuses on the analysis of techniques of peace making, which may vary between grassroots cultural identity assertion, boycotts, protective accompaniment, imperial boundary making practices, among others. Through further examining these techniques one can come to understand the main priorities of peace organizations and how these are being instigated. This is particularly crucial because it leads to an understanding of how techniques of peace “make space for peace” in areas of violence (Megoran et al, 2014).

Lastly, I sought to question how the elusive concept of peace is performed and the shifting scales at which it is encountered. This manifestation was particularly significant in understanding the implementation of pedagogies of peace and how every day settings in which individuals nurture mutual respect and positive interactions allow for “quiet successes” for constructing a culture of peace (Megoran et al, 2014).

Chapter 4: Results

Women's Contributions to Peace in Colombia

Colombian women are central protagonists in non-violent resistance against armed actors and have joined forces to develop a common agenda for peace at all levels and within all sectors of Colombian society (Rojas, 2004). I had the privilege of conducting oral history interviews with four women's organizations in Colombia that steadfastly call for peace in the midst of the longest running insurgency Latin America has ever seen. United under ethics of positive peace, these groups have joined together to form a strong, collective voice for women across the nation (Nobel Women's Initiative, 2016).

Although specific methodologies may vary widely across individual organizations, through my research I found that women's organizations are largely united by five major themes: (1) an understanding that peace is not merely the absence of violence, but is rooted in social, economic, and cultural inequalities and injustices; (2) condemnation of human rights abuses, and consequently, protection of women's rights; (3) an emphasis on the importance of reaching a peace agreement through pacifist means; (4) the fundamental need for a gendered perspective in the design, implementation, and assessment of peace projects; (5) a transformation of the cultural practices that celebrate war and violence and perpetuate the systematic oppression of women and other vulnerable populations.

Women's Peace Initiative

In 2001, the Women's Peace Initiative (IMP) began as a space where women from a variety of backgrounds and sectors could design a shared agenda for peace. Their two-fold purpose centered on ensuring the participation of women in all spaces of peace processes and dialogues as well as establishing visibility and respect towards women activists as political and social agents of change (Bouvier, 2009). Implementation of these goals calls for ensuring the protection of women from violence, a focus on truth, justice, and reparation, and an emphasis on the support and accompaniment of victims in the territories (Colectivo Mujeres Pazificas, 2010).

Since its inception, IMP has successfully accompanied and supported 45 victims of paramilitary sexual violence, and now stands as a leader in ensuring the intersection of the Truth Commission and reports of sexual violence from armed actors. This movement is particularly significant in Colombia as an international forum on sexual violence revealed that impunity for sexual violence in the country has reached 98 percent. During the 50-year armed conflict, 90,000 reported cases of sexual assault sustained a less than ten percent conviction rate (Sheldon, 2014). Such disproportionate rates of mass rape and sexual violence committed by armed forces are a tool with which to forcibly displace civilians, assert territorial control, and intimidate women leaders as well as human right defenders (Sheldon, 2014). However, with the aid of the Truth Commission, IMP has deliberately fought impunity and gained justice for victims across rural areas, including the conviction of Marco Tulio Perez Guzman, a paramilitary leader who raped close to 50 women

and currently faces sentencing for up to 40 years in prison, despite his adamant denial of crimes of sexual violence.

Like most women's organizations for peace, IMP is critical of Colombia's 1975 Law of Justice and Peace, which gives a maximum sentence of eight years to paramilitaries as long as they admit to the crimes perpetrated, regardless of the offense committed. Women's organizations counter this law with the firm belief that armed actors who perpetrate crimes against innocent civilians should be held accountable and punished. In Guzman's case, he chose not to hide behind this law and went to court believing that he would be ruled innocent as a result of impunity and paramilitary intimidation tactics against victims; however, IMP worked to develop various mechanisms to support claims of crimes of sexual violence, such as supplementary witnesses, psychological assessments, and medical examinations, which served as evidence for conviction and have legally held paramilitaries accountable for their violations as well as their subsequent refusal to admit to their crimes.

IMP also submitted a groundbreaking report to the Colombian Congress titled, "Violence against Colombian Women and Their Rights to Truth, Justice, and Reparation: Against Impunity and Silence," which recommended that Congress consider including "a gender perspective in the legal framework for the demobilization and reintegration of armed groups" (Bouvier, 2009). Such a proposal is significant because investigations in international peace processes have shown that incidences of violence against women significantly increase in the post-conflict

phase after combatant reintegration. This proposal also denotes crimes against women as crimes against humanity, which according to international law denies amnesty to perpetrators (A. Ceron, personal communication, 2016). Such efforts have helped to ensure greater visibility for victims of sexual violence as well as a reduction of impunity for offenders.

The Women's Peace Initiative has also worked to establish an unyielding and substantial presence of women leaders in the National Council of Peace and within spaces of civil society. Before this IMP-led movement, the council only supported a single female leader, but is now represented with 12 women activists, acting as a collective voice for women at peace negotiations and discussions. As such, the initiative's demand for the restructuring of social groups opened up spaces for women in the national council, both in terms of voting power and exerting ideological influence. IMP's fight for political representation and activism extended also to their presence in Habana, Cuba with the 2016 state-led peace dialogues that invited five representatives from the initiative out of a total of 60 victims, 60 percent of whom were women, to the negotiation process in Habana. This particular achievement demarked progress in terms of visibility for women in governmental spaces (A. Ceron, personal communication, 2016).

Casa de la Mujer

As a feminist organization dedicated to defending and promoting women's rights in Colombia, Casa de la Mujer works in 20 different departments across Colombia to "form and strengthen collectives of women who have been impacted by

the conflict,” and has had a significant role in creating and reinforcing spaces of autonomy, visibility, and support for over 83,000 women across the nation (Nobel Women’s Initiative, 2016). With three primary strategic objectives, Casa de la Mujer works to ensure the promotion of peace across Colombian territories. These include: the advancement and protection of women’s fundamental rights, violence-free life for women, and development of democracy and social justice through historical memory and truth.

This organization is responsible for dispersing feminist ideology and securing the positioning of women’s agenda on the public and political scene in Colombia and is currently recognized as one of the country’s leading feminist institutions for such efforts. It’s particularly renowned for its design of comprehensive care models for victims of the armed conflict as well as for its design of pedagogical and methodological methods for working with diverse women’s groups in strategic alliances for peace (Casa de la Mujer, 2015).

With the primary mission of fighting Colombia’s culture of violence and the alarming rate of violence against women, Casa de la Mujer has also designed, produced, and disseminated communicative advertising campaigns that seek to prevent, denounce, and eliminate violence against women. “There’s a culture immersed within the justice administration that continues to victimize violence against women,” Diana Quigua, in-house lawyer for Casa de la Mujer shared. “We’re finding that state leaders continue to legitimize this culture of violence by placing blame on victims, rather than on the perpetrators, which ultimately

impedes the allegations from reaching investigation” (D. Quigua, personal communication, 2016). With the goals of awareness and advocacy, Casa de la Mujer then published several national documents that outlined the impact of the armed conflict on women’s lives, such as with the “First Prevalence Survey on Sexual Violence against Women in the Framework of the Colombian Armed Conflict”, which increased awareness of the crimes perpetrated against women and the impunity that surrounds them. Additionally, the organization has promoted and accompanied legislation related to the extension of women’s rights in Colombia, particularly by affecting laws that recognize the rights of victims of violence, provide care and protection for victims, and punish perpetrators.

Through the action taken by Casa de la Mujer, armed factions have sat down to negotiate peacefully and contributed to the release of members of the public force held by the FARC-EP. Through the tenacity of many women who have dedicated their lives to a political solution to the armed conflict, Casa de la Mujer has successfully carried out applicable dynamics of pacifism and techniques of non-violent resistance that surround this movement. Diana described the legacy of Casa de la Mujer: “Millions of Colombians never thought a peace process was possible, but as the oldest feminist organization in Colombia, Casa de la Mujer stands as a pioneer for peace and has drawn from the experiences of generations of women feminists before us” (D. Quigua, personal communication, 2016).

National Network of Women

Groups of independent women and women's social organizations with a commitment to the defense of women's rights throughout Colombia formed the National Network of Women, an inclusive feminist organization that was formed with the purpose of producing spaces that promote the participation of women in constitutional reform. Through various processes of activism and empowerment, the network ensures that women serve as protagonists for change in various local, regional, and national spaces, rather than passive recipients. Although the promotion and defense of women's rights is the central focus of the organization, the network's mission centers on three specific concentrations: political participation and women's citizenship building, elimination of violence against women in all its forms, and women's participation in peace building. The network has proudly assumed a national role in these concentrations to ensure women's inclusion, empowerment, commitment, and transformation (Red Nacional de Mujeres, n.d).

Because Colombia holds one of the highest global rates of gender violence, impunity, and ineffective access to justice, the National Network continues to advocate for the elimination of violence against women with the goal of systematically affecting the quality of life of all women in the country. The network works to disseminate root causes of war, such as gender inequalities, poverty rates, and patriarchal values, which have ultimately made Colombian women invisible, vulnerable, and violable. Through establishing a direct dialogue with all Colombian citizens, the network thus seeks to deconstruct cultural patterns that naturalize violence against women (Red Nacional de Mujeres, n.d). Their mission further

centers on ensuring that women are able to report cases of sexual violence, and that reports are subsequently treated unequivocally and without intimidation. By acting as allies to women and certifying the completion a successful process, the network hopes other survivors will be stimulated to believe justice is achievable and therefore prompt them to denounce abuses.

To advance the ultimate objective of national peace building, this network of women activists seeks to promote the cessation of impunity for crimes of gender discrimination perpetrated against women in contexts of the armed conflict through principles of justice and reparation. Women advocates call for the participation of women in political decision-making so as to ensure the resolution of the armed conflicts and furthering the construction of a durable and positive peace (Red Nacional de Mujeres, n.d).

For the past 25 years, the National Network of Women has contributed to peace building and the promotion of democratic rights by positioning themselves in the national agenda as pacifist feminists, who have systematically denounced war as ultimately fragmenting civil society, weakening the state, justifying autocracies, and failing to promote true democracy. By ensuring spaces for women within the democratic system, the network fights to guarantee that the rights of diverse women's populations are holistically recognized and advanced (B. Quintero, personal communication, 2016).

National Association of Peasant, Indigenous, and Black Women of Colombia

The National Association of Peasant, Indigenous, and Black Women of Colombia (ANMUCIC) was initially organized around the creation of programs for the progress of women, but quickly assumed the role of defenders of the interests of *campesinas*, or rural farmers. ANMUCIC was established with the hope of establishing women as political actors and subjects of rights in all social, political, and economic scenarios in which they have been denied participation. Currently made up of 27 departmental associations of *campesinas*, indigenous, and black women, the association brings together municipal and primary organizations dedicated to gender and social service and whose associates are linked to the rural territories or have been displaced as a result of violence.

The group's primary contribution centers on the defense of women's rights with a focus on bettering the quality of life of rural women, empowering women in political, social, and economic realms, increasing participation in spaces of decision-making at the territorial and national levels, and ultimately demanding women's rights in regards to education, reproductive rights, poverty, inequality, and inherent dignity. ANMUCIC's mission works to advance initiatives that denounce corruption by both public and private entities, while presenting proposals that benefit rural women. Through coalitions and solidarity, this network has combined the efforts of diverse women activists in the reconstruction of Colombia's social fabric to establish Colombia as a territory free of violence (ANMUCIC, 2016).

Through principles of democratic participation in political decisions, anti-discrimination, equality of rights, and cooperation with associations working for the

benefit of rural women, ANMUCIC has been able to further its vision of implementing a response plan to the Colombian conflict as a way to collectively redress progress. Through the organization's formulation of agrarian politics, such as Law 731-2002, where ANMUCIC was the only organization that negotiated a signed legislation with members of congress, activists have been able to ensure the participation of rural women in all spaces of policy and decision-making. ANMUCIC leaders also participated in drafting the proposal of Law 1257, which helps to guarantee the protection of women who have been victims of violence and forced displacement. Through movements that fight for the rights of the most marginalized in society, ANMUCIC has undeniably revealed their stance as a coalition working to build a community and a country that reaps the fruits of a new generation of women entrepreneurs of peace (ANMUCIC, 2016).

Understanding Peace within Women's Movements

Approaches and philosophies vary within the women's peace movement and the organizations that support it. For instance, Casa de la Mujer and Women's National Network work from a feminist perspective and concentrate on "changing and questioning the power dynamics and their expressions in the language and symbols of society" (Bouvier, 2009). Although historically, women's movements have focused on leading proposals for an end to the armed conflict in Colombia through the mobilization of women, feminist movements also focus on women's personal, economic, physical, and psychological autonomy, as they realize that the origin of women's subordination in society originates from issues of societal inequality.

As such, Casa de la Mujer and Women's National Network find the intersection of feminism and peace in autonomy, as they argue women will not have the tools to access governmental resources to denounce abuses without causing a rupture in their economic and social means. This is particularly true with most family patriarchs discouraging or even forbidding women from denouncing sexual abuses for fear of shame, retaliation, or persecution. Feminist organizations thus seek to work around aspects of inequality and dependency to better address the core epidemic of violence against women (D. Quigua, personal communication, 2016). For activists within these organizations, the development of personal feminist identities are fundamental for understanding their position within Colombian society—as women, as peace advocates, and as survivors.

For Beatriz Quintero, leader of the Women's National Network, feminism is based on the ethics of respect, a search for equality, a fight for solidarity, and a wider understanding of diversity within society. "Feminism has granted me the ethics to admit that we are different, but that these differences do not and should not imply discrimination," Beatriz discussed. "Being a feminist means admitting the great diversity and great intersections that occur within society" (B. Quintero, personal communication, 2016).

Similarly, lawyer for Casa de la Mujer, Diana Quigua, discussed how feminist identities have allowed the organization's activists to transform how they relate to fellow Colombians, even within the complex and asymmetrical context of the Colombian war. "My biggest personal challenge has been finding new ways to relate

to others within the war dynamics that exist, because Colombian society is permeated by violent factors that emerged and are rooted in the conflict,” (D. Quigua, personal communication, 2016). Achieving peace for Diana and fellow feminist leaders is therefore rooted in solidarity, respectful dialogue, and internal progress. “We must all personally and individually prepare for peace,” Diana added.

Other organizations, such as IMP, define women as political agents of change and continue to encourage their direct participation in negotiations for the inclusion of a gender perspective in the reconstruction of Colombia (Bouvier, 2009). The main concern of comparable organizations is to highlight the role of women as valid political actors and ensure their inclusion in these spaces. Other women’s groups work exclusively in conflict-ridden areas and must deal with daily consequences of conflict, such as rampant sexual violence, displacement, and forced disappearances, such as The National Association of Peasant, Indigenous, and Black Women of Colombia, and are dedicated to “further expanding knowledge of the impacts of violence on rural women and children” (Bouvier, 2009).

Beyond Ceasefire

In my interview with peace activist for IMP, Angela Ceron Lasprilla, she described the end to violence against women as central to the construction of peace; however, she indicated that this must extend beyond a ceasefire as a result of the armed conflict. “The armed conflict is only 20 percent of the violence in which we live in,” Angela said. “We are striving to make visible what women have endured as a result of the conflict, but we also want to construct spaces for peace where women

are made more visible, the exclusion of women is reduced, and where women's fundamental rights are promoted. Such a construction of peace is created daily within our communities" (A. Ceron, personal communication, 2016).

Similarly, Nelly Antonia Velandia from ANMUCIC also asserted that although a ceasefire is fundamental to the Colombian nation, peace goes beyond the end to conflict, and will only truly be possible through the guarantee of women's rights and the implementation of active participation of women. Additionally, countering violence consists of ensuring that the government combats structural issues, such as narco-trafficking, illegal mining, and extractivism by multinational corporations. As such, peace requires truth, justice, reparation, and an end to the systematic violence perpetrated against women.

Protection of Human Rights

As a representative of ANMUCIC, Nelly also centered her discussion on the debt she believes the government owes rural women across Colombia, as the state has not properly defended women's basic rights. ANMUCIC seeks peace by demanding recognition and support by the government—not just of the social and political work that women have dedicated their lives to for generations, but of their inherent dignity as human beings. Ultimately, under this ideology, Nelly asserts that peace means ensuring policies are properly implemented, while women and their organizations are both strengthened and protected (N. Velandia, personal communication, 2016).

For ANMUCIC, nonviolent resistance techniques comprise the bulk of their methodology. International accompaniment, a technique that principally depends on the physical presence of international observers in conflict areas, most often seen in indigenous communities, serves as a key construction of peace. Primarily a protective strategy, international accompaniment is used to safeguard organizations, human rights defenders, and periphery communities whose lives are severely threatened by political violence and vulnerability. International accompaniment rests on the mission of “preventing and relieving pressure or risk situations affecting the continuity of work or physical and psychological integrity of individuals are organization [...] because of their work defending human rights” (Action Peace, 2016).

The recuperation of the social network through psychosocial reconstruction, visibility of political actors, and the prevention of protection, prevention, and decreased incidence of victimization also serve as primary resistance techniques for ANMUCIC. Through alliances and continued social mobilization, ANMUCIC has been able to establish solidarity with fellow social organizations, lawyer collectives, and international organization to form spaces in which to realize proposals and perform monitoring for victim law and land restitution.

ANMUCIC’s diverse population also recognizes the importance of convergence of peace and ethnic identity. “We search for peace through mutual respect of our beliefs, cultural and territorial autonomy, sharing of experiences, weaving of knowledge, and undertaking intercultural rituals to better face and

transform the pain that the war has caused us,” Nelly shared (N. Velandia, personal communication, 2016). By performing recreational activities and rituals, and contributing cooking knowledge, medical remedies, production of organic goods, and seeds, women are better able to share in peace building as it relates to ethnic and cultural identity.

Search for Peace through Non-Violence

My interview with IMP’s Angela Ceron centered on the discussion of implementation of non-violent techniques. IMP’s framework rests on the understanding that they are a united, pacifist movement driven by insistence and persistence. This motto arose from the *siriri*, a Colombian bird known for its strong, high-pitched cry. Angela shared that when *siriri* hatchlings are taken from their nest by birds of prey, they are never eaten because the birds of prey are unable to withstand the noise of their cry and tend to release the chicks. “What the *siriri* does is exert forceful pressure with its song so that he’ll be set free—this is what we do with out work,” Angela said. “We work with this symbolism as motivation, and every Tuesday we go to the Plaza Bolivar [square located in the heart of Bogota’s historical area that contains the National Capitol, which is the seat of the Colombia’s Congress] at 10 am and pressure the government for humanitarian accords, and continue to search for signatures of support until we reach our goal” (A. Ceron, personal communication, 2016). The activists wear shirts with this emblem as a reminder that their work does not end until they are heard.

For Angela, being a champion for peace and women's rights means finding a balance between her identity as an activist and as her identity as an aunt, a sister, a daughter, a friend. Because of the impact of threats and violence on her life, armed bodyguards protect Angela on the streets, and her normalcy means living in fear. "I am not able to go out in public with my nephew or play with him outside because something could happen to him," Angela discussed. "I've become a liability, a source of fear for my family." Even as a top leader within IMP, Angela acquires no funds for her work as an activist, but is fully supported and sustained by her parents. Despite the many hardships Angela and other IMP activists withstand daily, endurance and resilience as inspired by the *siriri* maintain her. "I'll continue to do this work for as long as I can because this is the life I've chosen," Angela concluded. "This is my decision."

Transformation of a Culture of Violence

To ensure lasting and sustainable peace, women's movements agree that the transformation of Colombia's culture of violence is fundamental. Consequently, IMP places an emphasis on fighting Colombia's culture of violence and the prevalence of *machismo*, particularly through the support and construction of new masculinities. This cultural transformation is centered on the commitment of men to personal change, including healthy expressions of emotions and frustration management, active participation against violence towards women and gender discrimination, and the support, promotion, and demonstration of positive models of masculinity, such as male caregivers, and traits of pacifism and sensitivity (Emakunde, 2010).

Similarly, Nelly Antonia Velandia from ANMUCIC defined peace as confronting the *machista* culture that permeates and resolving conflicts in a pacifist manner. “We construct peace through dialogue and discussion: by individual action, by peaceful action in the home, and by public action” (N. Velandia, personal communication, 2016).

Gendered Perspective

A theme of hope for a more inclusive and gender-conscious society emerged throughout my interview with Beatriz Quintero, activist for the National Network of Women, particularly as she discussed the construction of a more complete peace: “Although the extensive conflict of the civil war has fragmented civil society and the state, the vast majority of the population wants a peaceful society and the capacity for happiness,” Beatriz shared. “We have the possibility to construct a more peaceful and democratic country through proactive feminism, which will ultimately lead to greater conditions of equality and greater opportunities for women’s political participation.” Such a call for cultural transformation is rooted in women’s representation in both percentages and ideology within the democratic agenda, as without women peace is fundamentally imperfect. “For sustainable peace, we must include women into the peace agenda, as without women we are missing significant input and the intelligence of half of the population,” Beatriz said (B. Quintero, personal communication, 2016).

At the national network, women’s nonviolent techniques for the promotion of peace include demanding active participation in all spaces of negotiation, such as

within the Development Plan, National and Local Peace Council, and National and Local Planning Councils; construction of national reports regarding violence rates, impunity, and violation of rights; and the fight for education so that women can better exercise and demand their rights. Beatriz discussed the significance of pedagogies for peace as part of their mission of peace building: “It’s of great importance for women to be informed regarding the peace process so that when norms are implemented throughout the regions and territories, women can also ensure their active participation and the inclusion of their agenda in the peace consolidation” (B. Quintero, personal communication, 2016). During the 2016 peace accord, the network created infographics, drawings, and simple analyses that were disseminated to rural women and local *campesinos* to guarantee they were fully informed of the fundamental points of the 127-page peace agreement drafted by the state.

Women’s ultimate vision of peace exists as a movement of both gender and classes that focuses on the rights of women and the strengthening of public participation of women. These movements focus on making visible women’s condition of discrimination, while educating the public and posing gendered peace as a necessary element for society. Nevertheless, these movements believe women must continue to move beyond pedagogy and discourse, and ensure action as well as alliances with other women so as to ultimately form a great movement of convergence that will result in consciousness and attention.

“Women don’t have access to spaces where decisions are formulated,” Matilde Mora Poveda, *campesina* activist discussed. “We must create specialized attention in rural centers, where women lack visibility, where women’s voices are ignored, where women are not taken into consideration as active agents” (M. Poveda, personal communication, 2016). As such, women’s movements desire to be acknowledged as defenders of human rights, as active actors in the politics of the territories, and as agents of social change.

Regional Peace Initiatives by Racial and Ethnic Groups: Indigenous Groups

Colombia’s rich cultural and ethnic landscape is made up of indigenous peoples and Afro-Colombians that have been historically ignored and marginalized by state forces. One hundred two indigenous groups, as acknowledged by the National Authority for Indigenous Government (ONIC), make up approximately 3.4 percent of Colombia’s population and exhibit 65 different languages and diverse cultures, social organization, and ways of life. These groups are concentrated in rural areas across the regions of Guainia, Vaupes, La Guajira, Vichada, and Amazonas, which have suffered a disparate amount of internal displacement, violence, and human rights abuses (Sanchez-Garzoli, 2012) (See Figure 4). Because indigenous cultures and communities are intricately linked to land and territory, their vast displacement has severely threatened indigenous survival (Bouvier, 2009). The indigenous groups I examine through case studies, including the National Authority for Indigenous Government or ONIC and the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca or CRIC, fight to resist the widespread political,

physical, and economic aggression that has “threatened the lives and livelihoods of Colombia’s 800,000 indigenous people” (Bouvier, 2009). My examination of indigenous actions and voices describes how these movements have contributed to peacemaking in Colombia and shape both informal and institutionalized peace strategies. Three themes unite indigenous groups’ search for peace: (1) Defense of their territory, (2) seeking peace through pacifism, (3) the search for indigenous autonomy.

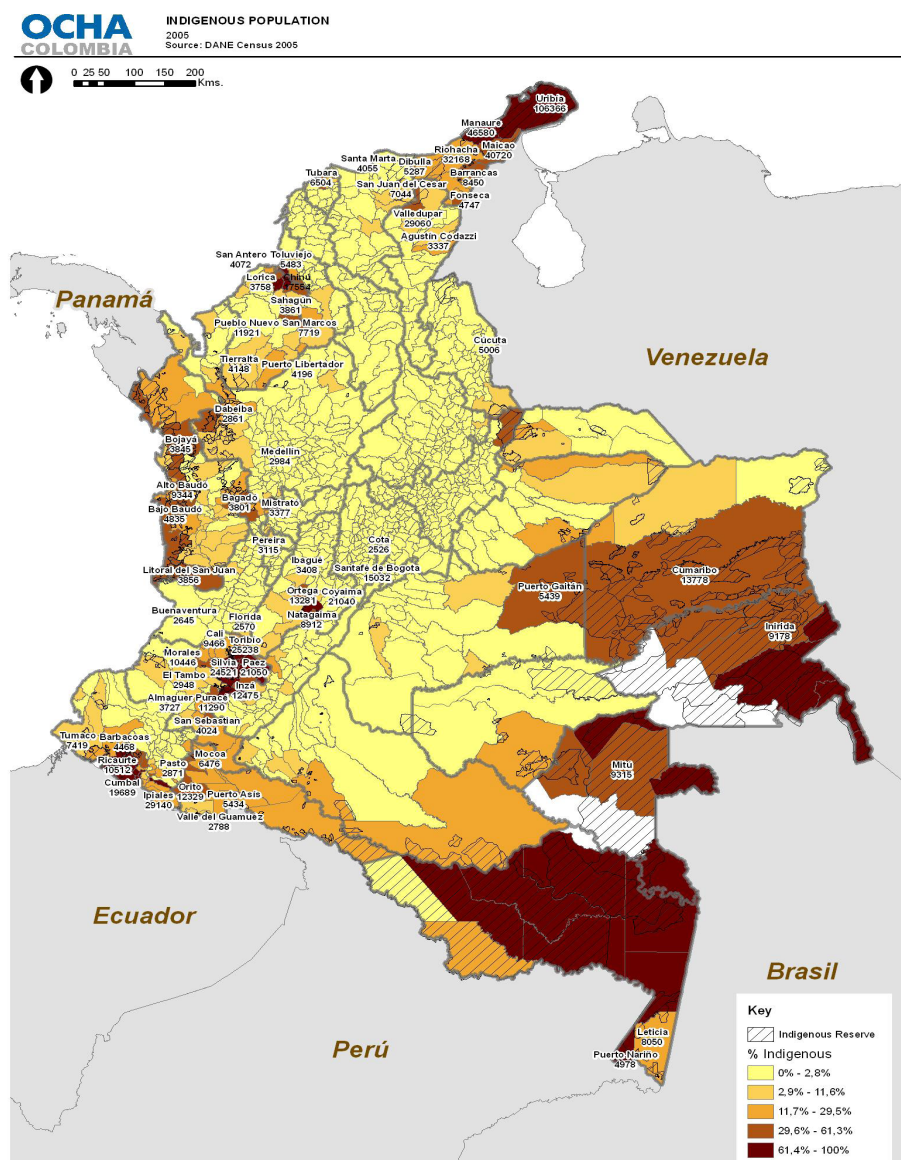


Figure 4. Colombia's Indigenous Population
Source: DANE Census, 2005

National Authority for Indigenous Government

The National Authority for Indigenous Government exists as an organization that represents indigenous populations in Colombia through a general assembly with representatives covering 90 percent of Colombia's indigenous communities. Led by ten councils, the organization primarily centers on the principles of unity, land, culture, and autonomy. I had the opportunity to discuss ONIC's work with Alexander Dora and Gilberto Arlan from ONIC's Peace and Human Rights Council, who fight for the fundamental rights of Colombia's indigenous communities and villages throughout 47 regional departments. The council's greatest achievements, as described by Alexander include the demand for fundamental rights, the development of national forums, peace forums, and macro-regional peace forums, and indigenous people's proposals and involvement within the state's peace processes. "We support the indigenous peoples at a national level as peoples of peace," discussed Gilberto. "Our territories must be spaces of peace for people" (G. Arlan, personal communication, 2016).

Alexander and Gilberto also work on establishing decrees that give attention to indigenous authorities in different territories in Colombia so that the organization is able to carry out community processes in the best and most effective way possible. "In indigenous territories armed conflict has always existed, but we have always countered this by working on peace processes and coexistence within the territories," Alexander discussed. This grassroots movement has slowly but

effectively gained support and achieved greater attention to collective and individual reparation.

Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca

Also advocating for indigenous rights and protection is the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca, or CRIC, which works to reconstruct and strengthen the *Plan de Vida* or Plan for Life—an Indigenous tool used to build a participatory proposal on indigenous projects and information regarding the community, its needs, and its vision—that seeks to reconstruct and develop constitutional, economic, social, and cultural rights of indigenous populations, and reinforce the process of territorial, environmental, political, education, and educational rights. Maria Ovidia Palechor, a representative of CRIC and leader of CRIC’s Defense of Life program, discussed her experience with the organization, to which she has dedicated over 20 years: “I have been a part of the indigenous community all of my life and have always been involved with the organization because that’s where I’m from—we’re born in the communities and we die in the communities” (M. Palechor, personal communication, 2016).

Maria Ovidia and her colleagues have helped to develop the Plan for Life as the path and life of the indigenous community, which exists as a strategy that allows for the survival and success of people in the territories. A main participant in peace initiatives, CRIC has contributed to civil society peace agendas for the construction of a lasting peace, particularly through the inclusion of different techniques for peace building, which focus on upholding respect for diversity in

Colombia. In particular, CRIC has established a peace proposal called Beyond Conflict, which states that many structural aspects of Colombia's economic and democratic models must be reviewed in order to truly transform the conflict and allow for the advancement of peace through the restoration of balance and equality.

Understanding Peace within Indigenous Movements

Defense of Territory

Most indigenous initiatives' understanding of peace finds its basis on the protection of territory and indigenous identity, which was the primary discussion I held with ONIC's leaders: "We want a respect of our territory and our autonomy," Alexander Dora, from ONIC's Peace and Human Rights Council, discussed. "We want the protection of the culture of indigenous communities, a respect for the indigenous world, and our cultural law" (A. Dora, personal communication, 2016). Alexander went on to discuss the significant connection between peace building and the relationship that indigenous individuals hold with the environment and territory. Territorial rights encompass the end to exploitation of water resources, mineral resources, hydrocarbon, and deforestation, as these practices greatly affect indigenous communities while impeding adequate survival and progress. Gilberto, a fellow ONIC colleague, also shared that he believes the rights of indigenous peoples are integral and inextricably linked to territory: "We believe that all humans have a right to enjoy a life of dignity, to make a good living, to restore what has been affected by conflict," (G. Arlan, personal communication, 2016). Under these principles, the central message of peace finds its basis on the healing of

indigenous territory, the preservation of water sources, and the use of protection strategies.

For indigenous communities, peace must begin as a grassroots movement, originating from vulnerable communities, and focusing on the factors that most affect the territories. Several resistance techniques that ONIC supports and employs focus on establishing territorial control through the use of the indigenous guard, an organized self-defense mechanism used by indigenous communities in Colombia. Through this process, ONIC has not only been able to establish territorial control, but also intervene against illegal forces. Maria Ovidia Palechor, CRIC's representative also discussed the impact of territorial resistance techniques: "The presence of our resistance techniques in the territories has ensured that armed groups decreased their violent practices within the conflict. This gives us hope that civil society groups will be guaranteed their fundamental rights like the rest of humanity" (M. Palechor, personal communication, 2016).

The guard contains thousands of indigenous leaders who protest only with ceremonial *bastones*, which are wooden sticks decorated with the colors of specific indigenous communities (See Figure 5). Indigenous guards are also used for *minga* events, which refer to the traditional practice of collectively "constructing a building, hoe or plant a field, or reap a harvest" (Bouvier, 2009). "We lead the *mingas*, a series of protests carried out by approximately 60,000 indigenous people from various ethnic groups," Gilberto discussed. "ONIC serves as the main leader and promoter of the *minga*" (G. Arlan, personal communication, 2016). Additionally,

communities also promote the strategy of international accompaniment to ensure that indigenous peoples have a third party observing and making judgment calls for the protection of citizens. In this sense, the international community plays an important role in regards to the fundamental rights of civil society members.



Figure 5. Indigenous Minga
Source: Zibechi, 2008

Seeking Peace through Pacifism

Beyond a focus on territory, however, CRIC leaders described the intricate dimensions that peace encompasses, including dialogue and solidarity. “We do not believe that anything can be solved through war,” Gilberto shared. “We believe in solving conflict in a civilized way. What we do here at ONIC is defend the position that [...] peace is built from dialogue, but for dialogue to be influential, Colombians must count on the participation of the society that has most been affected by the conflict for over 40 years” (G. Arlan, personal communication, 2016). CRIC’s mission also supports this ideology, as indigenous leaders hold significant experience in

negotiation and resolution of conflict. In this sense, CRIC has created territories of peace and territories as spaces of dialogue and respect for diversity and difference.

Peace is also viewed as dependent on memory processes, truth, and reconciliation. “Indigenous communities have always been committed to peace but we believe that peace is not the solution to the problems of our country; we believe that peace is the way or the tool to achieve a better country,” Gilberto discussed. “We believe that peace is linked to reconciliation, but it is also linked to the recovery of historical, processes linked to what we call historical memory” (G. Arlan, personal communication, 2016).

Indigenous Search for Autonomy

In order to ensure the right of settlement of the indigenous people in the territories, who are in danger of cultural and physical extermination, Indigenous leaders continue fight for the respect of their territory and autonomy. Without the conditions for autonomy and recognition of indigenous rights, indigenous peoples in Colombia will not be able to ensure the recuperation of identity. As described by the leaders I spoke with, pride for their indigenous identity and contribution to processes of peace are constructed jointly. “This work has reaffirmed my values because we are communities of peace first and foremost—we defend life, and as such, we prioritize autonomy, equality, and a respect for nature,” Maria Ovidia Palechor from CRIC shared (M. Palechor, personal communication, 2016).

Maria Ovidia also provided a unique perspective for resistance techniques, particularly focusing on peace education. CRIC focuses on the strengthening of

indigenous languages through the CRIC bilingual education program. This program aims for the promotion of programs that allow for the strengthening of cultural practices of language, ancestral medicine, while promoting and reaffirming principles of unity, territory, autonomy, and self-determination (M. Palechor, personal communication, 2016). The organization's education model is based on principles of respect, equality, and genuine independence. "We must all contribute to guarantee the establishment of more equitable social justice," Maria described. "There's much to learn from the local practices and way of life of indigenous societies, such as the defense of territories and the creation of the indigenous guard which serve as strategies of the promotion of peace and equality" (M. Palechor, personal communication, 2016).

Regional Peace Initiatives by Racial and Ethnic Groups: Afro-Colombians

The 2005 census found that over 4.3 million Colombian citizens identify as Afro-Colombians, making this citizen group 26 percent of the Colombian population. Like indigenous groups, Afro-Colombians reside primarily in rural areas and coasts in Antioquia, Valle del Cauca, Nariño, Choco, Cauca, and Risaralda that have also been historically marginalized by state leaders and paramilitary insurgencies, with millions of Afro-Colombians displaced over the last two decades (See Figure 6). Although both Afro-Colombians and indigenous persons are protected under Colombia's constitution, which emphasizes equality regardless of race and language, these populations' physical, cultural, and territorial integrity has been "systematically violated by internal armed conflict, violence, human rights abuses, death threats, and internal displacement" (Sanchez-Garzoli, 2012). This crisis has

demonstrated a drastic lack of respect for human rights and the sanctity of natives' territories. Because areas of extreme conflict coincide with the most acute forms of violence against women, indigenous and Afro-Colombian women and girls are also highly vulnerable to “sexual violence, forced prostitution, and harassment by armed groups” (Sanchez-Garzoli, 2012). Instances of violence against women and girls have increased particularly in Buenaventura and Valle del Cauca since 2009.



Figure 6. Afro-Colombian Collective Territories
Source: Instituto Geográfico Agustín Codazzi

In Colombia, the concentration of violence in indigenous and Black communities is inextricably linked with non-recognition. Ethnic groups' struggle for recognition exists as a "struggle for valuing identities, territories, and alternative forms of development and culture" (Rojas, 2005). Because the reconstruction of ethnic identities that have been threatened by conflict is an ongoing and difficult process, these mobilizations that favor peace are fundamental to creating awareness and solidarity, while providing a space for public debate and the formulation of peace agendas. For indigenous groups, the concept of territory has been central to the development and redefinition of their ethnic identities, which are interconnected with justice and land rights. For Afro-Colombians, peace initiatives relate to the struggle for rights relating to identity and territory, autonomy, and their own understanding of development (Rojas, 2005).

Afro-Colombian Peace Council

The Afro-Colombian Peace Council (CONPA) exists as an important alternative to peace building as it works under the ethnic perspective, which is often excluded from discussions of peace in the country. The council strives for ethnical representation on national and international scales. Because ethnic and racial communities must be protected, ethnic conventions and a revision of the peace negotiations are vital for the collective construction of peace. CONPA was established for displaced Afro-Colombians by Marino Cordoba, a well-known community advocate who was forcibly displaced by a paramilitary regime who arrived in his town in the middle of the night with a target list of human rights

advocates and community leaders. Pulled from their beds and stripped off their clothes, many victims were marched around the village in front of residents and families and then massacred. Marino hid in a nearby river for three days before escaping to Bogota. Since then, he's survived two assassination attempts on his life (Cuevas, n.d.).

Inspired by a duty to construct peace, Marino and CONPA's efforts have reached the national spotlight, as the high commission for peace agreed that the final 2016 accord for peace would hold an ethnic perspective, after the high commission for peace met with CONPA leaders who argued that an ethnic perspective was a necessary element for strengthening of a pedagogy for peace (R. Moreno, personal communication, 2016). However, when interviewing CONPA's representative, Richard Moreno, he made clear that peace building does not start or end with state proposals:

“We believe that negotiations for peace began first because of the pressure exerted by civil society leaders. Even though there was willingness from the part of the state, and now from the FARC, civil society leaders were who forced actors to make the decision to sit down and negotiate [...] What we propose are alternatives to collective peace building and making the population understand that peace is not resolved with a signature in Habana, but is a matter of ethnic proposals that we have been offering and constructing for 50 years” (R. Moreno, personal communication, 2016).

The council bases itself on four strategies grounded on self-protection mechanisms, territory, and cultural identity, among others. These include: strengthening Afro-Colombian autonomy and the community council's capacity to govern their territories, particularly through the formulation and implementation of

land management plans and internal administrative structures; strengthening productive projects that guarantee food security and self-subsistence that meet the communities' overall food needs; strengthening Afro-Colombian cultural identity and social cohesion through the recovery of memory and empowering traditional practices and knowledge; strengthening self-protection initiatives of the communities that include security risk plans (Sanchez-Garzoli, n.d.).

A primary part of the organization's mission is also the promotion of territorial peace to ensure community and organizational participation in the peace process. For CONPA, territory is fundamental for peace: "Territory is not a commercial good. Territory is part of life itself. Therefore, who has more territory does not equate to who is richer. Rather, whoever has more land generates a greater legacy to pass on to his sons and daughters, which is fundamental for cultural identity. Territory is an axis of cultural identity for the ethnic communities of this country and that's what we contribute to the construction of peace" (R. Moreno, personal communication, 2016).

Puente Nayero Humanitarian Space

Often described as Colombia's most violent city, Buenaventura holds a homicide rate 56 percent higher than the national average and an 80 percent poverty rate. These conditions of instability and inequity have made Buenaventura a battleground of crime and violence, with Human Rights Watch documenting pervasive abuses of human rights, including records of murders, disappearances, and dismemberments. "One of the more disturbing revelations was the existence of

several *casas de pique*, or chop houses, where gangs torture their victims by cutting them to pieces— sometimes while the victims are still alive. They then throw the body parts into the ocean” (Johnson, 2015). Nineteen-year-old Buenaventura resident, William Mina, remembers the fear that overtook his community: “They were killing people in front of kids; they were taking houses. The community was scared” (Johnson 2015). Another community member, Fleiner Angulo recalled the impact that paramilitary and gang infiltration was having on the children of Buenaventura: “When local children argued with each other, they resorted to a language they know works. ‘*Te voy a picar*,’ they would say: ‘I’m going to cut you up.’ It’s easy to get the paramilitaries out, but it’s hard to get the violence out of your head” (Johnson, 2015).

Terrorized daily with threats and violence, community members chose to organize themselves into a self-defense coalition with the help of the police, the Inter-Ecclesiastical Commission of Justice and Peace, and the World Council of Churches. Overnight, citizens walled off the entrance to their street with wooden poles and declared the neighborhood of Puente Nayero a “humanitarian zone” that banned any armed groups from entering the protected area. The entrance to Puente Nayero is marked by a hand-painted public mural along with community guidelines, including promises not to engage in any forms of violence and agreements of mutual protection of residents inside the humanitarian space (See Figure 7). Their constitution reads:

Beginning today, we are creating this constitution of a humanitarian space as a mechanism of self-protection for our physical lives, for our

cultural existence—to avoid losing our territory—and for our new generations, present and future [...] We establish today this initiative of our Humanitarian Space listening to our African ancestors, to our assassinated and disappeared relatives, listening to Mother Earth, with whom we've lived and constructed a special relationship over 25 years here in Buenaventura (Colombia Support Network, 2014).



Figure 7: Puente Nayero Banner
Source: Deutsche Welle, 2015

After establishing the constitution, one of the community's first acts was to tear down the chophouse at the end of their street, which now stands as a memorial to the lives lost. Next, the community sought psychological support for their children, followed by a symbolic demobilization. A Puente Nayero community leader discussed:

They [the children] made a promise—an agreement—to put down their weapons and in return they received the gift of musical instruments. As of that moment, they decided to stop playing with violence, and instead start playing in a peaceful way. Since that moment, people feel safer, they are much happier. You can see children playing, women

sitting outside spending time with their neighbors (WFPColombia, 2015).

Two hundred seventy-nine families now live in the humanitarian zone, which stands as a symbol of hope for the residents of Buenaventura (Taylor, 2015). After enduring up to three murders and six forced disappearances daily, Puente Nayero successfully celebrated a murder-free year in 2015.

Understanding Peace within Afro-Colombian Movements

During my discussion with CONPA's Richard Moreno regarding peace, he shared with me the importance of ensuring an ethnic perspective is included within the peace agenda. For sustainable peace to exist, the agenda must respect and reflect the diversity within the nation. Under CONPA's ideology, the construction of a lasting peace must be based on coexistence between a variety of actors and sectors living within society. However, as aforementioned, Richard and the organization he helps lead believe that state peace accords are not the end of the transformation of the Colombian nation. In order to end conflict, topics that are not in the state's agenda must be addressed, such as a model of development, which must be discussed with many actors and sectors across the country.

If we take the official numbers given by the government, there are more than two million Afro-Colombians that have been displaced or are victims of violence. This means fifty percent of the Afro-Colombian population has been victimized as a result of the conflict. This means that the construction of peace must be fundamentally rooted in ethnic groups. We contribute territory, we contribute population, we contribute renewable and non-renewable natural resources, we contribute to the country's cultural diversity, we contribute proposals for reconciliation, but more than anything, we contribute our presence as human beings that have been historically excluded from the country's development, but nevertheless continue giving to a more

diverse country with conditions for equality and exclusive of conflict (R. Moreno, personal communication, 2016).

Similarly, the Puente Nayero Humanitarian Space has formally urged the Colombian state to listen to its environmental proposals, which detail the protection of animals, sources of life, such as water and land, and ecotourism plans that respect their customs and that would make possible living wages for Buenaventura families and those of all Colombians (Colombia Support Network, 2014).

“Under these guidelines, peace cannot be achieved by giving wealth to the few and impoverishing the rest,” Richard Moreno shared. “Peace, instead, must become the guarantee of equality for everyone as well as respect for ethnic and cultural diversity” (R. Moreno, personal communication, 2016). CONPA and Puente Nayero work to achieve this vision through the fight towards nonviolence, the construction and strengthening of individual rights, autonomy within the context of cultural identity and the customs that historically denote Afro-Colombians as a people, and the protection of life for ethnic communities.

It’s this vision that led to the construction of Puente Nayero, as residents established their right of self-protection after having understood the diverse experiences of their organized population in the defense of life and the territory (Colombia Support Network, 2014). During Puente Nayero’s first anniversary, an indigenous community member who was visiting the Humanitarian Space denounced the Colombian government as

responsible for the violence in ethnic communities. Under this view, “foreign investment in Colombia has largely served to displace vulnerable communities—mostly Afro-Colombians, indigenous people, and small-scale farmers—to promote development projects that further feed the rich and worsen inequality” (Taylor, 2014). Despite the complex economic and social aspects that surround ethnic communities across Colombia, Puente Nayero stands as a model of hope. “By slowly expanding their nonviolent space and organizing with other communities throughout Colombia to resist physical and economic violence, the people of Puente Nayero work for more inclusive and sustainable peace-building processes (Taylor, 2014). Ultimately, Afro-Colombian communities strive for a collective construction of peace.

Because of their peace activism, both CONPA and Puente Nayero are recipients of constant death threats by paramilitary members, but nevertheless continue advocating for peace with justice and dignity. Puente Nayero’s leaders sustain their commitment to the practice of nonviolence, while defending their territorial, cultural, and human rights as well as strengthening community support and unity (Taylor, 2014). CONPA’s Richard Moreno, like all of the civil society leaders I interviewed, also described the threats and fear that exist as a part of their crusade. Primarily, Richard finds his resilience and identity through the legacy of his father, Saturnino Moreno Rivas, who was the President of COCOMACIA, one of Colombia’s most important Afro-Colombian civil society organizations:

This is a man that I will honor all of my life just for having been my father. He taught me about territorial defense, ethnic protection, and the importance of being proud of who we are and what we have constructed as a part of these processes. This has allowed me to grow next to many individuals, many friends, who hold higher principles and values than me. Individuals who I love and appreciate and who, more than anything, have allowed me to collectively construct peace alongside them. My personal, ethnic, and collective background is obedient to this (R. Moreno, personal communication, 2016).

Richard then went on to describe why he continues fighting for the peace in spite of the threats on his life:

I am filled with fear—fear of what will happen to my five sons if I am not here; fear of what will happen to my mother if I am not here, but these fears are what drive me to do what I do—to continue building, and understanding that staying silent means giving justification to those who do not deserve it, and understanding that staying silent means falsely pretending that I can die without having done something. It's better to have died doing something, building something, than to live hiding (R. Moreno, personal communication, 2016).

Resilience for Survivors of Violence

Colombia's armed conflict has cost thousands of lives and displaced millions of people—many of these victims, understood as individuals who have individually or collectively suffered harm as a result of violations of International Humanitarian Law, have found peace and consolation through resilience (Nussio, et al., 2015). Through my research, I have found that in order to establish a sustainable peace for Colombia, resilient communities across the country must be developed in order to progress towards a sustainable peace while turning away from Colombia's culture of violence.

I had the opportunity to interview individual survivors of violence so as to further understand how Colombian survivors cultivate resilience, develop an understanding of peace, and establish communal ties around their experiences of violence. I met with four different Colombians with varying backgrounds and personal stories that are united under their personification of resilience and strength. These include: Laura Ulloa who was kidnapped by the FARC when she was just eleven years old; Diana Gomez, the daughter of a Colombian politician in who was forcibly disappeared in 2006; and Carlos and Paola Carrillo, survivors of the bomb in the El Nopal social club.

Laura's Story

Kidnapped by armed guerrilla members while riding the bus home from school, Laura Ulloa spent seven months in captivity inside FARC camps in the jungle, but was ultimately liberated after her parents paid a substantial ransom. Through the support system of her family and friends, Laura found understanding and compassion, allowing her to recover from her kidnapping; her father, however, sought medical resources from severe emotional and physical complications that he suffered as a result of Laura's abduction. Although Laura shared that witnessing her father on the verge of death as a result of the traumatic stress he endured, she never hated nor blamed her kidnappers. "I had a very unique experience in that I began to forgive while I was still being held captive," Laura discussed. "During this time, I began to know the individual stories of the guerilla members. Their stories really touched me because they were narratives of absolute poverty, of abuse, of

extreme suffering—a suffering that I had never lived nor experienced. I realized their lives are not as black and white as one would expect” (L. Ulloa, personal communication, 2016).

Regardless of the pain that the FARC brought upon Laura and her family, she considers that the experience helped her to become more sensitized towards the suffering of others. “There’s a phrase that I love: ‘forgiveness is an act of reflection, never of humiliation,’” Laura discussed. “Forgiveness is an internal process, a process of truth and much reflection—for me, it’s been a liberating act. Independently of what’s been done to me, I forgive because I personally do not want to be attached to a feeling of hatred or vengeance because my life is worth more than that” (L. Ulloa, personal communication, 2016). Days before being released, Laura wrote letters to each of the guerrillas who closely guarded her during her captivity. At the end of the letter, she wrote down her home phone number and even her mother’s cellphone and promised she would return to the jungle at 18 to help the FARC. “I spent 24 hours with them for seven months. At that age, I was brain washed and believed in them. Later on, I realized that this was not the way, but that I could help them in a different manner. The people who guarded me, many of them boys and girls like me, I got to know them, and I got to know their problems. Most of them were not there because they wanted to be” (Saavedra, 2015).

Upon graduation from college, Laura dedicated two years to working with the Colombian Office for Reintegration (ARC) helping demobilized members of the FARC, ELN, and paramilitary sects build a new future free from guns. “Being able

to forgive my kidnappers was the best thing that's ever happened to me, because I've learned so much from them, and because I think that the last thing this country needs is hate," Laura shared. "While I was kidnapped, I realized that these were individuals that had very complicated and sad life stories, and I wanted to be able to help them to achieve good" (L. Ulloa, personal communication, 2016).

Laura's unique experiences gave her a significant understanding of peace based on tolerance and empathy. "Peace is the capacity to place oneself in others' shoes in all aspects of life. I'm sure that if there was more tolerance, not only would there not be war, but there wouldn't be violence in all scales—domestic violence, child abuse, even animal abuse. There are so many people in Colombia that are killed as a result of intolerance" (L. Ulloa, personal communication, 2016). Laura recognizes that deaths in Colombia find their basis on a systematic culture of violence—a culture that is ultimately intransigent towards the other. Under this perspective, the construction of lasting and sustainable peace centers on combating this system. She continues to dedicate her life towards a path of peace by working with the Corona Foundation as the Coordinator of Social Projects for Education, where she runs programs for children and adolescents in vulnerable areas. "I decided to work on education because this is a necessary tool to build a sustainable and true peace. Education is the only way to take children away from war" (Saavedra, 2015).

Diana's Story

Although in meaningfully varying ways, like Laura, Diana Gomez, whose father was forcibly disappeared, continues to raise her voice against the violence in Colombia. Through working on a doctorate thesis in cultural anthropology, Diana exposed the role of victims and the disempowered in Colombian political and social movements. Her thesis helped her not only to better understand how victims' identities are constructed, but she was further able to develop her individual pursuit of truth and justice. Diana described that among her primary research findings was the conclusion that an identity that surges from violence infringed upon by a third party often helps individuals organize and mobilize. "As a result of violence, life changes radically and there's a before and after—before the act of violence and after that experience," Diana discussed. "For me, that history of violence is also marked by political identity and my involvement with feminist movements. My identity as a victim began to occupy a very central part of my everyday life" (D. Gomez, personal communication, 2016).

In 2006, Diana began working with Sons and Daughters in Memory and against Impunity, an organization that brings together the sons and daughters of Colombians who have been murdered, disappeared, tortured, or exiled. This group uses memory to articulate the struggles sustained by survivors of violence in Colombia, and ultimately promotes memory as a fundamental element for the construction of peace:

We completed many commemorations in relation to what had occurred to our mothers and fathers, many of who were leftist leaders, social activists, journalists, or defenders of human rights. It's important for Colombian society to recognize what has occurred with victims that

have been forcibly disappeared or assassinated by agents of the state, and recognize the damages caused to their family members. However, not only should the suffering they've experienced be recognized, but also the great contributions that these men and women have given to Colombian society in terms of censoring violence, creating memory of their loved ones, and permanently contributing to peace building (D. Gomez, personal communication, 2016).

Diana also became involved with feminist processes, which allowed her to create social ties that she viewed as a family that she'd chosen for herself. Through these groups, Diana was able to create a unique community of strength and resilience. As part of these organizational processes, she was able to receive the support that was not always available to her from family and friends who could not comprehend her suffering. Through these social organizations, Diana was further able to understand what a valid search for truth and justice meant and that she was supported through this process (D. Gomez, personal communication, 2016).

Diana has also found her understanding of peace building through feminist theory, which states that peace is not the end to the armed conflict, but means living in conditions of dignity and the construction a new societal model. By detaching from peace dichotomies, feminism understands that a construction of peace cannot be achieved without questioning and transforming the patriarchy. Such feminist movements in Colombia speak of peace with social justice or peace with equality, which relates to a stable and sustainable peace. As such, a deeper understanding of peace is rooted in justice (D. Gomez, personal communication, 2016).

For Diana, peace construction does not require forgiveness, however. “I don’t believe in forgiveness,” she shared. “It seems to me that forgiveness is an imposed conception, and I think this type of context is very problematic. I think we can advance what is understood as peace construction without going through forgiveness—this does not mean that one is stuck in hatred or vengeance.” After spending many years fighting for peace in Colombia, Diana considers that one of the biggest contributions that victimized subjects can make is establishing an understanding that there are acts that are unforgiveable. “How can I forgive someone that decides to kill, torture, or forcibly disappear another human being?” Diana examined. “I can’t get it in my head that one can forgive these types of occurrences, but just because I don’t forgive, it does not mean that I don’t want to build peace” (D. Gomez, personal communication, 2016).

The Carrillo Family’s Story

On February 7, 2003, Colombia witnessed one of the bloodiest terrorist attacks that the country had seen in more than a decade. On this date, a vehicle containing a 330-pound bomb exploded in the garage of the ten-story building of the social and business club, El Nogal, claiming 36 lives and wounding more than 200. Six of the dead were children (Forero, 2003). Among them was Juan Sebastian Carrillo, a second grader at Bogota’s Anglo Colombian School, and my fellow classmate and friend. Many of the school’s students were in the club with their families when the bomb exploded and were able to help in the aftermath. Initially, an eight-grade boy rescued Juan Sebastian from a collapsing floor and advised him to wait while he

aided other victims. Juan was gone when he returned, but his body was later discovered in the club's rubble (Wilson, 2003). Carlos Carrillo, Juan Sebastian's father, described the fears he faced as he lay injured on the floor of the club:

What I'm about to say might sound illogical, but the day my son died, I was thanking God that he didn't suffer. That day as I was dragging myself through the halls of the El Nogal so that I wouldn't get burned by the fires, I told God, 'if my son is still in here—because I wasn't sure if he was—please don't allow him to suffer; don't allow him to witness this horror.' When I found out that my *Juancho* had died suffocated, as he had locked himself in the golf club storeroom, I thanked God because he didn't allow him to suffer, he allowed him to sleep, and rest in His peace.

Although Carlos described how undergoing such a tragedy radically transforms an individual, rather than getting lost in systemic hatred, he sought to progress his faith and values. After the bombing, he helped to establish the El Nogal Foundation, which was founded with the purpose of helping to encourage victims, particularly former employees from the club, and help them through psychological, educational, and economic issues. Today the foundation continues to help victims across the country who need economic help in funding their college tuition. Throughout the years, Carlos has been able to collaborate, generate resources, and arrange events to aid these victims of violence.

Carlos and his daughter, Paola, also found a community and a source of resilience with fellow victims of the bombing. "Initially we all came together so that we could move forward and support one another," Paola shared. "By being with the people that have gone through the same things you have, you feel that you're understood [...] for most people it's very easy to judge and very difficult to

understand without having lived it. Through this community, I was able to form close ties with survivors” (P. Carrillo, personal communication, 2016). Carlos, whose wife died when Juan Sebastian was four years old, has also been particularly vocal about the tragedy that he and his family endured and has found unique solace in this: “Being able to share my story about how we’ve overcome and what we’ve relied on for support—that was also a way of helping other [victims] and giving each other encouragement” (C. Carrillo, personal communication, 2016). Paola also described her process towards resilience and overcoming tragedy: “I’ve always thought that life is like a sailboat, you can either sink or keep sailing—the decision is yours. I chose to keep sailing. I’m not going to deny that there were really terrible moments, moments in which I wouldn’t sleep and would cry for days on end, but I tried to make the best of what I was forced to live through” (P. Carrillo, personal communication, 2016).

When discussing forgiveness and its relationship to peace, Carlos discussed his views as frankly and honestly with me, as he did with Colombia’s President Juan Manuel Santos.

I hold no hatred for the people that bombed El Nogal, and I say that with peace and sincerity, and that helps me. I am convinced that what was born from that day of tragedy was forgiveness. I hope that [the perpetrators’] acts will be forgiven, because they must be forgiven, but they also need to be sanctioned, because one cannot kill 50 people today and tomorrow ask for forgiveness, be reinserted into society, be given an important salary, and be given the possibility to become a part of the country’s federal government (C. Carrillo, personal communication, 2016).

On the day of what would have been Juan Sebastian's high school graduation, Carlos expressed his anguish to President Santos, whose son was also graduating from the Anglo Colombian School: "Please don't let there be any more empty chairs in any graduation across the country." Although the Carrillo family continues searching for a lasting peace that comprises of justice and a lack of impunity, they still believe peace is ultimately necessary and find solace in Juan Sebastian's life well lived. "*Juancho* had a mission: he came, he accomplished it, and he left absolutely blissful," Carlos disclosed. "His mission was to help us after his mom died, he was the crane hook that pulled us out with his happiness, with his personality, with his smile."

Chapter 5: Conclusion

“It is not yet too late to undertake the creation of a minor utopia: a new and limitless utopia for life, wherein no one can decide for others how they are to die, where love really can be true and happiness possible, where the lineal generations of one hundred years of solitude will have at last and forever a second opportunity on Earth.”

-Gabriel Garcia Marquez
(1982 Nobel Prize acceptance speech)

After enduring decades of violent conflict, the main victims of Colombia’s war have sought peace and empowerment on the basis of their own capacities by way of non-violent means. Through my research, I have found that individuals’ conversion to nonviolent ideologies and mentalities allow for the development of lasting peace; therefore, nonviolence should not focus on efficiency and data, but should instead be “practiced for the sake of practice,” as supported by sociologist Daniel Ritter (Woon, 2014).

Activists’ understanding of peace and nonviolence is rooted in social and economic development, rather than merely the absence of violence and the establishment of a ceasefire, as demonstrated across all interviews examined in this thesis. Community leaders and human rights advocates view the start of the war as a consequence of severe social and economic inequality, as Colombia is the sixth most unequal country in the world. As a result, equitable development is fundamental to sustaining peace. Moreover, these individuals furthered the understanding that peace does not preclude a commitment to peace, as peace is not a condition, but an ongoing process. Peace should not be portrayed as “mythical singular.” Such an interpretation tends to be so abstract, that peace can appear an

unachievable ideal. Consequently, peace must be understood as a plural concept that can be furthered through discussions and discourse led by activists about what peace means in different places and spaces, and the ways people in these communities seek to build it (Megoran et al, 2014).

I found that the creation and preservation of these groups is a key way for minorities to find representation and form a sense of community, support, and acceptance. Through these movements, members are able to find a voice in the peace process and establish resistance against the war atrocities and human rights abuses that have occurred—they are a way for Colombia's marginalized to execute change in a system that has continuously failed them. Although Colombia's peace movements vary on the basis of techniques and methodologies, all groups nevertheless outline a culture of peace as centered on education, sustainable economic and social development, respect for human rights, gender equality, democratic participation, the promotion of tolerance and solidarity, and participatory communication.

Membership within groups has become a central part of individuals' identities and culture. In fact, most risk their lives to guarantee human rights, but believe the movement is worth this threat on their wellbeing. This was particularly highlighted in Angela's interview (IMP), who discussed the strain her personal life suffers because of her activism, or Richard Moreno's (CONPA), who shared about the fear he battles daily, but he nevertheless manages to overcome for the future of his community and in honor of his father's legacy. Because of such dedicated

passion to the peace movement, I also discovered leaders' identities as peacemakers and defenders of human rights falls as a priority to their identity as Colombian nationals. Therefore, their identity as members of a state that has continuously marginalized and forgotten them is not as significant as the identity of that of a peacemaker wanting to alter the conditions of the country.

As victims of violence, survivors have been able to construct a culture of peace by responding to war through a variety of psychosocial techniques. These include individual and community empowerment through social accompaniment, the recovery of collective memory as a dignifying way for recovering their self esteem, developing solidarity, trust, and respect for members of their community, and revealing truth and denouncing perpetrators. Through the powerful weapons of education and discourse, survivors of war have been able to better understand the problem of conflict from the perspective of cultural practice and therefore develop functional relationships based on the construction of a peace culture (Sacipa-Rodriguez, 2014). Although varying understandings of forgiveness were explored across victims' experiences, all reinforced the concept put forth by the Seville Statement on violence, which states that neither biology nor environment condemn humanity to war—a species that invents war is also capable of inventing peace (Sacipa-Rodriguez, 2014). Under this practice, survivors have been able to put forth values, attitudes, and behaviors that reflect and inspire social interaction and sharing based on the principles of freedom, human rights, democracy, and solidarity.

A significant instrument of non-violence resistance I found across groups was a mention of pedagogy and visibility. Most civil society leaders conveyed the belief that changing the culture of violence in Colombia centered on altering education and establishing it as a form of resistance. The aim of establishing peace education for Colombians is seen as a primary step of transformation, so that individuals have better tools to implement peace in personal contexts, such as at home, at school, and in their neighborhoods. In fact, many discussed a lack of discrimination between violence as a result of the armed conflict and domestic violence, gang violence, and neighborhood violence. Under this understanding, to change a culture of violence, each individual must seek to establish communal welfare.

Additionally, social movements have also used empowerment and community accompaniment as an underlying form of non-violent resistance, which is seen as a strategy aimed at increasing the power of marginalized groups so that they have greater access and control of material resources as well as greater participation and influence on social and political change. I found through my research that activists and leaders have become more aware of their individual strength and abilities through community organizing for collective action. As a result of localized and regional mobilization, peace in Colombia is shaped by the space in which it is made, and in turn, peace, too, shapes that space, such as through the discussed boundary making practices, protective accompaniment, *minga* protests, defense of territory, among others. Grassroots peacemaking practices have helped to reimagine what

geography can be, as peace means different things to different individuals throughout various sites, scales, and time. As such, peace is not a static, narrow dogma, but a plural understanding that is established by practice and ongoing social relations.

All groups, although indigenous associations in particular, also discussed the importance of territory. Via the state, paramilitary groups, the FARC, or even private corporations, their land has been taken over unjustly. As such, the spaces in which ethnic communities lived, worked, created, developed have been robbed from them; however, through these groups, minorities have nevertheless found a way to create a space that centers on auto-protection and autonomy. These spaces have become a center for cultural and traditional values that had been previously taken from these different cultural and ethnic groups. Moreover, these spaces of support have been a fundamental way for peace communities to exert their value, their rights, and their need for acknowledgement.

Despite vast patterns across the movements, geographies of peace are nevertheless very emergent and uneven. Contradictions exist within peace groups, which can cause tension across movements. This is seen, for instance, with IMP, which does not identify as a feminist organization and primarily works to build peace “from the bottom up” by promoting legal and psychological assistance to victims of the conflict and promoting peace directly in areas of conflict. However, Casa de la Mujer, is an organization that is primarily responsible for dispersing feminist ideology and securing the positioning of women’s agenda on the public and

political scene across Colombia. For feminist organizations like Casa de la Mujer or the National Network of Women, the development of personal feminist identities are fundamental to carry out their work as activists. However, as an organization, IMP is concerned the label of “feminists” will carry negative connotations for society that will prevent them from properly carrying out their mission of peace promotion. This tension was also seen within victims of violence, whose experiences and search for peace allowed them to, for instance, understand the concept of peace in dissimilar ways. For individuals like the Carlos and Paola Carillo as well as Laura Ulloa, forgiveness as a liberating act that allowed them the closure to resiliently continue living their lives; however, Diana expressed concern over the concept of forgiveness, which she considered to be “an imposed conception.” For Diana, peace construction did not require forgiveness. Overall, such contradictions allow for understanding the importance of peace as a grassroots experience. Activists and organization contain within them various priorities that they view as most essential for peace, this reinforces the understanding that peace is an ever-changing process, rather than a static endpoint.

After six presidential administrations’ failure to establish peace across Colombia, civil society leaders have chosen not to rely on the signing of a peace agreement by the state to bring peace to Colombia; however, as aforementioned, most all interviewees expressed their support of the peace agreement. They firmly believe this is an important measure for Colombia that should not be ignored, but it is nevertheless fundamental for their groups to continue advocating for peace and

human rights because the signing of a peace agreement will not guarantee peace. Most leaders expressed concern of an exponential increase in violence against their communities as a result of the signing of the peace agreement, as marked by precedence in similar countries such as Guatemala and South Africa. Because most fear an increase in violence against minorities, particularly women, rather than significantly altering their mode of operation in post conflict, they believe the continued execution of their mission will be even more fundamental.

Although a state peace agreement is important, these peace movements must work hard to ensure that the agreement is being followed and that individuals' rights are rightfully being protected. This is particularly significant because Colombia has strongly relied on the judicial system and the creation laws and politics surrounding social justice; however, most civil society leaders shared that these policies have not been properly implemented across the country. Consequently, they did not want to see more policies or laws created; rather, they wanted to ensure that these laws are properly applied and defended. Although most leaders support peace movements on a state level, I have not found a reciprocal support by the state towards civil society movements. In fact, I found significant contempt of these movements by Santos' administration. The main explanation I received was that most of the administration believes these groups support the FARC. Lucia Jaramillo from President Santos' High Commission for Peace discussed the relationship: "The distrust is mutual [...] these are guerilla members simply without arms, but they will pick up arms later on" (L. Jaramillo, personal

communication, 2016). The state-led movement for peace in Colombia is only the beginning. The Colombian state will have to move to build peace in areas where FARC guerillas operated and ensure the successful demobilization of ex-combatants—both left-wing guerrillas and right-wing paramilitaries. This cannot be accomplished without civil society’s peace builders: human rights defenders, social leaders, and grassroots peace activists across all sectors of society.

Although Colombia has endured decades of extreme violence, in which civil society leaders have been marked by stigmatization and persecution, these organizations have thrived because of their determination, courage, and creativity. In the words of Gimena Sanchez-Garzoli (2016), Senior Advisor for Washington’s Office on Latin America, “this is the non-violent side of Colombia that has constructed hope and dignity and met the needs of the displaced, women, Afro-Colombia and indigenous groups, youths, and victims when the nation’s institutions have fallen short.” I would argue that the solution to Colombia’s elusive violence should come first from the cultural sphere through a process of recognition and valuing of identities.

My research has led me to understand not only the merits of the geographies of activist movements, but also how academics and international leaders can become actively involved with these movements through solidarity and alliances with marginalized groups across Colombia. This is particularly relevant with international accompaniment, which highlights how international volunteers “rely on their privileged bodies to shield and protect precarious lives” (Pain & Staeheli,

2014). The international community, including the United States, which has funded over fifteen years of war in Colombia by contributing more than \$10 billion to the armed conflict, should support the consolidation of peace in Colombia (Haugaard & Sanchez-Garzoli, 2016). In order to continue to be a public voice of support for peace in Colombia, the country's allies abroad should increase their support for civil society organizations when designing and implementing programs for peace. Because much Colombia's rural and remote areas have been the battlefields of the armed conflict, Afro-Colombian and indigenous groups who are responsible for civil society organizations in the territories have the best knowledge, skills, and experience in order to build true territorial peace (Haugaard & Sanchez-Garzoli, 2016). Although assistance provided to civil society initiatives should be increased, I would argue that the support must be independent in order to be effective and enduring. Under this agreement, these organizations should not be required to work directly with the state or any other specific actors and must be shielded from violence exerted by those whose interests are threatened by peace construction and human rights defense (Haugaard & Sanchez-Garzoli, 2016).

For Colombia to develop true and sustainable peace, the participation of civil society leaders is essential, as they provide spaces for public debates, awareness of minority struggles and alternative perspectives, and contribute to the formulation of holistic and inclusive peace agendas. In order for peace to truly redefine society and redesign the culture of violence entrenched in Colombia's history, warlike discourse must be replaced with ideologies and norms that promote humanizing

practices by all social actors and victims, especially those who exist as most vulnerable in society.

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