

### Women and Historical Memory, Activism Instead of Silence: Two Emblematic Country Cases in South America

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**WOMEN AND HISTORICAL MEMORY,  
ACTIVISM INSTEAD OF SILENCE:  
TWO EMBLEMATIC COUNTRY CASES  
IN SOUTH AMERICA**

**ESTHER MARGARITA ARIAS CUENTAS**

**Abstract.** The studies of historical memory in South America were initially treated in the context of the struggle for human rights without paying attention to the gender issue. Nowadays, women groups, holders of the experience gained in the last few decades have entered this field, claiming their right to convey the past to the present from their own perspectives. Policies of memory applied in the region today seek a narrative that facilitates the encounter of different voices that coexist to reinterpret the past. The women's perspective in this domain allows for the differentiation of the types of violence against them in authoritarian regimes and internal armed conflicts. This paper examines some elements of analysis to understand the particularity of this perspective and highlights the specific dynamics and results thus generated theoretically and practically. The central argument considers that the various acts of violence against women in a time of repression and/or domestic war in South America are an extension of the discrimination and marginalization that they have historically and socially experienced; hence, the new practices of memory try to overcome these circumstances. To illustrate this situation better, it presents two emblematic "country cases" in South America: Argentina and Colombia.

*Keywords:* historical memory; women, violence; activism; Argentina; colombia; empowerment.

### **Introduction**

The field of memory has been continuously gaining more and more attention in the past years despite the immediacy brought about by the digital era and the apparent illusion that we merely live in the present time. Narratives of the past allow for alterations, rearrangements, and expansions of the current interpretations and analyses of recent

traumatic events. In this context, new perspectives, new actors, and new purposes open a wide range of options regarding historical memory studies, a field where women have a social and political impact. 2018 is considered the “year of women”; it was the year that 100 years of women’s voting rights were commemorated, and it was also the year that campaigns against sexual harassment intensified. It is equally relevant to inquire about the role of women in further areas, in more specific scenarios, and in other subject domains, even if they relate to a painful past, as a “reference point.” This paper considers this context, as well as some of the discussions at the 5th International Interdisciplinary Conference of Political Research, SCOPE, organized by the University of Bucharest last May. This paper raises an important question and debate on how to understand the current participation of women in the permanent construction of historical memory in South America after violent periods, such as those of dictatorships and internal armed conflicts. It also examines, in specificity, the lessons, if any, that can be drawn from the two emblematic cases of Argentina and Colombia as discussed in this paper.

The initial argument is that women in this geographical area have followed a metamorphosis in their way of action, to achieve truth, justice, repair, and in some cases, to reach a reconciliation. With sorrowful stories and hurtful experiences, women in South America have “fought by peaceful means” to win spaces of hope and inclusion, while claiming their memories as part of the history and showing resilience in adverse situations.

To develop a gradually overarching argument, this article is structured in four sections. First, it gives an account of the general context in which the field of historical memory arises as an academic domain and its link to human rights discourse – moving on to historical parallels between the democratic transition in South America and the expansion of the historical memory as an inclusive concept that will legitimize the claims of different groups, counting women. Subsequently, it emphasizes the specificity of women participation in the process of constructing a historical memory, wherefore two particular cases for our emblematic countries are to be highlighted. Finally, this document offers a brief conclusion that simultaneously serves as an invitation to reflect on what is expected of women’s activism in the 21st-century vis-à-vis historical memory.

**The emergence of historical memory:  
from abstract to the field of human rights**

Historical memory as an academic concept originates in the work of the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, who favored the concept of collective memory in an attempt to widen prior philosophical, psychological, and literary discussions, in which memory had a higher relevance at the individual level (Mitzal 2003). In the translation of his work into English in the 1990s, the critical question that synthesized his academic research on memory was, "What determines what we remember and what we forget?" The explanation that Halbwachs offers is the entry point for developing his theory of collective memory. His primary thesis is that even if the act of remembering or the act of forgetting something is an individual capacity, "human memory can only function within a collective context" (Halbwachs 1992, 173). It is precisely this collective capacity turned into action that he calls collective memory.

Additionally, Halbwachs focuses on understanding how collective memory is strengthened by some "social frameworks" such as family, religion, and social class as well as general ones such as space, language, and time, which are all instruments of a kind of dominant memory (Halbwachs 1992). These frameworks are exclusive, and, within them, there are different asymmetrical power relations as other authors showed later in the second half of the 20th century (e.g., Foucault 1994, Bourdieu 1979).

Halbwachs' contribution is crucial in understanding the concept of memory as an academic construction in sociological terms; nevertheless, the framework he developed has limitations. The characteristics of modern society he described are distant from those of the contemporary societies where we live. In these societies, paradoxically, the concept of historical memory is more relevant than the concept of collective memory, specifically when referred to a recent traumatic past.

This observation is of crucial importance as some scholars try to extend Halbwachs' academic heritage without maintaining a critical distance. The concept of historical memory was not a topic for Halbwachs for the reason that he strongly differentiated memory from history and considered them opposites. In Halbwachs' perspective, memory is a living component, while history is allegedly universal but static.

To continue with the archeology of the memory field, it is relevant to mention that it would only be with the events of the Second World War, where Halbwachs, himself, was a victim, that the complementarity of history and memory would begin to be considered. This is especially relevant due to the introduction of victims and survivors' memories of the war. The first-person narration of the horrors had psychological and legal-sociological impacts that are going to be translated into the political arena. As a result, for instance, this transformation constituted the basis of the slogan "Never again" that, in the normative term, found immediate support with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Confino 2005). Since then, a new discourse has begun to dominate historical memory studies beyond the sociological angle. Respect for and the defense of human rights opened the path to a new kind of contradiction-confined historical memory studies.

In chronological terms, only a decade after the adoption of the Declaration of Human Rights, the world entered the Cold War, and with it, new violations of human rights began to take place in different latitudes under the rule of various agents. South America was not an exception. During the struggle for power and zones of influences between the United States and the Soviet Union, the American continent was protected against communism by a doctrine of military security (Domínguez 1999).

After the Second World War, i.e., during the Cold War, various dictators seized power in South America. According to the table below, Colombia was the first South American country to have this type of regime; however, the military junta was disbanded before the beginning of the Cold War, and Colombia never again experienced a military dictatorship. In this regard, Colombia is an unusual case. While formal democracy was preserved in this country, unlike many of its neighbors, Colombia would be the only one in South America exposed to prolonged, intense internal conflict between leftist guerrillas—labeling themselves in the beginning as Marxist-Leninist—and the regular armed forces. The internal conflict of more than five decades of confrontation, which changed in various aspects, such as the number and kind of actors (e.g., emergence of paramilitaries in the '80s), their purposes, and their strategies. The conflict has claimed nearly nine million victims, most of them women (Unidad de Víctimas, 2018). On the other hand,

this document does not go into the details of each of the dictatorships that coincided with the beginning of the Cold War but emphasizes how they undermined democracy. This happened not only in formal terms—through the lack of regular elections—but also in substantial ones via a systematic violation of human rights.

As can be seen in the table, some of these dictatorships vanished even before the end of the Cold War; nonetheless, the true story of what happened to the victims and the societies, in general, continues to be controversial in some countries. This is why the issue of historical memory is still an open field in South America, drawing the attention of different scholars.

**Dictators in South America immediately before and during the cold war**

<b>Dictator/Country</b>	<b>Term</b>
From Jorge Videla to Leopoldo Galtieri <b>Argentina</b>	1976-1983
Hugo Banzer <b>Bolivia</b>	1971-1978
Humberto Branco <b>Brazil</b>	1964-1967
Augusto Pinochet <b>Chile</b>	1973-1990
Gustavo Rojas Pinilla <b>Colombia</b>	1953-1957
Guillermo Rodríguez/Militar Governing Board <b>Ecuador</b>	1972-1979
Miguel Antonio Noriega <b>Panama</b>	1983-1989
Alfredo Stroesner <b>Paraguay</b>	1954-1989
Juan Velasco Alvarado /Francisco Morales <b>Peru</b>	1968-1980
Juan Bordaberry, Alberto Demicheli, Aparicio Méndez y Gregorio Alvarez <b>Uruguay</b>	1973-1985
Marco Perez Jimenez <b>Venezuela</b>	1952-1958

Source: Own elaboration after consulting [www.notimerica.com](http://www.notimerica.com)

### **Democratic transitions in South America: a door to an inclusive historical memory?**

According to the table above and in the context of the Cold War, the last dictator to leave the sphere of power in the region was General Pinochet in Chile. Thus, it can be said that in the '90s, the subject matter of human rights returned to the center of the agenda in many South American countries in a broader manner. It was more comprehensive, as it is impossible to disregard the fact that during the reign of these dictatorships, there were activism and a resistance movement. In concrete terms, once the dictatorial apparatus came to an end, it was easier to go further with the denunciations of the horrors lived, and the box of memories suddenly re-opened.

Initially, this process did not have any gender specificity, and it was only with the wave of what is called "democratic transitions and consolidation" (O'Donnell et al. 1988) that the first steps materialized, such as the fact that various South American countries, including those confronted with internal violence, began to include an integrative approach to memories in their constitutions. In fact, in the 1990s, many states adopted new constitutions; Colombia was a pioneer in adopting its new mayor chart in 1991 as a result of a constituent assembly in which women's participation was a novel aspect in the way of doing politics in the country (CEPAL 2005). There were also explicit articles about equality, protection against gender discrimination, and women's participation at all decision-making levels of public administration.

The novelty of female participation in this specific case is that it not only concerned the protection of women against all kinds of systematic discrimination but also ensured their participation in political life. Beyond Colombia and across the continent, some authors point out that, in this period, a kind of "Ius Constitutionale Commune" was born in Latin America. This fact is understood as a regional constitutional approach that adopts measures to overcome the inequities (including gender inequality) and the unacceptable living conditions of the population (Bogdandy 2015). This halo of change represented a transformation of the political and social reality aiming at achieving the consolidation of democracy and respect for human rights. Besides, during this period, the national legal systems of many countries in Latin

America opened up more to international law, in particular to the inter-American system for the protection of human rights, which would also be the door for the issue of gender inequality to enter the political agenda<sup>1</sup>.

Nevertheless, Nevertheless, it is vital to identify that although there was an avid interest in democracy, it took time to dismantle the legacy of dictatorships in democratic institutions (Frantz & Geddes 2016) and the influence of actors of the internal conflicts of the political sphere in Colombia (Garay et al. 2008). Thus, although democratic governments began to operate formally in many South American countries, the autocratic “heritage” in the democratic institutions survived through different processes, one of the most controversial examples being Augusto Pinochet senator-for-life. In Chile, his legacy caused a spectrum of mistrust and undermined confidence in justice and truth, critical pillars for the construction of historical memory.

In this panorama of ambiguity during the political transitions, it became clear that democracy is hardly sustainable at the expense of those who were direct and indirect victims of violence, either state violence or the one infringed by the armed actors within a given conflict. Consequently, the cultivation of memory became not only an idealist objective but also a condition to strengthen democracy, particularly if one considers the exercise of memory in a pluralistic way contributing to the construction of a respectful present, concerning human rights and a peaceful future by learning from past experiences.

In these terms, the development of an inclusive and sobering truthful memory began to manage different forms. First, with strong activism and then through truth commissions, the recurrence to justice in international arenas (e.g., The Inter-American Court of Human Rights), the constitution of associations working on memory, and more recently the museumification of lived experience and past horrors (Hite 2017). All these processes admit the narratives that were previously excluded or minimized and that the new constitutions sought to embrace. In this new approach, women’s memories appeared as a complement rather than as a counter-memory of other victims’ experiences.

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<sup>1</sup> The Inter-American System for the protection of Human rights exists since 1969, but it steadily began to operate in the '90s, increasing its action after dictatorial regimes.



### **Specificity of women's memories**

When women entered the field of construction of historical memory, they arrived at an area that was, until then, masculine: The conflict, dictators, and armed men were protagonists and victims of history, and women's participation or discourse was the exception to the rule, and when it was not, it was minimized. This was so not only because there were anti-democratic regimes or deformed democracies but also because of the asymmetries in the social frameworks, as identified by Halbwachs. Now, in concrete terms, what does the participation of women in historical memory mean? And what is its specificity?

It is prime to understand that the silence concerning the dominance and violence over women in the private South American sphere (e.g., family and other structures of society) facilitated violence in public settings and its legitimization. Thus, the traditional authoritarian male role toward females was an image to reproduce in the context of repression and war. Despite these adverse conditions and systematic silence, there was consistently an emerging community of women activists, feminist advocates, and academics who questioned these circumstances, attempting to promote change. In each country, depending on the respective context, women organized themselves and fought for their rights in different ways. Considering that their general battle should be framed in a cultural and political framework indeed included the respect of women's physical bodies and an enduring fight against the portrayal of women as trophies of the regime or war booty.

Early demands came in even before the transitions did, and they were necessary. Although there was already a Charter of the United Nations and the declaration of human rights that enshrined the principle of non-discrimination, none of these documents reflected the specific needs of women and, accordingly, the violations of their human rights. Contributions from the multilateral arena came later; for instance, the time frame between 1976 and 1985 was declared by the United Nations as the Decade for Women (United Nations GS 1976). At the discursive level, in this period, violence began to be denounced not as a phenomenon that occurs only in the family but also as a form of discrimination and violation of the human rights of women in the public arena.

In the case of dictatorships, the violations of female rights mostly concern the issue of the enforced disappearances of activist women, the obligation to carry pregnancies in captivity, the denial of maternity, the illegal appropriation of children, and the various tortures and rapes (Joffely 2017). These abuses, however, are the reasons to talk about the democratic transition of the past and review what happened to make people say, "Never again."

Parallel to the time of the transition to democracy, the issue of violence against women became more relevant since respect for human rights is not possible if women do not have guarantees for a life free of violence and if there is no reparation for those who have already suffered. That possibly explains why different groups of female victims required the states to comply with its international obligations, including justice for old crimes and responsibility to protect victims where conflicts remained.

Since then, the struggles of women's organizations that inherited a traumatic past have been focusing on demonstrating how the repertoires of violence and domination exercised on men and women are not the same. Moreover, they seek to teach how some armed actors or agents of the various dictatorships reinforced traditional views on femininity and masculinity. Among these repertoires, it is critical to find the ones related to sexual violence and the devaluation or reduction of women's bodies under different circumstances. Indeed, some intellectuals object to the view that sexual violence against women is in and of itself a kind of reduction of women, although there is no agreement among feminist theorists on this regard. The criminalization of these practices is significant because, in these terms, a "relativist" view on this conduct is not possible anymore: Not everything is permitted in war (Centro de Memoria Histórica 2011, 39).

This is not to deny that, before entering a democratic transition or democratic consolidation, men in the system minimized women politically and socially. Even symbols around their achievements were dismissed, and sabotage arose against valuable structures for them, such as the family, the neighborhood, and the adjacent community. In current times, as women are gaining space to recount their memories, it is essential to keep in mind that the narratives of their past are not just about what happened to them but also about what women have achieved after this. And this is relevant

because women's narratives go beyond the labeling of women as submissive victims and consider them actors of change.

Given that it would be overstated to generalize each unique experience in South America, this text presents two emblematic cases. The first case is about the mothers and grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, and the second one is about the participation of two key Colombian women groups in the peace negotiations (2012-2016) between the Colombian government and the FARC – the oldest guerrilla faction in Latin America, today demobilized and transformed into a political party. Both of these cases are emblematic as they highlight inspiring experiences which are yet relevant even beyond the borders of the region. The aforementioned women groups and their memory battles continue to influence the ruptures in the relations of discourse domination while seeking measures of truth, justice and reparation, and long-term options for non-repetition.

### **Mothers and Grandmothers of *Plaza de Mayo***

The movement of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo appeared in 1977 and was founded during the dictatorship of Rafael Videla in Argentina. Some women, tired of the silence of the authorities regarding the information about disappeared loved ones, decided to gather peacefully in Plaza de Mayo. Plaza de Mayo is the center of the traditional politics in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and faces the front of the Argentinian presidential headquarters.

Mothers of Plaza de Mayo began with the impetus of a woman, a mother named Azucena Villaflor. She encouraged other mothers like her not to keep their lips sealed and introduced activism instead of silence in a time of great repression. She paid for her pursuit of the truth with her own life; she disappeared in December 1977. Nonetheless, her idea has grown over the past 41 years, and the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo is one of the most important social organizations in Latin America and the world that is contributing to memory studies. Thus, the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo is not an updated historical phenomenon but rather a vibrant organization that advocates for old and new causes related to human rights.

The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo's central pillar is the "socialization of maternity" not as a weak status but, on the contrary, as a condition of empowerment. It is through this socialization that they can take their demands by themselves to the political and public realm (Bouvard 2002). In other words, it is a positive eruption of the private sphere into the public space expressed in the claim of something so personal that it is the life and destiny of one's children. As we will see now, some of the achievements of this movement confirm these statements.

A first achievement is public awareness about the crimes committed during military dictatorships. This social organization clarified the facts possible; women did not let the government hide the murders. They marched on squares, week after week, year after year, to demand the truth about what happened to their children<sup>2</sup>. Beyond complaining, this group managed to bring the perpetrators to court.

A clear example is showcased in the restoration of democracy in Argentina. Dictator Videla was found guilty of multiple murders and disappearances, and he was in jail from 1985 through 1990. Former president Carlos Saúl Menem pardoned Videla and other military leaders. However, the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, a grassroots human rights group, got him back into prison in 1998 for the disappearance and trafficking of several babies born in captivity. It means, the regime not only made the mothers disappear but also made the children who were too weak disappear from their families (Ardity 2002).

A second achievement linked to the last one is the recovery of the identities of more than 130 children who disappeared during the military dictatorship. This was possible thanks to the creation of the National Genetic Data Bank and the Argentinian Commission for the Right to an Identity, or CONADI (Bonner 2007). Both agencies can be considered attainments of the movement. Mothers and grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo pushed the transition governments to modernize such technical institutions to get scientific material to report the truth about the destinies of their children and grandchildren after being born in captivity (grandmother's website).

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<sup>2</sup> According to their website, the last 12th July they have achieved 2100 gatherings since their first action together and under the motto "We still give birth to memory and future." Visited 16<sup>th</sup> July 2018 <http://madres.org/index.php/las-madres-cumplen-2100-jueves-en-la-plaza/>

A third achievement has to do with the cultural resources that these mothers were able to build. They created a cultural center, a school, a library, a newspaper, a radio station, and a university, all of them focusing on human rights and the promotion of networks in this domain. The victimhood of these mothers transformed into a creative power destined to influence new generations. Although there have been some legal problems linked to the administration of the university, it is more than symbolic that an academic institution in Argentina involving the university's name offers studies in law, social communication, history, and social work. Historical memory passes by truth and justice for this group but also by permanent remembrance, and no other tool is more powerful to achieve this objective than education.

The "Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo" have maintained over the years, working relations with international organizations for the defense of human rights, governmental and non-governmental, as the Commission on Human Rights of the UN, and Amnesty International, respectively, but also with other intergovernmental organizations, creating international solidarity networks and providing expertise to other women groups dealing with their past. A recent example is their encounter with the mothers of disappeared youngs in Bogota in 2015<sup>3</sup> (Loaiza 2015)

However, and in spite of the achievements here presented, it is crucial to the highpoint, that for these mothers, as far as truth is not complete, reconciliation is not possible. This aspect partially explains why some branches of the group refuse the proposal of Catholic authorities in Argentina to reconcile mothers and grandmothers with military authorities. For many mothers, as far as not all grandchildren appear, as far as the government does not update the official position concerning the number of victims of the dictatorships, the field of memory in Argentina will remain an open one.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> It refers to the scandal of "False positives" in Colombia when some civilians appeared murdered and then presented as members of FARC.

<sup>4</sup> Not to be surprised that after the last condemnation on November 2017 regarding 48 pilots involved in "death flights," victims and/or family of them, consider there are still more cases of abuse to come to light. Turn the page is not an option. Besides there is a kind of differences with members of the current government,

### **Women groups in the peace process between the Colombian Government and the FARC**

"We have suffered, but we don't want to be remembered for what they did to us, but by what we did for ourselves after." With this phrase, Mayerli Angarita ended her speech this year in March in the framework of the international women's day, while receiving her prize as co-winner of the Anna Klein Award delivered in Germany, for her work as the leader of the Colombian organization, "Telling to live." The prize is recognition for her activism at the national, regional, and international stages and her struggle in defense of the rights and participation of Colombian women in the peace process with the "FARC" guerrilla.

According to her testimony, "Telling to live" was founded in 2000, when the internal conflict intensified in the area of Montes de Maria in the north of Colombia. Its objective is to reconstruct the self-confidence among women who were considered spoils of war. At the same time, it is an option to appease the pain for the loss of family members through what they think, the healing power of the word, and an opportunity to rebuild their life projects and contribute to their communities as managers of peace<sup>5</sup>. This point is of high relevance if one takes into account that the claim for prison as a fulfillment of justice is not the only way women can demand recognition and the validation of their voices. There is a subtle difference between the focus of Mothers of Plaza de Mayo's activism and the Colombian women groups presented in this document.

As stated above, the discrimination and violence that were originally endorsed in some countries were engendered by a view that places women in situations of dependency and passivity. The activism of Telling to Live is a clear example of how to overcome the representations of femininity that are disseminated through dominant narratives. These narratives only situate women as victims or passive figures in history, taking away their agency capacity on the political and social levels.

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including President Macri, who has affirmed the dictatorship regime left 8000 victims and no 30.000 as mothers and other human rights groups in Argentina claim.

<sup>5</sup> Mayerli Angarita visited Germany in March and participated as a guest in other conferences to celebrate women's day. As a scholar, I had the opportunity to attend some of these activities and learn more about the history of this group which is also available on their official website. [www.narrarparavivir.org](http://www.narrarparavivir.org)

This collective has around 800 women, each one a social leader in the landscape of her area. Some of them, like Mrs. Angarita herself, have tried to enter the political arena as mayors or representatives of their villages. Despite not winning an election to date, they have defied the illegal groups that thought they were not able to abandon their “victim categorization.” The female members of Telling to Live have remained strong, even after death pamphlets banned female participation in politics in this area. However, as Mrs. Angarita herself used to say “They [illegal authors of the pamphlets] cannot take away our capacity to dream and our capacity to transform our territory in a territory of peace.” In March 2015, she traveled to Havana, Cuba, the venue of the peace negotiations, to meet with the gender subcommittee of the Colombian Government and FARC negotiators, and she demanded the de-escalation of the conflict, particularly concerning violence against women.

Telling to Live is not a secluded case of the significant representation of women’s rights in Colombia. The Women’s Pacifist Rout (Ruta Pacífica) is another significant case, which assembled data from about 300 Colombian women’s associations. The primary thesis of Ruta Pacífica is that, in Colombia, the war has been a masculine issue in which men of the extreme right and the extreme left of the political spectrum have been trying to control the state. This institutional power has excluded women mainly at the local and regional levels, with some exceptions.

Since its foundation in 1996, The Women’s Pacifist Rout, just like Telling to Live, has been working to find a solution to the armed conflict through negotiations. They have made a special contribution in making visible how the war has affected women; they campaign for the rights of truth and justice and advocate for a participative culture of memory. The Women’s Pacifist Rout works in the most remote territories of Colombia and in the very local micro terrain, helping women come to terms with the trauma of war and helping them overcome fear, disillusion, and silence. It provides advice, socio-psychological support, and cultural and educational programs (The Women’s Pacifist Rout website).

Members of The Women’s Pacifist Rout stopped considering themselves exclusively as victims of the conflict and started considering themselves as social and political actors able to participate in the peace process. It was the first organization in Colombia to create its own truth

and memory commission. Since then, this group has collected more than 1,000 individual testimonies of women whose human rights were violated. The commission provided a report about it to the Colombian government and the FARC during peace negotiations.

In recognition of its work, The Women's Pacifist Rout is supported by several organizations nationally and internationally. In 2014, the organization won the Colombian National Prize for Peace, and in 2016, it won the Human Rights Prize of the German Friedrich Ebert Foundation.

These are just two examples of how women mobilize and raise their voices peacefully against the perpetrators of the various violations of their rights. These two cases of Colombian women were able to convince the involved parties of the importance of a gender commission in the course of negotiations. Even more importantly, these women managed to ensure that fellow women be directly involved in the implementation of the agreements under the premise that, without the voice of women, the truth is not complete. This is not because the truth has a gender but because the focus on the process of remembrance is different. In fact, last October, according to the latest report of the United Nations and as a follow-up to the 2000 resolution 1325 of the United Nations on Women, Peace, and Security (S/RES/1325 2000), the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, highlighted the issue of the inclusion of women. She did it in both the negotiation and the implementation of agreements in an open debate on the Security Council of the achievements of Colombia. This debate led to the consideration of the Colombian experience as satisfactory and a reference in the international context<sup>6</sup>.

The Colombian peace agreement is currently seen as the most inclusive worldwide concerning not only women but also gender issues in a broader sense (Nylander & Salvesen 2017). At the same time, it inspires many measures that are being taken now in Colombia, such as the participation of

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<sup>6</sup> For more information follow the Speech: Women, peace and security, an essential pillar in global affairs Statement by Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, at the Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace, and Security, consulted on October 27, 2017 <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2017/10/speech-ed-phumzile-unscc-open-debate-on-women-peace-and-security>



women in the truth commission and the transitional justice system (Special Justice for Peace, known as JEP). One of its top priorities is to demonstrate, that women's bodies were used as objects of war by all irregular actors.

'Telling to live' and 'The Women's Pacifist Route' also reveal that power in Colombian women's perspectives is not just the capacity to lead in political terms, a community or a territory. Power for them is the capability to generate positive changes within conflict contexts. They use power as an empowerment tool to recognize that even after barbaric acts; women can entirely appropriate their rights, their present, and their future.

### **Conclusion**

The most important outcome of this paper is that the direct participation of women in the construction of historical memory, vis-à-vis a violent past, tends to contribute to eliminating structural discrimination against them. When women remember and do so collectively, they become more and more empowered and able to strengthen a network of collective activism that crosses borders in a kind of transnational solidarity. International recognition of groups appertaining to the two typical countries is a solid proof of that.

Memories are not the same for men and women; memories are connected to past emotions, including traumatic ones. Thus, women put a different emphasis on their accounts than men do because of their own different restrictions that apply to their personal realms. Moreover, because women believe more in the collective healing process than men do, they are more willing to reveal what they faced during repression or domestic conflicts.

Finally, it is important to bear that historical memory studies can campaign "Never Again" but also in some cases promote reconciliation as is the case now in Colombia. Although there is no unique direction in historical memory studies, the challenge of women's participation in that process is to move away from a "sacralization of the past". It means to be able to update it, being carriers of solutions to current problems, and thus project themselves into the future in an equal world that considers women's narratives and memories with all its transformative power.

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