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## **‘Violence Came Here Yesterday’: The Women’s Movement against War in Colombia**

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Some of us join a movement against war when we’re jolted into an act of compassion and responsibility by something we see on TV news. Others among us create such a movement because it’s the only thing left to do, because violence walked into our village, our street or our home one time too many. That’s how it is in Colombia. The *Movimiento de Mujeres contra la Guerra* is a movement of women ‘coming out’ in rage, rebellion and hope against fifty years of political violence that’s wrecked generations of lives - a kind of violence you don’t need a TV programme to tell you about because it’s intimate, it’s local and you can see it inscribing one new scar after another on the bodies and minds of those you love.

### **Armed conflict in Colombia**

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century there have been only two political parties of any significance in Colombia, the Conservatives and the Liberals. They have been alternating monopolies of power, whose rivalry has divided the country as effectively and as violently as if they had been warring ethnic groups. Peasants, workers, resources and territories were divided and recruited by the Liberal and Conservative elites for their political strife, which was often an armed struggle. Progressive movements trying to cut through this clientelism were wiped out. In the 1950s this armed party politics devolved into a 16-year period of murderous civil war they termed *La Violencia*.<sup>1</sup>

Poverty, gross inequality, the exclusive nature of the political elite and continuous stalling by successive governments on the crucial issue of land reform, caused the rise of leftwing guerrilla movements in the 1960s. The strongest and most widely known guerrilla force is the FARC. Still active, though smaller than FARC, are the ELN and the ELP.<sup>2</sup> The guerrilla built support for their social and economic programmes in areas of the country where capitalist exploitation was giving rise to the greatest resentment. They funded their organizations by extortion, kidnapping and (increasingly today) ‘taxes’ on the production, processing and sale of cocaine.

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<sup>1</sup> In this Profile I draw on information conveyed to me in interview, on leaflets and other ephemeral material, and on the publications listed in the references at the end of the paper. I only cite individual people and references where I quote their words directly.

<sup>2</sup> *The Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional* (ELN, the National Liberation Army) was inspired by the Cuban revolution and formed in 1966; *The Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias Colombianas* (FARC, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), associated with the Communist Party, was formed in 1964; the *Ejercito Popular de Liberacion* (EPL, the Maoist-influenced Popular Liberation Army) was initiated the following year.

The government's armed forces, intent on finding and eradicating the guerrilla movements and suppressing popular discontent, have killed, imprisoned and tortured tens of thousands. The state's inability to uproot the armed fighters led wealthy landowners, the business class and the drug traffickers to raise and fund their own armies, shadowy militias, now grouped under a single association of paramilitaries, the AUC (United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia). They are active in both rural and urban areas, battling the guerrilla for control of their territories. Their strategy is to attack guerrilla bases, real or imagined, cordoning, massacring and expelling civilian communities. They contain many criminal elements, are deeply involved in narcotics, and are known to receive the tacit support of elements in the state military.

For Colombian men it is difficult to avoid bearing arms. Poverty, lack of prospects, fear for their families and the need for 'protection' drive them into the dangerous embrace of one side or another. Many Colombian men have inevitably been brutalized by their involvement in fighting. It starts early. More than 11,000 children are enrolled into guerrilla and paramilitary units (Human Rights Watch 2003b). But women fight too. According to the AUC, women constitute 12% of their ranks. The estimate for FARC is as high as 40%.

The United States of America compounds the violence in Colombia. Its triple agenda is securing Colombia against leftwing insurgency, protecting US oil and other business interests and stemming the flow of narcotics to US markets. In 2004 it will donate \$680 million in aid, which puts Colombia among the top five countries in terms of receipt of US military assistance. US Southern Command has 1500 military personnel in the country. Its approach to the narcotics problem is purely coercive and involves programmes of fumigation from the air that destroy, along with coca plantations, subsistence crops and people's health. US policy favours rightwing Colombian administrations and drew the country into the Coalition for the invasion of Iraq. Since 9/11 US official statements have rhetorically linked FARC and Al-Qaeda and encouraged the view that terrorism in Colombia is yet another legitimate target in the international 'War on Terror'.

The current president of Colombia, President Alvaro Uribe, is a hardliner heavily criticized by local and international human rights organizations. His approach to the eradication of the guerrilla has been to issue weapons to farmers and establish networks of paid informers among them, thus increasing the militarization of everyday life. He avoids challenging the paramilitaries in the field and is currently negotiating with some of their commanders on an agenda that some fear may afford them impunity (see p. 17 below). After 'September 11' he further undermined human rights by filing an Anti-Terror law in Congress. Although not approved, many of its provisions are applied in practice. In 2003 he launched a campaign against NGOs, peace initiatives and social movements accusing them of being 'politically motivated'. Yet his poncho-wearing populist style wins him many votes and he receives little criticism from a media owned by his wealthy rightwing supporters.

## The effect on everyday life and on women

In the last ten or fifteen years, despite a series of peace negotiations between the government and several of the armed actors, the lives of ordinary Colombians have become even less secure. In 2003 human rights groups registered more than 2500 *civilian* deaths, alone, as a result of political violence. In 2004 the official figure for all homicides was 27,000. Fifteen percent of these were said to be 'political' killings – but it is difficult to distinguish political and non-political violence. Torture remains commonplace and hundreds are held hostage. The week I was in Colombia (August 2004) three trade unionists were killed by state armed forces. The week before that, ten seasonal workers of the coca harvest were massacred in the fields.

Sexual violence against women is endemic, used by all three armed actors to punish the women for associating with 'the wrong side', or to punish enemy men. Of 3486 instances of sexual violence reported for the period 1995-2001 in the city of Medellin alone, in 1785 the aggressor was not known to the victim and it is believed that many of these cases were politically motivated rapes e.g. retaliation by one armed group against another (Gallego Zapata 2003). Women are often kidnapped into sexual servitude and forced to do domestic labour for guerrillas or paramilitaries. Contraception is difficult to obtain, and abortion is illegal. The danger of travelling to hospital and lack of facilities in rural areas mean women must often give birth at home, with resultant deaths.

Donny Meertens, a feminist academic at the National University, explains

Whereas earlier traditional power-holders – including guerrillas in their old strongholds – could offer some protection to their local population, the present frequent power-shifting renders this nearly impossible. Protection is replaced by terror as the most easily available mechanism for obtaining popular quiescence. All armed combatants understand territoriality as a zero-sum game in which no neutral space exists, and no room for negotiated solutions is available. The civil population is caught in the paranoiac logic of '*si no estas conmigo, estas contra mí*' (if you are not with me, you are against me)...

In a situation where it is not safe to assume any responsibility nor to make any accusation, the only way to refer to acts and perpetrators of violence is in a neutral form: *violence came here yesterday*, as if it were an autonomous force and not a human act. (Meertens 2001:38).

Increasingly, in many areas, the only response left to ordinary people is to abandon their homes. Last year it is estimated that an average of 650 people *each day* were forced to uproot themselves. Estimates of total 'internally displaced people' (IDPs) in Colombia range from 1.5 million to 3 million. They gather in vast precarious settlements on the edge of towns and cities.

The IDPs are disproportionately women. Many are heads of households. Of those, many are widows of men killed in the conflict. Maintaining the primary bonds of family and community was women's role, so women experience their sundering even harder than men. But they are quicker and better than men in

adapting to the new circumstances, learning how to deal with the institutions and invent ways of keeping themselves and their families fed (Meertens 2001). The war pursued displaced Colombian women even into the cities. The armed actors control many urban areas, policing women by rape, carrying out exemplary assassinations of women leaders, dictating moral norms – even threatening girls with death for sporting pierced navels or drop-waist jeans.

As a result of the conflict, the new Colombia is a nation of city dwellers. Migration from rural areas to towns and cities began in the 1970s and today 70% of the population is urban. The country has a wealth of natural resources, yet 60% of Colombians live in poverty, while some are super-rich. In matters of health and hunger the country is more comparable to Africa than it is to the rest of Latin America. Added to the material immiseration, many women, men and children live continually with the memory of dead and 'disappeared' loved ones, and a terrible nostalgia for an irrecoverable place and time.

### **The Colombian peace movement**

There is a long history of peace negotiations in Colombia. Successive presidents have swung between a maximalist concept of peace, with social and economic changes under discussion, and a minimalist agenda of agreement to disarm particular groups in exchange for electoral representation. For instance, the peace negotiations with M19 in the early '90s resulted in some becoming congressmen and senators. Neither approach has succeeded.

Historically, civil society has been excluded from these official peace processes. Indeed Colombian civil society has scarcely existed apart from those civil organisations that are 'fronts' for the armed interest groups. In the 1970s and 80s popular movements, peasant movements for agrarian reform, and human rights organizations were crushed. The human rights movement however had a moment of success in 1991, under a relatively liberal regime, in obtaining a revision of the national Constitution. This Constitution surprisingly stated that peace is both a right and a duty.

It was around this time that social mobilization for peace took off, first in war-ravaged areas like Uraba and Magdalena Medio. The period 1993-99, on the one hand saw the so-called 'dirty war' in which the paramilitaries harassed the trade union movement and wiped out the leftwing *Union Patriótica*, but on the other were a period of rapid growth in peace mobilization and organization, with more social sectors and more regions involved. A Committee for the Search for Peace was formed. The Catholic church set up a National Conciliation Commission. Esperanza Delgado describes these peace movements as

processes with origins in social sectors that have traditionally been excluded from full participation in the political life and economic wealth of the country, such as the indigenous peoples, Afro-Colombians, the *campesinos*, and women (Delgado 2004:24).

One important initiative, in 1993, was the forming of *Redepaz*, a National Network of Initiatives for Peace and against War, which currently has 120 regional 'tables' in which social leaders, local authorities, NGOs and individuals come together to discuss and solve local problems`.

I interviewed Ana Teresa Bernal, a founding member of *Redepaz* and one of its current presidential team of five. On its formation *Redepaz* countered then president Gaviria's proclaimed policy of 'integral war' with a policy of 'integral peace'. They meant, they said, 'Peace which considers the human being as global and integral with his [sic] environment. Peace which recognizes and respects the human being in public and private space. An integral peace is conceived with humanistic elements, fomenting expressions of love and tenderness' (*Redepaz* current descriptive leaflet, 2004). They maintain a careful position of autonomy and neutrality with regard to all actors in the conflict, including the army, and promote non-violent ways of resolving it.

*Redepaz*' most impressive action was to organize in October 1997 a national 'Mandato', a referendum which generated over 10 million votes for peace – more than the combined votes for all candidates in the previous presidential election. They followed this with a 'Children's Mandato' which raised 2.7 million votes. The popular will for peace revealed by these spontaneous referenda pushed the government into peace negotiations with FARC the following year. A permanent Civil Society Assembly for Peace was formed in 1998, and in 1999 mass demonstrations around the country brought out an estimated 8 million people under the slogan 'No Mas' (No More). But the collapse in 2002 of the negotiations between the government and FARC finally left the peace movement in demoralization and disarray.

### **The women's movement against war**

*Redepaz*, like the other initiatives described above, is a mixed organization of women and men. Although Ana Teresa in interview distanced *Redepaz* from any kind of dogma or 'ism', including 'feminism', the Network has been alert to the potential of women to contribute important energy to peace movements. Possibly half its membership is female, women are well represented in the leadership, and Ana Teresa told me of some attempts to encourage women's activism in *Redepaz* through training and other means of 'empowerment'.

It is however in *specifically women's organizations* for peace, organizations with a gender analysis of war, that the initiative now lies, while the movement as a whole, of which *Redepaz* is a part, is somewhat becalmed in the aftermath of the collapse of the FARC talks and the accession to power of Uribe two years ago. So significant is this contemporary movement of women for peace that it was described to me by Olga Amparo Sanchez, an academic feminist and antiwar activist, as the third of three big steps forward for women in Colombia on a par with winning of the vote fifty years ago and achieving the reform of the Constitution in 1991.

The logic of the movement lies in the reality of Colombian life. Women are raped and abused by the men of all sides of this conflict. The sustenance of everyday life - especially for indigenous women and peasant women - is made perilous or impossible by the operations of the armed actors. It is not surprising if women are sometimes pushed by their circumstances across a threshold, the line that separates passivity and fear from courage and resistance. In many parts of the country male leaders of human rights and peace organizations have been assassinated or disappeared. Women and women's organizations are the only remaining bearers of any type of democratic demands. Increasingly they are bringing together issues that used to be the domain of separate NGOs, on the one hand those of human rights and on the other those of peace. As Patricia Prieto said to me, in interview, 'It's on women's shoulders. They are holding things together. They are the weavers and maintainers of the social fabric.'

Yet the significance of women's mobilization, its meaning for the prospects both of women and peace in Colombia, is under-estimated by civil society leaders, who are predominantly male. 'The men recognize our importance in politics and movements, but they retain the power,' said Maria Eugenia Sanchez, in interview. 'When they talk and write about the movement, we disappear.' 'They invisibilize us,' Olga Amparo said.<sup>3</sup>

The conference I attended in Bogota in August 2004 was titled 'International Encounter of Women against War'. It was attended by around 250 Colombian women of all social sectors and regions, and around 30 overseas activists. It was organized by two substantial women's initiatives working together. They are the *La Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres por la Negociación Política de los Conflictos* (Women's Peaceful Road for the Political Negotiation of Conflict), and the *Alianza Iniciativa de Mujeres Colombianas por la Paz* (IMP, the Alliance of the Colombian Women's Initiative for Peace). In the remainder of this profile my main focus will be these two substantial national initiatives of women for peace. Both of these are devices for mobilizing and unifying many smaller constituent organizations and, for purposes of the conference, called themselves *El Movimiento de Mujeres contra la Guerra* (the Movement of Women against War).

However I shall make mention along the way of several other women's NGOs.<sup>4</sup> Some of them are focused on 'women' more than 'peace'. But, as will

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<sup>3</sup> Current peace organizations, other than those mentioned in my text, of which I heard while in Colombia are as follows: *La Asamblea Permanente de la Sociedad Civil por la Paz* (Permanent Assembly of Civil Society for Peace) which publishes a regular bulletin; *Planeta Paz* (Planet Peace), a project of the National University and the Latin American Legal Studies Institute (ILSA); and the *Campana Colombiana contra Minas* (the local branch of an international campaign against landmines).

<sup>4</sup> Women's organizations I heard mentioned included the *Movimiento Nacional de Mujeres Autoras y Actores de Paz* (National Movement of Women Authors and Actors of Peace) and *Dialogo Mujer* (Women's Dialogue, based in Bogota). In addition: *ANMUCIC* (National Association of Indigenous and Peasant Women of Colombia); *Madres y Familiares de Miembros de la Fuerza Publica Retenidos y Liberados por Grupos Guerrilleros* (Mothers and Families of Military Personnel Kidnapped/Freed by Guerrilla Groups); *Red Ecumenica*

become clear, Colombia's circumstances mean that violence, and the need for an end to violence, are issues that can hardly be ignored by any woman's organization here. For one thing, women who raise their heads and become active in any local or sectoral organization are immediately confronted by one force or another and have to bear the costs of that in their own and their families' lives. This is the case whether they are identifiably linked to one 'side' or the other, or are (equally provocative) attempting to create actively neutral 'peace communities'.

### **1. *La Ruta Pacifica de las Mujeres por la Negociacion Política de los Conflictos***

*La Ruta Pacifica* formed in the mid-nineties in response to the violence women were experiencing in both rural and urban areas.<sup>5</sup> In defining themselves this way, they referred specifically to both the life threatening violence of the three-sided armed conflict and other, 'less visible because less fatal', manifestations of violence against women: rape, abduction and forced labour.

*La Ruta Pacifica* is made up of more than 300 organizations and groups of women in eight regions (Santander, Valle del Cauca, Risaralda, Condinamarca, Putumayo, Antioquia, Choco and Cauca). The member NGOs represent and include women of many specific 'identities': women of the many tribes of indigenous peoples of Colombia; Afro-colombians whose presence derives from the slave trade; young women; peasant women; women of the urban poor; displaced women. Membership is also open to individuals.

The central office of *La Ruta Pacifica* is in the city of Medellin. They also have 'regional coordinations' with street addresses in Bogota and the towns of Bucaramanga, Pereira, Cali, Puerto Caicedo, Popayan and Quibdo. Management is achieved through monthly meetings of the regional coordinators. Communication is mainly by phone. Although e-mail is used it is impossible to lean heavily on it as an organizing tool because many of their constituent women and groups lack computers and Internet access. Their website and e-mail contact are, however, very important in their international links (see p.11 below).

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*Nacional de Mujeres por la Paz de Colombia*, a nation-wide network sponsored by the Catholic Church; *Liega de Mujeres Desplazados por la Violencia en Bolivar* (League of Women Displaced by Violence in Bolivar); *Audiencia Publica de Mujeres*, with 800 women members in various organizations and sectors; and finally the *Red Nacional de Mujeres* (National Network of Women) a longstanding network of local women's groups with a headquarters in Bogota.

<sup>5</sup> I draw in my description of *Ruta Pacifica* on both printed material (see references at the end of the Profile) and interviews with Marina Gallego Zapata, the national coordinator of RP based in Medellin, and with Clara Tamayo, Olga Amparo Sanchez and Maria Eugenia Sanchez, members of the Bogota section of RP, based in the Women's House (*Casa de la Mujer*) in Bogota. The translation into English of printed material is my own. In quoting interviews, in some cases I am drawing on the record of an original conducted in English, in others on the words of interpreters.

I will mention just three of the many local organizations that make up *La Ruta*, the only rationale for the selection being that I had the opportunity to meet some of their activists while in Bogota.

- One is the the *Casa de la Mujer*, the Women's House of Bogota, which has existed since 1982. It is a focal point for women in the city and provides support for women experiencing domestic and other forms of violence. Several of the activists of the Casa de la Mujer are coordinators of *La Ruta Pacifica* in the capital city, and their building serves as its base there.
- A second is *Corporacion Vamos Mujer por la Participacion de la Mujer Popular*, in Medellin, which likewise has contributed administrative resources to the national coordination of *La Ruta Pacifica*. A substantial project, already 25 years old, *Vamos Mujer* operates in Medellin city and the surrounding region. It fields a team of four programme coordinators, supported by 28 'associates' and it offers women, on the one hand, training and qualification, and on the other psycho-social care to counteract the effects of violence. Their training is designed to transform women's attitudes and values, increase their knowledge and skill, and help them participate in the political life of the city and community. Clara Ines Mazo, Estella Ospina and others of the lively and creative team of *Vamos Mujer* are equally active in *La Ruta Pacifica*.
- A third affiliate of *La Ruta Pacifica* is the smaller NGO *Corporacion para la Vida Mujeres que Crean*, established fifteen years ago, also in Medellin. Its aims include developing educational processes with women to strengthen them as individuals and social beings; contributing to the transformation of relationships which discriminate against women; and working to build ideas of self-awareness in women regarding their position and condition.<sup>6</sup> Its present coordinator, Leonor Esguerra, told me that, in offering training to women, they avoid 'handiwork' that could reinforce traditional gender roles. They focus, rather, on empowerment, addressing women's sexual, reproductive and other rights. Leonor herself is interesting for bringing to the project qualities that combine the compassion and heart that comes of early years as a Catholic nun and school teacher, a political analysis deriving from a period as a grassroots activist among peasants and slum-dwellers in Colombia and Nicaragua, and a feminism learned in a critique of both those traditions.

#### *La Ruta Pacifica's politics*

Their principal leaflet introduces *La Ruta Pacifica* as

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<sup>6</sup> Paraphrased from an entry on *Mujeres que Crean* on the website [www.peacewomen.org](http://www.peacewomen.org), accessed September 13, 2004.



a feminist political project, national in character, working for a negotiated end to armed conflict in Colombia and to render visible the effects of war in the lives of women. We declare ourselves to be pacifists, antimilitarists and builders of an ethic of non-violence in which the fundamental principles are justice, peace, equality, autonomy, freedom and the recognition of otherness.

They describe their politics as follows. First and foremost, peaceful and antimilitarist resistance ‘that redeems the sacred value of life and thence of the “everyday”, of sensibility, the respect for difference, solidarity and sisterhood’. They stress dialogue at various levels – local (both urban and rural) and regional dialogue within the populations close to the armed conflict, and also women’s active participation in the national processes of negotiation leading to a peaceful route out of conflict. They call for a culture of non-violence and co-existence. They use ‘international human rights’, especially women’s human rights, as a rallying point. They demand processes of memory, truth, justice and reparation because only such processes ‘will permit the recovery of hope and the process of reconciliation in our country’.

*La Ruta Pacifica* are more unequivocally feminist and pacifist than most other women’s NGOs in Colombia. They call feminism and pacifism their two ‘bulwarks’ (*baluartes*). In terms of feminism, they are very explicit in condemning violence against women whether domestic or military, and in affirming women’s sexual and reproductive rights. ‘We say “no” to domestic slavery, to the intervention of the armed actors in private and emotional life; “no” to using women’s bodies as the booty (*botin*) of war’ (principal leaflet).

In terms of pacifism, they call for the demilitarization of civil life and are uncompromising in their rejection of a resort to arms on whatever pretext. In Colombia almost everyone in civil society condemns the mercenary and brutal paramilitaries. But some would excuse the violent actions of the guerrillas, on grounds of their proclaimed programmes for social and economic reform. And yet others might excuse the state’s use of force, due to its electoral legitimacy. *La Ruta Pacifica* make no such exceptions in the name of ‘just wars’.

Their political formulations also show RP to have an analysis of Colombia’s wars that encompasses much more than the gender dimension. They link peace with the internationally-defined rights of the human being, as well as those of women. They denounce the multinationals for ‘economic genocide’ and for exploiting Colombia’s rich bio-diversity and natural resources. They call on Colombian factory and land owners to take responsibility for those causes of conflict in which they are implicated, to support economic redistribution and involve themselves in the movement for peace. They write and speak about environmental destruction and sustainable development, using the terminology of eco-feminism. They speak of the challenge of ‘constructing citizenship and democracy’ while conflict continues.

#### *La Ruta’s actions and themes*

*La Ruta Pacifica*’s very first action was a national mobilization in 1996 that transported more than two thousand women in forty coaches from all over

Colombia to the desperately war-torn area of Uraba. It was an act of solidarity with women who had survived massacres in which many of them had lost husbands, partners and children. Official information suggests that a lot of these women had been raped in the course of those events. These facts galvanized certain women<sup>7</sup> - two members of the Working Women Programme of the National Trade Union School, the coordinator of the Women's Department of the *Central Unitaria Trabajadores* (the trades union congress of Colombia) and certain activists of the Women's House in Bogota and other organizations. They had to 'do something'. They chose November 25, the international day of action against violence against women, for a 'convergence' on Uraba.

Women were at first afraid of the prospect of this risk-laden project, involving travel through disputed territories. Uraba was an ultra-violent area. For many of the participants it would be more than a 48-hour journey. For many it meant going against their family's wishes. And for some it would be the first journey of their lives out of their own locality. Each woman took a decision for herself whether to join this action or not, talking through their fear in many preparatory workshops all over the country. Later, many felt these workshops had been as life-changing as the journey itself.

It was the first time Colombia, in all its history, had seen women, women alone and together, in such numbers, taking a political initiative in the absence of men. Why women? Constituting its membership as 'women' (Maria Eugenia Sanchez told me) was a conscious decision in *La Ruta Pacifica*. 'It's a political choice to be a women's organization, it's not *exclusion*.' The choice is theoretically grounded. Patriarchy and patriarchalism are concepts the group use without hesitation. This distinguishes them from the mixed-sex peace organizations, some of which are actually affiliated to RP. The latter contain many women members, some of whom participate in *La Ruta's* activities, but the organizations do not share *La Ruta's* gender analysis.

A slogan used by *La Ruta Pacifica* from their very first action in Uraba was a conscious echo of the women's strategy against war in Aristophanes play *Lysistrata*, written 2400 years ago. They said, '*No parimos hijos ni hijas para la guerra*' (We will not give birth to sons and daughters for war.) It was the idea of Rocio Pineda, one of the founding members of *La Ruta*. (We shall meet her again below in connection with the *Iniciativa de Mujeres por la Paz*.)

Rocio wrote a startling article on these lines in 1997 which can be read in the volume of collected talks and essays published by *La Ruta Pacifica* in 2003. She quotes *Lysistrata's* words to one of the military commanders in Aristophanes' play.

Look: when we are spinning, if the skein gets tangled we take it off the spindle, we tease the threads first this way, then that way. If you let us, we'd

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<sup>7</sup> They included Rocio Pineda and Pilar Córdoba (Escuela Nacional Sindical, Medellín), Patricia Buriticá (Central Unitaria de Trabajadores, CUT, Bogotá) and Olga Amparo, Norma Henríquez and Maria Eugenia Sánchez (Casa de la Mujer, Bogotá).

deal with this war in the same kind of way, sending ambassadors to one side and the other (*La Ruta Pacifica*, 2003a:68).

In this article, Rocio challenges women's loyalty to their men. She cites the thirty thousand violent deaths in Colombia during the preceding year. She invites women to question themselves: who are these men we love?...whose are these bodies that we desire, eroticize?... What were they doing just before they made love to us?...How can we take into our arms, she asked, someone who's killed, who's left some child fatherless?

She told me, looking back on those days

It was possible to think this way, then. To think: if we want to, women can stop war. Even if weapons are strong. We can simply refuse to make love with men who carry guns, we can refuse to conceive children for them. This is a source of power that women have. Why not use it? Then we would have no more young men for militarism to recruit.

'*No parimos*' early became, and still remains, an important slogan for *La Ruta Pacifica*. In that initiating moment Rocio had meant it not merely as a slogan but as a strategy. But, she says now, philosophically, it's hardly surprising it didn't catch on. 'To tell women not to make love with men, that's a highly irreverent and non-respectable idea in any society.' All the same, I was struck by Olga Amparo Sanchez, in her talk at our conference, describing patriarchalism as 'a relation in which women's love, freely given, is exploited by men' (she was quoting Anna Jonasdottir). This seemed to me a sign that Lysistrata-thinking is still alive in *La Ruta Pacifica*.

Solidarity actions, like the journey to Uraba, in which women in one region imagined and then actually set out to find a 'soul sister' in some other region, suffering perhaps more than she herself, became characteristic of *La Ruta Pacifica*. Another huge mobilization, seven years later, would take 3500 women in 98 coaches on a 'Journey of Solidarity with Women of the South'. Putumayo is a coca-growing area, terribly afflicted by the fumigation policy sponsored by the USA's anti-narcotics programme under 'Plan Colombia'. '*La fumigacion = la miseria*' they wrote on their banners, and 'For the demilitarization and recovery of civil life'. A video I saw of this action left me in no doubt of the extraordinary innovation this woman-to-woman pilgrimage represented, and the great warmth and optimism it generated.

*La Ruta Pacifica* have organized many such activities over a period of eight years. Their persistent theme is ridding Colombian life of violence. Each activity has been painstakingly prepared in a process that is essentially feminist and formative. Each one has generated a statement for issue to the media, setting out women's principles, hopes and demands. One event, in 1998, was a mock tribunal, in the Caribbean coastal town of Cartagena, set up to 'try' those responsible for the many unpunished atrocities. In 1999 *La Ruta Pacifica* was held back for lack of funding. But in 2000 they took a new initiative in an act of solidarity with the *Organizacion Feminina Popular*, seriously threatened by paramilitary groups in Barrancabermeja, in the east.

### *Internationalizing the movement*

Gradually *La Ruta* were internationalizing their scope and connections. Their basic leaflet states 'We are creating an international network of women and NGOs that support negotiation for an end to armed conflict in Colombia...We want to generalise links of solidarity with women and men in other countries to stop war and the war path' (principal leaflet). On November 25, 1997, they organized an international conference of women working for peace. They termed it a *Cabildo* or lobby. In August 2000 *La Ruta* joined with the *Organizacion Feminina Popular* (OFP, Popular Feminine Organization) to create a *Mujeres de Negro* (Women in Black) movement in Colombia.

OFP is a grassroots organization comprized mainly of urban women. It is strongest in the city of Barrancabermeja, in the very violent region of Magdalena Medio, a guerrilla stronghold taken over by paramilitaries in bitter fighting. OFP maintained independence under both regimes, struggling for human rights, persecuted by both sides. Some women have been killed, and many others have had to go into hiding or exile. The Organization does not only work for women, but for families and children. It supports women who have experienced violence, and runs 'soup kitchens'.

From August 2000 onwards vigils in the characteristic style of Women in Black, that is to say, silent and dignified, opposing violence, militarism and war, have been held on the last Tuesday of each month not only in Bogota and Medellin, but also in Puerto Caicedo, Pereira, Cali, Barrancabermeja, Bucaramanga, Popayan, Quibdo and other centres. The only difference to Women in Black vigils elsewhere is that the women sometimes enliven their black clothes by carrying or wearing yellow flowers 'representing the hope we have for peace and to move others to join us in our struggle' (Colorado 2003, p.1).

*La Ruta* and OFP saw their adoption of the Women in Black formula as specifically linking them to a movement of women they knew to be cooperating for peace in Israel and Palestine (and the North American WiB groups that had formed around this Middle Eastern issue), and with women of the former-Yugoslavia who had adopted the name Women in Black (together with the groups in Spain and Italy supporting them).

In interview with *La Ruta* activists Clara Elena Cardona Tamayo, Olga Amparo Sanchez and Maria Eugenia Sanchez, I asked why becoming part of Women in Black had seemed appropriate to them. Of course, the WiB-style vigil, public, repetitive and predictable, simple to look at and easy to participate in, gives them a kind of unity across towns and regions in Colombia and makes them visible to the public and the media. But they also said that the connection with women's organizations opposing war in many other countries, on the basis of similar principles, had been the most important gain for them. Women from *Mujeres de Negro* in Spain had visited Colombia. They had invited Colombian women to Spain and organized speaking opportunities for them. Colombian women visited the USA too, at the invitation of the Women Waging Peace programme organized by

Ambassador Swanee Hunt's Harvard-based Hunt Alternatives Fund. They were enabled to lobby congress persons and state officials about the disastrous social effects of the practice of fumigation of coca plantations under the US-sponsored anti-narcotics programme.

International links have been helpful to *La Ruta Pacifica* in several different ways. They began to get richer information. They learned new methodologies. They got informed feedback on what they were doing. They were able to explore their position more analytically in the light of others' experience. Becoming familiar with women's anti-war agendas in other countries, they themselves became more clearly anti-imperialist. As Women in Black itself developed its international scope, particularly after 9/11, the women in Colombia came to see that worldwide solidarity actions were possible. They recognized the value in calling for women worldwide to put pressure on their governments and on the United Nations to press Colombia to adopt international standards in human rights.

The year they took on Women in Black identity, *La Ruta Pacifica* were one of the winners of the Millennium Peace Prize awarded by UNIFEM and International Alert. Their fame woke them up sharply. 'We saw, yes, we are in the world. We are in Women in Black. Now we have a reputation to live up to!', Olga Amparo told me. Their reputation beyond their national borders continued to grow. When, in July 2002, *La Ruta Pacifica* and other women's organizations called a very successful demonstration in Bogota which drew 40,000 women from the region and beyond, the event was supported by simultaneous actions organized by Women in Black in Spain, Canada and other countries. In December 2003 *La Ruta Pacifica* received a 'special mention' by the French government, an award made to organizations defending women's rights. They have learned a lot, Marina Gallego told me, from the Afghan women of RAWA (the Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan) and from the Zapatistas in Mexico. Both movements have been greatly empowered by worldwide support gained by creative use of the Web.

For one thing, you need to be internationally known to win international funding. The upsurge in *La Ruta's* activity since the millennium has been made possible by the Swiss agency Suippcol who took them on as a partner and became their principal funder, with a grant of US\$350,000 per year. Suippcol – it stands for Swiss Programme for the Promotion of Peace in Colombia – is a coalition of several donor organizations including Swiss Caritas, Swissaid and Swiss Amnesty International. *La Ruta* also receive support from funders in Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Canada and the UK.

#### *La Ruta Pacifica's strategies*

*La Ruta's* basic leaflet includes the following in a list of strategies (translated and summarized here by me):

mobilisation - to denounce violence and offer solidarity to women who experience it;

communication and publicity - to shift public opinion towards the non-violent negotiation of peace;

protection – to increase the safety of women and their organizations;

education – especially to enhance women’s self-worth;

information – especially documenting human rights abuses;

alliances – local, national and international with like-minded organizations;

reparation – starting the processes they believe are much needed in Colombia, that will permit the recall of memories and the speaking of truth, so as to ultimately achieve justice and reparation.

Their most characteristic strategy, though, and one to which they have given a lot of thought is:

symbolism – the deconstruction of the pervasive symbolism of violence and war and the substitution of a new visual and textual language and creative rituals and other practices that ‘recover what women have brought to the world’.

A whole section of their impressive 185-page book (*La Ruta Pacifica* 2003) is devoted to symbolism. It is interesting to see here a mixture of hard-headed economic and political analysis with an evocation of women’s ancestral traditions and spirituality. This is what I bring from my reading of it...

First, the use of symbolism is not about abandoning rationality but combining it with intuition and emotion to invent expressions that are surprising, clear and powerful enough to interrupt and contradict patriarchy, militarism, authoritarian masculinity and exclusion. It’s about using non-verbal images in a world in which we are barraged by wordy politics to such an extent that words are felt to have lost their sense. It’s about excavating and recovering a feminine knowledge that has been subordinated, silenced and buried. It’s also about crossing the borders between Christian traditions in Colombia and surviving pagan traditions, both native American and African in origin.

The main themes appear to concern countering violence and death, affirming life and renewal, and asserting connectedness and sisterhood (*sororidad*). They use rhyme, rhythm and music in chanting and singing, drumming and dance. They make reference to the elements: earth (planting, seeds), fire (use of light and torches), and water (bathing together in the river). They use colours symbolically – yellow for truth; white for justice; green for hope; blue for making amends. They use clothing – white, black; they ritualize hands and touch. They stitch and sew quilts and banners with words and images.

Above all, the trope of weaving (*tejer, tejido*) recurs. On the one hand this represents connectedness – they sometimes use the visual image of a spider’s web. On the other hand the notion of weaving, unravelling and weaving anew, symbolises the creative cycle of life, death and renewal; and perhaps most importantly the deconstruction and reconstruction of meaning.

We experienced something of *La Ruta*’s delight in ritual during our conference in August. Each morning we were greeted and each evening were bade farewell by a performance of dance and music. It was very effective in settling us, focusing us and calming our anxious thoughts, putting in perspective the violence we were dealing with, conceptually and verbally, throughout the day. The performers were young, and included both women and men. Two young women performed slow and expressive dances, while the musicians played. The performers did not use words. But we ourselves were invited to do so – calling out, in unison, at intervals throughout the conference: *‘Ni guerra que nos mate, ni paz que nos oprima’* (Neither war that kills us, nor peace that oppresses us). Soon we were doing this unprompted, a kind of spontaneous affirmation of our shared purpose.

It may be that the very varied women that comprise *La Ruta Pacifica* react in differing ways to the symbolic dimension of the organization’s strategy, some ascribing it more validity, some less. Sometimes the symbolism itself, but even more the words used to describe it, border on the essentializing and romanticizing of ‘woman’. But the value that the inventive use of symbolism and ritual by *La Ruta* has observably had in drawing together women of different regions and different traditions in Colombia is undeniable. In each of their pilgrimages across the country, from the first event in Uraba to the most recent in Putumayo, symbolism has been powerfully effective in generating a sense of solidarity and sisterhood, and in converting a protest against the very negative phenomena of militarism, violence and death into an experience (even if only lived for brief moments) of their very opposites. All *La Ruta Pacifica*’s actions are an affirmation of the value of the civil, of the ‘everyday’ and of life.

## **2. *La Alianza Iniciativa de Mujeres Colombianas por la Paz (IMP)***

For *La Ruta Pacifica* the inclusion of women in peace negotiations is a key principle. But the organization is much better known for its ability to mobilize women from the grassroots in high-profile incursions into public space. IMP, by contrast, is an organization that has been dedicated from its inception to ‘negotiating with power’, carrying a women’s agenda into formal peace processes.

Key actors in the *Iniciativa* are Rocio Pineda, one of the founding members of *La Ruta Pacifica*, who describes herself as ‘a feminist, a social researcher and at present a public servant’, and Patricia Buritica, an experienced and respected leader in the Colombian trade union congress, the *Central Unitaria de Trabajadores*. Patricia had a pre-existing link with trade unionists in Sweden. Swedish trade union women had visited Colombia early in 2000. At

the time, the Colombian government was involved in negotiations with FARC (a process which had begun in January 1999 and would finally fail in February 2002). The Swedes expressed concern that women were not engaged in these negotiations. They offered to create a safe space and to host such an encounter.

Thirty Colombian women were invited to Sweden – representing the women's peace movement, the Colombian government, the guerrilla group ELN, and FARC women from Caguan, a region where this group were most active and the location of the current dialogue between FARC and the government. Before this encounter in Sweden, and in order to broaden the base of the delegation and its agenda, an assembly of 700 women of different social sectors was organized, at which 60 presentations were made, reflecting the diversity of women's concerns.

As it happened, they flew to Stockholm on the fateful day September 11, 2001. Rocio says, 'We took off in one world and landed in another one'. The meeting was positive and useful, despite the fact that the FARC women were unable to attend. Caroline Moser, a British feminist academic well known for her research on women in Colombia, had been asked to be present. She alerted the peace movement women to the fact that, if they were to be invited by the government and the other armed actors to be present at governmental negotiations, they would not yet know *what* to negotiate. She suggested the civil society women work towards a women's negotiating agenda. They termed it a 'minimum agenda', because so many negotiations in Colombia in the past have failed through trying to address too many issues at once.

#### *A women's agenda for peace negotiations*

They returned to Colombia and set to work designing a proposal to the Swedish Cooperation Agency for funding for a group of women to work on the minimum agenda. It was approved in January 2002. The following month they met for the first time as an alliance calling itself *Iniciativa de Mujeres Colombianas por la Paz*. The alliance would eventually acquire a national coordinating committee of forty (two women from each of the allied organizations), and a political committee of eight. Patricia would become the national coordinator.

Ten days after IMP came into existence the talks between the government and FARC collapsed. But the women continued throughout 2002, in a complex process of consultation, building their (renamed) 'basic agenda'. The consultation had a territorial dimension (it took place in seven regions) and a sectoral one. The seven social sectors represented were trade union women, young women, peasant women, indigenous women, afro-colombian women, women of peace groups and a category termed 'academics, public servants and feminists'. They addressed five categories of exclusion: economic, political, cultural, territorial and social. In the course of one year they assembled 600 demands. On November 25 2002 they organized a four-day *Asamblea Constituyente Emancipatoria de Mujeres*, involving 230 women chosen by direct voting from the 7 sectors and 7 regions. In careful discussion



the demands were consolidated to twelve. Rocio says, 'this was our suitcase'. It was women's baggage, that they could carry with them into whatever peace process they gained access to.

In 2003 they made a national campaign in which the agenda was widely diffused, questioned and confirmed. Although no negotiations were current, elections were due in October. The women decided to take their 'suitcase' to mayoral and local candidates and ask them to adopt it. They said, 'if you want women's votes, include these demands in your election manifesto'. This way, the agenda got well known in local government centres and women started to have the capacity to deal with politicians. IMP pursued those candidates that were eventually elected into their offices to ensure that the points of the women's agenda they had included in their manifesto were subsequently built into their local development plans. It was a successful strategy and in the process the women learned a lot about the working of politics at the local level.

### *Negotiations with paramilitaries*

In 2003 the Colombian government announced its intention to pursue peace negotiations with the AUC, the combined paramilitary forces, which led to the 'Single Negotiating Table' (*Mesa Unida de Negociaciones*) at Santa Fe de Ralito on 1 July 2004. The women of IMP had realized a new round of negotiations with the AUC might be around the corner. They'd asked themselves 'what do we do if we are called to attend such talks?' Because, down at the base, negotiating with guerrillas is seen in one light, having truck with the rightwing and criminal paramilitaries is regarded quite differently. Suddenly things were moving fast, and talks were about to begin. Rocio said, in interview

It's a very dynamic situation in the country. The developments and changes are so abrupt. We've got to be alert if we want to engage, to ride the twists and turns and keep up with political events. As women we're used to a different pace – consciousness raising, educational processes.

IMP's eight-woman political committee took the bold decision to write to the national government stating their concern about the impunity this peace process could result in, and an interest in achieving some mechanism of intervention.

They had a first meeting with the government in June and confirmed that they wished for a *Mesa de Observacion* (Observation Table) at the talks. The government representatives asked them for a written, precise, proposal. The women asked to speak first to representative of the Organization of American States that were to be the verifiers of any ceasefire and demobilization that might be agreed. Recognizing the gender-specific impact of the war in Colombia, the OAS encouraged the IMP to participate, and the government to accept them. Five women were invited on July 1 to a meeting which established the *Mesa*. It was agreed that a meeting of the three parties would be held in the north of Colombia, in a territory controlled by significant

paramilitary leaders. Talks were to begin on August 11 – but at the request of the *Iniciativa de Mujeres por la Paz* they were deferred to August 18 while our conference, the *Encuentro Internacional de Mujeres contra Guerra*, took place in Bogota.

*Women are saying 'no impunity'*

The expectations carried by IMP into these talks with the paramilitaries include: that there will be representation of the victims of paramilitaries' crimes, that civil society will have an adequate space there, and that a Truth Commission will be on the agenda. This last is a crucial issue. There is universal agreement in the women's peace movement in Colombia that *impunity* for their crimes must on no account be offered to the armed actors as a bargaining chip in negotiations. IMP and *La Ruta Pacifica* are united in this. However, in Colombian pre-negotiation discourse the word 'impunity' is too inflammatory. The notion of a Truth commission, as employed by IMP, is commonly recognized to be a surrogate.

What makes the engagement of IMP in these particular talks controversial among women is the character of the Uribe government. It is rightwing, militaristic and suspected of being too tolerant of the AUC. Certain units of the army have illegal relationships with paramilitaries that, far from being punished, may be assumed to reflect government policy. The AUC is approaching the talks with a demand for total impunity. And it is known that Uribe has in mind to exempt from prison sentences those who are willing to submit to fines that will be paid as reparations to victims.

The issue of impunity is tightly related to the psychological, as opposed to the merely technical, ending of conflict. After *La Violencia* in the 1950s and 60s, in which 300,000 people died, there was no process of 'truth and justice', merely an attempt to forget. People feel now that this amnesia partly explains the continuing violence. Also, people are alert to the fact that previous agreements with paramilitaries have resulted in many of the 'demobilized' men continuing their violence. Patricia Prieto, who herself works in an academic environment that is relatively sheltered from violence, pointed out to me that 'no impunity' is an important demand first and foremost for women at the grassroots, in both urban and rural areas. The day after an agreement is signed they are liable to be confronted by these men and subject to their controls.

Trade unionism is one of the shaping forces in IMP and this influence is visible in their tendency towards *engagement with power* (this after all is what trade unions do) and in their labourist and liberal feminist agenda (reform of the structures to accommodate women). For instance, IMP are demanding that in any Truth Commission women must have 50% of the seats and women's human rights must be on its agenda. *La Ruta Pacifica* is an expression of a rather different kind of feminism, more anarchic, more creative, more suspicious of institutions.

On the other hand, there is perhaps a little of both traditions in the thinking of many of these women activists, as individuals. So we see that women of *La Ruta Pacifica* are expressing extreme caution about IMP's decision to engage. As Marina Gallego, RP's national coordinator, said to me, 'As feminists we must keep a critical distance'. Yet the second point in their own manifesto states 'active participation of women in peace negotiations'. At the same time I could see that women of IMP, even as they headed into the negotiations, were beset with doubts and anxieties about their chosen course of action. What this critical moment for the women's movement in Colombia shows is that UNSC Resolution 1325, baldly and boldly calling for women's participation in peace processes, contains many contradictions and unanswered questions.

At our conference a number of very well-informed feminists from El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua spoke about the disappointments of their 'post-war' societies. Ceasefires had not ended the violence in their countries. The questions of victims had not been answered with truth. People were still waiting for justice. Women's human rights were still not honoured. So as Colombian women listened to these speakers from neighbouring war zones, the question in their minds was: will women be able to attend these talks without, in the end, finding themselves endorsing impunity? But, you could tell that many were also thinking, 'if we're not part of the process, we can't influence the outcome'.

IMP, along with *Redepaz* and the organizations that comprise this alliance, are hoping that others will eventually recognize the wisdom of their choice. But they're hoping above all that the choice will prove right, that their Observation Table, whose clumsily-long title is now 'Observation Table for Life with a Perspective of Truth, Justice and Reparation from a Gender Perspective' will avoid co-optation and find itself contributing, not to a deceitful 'pacification' manoeuvre, but to a genuine peace.

### **3. *The involvement of 'academic' activist women***

Something that struck me particularly in Colombia was what I felt to be a productive relationship between 'grassroots' women and 'academic' or 'intellectual' women. I use these words in quotation marks because they are an unsatisfactory shorthand. It's difficult to find the right words to characterize the differences I'm stressing here. I guess I'm not the only one to have this difficulty. We saw above how IMP, in defining their seven 'sectors', lumped together as the seventh 'academics, public servants and feminists'.

What I mean to say is that some women – women who spend a lot of their time reading, writing, teaching and dealing with institutions, who have rewarding jobs, travel abroad, speak languages in addition to those of Colombia - are nonetheless deeply committed to movements the bulk of whose members are very different from themselves - afro-colombian women, indigenous and peasant women from rural areas, working class women from urban areas, and women who have suffered displacement and are living in poverty. We saw, above, the involvement of Caroline Moser with the *Iniciativa*.

In *La Ruta Pacifica*, too, the commitment of a number of 'academic' women, combined with the trust of the grassroots membership, seems to enable a creative partnership between very differently situated women.

Another interesting example of this kind of cross-class partnership is the *Mesa De Trabajo Mujer y Conflicto Armado* (Working Group on Women and Armed Conflict). I interviewed Maria Isabel Casas, who is a member and informal coordinator. The group's aim, she said, is to document the realities of women and girls in the Colombian conflict. 'It's to be sure that women's voices will be heard if there's a peace process,' Maria Isabel told me. 'If one day there's a Truth, Justice and Reparation Commission, we will be able to contribute the truth bit.'

The *Mesa de Trabajo* has as its members both individuals and groups. The latter include human rights organizations and women's organizations many of whose members live in rural and urban conflict zones. The group is in this way a productive combination of grassroots women, who are a rich source of first-hand experience and information about conflict, and intellectual women who can contribute conceptual resources, research and documentation methodologies, and writing skills, helping to systematize the material produced. In order to sustain agreement among these diverse elements, their common understanding is defined in relatively narrow and clear terms. Simply, 'We all believe that violence is not a permissible route out of conflict'.

The group was set up in 2001 as a result of an intervention by Radhika Coomeraswamy, the UN Special Rapporteur on Women. Contacted by Colombian women, she accepted an invitation from the government, made a five-day study visit and wrote a series of recommendations. The subsequent annual publications of the Working Group now follow up the themes Coomeraswamy's original report.

In addition I heard of politically-committed feminist academic work going on in the *Universidad Nacional* (National University), particularly in the *Escuela de Estudios de Genero* (School of Gender Studies), where Donny Meertens is internationally known for her work on gender and displacement. This development in the higher education system was prompted by a feminist study group founded in the late 1980s, called *El Grupo Mujer y Sociedad* (Women and Society Group). This group of ten or fifteen women, including sociologists, psychologists, social workers, philosophers, lawyers and historians, is still flourishing, is important in nourishing and sustaining the *Escuela*, and has produced thirteen issues of an impressive feminist journal, of academic quality but wider appeal, called *En Otras Palabras* (In Other Words). Both the *Escuela* and *Mujer y Sociedad* are members of the *Iniciativa de Mujeres Colombianas por la Paz*.

It was Patricia Prieto, a member of *El Grupo Mujer y Sociedad* and of the editorial committee of the journal *En Otras Palabras*, who told me about these feminist initiatives. For many years, employed on the staff of the Ministry of Agriculture and other agencies, she did policy research on rural development, in close contact with peasant cooperatives and with the women of ANMUCIC,

the *Asociacion Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas e Indigenas de Colombia* (the National Association of Peasant and Indigenous Women of Colombia) who were demanding the right of women to be the beneficiaries of agrarian reform.

## Coda

The odd thing about Colombia is that, while you know it is scarred by violence and suffering, you are immediately aware of its stunning physical beauty and feel straight away the rich diversity of its people, and their warmth and humour. I feel like ending this Profile with a quote from my interview with Maria Isabel Casas, who told me

I love Colombia as though it were a person...Colombia's crazy. It's a combination that's difficult to explain. From outside, people see us as a lot of crooks and killers. And it *is* a murderous place. It's sadistic. But it's also a creative place. Colombia is tender. Colombia is passionate. I can love in Colombia. We can dance and enjoy friends...

Everything that's beautiful here is being killed. What we're defending is a very special life energy. They're going to do away with it. So many people are leaving. We're losing our vital energy. And what's being killed isn't just bodies, it's all the wealth of a diverse culture. This country gives me so much and I want to give something back, to help towards a solution.

## Contacts

The focus of my eight-day visit to Colombia was the international conference, *Encuentro Internacional de Mujeres Contra la Guerra*, held in Bogota, August 9-11, 2004. I learned a great deal from listening to presentations at the conference, but also had the chance to interview:

Marina Gallego Zapatas, national coordinator of *La Ruta Pacifica*, and Olga Amparo Sanchez, Maria Eugenia Sanchez and Clara Elena Cardona Tamayo, three of its members; Rocio Pineda, a leading actor in the *Iniciativa de Mujeres Colombianas por la Paz*; Ana Teresa Bernal, one of the presidential team of *Redepaz*; and also Leonor Esguerra of *Mujeres que Crean*; Maria Isabel Casas of the *Mesa de Trabajo Mujer y Conflicto Armado*; and Patricia Prieto of the *Grupo Mujer y Sociedad*.

I also enjoyed a social evening hosted by women of *Vamos Mujer*. I had generous help with interpretation from Spanish to English from Carmen Elisa Alvarez, Clara Elena Cardona Tamayo, Gloria Roig and Roberta Bacic. My very warm thanks to all of you!

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This document is one of a series of local and regional profiles that will appear on this website in coming months. They are interim products a two-year research project *Women Opposing War: Organization and Strategy in the International Movement of Women against Violence and Militarism*, being carried out by the author from her base in the Department of Sociology, City University, London, during 2004/5, with the support of several charitable trusts. The profile is not intended for publication in its present form. I would be grateful if you would not quote it in published work without first seeking my agreement.

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