

EL CONFLICTO ARMADO INTERNO DE COLOMBIA: AN ANALYSIS OF CYCLES OF CONFLICT THROUGH GALTUNG'S TRIANGLE OF VIOLENCE

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ABSTRACT

The present research aims at analyzing the 'Conflicto armado interno de Colombia', focusing on the perpetrators' modus operandi and its repercussions for the victims through the lenses of Peace Research theory. The author specifically chose Johan Galtung's triangle of violence, a conceptualization of the three dimensions of conflict, namely direct, structural and cultural violence. The paper's ultimate goal is to understand how violence affected Colombia's stability and its path toward peace from the assassination of the presidential candidate Jorge Gaitán (Labor Minister from 1943 to 1944), that occurred in 1948 during the electoral campaign, to today. The analysis aims to demonstrate that a majority of violent acts fall into the category described by Galtung as 'direct violence', where a clear linkage between the perpetrators and the victims is clear. Addressing the second dimension, it is possible to pinpoint children as the main victim of 'structural violence'. Notwithstanding women and minorities being injured parties as well, the analysis demonstrates how 'cultural violence' affects this category in a different way, especially referring to the patriarchal structure of family dynamics in the country. The conclusion highlights that this paper focuses mainly on three precise aspects that affected (and affect) the República de Colombia, namely armed confrontations, child recruitment, and gender-based violence, leaving the doors open for further research, especially concerning displacement and other manifestations of structural and cultural violence.

Keywords: *direct violence, structural violence, cultural violence, Colombia, guerrillas, paramilitary, drug lords, gangs, child soldiers, gender-based violence.*

"After a conflict lasting more than half a century, we, the National Government and the FARC-EP, have agreed to put a definitive end to the internal armed conflict. The conclusion of hostilities will first and foremost represent the end of the enormous suffering that the conflict has caused. Millions of Colombians, men and women alike, have been victims of forced displacement [...], tens of thousands of people of all kinds have disappeared, and vast numbers of communities have been affected in one way or another throughout the length and breadth of the country [...]. There must be no more victims in Colombia" ("Final agreement to end the armed conflict and build a stable and lasting peace", 2016)."

INTRODUCTION

These hopeful words, contained in the preamble of the agreement reached in 2016 between the FARC-EP (The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People's Army) and the National Government of Colombia, which consisted of the bilateral cessation of hostilities, disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration into civilian life of members of the insurgent group, seemed to signify the de facto beginning of the end of an era characterized by the violence of every kind, instability, murders and terrorist attacks. Notwithstanding, they were only a first step towards the ultimate goal of having a sustainable status of peace in the country. In fact, non-state armed groups such as the National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrillas and groups formed from the roots of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) after the 2016 peace agreement, continue in recent times to commit several violent attacks in the country. They "impose their own rules and enforce their compliance by threatening civilians" (Human Rights Watch, 2020), especially on the border

between Colombia and Venezuela, with “punishments ranging from fines to forced labor to killings” (Human Rights Watch, 2020). These violent episodes occur mainly in the most remote parts of the country, where “law enforcement and judicial processes rarely reach” (Human Rights Watch, 2021), spotlighting the struggle of the state institutions to put a caesura to this endless and violent trend, especially with regards to women, children and minorities, the most affected *strata* of the society.

This paper analyzes the Colombian case study outlined above through the lens of Johan Galtung's triangle of violence (Galtung, 1969), conceptualizing the three dimensions of conflict - namely direct, structural and cultural violence, in order to investigate the perpetrators' *modus operandi* and its repercussions for the victims in the Colombian society. For this reason, this paper proposes to deepen the analysis of the three precise manifestations of the cycles of violence that have been occurring since the eruption of '*La Violencia*' in 1948: the physical violence perpetrated by several criminal groups and by the paramilitary; child recruitment; and gender-based violence. These manifestations correspond to Galtung's concepts of direct, structural and cultural violence, especially taking into account that these patterns are still present in today's Colombia and continue to exacerbate the country's instability, reducing the expectations of implementing a long-term sustainable peace commitment adhered to by all parties to the conflict, as detailed in the 2016 peace agreement.

Given the circumstances, this approach is the most suitable tool to understand the real nature of the ongoing violent episodes in Colombia. In the light of the chosen theoretical framework, this research intends to investigate the three aforementioned 'nuances' that violence can assume while being inflicted, trying to answer the following core questions: “How can the violent behavioural patterns and the social complexity of the Colombian conflict be described and why are they enduring?”

How is Colombian violence's vicious cycle affecting the different strata of the society, its stability and its path toward peace?”. The author decided to choose specifically this theoretical framework because it is able to address the multidimensionality and the complexity of the conflict through its triangular conceptualization, without using a unidimensional narrative that would run the risk of oversimplifying the reality and reducing all violent behavioral patterns to only one explanatory matrix, the illicit-drug trade and its implications for Colombia's society. After a brief theoretical overview of Galtung's triangle of violence, this paper focuses firstly on direct violence and provides some practical insights into the concept as applied to Colombia's realities on the ground, then moves to structural violence with reference to the case of the child soldiers, and concludes with an analysis of the cultural violence being committed in particular towards women and minorities, one of the most common and vulnerable targets in the Colombian society, to draw accurate conclusions about the multidimensionality of the Colombian conflict.

THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: GALTUNG'S TRIANGLE OF VIOLENCE

Before considering the three theoretical dimensions mentioned above, which are useful to understand the modalities through which the perpetrators inflict violence and their consequences on the population itself, it is necessary to introduce the chosen theoretical framework, starting with Galtung's definition of violence, which constitutes the core aspect addressed in the following section of the paper. In his writing '*Violence, Peace, and Peace Research*' (Galtung, 1969), Johan Galtung, the main promoter of the Peace Research approach, rejects conceptualizing violence as only the intentional harm done by an actor to another actor. He defines it instead “as the cause of the difference between the potential and the actual, between what could have been and what is” (Galtung, 1969: 168), and explains that it occurs specifically when “human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realization” (Galtung, 1969: 168).

Although this definition is generally acknowledged by scholars, it raises the following question: if violence is considered as an idea that encompasses every aspect that undermines the potential of self-realization of human beings, can poverty, the lack of basic needs such as education, prostitution, and a patriarchal familiar environment be considered forms of violence as well? The answer is, according to Galtung, only one: affirmative. These can be considered examples of structural and cultural violence, whose facets will be introduced below. Galtung, in his work, counters the general understanding of violence, mostly depicted in the

collective imagination as murder, rape, shootings, torture, and slavery because of the direct linkage being clear and 'visible' between the perpetrator and the victim. According to his interpretation of violence, in fact, this act is not only physical, it can also be psychological. It isn't only intended, it might also be unintended. It isn't only manifest, it may be also latent. It isn't only direct, it can also be intrinsic in the structure of the society. Violence doesn't only harm quickly and in the moment, it harms slowly as well over long periods of time. Thus, violence can be more subtle than a common-sense understanding of this notion imagines.

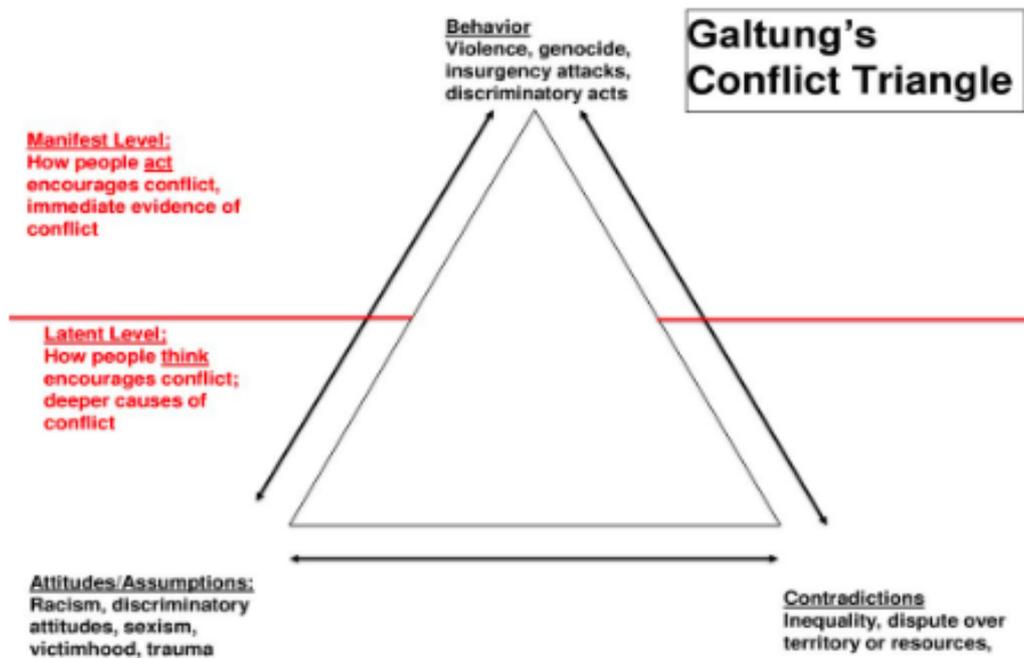


Fig. 1: Galtung's Conflict Triangle (Hernandez, 2019)

Building on this definition, Galtung suggests that violence can be inflicted in three different ways, called respectively direct, structural and cultural, which can be represented by the three corners of the triangle in the light of the causal connection and their matryoshka structure, being the three interconnected as follows: cultural is present into structural and structural into direct. Hence, the three main categories are fully interdependent, in the sense that there can be a progression from one to another, as shown in the picture above.

The top of the triangle depicts the first type, direct violence, defined as the literal violent 'event' (Galtung, 1969: 294), most of the time accomplished by an identifiable actor that inflicts harm in order to achieve a determinate objective. In this category may fall the examples of brutal episodes of the confrontations between Colombian rebel groups and the military, an aspect that will be expanded on in the following section. The lower left-hand corner of the triangle portrays structural violence, understood as a process where "violence is built into

the structure [ed: of the society], and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances" (Galtung, 1969: 171).

Structural violence restrains people from experiencing an outstanding lifestyle. This most often occurs in the margins of the countryside, where malnutrition and displacement are still a daily occurrence, forcing thousands of children to join the armed groups linked to illicit drug trafficking activities in order to have a minimum chance of survival. The most intense and hardest to mitigate is the last type, cultural violence, consisting of any method deployed to legitimize the aforementioned two forms of violence emanating from a patriarchal conception of the society that allows men to mistreat women, thus augmenting the number of abuses and mistreatments. As Galtung explains, these three deeply correlated concepts end up creating a self-perpetuating cycle of violence: "violence creates violence" (Ignacio José et al., 2017: 155), making it difficult to put an end to the process, considering its deep roots embedded in the very structure of the society. This vicious cycle of violence characterizes events in Colombia since the end of 'La Violencia', the ten-year civil war during which more than 200,000 Colombians, especially peasant farmers, were killed ("Colombia in Detail," 2022), which lasted from 1948 to 1958, the year linked with the end of the civil-war and the beginning of the Colombian Conflict per se

DIRECT VIOLENCE

Overall, the main actors inflicting what Galtung defines as 'direct violence' in Colombia, in other words, who physically harm other humans with intention, are the state military forces, the members of the guerrillas, the paramilitaries, and the so-called 'narcos', whose violent actions do not differ much from each other. Before explaining how these actors play a crucial role in inflicting such violence, it must be highlighted that armed confrontations in Colombia have been a daily occurrence since 1930. However, this paper focuses only on the second half of the twentieth century, whose political violence occurred in the decade following the assassination of the Presidential candidate Gaitan in 1948,

known as 'La Violencia' (Kreutz, 2007), which can itself be considered a prequel to the atrocities that followed. At the time, Colombia suffered a terrible internal conflict between partisans of the liberal and conservative political parties (Kreuz, 2007). Only in 1958, a deal between these opponents could be struck with the creation of the National Front, endorsed by both liberals and conservatives, which merged these political élite forces and contributed to establishing a system alternating the presidency and all major government offices between members of the two factions.

However, other parties and movements were excluded from this political bargain and this fact triggered the episodes of violence that followed in the succeeding years (Kreutz, 2007). Consequently, these circumstances caused the rise of numerous Colombian guerrilla movements in opposition to the National Front. This asymmetric conflict started in the mid-1960s with the birth of groups such as the *Movimiento de Obreros, Estudiantes y Campesinos* (MOEC), an organization with the intention to overthrow the government; the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN), a revolutionary group based on the communist ideology classified as a terrorist organization by the Colombian government; the *Movimiento 19 de Abril* (M-19); and the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias Colombianas* (FARC), the most powerful of these insurgent groups. This complex new conflictual environment with multiple armed actors caused direct violence to spread across the country. The FARC and ELN especially used various forms of violence - in particular mass killings, sexual violence, executions, kidnappings, and extortion as sources of leverage and income to gain more power over larger swaths of Colombian territory. Their hostages and the victims included soldiers, police officers, and politicians. Some were held as captives for years, sometimes chained to trees and freed only after ransoms were paid or after successful rescue operations. Others were killed or died in captivity (BBC, 2021). Most of the homicides were committed with guns and more than half occurred in public spaces as a result of personal vendettas or as paybacks both between the military and guerrilla groups (Garfield, 2004).

Hence, the National Front started considering those guerrillas as the most serious threat to national

security and involved the Colombian military in a new fight against the 'communist threat', being the guerrilla movement linked to Marxism. It also embarked on a new relationship with the US military, eager to cooperate with it in fighting against the 'Red danger' coming from the south and the peril related to the illegal drug trade, given that the coca paste was imported from Bolivia and Peru, produced in Colombia and shipped to the US since the beginning of the 1970s. Furthermore, to counter the guerrillas, the Colombian military started cooperating with the so-called 'death squads' in counter-insurgency activities in areas considered guerrilla strongholds, such as the American Anti-Communist Alliance (also known as the AAA or Triple-A), which started a terror campaign, for example, by using chain saws to cut off the arms of young men who refused to join them (Johansen, 2014).

These rising political tensions in the country were exacerbated by the ongoing illicit drug trafficking operations. The drug trade system naturally planted its roots mostly in areas where the state was absent, consequently leaving space for the development of parastatal organizations that established their authority through violence (Sánchez, Solimano, and Formisano, 2005). The state's inability to maintain control of some areas of the country was clearly demonstrated by the success key drug lords had in creating semi-autonomous fiefdoms during the 1980s (Watson, 1990), as they began to attack the Colombian elites to gain even more control over such territories. By the late 1980s, drug traffickers, such as Pablo Escobar Gaviria, and Jorge and Juan David Ochoa Vásquez, who were all related to the Medellín cartel, as well as 'Pacho' Herrera, who was linked to the Cali cartel, wielded significant political power in their new fiefdoms. These drug lords constituted another category of actors inflicting direct violence in the country, not only by organizing terrorist attacks but also by raising private armies to fight against guerrillas. 'Death to Kidnappers' (MAS) within the members of the Medellín Cartel or 'Persecuted by Pablo Escobar', financed by the Cali Cartel with the purpose of killing Pablo Escobar and his associates, are prime examples of such private armies that only worsened the expansion of violence in Colombia.

The conflict also escalated with the merging of private armies financed by landowners or drug lords, as the brothers Castaño, in an umbrella organization called the 'United Self-Defenses of Colombia' (UAS), which committed atrocious crimes against civilians they stigmatized as guerrilla supporters (Vargas and Caruso, 2014).

Given this complex puzzle, where numerous different actors gained power, the civilian communities could only go on with their lives by carefully walking on a tightrope between survival and death. On the one hand, they were torn between poverty, kidnappings, and murders. On the other hand, becoming part of those drug organizations could grant them a stable livelihood, though the profits of coca, combined with security prospects provided by joining or supporting the guerrillas against the increased threat from paramilitary groups or other rival drug cartels (Kreuz, 2007). Considering this historical background and its present condition, this Colombian scenario is a good fit with Galtung's 'direct violence' concept, given the close and visible links between the subjects and the objects of the violent actions. The subjects perpetrating atrocities aim to subjugate their enemies through threats and violent actions, causing as final result irreparable physical, psychological and economical harm to the victims. In the light of Galtung's definition of violence, one can surmise that breaking this 'thin red line' between the perpetrators and victims with peace agreements, negotiations and bargaining cycles would not be easy, but would be at least feasible. Ending direct violence is, however, not as straightforward an endeavor as it may seem, because of the long history between the parties to the conflict, the radicalization of its combatants, and the numerous different groups that strive for power against each other.

To solve this puzzle, several attempts to demobilize guerrilla groups were made by the government, with partial success: the M-19 (the 19th of April Movement), a guerrilla organization, was demobilized, for example, and a peace agreement with the most brutal group, the FARC, was reached in 2016, with the ultimate goal of ending altogether the hostilities between the parties. However, since then violence has escalated again, especially undermining the most vulnerable strata of Colombian society, killing women

and men who showed leadership in their communities and African-Colombians, as well as indigenous land activists, human rights activists, and peasants asserting their land rights (Uribe, 2020). To conclude, these forms of direct violence are not only dangerous because of their inherent atrocity, but they are also capable of destroying the means of realization of every civilian living in the societies and communities they implant themselves in (Galtung, 1969: 169). Moreover, direct violence condemns Colombian citizens to an unfulfilling existence between pervasive fear of death, constant uncertainty about their daily lives, and routine deprivations of their most basic rights such as economic, political and food security. This specific aspect of violence will be analyzed in the following section.

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE INFLICTED ON CHILD SOLDIERS

According to Galtung, structural violence exhibits, in comparison with direct violence, a *modus operandi* where “there may not be any person who directly harms another person” and “individuals may be killed or mutilated [...], but whereas in the first case [ed: direct violence] these consequences can be traced back to concrete persons as actors, in the second case [ed: structural violence] this is no longer meaningful” (Galtung, 1969: 170). Taking this into account, in order to understand the real nature of structural violence in Colombia, it is necessary to acquire a deeper understanding of the illegal drug commerce dynamics, which irreversibly reshaped the society and communities it affected. There had always been a big difference between the dangers citizens were exposed to in the cities and those in the rural areas of the country. The lack of infrastructure between the outskirts and the periphery contributed to the isolation of the citizens living in marginalized areas, increasing their exposure to the narcotrafficantes’ net peril, especially because “for most Colombians the central state was an abstract concept and power was largely exercised and determined locally or regionally, not in Bogotá” (Le Grand, 2003).

The illicit drug trade in Colombia dates back to 1975, as the coca was initially imported from Peru and Bolivia to be refined locally. As soon as key businessmen from the emerald trade, later linked to the Cali and Medellín cartels, realized its usefulness, they brought the crop to Colombia as a complement to their imports and started involving civilians in drug production (Kreutz, 2007). The local population accepted growing cocaine because it was one of the only crops that could provide them with a livelihood: it grew easily and once collected from guerrillas, its profits granted many of them not only the opportunity to build a dignified life but also provided social mobility opportunities, including access to education and better healthcare (Kreutz, 2007). As a matter of fact, the linkages between illicit drug trade and poverty, and between crime and economic despair became clear: drugs brought tremendous prosperity to Colombia, a country with extreme socio-economic inequalities and poor living conditions. Consequently, despite their brutal means, the cocaine magnates gained popular support from the massive slums around Medellín and Cali because they were perceived as sharing their wealth with the poor (Kreutz, 2007). For example, Pablo Escobar Gaviria built a low-income housing unit called ‘Barrio Pablo Escobar’ through his social action program, called Medellín Without Slums, in Medellín.

Taking this social structure into account, the main target of the drug gangs were (and are) specifically children. According to the Report of the UN Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (UNSC, 2021: 7) issued on 21 June 2021, in 2020 occurred 210 grave violations against 184 children, 116 children were recruited by the FARC and other groups, or better yet, were forced to ‘volunteer’, seeing it as a possibility for life-long employment and income, given that the allure of food, salaries, and motorcycles was often sufficient motivation to discount the associated risks (Dickinson, 2021). After being recruited because of their desperate need for a better existence given their poor living conditions, children were delegated the lowest organizational tasks in the gangs they joined and were frequently the first to be sent into armed confrontations with rival gangs or state security forces, given the high probability of not being held accountable for their actions (e.g. targeted assaults and executions) by

state security forces (Dickinson, 2021) because of their age. Needless to say, both child soldiers and children in armed gangs face violent threats associated with armed combat against rival groups (Lawson, Hawrylak, and Houghton, 2008): they run the risk of being sexually abused and physically mistreated, and they develop long-lasting psychological trauma by being constantly exposed to carnages, blood and violence from a very early age. Furthermore, the families of child soldiers are not always aware of the radicalization of their own children; they realize occasionally that their offspring have become part of criminal networks only after their mutilated corpses turn up as casualties of battles (Dickinson, 2021).

In this way, as recurrent violence becomes embedded in Colombia's social system, it becomes part and parcel of its daily living reality. Children and youngsters grow within that system, assimilating day by day its behavioral patterns. They start to build their own arguments, valuations, actions, and social relationships according to the violence they suffer, the backgrounds they live in, and to develop future expectations on the basis of the behavioral patterns they get used to imitating (Dickinson, 2021). Hence, the desire for revenge triggers a mechanism difficult to eradicate: these children start to consider as normatively 'good' someone who provides 'justice' in this environment, regardless of the means he may use, thus legitimating even premeditated murders (Dickinson, 2021). Therefore, it can be deduced that child soldiers are the most frequent target of structural violence in Colombia. As Galtung explains, the potential level of realization of those children is possible with a given level of insight and resources, such as food, water, clothing and shelter, for example, but also sanitation, education and healthcare. However, if those resources are monopolized by a group or class, in this case, the guerrillas, or used for other purposes, such as to increase the power of the gang, "the actual level falls below the potential level and violence is present in the system" (Galtung, 1969: 169). To sum up, such children are born in a system embedded in violence, shaped by violence and disrupted by violence, and are not equipped to recognize that this environment is a deviant one that barely allows them to reach the minimum standards of a life worth living.

CULTURAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND MINORITIES

The last type of violence according to Galtung's typology is the so-called cultural violence, namely a type of violence manifested culturally. It plays the role of legitimizing the agent (or better the ruling class/group) inflicting direct and structural violence by creating active consent in response to such brutal acts, portraying them as normal, and consequently exacerbating inequalities, biases, and cultural values attached to the social background (Galtung, 1990: 291).

In Colombia, society has been described as "pervaded by intolerance, ethnocentrism, individualism, profit-making and by a patriarchal-authoritative culture with a deeply ingrained *machista* approach to women's participation in public life and gender roles" (García, 2009: 18). Therefore, women in Colombia tend to be subjugated to men's authority, especially considering their limited access to education, the scarce quality of the healthcare system, and their reduced access to finance and to justice - instruments that could potentially allow them an escape route and not legitimize men's violent and brutal acts as a consequence of their perceived superiority.

Moreover, violence exacerbates the frequent changes in territorial control by the armed groups (Tovar-Restrepo and Irazábal, 2014), which inflict the indigenous populations as well, whose main survival depends on agriculture. Especially among the indigenous minorities, such as the Arhuaco and Pasto communities, men have control over the land and its economic profits, men are engaged in the military or political control of their zones and, in case of necessity, men act as direct combatants, whereas women are mostly used for domestic work and sexual exploitation (Tovar-Restrepo and Irazábal, 2014). Moreover, indigenous people are forced to grow coca or poppy to exchange for products they need in local markets, considering their subjugated condition that prevents them from being independent (Tovar-Restrepo and Irazábal, 2014). Their activities are mostly underpaid, and

unremunerated and the goods they produce are limited to their families' consumption (Tovar-Restrepo and Irazábal, 2014).

Cultural violence against women and girls can be found not only within the walls of the family home or within indigenous communities but also inside the dynamics of the guerrillas, making it systemic and widespread. In fact, threats, intimidation, and psychological abuse are only some of the instruments through which cultural violence is inflicted. Rape can be also considered a 'tool' in gangs' hands to intimidate and subjugate young girls, who may drift into human trafficking circles linked to guerrillas or into the sex industry environment, in the hope of escaping from disastrous familiar dynamics, poverty, or home violence. Women and girls might also become part of the gangs themselves, playing auxiliary gang roles as messengers and informants, given their willingness to regain power or self-esteem in reaction to abusive or restrictive family situations (Lawson, Hawrylak, and Houghton, 2008: 50). Prostitution can be, therefore, a double-edged sword, being used both to inflict violence and to access either the sex industry and the drug traffickers' networks - a system created by new contacts and male colleagues, which increases the sex workers' probability of finding new partners within the gang in order to gain the status, wealth and the protection they lack in civilian society (Lawson, Hawrylak, and Houghton, 2008: 50). These perceived benefits make youngsters even more prone to accept riskier tasks or to engage in excessive behaviors within the gang, such as uncontrolled drug consumption.

Finally, it is necessary to recall the fact that women are not the only ones being affected by cultural violence. The Colombian masculine-driven society with a strong religious tradition is also a massive obstacle for cultural minorities and for the LGBTQI+ community, who are all targets of both guerrillas and military violence, along with women of African descent who tend to be part of the more underprivileged strata of society - an aspect that could be investigated in further research. In conclusion, cultural violence is a condition that dramatically exacerbates deeply-rooted structural inequalities, thus playing an important role in

determining the targets and the type of the aforementioned violent acts, and the extent to which they are inflicted on their victims.

CONCLUSION

It is generally acknowledged that the ongoing Colombian internal conflict is a complicated puzzle to solve since the main actors engage in open and direct confrontation, which has repercussions on the entire society, creating a vicious cycle difficult to eradicate. Considering Johan Galtung's triangle of violence as the chosen theoretical background for this paper, it is possible to state that the majority of the violent acts fall into the category that Galtung calls 'direct violence', where a clear linkage between the perpetrators (the military, the paramilitary, the guerrillas and the drug lords) and the victims (members of the counterparts or civilians accused of being informers, collaborators, or sympathizers for the other side) is observable. In addition to the targets of kidnaps and murders, only to cite some examples, the civilian population can be considered as a victim per se, taking into consideration that this violent structure prevents Colombian inhabitants from enjoying basic rights, such as food security. In most of the cases, in fact, violence is not a choice, but the only possible option to survive to extreme poverty. Given the structure of the society and the difficult living conditions in the country, children suffer particularly from embedded 'structural violence': they are often forced to 'volunteer' to join the guerrillas in order to have a minimum salary and to enjoy the life-long protection promised by such armed groups, in return constantly putting their very lives at risk. Most child soldiers, in fact, are unaware of the ideology of their organizations but choose to join the guerrillas exclusively for the minimum source of income such organizations can provide. Women and minorities can be considered victims as well, but in a different way, being the main target of cultural violence, considering the patriarchal structure of familiar dynamics that justifies most of the times the brutal acts towards them, often seen as 'legitimate' and 'necessary'.

These three categories, as shown in the theoretical section, are not separate manifestations of different

forms of aggressive behaviors but are interdependent and intrinsic in the structure of the society, each leading, therefore, to the exacerbation of the above-noted vicious cycle in Colombia.

The research showed how Galtung's triangle can successfully embed all the different manifestations of the violent acts in the country, taking into account its multidimensionality, an aspect often overlooked in most of the descriptions of the conflict, which reduce the genesis of the armed confrontation to one simple matrix, the illicit drug trade and direct violence per se, thus failing to notice structural and cultural forms of violence. This paper has therefore focused primarily on all three specific types of violence that have been affecting the República de Colombia, namely armed confrontations, child recruitment, and gender-based violence, leaving the doors open for further research, especially concerning internal displacement as well as other manifestations of structural and cultural violence.

To conclude, if the Colombian conflict is compared to a chess game, it is necessary for the perpetrators to keep control over all the pieces in play, namely children, women, and minorities, by inflicting violent acts and by suppressing their voices in order to win the match against the other side, be it the guerrillas, the Colombian military or the drug lords. The best approach to end this violent game seems to be reaching an agreement including all various parastatal actors and the political establishment in the process, in contrast to the 2016 peace agreement, which focused just on one armed group. However, none of the actors intends to surrender and each of the parties hopes to checkmate their direct opponents, with the ultimate goal of winning the game and enjoying the power, perks and privileges obtained through direct, structural, and cultural violence. In conclusion, a formal peace covenant, such as the one signed in 2016, is just a small step towards the conflict resolution, because structural and cultural violence are issues not easy eradicable through a legal accord between the conflict parties, the fact that should be taken into account by the policymakers while designing the process of conflict resolution.

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