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**Ecofeminism in action:
unleashing the potential of ecofeminist
practices as regenerative tools for
community building.**

The Colombian case of la Ruta Pacífica
de las Mujeres.

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Abstract

Women, lands, peace. But also: care, natural resources, and bodies. What do these elements have in common? How do they intertwine? To find an answer, this work needed to make before yet another reflection: how can we make the world we are living in tailor-made for every being that inhabits it? All these reflections reveal to be grafted into the very concept of ecofeminism. For approached as a hypothetical set of theories, ecofeminism proves instead to be a policy-making, valid, and concrete way of intra-acting with patriarchal power structures through the workings of the Colombian movement known as La Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres. Exploring the ways the movement is trying to foster a feminist perspective in peace-making processes also means understanding how the elements above mentioned intersect and intertwine, while showing the way for new, ecofeminist, and regenerative approaches to non-human lives.

1. Introduction

There are many things I would like to say before introducing *La Ruta Pacifica de las Mujeres* and its relationship with the ecofeminist theoretical framework and practices. “Introducing” is the correct word choice: a topic as such would in fact require far more resources in terms of time, means, and even space to be addressed exhaustively. Nevertheless, one of the things my academic experience in the field of Environmental Humanities has taught me, is the importance that in times like these disciplines and researches oriented toward more sustainable futures explore the connection that theories and practices have with each other when it comes to leading the way toward more sustainable approaches to lifestyles, practices, and resource exploitation. After all, we are finding ourselves living the histories of droughts, extreme weather events and environmental disasters we for long thought were way ahead of us. These dreadful foretold tomorrows of extremely high temperatures, and dangerous droughts are knocking on our doors sooner than we expected, and it seems that we are mostly finding ourselves unprepared to face them. What usually happens in situations like the one Italy witnessed in the summer of 2021 - the hottest summer in its history- is that the solutions implemented are only stopgaps that fail to address the so-called “bigger picture”. In this sense, these times, in my opinion, call for an era of reconsideration. What I mean is that, starting from the awareness that there are no technologically advanced solutions yet ready to save us, we should explore and make the best of what we already have. Of the tools, worldviews, knowledge, and practices that are already rooted in our presents. But how?

Once assessed the failure of the mere STEM approach, as in the purely scientific approach for the explanation and sensibilization campaigns around environmental issues - better explored by Marco Armiero et. al’s first Italian work around the Environmental Humanities (2020) - it is time for the so-called social sciences to offer interesting innovative viewpoints to address the sustainability challenge. More specifically, by

focusing on the ways we -both as societies and as selves- live, relate to each other and with natural resources, interesting hints for reflections unveils. One approach does not and cannot by any means substitute the other. It is rather a merge, an encounter between different tools and practices. It is thanks to this encounter between the STEMs and social sciences that the interconnection between the different aspects intrinsic to the sustainability challenge can be explored, unveiling a broader framework.

The awareness of this existing interconnection between environmental factors and human ones when it comes to sustainability is the point of departure of this work, the very premise it builds upon. However, to start from a given premise means to also become equally aware of the interconnectedness of processes of marginalizations. In this sense, this work agrees with the ecofeminist recognition of commonality between conditions of discrimination and oppression worldwide faced by women, and the condition of degradation natural resources worldwide currently undergo. Recognizing and analyzing the existence of an existing relationship between the condition of women and that of natural resources will be the main aim of this work. Specifically, I will try to explore the bond between natural resources well-being and women's access and active management of such resources in the concrete dimension of the contemporary Colombian context. For that I decided to focus on the Colombian case of La Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres: to understand how -and how effectively- ecofeminist theories could be translated into concrete practices and actions. Specifically, building on from the framework that sees the world as a text to be interpreted elaborated by Serenella Iovino (2016), I recognize the importance the Colombian socio-political context plays in La Ruta's experience. Colombia is in a fact a complex reality, shaped by a long history of internal conflicts, ambivalence, and fragmentation. The Latin American country still faces a series of social, political, and economic struggles that necessarily intersect with Colombian women's conditions. Being aware of such a web of hidden interconnections is the first step to addressing Colombia without falling into the use and repetition of stereotypes, a frequent occurrence when Latin America is approached by this side of the *charco*.

The reflections in this thesis may sound highly speculative to some; yet, they are already being translated into concrete policy-making and paths-shaping practices

worldwide. Concretely, once we are able to step outside a highly Western-oriented point of view, we can discover how deeply such practices are already rooted in many experiences all over the world. It is the case of the Paraguayan partnership between the UN-REDD Programme and the GEF Small Grants Programme, an alliance that allowed indigenous women to have full engagement in the design, implementation, and development of agro-forestry techniques. (UNDP 2018). A community tree nursery of 1,052 m² was built, for a total of 44,880 plants corresponding to 33 fruits. Results show that women have all acquired knowledge and skills in marketing and sales, which has improved their ability to generate an income for the benefit of themselves and their families. Moreover, by co-planting the seedling trees with their agricultural crop, the women were able to increase the resilience of the local ecosystem and, as a result, the crops' resistance to pests and diseases. It is also the case in the Indian village of Badah, where locals have created the Jagriti association. (ibidem). Most of Jagriti's members come from the Scheduled Castes - also known as "untouchable" - for this reason, the association created a plan for women to organize themselves into women saving and credit groups (WSCGs), that mainly focused on teaching women how to use the seeds from local trees to produce valuable oils, soaps, and other products for sale, while at the same time implementing regenerative practices. These women are now keystones in the safeguarding of threatened local species, while also implementing means to fight deforestation, and organizing meetings to sensitize the local community. Moreover, if it is true that not everyone experiences the conditions of marginalized groups, it is equally true that we are all embedded in a series of relationships. We all know and have first-hand experience of how interaction with the world shapes it. And it is only once we recognize that power that we can understand and see how differently it acts in different contexts. Moreover, it is only once we recognize our active role in this web of relationships that we can also understand how we can be a part of the creation of a more equal and respectful way of being in the world and with the world. It is in this sense that a revolution in the way we intend relationships is possible. Concretely, it is in this sense that we can recognize how "women" are not merely fragile and weak entities and identities. Rather, they are actively capable of weaving transformative relationships, of re-establish respectful ways of being with natural resources. Of re-build better futures,

that include every living being. Colombia is therefore not as far as we think, nor as an isolated case as one may tend to believe.

To be coherent with my beliefs and ideals, I do realize that to touch upon certain issues necessarily calls for some linguistic premises. This work is about “women”; however I do realize that to deal with such general and abstract needs for a disclaimer. I cannot speak for the data reported or for the authors and scholars quoted; however, it is in good faith that with “women” I mean for the whole text every individuality that presents with a female gender expression. It is also in this sense that the word “inclusivity” has been chosen as the best viable option. I am aware, however, of how the concept of inclusivity fosters a sense of opposition between a border -that is included- and a center -that includes: a power play not to underestimate.

To offer a complete framework, the first chapter will precisely focus on exploring the framework of the Colombian context, with of course a specific focus on women’s conditions. The situation of oppression and inequality that Colombian women face will prove to be strictly related to the degradation natural resources are undergoing, due to both the internal armed conflict and a series of economic and social conjunctions that lead to the widespread practice of exploitation. Specifically, by exploring the connection between the state of terrestrial natural resources, and the economic, social, and political struggles interesting Colombian women, the importance of *el problema de la tierra*, will come out. Land property -and the consequent land management- will, in fact, prove to be at the core of many tensions that, intersecting, foster a series of conflicts where women and land themselves end up being the main victims. It is only once the importance that *el problema de la tierra* is understood, that the Colombian movement La Ruta can be correctly framed. For that, the second chapter will outline the most important features of the movement. Being embedded in a highly violent and conflictive context, the most important objective for La Ruta is the creation of the bases for peace-making practices, a peace however for every living being. To make sure that such peace-making processes are concretely inclusive, La Ruta works in the sense of strengthening and fostering a sense of community. Their focus is in fact on the reinforcement of relationships, both between members of the community and between the community and its territory. In this sense, the land property proves to be once again

fundamental: in a context where the possession of lands becomes the precondition for conflicts continuation, the correct re-assignment and assessment become a premise for peace to be effectively realized. Land in this sense cannot be considered a mere inanimate object to be controlled, but rather a part of a series of relationships. La Ruta will prove how such an approach is not a mere theoretical exercise but is rather translated into the way women take care of productive lands they own. While Colombian law and context still make it harder for women to have access to the land property when it happens land thrives from female management. This is also because women are focused on care activities, rather than productive labor. The so-called sexual division of labor is a recurrent matter of debate -as well as a worldwide current issue- that sees the oppression of women, confined and obliged to take on reproductive labor, as in care activities, whereas men are responsible for productive labor, that imply economic independence. This division, of course, detrimental for women, can be overturned once we reassess the way we frame it. Exploring the interconnections between natural resources management and ecofeminism worldviews, the last chapter will argue for a revolution in the way societies intend relationships. In concordance with relational good theories, I will explore how reassigning relationships centrality may guarantee a more just future for women and marginalized human groups but also more sustainable approaches to natural resources.

Colombia may seem far away; yet, as I will conclude, is closer than we think: the practices and worldviews implemented by La Ruta do not stop where the Latin American country borders end. It rather encompasses them, becoming a worldwide issue. La Ruta proves that other ways of living and being with the world are possible and effective. In the conclusions, I will present other cases where ecofeminist theories have been effectively implemented. Because, even if Colombia seems far away, it proves a point that touches us all, as selves and as communities.

2. Women and natural resources state in contemporary Colombia

To fully understand the work, mission, and objectives of the Colombian organization La Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres - from now on only referred to as La Ruta¹ - it is obviously necessary to contextualize the socio-economic, political and historical very background with which - and in which - it acts. This will be the aim of this first chapter, which will function as a compass to orientate the reader into the intricate web of relations, power struggles, and relationalities where the Colombian women - and therefore the work of La Ruta - is embedded.

Of course, to say that the Colombian context is complex is an understatement. The Colombian see the sweeps of history resulting in a wide range of actors, violence, and crises that collide on a particularly slippery slope when it comes to issues such as human rights, peace-keeping, or environmental struggles.² Decades-long of still not totally concluded³ internal armed conflict have contributed to creating a highly fragmented scenario in which women's voices often remain unheard. Colombian women are called to pay the highest price in a such complex social context, going from the lack of consideration of women's voice in peace-making practices to the lack of inclusion of women's experiences in the process of construction of collective memory.⁴ Such absence is rooted in a perspective around society whose hierarchical origins trace

¹ As the activists as well as the mainstream media use to do.

² Far from passing any judgment on the ways such issues are handled, it should, however, be noted how the enormous complexity of the sociopolitical landscape that makes Colombia a multifaceted reality, is difficult to completely grasp and fully describe. There are multiple reasons behind such difficulty. Among them, there surely are many actors with different intensities and different timings dynamically interacting and shaping the conflicts' development: each of them would require far much more space than the one that can be dedicated here.

³The subject should be treated carefully; as we will see, the critical matter of how peace is defined inevitably intertwines here with women's conditions - and therefore with La Ruta's claims.

⁴ Such absence is also witnessed, for instance, by the lack of attention to gender studies, introduced in the country starting from the Nineties only. In particular, as Gallini (2013) recalls, a push forward in gender studies only began in the country thanks to the atmosphere created by the approval of the '91 Constitution. The academic world also started to show signs of gendered attention starting in 1994 only, with the creation of the first *Escuela de Género*.

back to patriarchal constructions: that is one of the reasons why the activities, efforts, claims, and successes of La Ruta are so fundamental. As the movement recalls, the lack of a feminist approach is furthermore linked with the difficulty women encounter in denouncing the high levels of violence they are subjected to. Specifically, the lack of denunciation of violence, abuse, or torture often ends up affecting studies on women's condition, while at the same time preventing such conditions from improving. The *Comisión de Verdad y Memoria* - one of La Ruta's main operational bodies⁵ - focuses precisely on creating safe spaces for women's voices to be heard, therefore unveiling the real conditions they live in, while at the same time also denouncing the many struggles they encounter.

Some of the various affectations on men and women stemming from human rights violations are related to the subjective aspects that limit possibilities of denunciation and investigation because of their impact on intimacy and personal life. But they are also related to objective elements and difficulties like the lack of political will, from the part of the State, governments and public officers, to tackle this problematic, together with a socio-sexual patriarchal culture that erases differences and uniform their treatment.⁶

In this sense, efforts have been put into identifying the main axes of problematic matters that affect and invalidate women's everyday life experiences. Such matters involve a series of different levels of women's lives. To grasp this multi-dimensionality, this chapter will start by providing a historical overview of the increasing recognition the feminist movements have achieved through the decades; in doing so, particular attention will be put on the specific case of rural women. This last social group is in fact widely recognized to be the most effective agency in improving Colombian women's access to the ownership of productive lands. Of course, the history of feminist movements in Colombia is full of obstacles and struggles that, to this day, cannot be considered entirely solved. In this sense, regarding land management and ownership, there still is a

⁵ The Commission will be more in detailed presented in the second chapter, being one of the most important entities La Ruta relies on for the creation of an inclusive gendered collective memory.

⁶ Comisión de Verdad y Memoria 2013, 4.

great issue that involves the role women are called to play in household management. More specifically, women's economic condition in Colombia is still largely dependent on their duty as unpaid domestic workers, which often leads them to be necessarily dependent on a male counterpart for financial survival, making them particularly fragile. From this perspective, it will be more easily understandable how difficult it is for women to escape the pervasive violent pattern they are often forced to live in. Generally speaking, in fact, violence against women is deeply rooted in the Colombian panorama. Such violence mainly translates into sexual abuses, rapes, attacks on sexual freedom, or murders; however, such attacks often do not limit to the individual, but rather also menace women's entire households, lands included, therefore forcing them to move. Furthermore, we will see how violence against women rarely leads to reparative justice: on the contrary, due also to the lack of female representation in political spaces, women find little help from the institutions. All things considered, is, therefore, no surprise how women are the most hit by internal conflict, which impacts their lives in many different ways. In this sense, women's exclusion from land management evidently becomes another fundamental dimension of discrimination, especially if we consider how the solution to *el problema de la tierra*⁷ plays a central role in the post-conflict reconstruction. As we will see, there is in fact a clear link between the extension of the conflict, peace-keeping processes and the right to land access. Excluding women from equal land access rights means fostering tensions and inequalities. At the same time, exploring these lines of tension means unleashing women's voices. Once such experiences are unleashed, it is possible to identify some points of connection between women's experiences and non-human ones. The Colombian conflict(s)⁸ have in fact produced huge damages to the ecosystems; damages that, however, become meaningless in the reconstruction processes, in light of the desire to maximize (male) human's benefits. Shortly said, women and non-human voices, those who most suffer(ed) from the conflict, have for long been violently silenced: yet, from their

⁷ Expression that could be translated as "the land struggle".

⁸ The concept of conflict(s) is here used to intend not only the historical dimension of the Colombian civil war. As I will explore, there are multiple axes of tensions, which are not always (directly) related to the war. Given conflicts - such instance the neo-capitalist hectic research of lands to expand monocultures - are however all united negatively impacting environmental well-being, as the last section of this chapter will explain.

connection, the potential of regenerative paths toward more sustainable futures unleash, La Ruta proves.

2.1 Women's condition in contemporary Colombia

According to the DANE (2022), back in 2021 in Colombia there were 26.1 million women representing 51.2% of the total population; this means that, for every 100 men, there are about 105 women. Furthermore, data from DANE (2020) shows that only 9,1% of Colombian women are over 65 years old.⁹ This means that despite Colombia facing an overall aging population, with such data believed to be growing up to 21% by 2050, the female population in the country is still relatively young. In this regard, Figure 1 shows how the average age is around 30 years old in almost every ethnic group.

Autorreconocimiento étnico	Edad promedio	% de 0 a 14 años	% de 15 a 64 años	% de 65 años y más
Mujeres				
Indígena	27,1	33,1	60,9	6,0
Gitana o Rrom	33,4	23,3	67,8	8,9
Raizal del Archipiélago de San Andrés, Providencia y Santa Catalina	33,6	21,2	70,4	8,4
Palenquera de San Basilio	35,9	18,9	69,8	11,3
Negra, Mulata, Afrodescendiente, Afrocolombiana	31,1	25,7	67,0	7,4
Ningún grupo étnico	34,7	20,7	68,9	10,3
No informa	34,0	18,7	73,4	7,8
Total	34,1	21,6	68,5	9,9
Hombres				
Indígena	26,4	34,5	59,9	5,6
Gitano o Rrom	32,2	22,2	71,0	6,8
Raizal del Archipiélago de San Andrés, Providencia y Santa Catalina	31,8	23,2	69,6	7,3
Palenquero de San Basilio	33,7	19,8	71,1	9,1
Negro, Mulato, Afrodescendiente, Afrocolombiano	29,6	28,2	65,2	6,6
Ningún grupo étnico	32,8	22,9	68,4	8,7
No informa	30,5	15,7	79,5	4,8
Total	32,2	23,7	68,0	8,3

Figure 1: data around women's and men's age and ethnic identification. DANE (2018).

⁹In Italy, for example, women over 65 years old are 13.79 % of the overall population (ISTAT 2022).

Yet, as anticipated, things seem to be changing: according to CNPV (2018), the percentage of the population over 65 has doubled since 1985. This has also much to do with life expectancy: generally speaking, women are expected to live 6.5 years longer than men. Of course, such data is subjected to variation due to issues such as geographical localization; a woman living in Vaupés¹⁰ is generally expected to live 15 years less than one living in Bogotá.

Referring to the data presented in Figure 1, it also stands out how relevant the issues of ethnic belonging, self-identification - and therefore consequent representation - are. In this regard, Colombia proves to be an incredibly diverse and varied country. As Figure 2 shows in better detail, many are the individuals identifying as belonging to a specific ethnic group or identity: precisely 2.5 million self-recognize themselves as non-white. Of such ethnic groups, the most widespread certainly is that of afro-descendants. This is a crucial point to keep in mind when it comes to addressing the socio-economic and political condition of Colombian women: as anticipated, the categorization of “women” used here should be intended as a mere analytical category that is, however, in no way meant to be completely descriptive and exhaustive of the reality concretely experienced by Colombian women.

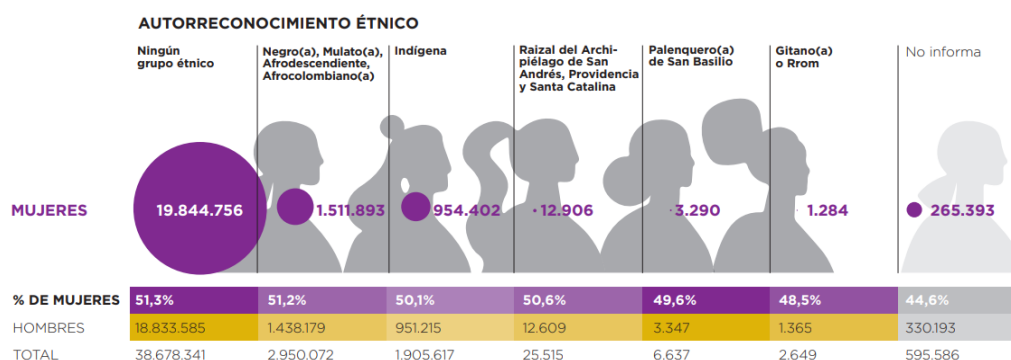


Figure 2: ethnic self-identification of the Colombian population. DANE (2018).

¹⁰ Vaupés is a department situated in the southeastern part of the country. Many are why the average life expectancy is so low compared to other parts of the country: the area is hardly accessible, especially via land. Of course, this results in a scarce presence of institutional bodies, therefore limiting population access to fundamental rights.

Such differences are also true in terms of the concrete spaces where women live. According to DANE (2018), 77.2% of the total Colombian population lives in municipal entities called *cabeceras*, intended as administrative centers that control other subordinated towns or villages, where women constitute the majority. In general, the gender ratio varies between rural and urban areas. Urban centers see a majority of female inhabitants - 109 women for every 100 men - whereas in rural areas there are around 92 women for every 100 men. Such information plays a fundamental role in light of the right to land access this work focuses upon.

But how do these women live? How are the social, economic, and political conditions they are embedded in? To answer these questions, it is necessary to take a step back and analyze the struggles women had to face since the very foundation of the country. By helping identify some red thread in women's struggles, such a historical path will help better understand the current socio-economic conditions women are currently embedded in.

2.1.1 An historical overview of Colombian women's struggles

The history of feminist struggles in Colombia could be seen as divided into two main periods by the Constitution of 1991. Among the many points of change that the constitutional text promoted, one of the most important is the introduction of secularism in Colombia: the rupture with the Catholic Church's influence deeply modified women's perception within society, therefore also empowering feminist movements. Until then, Colombia was in fact deeply affected by the Catholic authority, exercised through a Concordat signed by the new-born country and the Vatican in 1887: by recognizing Catholicism as the official religion, Colombia gave huge controlling powers to the Catholic Church. Since Catholicism perceived women as life carriers and carers, this agreement influenced the way Colombian society perceived women, therefore affecting their difficulty in accessing civil, social, and political rights (Wills 2004). Such way of perceiving women translated into many aspects of their lives, starting such instances from the way women were educated. Being perceived only as future wives or mothers, little attention was given to their personal education as individuals: they were rather instructed to be submissively capable of managing house chores and children's

education, to be good mothers and good wives. On the contrary, depending of course on their social background, men were called to have a more complete academic formation, to be able to thrive professionally. If women wanted to work outside the household, the only possible occupation they could aim at was that of educator or teacher. According to the Catholic view of social roles, women were in fact believed to be naturally fit for such roles, being designed by God as caregivers (Wills 2004). Maria Rojas Tejada was the first feminist to have tried to defy such belief: the suffragist tried to found a center for women's education, one that could provide them with almost the same possibilities men had. However, the pressures exercised by the Catholic Church forced her to continuously move until 1915, when she finally established in Pereira a secular school open to both men and women. In the meantime, other women all over the country were starting to make their voices heard to raise economic, social, and political claims: the first feminist movements were rising.

The first important achievement of such movements had to wait until 1932 when, through Law 28, marital power was abolished and women were finally recognized as subjects of law. Until then, in fact, marriage made women entirely politically and economically dependent on their husbands, therefore depriving them of their belongings or right to make any sort of decision. Such achievement was made possible by the *IV Congreso Internacional Femenino* of the *Liga de Mujeres Ibéricas e Hispanoamericanas*.¹¹ The such measure also implied that women were finally recognized the right to own property and goods. Such political recognition was followed by the right to be elected to public offices (1936). Ironically, while still eligible for public offices, they were not allowed to vote: such right had to wait for a Congress resolution¹² that passed in 1954 after eleven tentative amendments. However, it was not until three years later that women were effectively called to vote during the *Frente*

¹¹ The International League of Iberian and Latin American Women was a feminist international organization founded in 1921 by a group of Latin American liberal feminists. The League was thought of as a Latin American feminist parallel to the US-dominated Inter-American Commission of Women of Pan-American Union. (Coehn 2001).

¹²Colombia is a Presidential Republic where the Supreme Court holds the judiciary power; the President exercises the executive power whereas the Congress, composed of the Senate and Chamber of Representatives, holds the legislative one.

Nacional experience, in 1957.¹³ In the meantime, major achievements were also made in fields such as the right to an academic education (1933) and the elimination of punishments for unfaithful women (1936).¹⁴

Once citizenship rights were secured (1954) and the overall public sphere of women's rights seems to be improving, Colombian feminists started looking at the condition's women were living in their private spheres. In particular, when socialist movements intersected with this new feminist perspective, a new awareness of the issue of sexual separation of work was shed. Specifically, women realized the huge impact the catholic narrative was playing in shaping gender roles: while men were called to work outside the households and therefore seen as breadwinners, women's task ultimately was that of taking care of the household itself with little time remaining for other occupations. In particular, feminist movements realized how family and the Catholic Church forced women to carry overburdening tasks, preventing them from freely and equally thriving in other spheres: despite the many advancements of the last decades, women have still prevented the same possibilities as men. As Wills (2004) explains:

The family and the church, surrounded by a sacred breath, began to be perceived as institutions unfavorable to the advancement of the freedom [of] women by reproducing stereotyped constructions of femininity and masculinity.¹⁵

That is why advancements such as the recognition of juridical equality between men and women (1974) were a strong statement of the need to push the claims further. In particular, at the end of the Seventies, feminist fights focused on the right to abort, in total defiance of the role imposed by the Catholic Church and therefore in open refusal of the influence religion had until now played. What is here interesting to notice is that,

¹³The experience of the Frente Nacional (1958-1974) has been a political experiment Colombia experienced when trying to find a balance after the violent struggles of *La Violencia* between conservatives and liberals. The experience is obviously quite relevant for the development of the conflict: the polarization of the political debate in only two fronts - the conservative and the liberal one - made it so that other political voices needed new places and spaces to make their voices heard, flowing into not always peaceful forms of dissent. (La Rosa and Mejia 2017).

¹⁴ Despite that, men were still exonerated from any legal consequences if they were to kill their cheating wife. Such legal mitigation remained in force until 1980 (Wills 2004).

¹⁵ Wills 2004.

as it happened before for the abolition of marital power, there was a great bottom-up mobilization: in 1978 more than 250 women met to write a proposal of law in favor of the right to abortion. It was during this meeting that the 25th of November was established as the Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, to remember the killings of the Mirabal sisters in 1960 in Santo Domingo (Wills 2004). Although the tentative to ensure the right to abort failed, such a fervent atmosphere was a great prelude for the upcoming Constituent Assembly.

While women were fighting for the recognition of their rights, the entire country was shaken by a long and brutal internal conflict. The specific legacy of such events on women's lives will be later on assessed; what is here interesting is how in a tentative reconciliation, the former president César Gaviria promoted a new Constitution. Despite the many tensions internal to the feminist movements all over the country, at the end of 1990, a feminist working table ensured the translation of the UN's *Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women* into constitutional law. Furthermore, the new Constitution represented a huge advancement in many fields of Colombian women's lives: for instance, article 13 ensures the right to non-discrimination whereas article 40 guarantees women's access to public administration. What is particularly relevant for this work, however, are articles 42 and 43. The first one guarantees equality among family members, translating into the right to family planification but also the right to divorce, and pregnant women's protection. Furthermore, it condemns violence against women and children within families. Article 43, instead, guarantees special protection to women in charge of households. Both these articles are general frameworks of reference for the development of legal and political tools for women's access to productive lands. More in general, despite the Constitution, has officially declared the political rupture with the Catholic Church, decades-long of legal, political, and social influence has left a strong footprint in the ways women are perceived. Most importantly, despite having gained access to fundamental civil rights, women often still find themselves in a critical position. On one side, the narrative of life carriers and carers has forced them into a subordinated position, especially in light of the distribution of tasks inside the households. Moreover, even if much has so far been done to guarantee women access to basic rights, there still are cultural, economic, and

political factors that still puts them in a more fragile position. This is especially true when it comes to rural women.

2.1.2 A focus on rural women

The increasing awareness of the multiple ways women were discriminated against allowed, starting from the Eighties, new political voices to enter the international public debate. In this atmosphere of awakening awareness, new attention was shed on rural women's conditions. Colombia - as well as the other Latin American country's experiences - were deeply influenced by international legal developments: the most important milestone was the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, dated 1981. What happened in Colombia was that, starting from the Eighties precisely (Fajardo 2015) new legislative attempts to ensure a more inclusive land property system were carried out. Many were the reforms proposed whose aim was to define more equal access to productive lands. Figure 10 gives a brief overview of the most relevant ones.

Law	Relevant features
Law 30 of 1988	Natural persons who reached 16 years of age and who are the head of the household could obtain possession over uninhabited lands or become partners of a community enterprise (art. 12).
Law 160 of 1994 (National systems of Agrarian Reform and Rural and Farmer Development, legal provisions).	Support to under-resourced men and women in the acquisition of lands through credit, direct financial, and special attention toward rural women head of a household. (art. 12.) Priority in parcels acquisition to rural women head of households. (art. 40.) Joined certification of uninhabited venues. (art. 70).
Law 731 of 2010 (Rural women)	Jointed certification of rural reform of lands. (art. 25).

	<p>Joined certification of rural reform of venues to community enterprises or associations of rural women (art. 25).</p> <p>Priority to rural women heads of households to access housing subsidies. (art. 27).</p> <p>Inclusion of rural women in reforestation plans, programs, and projects. (art. 28).</p>
<p>Ley 1448 of 2011 (Victims and land restitution)</p>	<p>Establishes the right to land restitution to the rightful holder's spouse, or female or male partner, who lived with him/her at the moment of the facts or menaces resulting in the dispossession or forced abandonment. (art. 75 and 81).</p> <p>Order of the implementation of the special program to guarantee women's access to restitution processes (art. 114).</p>
<p>Law Decree 902 of 2017 (Integral Rural Reform)</p>	<p>The National Land Agency will realize the direct allocations in the name of the spouse of the permanent partners, whenever it happens. (art. 25).</p> <p>Principle of differential focus for the formulation of Plans of the social organization of rural property (art. 43).</p> <p>Recognition of the care work for the purpose of configuring facts that demonstrate the occupation or possession (art. 9).</p>
<p>Law 1900 of 2018</p>	<p>The Executive Council of National Land Agency will "[...] prioritize the rural populations for land access, formalization, allocation of national fields and the assignation of resources for production projects" (art. 2).</p> <p>A differential gendered approach will be applied to assign national fields. (art. 3).</p>

Figure 3: Overview of legislation around land access and management with an inclusive gendered perspective.

As Figure 3 shows, the first time Colombia recognized the right for women to be owners of lands was in 1988: Law 30 for the Agrarian Reform established for the first time that in the adjudication and establishment of legal acts for land possession were to be made in the name of both partners, man and woman, who ruled the land. Briefly put, such a revolutionary act recognized for the first time that women were equal to men in regard to land possession, despite the marital situation between given partners. Furthermore, Law 30 also included some specific provisions involving women as heads of households. In the fervent atmosphere above described, many bottom-up movements were created to ensure rural women's rights; the most important one surely being the Anmucic, *Asociación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas e Indígenas de Colombia*.

One of the most important achievements of Anmucic was the guarantee, for women heads of households, to enjoy some additional rights such as priority access to uninhabited lands and inclusion in the communal enterprises created by the act itself, to name a few. To further affirm women's equality to men, the legal act also established that women should be equally represented as men in a regional and national committee created to monitor the Agrarian Reform. What happened before 1988, under the observation of the organization, was that the previous Agrarian act of 1961 was thought with the belief that once the head of the household was granted land access, the whole household would benefit from it: what instead happened was that when men were the heads of the household, women would totally lose control over the land.

Despite such important achievements, the situation seemed to show almost no sign of improvement. Concretely speaking, data regarding the 1988-1991 period shows how female owners of lands were around 11 percent: the same data as under the 1961 legislation. According to Anmucic, the such stall was due to the lack of implementation of 1988 provisions.¹⁶ (Deere and León 2000). Generally speaking, Deere and León (ibidem) underline how the jointed titulation, which was failing on a national level, was

¹⁶ It should be noted how the work Anmucic carried out was made difficult by other organizations for rural population's rights: the feminist perspective Anmucic embraced was seen as a divisive element for the advancement of class struggles. (Deere and León 2000).

instead quite heterogeneously applied on a local level; the provision's application was therefore too dependent on the local authorities.

As seen before, the 1991 Constitution was a huge step forward in women's claims recognition. Such advancements were happening at a moment where, due to the extended internal conflict the country was undergoing, the female-headed households were multiplying. It was in this perspective that the Incora¹⁷ established that, in the process of redistribution of lands left unattended due to the conflict, women were facilitated when applied to be land owners. Following and building on such achievement, former president Gaviria promoted in 1994 Law 160. Given Law legally describes recipients of land distributions as households' heads - independent from their gender - who lives in poverty and who does not own any property. The legislation further establishes that not only women heads of households, but women in general who find themselves in a condition of fragility due to the conflict are to be granted benefits when applying for land access. Last but not least, the provision also reaffirmed jointed ownership. Since then, female access to land has improved: Deere and León (ibidem) show how female-headed households grew to around 14% by 1998.

Despite such improvements, and those presented in Figure 10 - which will be here not explored both for a matter of spaces and a lack of a historical perspective about them - much still needs to be done. Concretely, looking at the contemporary situation, what can be indeed affirmed without fear of contradiction is that for women is still quite hard - if not sometimes even impossible - to easily have access to land management and ownership. This has resulted in a great disparity in the male and female ratio of landowners. Considering in fact the 114 million hectares (OEA 2020) that compose the total of Colombian productive lands, the average should be 2.3 hectares per capita. Of the total, 42.5% belong to privates, which could it be either (small national) companies or households. However, according to Oxfam (2017) back in 2016, 26% of Colombian farms managed by natural persons¹⁸ were run by women; men, instead, were in charge of around 61%.¹⁹ Moreover, women's farms tend to be smaller, predominantly less than

¹⁷ Stands for *Instituto Colombiano de la Reforma Agraria*, in English: Colombian Institute for the Agrarian Reform.

¹⁸ I.e. owned by an individual human being, to be distinguished from that of "legal person".

¹⁹ The remaining 13% is controlled jointly both by male and female owners.

5 hectares; they also have far less access to less access to machinery, credit, and technical assistance (Oxfam 2017).

As it will later on be better explored, the issue of land access and redistribution of lands is a fundamental point in the Colombian state processes. *El problema de la tierra* is in fact identified by multiple actors as one of the fundamental sources of tensions that, to this day, is still fostering the conflict. That is why the data above presented should not be underestimated. Furthermore, in relation to the conflict, what such data still lack to show are the ways land access often becomes a source of violence in women's experience. Such violence is a physical one since in the frame of the ongoing conflict(s) land grabbing is a practice that implies extortion, intimidation, sexual violence, threats but also kidnapping, and murder. Especially when the household is a female-headed one, physical and sexual violence is a tool that allows actors to gain possession of female-owned land (Ruta Pacíficade las Mujeres 2020). Furthermore, women are often called to fulfill the needs of the households, both in terms of domestic practices and of its inhabitants' needs. It is an internationally spread phenomenon known as "unpaid domestic care": an issue that deeply involves Colombian women's everyday life, as the next section will show. In this sense, lands are often a way for women to ensure subsistence means to their families and relatives: once the access is denied or partially conceded, it often means that such women will be forced to live in a condition of fragility, poverty, and instability. Last but not least, when women are land owners, communal relationships are reinforced, scholars (ibidem) show. This means that, once women's access to land is limited, such relationships are deeply endangered: if lands are converted from a condition of subsistence to one of exploitation, the the cooperative mechanism between human and non-human lives, as well as within human lives is completely diverted.

The shortage of laws regarding women's access to land is also related to the way economics and politics have framed the role of women in relation to income and financial stability. In particular, as Magdalena León (2007) finds, such relation has longly been seen only as an active workforce, completely regardless of the issue of property. Specifically, León reflects on how

[...] issues related to work were privileged, whereas other alternatives for women's economic autonomy ignored. Among them, studies and reflection on property rights and gender are conspicuously absent.²⁰

It could therefore be interesting to look in detail at how women are in the workforce frame.

2.1.3 Unpaid care work and its impact on women's economic independence

The economic gap between women and men is a fundamental tool to frame the current living conditions of Colombian women. Economic and financial stability are in fact strictly intertwined with other socio-political contingencies of women's lives, such as access to education, health insurance, or even justice.²¹ When the economic aspect of gender disparities is approached, many issues arise. Of course, the space here is too limited for a complete and exhaustive recollection of the economic situation of Colombian women that considers the many differences between each specific group or case. Generally speaking, however, it is possible to identify some major topics that offer hints for reflection of special relevance for the matter here studied and that can, moreover, offer a quite comprehensive picture, especially in relation to the consideration above presented. Once this relevant topic is that of employment: how many Colombian women are effectively employed? What is their employment and how good are they paid, especially compared to their male counterparts? How is money managed, when women are the breadwinners?

According to DANE (2021),²² women make up half of the Colombian population able to work, being precisely 51.1% of the total. However, of such half, many are unemployed. In 2021 out of the 21 million people working, only 8 million - 39.5% - were women. This means that up to 18.1% of women were unemployed, against 10.1%

²⁰ Léon 2007, 293.

²¹The relationship between income and well-being is, to this day, still a huge matter of discussion. Different scholars give different interpretations of how well-being - and happiness - react as a response to income variations. What all of them agree upon, however, is that there is a physically lower threshold that allows for access to efficient necessary services such as healthcare or education. In between such services, there is also the problematic issue of access to justice and the possibility of legal representation.

²²DANE - short for Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística - is the national body responsible for the collection, processing and general dealing of Colombia's official statistics.

of men. As the most recently published bulletin of DANE shows,²³ 53.1% of the unemployed workforce are women; in contrast, out of the total workable population, 59.1% of men are currently employed. Luckily, the situation is slightly improving over time; however, to date, women are still working much less than men. But why is that? Of course, there are multiple reasons behind such a gap. On one side, the pandemic and the social consequences impacted Colombian women too:²⁴ DANE (2021) estimated that 2.4 million jobs were lost in Colombia due to the COVID-19 pandemic. 58.3% of these - namely 1.2 million jobs - were women. The overall situation has improved since 2020; yet, 74% of the workplace still missing to recover the pre-pandemic situation belongs to women. This means that the majority of those that lost their jobs during the health crisis were women; and that these women are still not working to date. But why is that? Many are the aspects to be considered.

The most crucial factor influencing the female employment rate is the role women are called to face in the frame of family organization. As seen before, the private organization of households' duties is in fact unequally distributed, with much of such duties carried out by women alone. Such an issue is known as unpaid care work.²⁵ According to the OECD, unpaid domestic work can be defined as follows:

Unpaid care and domestic work refers to all non-market, unpaid activities carried out in households – including both direct care of persons, such as children or elderly, and indirect care, such as cooking, cleaning or fetching water.²⁶

Unpaid domestic work, therefore, translates into all those activities related to family functioning and caretaking that are often - if not always - entirely taken on women's shoulders, who carry them out for free. Of course, being so involved in domestic activities, women have far less time for paid labor outside their households. This is why

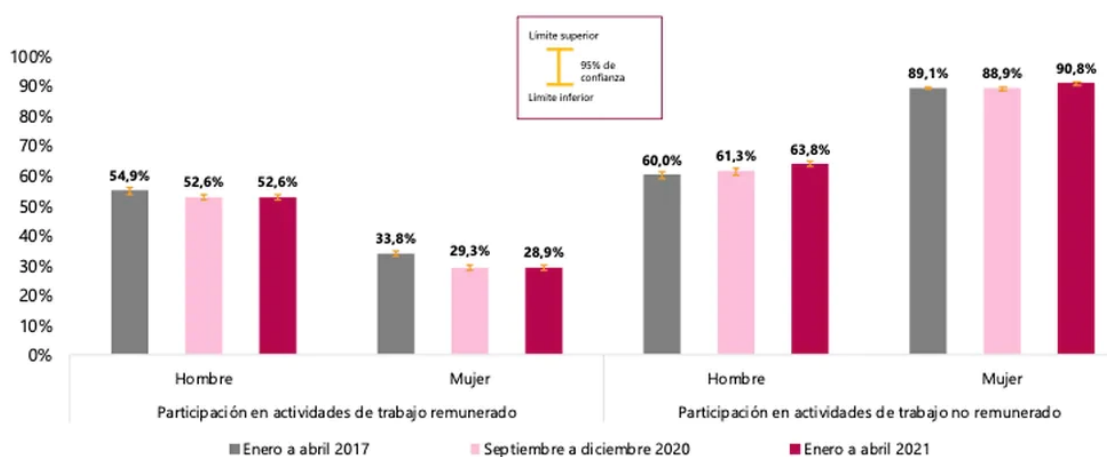
²³Published on 13th October 2022 and referring to the trimester June-August 2022.

²⁴According to the ILO, the pandemic highly affected female employment: women's occupation globally declined by 4.2% in 2020 only, compared to the previous year, with a huge disparity between the different countries. Looking at the wider picture, the situation is quite worrying. ILO (2022) finds that the current global labor force participation rate is made of only 47% out of the total women able to work, against a male ratio of 72%.

²⁵Called in Spanish *economía del cuidado*.

²⁶Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2019.

unpaid domestic care work is one of the most pressing and urgent issues in feminist(s) debates all over the world. On one hand, it triggers reflections - and protests - against the oppressive reality of static and a-critic gender role assignment: women, being life breeders, are believed to be assigned to domestic work, which of course in this optic is not even seen as labor - therefore to be paid - but rather as a “natural”²⁷ duty women have to carry out. On the other hand, as already mentioned, such a burden represents a physical and concrete impediment for women to becoming part of the active workforce. In the Colombian case specifically, UN Women (2021) shows that women carry out 78% of the total care work in households; moreover, 89% of the total Colombian women are at some level involved in unpaid domestic labor activities. This means that women spend much of their time taking care of other family members or of the household: on average, such tasks take them 7 hours and 14 minutes daily. Men, on the other hand, dedicate only around 3 hours and 25 minutes daily to domestic work. Considering the standards set by the ILO (1935 and 1962)²⁸ of an 8-hour long working day, Colombian working women should - and are - called to deal with two different labors, a paid and an unpaid one. Figure 3 makes the gap even more immediately evident: it is sufficient to look at the section on the right to see how pervasively unpaid domestic work interacts with women’s lives and time.



²⁷ Being an environmental humanist, as well as a feminist, I am well aware of how socially constructed the concept of “nature” and “naturally” are, especially when related to gender roles. Moreover, such theories have been studied over the decades by a number of scholars like Judith Butler (1990),

²⁸ The reference is here to the Hours of Work convention and to the Reduction of Hours of Work Recommendation.

Figure 4. DANE's findings about female and male participation in paid and unpaid work.

But what happens when women do work? How well are they paid? The short answer would be: not good enough. What happens is in fact that there still is a gap between male and female income. Luckily, data shows a positive trend in this sense: after decades of figures hovering above ten percentage points difference, in 2020 the gap was estimated at around 5.8%. However, the DANE itself warns us to interpret such improvement carefully. Such leveling is not in fact the consequence of an overall advancement in women's condition, quite the opposite: the pandemic forced in fact less educated women out of the working force picture, therefore somewhat invalidating results. Regarding responsibilities and recognition, in fact, women are far less present in top-ranks roles. Only 20% of managerial positions belong to women. These are more likely to be occupying the lower - when not the lowest - levels of the professional ladder. It is therefore no surprise that poverty is still a female issue.²⁹ In concordance with what global data and considerations show, back in 2020 47% of Colombian households where women were breadwinners lived in a condition of poverty. Moreover, looking at the pre-pandemic situation, every 100 men living under the poverty line corresponded to 116 women living in the same situation. Generally speaking, however, official statistics should be treated carefully. Such data are in fact likely to not consider factors that intrinsically influence women's labor experiences. It should in fact be considered how women are one of the social groups most affected by informal work,³⁰ often translated into unsafe and unstable occupations. Many women - and their families - rely on the informal economy as a fundamental means of subsistence. Generally

²⁹Such phenomenon can be inserted in the wider frame of reflection of the so-called "feminization of poverty", a term coined in the UN framework back in the 1970s. The term refers to the increasing disparities women and men are facing, which reflect an increasing tendency that sees women becoming more and more poor with respect to their male counterparts.

³⁰ILO defines informal workers as belonging to one - or more - of the following categories: "1. unpaid family workers in registered or unregistered businesses with more than five employees; 2. employees in registered firms (or firms with more than five employees) without access to at least one of the three key benefits; 3. own-account workers with unregistered activities; 4. employers in unregistered businesses with less than five workers; 5. unpaid family workers in unregistered businesses with less than five employees; 6 employees in unregistered firms with less than five workers and without access to at least one of the three key benefits; 7. employees in unregistered firms with less than five workers with access to all three key benefits; 8. members of unregistered producers' cooperatives with less than five workers; 9. workers not classifiable by status in other unregistered businesses with less than five workers." (2014).

speaking, as the ILO (2018) points out, informal employment presents many different problems - both for the worker and for national well-being - since it escapes any form of regulation, taxation, or union recognition: in this sense, according to the international organization, with an exception regarding the age group 18-28 in all the others the majority of workers are women.³¹ Women are often pushed by external factors to accept such degrading conditions: for example, one thing to be kept in mind is how women are less likely to be employed because they often are also offered fewer jobs. According to a UN Women report (2020), women from 29 to 44 years old denounce higher difficulties than men in finding employment or going back to the old one after events such as pregnancies or marriages.

To summarize, Colombian women are therefore generally less likely to work, to be economically sufficient and independent, and on the contrary way more likely to be too overburdened with unpaid care responsibilities to dedicate themselves to work. The data presented helps to draw an approximative overview of women's economic conditions. In this sense, Colombian women prove to be fragile from an economic perspective: such fragility, however, translates into many other spheres of their lives. Being economically dependent, it is for instance more difficult for women to become independent from their male partners or relatives. Such a dependent relation may become dangerous when it is inserted in a wide web of pervasive violence, as the next section will explore.

2.2 The impact of the Colombian conflict on women.

The term "violence" is an umbrella term indicating a wide variety of experiences shaped by many different factors. This work primarily focuses on what the UN calls "violence against women",³² defined as follows.

³¹According to the OECD (2022) in Colombia the informal sector interests around 60% of the population.

³² Of course, it is sometimes easy to fall into the linguistic trap of overlapping "gendered-based violence" with "violence against women". Nonetheless, the two expressions clearly define two different phenomena. Where the first one "refers to harmful acts directed at an individual based on their gender" (UNHCR), the second strictly deals with the violence experienced by one gender solely, with all the specificity it implies. It seemed important to point out here that all the references to "gender", from now onwards, precisely deal with the very second case.

The term “violence against women” means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.³³

In this sense, Colombian women are called to deal with a context where violence is a pervasive constant. To assess how the conflict has impacted women’s lives, a reference to the broader framework of violence against women is needed. That of “conflict-related” and “non-conflict-related” forms of violence is in fact a distinction that becomes meaningless in front of the concrete experiences women face in their everyday lives. Concretely, in fact, “violence against women” translates in Colombia into a series of different practices going from sexual abuse to torture, from kidnapping to political violence.

Generally speaking, the most attention is usually given to sexual crimes such as sexual assaults, abuses, or crimes against sexual freedom. However, multiple other forms of gendered violence frequently take place, such as murders, tortures, or attacks against private properties. As this section analyzes, each act of violence against women should not be seen as isolated: on the contrary, every violent practice is intertwined with one another, creating a worrying picture for women’s well-being. To connect the dots and be able to unveil the relationship between said practices is a step forward toward reparative justice. That is why the workings and efforts of La Ruta are fundamental: its mission of peace-making is in fact helping to understand and outline the multiple forms violence against women had - and to this day still has - in the frame of the (ongoing) armed conflict. To do so, La Ruta reworks - by adapting it to the specificity of the Colombian context- a fundamental concept: that of the continuum of violence (La Ruta Pacíficade las Mujeres 2013).³⁴ As just said, recognizing the deep level of interconnection each form of violence has with one another means in fact being able to frame them in a bigger picture, therefore re-assessing responsibilities correctly.

³³ United Nations 1993.

³⁴ La Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres 2013, 32.

The continuum of violence helps to understand how the specific violence of war is linked to the violence present in the relationship of domination between men and women in times of peace. It is in this key that the following, better-analyzed issue have to be read: as interconnections influencing each other and resulting in each other.³⁵

Recognizing the very interconnected nature of violence(s) also means being able to understand how subtle they can be, therefore unleashing new fields of analysis and reflection around the vexation women are subjected to. In this sense, keeping in mind this concept can help better understand why the women's exclusion from land ownership is here framed as an act of violence.

2.2.1 Violence against women

In UN Women's words in Colombia: "Violence against women and girls knows no economic or social boundaries and affects women and girls from all regions and income levels." (2020, 4). Such a statement is particularly true when it comes to sexual abuse and, more in general, to all forms of violence regarding the sexual sphere. In this sense, the data presented by DANE and summarized in Figure 5 are worrisome:

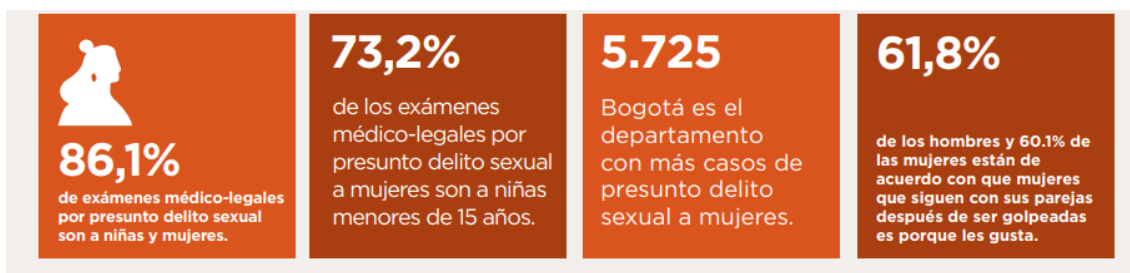


Figure 5. Overview of the Colombian situation around sexual violence against women. DANE (2018).

³⁵ Ibidem, 2. The original goes: "El continuum de las violencias ayuda a entender cómo la violencia específica de la guerra entronca con las violencias presentes en la relación de dominación entre hombres y mujeres vigentes en épocas de paz."

What is especially shocking - at least for my personal sensitivity - is how the tests and exams around alleged³⁶ sexual assaults and violations involve an incredibly high number of minors under 15 years old. In 2019 only, 26.158 medical exams in order to verify an alleged sexual assault were conducted; 86,1% of them were carried out on women.³⁷ (CEPAL 2020). As Figure 5 suggests, generally speaking, such kind of violence involves women from a really young age: the most interested age group is in fact that from 10 to 13 years old (7.513 tests); followed by that from 5 to 9 years old (5.000) and from 14 to 17 (4.626).

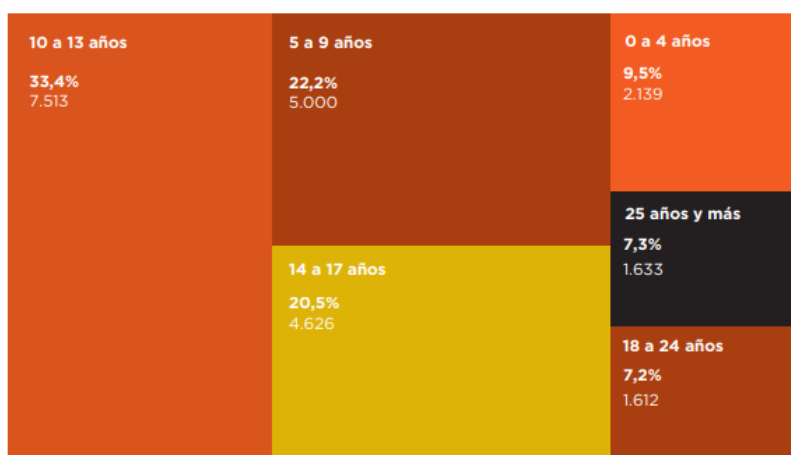


Figure 6: Distribution of medical tests for alleged sexual offenses, divided by age of the victim. (DANE 2019).

Moreover, women are usually not so keen to denounce: according to Oxfam (2010)³⁸ between 2001 and 2009 less than 18% of women denounced sexual abuses they suffered. This is due to a multiplicity of factors; on one side, the difficulty to denounce is linked to a disturbing trend toward the justification and normalization of violence against women. In particular, 4 out of 10 Colombian women agree that a good wife should obey her husband no matter what, while 60.1% of women -and 61.8% of men-

³⁶ The adjective “alleged” should not deceive: looking for example at the numbers of child mothers, we discover how CNPV (2018) finds that 6.3% of young girls from 10 to 19 had had at least one child born alive.

³⁷ For the sake of completeness, the gender ratio of medical analysis for alleged sexual violence is that of one man every 6 women.

³⁸ Unfortunately, it has not been possible to find more updated data. However, the trend seems to be confirmed for the following years, up to today (2022).

agree that a woman victim of violence continues to stay with her abuser in reason of her presumed fetish for violence (ENDS 2015). As shown in Figure 7, this trend is subject to wide geographical variations. In particular, the trend of naturalization of violence against women strongly grows in rural areas, thus configuring additional silent obstacles to women's access to productive lands.

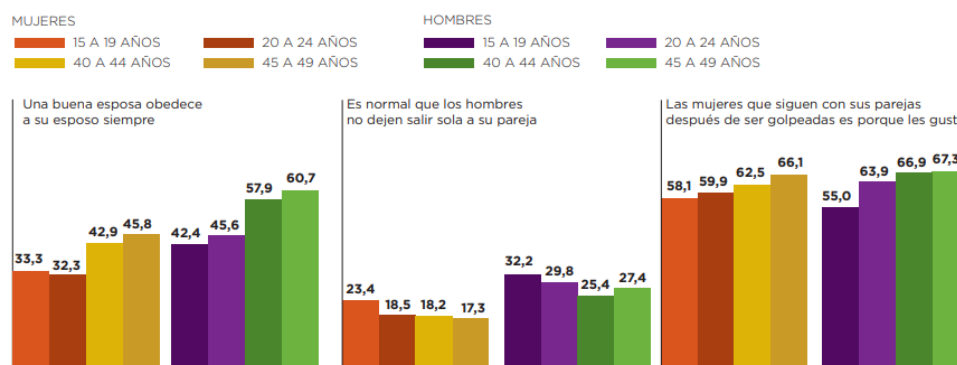


Figure 7: Percentage of people agreeing with sexist affirmations such as “women stay with a partner that hits them because they like it”. ENDS (2015).

Furthermore, women are discouraged from denouncing the violent act they are subjected to due to the failure of legal tools. Law 1761 of 2015, or Article 104A of the Criminal Code - whose aim was to criminalize violence against women and femicide - did not - and still does not - prevent an escalation of unprecedented violence. Concretely speaking, the law seems to fail when it comes to ensuring justice for women. For example, according to the *Observatorios de Femicidios en Colombia*, 1.881 women were killed over the last three years out of a gendered-related dynamic. Despite such high numbers, only 677 cases were denounced: 378 were arrested and only 140 were proven guilty.³⁹

However, there is another reason why it is so difficult for women to have access to justice. The issue of access to fair and equal justice measures is in fact strictly related to the matter of the fair and equal representation of women in decision-making political

³⁹ The high numbers of women’s killings have resulted in the development of new fields of reasoning and proposals for new terms: Segato (2012)- supported by Giletti Benso (2014) - proposes, for example, the Spanish term *femigenocidio*.

spaces, especially in those spaces where legislative and judiciary powers are held. In this sense, political participation insurance is a crucial aspect of women's overall well-being, one capable of influencing and improving their access to reparative justice.

2.2.2 The lack of political inclusion and violence against women

Despite the many achievements feminist movements were able to reach over the decades, to this day there is still no effective political parity and equality. Concretely speaking, a huge gap is still present when it comes to female political representation. As Figure 8 shows, there are many political fields where female inclusion is clearly lacking. On one hand, only a small part of the governmental bodies are composed of women: in particular, a great issue is represented by the small percentage - 24.5% - of women involved in the spaces and places where the legislative power is held.



Figure 8: Overview of the political body's composition in relation to women's inclusion. DANE (2018).

Figure 8 helps to immediately understand current data around equality: considering for example the overall 279 seats that compose the Colombian Congress, only 55 of them belonged to women back in 2020; i.e., there were more than 4 men for each woman. Since women make up half of the populace, the issue of equal representation is not, and cannot be interpreted as a secondary matter.⁴⁰ In this sense, it could be said that some efforts to improve the situation were actually put in place. Designed to increase female participation in decision-making, the so-called *Ley de Cuotas* (Ley 581 of 2000) enhanced female participation in the higher sphere of the country's government. According to said act, at least 30% of senior positions in public bodies must be held by

⁴⁰ As explored in the next chapter, inclusive political representation is also one of the main point La Ruta tries to make with its claims and protests.

women.⁴¹ Such a law seems to be effectively helping in improving the situation: as the UN Women (2020) finds, the Ley de Cuotas promoted an increase in female participation in key roles of public administration, ministry included. What however such acts didn't have a positive effect on is the difficulty female participation encounters when it does not rely on administrative mechanisms but rather on democratic processes such as elections. In given cases, women still have to face serious struggles in terms of issues such as fundraising, spots on political lists, access to media representation, and so on.

Another issue the law seems to be ineffective upon is the matter of female representation in spaces where judiciary power is held. Specifically, there is a serious crisis of female participation in bodies such as the Supreme Court: not only there is an already critical unbalance that sees 3 women out of 23 representatives (2017), but the situation seems to be progressively getting worse.⁴² (CEPAL 2020). Before 2000, women represented less than 5% of the Supreme Court composition; since then the situation seemed to be improving until the peak of 33% registered in 2010. However, data has then fallen down to 3 (2022).

Political inclusion in decision-making bodies is closely related to the main point of this work: the issue of women's right to access, own and manage productive lands. As the next chapter will show, the experience of la Ruta is in this sense quite explicative of how enhancing female political inclusion also fosters a positive effect on land management inclusion. Moreover, such issues intersect on the basis of the need to solve and improve the post-conflict peace-keeping mechanisms. The premises all these matters rely upon, however, is the great level of damage said conflict has actively produced on women's lives, bodies, relationships, and experiences. That is why, to unveil the potential and the power of La Ruta's experience, it is first necessary to study the legacy of the internal armed conflict on female lives. In summary, the lack of real political inclusion results, for women, in increased difficulty in accessing lawful regulatory

⁴¹ Italian readers may be more familiar with the famous issue of *quote rosa*, a political tentative to implement female presence in managerial positions of the public and private sectors. Such approach to inclusivity, however, is often critiqued and labeled as tokenism.

⁴² According to CEPAL (2016), back in 2017 only 13% - 3 out of 23 - of the components of the Supreme Court was a woman. The data is particularly low even when compared to other Latin American countries such as Brazil (18.2%), Argentina (20.0%), Chile (23.8%) or Ecuador (47.6%).

mechanisms. This results in a concrete lack of access to restorative justice: a fundamental tool to fix post-conflict wounds.

2.2.3 Main actors in the Colombian armed conflict

According to the mainstream narrative, generally speaking, four are the major actors recognized to be shaping and fostering the dynamics of the conflict: politics, as in the state government; guerrillas, born mostly out of the population's desire for self-defense and self-determination; the drug cartels; and paramilitary forces, mostly created by such criminal groups to fight against guerrilla's disturbance of their business.⁴³ Each of them has its own history of alliances, tensions, and motives that pushed them to enter into war; even if it is possible to frame them in broader categories of analysis, it could however never be possible in such a limited space to account for the different relationships of power within and between them. All these actors cannot be framed as independent or fixed groups: on the contrary, the boundaries between them are blurry and shady.⁴⁴ The crucial thing relevant here is that such a scenario has led Colombia to a high socio-economic and political fragmentation, with all the consequences it implies both in terms of concrete effects on the population and in terms of clarity of comprehension of the conflicts' dynamics. Better summarized through Fernán González (2004) words: "The Colombian conflict is overwhelming in its complexity and devastating in its impact on the civilian population." Besides, the conflict could hardly be summarized by the conventional thinking tools generally applied to address and study wars. Most importantly, being even hard to distinguish sides, the Colombian conflict escapes the logic of the "winner-losers" dualism, making it almost impossible to identify a univocal "winner". What remains clear is that the one and only true loser is

⁴³ Of course, this is just a gross approximation of the many and multifaceted actors that were - and in part still are - involved in the internal conflict.

⁴⁴ The Colombian case is marked by duplicity and corruption: it is no secret that many government actors have strong ties to drug trafficking and paramilitary experiences. At the same time, many other less known figures that over the decades somehow entered the political scene were later on found to be ambiguously linked to criminal groups. The country hero General Maza Marquez, for a long-time chief of the intelligence office against drug crimes DAS (*Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad*), was found guilty in 2016 of the homicide of the presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galán, committed in 1989. As García Marquez wisely puts it: "Pero nada era simple en esos días, y mucho menos informar sobre nada con objetividad desde ningún lado, ni era fácil educar niños y enseñarles la diferencia entre el bien y el mal." (García Marquez, 2003, 73). For further details, see also Gallini (2010, 12).

the population's health and well-being. The *Registro Unico de Victimas*⁴⁵ - a database created in 2011 to register the conflicts' victims - estimates that by April 2022 almost 10 million people had lost their lives in the conflict, of whom more than 2 million were children. Moreover, according to the Observatory for Conflict and Memory,⁴⁶ 51.919 women were victims of the conflict; 18.048 of them were directly killed in the conflict's actions. In the meantime, political violence has cost the country almost \$13.6 trillion up until 2017; the equivalent of \$5 per person globally.⁴⁷

Exploring the ways Colombian women have been affected by the conflict means slamming against a general sense of difficulty in framing the context correctly. On one side the great level of social fragmentation above explored is surely to blame since it makes it difficult to have a univocal recollection of the events. On the other, the difficulty women encounter to denounce the violence - be it sexual or psychological - they are subjected to also translates into the widespread absence of their voices. Concretely, the issue is very well presented and contextualized in the Colombian scenario by the Comisión de Verdad y Memoria:

There are few surveys documenting the specific effects of the violence [in the conflict's context] in the women's body and life, the responsibilities that are imposed on them and the important vulnerabilities to which they are subjected, which destroy their dignity and ignore their rights.⁴⁸

The quote above summarizes one of the greatest problems about the dynamics of the conflicts, both as a subject of studies and research and as a socio-political issue to be

⁴⁵ Readable here: <https://www.unidadvictimas.gov.co/es/registro-unico-de-victimas-ruv/37394>, last seen on 4th October 2022.

⁴⁶ The *Observatorio de Memoria y Conflicto* is a body of the *Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica* (National Center of Historic Memory): its main task is to document and inform around the many ways violence develops in the framework of the internal conflict. The homepage of its website presents an updated number of the conflict's victims: <https://micrositios.centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/observatorio/>. (Last seen on 9 December 2022).

⁴⁷ Economically speaking, the conflict has had a huge impact on Colombia's GDP, often the preferred index of analysis to assess a country's economic well-being. In 2015 only, the country spent up to 30% of its internal GDP in conflict-related expenses. These numbers are the result of an Intuitions of Economics and Peace investigation published in 2017. The report is readable at the following link: <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/forging-peace-in-colombia-an-economic-asset/> (last seen on 3rd October 2022).

⁴⁸ Comisión de Verdad y Memoria 2013, 3.

solved: women's experiences, pain(s), and traumas - that constitute the most hit half of the population - are the great absent. I am here interested in exploring the ways in which the conflict threatens and endangers women's lives. Being constrained by obvious limitations, and in concordance with the aim of this paper to do justice to the ecofeminist positioning, to present the Colombian conflict through feminist lenses means here exploring the ways in which women's experience intersects with issues such as justice and peace, translated in the historical dimension of the Peace Accords signed back in 2016. Contrary to what the name suggests, however, such Agreements cannot be seen as the concluding point of the conflict: the Colombian context has actually been shaped by such agreements that, instead of reaching equity, have instead fostered a gendered socio-economic and political gap that La Ruta is trying to flatten. Before however diving into the role women can have as peace-keepers, it is necessary to understand the struggles they suffered in the conflict.

2.2.4 Women as the most vulnerable to the conflict.

Of course, it is to this day still too hard to exhaustively define the scope with which the armed conflict impacted Colombian women's lives. As anticipated, this is due to a multitude of factors: on one hand, it is strictly interlinked with the retrosy and the difficult start of gendered approaches to violence studies. On the other, it deals with the difficulty above mentioned in recognizing and denouncing abuses and violence women suffer, a difficulty rooted in the very same pattern of naturalization and denial identified for violence against women in general. What however multiple publications have shown (Butler 2015) - and confirmed by the inquiries carried out by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (2006) - is that violence against women is generally used as a strategy of war by the actors involved in the conflict. Translated in the Colombian conflict, the Court has identified four main "manifestations of violence" (Inter-American Courts of Human Rights 2006) against women perpetrated in the frame of the internal conflict.

The first category identified by the Court deals with that particular physical - and consequent physiological - violence that completely delegitimizes female

identities. The actors involved in the conflict use in fact physical, physiological, and more specifically sexual violence against female targets to dehumanize the victim, terrorize her and her surroundings, and eventually earn control of either their territories or resources. The way such mechanisms work is particularly clear when sexual violence is addressed. In this sense, Judith Butler (2015) shows how the patriarchal gaze dehumanizes the victim: when sexual abuse against women is used as a weapon, women's identity becomes perceived only in their being mothers, daughters, wives, or in general female relatives of a - more important male - sensitive target. Male individuals are in fact believed to be the "protectors of women's sexuality" (Inter-American Court of Human Rights 2006), as if women were not able to stand for themselves. Briefly, women are raped to bend the - generally male - enemy by gaining control over "his" women: in this way, women stop being individuals and start being goods. Such violence acts on a double axis: on one hand, it causes concrete psycho-physical damage. On the other, it completely delegitimizes the existence, identity, and independence of the women subjected to it, who therefore even lose the sense of themselves.⁴⁹ Some scholars, like Guzman Rodriguez and Prieto Davila (2013) have tried to understand the scope of sexual violence in the armed conflict context. According to their findings:

[...] according to the *Registro Único de Víctimas de la Unidad para la Atención y Reparación Integral a las Víctimas*,⁵⁰ between 2008 and 2012, 704 cases of crimes against sexual freedom of women and 261 cases of men were registered. These data are perhaps the most accurate, insofar as in the *Registro Único de Víctimas* only those victims who have suffered violations within the framework of the armed conflict and for whom a minimum of prior verification of the facts has been carried out. It is worth noting that the number of crimes against sexual freedom committed against women between 2008 and 2011 (704 cases) are almost double as many as

⁴⁹ Multiple branches of contemporary psychoanalysis identify the sense of self (also called sense of identity) as one of the basic needs; those needs are the fundamental ones, to be fulfilled while growing up. (Maslow 1954).

⁵⁰ Italic is mine.

the number of alleged cases of sexual violence committed against women in the context of societal violence (384 cases) recorded by the INML.⁵¹

Sexual abuse is however not the only way the actors take control over female identities and their bodies. Women are in fact no strangers to homicides, tortures, and massacres. In September 2022 alone 49 women were killed (Observatorio Femicidios Colombia 2022). Most of such killings are happening in areas of reactivation of the conflict, representing therefore a weapon for war.⁵²

The second category the Court identifies is linked to the issue of forced displacement. Violence and abuse cannot and should not be considered punctual events that exhaust their destructive potential in the moment of the act. Apart from psychological implications - that cannot find the space here to be appropriately explored -, there are also the concrete physical consequences the conflict implies. Once an area becomes the target of the armed conflict, the entire environment as well as the social fabric is damaged. This forces people to move, resulting in the phenomenon commonly known as “forced displacement”.⁵³ The UNCHR defines it as follows:

Forced displacement occurs when individuals and communities have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of events or situations such as armed conflict, generalized violence, human rights abuses, natural or man-made disasters, and/or development projects. It both includes situations where people have fled as well as situations where people have been forcibly removed from their homes, evicted or relocated to another place not of their choosing, whether by State or non-State actors. The defining factor is the absence of will or consent.⁵⁴

In this sense, therefore, it is fundamental to keep in mind the role violence against women plays in forcing them to leave their homes or hometowns. There is a clear

⁵¹ INML stands for *Instituto Nacional de Medicina Legal y Ciencias Forenses*, as in the National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences. Guzman Rodriguez and Prieto Davila 2013, 29.

⁵² Said 49 feminicides took place in: Valle del Cauca (13), Bogotá (9), and Antioquia (8).

⁵³ Known in Spanish as *desplazamiento forzado*.

⁵⁴ UNHCR 2010.

connection between forced displacement, internal conflict, and violence against women. As Torregrosa et. al (2020) better explain, this relation between the three factors results in incremental growth of risk for women's well-being.

The connection between the armed conflict and violence against women is undeniable. The probability of occurrence of a new event on a victim of forced displacement is demonstrated, as 85% of all victims of any other conflict-related event have suffered displacement (Torregrosa et al.)⁵⁵

Concretely, it means that if - as before seen - women are far more likely than men to be subjected to threats, physical violence, or sexual assault as a result of the armed conflict, they also are more likely to try and physically escape such reality by moving. However, as often happens in forced displacement cases, Colombian women too rarely successfully escape such logic and dynamics of violence: on the contrary, forced displacement seems to often lead them to even more dangerous and hurtful situations. That is why internal migration⁵⁶ becomes not only a necessary consequence of direct or indirect violence but it must be read as violence in itself. Uprooting women and completely annihilating their relationship not only with the human community they were living in but also with the space they inhabit(ed) forces them to a - often perpetual - state of precariousness that drives them into dangerous or difficult situations in order to ensure their own survival and that of those who depend on them.⁵⁷

But when women move, where do they go? The answer is not quite clear. Many have been studies around the trajectories that people followed when escaping conflict-related

⁵⁵ Torregrosa et. al. 2020, the original says: "La conexión entre el conflicto armado y la violencia hacia las mujeres es innegable. La probabilidad de ocurrencia de un nuevo hecho sobre una víctima de desplazamiento forzado se encuentra demostrada, pues el 85% de la totalidad de víctimas de cualquier otro hecho relacionado con el conflicto ha sufrido el desplazamiento (Red Nacional de Información, abril 2019)."

⁵⁶Of course, migration is not only internal. Women - and migrants in general - are of course also moving outside the Colombian borders. However, to focus on external migration would mean widening the focus and make such reflections even more complex. Moreover, being migrants forced to leave by what may seem circumstantial conditions, with therefore the hope -however - of returning soon, the widespread tendency is to move, at first, within the country. (Guzman Rodriguez and Prieto Davila 2013).

⁵⁷ Being the ones that carry the socio-economic weight of care responsibilities, as above seen.

direct or indirect violence.⁵⁸ However - but not surprisingly at all - most of them are not disaggregated by gender. Generally speaking, the major receptors of internal displacement have been big cities such as Bogotá, Medellín, and Santa Marta. The overall picture is indeed that of a tendency to migrate toward a big urbanization center within the country's borders: rural areas are therefore more likely to be subjected to depopulation processes.⁵⁹ The issue is particularly relevant when migrants are young rural women, who look for better opportunities in terms of socio-economic recognition. Of course, such tendency does impact on the issue of rural areas management and is therefore relevant to the recognition of the right for women to access lands: when such access is not - or only partially - guaranteed, migration becomes the only viable option.

The third point touched by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights concerns the fact that women are forced - by context or by force - to become providers of sexual services for fighters. The issue of the active involvement of women in the conflict is however highly controversial and it will therefore not be touched on here.

Fourthly, the Court reminds us of the social impositions over women happening in territories occupied and controlled by (illegal) armed groups. Such control is exercised in a multiplicity of ways: going from impositions over clothing choices, to issues such as reproductive health. Bending individualities and taking possession of women's lives is a way for armed groups to earn the population's control; women in this sense are once again delegitimized in their individuality, being forced to respond to often highly patriarchal society regulations.

2.2.5 Pace Accords: the beginning of an end?

The official mainstream historical narrative situates the ending of the conflict in 2016 when former president Juan Manuel Santos signed the so-called Peace Accords that involved mainly only one agent of the conflict, namely the Revolutionary Armed Forces

⁵⁸ It may be interesting for the reader to have a look in this sense at the project carried out by the Universidad de Las Andes and the Center for Spatial Research about internal migration. The project maps the trajectories and path trying, as much as possible, to disaggregate data: <https://conflicturbanismcolombia.com/> (Last seen on 21st November 2022).

⁵⁹The World Bank data shows quite clearly how the rural population is actually and concretely diminishing: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS?locations=CO> (Last seen on 22nd November 2022).

of Colombia,⁶⁰ better known as FARC-EP. Negotiation processes were carried out in La Habana and started in 2012: such a journey ended in 2016 when the parties finally came to an agreement.⁶¹ In this sense, I argue - in agreement with scholars such as Mejia and La Rosa (2017) - that the subject should be treated carefully: it is true that internationally and academically the conflict is considered to be ended back in 2016. However, the issue is far more complex. The UN addresses peace as a holistic concept, defining it as "well-being for all, not just absence of war".⁶² If we consider such a point of view, Colombia cannot be considered entirely at peace, since as we have seen the internal conflict has produced - and continue to produce - a level of violence as such to influence, affect and disturb the lives of almost half of the population. It may seem like a mere matter of linguistic interpretation; however, it goes without saying that linguistic choices do reflect on the way human beings perceive the reality surrounding them, and, for this, it also shapes the way they react to it. That is also why it is important to not conform and stop to the mainstream, flattening categories: there is the concrete risk of underestimating the importance and the need of movements and *luchas* as the one La Ruta is carrying out.

It is of course here of little interest to give a precise and detailed account of the development such agreements had to go through; such work would require in fact much more space. What is instead compelling for the topic here explored is the intrinsic

⁶⁰Founded in 1964, FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias*) are considered to be the legacy of the peasant Marxist organizations generally known as *Autodefensas campesinas*. As it will later on be better explained, the peasantry had to collectively organize in order to protect their possessions and families during *La Violencia* (1948 - 1958). Rapidly expanding, said groups occupied large areas of the country, angering the central government. To re-establish the State's control over the Marquetalia territory, the peasant headquarters, the government launched *Operacion Soberania*: a violent oppressive attack to these *campesinos* resistance group and unwillingly offering the perfect *casus belli*. Survivals will in fact gather around the figure of commander Tirofijo, reuniting under the FARC name. From 1984, the organization will add the suffix "EP", as in *Ejercito del Pueblo*. (La Rosa, M. P. and Mejia, G. R. 2017).

⁶¹ Initially signed and concluded without taking into consideration the voices of precisely those sectors of society that were most affected by the conflict itself, the Agreements were subsequently rejected by the Colombians via means of a popular referendum. The surprising outcome may seem controversial, given the country's widespread efforts toward peace. All things considered; however, it is on the contrary quite explicative of how a societal rupture such as the one the Colombians were called to face cannot be fixed by a signature, but rather requires a more inclusive and thoughtful response: on the one hand, the population was not willing to let *guerrillas* get away with significant wins, especially in light of the lack of remorse they showed for their violence all over the country. On the other hand, President Manuel Santos had made himself the reputation of a too condescending negotiator, arguing that "son sapos muy grandes que uno se tiene que tragar." (El Espectador, 2014.)

⁶² United Nations 2014.

intertemporal dimension Colombian Peace Accords have. Of course, political decisions always need their time to be concretely translated into everyday lives. However, in the Colombian case, it is possible to refer to a truly work-in-progress, one that is to this day still developing. This perspective is confirmed by the very same governmental organizations: many are in fact the tools international organizations, Statal entities as well as civil society are implementing to assess the state and the advancements of the Peace Accords.

Before however trying to understand how good - or bad - the current state is from a feminist perspective especially - it is necessary to take a step back and outline the main points given Accords contains. As it is self-evident, many are the points of rupture that shaped and were shaped by the armed conflict. For this, the Accords revolve around six main points: Policies of comprehensive rural development; Political participation; End of conflict; Solutions to the issue of illegal drugs; Victims; Mechanisms of authentication of the Accords. Every overall point is then subdivided into different pillars and indicators that deal with more specific matters. The general picture of the advancement of the given points is represented in Figure 10, updated to November 2022. Generally speaking, many have been improvements such points have given to Colombian society. However, some critical issue still remains. Over the others, the most relevant critical point for the issue here presented is by far Number 2: Political Participation. As Figure 10 shows, in fact, the such a point is only completed for a little more than a half. Data that should not surprise if benchmarked with the data above presented around women's involvement in political participation. Of the 3 pillars, 68 indicators, and hundreds of strategies that compose such point, the most critical ones are in fact those that involve women's inclusion, such as the Promotion of women's political and civic participation within the framework of the Agreement (Point 2, Pillar 3, Strategy 7).

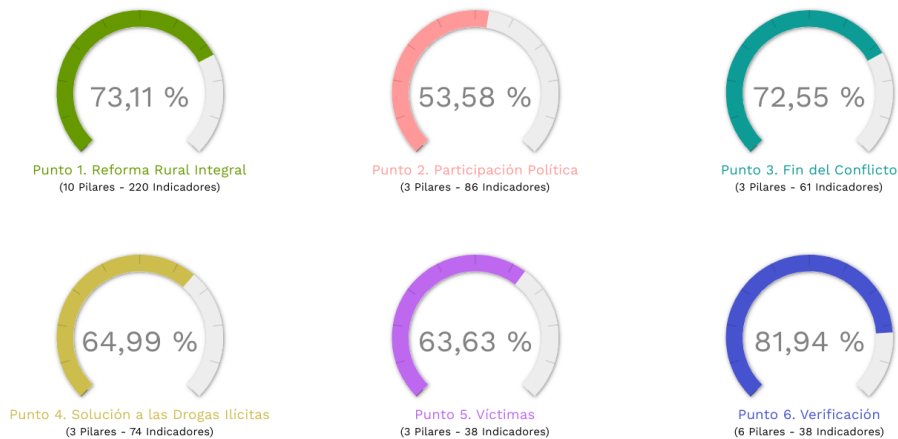


Figure 9: state of the Peace Accords progress to November 2022. (SIPO 2022)

Of course, the other particularly relevant point for the sake of this work is number 2, known as *Pacto Rural Integral*. Such a Pact is yet another step in the history of the tentatives to establish a more inclusive management system of productive lands. *El problema de la tierra*, as anticipated, is in fact a crucial source of tensions that, to this day, is still fostering tensions and conflicts. It is helpful here to try and frame it in a feminist perspective.

2.3. ‘El problema de la tierra’ from a gender perspective.

Rural reforms and land ownership are crucial issues in the Colombian context, one that touches intimate chords and deals with broader matters of political participation and civil rights protection. Land management is in fact one of the main socio-economic drivers and political issues functioning as the point of rupture behind the many tensions that, intersecting, have concurred to foster the internal armed conflict. That is also why the previously mentioned *Pacto Rural Integral* is the first point presented in the Peace Accords. In this sense, La Ruta too recognizes the centrality of the such point when it comes to the perpetuation of violence and abuses in the frame of the conflict. As a matter of fact, the control over land intertwines with a wide range of socio-economic issues: on one hand, it guarantees a series of financial or income-related privileges; on the other, it may be a guarantee of subsistence for some individuals or households.

Generally speaking, controlling lands means controlling resources: this also means, at the same time, having power.

Although it sounds commonplace, it goes without saying that one of the central reasons for the social and political armed conflict that the country is experiencing is precisely the competition for land, control over it and the resources that may be in these territories.⁶³

Land control is embedded in a power-play dynamics that much has to do with colonization, both in the sense of subjugation and imposition of authorities and structure of living, but also, in the Colombian case, in a more historical sense. Indeed, the issue of land management and land-owning dates back to the very processes of state-building the country went through starting from the colonial period. (Fajardo 2015). The Colombian territory was back then unevenly occupied and exploited. Rural and peripheral regions were mostly inhabited by marginalized groups - the so-called “*mestizos*”⁶⁴ - leaving little room for statal intervention. (Fernan Gomez 2010). At the same time, the State itself had little interest in colonizing and exercising its powers over what seemed to be “useless” territories: too far to be reached, both geographically and socially, and unfit for the monocultures⁶⁵ because of topographical reasons, these areas were mostly let to self-organize. In a such fragmented scenario - where the public political focus was entirely on the exacerbation of the political division between

⁶³ The original, in Spanish, is: “Si bien suena a lugar comun, no sobra decir que una de las razones centrales del conflicto armado social y politico que vive el pais es precisamente la competencia por la tierra, el control sobre ella y los recursos que pueda haber en estos territorios.” La Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres 2013, 20.

⁶⁴ During colonial control, the term *mestizo* originally indicated the offspring’s resulting from sexual intercourses between individuals from *la raza blanca* (white, mostly as in European) and *la raza india* (as in indigenous). Of course, there is an ongoing debate around the use of such term today: generally speaking, to this day it indicates an individual with multiple ethnic origins. Some social groups and current of thoughts however revendicate the usage of the term with positive connotations (Anzaldúa 1987).

⁶⁵ The issue of monocultures and their impact on the socio-economic condition of Colombia will be better analyzed further on. It goes without saying, however, that such issue is much wider than what could be here explored: many have been the (often silenced) voices trying to denounce the multileveled and deep implications that the *ejes cafetero y bananero* (the coffee and banana’s belts) have had in the development of socio-economic and political inequalities. Reader interested in the topic may deepen, such instance, the history of the United Fruit Company; one of my favourite recounts in this sense is contained in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez.

Liberals and Conservatives⁶⁶ - the possibility opened for independent armed groups as the *guerrillas* or drug trafficking to thrive, escaping State monopoly of justice and force. Moreover, as Fajardo (*ibidem*) explains, “over the past several decades, trends toward concentration of ownership and the exclusion of the most vulnerable sectors have been affirmed.”⁶⁷ The following process of occupation or colonization and the formation of legislative acts ensuring land rights generated a - still present - high discrepancy between who owns the lands and who concretely works on it: this means that such areas where the State is less present are, on the contrary, up for grab for the forces that have the socio-economic and political force to escape its monopoly. Generally speaking, such areas are also those labeled as “protected”, spaces where as much as productive they can be, human presence should be limited if not absent. Such spaces - around 10% out of the total national lands corresponding to almost 11.3 million hectares (OEA 2020) - are where 90% of illegal cultivations are located, with significant impacts on deforestation. The unbalance in land management becomes even more impactful in light of what was assessed by Oxfam: back in 2018 1% of the most important landowners controlled 81% of the total land. (Oxfam, 2018). The situation has gotten worse since the Sixties, when Colombia experienced the growing pressure of entering a neo capitalist market that pushed the country to exploit monoculture production as much as possible, resulting in a few landholdings becoming bigger and incorporating smaller crops. To this day, the issue of land ownership is still touching deep chords, still fostering socio-political tensions: suffice it to think that it is still a fundamental point of the recently elected president Gustavo Petro’s agenda.⁶⁸

Unfortunately not surprisingly, when addressing inequalities around land management little or no attention has been given by the institutions to a feminist approach: this means that women result, once again, the great absence from such a

⁶⁶ The historical development of the internal armed conflict has of course different and deep roots in the events that took place in Colombia over the last century. Among these, there surely is the experience of Frente Nacional but also the polarization of the political debate in Colombia that saw as the only recognized political voices that of Conservatives and Liberals for over three decades.

⁶⁷ As the original states: “A lo largo de los varios decenios se han afirmado las tendencias hacia la concentracion de la propiedad y la exclusion de los sectores mas vulnerables.”

⁶⁸ This reform is of course too recent to be evaluated. Moreover, it cannot be said to be effectively completed or definitive: for the time being it seems that Petro’s (elected in June 2022) chore strategy should be that of buying lands from previous owners and sell them, at a lower price, to *campesinos*. There still is little mention to the women’s fate in this project.

crucial discussion. Being land ownership such a crucial issue, capable of defining the fate of the entire country and drawing the line between peace and conflict, many have been the attempts to create a more inclusive legislative framework to balance the gender gap.

2.3.1 Rural women and the issue of rural property

We have briefly seen how, historically, many have been the attempts to create a legal framework that ensured women's inclusion. It could be here helpful to understand how a feminist perspective on women's access to productive lands can unveil the link between women's conditions and non-human ones. This also means, practically, understanding what are the obstacles that, to this day, are still preventing women from successfully accessing lands.

When it comes to gaining control over vacant lands,⁶⁹ law ensures women access through the acquisitive prescription of ownership or usucaption.⁷⁰ Of course, such mechanisms are often guided by highly informal processes: occupants or possessors are not usually registered in the Public Registry Offices,⁷¹ making it harder for women to be officially recognized as land owners at a later stage. Moreover, women have usually access to land through what are commonly referred to as secondary rights, meaning that they are land-owners in virtue of family or marital ties. Women's relation to land is therefore often - if not always - necessarily mediated by a male presence. Institutional policies do enforce such tendency, by for example recognizing only one possible titleholder, when it comes to collecting information about the people who apply for land access right. It is not a mere semantic issue: reflecting on statistics and the conception of land policy, it also shapes the way women conceive agrarian policy. (León 2010). In this sense, moreover, even human component is not trained or sensitized in the incorporation of a gendered perspective, reinforcing the barrier between women and land access rights.

⁶⁹ A rare occurrence, that however may be the result of forced displacement of the previous owners.

⁷⁰ According to the National Constitution, to prove the usucapion "it must be demonstrated a direct, peaceful and uninterrupted occupation for at least 5 years, which meets the criteria of the social and ecological function of property."

⁷¹ The Statal register that collects land ownership rights.

But why is land access such an important matter for women? Why is it so crucial to try and include a feminist and gendered perspective around such issue? Depending on the perspective embraced, many could be the possible answers. From a feminist perspective, as Léon (2007) explains, the relationship between land property and feminist issues is related to concepts such as well-being, negotiation power and empowerment.⁷² Regarding well-being, Léon finds how access to rural property is directly related to well-being insofar it concretely influences physical well-being and the risk of poverty. Moreover, such well-being should not be intended as women's individual well-being. As Léon clarifies, in fact, men are more likely to dissipate goods and resources coming from men's land ownership, whereas the entire household benefits when such land is managed by a woman.

In Latin America, as in other regions, there is growing evidence that women are more likely to share, for the benefit of the family, any income they earn individually. In contrast, men are more likely to spend on their individual consumption (especially on liquor and tobacco) part of the income they earn, and that they contribute only a portion of it to the family fund. The division of male income between discretionary consumption and household expenses is almost never a decision made jointly in the family, as it is often made unilaterally by the man.⁷³

Such findings are consistent with the data above presented around unpaid domestic work: women feel the duty of provide for the entire household, whereas men are keen to perceive more strongly their own individuality with respect to the household duties.

With respect to negotiation power and empowerment, Léon (2007) starts from the premises that the household should be seen as a field of relationships based on continuous negotiation between the parties in relation with features such as gender, age and kinship. Of course, other external factors contribute to increase or decrease the

⁷² Rachele Borghi (2020),- recalling Maria Nadotti translation of bell hooks works - provides an interesting critique around the term "empowerment": the scholar argues that such word is soaked with neoliberalism and gender mainstreaming, due also to its frequent use in pinkwashing campaigns. What is interesting here, is that the author identifies as Italian viable alternative "*impoteramento*", freely inspired to the Spanish "*empoderamiento*".

⁷³ Léon 2007, 297.

negotiation power of each household member: property is one of them. Furthermore, Léon (*ibidem*) argues that land access, being more stable and usually more proficuous, gives even more negotiation power than the mere employment, a power that sometimes may even extend outside the households' borders. It is in this sense that land access becomes a tool for female empowerment: giving such increased power negotiation to women, it allows them to re-define more equal social norms.

Building on Léon's considerations, other arguments for the importance of women's right to access lands can be found. On one side, simply looking at the data, it is evident how the disparities in land access are no longer tolerable: half of the population has little access to a primary need, and such half is also the most responsible to fulfill such needs. Moreover, as underlined before, land property is a crucial tension behind the ever-going internal armed conflict; it is only by reassessing and redesigning the map of possession in a more fair way that the tensions can finally come to an end. Rural women in this sense have come over a long process of self-awareness around their role as key actors in subsistence agriculture and food sovereignty. Such process has been developed - and is still to this day developing - in a broader frame that calls for protection, communion and care-work around critical environmental issues; among the others, for example, the worrying topic of biodiversity loss, managed through "alternative"⁷⁴ knowledge producing methods. In this sense, as Benitez (2010) argues, Colombian rural women often move between two dimensions: on one side, they are embedded in a neo capitalist production systems, that calls for high competitiveness resulting in high level of natural resources exploitation; on the other, being also the carriers of care-work, they are also called to take in consideration subsistence practices, generally more interested instead in resources regeneration. This tensions between such different spheres rural Colombian women find themselves embedded in, allows to frame the transformative positive potential of rural women's access to productive land is unleashed. This becomes especially true when considering how such lands are undergoing multiple and multidimensional menaces and threats.

⁷⁴The term "alternative" implies a deviance from a rule, to be considered the "norm". That is why is under commas: I fear is not the best rhetoric option, despite however still being the most immediately comprehensible.

2.3.2 Environmental well-being and its implications for Colombian women

To exhaustively explore the many and multi-layered menaces that threatens Colombian environment well-being, a whole other thesis work should be required. The point is here to try and outline how some human-driven dynamics are currently menacing natural resources and, in doing so, are also threatening women's lives and well-being. Among the many challenges Colombia is called to face, some of the most urgent surely are global-relatable issues such as deforestation, biodiversity protection, or water pollution. Such topics, when benchmarked with the issue of female participation in land management, implies the contextualization of productive lands in the broader frame of natural environment: crops cannot in fact be seen as a separate and self-independent entities, but are rather inscribed in the wider frame of the "natural"⁷⁵ environment. Before therefore outlining the current state of the Colombian environment, it could be relevant to point out how such reality has been - and still is - called to face multiple axes of threats: the environmental challenges just mentioned are in fact, once translated in the Colombian reality, necessarily related to socio-economic and political factors. In this sense, of course, the most destructive practices for non-human lives are to be traced back to an anthropogenic source.

The internal armed conflict obviously plays a big part in the exploitation of resources as well as in the depletion of entire areas where ecosystems services and biodiversity are seriously threatened. When war is involved, little attention is paid to the conservation of the context where the conflicts take place: the Colombian Truth Commission (Comisión de la Verdad 2022) has estimated that the biggest impact the conflict have on environmental conservation is mainly interlinked with the issue of forced displacement previously illustrated. What happens when more vulnerable social groups leave their lands because of reiterated violence is that such lands are occupied either by armed groups, or - even worse for environmental protection- by agribusiness owners who exploit such lands for monocultures. This means that, where there was once a territory whose resources were mostly exploited for subsistence measures - therefore with a great respect for issues such as biodiversity or cyclicity of ecosystem services -

⁷⁵ It goes without saying that, when it comes to ecosystem's studies, every categorization can only serve as a category of analysis, rather than an ontological differentiation.

the new exploiting system is only focused on maximizing profits, with less attention to the well-being of the system itself. Furthermore, in some cases the conflict directly and evidently damages the ecosystems: it is for example the case of explosives detonations, which can affect up to eight hectares of soil, forest and water.⁷⁶ A particular way in which detonations impoverishes environmental well-being are the many documented cases of pipeline blasting,⁷⁷ a practice which produces fires and pollution due to the release of hydrocarbons: in this way, the territory is completely devastated. After all, the exploitation of natural resources and the environment is embedded in the very essence of the conflict itself. A useful thinking tool to understand it is the case of *paramos*⁷⁸ conservation, used as strategic corridors by the guerrillas (ibidem).

The conflicts however also damages ecosystems in much less evident ways. Small land owners are in fact often forced to leave their lands under the pressure of corporations and multinationals. Colombia - as well as other Latin American countries - has based its economy almost entirely on exportations of legal or, of course, illegal goods. Colombia is in fact one of the most important providers of coffee worldwide, being part of the so-called *eje cafetero*. This implies that the demand for coffee plantations is extremely high: international corporations are therefore strongly interested in acquiring - for free, if possible - new territories to implement their intensive *monocultivos*. (Fajardo, 2015). However, monocultures are highly noxious for environmental well-being, since they encourage infestations and impoverish the soil, among other things. To acquire such lands, corporations often use illegal tools such as threats, extortion or even torture: in this way, they push previous owners to leave their

⁷⁶ There are many different reasons behind the detonations that correspond to many different sensitive targets. According to Méndez and Zapata-Rivera (2021) at least 3,659-armed targeting oil infrastructures actions were carried out since the beginning of the conflict: sixty percent of these used explosives, resulting in oil spills and consequent enormous environmental damages. The Commission (2022) recalls how the most emblematic case in this sense has been the December 1990 attack the National Army carried out against the FARC in the rural area of La Uribe. The Army exploded 186 detonations, causing immense damages to the local ecosystem such as soil pollution, water pollution, deforestation and biodiversity loss.

⁷⁷ Starting from 1960 the hydrocarbons transportation infrastructures have been attacked around 2,575 times, releasing 4.1 million barrels of petroleum in the environment. (Méndez and Zapata-Rivera 2021).

⁷⁸ The term páramo indicates a variety of alpine tundra ecosystems, mainly located in the Andes Mountains. It generally presents a tropical vegetation, with cold and humid high altitudes. It is the habitat of a high number of species.

houses because of the high level of productivity or strategic positioning such lands may have. (ibidem). Moreover, as mentioned before, Colombia is also known to be the starting point for the drug dealing market. Of course, this is a big issue on many fronts: the cultivation and production of drugs - to be sold nationally but most importantly internationally- is the main source of financing for illegal armed groups. (Mejia & La Rosa 2017). Leaving apart the considerations about the epidemic of drugs and the effects such substances have on human beings, it is here relevant to consider the non-human side of the issue. Coca crops represent a serious source of law and order problems, because as just said they are the fastest method of insurgency funding. Trying to solve the issue, the Colombian State opted for the coercive reduction of the crops via a mixture of chemical substances applied through arial spraying. One of the main components of such mixture was the well-known glyphosate, that causes incredible damages not only to non-human lives, but to human ones too.⁷⁹ According to the Commission (2022), when the spraying began the toxicity of the mixture had not been examined nor its effects studied or supported by scientific evidence. It goes without saying that such an aggressive approach implies huge risks for ecosystems well-being.

What does all of this imply for Colombian women? On one hand, as Mertens and Segura (1997) explain, the rising of drug traffickers resulted in the increasing of rural women's forced displacement because of drug dealers blackmailing. On the other, the investigations from bodies such as Amnesty International (2020) shows how the Statal response to illegal cultivations seriously threatens private crops that are used as form of subsistence. Since women are generally in charge of household's food security, such aggressive response to illegal cultivations risks to break the relation of care women entertain with the lands. This is also because, once polluted with aggressive chemical elements, soils may take up to decades to recover, alongside with extensive regenerative technologies, that women often can't afford.

As just mentioned, Colombia is a big exporter: however, the country does not rely on agribusiness only, but it is furthermore particularly internationally active in the metals' exportation, coal, nickel, gold and silver, platinum and emeralds (DANE 2021)

⁷⁹ For the reader interested in a brilliant book about the effects the indiscriminate use of pesticides can have, the must-read is of course *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson (1962).

especially. To date, Colombia has registered 7,258 mining rights, 3,104 of which already legally habilitated for the extraction of petroleum.⁸⁰ It goes without saying how mining activities involve highly polluting practices that intersect here with an usual little consideration of civil, human or land rights. In this sense, Francesca Casafina (2016) underlines how mining practices are source of multidimensional injustice: the mining extraction is not only a confined and delimited labor, it also creates and fosters an entire ecosystem based on violence and expropriation. Carbon extraction, for example, is at the base of an highly exploiting system that has many serious implications for women. Casafina's reflections are exemplary in highlighting the multiple ways extractivism endangers women's and non-human's lives. The scholar (ibidem) identifies five main ways in which *megaminerias* threatens the living conditions of the most fragile social groups: 1. Being extractivism based on land-grabbing processes, it makes even more difficult for women to access lands; 2. Where extractivism thrives, traditional subsistence practices – carried out mainly by women – are seriously threatened, therefore depriving women and their family of rights such as food safety; 3. Extractivism completely shakes the social fabric upside down, therefore endangering traditional practices of co-existence with non-human lives; 4. Because of the loss of such traditional practices, cultural traditions are seriously endangered; 5. women's bodies become merely resources to be exploited for services such as sexual performances. More broadly, it is possible to outline many important socio-economic impacts of mining activities like human rights violation, loss of traditional knowledge, militarization; environmentally speaking, extractivism is extremely dangerous for non-human lives, since it causes soils contamination, deforestation, water contamination, and biodiversity loss.

Being responsible of soil impoverishment - therefore affecting productive lands' availability - the environmental threats above mentioned concretely result in many different negative impacts on Colombian women's lives. In particular, when soils are endangered, women's access to subsistence means is threatened too. At the same time, the depletion of resources may also negatively reflect on societal organizations,

⁸⁰ I have personally found the reflections Eriksen (2016) outlines around the level of democracy in carbon extraction plants quite enlightening.

breaking the sense of community that is instead fostered by traditional land management practices. Put it shortly, when the well-being of soils is endangered by the factors above presented, women's access to food and water becomes uncertain. Such menaces completely shape the way lands are approached: from source of subsistence, to be protected, to source of enrichment, to be exploited. This means that the bonds of community are broken by external factors - such as extractivism or internal conflict- becoming instead a competition for survival.

Having seen some of the most important axes of tensions that involve and menace the Colombian ecosystems preservation, how does these concretely translate in the Colombian context? How good is the state of the Colombian ecosystem?

2.3.3 Figures on environmental degradation and its impacts on women's lives

Assessing the state of Colombian environmental well-being is of course a task for longer and better equipped works of research. However there are some tendencies that can be highlighted and serve as benchmarks to assess the concrete transformative potential of more equal land management. Many are the different critical areas non-human lives are struggling in: a great number of them are shareable on an international level, such as biodiversity loss, water pollution or deforestation; others are on the other hand more specific of the Colombian context, such as mangroves or paramos loss. Generally speaking, such issues interconnects with productive land managements on a wide variety of levels: such instance, when species are lost, ecosystem services - such as land productivity - is impoverished.

In this sense, one of the most pressing and relevant issue is that of deforestation: Colombia is witnessing a rapid declining rate of forest, that jumped to a peak of 44% in 2016. (DANE 2017). The situation is especially critical in areas such as the Chocó, where in the next five years up to 10% to 22% of species are believed to be extinct. In the area considered a series of tensions intersect: on one side, due precisely to its rich biodiversity, the region is highly productive in terms of coffee plantations; on the other, it is also crucial for mining activities, with low regulation from statal bodies. Deforestation in Colombia also translates in the loss of paramos, ecosystems widely recognized to be carbon sink. The damages to such natural environments is particularly

serious if considered that around 8,000 people per year die because of air pollution. (DANE 2020).

The fate of paramos is also strictly interlinked with that of water supplies. These ecosystems provide fresh water to 85% of the population; however, they are increasingly turned into coffee monocultures, which, on the contrary, are instead responsible for water supplies depletion. In 2012 only such activities have discharged up to 205 tones of mercury in the ground, deeply polluting groundwaters (Estudio Nacional del Agua 2013). Alongside this worrying situation, the Water Quality Index shows that the industrial sector too is effectively damaging water resources to the point where 11.8 to 19 million people in Colombia are at very high risk from poor water quality (World Bank 2018).

Moreover, water pollution, air pollution and of course deforestation are seriously threatening biodiversity conservation. All these sources of pollution reflects not only on the poor state of land well-being, but also - on a wider scale - on issues such as the temperature, which as already risen by 1°C over the last 20 years with serious implications on non-human and human lives.

It goes without saying how biodiversity loss, deforestation as well as the other environmental distresses above mentioned have a huge repercussion on ecosystems well-being. The very first step in this chain of negative consequences, however, is the loss of ecosystem services that women rely upon for subsistence. When water quality impoverishes, there will be far less clean water for the population drinking needs. If biodiversity is lost, and therefore soil well-being is endangered, this will mean that cultivations will find it more difficult to thrive. If, as considered before, women are often responsible for food security and the satisfaction of households' primary needs, they will also be more likely to be the first ones to be called to deal with such issues. Rural women are the carriers of traditional knowledge and practices around the relation with non-human lives; however, such practices are seriously endangered when inserted in a reality where environmental conditions are above critical - and they are getting worse. Data presented above briefly show how there is less and less marginal space for women to cultivate a respectful and sustainable relation with the ecosystems: there being less and less availability of productive lands, the competition for their control

increases. Of course, being embedded in a socio-economic and political condition as the one before illustrated, women have little hope to see their rights protected and their well-being safeguarded. On the bright side, however, their resistance represents an alternative path to land management, one that can prove to be effectively positive for both human and non-human lives.

Generally speaking, therefore, the Colombian context has of course a lot of point in favor, that make its ecosystems resilient and resistant to the many field of pressure it is forced to face. However, the question that remains is: for how long is it going to be able to bare such pressures?

2.4 Conclusions

This chapter explored the general conditions Colombian women find themselves embedded in: despite the many improvements, their individuality and subjectivity is often ignored, while their living conditions are more than often under the threshold of decency. When it comes to rural women, their claims to a more equal access to land ownership often remain unheard. Emarginated, women often encounter violence since a very early age, a violence that encompasses every possible categorization, intertwining with a fragmented and difficult background where the clashes of the internal conflict are still not solved. The same happens to non-human lives, whose importance only relies on the capacity they have to fulfill human needs. The experiences women and non-human entities find themselves in are therefore often intersected and related: both are left aside when not functional to neo-capitalist patriarchal needs. Of course, as it has been seen, the conflict exacerbates such dynamics, being often the primary axes of tensions: peacekeeping attempts are therefore not just a matter of internal order. Peace, for Colombian women and non-human beings, also means a new way of co-existing and co-living. Such an extensive perspective on peace is at the core of La Ruta's efforts. The next chapter will therefore focus on the Colombian movement, trying to underline how its aim of peace insurance can truly foster a new policy-making ecofeminist practice.

3. La Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres

After having briefly explored the contemporary panorama Colombian women are living in, this second chapter will study and consider how La Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres is shaping said panorama, setting a concrete example of the regenerative potential of ecofeminist practices. To start such reflections, it will be necessary to introduce the movement's origins, its scope as well as its missions and values. The movement's primary aim is that of ensuring women's inclusion in the peace-making processes that follows the conflicts above presented. This overall mission unravels in a multitude of different actions and positionings. Of extreme relevance to the analysis of ecofeminist regenerative practices precisely, such instance, is the method La Ruta adopted to create a collective inclusive memory, a necessary precondition for peace maintenance: by sharing their stories, women recognize each other's pain and in each other's pain. Re-centering the collection of data around women's lived experiences means fostering connections through mutual respect, which potentially function as an effective policy making tool. In this frame, that little seem to deal with environmental issues, I will explore how La Ruta practically engages with female access to productive lands - another precondition for peace-making - both directly and indirectly; in doing so, the importance of implementing the sense of community between women also means to rise the point of the relationship between women's rural inclusion and environmental well-being. To conclude, I will try to outline the ways in which the movement addresses land access issues, and how does this interacts with the paradigm of sustainable development. Such reflections will then be the framework of reference for the very last sections of this chapter, where concrete results from the interrelation between inclusive female land management and environmental well-being will be presented.

3.1 La Ruta: an overview

3.1.1 Origins

La Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres, often simply referred to as La Ruta, is a Colombian movement whose political stances mostly revolves around denouncing and rejecting any form of violence. To understand how deeply the movement cares for the feminist cause, it is necessary to take a step back to 1996 when Urabá, a subregion of the Antioquia Department in the North-Western part of the country, was one of the most violent places in Colombia.⁸¹ There are many reasons why the conflict erupted there so particularly violently. On one side, the dynamics there at play much had to do with what has been defined *as el problema de la tierra*. The area is in fact mostly known for being one neuralgic center of banana plantations; the concentration of agrarian productive lands, resulting in a clustering of highly extractivist neocapitalist actors, led to multiple cases of land dispossessions - much of which still not solved to this day - therefore fostering an increasing sense of frustration.⁸² For that reason, it was no surprise how, if compared to national standards, the overlapping of labor struggles with the military war was there particularly worsened. Consequently, the importance of land-related conflicts raised *guerrilla's* - and especially FARC's - attention and involvement in the area, therefore causing the rise of paramilitary armed groups to gather as well. Moreover, locals often treated said armed groups with an increasing sense of ambiguity, making it harder for disputes to find a univocal solution. These multiple axes of tensions were furthermore worsened by the population's claims for a more democratic land management system, which obviously questioned and defied the agrarian elites. (Comisión de la Verdad 2020).

⁸¹ Reports seem to suggest that, especially since 2006, the region is now facing much quieter and safer times, thanks to the demobilization of paramilitary forces such as the AUC (*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*), once particularly active in the area. However, as said reports also highlight, the issue of land access rights is, on the contrary, getting worse: as the Forjando Futuros database states, 93% of alleged land theft cases have still not been legally resolved. This is obviously fostering social, economic and political tensions and conflict. (Colombia Reports, 2019).

⁸² See previous note for reference.

From the Nineties onward the already problematic intersection of these tension lines lead to a peak of violence, translated into the perpetration of at least eighteen massacres in the years between 1994 and 1996.⁸³ (Comisión de la Verdad 2020). The most notorious one, dated 1994, is called *Massacre de La Chinita*: FARC's Fifth Front broke into a fundraising organized by the locals to buy scholar supplies, killing 35 people.⁸⁴ Such a terrible massacre echoed the national media, arising the attention of a group of women coming from all over the region: once together, the growing awareness of the burden that conflict placed-and still places-on women's shoulders acted as a driving force to convert anger into action. La Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres was born. The movement was therefore originated by the desire of a comeback, as a bottom-up effort of women to protect themselves, their beloved and their properties from the destructive patriarchal attacks the conflicts induced. Moreover, such desire of ransom combined with the consciousness that, despite being powerless when isolated, if united women had the necessary strenght to oppose such violence. That is why an embrional group of feminist organizations gathered in Antioquia in the aftermath of La Chinita and decided that they could effectively do something to protest against such havoc.

Something had to be done for the women of Urabá. [...] The proposal was to travel to Urabá. It was as simple as that: to reach this corner of Antioquia and embrace each of the women who were suffering there. [...] During a security council in Antioquia, in the presence of the governor and the undersecretary for gender issues, a nun from the *Renacer de Apartadó* group assured that 95% of the women in a town in Urabá had been raped.⁸⁵

⁸³Entrevistas de la Comisión de la Verdad: <https://web.comisiondelaverdad.co/actualidad/noticias/uraba-asi-avanza-la-comision-de-la-verdad-en-ese-territorio>, last seen on 6th October 2022.

⁸⁴ To read a detailed summary of the events, an El Espectador article about that day can be found at the following link: <https://www.elespectador.com/judicial/esperanzados-que-murieron-hace-20-anos-en-la-chinita-articulo-470275/>, last seen on the 6th October 2022.

⁸⁵ My translation from the original: “Había que hacer algo por las mujeres de Urabá. [...] La propuesta era hacer un viaje hasta Urabá. Así de simple: llegar hasta este rincón de Antioquia y abrazar a cada una de las mujeres que allí sufrían. [...] En un consejo de seguridad de Antioquia, en presencia del gobernador y de la subsecretaria de asuntos de genero, una monja del grupo Renacer de Apartadó aseguró que en una población de Urabá el 95% de las mujeres habían sido violadas.” (La Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres 2003, 13).

This gathering of feminist organizations fueled an increasing sense of indignation: women recognized themselves in each other's experiences. Women all over the country lived in fact in a continuous state of fear, violence and abuse and yet no efforts - a part from women themselves - were made to change the situation. Violence against women was so common to be almost normalized. That is why on 25th November 1996 a 40-buses long caravan reached the Mutatá municipality in Urabá where, according to the testimonies, the whole town was waiting for the thousands of women coming from all over the country. It is in this "moving moment of a collective hug from women of any culture" (La Ruta Pacifica de las Mujeres 2003, 15)⁸⁶ that La Ruta originated. In such a jubilant atmosphere, the newly born movement redacted the *Declaración fundante de las mujeres de Colombia en Ruta Pacifica para la resolución de conflictos*. This is where the organization's name came from: a long colorful human snake made of bodies coming from all over Colombia, walking together on a path drenched with blood and violence toward a new, better future.

3.1.2 Operational organization

Starting from such premises, the organization has been incredibly growing over the past decades. To this day - functioning as a clumping force for feminist associations - the movement is formed of more than 300 organizations coming from different areas of the country. Based on women's desire to be included in the democratic processes of peace-making and State (re)building, the movement places itself in a level in between the Statal and local dimension. Its main purpose is in fact that of creating a physical and social space for women's organization to meet, dialogue and work together in order to build an inclusive future for Colombia, both nationally and locally. To this day, La Ruta is composed of representatives of more than 300 organizations. Geographically, this translates into a territorial presence in 142 municipalities, located in 18 Colombian departments: Antioquia, Atlántico, Bogotá, Bolívar, Caldas, Caquetá, Cauca, Guajira, Chocó, Huila, Magdalena, Nariño, Norte de Santander, Putumayo, Quindío, Risaralda,

⁸⁶ In the original it is an "emocionante momento de abrazos entre mujeres de todas la culturas".

Santander y Valle del Cauca. Thanks to the widespread influence, the movement's sphere of action reaches up to 10.000 women.⁸⁷

Operationally speaking, La Ruta is divided into nine *Regionales* each of which makes reference then to the *Asamblea Nacional* and to the *Junta Directiva*, the highest representative bodies. This conformation allows for the movement to be equally balanced between a certain level of local independence, while at the same time finding spaces and places for the whole Ruta to democratically dialogue and debate about topics of national relevance.⁸⁸ As for the factual lines of action, La Ruta works extensively to expand its presence all over the country, by entering into contact and associating with many different feminist and female organizations. On the other hand, the movement fosters an educational approach around female rights issues by organizing workshops, conferences, and meetings. At the same time, precisely to implement this line of work, La Ruta has founded a formative path called *Escuelas Trenzando Saberes y Poderes*, thought to help women understand the potential of collective feminist practices.⁸⁹ Moreover, the organization also engages as a public - and legal - subject with governmental and international bodies such as the UN to advocate for the recognition and insurance of female rights.

Time-wise, to ensure its mission's success, La Ruta operates according to five-year strategic plans. The first one, covering the quinquennium 2016-2020, is called *Las mujeres construyen paz territorial*.⁹⁰ The main aim of such plan was to ensure women's participation in the peace negotiation processes, as well as to raise awareness around the multidimensionality violence against women may assume. As the *Evaluación diagnóstica*⁹¹ (2021) shows, many have been the positive impacts La Ruta's operations have had on female lives. Among these, there is a widespread more easily acknowledgment on a socio-political level of episodes of violence against women, a higher number of registered reports of abuses - intended in all of its forms - as well as

⁸⁷For a better-detailed picture of the organization's numbers, please visit: <https://rutaPacifica.org.co/wp/quienes-somos>, last seen on 13th October 2022.

⁸⁸ For a more detailed description of the internal structure of the movement, please see: <https://rutaPacifica.org.co/wp/estructura/>, last seen on 11th October 2022.

⁸⁹ More here: <https://rutaPacifica.org.co/wp/escuela-trenzando-saberes-y-poderes/>, last seen on 11th October 2022.

⁹⁰ In English: "Women build territorial peace"

⁹¹ In English: "Diagnostic evaluation"

higher awareness and attention toward the need for psychosocial support for women. (Ruta Pacíficade las Mujeres 2021). Moreover, as it will be better analyzed in the next pages, much has also been done locally to reassign dispossessed land to female landowners. To date, the movement is currently involved in the 2021-2025 strategic plan. Internally, the plan aims at increasing the number of organizations cooperating with La Ruta, with a focus on strengthening its presence in rural areas.⁹² Externally, instead, it aims at implementing the Peace Accords by continuously working to implement awareness about violence against women as well as by reinforcing female protection strategies in the areas most hit by the conflicts.

3.1.3. Values and missions

Movements such as La Ruta Pacíficade las Mujeres are hardly definable: the multiple issues it faces and the many struggles it tries to solve are translated into a multiplicity of actions and positionings, making it hard to pigeonhole such movement in a few words. In this sense, to try and avoid as much as possible any kind of interference from my part, it makes sense to start reasoning around La Ruta through the words that the movement itself uses on its website:

The Ruta Pacífica is a feminist movement with nationwide political action, which works for the negotiated settlement of the armed conflict in Colombia as well as to make visible the impact of war on the lives and bodies of women; it is pacifist, antimilitarist and builder of an ethic of nonviolence in which justice, peace, equity, autonomy, freedom and the recognition of otherness are fundamental principles.⁹³

As the excerpt affirms, the movement's primary value is that of pacifism and rejection of violence in all of its forms: "No parimos hijos ni hijas para la guerra" is its main

⁹² As the original document states, one of the first points for the organization to reach is in fact that of a "Mayor número de organizaciones en la Ruta y especialmente de mujeres jóvenes, campesinas y académicas" (Ruta Pacíficade las Mujeres 2021, 3.)

⁹³ As the original version states: "La Ruta Pacífica es un movimiento feminista con accionar político de carácter nacional, que trabaja por la tramitación negociada del conflicto armado en Colombia y por hacer visible el impacto de la guerra en la vida y cuerpo de las mujeres; es pacifista, antimilitarista y constructora de una ética de la No violencia en la que la justicia, la paz, la equidad, la autonomía, la libertad y el reconocimiento de la otredad son principios fundamentales." (Taken from: <https://rutaPacifica.org.co/wp/quienes-somos/>, last seen on 6th October 2022).

motto.⁹⁴ In this sense, all the actions the movement carries out are strictly pacifist. That is why, as the following pages will present, La Ruta's preferred way of action are pacifist demonstrations, such as sit-ins or marches.

As can be read in the founding declaration,⁹⁵ many are the main points the organization will grow around. Translated into the country's specificity, the movement's primary efforts are oriented toward working to ensure female inclusion in peace negotiation processes. This tension toward a collective and inclusive peace flows, in the movement's view, through the recognition of the brutality whereby the conflict(s)⁹⁶ has violently impacted women's bodies and lives predominantly, either directly and indirectly. Therefore, precisely to ensure the successful (re)construction of the State social, economic and political fabric, La Ruta claims the need for a new perspective about the conflict, one that takes into consideration a multilayered gendered approach. This means dealing with violence all-around: it is not just a matter of denouncing past traumas and any form of violence women had to face during the high-intensive phases of the conflicts. La Ruta also tries to unfold the social, economic and political roots behind violence against women, trying to unveil the more profound level of analysis without however sacrificing the operative and urgent need for action. Taking in considerations land access, for example, the movement advocates for more inclusive and intersectional legislations, striving for a real and concrete political justice while also understanding and studying how forced displacement and the consequent loss of lands impacts women's everyday life.

Constantly trying to understand and highlight the way national and local dimensions impact each other, La Ruta also unveils the necessity for an inclusive memory in a feminist's sense. That is why dealing with (re)construction also necessarily means dealing with women's inclusion retrospectively, therefore interpreting inclusivity as tool for the (re)creation of a gendered-careful collective memory. Most importantly, stretching the gaze toward possible futures, La Ruta makes inclusiveness a real,

⁹⁴ Translated: "We did not give birth to sons and daughters for war".

⁹⁵ The reference is here to the *Declaración fundante de las mujeres de Colombia en Ruta Pacifica para la resolución de conflictos* previously mentioned. The document is divided in into a *Manifestamos* and a *Declaramos* sections, to reiterate both the operative soul of the movement but to also recall its function of space of debate and dialogue.

⁹⁶ See previous chapter for considerations about the conflict complexity and multiplicity.

concrete instrument for land governance and policy-making. To understand the real transformative scope that the movement's project has, it is necessary to briefly explore its main features. On the one hand, the movement's innovative approach to the processes of (re)creating a collective memory will be analyzed in light of its being revolutionary: instead of considering statistics and data, the movements in fact re-center the discourse around the subjectivity of women's lived experiences. The constructive potential of such approach becomes evident when benchmarked against the realization of how women's voices have long remained unheard; once unleashed, they become bearers of a different perspective on the conflict itself, and thus on concepts such as 'peace' or 'justice'. Only once the pain that binds women's experience to conflict's dynamics is understood, it is possible to explore how precisely this commonality becomes a vehicle for the identification of relationality as a tool for real territorial policy. Among the suffering endured by women in the Colombian context, as anticipated in the first chapter, the experience of lack of access to land is essential. By then analyzing the issue in relation to the relational approach proposed by La Ruta, and contextualizing it within the movement's mission of achieving inclusive peace, it will be possible to reason about how these elements intersect in light of the issue of natural resource management. The underlying question will thus be to try to understand how La Ruta's work, while not directly dealing with environmental issues in the strict sense, actually ends up as a bearer of land management practices that are concordant with the goals of sustainable development. The importance of women's access to land, which will necessarily have to be analyzed in light of women's access to policy-making spaces as well, thus translates into a question that, as we will see, is not merely anthropocentric, indeed. All of these factors will be the subject of analysis in this chapter, which, by focusing precisely on the movement's work in favor of real and concrete inclusive peace, ends up, as we shall see, influencing environmental well-being as well.

3.1.4. A pervasive ecological conscience

What is truly of interest for the sake of this work, however, is the surprising pervasive presence of the movement's ecological conscience. At least at a first glance, La Ruta's aim seems in fact to have little to do with environmental matters. The stances and

claims, mostly politically or socially oriented, are as anticipated mostly centered on the total rejection of violence, as well as in the identification of possible paths for peace negotiations. Briefly put, the movement's anthropocentric focus is undeniable. Better analyzing the movement's positioning, it however turns out that said anthropocentrism may not be as all-encompassing as it seems. La Ruta's claims and missions are in fact based on the acknowledgment of the deep level of interconnection between peace achievement and what is (now) commonly known as 'sustainable development'.⁹⁷ This link, better explored in the next sections, has been developed by the movement through time, conjugating and focusing on the struggles for female access to productive lands especially. It seemed here important to point out how the recognition of environmentally-wise issues - which may often seem forgotten or indirectly addressed by the movement itself - is actually a premise that La Ruta never questions, becoming a precondition to deal with concepts such as conflicts, peace, or negotiations. Concretely, not only their claim is that of never forgetting the "political commitment to protect our planet"⁹⁸ (La Ruta Pacificade las Mujeres 2003, 17) , but La Ruta also engages to "speak up against the upcoming ecological disaster"⁹⁹ (ibidem, 17) as well as to always remember that the resources invested in wars are always the ones that should instead be invested to foster a sustainable development, being it a crucial prerequisite for a more peaceful society to actually exist.¹⁰⁰ (ibidem, 18). To reach said objectives, as anticipated, the only weapon they are willing to fence is "the dialoguing and committed word"¹⁰¹ (ibidem, 18.). As previously said, these statements can in all effects be considered as founding principles of the line of action that will progressively be improved with time, experiences, and dialogue. To better define its positioning, such instance, in 1997 La Ruta called for a general assembly of international feminist

⁹⁷ The term, commonly accepted by the mainstream media as well as by a great part of the academic world, is here in between commas to underline the critical issues it implies. Many are in fact the arising voices suggesting such terminology, especially as in what concerns the "development" part, can be considered linked to colonial, imperialist, and capitalist roots: all things that are at least partially in contraposition with what sustainability should be. (Planetary Project 2020).

⁹⁸ The original goes "No olvidaremos nuestro compromiso político de proteger a nuestro planeta, la madre tierra".

⁹⁹ In Spanish: "Nos pronunciamos contra el desastre ecológico que se avecina a las entrañas de estas tierras".

¹⁰⁰ As the original document goes: "Siempre recordamos que se invierten en la guerra los recursos que deberían invertirse en el desarrollo. Sin desarrollo sostenible y sustentable, no habrá paz".

¹⁰¹ As the original states, "la palabra dialogante y comprometida".

movements known as *Cabildo Internacional de Mujeres por la Paz*. What is interesting to notice here is how said document not only fosters the previously mentioned positions and values, but most importantly start to translate the ecological consciousness in a more concrete way by directly identifying landowners and multinationals as equally responsible for the atmosphere of violence and violations the country has been living in, as well as historically guilty of actively promoting the conflict. The denouncement clearly becomes the first step forward to the conflict(s) resolution: by reassessing responsibilities - especially less evident ones¹⁰²- La Ruta defines how pervasive, and crucial, the issue of female land ownership actually is.

3.2 Toward a gendered memory about the conflict(s)

As anticipated, the *Comisión de Verdad y Memoria de las Mujeres Colombianas* is one of the most important bodies of the movement. Concretely, La Ruta defines the Commission as the result of

[A process of] accumulation of the Ruta Pacífica as a medium-term strategy to set the dialogued negotiation of the Colombian armed conflict through the voices of women. The strategy aims at making women themselves the central axis for the construction of peace and reconciliation, and thus being able to break the silence to which they have been historically relegated. Its implementation is conceived as a process where women who have been victims of violence against their lives and bodies are placed at the center, together with their contributions, demands, and vindications.¹⁰³

The Commission's main aim is that of improving the monitoring, verification, and protection in cases of conflict-related violence against women in order to expose war's overall impacts on women's lives and bodies. Operatively speaking, the Commission is formed by the National coordinator - who to this day is Marina Gallego - that works

¹⁰² For a better in-depth focus on the matter, please refer to the previous chapter.

¹⁰³ From La Ruta's website, Comisión de Verdad y Memoria section (<https://rutaPacifica.org.co/wp/que-es-la-comision/>, last seen on 13th October 2022).

together with the regional coordinators, and five other collaborators, for a total of 27 figures.

What is surprising and revolutionary, however, is the methodology La Ruta decided to implement to carry out such a project: collecting testimonies.¹⁰⁴ Where the common mainstream narrative focuses on hard data and figures, La Ruta decides to re-center the discourse around the subjectivity of women. However, the movement mode of act should by no means be interpreted as a less reliable source. What instead such a method does - that canonic statistics fails instead to do - is defying the common highly biased approach¹⁰⁵ to violence studies whose tendency is that of agglomerating facts carelessly of the gendered dynamics at play in such scenarios, ending up offering an often-distorted overview of how the conflict intersects and interacts with gendered processes.

In particular, La Ruta points out how crucial a feminist approach should be when it comes to concepts and processes such as the ones of justice, truth, and reparation. What happens when a gendered gaze enters such dynamics is that a new light is shed and new truths are unleashed. Such instance, focusing on real, lived stories helps to understand how the concept of 'justice' is in fact, for women, relative: as explored in the first chapter, the path to restorative justice is in fact fraught with obstacles and difficulties. For that reason, women often find themselves having to deal with longer journeys, full of obstacles and socio-political barriers, with little guarantee to be lawfully compensated. This is especially relevant, as highlighted by La Ruta and as presented below, especially in the field of rural justice.

3.2.1 The usefulness of testimonies collection

¹⁰⁴ It goes without saying that such testimonies were collected following a rather clear and strict methodology. Such process is divided in two moments, being the first of the documentation followed by the codification and systematization of the cases. Both these moments are then sub-divided in different phases. What is here particularly interesting surely is the choice of the interviewer, chosen as someone with whom the witness can somewhat identify or connect with. This is because “in contexts like the Colombian one, where there is a systematic practice of human rights violations, memories are limited by fear, and working with interviewers whom the women trust is very important in order to overcome the fear and generate conditions enabling the sharing of atrocious facts”. (Comisión de Verdad y Memoria 2013, 6).

¹⁰⁵ Explored in the first chapter.

As anticipated in the first chapter, when it comes to studying and analyzing the way the conflict impacted the population, a feminist approach is almost never taken into consideration. In this sense, women's experiences get lost in the general data. This is paradoxical, if considered how "women are the ones who bear the consequences of war" (Ruta Pacíficade las Mujeres 2013, 3). On one side, as La Ruta underlines, in patriarchal society women are the ones in charge of the familiar well-being, both in a sense of being active care-taker, hence making sure primary goods are ensured. Similarly, they are also the ones called to deal with the problems brought about by the loss or disappearance of family members. At the same time, this level of responsibility often does not translate into a correspondent level of independence or autonomy, quite the opposite. At best, women are forced to work for male relatives with little or any socio-political recognition, when not subjected to varied forms of violence and abuse. (Ruta Pacíficade las Mujeres 2013). The kind of relationality here at play, the one where Colombian woman is embedded - a type of power-relations that's a crucial point in gender studies - is clearly worsened by the conflict dynamics. Indeed, when this power dynamic is viewed in light of the movement's attempt to create an inclusive path to peace, it becomes evident how precisely the lack of a vision that considers the gender approach is harmful. Such instances, when it comes to reparation policies these are often translated into - often uneven - economical compensations: surely useful, yet functional only to the maintenance of the status quo, since they completely lack any change-maker efforts in the dynamics just now explored. Truth and justice, in Colombian women's experience, surely deal on some level with economic discrimination and disadvantages. Nonetheless, considering the monetary side of the issue is not sufficient at all.

In comparison to the suffering and the effective reconstruction of one's life project, [economic compensation] places an extra burden on the women who, given their conditions of precariousness and poverty, have to manage to go and claim it. [...] For women, the search for truth and memory based on their own experiences and feelings means deconstructing the pain.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Ruta Pacíficade las Mujeres 2013, 3.

There is, in fact, another deeper level, one that deals with the physical and psychological pain the conflict causes to women that needs to be considered if peace-making processes are to be truly successful. That is one of the main reasons behind the effectiveness of the unorthodox operating method of La Ruta.

Such painful yet necessary process of memory reconstruction through testimonies collection implies a series of beneficial collective and individual consequences for the wholesome feminist recovery process of women's traumas. On one end, as already clarified, putting testimonies at the center means making such voices visible, giving them a safe social and political space where they feel entitled to transmit their pain. At the same time, sharing traumatic experiences fosters a sense of community and belonging, where proposals from women can be collected and then presented to governmental bodies.

In this way, (re)experiencing trauma collectively is not just pain for its own sake: it means, on the contrary, reclaiming one's centrality in one's lived experience, making it a vehicle for identification and thus creating collectivity. On a more personal and intimate level, sharing traumas and stories of lived or witnessed violence can become a way for the woman to make such experiences more psychologically bearable, lighting an otherwise too-heavy burden. And once these silenced histories are made public, they can become the carrier of a new kind of relationality: sharing pain, worries, and hurtful truth encourage a sense of recognition in one another. Recognizing the common matrix of individual experiences becomes a tool for resilience, going beyond the individual and sphere and translating instead in a sense of reciprocal respect and acknowledgement.

3.2.2 The role of Truth and Memory Commission in peacekeeping

After having analyzed and synthesized the collected testimonies, the Commission produced a two-tome-long study published in 2013 and called *La verdad de las mujeres*.¹⁰⁷ For the sake of brevity here required this section will mainly focus on the final section of the English shortened version, published under the same (translated) title in 2017. The last chapter, called *Perspective of the women who participated in the*

¹⁰⁷ In English: "Women's truth".

process of the Truth Commission, can help to better define and comprehend women's perceptions both of La Ruta's activities and actions as well as of the very context in which they are embedded. This point becomes fundamental to have a better understanding of how women relate to the conflict and to its consequent resolution, in order to deal with how specifically land ownership issues are perceived and dealt with.

The first thing to stand out is the specific claim that armed groups, of whatever side, political belonging, or level of legality, have brutally shaken social cohesion by introducing arms in a once safe place and “take the land or to oblige the people to comply with their orders and fulfill their demands”. (Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres 2017, 74). Precisely because proven guilty of having caused such a rupture, it is women's demand that such actors actively participate in fostering peace-ensuring processes. Women's entitlement to be the carrier of such demand comes exactly from their position of most hurt identities due to conflict-related dynamics, as the first chapter has explored. Surely, the level of damage greatly varies when observed through intersectional lenses. However, La Ruta recognizes how the conflict's influences have been totalizing, interesting - in different ways, of course - all of the women's experiences in the country, who *all* encountered violence under its many forms along the way. Building on the consideration presented in the first chapter, it is here relevant to see how La Ruta legitimizes women's pain by identifying the concrete violence these women have been subjected to. As the data shows, many are in fact the way violence concretely presents itself in Colombian women's lives.

Violations of human rights against women				
Harassment and destruction	Physical, psychological, and sexual torture	Violations to personal freedom	Forced displacement	Violations of the right to life
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Requisitions - Forced entry - Threats - Being followed or surveilled - Destruction of goods/property 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Psychological torture - Physical torture - Sexual torture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Arbitrary detentions - Forced recruitment - Taken hostage - Confinement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Individual, familial, and collective displacement - Rural > Urban 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Extrajudicial executions - Forced disappearances - Attacks and injuries
64%	59.3%	10%	73.77%	72.6%

Figure 1. *The figure shows how different - yet pervasive - Colombian women's experience is.* Ruta Pacificade las Mujeres 2017, 80.

As Figure 1. highlights, many are the axes of variation when female experience of violence is considered.¹⁰⁸ Certainly, as before said, given experiences vary depending on several factors presented above, especially if considered through an intersectional approach. As Crenshaw (1991) and many scholars after her argues, multiple are the axes of discrimination an individual may encounters. Such axes - like class, age, skin color or sexual orientation - are strongly present in a reality as the Colombian one, with a high level of demographic variation (La Rosa and Mejia 2017) according to factors such as ethnical belonging or geographical localization. In this sense, it no surprise that non-white, rural, poor women are differently - and worst - impacted by violence than white, urban and middle-class ones. However, looking at the results of the Commission's work, and benchmarking them with the consideration presented in the

¹⁰⁸ As seen before, lives and bodies of female individuals are the most subjected to conflict's dynamics. Such dynamics obviously vary according to a multitude of factors. Moreover, the experience of violence needs to be framed as a continuum; that is why the categories above mentioned are to be understood as categories of analysis, not as concrete different experiences. Of course, for this reason the list is not completed. Nor can be forgotten how important, in this sense, the concept of 'intersectionality' is: in a country where afro-colombians and indigenous are still evidently living in a disadvantaged situation, women's experience have to be read in relations to multidimensional discrimination.

first chapter, it becomes clear that violence is an overall ongoing constant in the lives of Colombian women. La Ruta finds in fact that “each family has been affected by systematic violations of human rights against some of its members”. (Ruta Pacíficade las Mujeres 2017, 80). The pervasiveness of the female experience of violence is a quite fundamental premise to be able to correctly frame land dispossession issues and the consequent claim for female access. What is never to forget, in fact, is that is not just a “mere” matter of violating private property rights, and neither can it be read as an issue of income reduction. As above seen, land dispossession and the forced displacement phenomena that it causes are inserted in a web of pervading and penetrating violence: the expropriation often passes through sexual assaults, homicides, hostage-taking, and much more. Women are - or were - forced to move to save themselves, their children, or other family members. In doing so, however, they often end up becoming victims of other forms of violence. (Ruta Pacíficade las Mujeres 2017). That is also one of the reasons why female access to productive lands is not just an issue of equal income, but rather the recognition of a systematic violence problem, a way to untangle and unveil how deeply women have to fight, every day, for their bodily and psychological safety. One cannot talk about peace without considering women's access to land.

3.3 La Ruta and women's access to productive lands

Recognizing the interconnectedness of land access with issues such as peace-making and violence perpetration necessarily also means considering the role inclusive public participation plays in the (re)construction of the country. Such entanglement should serve as a premise to reason around its effects on future sustainable development scenarios. Having in fact considered the current national situation - presented in the first chapter - these concluding sections will explore how such dynamics interacts with the two instances La Ruta fosters, being it the efforts toward more inclusive gendered futures and the focus on relationalities-creation. The next pages will therefore study and address the issue of land management through a gendered inclusive approach. Moreover, by referring to La Ruta's positioning and actions, I will reflect on how such inclusive approach actually goes beyond a mere anthropocentric focus, trying to understand how the non-human sphere reacts to inclusive land management. What I

would like to argue here, in fact, is that La Ruta's efforts in fostering gendered inclusivity also result in overall increased well-being, for both human and non-human. As already explored, land dispossession experiences - widely shared by a great part of the most disadvantaged sectors of the population - have an intrinsically gendered dimension that should never be forgotten. The choice of La Ruta of basing its research on testimonies collection allows to detach forced displacement and land dispossession from a mere matter of data or numbers, unveiling the more profound attachment female individuals have with lands, as well as the traumatic experiences that come from the obliged moving. As the movement suggests, in fact, from the collected testimonies a sense of "grief for the loss of feeling, of land, and of the life that was" (Comisión de la Verdad y Justicia 2017, 14) transpires. In the Commission's own words: "This violence that separates the civil population from the land acts deliberately against women because they are the key to the existence of life under humane conditions". (Comisión de la Verdad y Justicia 2017, 14). Without falling into essentialist consideration, La Ruta argues that on a practical level, being domestic works often - if not always - women's duty, makes females the ones capable to maintain and ensure the conditions for minimum human well-being. Or, better said:

[...] the violence focuses on women because they are the ones who have historically maintained, and continue to maintain, the conditions of humanity understood to be the minimum standards for quality of life (shelter, food, hygiene, education, etc.) necessary to sustain people. And beyond the material conditions of life, although not separate from them, it is above all the women who create relationships that humanize and civilize, giving identity, recognition, and value to people; creating close ties among family and community relationships that form the social fabric. Violence against women, then, has as its objective to undermine the humane conditions of the people, as it is the work of the women to care for one's body, the relationships and spaces of life that create these conditions.¹⁰⁹

In this sense, land dispossession is not only a matter of individual experiences or suffering. Rather, it represents a brutal and pervasive way to destroy the web of

¹⁰⁹ Comisión de la Verdad y Justicia 2017, 34.

relationships and relationality every female individual entertains both with other human beings as well as with non-human ones. Such a web of relationships, however, escapes common data representations or hard figures. It is therefore precisely because of the power unleashed by the recognition of the importance of such way of intra-acting that La Ruta's work is revolutionary. Re-centering the focus on female experiences does not only mean creating a sense of community between female lives and perceptions. It means recognizing how important and valuable inclusive and respectful relationships are. It is in that sense that the apparently anthropocentric agenda of peace ensuring actually loses its anthropocentrism. By creating a sense of community based on shared gendered experiences and worldviews, and recognizing how fundamentally gendered the experience of land management is, the potential of female landownership to ensure environmental recovery becomes evident. La Ruta's mission of ensuring inclusive peace processes necessarily contains these acknowledgments, making its works effective not only for social, political, and economic improvement but also - and here most importantly - environmental recovery.

3.3.1 Land access as peacekeeping tool

As already explored, in the Colombian context women's access to productive lands has much to do with dispossession practices and the consequently forced displacement it causes. That is why the issue is often framed in the sense of restorative or reparative justice. The most important publication of La Ruta in this sense is without a doubt the 2015 report called *Acceso de las mujeres a la tierra: realidades de la restitucion y el desarrollo rural para las mujeres*. In such work, the organization studies in depth the situation of women's access to productive lands. In this sense, what La Ruta does is framing the issue in terms of forced displacement and its effects on women's lives and bodies. When in fact agrarian contexts become the field for violent, conflict-related neo capitalist processes to develop, can women still safely take care of said lands? And when forced to move, how do they eventually come back to their roots under a safe public legal framework? That is why, after presenting the legal framework, already explored here in the first chapter, the study proceeds to assess the situation of women's access to productive lands, especially in the cases of land dispossession. What will be of

interest in this section is, starting from the considerations provided by La Ruta, to briefly provide a context of the organization's perspective and approach to the matter. The study bases its premises on the already mentioned stance that “land is a fundamental women’s right”¹¹⁰ since, as previously explored,

[...] land use and the fight for it are one of the primary causes of the Colombian armed conflict, landownership policy becomes a fundamental tool to reach a real, long-lasting peace that includes social justice, especially from a territorial perspective.¹¹¹

Embedded in the wider effort for peace achievement, it becomes evident how female access to land ownership is not and cannot be a secondary objective for La Ruta. On the contrary, the organization identifies it as one of the main prerequisites for a concrete new, more equal future to be built. Land ownership access has however here to be read on multiple levels. On a global level, being Colombia, a country based for a great part on an agrarian tradition, the role female identities play in land management becomes a fundamental tool of analysis for understanding the conflict dynamics. In this sense, female access to land becomes a way to design and ensure social peaceful stability. On the other, on a more individual level, land ownership becomes a way to economically self-emancipate, while also regaining political agency. As a matter of fact, “women, not being landowners [...] have a limited access to financial services”. (Ruta Pacíficade las Mujeres 2015, 11). These two perspectives on the issue are the ones La Ruta analyses to foster its claims of inclusivity. This is the main reason, at least initially, behind the movement’s efforts toward female inclusion in land ownership. The commitment, elaborated since the very beginning as previously recalled, is actually then translated into the strategic plans previously presented. What is here of particular interest is the currently active plan.¹¹² Particularly, it is worth noting the recognition of the necessity of carrying out incisive actions to include a gendered approach to the actions of the Peace

¹¹⁰ Or, as the original states: “la tierra es un derecho fundamental para las mujeres” (Ruta Pacíficade las Mujeres 2015, 1).

¹¹¹ Ruta Pacíficade las Mujeres 2015, p. 50.

¹¹² Which develops over the time-span 2021-2025.

Agreement, translating particularly into what is contemplated in the Reforma Rural Integral.¹¹³ It is also in the said strategic plan that La Ruta introduces for the first time the Sustainable Development Goals¹¹⁴ as a benchmark to assess its action successes, therefore legitimizing the existence of an interrelation between female inclusion in rural reforms and sustainable development.

3.3.2 Women's access to the land and the SDGs framework

Relating inclusive landownership with the SDGs framework, therefore establishing their validity as useful benchmarks, allows for many different considerations to be done. Of course, it goes without saying how La Ruta mainly operates considering two out of the seventeen targets, being number 5 - Gender Equality - and number 16 - Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions. Nevertheless, La Ruta itself does not obviously fail to recognize the deep interconnection that each SDG maintains with the others.¹¹⁵ As the UN recalls, SDGs have been designed according to the principle that

[...] eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. [For that, SDGs are] integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social, and environmental.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ As the plan itself states: “Fuerte incidencia para que las acciones del Acuerdo de Paz más relacionados con el empoderamiento económico de las mujeres sean implementadas resaltándose lo contemplado en el de Reforma Rural Integral.” (Ruta Pacificade las Mujeres 2021, 4).

¹¹⁴ The SDGs, short for Sustainable Development Goals (known in Spanish as ODS, *Objetivo Desarrollo Sostenible*), are a group of 17 operational global goals that the UN established back in 2015, to be achieved by 2030. What is interesting - and on some minor level revolutionary - of said goals is the recognition of the high level of interdependence each one has with the others. Such interdependence, which may vary according to different factors, is at the core of debate around integrated approaches to sustainability as the one here presented. Moreover, SDGs are generally - and here specifically - quite useful, since the UN itself has elaborated specific targets for each goal to be reached, as well as specific indications to measure said goal advancement.

¹¹⁵ “Durante 2020, la RPM en alianza con Equal Measures 2030 (EM2030), participó del lanzamiento del proceso de construcción del “Índice Global de Género ODS” que a través de 43 indicadores de 12 de los 17 Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible mide la situación de las mujeres en los territorios y evidencia cuáles son los desafíos para alcanzar el desarrollo sostenible con un enfoque vinculado a la implementación del Acuerdo de Paz”. Ruta Pacificade las Mujeres 2021.

¹¹⁶ United Nations 2015, 2.

In this sense, SDGs are a great way to assess how deeply interconnected the movement's efforts toward peace are in influencing overall sustainability. In particular, La Ruta has adopted SDGs as the means of assessing, as well as communicating, the effectiveness of its actions and policies suggestion. Practically speaking, this has resulted in approaching Peace Accords in light of such parameters, making the movement's successes in peace ensuring more intelligible and globally recognizable.

This approach is naturally relevant to the topic here explored. On one hand, by referring to the SDGs framework, La Ruta once again reaffirms its purpose of an inclusive peace, which however does not only take into consideration issues of anthropocentric relevance but, on the contrary, reinforce the idea of an integrated approach to peace and well-being, one where the non-human sphere plays a great part in. On the other, adopting the SDGs framework as benchmarks can help to better navigate and globally understand the effectiveness of female inclusion's benefits on non-human agents. This will be the central matter of discussion in the last section of this chapter. After having explored La Ruta's approach to justice and inclusivity, in fact, it is now proper to assess, on a practical level, how actions and policies the movement fostered and is currently fostering are impacting the overall well-being. The reference to the SDGs framework has moreover another beneficial effect when it comes to addressing La Ruta's experiences: being embedded in a wider frame of reference such as the Agenda 2030's index confers to the movement's actions, policies and thoughts a global reach, therefore making them surely relevant to other gendered experiences throughout the world.

3.4 Inclusive landownership and environmental regeneration

Before presenting the data around the effects of female land ownership, it seemed important to recall how such issue is a huge problem whose resolution still is, to this day, a work in progress - not only for the Colombian context, but also female rural populations all over the world. As it will be evinced, even if La Ruta's efforts have actually fostered great results in this sense, of course much still remains to be done in order to achieve factual gendered equity. It is precisely in the concreteness of this lack

that the work of the movement plugs in, trying to design possible paths forward and alternative inclusive solutions. This is why this section will start by introducing what the movement has done and is still doing: the focus, rather than being on the already concluded projects solely, will tend toward considering proposals for future better scenarios as a real concrete part of the movement's policy making. In this sense, exploring how La Ruta is concretely engaging in female access to land will necessarily mean to deal with the broader issue of female public participation. It is in that key - as seen, a fundamental one for La Ruta's mission of peace insurance - that data and findings about the beneficial effects of inclusive land ownership and management will be presented. Inclusive land management will be in fact framed in light of how it intersects with inclusive participation in policy making, with a special regard of course to territorial governance. Starting from this consideration, it will be here explored how the inclusivity La Ruta fosters - translated as already seen into an ethic of relationality - concretely impact not only the human sphere, but also the non-human one. As anticipated, however, hard data will be here not enough to unleash the potential and the concrete restorative power such inclusivity has: that is the reason behind why the findings will be necessarily be framed in relation with the SDGs model. It is by embedding all these elements in the wider context of a continuous tension toward sustainable development achievement, that female access to productive lands can unleash its potential as a constructive method for alternative, more sustainable tomorrows.

3.4.1 Inclusive public participation to ensure land access

Women's inclusion in natural resource management do undoubtedly crucially intersect with public participation. As underlined by Esther Mwangi et. al (2011, 8):

“Mixed groups [in terms of gender] can for example, take advantage of men's capacity to adopt new technologies and resource management and monitoring practices, while benefiting from women's capacities to manage conflict and enhance cooperation.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Mwangi et. al (2011, 8).

As already seen, access to land management and ownership is a necessary condition for maintaining peace. Precisely in this sense, inclusive land management necessarily intersects in double strand with the much broader issue of public participation, an issue that - as the figures in the first chapter show - is still is a huge matter of debate in the Colombian context. Continuous are the efforts to guarantee the existence of legal tools thought to facilitate female land access. However, the ongoing reaffirmation from Statal and governmental bodies of a principle of equality clashes again and again with the already explored gendered power inequality dynamics, such as the difficulty to access restorative or recovery justice. Put it shortly, as La Ruta recalls and as previously highlighted, the tools exist:¹¹⁸ however, they fail to be applied with the appropriate rigor also because of the low presence of state entities. Such mismatch, among other things, is also partly due to the lack of real and effective inclusive public participation.¹¹⁹ It is precisely in the concreteness of lack of real public participation that La Ruta moves when trying to foster female access to land ownership. For that reason, it becomes evident how the movement's efforts are, in the first instance, necessarily oriented toward aligning such discrepancies, therefore ensuring really legal and political justice. It goes without saying how it is not an easy task at all. In particular, the movement agrees to address the issue through an intersectional perspective, recognizing how the already complex situation is particularly worsened in cases of nonwhite women (Ruta Pacíficade las Mujeres 2015). Similarly, there is a general greater difficulty in cases not directly attributable to the categorization of forced displacement: women who, for a variety of reasons, decide not to leave territories - which they nonetheless have partial or almost no control over - will have more difficulty accessing justice tools. (Ruta Pacíficade las Mujeres 2015). According La Ruta, the weakness the already existing

¹¹⁸ In particular, the reference is here to the Ley 732 dated 2022, which “although valid, they are not fully enforced.” (Or, as the original goes, “Pese a estar vigentes, no se aplican con cabalidad”). (Ruta Pacíficade las Mujeres 2015, 70).

¹¹⁹As mentioned in the first chapter, there are several reasons behind the difficulty of effective justice realization in the Colombian context. In addition to the underlying ambiguity that connotes Colombian institutions, and the general mistrust it has implied toward them, there is also to be considered an objective difficulty of the state itself in implementing post-conflict reparation measures, in light also of the fractious and difficult relationships between the different social actors. (La Rosa and Mejia 2017).

legal tools have is moreover way worsened in these cases by the uneven and faint presence of the statal power in rural areas.

In this sense, inclusive public participation should become a tool that allows for concrete policy-making: translating into an inclusion that considers female voices in an intersectional perspective when it comes to matters such as mining exploitation or intensive agribusiness, inclusive participation unleashes its power as (re)constructive path. Concretely speaking, throughout its publications and workings, the movement advances a series of proposals to implement an effective inclusive participation. It is no surprise how La Ruta's strategy to land governance is that of a bottom-up approach, one that - in consonance with the witnesses-centered focus - translates in the analysis of the context and its specificities, to be explored through the lens of intersectional feminism. (Ruta Pacificade las Mujeres 2015). To do so, the movement argues, the practical starting point should be that of censusing the actual scope of land-owning gap, disaggregating data according to gender, a practice still not done nationwide to this day. Hand in hand with this approach, of course, the movement advocates for the implementation of the already existing legal, institutional, and political tools, with a more specific focus on the *Pacto Agrario*. Practically speaking, this should translate into the adaptation of the previously mentioned *Mujer Rural* program - carried out by the Ministry of Agriculture - to the concrete needs of rural women. (Ruta Pacificade las Mujeres 2015). In between all of these practical indications, however, there is one of particular relevance to the argument that is being supported here. Indeed, La Ruta supports and suggests higher participation of women in the so-called CMDRs - *Consejos Municipal de Desarrollo Rural* - to foster socialization mechanisms among rural women. The collective dimension in this sense does not function as an ancillary, secondary benefit of little importance: on the contrary, it becomes lymph of life for territorial governance, a practical way of doing concrete public participation that benefits all the actors involved. Moreover, the attention to the collective dimension such bonding mechanisms foster is also fundamental to the recognition of the existing beneficial effects of a sense of inclusive communities that go beyond anthropocentric lenses. (Ruta Pacificade las Mujeres 2015).

Coming to more recent publication, the analysis of the Strategic Plans La Ruta has presented allows to underline some concrete actions surely worth mentioning. In doing so, it is relevant to recall the tension of La Ruta's actions between regional local context and nationwide relevance: what is going to be presented from now on are only a few considerations around the national level. This is because, while obviously sharing a general history and commonalities, the different Colombian regions differ in important ways due to several factors as much related to the conflict as to geographical and topographical features.¹²⁰ Nationwide, while continuing to collect and unveil unheard voices and testimonies, La Ruta engages with national institutions. On one side, the movement takes active part as an interlocutor in the processes, meetings, and dynamics that interlinks with Peace Accords, while on the other it works toward the strengthening of female negotiation power through mobilizations and *plantones*.¹²¹ Mobilizations, in this sense, play a fundamental role in awakening consciences while peacefully reaffirming the necessity of a more inclusive governance. As the UN Women writes:

If there is one word that identifies the Ruta Pacificade las Mujeres, it is mobilization [coming] at the request of the women themselves and their communities, mobilizing hundreds and thousands of women at times when the territories urgently require the attention of the state to demand and guarantee their rights or to tell the armed actors to stop the war.¹²²

But are La Ruta's actions directed towards an inclusive political representation and participation effective? As the numbers *Evaluación Diagnostica* shows, the first

¹²⁰Colombia is a geographically extensive state whose internal topography varies incredibly. There are several areas that, for reasons strictly related to the lay of the land, make access both real and figurative difficult. Due-not solely-to topographical conformation, different regions have often experienced different developments in conflict dynamics. For this reason, talking about Colombia often means grouping together varied and ramified experiences. (La Rosa and Mejia 2017).

¹²¹ The term *plantones* is a social collective political action where those involved peacefully "plant" themselves in a certain place to show their discontent. Its clear roots in the non-human natural world seems here almost like an involuntary pun.

¹²² From the original version: "Si hay una palabra que identifica a la Ruta Pacificade las Mujeres es movilización [la Ruta] llega a solicitud de las mismas mujeres y de sus comunidades, movilizandoo a cientos y miles de mujeres en momentos en los que los territorios requieren con urgencia la atención del estado para exigir y garantizar sus derechos o para decirle a los actores armados que paren la guerra.". (<https://colombia.unwomen.org/es/noticias-y-eventos/articulos/2020/11/ruta-Pacífica>, last seen on 24th October 2022).

Strategic Plan actions effectively implemented female public participation, allowing for more women to be included in the spaces where decision-making processes develops.

REGIONAL	INSTANCIAS EN LAS QUE SE DESIGNARON MUJERES
Antioquia	-Concejo Municipal de Paz (1 mujer Ruta) -Consejo Consultivo Departamental de Mujeres (5 mujeres Ruta)
Bolívar	-Consejo Territorial de Planeación (1 mujer ruta, coordinadora de la Ruta Bolívar)
Cauca	-Secretarías de la Mujer, como enlaces de género, gestoras de paz, gestoras sociales y voceras territoriales para temas de género (12 mujeres Ruta)
Chocó	-Secretaría para la Mujer, Medio Baudó (liderada por 1 mujer Ruta) - Concejo Municipal de Quibdó (1 mujer Ruta) - Concejo Municipal del Medio Atrato (1 mujer Ruta)
Santander	-Consejo Consultivo de Mujeres del Departamento -Consejo Departamental de Paz -Concejos Municipales -Asambleas -Personería Municipal (1 Asesora en temas de género)
Valle	-Alcaldía del Dagua (1 mujer /Ana María Sanclemente) -Concejo de Candelaria (1 mujer /Gessica Vallejo)
Nacional	-Alcaldía (1 mujer / Claudia López) -Camara (1 mujer / Angela Robledo) -CEV, JEP, UBPD. 1 mujer de la Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres en la CEV – JEP con 3 magistradas cercanas de la ruta. -Consejos Nacionales y Territoriales de Paz (6 mujeres de Ruta) - Consejo Nacional de Paz y Comité Nacional de Paz. 1 mujer de la Ruta

Figure 2. Number of women elected to public office as a result of La Ruta's work, in accordance with the Strategic Plan 2016 - 2021. Interestingly, many of these offices are related to land use planning issues, not only at the local level but also with a national scope. . Ruta Pacíficade las Mujeres 2021.

Figure 2. shows how through La Ruta's influence and actions there has been a real quantitative improvement in political inclusiveness in the areas where the movement is most active. The processes put in place by the organization, then, have certainly set a course whose effects will surely be more clearly observed over the long haul. It is precisely this time horizon that must be kept in mind while addressing this issue. Yet, this should not be done in a devaluing way, quite the contrary: in fact, the results presented are to be considered the starting point of a process that is, as of today, still unfolding. What the above-mentioned data suggests, however, is that in a scenario such as the one Colombian woman live every day,¹²³ something can change - and it is actually changing. Of course, the implementation of the Peace Accords will still take much time, efforts and actions to be completed. But the truth that comes out of the

¹²³ Presented in the first chapter.

picture is that La Ruta's presence is actually fostering a more inclusive representation and participation: female voices are starting to be heard in places and spaces where policies are actually decided and implemented. Such tendencies are confirmed by the studies carried out by the movement itself: in the time span from 2015 to 2019, female public participation increased by 16.17%, with a total of 754 women running for public offices. (Ruta Pacificade las Mujeres 2019). Considering such success, how does it influence female land access? And, moreover, how can such inclusive public participation benefit non-human agents, in the frame of the SDG approach?

3.4.2 Women's inclusive land ownership access

Before diving into the concrete results that La Ruta's efforts toward a more inclusive land management are having, it should be pointed out how - as anticipated - such findings are necessarily incomplete. Several factors account for this. On one side, there resists the objective difficulty in measuring the impact of inclusive policies in managing access to land, a difficulty that is part of the broader strand of the lack of a gendered approach to land analysis. In this sense, of course, the movement's efforts-as admirable as they are-cannot substitute in means and capacity for those available to any statal body. On the other, as it is rather self-evident, these are processes that unfold over the long haul: as is often the case when dealing with political and social processes, the results of given dynamics of change are observable with clarity only at a certain temporal distance. The need for a trans-temporal approach becomes even more glaring when considering the fact that, as anticipated in the first chapter, the Peace Accords cannot be read as a point of arrival but, rather, as a goal of a much longer process that, as La Ruta reminds us, cannot yet be said to be finished. On the other hand, however, continuity and the intertemporal dimension are also two inherent features of the concept of Sustainable Development Goals, which understand sustainable development not so much as an inflexible straight line that leads from situation A to a - more sustainable - situation B, but rather as a continuous tension toward constant improvement.¹²⁴ However, these necessary premises should not undermine the sense of the work done

¹²⁴ Hence, on the other hand, the sense of intermediate targets, which, by setting minimum goals, attempt to guide this process, but do not set themselves up as inflexible goalposts.

here, which, of course, hopes to be a starting point for a broader study and practice. Reasoning about the way women's access to land positively influences environmental well-being and demonstrating its validity on a factual level beyond essentialist considerations, can - and should - become an essential tool for (re)designing our communities. Keeping the context in mind and thus starting from the specificity of the Colombian case, in the analysis of the results presented below the work focuses mainly on the time frame 2000 -2021, with a particular focus on the post-Peace Accords five-year period from 2016 - 2021. Seen the time span considered, it should also be pointed out how the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic has somehow influenced the results- both directly and indirectly.¹²⁵ Having said that, do inclusive public participation



translate into inclusive land access?

Figure 3. Results from analyses conducted by the movement about the advancement of women's effective access to land. Ruta Pacificade las Mujeres 2022.

As anticipated in the first chapter, within the framework of the Peace Accords, Point 1 concerns the so-called Reforma Rural Integral, to which corresponds 21 norms considered indispensable to be implemented. As of 2021, only 15 of these have actually been carried out. (Ruta Pacificade las Mujeres 2021).¹²⁶ However, approaching the

¹²⁵ The issue of the covid pandemic -and the movement's approach to it- has been little explored here for several reasons. On the one hand, trivially, because of a mere matter of space restrictions. On the other, its long-term social, economic, and political effects are yet to be carefully observed and studied. With reference to the data presented, however, I feel it would be a long shot to say that the pandemic has marred the results. In fact, as has instead been widely reported by both La Ruta and feminist associations globally, the consequences of the pandemic have rather acted as a litmus test with respect to fragility, violence, and inequality. Hence, on the contrary, in my view, the results are trivially even more telling precisely by virtue of the pandemic itself.

¹²⁶ For further details, please refer to the first chapter.

implementation of the Rural Reform through a gendered approach, it seems like positive trends can be observed.

According to the movement assessments - summarized in figure 3 - through the Fondo de las Tierras, in 2021 alone a total of 1.475 hectares were corresponded to 910 women: a great result if compared to 2020, when only 47 hectares were assigned to 30 women. Of course, in this sense, the extraordinary situation related to the pandemic highly influenced data collection as well as the restitution processes as a whole. If such data are however observed in relation to the gender gap, we discover how 2021 saw 55% of the beneficiaries being women, whereas in 2020 female beneficiaries were only the 30% of the total. (Ruta Pacíficade las Mujeres 2021). Stepping outside the Fondo de Tierra reference, as of September 2021, 10 of the 16 roadmaps for the implementation of the PDETs had been constructed, leading to 739.488,76 hectares assigned.

This positive trend seems to suggest an increasing awareness over the gendered struggles behind land access; more importantly, it also seems to suggest that a possible, more inclusive solution may be no utopia. Of course, it would be premature to talk about equity. As already explored, there still is a long way to go to achieve effective parity. Besides, as La Ruta recalls:

Since the beginning of the implementation of the Agreement, 152,687 hectares of land have been handed over and formalized, of which 60,450 (39.5%) were handed over to 12,889 women. The disparity between women and men in land formalization remains.¹²⁷

Those are, however, good news of no small importance. It is in fact worth considering how, in a chain, the above results influence various other aspects of anthropogenic well-being. Indeed, the issue of access to land is undoubtedly linked to a number of other factors that are certainly related to anthropogenic well-being, but which in turn necessarily interact with the management of natural resources and thus with the well-being (or malaise) of the non-human sphere. Some of these, such instance, are combating gender inequality relative to poverty, but also specifically combating hunger

¹²⁷ Ruta Pacíficade las Mujeres 2021.

(SDG 2). For example, looking at the economic issue, according to La Ruta's assessments, as of June 2021, monetary poverty for 2020 amounted to 42.5%. In this sense, access to land for women becomes a path to economic power, health insurance and thus for greater independence from violent and abusive dynamics.

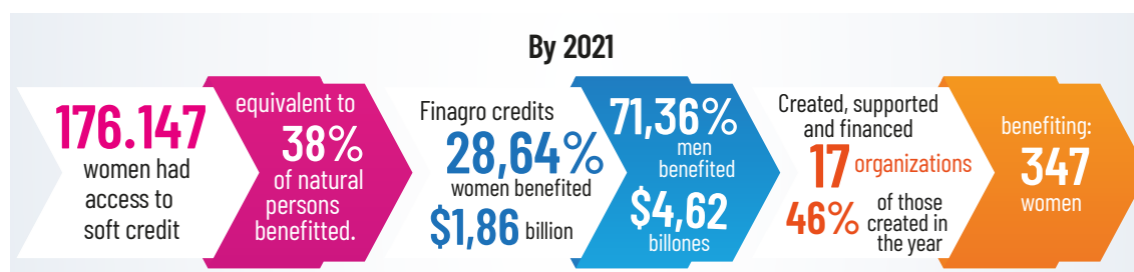


Figure 4. Results from analyses conducted by the movement about the advancement of women's access to economic financial aids in relation to land access. Ruta Pacificade las Mujeres 2022.

As figure 4 shows, in 2021 the FINAGRO plan¹²⁸ allowed 176.147 women to have access to soft credit, corresponding to 28,64% out of the total. Disparities in this sense are still evident. The situation seems to be in this sense confirmed if compared to that of 2020, when only 120.294 women - being the 34.7% of the total - acceded soft credit. (Ruta Pacificade las Mujeres 2021). For this reason, too, securing access to land becomes fundamental. What is surprising, but concordant with the spirit of the movement itself, is how this emancipation is often not merely an individual matter, but rather passes through the collective sphere. Indeed, as can be seen, funding does not necessarily affect individual applicants, but instead often results in collective investments at the level of organizations creation, for example. In this sense, a positive

¹²⁸ FINAGRO is “a mixed economy company, organized as a banking institution” that is related to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. Its aim is to provide resources to financial intermediaries, but also and most importantly to support farmers and their productive projects. (<https://www.finagro.com.co/overview>, last seen on 22nd October).

trend can be evinced too, with 17 founded in 2021 against the 8 being created in 2020. (RPM, 2021). Moreover, the efforts La Ruta is fostering through the sharing of knowledge, practices and expertise has resulted in a concrete educational path that involves 141 women, corresponding to 47%, operating in 30 districts to deal with reconciliation processes. But what happens, when in this framework women actually have access to land?

3.4.3 The impact of inclusive access to land management on non-human lives

When inclusive land management becomes real, lands respond: that is the axiom upon which this work is based. In this light, the question is now: how does concretely non-human lives respond to such intra-action? As the UNCCD finds:

[...] research shows a positive correlation between women's land rights and effective land restoration [moreover] women with more secure land rights are more likely to invest in natural resource management technologies and land restoration.¹²⁹

In this sense, of course, such response is often clearly understandable only when framed through anthropocentric tools of analysis. Most of the researches carried out to the moment of the writing have addressed the issue, for example, precisely through the problem of food safety, a topic very much related with other sustainable development issues. Considering for example the issue of SDG number 2, known as Zero Hunger. Of course, food management depends on a series of factors that may be more or less linked to the issue of land management. It is however undeniable that there is a positive correlation between respectful natural resources management and diminution of hunger. In particular, coming to the Colombian case specifically, as La Ruta recalls (Ruta Pacíficade las Mujeres 2021) the need for a balanced relationship with natural resources cannot be considered a luxury. Hunger is in fact a real and dangerous risk (FAO 2022): suffice it to say that, as a result of the post-pandemic situation, in 2020 about 2.4 million households no longer eat three meals a day. (DANE 2021). Of course, the reference to

¹²⁹ United Nation Convention to Combat Desertification 2021, 22.

SDG 2 may seem rash. Yet it helps to clarify both the importance and urgency of the issue, as well as the actual and real effect that inclusive land management policies have. Sure, it must be taken in consideration how the reflections here presented cannot be considered scientifically valid for a comprehensive assessment about the nation's environmental well-being. These kinds of considerations, in fact, would require far more space and tools than have been possible to employ here. Moreover, the very lack of constant and detailed monitoring makes it difficult to return an accurate picture of how women's political inclusion and subsequent inclusion in land management processes actually contributes to soil regeneration.

But how do these general reflections translate into the concreteness of ecosystem management? How, concretely, can inclusive resource management be a tool for real soil regeneration? Exemplary in this regard is the case of the piangueras of the Cauca Valley, particularly in the Naya Basin. The area, located in the south-western part of the country, is one of the most fertile terrains for La Ruta's activities. Generally, the movement activities to ensure inclusive public participation and land access have here been a success, despite of course requiring still much work to be implemented. (Ruta Pacíficade las Mujeres 2019). Thanks to this successful grafting into the territory, the movement - in collaboration with ACUA¹³⁰ and other local associations - implemented a project to regenerate the area's piangueras.¹³¹

Two main actions were identified for sustainable harvesting. The first was to establish a minimum size for individual piangua to be harvested. The second was the definition of the time and length of harvesting closures, including monitoring of the sites that were closed and of the cockle populations in those sites. The women also agreed on and implemented a piangua and mangrove conservation and sustainable use plan in their communities. Based on the analysis carried out on sustainable harvesting with their communities, the group proposed a voluntary harvest ban to ensure the survival of the cockle resource, which was signed and implemented by the five communities involved. As a result, five species are now

¹³⁰ Short for *Fundación Activos Culturales Afro*.

¹³¹ Piangueras is the name commonly attributed to those communities, generally indigenous or afro-descendants - that engages with the management and maintenance of pianguas whose latin name is *Anadara tuberculosa*.

under sustainable management and conservation in the Naya River basin, including the mangrove cockle, and four species of mangrove. As a result, the women are helping conserve and sustainably manage 1,000 hectares of mangrove.¹³²

It may seem, at first glance, to be a minor achievement. However, multiple are the studies suggesting how mangroves are actually a species with multiple proven benefits on the surrounding ecosystems. Such an instance, they contribute to implement water quality - objective of SDG number 6 - while also implementing biodiversity conservation. Moreover, mangroves are recognized to be a great natural carbon storage, therefore becoming great allies for climate change mitigation. (Rahman et. al 2021) In Colombia, mangrove ecosystems are specifically associated with other types of wetlands such as brackish herbaceous plant along beaches, as well as with swamp comprising species. (Rodriguez et al. 2016). Furthermore, the Colombian coast is proven to have global worth significance in terms of carbon sinking capacity. (Blanco-Libreros and Álvarez-León 2019). In this sense, it becomes evident how inclusive resource management - that is only possible with an inclusive access in the first place - can concretely impact biodiversity well-being, fostering a more inclusive habitat. Such relation, however, it is by no means a one-way road: the human and non-human agents, in fact, concretely intra-acts.

A key objective of the SGP project was to empower the women in the management of their territory. However, when the women had greater autonomy and leadership it initially generated some discomfort. This slowly disappeared when the results of the protection of the piangua became evident.¹³³

The Naya River case is just one example of the concrete effects that inclusive natural resources management has on the non-human agents involved, but it is not the only one. Multiple are the cases of inclusive management that proves to have beneficial effects on the non-human agencies. Yet, unfortunately, the public - as well as the scientific - debate is still not interested in such topics to the point of fostering concrete and detailed

¹³²United Nations Development Program 2018, 50.

¹³³ United Nations Development Program 2018, 47.

research. Gendered approaches to land management issues, as already largely explored, are still far from becoming an object of mainstream policy-making. This is largely due precisely to the difficulty that persists in considering the importance of a gendered approach to the land question not just a formal right, but a real tool for resilience and adaptation in the face of the need to rethink our relationship with the non-human. The relationship between gender issues and land management has always been treated here from a pragmatic perspective: the essentialism that -often- in fact surrounds ecofeminist approaches risks obscuring the link of concreteness that instead must exist precisely between gender issues and the sustainable management of natural resources. That is why, in my opinion, the lack of studies and research should not make one desist from the topic, but quite the contrary. As next chapter will explore, such alternative resilience tools - so necessary in times of climate change and environmental distress - are fundamental allies to be considered. How does however such potential translate on a wider level? How does La Ruta's experiences and approaches can lead the way to a transformative and (re)constructive path to unveil new futures?

2.5 Conclusions

As presented in these pages, la Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres is a complex and articulated reality that, trying to foster a feminist approach to the Colombian conflict resolutions, ends up questioning and unveiling issues that goes far beyond even from the Colombian case. In this sense, as seen above, the overall mission of a peace-making that considers the struggles, pains and violence women had - and still have - to face does not conclude in the mere resolution of single and punctual issues. Rather, such mission requires a holistic approach that, touching on many chords of women's experience of violence and abuse, ends up prevailing the boundaries between human and non-human experiences. La Ruta's experience, of course, is still a highly anthropocentric one: after all, its main objective is that of human well-being. However, in the Colombian case¹³⁴ such well-being necessarily intra-act with non-humans through the issue of land management. Inclusive land access therefore becomes a neuralgic point

¹³⁴ Of course, as anticipated in the introduction, the Colombian case is here considered as one of the possible case studies to be analyzed to better understand the potential of ecofeminist practices. Other cases will be further analyzed in the following chapter.

to reflect about issues such as sustainable development on one side, but also to address the violence and abuse female bodies are called to face in highly patriarchal practices of natural resources management. La Ruta opposes to such management a method that could be called an ethic of relationality:¹³⁵ in this way, subjectivities inter and intra-acting become a concrete tool for reconstruction that proves to be effective both for the human and the non-human sphere, the Naya River case proves.

Seen the concrete possibility of such path to lead to a more sustainable resource management, next chapter will try to offer some reflections around La Ruta's experience in relation with feminist and ecofeminist theories and approaches. Colombia in this sense offers a perfect thinking tool to foster wider-ranging considerations: in this sense, La Ruta's case should not be seen as an isolated and punctual case, but rather as a concrete example setter leading the way for alternative paths toward more sustainable futures.

¹³⁵The expression is of my own invention, freely inspired by the "ethics of care" elaborated in 1996 by Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan.

3. La Ruta, ecofeminism and relational goods: the centrality of a relational approach to sustainable resources management;

La Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres, despite its decades-long of experience and the many advancements it carried out for Colombian women, has much potential still undeniably unexplored. Internally, the movement is already radically shaping Colombia's power dynamics, reassessing the importance of women's experiences of loss, trauma, and pain but also of resistance, resilience, and community-building. In doing so, the movement however proves that its transformative potential can go far beyond the country's borders, shaping and influencing processes worldwide. On one hand, this local dimension is fundamental to framing the movement appropriately, understanding the specific ways it interacts with other local actors, or the way in which it deals with feminist matters. Furthermore, as Adrienne Reich (1984) evocatively writes:

When I write "the body", I see nothing in particular. To write "my body" plunges me into lived experience, particularity (...). To say "the body" lifts me away from what has given me a primary perspective. To say "my body" reduces the temptation to grandiose assertions.¹³⁶

Such reflection implies two considerations. On one hand, that every theoretical framework is implicitly bounded with a concrete experience. On the other, that every specific body has a specific view where different worldviews or knowledge is produced. Better said, location is a fundamental precondition when it comes to consider the way we interact with the world.

¹³⁶ Reich 1984, 4.

This awareness is particularly relevant when La Ruta's potential to go beyond Colombia's borders is explored. To understand this perspective from a broader scale, however, also means to consider why such experience proves to be so successful. To do so, and to unleash the full potential of this approach, is necessary to outline some general theoretical concepts such as "ecofeminism" or "relational goods". In particular, I will start by briefly exploring the many ways "ecofeminism" can be defined, identifying the positioning that I find to be more useful when it comes to policy-making and practice-shaping mechanisms. Furthermore, starting from the given definition I will analyze the ways in which La Ruta shares some features of the ecofeminist movements - and could therefore be labeled as such. Once clarified the points of connection between the Colombian movement and the ecofeminist thesis, I will explore the ways in which such connections work in fostering the need for a shift toward an ethic of care and of relationality, based on the concept of "partnership ethics" proposed by Carolyn Merchant (1996). Once established the ways in which I believe La Ruta to be engaging in partnership ethics, I will try to understand how and why a relational approach is practically successful. More specifically, through the conceptual framework of relational goods, I will explore how enhancing relationships is key to a more sustainable paradigm, for both human and non-humans' life forms. To conclude, I will outline how and why I think the regenerative power of La Ruta, centering and embodying these approaches, can effectively be transformative.

Before however diving into such concepts, a theoretical premise is necessary. This chapter will make frequent reference to issues such as "sexual division of labor", "reproductive" or "productive" labor, and "unpaid domestic work". If the very last has been widely explored when assessing Colombian's women economic situation, the others may not be known to some and therefore need a brief definition. Such concepts are widespread categories among (eco)feminist¹³⁷ debates and are born out of Marxist conceptions of feminist issues. Concretely, where productive labor is intended as working activities that result in monetary or economic wealth, reproductive labor is all those activities that deal with caregiving. More specifically, reproductive labor is

¹³⁷ I used the parenthesis here because the concepts, even if elaborated by feminisms, are now central in the ecofeminist debates too, as the next sections will explore.

generally associated with unpaid domestic work, as in those tasks that mainly revolve around the households' well-being and that are generally gendered and ethnically unevenly distributed (Mohanty 2003). In this light, the concept of "sexual division of labor" explores the way in which different genders are generally called to deal with different tasks. While men are generally called to carry out productive labor, women are instead bound to care work, therefore mostly confined to dedicate themselves mainly to reproductive labor which, however, is commonly not economically, politically, and even socially recognized as worthy. (Ibidem.) Of course, this rises a series of issues like women's financial independence, political recognition, or self-determination.¹³⁸

Ecofeminism too has inherited such concepts, translating them into the intersection with environmental concerns: that is one of the points, I argue, that connects La Ruta's experience with ecofeminist theories.

3.1 Ecofeminism: a new ethic of care.

Before exploring the many points of connection between La Ruta's experience and the ecofeminist movements', it is useful to understand what we mean when we speak about ecofeminism. Most importantly, it is relevant here to understand, among the many possible interpretations the term might have, the perspective through which I think ecofeminism should be approached when benchmarked with La Ruta. Despite having collaborated with many ecofeminist associations,¹³⁹ La Ruta never openly describes itself as an "ecofeminist" movement. For this reason, it becomes even more compelling to correctly frame what ecofeminism is. To do so, a brief historical overview of ecofeminism's theoretical framework will be necessary. Once shortly explored the history - and the consequent different wings - ecofeminism assumed over the decades, I

¹³⁸ A further elaboration of such concepts has been that of the "international division of reproductive labor". With globalization processes twisting entire countries' economies and power relations, the issue of the sexual division of labor was articulated by the need for accounting for the colonialist and racial implications the phenomenon took on a worldwide scale. The concept was here worth mentioning since such an issue mainly interests the so-called "Global South" of which generally Colombia is a part. For further readings, I particularly suggest Mohanthy (2003) and Mies (1986).

¹³⁹ For example, in 2014 La Ruta signed an alliance with the Colombian ecofeminist movement COMUNITAR. The associations collaborated in establishing the above-mentioned *Trenzando saberes* school programs.

will argue that the common interpretation of ecofeminism as a mere theoretical framework limits the potential of such worldview which, on the contrary, proves to be a practical guiding line for policy-making and eco-friendly¹⁴⁰ practices. To understand the practical implications of ecofeminism in reference to the specific case of La Ruta, the concept of “partnership” first introduced and described by Carolyn Merchant will be used. Once the theoretical framework will be outlined, it will be possible for me to explain why I here argue that La Ruta, despite never self-identifying as such, is a concrete example of a (successful) ecofeminist movement. From that on, it will become clear that ecofeminism, especially if translated in the Colombian case, is a concrete alternative path that helps to deal with issues around the so-called matter of sustainable development. Exploring the interconnection between La Ruta and ecofeminist positionings also means exploring how, and why, there is the (urgent) need for a switch toward a relationality paradigm.¹⁴¹ Practically speaking, once clarified how La Ruta’s ecofeminism relies on the concept of partnership, therefore promoting the just-mentioned switch, it will become clear how such an approach can truly set a policy-making example. Specifically, by re-centering a relationality based on partnership ethics (Merchant 2003), a new perspective on economic matters opens up; one capable of dealing with issues like sustainable development or sexual division of labor, urgent matter of our contemporaneity’s.

3.1.1 Ecofeminism: historical overview of the philosophical movement

The term “ecofeminism” is still relatively young: the first time “ecofeminism” ever appeared was in 1974 when French feminist and activist Françoise d’Eaubonne published its *Feminism or Destruction*. In the text, the French thinker describes ecofeminism as the recognition of the relation between marginalized human groups’ domination and oppression, and the oppression and domination of non-humans’ lives. In

¹⁴⁰ Together with “sustainability”, the term “eco-friendly” has so far become over abused especially due to the omnipresent greenwashing campaigns. However, I think that in this specific case, eco-friendly is a particularly fitting concept: since the focus is on relationships, in fact, what could be more on-point than *friendship*?

¹⁴¹ Social science paradigms are the frames and models according to which social researchers can observe the world and make conclusions about institutions, processes, and interactions within the society. (Babbie, 2014, p. 31.)

particular, she identifies the roots of such oppression and colonization in the Western patriarchal structuring of society, a structure that is imposed all over the world through the processes of colonization. In the text, d'Eaubonne argued for the need for a revolution in the ways relationships between humans and non-humans have been intended so far, blaming the heteronormative patriarchal structure for the environmental destruction produced by the human population.

This worldview had of course deep historical roots, to be traced in the general sense of alert coming from the rising awareness of environmental distresses' scope. The Eighties were in fact a decade of increasing attention toward environmental matters, with the creation of a great number of inter-governmental bodies and non-governmental associations to promote a more sustainable lifestyle.¹⁴² Intersecting such fields of study with the newborn environmentalist conscience resulted in the realization of how environmental disasters and distress impacted populations unevenly. Unsurprisingly, women were prominently hit by pollution and other forms of environmental degradation, if compared to their male counterparts (Lin 2014). Such theoretical reflections were already translating into the widespread formation of bottom-up movements. These movements, mainly developing outside the frame of the Western cultures, while opposing highly exploiting systems of resource management, were setting practical examples of more sustainable relationships with non-human life forms. Concretely, these approaches were based on the equality between men and women; that is also why they have been retrospectively defined as ecofeminists. The most famous example of this surely has been the Chipko movement.¹⁴³

Ecofeminism is rooted in the socialist, radical, and cultural wings of the feminist movements. From each perspective on feminist issues, ecofeminism inherited a peculiar feature to be intersected with the environmentalist conscience. Concretely, socialist

¹⁴² The concept of "sustainability" itself comes out of the Eighties, with the *Our common future* report (1987), better commonly known as "Brundtland Report".

¹⁴³ Rampant deforestation in the Himalayan region of Uttarakhand worried the local population to the point that, back in 1973, a collective movement for forest preservation arose. Being the ones most affected by deforestation processes, women were the backbone of the movement. The most famous action - and the most quoted by early ecofeminist scholars - was carried out in 1974 when 27 village women confronted a group of loggers hired to cut 2,500 trees near Reni village. Despite the threats and intimidation, women hugged trees to stop the cutting work for four days long, eventually making the contractors leave. The name of the movement comes from Hindi, *chipko andolan* means in fact "[tree] hugging movement".

feminism inspired ecofeminism to consider the economic aspects of the ecological crisis, which were less explored by traditional environmentalism. Cultural feminism influenced ecofeminism in the recognition of the social matrix behind the distinction between culture and nature: defying such binarism, ecofeminists reiterated that given concepts are not to be interpreted as ontological categories, but rather as a social construction that fostered both women's and non-humans' oppressions. Lastly, radical feminism transmitted to ecofeminism the recognition of the importance of relationality. In particular, as Lin (ibidem, 10) explains, this kind of feminism focused "on the relationship, caring and loving culture." If, however, radical feminism limited such an approach to the human-to-human relations, ecofeminists extended the limits of the concept of relation, including human to non-human ones.

To this day, it is still difficult to properly and univocally define ecofeminism. Following d'Eaubonne's publication, many have been in fact the scholars that adhered to ecofeminism, the most famous ones surely being Vandana Shiva and Marie Mies who together wrote *Ecofeminism* (1993), Carolyn Merchant (*The Death of Nature*, 1980), and Greta Gaard (*Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*, 1993), but also Val Plumwood (*Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 1993) or Carol J. Adams (*The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*, 1990) and many more. Of course, every scholar, bringing their own voice and stressing the focus on some features of expense of others has shaped as many worldviews. Many have been in fact the possible interpretations of the many issues ecofeminism revolve around: scholars have proposed different analyses of the causes behind women and non-human oppression as well as many different - more or less - practical tools to dismantle such oppressions.

Shortly said, this means that there are many ways in which ecofeminism can be interpreted. However, generally speaking, according to Greta Gard and Lori Gruen (1993)¹⁴⁴, it is possible to identify four main ecofeminists' pillars. The first is the recognition of the mechanical materialist model as the cause behind the reduction of all things to a dead inert matter to be exploited. This means that, according to ecofeminism, the neo-capitalist and phallogocentric¹⁴⁵ Western societies have often embraced narratives

¹⁴⁴ Mainly inspired by the works of Carolyn Merchant and Rosemary Ruether.

¹⁴⁵ Building on Lacan's theories (1958) - re-worked and analyzed by Butler (1993) - phallogocentrism can be briefly described as the male-centered approach to the world's analysis.

that see the world as a mere ensemble of cause-consequences relations, preferring the concreteness of the creation of profits. In this way, processes of careless exploitation have been reinforced. Secondly, ecofeminists share the awareness of the reigning “patriarchal religion”, and the recognition of the establishment of a worldwide gendered hierarchy. Briefly put, they agree that the world is governed by power relations that - generally - see women in positions of disadvantage. Thirdly, the scholars identified the dualism between the self and the other(s) and the domination ethic as a source of exploitation and oppression that works both toward women and non-humans. Better said, the narrative behind the celebration of the “self” - being both “I” or “we” - and the consequent distancing from what is being perceived as “other”, fosters colonization practices. Last but not least, the fourth point is the recognition of the constant need for capitalism for the exploitation and instrumentalization of oppressed humans and non-humans as a tool for wealth creation. Of particular relevance for La Ruta is the consideration of how both natural resources and labor as “necessary resources to control and maintain in the least expensive and most efficient way possible” in Stefania Barca’s words (Barca 2020, 1). An example of such a mechanism - particularly relevant for the Colombian case - could be the sexual division of labor: by exploiting disadvantaged social groups, capitalistic productive labor can thrive. Better said, the capitalistic drift the mechanistic materialistic implied

[...] considered productive labor as non-labor, that is without value, even if socially necessary to the maintenance of the master; and common goods as forms of value still not realized, that the master must exploit to make them lucrative. ¹⁴⁶

As anticipated, building on these four pillars there have been many different interpretations that each scholar or wing of thought has given of the umbrella term “ecofeminism”. Many have also been the further elaborations of ecofeminist positionings resulting in the development of other fields of studies, such as Vegetarian Ecofeminism, Materialist Ecofeminism, or Spiritual Ecofeminism, to name a few. (ibidem). As the name suggests, Vegetarian Ecofeminism - as well as similar other

¹⁴⁶ Barca 2020, 1.

fields of study¹⁴⁷ - primarily focuses on studying the ways human colonization processes affect non-human lives, with specific attention to non-human animals.¹⁴⁸ In this sense, such fields of study may explore topics such as animal rights, or human dietary habits but also underline the interconnection between different forms of oppression of women or human marginalized groups and non-human animals. Spiritual Ecofeminism is instead more focused on the intimate relation that female individuals are believed to have with Nature. Practically, it is centered on the figure of the “goddess”, to be intended as in the supposed increased power women have in relation to the environment in virtue of their fertility. This field of study is generally believed to be intertwined with indigenous or “alternative” forms of knowledge and may make great use of figures such as that of the moon, animals, or the relation between nature and female fertility. (ibidem). Last but not least, Vandana Shiva and other scholars have developed the so-called Materialist Ecofeminism, a debate that focuses more broadly on the economic aspect as well as on the power dynamics at play between production and reproduction, and the impacts such dynamics have on non-human lives. According to Merchant (ibidem), such a kind of ecofeminism “advocates the liberation of women through overturning economic and social hierarchies that turn all aspects of life into a market society that today even invades the womb”. In this sense, analyzing economic matters can become an entry point for a broader reflection on women’s condition and its relation with non-human lives. Specifically, being responsible for reproductive work and therefore for subsistence insurance, materialist ecofeminism argues that women are in the first lines of (environmental) common goods protection, since these are the very basis for the reproductive work they are called to carry out.

Of course, the three above-mentioned are just a few examples of the many perspectives’ ecofeminist thinkers may take. Many more could be the dimensions, and scope or specific matter of analysis: each index shapes a more or less specific kind of

¹⁴⁷ Many are the interconnected field that focuses on non-human animals, such as Critical Animal Studies or Vegan Studies.

¹⁴⁸ To reiterate the relationships between humans and non-humans, as well as the social matrix behind the distinction between “nature” and “culture” - therefore erasing the presumed distance between humans and nature - given fields of study prefer the expression “non-human animals” when referring to what is commonly known as animal species.

ecofeminism that, in a continuum and contaminations of thesis and ideas, becomes a still evolving vivacious dialogue.

What however I find to be relevant here, is precisely the way in which ecofeminism is capable of offering a broad framework for analysis: not limiting itself to a single sphere or specific kind of oppression, ecofeminism offers instead a tool for connecting different experiences and dimensions of oppression therefore allowing to create an interconnected narrative of reality. In particular, this interconnectedness translates into the concreteness of the importance of the relationships between human beings and non-human ones. Interconnection passes in fact through the concrete continuous exchange between marginalized female conditions and exploited non-human ones that, concretely, enter into relationships every day. Precisely because the neo-capitalistic patriarchal structure call women to carry the burden of unpaid domestic work, their bodies become the carriers of the co-operation - as co-producers, together with natural resources - with non-human lives. To better understand why La Ruta is an ecofeminist movement, this point will prove to be fundamental. Specifically, one concrete form of relationship among the many possible proves to be particularly relevant: partnership.

3.1.2 Ecofeminism: a partnership ethics

The study of the many ways in which species interact has for long interested both the so-called social sciences and the so-called natural ones, each of course focusing on its particular field of interest. In the Introduction of one of the first divulgated Italian publications around Environmental Humanities, Marco Armiero et. al write that

Now, that different organisms carry out social activities is something that can surprise social sciences, but that has never surprised life sciences, which have always explored the many different forms relationships have, especially starting from the fact that the relationship between organisms and their environments are not unidirectional (...).¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ Armiero et. al 2021, 15.

Generally speaking, when it comes to ecological relationships, scholars have in fact identified four major ways in which individuals interact with each other, mainly differentiating between specific - within the same species - and intraspecific - among organisms of different species – relationships (Berman, J. 2020). Once established the nature of the relationship with respect to the species involved, scholars have outlined three main ways in which organisms and individuals interact with each other: competition, predation, and symbiosis. Competition, it goes without saying, is that particular kind of relationship where two individuals rely on the same environmental resources for their survival; therefore, the two are most likely called to compete for the successful exploitation of given resources, a competition that most likely implies the exclusion of the other party. Predation, on the contrary, translates into a relationship where one of the individuals is concretely the environmental resource the other needs: put it shortly, one organism will therefore feed itself on the other. Finally, the most complex interaction between species is that of symbiosis, i.e., the close relationship of two dissimilar organisms. Often misinterpreted, the term is an overarching term that includes more specific forms of relationships such as mutualism, commensalism, and parasitism. In the first case, i.e., mutualism, both the organisms involved benefit from the symbiotic relationship: one of the most common examples of mutualism could be that between bees and flowers, with bees benefitting from the flower's nectars, whereas flowers benefitting from the pollination processes bees foster by flying from flower to flower. In the case of commensalism, on the other hand, only one out of the organisms involved concretely benefits from the relationship, whereas the other is unharmed and generally indifferent to it. It is for example the case of birds that nest in trees: while birds benefit from the ecological condition's trees offer, these last are quite indifferent to the nest's presence. The last type of symbiosis is probably the most commonly known, especially in the post-pandemic context. Parasitism is in fact that kind of symbiotic relationship where, while one individual benefits from the relationship, the other is concretely harmed by it: some of the most known parasites could be fleas or tapeworms, to name a few. ¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰Predation and parasitism mainly differ insofar as where predators wish to quickly end other organisms' life to feed from it, parasite thrives on the prolongation of an (unhealthy) life of the counterparts: the longer it survives, the longer the parasite could feed itself before having to search for another host.

When it instead comes to the study of the relationship between human beings only, the space is here way too limited to even only summarize the state of the art around the subject. What is however interesting to notice is that starting from the Aristoteles assumption that “man is by nature a social animal” (Aristotle 350 B.C.E), human beings have always been interested in exploring the ways in which they related with each other and within themselves. This has of course resulted in a huge number of fields of study, both outside and inside the academic world.

However, it is only with the arise of the new environmental conscience above mentioned that human beings started deeply questioning the ways in which they interacted with non-human beings. Starting from the natural science framework of relationships above presented, there have been many have attempts to try and describe how humans' shape are shaped by their interaction with non-human beings; from there, many explanations and theories have been developed. Ecofeminist thinkers too did not hesitate to outline different kinds of relationships existing between species, with a particular focus of course on the ways such relations did - or did not - replicate oppression patterns.¹⁵¹ Moreover, they indeed also provide new frameworks for reflection, while also trying to escape a mere theoretical framework by suggesting new practical ways to engage in intraspecies relationships.

Among these many proposals, the one that I think better suits La Ruta's experience is that elaborated by Carolyn Merchant in 1996. The ecofeminist scholar proposes what she calls “a partnership ethics”. In her own words, such kind of relationship

[..] is an ethic based on the idea that human beings are partners, caregivers, and collaborators and that people and nature are equally important to each other. If people and nature recognize that they are protagonists, we have the possibility of a condition that is mutually beneficial.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ One of the most interesting - and famous - theories regarding humans to non-humans relationships is that of “Companion Species” proposed by Donna Haraway (2003). Investigating the realization of intra-species sociality, Haraway argues that humans' relations with dogs represent the most compelling example of engaging with “significant otherness”: the relationship, in this sense, is a way for us to learn from non-human animals.

¹⁵² Merchant 1996, 1.

According to the scholar, this ethic is based on the precondition of the recognition that the greater good for both human and non-human's communities rely on reciprocal interdependence. In this sense, the "partners" involved are not only institutions or governmental bodies; on the contrary, a partnership ethic implies the involvement of each individual, either human or non-human. According to Merchant, this switch could help us to move outside the rhetoric of "environmental conflict" toward one of cooperation. To do so, the ecofeminist thinker proposes five principles for the human community to enter into partnerships with non-human ones.

1. Equality between humans and non-humans.
2. Moral consideration both for humans and for the other species.
3. Respect for both cultural diversity and biodiversity.
4. Inclusion of women, minorities, and of non-human nature in the ethic responsibility code.
5. Profound ecological stewardship, that is consistent with the stable well-being of human and non-human communities.¹⁵³

Starting from the undebatable implicit assumption that women and men are equal, Merchant suggests that to engage in successful partnership ethics, humans should in the first place learn to listen to nature and pay attention to its needs and desire. Once done, the resulting relationship will be a mutual negotiation of needs, in the continuous tension toward a greater good that make visible the connections between humans and non-humans. Relationships are therefore at the very core of this idea of partnership, Merchant argues. Moreover, the author claims that the importance of given relationships of care and respect is also reinforced by the theories of other ecofeminists, such as Val Plumwood.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Merchant 1996, 4.

¹⁵⁴ According to Plumwood (1993), relationships are at the base of the creation of a new history rooted in continuity and diversity empowerment, rather than in authority and colonization. Western mainstream history has cemented the separation between the self and the social construction of nature, therefore reinforcing a sense of separation between the self of the world: this mechanism is at the base of a justification of nature's overexploitation. That is why a healthy path for constructing a better future should be looked for in the histories silenced by the West, such as women's stories of care - as the scholar defines them.

By establishing these practical pillars, partnership ethics builds from the theoretical level, translating into the possibility of becoming a concrete policy-making guideline for the creation of ecofeminist relationships between humans and non-humans. Moreover, the concreteness of Merchant's approach is reiterated by the continuous reference the scholar makes to existing international legal tools that confirm, from her viewpoint, the feasibility of such ethics.¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, Merchant work does not stop there. By presenting some strategies to “actively design with nature” (ibidem, 16) the scholar in fact presents a series of case studies where the ethic of partnership, correctly put in place, has proven to be successful in the management of natural resources, creating a respectful bond between humans and non-human communities. Such instance, Merchant mentions the achievement of the US Environmental Protection Agency that in collaboration with corporations largely employing CFCs,¹⁵⁶ ensured CFC-free even before any political move was made. Merchant’s work therefore clearly argues that an ethic of partnership is concretely possible and that it does represent a possible way forward. Of course, applying such an approach can be difficult, the scholar argues. However, overcoming such difficulties is possible.

In this sense, the next section will explore how, and why, precisely despite the problematics it may entail, I believe such ethics is particularly relevant to La Ruta’s case.

3.1.3. Ecofeminism: La Ruta’s experience

As above mentioned, La Ruta never openly describes itself as an ecofeminist movement. Analyzing the reasons behind such choice is of little importance here. What I consider to be more relevant, instead, is the explanation of the motives that pushed me to investigate La Ruta’s experience through the lenses of ecofeminism. Concretely, this

¹⁵⁵ Merchant, for example, argues that the partnership of ethics she elaborates is consistent with the Rio Declaration of 1992 that advocates for a “global partnership to preserve, protect and restore terrestrial ecosystems’ wellbeing”. Such perspective echoes that of “partners of life” of the 1991 Global assembly of women and the environment as well as the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development.

¹⁵⁶ Stable, nonflammable, low-toxicity gases or liquids, CFCs (short for chlorofluorocarbons, most appropriately called Freons) have been banned since the Montreal Protocol of 1987, since proven responsible of ozone depletion.

implies exploring the points of contact between the above-outlined worldviews and the Colombian movement's ideals.

As previously explored, the main objective of the Colombian movement is the inclusion of women's voices, experiences, and pains in the peace-building processes. At the bases of such an approach to peace, however, there is the recognition of the central role women are called to play in the frame of the Colombian internal armed conflict, representing the most hit social group. Many are the ways such negative centrality is reinforced: sexual, physical, or psychological violence to name a few. Among the most subtle forms of oppression women are called to put up with, as explained, there is the exclusion or the difficulty to access (re)distributive mechanisms of productive lands. The ways in which political, historical, and social factors as well as fallacious legislations reinforce women's exclusion make the Colombian case an extremely interesting case study. Building on such premises, what I am particularly interested in is exploring how, in a given context, La Ruta's approach represents an ecofeminist solution to a problematic situation.

According to my point of view, many are interesting points to be analyzed to show how (unknowingly) ecofeminist La Ruta is. On one side, as above outlined, ecofeminism develops from the recognition of the interconnectedness between oppression against women and oppression against non-human life forms. More concretely, ecofeminists try providing worldviews that, connecting these groups' experiences, can offer a recollection of the influences given oppressions have on each other, and outlines their points of interaction. Through such analysis - which offers often unexplored and innovative perspectives on the world - alternative paths can be presented, while at the same time, it is possible to reassess the scope and the significance of such oppressions. In this sense, *el problema de la tierra* is undoubtedly an ecofeminist issue. The analysis - and the fights - for women's inclusion in land ownership and consequent management deals with the recognition of the interconnectedness between Colombian's women exclusion from land production and the over-exploitation of natural resources by highly neo-capitalist and patriarchal practices. As already explored, when households are dispossessed from their lands to be turned into monocultures or mining sites, women and non-humans turn out to be the

most damaged. At the same time, when such lands are instead employed for subsistence agriculture - therefore often relying on women's work, as we have seen - the general outcome is that of a more respectful and thriving state for both women and non-humans. La Ruta proves to be aware of this: in this sense, the movement's project of peace-building necessarily includes women's enhanced inclusion in land management, therefore implying a subsequent more respectful relationship with natural resources. As we have seen, the importance of a relationship of care and respect for the environment is a never-questioned precondition, as the foundation document of the movement states.

Seen how inclusive land ownership and management are pillars of peace-building processes and seen how such pillar builds on the recognition of the importance of respectful humans to non-humans' relationship, I argue that of particular relevance to the benchmark of La Ruta's movement is the materialist strand within ecofeminism. More specifically, as before explained, this sphere primarily focuses on the importance of relationships as concrete policy-making mechanisms along Carolyn Merchant. The study of the relationship between humans, and between humans and non-humans, is one of the main ways through which ecofeminists try to explain and explore the sources of oppression; at the same time, through a series of suggestions and practical guidelines, the creation of a certain kind of relationships becomes the way for ecofeminism to dismantle given oppressions. In this sense, as ecofeminism suggests, La Ruta's action revolves entirely around the creation of a community, and the recognition of how given communities are not to be intended as human beings only. As the approach of Truth and Memory Commission¹⁵⁷ points out, the creation of bonds between women is the preferred tool La Ruta uses both to explore and assess the legacy of the internal conflict on women, both to practically enhance and reinforce women's political voices and actions. This bonding mechanism proves to be relevant for the issue of land access too: as explored above, La Ruta is in fact oriented toward inclusive access to land management. Its approach involves a collective effort, building on fostering a sense of belonging to the community - intended both socially and environmentally - and leveraging on the relationship within women, and with their lands to actively foster access mechanisms to land management. Relationships among women and between

¹⁵⁷ Matter of analysis of the second section in the second chapter.

women and their territories are therefore not secondary benefits, but rather the central tool of action. At the same time, the rupture of given relationships because of the conflict(s) is central in La Ruta's thinking. Being the movement's approach not quantitative - in the sense of the count of the numbers of women who abandoned their territories - but rather qualitative, the movement's focus is on emotions, feelings, and necessities rather than on productivity. Respectful relationships with natural resources, therefore, become a way for women to emancipate, to recognize each other, and at the same time it sets the way for sustainable policy-making.

But what kind of relationship is this? What principle is based upon? In my view point, La Ruta builds - probably unknowingly - on the ethic of partnership Merchant proposes. La Ruta's worldview, in fact, is no utopia; it does not build on unrealistic expectations and preconditions, as other ecofeminist theories do,¹⁵⁸ that as much as inspiring and future-oriented as they can be, do not take into account the concrete contingencies some countries - or individuals - still find embedded into. La Ruta operates in a concrete time and concrete space, one whose limits are clear. One where the complete communion between humans and non-humans is (for now?) unthinkable, and where women struggle, every day. One where negotiation between the different needs is necessary, and cooperation becomes compelling, especially between marginalized groups like women and non-humans who often find themselves left outside of institutional, governmental, or economic planification. Being both women and non-humans confined at the margins, the only way to ensure their survival is to enter into a partnership.¹⁵⁹ Real needs imply concrete solutions: these, however, do not necessarily have to be the oppressive ones proposed by the current neo-capitalist patriarchal status quo. Resources exploitation can be done in partnership with non-human needs, and desires and in respect of their lives, as La Ruta proves. The key

¹⁵⁸Generally speaking, I believe that the great risk when it comes to ecofeminism is the essentialist drift. Specifically, some scholars argue for a complete communion between humans and non-humans: a great objective, that however clashes against the contemporaneity of many contingent situations women - and humans - find themselves embedded. More sustainable and respectful approaches are of course possible, but the switch toward a total fellowship should beforehand take into consideration the many difficulties - as well as differences between each other - women live every day.

¹⁵⁹According to scholars such as hooks (1984) and Mohanty (2003) - and as Andalzua (1987) translate in the chicana dimension- margins are great spaces of observation, and knowledge production as well as fertile spaces for the production of alternatives to oppressive capitalistic power relations.

is to enter into a relationship of partnership, one where resource usage does not mean resource depletion. And this, as proven by the above-mentioned Naya River experience, is already happening.

Furthermore, this perspective on the importance of partnership relationships has an interesting economic dimension, quite relevant for a country where women's role in the economy is still problematic. Relationships can be not only a source of policy-making practices thought to safeguard the already existing resources from depletion, but they can even become a resource in themselves, economically speaking. In my point of view, there are three main reasons that support the given argument. Firstly, as seen above, relationships improve the social fabric, therefore generating the preconditions for a more safe and healthy place to live, one where people are more willing to live and thrive. Secondly, as proven before, this approach does in fact benefit environmental conditions, therefore improving resource availability over time too. Last but not least, community building and a strong social fabric, combined with more resources, do enhance resilience to changes, stress, or distress, helping therefore the communities - humans and non-humans - to thrive over time. In La Ruta's case, recognizing the effectiveness of the partnership ethics means to become aware of the importance relationships play. Once established that, potentially transformative new paths unleash.

3.2 Relational goods: the ethic of partnership from an economic perspective.

La Ruta, as we have just now seen, shares some points of connection with the materialist ecofeminist worldview. Practically speaking, this means being able to engage in peace-building mechanisms that foster a partnership ethic, i.e., in the capacity of entering into cooperative relationships with non-human life forms. This becomes extremely evident when benchmarked with the problematic matter of inclusive land ownership. The just-mentioned focus on relationships and bond creation, however, is not only limited to the sphere of policy-making mechanisms. What I am here arguing is that once clarified how La Ruta does foster an ecofeminist approach in concordance with Merchant's partnership ethics, it is interesting to notice how and why such an approach is beneficial for both human spheres and non-human ones. Better said, how is

it that La Ruta's approach to enhancing relationships between human beings and non-human beings has a positive impact on socio-economic development, but also on the environmental one? What is the concrete connection between all these plans? To understand it, it is necessary to make reference to the theory of the relational good. Once explained what relational goods are, it will become self-intuitive why they are so beneficial for human well-being. From then on, it will be necessary to explore how and why relational goods positively influence non-humans' lives too. Once the link between sustainable resources management and relational goods will be clarified, I will explain how and why I think that La Ruta represents a great embodied example of these reflections, and more importantly, how a relational approach can be the key to solving pressing human and non-human needs.

3.2.1 Relational goods: some principles

The concept of relational goods in relation to economics is rooted in the so-called Easterlin paradox, dated 1974. Richard Easterlin, professor of economics at Pennsylvania University, observing the growth and degrowth of income and happiness, found that the two have a peculiar relationship. The two both, in fact, grow until a certain threshold; once a given point - changing according to sociocultural factors - is reached, if income continues to grow, happiness will instead decline. Intuitively, such a relationship is described by a parabola-shaped curve with a downward concavity. Despite being widely debated, the Easterlin paradox's silver lining was that of ensuring that the economic mainstream debate focused on the relationship between income - in all of its forms - and happiness. The issue had in fact been since then relegated to the background.¹⁶⁰ This new awareness of the social and individual implications of wealth paved the way for the relational goods economy to be developed. The focus was no longer on the mere processes of profit maximizations; the new approach rather perceived economy - and the consequent wealth creation processes it encouraged - as bounded with social issues such as self-satisfaction or individual happiness. Briefly put, the economy was for the first time approached as embedded in a broader social context

¹⁶⁰Civil School Economy was an Eighties' economic wing that proposed and focused on the relationships between happiness and wealth. Left in the background for some decades, these positions are on the rise thanks to the need to look for sustainable models.

where individuals were seen as beings with articulate needs, and not only potential wealth creators.

Among these needs, social interaction was found to be fundamental. For long perceived as mere tools for profit creation, human interaction was finally framed as a fundamental part of human lives, one that widely contributed to their well-being. In the rise of this shift of perspective, the Italian economist Benedetto Gui (1987) started to outline the concept now commonly known as the relational good theory. According to such proposal, classical and common economics - which focused entirely on goods' use¹⁶¹ or exchange value¹⁶² - failed to correctly assess the value human relationships have in wealth creation. Goods - either physical or not - are exchanged, bought, or sold in a concrete context: a frame made of human relationships. In this sense, relational goods theory defines relational goods as non-material goods that are produced and consumed within human interactions and are therefore intrinsically linked to relationships. Concretely, these kinds of goods are more common than what it seems: the enjoyment of a movie at the cinema, seen with friends, family, or beloved ones, or even alone, but still in a room full of people, to name one. Relational goods lie in sharing experiences, emotions, sensations, and pains. Robinson and Flora (2003) explain that relational goods are produced through the share of what they call "intangible socio-emotional goods", shortened in SEGs, i.e., goods capable of satisfying socio-emotional needs. It may be the case in which SEGs are attached to commodities or physical goods: when this happens, a given physical object is recognized to have an attachment value good (AVG). There are multiple possible examples of AVGs in our everyday lives: family photos, wedding rings, favorite dresses, or beloved items.

It goes without saying how difficult it is to effectively study relational goods, especially for a discipline such as economy, widely based on quantitative methods of analysis. However, it is also equally important to recognize how deeply such relational goods influence everyday lives, both at the individual and at a broader level. It is in fact

¹⁶¹ Generally speaking, use value refers to the features of a given item to satisfy some human requirements, want, or need, or which serves a useful purpose.

¹⁶² Shortly put, the exchange value of a good is the proportion at which an item can be exchanged for other commodities.

self-intuitively: if societies recognize the potential of relationships in wealth-creating processes, they will try to strengthen community bonds as much as possible.

Once defined as what relational goods are, and see how they contribute to enhancing the overall wealth of individuals and the communities they inhabit, it is arguable that humans enjoy and thrive through reinforced relationships. In this sense, La Ruta - through the approach based on collective action and sisterhood creation - does respond to this kind of approach. To stop here, however, is to miss a piece of the bigger picture. Relational goods in themselves do not explain how and why, once human relationships are enhanced, this shift toward a restored centrality of relationships can positively affect non-human lives. Put shortly, relational goods help us understand why La Ruta's focus on community creation benefits women and Colombian society as a whole, socially, politically, and economically speaking. However, to understand how and why the relational approach is effectively beneficial to both human and non-human spheres when it comes to land access, a step forward is however necessary: exploring how the relational approach intersects with issues such as sustainable development.

3.2.2 Relational goods and sustainable development

As Walsh et. al (2022) argue, our societies are currently based on what scholars refer to as a “mechanistic paradigm”.¹⁶³ Such a paradigm proves for them to be the main approach humans have when approaching natural environments. Concretely, it is based on three main constitutive patterns, i.e.

1. Humans are separated from and above nature;
2. Humans are able to control nature;
3. Nature is a machine, and can be known and addressed by reducing it to its parts.¹⁶⁴

Intuitively, the mechanistic paradigm does not incentivize the creation of a respectful relationship with natural resources. As ecofeminists theorize too, on the contrary, it

¹⁶³ Such paradigm is of course the same mechanistic view that the ecofeminist movement too tries to dismantle.

¹⁶⁴ Boehme et. al 2022, 3

fosters a highly exploitative perception of non-human lives. According to the scholars (ibidem), societies have for long relied on the framework of the switch toward a more sustainable lifestyle to dismantle such a detrimental paradigm, pushing consumers to be sensitive toward “greener” solutions. However, the paradigm of a sustainable lifestyle seems to be exhausting its usefulness and power in the current search for solutions to the environmental crisis. Specifically, this does not mean that the concept of sustainability is outdated, or useless. What the scholars argue is that such an approach is failing to address the urgent and pressing matters regarding environmental issues. Concretely, the narrative of a switch toward a more sustainable lifestyle proves to be unable to break the patterns such paradigm builds upon since it relies too much on individual responsibilities. The focus on individual action results in a sense of isolation and fails to address the systematic changes needed for the mechanistic approach to be dismantled. In this sense, the scholars argue that a new approach should be enhanced, which they define as the relational paradigm.

This paradigm is the result - according to the scholars’ findings - of a qualitative analysis around the relational approaches applied to sustainability studies- with ecofeminism being labeled here as relational ethics - across a wide range of disciplines and research. Of course, each of these disciplines intends and translates relational approaches according to the specificities each discipline requires. However, generally speaking, this relational approach seems to be rooted in three main pillars. Said in Walsh et. al’s (ibidem) words:

Despite differences between the various perspectives cited, all describe a paradigm that (i) is grounded in a relational ontology, (ii) emphasizes the need for understanding human and non-human nature as mutually constitutive, and (iii) values more-than-human relations.¹⁶⁵

The relational ontology to which they here refer is intended as by Wildman (2006, 1), i.e., “the relations between entities are more fundamental than the entities themselves”, and are the answer to overcome the nature-culture diversification, precondition of the

¹⁶⁵ ibidem, 20.

mechanistic paradigm. What is here interesting noticing about the scholars' perspective, is that they argue that relational approaches "provide a basis for integrating the so-called "inner" and "outer", "personal" and "collective" dimensions of sustainability" (ibidem), while at the same time preventing from the creation of the "self" and "other" dualism that ecofeminism critiques too. All these considerations, as we will see in a moment, prove to be extremely relevant to analyze La Ruta's case. Before that, however, some last considerations can be interesting to further develop the relational paradigm analysis as the scholars intend, such paradigm is not a mere substitution of the mechanistic one. On the contrary, it should work as a frame of reference, a container for new narratives to thrive. The new focus should therefore be on understanding and correctly framing the different interactions between human actions and their effects. Moreover, this new perspective could help outline a holistic perspective on the world's function, as well as offer what the authors call "a comprehensive understanding of lifestyles". (ibidem). Of course, this does not mean that quantitative approaches - intrinsically the preferred tool of mechanistic analysis - are to be forever banned. As Capra and Luisi (2014) in fact argue: "the emphasis on relationships, qualities, and processes does not mean that objects, quantities, and structures are no longer important." Once set the focus on the importance of the exploration of the relationships between entities and agents, quantitative analysis is surely useful to correctly assess and understand the concrete development of given relationships.

What does it all have to do with relational goods and sustainability? First of all, as already clarified by approaching the relational paradigm proposed by Walsh et. al relationships are the starting point for analyzing the world. However, putting relationships at the center is not a mere theoretical exercise. It means realizing that our ways of being in the world are, at the same time, ways of being with the world: this means gaining a conscience of the influence we constantly exercise. In this sense, the shift toward a relational approach means a new awareness of our interactions. More specifically, a new awareness around the way such relationships have truly transformative potential. They are not just a mere superficial action human or non-humans may engage in: they can change our ways of being, and we can change others'. To understand it, Barad's (2007) concept of intra-action could be relevant.

Intra-action is a concept of new materialism that sees agency not as a property of the actor that exercises it, but rather as a dynamism of interrelated forces where every agent is in a constant exchange with one another. In this sense - in concordance with Wildman (ibidem) - relationships are constitutive of the very same organism that maintains them.

Building on this new awareness of the potentially transformative power of relationships also means understanding the importance of maintaining healthy, good, and respectful relationships: if everyone - and everything - is interconnected and related, safeguarding ourselves also means taking care of our relationships. These “good” relationships, intended here between humans and between humans and non-humans are capable not only to dismantle the mechanistic paradigm, therefore improving non-human life forms and our relationships with them, but also to generate concrete value. This is the point where the notion of relational goods becomes relevant. Once established the centrality of relationships and considered how consequently these should be translated into respectful ones, the benefits - socially, politically, and economically speaking - are well described by the relational good theories.

The sustainable implications of the such switch are quite evident. The system of relationships in fact encompasses the human sphere - otherwise, it would not be able to dismantle the mechanist paradigm - and include non-human lives too. To do so means to re-assess the importance of a mutually respectful relationship with non-human life forms, an implicit precondition for sustainable development.

3.2.3. Relational goods: La Ruta's case

As argued above, La Ruta's case offers a good example of Merchant's partnership ethics. (ibidem). Such a framework, describing the ways in which humans should interact with non-humans based on cooperation and negotiation mechanisms, puts of course at the center of the picture the importance of relationships. However, partnership ethics focuses on the premises only, exploring the consequences of a shift toward the centrality of relationality only theoretically. What the theory of the relational good does, instead, is to focus the attention on the consequences of such a shift. Better said, if partnership ethics explains how the theory of the relational good can help us better frame the “why”.

To better understand how the two frameworks interrelate - and how can they be concretely applied to real-life situations - La Ruta's case proves to be quite effective. If, as above-seen, partnership ethics translates into the enhancement and fostering of caring relationships between humans and non-humans, society as a whole benefits from it. The concreteness of such benefit is well exemplified by the Naya River case explored in the second chapter. What happens is that once a partnership is established between the involved parties, that relationship will of course necessarily be mutually respectful, as Merchant herself (*ibidem*) argues. In this sense, when benchmarked with relational goods theory, the whole system will benefit from the relationship, which will add value to the exchange. As seen before, the focus La Ruta poses on creating bonds and connecting experiences does not exhaust its potential in the improvement of humans' social conditions, such as the insurance of peace mechanisms' success. It also influences and benefits, in concordance with the reflections outlined above, the well-being of non-human lives. This positively reinforcing mechanism works in a sense of empowering the communities that decide to engage in partnership ethics with their environmental context.

Concretely speaking, as we have seen, La Ruta's claims to women's access to land management, when successfully implemented, do flow into the creation of partnership ethics between Colombian women and the land they manage. Of course, such positive mechanisms are often unwilling, pushed by the desire and necessity of subsistence that women are called to face. The theoretical framework of relational goods, however, can be both an effective tool to explain the positive consequences of women's access to productive lands, while at the same time can be used as a point in favor of the creation of more inclusive legislation, policy-making mechanisms or event movement for the consideration of women's inclusion in productive lands ownership.

In my point of view, however, there is still a piece missing. Once assessed the partnership ethics behind La Ruta's approach to human and non-human relationships, are explained how and why the centrality of such relationships proves beneficial for all the parties involved, and new paths for reflection of course open up. One in particular deals with and unites all these considerations, being at the same time both a

fundamental issue for (eco)feminism in general and particularly compelling for Colombian: unpaid domestic work.

4.3 Ecofeminism, relational goods, and La Ruta: some reflections

The reasons and the ways in which La Ruta intersect ecofeminist and relational good theories open up the path for further reflections to be outlined. In my viewpoint, in fact, all these considerations are strictly interlinked with the broader issue of the sexual division of labor. Each of the theories, reflections, and frameworks above presented are in fact intrinsically linked with the social, economic, and political role women are called to play in contemporary Colombia - and in contemporary societies all over the world. The capacity of entering into a relationship with humans and non-human life forms is not an act that happens in an ontological void. Colombian women enter into relationships between themselves and with others' life forms in the concrete context above presented. In particular, we cannot ignore the ways in which the sexual division of labor and unpaid work more specifically do shape the relationships Colombian women enter. The way I see it, each framework before mentioned can effectively work only when and if benchmarked by this concrete reality.

The central point of this work has been productive land access, which has been described here as a fundamental tool in the light of the subsistence duties women are called to carry out. This means that women are constantly embedded in negotiations and cooperative webs of relationships. When they have effective access to productive lands, their approach is necessarily relational: since they are socially called to fulfill their households' needs, they will necessarily be called to gather those needs, mediating between them. Colombian women will be called to understand the line between the necessary exploitation of resources for the household's survival, and non-human life forms' need for time to regenerate. This silent cooperation and negotiation are at the very base of partnership ethics.

At the same time, the relationality women necessarily have to practice is seen as a burden by a neo-capitalist worldview that only focuses on productivity and performativity, quick and fast attributes that nothing have to do with cooperation, but

everything instead with exploitation. However, I think that La Ruta's success precisely lies in the capacity of framing given relationality differently, dismantling such a neo-capitalist narrative. What I mean is that the issue of care work, as in the imposed role of women to be free care workers - has the potential to become an emancipation tool, instead of an oppressing one. On one hand, through the theory of the relational good, care work is - eventually - recognized the deserved merit. Building upon the consideration that taking care means engaging in respectful relationships, care work becomes the source of an important amount of value, economically speaking. Such value, however, through the theory of the relational good ceases to be necessarily linked with productive labor, but it rather becomes value per se. More specifically, the subordination of reproductive labor to produce one can be dismantled.

Moreover, it should not be forgotten how all of this is happening in a world that is "on fire", to quote a famous climate activist.¹⁶⁶ Colombian women and the successful ways in which productive land is managed become exemplary thinking tools. They - together with women all over the world - are in the first line in the fights against over-exploitation, pollution, and contamination of neo-capitalist processes. (Gaard 2011; Mohanty 2003). Not - generally - in virtue of some utopic environmentalism: but because they, better than anyone, understand the violent repercussion that such a capitalist approach has on the web of relations women are inserted.

Of course, the space is here too limited and the writer is still on her way to learning, to offer a concrete solution. Moreover, I am not here to argue that women, by themselves, can practice self-liberation; an approach that I find somewhat elitist and victim-blaming.¹⁶⁷ However, what I would like to argue, is that new paths are possible. La Ruta channels these tendencies by centering and connecting the dots of different forms of oppression women - and non-humans - face. The movement could in fact just decide to promote the punctual integration of women in Congress seats, or the Peace Accords working table, but it does not. La Ruta, instead, digs into the pains, the needs,

¹⁶⁶ Greta Thunberg, as per her book *Our house is on fire* (2019).

¹⁶⁷ It is in fact important never to forget the historical roots oppressions have; by doing that, falling into victim-blaming can be easy. Oppressions and discrimination are not (only) to be treated punctually, but their roots must be understood to be correctly assessed and dismantled. In this sense, I think that interesting reflections are offered by Federici (2004) in estimating the historical roots of capitalist oppression on women.

the feelings, the connections between Colombian women, their realities and the ways they inhabit their territories, to unveil their relationships while at the same time underling the potential that from such relationships come. The only peace - and consequent future - is holistic; but holistic is not a sum of the parts: is a constant, relational, exchange.

5. Conclusions

As we have seen, ecofeminist theories can effectively translate into political practices. Such practices, however, do not limit their beneficial effects on the mere natural resources: they rather cross the sphere of resource management, becoming bearers of wider changes. Given approaches, in fact, re-center the focus on the importance of relationships and relationalities, therefore redefining the ways relationships develop and are perceived within societies and between societies and natural resources. La Ruta is an excellent example of this: embedded in a context where relationships of care are often broken or seriously threatened by conflicts and neo-capitalist practices, the movement creates a safe space for care relationships to become regenerative on multiple layers. This work focused on the case specifically by virtue of its capacity to easily show all these features, becoming a great thinking tool for the reflections this work contains to develop. As anticipated in the introduction, however, La Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres is not an isolated case: many other examples can be in-details explored and studied. Such virtuous examples of ecofeminist community management do not stop at terrestrial environments only. It has proven to be successful also in the protection of marine ecosystems, such as the cases of the Belizean Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI), the Gambian Try Oyster Women Association and the Turkish Underwater Research Society, the Mediterranean Conservation Society prove. (ibidem). Ecofeminist practices have also been found to be effective in the conservation of biodiversity, such as the Armenian case of the Berd Women's Resource Center Foundation shows (ibidem). My hope is that, with the debate around ecofeminist positions slowly re-gaining centrality, Italy can too join such efforts in the construction of "alternative" ways of managing natural resources.

As just seen, that of La Ruta cannot, therefore, be treated and approached as an isolated case, as the exception out of a set of rules. The width of its example, however,

is not only a geographical matter. What this case -and the cases such as the Colombian one- do is unveil a series of urgent matters. It is not -and it cannot be reduced to- a matter of natural resources management only. It deals with the ways in which we interact as societies and as selves, with the ways in which our societies have been so far structured upon the oppression of certain groups. It deals with worldwide issues such as the sexual division of labor, as the colonial and imperialist shade that still persist in our perception of our todays. It calls for a re-consideration of how we, until now, valued goods and relationships, both in economic terms and as sources of values. The case of La Ruta asks us to question the way we interact with each other, and with others. The ways in which we - as selves and as societies - act in the frame of the relationships we are embedded into. Addressing overexploitation, pollution, degradation, and so on means addressing and exploring the consequences of a precise series of practices of relationality. More specifically, it means exploring how we enter into a relationship with natural resources, and how these resources react accordingly. As seen in the text, re-centering the focus on relationships has multiple effects on the way we end up perceiving environmental matters. On one hand, it gives renewed importance to the entity involved in the considered relationship, which ceases to be a mere inanimate object, but becomes instead an actor that, on different levels, shapes the relationship itself. On the other, it necessarily calls for a reconsideration in the ways we, both as selves and societies, intend relationships. From there, wide possibilities for further reflections open up, teasing our perception of economic, political and social matters while at the same time always remembering we are embedded in a web of relationships: a web that we shape, and that shapes us. A web that -hopefully- gives us the possibility do design more sustainable futures.

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