

## **Doing gender in the midst of war: the example of the demobilization process of paramilitaries in Medellín, Colombia 2003-2007<sup>1</sup>**

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### **DOING GENDER IN THE MIDST OF WAR: THE EXAMPLE OF THE DEMOBILIZATION PROCESS OF PARAMILITARIES IN MEDELLIN, COLOMBIA 2003-2007**

#### **Abstract**

This article examines how the demobilization process of former paramilitary groups in the Colombian city of Medellín *does* gender by representing the ‘traditional nuclear family’ as the marker of pacification for former male combatants. By reading the Democratic Security Policy, it makes visible the ways in which the state project of security aims at fixing the moral boundaries of the identity category of nationals. It looks at the security practice of demobilization, individual as well as collective ones, and interrogates how it informs and shapes traditional notions of family. Finally, this article highlights the functions and effects that the invisibility of gender plays in the legitimation of the state project of security and questions the violence embedded in sanctioned gender relationships.

**Keywords:** Security, identity, gender, war on terror, demobilization.

#### **Introduction**

*Lay down your arms, come back to the nuclear family and abandon a clandestine life* (DSP, 2003: §116) has been the slogan of the Colombian government to call members of illegal armed groups to join the demobilization process. This invitation is part of the Democratic Security Policy (DSP), the official security strategy in place since 2002 and, hence, the beginning of the demobilization process for more than fifty thousand combatants that also marks the beginning of the present inquiry. This paper reads the ways in which the demobilization process in Medellín from 2003 until 2007 *does* gender and ultimately contributes to the cycle of violence the security strategy promises to halt.

The focus of this paper lies in the problematisation of gender relations for men and women in the reintegration process in Medellín.<sup>3</sup> I ask how the security discourse does gender for former demobilized men that, following the proclamation of the nuclear family as the basis of citizenship, makes women the necessary peaceful counterparts. As such, traditional heterosexual arrangements become institutionalized as the security formula in the new war on terror. Sanctioned gender roles and relationships, that produce and reproduce the figure of male as warrior and the role of women as confined to the reproductive private sphere become crucial to closing ranks against terrorists and so both men and women are hailed and summoned to perform identities that secure the nation. As a way of introducing the main part of the work, I would first like to make explicit my own position and the assumptions upon which this paper is based.

I perceive this paper as an academic contribution, yet this text is also a glimpse of myself. The call for an open war on terror caught me by surprise in May 2002, when Alvaro Uribe was elected President on the political platform of Democratic Security. I was puzzled with the results of the elections that proclaimed a war of ‘all against the terrorists’, I thought we had always been at war in Colombia, especially in Medellín, where I was born. What could then mean that we were now ‘really’ closing ranks to defeat dangers, represented in the blurred figure of ‘terrorists’ and ‘terrorist-sympathizers’? This war meant to put the security of the Nation first.

My personal and professional experiences, as well as my academic background, made me aware of the many affiliations I had. I was a peace scholar, foreigner, daughter, woman, heterosexual, latina, middle class, *mestiza*, and yes, also Colombian. These identity markers, gender, nationality, ethnicity, age, profession, among others are sometimes too broad and sometimes too strict and they do not represent my subjectivity. Hence, being Colombian was an imperfect identity category among many; one that could not overshadow the rest of my affiliations. Furthermore, my nationality has contributed greatly to being who I am personally and professionally. I am a peace researcher to a great extent because I grew up in Colombia, in a political, social, cultural and economic context in which violence was ordinary for resolving conflicts, and I have spent significant years trying to come to terms with alternative ways of transforming conflicts peacefully. Despite and because of this recognition, I am not nationalistic and I refuse to enroll in the ‘army of good people’, to be stripped of the many identity positions and affiliations I embody and be reduced to a transparent citizen in the war on terror. I believe I have alternative options for dealing with violence that do not reproduce more violence. This paper is a specific expression of these provocations.

What is implied in this research is, on the one hand, that security discourses are crucial for the construction of identity categories and, on the other hand, that gender is a doing. The first assumption derives from the belief that discourses are living texts, which simultaneously describe and prescribe realities (Campbell, 1998; Hall, 1996; Stern, 2005; Weldes and others, 1999) and thus come into being within contexts, positioned, constituted and constitutive of power relations (Said, 2003; Butler, 1995). The expression *doing gender* refers to Judith Butler’s notion of gender as “an incessant activity performed, in part, without one’s knowing and without one’s willing ... as a

practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint” always acting in concert with or for another (Butler, 2004a: 1). In other words, gender as a doing is made up beyond oneself “in a sociality that has no single author” (ibid), which in this article I relate to a specific group of gendered security discourses on state, nation and family.

Following this argument, I focus specifically on the official Colombian Democratic Security discourse and how it constructs categories that play an important role in the process of identification. I use the term process because, first, discourses are not sufficient to constitute identity since not any subject fits into any category or can be removed or exchanged as a puppet in an unproblematic fashion (Hall, 1996: 6-10; Butler 1990). Social subjects are hailed into the positions created by discourses but they necessarily have to invest in those positions for articulating their identity. Identity, understood as this particular ‘intersection’ (Hall, 1996), needs the subject’s response or investment to perform certain subject positions.

Moreover, the process of identification is imperfect, temporal and unsettling since “the subject never achieves the completion or wholeness toward which it strives [and] remains haunted by that which has to be excluded for subjectivity to be constituted in the first place” (Edkins and Pin-Fat, 1999: 1). In this sense, identification is a performance, a continuous doing by subjects who are always in the process of becoming, a constant negotiation that never finds a perfect fit (Stern, 2005).

This ‘becoming’ gains ever more importance when looking at the representations of identity categories. In Hall’s view, “not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from’, as much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves” (Hall, 1996: 3-4) identities are constituted within representations. In this line of thinking, how identity categories are represented plays a vital role in the conditions of possibility for the constitution of the subject. Representations make feasible certain ways of becoming while necessarily rendering others irrational, abnormal and impossible.

In security discourses, such representations are evidently intertwined with identity categories such as state, nation and others. Security discourses generally emanate from state officials and commonly follow a simple structure in which threats are presented to the public, claiming that they are also – by extension – dangers to the nation, and from such denomination a list of measures is constructed (Weldes and others, 1999) that aims at blocking the development of whatever is said to be putting the collectivity at risk (Wæver, 1995). By naming dangers, security discourses function as “a specific sort of *boundary producing political performance*” to domesticate “the meaning of man [sic] by constructing his [sic] problems, his [sic] dangers, his [sic] fears” (Campbell, 1998: 62). State security discourses do not only construct ‘men’s’ problems, dangers and fears, they do also construct women’s problems, dangers and fears. In a differentiated manner, the construction of both manhood and womanhood in security discourses is then paramount, not only to point at what ‘good citizens’ should be afraid of, but also to construct citizens’ loves. “For security is a package which tells you what you are as it tells you what to die for; which tells you what to love as it tells you what to defend

(*dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*); and which tells you what is right as it tells you what is wrong” (Dillon, 1996: 33).

Thus, when naming dangers the boundaries erected do not only involve delineating the territorial space of the state but, equally important, the cognitive and moral borders which divide homogeneity from diversity, inside from outside, self from other (Stern, 2005: 27; Walker, 1993). These borders presuppose “clear-cut, unambiguous, non-overlapping and defined” frontiers (Chilton, 1996: 64). Moreover, inside its borders, through the measures the state devises to cope with the dangers it names, the state is supposed to secure the ‘imagined political community’ (Anderson, 1991).

In this direction, when security discourses establish which events and actors, what and whom we should fear, they necessarily establish the other, the outside and the *to be feared* at the same time that they establish the domestic, the safe and ordered. Both are constituted in what William Connolly (1991) has named the economy of identity/difference, implying that an “identity is established in relation to a series of differences that have become socially recognized” and that “are essential to its being” (Connolly, 1991: 64). If differences did not exist, neither would identity in its distinctness and solidity (ibid).

Through denominations of danger, the state partially creates those idealized representations of identity to which *national* and *foreign* are hailed. The ways subjects are hailed to adopt certain subject positions are multiple, involving institutional and security practices, such as the demobilization process. Their discursive representation and this particular security practice, ‘how we are represented’ and thus how those representations bear on ‘who we might become’, are the gendered processes of identification I want to problematise in the particular case of the demobilization process in Medellín.<sup>4</sup>

In the constant construction of the identities of state, nation and other, gender plays a crucial role. Those who are called, summoned and hailed by institutional practices to fulfill their security duties in Colombia have a gender-differentiated position, men ought to be active politically, financially sufficient ‘citizens,’ and women ought to show their security loyalties in the war on terror by fulfilling their roles as mothers, heterosexual partners of former combatants and become the markers of pacification. Their active belonging to the category of ‘good citizens’ restricts their agency, reduces their personal, sexual and political affiliations, which is overridden by their obedience to the state’s project of security.

The construction of an individual citizen in the Colombian case, represented as an autonomous self that founds the political community, privileges attributes traditionally linked to masculine power relationships by presenting the main characteristics of sovereignty (objectivity, rationality, morality and power-driven) as concomitant interests and features of ‘men’. However, this gender constitution is made invisible in security politics in order to present ‘the sovereign man’ as an unproblematic disembodied being that founds political order. Citizen, this subject of law, of political, economic and

cultural practices and rituals, is impossibly individual, with impossibly undifferentiated, uniform, and universal properties, entitlements, and duties (Joseph, 2000: 3). In short, citizenship becomes an impossible ideal of an “independent, autonomous individual, disconnected from time and space, circumstances, personal relations, state formations or position of knowledge” (Weber, 2008). In other words, in order to appear universal, this ‘citizen’ needs to be devoid of its gender, race, class, ethnicity, as well as other contextual and historical aspects of identity (Politics & Gender, 2007).

I turn my attention at this particular historicity of gendered citizenship in the Colombian setting. Instead of assuming that the citizen, as subject, is autonomous, centered and devoid of gender, I explore the security discourses and the micropractice of demobilization of paramilitaries in Medellín as a way of making visible how citizens are, in and of themselves, open to relations with others and how their experiences open up new frameworks for understanding violence (Butler, 2004a). I want to pursue an investigation that scrutinizes the positionality of men and women in the Peace and Reconciliation program, how they are hailed to adopt impossible neutral, autonomous and sovereign citizenship practices. They are women and men who are ‘done’ in their gender, partly, by the discourse of Democratic Security.<sup>5</sup>

In order to develop these arguments, this article is structured as follows. First, it reviews the security policy of the Colombian government, pointing at how the naming of terrorism constructs identity categories for ‘us’ and ‘them’. Then by examining closely the particular case of the demobilization process in Medellín, Colombia this paper problematizes the representation of the nuclear family and its concomitant gender roles, relationships and duties carried out in the name of state security.

### **(New) war on terror in Colombia**

As it was mentioned in the introduction, the demobilization process of members of illegal armed groups is part of the state’s security practices in the war on terror. In order to contextualize and position this discourse and its security practices, it is crucial to comprehend how the armed conflict has been redefined according to the concepts of a (new) war on terror. This new framework for violence brings along its own interpretation on the causes of war and hence makes viable certain methods for conflict transformation while – necessarily – leaves others unconsidered.

Although traditionally defined by the government as a war between the state and communist guerrillas, since the decade of the eighties the naming of the Colombian conflict has changed radically (Nieto and Robledo, 2001). The expansion of drug cartels and the creation of paramilitary groups increased the intensity and complexity of the war. The actors of the war proliferated and the connections between guerrillas and drug business, between drug cartels and politicians, between drug cartels and paramilitary groups and between politicians and paramilitary groups were evident. Violence rose to the ranks of the worldwide highest rates of murders, kidnapping and internally displaced persons, making civilians the number one target of the different armed groups, including the armed state forces.

Against this background, definitions and names of the Colombian war flourish.<sup>6</sup> Aware of such multiplicity, I would like to concentrate on the official definition of the war according to the government, since this definition informs the security discourse and serves as platform for the demobilization process. In contrast to (neo)idealist views which present the situation of violence as the result of economic, political and social conditions of ‘underdevelopment’,<sup>7</sup> the current government has defined the war along the lines of a (neo)realist perspective. This perspective assumes that violence exists in individual ‘men’ free from laws and government. Thus, when there is no common power which keeps ‘men’ at awe, no authority can contain the unruliness of ‘man’ who lives in constant fear of ‘a war of every man against every man’ (Hobbes, 1651). The solution to this problem is to establish a common power – a sovereign state authority – that produces so much fear in ‘men’ that it makes them obey and restrain from waging war against their equals. In return, the government promises security and internal order.

These suppositions about subjectivity, violence, fear and consensus are echoed in the official narrative of the war on terror that, hand in hand with the concept of new wars,<sup>8</sup> seem to flawlessly fit the Colombian conflict according to the government.<sup>9</sup> President Alvaro Uribe argues that the guerrillas are narco-terrorist organizations whose mercenaries plunder, intimidate and serve criminal activities (Uribe, 2005). Thus, robust security measures, which undermine democracy, are necessary for the state to recover its lost authority. The President promises that once security is achieved, peace will be born out of authority and people will be able to enjoy freedoms (Uribe, 2002a: 20). So Uribe (ibid: 27) proposes a strong state, a strong government, and good people collaborating with the armed forces to “close ranks against the terrorists”.

Since the (new) war on terror denies an ideological basis for struggle, a particular economic perspective on the causes of violence has gained momentum to comprehend the nexus between armed groups and drug business. This particular view, although contested by numerous political analysts (cf. IEPRI, 2006), has been made popular in Colombia through the design and implementation of World Bank projects. Former WB researcher Paul Collier (2006) holds that people naively believe in the discourse of the rebel groups that claim grievances – like inequality, political repression, and ethnic and religious divisions – as their motives for armed struggle. On the contrary, argues Collier (2006: 23), “[w]hile objective grievances do not generate violent conflict, violent conflict generates subjective grievances. This is not just a by-product of conflict, but an essential activity of a rebel organization.”

Following this thesis, the real cause of violent conflict is the possibility of the rebel groups to profit. There will be rebellions as long as the rebels and their leaders can fill their pockets with money. Hence, rebel groups need to be understood as rational economic agents who respond to incentives and sanctions (Collier, 2006). Consequently, to end violence the risk factors that feed the war need to be tackled with economic and financial instruments.

This definition of violence and its concomitant solutions resound in the current governmental understanding of the Colombian conflict. The government does not

acknowledge a causal frame to comprehend violence but argues that grievances are the very consequences of insecurity. Poverty, exclusion, ecological degradation, political marginalization, violence, humanitarian crises and the 'underdevelopment' of the country are seen as effects of violence and not as conditions for its emergence or continuation (Uribe, 2004a). In this logic, the war will only end when the enemy is defeated militarily. To achieve this defeat, it will take organized state and non-state violence as well as weakening the enemy's sources of income.

### **The Democratic Security Policy**

In order to defeat the terrorists, recover the authority of the state, bring back security to the country and unite Colombians, the government has designed the Democratic Security Policy (DSP). The DSP was the political platform used in the 2002 Presidential campaign of Alvaro Uribe<sup>10</sup> and, once he was in office, it was launched as the security and defense strategy in June 2003 (DSP, 2003). Though Uribe has been in power for over seven years, the pillars of the DSP have been maintained throughout this administration.<sup>11</sup>

For the purposes of this article, it is important to highlight the discursive formations that the DSP creates for the identities of state, nation and others in order to comprehend more thoroughly how these gendered representations hail subjects through the practice of the demobilization process.

The structure of the DSP (2003) follows a conventional understanding of security discourses. It first produces the effects of a state subjectivity by invoking a primary and stable state identity; then it lists a collection of threats that are said to be endangering the state and by extension the nation; and from these representations of dangers the state imparts strategies to cope with the dangers it names and, simultaneously, legitimate the state's role as provider of security to its citizens. In this process, the categories of state, nation, and others are constructed and then produced as social facts according to state's actions (Weldes and others, 1999). Likewise, the border which divides, and at the same time joins, us and them is outlined following a set of markers which enable to distinguish the 'good nationals' from the 'terrorists' (Campbell, 1998).

Addressed to the whole society, the preface of the DSP by the President and the Minister of Defense states the theme perfectly. Everybody's goal is to achieve security: the executive, the legislative and the judiciary branches of the state, the military and the police especially, the civilian population, the industrial sector and the international community. To achieve security, all have to fight against terrorism (DSP, 2003: 6, 8). Thus, security is not reduced to a state obligation, but is a task that has to be undertaken by everybody. Security is proclaimed as an obligation for the whole society. Security is turned into everybody's problem and everybody's responsibility.

The naming of dangers in the DSP refers to six threats "which pose an immediate danger to the stability of the country, its democratic institutions, and the lives of Colombians" (DSP, 2003: §36). These dangers are terrorism, illegal drugs trade, illicit finance, traffic of arms, ammunition and explosives, kidnapping and extortion and

homicide. Though these dangers comprise a wide spectrum, in the explanation developed in the DSP they all relate to terrorism.

Simultaneously, the notion of 'terrorism' is vaguely defined as a method for which "the only common denominator among [its] different variants [...] is the calculated use of deadly violence against civilians for political purposes" (DSP, 2003: §37). Terrorism turns into the label ascribed to all types of illegitimate violence and hence the term "is conceived as an action with no political ground, [and which] cannot be read politically. It emerges, as they say, from fanatics, extremists, who do not espouse a point of view, but rather exist outside of 'reason', and do not have part in the human community" (Butler, 2004b: 88-89).

Leaving terrorism outside of the realm of politics turns 'terrorists' into invalid political interlocutors. Therefore, the ways of dealing with this threat are presented as apolitical. According to the government, the war on terror can only be won by military means (DSP, 2003: §88-§90). And since 'we all have to fight terrorism', the concept that the government introduces for marking the borders between 'us' (good citizens) and 'them' (terrorists) is the notion of 'patriotic solidarity', disguised as a Constitutional duty for all Colombians:

*Solidarity* demanded by the modern social democratic State to help prevent crime and terrorism, by providing information relating to the illegal armed groups. [...] If 44 million Colombians support and feel support by the State, terrorism can be defeated. (DSP, 2003: §130)

The government has placed its security's priority on the cities, where the plan is to "encourage the participation and co-operation of each and every citizen in the achievement and maintenance of security [through] alliances between the authorities and the citizenry [as] the quickest and surest way of restoring security" (DSP, 2003: §93-§94). This alliance comprises, amongst other elements, "active citizen co-operation, based on the common values of respect for the dignity of the people and the rejection of [non-state] violence" (DSP, 2003: §104).

Citizen's cooperation has been mainly institutionalized in rural and urban areas as networks which "in accordance with the principle of solidarity and the duty to contribute to common security, will provide the authorities with information which will help in the prevention of crime and the pursuit of criminals" (DSP, 2003: §131). This army of good people "will also participate in programmes aimed at promoting a culture of security" and act as "an extra set of eyes for the authorities with whom they will be in constant contact" (ibid).

In this fight of all against terrorism, the government aims at involving the whole society. Therefore, it is a key factor that the government controls what the media is allowed to communicate. Journalists are informed of their duties in this fight: they should report with responsibility and prudence "when releasing information which endangers lives or jeopardises [military] operations" (DSP, 2003: §136). The above includes "the use of the

media by those who attack the civilian population as a sounding board to justify their actions, and the impact of the language that is used when reporting information” (DSP, 2003: §137). This way, the state dictates the limits of what can be spoken and what cannot be spoken about in the media, censoring criticism of state violence in the name of security (Butler, 2004b).

Following Gianni Vattimo (1992), this image resembles the transparent society in which citizens’ activities, thoughts, actions, plans, attitudes and behaviors are controlled by a government that is ever more opaque. The security functions of the state expand to a point in which it is no longer possible to control its actions. When the increase of securitized issues is pervasive to the point of controlling the definitions of the armed conflict by the media, then such society can no longer contain that common power which ‘keeps men at awe’, to paraphrase Hobbes. The fear the Leviathan inflicts is overwhelming, it draws the boundaries of public speech, of a reasonable opinion in the media and it silences those who criticize state policies by labeling them unpatriotic and terrorist-sympathizers (Butler, 2004b).<sup>12</sup>

Precisely in this direction, when security turns into a duty for everyone, then ‘the people’ have the obligation to accomplish their security duties or otherwise face the consequences of being labeled suspect, non-collaborator and, in this logic, a security threat in themselves. The call for security, based on a national fight against terrorism, not only includes those who commit acts of terror, but it stretches to include anyone who is suspect of doing so, as well as people who do not actively collaborate with the security forces to fight the war, who do not comply with security measures, those who criticize the government and those who do not want to be ruled this way (Butler, 2004b).

These discursive formations, which construct an ideal picture of ‘the Colombian national’, are articulated as the history of an imagined political community organized as a fraternity for which its members should be willing to kill and die for (Anderson, 1991). In the DSP, the political community has clear origins, current attributes and a common future. According to official security discourses, ‘Colombia’ is a great nation born in the war of independence and later on shaped by an authoritarian military figure (Simón Bolívar) who was able to bring security to the country. Only afterwards, its counter figure, symbolizing civilian freedoms (Francisco de Paula Santander), had the chance to erect norms and rules which brought civil liberties to the people (Uribe, 2002b). The government recalls this ‘historical event’ as a *coup de force*, which legitimizes current public policies and the sacrifices it demands from the citizenry based on the birth of the nation (Campbell, 1999).

At the present moment, this nation is portrayed as weak, a conglomerate of people who “cannot mourn their dead anymore, [as a] nation who is agonizing” and, consequently, it needs a strong state to support ‘her’ in the war on terror (Uribe, 2002b). Hence, the nation’s unity is based upon the exclusion of those who have harmed ‘her’. ‘We’ are bound by the pain that has been inflicted upon ‘us’ by ‘them’. ‘We’ are defined by the enemies *we face* (Saco, 1999). At the same time, the state promises that this enemy –

terrorism – will be defeated, only if ‘we’ all collaborate with the security forces. The unity of millions who make up the army of ‘good people’, under the command of a strong state authority, is the necessary combined force that will be able to defeat the narco-terrorists.

The President claims that, on the day in which security prevail, uncertainty will be mastered and peace will be born out of authority (Uribe, 2002a). On that day of victory, the sacrifices of today will be worth it. Hence, in this fight future scenarios are crucial. The future is the time-space that takes precedence over the present. All the sacrifices are made in the name not just of security, but also of “achieving security in the future” (ibid).

Citizens then are made in the concrete historical-political space that collapses fraternity into nation. This particular articulation unites the notions of citizen and patriot and makes their meaning synonymous. Just like in the nineteenth century wars, the figure of a patriotic citizen does not just entail rights, but also obligations to the homeland, which explicitly include the call for rising up in arms to defend ‘her’ (Uribe de H., 2004: 88-89). The representation of a patriotic citizen, as discursive identity category, also implies matters of imagination, desires and inventions in which public speech has an important role to play for the very ways in which ‘we’ conceive ‘us’ as social subjects (ibid: 76-77).

Such temporal elements are carefully constructed in a way that the story of ‘who we are’, ‘where we come from’ and ‘where we are heading to’ is presented as coherent, unitary and consistent. This narrative makes the nation’s identity fixed, its borders clear-cut and its destiny certain. Each of these times and places confirms the thesis of the government that only when the nation participates actively in the war and fulfils its patriotic duties, security will be achieved and then, only then, peace will be born out of authority and people will be able to exercise their freedoms.

### **The demobilization process**

The project of defeating terrorism with a military campaign and with the ‘patriotic solidarity of the good citizens’ is the basis for the demobilization process. It was inaugurated by President Uribe on 23 December 2002 when enabling the state to initiate processes of demobilization with armed groups without recognizing their political status (Law 782/2002). This legal prerogative was designed for the paramilitary forces, which had promised to enter a ceasefire since November 2002. However, “[d]espite the declared cease-fire, paramilitaries were still responsible for massacres, targeted killings, ‘disappearances’, torture, kidnappings and threats” (Amnesty International, 2004: 5-6).

In July 2003, government representatives and paramilitary leaders of the group Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) signed the Agreement Santa Fé de Ralito and paved the way for the demobilization process to take place outside the frame of a peace agreement. The demobilizations were so agreed to result in the reincorporation of former combatants into civilian life and contribute to the state’s security strategy by reducing the ‘man’-power of illegal armed groups and using their confessions as a

source of military information “to stop illegal armed groups’ assaults and formulate military counterattacks” (Anaya, 2006: 2).

It was made clear that the demobilization process was not a pillar in a peace process but a key element in winning the war on terror, and herein rests one of the biggest difficulties. The legal procedures for demobilization were signed before the reincorporation into civilian life had been thought out and before it was clear how the rights of the victims could be safeguarded and protected. This sequence in time reflects the priorities of the security agenda and severely diminishes the possibilities of turning this war strategy into a peace process.

From November 2002 until May 2007, the government’s invitation for terrorists to lay down their arms, return to “the nuclear family and abandon a clandestine life” (DSP, 2003: §116) was headed by circa 44,500 demobilized persons (Presidency of Colombia, 2007). Out of this group, 31,000 are combatants who have demobilized in collective acts and the rest individually. Out of all the demobilized combatants in the three years period, approximately 3,400 (eight percent) are women (Policía Nacional, 2007).<sup>13</sup>

The main common characteristic between collective and individual demobilizations is that both imply disarmament, provision of information to the security forces and reincorporation into civilian life. However, there are great differences between collective and individual demobilizations. Collective demobilizations take place because of the order of the armed group leader, which implies a hierarchical structure and obedience, relations that do not automatically disappear with the demobilization act (Iniciativa de Mujeres por la Paz, 2006: 15; Restrepo, 2009). On the other hand, individual demobilizations take place on the basis of combatants voluntarily abandoning the armed group, which for many of them implies being labeled as traitors and thus living in constant fear of getting killed by former comrades (Anaya, 2007: 16).

#### *Individual demobilizations*

Whereas most of the collective demobilizations take place in the locality where the armed groups operated, because of its characteristics individual demobilizations imply the relocation from where the person was living with the armed group to a shelter in distant urban areas called House of Peace “Casa de Paz”. This movement aims at protecting the demobilized person from possible revenge of the former armed group and it has implied the isolation and exclusion of the demobilized in the shelters the state has arranged for them. This isolation also is an incentive for former combatants to hand information to the military forces since “to give information that leads to capture former commanders or helps disband their former block or group is a way of protecting their own lives” (ibid).

Since the project of state security seeks the constitution of the nuclear family, once the demobilized person has been assigned a shelter, his/her family is also relocated there. This move has significant gender effects and consequences. The first one is that even if a combatant spent years away from his/her family, once the demobilization takes place the state finds the family and moves it together with the former combatant without

taking into consideration if and how the families seek re-unification. Additionally, the stressful situation provoked by the 'family reunion', together with high levels of anxiety in the shelters, has resulted in an increased number of cases of domestic violence and abuse (ibid: 15).

Combining these findings with the data of the National Police (Policía Nacional, 2006) which claims that around eighty-five percent of the individual demobilized combatants are men and that the state only recognizes as 'nuclear family' members of heterosexual couples, leads to the conclusion that most of those who suffer acts of violence in the shelters by their partners are women. This information provides a more complete picture of the gendered character of the security practice of demobilizations. Men entered the demobilization process on a 'voluntary' basis and their families (i.e. wife and children) are relocated away from their living places in provisional shelters in urban centers. All family members are isolated from the places where they lived and the wives and children of these former warriors are abused. The state, however, has not yet considered increased domestic violence as an effect of the demobilization process.

Conflating the ideas of nation and family in the name of security is then highly problematic. The state demands from 'good citizens' to pay their security obligations to the nation by providing information to the security forces and to 'become one of us' by joining the nuclear family. This way the state enforces the rules of heterosexual marriage as fundamental element in securing the identity of the nation. Whether former combatants and their wives and children want to be re-unified is not a question. The state makes sure that the family is relocated at any cost in terms of physical and psychological violence to 'family members.'

In this light, the gendered obligations to the nation are made evident. As nationals, Colombians are expected to be prepared to die for their country (Yuval-Davis, 1997: 24) but whereas men are publicly recognized as former warriors and, once demobilized, as important sources of information to defeat terrorism, women are hailed to fulfill other type of national duties. To paraphrase Yuval-Davis and Anthias (1989: 7), women's duties comprise being biological reproducers of the members of national collectivities - such as explicitly being called to bear children to demobilized men-, as reproducers of the boundaries of national groups - in this case border markers for demobilized groups - and as active transmitters and producers of the national culture - a culture of peace, civility and regulated heterosexual relations.

Contrary to the role of men during and after war, women are made invisible in the demobilization process. Although they are also active participants in violent struggles and are singled out in the demobilization process as biological and cultural reproducers of the 'good citizenry', the state handles this process as gender-neutral. In the same vein, the construction of manhood and masculinity is also left untouched. Which type of gender relations can help clarify why circa ninety percent of the combatants are male? This question is left unconsidered.<sup>14</sup>

#### *Collective demobilizations in Medellín*

At the local level, nationalist women's duties are also present in collective processes of demobilization where nation, state security and nuclear family become a pervasive unity that is presented as an apolitical issue and, thus, left outside of the limits of public debate. I would like to use the example of the city of Medellín to illustrate the complex and discriminatory character of this gendered process.

Once the national government signed demobilization agreements with paramilitary leaders, local administrations found themselves faced with the question of how to deal with thousands of former combatants who were disarming. As it was mentioned in the introduction of this section, the state first decided upon disarmament and only later concerned itself with the question of reincorporation. In other words, since 2003 cities like Medellín have received thousands of demobilized persons without any specific plan for reintegration except the central government instruction of 'turning warriors into citizens' (Iniciativa de Mujeres por la Paz, 2006: 15). From 2003 until 2006, the city of Medellín received approximately 4,000 demobilized men and 40 women, a total number equivalent to thirteen percent of the total demobilizations in the country (Alcaldía de Medellín, 2006: 5).

Precisely for dealing with the demobilization process, the local administration of Medellín designed the institutional Program "Peace and Reconciliation: Model of Intervention for Returning to Legality" (*Paz y Reconciliación: Modelo de intervención de regreso a la legalidad*, hereafter PPR). The PPR should then make sure that former combatants are successfully turned into citizens, defined by the local administration as a process in which the individual is prepared to fully enter society and acquire a formal job (Alcaldía de Medellín, 2007: 6).

The PPR was designed upon an initial diagnosis based on testimonies of former combatants as regards their motives for joining illegal armed groups. The information provided by demobilized people and collected by the local government shows that the main reasons for joining armed groups are external threats (25 percent), death of a loved one (25 percent), stressful economic situation (23 percent), conflict with family members, friends or neighbors (7 percent) and others (20 percent) (Alcaldía de Medellín, 2007: 2). Despite of this initial diagnosis, which hints that most of the motives for joining armed groups are found at the relational level, only two out of seven areas of intervention deal with non-financial aspects of violence (Alcaldía de Medellín, 2006: 9). Hence, no institutional line of action was designed to respond to relational conflicts in the reincorporation programs implemented by the state.

For example, the psychosocial support area aims at providing familiar and communitarian psychological support, creating and strengthening trust, promoting communitarian development and establishing processes of compensation and reconciliation (Alcaldía de Medellín, 2007: 3). However, once set into motion this support program aims at providing education and job opportunities to former combatants. This lack of consistency is made clear in the first question posed to the demobilized person within the framework of the psychosocial program: "In which area would you like to study or work" (Alcaldía de Medellín, 2006: 11). The multiple

choice answers offered to the interviewed are: finish primary school, finish high school, professional training, high-level education, and social and communitarian action (ibid).

The PPR supplies former combatants with two years of monthly stipends, training courses and jobs offers. These conditions seek to make the demobilized persons economically productive and politically active citizens with cleaned criminal records.

An obvious yet unauthorized question that needs to be asked is why are relational aspects of violence not dealt with in the PPR? What is at stake when taking seriously the testimonies of former combatants? I believe that some answers to these questions are to be found in the effort to fence off counter-articulations to the identity of the nation as it is constructed in the security discourse of the Colombian government.

On the one hand, if demobilized persons contend that their motives to join illegal armed groups were not financial reasons but external threats, the death of a loved one or conflicts with family members, friends and neighbors, then the picture that arises enters in clear contradiction with the definition of violence espoused by the government. The latter defines violence in Colombia because of a weak state authority in the past and nurtured by the desire of narco-terrorists to fill their pockets with money. The state promises that peace will be born out of authority, only if we follow the security measures and actively participate in the 'army of good people'. Peace then turns into a certain promise, a knowable stage, always deferred in the future, for which we sacrifice today. This promise "overshadows the conviviality of individuals and communities" (Dietrich, 2006: 29) and, problematically, is unresponsive to the situation at hand, while constantly referring to highest principles beyond the present moment (Dietrich, 2008: 178).

Thus, listening to the testimonies of demobilized persons dissolves the frame for understanding violence within the (new) war on terror. These testimonies highlight the fact that there is much more to collective violence than greed and disobedience to sovereign authority. The testimonies hint at violent conflicts that express feelings, thoughts, words, actions and reactions in their own communities, relationally, in a particular context with concrete persons (Dietrich, 2006: 42). Consequently, these testimonies cannot be inscribed upon conventional divisions between sovereign/non-sovereign and us/them. Most importantly, when we listen carefully to the testimonies we realize that they defy the violent inscription of 'otherness' as a threat to 'our' national and territorial unity and to 'our' war on terror. Yet, articulated along the DSP lines of exclusion and violence against 'otherness', the Colombian government cannot come to terms with these particular understanding of violence and relationality.

Secondly, taking serious relational aspects of violence implies looking at the ways in which these relationships have worked and have constituted themselves in Medellín in order to recognize which role they have played in the legitimation of violence. In other words, this reflection would imply making visible relational aspects that account for collective violence with the aim of transforming them (Galtung, 2004). I would argue that gender does not only shape the institutional, political and economic structural

levels, but also that at the relational level gender relationships play a decisive role. Yet, since the state project of security is based in particular on the construction of traditional gender relationships in the form of nuclear families, a profound transformative gender perspective is banned from public debate.

Let us briefly take the example of the “death of a loved one” to make this point clearer. In former versions of the PPR made public by the local administration in July 2006, instead of ‘the death of a loved one’ accounting for 25 percent of the motives alleged by demobilized combatants to join the armed groups, the official document read “personal vengeance”. One could argue that the motivation for joining the armed group is the desire to avenge the death of a loved one, not necessarily the death in itself.

The topic of revenge has been widely researched by cultural scholars in Medellín (Salazar, 1993, 2002; León, 2004; Blair, 1999, 2005; Vélez, 2000). What some of these findings suggest is that in many cases acts of violence perpetrated by young males have been justified and encouraged by the figure of motherhood (Vélez, 2000).<sup>15</sup> The feminine figure of the mother in need of protection by a hyper-masculine warrior son keeps feeding the cycle of revenge. Paradoxically, then, the relationships of a mother taking care of her children and in need of protection by a male figure which is strong, exhibits warrior features and acts as financial support of the family is precisely the representation of the family encouraged at the institutional level as part of the national security strategy.

Yet, the complexity of the relations between violence, gender and agency would point to the urgency of recognizing the multiple roles and relationships between women and men, womanhood and manhood, in war and peace that challenge a clear dividing line between victim and perpetrator along gender identifications. This implies that the stereotypical dynamics of patriarchal culture in Medellín “in terms of the bipolar concepts of *machismo* – hypervirility – and *marianismo* – a female archetype of purity and submissiveness; in other words, violent subjects (men) and peaceful ones (women)” (Riaño-Alcalá, 2006: 143), need to be closely scrutinized and thought out in their complexity. The call for understanding the violent conflict as systemic, relational and contextual then also requires that gender categories are open for recognizing how men and women are “instigators of conflict, perpetrators of violence, victims of conflict and eligible for demobilisation and reincorporation processes” (Schwitalla and Dietrich, 2007: 58). Their gender identities allow for multiple positions that are being limited and restricted by simplified, fixed and stereotypical traditional gender identities in the DSP which, ultimately, rework the same gender divisions that feed violence in the first place.

#### *Institutional readjustments of gendered demobilizations*

The Peace and Reconciliation program of Medellín became the model for the rest of the country in the middle of 2006, after the Colombian Parliament passed the Law Justice and Peace (*Ley de Justicia y Paz*, Law 975/2005) and a new institutional framework was created to attend massive demobilizations of more than forty-four thousand between August 2002 and May 2007. Based on the mandate of the Justice and Peace Law, in 2006 the National Commission on Reparation and Reconciliation (CNRR) was

formed and, based on the Peace and Reconciliation program, the office of the President created the High Council on Reintegration (*Alta Consejería para la Reintegración*, ACR). This institutional framework was so erected inspired on the 'success' of the program in the city of Medellín, which by then experienced a dramatic decline in the number of murders registered, i.e. 61 percent between 2003 and 2007 (Restrepo, 2009: 16).

However, since the beginning of 2008, critics of the local administration have put to scrutiny the so-called success of the reintegration model. According to political scientist analysis (cf. Restrepo, 2009), the decrease in the number of murderers in Medellín, from 2003 until 2007 would obey to a structural unification between illegal groups, mainly a hierarchical line of command from former paramilitary leader 'Don Berna', which also absorbed other armed groups in the city, and legal arrangements supported in the reintegration process of the local administration.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, despite the evidence that the Peace and Reconciliation program in Medellín portrayed a false decrease in violence and created the conditions for illegal and legal organizations to adjust to new forms of organized violence in the city, most critics fail to scrutinize the gender dynamics that called on men and women to position themselves in relation to war through the local conduct of everyday reintegration practices (O'Gorman, 1999: 102).

The institutional reaction towards gender critiques of the demobilization process has been to include the 'issue' of gender in the institutional framework of the CNRR. One of the working groups of the Commission is called 'gender and specific populations', which is geared towards paying special attention to victims, such as women, children and historically discriminated groups, like indigenous and Afro-Colombian populations (CNRR, 2009). In this manner, the state retakes the topic of gender and accommodates it in the official discourse as it is necessary for the project of security to succeed: women are victims. They cannot be seen as active combatants nor are they officially recognized as female members of demobilized groups and/or active citizens that defy the division victim/perpetrator. Women are re-inscribed in the category of passivity, peacefulness, in need of help and protection by the state, and fit for the state project of creating a nuclear family as part of the security strategy. In this manner, the state has succeeded in resignifying gender relations by bringing in women in their role as victims.

Hence, in the following lines, I would like to highlight the many functions and gender effects which are produced by the assumptions articulated and those silenced in the demobilization process. My contention is that the state project of security can only be enforced by the invisibility of gender and the seemingly moral certainty that the notion of nuclear family provides for securing national identity.

### **Gendered effects of the security project**

While analyzing the political constitution of the gendered subject by looking at the public discourses on demobilization in Medellín, I have traced how they produce the effects of seemingly coherent gender identities (Butler, 1990: 208). In the following, and attending to Judith Butler's invitation to rethink gender identities as open to resignification, I inquire into the limits to the possibilities for becoming someone/somebody different than a woman fulfilling her official security duties.

#### *Carrying on security duties*

As it was sketched above, participating in the project of security of the Colombian government is an obligation for everyone who does not want (or cannot afford) to be labeled terrorist or terrorist-sympathizer and thus a security threat in him/herself. Through different security practices, amongst them the demobilization process,<sup>17</sup> subjects are hailed to assume the positions of soldiers and collaborators in the war on terror. However, what the analysis of the demobilization process both at individual and collective levels suggests is that the subject positions for constructing the nation of 'good citizens' are highly differentiated for men and women. The project of turning warriors into citizens rests on and at the same time deepens the dichotomies male-female, warrior-caretaker and protector-protected.

Though most of the demobilized combatants are male (ca. 90 percent), the process of demobilization is portrayed as gender-neutral. This assumption is quite problematic for many reasons. The masculine figure of the male soldier – as official warrior in the army and/or as the extra set of ears and eyes of state authorities – makes sure that males remain the main protagonists of the war and once demobilized the main protagonists of the public sphere. Once granted the status of citizens, men collaborate with the security forces by providing information to militarily counter-attack narco-terrorists organizations. Yet they are also granted training and job opportunities allowing them to become economically productive and politically active citizens.

Still the project of security calls on these 'citizens' to join the nuclear family and, if most of the demobilized combatants are male, to paraphrase Cynthia Enloe (1989), one would ask 'where are the women'? The representation of the nuclear family implies a married heterosexual couple living together and bearing children. Thus women, in their public 'absence', are the other side of the coin of the project of state security. They need to also fulfill their security duties in the war on terror by pacifying the men who have laid down their arms. Women are re-united with their male partners and are expected to serve as guardians of the new citizen. In this manner, women ought to pay their contribution to the state project of security by biologically and culturally reproducing the 'good nation'.

The consequences of this representation are manifold. First, it constructs the role of women in the war on terror as synonymous with pacification, if not peacefulness, at the same time that it represents males as economic and politically active citizens. As it has been researched in the particular case of the Colombian war, women actively participate in the war effort (Londoño and Nieto, 2006; Meertens, 2003; Iniciativa de Mujeres por la Paz, 2006).<sup>18</sup> The fact that only eight to ten percent of the current demobilized

combatants are women should raise suspicion. Is the demobilization process only geared towards providing citizen status to males? To encourage women's participation in the demobilization process would disrupt the articulation of women's peaceful 'nature' and thus the myth of the nuclear family as the solution to male aggressiveness and collective violence would fail.

Secondly, the fact that men enter the process of becoming citizens both as economically autonomous and as legal participants in the nation-building process leave women relegated to the 'traditional' sphere of household activities. Once warrior and now citizen, demobilized men keep performing their roles as masculine protectors. Therefore, the transition from warrior to citizen does not entail the transformation of traditional masculine identity, it does however imply becoming a 'good national' in the war on terror. Thus while men receive educational training and job offers as part of the demobilization process, women are supposed to carry on their security duties to the nation-state by staying home and bringing up children. Such institutional security arrangement creates women's dependency from male partners and accentuates the lack of spaces and opportunities to participate in other type of activities. For women it implies that their affiliation to the nation should override any other interests and sexual preferences they might have for the sake of national unity.

In other words, what is at stake is the construction of gender and families as pillars of the state project of security. 'Traditional' gender relationships, and 'traditional' men's and women's roles are represented as the features that mark the end of the warrior's life in combat and the beginning of a citizen's life to enter society.

#### *Gender identities in the process of becoming*

I would like to retake one of the initial points raised in this paper in regards to the constitution of identity. Hall argues that the process of identification is not so much about being but about becoming:

not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. Identities are therefore constituted within, not outside representation. (Hall, 1996: 4)

Therefore, we are looking at the (lack of) possibilities for becoming something different from a woman fulfilling her obligations to the nation in the fight against terrorism. Who they might become has regrettably been already decided in the security discourse and is powerfully being carried on by national and international institutions. As Michael Shapiro (2001) notes, the representation of the nuclear family in its 'traditional' understanding provides moral certainty to the politics of national culture. The erasure of the possibilities to relate somehow differently, to establish kinship relationships along alternative lines and to articulate counter-narratives of what it is to be a man, a woman and families are fenced off by the politics of security.

Making the nuclear family essential to the state project of security at the same time fixes family (sex and gender) constructions. The securitization of the nuclear family, in the terms espoused in the DSP and practiced in the DDR process, provides shields that make unintelligible and threatening alternative sex and gender arrangements in the name of national security. In the midst of the Colombian war on terror, the nexus family-security makes a powerful argument not to be constituted differently because if what is at stake in re-thinking gender relationships is a national security concern, then the possibilities for becoming otherwise are security threats in and of themselves.<sup>19</sup>

### **Final remarks**

Framed in the (new) war on terror, the Colombian government has launched a military campaign to defeat narco-terrorist organizations that are portrayed as mercenaries who plunder and intimidate, are driven by financial greed and, hence, lack any political status. In order to recover the authority of the state, the government calls for a united front against terrorism in which 'we all have to fulfill security duties'.

In the government's Democratic Security discourse the discursive formation of the identity category of 'nationals' is defined as a fraternity of people who share a common history, present and future. In order to achieve security in the future, as the government promises, all 'good citizens' need to participate in the war effort, either by providing information to the security forces or by actively fighting in the war.

Part of the security strategies of the state is the demobilization process of paramilitary groups with which the government aims at diminishing the 'man'-power of illegal armed groups and collecting information to be used in military counter-attacks. In order to disarm combatants, the government calls on them to lay down their arms and come back to the nuclear family, offering them the abandonment of a clandestine life in return for citizenship status.

In this sense, the security policy seeks to secure the physical borders of the state as well as the moral borders of the nation. Both these projects need each other to appear as coherent and unproblematic enterprises. In other words, the state needs to maintain the ideal image of a nuclear family as natural, traditional and as source of peace. To unsettle this idea would imply rethinking the ways in which this (new) war on terror has been defined and also the state security project.

The Peace and Reconciliation program of Medellín included, besides official disarmament of combatants, an institutional model of reintegration into 'civilian life', offering job and education opportunities to turn combatants into law-abiding citizens. Based on a gender-blind notion of citizenship, the Medellín program focused on giving public political voice and financial opportunities to a majority of male combatants and encouraged them to enter heterosexual arrangements in which their female counterparts would serve as markers of their pacification and 'return to normality'.

By looking at the gendered character of the demobilization process, both individually as well as collectively, it was evidenced that though women are crucial for the state project

of security, they remain invisible. While demobilized male combatants receive education and jobs opportunities, women are called to fulfill their national security duties by performing their role in official nuclear family arrangements.

Making women invisible in the war has manifold consequences and functions. First, the ideal images of women as peaceful and caretakers are left untouched. Since the demobilization program is geared towards turning male warriors into citizens, women's participation in the demobilization program is low. The state makes sure that the institutional framework and the data generated creates no evidence that, in fact, women play an important role in violent relationships that feed the war. As far as their role as perpetrators is negated, the project of state security can make use of women as border guards of pacification. Because women do not participate in the demobilization program as members of illegal armed groups, the state's project of a secure nuclear family has ground.

Secondly, making women invisible in war activities denies them the benefits of the demobilization program and becoming active citizens. This militaristic logic is clearly exemplified in the security project: only those who were soldiers can now become citizens. Those excluded from the war are also excluded from being active political and economic agents. Women's invisibility is necessary to deny education and job opportunities to women, leaving them outside the practice of citizenship as it is conceived by the Colombian government.

Conflating state security with the nuclear family construct is a powerful combination. It negates ambiguities and uncertainties in the political and sexual realm(s). Making the 'nuclear family' a security issue in the war on terror silences and marginalizes alternative identities, it forecloses possibilities to be represented differently, for being constituted in multiple and alternative manners. If we are to peacefully tackle the continuation and exacerbation of violence, the seemingly gender-neutral character of the security discourse in Colombia should be unsettled, disrupted and questioned in order to challenge the postulates and restrictions of pursuing the impossible promise of a secure political future and open a public discussion on how this 'traditional' gender doing can be undone.

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<sup>3</sup> The scope of this paper leaves aside the role of women as combatants and active participants in armed groups as well as women as victims. My focus does not imply that women are ‘only’ civilians or, to paraphrase Sjöberg and Gentry (2007), that they are destined to fulfilling mythical roles as mothers, monsters and whores. I believe that precisely a problematisation of women’s roles and gendered insecurities in war and peace arrangements needs to go beyond a moralistic typology of conflict that divides violent scenarios in victims, perpetrators and civilians caught in the middle. The war in Medellín, as I have argued elsewhere (Echavarría, 2007), is a systemic conflict that challenges us to rethink violence as collective, responding to diachronic as well as synchronic events, dysfunctional relationships and which cannot be dealt with by regenerating ‘perpetrators’. As this paper also suggests, we have to take the chance we have on our hands and confront ourselves with probably the scariest of all possibilities: that we are all part of the conflict. See the original contribution of Bowen and García-Durán (2004) in this respect.

<sup>4</sup> This examination hence does not consider the investment, resistance or reaction of subjects to those practices, which are necessary to articulate the process of identification. In this regard, see especially Pearce (2007).

<sup>5</sup> The question of recognition and withholding recognition for performing gender is a main topic of Butler’s *Undoing Gender* (2004a), which is indispensable for gaining a more comprehensive picture of the negotiations of identities at stake. See Echavarría (2010).

<sup>6</sup> The definitions on the characterization of violence in Colombia also abound in academia. Some Colombian academicians have focused their attention on the causes for the war, privileging political and social explanations that mainly address injustice and inequality issues, as well as the inability of the state to accomplish its functions (Angarita, 2001; Comisión de Estudios sobre la Violencia, 1995). Other currents have centered their attention on the characteristics of the armed struggle, first classifying the armed actors and, from there, inferring conclusions about the character of the conflict (Franco, 2002; Pizarro, 1990; 1991; Rangel, 2005). The financing of the guerrillas and paramilitary groups with drug money has marked economic analyses by denying much of the political character to the armed conflict (Deas and Gaitán, 1995). Several academics have tried to trace the development, evolution or transformation of the armed groups in the past four decades and to assign to each period a different characterization (Nieto and Robledo, 2001). Finally, a considerable number of academics comprehend the history of the conflict within a wider spectrum. They trace the causes of the current armed conflict to the day of independence in the nineteenth century as a way of highlighting it as a long and violent process of nation building (Ramírez, 2002; Uribe de H. and López, 2006). A recent book that compiles in succinct and well-elaborated manner discussions on the importance of defining the war is the edited collection by the IEPRI (2006) *Nuestra Guerra sin Nombre* [Our Nameless War].

<sup>7</sup> A contrasting view is held by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). In the 2003 Annual Report, the UNDP depicts the Colombian armed conflict caused by structural circumstances such as the weakness of the state and the political exclusion of alternative tendencies from the political legal system, amongst which the UN acknowledges the political project of the armed groups. In this light, the UNDP proposes to strengthen development programs, which would bring about an improvement in the socio-economical conditions and, so it is assumed, alleviate poverty and exclusion which shall foster economic growth and peace (UNDP, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> Mary Kaldor’s use of Colombia as a quintessential ‘new war’ (Kaldor, 1999) has gained widespread appeal among both policy elites and academics. This has also provoked heated debates in Colombia that are concisely discussed in Marshal and Messiant (2004).

<sup>9</sup> The international dimension of the conflict, especially the political, military and economic alliance between the US government and Colombia, plays a chief role in the denomination of the conflict. Plan Colombia may be the clearest expression of the US government's official understanding of the Colombian situation as a democratic state fighting narco-terrorism. Envisaged in 2000 under the Presidency of Pastrana and approved at that time by the US Congress, Plan Colombia has been controversial since its publication and, although it may fit neatly into the war on terror rhetoric, it was conceived before 9/11. This makes clear that, although the DSP intertextually and contextually fits into the war on terror, the war against narco-terrorism through military means has enjoyed a longer tradition in the country.

<sup>10</sup> Alvaro Uribe was first elected as President in May 2002, a couple of months after the breakdown of peace dialogues between the government of President Andrés Pastrana and the guerrillas Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP). This breakdown was crucial for the election of the popular right wing politician Uribe, who proposed to end the war by defeating the guerrillas militarily. For a discussion on the culturally produced crisis of the peace talks and the designation of an open war as the only plausible option left for Colombians, see Echavarría (2010).

<sup>11</sup> In 2007, the government issued a consolidation strategy for the DSP, which should serve the second Presidency of Uribe (2006-2010). This new document mainly reworks the DSP original geopolitical objectives of territorial control while emphasizing biopolitical practices, especially the management of the population through reducing their movement and circulation (Ministerio de Defensa, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> A well-known international example in which the current government equated criticism of public policies with terrorist-sympathy is the accusation of President Uribe to Amnesty International (AI) in 2004. After the massacre of La Gabarra, in a speech President Uribe (2004b) questioned why AI had kept silence when narco-terrorists (the guerrillas FARC-EP) committed acts of violence, whereas AI constantly denounced state's actions. The President reminded AI of the obligation to take sides, either it was with the terrorists or with the Colombian state institutions.

<sup>13</sup> Since the demobilization process is labeled as a national security issue, official information about demobilized persons, like their gender, is restricted and fragmented in different public communications. The gender data offered here derives from several sources (Presidency of Colombia, 2007; Policía Nacional, 2007; Anaya 2006, 2007; Iniciativa de Mujeres por la Paz, 2006; Alcaldía de Medellín, 2006).

<sup>14</sup> In June 2007, I met with the director of the Peace and Reconciliation Program, Jorge Gaviria. Trying to interrogate the gender dynamics of the demobilization process I asked him why there was no attention to gender in the institutional framework designed. He responded that there was no specific gender program because there were very few women demobilized. This anecdote cannot account for any representative data, but it does signal the lack of consideration of gender, as analytic prism, in the demobilization process and the silence built around gender altogether. As explained in the section below, gender is collapsed in the figure of women, it is understood as 'an exception', i.e. monsters (Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007) and hence, there is a low numbers of female combatants that transcend sanctioned gender roles (Gunhild and Dietrich, 2007). Preferably in the picture of the secure 'nuclear family', women are portrayed as victims (CNRR, 2009). For a critical discussion on female combatants and their experiences in demobilization processes in Colombia, see Londoño and Nieto (2006) in note 18, and for a study of masculinities in the Medellín war, see Baird (2009).

<sup>15</sup> Especially salient has been the phenomena of hired assassins (*sicarios*). For instance, authors like Vélez (2000: 172) argue that distinctively in this case violent manifestations can be viewed as the emergence of unconscious content that has been excluded and repressed consciously by a dominant culture that honours violence. Thus, the emergence of violence should be addressed in a collective manner by embracing the manifestations of violence – individualized in the *sicarios* – and should allow for the expression of intergenerational traumata and the revalorization of the feminine.

<sup>16</sup> The hierarchical structure combining legal and illegal arrangements was materialized in January 2004 with the legal creation of the NGO Corporación Democracia (*Corporation Democracy*), which served as the officially recognized group of interest of demobilized combatants and was in charge of implementing several reintegration programs in the communities. This allowed the NGO to receive financial support from the city administration and created a network in the communities to exercise social and military control (Restrepo, 2009: 5).

<sup>17</sup> Numerous micropractices of security are in place in Colombia, like Citizen's Cooperation and Warning Networks and Peasant Soldiers, which also have an important effect in the process of identification. Moreover, as subjects constantly negotiate their identity constellations (Stern, 2005) various discourses and practices of resistance to the ideal categories sketched in the DSP range from nonviolent institutional programs to civil society movements. The vastness of this topic exceeds the limits of this article, yet I have developed it more thoroughly in Echavarría (2010).

<sup>18</sup> The research by Londoño and Nieto (2006) collects testimonies of former demobilized women during the decade of the nineties in Colombia. The findings of this investigation highlight the heterogeneity of women's experiences during the war and after their demobilization. Amongst others, the motivations for entering the armed groups vary from utopias and revolutionary idealism to escape from gendered domestic violence and economic deprivation. As well, their life during warring years is quite dissimilar, from an adoration of an ideal belief in equality to bitter experiences of oppressive gender relationships as part of their revolutionary duty. Their reintegration into civilian life has also made for a collection of experiences that cannot be generalized: some idealize armed struggle times as their most concrete moments of freedom and liberation, whereas others see them as moments in which their lives just took the wrong turn. As diverse as these stories might be, it is clear that women have represented a challenge both to their comrades in combat as well as to institutions in charge of demobilization processes and they do bring with them important lessons and input for debating about gender and war. With this multiplicity in mind, I write my contentions about women in armed groups.

<sup>19</sup> For a discussion on the challenges and difficulties women face when negotiating their position in regards the DSP and how they resist peacefully the call for 'joining the army of good people', see Pearce (2007) and Riaño-Alcalá (2006).