

Social Movement Madres de Soacha (Mothers of Soacha)*

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Abstract

This article analyzes the history of the Madres de Soacha, a social movement of mothers that searched for the truth about the extra-judicial killings of their sons in 2008. After a judicial battle, these mothers proved that the Colombian Army perpetuated these massacres under the state policy of Democratic Security. This research argues for a robust notion of collective identity and memory building of this female movement, which is not reduced to a mere concept of victims. It displays different national and international actions that the Madres de Soacha developed for building memory and collective identity through narratives and agency.

Keywords: social movements, extra-judicial killings, Madres de Soacha, survivors, agency.

Movimiento Social Madres de Soacha

Resumen

Este artículo analiza la historia de las Madres de Soacha, un movimiento social de madres que buscó la verdad de las ejecuciones extrajudiciales de sus hijos en 2008. Tras la batalla judicial, estas madres demostraron que el Ejército colombiano perpetuó estas masacres bajo la política estatal de Seguridad Democrática. Esta investigación defiende una sólida noción de identidad colectiva y de construcción de memoria de este movimiento femenino, que no se reduce a un mero concepto de víctimas. Muestra diferentes acciones nacionales e internacionales que las Madres de Soacha desarrollaron para la construcción de la memoria, de su identidad colectiva a través de las narrativas y de la agencia.

Palabras claves: Movimientos sociales, ejecuciones extrajudiciales, Madres de Soacha, sobrevivientes, agencia

Movimento Social Madres de Soacha

Resumo

Este artigo analisa a história das Mães de Soacha, um movimento social de mães que buscaram a verdade sobre as execuções extrajudiciais de seus filhos em 2008. Após a batalha judicial, estas mães demonstraram que o exército colombiano perpetuou estas massacres sob a política estatal de Segurança Democrática. Esta pesquisa defende uma sólida noção de identidade coletiva e a construção da memória deste movimento de mulheres, que não se reduz a um mero conceito de vítimas. Mostra as diferentes ações nacionais e internacionais que as Mães de Soacha desenvolveram para a construção da memória, de sua identidade coletiva através de narrativas e agência.

Palavras-chave: Movimentos sociais, execuções extrajudiciais, Mães de Soacha, sobreviventes, agência.

Mouvement Social Mères de Soacha

Résumé

Cet article analyse l'histoire des Mères de Soacha, un mouvement social de mères qui ont cherché la vérité sur les exécutions extrajudiciaires de leurs enfants en 2008. Après la bataille judiciaire, ces mères ont démontré que l'armée colombienne perpétuait ces massacres dans le cadre de la politique étatique de sécurité démocratique. Cette recherche défend une solide notion d'identité collective et de construction de la mémoire de ce mouvement de femmes, qui ne se réduit pas à un simple concept de victimes. Il montre différentes actions nationales et internationales que les Mères de Soacha ont développées pour la construction de la mémoire, de leur identité collective à travers

Mots clés: Mouvements sociaux, exécutions extrajudiciaires, Mères de Soacha, survivants, agence.

“We, the mothers, are the ones who suffer the most because we didn’t give birth to children for the war” Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres, 2013

INTRODUCTION

The *Madres de Soacha* (Mothers of Soacha) is a social movement founded initially by six mothers, Luz Marina Porras Bernal¹, Carmenza Gómez Romero², María Ubilerma Sanabria López³, Blanca Nubia Monroy⁴,

- 1 Luz Marina Bernal Parra, born in Turmequé, Boyacá (1960), is a peace activist and human rights defender and was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2016. She is the mother of Fair Leonardo Bernal, assassinated by the Colombian Army. Fair was a 26-year-old with a mental disability that made him act like a 10-year-old, for which his mother knew he would never have joined an illegal armed group.
- 2 Carmenza Gómez Romero was born and raised in Cabuyaro (Meta) in a family of 14 siblings. Her parents were from Santander and arrived to Puerto López fleeing violence. At 16, she arrived in Villavicencio and learned to be a survivor from her mother. From selling coffee in the street to a restaurant employee. In 1982, she came to live in Bogotá. Three of her sons served in the military, and two were murdered, victims of the violence surrounding the so-called “false positives”.
- 3 María Ubilerma Sanabria Lopez member and one of the main founders of the Mothers of Soacha, the mother of Jaime Estiven Valencia Sanabria, who disappeared on February 6, 2008, in Soacha, Cundinamarca
- 4 Blanca Nubia Monroy is another member of the Madres de Soacha. Her 19-year-old son, Julián Oviedo, disappeared on March 2, 2008. He had gone out to meet someone, and on his way out, he asked his mother to save food for him because he would return immediately. That was the last time they saw him alive. A day later, troops from the Santander Battalion reported an alleged attack by a group of ELN militants in the municipality of Ocaña. They notified that Julián Oviedo Monroy was killed in the crossfire.

Edilma Vargas Riojas⁵ and Flor Hilda Hernández⁶. According to Turner and Killian, a social movement is “a collectivity that acts with some continuity to promote or resist change in the society (or group) of which it is a part”⁷. Thus, these Colombian women and their allies mobilized to pursue justice following the extra-judicial killings of their sons by the Colombian military. This research constitutes an effort to make visible the situation of Colombian women as victims and their social movement response to their victimization as an answer to their judicial claims as social and political actors.

Between January and August 2008, there were disappearances in the municipality of Soacha (Cundinamarca). Among the disappearances were 16 young men, 13 from Soacha and three from Bogota⁸. As a result of their disappearance, their mothers started demanding answers from their administrative municipality about their sons’ whereabouts. Later that year, these young men’s dead bodies were discovered in a mass grave without identification in another Colombian department, Norte de Santander, in the town of Ocaña.

The Colombian Army presented the killed victims as guerrillas and sometimes paramilitaries murdered in combat. The military carried out these killings in collusion with paramilitary groups or criminal gangs. The Army perpetuated these killings to receive awards and money for each killed enemy. The Army presented the murdered victims as guerrilla killed in combat and sometimes as killed paramilitaries. These killings often colluded with paramilitary groups or criminal gangs. This evidence about enemies killed in action – guerrilla or paramilitary- generated awards and money for the military by their superiors.

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- 5 Edilma Vargas Riojas, mother of Julio César Mesa Vargas, who disappeared on January 27, 2008, and member of the mothers of Soacha. After receiving threats, Edilma Vargas Riojas was forced to leave her house in the neighborhood of San Nicolás in Soacha. However, and despite the pleasantries, she began to meet with the mothers of Soacha in public squares, universities, and schools to denounce the disappearance and murder of his son.
 - 6 Flor Hilda Hernández, mother of Elkin Verano disappeared on January 13, 2008, in Soacha and had already died on the 15th, as one of the first victims of the 15th Infantry Battalion.
 - 7 Ralph Turner, and Lewis M. Killian, *Collective Behavior* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1987), cited by Roberto González Arana and Ivonne Molineros Guerrero, “Movimiento obrero y protesta social en Colombia. 1920-1950”, *Historia Caribe* Vol. 8 No. 22 (2013): 170- 171.
 - 8 Andrea Latorre, “Las madres de Soacha: Acciones de resistencia que construyen paz” (Master’s thesis, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2013), 4.

Since the discovery of the mass graves of these young people, the *Madres de Soacha* have organized to demand justice. These women and other relatives have been threatened, harassed, and subjected to surveillance to silence them in their campaign to seek justice. However, the movement received many other allies from the civil society, such as sisters, aunts, and daughters from other cases of extra-judicial killings. Thus, there were not only mothers who formed the collectivity. The decision to join the Movement of the *Madres de Soacha* by these other civil society sectors is linked to the life stories of its six founding members. Likewise, another reason to join was the inaction and inability of the State to find answers and solutions to the violence against the population, notably in the face of the murder of six thousand innocent young people who were not combatants of any armed group but civilians in search of job opportunities. The demand for justice and truth motivated the permanence of this mothers' movement, which also received the support of many different international human rights organizations.

Thus, the mothers of the killed men started a judicial and media fight against the extra-judicial killing and organized massive protests against the State. Additionally, they made alliances and formed coalitions with other women's social movements and international non-governmental organizations such as Amnesty International and the founding line of *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* (Mothers of May Square) in Argentina⁹.

1. COLOMBIAN CONFLICT

To understand the background of these extra-judicial killings is necessary to overview the conflictive socio-political situation of Colombia and the conditions of women within that context. Colombia has had an internal conflict for almost 60 years, with terrible results of many massacres and millions of cases of women victims as the mothers of Soacha.

The distinctly Colombian reality must be brought into account to understand the context in which these mothers struggle. On the one hand, in Colombia, official education teaches due to the country not

9 Laura Cerón, "Así recordaron en Ocaña las madres de Soacha", Centro de Memoria Histórica, March 3, 2020. <https://centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/tag/madres-de-soacha/> (accessed October 25, 2021).

having a military dictatorship, as in most of the continent, we are the oldest democracy among the Latin American countries. However, the functioning of institutions has not been the rule since 1948, and in thirty years (1958-1988), the government was exclusively for the liberal and conservative parties. This generated a State of Siege, which was in force for more than twenty-two years¹⁰. After the State of Siege, the Executive Power has become a true Legislative Power and has been used for military purposes to restrict individual guarantees such as the right to strike, locomotion, and freedom of the press¹¹.

In the 1940s, another important event in the sorted history of violence in Colombia, the well-known *Bogotázo*, following the murder of the liberal leader Jorge E. Gaitan, deeply divided the country for the following two decades. Ongoing violence and deepening polarization led to the establishment of Colombia's first and only military dictatorship led by Gustavo Rojas Pinilla. In the 1950s and the 1960s, there were already the beginning traces of emerging leftist guerrilla movements aligned with the rise of Latin American Marxism and the Cuban revolution, which profoundly impacted the political ideologies in Latin America. The State of Siege increased the prevalence by suppressing the space for other political parties' demonstrations. By the 1960's, both *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo* (FARC-EP) (Colombian Revolutionary Arms Forces – People's Army) and *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN) (National Liberation Army) had emerged and were operating in Colombia¹².

Moreover, at this time, internal armed conflict between the guerrilla and the Colombian State was escalating as various actors were adding to it and establishing a complex synergy; subversive groups cooperated with drug dealers, and the paramilitary groups were supported by the military. Therefore, the harassment and homicidal violence toward civilians is complex and multidimensional because it stems from different types of conflict actors.

10 Enrique Santos, "La Guerra de los Mil Días", *Revista Credencial Historia* (2016): 173.

11 Pedro Medellín Torres, *El presidente sitiado: ingobernabilidad y erosión del poder presidencia en Colombia*, (Bogotá: Planeta, 2006).

12 Castor Díaz Barrado, Carlos Fernández, and José Rodríguez-Villasante (Directores), *Derecho Internacional Humanitario y Derechos Humanos. Reflexiones sobre el conflicto colombiano*, (Pamplona: S.L. Civitas Ediciones, 2013).

In this context, Colombian actors have been confronted with two different roles: one as victims and the other as activists for peace; still, both roles perpetuate the ontology of women as subjects of male domination. Within subversive groups such as FARC-EP or ELN women are considered objects generally and sex slaves of the commanders specifically. And in the state security forces, women are also victims of sexual harassment¹³.

Furthermore, the Colombian armed conflict brings other terrible consequences for Colombian women, not only sexual violence. Women who have lost their husbands in the conflict must assume the household, or they and their families are forcibly displaced. In 2003, half of the displaced Populations in Colombia were women, especially from 18-45 years old, and particularly in three categories: widows, mother-led households (between 34.6 and 49.7 percent of displaced families), and victims of sexual violence¹⁴.

The Colombian armed conflict has a disproportionate impact on women's lives. This means that in exceptional situations such as an armed conflict, women are in a position of particular vulnerability for the discrimination that has befallen them. The damages are further increased by other forms of discrimination such as ethnicity, age or sexual orientation¹⁵.

From this perspective, it is essential to state that women, especially pregnant or women of childbearing age, are not "simply spontaneous victims." But also many women have violent death, torture, and mutilation while pregnant due to its strong symbolic role. In this case, women are seen as givers of life, and they are important war targets because they are the potential procreators of the enemy¹⁶. Therefore, women's killings

13 Castor Díaz Barrado, Carlos Fernández, and José Rodríguez-Villasante (Directores), *Derecho Internacional Humanitario y Derechos Humanos. Reflexiones sobre el conflicto colombiano*, (Pamplona: S.L. Civitas Ediciones, 2013).

14 Castor Díaz Barrado, Carlos Fernández, and José Rodríguez-Villasante (Directores), *Derecho Internacional Humanitario y Derechos Humanos. Reflexiones sobre el conflicto colombiano*, (Pamplona: S.L. Civitas Ediciones, 2013).

15 SISMA y MZC, "Diagnóstico: Mujer, Paz y Seguridad: Los movimientos de mujeres y paz en Colombia. Desde los años noventa hasta hoy", July 2010. http://mesadeapoyo.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Mujer-paz-y-seguridad_-Colombia.pdf (accessed October 25, 2021).

16 Martha Bello, Vilma Sned Giraldo, Sandra Milena Alvarán and Jorge Andrés Cancimance, *Procesos Organizativos De Mujeres Víctimas De La Violencia Sociopolítica En Colombia* (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2009), 13

signify the total extermination of the enemy; even though women are not on the battlefield, they have this special status during a conflict that makes them more vulnerable. According to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, forty-three of every hundred female victims from internal armed conflict have been affected by various forms of violence based on gender¹⁷. Armed actors, in their struggle to control territories use violence against women as a war strategy and communities live¹⁸.

Historically, women in Colombia, as well as ethnic minorities, had great difficulties accessing justice and reconstructing their historical memory, given that they have been considered part of a subordinate group. All this, in a context of violence and internal armed conflict, these groups have contributed to thousands of victims. According to Gonzalo Sánchez¹⁹, memory “was until very recently a resource of the elites that they administered as a mechanism for reproducing themselves, but in recent decades it has been democratized”.

On the other hand, women have been crucial in the peace processes in Colombia, particularly regarding FARC-EP. This is evidenced by their preparation and participation “in peacebuilding processes at the local, regional and national levels for decades, and their pressure during the negotiations with FARC-EP led to the participation of women negotiators at the table on both sides. In addition, women represent almost half of the people included in the Unified Registry of Victims”²⁰.

As we have already noted, women have been disproportionately affected by the conflict over the past decades, and they have mobilized “to end various types and structures of local, regional and national violence. Even in times of crisis in the peace negotiations, there was an important tradition of anti-militarist women’s movements in Colombia that

17 Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Violence and discrimination against women in the armed conflict in Colombia, 2006, <https://www.cidh.oas.org/pdf/%20files/InformeColombiaMujeres2006eng.pdf>, (accessed October 25, 2021).

18 Martha Bello, Vilma Sned Giraldo, Sandra Milena Alvarán and Jorge Andrés Cancimance, *Procesos Organizativos De*, 13.

19 Gonzalo Sánchez, “Tiempos de memorias, tiempos de victimas”, *Análisis Político* Vol. 21 No. 63 (2008).

20 Theresa Bachmann and Kristina Birke, “Las mujeres incrementando la inclusión”, in *Los enredos de la paz. Reflexiones alrededor del largo camino de la transformación del conflicto armado en Colombia*, eds. Kristina Birke and Sabine Kuntentbach (Bogotá: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, GIGA, 2021), 253.

sought to promote negotiated solutions to the armed conflict”²¹. Some examples of those movements are *Red feminista antimilitarista*, LIMPAL Colombia (*Liga Internacional de mujeres por la paz y la libertad*) (International League of women for peace and freedom), and *Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres* (Women’s Peace Route).

Historically, social mobilization in Colombia has been a manifestation of rejecting arbitrariness and authoritarianism. For Cesar Torres del Río, mobilization” as a means to achieve reforms of various kinds was considered since the twenties, a subversive action, destabilizing the institutional scaffolding and susceptible to social and legal condemnation. The worker, the citizen, the peasant, and the indigenous were treated as enemies of society”²² This is particularly true for women, particularly mothers’ mobilizations as *Madres de Soacha*, whose mobilizations was rejected by the establishment.

In many cases, “not only the victims do not care, but society tolerated and justified their death and persecution, thanks to the stigmatization they have been subjected to on behalf of the armed actors and their funders, who have been responsible of the point out them as collaborators and accomplices of the guerrillas, as transgressors, abnormal and undesirable.” Thus, society judged the killed men as guilty using quotes like, “if they were murdered, it had a reason/motive” or “who owes nothing fears nothing.” Crimes are often read as “necessary evils” to maintain an ideal of order and social progress.²³

“There is a country that doesn’t give a damn about the countryside and the people suffering from the war. That is the feeling we have”, said the priest Antún Ramos after knowing the triumph of” No “in the plebiscite. His statements revealed the feelings - of frustration and bewilderment - of peace treaty supporters but at the same time revealed a reality: for the urban sectors, war occurs in settings far from their lives. Today Colombia lives at a new crossroads while many social sectors fight for the war to come to an end.²⁴

21 Theresa Bachmann and Kristina Birke, *Las mujeres incrementando*, 253.

22 César Torres del Río, *Colombia Siglo XX. Desde la Guerra de los mil días hasta la elección de Álvaro Uribe* (Bogotá: Norma, 2010), 79.

23 Nubia Bello, “Colombia: la guerra de los otros”, *Nueva Sociedad* No. 266 (2016), 144.

24 Nubia Bello, *Colombia: la guerra*, 140.

1.1. From “False positives” to extra-judicial executions

The case of the extra-judicial killings in Soacha was popularly known as *Falsos Positivos*, or False Positive. However, this was not the correct definition because “false positives” is a euphemistic expression for implying extra-judicial killings. Extra-judicial killings are state crimes disguised by reported cases as positive results in action against illegal armed groups and are listed in special reports as “combat deaths” of insurgent actors and other legitimate actions under wartime according to international humanitarian law²⁵. Therefore, this concept of “false positive” was strategically used to hide the hand of the State’s real crimes. The fact is the dead men were not insurgent actors or criminal combatants lawfully killed by Colombian state forces. They were entirely civilians, and in some cases, they were even minors²⁶.

In Colombia, extra-judicial executions are “the criminal strategy of presenting civilians as guerrillas killed in combat, who were deceived or kidnapped from their place of residence, and then executed in distant regions; thus they would not be claimed, and would end up buried as N.N. in cemeteries.”²⁷ This was a consequence of the perverse derivation of the Democratic Security Policy, put on placed by former president Alvaro Uribe Velez. These killings added to a saga of crimes throughout the armed conflict to cover up military errors or to mask intentional actions guided by the desire for retaliation for a guerrilla attack²⁸.

In the context of the internal armed conflict, extra-judicial executions are a serious phenomenon of human rights violations and disregard for human dignity. Also, these killings are a manifestation of the maximum degradation of armed conflict and State agents, who were supposed to protect civil society²⁹. Selective murders are the form of violence used by the armed actors that have caused the most deaths during the conflict. The number of victims of selective killings could have reached,

25 Mónica Parada Llanes, *Dos historias, zozobra y una fosa común*, (Bogotá, 2011), 143.

26 Andrea Latorre, *Las madres de*.

27 Centro Nacional de la Memoria Histórica, *Basta Ya. Colombia: memorias de guerra y dignidad* (Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional, 2013), 46-47.

28 Centro Nacional de la Memoria Histórica. *Basta Ya*, 47.

29 Comisión de la Verdad, *Verdades en Convergencia. Análisis de la jurisprudencia del Consejo de Estado en diálogo con la Comisión de la Verdad*, (Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional, 2021), 30.

according to *Grupo de Memoria Histórica* (GMH) projections, 150,000 people. This means that nine out of every ten homicides of civilians in the armed conflict were selective assassinations.

However, women's social movements have created an activist network for searching for the truth about the extra-judicial massacres. "Women's political action in the construction of peace and historical memory deserves more attention every day. Among many examples are the *Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres* (Women's Peace Route), which has compiled the testimonies of women victims as an exemplary exercise in the reconstruction of individual and collective memory, and the Colombian Women's Initiative for Peace"³⁰. Indeed, "the truth' of the war is above all the 'truth' of its atrocities and not so much the truth of the discourses that legitimized it nor of the regional orders built between consensus and coercion"³¹.

The latest is evident for the *Madres de Soacha*; after almost eight months of disappearance, the mothers began the process of seeking truth. The official staff from Soacha contacted them to identify the young men's bodies that were found in Ocaña. Additionally, the prosecutor informed the mothers that their children were guerrillas killed in battle with army troops. This was one of the main disputes of the *Madres de Soacha*, insisting their sons were not criminals.³²

The strategy used by the Army to kill civilians in Soacha was to attract young unemployed people by offering job opportunities. In the absence of decent jobs, the boys fell into the trap and trusted that the offers were genuine. According to Philip Alston, United Nations (UN) rapporteur on extra-judicial executions, a large group of soldiers represented a national death squad, with the mass grave of Soacha being just the tip of the iceberg. Also, the Army used other

30 Mayra Sánchez Mora and Zuriñe Rodríguez Lara, "Acciones colectivas de las organizaciones de mujeres por la paz en Colombia", *Revista de Paz y Conflictos* Vol. 8 No. 2 (2015), cited by Theresa Bachmann and Kristina Birke, "Las mujeres incrementando la inclusión", in *Los enredos de la paz. Reflexiones alrededor del largo camino de la transformación del conflicto armado en Colombia*, eds. Kristina Birke and Sabine Kuntentbach, Bogotá: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, GIGA, 2021, 255.

31 Centro Nacional de la Memoria Histórica. *Basta Ya*, 26.

32 *Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres*, *La verdad de*, 46.

civilians to convince the young people to go somewhere in Colombia to work. In most cases, the destination was the town of Ocaña, in Norte de Santander. In those places, the Army killed civilians and presented them as guerrillas killed in combat³³. For every dead body, soldiers received approximately two to four million pesos, one to two thousand dollars from the government.

According to Philip Alston, in Colombia, the impunity rate for the crimes committed by the armed forces is 98.5%, most of which were committed during the presidency of Alvaro Uribe. According to the Alston's report, "more than 3,000 extra-judicial, summary, and arbitrary executions, were perpetrated in Colombia between 2002 and 2009 are considered international crimes³⁴. Moreover, in 2010, 1,700 cases went public for the first time after the municipal official in Soacha reported that 11 young men were missing, and later found murdered in the town of Ocaña, Norte de Santander. Also, this forced the government to officially recognize these human rights violations and address these cases³⁵

Although records vary, it is generally accepted that the murder of civilians passed off as combat deaths totaled 2,000, with a peak between 2004 and 2008. The *Fiscaña General de la Nación* (Attorney General's Office) recorded more than 1,500 investigations of disappearance from January 2000 to January 2012. These disappearances occurred in the municipality of Soacha (Cundinamarca), while the extra-judicial executions occurred in municipalities of the northwest departments of the country and the bodies were found in mass graves in the village of Las Liscas, municipality of Ocaña (Norte de Santander); Brasilia village, municipality of Cimitarra (Santander); and in the municipalities of Aguasblanco of Villacaro and Abrego (Norte de Santander)"³⁶.

33 Amnesty International, *Colombia Seeking Justice: The Mothers of Soacha*, (London: Amnesty International Publications, 2010), 3.

34 Christian Peñuela, "Las Madres de Soacha no olvidan: exigen verdad, justicia y reparación", *El turbión*, Bogotá, October 26, 2010.

35 Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres, *La verdad de*, 217.

36 Andrea Latorre, *Las madres de*, 4.

2. THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO FEMALE MOVEMENTS IN COLOMBIA

Latin America is a post-colonial or neo-colonial region³⁷. It is also part of the under-developed or “third” world³⁸. Latin American states, like Colombia, have a complex relationship to gender, and North American and European feminists have historically misunderstood and homogenized Latin American women. Because of this, Latin American feminism demands a more complex conceptualization. Notwithstanding the conceptual and academic labeling, Latin American feminism has history of encounters and constructions between feminists and other women’s movements³⁹. Many authors explore the history and chronology of women’s agency in Latin America⁴⁰. Women’s agency did not begin intrinsically with feminist movements or perspectives.

Around 1970 women and women’s movements were engaged in intense social justice activism in response to the political repression and dictatorships of the Cold War era. Women were important allies for socialist parties demands for land, fair wages, health, food and other basic needs. In addition, women’s movements were important for the defense of human rights. Latin American women organized the first organizations for relatives of the disappeared. The Argentine Madres y Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo, the Bolivian Housewives Committee, and the Confederation of Guatemalan Widows (CONAVIGUA) organized themselves without any reference to an explicitly feminist ideology. Furthermore, academic literature appeared in the mid-1990s analyzing the political role of mothers of the disappeared in Latin America and how these women resignify the maternal exercise to include it in public and civic practice⁴¹.

37 Gayatri Spivak, “Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular”. *Postcolonial Studies: Culture, Politics, Economy* Vol. 8 No. 4 (2005): 475.

38 Chandra Mohanty. “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse”. *Feminist Review* No. 30 (1988): 61-88

39 Luciana de Aragão-Ballestrin, “Feminismos Subalternos. Subaltern Feminisms”, *Revista Estudos Feministas* Vol. 25 No. 3 (2017).

40 Doris Lamus-Canavac, *Localización geohistórica de los feminismos latinoamericanos*. *Revista de la Universidad Bolivariana*, Vol. 8 No. 24 (2008): 95-109.

41 Elizabeth Maier, *Las madres de los desaparecidos. ¿Un nuevo mito materno en América Latina?*, UAM-El Colegio de la Frontera Norte-La Jornada Ediciones, México 2001

Academic studies about Colombian women within armed conflict, have been dominated by feminist standpoint epistemology. This approach attempts to understand the different feminist social movements that arise in opposition to domestic violence and the armed conflict violence against women. The chronology of these feminist studies started in the 1970s and was largely concerned with fertility, work, and family Donny⁴². Different from the social process that happened in Latin America. Later in the 1980s, the subjects of feminist publications were more diverse, tackling issues such as domestic violence, gender representations in the media, and the first historical studies of gender in Colombia⁴³.

Nevertheless, from the 1990s on, there were three core areas of analysis in the literature: 1) gender and development, 2) gender, power, participation, and new forms of citizenship, 3) gender identities and their social and cultural representations. A recurrent theme of the feminist literature on Colombia mentioned that the feminist movement constituted new dynamics of interaction where women were organized by a network. Therefore, with a more shared experience, issues like peace initiatives and the actions of mothers of the disappeared/kidnapped started to achieve greater visibility⁴⁴. After almost 20 years Colombian academy was fully debating the phenomenon of women in war and women's movements.

However, there are some gaps in this academic approach to analyzing Colombian women as victims of armed conflict. First, these studies were primarily focused on the live conditions of poor, indigenous or peasant women, without analyzing female victims of sociopolitical violence in particular. Also, Colombian scholars questioned why the mainstream feminist theory was late in analyzing and problematizing women as victims of the armed conflict when one of the most obvious and stronger problems that Colombian society was living at that moment, the 1970's.

42 Donny Meertens, "Mujer y violencia en los conflictos rurales", Instituto de Estudios Políticos y Relaciones Internacionales —IEPRI— Universidad Nacional De Colombia (1995), 54. Bogotá, 1995.

43 Martha Bello, Vilma Sned Giraldo, Sandra Milena Alvarán and Jorge Andrés Cancimance, *Procesos Organizativos De*, 18.

44 Martha Bello, Vilma Sned Giraldo, Sandra Milena Alvarán and Jorge Andrés Cancimance, *Procesos Organizativos De*, 18.

Additionally, the mainstream feminist theories did not explain how women's movements in Latin America mobilized or how these movements' causes intersect gender with class, community, or occupation⁴⁵. The theorists did not realize that collective identity can be multiple, and its construction is needed for the success of any social movement. Also, these women were mobilized not just by the motive of being women but as the legitimate representation of family, and truth-seeking⁴⁶. For, Doris Lamus Canavate this is an important difference from Western feminism, because Latin American women's movements are heterogeneous and explicitly feminist movements are also diverse⁴⁷.

Traditionally, in social science, the role of women and girls in armed conflict and peacebuilding was limited to their status as victims. However, in the last two decades, the literature has been prolific in highlighting women's agency; instead of portraying them as passive subjects in violent contexts. Restrepo discusses how some victims overcome that condition and become leaders in peacebuilding, which carries severe personal risks. In her view, they are "powerful agents of change: capable of achieving healing, empowerment and even reconciliation in society"⁴⁸.

According to Lopez, women are seen as passive actors in conflicts, repressed and ignored, because there is a generalized perception that men generate war and women end up bearing it and suffering. This created an effect on women that enforces them to give the lives of their children. Nevertheless, in the literature, authors like Giovanetti, Manotas, and Molinares reflect how conflicts not only killed women but also disrupted their lives, turning them into war spoils. But this conflictive context also turns from passive actors to *mujeres agentes de cambio* (women agents of change) and bridges of pacification, negotiation, and construction of peace processes and collective memory that they assume as survivors⁴⁹.

45 Joe Foweraker, *Theorizing Social Movements*, (Boulder, Pluto Press, 1995).

46 Joe Foweraker, *Theorizing Social*.

47 Doris Lamus-Canavate, *Localización geohistórica*. 95-109.

48 Elvira Restrepo, "Leaders Against All Odds: Women Victims of Conflict in Colombia", *Palgrave Communications* 2, No. 16014 (2016): 1.

49 Cecilia Giovannetti, Jessica Manotas, and Ivonne Molinares Guerrero, "La mujer y su doble condición: víctima de los procesos internos y protagonista en los procesos de justicia transicional. El caso de Colombia" in Castor Díaz, Carlos R. Fernández Liesa and José Luis Rodríguez-Villasante, *Doce Miradas del Conflicto Colombiano*, (Madrid: Instituto Universitario de Estudios Internacionales y Europeos "Francisco de Vitoria", 2013).

In this research, we explore the case of *Madres de Soacha* as a movement of mothers struggling with the disappearance of their sons in the hands of the strong and powerful military forces of the State, which is contextual and theoretical linked to other movements of mothers in the region such as the founding line of *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* in Argentina. However, in Colombia these cases are even more controversial because Colombia is recognized as a democracy, while in Argentina was a military dictatorship. Therefore, these acts are viewed to be extremely morally wrong in a recognized democratic state⁵⁰.

The *Madres de Soacha* was a women's organization promoting collective leadership and shared decision-making, which goes against the passive figure of the vulnerable women and take distance from the vertical hierarchically organized male-dominated military regime, political parties or unions. This means that this movement was promoting political agency of these women, as well as applying *horizontalidad*, or horizontalism, the horizontal distribution of power that characterizes many contemporary social movements.⁵¹

Moreover, the new women's identity, social justice activist women are different from domestic women and political males.

“Women have gone from being housewives, or recipients of male labor on the land “to providers and claimants of rights, to be the voice of their children, parents, family, and neighbors, to have a notorious presence in forbidden spaces such as the mass media, local development programs, government agencies, and in the countless attempts to recover the violent memory of the country”.⁵²

Women experienced, perhaps for the first time, social equality and community in their resistance work and the streets, which changed the perception of the traditional role of a mother and their perception of victims, building a new collective memory.⁵³

50 Joe Foweraker, *Theorizing Social*.

51 Marina Sitrin. “The Zapatista Movement in Local and Global Context.” *USA International Journal of Comparative Sociology* (Stony Brook University) Vol. 46 No. 3 (2005): 266-269.

52 Cecilia Giovannetti, Jessica Manotas, and Ivonne Molinares Guerrero, *La mujer*, 440.

53 Joe Foweraker, *Theorizing Social*.

The *Madres de Soacha* activism and leadership can inscribe what Martha Nubia Bello defines as the struggle to build a memory to do justice. To denounce, seek evidence, as a cry to share the pain, to face isolation, to heal, as a therapeutic resource, as a tribute to pay homage to the absent, as a commemoration and dignity, as a memory of the missing, “if we forget them they die”.⁵⁴

3. COLLECTIVE IDENTITY THEORY

To fully explore the dynamics at play in Colombia’s female-led social movements, we argue that the collective identity theory in combination with gender perspective help us to understand better the organized process of the *Madres de Soacha*. As stated before, feminist theory is too limited to understand the reasons and the identification of *Madres de Soacha* as a social movement, so the collective identity could give us the basis for understanding the constructive process of identity that these women pass through.

According to Klaus Eder⁵⁵ the base assumption of collective identity theory is that collective identities are *narrative constructions*, which gather and limit a network of actors. The narratives are constructed by stories “that people tell each other, thus creating a space of narrative fidelity”⁵⁶. For Eder, “any narrative can become – given a historically contingent context of communication – a collectively shared narrative serving as a referent for a collective identity”⁵⁷. Telling stories in a group generates and strengthens social relations and creates a space for spreading stories that embedded collective identities, boundaries, and cognitive projects. Nevertheless, creating an identity of “us” generated a distance from the others, who are not included in the narrative.

William McDougall believes that from the interaction of actors in a network, arises a “group mind” that has a reality and existence that are qualitatively distinct from the isolated individuals making up the

54 Martha Bello. Conference “Memoria en medio de la guerra: sentido y disputas”, Seminario internacional Historia y memoria de violencia y conflictos en América Latina, Universidad del Norte, August, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zxsojx3W7e8&t=4386s>.

55 Klaus Eder, “A Theory of Collective Identity”, *European Journal of Social Theory* Vol. 12 No. 4 (2009): 427.

56 Klaus Eder, *A Theory of*, 427.

57 Klaus Eder, *A Theory of*, 259.

group⁵⁸. For example, Muzafer Sherif 's research shows how norms emerge from interaction and is internalized to influence collective behavior.⁵⁹ It is our contention that collective identity theory can be applied to the case of Madres de Soacha, in order to show a common space of communication where they share stories that hold in their narrative structures of social relations and similar experiences.⁶⁰ This networking constructs the self-image as part of a group but not just as an isolated individual.

4. Social Movement *Madres de Soacha* collective identity and support

Madres de Soacha started with six women. After a couple of months, the number elevated to eleven women. The new members were Luz Edilia Palacio and Elvira Vásquez, who joined the movement after meeting the other mothers in legal medicine inquiring about the whereabouts of their children. Lucero Carmona, the mother of Omar Leonardo Triana Cardona⁶¹, was not in Soacha but in Antioquia. She recalls that “When I arrived at the Soacha group, I didn’t know that the same case had happened to me as to them: they had murdered our children, and I didn’t know... I listened to them (*Madres de Soacha*) in 2008, I watched them on television, but I didn’t understand why?”⁶² Zoraida Muñoz mother of Yonny Duvian Soto Muñoz, and Jacqueline Castillo, sister of Jaime Castillo, who disappeared along with Yonny from Bogotá and was murdered in Ocaña with the youth of Soacha. Jacqueline was not a mother but a sister, and she was received in the movement after she had the legal procedure to identify and recover Jaime’s body. Currently, Jacqueline is the legal representative of *Madres de Falsos Positivos* (MAFAPO) (Mothers of the “False Positive”).

With the cases of Lucero, Zoraida, and Jacqueline, the movement realized that the disappearances were not only happening in Soacha. The young men were kidnapped from different localities in Colombia and later murdered in Soacha.

58 William McDougall, *The Group Mind: A Sketch of the Principles of Collective Psychology, with Some Attempt to Apply Them to the Interpretation of National Life and Character* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1920).

59 Muzafer Sherif, *The Psychology of Social Norms* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1966).

60 Klaus Eder, *A Theory of*.

61 He was murdered in Barbosa, Antioquia and whose body appeared until 2011 in a common grave

62 Omar Vásquez Ocampo and Melissa De La Hoz Pimiento, “Las voces de los falsos positivos: Memoria del conflicto. Las caras del horror” (undergraduate thesis, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, 2013).

In a couple of months, the entire town of Soacha and many other social movements affected by the conflict started supporting them. *Madres de Soacha* achieved national and international attention by denouncing these crimes using media outlets such as the radio, Facebook, and non-governmental organizations such as Human Rights International.

However, as the collective identity theory states, these women started their public process by first strengthening their identities primarily as mothers, and then mother-victims of the conflict. They built a common narrative of mothers during the process of sharing their stories and searching for the truth. Therefore, this collective identity strengthened their alliance and sense of solidarity as mothers since they lost their sons under similar circumstances—extra-judicial killings- or armed conflict in general. The way that these women achieved that alliance was by forming a support group for building memory, to remember their children and to publicize their stories.

“Most of us moms are heads of the household, it didn’t happen overnight, it was planned. They saw that they were young, only with their mother, who thought they were not going to do anything. For example, the Prosecutor’s Office did not receive the complaint, but when we joined with the other mothers, we started. They said they were not going to listen to us, and the most terrible thing is that they backfired ... they thought that these low-income people were not going to report, or simply that they were going to stay seated, and that they would never look for their sons. They were wrong, and we unconsciously triggered the broad complaint nationally and internationally, making visible what was happening not only in Soacha but in all regions of the country.”⁶³

The mothers’ gatherings took place in the *Personería* building that became, until now, the Soacha mother’s second home. Fernando Escobar, *personero* of Soacha or the local procurator, gave them a salon, soda, and cake for the mothers to come together and talk. According to Escobar, just talking helps them to share the pain of losing their children, and they keep doing this meeting every Wednesday⁶⁴.

63 Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres, *La verdad de*, 232.

64 Lina Marín, “Fernando Escobar. El hombre que destapó los falsos positivos y hoy sirve de apoyo a las madres de Soacha”, *La Silla Vacía*, Bogotá, July 24, 2009.

Furthermore, if we applied the collective theory in the mother's meeting sections, we can analyze that they had all of the elements for constructing a strong identity, and they have a common space for communicating their shared stories. The participants could feel attached to the victim-mother discourses they use, and the similar experiences of pain and injustice created a stronger tie among them. Therefore, the self-image of the "Madres de Soacha" has been constantly shaped by the new context and dynamics they created after the killing of their sons. New experience based on constant dialogue among women, affected by this situation creates a discursive understanding of the unfair situation, which later generates new types of practices and spaces that interconnects people, movement, and organizations around the same concerns. Effectively, the *Madres de Soacha* created new kinds of interconnection with other organizations that allowed them to have major national and international attention; these mothers now have a strong voice. Some of the major alliances that *Madres de Soacha* built with other social movements in Colombia included: MOVICE, MINGAS, ANDAS, CLARETIANOS.

MOVICE is the *Movimiento Nacional de Víctimas de Crímenes de Estado* (National Movement of Victims of State Crimes), MINGAS is *Movimiento Indígena* (Indigenous Movement), ANDAS is the *Asociación Nacional de Ayuda Solidaria* (The National Association for Solidarity Aid), and CLARETIANOS is a secular movement in the Catholic Church. Also, all of these movements have international sponsors and alliances, especially MOVICE that works with the European Union⁶⁵. This was an important alliance for *Madres de Soacha* because all these nodes from different networks allowed more visibility, helped to legitimize the *madres'* claims, access to NGOs that support victims of human rights violations, and access to donations. In a few words, they achieved international solidarity. As one of the mothers stated, Amnesty International gave us the opportunity to report internationally, in Spain, Germany, Denmark, Belgium, the Netherlands, Ireland and the United States. (We) united and leave the precedent that if something happened to us, they (the Colombian government) were (responsible)⁶⁶. In Burt's theory, bridges to other networks can become strategic relations that

65 Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres, *La verdad de*, 232.

66 Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres, *La verdad de*, 233.

maximize opportunities for cooperative relations, the pooling of resources, and the joint planning of mobilizing strategies among different groups⁶⁷.

Nationwide, other mothers, sisters, and daughters of disappeared youths and extra-judicial killing, from different cities of Colombia, started getting in touch with the *Madres de Soacha* to renew efforts, to clarify what happened, and denounce the facts. “We began to arrive at the Memory Center to unite, to echo, to say: we are the same; they did the same with our children. As support, so that they (government) listen to us because everything almost coincided. Everything matched. So, there we began, to remember (to build memory), to bond with them.”⁶⁸

Moreover, the officials in Soacha and the mass media have been supportive elements of *Madres de Soacha*. The broadcaster radio from Ocaña, “*Voz de Ocaña*”, reported the deaths every day⁶⁹. The local procurator arrived twice, in March and June 2008, to the office of the presidential adviser Jose Obdulio Gaviria. Fernando Escobar, the *personero*, showed Obdulio the evidence of cases of Soacha. Obdulio took note of the case. But, by then, Escobar returned to report to the authorities, but the authorities said that Escobar was a delirious man.

Also, in a short-term *Madres de Soacha* won an international award. El *Instituto Catalán Internacional de la Paz* (CIP) (International Catalan Institute for Peace) gave the award of “*Constructores de Paz 2012*” (“Builders of Peace 2012”) to the movement *Madres de Soacha* for fighting against the impunity and obtaining justice for the death of their children and all the “false positives”⁷⁰. One example of their success in calling for national and international attention was that in May 2010, thousands of roses and messages of solidarity around the world to the *Madres de Soacha* were sent to them. “Now they know that they have the support of thousands of caring people of the entire world”⁷¹.

67 David Knoke and Nancy Wisely, “Social Movements”, in *Political Networks*, ed. David Knoke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

68 Carlos Gutiérrez Rodríguez, “La lucha contra el olvido de las Madres de ‘Falsos Positivos’ de Soacha y Bogotá (MAFAPO): condiciones y formas de movilizar una memoria subterránea (2008-2018)” (master’s thesis, Universidad Nacional de la Plata, 2020), 73.

69 Lina Marín, Fernando Escobar.

70 EFE, “Madres de Soacha” piden en España justicia por ejecuciones de su hijos. En Colombia se han hecho más de 4.700 denuncias por “falsos positivos”, *El Espectador*, Bogotá, March 22, 2013.

71 Amnistía Internacional, “Las Madres de Soacha”, Amnistía Internacional, March 4, 2015.

One important limitation of the legal process was that the main protagonists and victims of the murders in Soacha and Bogotá have as their epicenter this population of 880,000 inhabitants located in Cundinamarca. The main justice agencies, such as the Attorney General's Office of the nation, the National Center for Historical Memory, and the Truth Commission, are based in Bogotá. It took 14 years until, between April and May 2022, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace and the Truth Commission finally created venues for soldiers involved in these murders to begin recognizing their responsibility for these heinous crimes.

4.1. Actions

The main objective of *Madres de Soacha* was to take legal action against the military. Therefore, the Madres de Soacha achieved their first broad extra-judicial execution trial against the military on March 6 of 2009. And that same day, *Madres de Soacha* called for a nationwide march with all the victims of the “false positives” and extra-judicial killings.⁷²

MOVICE was one of the groups that helped the most in the organization of this march. The main goal of this march was to demand justice, truth, reparations for victims, and measures to prevent the recurrence of these crimes. This march was significant because more than 200 relatives of the victims in Bogotá participated, and the march passed by the Ministry of Defense headquarters of the Attorney General. Also, this march was widely followed in other important cities of Colombia, such as Medellín, Manizales, Bucaramanga, and Cucuta, and internationally in Buenos Aires, Paris, Barcelona, Madrid, and Gijón.⁷³

Also, *Madres de Soacha* developed twelve claims that defined their struggle for the killing of their sons and against the difficult legal process of their demands against the military. The impunity and preference in the legal system for the military forces was evident.

Their claims include:⁷⁴

72 Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres, *La verdad de*, 233.

73 Giovanni Alarcón, “Colombia marcha contra los falsos positivos”, Radio Santa Fe, Bogotá, March 6, 2009.

74 Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres, *La verdad de*, 234.

1. Forced disappearance, involving military kidnapping and drugging.
2. Their sons were found undocumented
3. Murdered.
4. Robbed of their identity, putting them in mass graves as NN (Anonymous).
5. The State appointed their sons as criminals; the President did not have the political will to find out who these children were.
6. Mothers are threatened by demanding truth, justice, and non-repetition of these killings.
7. They are the mockery/joke of the military in the public audience.
8. The judicial system is shielding the military from legal scrutiny by allowing long delays; meanwhile, all the accused military personnel were released in the first term.
9. Destroy family life, ending dreams, projects, and tranquility.
10. The Colombian State or the government is unwilling to take responsibility for these cases, just think about military impunity.
11. Mothers of Soacha began to die without knowing what happened to their children.
12. The judges have imposed the military criminal jurisdiction shielding the military.

In 2015, the head of the investigative body from *Madres de Soacha* cases stated that “we have over 800 sentences against members of the security forces, more than 3000 members of the security forces detained by the issue of false positives, more than 5000 are being investigated”.⁷⁵

75 El Espectador Judicial, “Más de 20 generales son investigados por “falsos positivos”: Fiscal General, El Espectador, Bogotá, April 12, 2015.

4.2. Important achievements:

Five years since the killing of their sons, *Madres de Soacha* have constantly denounced the impunity that exists in these cases, not only for their sons' deaths but also for the threats against them and their families. They also denounce a lack of rigor and ineffectiveness in the advancement of the investigations and trials of the soldiers. This impunity has prevailed, so far, only some internal National Army investigations advanced, which made the high command and the national government introduce judicial processes against some of its members who had been recognized as guilty.⁷⁶

However, there has been an important and historical achievement in this case. On 30 July 2013 the Superior Court of Cundinamarca considered the false positives as a crime against humanity. The case that was adjudicated was referred to Fair Leonardo Porras Bernal. The judge acknowledged the conspiracy to commit a crime and forced disappearance in the case of the young men from Soacha. The decision of second instance increased penalties of 35-55 years imprisonment and sentenced the Major Marco Wilson Quijano, Lieutenant Aldair Diego Vargas, the Corporal Carlos Manuel Gonzalez, and the soldiers Richard Contreras Aguilar, Carlos Antonio Zapata Roldán and Ricardo Corzo, on charges of conspiracy and forced disappearance, which had been acquitted at first instance.⁷⁷ These judgments represent a historical departure from the culture of impunity that remained in the cases. They are the result of the struggle of these mothers and their resistance to threats, fear, and death.

5. AFTER THE PEACE TREATY

In 2021, after 13 years of their sons' massacre, the *Madres de Soacha* were able to speak in a special court for the victims. This court searches to find out the truth during the Colombian conflict. In a harsh and moving virtual broadcast, the *Madres de Soacha* and Bogotá presented their report to the *Comisión del Esclarecimiento la Verdad* (CEV) (Truth Commission) and the *Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz* (JEP) (Special Jurisdiction for Peace). They included in the document and the events that these women, mothers, wives, and sisters had to face after their relatives were victims of extra-judicial executions.

76 Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres, La verdad de.

77 Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres, La verdad de.

“It is intended to recognize the different dimensions of the damage caused, something that is minimized often because the numbers do not reveal the mothers who died of moral pain, the children who were left without the support of their parents, who have had to suffer stigmatization, physical and mental illnesses, family breakdowns, manipulation, illegal removal of organs, having to face mass graves to find someone to love”⁷⁸.

“United for memory and truth” gathered the testimonies of the 15 members of the *Madres de Soacha* and Bogotá collective, victims of the so-called false positives in Colombia. JEP magistrates and CEV commissioners promised to answer why these serious crimes occurred.

Jacqueline Castillo, the legal representative of *Madres de Soacha* opened and closed this meeting by thanking the JEP on behalf of 6,042 victims of extra-judicial killings presented as false casualties in combat by State agents. Castillo thanked the JEP because it realized that the murders were not isolated cases but rather a systematic crime of the State. Castillo insisted that they wanted the high command to stand up to them and that, as a restoration measure, the medals and promotions the State gave to those responsible for the murder to be withdrawn in public.

Eight women of the movement were victims of other events of the armed conflict, such as threats, forced displacement (in the case of four of them), and the murder of their relatives. As happened to Beatriz Méndez, her brother and his nephew were killed. Carmenza Gómez and Luz Edilia Palacios lost another child.

On May 10, 2022, the Truth Commission organized an encounter with victims and members of Mafapo and soldiers who acknowledged their responsibility in the extra-judicial executions. During this encounter, Commissioner Alejandro Valencia announced ten “statements of truth” that will appear in the Final Report of June 28, 2022. Valencia stated that these results were based on 1,042 interviews with victims, 178 with those appearing, and 402 with experts, witnesses, and other

78 José Vargas Esguerra, “¿Quién dio la orden?”: las Madres de Soacha presentaron informe ante la JEP y la CEV”, *El Espectador*, Bogotá, March 16, 2021.

actors. Also, the Commission reviewed 320 reports from victims and civil organizations. The ten truth statements were⁷⁹:

1. The extra-judicial executions were war crimes and crimes against humanity that were encouraged by the government and implemented by the military forces.
2. It was an institutional structure that allowed and created the modus operandi of this practice. Although it was not written in the regulations, the institution practiced it.
3. The main culprit was the Army. But there were other states and non-state actors participating in the criminal network. Including the Gaula, the Navy, and other civilians.
4. The victims were people from vulnerable sectors, considered expendable by society or inhabitants of areas with high stigmatization due to the presence of the guerrillas.
5. The modus operandi resulted in fraudulent actions in which members of all ranks of the Public Force participated.
6. State funds were used to finance this criminal practice, including transactions with paramilitary groups.
7. These events have occurred since the 1980s. It was a dynamic that attacked the civilian base of the guerrillas.
8. There were complaints, including from international organizations such as the United States government, that the criminal practice of body count was taking place in Colombia. The State ignored these warnings.
9. There was constant coordination between the Public Force and paramilitary structures between 2002 and 2006. The paramilitaries gave the bodies of victims to the Army, so they presented as guerrilla combatants.

79 El Espectador, “10 verdades que Comisión de la Verdad dirá en su informe sobre ‘falsos positivos’”, El Espectador, May 10, 2022.

10. According to the JEP, there were 6,402 victims between 2002 and 2008, but it is a preliminary figure that may vary in the future. Nevertheless, the JEP estimated a high underreporting in the count of victims.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we give an overview of the Colombian social movement *Madres de Soacha*. This paper provides a historical and political background that shows the causes and evolution of the *Madres de Soacha* movement. Also, it analyses the role of women in armed conflict and the theoretical approach that Colombian researchers have used to analyze these types of social movement issues.

This paper proposes using the collective identity theory for analyzing and understanding the new experiences and dialogues that *Madres de Soacha* have shaped, especially where they created a cohesive collective identity, and their personal self is defined as part of this group. In short, the collective identity approach helps to reveal how these mothers effectively left being individuals and passive actors to be part of *Madres de Soacha* and strong political actors in peace building and building national memory.

After thirteen years of a systematic struggle against military impunity, legal ineffectiveness, and threats against their lives and their families. *Madres de Soacha* continue fighting for justice, truth, and vindication among the Colombian families.

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