Girls to Women:

Gendered Transitions to Adulthood in The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia.

Author's Declaration

The work presented in this dissertation was carried out in the Department of Geography, Environment and Development Studies, Birkbeck College, and is entirely my own except where other authors have been referred to and acknowledged in the text. It has not previously been submitted for a degree in this or any other university. The views expressed in this dissertation are my own, and not those of the University.

Signed *Verity Powell, 16th September 2011*

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation aims to answer the question: To what extent does the construction of girlhood in Colombia contribute to girls' decision to join the leftist-guerrilla movement *Las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC), as they transition from girlhood to womanhood?

The background to the conflict and the evolution of FARC as a political and military organisation are explored, the role of gender and the use of child soldiers within FARC is looked at in order to understand what FARC offers that appeals to some girls in Colombia. Finally the construction of girlhood and the transition to womanhood in Colombia are explored, from that I identify the motivating factors that contribute to some girls' choosing to join FARC as an alternative to the existing models of girlhood in Colombia.

From this, I conclude that it is not the construction of girlhood that results in girls' joining FARC but exceptional personal circumstances, specifically domestic violence and abuse.

ABBREVIATIONS

ANAPO: The National Popular Alliance, *Alianza Nacional Popular*

AUC: United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia, *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*

CCP: Colombian Communist Party

DDR: Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration

ELN: The National Liberation Army, *Ejército de Liberación Nacional*

FARC: The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, *Las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*

IDP: Internally Displaced Person/People

M-19: 19th of April Movement, *El Movimiento 19 de Abril*

OAS: Organization for American States (Spanish Abbreviation, OEA)

PTSD: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this dissertation is to answer the question: To what extent does the construction of girlhood in Colombia contribute to girls' decision to join leftist-guerrilla movements? The central hypothesis is that some girls in rural Colombia join leftist-guerrilla movements because of the limitations caused by the construction of girlhood in Colombia. As girls' transition to womanhood, these constructions become increasingly restrictive and I hypothesise that in order to exercise their agency, some girls join FARC, attracted by their claims of gender equality, and the opportunity to experience adventure and freedom from gender norms and expectations.

To explore and expand upon this hypothesis, two separate literatures are systematically reviewed; firstly the literature regarding the conflict in Colombia and leftist guerrilla movements in Colombia, specifically The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (*Las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia,* FARC), the use of child soldiers and gender within FARC, secondly the literature relating to gender equality and the construction of childhood, specifically girlhood, in Colombia. Then the two areas of literature are drawn together in order to answer the primary question: To what extent does gender inequality and the construction of girlhood in Colombia contribute to girls' decisions to join leftist-guerrilla movements?

Outline of Chapters

The dissertation is laid out into several sections; a literature review, a methodology, three chapters and the conclusion.

The literature review starts by looking at the literature post-Cold War and the concept of "trauma" and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), followed by the development of the psycho-social and social-ecologies schools of thought. The literature exploring young peoples' motivations for joining armed groups is reviewed, and finally an overview of the literature on child soldiers in Colombia.

The history of the conflict is explored in order to give a background to the conflict, and to explore how the conflict has shaped Colombian society, which is the backdrop to the research conducted.

The evolution of FARC is then chronicled. Despite there being several leftist-guerrilla movements in Colombia FARC was chosen for this dissertation as it is the largest, most prominent and currently active leftist-guerrilla group in Colombia (Gonzalez-Perez, 2006:321; Council on Foreign Relations, 2009). The chapter outlines how they grew out of the conflict in Colombia, the development of their political ideology and their involvement with the illegal drugs industry in Colombia. The role of child soldiers within FARC and gender

within FARC is explored, including their claims of gender equality, the roles of female combatants and their status within FARC. The purpose of this chapter is to understand what FARC offers as an alternative for girls and why that makes it an organisation some Colombian girls want to join.

The final substantive chapter is the construction of girlhood in Colombia. This chapter explores how childhood is constructed in Colombia against a backdrop of endemic violence, a culture of machismo, large-scale internal displacement and limited access to resources. The purpose of this chapter is to identify factors that contribute to the construction of girlhood in Colombia.

The conclusion draws the dissertation to a close, bringing the chapters together and providing an analysis of the findings in order to answer the question: To what extent does the construction of girlhood in Colombia contribute to girls' decisions to join leftist-guerrilla movements? Finally, I assess the validity of the hypothesis and find that the construction of girlhood is not the primary cause of girls joining FARC.

FARC has been labelled a terrorist organisation and a guerrilla movement, which raises the question, is there a difference between a guerrilla movement and a terrorist one? Guerrilla warfare is best described as a set of tactics used by a minority group within a state in order to oppose the government (Beckett, 1999:ix). Guerrilla groups are defined as "small groups who engage in

unorthodox attacks on the state or its military apparatus, while terrorists target civilian populations in an effort to generate chaos and fear" (Gonzalez-Perez, 2006:314). Terrorists can employ guerrilla tactics and guerrillas can become terrorists if they attack civilians (Gonzalez-Perez, 2006:315). This is certainly true of FARC whose main aim is to oppose the government and do this by targeting military and governmental apparatus. However they have been known to commit atrocities against the civilian population.

Whether FARC is a guerrilla organisation or terrorist one is not very important to the hypothesis. I am looking at why girls in Colombia join leftist armed groups, and to that end the blurred lines of definition between guerrilla and terrorist groups are not what I aim to explore. However, I believe that FARC do terrorise the civilian population and that this is not an accidental side effect of their attacks on state apparatus. However, I will continue to define FARC as a guerrilla group whilst acknowledging that they have committed terrorist acts.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Early literature on war-affected children

There is a substantial literature on war-affected children in the post-Cold War era. Kaldor (1999) describes these conflicts as "new wars". Key characteristics of "new wars" are the lack of a clearly designated combat area, fighting occurring within states, the proliferation of small arms and the civilian population becoming viable targets for attack (Wells, 2009:143; Singer, 2006; Boyden & DeBerry, 2004; Kaldor, 1999). All of these factors increased the involvement of children in conflicts, as both victims and actors (Cohn & Goodwin-Gill, 1997:9; Ahlström & Nordquist, 1991:6–15).

The early literature focused on the effects of traumatic events and their psychological consequences as the primary area of interest for researchers and gave rise to a body of war-literature primarily focusing on "trauma" and specifically Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in war-affected children (Magwaza et al, 1993; Nader and Pynoos, 1993; Kinzie et al, 1986). This body of literature identified the effects of "trauma" and PTSD as negatively affecting the child not just during the time of trauma but as causing lasting, developmental deficits.

However, the research methods used to gather the data were later questioned because of the use of Western models of medicine and psychiatry and their

failure to fully understand the experiences of war affected children, as well as cultural, racial, gender and class differences between children (Dyregrov et al, 2000; Garbarino & Kostelny, 1996; Hjern et al, 1991). The main critique of this area of the literature is that it identifies the child as an isolated entity and does not recognise the importance of wider societal relationships and the impact they have on the child and their rehabilitation. PTSD has also been identified by some as a Western social construct, following the war in Vietnam, and that its purpose was political in order to portray returning soldiers as victims rather than perpetrators of violence (Bracken, 2002; Summerfield, 2001). Despite this critique the concept of "trauma" and PTSD are still used in practice today.

Psychosocial and social ecologies

Moving away from the medical and psychiatric models established in the earlier literature, which focused on individual responses to events, the literature began to look at the wider societal impacts of war on children. Machel (2001) published a comprehensive review on the impact of war on children, exploring the many complexities surrounding war-affected children both as a direct consequence of conflict and the wider issues such as children being forcibly displaced, the impacts on children's health and highlighted the importance of psychosocial recovery.

The Psychosocial and Social Ecologies school states that children are "shaped by the cultural, social and cultural contexts of their lives (Boothby et al,

2006:3). This model works on the central premise of "resilience", focusing on "coping, resilience and recovery for war affected communities" (Boothby et al, 2006:11; Ager, Strang and Abebe, 2005; Strang and Ager, 2003). This literature puts great weight behind the importance of meeting basic needs in rehabilitation programmes, and of listening to communities when rehabilitating child soldiers, including the use of local practices and spiritual healing (Boothby et al, 2006; Honwana, 2006; Wessells, 2009).

Boyden and de Berry (2004) build on the concept of resilience and put forward the use of an ethnographic and anthropological perspective, moving away from quantitative data towards the use of qualitative data. As with the social-ecologies and psychosocial literature, they presented a shift away from the view of the permanently damaged war-affected child towards a perspective that outlines the resilience of human beings to over-come traumatic events (Boothby et al, 2006:9).

My critique of the psychosocial and social ecologies school is that, by focusing on resilience, they underplay the traumatic effects of war on children and communities.

Child Soldiers

Thus far the literature cited focuses on the war-affected child, we now look at more specific literature concerning child soldiers. Issues concerning the use of

the term 'child-soldier', and whether all children involved with armed groups should be called “child-soldiers”, are discussed at length in the literature. This is due to the many different roles that children in armed groups fulfil, not all of which include direct involvement in fighting, and are as diverse as cook, porter, spy, sex slave, body-guard and medic (Wessells, 2009; Hobson, 2005; Mazurana and McKay, 2001). It is important to highlight the varied roles played by children associated with armed groups, because it is possible for a child to have been part of an armed group for many years without necessarily having fought on the front line (Specht and Attree, 2006). A possible reason for the widening of the term “child soldier” to include all children involved with fighting forces is to expand the numbers of “child soldiers” and thus gain greater attention to the issue. However, it could also be said that the reason for it being used as a catch-all phrase is that all children involved in fighting forces, whether they participate in battle or not, are likely to have similar issues to those that did fight, such as being unable to locate their families, being stigmatised by wider society and possibly having been treated badly by other members of the fighting force.

Brett and Specht (2004) also explore the importance of qualitative data in providing a fuller understanding of the motivating factors for adolescents voluntarily joining armed groups. The literature regarding child soldiers aims to encapsulate the experiences of child soldiers from before they join, the factors that contribute to them joining, what occurs during their time in the armed

groups, how this differs from region to region (Wessells, 2009; Singer, 2006; Brett & Specht, 2004; Cohn & Goodwin-Gil, 1997).

A great deal of emphasis is placed on the importance of successfully rehabilitating child-soldiers. One way they identify of doing this is by identifying the factors that motivate them to join armed groups, so that rehabilitation programmes can attempt to fill the gaps in their lives that children fill by joining armed groups, and prevent them from re-joining (Wessells, 2009; Boothby et al, 2006; Singer, 2006; Brett & Specht, 2004).

Motivations for joining an armed group

As this dissertation is concerned with what motivates some girls in Colombia to join armed groups, the literature hypothesising why children chose to join armed groups is now explored. Brett and Specht (2004) look at the causes of children, specifically those in their teens, voluntarily joining armed groups. They identify the following motivating factors: war, poverty, education and employment, family and friends, politics and ideology, specific features of adolescence, culture and tradition.

The reasons girls join leftist movements, as opposed to paramilitaries, government or state military institutions is questioned by Cunningham (2003) who identifies several motivations for joining guerrilla and terrorist organisations. Only two of which are applicable to FARC; a belief in a political

cause and social motivation, such as wanting to aspire to a high rank in the social hierarchy. Hudson (1999) identifies the reasons as poverty, social isolation and lack of opportunities (Hudson, 1999: 20), these correspond with the reasons children join any armed group. However, there is no straightforward explanation and whilst some girls may have deeply held political convictions, for others it may simply be a matter of opportunity (Graham, 2008:202), such as the guerrilla having a presence where they live whilst the military and AUC do not. This is especially applicable where the choice to join is based on fleeing a domestic situation, instead of a political decision and the nearest means to flee is taken.

This perspective requires that children and adolescents be recognised as independent actors with agency and is a clear shift away from the earlier literature of the child as a passive victim of conflict. Whilst the adolescents may have made a voluntary choice and exercised their agency in order to join an armed group, in many instances the voluntary nature of that choice is questionable due to the limited number of other choices (Brett and Specht, 2004).

Girls' participation in armed groups

It is now acknowledged that within armed forces that use children, there are a large number of girls within the ranks. Female child soldiers occupy diverse and often auxiliary roles (Wells, 2009:156; Hobson, 2005). Although figures

are difficult to gather and verify, estimates state that girls represent between 6 to 50% of child soldiers, dependent on region and conflict (Spellings, 2008). Two of the most prominent authors on the roles of female child soldiers are McKay and Mazurana (McKay et al., 2006; McKay, 2005a; McKay, 2005b; McKay, 2005c; McKay and Mazurana, 2004; Mazurana, McKay et al., 2002; Mazurana & McKay, 2001; McKay, 2000; McKay, 1998), working together and separately they have complied a comprehensive body of work. Their main focus is female, child soldiers in the African continent, but they have written on conflicts around the world. They also consider their findings to have cross-cultural relevance (McKay and Mazurana, 2004:13).

Because the focus of this dissertation is on Colombia, I have not extensively reviewed the literature concerning female, child-soldiers in other regions. However, there are conflicts globally that are comparable with the conflict in Colombia and the involvement of girls within fighting groups and a body of associated literature. The conflicts in Mozambique, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Eritrea, Sri Lanka and to a lesser extent South Africa all involved leftist, guerrilla movements that made claims to be egalitarian organisations and included girls in their military activities (Wells, 2009:156; Honwana, 2006; Singer, 2006; McKay and Mazurana, 2004:91; West, 2000; Shepler, 2005).

Girls in armed groups in Colombia

In Colombia it is estimated that girls represent a quarter of the child soldiers in fighting forces (Human Rights Watch: 2003). Kearins (2002, 2003), writing for the Quaker United Nations Office, examines the experiences of female child soldiers across the globe and in Colombia. The factors that Kearins (2003) identified as putting children at risk of joining armed groups correlate to those identified by Brett and Specht (2004) and they include; being poor and/or disadvantaged, inhabiting a combat zone and being separated from their family.

The experiences of girls in armed groups in Colombia are explored by Gjelsvik, (2010) and Kunz & Sjöberg, (2009), who question whether the experience is empowering or further entrenches women's oppression in Colombia.

As previously stated, guerrilla groups and terrorist groups are not always easily distinguished and a single organisation may warrant both descriptions at different times. Some of the literature on girls in FARC is concerned with their decision join a terrorist organisation (Stanski, 2006; Cunnigham, 2003), as opposed to the state military, or paramilitary organisations.

The literature informed the hypothesis because whilst there is clearly a large body of literature on child-soldiers globally; looking at their motivations for joining, their experiences whilst in the armed group, and disarmament, demobilisation and rehabilitation once they leave, as well as the experiences of

female, child-soldiers in Africa and some parts of Asia, the literature focusing on female, child-soldiers in Colombia is less prevalent.

The existing literature on female, child-soldiers in Latin America has tended to focus on whether the experience is empowering, or the result of oppression and victim-hood (Gjelsvik, 2010; Kunz & Sjöberg; 2009) or to pathologise them as terrorists (Stanski, 2006; Cunnigham, 2003). And whilst both approaches offer valuable insights, and refer to the gender-bias in Latin America, they fail to address how constructs of girlhood in Colombia may result in the desire to join leftist-guerrilla groups.

3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides an explanation of the methodology used, taken to mean "a way of thinking about and studying social reality" (Strauss and Corbin, 1998:3), including the theoretical framework and feminist theory. Then the method used, "a set of procedures and techniques used for gathering and analyzing data" (Strauss and Corbin, 1998:3), is outlined.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used is feminism, drawing on two concepts; gender and girlhood. In order to do this, the constructs of gender and girlhood in Colombia are analysed.

Childhood Studies has drawn on feminism by presenting childhood as a social category, as feminism did with gender, rather than a biological fact (Butler, 1990, 1993). The 'social construction of childhood' is taken to mean that "children's lives are shaped by the social and cultural expectations adults and their peers have of them" (Wells, 2009:1), and not just the biological aspects of childhood.

In order to define what constitutes a child in Colombia I will be using the age of majority as a general marker, whilst acknowledging that this is just one way in which childhood is defined. "The age of majority is a social, religious, cultural or legal device through which societies acknowledge the transition to

adulthood" (Cohn & Goodwin-Gill, 1997:7). The age of majority in Colombia is 18, this is the age at which one can vote, buy alcohol, join the military, get married without parental consent and be considered as an adult in the judicial system. The only variant to the age 18 is the age of consent for sexual intercourse, which is 14. In line with the Conventions on the Rights of the Child, and the legal age of majority in Colombia, children will be defined as those under 18 years of age.

This "transition to adulthood" is recognised as that period when the young person is no longer a "child" but not yet an "adult" (Brett and Specht, 2004:29). This is the age at which people begin to form their adult identity (Erikson, 1968), and begin to project a future for themselves (Cohn & Goodwin-Gill, 1997:31). This is an age of contradictions, where the child has a sense of strength and power, as a result of their intellectual and physical maturity (Brett and Specht, 2004:30), which can result in impulsive behaviour driven by a sense of invisibility. But it is also a time of stressful transition, both physically and mentally, which makes them particularly vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups (Machel, 2001:12).

The girls discussed in this dissertation are in the "transition to adulthood". This would suggest that terminology, other than "girl", such as "youth" or "young person" may be a better description for those who are developing physically and intellectually into adults (Cohen & Goodwin-Gill, 1997:9). However that

strips them of their gendered identity, which is central to my hypothesis. Therefore, for the purpose of this dissertation "girls" means girls and young women ranging from thirteen to twenty years of age, this is the primary age of child soldiers in Colombia (Kearins, 2003:7-8).

Despite the importance of this transitional age, there is little research that focuses on girls, in this age group, in conflict situations (Spellings, 2008:23; Kearins, 2003:1). This may be because "girls" and women's experiences are not yet well understood and many girls transition into womanhood during armed conflict" (Boothby et al, 2006:92).

The other concept used for this dissertation is that of gender. In this dissertation gender is understood to be the "social construct of sexual difference… the way societies define and regulate femininity and masculinity" (Dore, 1997:9). Gender is "recreated and transformed through an inseparable mix of norms and behaviours that are cultural, economic, historical, sociological, linguistic, scientific and always political" (Dore, 1997:10).

The terms "empowerment" and "agency" are used throughout this dissertation. Empowerment is taken to mean "facilitating oneself or others to work towards or attain personal aims. In a feminist sense it is used to describe an enabling power to do something rather than a power over someone" (Humm, 1995:78). Agency is taken to mean that an individual actor has "the capacity to process

social experience and to devise ways of coping with life, even under the most extreme forms of coercion, within the limitations of information, uncertainty and other constraints that exist" (Moser & Clark, 2001:4-5). This is especially pertinent when considering girls within conflict zones and the limited options available to them.

Feminist Theory

The epistemology used for this research is Feminist theory. Feminist theory is a development of Critical theory (Ingram & Simon-Ingram, 1992:ixx). Critical theory rejects the three basic principles of positivism: "an objective external reality, the subject/object distinction and value free social science" (Jackson & Sørensen, 2010:248). This means that the work in this dissertation rejects that there is an absolute reality that can be recorded and documented, that there is no real distinction between the analyst and the subjects being analysed, and that it is not possible for the research to be conducted without my own beliefs being brought into the work.

Feminist theory "critiques existing forms of domination based on … gender" (Ingram & Simon-Ingram, 1992:xxxii). Feminist theory identifies the ways in which dominant concepts and practices of knowledge systematically disadvantage women. This is done by excluding women from inquiry, denying them epistemic authority, denigrating "feminine" cognitive styles and modes of knowledge, producing theories that represent women as inferior and render

power relations invisible, and producing knowledge that reinforces gender hierarchies (Anderson, 2011).

By applying feminist theory to this dissertation I assert that girls' experiences are affected by their gender and that this results in their oppression within society, that this should not continue unaddressed and therefore warrants research. This was used to develop the hypothesis that there is limited scope for girls in Colombia to transition to womanhood free from rigid social constructions of femininity and masculinity and that FARC provides a space in which the transition to womanhood is more egalitarian than it otherwise would be in Colombian society.

Research Methods

The data used in this dissertation consists of existing research and literature on child soldiers, and female child soldiers in Colombia, as well as texts relating to the conflict in Colombia, the illegal drug trade in Colombia and Colombian society. In order to identify these texts I did a systematic search of the library book and journal databases at Birkbeck University, The School of Oriental and African Studies, London School of Economics, Senate House and British Library using the following terms:

Colombia

Child soldier

Female child soldier

FARC (abbreviated and in full)

Female child solider AND Colombia OR FARC

Female soldier AND Colombia OR FARC

Child soldier in FARC (abbreviated and in full)

Gender Latin America

Gender Colombia

Machismo

I also located several key texts relating to child soldiers globally, these are outlined in the literature review. From these texts I located other texts and resources that related specifically to Colombia.

I then organised my research, extracted themes and put them into groupings, including:

Background to the conflict

Actors in the Conflict

Evolution of FARC

Command Structure of FARC

Political Ideology of FARC

Membership of FARC

Drug trafficking and kidnapping in relation to FARC

Child soldiers in FARC

Gender in FARC

Transition to adulthood

Violence

Internal Displacement

Machismo

Gender

Having gathered and organised my findings into the categories above, I then set about testing the hypothesis by re-examining and analysing my findings in light of the questions posed by the hypothesis. I had not originally intended to explore the concept of machismo, but it arouse several times in the literature on gender inequality and eventually became an important part of my research.

The majority of the data I located was qualitative, and based on fieldwork and interviews with women in Colombia and adolescents who had been involved with FARC. There were also a number of quantitative sources, especially with regard to the number of IDPs, the length of the conflict and the number of youths involved in the conflict.

An interesting piece of data was the primary data interview transcripts included in the appendices of Kearins (2003) paper. The interviews had been divided into coded categories, but other than that the transcripts were unedited. The

interview transcripts provided a wealth of information for me to draw on. Despite the small number of girls interviewed, only six girls met the selection criteria, the interviews with them went into great depth and provided information about how the girls had come to join FARC and how they felt about their time in FARC. The girls names were not disclosed, instead they are referred to as "Girl A" through to "Girl F". In the other literature on female child-soldiers in Colombia I found the "voice" of girl soldiers was not a prominent feature, in Kearins (2003) paper I was able to read how the girls viewed their own experiences which enriched my understanding of their motivations for joining and how they viewed their own experiences.

Practical Problems and Ethical Considerations

As I did not conduct primary research or research with human participants the ethical considerations for my research were concerned with how the data was originally collected and the point-of-view of the researcher. There is also an ethical consideration in the way in which people are presented in research. As a researcher it is important to bear this in mind, as everything written about people and available in the public sphere has the possibility of influencing the way people perceive a situation and the people involved. In this instance it is important not to represent Latin American women as victims of violence, and Latin American men as perpetrators of violence, as this reductive view results in the perpetuation of negative gender stereotypes of Latin American people.

Although there is plenty of data regarding the conflict in Colombia, child soldiers and female fighters in Colombian fighting forces, there are issues regarding how the data was initially gathered. This needs to be considered when using it as secondary data. These issues include the relative inaccessibility of child soldiers for researchers' due to the secretive nature of rebel groups, the reluctance of former child soldiers to openly identify themselves due to fear of reprisals and the denial of the use of child soldiers by all actors in the conflict.

It is also important to be aware of any bias on the behalf of the researchers who conducted the primary research. The validity of the primary data must be considered before drawing conclusions from it; the political and military situation in Colombia is constantly shifting and findings that were true a few years ago may no longer be relevant.

An unpredicted practical problem was the difficulty in finding publications by FARC. FARC had previously had a website on which they had posted propaganda, interviews with high-ranking officials and updates on their military and political ambitions. However, this website was hosted by a European provider who shut it down and FARC have been unable to find a new host for their website, therefore I was unable to verify the accuracy of sources citing interviews with FARC leaders and commanders taken from the website.

Limitations of Research

The main limitation of the research derives from the sole use of secondary data, whilst secondary data taken from academic journals and publications has a level of pre-established reliability from the process of being peer-reviewed, it does leave a lot of room for interpretation. The data I was accessing had already been read through a theoretical lens and interpreted according to the position of the researcher. I then read their research and applied another theoretical lens and brought my own interests to bear on the research. However, my work remains valid because of the systematic way in which the research was gathered and presented. I have already asserted that I do not believe that it is possible for research to be conducted without my own beliefs being brought into the work, but by being aware of this and making a full disclosure of what these beliefs are in my methodology I aim to present a balanced dissertation.

4. History of the Conflict

This chapter outlines how Colombian society and the current conflict in Colombia have been shaped by the past conflict. This is in order to provide both an historical and spatial context for the evolution of FARC, as well as an understanding of how the conflict has permeated almost all aspects of Colombian society, including the construction of girlhood.

The chapter is laid out to provide a chronological history of the conflict, starting with the period known in Colombia as *La Violencia* (the Violence), then the period following the official truce between the Liberal and Conservative parties which saw FARC develop into an organised movement, the other key actors in the conflict are profiled. Lastly I explore how the illegal drug trade has altered the profile of the conflict.

La Violencia

The modern day conflict in Colombia has a long and complex history, starting in 1819 when Colombia declared independence from Spain. The end of colonialism resulted in a power vacuum and an unstable political environment (Richardson, 2007:2). From this period emerged two political parties, the Liberals and the Conservatives, and they remained the dominant parties for the next 150 years (Richardson, 2007:2). This bi-partisan political structure resulted in the dominance of a small number of elites and an on-going and

violent political struggle against this by rural peasants (Gjelsvik, 2010:6, Chant, 2003:26).

The volatile political situation was further ignited by the assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, a Liberal land-reformer and leader of the Colombia Liberal Party, in 1948 (Richardson, 2007:2). His assassination resulted in violent reprisals by Liberals and Liberal sympathisers and a period of sustained and brutal violence, known as *'La Violencia'* (the violence) (Richardson, 2007:2). During *La Violencia* over 300,000 people were killed and 2 million people were internally displaced (Stanski, 2006:137). The result of *La Violencia* on Colombian society was the militarisation of civilian life and the worsening and deepening of political tensions between political elites and the rural peasantry.

A truce was signed in 1958 between the Conservative and Liberal Parties (Richardson, 2007:3; Stanski, 2006:137), despite this, violence continued until 1966. The truce banned all other political parties that had fought with the liberals from participating in the Colombian parliament. However, this did not result in the disbanding of the other political parties. The Colombian Communist Party (CCP) refused to relinquish the territory it had gained during *La Violencia*. In order do this the CCP ordered the peasants in the territory to form "self-protection units" (Richardson, 2007:3). Since then guerrilla organisations, paramilitary groups and military forces have been locked in a civil war for dominance and power. In addition to this, the expansion of the

illegal drug industry in Colombia since the 1990s, has added an additional level of complexity to the conflict (Thoumi, 2003).

Key Actors in the Conflict

Armed groups expanded numerically and territorially during the 1990s. In 1997 there were 132 guerrilla groups, mainly divided into FARC and ELN forces. There were also 100 paramilitary organisations within AUC (Gjelsvik, 2010:26; Richardson, 1997:3). Although this dissertation is primarily concerned with FARC, they cannot be considered in isolation from the other key actors in the conflict, including the Colombian military, other guerrilla groups and paramilitary organisations in Colombia.

The other key leftist-guerrilla groups are the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (The National Liberation Army, ELN) and *El Movimiento 19 de Abril* (19th of April Movement, M-19). ELN are a Marxist-Leninist movement and were formed in 1963 by students, Catholic radicals and left-wing intellectuals. They claim to represent the rural poor against Colombia's wealthy classes and oppose US influence in Colombia, the privatisation of natural resources, multinational corporations and rightist violence. ELN operates mainly in the north-east of Colombia and has approximately 2,200 to 3000 members. Like FARC their main source of income is from drug-trafficking and kidnapping (Gjelsvik, 2010:27, Wells, 2009:143). ELN is remains active, however they have

experienced challenges in the face of the militarised strategy of Uribe's government (Gjelsvik, 2010:28).

M-19 was formed in 1974 and was initially an armed wing of ANAPO, much as FARC was the armed wing of the CCP. M-19 consisted mainly of urban, middle class activists, intellectuals, communist youths and disgruntled members of ANAPO (Guáqueta, 2007). They remained a predominantly urban organisation until they started kidnapping people, at which point they expanded into rural areas (Vásquez, 2005). M-19s ideals are grounded in orthodox Communist values. They want political and economic reform and to open the elite controlled bipartisan political system, they are considered to be less radical and violent than FARC and ELN (Gjelsvik, 2010:28).

The other side of the conflict includes the Colombian military and *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (*United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia, AUC). Paramilitary groups emerged during the 1980s to protect the interests of oil companies and wealthy landowners from attack by guerrilla organisations. In 1997 these paramilitary organisations unified as an umbrella group under the name AUC. (Gjelsvik, 2010:29).

AUC are financed by drug money, payments and voluntary contributions from drug lords and land owners seeking protection from guerrilla organisations

(Guáqueta, 2007). They have no political ideology that they subscribe to and promote, other than maintaining the status quo in Colombia.

It has been speculated that AUC maintain close links with the military and are rumoured to co-operate with them (Human Rights Watch, 2003:22). The Colombian military has been bolstered in recent years by the influx of money from America via Plan Colombia and President Uribe's determination to bring an end to the conflict (Council on Foreign Relations, 2009).

Introduction of the Drugs Trade

Although the conflict in Colombia is predominantly one of political ideology, it has, in recent years become closely linked to the growing illegal drugs trade. The leftist-guerrillas have become increasingly involved in the trafficking of narcotics as a source of income (Thoumi, 2003:103). This has led some to claim that the guerrillas are essentially drug cartels, rather than political or ideological groups (Kunz & Sjöberg, 2009:10; Villmarín, 1996).

The drug trade is estimated to account for up to 80% of the guerrillas and paramilitaries income. The drug trade raises an estimated $800 million a year for the guerrillas and paramilitaries, and there is a suggestion that a large proportion of this revenue is skimmed off by top commanders in all of the military organisations (Kaldor, 1999:102). It is clear that without the illegal drug trade, FARC would struggle to survive economically and that the addition

of the illegal drugs trade has altered FARC from a political group to more complicated organisation with deep ties to the illegal drugs trade.

This chapter has outlined how the current conflict in Colombia has been shaped by the past, in order to provide both an historical and spatial context for the evolution of FARC. The next chapter explores how FARC evolved over the course of the conflict.

5. THE EVOLUTION OF FARC

FARC has grown from a small group of peasants in rural Colombia to be the largest and most dominant leftist-guerrilla group in Colombia (Gonzalez-Perez, 2006:321). The purpose of this chapter is to chronicle how FARC developed, starting with their early incarnation as a 'self-protection unit' (Richardson, 2007:3) through to their present status. The chapter then looks at how the political ideology of FARC has altered and shifted, along with their political and social aims. It would be hard to write a chapter about FARC and not include a section about their involvement with the illegal drugs trade, as it has become an intrinsic part of the conflict and the structure of FARC. Then the use of child-soldiers by FARC is examined and lastly, the role of gender within FARC is explored.

Formation of FARC; from self-defence force to guerrilla group

FARC was initially started as a self-defence force as ordered by the Colombian Communist Party during *La Violencia* (Kunz & Sjöberg, 2009:9) and its membership consisted of squatters and poor peasants. Under the protection of these armed groups, peasants formed "independent republics", predominantly in the southern and central regions of Colombia (Graham, 2008:198; Stanski, 2006:137). When the official truce was signed between the Conservative and Liberal Parties, the Communist Party refused to give up the territories gained during the conflict (Richardson, 2007:3).

In 1964, the Colombian army attacked the independent republic of Marquetalia in the "Battle of Marquetalia" in an effort to capture Manuel Marluanda Velez and Jacobo Arenas, two peasant leaders and future leaders of FARC. Following the attack by the army, Marluanda and his followers regrouped as FARC. No longer able to maintain their fixed position, they shed their defensive position in favour of a mobile guerrilla strategy (Stanski, 2006:128). The newly formed FARC consisted of 48 members, liberals and communists, with the intention of over-throwing the government (Van der Walde & Burbano, 2001:24; Molano, 2000). FARC remained a relatively small group with strong ties to the CCP for the next decade.

By the 1980s FARC had become an independent guerrilla organisation with its own political and military doctrine and completely separated from the Colombian Communist Party (Safford, 2002). In the present day FARC continues to be a primarily military organisation, with a subordinate 'political wing' (Kunz & Sjöberg, 2009:10). Although it has been speculated that since the death of Manuel Marulanda Vélez in 2008 and the rise of Adolfo Cano as the new leader, FARC is attempting to take a more political direction (Kunz & Sjöberg, 2009:10). This has not been substantiated in peace negotiations (Council on Foreign Relations, 2009).

As with most military organisations, FARC has a strict hierarchical structure (Kunz & Sjöberg, 2009:9). FARC is centrally led by the 'Secretariat', the

governing body composed of seven members. The 'Secretariat' is elected by the *Estado Mayor Central* (Central National Command). FARC has over 60 military fronts or columns, these are organised into seven blocks, plus a substantial urban militia (Kunz & Sjöberg, 2009:9).

FARC currently operates in roughly one-third of Colombia, mostly in the plains at the base of the Andes and the jungle of the Southeast (Graham, 2008:207). From 1998-2002 there was a demilitarised zone officially controlled by FARC in the El Caguán river basin, a jungle region in south central Colombia (Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, 2004:4). In this area and other rural areas FARC operates as a public administrator, providing schooling, health-care, social services and conflict mediation and resolution amongst residents. This is because either the government control and resources do not extend to these regions, or these regions are purposefully denied access to vital resources as a tactic of war (Stanski, 2006:139).

Whilst it is difficult to verify the exact numbers of FARC membership it is estimated that FARC has between 9,000 to 11,000 combatants, plus urban militias estimated at 15,000 members (Kunz & Sjöberg, 2009:11).
Between 80 to 90 percent of FARC members come from rural areas (Kunz & Sjöberg, 2009:12; Graham, 2008:207), whilst the militias are predominantly made up of urbanites, including intellectuals, students, doctors and lawyers (Hudson, 1999:88).

Commander Raul Reyes (Leech, 2011) states that both men and women voluntarily join FARC and commitment is assumed individually. Initiation into FARC is an act of conscience, voluntary and personal, and occurs between the ages of 15 and 30 (FARC-EP, 2004 in Graham, 2008). Membership is for life and desertion is high treason and punishable by death (Kunz & Sjöberg, 2009:12).

Political Ideology and Aims

The political ideology of FARC originates in the socio-economic inequalities embedded in Colombian society and developed from peasant agitation and built on Marxist ideology (Gjelsvik, 2010:26; Stanksi, 2006:138). FARCs agenda was essentially Marxist and called for the redistribution of land and wealth, state control of natural resources and a substantial increase in social welfare (Stanski, 2006:139).

In its current incarnation FARC have adopted an ideology referred to as "Bolivarianism', the term encompasses their vision of better social protection, agricultural reform and local autonomy (Stankski, 2006:140). FARC's traditional goal to overthrow the Colombian government and replace it with a Communist system has also evolved into a fight for a democratic regime with social justice and human rights in a society that includes the marginalised sectors of the political process and land reform (Kunz & Sjöberg, 2009:10).

The Illegal Drugs Trade and Kidnapping

It would be difficult to write an analysis of FARC without discussing the use of kidnapping and their involvement with the illegal drugs trade. FARC have become increasingly involved in drugs trafficking, another source of income has been kidnapping, demanding ransom and taxation of peasants (Gjelsvik, 2010:26; Wells, 2009:143; Gonzalez-Perez, 2006:321). This has caused FARC to lose some popularity within the peasant population as their violent methods have been turned against those they purport to be fighting for (Villmarín, 1996).

Whilst the illegal drugs trade and the violent tactics FARC have employed have had a negative impact on their relationship with rural peasants, it is also the route through which most peasants have contact with FARC. Rural farmers frequently grow coca to supplement their incomes, through this they come into contact with FARC (Thoumi, 2003:103). This is also an important route for the recruitment of young-people, which we shall explore later on.

Child Soldiers in FARC

There are an estimated 11,000 to 14,000 child soldiers in the Colombian conflict, they account for almost a quarter of all combatants and are involved in all sides of the conflict (Singer, 2006; Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, 2004; Human Rights Watch, 2003). Up 30 percent of some guerrilla units are children, with up to 85 percent of urban militias reports being under 18 years old (Human Rights Watch, 2003). An estimated third to half of

children involved in guerrilla groups are female (Richardson, 2007; Human Rights Watch, 2003).

Life for children in FARC doesn't differ much from that of adult guerrillas. They are expected to adhere to the strict schedules and intense military training and are permitted little contact with their families (Girl A in Kearins, 2003:43; Girl E in Kearins, 2003:63; Human Rights Watch, 2003). The military training is intensive and often brutal (Richardson, 2007:8), with children forced to watch captives being tortured and having to shoot captives and comrades as a test of valour (Girl A in Kearins, 2003:46; Human Rights Watch, 2003; Kearins, 2003:12).

FARC claims that they do not force or coerce anyone to join and that they do not accept recruits under 15 years old (Human Rights Watch, 2003:29). However, there are reports that indigenous children are often forcibly recruited to work as guides in remote, rural areas (Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, 2004, Human Rights Watch, 2003:29; Machel, 2001:8) and that girls as young as 11 are recruited (Kearins, 2003:8). Children who have crossed the border into Colombia to work as *raspachines*, (people who harvest coca leaves) are also forcibly recruited by FARC (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2008). For those who already have contact with FARC, such as the *raspachines*, the line between voluntary and coerced participation is often unclear (Brett & Specht, 2004:112; Cohn & Goodwin-Gill, 1997:24) because "cooperating and interacting with the FARC becomes a natural part of

adolescence and over time results in joining full time" (Girl C in Kearins, 2003:41; Gjelsvik, 2010:40).

There are high-rates of attrition amongst child-soldiers. Many are unable to return to their homes as they risk being caught by FARC and killed (Kearins, 2003:14-15). Others don't want to return home, especially if they originally joined FARC to escape domestic abuse (Richardson, 2007:10). Issues arise when these children try to leave FARC and demobilise. If captured by the police or army they are handed over to juvenile judges and then on to Reception centres run by the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (ICBF). Since 2002 ICBF guidelines have stipulated that all children who have left armed groups "have a right to specialied protection from the State, regardless of the circumstances in which they left". Up until the point children had different legal rights depending on whether they deserted or were captured, and which armed group they belonged to (Richardson, 2007:10).

In 2000 "Operation Berlin" brought the number of child soldiers used by FARC to the attention of the international community. FARC sent the "Arturo Ruiz" column, consisting of approximately 380 combatants, to regain territory lost to the paramilitaries in the north east of Colombia. During the operation the Colombian army ambushed FARC. Nearly half of those captured or killed by the army were reported to be children, nineteen of them were 15 or younger (Human Rights Watch, 2003:84).

Gender in FARC

In the early days of FARC there were few women in the organisation. By the 1990s FARC had started to recruit women and by 2002 women comprised an estimated 20-45% of the guerrillas (Kunz & Sjöberg, 2009:1; Graham, 2008:207; Gonzalez-Perez, 2006:322; Stanski, 2006:140). FARC was 'greatly strengthened by the influx of girls and women into (the) ranks' (Ness, 2005:357), it has been speculated that this was the reason for a drive to recruit women, rather than an ideology of gender equality (Gonzalez-Perez, 2006). The rising numbers of women joining FARC has a "cyclical effect, causing the group to become more responsive to women's objectives, thereby attracting still more women" (Gonzalez-Perez, 2006:326). Many of the female combatants are from rural areas and are often quite young, many under the age of 18 (Kunz & Sjöberg, 2009:6-8).

FARC represents itself as a community where men and women are equal (Kunz & Sjöberg, 2009:2; Stanski, 2006:140 Girl B in Kearins, 2003:47; Girl C in Kearins, 2003:51; Girl F in Kearins, 2003:69) and their internal regulations state that women can participate in all military operations (Graham, 2008:208; Spellings, 2008:29) and that women are technically able to reach the highest ranks, although this has not yet happened.

If girls prove themselves in battle they are just as likely to be promoted to commander as boys (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2008; Human Rights Watch, 2003; Girl F in Kearins, 2003:71; Kearins, 2003). FARC claims that there is an equal division of labour within FARC (Girl B in Kearins, 2003:47; Girl C in Kearins, 2003:56) The non-gendered division of labour can be perceived as liberating as it frees women from traditional "women's roles" (Gjelsvik, 2010:44). However the claims of the equal division of labour are not supported by eye-witness accounts which have stated that there are a higher percentage of women working in the kitchens and as medical personnel (Kunz & Sjöberg, 2009:26; Graham, 2008:209).

FARC claims that their ideology creates an environment of gender equality (Kunz & Sjöberg, 2009:10) within the organisation, stating that women are "vulnerable to the same inequalities and injustices that they are combating for society at large" (Stanski, 2006:139). Because they have rejected traditional power structures, they are also able to reject the limitations of traditional gender norms (Gonzalez-Perez, 2006:318). This claim to equality is cited frequently in FARC's propaganda and is an integral part of their recruitment of women (Stanski, 2006:140).

Despite these claims of gender equality, the inability of women to reach the top ranks within FARC has made people question the extent of that gender equality. Whilst women have reached the level of commander (Girl C in

Kearins, 2003:53-55), no women have become members of the Secreteriat (Kunz & Sjöberg, 2009:1; Graham, 2008:209, Cunningham, 2003:179). Two reasons for women's failure to reach the top levels have been hypothesised; that gender inequality and the culture of *machismo* in FARC prevents them (Cunningham, 2003:179) or that women only started to join FARC in significant numbers in the 90s, so there are young women progressing through the ranks but they haven't reached the top yet (Cunningham, 2010:186; Gonzalez-Perez, 2008:42).

It has also been argued that gender equality in FARC is primarily based upon allowing women to join as long as they conform to masculine characteristics both physically, in term of strength and endurance, as well as emotionally and mentally (Gjelsvik, 2010:44; Stanski, 2006:148). Some claim this "sameness", should not be mistaken for gender equality (Gjelsvik, 2010:44) as it does not give equal status to characteristics associated with "femininity" and that FARC actually predicates the involvement of women only if they renounce those "feminine" aspects of themselves. However, this view suggests that there are innate qualities that women possess. As I believe gender is social construct, I do not support this view.

Women in Colombia join guerrilla movements for multiple reasons, not least of all identifying with the guerrillas aims (Wells, 2009:156). In Colombia there are a significant number of women participating in grass-roots political

organisations and movements (Gjelsvik, 2010:32). However the numbers of women involved in the higher-levels of politics are low (Chant, 2003:26). The guerrilla groups are able to provide the opportunity to fight for their political ideals when formal channels have proven difficult to access (Cunningham, 2010:179; Gjelsvik, 2010:39; Galvin, 1983:20-23).

Barth (2002) observes that women are often found in Marxist-Leninist movements and therefore "it seems likely that the political ideology plays an important role in their recruitment" (Barth, 2002:12). A reason for this may be that domestic guerrilla groups frequently espouse the breaking away from existing societal norms that such groups espouse, including a breaking with traditional gender-norms and the acceptance of female participation (Gjelsvik, 2010:39; Kunz & Sjöberg, 2009:7; Graham, 2008:203; Gonzalez-Perez, 2006:316).

Many women join FARC with the desire to change the unequal power balance in Colombia and to be liberated from subordination by male dominance (Gjelsvik, 2010:41). Within FARC women are able to forge a path to leadership roles, with the hope that by doing so they will be able to alter the hierarchical structure not just in their organisation, but also in wider society (Gonzalez-Perez, 2006:313-314).

A feature of female participation in FARC that is considered unique to FARC is the compulsory use of contraceptives by women and the over-seeing of relationships by commanders (Girl C in Kearins, 2003:58; Kearins, 2003:15). Relationships in FARC are closely monitored in order to reduce the impact intimate relationships may have on the organisation (Graham, 2008:210; Stanski, 2006:145). The rules surrounding sexual relationships are complex; emotional or long-term relationships are discouraged, pregnancy is forbidden, female and male combatants need to "register" to before starting a sexual relationship (Kunz & Sjöberg, 2009:28; Girl F in Kearins, 2003:71).

These rules are in place to control male and female sexuality within FARC. However the rules differ for male and female members, men are allowed to form relationships outside of FARC whilst women are not, and if a pregnancy occurs then it is the woman's fault and she will be encouraged or forced to have an abortion (Gjelsvik, 2010:53-54; Kunz & Sjöberg, 2009:28; Spellings, 2008:30; Stanski, 2006:147; Girl C in Kearins, 2003:52; Kearins, 2003:8,15).

The control over relationships could be interpreted as a way of controlling women's relationships and sexuality (Gjelsvik, 2010:49). However, some women view the regulation of relationships in a positive light because it strengthens their position within intimate relationships (Gjelsvik, 2010:50; Girl E in Kearins, 2003:64).

FARC claims that acts of sexual violence and abuse by male guerrillas are not tolerated, the official punishment is death (Girl A in Kearins, 2003:44). This mandate provides women within FARC with a protection that is not present in civilian society in Colombia. This does not mean that violence, sexual harassment and rape do not occur within the group. Women are particularly exposed when it comes to men in higher positions in the group" (Gjelsvik, 2010:50; Kunz & Sjöberg, 2009:29; Girl E in Kearins, 2003:65).

Whilst officially acts of sexual violence are forbidden it does not mean that women within FARC are not sexually exploited. Women within FARC reported that women are frequently pressured into relationships with Commanders. Girls feel pressured because of the Commanders' status (Spellings, 2008:30; Girl B in Kearins, 2003:47) as well as some commanders claiming that it is their "revolutionary duty" to enter into sexual relations (Kunz & Sjöberg, 2009:29). Some would suggest that this is a replication of the subordinate position of women in Colombian society and runs counter to FARC's claims of gender equality (Stanski, 2006:147). However, some girls identified the advantages of being in a sexual relationship with a Commander, including better food, less arduous work and a reduce likelihood of being sent on dangerous missions and claimed they had purposefully aligned themselves with Commanders because of the benefits they could receive (Girl C in Kearins, 2003:60; Girl F in Kearins, 2003:43; Kearins, 2003:12).

The purpose of this chapter has been to chronicle how FARC has developed from a small, peasant defence-force into the largest guerrilla movement in Colombia. The chapter explored the use of child-soldiers by FARC and the role of gender within FARC in order to identify what FARC offers the girls who choose to join and to what extent these promises are upheld once girls have joined. As previously stated, the central hypothesis to this dissertation is that FARC provides an alternative space in which girls can transition into womanhood with fewer constraints on their gendered identity. The next chapter looks out how this gendered identity is formed in Colombian society through the construction of girlhood.

6. THE CONSTRUCTION OF GIRLHOOD IN COLOMBIA

The central hypothesis of this dissertation is that the social construction of girlhood in Colombia creates an environment in which the transition to womanhood is difficult and restrictive, and that FARC provides an alternative space in which to transition to womanhood. I hypothesise that the space provided by FARC is thought by girls to be more egalitarian and to provide more varied opportunities than civilian life in rural Colombia.

The construction of girlhood is a vast and complex concept, which not only varies country-to-country, region-to-region, but also family-to-family and girl-to-girl. I do not aim to encapsulate all of the elements that contribute to the construction of girlhood in Colombia. Instead I identify four key-factors that are present in the construction of girlhood and are contributory factors to girls' deciding to join FARC. They are the endemic violence in Colombian society, the culture of machismo and gender inequality, large-scale internal displacement and limited access to resources.

Violence

Violence is endemic in Colombia, the reasons for which can be traced to the conflict. This violence manifests in several ways, the militarisation of civilian life, high-levels of violent criminality and in violence against women (Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, 2004:20; Meerten, 2001:134).

The militarisation of civilian life increases peoples' exposure to, and awareness of violence. The militarisation of civilian life is characterised by the presence of heavily armed police or soldiers on the streets, armed guards in public buildings, armed checkpoints on roads and curfews (Cohn & Goodwin-Gill, 1997:31). The militarisation of civilian life also creates a climate of familiarity with the military and therefore normalises joining an armed group. For some, children seeing violence, or at least the threat of violence all around creates feelings of insecurity and they feel safer if they too have a gun (Machel, 2001:11).

Both men and women in Colombia are exposed to violence (Kunz & Sjöberg, 2009:19), however, women and girls also experience gender-based violence including rape, sexual harassment and abuse (Gjelsvik, 2010:36). Guerrilla, paramilitary and government forces have all used rape, sexual torture and other forms of sexual violence against women and girls as a tactic to destabilise the population (Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, 2004:19; Meerten, 2001:133).

Women and girls also face high rates of domestic violence (OMCT, 2004), and there is widespread mistreatment and sexual abuse against children in the home (Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, 2004:20; Kearins, 2003:11). The high-levels of domestic violence have been noted as a result of the role of machismo in Colombia; violence is used to ensure women remain in their

submissive role (Hernandez, 2003:866) and as a way to maintain unequal power relations between men and women (Humm, 1995:293).

Against this backdrop of endemic violence FARC provides a space in which violence against women within the organisation is prohibited and punished. This is in stark contrast to the high-levels of domestic violence in Colombian society. This provides an opportunity for girls to join for their own protection and to escape domestic violence and abuse (Kunz & Sjöberg, 2009:23; McKay and Mazurana, 2004:87-88; Girl A in Kearins, 2003:31; Girl B in Kearins, 2003:31; Girl D in Kearins, 2003: 32; Girl E in Kearins, 2003:33; Girl F in Kearins, 2003:34; Brett, 2002). Whilst joining a guerrilla group could result in being in dangerous situations there is a level of calculated risk; one is trained, one has a weapon, one is a soldier (Stanski, 2006:142; Brett & Specht, 2004:95; Girl A in Kearins, 2003:43). The decision to join FARC can be viewed as a decision to be ready for violence, which some girls may feel is inevitable.

Gender Inequality – Machismo

The Colombian constitution upholds the principal of gender equality between men and women in the public and private sphere (Gjelsvik, 2010:32), but this does not necessarily translate into the experiences of girls in Colombia. Colombian society is highly gendered, with men and women having separate and conservative gender roles (Gjelsvik, 2010:60; Gonzalez-Perez, 2006:317; Hernandez, 2003:860).

Machismo is defined similarly throughout Latin America as the belief that men are superior to women. It incorporates a set of cultural expectations for men, including positive aspects such as pride, courage and responsibility, as well as negative aspects such as aggression, power and control over women and other men, and sexual aggression in male/female relationships (Chant, 2003:14; Hernandez, 2003:862). This asymmetry in the relative positions of men and women is an "important ordering principal that pervades the system of power relations" (Moser & Clark, 2001:5) between men and women in Colombia.

Whilst this could be perceived as an over simplification of the roles of men and women in Colombia, it would be inappropriate "to deny the existence of a cult of "exaggerated masculinity" in Latin America,… when there is so much evidence of male domination and/or mistreatment of women, and where women and men in everyday life refer to machismo as denoting particular modes of male behaviour" (Chant, 2003:16).

The conservative gender roles of men and women in Colombia includes women and girls being becoming mothers at a relatively young age. The level of teenage pregnancies and young mothers is comparatively high in Colombia when compared with other Latin American countries (Kunz & Sjöberg, 2009:20). NGOs have recorded an increase in young mothers (those less than 20 years old) in Colombia, the figure being 11% higher amongst IDPs

compared to the rest of Colombia (Kunz & Sjöberg, 2009:20). This can be attributed to several factors, not least of all the limited access to contraceptives and sexual education (Rao, 2011:iv). Whilst this may be an influencing factor, it would not explain the relatively high rates of teenage motherhood compared to other Latin American countries that have similar issues with regard to accessing contraceptives. It may be that girls choose to start families because they want to have a child or because it provides a way to leave home. Either way, it should not be presumed that motherhood is forced upon girls and young women. However, it may be a choice made due to the limited availability of other options for their future, but this does not mean they are not exercising their agency.

As previously stated women are highly active in local politics, and constitute a large part of the grassroots activists, but due to gender inequality they are still under represented in political parties (Gjelsvik, 2010:32). With limited legitimate means to participate in politics at a national level, FARC provides a platform for women to fight for their political ideals and gender equality (Stanski, 2006:139). However, joining FARC to pursue political ideals and gender equality means committing to violence in order to achieve these aims. Which may be considered too high a price for some women, who instead choose to continue campaigning for change at the grassroots level.

As social actors the girls are finding alternative ways of formulating their objectives (Moser & Clark, 2001:5), such as asserting equality with boys, having their voice heard or making decisions about their own future (Brett & Specht, 2004:89-91; Kearins, 2003:16) by joining FARC. Girls are able to gain roles within FARC that improve their status, with the hope of continuing the improved social position in the post-conflict society (Graham, 2008:204).

Internal Displacement

There are substantial levels of internal displacement in Colombia as a consequence of the conflict (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soliders, 2007). Civilians have been deliberately targeted throughout the war in order to disrupt and destabilise the population, resulting in Colombia having one of the highest numbers of Internally Displaced People (IDP) in the world, with an estimated 2 million people having been displaced in the last twenty years (Women's Refugee Commission, 2002:1; Meerten, 2001:136). Children and youths are disproportionately represented and comprise 48 – 55% of IDPs (Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, 2004:10). The effect of large-scale displacement is the further creation of a climate of violence in Colombia (Kunz & Sjöberg, 2009:20).

Families regularly cite fear of forced recruitment of children into armed forces for fleeing from their homes (Boothby et al, 2006: 2; Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, 2004:14; Meerten, 2001:140). Many children become

separated from their families whilst fleeing; this makes children especially vulnerable to recruitment (Brett and Specht, 2004:25) as there in no one else to provide for them. Being in the highly militarized environment of refugee camp (Cohn & Goodwin-Gill, 1997:32), combined with an early exposure to violence, uprooting, to a difficult environment and a lack of education combine to produce easy recruits for guerrilla forces (Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, 2004:11) and both girls and boys are vulnerable to recruitment in order to escape realities of being displaced (Women's Refugee Commission, 2002:36; Cohn & Goodwin-Gill, 1997:33).

Women and girls who are displaced are also at an increased risk of being raped and subjected to other forms of violence than other women in Colombia. There are also increased levels of domestic violence amongst IDPs (Women's Refugee Commission, 2002:18,20). In these circumstances girls once again find themselves subjectively appraising the circumstances of their lives and assessing that FARC is a place where violence against comrades is prohibited. And making the decision to join FARC because the danger of being in a military organisation is outweighed by the violence experienced in civilian life.

Access to Resources

Due to the conflict, access to resources such as education, employment and healthcare are limited in rural areas, and this is exacerbated by the lack of government presence in rural areas (Stanski, 2006:139).

Schools have been targeted by guerrillas and paramilitaries (Brett and Specht, 2004:16; Machel, 2001:8). Not only are school buildings targeted but also "rural school teachers, mostly women, are particularly vulnerable because of their visible and politically sensitive role in educating new generations" (Meerten, 2001:139). Because of this, many schools have shut down, forcing girls to travel long distances to access education. Without a secondary education the career opportunities open to girls are limited.

War also changes employment opportunities (Brett and Specht, 2004:22). In Colombia a direct consequence of the conflict has been the disruption of agriculture and the national economy (Women's Refugee Commission, 2002:6). Because the civilian population has been targeted, many have fled from rural locations to the cities (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2008), and agricultural land has been damaged or used to grow cocoa (Thoumi, 2003:103). This has resulted in the rural population struggling to secure work, which in turn exacerbates poverty in rural Colombia.

Lacking opportunities, be they educational or employment, puts girls at an increased risk of joining armed groups (Graham, 2008:208; Richardson, 2007:6; Brett and Specht 2004:15). In these circumstances some girls will join FARC because of their "experiences or circumstances and in light of their subjective appraisal of the decision to volunteer" (Cohn & Goodwin-Gill,

1997:30). That "subjective appraisal" includes the knowledge that FARC will provide for you, if you join. FARC provides a profession of sorts, as well as food, military training, basic education, healthcare, protection and a sense of purpose and adventure.

The central hypothesis of this dissertation is that the social construction of girlhood in Colombia creates an environment in which the transition to womanhood is difficult and restrictive and that the FARC provides an alternative space in which to transition to adulthood that is more egalitarian and provides more varied opportunities for girls. This chapter has explored four factors that contribute to the construction girlhood in Colombia and girls decisions to join FARC.

5. CONCLUSION

The aim of this dissertation has been to answer the question: To what extent does the construction of girlhood in Colombia contribute to girls decision to join leftist-guerrilla movements? The central hypothesis is that girls in rural Colombia join leftist-guerrilla movements because of the limitations caused by the construction of childhood, specifically girlhood in rural Colombia.

In order to situate this hypothesis, the history of the conflict was explored. This chapter provided a background to the formation of FARC and also highlighted how the length and intensity of the conflict has resulted in violence permeating all aspects of Colombian society.

The formation of FARC was outlined, charting their development from a small, peasant organisation into the largest, leftist guerrilla group in Colombia (Gonzalez-Perez, 2006:321). The introduction of the drug-trade in the 1980s bolstered FARCs finances, but has also resulted in FARCs deepening involvement in the illegal drugs trade (Thoumi, 2003:103). This has led to claims that FARC is now a drug cartel that legitimises their use of guerrilla and terrorist tactics by hiding behind a political ideology (Kunz & Sjöberg, 2009:10; Villmarín, 1996). Whilst they have no doubt profited from the illegal drugs trade, I do not believe that their political ideology has been abandoned entirely.

The extensive use of child soldiers in FARC was chronicled (Singer, 2006; Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, 2004; Human Rights Watch, 2003) including the large number of girl soldiers (Richardson, 2007; Human Rights Watch, 2003). FARC claims that they do not allow children under 15 years old to join (Human Rights Watch, 2003:2), but there is evidence that children as young as 11 years old are members of FARC and that they participate in combat (Kearins, 2003:8).

FARC makes claims to maintain gender equality within the organisation as a fundamental principal of their egalitarian ideology (Kunz & Sjöberg, 2009:2; Stanski, 2006:140). However, it would appear that women were first allowed to join FARC in order to bolster their dwindling numbers (Ness, 2005:357). And claims to gender equality were developed afterwards in order to give ideological legitimacy to the decision (Gonzalez-Perez, 2006). Women now constitute a large percentage of FARC members, and this has the cyclical effect of encouraging more women and girls' to join (Gonzalez-Perez, 2006:326).

The purpose of these two chapters was to provide a historical and spatial context to the conflict and to understand what FARC offers girls as an alternative to civilian life in Colombia. I then looked at four elements that contribute to the construction of girlhood in Colombia, including; violence,

gender inequality and machismo, large-scale internal displacement and limited access to resources.

Girlhood in Colombia takes place against a backdrop of conflict and endemic violence. This is evident from the militarisation of civilian life and the high levels of violent criminality (Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, 2004:20; Meerten, 2001:134). Violence has also permeated into the domestic sphere, with high-levels of domestic violence and sexual violence experienced by girls and women in the home (OMCT, 2004; Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, 2004:20; Kearins, 2003:11). The fact that FARC forbids violence and sexual violence against comrades may attract girls escaping domestic violence and abuse, as joining FARC provides a level of protection that the girls' do not experience in their homes (Girl A in Kearins, 2003:40; Girl A in Kearins, 2003:41).

Machismo is clearly an important factor in the construction of girlhood in Colombia, as it shapes both men and women's gender roles within Colombian society (Gjelsvik, 2010:60; Gonzalez-Perez 2006:317; Hernandez, 2003:860). I believe that the concept of machismo can legitimise male aggression against women, which is a factor in the prevalence of domestic violence and sexual violence in Colombia (Chant, 2003:14; Hernandez, 2003:862). Whilst I maintain that gender inequality limits the opportunities available to girls in Colombia, I do not believe that it is a primary motivating factor for girls'

joining FARC. The claims of gender equality may attract girls who are escaping domestic violence, as violence against comrades is forbidden, but I do not believe that "gender equality" as a political ideology initially attracts girls to join FARC, but that their political conscious may be awoken after joining.

Girls' who are internally displaced have even more limited access to resources, are at a greater risk of violence and are exposed to the militarised environment of the IDP camp at a young age (Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, 2004:11). Girls in IDP camps face an increased risk of rape, sexual violence, domestic violence and abuse compared to other girls' in Colombia (Women's Refugee Commission, 2002:18,20). This difficult and violent environment makes girls vulnerable to recruitment by FARC in order to escape the camp and to gain protection for themselves (Cohn & Goodwin-Gill, 1997:33). Once again, FARC is perceived as providing a level of protection for these girls' that they unable to secure for themselves in civilian life.

The conflict in Colombia has resulted in the closing down of many schools, thereby disrupting girls' educations and limiting their employment opportunities (Brett & Specht, 2004:16; Machel, 2001:8). The conflict has also disrupted the Colombian economy, exacerbating poverty (Women's Refugee Commission, 2002:6). Being poor, out of school and unemployed can place girls at increased risk of recruitment, as FARC provides food, military training, basic education and healthcare (Graham, 2008:208; Richardson, 2006:6; Brett

& Specht, 2004:15). Despite this, not all girls' who are poor, out of school or unemployed choose to join guerrilla groups.

From this research I assert that the limitations caused by the construction of girlhood in rural Colombia are not the primary cause of girls' joining FARC, which disproves the hypothesis, but that the presence of violence is the main contributory factor in individual girls deciding to join FARC. Whilst violence is endemic in Colombian society, it is when the violence is present in the home or that the family unit is unable to protect against violence, as in IDP camps, that some girls make the decision to join FARC. These girls decide to join FARC as a calculated risk, leaving one violence-saturated environment for another, but in FARC they are armed and able, to some degree, to protect themselves. The cost of this "protection" is that the girls themselves must become violent and commit violence against others, including the civilian population. Therefore perpetuating the culture of violence in Colombian society.

6. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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