

Truth's

Politicising Women's Pain and Emotions



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PROLOGUE

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Non-repetition guarantees for acts of violence perpetrated against women, coexistence, reconciliation and construction of peace, are going through the inescapable ethical and political responsibility of having to explain how women have been exposed to the pain and suffering caused by violence and the patriarchal and capitalist logic of the Colombian armed conflict. In this regard, the truth told by women should contribute to consider their lives as valuable and as part of social interest and concern, as an inevitable link to repair them. Politicising pain and emotions means to acknowledge, understand, and explain women's suffering, in addition to somehow assimilating how losing their lives has not been and is not a reason for social or collective mourning, given that there has been an unequal distribution of pain, and women's suffering has not been and is not socially acknowledged or amplified (Butler, 2006, p. 16).

Therefore, we hope that the report «VerdadEs politizar el dolor y las emociones de las mujeres » (*TruthIs Politicising Women's Pain and Emotions*) will contribute to politicizing the roots of patriarchy and the socio-political structures in which we live, as well as to explaining why some lives are more protected than others, why some lives are more exposed to violence, and are more susceptible to suffering. And in the same sense, to make us understand why there are some women who manage to process and give a collective and political meaning to that pain through forms of resistance, supporting other women, promoting organization among women and posing constant demands for building a society in which women can be and have equal opportunities with men, and are free from violence.

Nevertheless, politicising pain and emotions also means asking about the causes of suffering, in this case, women's. If we identify the causes of individual and collective pain, we take up a moral responsibility to decide what to do about these causes so that reparation

and guarantees of non-repetition will contribute to transforming injustices, exclusions, and violence experienced by women and feminised bodies. Politicisation of pain and emotions should lead us to acknowledge that violence against women and violation of their rights cannot be pathologised or depoliticised, let alone to privatising suffering and its impacts, minimizing and / or avoiding responsibility by armed actors, the State, and society.

Moreover, it becomes necessary that the Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence, and Non-Repetition, hereinafter CEV, moves forward towards developing interpretative approaches that may allow giving new ethical-political meanings to the recommendations it must make in terms of guarantees of non-repetition and coexistence, as proposed by Butler:

In a certain way, war is framed/manipulated to control and boost its effect with the differential capacity a life has to be mourned; just in the same way, war frames or manipulates different ways of thinking about multiculturalism, and certain debates about sexual freedom, separated from external affairs (Butler, 2010, p. 47)

Agreeing with Butler's line of argument necessarily means verifying that in the official and unofficial narratives of war, women have not become a mourning object; on the contrary, women have been the ones who have mostly cried and mourned lives that in the context of a patriarchal and capitalist framework deserve to be mourned, while women's lives are not mourned because «a life that is not worthy of being mourned is a life that does not deserve to be mourned since it has never lived, or in other words, it has never been really worth as a life» (Butler, 2010, p. 64).

Furthermore, to move forward towards guaranteeing non-repetition of the events, Colombian society has to break up with the regulation and control of «who should be the object of public mourning and who should not» (Butler, 2010, p. 64). Women must be repaired by restoring their rights and acknowledging that their lives deserve to be mourned; their griefs and pains have to be politicised through actions that will allow women to be valued in their condition as human beings, as individuals and subjects of rights. However, valuing and repairing is not enough; it is imperative for Colombian society and its institutions to feel outraged, indignant, and find out what happened to women during the Colombian armed conflict. «Outrage at an injustice or at an unbearable loss, has huge political potential» (Butler, 2010 p. 65).

INTRODUCTION

«Men make war. Men (most men) like war, since for men there is “some glory, some necessity, some satisfaction in fighting” that women (most women) do not feel or enjoy.»

Susan Sontag in ‘Regarding the pain of others’

The report «VerdadEs Politizar el Dolor y las Emociones de las Mujeres», submitted to the Truth Commission, places women victims in the very centre and emanates from the sequence of experiences they have lived during the Colombian armed conflict. The pain and suffering women have undergone is deeply anchored in economic and cultural roots, given that it stems, reproduces, and feeds on the patriarchal system and on capitalism, a generator of relationships aimed at exploitation, oppression, subordination, exclusion, and control. This pain and suffering is linked not only to the individual stories of women in their identity diversity but also to their communities and families; as such, pain and emotions need to be politicized to find out certain paths towards guaranteeing non-repetition and co-existence.

The report has been built up from multiple voices, silences, and rebellious acts of victim and non-victim women, leaders who generously made up their minds to give their testimony to contribute to clarification of truth. It addresses violence, pain, impacts, and resistance of women, and inquires on what women expect from guarantees of non-repetition, starting from the premise that the conflict cannot be read as being neutral to social, economic, and political construction on bodies, subjects, communities, and territories; consequently, it must be understood as a scenario for reproducing patriarchy¹ and heter-

1. Patriarchy refers to the system of social and genre-political relations, sustained by women’s subordination and oppression. This system materializes in the different social and political structures, both public and private. Patriarchy, as stated by Fon-

onormative logics² in Colombia.

And as remarked by Mexican author Adriana Carmona (2004), patriarchy is a structure of violence learned in the family, reinforced in society, and legitimized by the State. This means that all of us participate in the social reproduction of patriarchy and capitalism in different social and political spaces. Furthermore, patriarchal violence against women is a political problem since power relations intervene in it, and it is also politicised as soon as it is placed for debate in public space; as stated by Hannah Arendt (1972), “power is never owned by an individual, [since] it belongs to a group and continues to exist as long as the group is maintained” (p. 146). And patriarchal power will exist as long as power of men over women subsists.

To perpetuate patriarchal power, violence against women has become a legitimised, normalised, naturalised, and in most cases, successful practice. Violent practices that aim at exerting control and are justified by goals such as ‘disciplining’, ‘educating’, ‘bringing to senses’, ‘setting up limits’, and even ‘protecting’ or ‘reassuring’. Society perceives and considers this as ‘natural and legit’, as a way of acting according to current cultural guidelines. Therefore, deployment of violence against women during the armed conflict has been a reconfiguring practice of patriarchy, its devices, and its heteronormative regime. Violence against women gives a new air to domination, to the aspirations of armed actors to transcend time, and to perpetuating a male hegemony that brings about and feeds the patriarchal capitalist system.

From what has been raised so far, it is possible to infer that the different types of violence against women not only reflect moral and political positions of the armed actors, society, communities, and the Colombian State, but that they are also part of the processes that have legitimised and imposed ways of being, living, feeling, and existing. Therefore, this report contributes to unveiling and understanding the rationale behind violence against

tenla (2008), «is established by men, who as a social group, and also individually and collectively, oppress women in the form of individual and collective appropriation of their productive and reproductive strength, their bodies and their products», either by using violence, imaginaries, prejudices and/or stereotypes that legitimize and perpetuate their position of power against women. While patriarchy is an interclass and planetary pact amongst men, it is also true that women play an important role in pinning them through the reproduction of material and symbolic values and practices.

2. Heteronormativity is a regime imposed by patriarchy, in which the only possible way to express sexual and affective desires and to experience sexuality and affection, is through the supposedly existing «complementarity» of the feminine and the masculine. This results in the establishment of a «male-female» binarism determined by biological sex.

women in the midst of the armed conflict as well as politicising the pains and emotions that violence has left in their lives and bodies, and how these intertwine with their subjectivities and stories and with the contexts of violence in the territories.

Women spoke about their territories, armed actors, changes in the daily life of their communities, power relations between armed and non-armed actors, forced displacement and recruitment, forced disappearance, and sexual violence; they also spoke about the impacts and effects the conflict has had on their lives, on their families, and their social and community networks. They openly talked about valuations, imaginaries -beliefs- and roles imposed on women before, during, and after the arrival of the armed actors to the territory, both in community and family settings, and on how violence against them has been interwoven from private to public and from public to private.

They talked about their resistance, rebelliousness, and dreams; also about the organisational actions with which they sought to carry out in relation to the conflict, and their stakes for stopping violence against women, that it ceases being so common in Colombia. They reflected on what reparation should be and how society should move forward regarding guarantees of non-repetition and peacebuilding. They did all of this from experiences, reflections, and emotions dwelling in their bodies, emotions which, though often silenced and banned, also challenge the imposed order, aiming at not being brought down to silence and mute bodies.

In this regard, their words and pain becoming public is an act that contributes to politicising their pain and suffering, bringing the truth to light, promoting coexistence, demanding guarantees of non-repetition, to building up that peace that Colombia so urgently needs. It is also an invitation to question the systems of domination that have enabled war through the proliferation of multiple ways violence against women, and to transform the ingrained practices and beliefs that so far have made this violence unstoppable.



The main learnings: that we have to resist, that women, despite difficulties, always women, unlike men, fall and it is easier for us to get up, we have the courage to get up every time we we fall, and that makes us strong. So, I think that we must not stop fighting for our dreams, for our goals [...] I once said it in a space: if women really want to guarantee us and they want to repair us, give us more spaces for strengthening , of higher education, of strengthening in entrepreneurship, of actions that we can do from the territories. For example, Caldono has a very wide potential of artisan women (Narrative from leading woman in Cauca).

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