



European Master's Degree
in Human Rights and Democratization

Academic Year 2004-005

***The development of women combatant roles in some
contemporary cases of armed conflict:
the Sri Lankan and the Colombian case studies***

**Thesis by
Dr. Caterina Chantal C. Arena, Ph.D.**

**Supervisor:
Prof. Dr. José Manuel Pureza**

nd
2 semester

Human Rights Centre

Director: Prof. Dr. Vital Moreira

*Ius Gentium Conimbrigae
Faculty of Law, University of Coimbra*

ABSTRACT

The present thesis is focused on women's involvement in armed conflict, specifically dealing with their roles as agents of political violence. Particularly I analysed the female participation in the armed struggle within two insurgent groups (the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), currently mobilized in Sri Lanka and Colombia. International Relations studies and Feminism theories constitute the theoretical framework of this analysis, due to the need to compare two different kinds of conflicts (nationalist for Sri Lanka and 'revolutionary' for Colombia) and to discuss the role played by women combatants in both of them. Indeed, the central point is to understand the needs of women combatants while taking into account the relationship between their involvement in the armed struggle, the specific goals they achieved in gender equality within the armed groups, and the role that society could give them during the post-conflict reconstruction.

The comparison between the two case studies shows indeed that myths of women warriors are used to pull women in the fight as well as gender equality issues are instrumental to frame the female participation. Nevertheless within both insurgent groups women face difficulties to challenge sexist stereotypes intrinsic to their own culture, which could lead to the female exclusion from peace building process, thus misunderstanding their specific contribute as women and as combatants.

Table of contents

Introductionp. 5

Part A: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1 War system and internal conflicts: the “new wars” debate

- *Main features of new wars.....p. 9*
- *The identity politics in the ethno-nationalist conflicts:
south Asia and Sri Lanka.....p.12*
- *The social justice goals within revolutionary struggles:
South America and Colombia.....p.15*
- *Impacts of the new wars on women: the rise of combatant women.....p.19*

2 Women at war: deconstructing stereotypes

- *The debate between essentialism and deconstructivism.....p.25*
- *Women as victims: stereotypes of vulnerability.....p.28*
- *Women as peaceful actors: the stereotype of sensibility and emotionality.....p.31*
- *Women as fighters: the myth of the Amazon.....p.34*

Part B: CASE STUDIES

Presentation of the two case studies.....p.38

1 Sri Lanka

- *The nationalist conflict. Background.....p.41*
- *Data on female members of LTTE.....p.45*
- *Motivations of female involvement.....p.46*
- *Feminist goals and equality issues.....p.48*
- *Abuses on women by LTTE.....p.52*

2 Colombia

- *Background: the Colombian conflict.....p.55*
- *The roots and evolution of the FARC.....p.57*
- *Data on female participation in the FARC.....p.60*

- *Motivations of the female participation in the armed struggle.....*p.61
- *Equality issues: what equality means within the FARC.....*p.63
- *Issues of maternity: pregnancy and forced contraception.....*p.65
- *Violence of the FARC against women.....*p.67
- *(Deconstructing stereotypes) Analysis of the women’s FARC statement:
gender’s roles within the politic ideology of FARC-EP.....*p.69

Conclusions.....p.71

Bibliography.....p.75

Introduction

The present thesis is aimed to provide information and data, framed on the basis of International Relations studies and feminist criticism, about female involvement in armed conflict within two insurgent groups (the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), currently mobilized in Sri Lanka and Colombia .

Indeed, the relative lack of research in this field could contribute to the underestimation of the importance of the roles of women combatants during conflict and post-conflict periods. As UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) underlines, the necessity to bring women's concerns to the attention of the UN itself and of the States involved in armed conflicts, is functional to increase women's decision-making roles with regard to conflict prevention and resolution (UN Resolution, 2000).

In this thesis "the need to consolidate data on the impact of armed conflict on women" (by using the words of resolution), is focused on women as agents of political violence, who constitute a specific part of the whole societies where the conflicts take action. Particularly, the comprehension of the different conditions, motivations and needs of male and female combatants is fundamental in order to achieve the DDR (Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration) programmes and also to develop a gender dimension in the peace building processes. Indeed, with regard to DDR, the UN Security Council resolution "encourages all those involved in the planning for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration to consider the different needs of female and male ex-combatants and to take into account the needs of their dependants" (art.13). As Mazurana stresses "earlier publications reveal that neglect of the many and complex roles that women and girls play during war and peace leads to less informed and effective DDR policies and programs that do not fully extend to the community level and may not contribute to peace" (Mazurana: 2004,57). Given current efforts to specify a gender perspective in DDR programmes and peace-building processes (especially after Resolution 1325), this thesis aims to give a localized contribution to the acknowledgement of the situation of women combatants in two contemporary and bloody internal conflicts.

Colombia and Sri Lanka present different features in the history and evolution of their conflicts and the involvement of women in the armed insurgent groups is linked to contextual factors that are interesting to compare. Moreover, the Colombian FARC and the Tamil LTTE each

present a high proportion of female combatants (constituting more than one third within both armed groups) who are constantly increasing also due to the lack of solutions to the political violence. One of the main risks that these women would run in a post-conflict situation is being underestimated or not recognized as combatants, which would lead even to their efforts to pursue feminist goals being ignored in societies where the female traditional role conflicts with the idea of women combatants.

Thus, the central point of this study is to understand the needs of women combatants while taking into account the relationship between their involvement in the armed struggle, the specific goals they achieved in gender equality within the armed groups, and the role that society could give them during the post-conflict reconstruction. In order to structure the analysis of female participation in armed conflict the thesis is divided in two parts, a theoretical framework and case studies exposition. The first part is aimed at defining several categories that will recur throughout the thesis, particularly in the part dedicated to the case studies. The theoretical part is focused on two basic topics, the armed conflict and the roles of women in war, trying to explain the main theories and then analyse them from the point of view of both International Relations and Feminist Studies.

The chapter on the conflict will deal with the “new wars” perspective, based on the theories framed by Mary Kaldor. The nature and structure of the new wars will be discussed in relation with the two specific contexts that I have chosen. Indeed I will show how the main features of the “new wars” (namely the privatizing of violence, the great involvement of civilians in the conflicts, the race of insurgent groups warfare and the strong impact of conflicts on women) characterize the internal conflicts in Sri Lanka and Colombia. Within this topic I will frame the differences between the South Asian pattern of nationalist struggles for self-determination and the South American revolutionary struggles aimed towards the achievement of social justice goals.

In the second chapter I will explain how the roles of women are perceived in relation to a war context, taking into account the feminist debate between deconstructivism and essentialism. As Betty Reardon points out: “Research does indicate that the most of the behavioural differences between human males and females are the consequence of socialization and education” (Reardon: 1985, 8). Starting from this perspective I will deal with the deconstruction of sexist stereotypes about the attitudes of women towards peace and war. Particularly I will analyse the stereotypes of vulnerability and peacefulness traditionally attributed to women, in comparison with the opposite myths about female warriors. During this exposition several connections will be traced with the Sri Lankan and the Colombian contexts of women in war. In the second part, the presentation of the two case studies includes the explanation about the choice to compare these two contexts dealing

with their main similarities and differences: a high percentage of women involved in both armed groups, the differences between the women's political commitments to a national struggle and to a revolutionary struggle, and the similar impact of these conflicts on the civilian population.

The Sri Lankan and the Colombian case studies present a similar structure of exposition, taking into account that some features of women's participation in armed groups occur in both cases, while other characteristics are specific to each context. For this reason the Colombian case study is more focused on the relations between male and female members within the armed groups while the Sri Lankan case deals more with the impact of women combatants' feminist goals on the whole society. Additionally, I have inserted a detailed explanation of the roots of both conflicts in order to better contextualize the roles and history of women's involvement in the two armed groups.

**WAR SYSTEM AND INTERNAL CONFLICTS. THE “NEW WARS”
DEBATE**

Premise

In this chapter I will deal with the so-called ‘new wars’, and try to identify the main characteristics that distinguish them from the old wars, in relation to the two case studies that I will treat in the second part of the present exposition. Afterwards I will treat, in greater detail, two different kinds of conflicts, namely the ethno-nationalist and the revolutionary armed struggles. Although each is based on ideological premises that led to specific developments of civil war, in terms of human lost, the consequences seem to be similar. The last part is dedicated to the analyses of war’s impact on women, who are not only military targets of the new forms of warfare but often become agents of political violence themselves.

Main features of new wars

As Mary Kaldor underlined, the new wars are basically characterized by three aspects that break down with the traditional pattern of war: the identity politics as the main goal of the struggle, the particular strategies of warfare more similar to ‘dirty war’, and the methods of financing them, usually by illicit traffics and links with external actors (Kaldor, 2001). The first feature is indeed common to many current conflicts in Eastern Europe, mainly spread over the former Yugoslavia and the former Soviet areas, but even in several African countries (Rwanda constituting the worst situation but an exemplary model of how identity politics can be pushed to their most extreme consequences) and in Asia, particularly in the south, where the formerly colonized countries are mostly characterised by harsh struggles for identity (focused in India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal).

The Central and South American areas apparently are not involved in the same pattern of identity struggles, although they are composed of many different ethnic groups that, as time has passed, have mixed themselves thus obtaining a very broad spectrum of cross and sub-cultures which are neither peacefully set together nor valued in an equal way by politics. Perhaps the main difference with the other mentioned areas is given by the different history of colonization that characterised these last countries: the strong hierarchical order that polarised society between the white Spanish oligarchy and all the other indigenous groups (included the forcibly evicted black

communities) did not imply the very prohibition¹ of mixing between them. Consequently power was not distributed to the local tribal chiefs, as it happened in the African zone, even because the traditional tribal structure was destroyed by the initial genocide. Rather, political and economic power was given progressively to the few local people who achieved a better status by sharing the economic and political interests of the oligarchy.

In Africa Western colonists did not mix with the population, or if they did, they never legitimized the practice. This policy allowed them to manipulate the different senses of identity within the ethnic groups, giving privileges to some of them, but maintaining the strong division between white elites and local people and between the privileged ethnic groups and the others. On the contrary, the draft of borders of the new States did not respect the ethnic composition of the population, which was, added to the disproportion of power among the fragmented ethnic clans, a strong contributing factor to the rise of conflicts.

In South Asia, the first decolonised region, identity politics started to work during the English colonisation, which, for instance, legitimized the formation of the Indian National Congress (1885) and of the Muslim League (1906), the earlier political movements that followed the splitting up of India and Pakistan (Morris-Jones, 1993). Indeed, even in this area different cultural and religious communities are present within the same nations: Muslims in India and Pakistan, Bengalis in India as well as in Bangladesh, Tamils in Sri Lanka and in India. As Morris Jones points out, “such communities have marked identities which suffer little erosion and can create lines of fracture within a State” (Morris-Jones: 1993, 158). The interstate relations are no less complicated, being characterised, after the spreading of more or less latent wars, by distrust and strong inimical attitudes: “what is shared is divisive, what is common is contested” (Morris-Jones: 1993, 158).

As we can see identity politics are deeply rooted, but their explosion into bloody intrastate conflicts, as well as their support for fundamentalist movements, represents a more current phenomenon to which the changes which happened after the Cold War era have heavily contributed. Indeed these kind of conflicts are more widely spread and detrimental to the nation-state within so-called ‘weak states’, whose economic position is quite critical and whose sovereignty as States became seriously undermined after the failure of the superpowers’ global bipolarization. Nevertheless, in the case of Colombia and Sri Lanka, their weakness as States was endemic even before the 1990s. Since the decades of 1950s for Colombia and 1970s for Sri Lanka.,

¹ Initially there were rules that forbade the union between white people and indigenous or black people, but they were stronger for white women rather than men. On the contrary, there existed many example of marriages between white men and indigenous women. Moreover the practice of the concubinage allowed long-term relations with women of lower classes. For more details about this topic see at Gonzáles T. L., Carantón S. J., «Doña non se casa con Nadie. Aproximaciones al amor y el matrimonio en Antioquia, siglos XVII-XVIII» in AAVV, *Globalización, multiculturalidad y medio ambiente*, VIII Congreso de Antropología en Colombia, Santafé de Bogotá, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Departamento de Antropología, 1997.

the capacity to control internal conflicts and assure protection for their nationals was already in crisis. Superpower influence was not so clear at that time, with Sri Lanka being more linked to the regional power of India, while the Colombian connections with the US have become more visible during the last decades.

The second feature that Mary Kaldor describes as distinctive from the old wars model is given by the use of a particular kind of warfare, often using high technology, and, above all, aimed at physical and mental humiliation, and sometimes elimination, of the targeted communities. Indeed, following the purpose to impose identity struggles, enemies are identified with the civilian communities that live in the contended districts. With regard to this kind of warfare the Colombian and Sri Lankan contexts present very developed tactics of terror and intimidation towards civilian populations, high numbers of displaced people and a huge proportion of civilian deaths from violence every year. While strategies of guerrilla warfare, counterinsurgency and terrorism in Sri Lanka are supposedly aimed at obtaining independence of the Tamil districts from the State, in Colombia the conflict is apparently focused on the achievement of social justice goals claimed by the guerrillas in opposition to the State's repressive policies. In reality what is characterizing these two conflicts in the new wars' context is the multiplicity of actors involved in political violence. In Sri Lanka the struggle between insurgents groups as Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), military and paramilitary forces, other political movements and more or less visible external actors, contributes to make unclear which are the goals of the fight for each of these components.

In Colombia the war is played between different guerrilla, army and paramilitary groups, landowners with their own death squadrons, organized crime linked to the drugs mafia and self-defence groups of citizens often armed by the State. To these components external actors (such as US soldiers and supposed Venezuelan links with insurgent groups close to the frontier) have to be added. As Mary Kaldor underlines with regard to the third feature of new wars, the financial sources of the conflict "can only be sustained through continued violence so that a war logic is built to the functioning of economy" (Kaldor: 2001, 9). Indeed the major economic sources of the two conflicts are internal (drugs particularly in the Colombian case, and the constant exploitation of civilian communities and organised crime for both contexts) and external (US financing for Plan Colombia, connections with India and Great Britain for Sri Lanka mostly through remittances from the diaspora) (Nava, 2005).

The idea that the goals of the armed groups fighting within the territory are not necessarily linked to the achievement of final victory, and then are not aimed at the reestablishment of a peaceful situation, is likely true in both contexts, due to the economic reasons explained by Mary Kaldor and the external interests in maintaining the war in each country. In Colombia the

persistence of the civil war is critical for the illegal exploitation of territories rich in different natural resources including gold, diamonds, oil, wood, and water. Clearly, the absence of legal sovereignty of the State, or in some cases its political acquiescence, allows different actors to fight for the possession of resources that were not exploited by the settled communities in an industrial or capitalistic way (Zuleta, 1998). Moreover, the use and the acquisition of weapons (financed mostly by these illegal profits), also contributes to the increase of the highly profitable business for the economies of the seller States (US, Canada, Italy for Colombia), making the war internally and externally bound to continue (Amnesty International, 2003).

The Sri Lankan links with international actors have developed in a different way, mostly through diplomatic involvement in peace processes, which have not prevented participation in military assistance or interests in the economic matters of the country (Sri Lanka has, during different periods, held Israeli military assistance, Indian peacekeeping operations, US advisory rule and, nowadays, the Norwegian monitoring mission of cease-fire) (Nava, 2005). Most of the peace negotiations have failed because the persistence of war was useful to the armed actors in gaining control of the population and its resources. Moreover some studies underline, as Mary Kaldor did, the potential danger of peace processes, whereas some of the fighting internal actors can take advantages through the internationalisation of the conflict or by simultaneously building stronger possibilities to fight when the agreements are believed to fail (Nava, 2005) (Mary Kaldor, 2001).

Another factor has to be mentioned: the culture of violence as another aspect which contributes to the perpetuation of these conflicts. Indeed, people get used to the weakness of the government to fulfil their right to be protected as well as becoming more disposed to use violence in order to address their own security or their economic faults (Prolongeau, 1993). Moreover, people get anesthetised by the persistence of violence and start to consider it normal, developing more and more passive attitudes with regard to the conflict (Bulla and Velasquez, 1997). The difficulties towards the acceptance of the peace are even harder for people involved in insurgents groups for twenty or thirty years, as their role in civil society is nonexistent and their integration into peaceful society becomes almost impossible.

Identity politics in ethno-nationalist conflicts: South Asia and Sri Lanka

Hobsbawm's view of nationalism explains the connections between the western former construction of the nation-state and its impact on third world countries, which had to face both their colonial inheritance and their broad ethnic composition (Hobsbawm, 1992). By assuming such a perspective, these two patterns of nation building are basically different for the historical conditions in which

they developed. While the western States tended to draft their borders theoretically believing in the 'homogenous' roots of their people, the new States which arose in the post-colonial era achieved their independence by unificatory and emancipatory movements, yet maintained their ethnic differentiations within the nation. Nevertheless this factor does not by itself explain the separatist movements that characterize the last two decades. Indeed, despite the fact that, for instance in the south Asian sub-continent (except in the case of Bangladesh), States usually have held together, frictions between different ethnic groups were previous to the nationalist ideas of separatism. Following Hobsbawm's theory, one factor that contributes to the embitterment of the current nationalist claims is precisely the application of the past ethnic and linguistic homogeneity pattern to the twentieth century. Such a shift is not only unrealistic but even counterproductive in terms of reasonable or peaceful solutions.

Indeed this distortion requires the building of assumptions contributing to the justification of new conflicts for independence: the idealisation of the past, often re-invented functionally to the claim of independence or separatism, the rise of 'old' distinctive traditions, the creation and glorification of national heroes, the sacralisation of the ethnic history of the group, the revival of traditional clothing, and the emergence of 'traditional rules' that guide the behaviour of the people, are all necessary components to the cultural and social construction of a characterising ethos that, ideally, always existed. At the same time the distinction between the nation as "an imagined political community (...) always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson 1991:5-7) and the ethnicity, conceived as a named human group claiming a homeland and sharing myths of common ancestry and historical memories (Smith, 1992 quoted in Handrahan, 2004), becomes almost blurred or at least confused. Indeed the traditional view of nationalism, usually mobilised by the state and linked to the political processes, becomes closer to the concept of ethnicity, traditionally mobilised by the community and more linked to socio-cultural boundary-markers. Actually "both the state and local leaders shape and mobilize ethnic and national identities" (Handrahan: 2004, 431). Moreover, the rise of fundamentalism, as the means to bring, at extreme consequences, the idea of the ethno-nationalist claim, offers some strategies to convince people that the fight for autonomy is the only way to address their social and structural problems.

I will focus on some of them while dealing with the Sri Lankan context. The perception of other ethnic communities as basically corrosive and dangerous for its own community (regardless to their majoritarian or minoritarian presence within the national territory) was developed by both Sinhalese and Tamil identity politics. While the former used this idea to hamper the inclusion of the Tamils in the nation-building process after the independence, the latter strongly underlined this concept to point out their condition of martyrs, victims of the State's aim to threaten their survival.

The “Tamil national leader’s (chief of LTTE) annual speech” in 1992 was focused on this idea: “Our enemy is committed to violence. Therefore, he has imposed an unjust war on us. Today, the enemy’s armed forces have come to our doorstep and are beating war drums. They are bent on devouring our land and to destroy us. He is prepared to shed any amount of blood in this genocidal war” (Official website of Peace Secretariat of LTTE, 2004a). After the beginning of the last peace negotiations in 2002, the annual speeches do not seem so extreme, but the conception of the Tamil as victimised people still remains in use: “We cannot allow the life and potential of our people to be systematically destroyed in the spider web of Sinhala chauvinism” (Official website of Peace Secretariat of LTTE, 2004b).

The second strategy put forward by fundamentalism is the sacralization of history as a means to build a pure and presumably primal identity of the ethnic group. The historical events narrated in the LTTE official website reveal a similar tendency to underline that the Tamil presence deeply rooted in the Island of Ceylon: “The dawn of the 17th century saw the ships of the seafaring nations of Europe appear in the Indian Ocean waters. They were attracted to the island by the cinnamon trade of Ceylon. They found a prosperous Tamil kingdom in the North and East of Ceylon which has existed for more than five centuries” (Official website of Peace Secretariat of LTTE, 2004c). On the contrary, historical sources point out the strong role of English colonisation in pushing the Indian Tamil community to immigrate to Ceylon in order to create tea plantations in the island (Nava, 2005).

The third characteristic of fundamentalist identity politics is the rejection of approaches of tolerance and compromise. Indeed these attitudes would undermine the unity of a group based on distinctive features that mark it in opposition to other communities. The past repression of Tamil moderate parties, called betrayers by LTTE, was instrumental in not achieving agreements that would shift the fight to a more political field rather than the bloody conflict between the insurgent groups and the government army. Indeed, as Hobsbawm pointed out, the question that usually underlies the rise of nationalism and ethnicity is the failure of integration among different communities in contexts where the social and political frameworks are already disintegrating. The claim to nationalist and separatist issues then appears to be the last resort for addressing these structured problems.

As some criticism has pointed out, although the identity question has been used to explain the recent ethno-nationalist conflicts, it should not override other explanations rooted in the political misunderstanding of unaddressed needs. Indeed, the current risk is to legitimise fights that motivate the use of violence by referring to identity issues: “martyrs or liberators, opponents of the order in power and self proclaimed holders of an alternative identity are all situated in a face-to-face

situation that at once ensure them if not sympathy at least understanding” (Von Busekist: 2004, 81). Moreover, the claims for a distinctive national community could not be shared by all the people who have been involved in such a struggle just for their ethnic origin. In the case of Sri Lanka it seems that the involvement in the peace process between LTTE and the government, as the main actors and potentially resolvers of the armed conflict, leaves little space to other sectors of the civil society, whether Sinhalese or Tamil.

Another factor contributing to the weakness of states facing this kind of conflict is their strong economic dependency on other states, which seems to be in contradiction with their aim to build a national economy based on their own resources. The data reported by the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) reveal that the ethno-national conflicts that characterise this region are basically undermining both the development of regional trades between the neighbour states and the possibility to internally consolidate their economies (Haider, 2001). In the case of Sri Lanka, the first visible economic consequence of the conflict concerns its strong tourism potential, which obviously fell through the spread of generalized violence. Moreover the control of North-Eastern regions by LTTE made more difficult not only the investment by external economic enterprises but even the State’s financing of social infrastructures, such as schools and health care centres (UNDP, 1998).

The most recent example of the isolation of these districts is shown by the difficulties that various teams of NGOs faced in entering in the Tamil area in order to help the population affected by the tsunami (Lancini, 2005). Some of them had to come back without having worked because the Tamil authorities denied them the access or delayed it through heavy bureaucratic procedures. This shows that although the two parts (Sri Lankan government and LTTE) subscribed to the agreements of ceasefire, the country is divided in two virtual nations, with their own political authorities, borders and armies. Of course such a fracture effects the economy: between 1980 and 1999, within the SAARC, Sri Lanka faced increased rates of intraregional imports (from 5,1% to 17,48%) and decreased percentages of intraregional exports (from 7% to 2,6%) (Haider, 2001). This means that its dependency on western industrialized countries increased (mainly for exports), given that the former percentages are calculated on the national index of imports and exports to non South Asian countries. At the same time Sri Lanka’s military expenditures from 1990 to 1999 doubled (from US\$ 214 to US\$ 470 millions) increasing their percentage on the domestic product from 2,1% to 4,2% (Haider, 2001).

The social justice goals within revolutionary struggles: South America and Colombia

The pattern of revolutionary struggle has developed in different contexts but I will deal mainly with the South American area, making particular reference to Colombia. As I mentioned before, this area is not characterised by ethno-national instances of separatism, because of a different way of conceiving ethnicity both from a political and social point of view. Particularly, the strong role of colonisation that began with genocide heavily contributed to the process of the acculturation of the oppressed: inferiority was ‘socialized’ at the time from both sides (the oppressive colonist and the oppressed indigenous parts). As Betty Reardon points out “many oppressed peoples have accepted a sense of their own inferiority as the price for survival” (Reardon: 1985, 47). Indeed the tendency to underestimate its own culture, linked to the overestimation of western countries, seems a constant element that characterised various fights, including struggles for independence and insurgent revolutionary fights, in South America.

There is a vast literature on the way the Spanish conquerors conceived indigenous people: first they were associated with evil, being considered not human because of customs shocking for the cultural thought of western people (as for instance cannibalism or the so-called sexual promiscuity strongly condemned by the Catholic Church) (Bellini,1992). Then the writers of the period changed this perspective, accepting the human nature of the indigenous although they were seen as degenerated into a state of nature. Another explanation of their shocking diversity was again based on the acceptance of their human nature which was considered not fully developed, so that the indigenous lacked for the normal intellectual abilities of fully grown up people: they were as children in need to be oriented because they could not distinguish between good and evil (Pagden,1989). All these stereotypes acted deeply, until recently, contributing to legitimise the hierarchical order of the society, structured on the racist evaluation of groups and communities (Fabregat, 1992)².

Despite the settlement of powerful Spanish groups which soon mixed with local people, their closeness with the western colonists States, even after the achievement of the political independence from them, is the main factor that led to the bipolar mentality that characterised the development of South America: the deeply rooted desire to emulate the western pattern of life as

² In Colombia there was a hierarchical structure based on the people’s somatic traits, so that the social pyramid of society was led by white people, then mestizos, indios, with black people at the bottom. For more details see Restrepo G., *Reflexiones desde el margen sobre el margen* in *Globalización, multiculturalidad y medio ambiente*, VIII Congreso de Antropología en Colombia, Santafé de Bogotá, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Departamento de Antropología, 1997. Some recent studies about the self-perception of black communities in Venezuela still reveal their interiorized sense of inferiority in comparison with other more powerful groups. For more details see Altez J., *Clientelismo y mismidad conflictuada de una comunidad negro-venezolana en un fin de siglo* in *Globalización, multiculturalidad y medio ambiente*, Santafé de Bogotá, VIII Congreso de Antropología en Colombia, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Departamento de Antropología, 1997.

“culturally” more developed³ in opposition to the quest for its own identity. Clearly this last point was very problematic given the construction of a new identity on the ashes of the indigenous culture.

It is starting from this point that fights for independence have spread over the nineteenth century, whose leaders indeed belonged to the Creole class and were influenced by the European theories focused on the right to constitute a nation, releasing it from the oppressive external exploitation and its political power. After the process of independence the structures of economic disparities among the population remained almost untouched, but this was the first step towards assessing the South American identity as separated from the European. Nevertheless the economic and “cultural” dependence from the West did not cease to be a deep component of the new states. Thus, the insurgent groups which arose during the second part of the twentieth century combined the tradition of the past struggles that showed the strong capability to mobilize the lowest classes, with the western influences of leftist intellectual texts and revolutionary claims.

The ideological frameworks of the guerrilla groups FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia), ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional) and M-19 (Movimiento 19 de Abril) in Colombia, at the beginning were permeated with Marxist and socialist theories applied to the local context and dealing with the political and economic disparities in the distribution of power. Moreover, the characteristic development of religious movements linked to theology’s liberation gave these insurgent groups more legitimacy among peasants and economically distressed people⁴.

Indeed, the main goals of guerrilla groups were based on issues of social justice: equality, distribution of resources, which translated in that context meant basically the agrarian reform, political representation, elimination of all forms of economic and social discrimination and rebellion against the abuses of the army towards the life of powerless citizens.

In an opposite tendency to the nationalist pattern of insurgency due to various factors, the identity issues linked to claims of ethnic differentiations were almost nonexistent within the guerrillas’ political programme. Firstly, the self-perception of identity characteristics was modelled on the opposition to the upper classes’ features, and then to their links with powerful states who contributed to exploit the people and the country. Secondly, the instances of equality were based on non-discrimination principles so that theoretically all the people from different countries, villages or

³ This aspect is still visible among the pull factors of the massive South American emigration towards Europe. Apart from the huge quantity of studies that confirm the tendency to idealize western countries as more evolved and culturally rich, I directly witnessed in the interviews with Colombian immigrants in Italy during my Phd..

⁴ Camillo Torres, a supporter of ELN was indeed a priest convinced of theology’s liberation ideology, who had a great success in mobilizing peasants. His image is still venerated as he was a strong defensor of the dignified life of the poor and his murder prompted a major involvement of the people in ELN fighting against the government’s army.

ethnic groups were welcome to join the struggle. This had a strong impact on the participation of women too, being considered as another social sector heavily deprived of the right to equality. Thirdly, the perception of the ethnic communities, as separated by the others by belonging to a specific cultural group, was limited during the sixties to the few indigenous groups who lived in the Amazon forest and whose lifestyle was initially far from the political involvement in the struggle. Mainly the separation between the black communities, the surviving indigenous groups and the rest of the civil society remained the same as before, with the only exception that, as time passed, even these groups were heavily impacted by the conflict, both in terms of economic resources and with regard to their own security (UNIFEM, 2005). Fourthly, with regard to Colombia the strong identity differentiation among people is focused on regional characteristics, which does not mean that there is ethnic homogeneity within every district, but rather a cultural development of shared customs on food, music, handicrafts or typical works and abilities that derive from the exploitation of the geophysical features of the site.

Nowadays the social appeal of guerrilla groups, as well as their strategies of warfare, are quite different in comparison with the periods in which they arose. With regard to the FARC, although their political programme seems to be the same as in the past, the conditions of their potential involvement in the politic sphere are quite changed. Apart from the fact that, after September 11th, they were officially classified as a terrorist group, and by then their possibilities to enter into peace dialogues seemed strongly compromised, other elements came to change the conditions of the Colombian conflict. The strong connections between the US and the latest Colombian governments, the disillusion of people forced to escape or to face constant threats to their life, the unclear links between the FARC and drug traffickers, as well as their involvement in kidnapping, murder and the looting of civilian communities, are all factors that shifted the political perception of the conflict into a generalised civil war. Some Colombian analyses identify this change during the eighties when the massacres of civil communities, perpetrated by different actors, start to be constant as well as the increased number of displaced people. The connections between the army, paramilitary groups and drug mafia transformed the warfare into a 'collective terrorism' that affected the whole of civil society (Zuleta, 1998). At the same time, the self-financing strategies of guerrillas groups through kidnappings and extortion of economic enterprises or civilian communities contributed to their lack of credibility:

“We should be realistic. The guerrilla no longer belongs to the classic pattern of guerrillas, based on the ideological and political purposes of addressing peasant discontent, unemployment, exploitation, the lack of land for the farm-workers, etc. The guerrilla groups are not longer supported by the popular huge and spontaneous movements too. (...) Basically it's a new kind of guerrilla which does not recruit ideologically its members but find them among unemployed or threatened persons, given

their well known tendency to impose, within certain sectors of population, the dilemma between life or death⁵ (Zuleta: 1998, 229).

The political programme of the current president, Alvaro Uribe, focused on security issues, seems to accept the ambiguity of a conflict that apparently is provoked by political violence but actually appears more similar to a state of generalized violence. His decision to increase military expenditures (by taxing the population with the so-called war tax) and the human potential in military actions is aimed to uproot the territorial control that guerrilla groups have achieved in some districts (called “rehabilitation and consolidation zones” by his security programme). This policy, based on the idea that the State has to protect its citizens, is also controversial, with the implementation of some “area specific measures” which include the recruitment of civilians, the so-called “peasant soldiers”, who have been entitled to defend their own household, and the reward of locals for information about illegal groups (Mason: 2003, 397). Given the tendency of both paramilitary and guerrilla groups to execute the suspected collaborators of the other side, such strategies put the population more at risk than ever. It is for this reason that some civil communities recently started to declare their neutrality, rejecting any help for or kind of collaboration with the different armed groups. Clearly their position is very uncomfortable for all the actors of the violence, the government included, because it symbolises the return to a civil ideal of community in opposition to the current militarization of the area. In a sense, the aim of these pacific movements is political because they continue to denounce human rights violations in order to underline social justice issues, and at the same time they support their right not to leave their houses, becoming displaced people.

Mary Kaldor pointed out that the new wars are characterised by the tendency to suppress the values of civility and multiculturalism (Kaldor, 2001). In this case the civil neutral communities are challenging such a trend by claiming their right to live peacefully in the land where they traditionally lived for generations. Thus the claim to identity issues is used to defend their own resources from external armed actors, their sense of solidarity being built on the common pain provoked by the war. These kinds of movements have increased in Colombia during the last ten years, with at least 50 similar projects in all the country (Courier Internacional, 2005). They represent the signal of a new way to consider the conflict as played by violent actors without regard to their ‘political’ view. Although the FARC and ELN still have strong support from the population in some zones, they are no longer seen as legitimate actors who fight against an unfair political system, in spite of the fact that their own perception of struggle is still based on that purpose.

⁵ The translation is mine.

Impacts of the new wars on women: the rise of combatant women.

After this brief exposition of different contextualised pattern of conflicts I would like to analyse in more specific detail the impacts of these ideologies and their outcomes on women. Their role as victims is especially underlined by the new wars warfare that targets them as members of the civil communities within which they are considered the pillars of continuity, being linked to the children who represent the future. In other cases, women strongly support peace movements to defend their right not to be victimised or to ensure a peaceful space for their children or even to overthrow the logic of destruction provoked or invoked by the war. But what we are seeing nowadays is also the increased number of women involved in the armed fight, within both national or ethnic conflicts and revolutionary struggles.

Usually their agency in wars is underestimated because it is not conventional to see women taking up arms, except with regard to extreme situations. Women are now more visible in the armed fight, not only in the government armies but even within insurgents groups. The number of women in the LTTE is estimated between one third and half of its members (Sajjad, 2004), while Colombian women joining the FARC, the ELN and the past M-19 are around the same in proportion with LTTE, but their participation is deeply rooted in these groups. With different motivations and claims, women in both contexts have been strongly incited, and sometimes forced, to join the struggle, while in the past the traditional tendency was to shelter them from the horrors of the war. Clearly this perspective is still prevalent in the general development of conflicts but, within more and more armed groups, women's participation, if not formally required, seems desired. Even when women, as in the last Palestinian *intifada*, were initially refused as martyrs, since the time they started to perform this role, their involvement was not only accepted but in some cases considered very useful by the insurgent groups (Brunner, 2005). In Chechnya some studies revealed the desperate search for women participating in suicide attacks, as that of the Nord-Ost theatre in 2002, by some insurgent groups of wahabita origin, the most fundamentalist Islamic sect within the Chechen area. The recruiters arrived to pay the families to leave their daughters in order to train them for the armed planned missions (Juzic, 2004). Why are women so urged to join the struggle? Clearly, in the case of Chechnya, women did not have any active role in the struggle because most of them were forced to participate in actions where they would die in a short time. Only few, being wives of dead famous commanders, were preserved from the death. In the case of Palestine the suicide bombing attack was mostly the outcome of their involvement, so that their role as organizers or fighters is very debatable (Brunner, 2005).

Several studies underline the expendability of women in suicide attacks: "both strategic and gendered factors lie behind the selection of women for such actions" (Sajjad: 2004, 8). The strategic

reason deals with the possibility of not being subjected to body searches or being confused with civilians. The gender reason concerns the disparity of roles within the armed groups: “Another reason why women are at times preferred over men is that men are often considered to be more suited to long-term military missions or for training recruits” (Sajjad: 2004, 8). Another important perspective focuses on the strong impact on media dealing with women’s agency in violence. In the Palestinian case their participation in a suicide-bombing mission was useful to gain visibility at the national and international level (Brunner, 2005). In the case of the Chechen attacks to the theatre, the images of the ‘black widows’ were transmitted in all the international media, shocking public opinion with the apparently strong determination by which women were taking action in these events (Juzic, 2004).

Moreover women’s participation in armed conflicts is totally contrary to their traditional role supported in many societies by strict rules of behaviour and custom. It is even true that suicide is not accepted in the Islamic culture, just as violence is condemned by the Christian ethic, but this factor has not contributed to stop the particular strategies of warfare in conflicts. Nevertheless, the case of women’s involvement raises more questions because on the one side they are traditionally not allowed to fight, and on the other side they have little space in many societies to publicly express their opinion both in terms of political representation and within the social organization, especially if they want to challenge it.

During a workshop recently held in Geneva some combatant women from Sri-Lanka, Iraq, Nagaland, Burundi, Turkey and the Philippines agreed on the fact that “their movements had better equality between men and women than the society at large” (Mazurana: 2004, 39). In particular Sri Lanka and the Philippines are contexts in which women are traditionally relegated to the private sphere. But within LTTE (Sri-Lanka) and NPA (Philippines) such restrictions were removed (Mazurana, 2004). So armed groups often become spaces where women can increase their importance, being recognized as fighters, and sometimes this process of empowerment leads to the development of a women’s rights agenda within the group. Within the LTTE there exists the “women political wing” although its political programme is not as visible as the general LTTE political guidelines for action. Within the FARC women are pushed to have their feminist agenda in the name of equality issues, being “this kind of human proletariat” (FARC-EP: 2001a, 25) more affected within all sectors of society by discrimination and injustice. Nevertheless the tendency is to join the feminist issues with the general political programme based on the Marxist ideology: “woman, your struggle is our struggle” said the official newspaper of the FARC in 2001, when the last peace dialogues were still in action (FARC-EP: 2001b, 1).

Now, given the broad spectrum of women's experience as combatants and the various approaches of the insurgent groups to their participation, their motivation to join the armed fight can be understood by taking into account various explanations. Firstly, their exposure to insecurity during conflicts could be an element that pushes them to think themselves more protected within insurgent groups. This was accepted as the most important factor for the involvement of girls and women during the Geneva Call Workshop, where 32 women combatants from 18 armed groups (included LTTE and FARC) tried to reflect together on their roles, motivations, problems within the armed struggles. Moreover revenge against military abuses, suffered violations or threats to life could be added to the basic factor of insecurity: "In the cases of 31 of the 32 women, they had been individually targeted by the state and its forces and suffered serious violations of their physical and mental integrity" (Mazurana: 2004, 49). The ideological factors, as the political and economic revolution or the national liberation and self-rule goals, constitute other pushing components to women's participation, especially with regard to the rhetorical strategies to involve women in the fight by using suitable formulas.

The insecurity factor and the ideological component are not necessarily separated issues: "Indeed, while nearly all initially joined the armed groups for defence against government violations, many came to identify with the political goals of the group (more equitable distribution of power and economic resources, an end to extra judicial killings and illegal detentions, freedom from state-sponsored violence, objective justice systems, accountable and accessible state security forces, improved access to education and jobs)" (Mazurana: 2004, 31). The new negotiation of the women's social identity (feminist goals), as another motivation to stay in the frontline of the fight, is linked to their traditional role within this context. Some women, for instance, can join insurgent groups to escape abusive or repressive families. Nevertheless the Geneva workshop reports that while none joined the armed groups specifically to fight for women's rights, some later came to believe that these goals should be part of the larger goals of equality and justice within the movement (50% of women in the meeting confirmed this trend) (Mazurana, 2004).

The case of women who were brought up in the armed groups by parents who were already involved in a political or ideological struggle seems also recurrent. The desire to support or share the husband/partner struggle constitutes another cause for women who by themselves might not have been directly involved in the armed fight. Finally, forced recruitment by insurgent groups is a factor that, given the high percentage of this practice within both LTTE and FARC, should be not underestimated. All these motivations are important because they show that there is not a uniform explanation for the increased numbers of women joining armed groups: every context has its own peculiar form of appealing to women's participation and assessing the rules of their involvement as

women and as combatants. Different experiences characterise the development of specific women's issues within the groups. For instance female members of LTTE are not allowed to maintain contacts with their families or to form a new family before an established age, given that sexual relations are forbidden (Mazurana, 2004).

This corresponds to a rigid view of male-female relationships but in a sense it prevents the sexual exploitation of forced abducted girls (in comparison with other groups, LTTE presents a low rate of sexual abuses within the groups) (Fox, 2004). On the contrary, Salvadorian women fought for their right to enjoy maternity claiming for security issues in the case they would be pregnant (Mazurana, 2004). Colombian women within the past M-19 assessed that they were treated as short-lived partners during love relationships because they did not correspond to the wife's model of woman. Moreover, from a professional point of view, in general, women have problems to be recognized as efficient combatants able to perform leading roles.

These are all features that put in question the self-perception of women with regard to their condition within the armed groups as well as the legitimate space of actions and relations that they should respect from a male point of view within the insurgency. Both perceptions are linked to the culture in which combatant men and women live and the kind of social conflict they face. Indeed, the roles of women change from an ethno-nationalist conflict within a specific community of Hinduism to a revolutionary struggle not focused on ethnic issues but on the ideals of social justice and sexual equality. Such differences will be exposed in more detail during the case studies part of this thesis, while the various stereotypes that define women's role in war contexts, included within insurgent groups, are developed in the following chapter.

WOMEN AT WAR: DECONSTRUCTING STEREOTYPES

Premise

As we have previously seen the war system has a different impact on women. The majority of cases show that women are specifically targeted during conflicts and their pain constitutes a “new weapon” that has the effect to exacerbate the enemy and consequentially the conflict itself. In other cases women are very active as peace supporters, working with human rights enterprises or NGO’s and trying to sensibelize civil society to reconciliation and peace reconstruction. Looking at the wide spectrum of women’s roles in war, we even find them as fighters sometimes directly involved in the armed struggle or generally supporting it in a less visible or violent way.

In this chapter, first I will try to frame the debate between essentialism and deconstructionism in order to be able identify the main stereotypes that lie behind the role of women during times of war. Then I will start to analyse why women are considered a special target and what relationship exists between the sexist scheme and the stereotype of women’s vulnerability, that gives them the virtual (and unfortunately the actual) role of primary victims during conflicts. Women and peace is the second subject that I will address, dealing with the stereotype of the more sensibility and emotionality that women are supposed to have in comparison with men. Women as combatants constitutes the third and final part of the chapter in which the stereotype of the ‘diabolic’ nature of women, as the common image that underlies their active involvement in violence, will be discussed.

The debate between essentialism and deconstructivism

It seems necessary to mark some feminist theories and categories which constitute the theoretical basis to make possible the deconstruction of stereotypes. In this regard the debate between essentialism and deconstructivism will be framed by starting to discuss the relationship between sexism, patriarchy and the war system.

Sexism, defined as the “the imposition of a specific sex-related identity, a sexually determined set of human attributes and sex prescribed social roles” (Reardon: 1985, 20) has deep roots in the world’s history. Its transnational feature results in different impacts on women and men depending on the cultural and social context in which they live; but we can still refer to it as a universal phenomenon, based on the emphasis on the biological difference between sexes.

Indeed, the concept of biological determinism, following which the broad variety of behaviours, abilities and social resources among human beings are determined by physiological specific traits (skin colour, sex, body type), constitutes the heart of the essentialist approach, that is the base of sexist beliefs (McKinnon, 2005). In philosophy, essentialism defines a subject by its deeper essence so that the most meaningful difference between male and female becomes the biological difference.

When, in her famous classic text, Simone de Beauvoir started to analyse the impact of the biological theories on social rules, she found that the word ‘female’ assumes a depreciative sense, not only because it restricts the women’s sphere to nature, but overall because it imprisons them in a sexual connotation (de Beauvoir, 1999). From this perspective it is consequential to assign them some characterizing biological traits among which the reproductive function is the main natural feature.

As Catharine A. MacKinnon points out “these so-called natural traits, in the essentialist view, determine social outcomes and individual qualities. Essentialism in this sense has long been central to the ideology of racism and sexism in its most vicious form” (MacKinnon: 2005, 85). Indeed the most harmful assumption of sexism, based on the assignment of ‘natural’ behavioural and separated characteristics of women and men, is their hierarchically based attribution of positive and negative values. The belief in the biological and intellectual superiority of men above women is fully held by sexism as shown by the attribution of positive values to men.

On the contrary, the attempt to deconstruct and then re-construct the positive and negative male and feminine values on a different basis is put into practice by feminist writers such as Betty Reardon. In her view, the positive values are the “authentic” attributes that lead to the full realization of human potential both in the individual and social sphere, while the negative values are distorted which stifle human and social development. These negative values “underlie stereotypes and rationalize discrimination and oppression. Our present social order [...] is overly characterized by these negative values, both masculine and feminine” (Reardon: 1985, 3).

Following this perspective the stereotype, as a means to interpret or simplify reality through the construction of fixed categories, is based on one main image, idea or characteristic that has become standardized in a conventional form without taking into account individuality and differentiation. As Catherine MacKinnon points out, the risk of considering women as a uniform category without considering the cultural, social and personal features that distinguish one woman from another, is still present even in feminist studies, which, for their gender oriented reasoning, are not alien to stereotypes (Mackinnon, 2005). Nevertheless, this exposition focuses more on the

common stereotypes that define women in the contexts of war rather than on the feminist theoretical criticism.

Assuming that the fixed ideas implied in stereotypes are often discriminatory towards women, because societies conventionally give more value to men's "natural" attributes, stereotypes can be considered both indicators and agents of the society hierarchical order between sexes. As indicators they are useful in comprehending the individual and collective attitudes that produce the particular balance between male and female in different contexts. As agents, in the way that they are not deconstructed but used, stereotypes still play a very important role as instruments of discrimination.

Indeed one explanation about the construction of social stereotypes involves the relation between masculine hegemony and violence as the form of intimidation to maintain power over females. In this perspective, sexist stereotypes have the function of "naturalising or normalising" the established power relations between sexes (Pettman: 1996, 94). Following the theory of Betty Reardon, the close relationship between sexism and war system is given by their common authoritarian denominator, that is, patriarchy. Her definition of war system is that "our competitive social order, which is based on authoritarian principles, assumes unequal value among and between human beings, and is held in place by coercive force" (Reardon: 1985,10). Patriarchy is a "set of beliefs and values supported by institutions and backed by the threat of violence. It lays down the supposedly 'proper' relations between men and women, women and women, and between men and men" (Reardon, 1985, 14).

As we can see, the first similarity between patriarchy and war is given by violence, used or threatened, as a mean to obtain or maintain power. Secondly, the patriarchal pattern of relations is based on a system of dualisms, as is war. Indeed, we can find some clear dichotomies in the patriarchal pattern (mind over body, thinking over feeling, etc...) as in the war system (winners over losers, aggressor over victims, etc...). In both sets of dichotomies sexism plays an important role, giving to women the 'natural' characteristics of innocence, sensibility and vulnerability as opposed to the male traits of power, rationality and aggressiveness. The following exposition tries to analyse these and other stereotypes about women (and men) in line with the relationship that Liz Stanley marks between deconstructionism and the use of the term 'women': "We know that we use it to stand for the social construction of *women* as a particular set of people who face - albeit with large and important internal differences- a common material reality rooted in oppression; and by material oppression here of course I mean categorizations or representations as much as physical material circumstances" (Stanley, 1997, 276).

Women as victims: the stereotype of vulnerability

Starting with the point that “masculinity, like war, is a cultural construction” (Pettman: 1996, 92) it is possible to individuate some “popular images” that associate men with violence and war and women with peace and nurturing. As Betty Reardon points out, “men are socialized to be warriors, in their roles of either enemies or aggressors, while women are socialized to be victims and surrogate enemies. Each sex is trained to its role, not born to it”. The feminization of the enemy has been discussed broadly by the feminist research on the war system’s features. This attitude is visible from the gendered insults between opposing forces to the frequent sexual assaults against women during conflicts. Some theories attribute the misogynist attitude of the military to widespread aggressiveness towards females. Following this perspective, man’s ancestral fear of women is the primary reason for attacking them.

As Simone de Beauvoir showed there have been different kinds of myths and rituals all over the world instrumental to reducing the ‘dangerous’ power of women, specially linked to the sexual and the reproductive sphere (De Beauvoir, 1949). Women were indeed associated with the negative powers of uncontrolled nature or to the diabolic temptations of passion that make manhood weak. They were charged with a fault intrinsic to their nature and impossible to borrow (the Christian myth of Eve is a clear demonstration of this). Following this perspective, men and societies had to neutralize this negativity by using different strategies: regulating women’s life by marriage, establishing specific taboos or reducing their space of relationships. By the adoption of different ways to control women, channelling their negative ‘power’ in form more suitable and pleasing to men, the connotation for women shifts from the image of danger to the opposite standard of vulnerability. Thus, the final domination of women leads to their consideration as weak and consequently exposed to others’ domination, so that they seem in constant need of protection.⁶ Although the scheme drawn by Simone de Beauvoir denounces a certain simplification of the relations between sexes, reduced through these myths into a power struggle, it is true that the two mentioned categories, women associated at the same time to both fault and innocence, are still in use. In this perspective the relation between women, fault and enemization⁷ reflects the assimilability of women to innocence and victimization. But, given that the human behaviour is not

⁶ The passage from the state of matriarchy, during which women were imagined as hurtful and plunged into promiscuity, to the state of patriarchy, seen as the domination of men’s rules, is actually highly criticized in anthropology, first because it seemed impossible to uniformly establish which one of these systems was held primarily in the history of the human beings. Secondly, the matriarchal system does not necessarily imply the power of women but rather involves rules of matrilineal descendance.

⁷ In psychology the relation between women’s fault and enemization is linked to the rejection of the power of the mother exercised on the young child. When the child grows up their separation is experienced by the son as the liberation from her, who remains interiorized as enemy.

as strictly dualistic as are stereotypes, there are still many categories that could be combined for the gendered process of enemization and victimization.

The assimilation of women to the nation or to the land is another way to gender armed conflict. Joshua S. Goldstein, among others, underlines this relation through many examples of war propaganda starting from the Second World War to the Vietnam conflict and to the Chinese/Japanese conflicts (Goldstein, 2001). As he underlines, in some cases the woman became symbol of the resistance to the enemy's attack while in other cases their violation is equated with the defeat of the nation. Indeed Lois A. West recalled the classical association of men with the State and the woman with the Nation (West, 2005). Further, sexist stereotypes connect these associations to the idealized concept of women's bodily integrity: if women resist the enemy's sexual assaults they could symbolize the national integrity⁸, if they are raped the nation is metaphorically contaminated⁹, if they fight the nation seems at the last resort¹⁰, if they are protected the nation is held secure.

All these stereotypes depend on the basic consideration of women as prey. Indeed masculinity's cultural construction is based on the image of the man as conqueror. If we associate this idea to armed conflicts, it is almost inevitable that women become virtual war booty. Moreover, the conquest implies the forced appropriation of the object conquered, so that from such a perspective women shift to become property. The problem, from a masculine point of view, is not considering the act of taking possession of females as embezzlement for the reason that women are human subjects and as human beings they belong to themselves. Masculinity puts into practice female embezzlement with even greater impetuosity if the woman in question 'belongs' to another man or community of men. The great aggressiveness towards women belonging to the enemy community, as well as the specular care for the integrity of women belonging to one's own community, depends primarily on the high degree of competitiveness between men that masculinity underlies. From this perspective the rape of the enemy's women represents a continuation of the

⁸ In essence, resistance even implies the extreme measure of death. The example of Lucrezia who preferred to sacrifice her life rather than subject herself to the enemy's assault, was used as strong symbol for integrity. The underlying assumption is very harsh: it is better to see a woman dead rather than touched by the enemy.

⁹ See at the example that Goldstein makes about the so-called "rape of Nanking" during the Chinese-Japanese conflict in 1937-38. The rape of 50.000 women of Nanking symbolized so strongly the humiliation and contamination of the Chinese national capital, that Chinese forces reacted with a very amplified patriotism and resistance.

¹⁰ See the analysis that Claudia Brunner makes on the suicide bombers in Palestine. She individuates some instrumental discourses that use feminine corporeality (in this case the suicide-bombing of a young and supposedly virgin Palestinian girl) to transmit a metaphorical message to the enemy. The participation of women to the armed attack implies both the extreme willingness of the Palestinian community to fight as well as its fragility: "if even our women are ready to blow themselves up in public spaces, you are going to have a hard time for the rest of your days, but if you strike back, we will point that this is our only weapon, the weapon of the weak" (Brunner: 2005, 35)

fight among men through the sexual dominance of the female body used as a 'vehicle' for the symbolic depiction of political purposes (Handrahan, 2004).

But, from a deeper point of view, "behind the cultural significance of raping 'enemy' women lies the institutionalization of attitudes and practice that regard and treat women as property" (Turshen: 2001, 60). In particular massive rape committed by the military can be considered "a distinctive act because it is perpetrated in a context of institutional policies and decision" (Turshen: 2001, 59). Indeed two main strategies are involved in the issue of militarized rape: the first is strictly linked to the assimilation of women to the reproductive function so that the decision to kill them or to provoke forced pregnancy depends on the final purpose of either eliminating the enemy's race or reproducing the aggressor's race. Moreover, the fact that a child conceived through this sexual aggression would necessarily assume the "race" of the father represents another standardized view of the male dominance between sexes. Indeed it implies the "lack of female ethnicity" as well as "the invisibility and irrelevance of a woman's identity" (Handrahan 2004, 438).

The second strategy involves more the traditional social roles of women: it corresponds to humiliate women in such a way that they will no longer be accepted as mothers and wives in their own society. In this way their traditional roles are attacked and the continuity of the community broken. Indeed the choice to rape women in public, in front of their family or members of the community aims to frighten and hurt the people provoking the future shame and rejection of this traumatic experience. As Pettman underlies about the politics of sexual terror, "sexual violence is aimed at them as women, in deliberate attacks on their images of themselves, and their relations as women and mothers" (Pettman: 1996, 102). The instrumental use of women in the struggle for power could not be so efficient if sexist stereotypes did not have a relevant impact on the social roles assigned traditionally to women: "women are expected to serve their community/countries not by fighting as a soldier, but by 'preserving' their sexual purity for the 'honour' of their male relatives. This is why women who have been raped are sometimes shamed by their relatives into committing suicide to maintain the honour of their men. Women can also be killed by their relatives to 'restore' honour" (Handrahan 2004, 435). In this case the process of victimization is double because women become the target of both enemy and community violence.

Another main factor that contributes towards the development of aggressive attitudes towards women (especially but not necessarily during conflicts) is their dehumanization. As mentioned earlier, the woman-property or the woman- prey correspond to the process of women's *objectification* which removes their human qualities. Following Betty Reardon's theory, the dehumanization of the woman as symbol of 'otherness', underlies the sexual alienation of male

from female, achieved by the rejection of ‘feminine’ characteristics from men and of the ‘masculine’ ones from women. When this rigid separation is put in relation to a hierarchical scale, the woman is considered less human as well. As Levi-Strauss pointed out, it has been always a common attitude to depreciate the ‘unknown otherness’ to preserve and define one’s own identity (Levi-Strauss, 1963).

Women as peace-supporters: the stereotype of sensibility and emotionality

In this paragraph I will address the stereotypes about the “innate capacity for greater sensitivity or more moral behaviour to women”, which depend on the general assumption of “feminine values and characteristics more human or humane than the masculine” (Reardon: 1985, 25). One suitable explanation for this deep rooted belief concerns the different patterns of education aimed to define and separate the men’s from the women’s sphere, through the achievement of a distorted complementary scheme: if men are trained to be warriors, women are educated to be peaceful. Betty Reardon explains very clearly this process of differentiation:

“The imposition of different forms of behaviour on men and women reinforces several characteristics of the war system: namely, the legitimation of aggressive behaviour and competitiveness among men is specular to the prohibition to indulge in aggressive impulse for women and their discouragement about competitiveness, except in the case they are fighting among them ‘to win’ and ‘hold on to’ a man. The cultural expectation of these patterns of behaviour is often perceived as necessary for order, security or the defence of national interests” (Reardon: 1985, 19).

Indeed if women were trained to express aggressive attitudes this order would be overthrown, thus shifting the complementarity of men’s and women’s behaviours. Another factor that contributes to the cultural expectation of the peaceful woman is her duty to take care of the household and the children. This implies a broad spectrum of qualities, such as the capacity to organize the space and time of the family life, the ability to understand the needs of the children and their relations with the internal sphere (as father and relatives) and social circle, the skill to interlace connections with the neighbourhood and the community in general (taking into account that in some societies women do not have great recognition within their community and that every context presents its own rules and customs in regard to gender relations).

All these abilities underlie the capacity to communicate, to comprehend another’s feeling, to foresee and prevent some problematic situations, to be the bridge of the other’s communication¹¹.

¹¹ This is particularly true in some migration situations where women become the intercultural ‘bridge’ of the whole family. Although in their society they seem have a subordinate role to men, women are those who leave first and

Some stereotypes of women are strictly related to this trend of female life. Indeed the quality of mercy, often associated with the image of a mother, wisdom, by which she can advise and warn her children, and traditional knowledge, for instance doing handicrafts, are all qualities attributed to women because the patriarchal division of labour required the glorification of the female idea of cleverness. And clearly the traditional division of labour recognized the role of mothering as the primary function of the woman. Although, depending on the context, the attribution of these qualities would not fully reflect the actual condition of women, it is still probable that, as time has passed, many women really developed some of these attitudes. Women are not by definition wild, merciful, sensible or intuitive but in some situations they are quite used to communicating, organizing, building relationships and intervening, whenever possible, to resolve conflict situations.

Some contemporary examples show this ability: in Colombia women are very active as supporters of peace especially within communities harshly impacted by the conflict, for example within displaced villages. This strong activity depends on a variety of reasons among which the traditional role of women in organizing the life of the community is a key factor (mutual collaboration in growing up children, the skill to provide the minimal food, resources to solve the housing problem, the establishment of an informal kindergarten, the possibility to keep in touch with other groups that can collaborate for the community's survival have been, for a long time, common practices for most Colombian women¹²) (Moser & Mcilwain, 2001). In this regard, efforts to achieve visibility and subsidies through connections with institutions and human rights enterprises, and to build a peaceful context, are kept especially by women; even because they are used to establish useful nets and relations in order to maintain a collective way of life, sometimes this represents the only way to survive.

During the Peruvian internal conflict between the State and Sendero Luminoso, women's peace movements tried to develop some specific goals, including the consolidation of their economic and productive roles, the promotion of education and health and the support for the reintegration of displaced persons. In a certain sense these achievement were not so far from the traditional life of Peruvian women (health, education and basic economy of subsistence were of women's concern even before the opening of the conflict) (Cordero, 2001). Nevertheless, as Isabel Coral Cordero reminds, "the mental health rehabilitation and developmental condition for children affected by political violence (...) went beyond their specific interests as mothers and had to do with

progressively build all the conditions for the future arrival and integration of the other members of the family. This female pattern of migration is recurrent mostly in central and south America.

¹² See also at Massiah J., *Women in developing economies. Making Visible the Invisible*, Paris, Unesco, 1993 and Rey de Marulanda N., *La Mujer y la Familia en la economía Colombiana*, in *Foros Interdisciplinarios, Sexualidad, Familia y Economía*, Bogotá, Cede Uniandes, 1982.

the quality of persons and citizens they sought to support and nurture, seeing children as the basis of future family and community progress” (Cordero: 2001, 161). The same research emphasizes that survival was the primary motivation for women’s mobilization in Peru and Peruvian success in the involvement of people was based both on their aim to the “integral preservation of family and community” (Cordero; 2001, 157) and on the acquiescence of the State.

It is also true that generally during wars and conflicts the male presence in the community declines because of their greater involvement as fighters. As a consequence, women have to supply functions that usually are of men’s concern, thus gaining more space and the possibility to express themselves. In one sense, wars tend to break down the traditional roles performed during periods of peace opening, thus opening some ‘fissures’ for other kind of social sharing. This is particularly evident in the case of Colombian female-head of households within the communities: “In IDP communities and areas with large numbers of single mothers, female-head of household have been targeted by armed groups precisely because of the strong community leadership they have exhibited when abandoned or widowed” (Unifem: 2005, 2)

Indeed, as victims or powerless witnesses of conflict provoked abuses, sometimes women react by asking for justice as a precondition for peace building. This, (among others like the famous ‘*madres de mayo*’), is the case of the Front of the Mothers, a movement that included more than 25.000 mothers of forced disappeared persons in Sri Lanka during the 1990s. Their old leader, Manorani Saravanamuttu, did not pay attention to the numerous death threats addressed to her, and broke down the traditional expectation of a mother’s silent cry for her lost son (Amnesty International, 1995).

As Simone de Beauvoir pointed out, this represents another typical stereotype: the “heroic mothers” are those that mourn and bury the dead accepting the sacrifice of their son in the name of the country (De Beauvoir: 1999, 221).¹³ The association of the mother’s image with politics, in this case focused on State violence, is used both to fight and to support war. In this way as Pettmann underlines, the stereotype of the peaceful mother vanishes:

There is no necessary relation between mothering and pacifism. Some mothers understand their attachment and responsibilities as requiring either the sacrifice of their sons for the state or nation, or the use of violence against other women’s son –and daughters. Many women do organize or participate in political action and resistance, and in support of armed struggles, as mothers. But we can make no presumption about their particular politics” (Pettman: 1996, 121)

¹³ Even if the case of Manorani Saravanamuttu is quite different (because her son was a journalist and not a nationalist fighter), the first warning of death to her underlined the imperative of the mother’ silent sufferance. The letter said: “Cry for the death of your son. As mother you should. Any other act will provoke your death at the less unpredictable moment”. The letter brought the following sign: “Justice, Honor and Glory for the Country” (Amnesty International: 1995, 98).

There are many factors that contribute to the “particular politics” which Pettman refers to: the kind of context and conflict that women experience, the peculiar way to instrumentalize their role as ‘national mothers’, women’s way of turning this instrumentalization against war and presenting themselves just as ‘hurt mothers’ and, not hardly least, their consciousness as women proposing a gendered view of peace and war.

Dealing with the relation between women, ethnicity and war Lory Handrahan pointed out that women who renounce the idea of ethnicity as a masculine cultural construction, actually can overcome their involvement in war as mothers or women that their nationalist societies require of them (Handrahan, 2004). In this way they break their segregation and meet other women from the around world interested in the building of peace. Clearly this is a difficult position because such a decision can push women out from their cultural rules and put them in danger. On the other hand, the politicization of motherhood by women’s peace movements has prompted the same ambiguity of the ‘heroic mothers’, reinforcing the stereotype of the peaceful mother and the sexist war’s view, and, more generally, the traditional focus on women’s reproductive function.

As Betty Reardon pointed out, women are not usually trained to compete with men but rather are used to competing among them. It is not strange that women defend their families and communities by expressing all the skills learned by living in the private sphere and, at the same time, putting in practice other abilities and attitudes derived from the conditions of war. The problem is whether, as women, they share common issues and how they deal with their human, social and contextual differences. In other words: are women able to go further than their particular communities and involve men in the changes necessary for peace? The broad spectrum of peace movements confirms generally that women are more concerned about peace than men, but this is not a justification of their supposed ‘natural’ or ‘learned’ peaceful attitudes. Even in the feminist debate the tendency to define which issues are women’s issues that lead to a specific women’s right agenda, is put in question because of the danger of building or adopting old or new stereotypes about women (MacKinnon, 2005).

Women as fighters: the myth of the Amazon

Resistance towards the image of women soldiers or fighters has been quite widespread. Indeed all the stereotypes mentioned about the traditional role of women in society become stronger when translated in the war system. From this perspective the normal function of women in supporting wars was not participation in the fight itself but their contribution to produce ‘cannon fodder’. Nevertheless other examples of women who worked for the war are also accepted, such as their strong (and cheap) labour in support of their communities, their function as cooks, nurses, spies,

scientists, informers and weapon carriers. But their direct involvement in the fight has been scarcely recognized or legitimized.

Even when they began to participate in armed struggles, the army or the insurgent groups that held them as fighters presented many impediments to their recognition. A few representative examples: during the Second World War Russian troops successfully used women's armed corps, but repeatedly tried to stop this practice (Goldstein, 2001); and during the first formation of the IRA in Ireland and LTTE in Sri Lanka women were not allowed to embrace arms (Alison, 2004). They had to create political pressure in order to form the 'women's front' that was legitimated after some years they commenced hostilities. Other cases of nationalist religious conflict, such as that of the Palestinians, show initial resistance, based on sexist religious rules, to keep women for suicide bombing attacks (Brunner, 2005).

This attitude arises from the combination of different sexist ideas. First, women's vulnerability could put the whole armed group in danger. Secondly, their physiological weakness does not cope with the concept of warfare. Thirdly, pregnancy could be an obstacle to their motivation and physical participation in armed actions. Moreover in the common imagination of war, women are charged with a lack of responsibility because of their 'natural' fear and softness. Their capacity to behave rationally is seriously put into question when they join armed groups. The strongest reticence springs from the break in complementarity between the male protective function and the women's and children's need to be protected. As we have seen given that the second position (the protected) is characterized by subalternity (Pettman, 2001), this relation is deeply unequal.

In a specular way the myth of the Amazons, the most common image that associates women with battle, turned this balance upside down by proposing the idea of a strong group of independent and very aggressive young female warriors who are substantially not won, not submitted to males. The stereotypes that derive by this image, still alive in the collective imagination, are linked to women's power associated with the fierceness of animals and with the female willingness to subjugate men. This image expunges from women all their 'good' qualities, such as mercy, caretaking, and sweetness, while encouraging the ideal male characteristics of proudness, competitiveness and cruelty. The meaning of their name (without breast) refers to the practice of cutting off the right breast in order to comfortably grasp a bow during battle. Moreover their custom of sexually using men only to ensure female descent, the killing or rejecting of male babies, and the supposed practice of reducing men to slavery, is quite horrifying to the masculine point of view. Nevertheless, from another point of view, this myth could also symbolise the masculinization of women, rather than their dominance over men. Indeed, the only positive and traditional female

feature that characterises the Amazons is their beauty, that leads to the male desire to win them and, at the same time, to their being defeated by their charm.

It is not a coincidence that women who join the armed fight are often required, and present themselves as determined, to behave 'like a man', to cancel their 'feminine' characteristics, among which the motherhood is again perceived as the questionable point of their identity as fighters. In some insurgent groups, as the guerrilla groups of El Salvador, the strong prohibition against women getting pregnant represents the consequence of the process of women's masculinization (Ibanez: 2001, 121).

But in other groups the image of mothers who fight because of their maternal instinct for protection is quite accepted. As Goldstein underlines, there is a very famous picture of Vietcong women holding, at the same time, both guns and babies in their arms (Goldstein, 2001). In a sense this image recalls that the 'nation' is using all its resources to carry on the fight. Indeed although it is true that female armed participation put in question some traditional rules about men's and women's space, the overcoming of the patriarchal pattern seems to be trapped between change and restoration and there is no way to classify uniformly how these two aspects are put in relation.

Following the difference drawn in the first chapter between the ethnic-national and the revolutionary conflicts, it could be said that the idea of women involved in the fight implies, in theory, two different concepts: the national pattern requires women fighters to sacrifice their lives (including motherhood, traditional marriage, sexual relations) in the name of ethnic struggle, which implies their purity as women and their abnegation as combatant. However, this is only an official code or rule, easily dismissed in actual events, given that the prohibition of sexual relations in some insurgent groups is not respected. Moreover sexual harassment and abuses are perpetrated within many armed groups (Mazurana, 2004).

Even from a women's rights point of view, strong female participation tends to open some issues related to women's liberation, as has happened in Iran. Indeed, some studies underline the concept of "feminist nationalism" to explain "cases where women's efforts to improve the status of women in their nation coincided with efforts of state-building" (West, 2005, 152). The revolutionary pattern seems apparently more open to general changes in women's condition of life: they are expected to fight against repressive practices and State's politics, making visible a female dimension of the conflict, namely the struggle for equality and non discrimination issues. Although generally this model does not push for a strict separation of women from the men's sphere (as the creation of separated training and fighting corps within the armed groups), the major legitimacy of love or sexual relations (in comparison with national fighters groups) produces the opposite effect: women are seen in practice as not suitable wives and thence pay the costs of their 'freedom' by

being temporally considered love's companions. Consequently women of both contexts face similar problems in terms of their recognition and relation with the male members of the group.

Betty Reardon underlines the concept of 'deterrence' to explain how sexism and war system, both based on patriarchal patterns, put in practice some strategies in order to prevent the achievement of liberation by the oppressed (women, minorities, and in general, 'the third world') (Reardon, 1985). It seems important to consider which could be the deterrent strategies used against women who threaten the 'natural order' by joining the armed struggle. If women themselves accept male superiority, which is a contributing factor to sexism (Reardon, 1985), they will also accept an unquestioned male authority. Following this perspective, the patriarchal system is less threatened and women's discrimination can take form by the assignment of less important roles. The rigid separation of housing, training and life for female and male members within an armed group is another way to propose the traditional separation of gender roles that takes place in the patriarchal society. The communication gap is brought to its extreme consequences: the physical separation of male and female individuals and the impossibility of exchanging feelings or opinions which could lead to the comprehension of each other's lives.

Forcing women back into vulnerability when the fight is finished (through the performance of their traditional roles) represents another way to consider their equality temporally determined. In this way women's participation corresponds to an emergency's measure. In other words: it constitutes the exception that confirms the general rule. The last point to conclude this analysis on stereotypes as actual agents of discrimination is the way the media considers women as actors of violence. Belinda Morrisey points out that western media mainly use three ways to make understandable how women are able to use violence: monsterization, mythification and victimization. Although her analysis is focused on cases of women killers mainly within the United States, these three strategies underline once again the difficulty of accepting that women can be extremely violent and that their human nature is not linked to any supposed intrinsic qualities of goodness. When women emerge from this scheme, the myth of the Amazons, linked to the idea of women outside of societal control, overbearingly returns to characterise the interpretation of their behaviour: "cases where women are accused of acts considered wicked and inhuman, for instance, have a vital role in maintaining notions of feminine evil, just as those where women are portrayed as victims have importance in preserving ideas of female oppression" (Morrisey: 2003, 7).

Presentation of the two case studies

Sri Lanka and Colombia provide two contexts in which political violence provoked a huge proportion of displacement, a high number of dead people every year, extrajudicial killings and abuses perpetrated by both official armies and paramilitary groups and a deep rooted insurgency which created its own forms of political power, in several zones replacing the state. Both contexts present a developed participation of women within the main insurgent groups (around one third of the whole armed groups), the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka (LTTE) and the Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia (FARC).

LTTE and FARC fight with different goals given that they act with nationalist and revolutionary perspectives, respectively: the first demands the self determination of the Tamil people, located in the northern and eastern areas of Sri Lanka, while the second tries to address social justice issues from a Marxist perspective. Of course the appeal to women's participation by the two armed groups involves the ideological background of the fight itself, linking the liberation of the Tamil people to the women's liberation from cultural sexist practices and the Marxist ideal revolution of Colombian people to the women's revolution to achieve gender equality. Nevertheless, the way to frame the ideological appeal to women seems to be similar between LTTE and FARC, given the great emphasis on female participation in the fight as a revolutionary event within both societies. Yet the life and rules within the camps follow different perspectives with regard to female comrades. Perceptions of sexuality, love relations, pregnancy and marriage are linked to the culture of each context, even when women apparently gain more freedom with regard to these issues. I chose to compare these two contexts because I wanted to stress their differences and similarities with regard to the women's motivations, commitments and goals within two patterns of armed fight born in different kinds of conflicts. Moreover, the recent failure of peace negotiations in Colombia and the current stalled peace talks in Sri Lanka constitute another point in common between these contexts, where the fight seems currently functional to itself.

Both armed groups, although quite strong and military developed, lost part of the people's support for this form of fighting in order to address the right to a better society free from exploitation and oppression. Of course, given the high numbers of combatants which actually constitute the armed groups (each between 15.000 and 20.000 members) they are quite far from demobilization and both present high rates of recruitment especially during recent years. Forced recruitment and high proportions of child soldiers are reported as features communal to both LTTE and FARC, although it should be said that the interviews made with combatant women reveal that they joined voluntarily even when they were very young. Both groups perpetrate abuses on civil

population, mainly by extortion, kidnappings and extrajudicial killings especially when they judge someone to be linked to the opposite wing (army or paramilitary groups). This attitude has led to the complete vulnerability of some civil communities exposed to the attack of all actors of political violence.

SRI LANKA CASE STUDY



Photo Gallery from the Official Website of Peace Secretariat of Liberation
Tigers of Tamil Eelam, available at <http://www.tamilnet.com>

Premise

The conflict in Sri Lanka has provoked strong restrictions on the freedom of expression given that the civilian society is constantly threatened by the two sides of the struggle, the Sri Lankan army and the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) insurgent group. Newspapers are blanked out and live broadcasts banned (Cohn, 2000). For this reason a journalist for the courier of UNESCO speaks about a “culture of silence”: “People are still afraid to talk about what happened between 1987 and 1990, or about what is going on today. Under existing conditions we cannot expect civilians to come forward to talk about the human rights abuses of the past and present. The challenge facing civil society in Sri Lanka is how to break this culture of silence” (Anbassaran, 1999). Indeed, the gathering of information about LTTE and women within that context has been very difficult despite the presence of some studies which have reported some particular views on this subject. Moreover, the huge proportion of propaganda by both sides of the political violence does not help in understanding the human rights situation or, more specifically, women’s approaches to their own conditions of life in the war.

Nevertheless I used different sources, among them propaganda itself, in order to explain the main points of female contribution to the nationalist struggle in relation to the armed fight. This study is in fact characterized by a ‘collage’ of different points of view, data and human rights reports that show how the war’s context is at the same time appealing and affecting women who try to challenge traditional Tamil gender roles by becoming combatants. Particularly, the reports on gendered abuses perpetrated by the LTTE, and sometime by the female members of LTTE, contribute to make evident the contradictions between a propaganda that presents women as subjects of rights and dignity, and the opposite practices aimed to target them if belonging to the opposite wing, or to rule them when they become members of LTTE.

The nationalist conflict. Background

After the independence from UK in 1948, Sri Lanka was characterized by a strong economic and political instability, which become progressively worse during the following years. Some commentators refer to the ethnic conflict between Sinhalese and Tamil populations as the main factor of this state of weakness, but Sri Lanka was a undermined State even before of the spreading of the conflict (Hattotuwa, 2002). The privileges given by the colonialist power to the English-speaking Tamil and Sinhalese elites (excluding those elites who spoke Sinhalese and were Buddhists) are considered significative factors of later Sinhalese exclusive policies toward the Tamil minority (Hattotuwa, 2002). According to the Sinhalese Gananath Obeyesekere (head of the

department of Anthropology in the Princeton University during the nineteen eighties), after 1948 the racial violence started to be visible when business competition between Sinhalese, Muslim and Tamil merchants led to the employment of dispossessed proletarians of the little trade towns to eliminate the business rivals. (Obeysekara, 1984). Moreover, following the colonization scheme, surplus villagers (given the progressive spill-over of people in the fifties) were excluded from irrigation projects (mainly in the centre and in the south) and were settled in the cities. Their settlement was allowed by local parliaments and party supporters who choose among these people creating differences and ensuring support for their 'political' interests.

Indeed, "one of the features of the politics in Sri Lanka since the sixties is the use made by politicians of all parties, of these dissatisfied urban people" (Obeysekara, 1984). The politics which exacerbate ethnic differences were framed in this kind of context where the building or consolidation of a new State and the competence for economic resources were at stake. The first institutional step in this sense was taken in 1956 when the Government introduced the 'Sinhala only' Act, which replaced English with Sinhalese as the language of the official Government business, clearly detrimental to the Tamil population. Indeed the final aim was to reduce the number of Tamils in the professions and the public sector. Afterwards, the "standardisation" system imposed by the Government in the early 1970s, established communal quotas for university entrance which discriminated against Tamil students. As Sanjana Hattotuwa (Research Associate at the Centre for Policy Alternatives in Colombo) stated:

"With 'standardisation' it became clear the Tamils had lost the educational and employment opportunities that had conditioned their commitment to a unitary Ceylon in the first place. Large number of young Tamils came to the conclusions their socio-economic aspirations could only be fulfilled within a separate Tamil state" (Hattotuwa, 2002).

Indeed it was in the seventies that small youth groups of Tamil insurgents were growing even with the clandestine help of India, which gave them arms and military training.¹⁴ In the meantime many Sinhalese politicians consolidated their relations with powerful local merchants, often involved in illegal activities. Any attempt to prosecute them was impeded by growing corruption and institutionalization of links between the UNP (the country most important conservative party) and the trade union known as JSS (National Workers Organization), which after the election of UNP in 1976, gained strength and eliminated the competence of other trade unions.

¹⁴ In 1970 a militant student body was formed called the "Tamil Students Movement" to protest government plans to limit access of Tamil students to universities. Violence escalated in Jaffna from 1972 onwards, beginning with the publication of a new constitution seen by the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) as anti-Tamil. The year 1972 saw the formation of two Tamil terrorist groups – the Tamil New Tigers (TNT) and Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO), splinter groups of the original Tamil Students Movement. For more details see at South Asia Terrorism Portal, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, 2004 at <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/shrilanka/terroristoutfits/LTTE.HTM>.

According to Gananath Obeyesekere, the JSS and its supporters had a big role in acts of intimidation towards Tamils given they were progressively provided with the Sinhalese Buddhist political ideology (Obeyesekere, 1984)¹⁵. During the early eighties a series of violent acts occurred in Jaffna, the heart of the Tamil area. Among them the burning of the public library, which contained priceless manuscripts on the identity of Tamils from Jaffna, constituted a meaningful symbolic act. Moreover, the introduction of the Prevention Terrorism Act (PTA) under President Jayawardene allowed the Government to arbitrarily detain for 18 months (renewable by an order every three months) all people suspected of involvement in unlawful activities. This act was used mostly to torture, detain and kill young Tamils or dissidents within the Buddha Dharma regime¹⁶. The repression of Tamil peoples in relation to the increased political violence became absolutely clear in July 1983 when, as consequence of an insurgent attack against 14 Sri Lankan soldiers in Jaffna, Sinhalese people in Colombo started to search for Tamils within the city and to kill them or burn their homes. Massacres happened in those days even within the prison (Welikade) where 35 Tamil prisoners were killed by Sinhalese prisoners and guards. According to Nakkavita, 79.000 Tamils were displaced in order to escape from the reprisal of the masses (Nakkavita, 1999).

The aggressors had a list with the personal identity of individual Tamil people and the location of their houses and shops in Colombo, so the implication of the Government in organizing the riots was strongly suspected.

It was in the same year that LTTE began its guerrilla campaign against the Sri Lankan Government. This insurgent group progressively eliminated its competitors (other separatists groups and Tamil politicians who were looking for a moderate solution of the conflict). In 1983, the Sri Lankan forces and LTTE started to target each other while the civil communities were strongly affected by the military operations. In 1987 the Indo-Lankan accord was signed, establishing the presence of Indian Peace Keeping Forces (IPKF) to grant the ceasefire between the two sides. The failure of this policy was evident in relation to the abuses that IPKF perpetrated on the civil Tamil population. In 1990 the IPKF left the country and in June the conflict spread out more strongly than ever. In 1991 the former Indian First Minister Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated. In 1994 LTTE killed President Ranasinghe Premadasa at a rally for elections. Both killings were made by female suicide bombers of LTTE (the Black Tigers).

¹⁵ Cyril Matthew, the president of J.S.S. who became Minister of Industries was indeed considered an inveterate enemy of the Tamil minority. A few days after the riots in 1983, he made a speech in Parliament underlining the thesis that Tamil people could have their roots and country in India while the Sinhalese were deeply linked to the Sri Lanka country and had to preserve their identity by the competence of the other racial groups.

¹⁶ An interesting testimony by S. A. David, president of the Gandhian Society, was published in 1983. He reported his own experience of detention under PTA describing the inhuman conditions and the tortures to which he had been submitted for several months. See at David S.A., Detention, Torture and Murder in Sri Lanka, 1983 at www.tamilcanadian.com/eelam/massacres/torture.html.

LTTE goals were clearly the self-determination of the Tamil Ealam people establishing an independent 'democratic' state in the north-eastern districts. In 1995 the Northern provinces were strongly attacked by the army who retook much of the Jaffna peninsula. The displacement of people increased because of the aerial bombing of villages and all the social structures, included schools, were disrupted. During the years in which the Sri Lanka forces controlled Jaffna (1995-2000), numerous human rights groups contributed to show the abuses perpetrated by the army towards the Tamil population in the Northern provinces. Sunila Abeysekera, a Sri Lankan human rights activist who received a UN Human Right Prize, denounced the high degree of impunity and the responsibility of high politicians both for ordering disappearances (and massacres) and for covering up the guilty. She found that the Government's attitude went towards "a total denial of the reality of what has happened in Sri Lanka" (Anbarasan, 1999).

In 1997 Amnesty International found that the Government "reacted too slowly to well-documented reports" about disappearances in the Jaffna peninsula the year before. Amnesty indeed denounced that over 18 months around 600 people disappeared after their arrest by security forces (Mc-Donald, 1997). Moreover, the Prevention of Terrorism Act prevented the Sri Lankan human rights activists from making contact with Tamil militants. Nevertheless some of these groups worked to create a network between the Tamil and Sinhalese societies with the aim to create a common base for peace. On the other side LTTE attacks against politicians, financial Government's structure¹⁷, Buddhist temples¹⁸, military structures and villages inhabited by civilian people increased, showing the military strength of this group. In 2000 LTTE entered Jaffna and defeated the army forces breaking the hope of the Government to eliminate definitively them. As consequence, a ceasefire was established in 2002 with the International Monitoring Norwegian Mission but the peace talks are actually stalled due to the difficulty of respect the ceasefire by both sides and the big interests played by all the actors involved. Sunila Abeykesera addressed the chance of reconciliation:

"We have come out of a particularly bad and horrifying period in our history. The older generations from all the communities still remember how they lived together happily in the past. It is the younger generation which has witnessed war, separation and suffering. If the situation is allowed to drift, then there is no chance for peace in Sri Lanka" (Anbarasan, 1999)

The LTTE runs a wide network of publicity and propaganda activities with offices and cells located in at least 54 countries. The largest and most important centres are located in leading western states with large Tamil expatriate communities, most notably the UK, France, Germany,

¹⁷ In 1996 the Central Bank of Sri Lanka was attacked and 91 persons died and in 1997 18 persons are killed as LTTE suicide bombers drive a truck packed with a large quantity of explosives into the twin towers World Trade Centre building in Colombo.

¹⁸ In 1998, 13 persons are killed in a LTTE suicide attack at the Sri Lanka's holiest Buddhist shrine, Temple of Tooth, in Kandy.

Switzerland, Canada and Australia. In addition to these states, the LTTE are also known to be represented in countries as far-flung as Cambodia, Burma, South Africa and Botswana. Its publicity networks covering Europe, Australia and North America also include radio and TV satellites.

Data on female members of LTTE

Women's involvement in the armed fight of LTTE has progressively increased in relations to the escalation of violence. It is not the case that the main periods of female recruitment follow the major events of repression by Government forces. Indeed it was in 1983 (the year of the 'Tamil Pogrom'), that a special section for women was created, called the Vituthalai Plulikal Munani (Women's Front of the Liberation Tigers) although they were not trained to fight until 1985. At first women were used "in propaganda work, medical care, information collection, fund raising and recruitment" (Alison: 2003, 38). They were trained for the first time in India (Tamil Nadu) given the connections between the Tamil fight and the regional superpower interests in supporting the conflict. Their first battle was in 1986 against the Sri Lankan army and only starting by 1987 women were trained in Jaffna, constituting a self leadership structure in 1989. Although their recruitment started to be consistent by the mid-1980s, the number of women involved in the fight increased by June of 1990, when the IPKF had left and the Government started a huge aerial bombing on Jaffna and Trincomalee. As a LTTE women said:

"The time I joined, about 1990, was perhaps the worst in this ongoing war. We had seen with our own eyes children who had been orphaned, parents who had lost their children. And there was no question of these children getting minimum education. So what we saw, at that juncture, only convinced us that something must be done" (Alison: 2003, 42).

The majority of the women who became involved were from rural backgrounds, primarily the more undeveloped areas outside Jaffna peninsula. The war had a more devastating impact in these areas, and consequently women had suffered greater economic hardship and persecution. Women from middle class backgrounds, particularly in Jaffna, joined the student wing of the LTTE, motivated by their "narrow visions of patriotism" (Hoole: 90, 329). The current proportion of women within LTTE is estimated at around 30% of the whole group (Alison, 2004). Other hypothesis about a 50% of women seem to be unrealistic. The number of LTTE members is not so clear. Some sources report that the LTTE's deployment increased from 9.390 before the cease-fire agreement was signed to 16.240 by the end of 2002 (South Asian Terrorism Portal, 2004). Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga alleged on January 8, 2004, that the insurgent group increased its military strength during the truce period by recruiting over 11.000 guerrillas. According to her "the LTTE has increased its cadre by three times from around seven thousand to over 18.000" (quoted in South Asian Terrorism Portal, 2004).

The forced recruitment of young people, and male and female minors, by LTTE seems an established practice given that every Tamil family has to contribute to the struggle by giving one daughter or son to the group¹⁹. Moreover some articles denounce that after the tsunami humanitarian catastrophe the forced recruitment of girls was recurrent (Lancini, 2005). But in general, after the ceasefire accords, LTTE had major chances to recruit people and to strengthen its forces. According to *The Hindu* “nearly 4.000 women cadres of the LTTE have been killed since they began taking part in combat from 1985, joining the LTTE pantheon of over 17.000 ‘heroes’ in the nearly two decade-old conflict. Over 100 of the women killed belonged to the dreaded Black Tiger suicide squad” (The Hindu, 2002). Indeed, due to strategic factors, women have an important role in the suicide squad as they are less subjected to body search or, in general, may be confused with civilians. Women seem also to contribute strongly to missions in the naval forces of LTTE (Alison, 2003).

Motivations of female involvement

Although within the LTTE forced recruitment is very recurrent, many female recruits say that joined voluntarily when they were very young (Alison, 2003). Indeed there are different views about the motivations of women’s involvement in the LTTE. On the one hand, according to Alison, LTTE started to recruit women due to a lack of male combatants rather than for a female ideological commitment on equality (Alison, 2003). On the other hand, Bose remarks that the ideological factor (the liberation of Tamil Eelam), linked to the alienation from the state, was a motivation both for males and females within the new generations starting by 1980 (Bose, 1994 quoted in Alison, 2003). And indeed the interviews that Miranda Alison made with women from LTTE apparently confirmed this trend: women declared to fight for the rights of the Tamil people, including land and self-determination.

Nevertheless the author defines “nationalist sentiment” for joining the fight as a “metareason” that constitute only the surface of the broad spectrum of motivations for LTTE women. Indeed the “communal perception of suffering” is very diffused among the Tamil people and could constitute the emotional reason for the ideological commitment to nationalism (Alison: 2003, 40). As Trawick stressed, the sense of solidarity with the suffering of others in the communities is claimed as the main motivation by women from LTTE, who revealed feelings of

¹⁹ A report from The University Teachers for Human Rights refers particularly to the high percentage of suicides in 2002 by parents who could not oppose to the forced recruitment of their children. The report makes a detailed scheme of forced recruitment in the Northern and Eastern provinces by gathering the complaints of civilian people of these areas with regard to violations they suffered by LTTE. For more details see at: University Teachers for Human Rights, Towards A Totalitarian Peace: The Human Rights Dilemma, Report no. 13, 2002 at <http://www.uthr.org/SpecialReports/spreport13.htm>.

revenge and the hope to address abuses (Trawick, 1990). The interviews made by Alison report that in some cases the women were sisters or daughters of members of LTTE or of persons killed by the Sri Lankan forces, so that they were already close to the idea of conflict (Alison, 2003). Actually the strong repression of the Sri Lankan forces is one of the most frequent causes of disrupted families, displacement and destruction of social structures. Particularly the displacement often implied more exposition to abuses, deprivation of food and for minors the interruption of their studies at the secondary schools.

The National Human Development Report made by UNDP in 1998 confirmed that the northern and eastern areas were the more affected by the conflict, so that the standards of education, employment, access to food and in general human development were lower in those zones. (UNDP, 1998). Moreover, according to Kanchana N. Ruwanpura who works for the In Focus Programme on Crisis Response and Reconstruction of the International Labour Office of Geneva, “current socio-economic indicators do not adequately cover the conflict-related reality of Northern and Eastern Sri Lanka” (Ruwanpura: 2003,1). Indeed the access to resources for the vulnerable groups (as women) could be lower than the standards generally reported.

Some women reported that they were studying but displacement and conflict did not allow them to finish and take exams. The lack of education structures seems indeed to be a strong push factor for girls (Alison, 2003). If we consider that minors are estimated at around 40% of the insurgent groups²⁰ it is likely true that the destruction of family relations and school education are the main important factors for many LTTE women grown in such a context. Nevertheless, some girls who joined the LTTE and now are inserted in rehabilitation programmes stressed that they “felt intense pressure from their families to constantly perform at the highest levels of achievement. Several of the girls dropped out from school rather than living with the never-ending pressure and expectations placed upon them by their parents” (Keirns: 2004, 5). Repressive families are considered indeed another motivation for choice of girls to become combatants of LTTE, especially when they are obliged to follow strictly the tradition against their willingness:

“About ten days before the day of the marriage, I started to plan to leave the house. I waited, tried to convince my parents, they were very adamant and would not listen to me. The day before the marriage every thing was ready. I ran away. I ran away to escape a marriage I didn't like” (Keirns: 2004, 16).

²⁰ Estimates based on LTTE fighters who have been killed in combat reveal that 40 percent of its fighting forces - including both males and females - were between 9 and 18 years of age. The first recruitment of child soldiers into LTTE ranks dates back over two decades, after the ethnic riots of July 1983 resulted in a massive exodus of civilians to India. At this stage, LTTE chief Prabhakaran selected Basheer Kaka, an LTTE leader from the harbour city of Trincomalee, to establish a training base in the State of Pondicherry in India for recruits under 16. Initially, the child soldiers - affectionately referred to as 'Tiger cubs' - received non-military training, mostly primary education and physical exercise. By early 1984, the nucleus of the LTTE 'Baby Brigade' or 'Bakuts', was formed. For more details see at South Asian Terrorism Portal, Child Soldiers of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, 2000 at http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/shrilanka/terroristoutfits/child_soldiers.htm.

Adele Ann, (wife of the ideologue of the LTTE, Anton Balashingam) found the personal suffering of women in the conflict as another gendered factor of their involvement (Ann, 1993). Some women from LTTE said that sexual violence, even when not personally suffered, constitutes a shared fear and anger among the female combatants. In 1997, the gang-rape and murder by the Sri Lankan army of Krishanti Kumaraswamy, a Tamil schoolgirl, has become the infamous symbol of the women's liberation struggles against the enemy's sexual violence. Two years after, on the anniversary of this shocking event, a female squad from LTTE attacked the same police station where the girl was abused, claiming revenge for the Tamil girl on behalf of all the abused women²¹.

Apart from the sexual abuses committed by the Sri Lankan army there have been many cases of Tamil women raped during the period of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (1987-90). During the 90s, violence intensified and indeed, as mentioned before, this was the period in which many women joined the ranks. Nevertheless, women's liberation ideology, as a specific gendered factor, seems not to be the main motivation to join but it becomes one strong goal of the struggle after recruitment (Alison, 2004). Indeed, some studies report that women could be willing to transgress the traditional taboos by joining LTE (Bose, 1994 quoted in Alison, 2003). Peter Shalk put great emphasis on the goals of "martial feminism" for women who choose the armed fight (Alison, 2003). Nevertheless, only few of them reported that they were interested in feminism issues before their involvement

Feminist goals and equality issues

Within the goals of self-determination for the Tamil people, the leader of LTTE, Velupillai Prabhakaran, claimed women's liberation issues stating that women should be free to control their own lives, as well as legally protected against sexual harassment rape and domestic violence. The non-discrimination principles were mentioned from the social, political and economic point of view. Prabhakaran even specified that these issues would be addressed by the mutual recognition by men and women of their dignity and shared responsibility in family life and social tasks (Pirapaharam, 1993). Nevertheless, it is significant that the leader of LTTE defined "the ideology of women liberation" as "a child born in the womb of our liberation struggle", thus implying two factors (Pirapaharam, 1993). The first is that without the LTTE, women could not achieve equality in their society, thus underlying the exclusive, innovative and revolutionary attitude of this insurgent group with regard to women: "It is only the women with a revolutionary consciousness who could

²¹ The case of Krishanti Kumaraswamy was the first to be judged by legal proceeding and, in 1998, six of the accused soldiers were sentenced to death. Indeed, the pressure of the human rights campaign contributed to force the Sri Lankan Government to authorize the legal proceeding.

become a revolutionary force” (Pirapaharam, 1993). The consequential reasoning implies that women’s liberation is secondary to the main goal of LTTE, namely the right of self-determination. And indeed some studies consider that, although women within LTTE refuse their traditional role in Tamil society, they did not put in question their subordinate role within the national struggle even because the women’s liberation is not a priority for LTTE (Kumudini, 2001).

Other views underlined that the acceptance of women’s liberation issues within the LTTE constitutes by itself a progressive shift towards the creation of women’s space of debate on their conditions. (Maunaguru, 1995). Another perspective is considered by feminist commentators committed to peace: women’s involvement in the fight is a negative point due to the sexist military views which, by definition, cannot improve the condition of women (Alison, 2003). Some other pessimistic views arise from the doubts about the positive impact of women’s liberation issues (claimed within the LTTE) on the whole Tamil society. According to Hoole, LTTE women did not spread their improvement to the society at large (Hoole, 1990). Although Hoole was referring to the period before the 1990s, his doubts remain a central point for the role of LTTE women in the post-conflict reconstruction, especially with regard to the contribution they could give to changes in traditional society.

Given the different views on the efficiency of feminist goals within the LTTE, it is important to understand which are the features of women’s oppression identified by the female members of the group. Some women stressed that within LTTE they are able to do certain things that during their childhood they were socialised to not do: bicycling, walking alone and visiting the sea were several actions that were and remain forbidden to women (Alison, 2003). In this regard their involvement in the LTTE gave them self-confidence and consciousness about the possibility of women’s empowerment. Indeed within the concept of fighting, it was evident that women had to break the attributes of softness and vulnerability, in order to take responsibility and risks for their lives. It was not possible to maintain a fear to walk alone or to avoid the sea and boats because of the danger to which women alone are traditionally exposed. At the same time it was not possible to rely on the protection of families and male counterparts. For this reason Bose thinks that women’s empowerment within LTTE should not be underestimated (Bose, 1994 quoted in Alison, 2003).

The gap between traditional Tamil society and the insurgent group with regard to women’s capabilities seems actually very broad. Bhanuka, 25-year-old, political leader of the women’s wing of the LTTE for eastern Sri Lanka (veteran of many battles against the Sri Lankan military) stated: “When we were children, we were told by our parents we had to behave differently from boys. We were told only boys rode cycles and played outside. But the LTTE was different. Now we are the same as the men. The LTTE makes no distinction between the sexes” (The Hindu, 2002)

As *The Hindu* critically stressed “Bhanuka and her comrades are emphatic that once the goal of national liberation is achieved, women’s liberation would spread out from the LTTE into Tamil society ‘automatically’. But there is nothing automatic about this (...) the history is replete with examples of ‘after the revolution, back to the kitchen’. There have been indications that LTTE might be no different. (The Hindu, 2002). Another female combatant remarked:

In our society they have separated the work for the men and for the women, so from childhood the girl is brought up – that you can’t do certain things. The girl feels that she can’t take some decision on behalf of herself, so she needs other to do that on behalf of her. Because she doesn’t know herself. You know, we have been brought up in this LTTE movement that we have to take decisions for ourselves” (Alison: 2003, 50).

Nevertheless, the separation of women’s space from that of men persists within the LTTE; women have separate camps for training and fight in female squads. Although some women allege that this rule contributes to the avoidance of the possibilities of sexual abuse within the groups (Mazurana, 2004), other sources note that “female fighters of the LTTE are cast as a symbol of the emancipated Tamil woman (...) they are forced to suppress their femininity and sexuality, which is regarded as a crime and an evil force that could sap their strength” (the Hindu, 2002). According to Hoole, when women joined the armed fight in the early 1980s they were not taken in as full time members, as the notion of women containing a “dangerous sexuality” was widespread. They would distract the men from their firm resolve to fight for their motherland. Women could, with this dangerous sexuality, sow dissension among the men, and this would sully the image of the movement in the eyes of the people. (Hoole: 92, 327)

Women are not allowed to marry before the age of 25 (for their male comrades the age is 28) and sexual relations or love are forbidden outside of marriage. Nevertheless some reports reveal that these rules are not always observed, given that sometimes male comrades visit female camps without permission (UTHR, 1995). It seems that the children of newly married couples are kept safe in some camps located in the Vanni area. The case of a LTTE girl who committed suicide because of pregnancy before the established age, out of marriage, and whose LTTE partner refused to recognize paternity, is meaningful of the fact that within LTTE the rules are not so progressive with regard to women’s issues (UTHR, 2002). With regard to the system of dowry, which is deeply rooted in Tamil and Sinhalese society, only few women have opposed to it during the Alison’s interviews, although the leader of LTTE considered dowry the consequence of the male chauvinistic oppression of women (Pirapaharam, 1993).

Clearly the problem is changing a pattern that considers women linked to family’s goods but that allow them to enjoy the inheritance (even if it passes to be administrated by the husband).Dowry implies that women remain dependent on the marriage’s rules and that the possibilities of female self-development are actually very limited. Some LTTE women claim that

they are trying to involve Tamil women of the civil society in projects of self-employment mostly among unmarried women and widows²². These are small projects but they could have an impact outside the group for the construction of gender equality. Nevertheless, it seems very difficult to change the roles within married couples even because LTTE women themselves observe strict rules of conduct about family life.

This does not mean that LTTE does not enter in the private sphere of families at all. There are some studies that underlie the role of this group in punishing domestic violence against women: women can complain about abuses so that the aggressor is first warned and then imprisoned if he continues to use violence against his wife (Alison, 2003). This attitude makes part of the judiciary system established by the LTTE in the northern and eastern regions.²³ Taking into account the power of LTTE by the constitution of a parallel state's structure, some other sources note that "recently, the LTTE issued a diktat laying down a dress code for women, asking them to give up western dress and opt for traditional Tamil clothes like the *dhavani* and the saree. It also prohibited adolescent boys and girls from interacting with each other, warning that this too was against Tamil culture" (The Hindu, 2002) .

As the human rights activist Sunila Abeykesera stated "more than ever before in history women have become the markers of the culture and traditions of a community. The easiest way to measure this is by looking at how a community imposes a dress code on women. We find stricter dress codes for women now than in the past. I think we are living in a society that's becoming increasingly fundamentalist and puritanical" (Anbarasan: 1999, 4). She is referring to a general attitude of the three main religions in Sri Lanka (Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam) which are invoked by the conservative wings to impose restrictions to Tamil, Sinhalese and Muslim women, especially when they claim to issues of gender equality. On the contrary, some LTTE women reported that, while raped women are usually shamed in the Tamil society, women combatants who suffered sexual abuses by the enemy are not discriminated for this reason within the insurgent group. Indeed sexual violence is considered "an accident, meaning that it was not the victim's fault" (Alison: 2003, 43).

The differences between what women from LTTE say about freedom and gender equality and the outsiders' views on this subject are sometimes very broad. In my view this gap depends both on the strong propaganda or indoctrination to which women who join the struggle are

²² The economic problems of Tamil widows are very widespread given that the 64,1% of Tamil women's headship is provoked by the murder of their husband (Sinhalese women who are widows because of the political violence constitute the 27% of the sinhala female head of household) (Ruwanpura: 2003).

²³ The LTTE has also set up a parallel civil administration within its territory by establishing structures such as a police force, law courts, postal services, banks, administrative offices, television and radio broadcasting station, etc. Indeed the most prominent of the LTTE 'state structure' is the 'Tamil Eelam Judiciary' and the 'Tamil Eelam Police'.

submitted and on the difficulty by aliens to accept their roles as free combatants in a conflict that transformed the Tamil areas in a 'regime' ruled by LTTE. Moreover, the role of women in decision making within the LTTE constitutes another much debated point. Some studies reported that there is no evidence of women involved in the policy making and planning of LTTE (De Silva, 1999) (Kumudini, 2001). Radhika Coomaraswamy, United Nations Special Reporter on Violence against Women and director of the Colombo-based International Centre of Ethnic Studies, states: "they are not initiators of ideas, they are only implementers of policy made by someone else, by men, and they become cogs in the wheel of someone else's designs and plans. They are the consumers not the producers of the grand political project" (Coomaraswamy quoted in Alison: 2003, 47).

On the other hand, Alison stresses that the top decision making body is constituted by 12 members, 7 men and 5 women and that the high number of participation of women has influence on the group itself (Alison, 2004). According to a female member of LTTE, the female political wing is now considered more important by the LTTE women given that before they were represented in the military sections but not in the political ones. In her opinion, the political under-representation of women arises from the later involvement of them in comparison to men who have created the LTTE (Alison, 2003). As Adele Ann (from LTTE) stresses, the basic goal that women have achieved by joining the fight is the breaking of their traditional societal roles, although in my view this corresponds to the overthrow of a sexist pattern without the creation of a concrete alternative. The risk is being entrapped in a vague ideal of women warriors without a commitment for women's role outside from the armed fight.

"Parliamentary politics and non-violent struggle remain within the acceptable domain of women's behaviour. The history of women in combat in the armed struggle is a chronicle of a fundamentally different order. Women in combat belong to a totally new world, a world outside a normal woman's life. And that is what makes these women fighters so interesting and admirable. They have taken up a life that bears little resemblance at all to the ordinary existence of women" (Ann, 1993).

Abuses on women by LTTE

All the members of LTTE are given a cyanide capsule. The LTTE recommend them to take it whenever they get caught by the enemy. Women (and girls) are especially convinced with the argument that they will suffer abuses and will be tortured by the Sri Lankan army, implying rape and sexual abuses (Keirns: 2004, 6). Suicide attacks or particularly dangerous missions are celebrated after the death of the combatant in the "Hero's welcome". The dead combatant will be honoured and whenever some fighters manage to save their own life, they will be respected and promoted. This was a strong motivation for male and female members to become martyrs. A girl

from LTTE reported how for her it was important to feel the respect and admiration of the comrades by doing this kind of actions (Keirns, 2004). I suggest that for women this is a very important issue given also the strong female involvement in the suicide squad. According to Keirns, “the ultimate identity as soldier in Sri Lanka would have been swallowing the cyanide capsule they had been issued. It both confirmed and ended their identity as soldier” (Keirns: 2004, 15).

Child soldiers are forced to watch their fellow soldiers convulse after taking the cyanide capsule or observe them being shot if they did not want to take the capsule (Keirns, 2004). The girls interviewed had been forced to commit massacres on civilians especially if they were under control of higher ranks (Keirns, 2004). With regard to abuses against women of Tamil civil society it is very difficult to obtain information as the censure is very strong in the areas of Tamil Eelam. Nevertheless some articles stated that “it has attacked Tamil women who have dared to dissent and think independently, portraying them as ‘loose’ westernised women, who had turned their back on Tamil tradition and culture” (The Hindu, 2002). Moreover the University Teachers for Human Rights (UTHR) has documented how Tigers are using their women fighters to oppress Tamil women outside the organisation. According to its report, the UTHR says the LTTE had in its prisons, until 1990, 200 Tamil women because they disagreed with its politics (UTHR, 1995).

The report of UTHR focused on some experiences of women who were arrested by LTTE during the 1990s because they were considered linked to the EPRLF (Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front)²⁴, through the participation of a brother, father or son or in the IPKF (Indian Peace Keeping Forces). They were brought in women's detention camps where they were submitted to torture by women of LTTE in order to obtain information (UTHR, 1995). Other reports show even attacks to women activists committed to peace who opposed integration with the LTTE wing.

²⁴ This was another Tamil insurgent group with a Marxist orientation, which was persecuted and progressively eliminated by LTTE.

COLOMBIA CASE STUDY



Jeremy Mc Dermott. BBC News, Friday, 4 January, 2002, available at www.latinamericanstudies/farc/farc-females.htm or <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/1742217.stm>

Background: The Colombian conflict

The conflict in Colombia is deeply rooted, existing since the time of independence. Nevertheless the historical period called *Violencia* started in 1948, when the liberal leader Eliecer Gaitan was killed by agents of the Conservative Party. As Gaitan had strong popular support, because of his political closeness to the lower classes (land-reform was one of the main points of his programme), a huge popular revolt spread first in Bogotá (the so-called *Bogotazo*) and then through the whole country. The conservative attempts to repress the rebellion were made through death squadrons who provoked massacres and displacement especially in the districts of the liberal rebellion. At the same time the liberal party mobilized people forming various armed groups with the initial aim to contrast the bloody actions of the conservative wing. The country fell into a state of permanent civil war and around 300.000 persons died in ten years. This kind of political violence has seen different stages, but it has never stopped.

The conservative and liberal wings continued to fight for power until 1958, when the two parties decided, through the creation of the National Front, to share public office and to alternate each other in the presidency. In the meantime the practice of armed conflict, as a means of solving political interests and gaining resources, became more and more consolidated. A law made in 1968 legitimated people to form self-defence groups (armed by the State), as the Government declared itself unable to grant security to the citizens. Military and paramilitary forces, as well as self-defence corps of citizens and guerrilla groups, were the main actors of political violence until the eighties, when drugs Mafia entered into the conflict, strongly contributing to its intensification. Their interests were focused on economic resources (the land to cultivate coca plantations) and politics²⁵ (laws against extradition²⁶, political participation in the government, possibility to exploit more resources).

The connections between drugs and emerald illicit economies, the Government and the landowners were (and still are) not very clear, but their political and economic interests converged during the later eighties against both the political programme of guerrilla groups and their control of some districts²⁷. Indeed between 1986 and 1990 paramilitary corps, in connection with narco-

²⁵ In 1982 Pablo Escobar, the most active narcotic trafficker of the time, was elected substitute of the senator Jaime Ortega by the Colombian Congress. Afterwards in 1984 Escobar proposed to the president Lopez Michelsen to pay one-fourth of the external debt of the country (three billions of US dollars) in exchange for the amnesty by the crimes he was charged with.

²⁶ In 1990 the drugs Mafia led by Escobar, kidnapped ten journalists, mostly relatives of ex-presidents of the Colombian Republic, in order to pressure the Government to reject the law on extradition strongly urged by US.

²⁷ For drugs Mafia the FARC were a very disturbing element. FARC initially established some rules regarding peasants who cultivate coca within their area of control: only one third of the land had to be dedicated to this plantations and the other two thirds had to maintain the traditional cultivations. Moreover, the drug traffickers, as well as the prosperous farmers of coca, had to pay a "drug trade tax" to the FARC, which was a kind of extortion which led to the belief that

traffic leaders²⁸, took action with the acquiescence of the military and of the Government itself, killing members of the UP (Union Patriótica) political party, which was formed as the legal wing affiliated to the FARC in exchange for their demilitarization.

Since the end of the eighties, syndicate leaders, human rights activists, judges, journalists and leaders of communities were also strongly targeted by paramilitary groups, who provoked huge numbers of displaced persons, massacres and intimidation to civilian people. On the other side, the two main guerrilla groups, FARC and ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional)²⁹, are also responsible for terror and killings, specially when they judge that civilian populations collaborate to help paramilitary forces (who usually don't ask but pretend information by the communities, using their warfare methods on the population). In 1999 the Pastrana Government began a process of peace negotiations, granting to the FARC a ceasefire on a demilitarized zone, S. Vicente del Caguan, where the peace talks had to take place. The 12 points on the agenda remained without agreement by the two parts, and the peace process failed definitely when President Uribe was elected in August 2002. His political programme was contrary to the negotiation, as he declared a new war against the FARC, promising to restore security and peace by the elimination of guerrilla groups. Actually the political violence is stronger than ever, due to the militarization of civil society by Uribe (see at the first chapter, p.18) and to the powerful control of the FARC mainly on the southern regions of Colombia. Moreover, President Uribe recently started a process of negotiation with the paramilitary groups in order to demobilize them, but this kind of politics is actually very discredited, given the links between the government and these groups to repress the population and the discover of connections between paramilitary groups and Mafia's drugs³⁰ (Podur, 2005).

Finally US policy, through the infamous Plan Colombia, is financially supporting the fight against the guerrilla groups, on behalf of the eradication of drug plantations. Of course, it is also damaging the ecosystem and the peasant and indigenous communities by the fumigations that take place every year in various areas of Colombia, especially in those controlled by the guerrilla groups.

guerrillas were involved in the narco-traffic trade. Nevertheless they didn't participate in the illicit trade of coca although they continued to impose the drug-tax. For more details see at Prolongeau H., *La vita quotidiana in Colombia al tempo del Cartello di Medellin*, Milano, Rizzoli, 1994; Arena C., *Attualità colombiana. Guerriglia e narcotraffico*, Sassari, Editrice Democratica Sarda, 1997.

²⁸ In 1981 the paramilitary group M.A.S. (Muerte A los Secuestradores) was created in order to fight the guerrilla groups (particularly the M-19) who had kidnapped the relatives of narco-traffickers.

²⁹ The M-19 (Movimiento 19 de Abril) was eliminated after 1990, when its leaders (candidates for presidential elections) were murdered.

³⁰ In 2004, "Italian police raids captured over 100 important Mafia figures along with tons of cocaine. The arrests revealed extensive links between the narcotrafficking organizations of the Italian Mafia and the Colombian paramilitaries, by way of the paramilitary leader who had made a televised address to the nation just months before, Salvatore Mancuso." (Podur, 2005)

The roots and evolution of the F.A.R.C.

The FARC arose in 1964, when a military operation ordered by the Government, with the support of US policy and funding, took place in Marquetalia against the so-called “Independent Republic” which was formed by Manuel Marulanda (the actual chief of the FARC) and Jacobo Arenas (a Marxist ideologue), with the aim of creating self-management and military self-defence communities (Molano, 2000). Forty-eight guerrillas, among them two women, managed to escape from the attack and afterwards created the FARC in the mountains of Cauca, a south-western region where they hid. Clearly, since the beginning, the US invasive interests, foreign business enterprises, landowners’ oligarchy and government authoritarian politics were targeted as the oppressive powers to fight on behalf of the Colombian people.

Indeed, the FARC defined themselves as the People Army (FARC-EP, Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia- Ejercito del Pueblo) as they believed in the strong involvement of the lower classes to see addressed their right to education, health care, employment, housing and land as well as their right to participate to political decisions. As written in the FARC’s statute “Our organization and arms should always be at the service of the people so that we are seen as their army. It is very important to transmit always our politics to the masses, so that they are conscious of it and therefore can participate in the struggle” (FARC-EP, 2000). This purpose was reached during the seventies and the early eighties, as from 1970 to 1982 FARC grew from 500 to 3000 members (Molano, 2000). Their popular support was found mostly among peasants but even intellectuals, students and workers who protested against the governmental repression of strikes and peasant movements. By 1986 the FARC had risen to 3.600 members, reaching 7000 in 1995, 15.000 in 2000 (Safford & Palacios, 2002) until almost 20.000 in 2005 (UNIFEM, 2004).

The history of the FARC is characterised by attempts to negotiate peace with different heads of government. The most famous started under the Presidency of Belisario Betancourt (1982-86) who achieved a partial ceasefire with the FARC through the formation of a political wing affiliated to it (UP, Union Patriótica). This political party achieved a significant parliamentary representation during the elections in 1986, but it was progressively eliminated by paramilitary groups during the following years. Around 4000 members of the UP were killed as well as four presidential candidates in 1989 (Carlos Pizarro of the M-19, Jaime Pardo Leal of the UP, followed closely by his replacement, Bernardo Jaramillo, and the Liberal Luis Carlos Galan) (Prolongeau, 1994). Meanwhile (1987) FARC joined other rebel groups in the Simon Bolivar Coordinating Guerrilla Groups (CGSB) to form a guerrillas’ alliance in order to face the escalation of violence against them.

Other negotiations were led by President Gaviria (1990-1994) in order to allow the participation of insurgent groups in the formulation of the new Constitution (approved in 1991). The Government offered only six of seventy places to CGSB within the Constituent Assembly (charged with writing the draft), because of the pressure of the military. Indeed one of the purposes of the CGSB was to restructure the army force. During these dialogues held in Venezuela (Caracas), the only agreements reached were about the nomination of a civilian as Minister of Defence (a position reserved for the military since the onset of the National Front) and the decision to outlaw the paramilitary 'self-defence' groups (Molano, 2000). The next round of talks took place in Mexico (Tlaxacala) in 1992. The CGSB (mainly constituted by members of the FARC, the ELN and the EPL) was not working well, as every group had its own fear with regard to the involvement of the other insurgent groups in the peace dialogues.

FARC was considered the driving force, within the CGBS, of the peace negotiations, so that the other groups were afraid to perform a secondary role. This was clear when the EPL provoked the collapse of the peace talks, breaking the ceasefire through the kidnapping and murder of the former Conservative Cabinet minister Argelino Duran. Moreover, as the model of the liberal economies was the disputed point of the Tlaxacala's dialogues, all the business associations criticized the Government for the decision to discuss this kind of issues with illegal groups who did not have a legitimate position in the Colombian society. This remains a crucial debate for the solution of the conflict, given that the recognition of the insurgent groups as agents within the political agenda could lead to a reconciliation process, but it would imply their role of combatants within a context of internal conflict. Both the government and the insurgent groups know this possibility. In 1995, the Constitutional Court, with regard to the constitutionality of Protocol II of the Geneva Conventions in conformity with the Law 171 (whereby such Protocol is approved), declared it applicable, recognizing its importance for the Colombian conflict:

“As regards the situation in Colombia, application of these rules (the obligations deriving from the principle of distinction) by the parties to a conflict is particularly binding and important, since the armed conflict currently affecting the country has seriously affected the civilian population, as evidenced by the alarming data on the forced displacement of persons included in this case” (Sassoli & Boivier: 1999, 1367).

In the same way the possibility to “foster reconciliation between the parties” is linked (according to the Court) to the respect of the rules of International Humanitarian Law which “encourages mutual recognition by the protagonists and therefore promotes the peace process and the reconciliation of societies disrupted by armed conflict” (Sassoli & Boivier: 1999, 1363). Even the FARC is conscious of IHL rules for the peaceful resolution of internal conflicts. Indeed they recognize themselves as a belligerent actor within the conflict, declaring that their statute and their practice are in conformity with the protection of civilians as well as with the principle of distinction.

They produced a document underlying their compliance with IHL in order to show their state of belligerence:

“It (the document) concerns the state of belligerence covered by the international rules contained within the Geneva Conventions of August 12 1949 and especially the additional protocols. The material clearly demonstrates that the FARC-EP has all the conditions so that it can be recognized as a belligerent force, in its structure and in practice. The Colombian Government and State have even recognized this. Despite this, there has not been any advancement in the juridical Status of the situation, which as is known concerns aspects of law in its different variations, the most decisive legal aspect being the political” (FARC-EP, 2000).

Actually their respect for the civilian population is far from the required standard of IHL rules. Many reports denounce the FARC’s abuses with regard to kidnappings, murder and extortions to communities living in the so-called ‘red zones’ (areas where the army, paramilitary groups and insurgent groups are fighting for the control of the territory) (Amnesty, 2004). It is also true that the army, with the consent of the Government, attributes its own abuses to the FARC in order to not cover responsibility and to shame this insurgent group (Molano, 2004). The United Nation High Commissioner for Human Rights for the Human Rights situation in Colombia reported that the practice of paying demobilized persons to provide false testimony is also recurrent (UNHCHR, 2004). Nevertheless, FARC are responsible for the 16 % of murders against female activists, they practice sexual abuse and recruit minors (Amnesty, 2004).

Flor Romero reported on a massacre in the Choco (a region inhabited mainly by black communities), known as the massacre of Bojayà, where the FARC put bombs in the church where scared civilians went to seek refuge from the attack (Romero, 2003). On the other side, FARC tends to deny these kinds of abuse. It is also important to say that freedom of expression within the FARC is very limited by their military structure. For instance, recruits are not allowed to disagree with political choices or with military actions, included those against civilians:

“Seven to 8:00 p.m. was the hour of TV news. At 8:00 to 9:00 p.m., we’d talk about what we had seen. But you had to take the correct line. If you didn’t agree, you kept quiet. Because if not, they’d wonder why you were defending the government. They’d think you were an infiltrator. You said nothing. For example, if you saw on TV that the FARC-EP did something bad, like destroy a house with women and children inside, you’d keep quiet” (Human Rights Watch: 2004).

Indeed, FARC continue to consider themselves as a political power closer to peasants, so that they constitute themselves as a little State within the State. Simone Trinidad, a commander involved in the last peace talks who was captured in 2004 and extradited to US, declared that people go to the FARC to see addressed their disputes with neighbours or their problems within the family. Although he didn’t agree about the FARC’s voluntary replacement of the State functions, as judiciary or executive, he said that it was a necessity to do it on behalf of the peasants (Leech, 2000). FARC also contains a clandestine revolutionary organization, called the Bolivarian

Movement for a New Colombia, which is considered the political alternative for the constitution of a new Colombian state, led by the lowest classes.

In 1998 President Andres Pastrana visited the FARC-EP camps and met with their Commander Manuel Marulanda Velez. In the same year, members of the National Secretariat of the FARC-EP met with a governmental delegation. Finally, it was on the 7th of January 1999, that public peace talks in San Vicente del Caguan (region of Caqueta) were officially established. This area was one of the five municipalities demilitarized by the Government as a condition demanded by the FARC-EP for the peace talks. National and international guests, representatives of the powers of the state and the accredited diplomatic body of Colombia participated in the negotiations. The failure of these peace talks led to another stage of intensified violence in which the FARC, now considered a terrorist group, are showing their military strength in opposition to the bloody attempts by the government to destroy them.

Data on female participation in the FARC:

According to UNIFEM, “today one third of FARC forces are women” (UNIFEM, 2004). Indeed, they are around 6.000 of 18.000 combatants within this insurgent group. Nevertheless some sources suppose that female members of the FARC are near to the 45% (UNIFEM, 2004). Rebel leaders of the FARC said in 2001 that between 30% and the 40% is made up by women (Brown, 2001); although the majority of sources agree that the most accurate percentage is around the 30%. In 2001 FARC members were estimated at 17.000 (Brown, 2001) (Leech, 2001), so since the time of the last peace negotiations to this moment their growth has been quite strong (1000 more combatants). Indeed it seems that during the period of the demilitarized zone, recruitment and training were intensified within the FARC. Particularly, many of the new arrivals during 2000 and 2001 were women. Nevertheless their increased participation, according to Brown, is visible since 1997: “The sharpest rise has come since mid-1997, when fewer than one-in-five FARC guerrillas were women” (Brown, 2001). There are even some motivations because FARC are recruiting more women than in the past.

The first factor seems strategic: the role of women in intelligence tasks has been appreciated during different military operations. Women can easily infiltrate themselves as house-maids in luxury buildings and provide information about persons targeted by the insurgent group for kidnapping or murder. In July 2001 the column Teofilo Forero used this method to prepare the kidnapping of 15 people in Neiva (Mcdermott, 2002). By assuming the traditional stereotype of seductive women sometimes they are required to extort information from policemen about important strategic matters. According to a Colombian NGO, in 2003 three girls were killed by the FARC because refused to use seduction to obtain information (UNIFEM, 2004). Another factor

seems to be the lack of combatant men with relation to the intensified violence (McDermott,2002) (Woroniuk, 2002): “the presence of so many female combatants at La Plata shows FARC is increasingly forced to rely on its women warriors as the intensifying war puts the rebels under greater pressure” (Woroniuk, 2002). The journalist is speaking about a bloody fight near the southern city of La Plata where 52 persons between the army and FARC rebels (with a high percentage of young women) died in July 2002. Of course not all female members of the FARC are combatants on the frontlines. Some are fighters, some others are working in intelligence roles, recruitment, tasks of propaganda or traditional gender roles such as cooking and cleaning. Nevertheless the initial training in combat is obligatory for all members, without taking into account the coming tasks.

Motivations of the female participation in the armed struggle

As I explained in the second chapter there are many reasons that contribute to female involvement in the armed fight. Apart from the personal motivation and experience of every woman joining the struggle, the Colombian context presents basically three pushing factors with regard to this choice: the feminization of poverty, the widespread violence linked to displacement and human right abuses and, particularly for minors, the crisis of the traditional family structure (mainly within the rural areas) affected by economic difficulties and often by domestic violence. Of course all three elements are in relation to each other, but usually one of the three mentioned elements is stronger than the others. There is even an ideological component among the factors of women’s involvement in the struggle, although I found few cases related to it, being many young women politically indoctrinated within the FARC, and afterwards becoming more conscious about the reasons and purposes of the armed fight.

The feminization of poverty is provoked by the deeply rooted sexist structure of society: women earn less than men doing the same job (wage of 66% lower than men according to Brown), they have a low degree of literacy which affects their access to work and they are often charged with the whole family’s economic survival (there is a very high percentage of women who are the head of the family). This situation is often mentioned by studies on the topic of Colombian women joining insurgent groups (Keirns, 2002) (Amnesty, 2004) (UNIFEM, 2004) (Human Rights Watch, 2003) or developing other kinds of illegal activities, including prostitution, in order to survive (Leech, 2002). Even members of the FARC, at different levels of command, mention women’s economic difficulties as a strong factor for their involvement in the group. Some interviews with women combatants (from peasant families of Southern Putumayo and Huila, which indeed are very poor areas) confirm this trend: they joined because they couldn’t find a job and their families were unable to feed the newborn children (Brown, 2001). Olga Marin, wife of Raul Reyes (the official

spokesman of the FARC), works with the team of FARC envoys who travel trying to achieve international support. Her opinion is quite similar: “The economic crisis has meant that women cannot find a suitable place in society and see greater possibilities in the armed struggle” (Brown, 2001). The FARC Commander Simón Trinidad underlined that in Colombia there are many young girls, “exploited in the coal mines, the gold mines, the emerald mines, and in the coca and poppy fields”, as many of them “in the streets of the cities doing drugs, inhaling gasoline and glue”. Trinidad added even the story of a girl (voluntarily joining the FARC) who was sent back home because she was too young, although afterwards she started to work in prostitution: “She is 14 years old. A child prostitute. She was better in the guerrillas. In the guerrillas we have dignity, respect and we provide them with clothes, food and education” (Leech, 2000). This is a classic explanation for recruitment of minors by FARC members. Some combatant women from Colombia explained during a workshop held in Geneva that the FARC offer protection to young girls at risk of abuses by the military (or paramilitary groups) (Mazurana, 2004).

Apart from the moral (and juridical) judgements regarding these justifications, it is also true that young girls and women go to FARC to seek revenge or to address their security problems: “I just wanted revenge and although I was very young, I begged the guerrillas to let me go with them” pointed out a twenty seven years old female combatant who saw abuses on her family when she was only twelve (Brown, 2001). Eliana Gonzales, one of the oldest female guerrillas (fifty years old; she joined the FARC when she was eighteen) said: “I am a daughter of the violence that has isolated this country for the last 40 years”. After her mother died of illness and her father was killed in a political dispute, she decided to enter the FARC. Her first husband and her son (only eleven years old) have been also killed for political reasons (the son because her mother is a guerrilla). But the most interesting thing she said is about her daughter, who also joined the guerrilla after her father’s death: “She has done well, she has learned a lot. Here you learn who you are. You feel fulfilled because in the civil life you are just one more on the misery belt around the cities” (Galdos, 2004). Unintentionally Eliana explained another reason of involvement for girls and women: the perspective of an adventurous life and the performance of an active and important role far from the daily life of exploitation and misery. Indeed she is not the only one who declared the charm of the guerrilla life in opposition to the lack of greater alternatives: “I went because I was bored at home and thought that life with the guerrillas would be an adventure. At 13 I did not know what I wanted to do, I did not realise that I could study like I am now” (McDermott, 2002) said an ex female guerrilla who deserted the FARC. Of course this is even an appealing reason for men, but for women there is an added component, given that they can fulfil themselves in a way that does not exist in civil life. A group of ex-combatant girls interviewed in a rehabilitation centre told that,

within the guerrilla group, they participated in “criticism” groups where they developed communication skills, gained knowledge and progressively learned to teach to other members: “If it were not for the fighting, the girls would have preferred life in the armed group over their life as a civilian” (Keirns: 2002, 4). Women can become commanders, perform tasks of responsibility, give orders and express their opinion in the established spaces for it (political debates, training groups, workshops). This is quite different from the traditional rural life in Colombian society. Finally, another gendered reason for female involvement is the high percentage of sexual abuses and domestic violence within the family. Of course minors are more at risk:

“My father [sexually] abused me from the age of five. He didn't want me to study or talk to anyone. Just work milking the cows. My mother knew nothing. He gave the orders. My father came looking for me but I didn't go back. The FARC gave me an AK-47 with three ammunition magazines, clothes and boots. He [the father] couldn't hurt me any more. [...] Now that I am no longer fighting, I would like to go somewhere else to study and work. Because I am worth it. I've never told anyone about the abuse. Nobody has ever asked me about it before. And anyway you keep quiet about such things. All I knew was that I had to get away” (Amnesty: 2004, 12).

Equality issues: what equality means within the FARC

Many female members of the FARC are very determined when they explain in what way the FARC intend equality and non-discrimination principles within the group. They have clearly repeated during various interviews that there is not sexual exploitation within the FARC and that women have the same duties of their male counterparts. They strongly underlined that women don't enjoy concessions because of gender, specially when they have to perform physical hardly tasks, as “hiking over rough countryside with backpacks weighing up to 75 pounds, or frontline combat duties” (Brown, 2001). Indeed the women's opinion about equality is often considered in relation to physical and professional attributes that are judged as being the same as men: “Women are not treated differently, we do not cut them any slack during training or operations. (...) They march with the men, they carry their equipment and they fight just the same” told Marianna Paez, a thirty-eight year old female commander (McDermott, 2002) who participated in the peace talks in 2001. And indeed women and men are trained together, go to the same military operations and there are not separated corps of women combatants.

Equality is an issue often mentioned within the FARC, by the political and social point of view to the gender perspective. So, just as there should be equality between the rich and the poor, the black and the white, women, and even children, are treated with equality in the sense that they are required to do the same things that men do like embrace arms, be trained in politics and express their support for the fight. In order to eliminate any kind of discrimination, strict rules of behaviour have to be followed: “Regulations have no friends” is the meaningful saying within the camps about

discipline, which is indeed considered one of the pillar of equality (Human Rights Watch, 2003). Punishments for serious infractions are usually decided by war councils, where all the participants of the front vote for which punishment has to be used (death or a lesser punishment), which in a sense represents a way to reproduce a 'democratic' structure of judgement. Sometimes executions are used to show that friendship or any kind of strict relationships should not interfere in the judgements: a friend who votes 'no' to the death penalty at the war council is probably chosen to execute the transgressor. I want to mention an example of summary execution in relation to the idea of gender equality within some fronts of the FARC:

"Marcos, the gun expert, told us how three adolescent girls--aged fourteen, sixteen, and nineteen--defended a girl accused of being a police infiltrator. The trio insisted that the accused be spared to respect her rights as a woman (the war council was held on International Women's Day). The war council voted that she be killed. The girls who had defended her were selected to pull the trigger" (Human Rights Watch, 2004).

In general, principles of positive discrimination (although the case mentioned is not the best to talk about positive discrimination) are considered as privileges that could damage the order among comrades, which is not as horizontal as the strict rules of conduct could suggest. FARC follow a vertical hierarchical structure of power and commandants have discretionary powers about slighter infractions and permissions that usually should not contradict the Statute. Nevertheless top ranks can authorize or alter decisions on executions and other important matters.

Indeed, the criticism that Flor Romero³¹ offers about gender and hierarchical order is focused on the favouritism which protects the wives of the high quarter chiefs and, in general, the female relatives of guerrilla men, from the risks of the armed fight:

"The curious thing is that the daughters or wives of the guerrilla men do not increase the commando troops. Just to let you know, neither the partner of Manuel Marulanda, known as Tirofixo and chief of the FARC, nor the ones of the other chiefs participate in military operations. There are not sisters, mothers or daughters of the guerrilla men in the ranks. Neither Olga Marin, or Liliana Lopez, wife of Raul Reyes, spokesman of the FARC, fights. She is chief of the Public International Relations and just attends meetings³² (Romero, 2003)

On the other side, during an interview with the review *Links*, the just mentioned Olga Marín confirmed that the lack of specific policies about FARC's women does not imply that discrimination is allowed, although she recognized that sexism is a reality even within the FARC:

Journalist: Does the FARC have specific policies to promote women?

Marín: As a policy, no. The FARC is a military political organisation for women and men and there are no different rules based on gender. There is a clause in our platform stating that women are free to be active in the guerrilla movement and prohibiting discrimination. As in every society, and as Colombians brought up in

³¹ A Colombian writer, President of UNEDA (Union of American Writers).

³² The translation is mine.

a capitalist society with its associated class relations, sexism is real, both in men and women. But of the women within the FARC, some 30 per cent, many are in mid-level leadership positions in the various fronts. Those who are able and willing can fight at the front line. Others choose to become involved in educational or political work. As women, we often have to fight against our own weaknesses, against our own form of sexism as well as sexism of the men (Jennings, 1997).

The conception that Olga Marín underlines about the breaking of sexism is indeed linked in her view to the elimination of women's vulnerability or 'weakness' through the fight, or through the general participation in the activities of the insurgent group. Nevertheless, this is the central point that leads once again to the assumption of the sexist value of male strength as the guiding rule for the women's behaviour: they have to be strong as men are. In a sense the masculinisation of women becomes the goal of the gender's equality.

Even though women pay for their involvement in the armed struggle by renouncing maternity and developing traditional men's skills, none of them is in the group of the seven persons ruling council, which is still an all male domain. In the same way there are other signals of inequality within the FARC, as in the fact that men are usually allowed to have love or sexual relationships outside the camps while the majority of women are not³³ (McDermott, 2002). Maria Eugenia Vasquez Perdomo was a combatant in the former M-19, where the concept of equality was quite similar to the FARC: "The fact that I was a woman by biological definition didn't bother me, but I wasn't very aware of what it meant, either, in world that made us all the same in ideology. Equality weighed more than difference" (Schmidt, 2003).

Issues of maternity: pregnancy and forced contraception

"Despite FARC's drive to employ more female guerrillas, women provide the domestic labour in the camps and are vulnerable to unscrupulous leader who enforce strict decorum from their foot soldiers but not on themselves. The FARC impose strict rules on sexual relationships and forbid pregnancy, which often results in forced contraceptive use abortion and abortions" (UNIFEM, 2005). Indeed, love relationship is not forbidden but it is obligatory to ask permission from the commander to form or to break a couple and to have a sexual relationship, which implies a very intrusive attitude in the intimate life of the combatants (Human Rights Watch, 2003). The commanders can even decide to stop a love relationship between a couple, namely because it is interfering with the guerrilla work (Mc Dermott, 2002). They usually are charged with birth control within the front and give contraceptives to the male and female members when they ask permission to have sexual relationships.

The use of contraceptive measures is not a choice up to combatants but has become a rigid

³³ This different treatment has been justified by a female guerrilla saying that within the FARC women are not exposed to sexual abuses (McDermott, 2002).

rule: “Well it is not written anywhere that we cannot have kids, but there is an obligation to plan against such. (...) It is understood that we are professional revolutionaries. Now while that might not be stated when you join, slowly that is made clear to you, as it is very difficult to be a revolutionary and be a mother” said the commander Marianna Paez (Mc Dermott, 2002). The forced contraception is mentioned by many sources. A study conducted on female soldiers found that within the guerrilla group girls receive contraception “immediately upon their entry into the armed group” (Keirns: 2002, 9). Mostly they were given an injection every six months, while condoms were used only by men infected by HIV. Indeed a girl reported that contraception, like pregnancy, were considered matters for women. It is considered their responsibility to take precautionary measures because, as the commander explained, women make the decision about the possibility to have sex with their male comrades. Pregnancy is strictly forbidden and the women are warned about this since the beginning of their involvement. In case of pregnancy abortion is the main outcome, even when women don’t agree. Another girl pointed out that pregnant women could be even killed for this (Keirns, 2002).

This is not only a practice of the FARC. Vera Grave, a senator who belonged to the M-19, wrote in her book that women were not allowed to have children. She had to abort as her partner simply said that any other solution was not possible:

“What for many people represents an ethical or juridical question constitutes for us (the women guerrilla) pain and violence. This has been one of the most critical debates with myself” (Grave: 2002, 179).

Olga Marín from the FARC takes another perspective:

“Why are women the ones who should renounce this fight (the guerrilla’s fight)? Why are women the ones who should solve the problem of children by desisting from their contribution to the (guerrilla’s) project and from their self-development? Why should always women have to sacrifice themselves?” (Lara: 2002, 117).

For security reasons, women who belong to the FARC, ELN, EPL (and the past M-19) cannot maintain contact with their sons or daughters. Of course some women (especially among the veteran ones) manage to write to their families or to visit them once a time, although this is not usually allowed. Others could carry on their pregnancy (with the special permission of top ranks), but they had to leave their children to civil relatives, the more possible far from the struggle. It is clear that for women the choice to join guerrilla groups represents an out-out, that is family or fight. And indeed many of them say that the guerrilla group has become their family (Galdos, 2004) (Keirns, 2004). This is true for men too, but as I underlined, they are freer to go out from the camps and, within the Colombian society, are considered less responsible about the growth of children. Indeed civil society often shames guerrilla women for leaving their sons and daughters. I would like to mention an article published within *El Espectador*, one of the main newspapers of Colombia. It was written at the time of the peace talks when women of the FARC began to tell their stories to the

journalists.

“Within the camps there is no dispute neither about the priority that the women give to their own interests to the detriment of their children, nor with regard to the respect of freedom. On the contrary, for these skilled women everything is all right. It is said that female guerrillas are very responsible women- which kind of reputability are we talking about? by leaving their children alone? - and that they assume with more passion commitments and challenges- by kidnapping innocent civilians?-. Responsibility is the last quality that could be attributed to these women” (El Espectador, 1999)³⁴.

This constitutes an important issue for DDR programmes, which will have to face in the majority of cases disrupted families and often the rejection both by children who feel abandoned and by the society that does not accept the image of women combatants or the renunciation of the role of maternity.

Violence of the FARC against women.

Although sexual abuse is forbidden within the FARC, UNIFEM reported that girls are often abducted and some of them reduced to sexual slavery (UNIFEM, 2004). The rules establish that rape should be punished with execution by the war council. According to the normal procedure, a sexually abused woman first must report it to the commander (McDermott, 2002). Nevertheless others studies report that usually women don't tell about abuses they suffered because this could put them at risk if the aggressor is not considered guilty. And if he is executed they face hostility from the ranks (Mazurana, 2004). Moreover there are many cases of middle and high level commanders who have sexual relationships with girls between twelve and fourteen, because of the privileges or protection that commanders could provide to the girls (Human Rights Watch reports that commanders often give presents or money to the girls just arrived to the camp) (Human Rights Watch, 2003) (Gonzales, 2002). Rape is considered a serious crime even if perpetrated against civilian women. In general FARC say that they try to not damage the civilian population, and especially women, because often they rely on their help for food, information, clothes washing or any kind of goods that are not available in the camps (Mazurana, 2004). Nevertheless, problems arise when someone is suspected of collaboration with the Government, army or paramilitary groups. There are cases of women who have been raped once they were captured by the FARC:

“Members of the FARC have also carried out sexual assaults on women and girls living in areas where the group has a presence. Breaches of the ban on civilians fraternizing with members of the security forces or paramilitaries have sometimes resulted in rape and killings. In some areas, the FARC have declared women and girls who associate with soldiers and police to be ‘military targets’. Sexual abuse is sometimes the punishment meted out to women and girls who ‘transgress’ in this way” (Amnesty, 2004).

Of course desertion is another reason to be executed, and in many cases girls and women escape

³⁴ My translation.

because they do not want to have an abortion (Human Rights Watch, 2003) (Guillermo Gonzales, 2002).

Now, there is another issue that I would like to outline about sexist stereotypes which lead FARC to exercise gendered violence. The UN Commissioner for Human Rights told that in Colombia “lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgenders were also victims of abuses and discrimination, including mistreatment and acts of ‘social cleansing’, because of their sexual orientation” (UNHCHR, 2004). In particular for the FARC, prostitution and homosexuality are generally considered transgressive practices that have to be eradicated or at least discouraged. An interesting article from Amnesty International described how two lesbians were forced to leave their house by the FARC. Paramilitary groups target lesbians too, and rape and kill them. Amnesty underlines that these armed groups, fighting each other, are curiously close with regard to intolerance about sexual orientation and prostitution (Amnesty, 2004a). With regard to prostitution, this practice is not usually punished, but FARC can decide to ‘grant’ the custody of the children to the father if there arises some dispute between the couple (Leech, 2000). Another case is reported by a former (minor) combatant within the insurgent group, who was ordered to shoot a woman accused of “practicing witchcraft, of casting spells on people who she didn’t like and stealing things from people in the neighbourhood” (Human Rights Watch, 2003). Again stereotypes about witch – women or women considered sexually compromised are not alien to the FARC. Sexual control of women within the group is quite accepted by women too: “The guerrilla movement says that women are free here. But that means free to learn and act. That doesn’t mean, though, that she’s free to have five or six partners. If we’re carrying out the armed struggle, things have to be well-ordered”, said a female commander (Brown: 2001).

Other kinds of problems arise from the lack of proper contraceptive measures in relation to gender discrimination (as we have seen FARC women have to use mostly pills, injections and intrauterine dispositives): in the Department of Santander, UNIFEM found that seventy percent of former female combatants and camp followers present sexually transmitted diseases (UNIFEM, 2004). Moreover, the access to health care centres is very difficult both for guerrilla members and displaced persons, being the last ones prevented by the escalation of violence to move out from the place where they take refuge. (Elustondo, 2003).

According to Amnesty:

“Driven by homophobia, the armed groups have responded to the spread of HIV/AIDS by expelling civilians from their homes and killing individuals suspected of being infected, including members of their own forces. Women fighters were more likely to be killed than men, according to testimonies from former FARC combatants. It is the women who suffer all the consequences. Men are not obliged to use condoms but pregnancy is punished. While a woman who is HIV-positive may be shot, there are [infected] men who are not.” (Amnesty, 2004a)

It is also important to underline that “discipline in the FARC-EP is particularly strict, suggesting strongly that the abuses committed by guerrillas, including children, are the result of specific orders that have been carried out and are not the product of misconduct” (Human Rights Watch, 2003)

To conclude this exposition I would like to quote and afterwards comment “the international women’s day statement of the FARC”, in order to show how women officially are appealed to participate in the FARC struggle.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY STATEMENT OF THE FARC-EP

March 8, 2001

“The sublime expression of women must be valued in its tenderness, both in their sacrifice for their children and for the causes of freedom. From these two elements the integrity of the human being comes about.

Spartan women loved and trained their children for combat. In the same way, the Amazon women in the south and in the Gaitana in Colombia did the same against the European invaders in America. During the wars of independence they gave displays of courage that lit the path of the victors, among them Manuelita Sáenz. Finally, in the great universal conflicts of all times they have left their stamp of heroism. It is not in vain that the most beautiful symbol of the French revolution and of freedom is a woman.

The imperialist assault on Marquetalia in 1964, the origin of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia People’s Army, met the resistance of the women guerrillas Miriam Narváez and Judith Grisales. In the revolutionary assault on July 26, 1953 on the Moncada garrison in Cuba, there were Melba Hernández and Aidé Santamaría.

The class confrontation against capitalist exploitation produced, and continues to produce, episodes in which valour and sacrifice for the cause of the oppressed reaches such a level of intensity that humanity cannot but recognize and commemorate them every year. International Women’s Day praises those tragic moments in which the determination assumes epic proportions. In those moments, women have never wavered one instant in assuming that determination, with their physical death if necessary, in the face of enemy arrogance.

Humanity, in its incessant search for spaces and new forms of the confrontation of the social classes, in its universal dimension and in the 21st century, has brought us the possibility to objectively understand the commitment of the proletarian women to our class in the socialist framework as well as their inhuman conditions under capitalism. The first case exists in the context of the sciences, technology and social equality; in the latter case, under the weight of neoliberalism, misery and discrimination.

In socialism, women are in the forefront of all fields of human labour, even fighting to defend the homeland at the highest military levels. Under capitalism, they are leaders in the various forms of class struggle, which extend from the struggles in the streets to its highest expression in the form of guerrilla war.

For this reason, we want to send our Bolivarian greetings to all guerrilla women fighters of the FARC-EP, and to the women of Colombia and the world. Let your cries of anger and protest continue to be heard against social injustice, wherever it may happen.

With Bolivar for Peace and National Sovereignty

Opening new roads to the New Colombia

International Commission, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia People’s Army (FARC-EP)”

Marzo 8 de 2001

(Deconstructing stereotypes) Analysis of the women’s FARC statement: gender’s roles within the politic ideology of FARC-EP.

In order to analyse this brief Statement made in 2001 to celebrate the 8th of March I will recall some of the categories described during the second chapter of this thesis. As we have seen, the participation of women in the armed struggle links, at least theoretically, their involvement in politics to several women’s issues. This connection allows the creation of ideological space for women’s motivations for the fight, apparently giving back to them the important role that society has historically denied them. According to this operation, first women are defined, valued and praised for their most beautiful distinctive quality, which in this case is “tenderness”, following the stereotype of women’s sensibility. By then, this characteristic is linked both to the women’s ‘nature’, represented through the correlated “sacrifice for children” and to women’s history, to which they have supposedly contributed with their cause for freedom.

These two elements (nature and history), opposed by definition, are used to recognize the traditional role of women in society and, at the same time, to glorify their liberation's fight. Particularly, the latter element is framed against external actors, as colonising powers, rather than internal traditional rules that produce discrimination within the Colombian society. Indeed the element of freedom seems more functional to FARC's ideology, although the idea of "sacrifice", by then spoiled by the role of maternity, is quite remarkable of the whole statement. Even the myth of the Amazons, that traditionally symbolizes the female fight against male hegemony, is used in another sense, recalling the indigenous struggle against the European oppressor. The assimilation of Spartan women, the warrior's skills of the Amazons, the courage of Joan d'Arc and the sacrifice of Manuela Saenz are all elements that contribute to the framing of female engagement in the struggle as "epic".

From this perspective, the strong determination of women that do not hesitate in front of death has overthrown the women's vulnerability stereotype, making women instrumental heroines for the land-defence. The issue of discrimination is then used to mean that women may and should fight on behalf of themselves for the social justice against capitalism, without touching the point of their own oppression within the society. The ambiguity of the statement with regard to women depends on the combination of different ideological claims, selecting from them the slogans more suitable for female participation in the fight, through the use of more traditional stereotypes. Indeed, nationalist claims are linked with socialist ideals, by unifying the fight of Bolivar for independence with the struggle against the unfair system of capitalism. Consequently, women shift from mothers (by using the stereotype of women as mothers of the nation), to fighters for their land against the external oppressor (recalling the myth of the Amazon linked again to the feminization of the land), and then to a special category within the oppressed proletarian class (reminding issue's of women discrimination within the capitalist system). Women in the FARC are supposed to take all these struggle's traditions, opening themselves to an international claim of women's issues which do not go beyond the "proletarian" claims of socialism and the heroic commitment to the nation.

Conclusions

Taking into account that the aim of this thesis was to provide information about women's involvement in the armed fight I focused particularly on their roles, needs and perspectives with regard to gender equality. I will underline the main results of my research:

- a) Both Colombia and Sri Lanka are countries where the roles of women are underestimated from a political, economic and social point of view. Women that joined LTTE and FARC, although in the most of cases they did not initially hold specific gender goals, came to believe that their involvement was important also in addressing gender equality issues within their society. Indeed, the two case studies show how the need to be considered 'equal' to men played a great role in motivating women to carry on the fight and to assume a way of life completely different from the traditional female one.
- b) The same armed groups appealed to female participation by underlying the discrimination that women usually suffer due to their assignment in subordinate roles. LTTE and FARC both offer strong propaganda to pull women into the armed struggle with the promise that in that context they would be respected and considered capable to do everything that men do. From this perspective, the value of women combatants has been assimilated to an imitation of the male role in the fight, with all manner of sexist stereotypes that this assumption implies. As I showed in second chapter, the theoretical feminist framework agrees on the fact that men and women are socialized as aggressive or peaceful, respectively. Thus while the roles of warriors and protectors are usually assigned to men, women are traditionally identified as bearers of life, implying attributes of softness, vulnerability and emotionality. It is for this reason that the conception of women combatants has been used to symbolize the overthrow of a deeply rooted pattern which separates men from the women's sphere by attributing opposite characteristics to each other, thus leading to the 'sexual alienation' described by Betty Reardon.
- c) Nevertheless, the analysis of the two case studies reveals that women's involvement in the armed fight depends on various motivations among which the specific impact of war on women (conflict factors) and the traditional oppressive sexist practices that affect them within their societies (pre-conflict factors) are the main causes .
 - The conflict factors include displacement (given its huge proportion in both Sri Lanka and Colombian contexts), gender-specific threats to women (rape committed by the official army in Sri Lanka and by paramilitary groups in Colombia, high rates of domestic violence and

harassment, forced abduction of girls by the armed groups), and the disruption of traditional gender roles due to the conflict itself (high rates of widows, orphans and dispossessed people who have to provide to their own survival without the support of the traditional family's pattern). The desire of revenge for abuses suffered or seen makes also part of this set of reasons for women joining the insurgency in both contexts.

- The pre-conflict factors are linked to the traditional views of women's roles in the family and in the society where, especially in Sri Lanka, women are not allowed to develop their capability outside of the private sphere. Some women joined the struggle to avoid such pressure in order to achieve an alternative way of life.
- d) Both case studies reported how traditional gender restrictions were mostly removed within the armed groups although this 'freedom' was strictly ruled by a military hierarchical order that women could not question, even when issues as sexuality, marriage and pregnancy affect more them than their male counterparts. Thus, while women in the LTTE have to preserve their chastity by living separated from the male members and following specific rules to marry, women within the FARC are forced into abortions or the use of contraceptives dangerous to their health (male comrades are not submitted to specific rules in this regard). These characteristics are meaningful to an ambiguous policy about gender roles within the armed groups, especially taking into account that women are less represented than men in top decision making committees and that their goals are perceived as secondary to the fight itself.
- e) Apart from the implications for life within the camps, where (especially within the FARC) gender abuses have been reported, another important point is to understand how women are and will be involved in negotiations, peace talks and DDR programmes. Indeed, even during the conflict itself women could be important in promoting International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law. As Mazurana stresses: "Women within armed opposition forces may be more inclined than their male counterparts to view sexual assault against female civilians and members of their own forces and killing of children and civilians as unnecessary and abusive and seek ways to address or prevent it" (Mazurana: 2004, 45). The recognition of women's struggles could be a means to pressure armed opposition groups in promoting key aspects of IHL and IHR. This step is particularly advised during the pacification process because the participation of women in round-table meetings with international actors give them visibility and power to speak about this (for instance

formalizing or strengthening internal codes of conduct or disciplinary codes to incorporate IHL and IHR provisions). Nevertheless, concerning the two case studies, women seem not to yet have the necessary power, or possibly the willingness, to hold this kind of role within these armed groups, despite their high proportion in each.

- f) The issues of gender equality born or held within the insurgency, although not fully developed, could have both a positive and negative impact on the society at large. Indeed women within both groups reject traditional forms of gender oppression and push for ideals of liberation. At the same time, they do not recognize that the character of the armed struggle itself separates them from civil society, thus eliminating other possibilities to support feminist goals. Consequentially, the future outcome of their roles in post conflict periods are not so clear.
- According to Alison, “the recurring global pattern of women post war remarginalization and return to traditional roles” (Alison: 2004, 458) could be applicable to the LTTE. “Despite the LTTE’s official commitment to wide-ranging social change that includes altering gender relations and caste hierarchies, there remains a serious unanswered question about what will happen if LTTE women begin strongly pushing feminist issues that the male sector of the leadership do not agree with” (Alison: 2004, 458).
 - With regard to the FARC the failure of the last peace negotiations in 2002 closed, once again, any possibility to recognize the roles and goals of women within that movement, although it should be underlined that those peace talks included only one female member of the insurgent group: “Colombian women have never been represented as a sector at formal negotiations with guerrilla groups. However, during the 2002 negotiations between the FARC and the Pastrana administration, one woman participated in the Thematic Commission on Behalf on FARC and one woman participated in the Notable Commission.” (Rojas, 2004)

This is indicative of the risks of a peace-building process in which women combatants (and those belonging to sectors of civil society) are not considered as actors in the creation of democratic institutions.

- g) As I showed during the analysis, the image of women involved in the armed fight is not accepted by society, so that their difficult reintegration could be another reason for rejecting options of disarmament and demobilization. Women belonging to LTTE and FARC have a fearsome reputation and their choices could be seen as threatening the cultural expectations

on traditional gender roles. For this reason, a special concern about their needs in a post-conflict reconstruction is necessary, that also takes into account that their experience within the armed groups led mostly to a process of masculinization or the eradication of their 'femininity'.

- h) The last point to conclude these considerations deals with the comparison between the two case studies. I focused on the kinds of conflicts that involve the LTTE and the FARC and tried to explore their features with regard to the ideological premises of their fight and the gender's commitments to it.
- I found some similarities in propaganda that put an emphasis on women as proud warriors who defend the land and their right to address the historical discrimination against them. This kind of reasoning was extremely vague because neither group dealt with a concrete alternative for life's pattern. Indeed, the second similarity was given by the general lack of alternatives to a combat lifestyle for male and female members, who will potentially fight until the end without knowing whenever it may happen. Both FARC and LTTE have a deeply rooted experience of insurgency, they control huge parts of territory and population and they gain resources by their constant mobilization. The participation of women is linked to this reality and threatening practices impede them, as their male comrades, to leave the groups if they are willing to do so. In a few words, the commitment to the cause of nationalist freedom or social justice becomes compelling from the beginning of such a choice.
 - With regard to the differences between the two contexts, of course they depend on the particular evolution of the conflicts and on the cultural features in which they are framed. Nevertheless, I found few differences in the communal perception of women combatants in both contexts, taking into account that cultural and social habits are very different in Colombian and Sri Lankan societies. Probably it is the idea itself of women warriors that, being not legitimated, provokes a general alienation towards their humanity, transforming them into proud heroines in the view of the armed groups or strange deviations from the norm from the perspective of civil society.

Bibliography

Abeyssekera Sunila, *Women and Peace in Sri Lanka. Some Observations*, 1999, at www.isiswomen.org/wia/wia399/pea00002.html

Alison Miranda, *Cogs in the Wheel? Women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam*, in “Civil Wars”, vol. 4, 2003, pp. 37-54.

Alison Miranda, *Women as agent of political violence: Gendering Security*, in *Security Dialogue*, vol. 35. no 4, December 2004, pp. 447-463.

Amnesty International, *A Catalogue of failures: G8 arms exports and human rights violations*, UK, Amnesty International Publications, 2003.

Amnesty International, *Colombia. “Scarred bodies, Hidden crimes”. Sexual violence against women in the armed conflict*, New York, Amnesty international USA, 2004.

Amnesty International, *Stop violence against women. Colombia: sexual control and coercion*, 2004a at <http://www.amnestyusa.org/outfront/packet/LesbianCaseSheet.doc>.

Anbarasan Ethirajan, Sunila Abeykesera: *Peace Campaigner On A War-Torn Island*, 1999 at <http://www.unesco.org/courier/1999-09/uk/dires/txtl.htm>

Anderson Benedict, *Spread of Nationalism*, London, Verso, 1991.

Ann Adele, *Women Fighters of Liberation Tigers*, Jaffna, LTTE Publication Section, 1993.

Arena C., *Attualità colombiana. Guerriglia e narcotraffico*, Sassari, Editrice Democratica Sarda, 1997.

Bellini G., *Conquista e demonizzazione dell’Indio* in Rigoli A., *Uomini e Culture. Antropologia delle Americhe*, Venezia, Colombo Publisher, 1992.

Brown Charles, *Colombia’s Female Guerrillas*, 2001, at <http://archives.econ.utah.edu/archives/m-fem/2001m01/msg00013.htm>

Brunner Claudia, *Female Suicide Bombers – Male Suicide Bombing? Looking for Gender in Reporting the Suicide Bombings of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, in “Global Society”, vol. 19. no 1, January 2005, pp. 29-48.

Bulla P., Velasquez A. H., *La epidemia de la violencia en Santa Fe de Bogotá* in AAVV, *Globalización, multiculturalidad y medio ambiente*, VIII Congreso de Antropología en Colombia, Santafé de Bogotá, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Departamento de Antropología, 1997.

Cohn Martin Regg, *Tamil Tiger fighters enter Jaffna*, 2000, at www.tamilcanadian.com/news/2000/05/20000515_2.shtml

Courrier International, *Uma neutralidade incomoda*, in «Courrier International», no. 6, 2005, p.18.

David S.A., *Detention, Torture and Murder in Sri Lanka*, 1983 at www.tamilcanadian.com/eelam/massacres/tortune.html

De Silva P.L., *The Efficacy of « Combat Mode » : Organization, Political Violence, Affect and Cognition in the Case of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam*, in Pradeep Jeganathan & Qadri Ismail, *Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka*, Colombo, Social Scientist Association, 1995, pp. 176-190.

Elustondo Georgina, *Carne de cañón*, 2003, at www.icrc.org/web/spa/sitespa0.nsf/iwpList138

Fabregat, C., *I meticci del nuovo mondo* in Rigoli A., *Uomini e Culture. Antropologia delle Americhe*, Venezia, Colombo Publisher, 1992.

FARC-EP, *Belligerence*, 2000, at http://www.farcep.org/pagina_ingles/documents/beligerence.html

FARC-EP, *International Women's Day Statement of the FARC-EP*, 2001a at http://www.iacenter.org/farc_iwwd.htm

FARC-EP, *Le donne e le loro Lotte*, in «Resistencia», Commissione Internazionale, no. 26, (no. 3 for the Italian version), San Marino, Cooperativa Culturale Macello, 2001b, pp. 22-25.

Fox Mary-Jane, *Girl Soldiers: Human Security and Gendered Insecurity*, in «Security Dialogue», vol. 35, no. 4, December 2004, pp. 465-479.

Galdos Guillermo, *Eliana*, 2004, at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/programmes/this_world/one_day_of_war/html/12.stm

Garcia Maria Isabel, *Secuestrada, violada y arrestada por rebelión*, 2003 at <http://www.mujereshoy.com/secciones/1417.shtml>

Gonzales Guillermo, *Los niños de la guerra*, Bogotá, Planeta, 2002.

González T. L., Carantón S. J., *Doña non se casa con Nadie. Aproximaciones al amor y el matrimonio en Antioquia, siglos XVII-XVIII* in AAVV, *Globalización, multiculturalidad y medio ambiente*, VIII Congreso de Antropología en Colombia, Santafé de Bogotá, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Departamento de Antropología, 1997.

Grave Vera, *Razones de vida*, Bogotá, Planeta, 2002.

Haider Zaglul, *Crisis of Regional Cooperation In South Asia* in «Security Dialogue», vol. 32, no.4, 2001, pp. 423-437.

Handrahan Lori, *Gender and Post-Conflict Reconstruction* in «Security Dialogue», vol. 35, no. 4, 2004, pp. 429-445.

Hattotuwa Sanjana, *From Violence to Peace: Terrorism and Human Rights in Sri Lanka*, 2002, at www.trinstute.org/ojpcr/51_hattotuwa.htm

Hobsbawm E. J., *Nation and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Hoole Rajan, Somasundaram Daya, Sritharan K., Thiranagama Rajani, *The Broken Palmyra: The Tamil crisis in Sri Lanka*, California, The Sri Lanka Studies Institute, 1990.

Human Rights Watch, You will learn not to cry. Child combatant in Colombia, 2003, at http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/colombia0903/4.htm#_Toc08

Jennings Allen, The FARC speaks out. Interview with Olga Lucía Marín and Marco León Callarcá, in Links, 1997 at http://www.dsp.org.au/links/back/issue11/11_FARC.pdf.

Juzic Julija, *Le Fidanzate di Allah. Volti e Destini delle Kamikaze Cecene*, Roma, Manifesto Libri, 2004.

Kaldor Mary, *New and old Wars*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2001.

Keirns Yvonne E., *The Voices of Girl Child Soldiers. Summary*, New York. Quaker United Nation Office, 2002, pp.1-24.

Kumudini Samuel, *Gender Difference in Conflict Resolution: "The case of Sri Lanka"*, in Inger Skjelsbaek & Dan Smith, *Gender, Peace and Conflict*, London, Sage,2001, pp. 184-204.

Lancini Francesca, Orphans at risk. A report from Sri Lanka: "Tamil guerrillas have begun recruiting children from the refugee camps", 2005, at <http://www.peacereporter.net>

Lara Patricia, *Las Mujeres en la Guerra*, Bogotá, Planeta, 2000.

Leech Garry, An Interview with FARC commander Simón Trinidad, 25th of June, 2000, at <http://www.colombiajournal.org/colombia15.htm>

Leech Garry, *Young Women Struggle to Survive in War-Torn Colombia*, in «Colombia Journal on Line», June 11 2001, at <http://www.colombiajournal.org/colombia67.htm>

Mason Ann, Colombia's democratic security agenda: Public order in the security tripod in «Security Dialogue», vol. 34 no. 4, Sage Publications, 2003, pp. 391-409.

Maunaguru Sitralega, *Gendering Tamil Nationalism: The Construction of "Woman" in Projects of Protest and Control*, in Pradeep Jeganathan & Qadri Ismail, eds, *Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka*, Colombo, Social Scientist Association, 1995, pp. 158-175.

Mazurana Dyan, *Women in Armed Opposition Groups Speak on War. Protection and Obligations under International Humanitarianism and Human Rights Law*. Report of a workshop organized by Geneva Call and by the Program for the Study of International Organization(s) (PSIO), Geneva, August 26-29, 2004, pp. 1-94.

McDermott Jeremy, Colombia's Female Fighting Force, BBC News, Friday, 4th January, 2002, at www.latinamericanstudies/farc/farc-females.htm or <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/1742217.stm>

McDonald Jim, Sri Lanka: The continuing spectre of “disappearances” (Amnesty International), 1997, at www.tamilcanadian.com/eelam/massacres/A1271197.html

Molano Alfredo, A Guerrilla Group’s Long History, Nacla Report on the Americas, sept /oct. 2000, at <http://www.icdc.com/~paulwolf/colombia/molano.htm>

Molano Alfredo, La masacre no fue guerra, Equipo Nizkor, Bogotá, 2004, at <http://www.derechos.org/nizkor/colombia/doc/molano2.html>

Morris-Jones W.H, “South Asia” in Jackson H. Robert and James Alan, *States in a changing world*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1993, pp.

Nakkavita Wijitha, Anti Tamil Pogrom of ’83. The day all hell broke loose, 1999, at www.tamilcanadian.com/eelam/massacres/837fea02.html

Nava Massimo, *Vittime. Storie di guerra sul fronte della pace*, Roma, Fazi, 2005.

Obeyskara Gananath, Political violence And The Future Democracy In Sri Lanka, 1984 at www.tamilcanadian.com/eelammassacres/83/ganan1/html

Official Website of Peace Secretariat of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam , *Tamil national leader’s annual speech 1992*, copyright 2004a, Peace Secretariat, available at <http://www.tamilnet.com>

Official Website of Peace Secretariat of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam , *Tamil national leader’s annual speech 2002*, copyright 2004b, Peace Secretariat, available at <http://www.tamilnet.com>

Official Website of Peace Secretariat of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam , *Historical Background*, copyright 2004c, Peace Secretariat, available at <http://www.tamilnet.com>

Pagden A., *La caduta dell’uomo naturale. L’indiano d’America e le origini dell’etnologia comparata*, Torino, Einaudi, 1989.

Pirapaharan, Women’s International Day Message, 1993, at <http://www.tamilnet.com>

Podur Justin, Colombia in 2004, Znet 2005, at <http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?SectionID=9&ItemID=7760>

Prolongeau H., *La vita quotidiana in Colombia al tempo del Cartello di Medellin*, Milano, Rizzoli, 1994.

Reardon A. Betty, *Sexism and the War System*, New York, Teachers College Press, 1985.

Report of the United Nation High Commissioner for Human Rights for the Human Rights Situation in Colombia, at http://www.hchr.org.co/documentoseinformes/informes/altocomisionado/Informe2004_eng.pdf

Rojas Catalina, In the Midst of War: Women’s Contribution to Peace in Colombia, Women Waging Peace Policy Commission, 2004, at

www.womenagingpeace.net/content/articles/ColombiaFullCaseStudy.pdf

Romero Flor, *Las mujeres y su utilización en el conflicto armado*, 2003 at <http://www.estandarte.com/leer/ensayo/E-00006/ensayo4.shtml>

Ruwanpura Kanchana N, *The survival strategies of Sinhala female-heads in conflict-affected eastern Sri Lanka*, Geneva, Recovery and Reconstruction, International Labour Office, 2003, pp.1-42.

Safford Frank, Palacios Marco, *Colombia: Fragmented Land, Divided Society*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2002.

Sajjad Tazreena, *Women Guerrillas: Marching Toward True Freedom? An Analysis of Women's Experiences in the Frontline of Guerrilla Warfare* in «Agenda. Women in War, Empowering Women for Gender Equity», no.59, 2004, pp. 4 -16.

Sassoli Marco, Bouvier A. Antoine, *How Does Law Protect in War*, Geneva, International Committee of Red Cross, 1999.

Schmidt Arthur, Introduction, 2003, at http://www.tempe.edu/tempres/chapters/lf56_ch1.pdf

Smith Anthony, *Chosen Peoples: Why Ethnic Groups Survive* in «Ethnic and Racial Studies», vol. 21, no. 2, 1992.

South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), *Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam*, 2004 at <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/shrilanka/terroristoutfits/LTTE.HTM>

Sumantra Bose, *States, Nations, Sovereignty: Sri Lanka, India and The Tamil Eelam Movement*, New Delhi, Sage Publications, 1994.

The Hindu, *How enabled...?*, 2002, at <http://www.hindu.com/thehindu/mag/2002/03/10/stories/2002031000010100.htm>

Trawick Margaret, *War and Tamil Women: A Women's Eye-view*, 1990, at www.tamilnation.org/forum/trawick/900000.htm

UNDP (United Nations Development programme), *National Human Development Report 1998. Regional Dimensions of Human Development. Sri Lanka*, Colombo, United Nations Development Programme for Sri Lanka, 1998.

UNHCHR (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the human rights situation in Colombia*, February 28th, 2005.

UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women), *Gender Profile of the Conflict in Colombia*, 2004, at <http://www.WomenWarPeace.org>

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, S/RES/1325 (2000), 31 October 2000)

UTHR (University Teachers for Human Rights), Information Bulletin N.5: Women Prisoners of LTTE, 1995 at <http://www.uthr.org>

UTHR (University Teachers for Human Rights), Towards A Totalitarian Peace: The Human Rights Dilemma, Report n.13, 2002 at <http://www.uthr.org/SpecialReports/spreport13.htm>

Von Busekist Astrid, *Uses and Misuses of the concept of Identity* in «Security Dialogue», vol. 35, no.1, 2004, pp. 81-98.

Woroniuk Beth, Girls go to war as Colombia frontline's killers, in The Guardian, 2002 at <http://list.web.net/archives/women-peace-and-security/2002-July/000129.html>

Zuleta Estanislao, Colombia, *Violencia, Demoracia y derechos humanos*, Cali, Fundaciòn Estanislao Zuleta, 1998.

Internet sites have been accessed between February and July 2005.