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Nieto-Valdivieso, Yoana Fernanda

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Victim-survivors as co-facilitators of repair and regeneration in Colombia

Yoana Fernanda Nieto-Valdivieso 

Law School, Honorary Research Fellow University of Birmingham, Birmingham, United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

This article explores the ways in which women victim/survivors of conflict-related sexual violence and other human rights abuses in Colombia are co-facilitating repair and regeneration in their wider social ecologies – including their families, communities, built and natural environments – through their physical and emotional work. I begin by exploring the concept of co-facilitation which is used in socio-ecological resilience literature to designate the process through which individuals and communities cooperate with their social ecologies to make positive development possible after stressful/traumatic experiences despite systemic inequality and oppression. Using empirical data and following a growing corpus of literature which recognises that during war people are not only harmed but also build life alongside violence, I argue that victim/survivors and women-led organizations cooperate to co-facilitate positive change in women’s lives and their communities. The paper concludes by reflecting on the role of these organizations as central resources in women’s lives and the need to strengthen them.

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Introduction

I interviewed Juanita at the house of a local women’s association in the middle of a tropical storm. She was a member of the feminist pacifist women-led organization *Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres* (RPM) and the founder of a local victims-led association for women victims of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). When I asked her how she coped with stressful situations she answered,

The thing that’s got me through, though, is my community work with the people. Organising workgroups, organising workshops. To say it another way, I... I bury myself in all this community work to forget that I exist; that I’m going through what I’m going through. (Research interview, 4 February 2019)

Juanita was referring to her personal problems and the death threats she received due to her leadership role and to the strategies she used in the past to deal with the multiple human rights violations she endured during the terror regime imposed by paramilitary organizations in her territory. Although Juanita’s words still carried the pain caused by the violence she and her community experienced, they also speak of the ways in which, in the midst of war and conflict, people made lives liveable through everyday doings and makings.

By looking at victim/survivor’s experiences of participation in women-led organizations and associations in Colombia, the article argues that the gender justice and the women’s rights framework used by these organizations, enable their members to become co-facilitators of repair and

CONTACT Yoana Fernanda Nieto-Valdivieso  y.f.fernandavaldivieso@bham.ac.uk  Law School, Honorary research fellow University of Birmingham, Birmingham, United Kingdom

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regeneration in their own lives and within their wider environments alongside ongoing violence. I use the concept of co-facilitation, which originates in socio-ecological resilience literature, to discuss how women-led organizations play a central role in enabling victims/survivors to make sense of the violence they experienced and rebuild life. This contributes to current literature looking at how feminist grassroots organizations in Colombia are helping women to overcome victimhood, navigate the risks and vulnerabilities they are exposed to, and regain their agency (Kreft, 2019; Zulver, 2019, 2021). The arguments presented are informed by literature looking at the reparative effect that participation in victim/survivor's organizations have on people who experienced gross human rights abuses (Acan et al., 2019; Gilmore & Moffett, 2021; Schulz, 2019).

I refer to the participants as victim/survivors because during our interviews they stated that they were victims, survivors or victims *and* survivors of CRSV. This distinction was not straightforward because in Colombia the category victim has become an important identity from where individuals and communities can exercise political action and voice their claims for truth, justice and guarantees of non-repetition (Jimeno 2010/2019, 2021). Thus, although some women rejected the term survivor adducing that they had not survived a natural catastrophe but were victims of the state actions (or lack of action), at the same time they saw themselves as survivors 'fighting' to remake their lives and find justice amid systemic inequality, ongoing conflict, discrimination, gender-based violence (GBV) and poverty. The article proceeds as follows: I begin discussing the concept of co-facilitation and its relevance when looking at women's experiences of remaking life alongside violence. I then move to present the methods for data collection and the context in which the research took place. In the final part of the article, I use empirical data to argue that participation in women-led organizations enabled women victim/survivors of CRSV in the country to reweave their worlds and (self)repair alongside violence. While focused on Colombia, the article contributes to broader debates within the field of gender and Transitional Justice (TJ), by exploring how women-led organizations and their members use their material and emotional work to bring about positive change at personal and community level.

Socio-ecological resilience and co-facilitation

Resilience refers to the process through which individuals, communities and their environments potentiate positive development despite experiencing adversity and numerous stressors including systemic violence and inequality (Clark, Ungar, et al., 2021; Theron et al., 2021; Ungar & Liebenberg, 2011). In recent years scholars have begun to discuss the concept of resilience in the field of TJ and the study of CRSV.¹ Building upon socio-ecological resilience thinking, Janine Clark (2022c), argues that looking at resilience processes in victim/survivors of CRSV firstly highlights the protective factors that individuals have in their social ecologies. And secondly makes visible the ways in which they use these resources to rebuild their lives, resist structural violence and oppression and seek change (Clark, 2022c, p. 4).

Resilience, however, and particularly its uses in fields such as security studies, global governance and international relations, has been criticized by scholars who link the concept to the production of a type of oppressive 'neoliberal subjectivity' (Bracke 2016; Cavelti et al., 2015; Chandler, 2012; Joseph, 2013, 2016; Neocleous, 2012, 2013). According to them resilience is a form of intervention underpinned by the idea that people need to learn to become more adaptable to the social, economic, political, and environmental forces they face (Pugh, 2014, p. 314). Authors such as Kastner (2020) have warned against the use of a psychological conception of personal resilience that fails to account for 'the root causes of vulnerability'. It is important to make clear that many of these critical views on resilience come from scholars examining how the concept is operationalized in the agendas of international organizations such as the European Union (EU) and the World Bank and the kind of governance they produce.

Following current socio-ecological scholarship, this article understands resilience not as the result of individual assets, skills, and capabilities but as a dynamic and relational process

taking place in the interactions between individuals and their wider social-ecologies (Theron et al., 2021; Ungar & Liebenberg, 2011). These refer to the social, economic, cultural, physical, and natural environments that constitute people's lives (e.g. their families, peers, services/institutions, cultural practices, and their natural environments). According to this body of literature, although individual psychological traits such as strength and self-determination are important to deal with adversity, they are only one part of the resilience story (Theron et al., 2021, p. 361). In this context, co-facilitation refers to the processes through which individuals collaborate with their social and ecological systems to generate positive adjustments to the challenges they face (Theron et al., 2021, p. 361). It also stresses the need to complement personal capabilities with a well-resourced social-ecology that offers supportive relationships, education opportunities, built and natural environments that promote well-being (Theron et al., 2021, p. 368). Furthermore, co-facilitation allows us to see that no one can be resilient alone, but pertinent support is needed to enable positive development for individuals (Theron et al., 2021, p. 368).

This article takes the concept of co-facilitation from socio-ecological resilience literature, to look at how women-led organizations interact and cooperate with victim/survivors of CRSV to deal with the effects of Colombia's internal armed conflict in their lives. I argue that women-led organizations and associations are a key socio-ecological resource enabling co-facilitation between our participants and their under-resourced social-ecologies. By providing networks of support, spaces for recognition, practical skills and citizenship building training, they not only allow repair and regeneration in women lives but also enable them to facilitate the healing and survival of their own families and communities. Such an exploration is located within a growing corpus of literature based on empirical research looking at individuals and communities' processes of repair (Clark, 2022a) self-repair (Gilmore & Moffett, 2021), their agency and strategies to resist and mobilize against violence (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2011; Kreft, 2019, 2019; Zulver, 2016) and secure the *re-existencia* of their communities (Lizaraso, 2019). It is important to make clear that the interviewees were both victims *and* agents because as Kreft and Schulz (2022, p. 3) point out, there is not a linear journey from victimhood to agency and victim/survivors of CRSV can occupy both spaces at the same time.

Methods and context

The empirical data informing the article was collected in Colombia between May 2018 and June 2021, in the framework of a five-year research project in which I participated as in country researcher. The study was funded by the European Research Council, and its aim was to understand how victims/survivors of CRSV in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH), Colombia and Uganda demonstrate resilience in their everyday lives. The three case studies were selected not because they permitted straightforward comparisons, but because their different types of conflict, uses of sexual violence in war, socio-cultural and political contexts, can shed light on the diverse 'pathways' followed by victim/survivors after their experiences, allowing us to 'sharpen' our analysis (Fujii, 2017, p. 664).

In the framework of the project, a total of 449 women and men completed a research questionnaire, and 63 of them participated in semi-structured interviews. In Colombia, we applied 171 questionnaires in 18 departments across the country² and conducted 21 semi-structured interviews. The questionnaires included the Adult Resilience Measure (ARM), a 28-item scale developed by Michael Ungar and his team at the Resilience Research Centre in Canada aimed at measuring the protective resources that a person has in their life to help them deal with adversity (including family, friends, and faith) (Resilience Research Centre, 2016). It also contained the Centrality of Events Scale (Berntsen & C, 2006), a traumatic events checklist, that questions about demographics and participant's life (e.g. main consequences of the sexual violence, participation in local associations and groups, and current problems). The interviews enquired about participants' experiences in the armed conflict, their sources of support, and the ways in which they deal with adversity. The interviews were

transcribed verbatim, translated into English and double coded by the PI and a post-graduate research fellow using NVivo software. The qualitative data went through two cycles of coding and as the project progressed, we used thematic analysis to identify patterns of meaning in the interviews. Ethics approval was granted by the Humanities and Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee at the University of Birmingham and by relevant ethics bodies in each country.

In Colombia, women-led organizations featured strongly in participant's narratives about their sources of support and appeared as a key resource helping them to move on and repair after their experiences of violence. Of the 21 interviewees, only three (two females and a male) did not have contact with any women-led organization or association, and both women were among the lower ARM-resilience scores in the sample. Between June and September 2021 our partner organizations, *Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres* (RPM) and *Profamilia*, conducted three reflection workshops to present and discuss key preliminary findings to research participants. The importance of women-led organizations was strongly corroborated during all the discussions.

Access to participants was gained through our partner organizations, and with the support of the victim-led organization *Red de Mujeres víctimas y profesionales*, the LGBTI organization *Colombia Diversa*³ and the local NGO *El Meta con Mirada de Mujer* which might have influenced the sample and explain the centrality of women-led organizations in our interviewee's narratives. However, when the quantitative data was analysed participants who reported not having sustained contact with women-led organizations and associations were more likely to show low scores in the Adult Resilience Measure (ARM).

The Colombian armed conflict and women's mobilization against war

On 24 November 2016, the Colombian government and the guerrilla organization *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC) signed a peace agreement aimed at ending the country's protracted armed conflict. Over the 60 years of its duration, the actors, dynamics and motives fostering Colombia's internal war have changed and adapted to national and international political and economic forces. To this day, alongside the multiple TJ mechanism that were put into place after the signature of the peace accord, gross human rights violations such as the assassination of social leaders and ex-combatants from the FARC, forced displacement, and CRSV perpetrated by all actors continue to affect large sectors of the population.

Sexual violence as a weapon of war, particularly against women and girls, has been documented in the country since the 1940s (Rojas & Tubb, 2013) and has been used continually during Colombia's conflict; however, its patterns, modalities and intensity have changed over time. To February 2023 the National Victims Register had documented a total 36,908 victims of 'crimes against sexual integrity and freedom', some of whom may have experienced this crime more than once (Unidad para las Víctimas, 2023). In most cases, CRSV occurred simultaneously with other abuses (e.g. assassination of loved ones, forced displacement and recruitment), and it disproportionately affected afro-Colombian and indigenous women (CNMH 2017). Due to the stigma associated with this crime and victim's reticence to denounce it, CRSV continues to be under-reported. Women-led organizations have been central in documenting and making CSRV visible in the country and thanks to their lobbying Law 1719 of 2014, ensuring access to justice for women victims of CRSV, was approved by parliament (CNMH 2017). The Law expands the definition of sexual violence, states that CRSV can constitute a crime against humanity; hence, it is not subject to statute of limitations, indicates that victims should receive psychosocial support and free medical attention, and that military courts do not have jurisdiction over CRSV (International Red Cross, 2014). To this day, women-led organizations continue to campaign for the opening of a macro case on CRSV by the *Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz* (Especial Jurisdiction for Peace – JEP) and monitor its rulings to make sure that they properly address this crime and the differential impact of the conflict on women and girls.⁴

Women-led organizations involvement in peace activism can be traced back to the end of the 1980s, when women and other sectors of the population began to demonstrate against the war as

a response to the intensification of the internal armed conflict (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2011; Gómez & Montealegre, 2021). Their mobilization as ‘mothers against war’ grew from the pressure that the conflict put on women’s initiatives pushing them to reflect upon issues such as democracy, peaceful resolution of conflicts, and legitimacy of the institutions and was not tied to conservative understandings of motherhood (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2011, p. 315). Between the mid-1990s and 2005 the degradation of the conflict characterized by massacres, extrajudicial killings, disappearances, CRSV, and the internal forced displacement of millions of people prompted what the CNMH (2013) called a ‘humanitarian tragedy’. During this period, the agenda of women-led and feminist organizations and networks was dominated by the objective of finding a negotiated solution to the armed conflict and included issues such as the demand for peace, women’s political participation, the need for attention for victims, the differential impact of the conflict on women and girls and the impossibility of attaining peace without social justice and gender equality (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2011; Wills & Gómez, 2006). In consequence, women leaders and their initiatives became the target of all armed actors. To keep working, regional and local associations withdrew from the public domain and focused on topics such as domestic violence, craft workshops, and children’s development (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2011, p. 325). They created networks and umbrella organizations to promote ties of solidarity with other women, share information and support each other, an example is our partner organizations RPM, which brings together women from 300 organizations located in over 142 municipalities across the country.

Women-led organizations as socio-ecological resources for repair and regeneration

In Colombia most research participants were in contact with one or more women-led organization, including professional organizations and NGOs and no professional associations and networks and victim’s groups. Formal/professional organizations had legal recognition which allow them to access funding from international bodies and cooperation agencies, to carry out workshops and projects on different topics. Some like RPM have a national reach, while smaller NGOs such as *El Meta con Mirada de Mujer* work at local or regional level. Informal networks and associations function at community level (Zulver, 2016) and have limited funding. However, many of them have ties with formal/professional organizations which support them with training, skill building and mentorship. Women-led organizations work focuses on issues such as the promotion and protection of women’s rights, women’s participation, gender equality, GBV, and women’s peace agenda. They work with women as women, however, because many of the individuals and communities who participate in their spaces are victims they also work with this population.

Participants were also members of women-led victim’s organizations and groups working with women as victims of the armed conflict, focused on guaranteeing their rights to reparation, justice, and non-repetition. An example is the *Red de Mujeres Víctimas y Profesionales (Red de mujeres thereof)*, a national reach organization providing legal, psychosocial support and training to victims/survivors of CRSV. At the local level, some of the interviewees were leaders and founding members of associations for women victim/survivors of CRSV in their towns and neighbourhoods. They were also representatives at the *Mesas de víctimas (Victim’s Boards)* in their municipalities. These are institutional spaces created by the government to guarantee that victims’ views are listened to and included in policy. Additionally, participants were in contact with victims’ organizations for other human rights abuses (e.g. forced displacement, extrajudicial killings), community organizations, cultural and religious groups. However, these organizations did not feature strongly in women’s narratives.

Despite their differences in size and capabilities, formal and informal organizations and associations had a feminist stance, even if they did not call themselves feminist,⁵ and allowed women to ‘form a collective identity that permits collective action’ (Zulver, 2019, p. 31). I use a broad definition that understands feminism ‘as the recognition of the systematic inferiorization of women resulting in

women's oppression or relative disempowerment, tied to a strategy for changing that circumstance' (Kaminsky, 1993, p. 21). In the last decades, Latin American women from popular and working-class backgrounds, lesbian, afro-descendants and indigenous women, have transformed some feminist tenets and developed their own feminist thinking (see Espinosa et al., 2014; Paredes, 2010/2013; Zulver, 2021) as a result women-led organizations were also concerned with wider struggles against all forms of inequality and oppression (Alvarez, 2009, p. 182; Zulver, 2016). This was reflected in the issues covered in the workshops which included, women's rights and political participation, existing laws and legal routes to fight CRSV and GBV, social justice and environmental preservation. Authors such as Kreft (2019) and Zulver (2016, 2019, 2021) have also pointed to the link between feminism and women's political mobilization in the country to resist and protect themselves against violence, fight CRSV and GBV and campaign for broader social justice issues and social change.

In the context of TJ, feminist interventions and literature tend to be linked to the idea of reparative justice (Albertson & Zinsstag, 2013; Zinsstag, 2013). However, looking at women's participation in women-led organization makes visible that, as an embodied political and performative practice, feminism is a key thread weaving women's experiences of co-facilitating positive change in their families and communities and plays a reparative role in their lives. Furthermore, the agenda for gender justice and gender transformative policies and practices advocated by the organizations challenges the limited time frame in which TJ mechanisms operate and strives to address the structural conditions that permitted violence to happen, the systemic inequalities that shape women and girls lives inside and outside conflict, and its continuity before and after war to peace transitions.

Formal women-led organizations as key resources in women's lives

Most of our interviewees had contact with formal women-led organizations such as RPM, *El Meta con Mirada de Mujer*,⁶ and the women's victim-led organization *Red de mujeres*. In their workshops women discuss the history of the struggle for women's rights, gaining skills, leadership and legal capabilities. Alejandra, a recognized community leader due to her work against GBV, stated that she learned 'how to defend women' (e.g. laws and legal mechanisms) at *El Meta con Mirada de Mujer*. The workshops also gave her tools to 'become a better parent' for her two sons and the courage to admit to herself, that she was a victim of CRSV. The skills and training provided by the organizations,⁷ complemented Alejandra's personal aptitudes (e.g. strength, self-determination) and enabled her to co-facilitate meaningful everyday changes in her own life, her family and community. At the moment of the interview, she was helping to document cases of CRSV in her region, had contributed to the anti-monument *Fragmentos*,⁸ and had just recently been able to tell her younger son about her experience of CRSV. Women's victim-led organizations such as *Red de Mujeres* provide socio-legal support, encouraged, and accompanied many of our research participants through the process of making a statement in front of the national prosecutor's office and the JEP to declare that they were victims of CRSV.

In the safe spaces run by the organizations, women could talk about their experiences after years of silence and provide peer support to other women. It was in these instances that many women spoke for the first time about their experiences of CRSV, listened to other women's stories and realized that they were not the only ones (see also Kreft & Schulz, 2022; Schulz, 2019). It could be said that participation in women-led organizations opened pathways to justice and repair as they gave women opportunities to renegotiate their gender identities, deal with isolation by (re)establishing relationships with other women and their communities (Schulz, 2019, p. 178), position themselves as agents against the armed conflict, structural discrimination, and violence (Kreft & Schulz, 2022, p. 5), and became interlocutors of the state asking for recognition, truth, justice, reparation, and non-repetition (Jimeno, 2021).

Ursula illustrates the reparative effect that participation in women-led organizations had in women's lives. As an afro-Colombian, rural woman, Ursula had experienced systemic racism

and multiple socio-economic inequalities. She was the victim of several forced displacements, the assassination of three sons, and CRSV. When I met her, she was 61 years old, still displaced from her land, struggling financially, and had received death threats due to her leadership role. When I asked her what title she would give to the story of her life she answered, 'A *Liberated Woman*' because 'despite what happened, I've got through it and worked for the common good' (Research interview 30 March 2019). She explained that before she used to fight with everybody and did not want to be alive, but 'Nowadays, now that I've made my statement, I can say to anyone: "They raped me". I can stand up in any meeting and say: "I was a victim of sexual violence."' Although the scars of what happened stayed with her, Ursula points out that she was able to heal thanks to the *Red de Mujeres*,

[they] take me on training courses so that I can get the national qualifications and they got me psychological therapy (...). I was national coordinator for the *Red* for nine months and now they've let me go as I was eager to work here in my region. I came back totally prepared for everything I might have to face from here on'. (Research interview 30 March 2019)

In their interviews, several women narrate how, after their experiences of CRSV, they abandoned everything or lost interest in life. Contact with the organizations offered them a possibility to re-engage with life, start afresh, take care of their personal image and wellbeing, and work to help other women. This was done by creating safe 'caring spaces' that fostered new affective connections and empowering participants 'by reinforcing feelings of belonging, identity and dignity' (Krystalli & Schulz, 2022, p. 13), and offering counselling and memorialization opportunities where women found ways to alleviate their suffering (Gilmore & Moffett, 2021, p. 458). As a result, women-led organizations became communities of emotion (Jimeno, 2021, 2019) enabling solidarity and helping women to (self)repair and overcome their experiences of pain and loss 'by understanding them as injustices that ought to be repaired' (Jimeno, 2021, p. 37).

The reparative effect that these organizations had on women's lives also includes their experiences of gender injustice. The learning spaces enabled by the organizations raised women's awareness about issues such as domestic violence, gender-based discrimination and injustice in their own lives. Claudia's participation in women's rights workshops, for instance, made her realize that she was in an abusive relationship, and with the emotional support of the organization she gathered the strength needed to be able to get out of it. Other women recounted similar experiences which suggest that the knowledge and awareness women gained in the workshops fostered a better understanding of their own experiences of GBV and injustice and motivated them to seek changes not only in their personal lives but also in their communities (see also Grabe et al., 2014)

In this section, I outlined some of the ways in which victim/survivors and women-led organizations cooperate to deal with the effects of conflict and co-facilitate processes of repair and self-repair in women and their communities. This cooperation has two components, the organizations complement women's strengths and build their agency by providing access to psychosocial support, leadership training, mentorship and a listening ear. They also offer technical advice to the smaller informal associations working at neighbourhood and community level, such as the ones led by some interviewees. In turn, the women offer their time, material and emotional work, willingness to share their experiences and support their peers and communities. As a result, women-led organizations became key resources giving women the space, tools, skills, capabilities, and confidence they needed to engage in collective processes to resist violence and remake life alongside conflict. For instance, in one of our workshops the participants stated that it was the NGO *Humanas* who guided them through the process of setting up their local association for women victims and stressed the lack of support from local authorities and the Victims Unit. Not surprisingly, most of the interviewees, including Ursula, stated that the organizations were their main, if not their only, source of support

(see also Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2011; Kreft & Schulz, 2022; Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres, 2013).

Leadership as (self)repair

This section briefly explores the role of non-professional local women-led associations in women's processes of self-repair and regeneration. These smaller associations lack formal recognition and external support and rely on their member's material and emotional work, which impacts their capabilities and agency. The importance of these smaller organizations came to the fore in several interviews across the country, where women like Sol, Ana, Diana, and Juanita recounted the positive effect that their role as community leaders had in their lives. When asked about her life today, Ana, an indigenous woman displaced with her family in a major city, stated,

I'm not so passive as I was before. Right now, I'm very busy because I'm working on a project with the girls, the women. I have 130 women at the organisation that was born out of the programme that I; that was to do with what happened to me [CRSV]. So, we've recently put together a group; the group's been well supported and is trying to find the girls something to do – some projects. It's for me too – keeping me busy, involved in something, doing things and for the girls too. They need something to keep them busy, so that they are moving on with their lives, so they don't stay shut in their houses thinking about the pain they have to put up with due to whatever gender situation – which might have been caused by their family or by people outside their family (Research Interview, 6 March 2019)

Self-organization in victim's groups can lead to collective self-repair (Gilmore & Moffett, 2021, p. 473) and several interviewees echoed Ana's remarks pointing to the reparative effect that their roles as leaders of local associations, human rights defenders, and victims' representatives had in their lives. Their community work enables them to learn how to live with their suffering (Gilmore & Moffett, 2021, p. 457) and become stronger by giving them a focus, skills, and self-confidence. It also allowed forgetting their own troubles, even if only momentarily, and in Ana's words made it possible to let 'all the pain go and allowing something good to flourish' (Research Interview, 6 March 2019).

Because women's social, economic, cultural, physical and natural environments were depleted by the conflict and systemic inequalities our interviewees inhabit very precarious worlds (Gilmore & Moffett, 2021; Hobart & Kneese, 2020; Lizaraso, 2019). The lack of a well-resourced social-ecology means that in many communities co-facilitation for repair and regeneration relies on women's everyday survival and caring strategies. This is why in their interviews victim/survivors recount the myriad tactics they use to secure the survival of their families and communities, which included walking their cities collecting food and second hand clothes in more affluent neighbourhoods to redistribute in their communities, knocking on the doors of local politicians asking for funding, organizing bazaars and community pantries, caring for other women's children, and providing emotional comfort to other women. As Zulver (2021, p. 113) points out while discussing the work of the popular feminist organization AFROMUPAZ, in the absence of state support and under conditions of continuous systemic violence women 'take it upon themselves to meet the practical needs of their communities'. The unrecognized and under-resourced, quotidian tasks and practices performed by women and their associations are key examples of the different ways in which women remake worlds alongside violence (Kristally & Schulzts 2022) using caring and corporal practices that require action and repetition (Lizaraso, 2019).

Not all women were leaders or activists. Some of them were just connected to local associations and participated in their activities, which allowed them to protect themselves (Zulver, 2019, p. 22), regain their agency, make sense of the CRSV they had experienced and the inequalities and vulnerabilities they continued to live through. However, we cannot idealize women's participation. Literature on the topic and interviewees themselves also referred to security risks linked to their leadership roles, internal conflicts, lack of resources, material, and economic recognition for their work (De Waardt & Weber, 2019).

Conclusion

In Colombia, participation in formal and informal women-led organizations gave victim/survivors of CRSV a symbolic and physical space to come together to resist violence and inequality, protect themselves, 'overcome victimhood and claim a feminist agency to resist the specific violences they face' (Zulver, 2019, p. 28 see also Kreft, 2019; Gilmore & Moffett, 2021). In supporting women's capabilities with training, mentorship, and emotional support these organizations are important resources promoting co-facilitation and helping women to rebuild their lives and find hope, alongside violence.

Current socio-ecological resilience literature states that for individuals to generate positive change in their families, communities, build and natural environments their personal capabilities need to be complemented with well-resourced social-ecologies (e.g. supportive relationships, education opportunities, spaces that promote well-being) (Theron et al., 2021). In a context of lack of resources, insufficient state support for victim/survivors and their communities, and the persistence of multiple forms of violence, women-led organizations are making co-facilitation possible by boosting women's abilities and knowledge and crafting safe spaces where they can work together, listen and support each other. Thanks to the organizations workshops, caring ethics, and feminist ethos, many of our participants became active agents in processes of (self)repair and regeneration in their own lives and their communities. Although the more visible examples are the women who became leaders, this process also includes victim/survivors who found new meanings and motivation to move on with their lives despite the pain they still carry and pursue their own goals (e.g. becoming a seamstress, finishing primary education, loving their bodies again).

The findings have implications for TJ, peacebuilding and international donors, because as I stated before co-facilitation requires appropriate support and pertinent resources, henceforth it challenges institutions and funding bodies to (re)think how to assist women and their organizations without instrumentalising or appropriating their work, imposing external agendas, and taking women's work and leadership without properly remunerating it, assuming that it is part of their caring and community roles. It reinforces the importance of including (pre)existing forms of organization and participation, particularly gender aware processes, taking place at the local, regional, and national level who had continued their work despite oscillations in official support and intimidation from armed actors (De Waardt & Weber, 2019, p. 224). Finally, because the feminist ethos of the organizations was a key component fostering victim/survivors' sense of agency and recovery, the need to find strategies to advance gender justice and women's rights agendas while facing increased anti-gender resistance and patriarchal backlash continues to be a pressing matter not only in Colombia but also in other conflict-affected and transitional societies.

Notes

1. For literature on TJ, CRSV and resilience see: Clark (2022c), Clark (2022b); Clark, Ungar, et al. (2021). For literature on CRSV and resilience see: Zraly et al. (2013), Koos (2018), and Moletsane and Theron (2017).
2. Antioquia, Arauca, Atlántico, Bolívar, Cauca, Caquetá, Cesar, Choco, Cundinamarca, Guajira, Huila, Magdalena, Meta, Nariño, Putumayo, Valle del Cauca, Norte de Santander and Santander.
3. They applied a small number of questionnaires. We were unable to conduct interviews with these participants due to the continuation of the armed conflict in the region when fieldwork was conducted.
4. The JEP is a TJ tribunal set up to prosecute the crimes committed by the FARC and the Colombian government.
5. I am aware of the diversity of feminist discourses and practices informing women organizations and associations in the country.
6. Participants also mentioned Humanas, La liga internacional de mujeres por la paz y la libertad (LIMPAL), and Alianza Iniciativa de Mujeres Colombianas por la PAZ (IMP).
7. she was also a member of the *Red de Mujeres*.
8. Created by Colombian artist Doris Salcedo.

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ORCID

Yoana Fernanda Nieto-Valdivieso  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3045-978X>

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