

Katholische Universität Eichstätt-Ingolstadt and Universidad del Rosario

Master in Conflict, Memory and Peace

**The memory construction of the military members in the Armed Conflict in  
Colombia: an analysis of the roles as a hero, a victim and a perpetrator.**

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**La construcción de la memoria de los miembros militares en el conflicto  
armado Colombiano: un análisis de los roles como héroes, víctimas y  
perpetradores**

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## **Abstract**

The thesis addresses the construction of memory in the Colombian armed conflict of the military through 3 roles, that of hero, victim and perpetrator. The roles are analyzed from the perspective of the place of enunciation as well as from role theory, which allows the individual to be related to more than one role at the social level. Additionally, the influence of military masculinity in the identification of roles by members of the Colombian army is explored. After the analysis, it is recognized that there have been more investigations in which the military is associated with victims than perpetrators. In turn, the roles of hero and victim are closely related; in the official narrative of the Colombian armed conflict in relation to the military, one role does not exist without the other. In this sense, the hero justifies and legitimizes the military as victim and vice versa. With respect to the influence of military masculinity with respect to each role, it was evident that it has a direct impact on them. Thus, the role of hero is the only one that, under the parameters of what it is to be a man in military terms, is desirable and compatible with the values learned and promoted by the institution. Similarly, the least desirable role is that of victim, since it fosters vulnerability, understood as something negative.

*Keywords: memory, roles, hero, victim, perpetrator, locus of enunciation, military masculinity, Colombian armed conflict*

## **Resumen Ejecutivo**

La tesis aborda la construcción de la memoria en el conflicto armado colombiano de los militares a través de 3 roles, el de héroe, víctima y perpetrador. Los roles son analizados desde una perspectiva del lugar de la enunciación, así como desde la teoría de los roles, la cual permite que el individuo pueda ser relacionado con más de un rol a nivel social. Adicionalmente, se explora la influencia de la masculinidad militar en la identificación de los roles por parte de los miembros del ejército colombiano. Tras el análisis se reconoce que se han producido más investigaciones en donde se asocian a los militares como víctimas, que como perpetradores. A su vez, el rol de héroe y de víctima están estrechamente relacionados, en la narrativa oficial del conflicto armado colombiano con relación a los militares, no existe un rol sin el otro. En este sentido, el héroe justifica y legitima al militar como víctima y viceversa. Con respecto a la influencia de la masculinidad militar con respecto a cada rol, se evidencio que los impacta directamente. Así pues, el rol de héroe es el único que bajo los parámetros de lo que es ser un hombre, en términos militares, es deseable y compatible con los valores aprendidos y fomentados por la institución. De igual

manera, el rol menos deseable es el de víctima, ya que este fomenta la vulnerabilidad, entendida como algo negativo.

*Palabras clave: memoria, roles, heore, víctima, perpetrador, lugar de enunciación, masculinidad militar, conflicto armado colombiano.*

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Context

The Colombian conflict is a complex and multifaceted armed conflict that has dismasted Colombia for more than six decades. It is rooted in historical inequalities, political tensions, and social injustices, the conflict involves various armed groups, including guerrilla organizations, paramilitary forces, drug cartels, and the Colombian military, each actor has been fundamental in the violent development of the conflict, the confrontation between them damages mainly the civil population, not only physically but also psychologically. The number of reported victims in the Colombian conflict so far is 9.681.2881, the main departments affected by violent situations within the armed conflict but are not included in the Unique Victims Register are Cauca with 2.499, Antioquia with 1.917 and Valle del Cauca 1.393 (Unidad de Victimas, 2024). The impact of the violence in the society is huge, with almost 10 million of victims in a long-lasting conflict that has deepened inequalities and social injustices. At its core, the conflict revolves around issues such as land distribution, political representation, drug trafficking, and human rights abuses.

In order to understand the conflict, it is mandatory to shed light on the main actors and their participation in the conflict. One of the main actors in the Colombian conflict is the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), a Marxist guerrilla group formed in 1964. FARC initially emerged as a response to social and economic inequalities in rural Colombia due to the failure of the state to address the needs of rural peasants such as land reform, education and healthcare. This aimed promoted the organization of peasants to fight against government forces, over the years it changed and FARC evolved into a highly organized and hierarchical<sup>2</sup> insurgent group with 20,000 to 30,000 estimated members (Gonzalez & Medina, 2014) at its peak.

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<sup>1</sup> For additional information please refer to Victims Unit in Colombia. Also, according to the National Center of Historical Memory report of 2021, the conflucted resulted in: 220,000 people killed; nearly 6 millions people displaced; over 60,6000 cases of forced disappearances, sexual crimes and gender-based violence: and the force recruitment of almost 6,500 children and youth (International Center for Transitional Justice, n.d.).

<sup>2</sup> “According to the disciplinary rules, FARC statutes, military structures are divided into blocs (comprising at least five fronts in a particular region) or joint commands (less than five fronts); fronts (two or more columns); columns (two companies, 110 fighters); companies (two guerrilla units, 54 fighters); guerrilla units (two squads, 26 fighters); squads (twelve fighters); and tactical combat units (six fighters)” (International Crisis Group, 2009).

Concurrently, the activities of the guerilla expanded into the illegal drug trade, particularly in the production and trafficking of cocaine, which implied a crucial source of funding for them. The estimated income perceives from this vary depends on the source of information; in 2015 for InSight Crime the income was between \$150 and \$500 million a year. Meanwhile, in 2012 Juan Carlos Pinzon, Colombia's defense minister, affirmed it was as high as \$3.4 billion (Council on Foreign Relations, 2017). The cocaine production in Colombia, has been an ongoing problem which was not only the main source of financing the illegal armed groups but also employed the peasants in the most remote zones of the country, the production which in most of the regions the production was mandatory as per the guerrilla, is an example of state abandonment and revictimization of the people who had no more choices and whose income were not enough to cross the poverty line.

On regard to fighting tactics, they performed guerrilla attacks on military and police targets, extortion<sup>3</sup>, kidnappings<sup>4</sup> for ransom, also bombings of infrastructure and economic targets all over of their influence's zones, with these tactics, they gain control over significant regions across the country which translated in more power and pressure for the government to take back control of those territories. In terms of responsibly of human rights violations FARC perpetrated massacres against civilians, forced displacement, landmines<sup>5</sup>, and recruitment of child soldiers<sup>6</sup>, just to mention the main perpetrators acts.

Another significant player in the conflict is the National Liberation Army (ELN), a Marxist guerrilla group founded in 1964 as a response to social injustices and economic inequalities in rural areas of Colombia, which nowadays are still a problem in the country. It has a very hierarchical operation with centralized leadership. On regard to members, the accurate number is very difficult to obtain; the difference range depends on the source, for Indepaz in 2018 the ELN

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<sup>3</sup> The victims of kidnapping were usually extortion to release the people, they were mainly wealthy entrepreneurs but also middle and lower classes (International Crisis Group, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> As per Colombia's National center for Historical Memory the guerrilla kidnapped 25.000 people between 1970 and 2010 (Council on Foreign Relations, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> 10.000 people have been victims of the FARC either killed or maimed by landmines, 4.000 have been civilians (Council on Foreign Relations, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> As per Human Right Watch in 2005 based on an conservative estimation, between 20 and 30 percent of the members were under 18 years old in the FARC (Human Right Watch, 2005).

had 4.000 member and 5.000 including militiamen. US government in 2019 reported an estimated of 3.000 armed members and in 2021 Insight Crime reported “ELN had 5.000 members in the begging of 90’s years and now they are between 2.500 and 3.000 members” (CNN Español, 2023). After 1973, Nicolas Rodríguez Bautista, alias “Gabino” and Manuel Pérez, alias “El Cura” took control of the leadership of the guerrilla and led the expansion, the guerrilla could strengthen itself due to the participation in kidnappings for extortion, which became their main source of income. In 1999, they kidnapped 190 people in a church in Cali<sup>7</sup> and a they seized flight from Avianca with more than 40 passengers forcing them to land in a remote area and kidnapped the passengers (InSight Crime, 2017). ELN “expand their criminal portfolios and venture into new sectors, such as drug trafficking and irregular mining, which time will become crucial source of income for them” (InSight Crime, 2017).

Also, they charge the so called “war taxes” to coca and marihuana growers, some fronts were involved in international droop production and trafficking, particularly on the border between Colombian department of Norte de Santander and the Venezuelan state of Zulia (InSight Crime, 2017) which provides them with more power and resources to keep going with the fighting. Like FARC, the ELN has engaged in armed struggle against the Colombian government, often targeting military installations, economic infrastructure, and multinational corporations<sup>8</sup> operating in Colombia. After the demobilization of the FARC, ELN took more relevance and spotted the regions where the FARC used to rule, and the confrontation with other criminal groups began<sup>9</sup>, increasing the violence after the peace process.

Continuing with actors, which have also played a prominent role in the Colombian conflict, paramilitary groups, they were originate as private militaries formed by wealthy people -including political leaders, cattle ranchers and landowner- drug traffickers and business interests to protect their assets from guerrilla attacks and also to advance in their own agendas. They started by working with drugs cartels and expanded to fighting a war with the guerrillas for control of coca growing areas (International Crisis Group, 2005). In this sense, “since late 1990’s paramilitary

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<sup>7</sup> It remains the largest kidnapping in the country history.

<sup>8</sup> The multinational companies drilling oil wells were extorted by the Domingo Laín Front in Arauca.

<sup>9</sup> Since 2019 ELN and Gaitanista Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AGC) are fighting in antioquia and Chocó to control the drug trafficking and illegal minig areas. Also, in 2022 the 10th Front of ex- FARC mafia and ELN’s Domingo Laín Front began to clash in Arauca (InSight Crime, 2017).

territorial control has developed more quickly than that of any other armed group, displacing the left-wing guerillas from traditional strongholds, especially in coca-growing regions (...) by 2000 UNODC calculated that paramilitaries were in 86 of 162 municipalities where coca was cultivated” (International Crisis Group, 2005).

Paramilitaries operated in the beginning as decentralized networks of armed units, usually with strong ties to local elites and economic power and interest, and had closed relationships with the military forces. In mid 1990’s paramilitary activity was expanded and was created the United Self-Defenses Forces of Colombia (AUC), in 1998 it became a highly regimented military command structure that incorporated regional organizations (Tate, 2001, p. 197). Also, they reformed the manipulation of local politics, which had reached enormous proportions, and because they were a true menace to state legitimacy due to they gained control of entire regions and their participation was affecting national politics (Guáqueta, 2007). Paramilitaries groups employed brutal tactics to assert control over territories, such as massacres<sup>10</sup>, forced displacement, and targeted killings of suspected guerillas sympathizers (Tate, 2001, p. 166), those are a few examples of the brutality and indiscriminate violence perpetrated by these groups.

On regard to human right violations, this actor was determined by the Truth Commission as main perpetrators in the conflict. The abuses committed by paramilitaries included extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances, torture, sexual violence, among others. They did not have guerrilla members as only targets, they performed violations against civilians, peasants, human right activist, trade unionists, and indigenous and Afro- Colombian communities who were perceived as sympathetic of leftist causes or were criticizing or performing an investigation on them (Tate, 2001). The threat to the democracy represented by the paramilitaries, for example, was that “in 2000, almost 85 percent of politically motivated homicides were attributed to state agents and paramilitary groups, with the remaining 16 percent to guerrilla groups” (Tate, 2001). In this sense, the violence in armed conflict increases with the cooperation of the paramilitaries and military forces.

While some paramilitary groups officially demobilized in the early 2000s, “many of whom may bear responsibility for war crimes and crimes against humanity, have already benefited from

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<sup>10</sup> The first one was Mapiripán from 15th July to 20 July of 1997 gunmen from the AUC took control of the city, killed at least 30 people, the bodies were dismembered and thrown into a nearby river so the exact total deaths were never established (Tate, 2001, p. 167).

measures that in effect granted them amnesties” (Amnesty International Secretariat, 2008) others have continued to operate outside the law, often collaborating with drug cartels and engaging in criminal activities such as drug trafficking, organized crime, attacks on civilians, especially activist and community leaders (InSight Crime, 2015). Amnesty International (2008) found:

In figure publish in 2007, the National Reparation and Reconciliation Commission (Comisión Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación, CNRR) referred to 3,500-5,000 combatants belonging to “dissident, rearmed, and emerging” groups operating in 200 municipalities (out of 1,098) in 22 departments in the country. Also in 2007, the Organization of American States’ Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia (MAPP-OEA) suggested that 22 groups with around 3,000 combatants had re-emerged, led by middle-ranking paramilitary leaders, and consisting mainly of supposedly demobilized rank-and-file paramilitaries. The Colombian non-governmental organization (NGO) Indepaz calculated that, as of November 2007, there were more than 6,300 of what they term “narcoparas” and “neonarcoparas” organized in 69 armed structures in 224 municipalities in 24 departments.

Considering this, paramilitaries did not leave the arms and abandon the conflict as they pretended; they performed just a representation where they “agreed” to demobilizing, but in fact they just kept operating under different names and in smaller groups, which leads to the perpetuation of the violence.

The final main actor in Colombian’s armed conflict is the army, which is the main representant of the State. The army has played an important part of the conflict due to the challenging and complex dynamics faced by the Colombian state in addressing insurgency, violence and organized crime. As a representant of the state in the war, the army as an institution has been playing a key role in the development of the conflict. It has been mainly fighting FARC and ELN, as principal enemies. In this sense, Colombian’s army is one of the largest in Latin America, currently has 250,000 members and every year more than 10,000 got retired (Voz de America, 2024). The lack of economic opportunities, turned the army into an attractive employer, military personnel, especially

those who belong to lower social classes<sup>11</sup>, can guarantee that their families have access to a life with the bare minimum like housing, education and food. Furthermore, is important to consider that in some countries, the military service is mandatory, which also leads to people with less resources see the army as the only option to fulfill this requirement.

With the previous information in mind and according to diverse challenges faced for the government in a country that has been in conflict for the last six decades, the army in Colombia is highly specialized in a wide range of military tasks, they are two main specialties: the special forces, which are trained for unconventional warfare, counterterrorism, hostage rescue, and special reconnaissance missions. The second one, is counterinsurgency and counter-narcotics, which operates in counterinsurgency operations and also provide assistance to civilian authorities (Ejército Nacional, 2021). Considering the highly prepared army, certain results against the guerrillas were expected, especially those related to drugs, in this sense, United States decided to support through military cooperation known as “Plan Colombia” whose main aim was fighting illicit drugs and organized crime, to contribute to economic reactivation and the achievement of the peace (Cufiño, Fernández, & Sierra, 2022).

Over the time due to conjunctural challenges, the objectives of the cooperation changed, especially after Alvaro Uribe was elected president in 2002, he implemented the ‘Democratic Security Policy’ which strengthen the military forces in order to regain control over the territory that was under the influence of the FARC. These strengthen brought several human violations from the army to the civils, mainly the extrajudicial executions and the cooperation with the paramilitaries; generating a delegitimization of the army and the government when the information went public. In order to contra rest the situation, a campaign known as “Heroes in Colombia do exist” which through videos intended to present the army personnel as heroes und ‘clean’ their image and the purpose of the operation. After that, the army has been focusing in their recognition as victims of the armed conflict. Nowadays, they are still a key factor in peace building.

In this sense, the Colombian government has been engaged in efforts to address the conflict through both military and political means. Over the years, several peace processes have been attempted, with varying degrees of success. One of the most significant breakthroughs came with

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<sup>11</sup> In Colombia people are divided by social classes which stratified “the population’s payment capacities based on their houses exterior physical characteristics and the conditions of their immediate surrounding areas” (Quiñones & Martines, 2021).

the peace agreement between the Colombian government and FARC in 2016, which was negotiated since 2012 under the leadership of President Juan Manuel Santos. The agreement aimed to end more than 50 years of conflict and included provisions for the demobilization of FARC fighters, their reintegration into civilian life, and measures to address the underlying causes of the conflict (Segura & Stein, 2019).

Despite progress in peace negotiations, challenges remain in achieving lasting peace in Colombia. Armed groups continue to operate in remote regions of the country, and violence persists, particularly in areas where drug trafficking routes intersect with political and social instability (Amnesty International Secretariat, 2008). Additionally, social and economic inequalities continue, contributing to grievances that fuel the conflict. Efforts to address these underlying issues, along with continued dialogue and reconciliation, are crucial for achieving sustainable peace in Colombia.

In this sense, an important part of guaranteeing the no repetition and the peace building is related to the memory part of the conflict. In this case, it is important to increase attention to different actors involved in the conflict that can give us a diverse representation of the incidents that they witness, considering it not as the 'Truth' but as their memory of the events that is relevant to memory construction and studies due to it helps to clarify and understand the damage to the Colombian population in a broader scope. All the actors mentioned before in this chapter are relevant; for purposes of this research, I focused only on the memory construction of the military forces, especially the army, as the main actor in the conflict.

The military service is mandatory in Colombia<sup>12</sup>, a project in the Congress is intending to modify the article 216 of the Constitution, specifying that it will be mandatory only in war or internal commotion. In the project presented, they justify the change considering that 99% of the soldiers belong to the poorest population of the country and the conscription was a risk factor which promote social inequality (Congreso de la Republica de Colombia, 2022). The lack of options and opportunities for people who belong to the lower class contributes to the cycle of violence due to they are the foot soldiers who risk death in warfare to a greater degree than members of dominant social groups and frequently suffer emotional abuse at the hands of commanding officers. Their

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<sup>12</sup> See more in the law 1861 of 2017.

rural communities, mining camps, and urban neighborhoods have also long experienced repression in the military's fight against "internal enemies" (Gill L. , 1997, p. 527).

In a society where value is related to what they have, the pressure for the people who are in need is extreme, privilege people disdain them and create the perfect conditions for poor people to face the war for them, it is not only the case for the soldiers but also for the civilians, who are collateral damage in terms of power. The power actors of the armed conflict in Colombia have been taking advantage of the vulnerable people abandoned by the state. All of the main armed actors<sup>13</sup>, had this military hierarchy, so military masculinity expectations and concepts are expected to be met, not only within the organization but also for society.

In this sense, through the experience of military service, men assert a dignified sense of masculinity that serves as a counterpoint to the degradation experienced by more dominant males and an economic system (Gill L. , 1997, pp. 527-528). The economic options for soldiers are limited, even with the salary provided by the army it is not enough, so when the military experience provides an expected sense of masculinity it is a social reward that is achieved, even though their personal understanding is differentiated and undervalued within the institution.

The army in Colombia, as a powerful institution, seeks to influence in the society and legitimized its own power, in order to do so the narrative presented should be in accordance with the problems the population has and how they help to solve them. In this sense, basic training is a gendered process of moral regulation in which the armed forces define the parameters of appropriate male behavior and link masculinity and citizenship to the successful completion of military service obligations, which are linked as closely to civic duty (Gill L. , 1997, pp. 533-534). Shaping the understanding and expectations of a proper man in a society like the Colombian is highly valued due to during the conflict people were presented with two paths of life, as guerilla men or as a military man, in terms of masculinity, both are under the same context of patriarchy.

Militarized masculinity is shaped in these contexts symbolic debasement of women and homosexuals: recruits are (whores), maricones (faggots), señoritas (little ladies), and other gendered insults (...) Closely tied to this rigid hierarchy is an ideology of male bonding. This ideology pervades basic training and conflates combat with beliefs about masculinity: troops share the same food and accommodations, wear the same uniforms, display identical shaved forms

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<sup>13</sup> Colombian armed forces, guerillas and paramilitaries.

to the same rigid codes of behavior, and are trained for war, test of their manhood (Gill L. , 1997). This mindset had an impact on the development of the conflict, not only because a lot of people were victims because of their gender and because of their sexual identity but also because within the troops they are marginalized and abused.

Considering the particular story of Colombian's conflict, it is important to understand how the memory construction in this particular research on the army members, determine the roles played by the army during the conflict.

## **1.2 State of art**

The memory construction in Colombia can be understood as an ongoing process, the diverse actors of the conflict provide different approximations to certain historic moments of the conflict. In this sense, the state of art was built on direct aims as references to memory construction and from other sources that deal with sensitive topics related to the roles of the military members during the conflict.

Jungle Memories (2019) is research made by the National Center of Historic Memory in Colombia, which propose is to give visibility to the police and armed forces victims of kidnaping either for Farc-EP or ELN. It focusses on the victims' memories of the kidnaping and they recovered their experiences to approach in a group way to the whole victimization process not only to them as individual but also to their family members who are also victims and after they realized they must deal with the trauma and life-changing experiences that kind of experience provides to a family. It is important to understand the one person can be understood in different roles depending on the moment of the life that they are in. The role-playing changed from person to person because each one of them internalized the role and combined it with their own being. Of course, the role and how you accomplish the task related to it is aligned with the context; without it, is not possible to validate the role itself, is through the society that you can comprehend the scope of a role.

Colombian armed conflict has been studied for a long time, those studies are related to the development of the conflict and memory of the victims, especially focus the civilians' victims which have been the most affected population in the war. Taking into consideration the different kinds of studies that have been performed. The approximation proposed in this study seeks to integrate the diverse scopes of analysis – Heroes, Perpetrators and Civilians- to orientated an analysis more integral in which you can consider one main actor, like the armed forces, from

different angles to provide an estimate of the framework more accurate to reality and intending to not impose one role over the other. The investigation will intend to be the first surmise in a broader analysis, it could lead to further research on the matter that can provide different approaches and information.

There is also the production of articles where emphasis is placed on the stories of officers, such as that of (Cabrera, Corcione, Pedreros, & Macea, 2018) where the authors present the articulation between the historical memory of the armed conflict understood from the Army and the life stories of active officers who belong to the José María Córdoba Military Cadet School. This is presented in the milestones section where the milestones are divided by the regions most affected by the conflict. Likewise, the narratives are framed in the period of distinction under former President Andrés Pastrana. The most relevant moments of the conflict in those areas are reconstructed and some comments from the officers who were active at that time are alluded to. The sections on the life stories of the collaborators add credibility to the narration of the selected milestones, adding a personal touch and unknown humanity.

In line with this article, we find (Castillo 2018) where the author addresses the construction of military historical memory, presents the differences between history and memory, and then delves into the different types of memory. Collective memory is the one he delves into the most, he states that it is through this that certain things are remembered or forgotten, although it is built from oblivion. He makes a relationship between collective, individual, and historical memory, as each in the military case has the ultimate goal of participating in the construction of the national historical memory. The efforts for the elaboration of the military historical memory, have been presented in the Military Forces through 3 types of memories, the communicative focused on recounting the lives of soldiers' victims of armed conflict; the collective memory which aims to justify the actions and operations of the military forces based on the actions of illegal armed groups; and the cultural memory which intends to generate and maintain the memory through museums, monuments, and publications.

The author makes a categorization of historical memory from the accounts of retired officers, where 3 categories emerge. The first is historical memory as a military signifier, where the military understands the history of the institution as their own and the way in which this can be instrumentalized to narrate individual events. The second category is the individual military memory as a discursive element where the sacrifice of the military does not translate into hatred

towards the institution, but rather into part of what it means to be military, especially for those who have been directly victimized by the conflict or indirectly by the poor socioeconomic circumstances of some members of the institution. Finally, the third shows us the collective memory as a non-linear construction of institutional memory, where memories have been modified over time and the places of memory serve as a binder of their memories, mainly through the military milestones that have shaped the military forces today.

The construction of a document that allows the convergence of different memories is key, in this sense, the article 'The Colombian National Army and its wounds: an approach to military narratives of pain and disillusionment' (Forero 2017), in which the author intends to account for what certain Army high commanders understand by institutional wounds within their narratives and the way in which professional soldiers mean personal wounds. The high commanders refer to institutional wounds since post-independence, where they affirm that the political elites were not willing to give the necessary relevance to the military for the construction of the nation. Another of the institutional wounds highlighted are the events of the banana plantations, where to speak of a massacre is an exaggeration, since they were there to pacify the region, but after their withdrawal the state's abandonment produced distrust in the military forces. These wounds are grouped in the misunderstanding of both the elites and the people of the work of the Army.

Studies of military memory in Colombia have been approached from different perspectives, the first is related to the impact of the media in the dissemination of the official memory where it appeals to the fulfillment of the values and virtues that were assigned to them by the constitution (Lanzaduri Angulo & Velzaquez Paez, 2018). A variant of the previous one states that the media are central especially television and radio as the only source of "information" - of the hegemonic narrative - for the majority of the population (Villa, Velazques, Barrera, & Avendaño, 2020).

The second perspective is approached from the recognition of the military as victims where the National Center of Historical Memory, with the publication of the report "Behind the Uniform" in which the memories of some soldiers who share their experiences of gratitude for the Army are told (National Center of Historical Memory, 2020). Additionally, studies were presented in relation to the understanding and recognition of members of the military forces as victims of violations of their fundamental rights (Ayala, 2018). The third perspective and the one that has been most developed focuses on a historical memory of the armed conflict and the role of the military in this,

it is explored from the military archives (Ugarriza & Pabón, 2018) and the official discourse of the institution.

Other approximations to the roles of the military in the conflict had been made but not focus particularly as memory construction. In this sense, those academic production was considered as part of the state of the art, due to allow to determine the different roles accomplished by the militaries in the conflict. Salazar (2012) expresses that the institutionalization of extrajudicial executions was so high within the army that most of the units were pressure to provide causalities, legal or illegal and its policy was led by the commanders of the army who were aligned to some politicians under the context of the Democratic Security Policy. Also, stated that the extrajudicial killings were brutal and revictimizing due to cruel procedures, getting rid of the bodies in places where the likely of being found was little and they did not have a record of the victims or the places where they buried them.

On this line of argumentation, Rojas and Benavides (2017) in their book 'Extrajudicial executions in Colombia, 2002-2010: blind obedience in fictitious battlefields' affirm that the violations of human rights committed by the army with regard to extrajudicial executions who were presented as enemies' causalities - which is also known as 'false positives'- were part of a complex institutional policy in which several agencies of the government were involved and colluded to "legitimize" these indiscriminate executions. The coordination and instruction with other state agencies were fundamental to accomplishing and institutionalizing the killings due to the expertise provided by the other agencies, another key factor was the rewards for the military personnel which incentivized the situation.

Continuing with the extrajudicial executions CINEP (2011) stated that the influence of these crimes on society was the introduction of false language and lies in the official institution's narratives, and its reproductions in the mass media as 'truth' which negatively impacted in the credibility of the state institutions, especially in the military forces. The incorporation of the false language brought a needy questioning with regard to the official narrative, which is important to consider when we are talking about memory construction because the historical memory is usually aligned with the legitimized history which is influenced by the powerful elites in order to favor them.

With the peace process the Special Jurisdiction for Peace and the Truth Commission were established and provided relevant information on regard of the roles of military personnel in the

conflict. The Special Jurisdiction for Peace realized in 2024 the videotapes of audiencias on regard Case 3 – which is related to the extrajudicial executions- were military members of all the rank confirm the association between military personnel and paramilitaries and the knowledge of the extrajudicial killings, the process, resources, threats and rewards related to them, which provide information from the first hand of how this situation was presented within the institution and how this can be useful to restore the victims and provide justice for them.

On the other hand, the report presented for the Truth Commission (2022) briefly discusses the coordination and alliances between the paramilitaries and the military personnel, and how it impacts the human rights violations due to the inaction of the army members with regard to the massacres perpetrated by the paramilitaries, or the elaboration of fake confrontations with the guerilla in order to justify the lack of presence. On regard of the extra judicial executions a few mentions were made nothing to deep to consider the report as a proper source on this regard. The lack of new information on regard of the ‘false positives’ is concerning due to the relevance of the report in order to reconstructed not only the truth but also the memory.

In relation to the perspectives through which the study of memories has been carried out, there is a knowledge gap regarding the contrast between the different types of memory, especially between victims, perpetrators and heroes which are considered as roles performed by the military personnel in the conflict. Thus, research on military memory has focused on a single type, usually referring to the official memory of the army, which is framed in a dynamic that seeks to legitimize the institution, its actions, and its status as a victim. However, they have not delved into a more individual memory of the military where they can express themselves without the legal ties to the institution, which can translate into more complex versions of the different events of the conflict and the way in which they understand it. Also, this kind of research has not be contrast with perpetrators’ memories, understood as memories with regard to events that were perpetrated by military personnel, this will contribute to the construction of a plural memory of the Colombian conflict, since it can show the tensions between the official memory, mainly related to the roles of victims and heroes, and the individual memory – associated to the perpetrator’s role- offering a diverse vision of the conflict with regard to this important actor.

### **1.3 Justification**

After the signing of the peace agreement in 2016 between the Colombian government and the FARC-EP guerrilla, it has been evidenced through the review of memory products by various

institutions that there is a lack of rigor in the processes and mechanisms of institutional memory construction by the government. Thus, work has been carried out in institutions or subdivisions of institutions in which memory plays a central role, such as the National Center for Historical Memory and the Head of Historical Memory of the General Command of the Army, which have produced pieces related to the memory of the military, fundamental actors in the conflict.

In a post-agreement context, where memory plays a fundamental role in the construction of peace, reconciliation, the truth commission, and other mechanisms to consolidate the issues addressed in the agreement. Thus, there is a need to involve more actively the different actors in the conflict, who through their experiences can contribute to the construction of a plural and diverse memory on regard of a main actor such as the army. In this sense, considering the information provided from the diverse sources in the state of art the different roles associated with the military personnel in the conflict has not been recomplicated in one document. This research aims to provide a first approximation to the memory construction of the army under the line of 3 main roles -victim, hero, perpetrator- considering the narrative of each of them as a key factor in understanding it and to contrast each of the roles with the hegemonic military masculinity thought in the army.

The analysis is relevant to the memory construction of the army because it provides a contrasted information and allows for a broad view of the roles performed during the conflict. The perspective is innovative because it combines different social theories and a critical assessment.

Thus, it is interesting to ask how does the identification of different roles -victim, hero, perpetrator-related to members of the Colombian army contributes to the study of the memory construction of the internal conflict? The thesis has five parts, first one approaching to the methodology, the theoretical and conceptual frame, detailing the critical military theories, locus of enunciation focusses in the narrative perspective and role theories, whose combination of the selected theories allowed the analysis of the study object. The second one related to how the memory of the land armed forces has focused on the victimization of their members and their families, displaying military masculinity as an internal and institutional barrier as discrimination. The third one exposes the memory construction with regard to the military personnel as perpetrator and the deep bonded with paramilitaries and the human right violations. The fourth one, reveal how the main narrative for the government on regard of the militaries as victims, allowed the interconnection with them as patriotic heroes who were willing to give their lives to protect society and the state, reducing

their participation in the conflict as a duty. The fifth one considered the general conclusions of the thesis and the interconnection between the roles, narrative and hegemonic military masculinity.

## **2. Methodology and Theoretical Approaches**

The study of the memory construction in Colombia is not new, it has been an ongoing research subject. Based on that, the approaches have been different depending on what kind of memory the authors are talking about, the main component of course is the memories of the victims, but it also been studied other actor's memories such the perpetrators -especially the paramilitaries and guerrillas- and of course the official memory from the government, which is mainly attached to the diverse corps of the armed forces like the Army, Navy, and Air, the members of those forces played a fundamental role in the evolving, changing and devolving of the armed conflict. Given the opportunity to tell their version – Army members- of the past, it is important because it is a way to heal for them and also contribute to the memory construction from different perspectives. It is important to clarify that the memory of one of the main actors in a complex context could be polemical because the roles that they represent are diverse and, in some cases, they do not name it. In this sense, this research aims to provide an initial approximation and identification of different roles assigned to the members of the national Army of Colombia during the memory construction of the armed conflict in the country and the analysis of those roles through the concept of masculinities, and how it shapes each role? How it can be understood and internalized in the different roles?

The following chapter will provide the information on the methodological and theoretical approximations analyzed and used for the development of the thesis. In this sense, the chapter is divided into two. The first one is where the methodology is explained and the second one explores the theoretical framework, dividing it into three parts and providing a concrete description of the concepts implement enduring the development of thesis.

### **2. 1 Methodology**

The research has a qualitative methodology, specifically the critical analysis of literature method used from an interpretivism philosophy, not only because it is related to the theoretical approximation but also because it allows to interpret and analyze the information gathering of the different members of Colombian's army. The decision of use this method was based on the type of analysis aimed, in order to accomplish a better analysis of the data, in this case the literature about the memory construction of the members of Colombian's army during the armed conflict. The information was gathered from different primary sources, and the main method was the interview with different members of the army, in this sense, the research had a narrative component,

described as “the observations and interpretations of people’s perception of different events, and it takes the snapshot of the people’s perceptions in a natural setting” (Gentles et al., 2015, as cited in Mohajan, 2018). This narrative component is not performed directly by me as the researcher, it was taken from the results presented by the different authors of the estate of art.

The importance of understanding the research method in the resources that allow me to build up the state of art of the memory construction of Colombian’s army, is to comprehend the approximation made by the researches into the individual point of view, and how they can be used as a tool for performing generalizations and conjunctions of the information collected. The analysis performed takes into consideration the narrative which is a fundamental part of the Locus of Enunciation theory, one of the main theories chosen for the analysis of the information. In this sense, “it investigates local knowledge and understanding of a given program, people’s experiences, meanings and relationships, and social processes and contextual factors that marginalize a group of people (Mohajan, 2018, p. 24). The memory construction based on the subjectivity of one of the most important institutions, as “actors” of the armed conflict, allows to get a general idea, also based on the structured order that is constructed and performed the Army as an institution, of how its members perceive the roles that have been associated with them when people refer to Colombian’s armed conflict.

The narrative approach taken by the authors allowed them to “focuses on people’s narratives either about themselves or a set of events. Instead of looking for themes that emerge from an account, it concentrates on the sequential unfolding of someone’s story so there is an emphasis on characters” (Mohajan, 2018, p. 30). This emphasis on the characters produces a connection with the individuals that can only be possible with this kind of approximation, which makes the analysis more interesting because it allows a comparison in one text of the different roles given to the Army members.

The selection of the sources was made based on the type of memory that it provides; collective and individual memory was taken into consideration. Most of the research taken as sources intends to provide a general perspective of the army members in Colombian’s armed conflict based on personal experiences that are at the same time generalized as the Army’s perspectives. The attempt of generalizations can provide a wide view of the perception in the society of the army members as well as their perception of themselves as main actors. The role associated with the memory

perspective that it is related determined the approach of the interviews and how they information provide can be use as first understanding of the memory process.

Considering the narrative approach taken by the authors of the primary sources, the main criteria for selected the sources that was used to perform the analysis. After the gathering, the selection was performed taking into account the results of those sources, based on the information collected a categorization of the information was performed. This categorization allowed me to identify three main categories of analysis – victim, hero and perpetrator- the information provide a different treatment with regard to each of the terms, in this sense the terms were identify as roles for the characteristics associate with each of them and how the narrative provided some guide on their expectations.

After gathering the information, the time for the theory selection comes. It was performed an initial search were the concepts of memory, narrative and role were fundamental from a critical perspective, due to those being the main topics of the research. During the preliminary search, the theory locus of enunciation was also found, as were some role theories but there was a need to provides a stronger analysis where the idea of including the military masculinities theory was conceived. Each of the theories postulate a complex framework but it can be mixed between them. The mix specify a border theoretical framework which generate the resources to explain the impact of military masculinity on the memory construction as community but also as indivial, being related with the roles that are usually expressed more from an individual place depending on the narrative.

## **2.2 Theories**

The theoretical framework of this research is mainly based on the critical military studies on regard of the memory construction<sup>14</sup> of the members of the army, in this case Colombian's army, from this perspective three different theories are used. The first one is the locus of enunciation, second one is the role as resources and the last one is military masculinities. To understand the reasoning behind selecting those theories, an approximation to the critical military studies was performed

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<sup>14</sup> It can be understood as socio- political processes which is active and selective, where collective memories are shaped by power dynamics, where the main characteristics are the negotiation and transmission of collective meanings and representations of the past, usually imposed by the particular narratives and interpretations of the past, while some marginalized groups may contest or resist these dominant memories. This definition is my own interpretation from Aleida Assman (2011) and Jeffery Olick (2007) definition.

considering the more representative authors but also mixing the theories of military masculinities with the locus of enunciation based on how diverse life experiences can determine the way in which we perceive the world and also how we make sense of it, it means how we understand our surroundings and the particular narrative that we acquire when one is talking about memory<sup>15</sup>.

### **2.2.1 Critical military theories**

The critical military studies are an interdisciplinary field that look for the analyze and critique of dominant narratives and assumptions about military culture and organizations. Considering the interdisciplinarity of this field, different theories converge to facilitate the critique and analysis of the main narratives in the military institutions. In this sense, theories from other fields like political science, sociology, international relations, cultural studies and anthropology are used to understand the political, social and cultural context in which military institutions operate. On regard with specific subjects on which this studies focus is in the importance of understanding the power dynamics that shape military organizations and practices. One of the authors more influent in this theme is Cynthia Enloe (2000), she emphasized the ways in which gender and sexuality shape military identities and practices, also how these practices and identities are used to legitimize military power.

Other approximation to understand the importance of the power in the shape of military organizations is exposed by Nick Vaughan-Williams (2016), who seeks to determine how this power is built through discursive practice, in his argumentation this constructed power is related to the language and symbols used by military organizations, which play a crucial role in the legitimization of their actions. In this sense, the use of language and the narrative that is behind it are important to prologue and maintain the power, this is the reason why the military institutions are perpetuating traditional gender roles, not only within the institution but in society as a whole. Military institutions are still playing a key role in influencing public opinion and values, this influence can be translated in manipulation of the agenda and narrative through the speech.

Clearly, the legitimation of military power has not been approximated by an only scholar. Jairus Grove (2019), managing the theme of the relationship between military power and technology, he studied the ways in which military technology is used to build and legitimize military power, and

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<sup>15</sup> “Is not a static or a passive faculty, but a dynamic, constructive, and even productive one. It is not simply a simple retention of the past, but a complex process of re-presentation, interpretation, and appropriation” (Ricour, 2004).

how this power is usually mediated through cultural and symbolic practices. In this sense, the examination of how military technologies are represented in popular culture and how those representations shape the perception of the military power by the society, is crucial to understand how the military legitimization comes from several places at the same time, knowing that allows to create different kinds of strategies to mitigate the manipulation of the narrative to perpetuate the traditional gender roles, in this case the military masculinity which is associate with the use of weapons and technologies.

The subject of this study, which is more relevant, for the purpose of this research, is importance of memory and the politics of memory in the understanding of military organizations and practices. Victoria Basham (2013) is the author more representative of this theme, she argues that there are different ways in which memory can be used to legitimize military actions and how the construction of memory within military organizations can be used to create a sense of collective purpose and identity. Her work examines the use of the language, symbols and rituals by military organizations to build and reinforce their identities and also to shape society's perception of the actions taken by those institutions. In this sense, memory is a tool to legitimize their policies and actions but also to provide a sense of unity and meaning to their members, which is essential to develop loyal soldiers that will be part of something bigger, in the Colombian case, fighting against the guerrilleros who are taking advantage of the people and are a treat to the national security.

Critical military studies are a broad and helpful field to understand gender roles, military power and the influence public legitimization through memory especially. This memory component of the field is not fully useful to accomplish the research due to some key points of concern being missing. One is the locus of enunciation<sup>16</sup> which allows to understand from which position the speaker talks, it includes the person's social, cultural and historical context. The analysis is made based on the narrative that each person takes to explain their "truth" understanding how power, identity and ideology are expressed through language and how these expressions reflect and reinforce social hierarchies. For this investigation, the reinforcement and reflection of social

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<sup>16</sup> Is an epistemic space from which the horizon of interpretation is articulated, it refers us to the basis of the cultural system that is expressed by means of an individual discourse. In other words, it is the space that delimits the knowledge of reality based on a structural mechanism (Muñiz, 2016, p. 25).

hierarchies are related to memory construction and how through this traditional military masculinity is perpetuated in Colombia.

### **2.2.2 Locus of Enunciation**

The narrative<sup>17</sup> is a fundamental concept to understand the locus of enunciation, in this sense, it is important to keep in mind that what is narrated is not always what it actually occurred, “inevitable is the form of narrative for any report on the way things really happened, that narrativity could appear problematical only in a culture in which it was absent- or, as in some domains of contemporary Western intellectual and artistic culture, programmatically refused” (White, 1987). This contestation of the narrative is important due to facilitates critical approximation to different events, through it you can identify and recognize the power dynamics and ideologies conformed by a particular narrative which shape the perception of reality, which will challenge dominant narratives and open up new requests for understanding and dialogue.

The possibilities that narratives offer to the understanding of the reality are wide so as White (1987) suggest

Far from being a problem, then, narrative might well be considered a solution to a problem of general human concern, namely, the problem of how to translate knowing into telling, the problem of fashioning human experience into a form assimilable to structures of meaning that are generally human rather than culture-specific.

In this sense, narratives are part of the human identification and construction due to without it they cannot be understood. The events on their own are not telling anything, is when you put them in a certain context or narrative, they can accomplish a purpose, that is the reason why narrative tends to legitimize the particular interpretation of the events. This interpretation is only valuable when there is contest, so the story must be told (White, 1987, p. 19) in a particular way in order to become predominant or more accepted and sometimes it is called “Truth”. In processes like Colombian post-conflict, the narrative plays a fundamental role in the memory construction, especially from the governmental institutions that depend on the institution or the leader of it to promote a particular narrative – more like the official one, which is aligned with the legitimization of the events- and it is present as the real memory of the conflict which is problematic.

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<sup>17</sup> is a meta-code, a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted (White, 1987, p. 1)

Reality will depend on the experiences and knowledge that each of them has of it, what a determined group of people consider as a reality is influenced by “an active role in the process of interpretation: through the historic narrative participate in the construction of a historical phenomenon” (Muñiz, 2016, p. 16). Considering the part of interpretation that every person gives to the narrative, it is crucial to identify where are they situated to comprehend the delimitation of their vision of reality (Muñiz, 2016, p. 25). This delamination of the reality allows a better understanding of the things that are going to be told and those that are not told, which are determinant in the approximation expressed in the narrative. Furthermore, the interpretation and understanding of the world as per Gadamer (2006) is through the language, based on the discourse interpretation where “we interpellated for a tradition that we have learned and it allows us to understand, that is the case of how we build the world from the human experience in the time based on tradition, memory and the past, this is how we make sense of what has happened”.

Making sense of the past is one of the most relevant parts of the human being, giving meaning to the experience that they had and its remembrance is a way of defining who they are, what they have been through and the impact of those experiences in their lives. In most people's narratives you can identify the before and after of a relevant event or period of time in their life. In this sense, “people have generally constructed their narratives from criteria other than chronological temporalities, their stories are endowed with emotionality, significant events that make the narration, a positioning of the experience, to give meaning to the past” (Sepulveda, 2015, p. 52). This meaning is what allows us to internalize the narrative because those events are particularly important in the proper context otherwise, they will be trivial for individual or collective memory purposes.

Discussing memory has been studied for a while, in this research I intended to focus on the analysis of the collective memory construction through individual memory, which is the case of the Army members. Considering the importance of the context and the narrative in the memory construction, as Sarlo (2005) explain:

Narration is anchored to the body, to a subjectivity that makes memory possible, but this memory is not a totality, it passes through the positioning of the subject, but also the narration is inscribed in a certain time that is not the time of the subject. It is inscribed in a determined time that is not the time of experience but the time of memory, and in this way, the narration is conditioned by the testimony.

Based on the previous, the sources of this work were conditioned by the testimony of each of the participants in the different studies, which allows to abord the narration in a specific period of time in the past that provides an explanation or a justification of the events in the present.

Clearly, history and memory are not the same but they are related in the Colombian context, especially when we are considering the Army, which is the main representant of the State in conflict flied. Muñiz (2016) resume the connection between history and memory made by Ricoeur:

He recognizes the self-explanatory character of narration and argues that the link between narration and history is undeniable, because the work of historicizing is to make memory of what happened in the past, and this operation is the link between both processes: that of narrating and that of making history, the activity with a temporal character of telling and the temporal activity of recounting the human experience. It is in narration that time becomes human time. We will also add the appropriation of space, making it human through narration.

In this sense, White (1987) explain that:

The nature of this immanence in any narrative account of real events, events that are offered as the proper content of historical discourse. These events are real not because they occurred but because, first, they were remembered and, second, they are capable of finding a place in a chronologically ordered sequence. In order, however, for an account of them to be considered a historical account, it is not enough that they be recorded in the order of their original occurrence. It is the fact that they can be recorded otherwise, in an order of narrative, that makes them, at one and the same time, questionable as to their authenticity and susceptible to being considered as tokens of reality. In order to qualify as historical, an event must be susceptible to at least two narrations of its occurrence. Unless at least two versions of the same set of events can be imagined, there is no reason for the historian to take upon himself the authority of giving the true account of what really happened (20).

The contestation of events during the conflict, between the official version, military members' version, the civilian version and guerrilleros' version is undeniable. Based on that, the need for legitimization and recognition for those who do not identify with the main narrative is relevant due to even if people belong to the same community the narrative from different actors of it can be opposite, the function of the narrative will change depending on whether it is conceived as an end in itself or only as a means to so other end (White, 1987, p. 27). This difference in the function of the narrative was demonstrated in the analysis of the roles constructed by the memory of the armed

members in Colombia, also considering the influence of military masculinities in the identification with the roles.

### **2.2.3 Roles Theories**

The term “role” is essential for the purposes of this investigation based on the identification of three roles associate with the army’s members through memory construction. In this sense, roles are considering a from a sociological perspective are essential building blocks of social structure and provide the framework for individuals to navigate through social situations and fulfill societal expectations based on the role they have been assigned<sup>18</sup>. It is crucial to clarify that roles are not inherent to human beings but are previously assigned by society depending on different social factors as family, education, profession and so on.

Reflecting the giving characteristic of the role others aspects are considered relevant to understand the concept such as the expectations. In this sense, each role is accompanied by how the individuals should behave and the duties that should be performed based on the position of the role that they have, also the expectations are shaped by the social and cultural context (Parsons, 1991). Likewise, the socialization is the process that allows individuals to learn and internalize the assigned roles, the knowledge to successfully fulfill the roles is acquired from different social interactions, cultural transmission and observation which also helps to understand the obligations and responsibilities associated with the role (Mead, 1972). Another important aspect related to it is the role conflict that can present to an individual in certain moments of their life when “opposite” roles are present in their life, this is the case of the army members who within their military role have complementary roles such as hero, victim and perpetrator, the interaction of the individual with each of the roles is different based on the embracing level of its acceptance.

Embracing the role is related to the identity and how they define themselves. The study of the identity is not part of this investigation, and the slight associations or correlations made between the identity and the role were not relevant for the analysis performed in this research. Considering, the previous information, Peter Callero (1994) argues that individuals have their own agency on regard to the roles assigned by society, which means that individuals are capable of using the roles as resources, so these are not fixed but flexible through personal experiences. The author also

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<sup>18</sup> The definition was made taking in consideration different authors such as Evering Goffman, Geroge Herbert Mead and Talcott Parsons, for precise information of their work please refer to the bibliography.

emphasizes the flexibility of the roles due to the ability of the individual to negotiate, modify or reject certain aspects of their roles to achieve a better alignment with their own values and aspirations, as a result, the individual shapes their social reality.

The interactionist approach to role theory, Callero's works belong has also been influenced by Ralph Linton and Anselm Strauss, they overall argue that individuals engage with their roles and make choices based on their interpretation and enacting considering their values, goals and social context.

Ralph Linton acknowledges the concept of "role set"<sup>19</sup>, this term refers to different roles associated with a particular status or position held by an individual, he remarks on the ability of individuals to occupy multiple roles simultaneously. Considering, that the interactions are highly influence by the expectations associate to each role in their own role set, which also determine their actions.

Evering Goffman (1963) contributed to the construction of the "role distance" as a concept, which describes the ways in which the individuals detach themselves from the expectations of a particular role. The distance allows them to maintain a certain degree of autonomy and independence which at the same time enable them to critically evaluate and adapt their roles based on their own values and preferences. On the same line, Anselm Strauss (1993) proposes the "negotiated order", which the roles are negotiated based on the interactions between the individuals, allowing them to shape and adapt their roles accordingly their interpretation of the situation, therefore emerges the concept or "role-making".

In this sense, the active agency performed by the individual on regard to internalization and communication is determinant of the fulfillment of the role. Even though, when the role is not fully fulfilled by the person, social interactions and expectations are usually mutating, especially in categories such as heroes, victims and perpetrators, the main characteristic will not change but the values associated with it will vary depending on the interaction that prominent individuals <sup>20</sup>get with the role. Role making as Strauss referred, is a phenomenon that can be materialized in the Colombian context where different individuals interfere in the construction of the role, showing

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<sup>19</sup> The term is not literally exposed by the author but his studies contribute to its construction for more information please refer to the bibliography.

<sup>20</sup> I referred to prominent individuals as those who are considered public people who are capable to influence in the public opinion, in this case, based on roles are socially constructed and shape, the changing in this opinion will impact in the expectations of certain roles.

the negotiated order between the prominent individuals and the society to determine the characteristics that will be socialized through interactions that will generate certain expectations for each of the roles. The explanation of this interaction will take place in the analysis, each chapter considered one approximation depending on the role and the agents directly involved.

#### **2.2.4 Military Masculinities**

Approaching military masculinities is fundamental to this research. In this sense, masculinity, as per Hinojosa (2010) is “defined by emotional control, over heterosexual desire, physical fitness, self-discipline, self-reliance, the willingness to use aggression and physical violence, and risk-taking, qualities tightly aligned with the military”. Also, Barrett (1996) characterized the military masculinities by “physical toughness, the endurance of hardships, aggressiveness, a rugged heterosexuality, unemotional logic, and a refusal to complain”. In this sense, the military masculinity is a hard version of masculinity which is usually standardized to a determine society contributing to the “devaluation of women and the supposedly feminine based on the image of the strong and brave soldier is dependent on the contrast foil of the emotional and weak woman whereby strategies of feminizing certain traits and behaviors are also used in military training” (Kiefer, 2022, p. 48).

Following the idea of the feminine as the opposition to the masculine, especially in the military masculinities Mc Manners (1993) argues that:

The concept of gender is by definition relational. In order to construct masculinity, ideas of femininity must be constructed that are supportive and complementary. Army training is a key site where such constructions take place. This training is a ‘critical period in a man’s life’, which works by breaking down civilian identity and rebuilding the individual as a soldier.

Considering this characteristic as military, the training that all of the members are required to perform at the beginning of the military career says that, “the aim of this training is to reconfigure body-selves towards the functional imperatives of military objectives” (Higate 2013, p. 114). Those objectives vary depending on each country, in this sense, training is the fundamental stage for providing, prioritizing and internalized what is considered by the institution as the desire soldier. Furthermore, Gill (1997) suggests:

Basic training is a gendered process of moral regulation in which the armed forces define the parameters of appropriate male behavior and link masculinity and citizenship to the successful completion of military service obligations that are linked as closely to civic duty as to the actual

practice warfare (...) are created by the imposition of acceptable masculinity that prize aggressivity, male camaraderie, discipline, and obedience to authority.

The construction of the type of masculinity that is accepted in the army demonstrates that “the intersection of the binary gender schema and the military schema shapes the construction of militarized identities, the military’s daily practices, social stratification and the link between military service and citizenship” (Ombati, 2015, p. 407).

Furthermore, being a proper male in society -especially in Colombian where conflict has been part of the lives of several generations- usually implies that they served in the military, there is a general belief that serving “is indispensable to becoming responsible, disciplined men who are capable of leading a family, and commanding others” (Gill L. , 1997, p. 538). The ideal of this masculine soldier who provides for the family and protects society is standardized for what a man should be, in a context of the military where indoctrination is fundamental for the perpetuation of the institution, this “generalized” conception of a “proper man” where other kind of masculinities are not allowed or fomented. In this sense, the militarization of the masculine ideal in the society brought the continuation of “hierarchies of race, class, gender, and sexuality, and to the shaping of national histories in ways that glorify and legitimate military action” (Lutz, 2007, p. 320) which is problematic due to the socioeconomic conditions that most of the soldiers have found in the army a solution and a constant income provider, and as per Enloe argues that military institutions are sites of the production and reproduction of culture and gender (Henry, 2017).

Reflecting on the military institutions as places of production in terms of gender believes, it is important to consider that masculinities “are multiple, dynamic and contradictory due to their being actively constructed – they are processes, not types (Connell 1987, 1995). They are constructed in relation to bodies, social definitions of a man’s place and the shifting contexts men find themselves in” (Hooper 2000; Connell 2002 a cited by Duncanson, 2009 p.64). The construction of the military masculinities depends on several aspects such as nationality, race, age, class, also within the institution when they choose their branch, regiment or job specialization (Duncanson, 2009, p. 64). These differences mean that we cannot talk about one military masculinity, we can refer to the hegemonic one or other masculinities depending on what is the

focus of the study. For purposes of this research, the military masculinity that I referred is hegemonic masculinity<sup>21</sup>.

The hegemonic masculinity is based on a model of man, in this case a military one, who is “tough, brave, ready for action and also hard-drinking, heterosexual and physically fit, can be said to have prevailed as the ideal or ‘hegemonic’ model (Higate 2003c: 30 as cited by Duncanson, 2009) (...). This does not mean that all soldiers fit this description; it means that this model commands power and respect and is recognizable as an ideal (Carrigan et al. 1985, as cited by Duncanson, 2009). This ideal man play a major role on the expectations that every soldier but also the society have of them, so the interaction with different kind of masculinities can influence the construction of everyone depends on the acceptances or rejection, on a conscious or subconscious level, of the ways of being a man demonstrated by other men, this interactions involved power struggles to asserts one’s masculinity (Duncanson, 2009). In this sense, the hegemonic military masculinity is mutually constructed by the institution, the society and the members, the last one whose adapt and internalized it in the best way they could but considering the experiences that they suffered during the service, it changed.

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<sup>21</sup> It is “defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Connell 2005 as cited by Kiefer, 2022, p.47).

### 3. Members of the Army as Heroes

In the Colombian's armed conflict, the military forces played an important part to fighting the guerillas, this situation was seeing as a high honor performed by men who were willing to defend the country against the insurgent groups, as it was their duty in the army. The narrative of glorious, powerful and heroic men who were part of the military forces has been circulating in society since the begging of the institution in Colombia, impacting in the imaginary of the population on a level to perceive the military as an example of ideal manhood, this is a common situation in most of the States, where military forces are strong and represent authority all over the country. In this sense, Hugo Bauza states that combat becomes one of the fundamental elements that define the hero and this is due to the fact that "the greatness of the hero lies in the fact that when he fights, he risks his life and, for this reason, combat becomes the essential proof of his existence" (Berrío, 2018).

Considering the important part of the combat in the existence of the heroes, it can also be defined as per Cristopher Vogler (2002) "as the most important of all archetypes, the one whom is at the center of all others and who stands out for his capacity for sacrifice. And by sacrifice we should understand the hero's willingness to give up something of great value, perhaps his own life, for the benefit of an ideal or the group to which he belongs". In this sense, the higher benefit or propose for who these heroes combat in Colombia is the peace and protection of the people as a giving assignment from the constitution. Also, in the imaginary of the society this narrative of protection and heroism is deeply rooted in a country that has fought an enemy of the State for more than 50 years.

According to Berrío (2018) and on this line of argumentation:

The hero dwells properly in symbolic narratives where the existence of a Destinator is necessary; that is, a mentor -as Vogler called him- who represents the paternal figure, linked to the symbolic law, and is in charge of giving the task to the hero, providing him with the tools to accomplish it and, finally, sanctioning the victory of the subject who is proclaimed as a hero. This intrinsic relationship between hero and Destinator -mentor-, is directly linked to the patriarchal order and would allow us to catalog the hero also as the personification of the values of a patriarchal society, of what that certain society would consider as correct, good, desired and admirable.

This representation of the hero as representation of a patriarchal society is closely linked to military masculinity, as masculinity as a concept develops in the context of patriarchy. This

development is translated into the institutionalization -in the military forces- of the desirable values of hero, which are mainly associated with men. The whole concept of the hero and its representation of the hegemonic military masculinity, can be understood in the narrative of the army, the training, the values thoughts, the expectations and the formal education within the army lead to the perpetuation of the patriarchy because it is permeated in the collective conscience and questioning is not an option.

### **3.1 Heroes as victims**

In Colombia where the opportunities are limited not only because of the conflict but mainly because the state has not been providing the basic conditions to build a decent life, joining the army as a stable source of income is attracting. Also, the impact of the narratives constructed by the government around the army, which represent in the collective imaginary the ultimate honor becoming a hero, can be inviting. The sense of being a hero for his family is important, most of the people who joined the army wanted to be called heroes, this can be related to a media campaign during the government of Alvaro Uribe (2002 to 2010) in which one of the main strategies is framed in his proposal for democratic security, which consisted of legitimizing and incorporating in the collective imagination a positive image of the armed forces. For this purpose, different propaganda means were used, such as the creation of the campaign "Heroes in Colombia do exist", where the heroism of the members of the Armed Forces was exalted through an altruistic figure. A clear example of this type of propaganda is reflected in the phrase "I do not know you, but I am willing to give my life for you" (Gordillo & Federico 2013) where the image of someone fighting in a rural context to protect the constitutional order and the legitimacy of the State is sold.

The role of hero is closely associated with the victim, in the official narrative both are building and legitimizing of other. There is not possible to understand the construction of the memory without considering the allusion performed for the government to how military personnel are heroes due to the honor of belonging to the military forces and to protect the society. As Mejía (2014) state:

Many glorious pages have been written in the fields of Colombia with the indelible ink that has left the brave and indefatigable bodies of the soldiers and policemen of the homeland. That blood, as a demonstration of greatness, has allowed the great majority of us to have the opportunity to return to our homes every night safe and sound. To wear the uniform of any of the institutions that make up the Armed Forces is the greatest honor for anyone born in this thriving nation, which travels through the paths of adversity.

The association between the victim and hero in the official narrative cannot be unassociated, an example of this closeness is the law 913 of 2004 which stipulated July 19<sup>th</sup> as the official date to commemorate the ‘National Heroes and Their Families Day’, in the article number 2 states: “All official, private and ecclesiastical dependencies of the Nation and in general all the Colombian people are exhorted to hoist the National Standard at half-mast on July 19 of each year in commemoration of this significant date and as a preamble to the National Independence Day in honor of those who have sacrificed for freedom” (Congress of Colombia, 2004). The mention of the sacrifice legitimizes the discourse and initiatives promoted by the government of Alvaro Uribe, related to the hard fighting against the enemy.

The official discourse has a deep impact on the perception of society, on regard to the different actors, military members are seen as heroes: “they are people who expose their lives for wanting to save [...] They are people who love their country very much. They have conviction [...] they are risking their lives for other people [...] as I said: sometimes you see them as heroes, but not all of them are good ones” (Villa Gomez, Velásquez Cuartas, Barrera Machado, & Avendaño Ramírez, 2020, p. 33). In the collective imaginary, the military are heroes because they sacrifice for the society but at the same time they question the heroism of the institution.

This fight can be understood in literal way, as Cabrera et all (2018) portrait it:

We had lost personnel (two soldiers) and the situation continued. The enemy was latent, it was night and they had just made the delivery of weapons by the Air Force, what they call the bombardment. Air Force, what they call the bombardment. We heard many people complaining; we did not know if they were the enemy's voices. We did not know if they were the voices of the enemy or of our commandos. [...] during the flight I had two young men for almost 40 minutes under a tree that reached them, well, let's not say it crushed them, but it did injure them and we could not remove the tree and we heard them asking for help. I don't know how we got the strength.

The sacrifice and struggle in the previous lines facilitate empathy with the man who is giving everything for the society in order to defeat the enemy, which has been harming the population over and over the time.

Another way to fight the enemy was to survive, not only through combat but to be kidnapped. The National Center of Historic Memory with the book ‘Memoirs of The Jungle: Memoirs of Members of The Security Forces Who Were Victims of kidnapping’ in 2019 states “one particularity of kidnapping was its longevity, since the victimization was not one, but several over days, months or years of captivity; perhaps this is why the memories of the damages and impacts are always tied

to the ways of coping with them and surviving”. The enduring of those who were victims of kidnaping contributes to the legitimization of military personnel as heroes, those who sacrifice their dignity, health, and family to survive and present the world the atrocities perpetrated by the guerrilla. Clearly the options in those cases were very limited, but the official narrative of the government on this topic, was to fortify the image of the army in the society and to exalt it.

Depending on the history of the army in the communities, they could be welcome or unwanted, the warming welcomed performed by some of the people sticks in the memory of military personnel, as one officer related “I managed to disembark, and we avoided that town from being taken over. Then, the reaction of the people was the one that marked me the most ... To see some children come out of a little school and offer us something to drink after it had happened. The face of joy and saying: soldier, take this water or take this, which was from the student canteen of the school, and a sincere hug” (Cabrera, Corcione, Figueroa, & Rodriguez, 2018, p. 186). This kind of memory was also spread on the media, in order to contribute to the social construction of the soldier as a hero and the representation of the honorable man.

Following this idea, the construction of militaries as saviors, can also be considered, from military personnel perspective as a recognition gave by guerrilleros, as the Cabrera et al (2018) found:

They put me in charge of them,’ says the officer. Went I went and hand them over at the Modelo de Monteria prison, they all shook my hand and said, "Thank you, have a seat! So I was the last one and I said: "Come on, why are you thanking me, brother, if I came here to thank you? brother, if I came to get them into the guandoca?" "It's because you saved our lives". So, these are the little things that stay with you

Narratives are constructed based on the perceptions and imaginaries, in this case, the officer consider himself a hero because they confessed him that he saved the lives of his enemies even though he was handing them in prison. Commentaries like that had a huge impact on the imaginary of the military personnel due to reaffirming the importance of their duty and the construction of a strong accountability.

In regard to accountability during combat or deployment, especially for those who are leading the operations is big, depending on the situation, leaders portrayed as humble people accomplishing their duty, such as an officer told Cabrera et al (2018):

The main mission was to eradicate illicit crops. So, if 150 people come to you with the intention of banishing the army, of putting an end to the mobile eradication groups, they literally said: "Let's give the army a stick, let's get those guys out, they are here". So, I went alone and told them to talk

to me. I really talked to them about what we can do, about what we are going through, about why we are going to destroy each other, [...] I managed to convince them to allow us to eradicate them in their territory

The diplomatic role accomplished by the commander in that mission provides a sense of superiority not only because military personnel had weapons but also, he portrayed himself as a logical and rational person who is willing to dialogue in order to be able to complete the mission. In this particular example, we can infer that he considers himself as a hero, he was able to deescalate a difficult situation with society and make them see the good in their work.

Following the good work and labor performed by the military forces, they had a crucial impact on the development projects of regions apart from the routes, where the population does not have the facilities to have a dignified life. A military officer stated:

We organized community centers as shelters with the community so that we could have children coming from the sidewalks and they did not have to leave and return the same days. They were there from Monday to Friday. The community action itself provided the administration and food, but on Fridays they would go home with their mothers and return. We built bridges because, in order to get through, they had to take off their slippers and cross the creek and the four main streets. In order for them to have a sense of belonging to their village, they wanted to turn it into a municipality (Cabrera, Corcione, Figueroa, & Rodriguez, 2018, pp. 194-195).

The work with the communities, especially on development and providing basic infrastructure was very important to the internalization of the role as a hero. They were able to accomplish their duty of protecting the people but at the same time, they were also giving extra to improve the lives of society. The gratification and gratitude from the community were a reward for the militaries, in the construction of the narrative and identifying themselves as heroes, memories like that produced engagement and legitimation. Precisely, in the near future, and more linked to a collective view, there are rules that have come to be created within civil society, recognitions of different kinds for people who have demonstrated with admirable actions that sometimes it is necessary to go beyond the duty to defend the people (Mejía, 2014).

Defending people can also be understood as defending themselves too, in an institution where the line of command is given not always the soldiers are willing to follow the orders, as the officer affirm:

I made the decision to stay at the Mobile Patrol Base next to an abandoned house, and the real intention was to sleep inside the house, but thank God I had some very good NCO's. So, a lance

corporal said to me, "Lieutenant, look, this is the chronicle of a death foretold: house, water, shade..., we have everything. There must be something going on here. So, we made the decision in the afternoon or at night to move about 100 meters from the house. I believe that these are things of God. Some soldiers got into the house and I went to fight with them to get them out of the house, and we got them out, then, after two hours, the house blew up, the house was blown up (Cabrera, Corcione, Figueroa, & Rodriguez, 2018, p. 192)

Considering the opinion of the NCO was curtail for surviving, the way in which the situation was recalled and narrated incentivizes the reader to relate to the decision and logic, also to connect those heroic anecdotes of the armed conflict to human beings of flesh and bone who are also vulnerable (National Center of Historic Memory, 2019, p. 48).

The vulnerability of military personnel in combat is huge, as the National Center of Historic Memory (2019) stated, "In combat, people take many things to make themselves, for example, one filled a jar with urine and lived drinking, another ate gunpowder, things you do to keep your courage and fear alive, and to make decisions, as my sergeant major says, 'if I have to shoot myself, I'll shoot myself'". Those kinds of actions performed to keep the courage and fear alive are related with the values promoted in the institution, bravery, toughness, resilience and resistance. Soldier and in general military personnel are thought to face physical and emotional pain with determination and strength, in combat they cannot be seen as weak because that is not a value associated with military manhood, and for the correlation to the hero that is portrait by it.

Clearly, the relationship between military masculinity – from a hegemonic perspective- and heroism is complex, mainly as I have expressed in this chapter, it can exist an idealization of the heroism as a masculine main desirable and fundamental characteristic for the military identity, which can be useful in the battle field as a manifestation of their manhood and courage. This courage can be dangerous because it can lead to irresponsible and reckless actions that can put their personal security at risk. At the same time, the glorification of the heroism can hide the reality of the trauma and suffering of military personnel, especially in a context where weakness or sensitivity is undesirable. The concern on regard the identity of the military is not addressed in this research but it would be very interesting performed an investigation on this regard, especially in a complex context like the Colombian one.

Another important part to consider on regard of the heroism are the rewards, "it is normal that within each regular armed corps there are different manifestations to reward acts of courage, skill, commitment and sacrifice. Often these incentives, tributes, awards, medals, decorations and

distinctions remain symbolic. For a member of a military and police institution, the honorific is everything” (Mejía, 2014). The honor related to these rewards is a fundamental part of the military narrative because the institution is the representation of the state, which at the same time represents the motherland, which is worthy to dying for. A particularity of the honor is the public recognition of the heroic acts as a crucial part of grace the courage of the soldiers, they also turn into model roles for other members of the forces and gain reputation within the unit and their leaders. The personal recognition is fundamental in this sense, to perpetuate the hero’s ideals and aspirations. It also, allows to preserve the honor of the institution as a whole and legitimize it to society.

Separating the heroism from the military forces in the collective imaginary is complex, as Mejía (2014) affirm ‘that is why many of us, when we speak of ‘hero’, or use the term ‘heroism’, perceive it from two perspectives: that of someone who does something beyond his duty for others; and that of a human being who, wearing a uniform, has defended his fellow men and women in the face of aggressions and threats of different kinds. It is true that, the view that almost all of us have of heroism is linked to the military and police sphere”. Considering the values associated with the hero as military values, in a context where those concepts are correlated, the narratives used by the media which are the main source of information for Colombian’s society regarding the armed conflict, are usually influenced by political interests who respond to powerful people with particularly agendas who pretend to manipulate the opinion of the people into their favor.

### **3.2 Mass media as a source of power in the memory construction of the ‘Hero’**

Bearing in mind the importance of the role, especially in a society like Colombian where armed forces members have been playing as a main actor since the beginning and the people have been thinking of them as mainly heroes. This vision of heroes is also related to the campaign “The heroes in Colombia do exist” It was made in a very particular context – Alvaro Uribe’s presidency- where the fight against “terrorism” was on the main spot and the military operations and actions must be legitimized by the population. The development of this expression was relevant to the consolidation of the role of the military as heroes, while at the same time the extrajudicial executions were out for the public in the case of “Soacha guys” Not only the polemic was raising in that moment, but also the mistrusting in the armed forces as a legitimate institution.

In order to contra rest, the negative effects of human right violations perpetrated by military personnel, the narrative of the state, not only through official channels but also through media,

impact favorable the perception of this group, “the construction of a discourse established by an actor of the armed conflict, which, using communication, has managed to position an image before the civilian population, generating among them: followers, passions and mainly generates a way of understanding the social situation of the country before the society” (Chala Quintero, 2019, p. 20).

As I mentioned before, the campaign “The heroes in Colombia do exist” allowed the exalting role of the military personnel as heroes, they structured an attracting narrative and

Using phrases such as "even though I don't know you, I am willing to give my life for you", the aim is to sensitize the civilian population to the sacrifice made by members of the security forces in the fulfillment of their role as guarantors of national sovereignty, thus highlighting their heroism, characterized by confronting a highly questioned state enemy, since it has been responsible for greatly harming civilians who do not act directly in the conflict while defending a cause outside traditional political projects (Chala Quintero, 2019, p. 59).

The interpretation of the inedita phrase can change based on what is the perception of the military, for those who has been directly affected by the violation of human rights perpetrated by the institution, or for those who are familiar with a political position of the right. It is important to clarify that considering military personnel as the main reference of the heroism did not began with the campaging as Chala Quintero (2019) states:

After highlighting the way in which the military was presented since the mandate of Álvaro Uribe and its influence in the construction of the collective identity of the forces, it is prudent to emphasize that this was not maintained only in this period of time it is necessary to mention here that this idea of heroism has remained a long-lasting phenomenon, because, although it has been exploited strategically, the work of the military in confronting a public enemy has been recognized for decades.

The acknowledgment of the heroism to military members has been performed not only for the government but also for other particular institutions, which reinforce the close connection between victims and heroes, those concepts at least in the Colombian memory construction process cannot be understood without each other, they complement and at the same time justifying the each other. In this sense, “the Matamoros Corporation, which constantly develops strategies for the recognition of heroes in 2018, developed a campaign in which the phrase "We all carry the surname of a hero" was presented in partnership with Ediciones Norma, giving the civilian population the opportunity to purchase a school article to benefit the military affected by the conflict but also

generating a rapprochement with the idea of the constructed hero and an identification with the cause they are defending” (Chala Quintero, 2019, p. 63).

The awareness attempt, performed for Matamoros Corporation, in regard of the support to the heroes, has a deep impact on the collective memory, in the discourse they exalt the labor of the militaries fighting the guerillas and being injured during the process, generating empathy for them and legitimizing the actioned against the cruel enemy. Bearing in mind the recognition of the heroes, the official narrative in Colombia usually as per Chala Quintero (2019):

The need to present the heroism of the military in extreme contexts in which they must defend their lives and the lives of Colombians by using strategies that impress and distinguish the National Army and at the same time allow them to have greater effectiveness and impact against illegal armed groups and the civilian population.

Another example of it, is

Race for the Heroes’ which aims to highlight part of the situation of the members of the Armed Forces affected by the conflict, thus raising awareness among the civilian population and promoting solidarity with the care and reparation programs carried out by the organization, as well as with the beneficiaries and their families (Corporación Matamoros, 2024).

Memory construction of the conflict, especially of a main actor of it, is a task who concerns every Colombian, but it is giving to a few ones. In this sense, “the psychic mediation of power that allows the exercise of power not only through direct violence, but also through the manipulation of consciousness, emotional, narrative and symbolic repertoire of the subjects, using media, social and educational tools” (Villa Gomez, Velásquez Cuartas, Barrera Machado, & Avendaño Ramírez, 2020, p. 24).

Mass media influence in how people remember the armed conflict, as collectivity, in this regard, they consider that when it is convenient, certain actions of armed groups are shown or hidden. Also, certain actors (guerrillas) can be demonized, others can be hidden or treated as a lesser evil (paramilitaries) and others (military forces) can be exalted” (Villa Gomez, Velásquez Cuartas, Barrera Machado, & Avendaño Ramírez, 2020, p. 27).

The continuous reference of the military as heroes in the official narrative, has an impact on the society, the constant presentation of the armed forces as saviors, full of honor and sacrifice allows us to consider as per Chala Quintero (2019):

The constructed hero possesses moral qualities that do not allow him to dispose of the lives of his compatriots, thus denying the perception of the military in the combat field as beings dehumanized

by war, presenting themselves as subjects at the disposal of the homeland, and maintaining a clear mission of safeguarding the integrity of other Colombians, whether they are associated with an insurgent group or not.

Nevertheless, the construction of this 'hero' does not consider the acts that involve the military as an institutionalized perpetrator -this statement will be developed properly in the correspond chapter of this research, especially for the close connections with the paramilitaries and the extrajudicial executions. Important aspects of the history in Colombia cannot be underestimated for the official narrative, where the discourse is focus on a few 'rotten apples' who are damaging and difameting the 'glorious army' whose members are just accomplish their duty. In this sense, "hegemonic versions also entail forms of oblivion (of the unnamed), which are omitted within the collective imaginary so that other actors of violence are made invisible or, at least, the emotions directed towards them are qualified, so that they can be considered as a lesser evil" (Villa Gomez, Velásquez Cuartas, Barrera Machado, & Avendaño Ramírez, 2020, p. 24).

Considering the information provided in this chapter, the heroic role that military personnel have been giving to the government and the institution itself during the development of the conflict is expected to be represented by the main values of the army, which are expected to be represent in a hero, who usually victims and, in most cases never perpetrators, as Villa Gomez, et all (2020) affirm:

In relation to the Military Forces, we have highlighted three types of signifiers: those that use the discourse of the hero, who protects us, takes care of us and gives us security. That of sacrifice, effort, struggle and dedication for love of country and for 'taking care of us', which implies a deep empathy, compassion, as well as admiration, gratitude, respect and pride. Finally, in relation to human rights violations and false positives, these participants always excused the Military Forces with the metaphor of the 'rotten apple', that is, that in a group of good people, in a good institution, undesirable people can always infiltrate, sneak in, or in their language, 'bad' people; but they are very few, so they must be purged, expelled, and in some cases, apply punishments similar to those that have been designated for guerrillas and some paramilitaries.

Finally, the heroic role of the military members is the most expected one, due to the personification of the values exalted for the institution, such as bravery, resilience, strength, and camaraderie. Those are deeply connected with the hegemonic military masculinity which influences in this case, the adoption or identification of a role in the armed conflict in Colombia.

## 4. Members of the Army as Victims

The memory of the Colombian armed conflict is a subject that has been recurrently studied in recent years. This reconstruction has allowed for a broadening and deepening of knowledge about the various actors and their versions of the events. One of the fundamental actors in the Colombian armed conflict is the National Army, whose work on memory has begun relatively recently. Thus, the work on the memory of the military through the National Center of Historical Memory has been built on the basis of the life stories of active or retired members of the institution who have been victims of the conflict.

Thus, a first approach to the vision of the military as heretics can be found in the report *Behind the Uniform of the National Center of Historical Memory*<sup>22</sup> - now on NCHM - of 2020, some experiences of certain military officers, non-commissioned officers or soldiers are exposed, which have had a very particular impact on the development of the lives of each one. The most relevant events related to the Colombian armed conflict in their lives are narrated, and most of them describe the traumatic experiences they had when they were victimized by the guerrillas. The purpose of the report is to show the stories of members of the National Army who are grateful to the institution and who have been direct victims of the Colombian armed conflict in order to humanize it. It is important to note that the contributors to the report had not spoken about their experiences before because no one had asked them. The military personnel who took part in this report were active, so they were not free to talk about their experiences in the war, but they were able to talk about their previous memories, which is also helpful for the study.

Based on the information given by the militaries, much of them had experienced the cruelty of living in a country in conflict: “the childhood of some of the soldiers who participated in the memory workshops went through hunger, the murder of their parents, forced displacement, domestic violence, recruitment (...) that unsuccessful childhood almost becomes an implicit metaphor of what, in the end, war has also been. Behind each combatant seems to hide a man with

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<sup>22</sup> Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica in Spanish, “is a public establishment of the national order, attached to the Department for Social Prosperity (DPS), whose purpose is the reception, recovery, conservation, compilation and analysis of all documentary material, oral testimonies and those obtained by any other means, relating to the violations that occurred during the Colombian internal armed conflict, through research, museums, and educational activities, among others, that contribute to establishing and clarifying the causes of such phenomena, learning the truth and helping prevent their repetition in the future” (National Center of Historical Memory, 2021).

questions about happiness and identity” (National Center of Historical Memory, 2020). This cruelty is not only a common thing among militaries’ members, but most of the Colombian population has been in a different degree experiment the violence.

Violence has affected militaries member in a huge proportion because they are part of the main actors of the conflict, most of them have experienced the constant loss and see it as a normal thing of their duty, it can be illustrated here: “I had a friend killed, but I must admit that I am not the most compassionate man. It made me sad, especially for his family, but I have learned to be strong, life goes on. I am aware that death is around us every day and that tomorrow I may die, but do you want me to tell you something? I would die happy because I have done my job in the right way” (National Center of Historical Memory, 2021). Indoctrination is fundamental for institutions like armed forces, especially in a conflict context, this indoctrination is related to the military masculinity ideal promulgated for the army, as relevant institution in the society for reproduction of ideas of manhood. Face all the time the option of being killed by the enemy is easier to accept if they have learned about sacrifice and how it is important for the conflict’s winning. Also, in the institution, the “ideal of man” or how a real man should behave, is tough in the army, you can easily identify how it is deeply rooted in their narrative, some examples are provided later.

Following the sacrifice idea for a bigger purpose, every conflict needs martyrs, in this case the militaries are part of this group with a different meaning than a civilian’s victims. In the popular conception being part of the army is a great honor and allows some of the members to “revenge” or make justice by their own to the abuses accomplished by guerrillas. An example of this strong desire is, “I ardently desired to be a soldier to pursue the bandits, capture them and kill them (...) In the Army he finds a completely adequate means for the realization of his purposes: he wished with all his heart to wear the uniform of our Army, to bear the arms of the Republic (Gutierrez 2001, 115). In this sense, the military as victim is a complex but very interesting role construction. This chapter proposes an approximation taking into consideration how the roles are made and which purpose they serve, and analyzing that with military masculinities insights and how the narrative provided an appropriation of the role. Members of the army have been victimized at different levels and forms, in this section will focus on some antipersonnel, kidnapping victims and their families each one will be described and analyzed in a separate section.

## 4.1 Antipersonnel Victims

War experiences are fundamental in the life stories of military personnel regardless of their rank, as evidenced in the chapter "It was my fault, it was my fault" in NCHM, 'That mine had my name on it', which tells the story of a professional soldier who in 2008 in Caquetá<sup>23</sup> stepped on a mine and his life changed forever. The soldier tells the story of his childhood in a village in Caquetá called El Tambo, where his interaction with the Army and the guerrilla was from a very early age, stating that when he grew up, he wanted to carry arms and wear a uniform, without being clear about which of the two sides he was referring to. The soldier says that most of his comrades came from families with very low incomes, as well as from regions where the options were limited, or they joined the guerrilla or the Army. The choice of join the army is not an easy one for them but sometimes it is the only way to help their families, especially those who are soldiers the lowest rank in the army. Considering the inequalities that most of the people in Colombia suffered, the victim role is quite broad, it is not the same as being a civilian victim as a military victim. Sometimes the second ones are discriminated because they were active in the army, but as we can notice in this example, they are usually victims of the conflict before, they joined the army. The discrimination plus the military ideal of a strong man is aligned with the prejudices that the society has in regard to the members who were victimized by the guerrilla. The victimization has been a long process, and as it showed is has been during different stages of their life.

This doble victim condition is very interesting due to the fact that they did not acknowledge the victim role before they were injured by antipersonnel mines. Perhaps it is related to their lack of knowledge about when are they consider a victim, their benefits or they just do not understand how assuming a role they can manage the resources that are given to them. So, military members of low rank join the institution and when they are in the field, they form several bonds with their partners like is usual, but when some of them die, it affects them so much, as we can notice in the following testimony: "I saw my dead spear, and I burst into tears, I looked like a baby. The others consoled me, told me that it was painful but that I had to get over it. And yes, I guess you get over it with time. But it is never forgotten" (National Center of Historical Memory 2016, 33). The way in which they have been taught to be strong and get over the deaths of their loved ones is

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<sup>23</sup> One of the states more affect by the violence, and the guerrilla used to have control of the majority of the territory and its population.

problematic, because it is a normalization of the dead and suffering while they close their feelings, leading to the distortion of their values and creating a false sense of mental stability, which is very dangerous, especially for those who go back home with PTSD. Also, the clear example of “men do not cry” and “men are stronger” in the military masculinity discourse, they are different from others because they are stronger and braver but at the end of the day, they cannot fully embrace their role as victims because they are not allowed by the people who surround them, losing with it the resources as therapy which is very helpful during this process.

Continuing with the related of the soldier, he has been a victim of the conflict since he was a child, a role that he has not been entitled to perform or identify with, there were coca crops on his farm, he was displaced, lost his friend in a guerrilla ambush, stepped on anti-personnel mine during the pursuit of a guerrilla and was discharged from the Army. In this sense, this person has been revictimized over and over again not only by the armed groups but also by the institution. The discharge is understood as a process of re-victimization in which the commander tells him that it is normal for him to be discharged even if he does not want to be, since soldiers are hired for war, and with the disability he can no longer fulfill his main purpose. This revictimization process has been in line with the mindset taught in the army, most of the leaders do not recognize each other if they are not available to accomplish their duty, that is problematic because they are creating a new wound in those people who, after the accident keep identifying themselves as a military and hero by defat. They are losing everything after being dismissed as soldiers, the huge impact of these painful process is evident in the narrative provide by the soldier.

In fact, after the accident, the victims tend to blame themselves for what happened, most of them, using psychological assistance, were able to understand that it was an accident and they could get over their disability, but the willing of be active in the army is still present “If I have the prosthesis on, I walk, you walk, and nobody looks at me. I am not ashamed to show it, people don't look at me with contempt or anything. It's more like with astonishment, curiosity. Even with admiration. The only bad thing about being an amputee is that I am not doing what I like the most: wearing my camouflage” (National Center of Historical Memory 2016, 42). The denial and regret that those victims were forced to leave the army is not studied and it will be interesting to dig into the daily life effects. The pension received allows them to survive with their family, they belong, as most of the armed members are victims to a low- mid and low class with limited resources, and build a life outside the army is usually a struggle because they do not have studies and with the disability, they

tend to focus their energy on other activities that help them recover their independence and sense of life.

Considering the overcome of victimhood as, an example in “the mine that changed the color of a pair of eyes” in NCHM ‘That mine had my name on it’ (2016), this chapter recounts the life of professional soldier Eduardo Franco Contreras who is blinded after stepping on an antipersonnel mine in 2010. It begins by saying that he is a Paralympic javelin thrower, he has several trophies. These s in the perspective is obviously related to his mutilation, in this sense Ocampo, Henao, and Vásquez (2010) found that traumatic amputations bring with them psychological alterations that have emotional, family, and social repercussions for individuals who suffer from them and involve a radical change in their lifestyle and quality of life (Herrera-Moreno, et al., 2018, p. 57). That is what experienced all of the anti-personnel victims experienced, whose use the resources that they got as victims to improve their lives and to be useful, the desired of being useful is related to the man as provider, and when they do not feel useful in one way or another, it is problematic for their mental health and well-being.

As Eduardo Franco Contreras -the protagonist of the chapter previously refers to, says, after the accident, he wanted to commit suicide:

Sometimes it comes to my mind that I wanted to take my own life because I thought I would not be able to teach my children anything. Now they are watching me take my supplements, my preparation, and my care. They and Coach Vergara are my team. When they were little, if they heard a helicopter, they would run out into the street even in their underwear and excitedly shout "my daddy, my daddy!". With sports, I am still their hero (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2016, 54).

The victim role-playing for armed members who were heavily injured in combat is more accepted not only for the institution but also for the society and it has been the most pointed out in the media but also in the academy, the prioritization of this study contributes to the legitimation of the army as a victim, even though they are accomplishing other roles that are not necessarily excluded between them.

Some of the armed members who were victims of anti-personal mine were previously victimized, this previous harassment was when they were civilians, and it could be, in some cases identified as a reason to join the army. The impact of the victimization is huge, as we can identify in the next testimony:

Revenge: that was the motive that pushed Eduardo Franco Contreras to wear camouflage. He had been sure he wanted to be in the military since the night the FARC broke into the neighboring farm of some of his parents' friends and massacred them and their children. They killed them all. Three months later, the paramilitaries raided a farm where he was working: they tied him up, beat him into submission, and slammed him to the ground. They then held another worker and tied him up and, in front of his companions, executed him. From there, the paramilitaries went after the day laborer's mother and brothers and killed them as well. Some of the bodies were left lying face down in their underwear. It was terrible (National Center of Historical Memory 2016, 55).

Each role that every person takes allows them different resources, in this case the soldier wanted revenge so the only way to do it legally was joined the army. After he to join the army against all odds, since his parents did not approve it, his purpose was to take revenge on both the FARC and the paramilitaries, however, over time he understood that being in the military was just a job and began to consider it as such. In this sense, if some members have this sense of revenge for their past, it is because they were not allowed to deal with the act of victimization neither restored so this is an issue that could be important to research to get a most accurate vision on how previous acts of victimization without restoration can influence in identify themselves as victims and how this role could impact their life decisions.

Thus, in the chapter “The man who shoots without hands” in NCHM ‘That mine had my name on it’ (2016), we are told the story of an Army captain who is active even after being the victim of an antipersonnel mine and losing his hands. In this case, we can identify how he manages his resources in a better way, it means that based on his position as an officer, he was availed to manage the connections and the training to keep being useful for the army. The protagonist is a person who, unlike the other stories, was not coming from a lower income, he had the economic support of his parents and joined the army with the purpose of helping others, this practice is quite unusual among the literature checked. In his story is evident the overcoming, with the prosthesis he can continue using firearms in his role as active military, he lives with the fear that the army will discharge him at any time even having all the capabilities to continue exercising his role, and this fear is a way of revictimized him because the army does not think in what their injured members need or want but in what is better for the institution which is not radically different in this case, the experience and formation of this official can be used in training for new generations and give him a sense of relevance that they usually seek “ a reconnaissance request for their institution, they want to feel

that some aspect of their experience can be useful for the Forces from they were came”” (National Center of Historic Memory, 2019, p. 266).

Also, when they are playing the victim role at the same time are requested to behave as they were taught, it means like a strong soldier who is not allowed to show and express the feelings. It is aligned with the masculine stereotype that is internalized by most of Colombian society, of course this label is strong and reinforce in the institution not only in the formation stage but during the performing of their duties. Even tough, after being victimized, they are required to keep this mindset, which is not in pro to the healing process, and it contribute to suppressing the grieve or any other feeling and pretending that everything is alright. This impacts them not only to them as individuals but also as a community member especially in the institution where they normalized this behavior and feel the pressure of keep going without the proper guidance or help. In this sense, members of the armed forces who have been victims usually got revictimized by the institution due to the lack of accurate process and instruments to help them to deal with the trauma “ some of the participants express being unsatisfied with the attention that they received they were medicated without information about how the medicament worked or their effects, they were also either restored or represented in the attention models” (National Center of Historic Memory, 2019, p, 273).

Armed forces members have been victims in multiple moments, there is an impressive story of Roque Monsilva volunteer soldier, he tells how at the beginning of his life he wanted to belong to the guerrilla, but later when an illegal armed group forces his family to sell the farm, his perception changes. That is the first victimization act that he recalls, and he is not identifying himself as a victim, it is more like an act, even though his life changed completely. After he joined the Army and was transferred to a red zone, his first contact in the area of operations was to see a helicopter carrying several dead soldiers, something that impressed them a lot, when people enlist in the army, especially in an armed conflict context, they do not measure the seriousness and brutality of the conflict, in this case, they were coerced to not feel braver because they were not witness a killing or a massacre before. The position of being afraid for the deployed was totally normal, but when they showed it, people on charge recriminated against them for the fact that it was not aligned with what a military is, their mindset is rooted in the prototype of man imposed by the institution and reaffirmed by the Colombian society.

In August 1998 he was kidnapped by the guerrillas after a heavy combat where they were outnumbered. To escape he manages to seduce a guerrillera who does not feel at ease in the group and who helps him to escape, after this in 2001 he rejoins the army, and he was assigned to the Sierra Nevada<sup>24</sup>. On a reconnaissance mission, he got wounded by anti-personnel mine when he was the leader of his squad. Being a victim is not easy for them but in a certain way he feels support by the army “As a soldier you know that at any moment you can fall on a mine, because we are exposed to these situations. But what hurts the most is to see the peasants, or their children fall. At least we get any pension and prostheses. But who helps those people? That is really painful” (Mata 2018). It is interesting how, in any moment, Roque identifies himself as a victim; he is conscious of his injury, but it does not matter how he approached it; he did not dig down on the experience of being a victim because the military mindset sticks to his personality.

Aligned with the victimization of the soldiers, they refer to personal wounds the two main reasons for joining the army can be highlighted: to obtain the military passbook and to be able to have a legal job that would support their families and provide themselves with "security" and the dream of carrying arms. Thus, when the soldiers entered the area, their mentality changed as they did not arrive with the desire to kill, but the circumstances of the war itself led them to do so, the dynamics of the war also brought with them loneliness and the construction of very close ties with their comrades since they shared all the time in the area, of operations and they were also the only ones who understood how they felt. "One enters, goes to the area and comes back with the war stuck, the war is a pod that sticks to one: one no longer sleeps, nor is one in the house calm" (Forero 2017, 52).

Similarly, in the chapter "Paramilitaries, coca and an antipersonnel mine installed by the FARC forever marked his life" in the book ‘Yes there is life after the war: Memories of soldiers mutilated by antipersonnel mines’ by Dagoberto Mata (2018), the story of the professional soldier Alexander Mena Lenis, who was the victim of an antipersonnel mine in 2008, is recounted. Since he has been a child, he was a victim of the armed conflict, first due to displacement after the escalation of the conflict, then with the murder of his father at the hands of paramilitaries in El Doce, Tarazá, Antioquía in 2001. This continued victimization is due to the state abandoned and the lack of restorative initiatives that can be implemented in a broad scope. After that event, he decided to

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<sup>24</sup> This is located in the northern part of Colombia in Magdalena department.

serve in the military because it was a secure source of income for his family. He was proud to be in the military, and was originally part of the creation of a mobile brigade and belonged to the counter-guerrilla battalion based in Ocaña, Norte de Santander. It was in an operation in that department where he lost his right leg when he was a victim of an anti-personnel mine, in this particular case, you can see how the role playing, either as military or as victim coexist perfectly even if one of the roles depend basically on the other. It is true that if you are a peasant, you can also be a victim of an antipersonnel mine but as a member of army your options increase exponentially, they are aware of the risk, but the lack of economic options makes them decided to join the army as the only regular and legal source of money in a conflict context.

This post-traumatic stress that most of the army members present after being in the field fighting actively is problematic due to, they do not receive good physiological attention after they experience the war. This trauma could influence the way in which they are perceived and treated by themselves and others within the institution. In this sense, “post-traumatic stress is a common diagnosis in victims of the internal armed conflict in Colombia and is considered a debilitating disease that occurs after a traumatic event such as a violent act or an accident. Due to recurrent memories of the event, those who experience it have a predisposition to suffer from depression accompanied by irritability, anger, guilt, evasion, and denial (National Institute of Mental Health,2015)” (Herrera-Moreno, et al., 2018, p. 57). Unfortunately, in Colombia, specially in patriarchal institutions like the army, asking for phycological assistance even when the members are active is considered a weakness, and those who ask for it receive different treatment which could tend to discourage the armed members to requesting help when they need. Even more when they do the treatment prescribe by phycologist or psychiatrist. In the army a lot of prejudices exist and are part of the policy implementations, as I have mentioned before military masculinities are rooted in the development of the instruction. As Duncanson (2009) stated:

By choosing their branch, regiment and job specialization, for example, military men construct different military masculinities (Barrett 2001). Nationality, race, age and class all also intersect with gender and play their part in the construction of military masculinities (Hooper 1998: 29; Higate and Henry 2004: 484).

Soldiers reproach the people who make up the army for relegating them when they are not useful for the war, so "I thank my army for all the opportunities given, but I also claim to it, to some of its men, the loneliness in which it leaves me, one who served them while he could sacrifice himself,

and once sacrificed is no longer useful for anything" (Forero 2017, 56). In this sense, exist a "different masculinities of officers, where authority and rationality tend to be emphasized, and the infantry soldier, where masculinity is more likely to be constructed around ideas of physical strength and aggression (Enloe 1993: 57; Connell 2002b: 38)" (Duncanson, 2009). As I explained before from all the victims that were consider in this part of the chapter just one – the officer one- is the only that was allowed to be part of the institution, so he performed inside the institution and how he is perceived by the other is related to the building of this resources as an officer and victim.

## **4.2 Kidnapping Victims**

The kidnapping was a war tactic implemented by the guerrillas in the fight against the government but it also affected civil society. In this sense, FARC-EP carried out three types of retentions:

Based on the Strategic Plan for increasing the financing and politic power: the economical retention to cattle ranchers, landowners, merchants, among others; the retention of members of the security forces captured in combat, ambushes and takeovers of towns or attacks on the civilian population, and the political retention of councilmen, mayors, deputies, senators, among others (...) in cases of extortive-political kidnappings of military, police or politicians, the demands could be: to press for peace talks, demilitarize a territory, promote a humanitarian agreement, among others (National Center of Historic Memory, 2019, p. 29) .

Most of the armed members kidnaped just want to be heard and recognized; this basic request has been constantly denied by the army and society. An issue of masculinity taught by the army is related to the difficulty of asking for help when they need it. In addition, this type of victimization is particular due to the longevity, the victims do not suffer just one kind of victimization but multiple during days, months or years of captivity; maybe because of it, the memories of the damage and impacts always come tied to the way of face and survive it (National Center of Historic Memory, 2019, p. 25). Also, the struggle with the past is not over when they set free; their life changes forever and their relationships too, which is usually a struggle for them, especially for those who spend years captive, the world as they knew it is not the same any longer. Taking into consideration different experiences of the people who were kidnaped is important to analyze the way they remember this experience and how trough it could identify the victim role-playing of these members or former members of the army.

Furthermore, they were performing an active role in the conflict - it means that they were active members of the army- when they were captured so an approximation of their memories of the dual

role playing are necessary to understand the importance of those roles in the conflict. As the National Center of Historic Memory (2019) proposed:

In terms of damages or impacts, for the survivors, the harm caused by the armed conflict is not limited to the loss of life of their comrades killed in combat, in the midst of the confrontation or in the context of kidnapping, nor is it an analysis of economic or material costs. In order to understand the complex web of the impacts of the armed conflict "we must understand the subjective meanings that the victims have attributed to what they have lost during the war".

Each one of the people who had been captive experience it in a different way, even if some of them were together in the same encampment, their life stories and values are diverse, but also, they were form in the same institution and under the same principles so they can be compared and analyzed. In this sense, those who were kidnapped for years have a different approximation because they made a life there just to survive, waiting and praying<sup>25</sup> and with the liberties that their captors allowed them, most of them described that with the time in some camps they were living as "guerrilleros" except for being locked down in their cells when the light came out. The trauma of losing the capacity of decision over their life can be identified in the way that they refer to those moments, the pain and anguish of how they remember those moments are shocking.

Likewise, they were victimized not only physically or emotionally by the captors but also by the life. When they were set free, everything has changed, even those who were captive some days, after a kind of trauma like that your life is not the same and it will never be. Even though, during the captivity, they did not know how to deal with the absence of affection, one example is:

The loss of the animals mean face a grief for a pet who dies, and the loss of give and received any type of love and affection that they felt that could not receiving from their partners. The pets were, at the end, one way to humanized themselves against the dehumanization that they were facing in the kidnaped, and also to heal some dimensions of their identity that were attacked with the dynamics of power by the guerrilla (National Center of Historic Memory, 2019, p. 161).

It is interesting how in these moments of need, pets can be understood as a way to humanized themselves, they were not able to experience love and affection during that time because even if they made new relations with the other men who were captive, they still had in their minds the masculinity ideal that was taught by the army. It means that being a man in Colombian's army is

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<sup>25</sup> Being religious is a common aspect among the members of the army, the institution in an informal way encourage believing in God.

required to be strong, brave and intrepid but they cannot show flaws because they will be called a “woman” or other comments associated to being “weak”, in this weakness you can find that men in the army are not allowed to show love in the same way that women. The inability of expressing feelings in front of other men is a sign of the internalization of the ideas of a “man” in this case where they were captives, none was able to express themselves fully as if they were having women with them.

The process of humanizing themselves with the pets continues to the guerrilleros when they are set free, the process of moving to the extraction point was usually a route for 2 or 3 days, according to army members who were kidnapped for several years could get some belongings that, in the conditions that they were facing, were valuables. So “They started to give [things] to guerrilleros, even if you do not believe it, they live in a difficult condition, some guerrilleros have stuff others do not” (National Center of Historic Memory, 2019, p. 235). The kindness that abductees were able to express for their captors could be understood as a sign of the behavior that they would like to experience with them. None showed compassion for them during the time they were captive; even some of them, after being realized did not find kindness in the society that they arrived. One of the victims refers to a particular experience:

Well we already been five years since April, five years since we set free and we realized and learned to distrust everyone (...) So the bad experiences changed you, if [the people] cry, because everyone came crying, they know that you have money and they came crying asking for money but they always stole from us (National Center of Historic Memory, 2019, p. 254).

These bad experiences brought by the community that surrounds them is also a way to revictimize them, most people want to profit from others without considering the sources of those economic resources. In this sense, after they are free, become a target for some members of the society who want to take advantage and make them victim but not from an armed group but for the same people who they felt the duty to protect as part of their being members of the army.

Society had been accepting and perpetuating these concepts of masculinity, which is also not helpful when members of the army who were victims of kidnapping go back to a community where they are not fully aware of what those who are coming suffered and pretend to incorporate as usual, not even willing to teach them the new stuff like technology for those who were captive for years, coming back to a reality where everything was related to technology was not easy. This technological challenge was expressed by one soldier as:

I began to suffer because of the slides, and the use of video video beam and so I started, as I was educated, to start me, I started to make my own billboards, so I bought my sheets of cardboard, my colored markers and I colored markers and I would stick up my posters and exhibit them, and so on, until the instructor arrived and said to me, "My sergeant, what a pity sergeant, what a pity, but look how they do it and learn how to make slides [on the computer], let them teach you", and of course there and of course they had to teach me, and I was learning, to the end of course they had to teach me, and I started to learn, but I started to learn (laughs). Then technology gave me a hard time (National Center of Historic Memory, 2019, p. 262).

The victims of kidnapping had certain expectations after they recovered their freedom, the main desire that they kept expressing was to be able to help the army to fight back the guerrillas that kept them captive for a long time. "The role played by those who were set free as 'hinge of information' between the institution and what they learned during the kidnapping because they contribute with new knowledge of the guerrilla structures what held them captive" (National Center of Historic Memory, 2019, pp. 263-264). Most of them were aware of the internal dynamics and how they operated, but they were never reached out to the institution, and it is a way of revictimization due to the commanders were not interested in the information that they were willing to provide, which also had the intention of help them to feel in control of their lives and useful in order to prevent further kidnappings. This denial frustrated them, as Ariel<sup>26</sup> express:

Personally, as soon as we left, they gave us an interview, with a camera and another person asking questions: I at least gave all the information I had, as if at least I gave all the information I had, as if to make an operation against them. I wanted to continue, I imagined that I was going back to my battalion [the one I was in before the kidnapping] and that if they did overflights in the helicopter, I would have in the helicopter, I spoke with my colonel and in what I can do to help, if I can identify where we were [while we were where we were [while we were kidnapped], to do operations and hit them [while we were kidnapped] To carry out operations and hit them [the ELN]. But it was really the first interview, and then we were never listened to again, at least I was never, at least I was never listened to, or where were you? or What can we bring for operations? What do we as an army have to improve? That was not [taken into account] (National Center of Historic Memory, 2019, p. 266)

The frustration present for most of the members is not only related to not being taken into account for operations against the FARC or ELN but also because some who were victims of kidnapping

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<sup>26</sup> Ariel Ramiro Novoa he was kidnaped for 8 months, is an active member of the army currently as First Sargent.

“by the ELN do not have the same visibility in the media, not even meanwhile there were kidnapped nor after their liberation” (National Center of Historic Memory, 2019, p. 256). Considering these allegations of lack of media’s visibility of the kidnaps accomplished by ELN, it could be a political strategy to spread the fear and focus on the FARC to allow the government the legitimacy of attacking the FARC by all the means. Also, it generates the question of is there any hierarchy in victimhood? Some victims are more important than others for the institution discourse? In the case of this people who did not have the same visibility not only during the kidnaping but also after it, they demonstrate that the political agenda plays an important role in the coverage of the victims.

Considering the political agenda as a resource if we are talking about role playing, it can also influence the academic world due to setting some priorities and ideas of how memory construction in a delicate topic like victims can be approached and understood. In this sense, under the military mindset for those who were victims should consider the following:

Being able to construct memories from the variety of our society, so why are we like that? Because we do not know, we do not know our origins to suddenly start to building a different society from the culture, because almost all our history has been violence, where do we come from? Maybe of violent genes, maybe that gene is inherent to the human being, but how can we change or how can we keep out that violent gene to transform it into a creative, educated, among others and starting from knowing our stories, our diversity, but here is not a memory of how the black people slavered and how were their stories of pain there is any (National Center of Historic Memory, 2019, p. 215).

This kind of questioning after being part of a traumatic situations as kidnaping is relevant not only for them as individuals but also for society and specially for the academics who can dig down this question in order to understand how the dynamics experienced by army members can determine the reasons for the violence and help the victims acknowledge the situation and pain.

### **4.3 Families of the armed forces members**

The texts related to the victims have been several; however, documents that focus on the stories of the wives of the military who have been killed are scarce, thus, in chapter two "those who never returned" in *Memory and Armed Forces victims*” by Nathalie Pabón (2018), it is exposed how the families of the military who have been victims of homicide in the Colombian armed conflict, depending on the rank to which their respective husbands belonged, had different experiences. The case of the wife of a colonel killed in an ambush, who due to her rank and having a better socioeconomic level was not revictimized by the army. On the other hand, there are the wives of

professional soldiers who were not immediately informed of the facts as the colonel's wife, nor did they officially know exactly what had happened to their relatives. This revictimization, especially of those who do not have a high socioeconomic background, sets a hierarchy for the victims inside the armed forces related to their former rank, that is a problematic statement because it gives a different value to a life depending on their economic resources, which basically allowed them be an official, a commissioned officer, or a soldier. Those privileges have been taken directly from the society, those who are aware of how manage their resources can play better their roles.

Thus, “the shadow of the internal armed conflict accompanied their lives from an early age, although fortunately in their childhood they did not experience direct victimization. However, as adults, they had to assume the death of their husbands and the emotional, but also economic difficulties that this entails, especially when it comes to families highly dependent on paternal income” (Pabón Ayala 2018, 33). In addition, as these women were economically dependent on their husbands' income, after their husbands' deaths, they experienced moments of scarcity because they did not have the resources to survive on their own while the pension was being processed. These women find help in the victims' organization, where they contact each other and share their experiences, but those kinds of experiences were not taking into account when you talked about armed forces victims. The resource issue experienced by those widows is encompassed in Colombian society and perceptions of women. Frequently the lack of economic sources for women means dependence on the provider, like in this case were their husband. Some strategies that allowed women independence must be provided by the state and in this case, the army, to improve the quality life of their member's families after becoming victims themselves after losing not only the beloved one but the provider, mindset deeply roots in the members of the army as a masculinity association/ duty.

In this sense, the extension of the victim role applies to direct victims – armed forces members- an is not taken into consideration when studies are performed. In some cases, “the family lives in total captivity, they do not have bars and they are not isolated from the world, and they do not neither have a pistol in front of their faces, but they are locked psychologically by a kidnapper that appears and disappears suddenly and haphazardly like an invisible being always there” (Navia, and Ossa,, 2001, p 69) Being aware of the repercussion for their family members during and after the kidnaping is a continue revictimization due to the fact that most of them have not access to mental assistance. Also direct kidnaping victims – armed forces members- usually refer to their family

members as the main victims because they did not know anything and were wondering about how and where they were, which was even more dangerous for them. This recognition can transform the way in which they remember being victimized, this role playing can be tricky for most of them. Since the kidnaped is not the only one suffering, their families deserved attention, and someone took care of them while the person was captive, and after the liberation, to nuance the impact and prevent deepening of the suffering (National Center of Historic Memory, 2019) p 178.

Based on the hard moments that the victim's family members suffered, a collective was created, the Colombian Association of Family Members of the Public Force to retain and set free for Guerrillas Groups<sup>27</sup>, its main goal was to look out for the liberation of their beloved ones, and it was confirmed by family members of the Public Forces member who were captive, retained, political prisoners or kidnapped from 1997 for the FARC-EP (National Center of Historic Memory, 2019, p. 215). This association was helpful for the families they were available to share their experiences and suffering, and together they were more powerful, capable of reaching out the authorities and being heard by the government and the armed groups. Family members' memories have not been broadened or studied, this will be an interesting way to recognize them as victims and to expand the memory construction of the armed members' families because they play a crucial part in their memories specially for those who were killed and cannot participate in this process.

The construction through the narrative and discourses as the military as victims is the focus on the governmental institutions and the mainstream memory academy in Colombia. Victimization as the only aspect of those soldiers who were injured on the battlefield or accomplished their duty is the easiest way to construct an official memory where those members of the army who represent the State are just victims, or in this case, they are martyrs. Military's pigeonholing as just martyrs is complicated because they are making impossible their conception as parents, sons, siblings, spouses, or perpetrator, being identified in the official memory, especially as victims is problematic because with that perspective, the dialogue between different memories is reduced or even denied which at the same time makes difficult the reconciliation process. In this sense, "If the historical memory; is unique and there are no others, that is, it is hegemonic, we should speak of national history, but not of historical memory, therefore, to speak of memories it is necessary the

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<sup>27</sup> Translation of Asociación Colombiana de Familiares de Miembros de la Fuerza Pública Retenidos y Liberados por Grupos Guerrilleros (ASFAMIPAZ),

intersection of several narratives and not only from a single vision of reality since it could eliminate the different emerging voices" (Castillo 2018, 51), so to contribute to this process of speaking memories is necessary to express the other part of the militaries memories where they are no longer just victims.

## 5. Members of the Army as Perpetrator

The Colombian army has always been the representative of the State in the armed conflict. As a main player and legitimized the actions, operations and tactics used during the conflict was not publicly questioned until it was too late and the damage was already there. Being a representative of the State provides a huge number of resources and power which were not managed in the best way due to the commander's alignment with some powerful people from different regions. This alignment allowed collaboration between the Army and the paramilitarism. Based on the information presented by the Truth Commission in June of 2022 the main perpetrator during the Armed conflict were the paramilitarism, where the links with the military forces were acknowledged but not the real impact of their connections in the development of the conflict. Considering the closed relations between these two important actors the role of the army as a perpetrator in the memory construction of the conflict is fundamental to understanding the complex dynamic of violence and its escalation. Also, the information provides to constructing the memory in this regard has not been partially presented by the military's members.

In this sense, is important to clarify that the military personnel are not perpetrators just for collaborating with the paramilitary groups but also for the different violations of human rights and of course not of all of the members participate directly in the crime's commissions, but even when they decided to look in the other side, they were facilitators. Another clarification is related to the consequences when some the military members refused to follow the instructions or decided to complain with other departments, threats and retaliations were made and the institutional collaboration was set. The retaliations were used as "coercions" for all those who were intending to complain and those reprisals served as example of what kind of power they held, some of them were send to the most dangerous battalions and putting in the most exposed positions, also as former soldier Luis Arenas (JEP, Arenas,2024) stated "major Prada threatened the soldiers he said ' if someone speak you know what it be the retaliation for it' that meant if anyone talk the person will be in danger, something could happen to them when they have leave or holidays, something bad, even the partners from the soldiers could be harm, that generates fear and make the people more cautions with what they were talking with their partners". With the previous statements, I am not intending to justify the lack of action from some members but to explain the conditions which were surrounding them at that moment.

This chapter intends to explore two sides of military personnel as perpetrators. The first one is related to the extrajudicial executions committed by the members of the Army between 2002-2010, considered as a clash point for its reputation and legitimation. The second one is the alignment with the paramilitarism and all the massacres committed in cooperation or without confrontation to defend the civil society from those attacks. Considering these two sides, the following chapter is divided into two parts and each one explores the memory construction on regard to the role of the army members as perpetrators during the armed conflict in the country.

#### **4.1 Extrajudicial executions or “False positives”**

The extrajudicial executions are a very sensitive and painful topic on regard to memory construction of the armed conflict in Colombia. It is important to mention that this phenomenon was not an isolated action but a collective responsibility “behind each false positive -they emphasize- there is official documentation authorizing the event, the order to move the soldiers for the operation and the authorization of reward payments, days offs and other permits” (Rojas & Benavides, 2017, p. 24). Considering the previous information, the systematization of these illegal killings performed by members of the Army was institutionalized, which naturally led to the complicity or authorization from some political leaders and become into a social manipulation strategy.

This “policy” was of course planned and performed during a particular political context where Alvaro Uribe was the president and he promoted and deployed the democratic security policy<sup>28</sup>, the results of the operation were fundamental to proving the effectivity of these policies and strategies. With this positive “outcome” the legitimization of the power and its policies were guaranteed. Under these circumstances, the military leaders considered different strategies to access diverse benefits that were granted to those members who had a better performance, this performance was measured based on the operative results, which were understood as enemies’ causalities. Based on the previous context, the institutionalization of the extrajudicial executions set a precedent on regard to the developing of those crimes, they mobilized diverse resources in order to accomplish the operations, as some witness declared:

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<sup>28</sup> This policy was intended to lend coherence to the security effort, the main strategy take was to regain control of the country by increasing the numbers and capacity of troops and police units and by deploying them across the country to challenge the guerrillas (International Crisis Group, 2003). To further information please refer to the source of this citation.

They were supported not only by operational units but also by non-combatant units such as the engineering battalion, as well as administrative areas, as evidenced by the advice provided by some members of the military criminal justice system, who advised on (sic) the soldiers at the scene and their offices to evade the action of the justice [...], they were supported before, during and after the events by high-ranking military commanders as well as civilian officials in the service of the State such as magistrates, judges, officials of the CTI of the Attorney General's Office, officials of forensic medicine and political leaders (Rojas & Benavides, 2017, pp. 25-26).

The resources mobilized to perform the executions as “regular one” were huge, which means that not only army members participate indirectly in the commission of those crimes but also different State agents from diverse areas. It means that the State as a whole institution was responsible for the extrajudicial executions, leading to an attempt to justify of these crimes, but society, at least those who were directly victimized or who were critical of the role of the Army during the armed conflict, was not intending to allow the legitimization of that kind of brutality against the civilians, just to their own benefit.

In this sense, one can identify the ironies between the roles associated to the army members, as Rojas & Benavides (2017) expose:

We can approach the worldview of the military and police institutions, revealing paradoxical situations -but certainly explainable- such as the fact that the perpetrators of these crimes, in their daily lives, usually behave like responsible fathers, lovers of their profession and affable in their dealings with others; or that the relatives of the military involved in the "false positives", not only tend to deny the commission of these acts by their loved ones, but also approve of these repudiatory procedures as a valid mechanism to confront subversion, terrorism and the increase in organized crime.

Usually, when people think about violent acts during armed conflicts, they do not tend to associate them directly with the State or any institution that it represents, even less their active personal, most of the people responsible for those acts in Colombia belong to a military institution, where its enrollment means to cover the basic needs economically and medically of their family in the low-class sectors, which provide more military members. Assigning someone as a “perpetrator” is not an easy task when you cannot relate as a victim or when the crimes are indifferent to you due to the main media campaigns of State legitimization, the lack of empathy that Colombian people have with regard to the conflict is also big, which also gives them the power to take disproportional measures to fight the enemy.

During that time, different state institutions collaborate with the Army in order to justify the perpetration of indiscriminate murders. Rojas & Benavides (2017) state:

The Technical Investigation Corps (TIC) officials supported, validated and legalized the murders, as evidenced, among others, by General Rodríguez Barragán, who hired public servants from the judicial police to set up the scene where the alleged fights took place before the investigators from the Attorney General's Office arrived to start the judicial investigations.

Considering the previous statement, the collaboration of other institutions was crucial for the development of the murders. Hiring some officials from the TIC was a strategic movement who denotes the premeditation of the killings. In this sense, the perpetrators, whether intellectual or material of the murders, knew that they were covered and protected by the leaders and the institution itself. The impunity of most of this crime was in a certain way an incentive to keep going with it; of course, the material benefits<sup>29</sup> for those who were involved also played a fundamental part in it.

The rewards were for “officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers from brigades, battalions and minor military units, both operational and administrative, intelligence and military criminal justice, as well as former military personnel and former members of paramilitary groups and officials of the Technical Investigation Corps, among other public servants, distributed in 31 administrative departments of the country” (Rojas & Benavides, 2017, p. 34).

Bearing in mind the information provided to the execution of this indiscriminate violence, in a November 2012 report the International Criminal Court stated that there were "reasonable grounds" to believe that these crimes corresponded to a state policy, known for years by senior military commanders and "disguised" or "tolerated" by the highest levels of the State (El País, 2014) . In this sense, the perpetrator label belongs to the State as a whole but of course, those who executed the plan had a relevant role in the development of this policy. The complexity of the situation for all the members of the State was great, most of them – who had direct contact or were implied in a part of the process- were tempted by the rewards mentioned before, and those who were not willing to accept or perform as commanders requested must face the consequences.

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<sup>29</sup> Such as rewards, studies, breaks, vacations and trips abroad, apart from the economic benefits that were issued by law Decretos: 128 de 2003, 2767 de 2004, 1400 de 2006, 105 Preámbulo35de 2008 y Directivas del Ministerio de Defensa Nacional No. 029del 2005 y 015 y 016 del 2007 (Rojas & Benavides, 2017, pp. 34-35).

The main narrative acknowledged by the government in Colombia on regard to the situation is related to an exception in the unremarkable behavior of the Army: “the explanation preferred by many in the government - that the killings were carried out on a small scale by a few "rotten apples" - is equally untenable. The sheer number of cases, their geographic spread, and the diversity of military units involved indicate that they were carried out in a more or less systematic manner by a significant number of elements within the military” (OHCHR, 2009, p. 3). The lack of accountability from the government had negative repercussions in terms of the truth. It is still the case that in the truth commission report from 2022 the false positives and the military as perpetrators are not an approach, even as a chapter, which clearly indicates this topic is not part of the agenda for the truth commission.

In this sense, the state is failing the victims not only for not providing clarification of the perpetrators but also for not offering guarantees in this process.

The development of incentives provided by the government for those who present more results on regard to fighting against the FARC, produce an increase to extrajudicial executions as an example of unilateral violence; this growth occurred during the implementation of the Democratic Security Policy (Duran & Castillo-Valencia, 2022, p. 47). The constant pressured to provide results from part of the Government was a relevant factor of the increasing of these crimes, as Salazar (2012) stated:

These units ‘installed’ in a territory to safeguard the roads will continue to be pressured to show ‘results’. The level of pressure will lead to the creation of false positives in military terms, the government has pressed for meeting objectives that it imagined to be easy to achieve merely with political will, ignoring other necessary requirements (military capacity, intelligence, knowledge, and analysis of guerrilla action). The commanding officers’ fear of presidential reprisals has drowned the discussion of alternatives and they seek simply how to present the results that are requested by the presidency and the high command. Conclusion: if there are no enemy dead, they are created.

Following that idea, Rojas & Benavides (2017) affirm that “on a percentage level, when comparing deaths in combat with extrajudicial executions, there is no decrease in so-called false positives between the first year and the last year of the democratic security government, but an increase of 1.23%”. The increase of the percentage is related with the procedures to legitimize the accomplishment of the democratic security policy, in this sense, the actions taken were “brigade and/or tactical unit commanders issued official documents authorizing the alleged operations, in

which the victims were said to have been killed. The documents, known as ‘operational orders’ and ‘tactical mission’ gave a semblance of legality to the extrajudicial executions” (Human Right Watch, 2015, p. 14)

The legitimacy of the operations was decisive in increasing of victims, the pressure put for the government to provide results and the incentives played a huge role in it.

The extrajudicial killings were so brutal and revictimizing, not only for the cruel procedures such as moving across the country, but also for victims because “who would be able to connect a forced disappearance in one small town with the appearance of an unidentified body apparently killed in combat somewhere else? This way, the military could reduce the risk of being caught. This way they could cover up their crimes more easily” (Salazar, 2012, p. 403). Also, the revictimization process is related with the denial of the crimes, investigations and reparations from the government.

The cover-up process of the extrajudicial killings was very institutionalized, these procedures were so common that military personnel received training from “military judges in the fictitious battlefield to advise soldiers on the scene of the crime while at the same time, in their offices, they advised them on the versions to be given in judicial, administrative and disciplinary investigations (Human Right Watch, 2015). Furthermore, when the victims were buried, all the legal procedures were not followed, which increase the difficulty of the identification of the corpses and the investigation as a whole. As the Coordination Colombia- Europe- United States (2012 p. 40) declared:

The victims were buried without taking all the necessary measures to identify them beforehand; fingerprints and dental impressions were not taken, nor was the respective forensic anthropological examination performed to establish sex, age, ethnic group and body measurements. Likewise, the corpses were moved, making the removal of the bodies difficult, causing the loss of much of the technical evidence on the crime scene and the victim's body, no evidence of torture or sexual violence was collected, and no record was made of the position of the corpse or the condition of the clothing.

The intentional failures on the due diligence on regard to the victims of extrajudicial executions coincide with the premeditation and training that military personnel got to avoid their criminalization of the murders. The lack of processable evidence and cooperation from the statal institutions in charge of providing justice for the victims perpetuate the revictimization and the insipient accountability from the Government as perpetrator. In a logic of fragile military

masculinities where the person who would be willing to cooperate with the justice was punished and denigrated, the options were very reduced - depending on the kind of information that the person had, the retaliation would be 'proportional' - under these coercive contexts.

A combination of political and economic factors was involved in this extrajudicial execution, which creates a complex panorama of human rights violations, especially in the Colombian case where most of the power of the institutions was implied. These factors were translated as "widespread impunity for human rights violations, a dysfunctional military justice system and cultural factors like esprit de corps, the overstatement of the 'military sacrifices, and a questionable understanding of 'military honor' may have contributed to the commitment of such crimes and certainly hindered their judicial clear-up (interview 22)" (Salazar, 2012, p. 405).

The victims of this "policy" were not only civilians but also military members "some of the 'snitches', as they were labeled by their comrades in arms, were killed and presented as casualties of the confrontation between the regular army and the insurgent troops; others, with their military or police honor shattered, voluntarily and forcibly hung up their uniforms" (Cosoy, 2015). In a country where the common is being corrupted, thinking out of this box -specially in a military institution like the army- is a big challenge which usually have negative repercussions in the life of those who dare to do it.

The memory construction around this topic is focus more on the victim's perspective than the perpetrators from the army, the information provide for those who commit the crimes is rare. The lack of information is related mainly to the detachment of the material perpetrators from the role; it means they do not recognize themselves as perpetrators, it could also be associated with the accepted association of military members with other roles like heroes and victims, which in a certain way legitimized the absence of identification as perpetrator. Furthermore, in a contexed where " the army, as promoted by the government and the Command of the Military Forces, was winning the war against the oldest guerrilla in the world, with social approval, for which it resorted to unconventional strategies such as alliances with the enemies of its enemies" (Human Right Watch, 1996), the questioning of under what kind of strategies the government was winning was out of scenery, only those who were the victims were digging for answers, that changed when the paramilitaries decided to make peace with the government to provide valuable information to the peace process. The alliance performed was with the paramilitaries all over the country, and this

cooperation translated into an institutionalized practice with huge impact on extrajudicial executions.

Some information about the alliances with the paramilitaries was realized by demobilized from different groups of paramilitaries. As per Jhon Jairo Hernandez Sanchez, alias 'Centella' who was presenting the testimony affirmed:

If I would count the times that coronel Mejia meets with command 39, we will never end Mrs district attorney. Between alias 39 – who was David Hernandez Rojas a former captain of the Army- and the coronel Mejia – who was called in the United Self-Defenses Forces of Colombia (AUC)<sup>30</sup> 'El Loco'- was an agreement to provide false positives (...) As result of that agreement the 19 members of the AUC were presented as members of the National Liberation Army (ELN)<sup>31</sup>, this due to the compensation of the arrangement let the group move, and taking money in the department as exchange the coronel Mejia told '39' he needed those 'false positives' to present to their commanders, also between them had an old friendship because they belonged to the same course at the Army (AFE, Demobilised assure that alias '39' and colonel Mejia were allies, 2009).

Friendship between paramilitary leaders and military leaders was common in the development of the extrajudicial executions but not only, they were also cooperating in other aspects that will be acknowledge later in this chapter. Furthermore, the relationship build between them was so strong and solid that even though when some new military personnel came to the zones, they were already aware of the alliances. Alias 'Pedro Bonito'<sup>32</sup> affirmed "the contact was not only with the generals but with all the intelligence personnel of the brigades. They had permanent contact with them. There were times when new generals and colonels were appointed for the zone, it was not necessary to contact them, they were already referenced" (AFE, The 'Paras' and the 17th Brigade of the Army, 2011). This kind of closeness was achieved not only through deep cooperation between the actors but also through the lack of retaliation.

This kind of alliances were normalized in contexts where both parties were getting benefits from it without major repercussions, which incentivize the continuity of this cooperation. Similar situations were presented all over the country when diverse military members joined forces with paramilitaries and other state agents. As an example, "the massacres, murders and the forced

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<sup>30</sup> Known as AUC for the initialism in Spanish

<sup>31</sup> Known as ELN for the initialism in Spanish

<sup>32</sup> Former paramilitary leader from the front Arlex Hurtado, whose name is Raúl Emilio Hasbún

displacement committed by the paramilitary groups between 1996 and 2004 in Urabá in Córdoba, Antioquia and Chocó were in complicity mainly with the 17th Brigade and with some Police members and agents from the Administrative Security Department, Intelligence and Judicial Investigations Bureau of the Police and Sectional Judicial Police” (AFE, The 'Paras' and the 17th Brigade of the Army, 2011).

The complicity between diverse state forces and agencies to accomplish the extrajudicial executions had a big impact on the total number of crimes committed. An example of the impact corresponds to “the paramilitary groups coordinated four ways of support with the military personnel: clear areas, delay the entry of the armed forces into certain zones, clear roads for the movement of troops, and accompany operations. Of the 22 massacres that the Banana Bloc has confessed to, we can say that 50% of them were related to the participation of military personnel” (AFE, The 'Paras' and the 17th Brigade of the Army, 2011). In this sense, the paramilitary groups and the military members are similarly involved in these crimes, but paradoxically, the official narrative of the armed conflict in Colombia only considers the paramilitaries groups as main perpetrators.

To the eyes of world militaries and paramilitaries, they were enemies and the Army should provide results with regard to fighting paramilitaries, but the alliance was so strong that military personnel would rather present civilians as paramilitaries. As per district attorney’s office “the closeness between paramilitaries and the army was such that they shared communication networks, repeaters and troops. In their alliance, they also murdered innocent peasants, disguised them in military garb, and handed them over to the 17th Brigade so that the Army would show results in its supposed fight against the paramilitaries” (AFE, The 'Paras' and the 17th Brigade of the Army, 2011). The described situation was not only with that brigade, it represents the general panorama and how the actions of one side is related to the other on regard to extrajudicial executions and other human rights violations. The consequence of this type of ‘results-oriented’ homicide was that anybody without a public profile could become a victim, anybody who was in the wrong place at the wrong time (Salazar, 2012, p. 402).

In addition, the systematization of the Democratic Security Policy led to extrajudicial executions, which became in practice a link to state orientations in the fight against terrorism through institutional, regulatory and administrative mechanisms as a rewards and incentives for military units and informants involved in producing that kind of operational result (Coordination

Colombia-Europe-United States, 2012, p. 7). In the reality, this phenomenon is generating more violence and abuses of human rights, when the performance of a military unit is measured by the enemy's deaths, the methods to accomplish those results will be turned crueler and more indiscriminate. A society like Colombian where violence and atrocities are normalized and the collective mindset of taking advantage to the other to better yourself is a pillar in social relations, especially in the military context where the stronger will be the survivor, the cards were settled by the politicians and commanders to profit one way or another from this policy.

Considering the previous information, "impunity played a decisive role. In 2010, the impunity rate for killings attributed to the Colombian armed forces was 98.5%, which made it more attractive to commit a false positive" (Lindsay-Poland, 2014). In addition, there was a code of silence within the military units to conceal these types of events" (Duran & Castillo-Valencia, 2022, p. 48). The code of silence is common in powerful institutions like the army, especially in the Colombian context, where the State as a whole was involved in this policy. The risk of talk or refusing to follow the directives of the leadership implies diverse types of repercussions -as I have exposed before in this chapter- which facilitate the continuity of the violation of human rights for civilians but also to military and paramilitary personnel.

Finally, as the inform of 2011 stated, "if the systematic crime of false positive has had a profound influence on anything, it is the introduction of false language, or lies, in official institutions, systematically reproduced in the mass media of "information", and consequently, in the collapse of the credibility of official communications" unfortunately, the commission of these crimes allowed society to question about the official narrative of the government, which in context like ours is crucial, to fight and search for justice and truth, a reparation that government could provide to the victims but is incapable of it.

## **4.2 Militaries and Paramilitaries as allies**

The paramilitary phenome as we know it nowadays in Colombia was highly influenced by the direct support of some senior members of the Colombian public security forces, especially high-ranking members of the army the paradox here is just some have been investigated and convicted for the alliances with the paramilitarism (Comision para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición, 2022). As I briefly explained in the previous part of this chapter, the alliance between these main actors of the conflict in Colombia was crucial to improving the results and benefits of both parts.

Considering the closed relations between Army, as an institution, and paramilitaries this phenomenon can be understood as sharing core values, mainly because former military personnel joined the paramilitary and took the institutional structure and values. Sharing values like strength, proud, loyalty, brotherhood and the idea of fighting against the guerilla as the main enemy with brutal tactics. Both sides benefited from the alliance it was so evident the relationship that international and national courts submit sentences were the depth of these operational and ideological alliances materialized in “La Rochela massacre (1989), the extrajudicial execution of former Unión Patriótica senator Manuel Cepeda Vargas (August 1994), the Ituango massacres<sup>417</sup> (June 1996, La Granja; and October 1997, El Aro), the Mapiripán massacre (1997) and Operation Genesis” (Comision para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición, 2022, p. 337).

According to the dates of the massacres, the alliances between these main actors lasted almost 20 years, considering the demobilization of the paramilitary in 2006<sup>33</sup>, the long-lasting relationship was determinant for the violent development of the internal conflict. This violence was translated not only into massacres but also in force displacement, robbery, bravery, extortion, kidnaping. There were intentional omissions, such as the setting up of army checkpoints to allow the mobility of paramilitary armies and inaction in the face of people's complaints regarding the paramilitary threat (Comision para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición, 2022, p. 337). The collaboration between them was crucial for the escalation of the violence, considering the paramilitaries as the main perpetrators of the armed conflict in Colombia is irrelevant when people do not consider the relationship with the armed forces, especially with the army to accomplish these violent acts.

The cooperation between military and paramilitaries was very complex, they operated jointly in most cases, but the relationship was deeper, sharing information -such as lists of people identified as sympathizers or members of guerilla groups- training, delivery of weapons and ammunitions, as an example of it I can referrer to the training school of Puerto Boyacá which was financed through ACDEGAM<sup>34</sup> to which the army provided weapons and other military supplies (Comision

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<sup>33</sup> It is important to clarify that even though this process was done, the paramilitary groups transformed themselves into criminals' groups and this process was more symbolic because in real life the violence did not decrease after this.

<sup>34</sup> Asociacion Campesina de Ganaderos y Agricultores del Magdalena Medio, in english Madgalena Medio Farmers' and Cattle Rancher's Association

para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición, 2022, pp. 338-339). Furthermore, “they have other support links related to cooperation, guidance and mobility in the field between the army and paramilitary groups, the loan of military installations and lodging of members of paramilitary groups” (Comision para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición, 2022, p. 340). This level of collaboration impact significantly in the progress of the conflict, military and paramilitaries allowed each other to obtain their goals in an easier way; they shared forces and resources so the result was heartbreaking, not only for the civilians who were their main victims but also to all the Colombians who are involved in the consequences of war.

The systematization of the cooperation involved not only the military personnel but also civilians who work in military institutions, the objective of the interconnection of resources was to achieve each group’s goals faster and in their own terms. In this sense, the training of paramilitaries by military employees was expected, as we can identify José Miguel Narváz Martínez<sup>35</sup> taught courses at the paramilitary school La 35 and La Acuarela, the training provide was generating better skills in the paramilitary, it is important to clarify that not every military member has the opportunity to study at the War Superior School because they are taught specialized training. The equity between the military and paramilitary in terms of resources and knowledge was very high, and it corroborates the declaration of not seeing the paramilitary as enemy but more like a extension of the army.

Even though the army was not participating directly, they were allowing the actions, an example of this was the absence of the security forces in the village La Gabarra in Tibú in 1999 when the second massacre was perpetrated by the paramilitaries. “The officer who was in charge of a military unit in the area assured to the Commission that he simulated an attack to the base in order to justify the absence of the army in the village during this massacre. When the authorities investigated, he lied, saying he did not have knowledge; they attacked them; it was raining and the power went out (...) the whole battalion was aware of the combat; it was a fictional one but it happened under a façade” (Comision para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición, 2022, p. 338).

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<sup>35</sup> Academic at Escuela Superior de Guerra and appointed deputy director at Security Administrative Department (DAS in Spanish) in 2005.

Alliances were central to the formation of these illegal armies and how they multiply and continued over time, “resulting in joint counterinsurgency operations between military and paramilitary units, the achievement of false results through extrajudicial executions and other criminal mechanisms, the direct participation of military personnel (active and retired) in the paramilitary ranks and alliances for the training of troops, among other interactions that prove their closeness to each other” (Comision para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición, 2022, p. 343). Considering the strong connections among them, paramilitaries were identified as allies in this war, they were an extension of the military forces, where they had more operating margin, especially on relation to human rights violations, as we can identify in their joint behavior.

The unity evidence between these two groups was such that not even the civilians of the regions where paramilitaries operate were able to differentiate them; as per the Inform of the Truth Commission (2022) “in different territories, the articulation and joint operation of paramilitary groups and military units was such that in some regions the civilian population did not distinguish between them and became accustomed to recognizing paramilitaries as part of the same State”. The implications of this conjunction, at least in the civilian imaginary, produce insecurity and a lack of trusting in governmental institutions because those who were supposed to protect them, were allied with the illegal groups who vulnerate the community constantly. The brutality of the acts committed by the paramilitaries can be associated with the ideal of manhood in the military - based on the deep influence, training and having members who were former militaries- and how through the dominant, provider, stronger man they were capable of show their supremacy over the guerilla and also the civil population in the areas that they controlled.

The cooperation between these main actors of the Colombian conflict also took place in joint operations in which human rights violations and breaches of international human law were committed. This problematic was addressed by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in different sentences, “in 2004 the Court established the international responsibility of the Colombian State for the illegal retention and forced disappearance of nineteen shopkeepers by paramilitaries in Puerto Boyacá, under the command of Henry Pérez, in closed connection with high-ranking army’s members” (Comision para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición, 2022, pp. 339-340). The inconsistency of the narrative presented by the State on regard of the collaboration between the army and the paramilitaries is revictimizing and neglecting a collective memory construction based on acceptance. The systematic aspect of the relationship

allowed impunity and the lack of militaries considered as perpetrators, the State was in charge of promoting the idea of the military members as heroes and created a whole strategy to maintain this perception, in order to obtain legitimacy, about this aspect I will refer in the next chapter.

The coordination and joint operations were not only against civilians but also against the guerilla, Yair Rodríguez -former army officer- stated “he had to dress with civilians clothes, go down to the town -Dabeiba- with weapons to a certain meeting point, when he and other soldiers that he chose arrive to that point, they found 2 NPR with tent, then the lieutenant Rodriguez in that time, move the tent and he found paramilitaries inside of the trucks (...) the major Pinzon Turcio order him and his soldiers to check the tunnel they will be supporting the paramilitaries fighting against the guerrilla” (JEP, 2024). In the audiences performed for the Special Jurisdiction of Peace in Colombia, regarding macro case number 3<sup>36</sup>, from the testimonies who has been published the consensus of the declarant is that in Dabeiba militaries and paramilitaries work together, especially those who were on charge of the units and those who were more experienced, the cooperation was with supplies, information and joint operations.

In addition, the relationship between military personnel and paramilitaries was related to obtaining information and resources to accomplished operations against the guerrilla. Some weapons were provided by the paramilitary in order to performed the operations and allow the legalization of the causalities presented (JEP, Ochoa, 2024). In the audiences, the collaboration between these groups was not only in that area, as per Luis Arenas (JEP, Arenas,2024) “Sargent Beltran had direct contact with the paramilitaries of ‘Cerro del Oso’ in Santa Rita de Ituango, he heard a communication between the Sargent and the paramilitary leader where the Sargent prevented them from moving away from the place they were because the battalion 18 would make an operation there”. The operation from this battalion provided the sense that alliances with paramilitaries were officially approved, but as I have discussed here, the systematic of these relationships all over the country disdained the concept of a few rotten apples promulgate by the state when it is referencing to these situations.

The collaboration between military and paramilitaries were so deep that they behaved as one, in this sense, as per former soldier Gabriel Gómez (JEP, March 14, 2024) “for a while we all had the support of the paramilitaries; in some operations, the paramilitaries were leading it”. Furthermore,

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<sup>36</sup> Extrajudicial executions

some of the members of the paramilitaries were former army personnel, as Richard Barroso (JEP, Rodriguez, Barroso & Echeverría, 2024) stated “we called the paramilitaries ‘cousins’ because some of its members belonged to the army in the past, officials, non-commissioner officers and soldiers who moved to the paramilitaries, so we considered them as part of the group” so applying the concept of enemy to them was difficult, mainly because in the army they describe the enemy as evil monster who deserved to be killed because their life has no worth. This can be the discourse promote for most of the military institutions in conflict context, dehumanizing the enemy facilitate violence and detachment from guilty, at this point is important to remember that being guilty or questioning the orders within the army is neither what is expected nor desired based on what military masculinity represents for this institution.

During the audiences, it was evident that most of the military personnel, no matter their rank knew about the relationship with the paramilitaries, especially in this area -Dabeiba- where they remember having combats against the guerrilla but never fought paramilitaries, former major Yair Rodriguez stated “major Pinzon Turcio had. Contact with the leader of the block who rules in Antioquia, every peloton who arrived in Dabeiba knew that the paramilitaries were there and they should not fight them” (JEP, Rodriguez, Barroso & Echeverría, 2024). The root of the connections is clearly made by the high-ranking officers in charge of the units or battalions, military institution is very hierarchical, even more than 20 years ago, that is the time frame of the investigation. Also, after so many years the memories related to specific situations were mainly blurred, of course not all of them had bad memory but it slowed down the investigation, the truth and judicial process for those who had an active participation in the violation of human rights.

## 6. Conclusion

Military forces played a crucial part in the developing of the conflict, as main actor, their actions had direct repercussions in the violence of the armed conflict on the country. As a state representant, they had a broad resources, privileges and duties that the other actors did not. It is clear, that memory construction in Colombia is an ongoing process, especially with regard to an actor very protected by the official version of the government and its influence on academic production in Colombia. Most of the sources were not directly referring to the memory construction, even though, they were related to each of the roles identified.

Talking about memory construction in Colombia is not an easy task, especially with respect to the national army. The investigation was showing us how the idea of hero and the construction of an especial association with the military forces have been favored by the government and that has not been the exception of one president but the norm in order to legitimize the actioner against the guerilla. Furthermore, the mass media has played a crucial function in the development of the collective imaginary of the internal armed conflict and how the perception in respect of the different actors have been manipulated based on the interests of the powerful people behind the story telling of the mainstream media in Colombia. The promulgation of values related to the hero, such as courage, resilience, strength, loyal are inherently associated with the core morals of hegemonic military masculinity. In this sense, the materialization and perpetuation of the patriarchal system, particularly in a context of conflict like the Colombian, has produced more violence and victims.

The investigation provided grounds to affirm that in Colombia the relationship between heroes and victims with regard to the military members is deep, those concepts cannot be understood and investigated without each other, they complement and substantiate each other. I found this correlation very interesting due to the number of victims of the military forces in Colombia. This connection allows the empathy from the society to the labor and sacrifice performed by the soldiers, but at the same time encourages the construction of an evil enemy who is worthy of being exterminated under the means required. The incontinent green flag provided by Colombians people to annihilate the enemy was a determinant of the actioner of the militaries in the conflict, contributing to the escalation and violence within the conflict, incrementing the human 'rights violations and, as result, more victims.

The victim role in the memory construction has been extensively studied, and the perspective through it has been address in multiples ways, as I explore in this research. The identification of three main types of victims were propose as follows: first antipersonnel mines, during patrols around the country, military personnel have been victimized for this cruel weapon, which has a broad impact not only in the life of the direct affected but also in the collective imaginary with regard to the guerilla. The second were the kidnapping victims, who recall their experiences and the infringement of so many rights that, they have to adapt to the jungle and precarious condition in order to survive. Direct victims, has been revictimized by the institution -army- in several opportunities, especially in terms of their disability, lack of proper attention, and integration. They have not been taking into consideration their active participation in the military, even though they had the desire, also the psychological treatments have not been effective or appropriate for every case. Finally, the third one, corresponds to the indirect victims of the military members; it means their families, who, depending on their social class and resources, experiences different victimization. A common thing between the families was the uncertainty of how the situation happened, it does not matter to the army the type of victim; they do not provide further information and it is not helpful for the grieving and healing process.

Considering the victims of the military, it is not a secret they had more privilege, in comparison to the civilians' victims. The institution provided the tools and sources required for the reparation and put their lives back on track, but clearly, this is not the reality for peasant victims of antipersonnel mines. With that in mind, it is important to point out the closed relationship between military members and paramilitaries, the dynamic was game changing in the development of the armed conflict. It is imperative to exalt that, as per the report of the Truth Commission in 2022, paramilitaries were the main perpetrators of the conflict. In this sense, the army as institution played a relevant role in the victimization; even though they were not directly participating in the human violations, the inaction in most of the cases allowed the massacres. The cooperation between them is not new information, but the gap of discussion on regard of this topic in the memory construction is concerning. Is it valid to question what kind of powers are behind this? and how this crucial discussion will affect them?

The extrajudicial execution, more commonly known as 'false positives', was systematically and internalized in the institution as a common practice, the participation of different statal entities in the training of the military and as guarantors of the situation is problematic, they did not keep a

register of the bodies, names and places where these killings occurred, so the restitution and reparation process are a long way from being as desirable in a peace context. The democratic security policy plays a crucial role in the generation and systematization of the extrajudicial killings, commanders under the army were pressed to provide casualties, and the implementation from the government of Alvaro Uribe of a punishment and reward system incentivizes this situation, materializing in the coordination within the troops, even with money collection, to perform this killing. Memory construction on regard, of military as perpetrator is very weak; from the official institutions, there are no references to approach this important role, and that is problematic due to the minimizing of humans' violations performed by military personnel, who are denied the right to remember and could be manipulative to the collective memory of the conflict for future generations.

The narrative in regard to each role associated to military members are very different between them, especially when they are telling the events, studying these different approaches allows for an attempt of integral memory construction. There are still a lot of gaps of knowledge that were out of the scope of this research but it would be very interesting to approach them in further investigations, the implications and repercussion of these roles in peacebuilding will be very pertinent to study, in order to test them.

The hegemonic military masculinity is transversal to the three roles: hero, victim and perpetrator, the different values are present in their construction, either to deny, exalt or minimize, depending on which role we are referring. The materialization of the morals in the roles are clearly the result of the internalization of hegemonic military masculinity as the core of the identity of the army and they cannot be understood without each other. This kind of relation brings to the table a very limited and concerning way of being, not only for the military but for manhood, because the military are usually exalted as the ideal man. In a context like the Colombian, this is very dangerous because the logic of the conflict has been translated to the houses, perpetuating the violence.

Finally, the identification of the roles of the military personnel in the internal armed conflict can be investigated from different perspectives; mine was a first attempt to present the roles as an analysis category and open the door to further investigations. This thesis was the first glimpse to a deeper investigation into the topic.

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