

The Politics of Memory in Post-Accord Colombia: Interventions from Women Social Leaders and Decolonial Feminisms

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This article contributes to critical heritage debates through exploring the politics of memory in the Colombian peace process with the left-wing guerrilla group FARC-EP. Following the signature of the Peace Accord in 2016 with the FARC-EP, the current right-wing government's (2018–2022) denialist politics have resulted in a lack of compliance of the Accord and a 'battle for memory'. In a context of ongoing conflict and violence, I present the interventions of twelve women social leaders who were interviewed between November 2019 and January 2020. From a decolonial feminist standpoint, I narrate the contestations and nuances of the politics of memory in times of ongoing conflict and entangle these with social leaders' heterogeneous demands for collective place-based memory, truth and justice. The interventions of social leaders involved in historical memory processes reveal an urgent need to address the instrumentalisation of memory and security concerns due to ongoing violence in post-Accord Colombia. Through centring women social leaders' interventions and decolonial feminisms this paper seeks to contribute to ongoing national and international debates on the constructions of historical memory in times of ongoing violence and coloniality, which promote place-based, collective, democratic, plural and empathetic memory, heritage and peace making.

Keywords: Historical Memory; Peace; Politics of Memory; Violence; Collective Memories; Decolonial Feminisms

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Introduction

On November 29–30 of 2016 the Colombian government ratified a historical Peace Accord with the left-wing guerrilla group the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (FARC-EP). This long-lasting armed conflict, has left more than eight million officially recognised victims (Unidad de Víctimas 2019) who have had ‘varied experiences of violence—in terms of forms of violence, alleged perpetrators, and effects of harms’ (Krystalli 2020). Thus, Colombia’s post-Accord period has been tied to a quest to understand what happened during more than 50 years of armed conflict involving military, paramilitary, state, business and guerrilla actors. Their focus has been on truth, justice and reparations for all victims/survivors. The National Centre for Historical Memory (CNMH) was a central institution in the plural processes for historical memory up until the current right-wing government appointed Ruben Darío Acevedo as its director in 2019. Following the lack of action in the recognition of the armed conflict and the right to truth for all victims by the newly appointed Centre Director, the CNMH was expelled from the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience in February 2020 (ICSC 2020). Thus, historical memory in the context of the Colombian peace process with the FARC-EP has been characterised by the politicisation of peace, memory and heritage and has even been called ‘a battle for memory’ (Alarcón 2020; Wills Obregón 2020a).

In this troubling time and given the socio-historic significance of the ongoing peace process with the FARC-EP, I focus on the juncture between the politicisation of memory and heritage. Entangling the interventions of twelve women social leaders¹ invested in the construction of peace in the country, this paper aims to: (1) Narrate how heritage and the use of memory as social and cultural processes are politically disputed and negotiated; (2) Advance decolonial feminisms as a needed standpoint to understand these processes; (3) Contribute to the active and ongoing debates on the politics of memory in Colombia for place-based, collective, democratic and empathetic memory, heritage and peace making.

In the next section I situate the article within critical heritage studies (CHS). I then introduce the epistemic-methodological considerations of the research conducted. Following the methods section, I present the contexts of the current Latin American and Colombian debates on the politics of memory, truth and justice. Given Colombia’s troubling context and my epistemic commitment to Latin American decoloniality, I then argue for the value of a feminist decolonial standpoint. In the findings I reveal how the politics of memory in Colombia are entangled in colonial and ongoing violence, and the instrumentalisation of

memory. In presenting the findings, I also narrate the place-based processes for collective memory emerging in the Colombian territories. In the conclusion I return to discuss how these processes contribute to CHS and the plural projects for decoloniality. Overall, through an empirical discussion of the politics of memory in Colombia, this paper argues that decolonial epistemic commitments and understandings within CHS open up possibilities to reveal how the coloniality of power operates in heritage and memory processes in place.

Critical heritage, official truth and selective memories

Conceptually, I commence from the CHS critique of the idea that heritage and memory-making are static and merely material, and focus on the sense of heritage as: ‘not so much as a “thing”, but as a cultural and social process, which engages with acts of remembering that work to create ways to understand and engage with the present’ (Smith 2006, 2; see also Waterton and Watson 2015). Due to the controversies surrounding the CNMH since 2019, the ‘battle for memory’ in Colombia is embedded in denialist politics that erase the implication of various actors of the armed conflict, obscuring the multiple narratives of this history. These denialist politics can be conceptualised as an ideology underlying an ‘authorized heritage discourse’ (AHD) of the state in Colombia, and the CNMH as mirroring the processes of ‘authorizing institutions of heritage’ (Smith 2006, 87).

Within the state-led AHD processes of historical memory in Colombia, official and selective memories and ‘truths’ are also circulating and reproducing nationalistic, institutionalised, militaristic and colonial accounts of the history of the armed conflict. Indeed, Little (2019, 631–632) argues that: ‘selective memory leaves out key elements of the past ... avoiding what is painful, shameful or immoral ... Privilege itself becomes deeply embedded as a root concept that supports cultural violence sustaining the status quo’. In the context of ‘the battle for memory’ in Colombia, Wills Obregón (2020a) elaborates that an official truth is:

A mechanism of symbolic power that seeks to ratify a hierarchical structure and protect those who are at the top ... Because of that, the official truth is associated with impunity, rigidity and a silence that is founded in ingrained fear.²

Thus, in this historical period, we are grappling with the use of *difficult heritage* and are in need of a critical social justice lens that can reveal how power structures and privilege operate in the social and cultural processes of memory (Smith 2006, 7; MacDonald 2009,

2016; Villalón 2017; Little 2019; Cantillon, Baker and Nowak 2020). Within CHS there is also a particular need of more decolonial, gendered and anti-racist interventions (Grahn and Wilson 2018; Ray 2019; Turunen 2019; Little 2019; Ugwuanyi 2020). Thus, by discussing the politics of memory in Colombia, I also advance a decolonial feminist agenda within CHS as the ‘conversation on coloniality of heritage is needed to create historical consciousness, visibility and polyvocality for remembrance of colonialism’ (Turunen 2019, 12; see also Ugwuanyi 2020).

Epistemic-methodological considerations

This paper commences from a political commitment to decolonial feminisms. Thus, I want to be transparent about the epistemic-methodological considerations of my positionality and of the dialogues presented here. As a white-*mestiza* committed to decolonial feminisms (see Rodriguez Castro 2018b) conducting research from Australia, my positionality is deeply entangled in the coloniality of power (see Quijano 2014). Therefore, it is through a decolonial feminist standpoint that I aim to critically trouble the way we create knowledge and work with communities in the Global South (see Rodriguez Castro 2018a; Rodriguez Castro 2018b). My research purposefully attends to the issue of the ongoing privileging of the Global North, and an urban and white-*mestizo* culture in Latin America, by focusing on the epistemic forces of place of *Campesinas*,³ Indigenous and Black women in Colombia. Thus, in Table 1, which introduces the women who participated in the interviews, there is a privileging of the testimonies of those who represent important organisations in Colombia, such as the Peasant Reserve Zones Association (ANZORC) and The Black Communities' Process of Colombia (PCN). However, the findings are in no way generalisable and do not intend to be. Rather women’s testimonies bring to light the importance of territorial, diverse and autonomous conceptualisations of memory and peacemaking in Colombia.

[INSERT TABLE 1]

The twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted from December 2019 to January 2020. These were conducted as part of a larger project involving interviews with key stakeholders in other museums, centres and institutions of historical memory in Cali, Medellin and Bogotá. Most of the social leaders had been involved in previous dialogues conducted in early 2016⁴ (see Rodriguez Castro 2020). All participants were able to choose whether they wanted to be identified through their name and/or organisation or remain

anonymous in accordance with a full research ethics clearance.⁵ The interviews were 40 to 60 minutes in length and aimed to understand how historical memory and the post-Accord period was being felt and lived by women social leaders. Topics discussed during the interviews included leader's understandings of collective memory and state-led historical memory construction, and their collective actions for peace and justice. The embodied, affective and place-based dimensions of the abovementioned issues were given primacy during the interviews and thematic analysis undertaken for this article.

The politics of memory in Latin America

In Colombia's current transitional restorative justice processes, memory-work is undoubtedly embedded in the ongoing advancement of neoliberal policies and colonial violence in the succession of various conservative governments. This context resonates with Latin American post-war and post-dictatorship histories. For example, during the 1970s the Latin American region underwent important socio-political change with the end of various dictatorships in South America and the end of civil wars in Central America. These historical moments resulted in a transition to various forms of liberal and weak peace and/or democracies. During this period of social and political actions, forms of memorialisation were evidently tied to processes for justice and reparations (Arias and del Campo 2009). At the same time, 'the transitional states had to balance the demand for truth and justice with the need for stability required by the expansion and consolidation of neoliberal economic policies' (Arias and del Campo 2009, 7). In reviewing post-1970s Latin America, Arias and del Campo (2009, 11) argue that:

If for human rights activists truth means the identification of the perpetrators so that there can be justice, for the state it means withholding this information to prevent prosecutions. Therefore, the only promise made by the Latin American states has been to bring out the "truth" in exchange for recognition of the impossibility of justice given the perceived need for political stability.

This statement resonates with the current Colombian context in which the state is exercising its power to instate an official truth through the use of cultural institutions, denialist politics and selective memories about the past (see Wills Obregón 2020a; Reed-Hurtado and Umaña Hernández 2020).

Recent literature has also argued that debates regarding truth, memory and justice in Latin America are now: (1) Understanding that 'truth is not fixed, nor is it likely ever fully

knowable’; (2) ‘Affirming the centrality of survivors and families of the victims’ in justice processes and contributing to the ‘complex politics of victimhood’; (3) Producing ‘research of consequence, including socially committed or engaged research’ (Burt 2020, 5). These trends identify first, the importance of understanding the politics of memory as a relational process and avoiding ‘dichotomous or linear ways of reasoning’ (Villalón 2017, 6). Second, the need to ground these discussions in engaged scholarship committed to contribute to ongoing debates for justice for all victims and survivors of violent conflict (see Villalón 2017; Burt 2020). Given the history of the Latin American politics of memory that continues to be a field in dispute due to the advancement of the neoliberal project and coloniality, Villalón (2015, 14) asks: ‘Can there be a collective memory in an individualistic, consumerist culture? Can there be justice without the recognition and reparation of colonial inequalities and their legacies? Can processes of memory, justice, and reconciliation advance in contexts of ongoing violence?’ I return to these questions in the paper’s conclusion.

Another dimension that has gained force with the most recent Latin American uprisings and mobilisations (e.g. Chile Despertó), is the plural construction of collective memories and counterhegemonic politics. Villalón (2017, 2) illustrates that in the region there is a ‘persistence of processes of collective memory and justice against official accounts that remained partial with the ultimate goal of uncovering the facts and coming to terms with the various effects of such violence and traumatic events’ (see also Villalón 2015). Arias and del Campo (2009, 11) provide an important intervention in the understanding of collective memories based on Candau’s work and argue that:

Collective memory is always a utopian construction, a narrative of memory will always be contested, and no society will have a single collective memory; the only thing a society as a whole may share is the silences, the things that everyone has chosen to ignore. In this sense the democratization process has been marked by demands for truth and justice.

Thus, the value of understanding the processes and plurality of collective memory in place rupture the hegemony of official truths and memories, and bring to light negotiations, tensions, silences and symbolic practices of co-constructing meaning as citizens (Arias and del Campo 2009; Villalón 2015).

The politics of memory and peace in Colombia: A brief context

The CNMH was created as part of the Ley de Víctima y Restitución de Tierras (Victim's Law 1448) in 2011 during ex-president Juan Manuel Santos' government. It was commissioned to create, design, and manage a museum of memory under the management of the CNMH that is yet to be finalised. This legislation recognises the existence of the internal armed conflict and is a central legal framework for the institutionalisation of memory in Colombia (Torres Ayala 2019). Torres Ayala (2019, 138) explains that 'this mandate was never intended to be about the construction of an official memory but about the support and guarantees that the Colombian state needed to provide civil society's memory initiatives that would contribute to guarantee the right to truth'. Since its inception the CNMH has done important work with victim's organisations and civil society. For instance, the CNMH has produced one of the most comprehensive database of historical memory in the country (e.g. Grupo de Memoria Histórica 2013). So rather than presenting all of the work of the CNMH as problematic, my interest is to demonstrate how the denialist politics of the government of Ivan Duque present a juncture in the ongoing peace process in Colombia.

Illustrative of the denialist politics of Colombia's current government is the lack of action of the state-appointed CNMH Director Ruben Darío Acevedo in the recognition of the armed conflict, which resulted in the expulsion of the Centre from the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC 2020). Acevedo was appointed in February 2019 and is a historian who has been critical of the Peace Accord with the FARC-EP. He has publicly denied that the internal armed conflict existed in Colombia, noting that what happened was a terrorist threat and attack to the state (Rendón 2019). These denialist politics exempt other armed actors including paramilitary and military groups as perpetrators of violence in the Colombian armed conflict and deny tenants of the Victim's Law. Indeed, there is legislation, judicial evidence and a Peace Accord which recognise the role of multiple sectors of the country, including the state and the military in the Colombian armed conflict (e.g. extra judicial killings see Gordon 2017). In the last two years, victims' organisations, social leaders, human rights defenders, academics, alternative media, workers within the CNMH, and other national and international memory initiatives have been outspoken about the problematic appointment and direction of Acevedo (e.g. ICSC 2020; Movice 2019; Wills Obregón 2020a). For example, on the 25th of February 2019, 84 organisations and 31 social leaders released a statement withdrawing their information from the CNMH database, expressing their collective determination to stop any collaborations with the Centre under Acevedo's direction (Movice 2019). Historical memory academic and former advisor of the CNMH María Emma Wills Obregón (2020a) has denounced that Acevedo 'is using all of the

resources of this state entity, not for the pluralisation of memories, as he claims, but for the construction of an official truth about the Colombian armed conflict’.

These denialist politics, supported by a right-wing political project of the current government to impose an official truth, have exempted the state of any implication in the violence of the armed conflict and allowed for the historical and symbolic blame of the FARC-EP as the only perpetrator (Estrada Álvarez 2020). Thus, Estrada Álvarez (2020) argues that the dispute for ‘historical truth’ has become one of the driving causes of the worsening of the Peace Accord implementation. In turn, this has had consequences in the reintegration of the members of the FARC-EP to civil society and as a political party, as stipulated in the Peace Accord. As Victoria Sandino a senator for the FARC political party noted in the interviews conducted:

The topic of historical memory and collective memory, similar to the peace, is a matter in dispute, really. Because there is a matter of official truth that they [the government] want to impose, which is the narrative of the victors...

Indeed, the lack of compliance of the current Peace Accord has had violent consequences for social leaders and demobilised FARC-EP members. Since day one of the Accord more than 400 leaders have been massacred (Osorio 2020), and over 200 ex-FARC combatants have been murdered (Partido FARC 2020). Therefore, the basic guarantees for the respect for life and a plural process for discussion about historical memory have not occurred (Reed-Hurtado and Umaña Hernández 2020). In summary, the current ‘battle for memory’ in Colombia is embedded in a broader context of political violence and ongoing social conflict that needs to be addressed.

A decolonial feminist standpoint

In the context of truth, memory and justice in Latin America, Villalón (2017, 6) has argued that ‘the changing, contradictory, and complicated nature of the processes of reframing collective memory, particularly of violent traumatic pasts, call for a Southern, postcolonial, feminist epistemology’. In fact, the need to centre gendered, anti-racist, Southern, decolonial or post-colonial epistemologies has been addressed by other critical heritage and memory scholars who argue that the use of heritage is implicated in the modern project and colonial practices that persist, and that a broader conversation is needed (Smith 2006; Grahn and Wilson 2018; Little 2019; Ray 2019; Turunen 2019; Ugwuanyi 2020). To overturn the

ongoing centring of Western and Eurocentric values in heritage, I turn to decolonial feminisms emerging from Latin America and present these as a standpoint to understand the politics of memory in Colombia.

Following the work of decolonial, anti-racist and communitarian feminists working from Latin America (e.g. Lugones 2008; Cabnal 2010; Méndez Torres et al. 2013; Millán 2014), I centre the epistemic forces of place as relational (see Harcourt and Escobar 2005; Massey 2005; Lozano 2016). Specifically, my praxis seeks to ‘strategically undermine the ways in which women’s bodies and women in the developing world have been respectively constructed as “objects” or as “victims who need saving” by focusing on the intimate relationships of the body-land’ (Rodriguez Castro 2020, 4). Thus, rather than presenting decolonial feminisms as a concrete theory or ‘school of thought’, I focus on the political commitment of these to destabilise the coloniality of power. By entangling the interventions of social leaders I centre their ‘epistemic horizons’ (Millán 2014, 11). Therefore, I destabilise the tendency of the coloniality of power to deny that women in Colombia are active and central subjects in these debates and the heteronormative history of the politics of heritage (Grahn and Wilson 2018). From the ‘borderlands’ (Anzaldúa 2007) Black, Indigenous and *Campesina* women social leaders in Colombia use their own epistemic standpoints and political actions to subvert the militaristic, neoliberal and colonial discourses of heritage and memory, that violently deny the victims of the armed conflict their rights for truth and justice in the post-Accord period.

In conversation with Latin American decoloniality, I argue that the current management of state-led historical memory in Colombia is embedded in colonial violence. That is, that the actions of current government and the direction of Acevedo in the CNMH, have caused symbolic, epistemic and cultural violence. The coloniality of power is therefore, lived and felt through processes of epistemic extractivism of memory and knowledge, and through the instrumentalisation of historical memory. Grosfoguel (2016, 126) explains that epistemic, economic and ontological extractivism share a process of objectification in which there is a transformation of knowledges, of the forms of human and non-human living, and of what exists in our surroundings as ‘objects to instrumentalise’. The consequences of these processes of extraction and exploitation are deeply affective and felt in place for the victims and survivors of the ongoing armed and social conflict in Colombia. As Andrea Cardona who has been involved with the Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres since the pre-Accord period, and was forcibly displaced during the armed conflict, highlighted in the interview when discussing the appointment of Acevedo:

... When we see these centres of memory [referring to the CNMH] in the hands of people like the person who is the current director, well it is difficult. There is pain, impotence and anger... How come someone who participated and caused so much pain is now safeguarding it [CNMH], it makes no sense.

Thus, there is a counterproductive effect in which the coloniality of power is reproduced and felt in place and through the body of many survivors of the armed conflict.

In summary, a decolonial feminist standpoint to the politics of memory in Colombia brings to the fore the ongoing political actions of women social leaders as epistemic subjects who are central to the debates and constructions of historical memory in the country. This standpoint also reveals the how the coloniality of power operates in the context of heritage and memory-making as processes contributing to critical heritage decolonising projects (see Ray 2019; Turunen 2019; Ugwuanyi 2020). From a decolonial feminist commitment to the politics of place of Colombian rural women, I narrate two main points that the social leaders discussed as issues in the current processes of historical memory construction which are: the instrumentalisation of historical memory and the obstacles of memory-making in times of ongoing conflict.

The instrumentalisation of historical memory

Historical memory can be conceptualised as a field in which multiple actors negotiate truths and histories (Wills Obregón 2020b). In the context of a peace process and ongoing violence the idea that seeking the knowledge of what happened during an armed conflict is a peaceful process and a consensus is arguably untenable (Reed-Hurtado and Umaña Hernández 2020). Thus, this process is better understood as relational and always in dispute (see also Villalón 2017; Wills Obregón 2020b). From a relational understanding of the use of memory in the post-Accord period in Colombia, I now turn to how social leaders conceptualised the processes of historical and collective memory-making.

In the interviews, social leaders expressed a concern with the way that historical memory was being instrumentalised. This included issues surrounding the use of international and national funds to meet tight deadlines without material effects in their communities where painful and difficult memories were being discussed or sometimes, extracted. For instance, feminist activist Diana Quigua, who has been involved in various organising processes particularly around ethnic and gender rights in Colombia, argued:

So I think that has been one of the biggest critiques to the ways in which the CNMH has given account of the acts of violence against women, because it was devoted to extract, extract, extract, but nothing was left for the women themselves, nothing is left.

Indeed, the broken processes due to the complications in the direction of the CNMH have left many social leaders with a lack of trust in institutionalised processes of historical memory (see also Cronin-Furman and Krystalli 2020 on transitional justice processes).

The lack of trust was also explained often in the interviews in relation to their timeline and the resources allocated. Two of the *Campesina* leaders who live in rural territories and represent important rural organisations in the country (ASODEMC and ANZORC) explained the shortcomings of centralised and institutionalised forms of historical memory for them:

I think that this is something that they need to invest enough resources and unlimited time. So that they don't make us rush, because then when we rush to deliver a report, we write *cualquier cosa*⁶ and you bring whoever. The important thing is the "figure and the table" as I like to call it. (ASODEMUC)

... They have forced us to generate "flash" historical memory processes. I mean of historical memory of one or two days, and to not really recapitulate that history. I think it leads us to play the same games, and allow many things. (ANZORC)

It is clear, that the purpose of instances such as the Truth Commission⁷ have particular legislative timelines that need to come to a conclusion following the signing of the Peace Accord. However, these excerpts reveal that there is a lack of information and transparency about the particular institutionalised processes for historical memory in place in Colombia. Particularly regarding the aims, limited resources and timelines of these processes, which could be better communicated to social leaders and victim's organisations.

Moreover, the lack of trust in the institutionalisation and centralisation of historical memory is embedded in a context in which the rights of rural women in the Global South have been historically instrumentalised (see Segato 2010), often with the objective of extraction and exploitation. This is also entangled in ideas of territorial peace that have been instrumentalised for the benefit of the country's elites and the governments' neoliberal projects and security agendas (see Cairo et al. 2018). Regarding the latter, Human Rights

Defender and Afro-Colombian leader from the Process of Black Communities (PCN) in Colombia, Charo Mina-Rojas cogently illustrated that:

... The issue is that all of this matter of historical memory, has become like... what I was saying before about women's matters, like a *cosa muy utilizada*,⁸ very institutionalised... So they grab things and adapt them and accommodate them, but ultimately, the memory needs to contribute to transform. But the way it has been happening is not really transforming anything, because it is a memory that is left in *anaqueles*⁹ and not in dynamic processes of construction and transformation of realities and of people.

Thus, Mina-Rojas poses a challenge to deeply reflect on the complicity in the objectification, institutionalisation, centralisation and instrumentalisation of memories in heritage and historical memory processes in Colombia. Adding to the complexity of the field of historical memory in Colombia's ongoing peace process is the continuation of violence and conflict, which I address next.

Historical memory in times of ongoing conflict and violence

Another matter that was mentioned during the interviews related to security concerns when sharing memories of the armed conflict in historical memory initiatives. As mentioned earlier, violence and the murder of social leaders is ongoing in Colombia's post-Accord period. Based on the statistics of the 2018–2019 accounted murders of human rights defenders, the Office of the High Commissioner of the United Nations Human Rights (2019) found that:

The single most targeted group was human rights defenders advocating on behalf of community based and specific ethnic groups such as indigenous peoples and Afro-Colombians. The killings of female human rights defenders increased by almost 50 per cent in 2019 compared to 2018.

Indeed, violence against racialised women is 'shaped by entrenched patterns of racism established during colonial rule' and 'transcends the binaries of war/peace' (Zulver 2020, 31). Mirna Rosa Herrera is a communitarian leader of the The Red de Mujeres Matamba y Guasá a Black women's network founded in 1993, representing around 22 community organisations and 500 members (García 2016). She has received multiple threats from illegal armed actors due to her leadership in Timbiquí, a town in the Cauca Pacific where violence,

illegal mining, drug trafficking and government abandonment continue post-Accord. She voiced her concerns on this targeted violence during the interviews. Herrera explained that when external organisations have asked them to contribute their stories to historical memory projects, they have opted for reasserting their autonomy and conducting their own processes, slowly and carefully for their safety because:

... If other people enter the territory to ask questions, people are not going to give them the information like it is. First, because we know that the conflict is not gone, so we don't know about the consequences that giving this information might bring. Do you know what I mean?

Various social leaders in the interviews also narrated experiences of feeling unsafe and some of them expressed doubt on whether in a time of ongoing targeted violence at social leaders, instrumentalist and time-limited processes for historical memory were appropriate. One of the leaders of the National Association of Campesinas, Black and Indigenous Women (ASODEMUC), Matilde Mora Poveda, illustrated this argument during the interviews:

So, it is going to take a long time in order for us to be able to recount these [memories of the armed conflict]. Yes, we need to do it. Yes, there are many people including me who can contribute. But we need the conditions of safety... In the sense that as many others, I do not feel safe to say what I know, there needs to be work done on this matter.

Thus, there is a clear connection with the demands for slow and engaged historical memory processes, and the need to assure the safety of social leaders. Indeed, the politics of memory in Colombia are deeply entangled in violent practices that persist and cannot be obscured in celebratory heritage and memory processes in the post-Accord period.

Based on her extensive experience as a communitarian leader Mirna Rosa Herrera also noted that the historical memory-work was better done outside the territory:

But we also know that part of this work we cannot do in the countryside... Because we do not know who is listening. So we have to travel – the women – to safer places where we are guaranteed to talk without fear. So we can start the process of construction, so we can then return the information.

Arguably, solutions such as the one proposed in the excerpt need to be given priority in the dialogues with more instrumentalised, institutionalised and centralised forms of historical memory. As this section demonstrates, difficult memory and heritage practices (MacDonald 2009, 2016), are also *dangerous* in Colombia's post-Accord period.

Towards place-based collective memory

Among the concerning context of state-led historical memory construction and ongoing violence and conflict, there is also a growing number of initiatives and processes for place-based collective memory in Colombia – arguably, forms of ‘place-based heritage’ (Little 2019, 631) that need to be amplified. This argument resonates with Latin Americana decolonial work that has argued for the importance of the epistemic forces of place of women in the Global South (see Harcourt and Escobar 2005; Lozano 2016; Rodriguez Castro 2020). In the context of Colombia, place is entangled with a particular relational understanding of the territory. Courtheyn's (2016, 952) description of the commemorative practices with the Community of Peace in San José de Apartadó illustrates the relationship of memory and territoriality: ‘these commemorative practices support claims that memory is a constitutive element in the production of “territories”, understood as series of spatialized values, practices and places that produce and are produced by particular political subjects’. In this section, I therefore narrate the nuanced processes that social leaders explained as important to their territorial, plural and place-based collective memories.

State-led violence is an experience that *Campesinxs*, Black and Indigenous people have faced in Colombia for decades (see Reyes Posada 2009). Thus, social leaders and organisations in Colombia were deeply aware of the issues that the post-Accord period was going to bring with a government such as Ivan Duque's. At the same time, people have continued to resist from the territory, in place, from the body-land and from a political commitment to the constructing peace in rural Colombia. Therefore, many organisations have continued to develop their own collaborative and autonomous projects for collective memory and peace (see for example, Courtheyn 2016; CINEP/PPP 2018). Agrarian and Environmental Rights Defender, Edilia Mendoza articulated how she imagined plural and democratic collective memory processes:

... This is an exercise that needs to happen from the heart and soul of the organisations. So it needs to be constructed and written. Every action, every *caminar*.¹⁰ No one knows that they will be part of history in a determined

moment, that depends on the sum of all of these diversities and the sum of all the differences. But it is also the sum of all the histories that this country has – the important historical wealth.

Thus, collective memory for many social leaders was attached to their territorial, ancestral and embodied experiences of place with an understanding of the plurality memory, truth and peace.

Regarding the processes for place-based collective memory there was a major argument regarding the need to centre feminist and/or women-centred processes for historical memory given the gendered and intersectional violences that women in the Colombian armed conflict have experienced (see Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres 2013). This argument resonates with recent debates on the politics of heritage that call for an engagement with ‘gender issues’ in theory and practice (Grahn and Wilson 2018, 255). Referring to the importance of dignifying women’s memories in the post-Accord period *Campesina* leader Elda Martínez Silva from the Peasant Reserve Zones Association (ANZORC) noted:

So it is also how do we dignify the memories of women and everything that we have done. It is necessary that Colombia understands that our participation is not for the press or about this particular juncture, but that our participation is there and has always been. And part of being sincere and respectful with our participation is about dignifying the memory of our women comrades too.

Commenting on the work of grassroots feminist and women’s organisations such as the Casa de la Mujer and Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres in Colombia feminist activist, Diana Quigua also argued that collective processes of women’s memory need to be discussed more broadly in historical memory initiatives:

The process of historical memory proposed from women’s organisations, with their methodologies, implicitly is accompanied by processes of transformation of women’s subjectivities, which is very different from the way that history is being narrated from the CNMH... [considering] the fact that there is a transformation of women’s subjectivities in the processes of historical memory is important because the conclusion of that process is that we as women are able to change... That process of transformation leads us to be political subjects who start appropriating our history... So women rise in another way, like with incredible

tools and potentialities, so let's say that this is the bet for non-hegemonic historical memory.

Therefore, these feminist, subjective and methodological processes from an embodied transformation are central to the context of difficult and dangerous collective memory-making in post-Accord Colombia.

Recounting the historical violence that Indigenous women have faced in their territories, Councillor for Generation, Women and Family, Lejandrina Pastor Gil of the National Organisation of Indigenous People of Colombia (ONIC) suggested that within the communities there is also a need to document and take seriously women's memories of historical gendered violence through:

Getting together and talking to the women who have experienced it... And even to end that violence that is rooted within and that no one is paying attention to... To grab that and talk about it with strength. It can bring us accusations and threats... but we can *sacar del yugo a muchas mujeres*¹¹.

Together, these interventions reveal the importance of differential approaches to historical and collective memory that take into account ethnicised, racialised and other intersectional experiences of the armed conflict. From 'non-hegemonic', place-based and territorial use of memory women leading collective organising in Colombia are proposing and enacting plural forms of peace and heritage. In this way, communities are asserting control over the national and international histories of the Colombian armed conflict while continuing to resist in place various forms of violence.

Conclusion

An important challenge to the politics of memory in post-Accord Colombia is Villalón's (2015, 14) question: 'Can processes of memory, justice, and reconciliation advance in contexts of ongoing violence?'. In this article I have demonstrated how women social leaders live and feel threats to their lives, violence and the coloniality of power due to the denialist political tactics. These tactics have been institutionalised and state-led through an authorized heritage discourse (Smith 2006). The complex context of *dangerous and difficult memories* suggests that there are no basic guarantees for the construction and discussion of plural memories of the armed conflict in Colombia (see also Reed-Hurtado and Umaña Hernández 2020).

The discussion on the instrumentalisation of historical memory poses a significant query related to the extent to which historical memory initiatives that are time-limited and state-led and/or centralised should be centred in the funding allocated to long-lasting peace and memory initiatives in Colombia. That is also in light of the history in the Latin American region of historical memory processes that have often promoted an official truth, selective memories and reproduce violence, despite an apparent return to democratic governance (see Arias and del Campo 2020; Burt 2020). However, rather than absolving the Colombian state's responsibility for seeking historical memory, truth and justice for those who are victims of the armed conflict, the question is how to re-build trust and construct historical memory in such contexts and from where? Arguably, the heterogenous place-based collective memory-making and organising experiences of social leaders, who often hold these difficult memories of the armed conflict, could be an important starting ground. In this respect, I have also argued that an epistemic-methodological decolonial feminist standpoint resonates with these processes and could be centred. Indeed, all sectors invested in the plurality of historical memory and peace should continue to amplify and commit to the non-hegemonic uses of memory and heritage in Colombia's post-Accord period.

More broadly, the Colombian politics of memory, as narrated from a decolonial feminist standpoint, demonstrate how we can advance CHS and decolonial epistemic horizons to understand and engage with *dangerous and difficult heritage* 'in ways that provoke... potentially more ramifying forms of unsettlement' (Macdonald 2016, 20). The Colombian peace process with the FARC-EP and its politics of memory provide an important opportunity to address heritage and memory processes that focus on exposing how colonial privilege and power operates. In turn, this can destabilise the fields' tendency to centre heteronormative, colonial, linear and abstract forms of authorized heritage. Therefore, this paper has addressed the need to centre gendered, decolonial or postcolonial, anti-racist, Southern or subaltern uses of memories and heritage. A feminist decolonial standpoint advances the conversation that CHS have started on the coloniality of heritage. To destabilise and de-structure the continuing Eurocentric privilege in the field, requires the political commitment of academics, heritage practitioners, social movements and state organisations to engage with its colonial pasts and presents.

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Notes

¹ Social leaders is used in this paper as an encompassing term that is being utilised in current political action and debates in Colombia and it includes activists, human rights defenders, rural, Black and Indigenous leaders, etc. However, it is important to note that self-identification matters. Thus, in Table 1 I present how women self-identify.

² All translations from Spanish to English have been made by the author of this article.

³ An approximate translation to this term (also *Campesinx* which is gender neutral) is ‘peasant’, but I use *Campesina* as it has both political and cultural significance for this diverse rural population of Colombia. Indeed, the categorisations of Black, Indigenous and *Campesinx*s are not static or uncontested, but rather used fluidly for political purposes and rights claims by these populations.

⁴ Except for the Concejera Lejandrina Pastor Gil (ONIC) and Elda Martínez Silva (ANZORC), who were new representatives of these important national organisations.

⁵ Griffith University Reference Number: 2019/889.

⁶ A colloquial expression in Spanish meaning ‘whatever comes to mind’.

⁷ The Truth Commission for the Clarification of Truth and No Repetition was created in 2017 (Acto Legislativo 01 and Decreto 588) as part of the agreements of the Colombian Peace Accord with the FARC-EP. It is an extrajudicial entity with a temporary character that seeks to investigate the truth of what happened in the armed conflict, contribute to the clarification of the violations committed and ‘offer an ample explanation’ of the complexity of the conflict to all society (Comisión de la Verdad 2020). The Truth Commission has a commitment to deliver a comprehensive report that encompasses the memories and testimonies of the victims of the armed conflict by 2021.

⁸ An expression meaning that this matter is being objectified.

⁹ The literal translation of this word is ‘shelves’ but here it is used as a metaphor to mean something that is left undone and forgotten.

¹⁰ Referring to the act of walking as a noun. As ‘walking through life’.

¹¹ A colloquial expression using a yoke as a metaphor and meaning ‘to release the burden for many women’.