



Nothing Without Us: Indigenous Resistance During the Colombian Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición. POLIS: Journal of Society and Culture, Vol. 2, Issue 1, 2026. © Sara Aristizabal

Nothing Without Us: Indigenous Resistance During the Colombian Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición

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Abstract

The Colombian *Acuerdo Final* marked a crucial moment in the country's attempts to establish long lasting peace and reparation for the victims of the violent armed conflict that had been raging in Colombia for decades. However, the signing of this accord brings up many questions about the government's historic disregard for Indigenous, Black, and Campesino voices. This paper inquires about the methods employed by the *Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición* to research the impacts of the armed conflict and make amends with the victims, many of whom belong to Indigenous communities throughout Colombia. Through a comprehensive

literature review, the author aims to shed light on the less recognized history of Indigenous resistance that runs parallel to *Acuerdo Final* and continues to define the government's plan for restitution, reconciliation, and lasting peace.

Keywords: Indigenous activism and resistance, Colombia, *Acuerdo Final de Paz*, research methodologies, armed conflict and truth, literature review

Positioning: Who I Am, Where I am From, and Why it Matters

It is not common practice within Western academia for a researcher to introduce themselves, but positioning oneself within one's research *is* paramount within Indigenous research methodologies. Tsalagi (Cherokee) scholar Jeff Corntassel writes that:

Awareness of colonial realities requires... a call for justice and the return of stolen lands/waterways to the Indigenous Peoples^[1] who maintain special relationships to these places... a responsibility-based ethic of truth-telling to identify and act upon new pathways to Indigenous resurgence. (Snelgrove, Dhamoon & Corntassel, 2014, p. 6)

It is important for me to acknowledge the Nations whose lands I grew up in as well as the Nations whose lands I do this research upon. I am grateful to the sə́lilwətaʔt̚ təməxʷ (Tsilil-Waututh), kʷikʷəłəm, Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group, Stz'uminus, Qayqayt, Skwxwú7mesh-ulh Temíxw (Squamish), šxʷməθkʷəy̓əməʔt̚ təməxʷ (Musqueam), Cayuse, Umatilla, Walla Walla, and S'ólh

Téméxw (Stó:lō) whose land I have the privilege to study and reside on. Colombia does not have a practice of land acknowledgements, but I still want to recognize the Emberá Peoples whose land my home is located on. I recognize that none of these lands were willingly ceded by these Nations and that I must hold myself responsible through my continued effort towards Indigenous resurgence. I start my article this way to decolonize not only Colombian perceptions of history but the actions that erase Indigenous voices.

This research is very close to my heart. It matters to me because I am a proud Colombian. I am proud of where I come from, my culture, and my identity. But, in that pride there is also space for shame, pain, and a desire for change. I have seen the way Indigenous Peoples are treated in my country. I recognize the corruption, segregation, and genocide arising from this colonization.

Without realizing it, I continued my education in Indigenous Studies to gain a deeper understanding of my country and its complex history. The privilege of growing up as a light skinned mestiza was made clear to me in my upbringing, but I did not understand what being mestiza truly meant. I felt a sense of defeat and helplessness that accompanied my identity as a Colombian. I now know more of the historical context that led to this prevalent feeling in my country. I am coming to understand the complexities of colonization and how it impacts my life and the lives of the people around me, how Latin America has been and continues to be exploited by colonial and imperial powers, and how Indigenous Peoples are among the most affected by these realities. This drive to learn

about the impact of colonial and imperial powers in Colombia led me to research the role of Indigenous Peoples in an important historical moment for Colombia, the *Acuerdo Final*.

I am still learning. Part of why this research has been so important, yet difficult for me, is because I am faced with how much more I have left to learn about the history of my family and my country. Being in contact with diverse cultural practices and decolonizing my own has been liberating and has allowed me to reclaim myself. To me, taking charge of my education means bringing Latin American Indigenous cultures to the forefront of my academic journey. I want Colombia to better understand and appreciate the lives of Indigenous Peoples past, present, and future. I am thankful for the opportunity to uplift Indigenous voices and to bring attention to the daily struggles of Indigenous communities in Colombia; and I will remain receptive to criticism of any mistakes, because I know I am bound to make many.

The idea to research the *Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición* (the *Comisión* for short), and its process of collecting testimonies and stories from Indigenous communities all over the country, came to me earlier this year. I was thinking about Gregory Younging's *Elements of Indigenous Style* and writing about the potential for a Latin American version of the text. As exciting as the idea was, it was a highly ambitious one that required a large amount of research to comprehensively capture the diversity of Indigenous communities in Latin America. So, I turned my attention to more familiar contexts. I set myself forth to know more about

the *Acuerdo Final*, its context, and the histories that surrounded its creation. Most of all, I focus on Indigenous involvement in the creation of this accord to unveil the ways in which colonialism has been institutionally encoded in Colombia's quest for peace.

I was still in high school when the *Acuerdo Final* was taking place and was somewhat unaware of it. Reflecting upon this now, I question the methodology of the research conducted by the *Comisión* which intended to establish the 'Truth' surrounding decades of conflict between the state and rebel armed forces. The fact that the vote against the original *Acuerdo Final* won left me with questions. The results indicated a disparity between what the government had negotiated (in the name of the Colombian people) and what the people wanted. This left me with questions concerning what the role of Indigenous communities was in the process of establishing the Truth, Peace, and Restitution that 'culminated' in 2016, a process which had been in the works since before 1982 when the first peace talks between illegal/rebel armed forces and the state occurred.

As I began this process, I did not have a specific research question. Instead, I had a multitude of questions that guided my learning. I had minimal knowledge of the current literature and the potential research gaps. However, what was clear was that it mattered whose voices and perspectives were considered to inform the 'Truth' of decades of armed conflict and violence in Colombia which had disproportionately impacted Indigenous, Black, and Campesino communities. This work had to be undertaken with a decolonial emphasis by focusing on the diverse voices of Indigenous Peoples in

Colombia to ensure that this research was not extractive or exploitative. Thus I ask, did the Colombian government use *testimonio* as their primary research methodology in a way that honours Indigenous communities and breaks away from harmful colonial research practices, thereby practicing genuine reconciliation instead of performative actions?

Terminology

Mestizaje

Scholar Catelli (2021) introduces Mestizaje as an “elastic concept” (p. 71) which I find to be a helpful way to understand the term because it has changed both in its definition and its cultural implication through time. To this day, many people throughout Latin America have varying understandings of it. Mestizaje has its roots in the colonization of Latin America. This fact cannot be ignored when bringing this term into conversation as a racial identity, as “mestizaje originates in racist colonial hierarchies that sought to demarcate clear racial boundaries and differences” (Pérez-Torres, 2013, p. 25). Mestizaje is characterized by the mixing of Indigenous, Black, and Spanish people resulting in a different ‘race category’. The Latin American Mestizo “is an affirmative recognition of the mixed racial, social, linguistic, national, cultural, and ethnic legacies inherent to Latino/a cultures and identities. It highlights the idea that cultural mixture represents a dynamic, driving component of Latino/a literature” (Pérez-Torres, 2013, p. 25). I would argue the term is not only evocative of “the very real constraints imposed upon mestizo bodies, not the least of which are the racial hierarchies

generated during colonialism and passed down a legacy of discrimination and violence” (Pérez-Torres, 2013, p. 25), but implies the discrimination and violence inflicted specifically upon Black and Indigenous communities by the colonization of the Americas. Therefore, Mestizaje adds another racial layer to the complexities of Latin American discourse.

Acuerdo General para la Terminación del Conflicto y la Construcción de una Paz Estable y Duradera (General Accord for the Cessation of the Conflict and the Construction of a Stable and Long-Lasting Peace) or Acuerdo Final

The peace talks began in 2012 in La Habana between the delegates of the Colombian government, represented by the president Juan Manuel Santos, and the delegates of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC)^[2] (Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz, 2016, p. 1). The intention of both parties was to end the more than 50 year long armed conflict that devastated the country and left approximately 8.5 million victims (Amnistía Internacional España, 2017). As a result of the peace talks, an accord was drafted, leading to the signing of the *Acuerdo Final* on November 24, 2016. The signing was done under the scrutiny of many national entities, as well as international ones such as the delegates of the Republic of Cuba and the Kingdom of Norway who served as primary witnesses and guarantors (Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz, 2016, p. 1). Nevertheless, the original version of the *Acuerdo Final* is not the one that stands today. The original accord was subjected to the scrutiny of the Colombian people by plebiscite. The result showed the votes against the *Acuerdo Final* won by a small margin (Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz, 2016, p. 2). This led to

modifications of the previously signed accord, and ultimately led to the creation of a revised one (Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz, 2016, pp. 1–2) which stands to this day.

The current *Acuerdo Final* has six sub-accords, each with the purpose of accomplishing one element of its general missive: ending such a prolonged conflict requires an accord that guarantees a ceasefire and provides new opportunities for the Colombian people, in particular for those who have suffered the most during the conflict (Cancillería Colombia, 2016, p. 8)^[3]. The sub-accords are as follows:

1. Put an end to the war: “*Acuerdo sobre Cese al Fuego y de Hostilidades Bilateral y Definitivo y Dejación de las Armas entre el Gobierno Nacional y las FARC*” (Cancillería Colombia, 2016, p. 11).
2. Truth, Justice, No Repetition, and Reparation to the victims: “*Acuerdo sobre las Víctimas del conflicto: “Sistema Integral de Verdad, Justicia, Reparación y No Repetición”*” (Cancillería Colombia, 2016, p. 17).
3. Against Drug Trafficking: “*Acuerdo Solución al problema de las drogas ilícitas*” (Cancillería Colombia, 2016, p. 25).
4. Better Opportunities for farmers/Campesinos: “*Acuerdo Política de desarrollo agrario integral. Hacia un nuevo campo colombiano: Reforma Rural Integral (RRI)*” (Cancillería Colombia, 2016, p. 31).

5. More participation and democracy: “*Acuerdo Participación Política. Apertura democrática para construir la paz*” (Cancillería Colombia, 2016, p. 35).
6. Carrying out the final accord: “*Acuerdo Implementación, verificación y refrendación*” (Cancillería Colombia, 2016, p. 41).

***La Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición
(Commission for the Elucidation of the Truth, the Coexistence and the No-Repetition)***

La Comisión was a state entity that aimed to discover and clarify the reasons behind the internal armed conflict to satisfy the right of the victims and the society to the Truth. The *Comisión* also intended to acknowledge the history of violence in Colombia and promote peaceful coexistence while focusing on preventing future conflict through a process of thorough, ample, and diverse collaboration to construct stable and long-lasting peace (Comisión De La Verdad, 2022a, para. 2). The *Comisión* was composed of 11 people who were elected through a public call due to their expertise in the armed conflict (Comisión De La Verdad, 2022b, para. 1). Of the 11 members of the *Comisión*, none identified as Indigenous. The three main goals of the *Comisión* were to first, research and explain the years of violent conflict between the state and the FARC, to establish a nation-wide understanding of this shared and painful history. Secondly, to promote and contribute to the acknowledgement of all human rights violations by both parties; thus empowering victims by creating a shared ‘Truth’ and preventing future human rights infringements. Lastly, to promote the coexistence and *buen-vivir*^[4] of

the Colombian people in different territories, and to move towards a peaceful resolution of all further conflicts (Comisión De La Verdad, 2022a). Because the *Comisión* was established as a temporal and extrajudicial mechanism (Comisión De La Verdad, 2022a, para. 4), its jurisdiction came to an end in 2022 (EVA Función Pública, 2022, para. 15). My research analyzes the methodologies employed by the *Comisión* in the pursuit of Truth and interrogates the mechanisms employed to deliver on these so-called promises.

La Comisión Étnica para la Paz y los Derechos Territoriales (The Ethnic Commission for Peace and the Ethnic Chapter of the Peace Accords)

Gruner (2017) highlights the need for an “effective ‘ethnic’ verification mechanism” (p. 176) that will guarantee that the terms of the *Acuerdo Final* are carried out in accordance with the wishes of the ethnic communities in Colombia, where many of the victims are from. Therefore, the existence of *the Ethnic Commission for Peace* (the Ethnic Chapter) marks a victory for the many Indigenous, Black, Campesino and other ethnic groups who had to fight for a place at the peace talks. This part of the process was based on the multi-generational and multi-ethnic efforts of “popular Indigenous and Afro-Colombian political and territorial organizations who have rallied to have a voice since 2012, when the talks began” (Gruner, 2017, p. 175). Nevertheless, the government and the FARC barely acknowledged ethnic voices, evidenced by the last minute integration of the Ethnic Chapter into the accord despite the intense efforts from ethnic voices to be included since the inception of the peace

talks (Gruner, 2017, p. 176)^[5]. This lack of inclusion is a lived reality in Colombia for Indigenous and Afro-Colombian people, which the Ethnic Commission intended to address by creating inclusive spaces for the “articulation of perspectives of ethno-territorial organizations” and calling attention to the noticeable gaps in the peace talks and the accord; for example, the lack of consideration for the implications and effects of the [*Acuerdo Final*] on Afro-Colombian and Indigenous rights (Gruner, 2017, pp. 175–76). Unfortunately, this reality is one that prevails to this day.

Peace and Truth in the Colombian Context

The basis for the peace negotiations was “predicated on the idea that the guerrillas [could] demobilize and engage without weapons in the political process” (Gruner, 2017, p. 179). However, “in some parts of Colombia, there is a terrible divide between the truth on paper and the truth in practice” (Bailey, 2016, p. 11). The Peoples facing this reality are rural Campesino, Indigenous, and Afro-Colombian communities. I refer to the state’s construction of truth and peace through the work of the *Comisión* as ‘Truth’ and ‘Peace’. Capitalizing these words speaks to a collective construct of the terms created to establish peace in Colombia. These terms do not intend to negate that truth comes with multiple facets and peace has different definitions throughout Colombia. How the construction of both these terms was carried out during the peace talks pertains to my inquiry when thinking about the ways in which the diversity of Indigenous voices in Colombia had a chance to shape these definitions, or the ways in which they were left out of the conversation.

Historical Context: Prelude to a Lasting Peace

Armed conflict in Colombia is rooted in the violent colonization of the Americas by the Spanish, and the many genocidal and assimilatory policies that implemented “a model of geopolitical relations sustained by a racial axis of colonial origin that has superseded the nominal end of colonial domination” (Catelli, 2021, p. 71). In discussing how colonial domination has established itself within the systems that rule us today, Gruner (2017) states that:

Much of the violence [ethnic groups] have faced historically and during the internal armed conflict in Colombia has been directly or indirectly linked to dominant legal and illegal economic production relations within a logic of often unfettered capitalist accumulation, dependent on systematic exploitation and dispossession, undermining other productive economic forms with particularly brutal effects on women. (p. 175)

Over the decades of violent armed conflict, there were multiple attempts by presidents and ethnic groups to forge a lasting peace, but efforts by Indigenous, Black and Campesino communities to establish peace are under-recognized. Indigenous resistance movements have been pushing for decolonial policies in government and protection for their communities ever since first contact with imperial colonial powers and have had to continually adapt to the everchanging landscape of violence.

The various attempts to advance civil rights have been marked by confrontations between two opposing forces—Conservatives and Liberals—with different nuances, within which native

populations including Indigenous, Afro-Colombian, and Campesino^[6] communities have been deeply affected. This historical dynamic between the two opposing forces has resulted in increased marginalization of these groups, requiring them to respond to their unmet needs through peaceful and sometimes violent confrontation. Such conditions have facilitated the rise of revolutionary movements that take advantage of these marginalized communities via exploitation, displacement, abuse, and murder. The history of almost half a century of gruesome violence in Colombia is nuanced. There are multiple armed groups that clash against the Colombian government causing the general public, especially the members of the different ethnic groups in Colombia, to endure years of conflict.

Violence is nothing new for the Colombian people, but neither are attempts at peace. Marco Palacios (2000) attempts to map out the history of peace negotiations in Colombia leading up to 2012. He is a Colombian mestizo scholar who speaks about the ‘performative’ motivation behind many peace attempts. When referencing the legitimacy for the *Acuerdo Final*, Palacios (2000) writes about all the different attempts at peace agreements, why they were unsuccessful, and how they provide context to understand this agreement. Every recorded peace process undertaken since 1982 has presidential origin and depended on the president’s political standing. Despite the various attempts at peace made over 17 years, by the time of his article’s release, guerillas (like the FARC) had never been stronger and there had been an accelerated growth in the paramilitary groups’ activities. One of Palacio’s main arguments is that most peace processes in Colombia took place as political tools for presidential

legitimacy and re-election (Palacios, 2000). Palacios shows how presidents like Barco (1986-1990), and Gaviria (1990-1994) talked with some armed groups to gain credibility for the Constitution of 1991 (Palacios, 2000, p. 21). Peace accords, motivated by hopes to gain political renown and capital, historically resulted as failures, utilizing little to no community involvement or any consultation with the victims.

The peace talks for the original *Acuerdo Final* in 2016 took place in La Habana (Havana, Cuba), a neutral territory with the supervision of international agents (Vanegas et al., 2019, p. 14). Despite the apparent success of this accord, the government under President Santos attempted to pass a referendum to ratify the agreement through the Colombian voting system (Vanegas et al., 2019, pp. 14–15). Unfortunately, the referendum failed (with 63 percent of voters abstaining from the vote) in part due to “disconcerting tactics by right wing political groups” (Gruner, 2017, p. 178). This forced the government to quickly renegotiate the terms, which ultimately led to the revised *Acuerdo Final* getting recognized by the Colombian Congress (Vanegas et al., 2019, p. 15) which stands to this day. Gruner also speaks to the opinion of the ethnic groups in Colombia, a majority of whom voted in favour for the original agreement, and the need to listen to Indigenous, Afro-Colombian, and Campesino voices as they “represented the strongest civilian peace protagonists, given what they have endured and what they have to lose if the [*Acuerdo Final*] is usurped by institutional and economic

interests, or if the threats of paramilitary and ‘illegal groups’ continue to amplify” (Gruner, 2017, p. 178).

It is of utmost importance to remember that the sustained effort and activism by Indigenous and other ethnic groups shaped the *Acuerdo Final* we have today. I argue that there is a less recognized history of Indigenous struggle and resistance that shaped the *Acuerdo Final*. This history of Indigenous struggle and resistance before, during, and after the peace talks stands as a testament of the ways in which these communities continue to push back against colonial policies and violent institutions. This less recognized history gives insight into a long history of discrimination against Indigenous, Afro-Colombians, and Campesino Peoples, and a pervasive presence of colonization and forced assimilation since the arrival of Spanish colonists to the American continent. This history holds real life implications for Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities in Colombia. Their voices should have been present at the table from the onset of the peace process in 2012 given the special legal status of Indigenous and Afro-Colombian people established in the 1991 Constitution. Unfortunately, the inclusion of ethnic voices in the accord “required considerable internal and external political pressure” (Gruner, 2017, p. 177). A major part of this conflict has been about the control of land and the struggle over the natural resources the land possesses (Bailey, 2016, p. 11). Moreover, Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities have been the most affected, caught in the crossfire between the Colombian Armed Forces and the rebel groups (the government refers to them as ‘criminal bands’).

Constructing National Peace would require recognition and remuneration to the affected communities by returning their territories as well as guaranteeing their safety, which presents economic risks for both the government and the rebel forces (Bailey, 2016, pp. 11–12). Therefore, on account of this territorial struggle (for the government and the armed groups), it was (and continues to be) convenient to exclude opinions that highlighted the “political–territorial character” (Gruner, 2017, p. 177) of the conflict, in which these communities pose an “obstacle” (Gruner, 2017, p. 177) for both sides in the development of their peace plans.

Introduction: Indigenous Resistance and the *Acuerdo Final*

President Santos announced in September of 2012 the start of the peace talks with the FARC. At the time these peace talks began and concluded, I was young and was not engaged with the political and social atmosphere in Colombia. I recognize this lack of engagement with the political and social atmosphere as a facet of my privilege, as my life was not constantly threatened by this conflict, unlike the reality for many Indigenous people in the country. However, I am now able to reflect not only on how the peace talks were carried out, but also how peace in Colombia has progressed since the signing of the *Acuerdo Final*. I recognize that a successful negotiation, construction, and implementation of country wide policies that guarantee peace, justice, reconciliation, and non-repetition of violent conflict is needs to prioritize Indigenous voices because “the violent actions of paramilitary and other

illegal groups see collective territorial rights as obstacles to ‘development and progress’” (Gruner, 2017, p. 176). Thus, a considerable number of resources need to be invested to construct the Peace around the restitution of these lands and the reconciliation with the Indigenous groups who have been taking care of their territories for centuries.

I knew the colonial legacy in Colombia remained strong, and achieving a commission guided by Indigenous voices was unprecedented in the country:

Displacement, violence, and related atrocities in ethnic communities have been endemic in the 52-year conflict, although have more profound historical roots spanning centuries from the arrival of Europeans; this merits much broader and focused attention, as ethno-territorial organizations work to put discussion of historical reparations on the national agenda. For the purposes of the current peace process, ensuring that these communities have a strong voice for implementation and monitoring of the accords is a minimum they must be afforded. (Gruner, 2017, p. 179)

Additionally, I wanted to research how much the government understood the importance of incorporating Indigenous research methodologies in gathering testimonies from the victims, many of whom are Indigenous, in their objective of establishing a collective Truth. I wondered whether the *Comisión* considered incorporating decolonial guidelines into their research and their subsequent actions. I knew that the search for the Truth and subsequent policies developed by the *Comisión*

needed to be rooted in Indigenous epistemologies, but I wanted to know the extent of decolonial, and Indigenous knowledge incorporated in government policies addressing the armed conflict. My research concluded what I initially suspected: that “ethno-territorial movements have fought hard to have these perspectives included in public debate and policy despite having lived with the consequences of violence, displacement, [and] systematic discrimination based on race, the ecological destruction of lands, and political and cultural erasure throughout [Colombian history]” (Gruner, 2017, p. 174).

It has been nine years since the *Acuerdo Final* and four years since the *Comisión*'s jurisdiction ended, and I still have many questions. How was the *Acuerdo Final* structured and carried out as a continuation or a disruption of the colonial paradigms present at the core of Colombia's institutions? How do the actions of the government since the signing of the *Acuerdo Final* reflect the compromises agreed on? To what extent do these actions prioritize Indigenous leaders and Indigenous methodologies? Did the government implement a peace agreement, a truth recording process, and a reconciliation initiative starting from Indigenous (ethnic) communities and extending beyond? Or did these processes occur outside of Indigenous communities and only end in them? What do the answers to these questions teach us about what we can do better in the future to prioritize Indigenous communities in order to ensure a more inclusive future for Colombia?

Literature Review

Pardo (2000), a Colombian mestizo scholar, is a rich source for background information, but some of his word choices when writing about Colombia make me question the biases present in his thinking. Advocating for US involvement and speaking about people working the fields, usually called Campesino or Indigenous communities, as “peasants” (p. 68) reiterates colonial and imperial language that has dominated US opinions of ‘the Colombian problem’ (Pardo, 2000). Despite my concern about the author’s biases, Pardo (2000) eloquently summarizes the Colombian history of drugs and war, making key connections between pivotal events in Colombian history and the 2016 Truth and Peace process which aimed to understand and resolve this history of violence. Pardo (2000) also anticipated the need for a larger scale peace agreement, highlighting his knowledge of Colombia’s complex and multifaceted internal conflict, as well as the gaps of the *Acuerdo Final*.

Jackson (2016), a US settler scholar, provides useful information to this issue as her work focuses on the perspective on Indigenous Peoples within the accord’s development. Jackson’s article is a helpful place to start my inquiry as her background in researching Colombian Indigenous movements presents a valid source of information, but further investigation into her research methods is required to ensure she utilizes a community led approach to research with Indigenous groups. Jackson (2016) mentions that this *Acuerdo Final* was the culmination of years of work, more specifically the last four years, but even though Campesino, Indigenous, and Black communities have been the most affected by the prolonged war, consultation with them remained minimal. Furthermore,

she highlights Colombia's colonial legacy in action and shines a light on the contradictions present in the process, indicating that the *Acuerdo Final* will remain a performative act until the promises made to Indigenous communities are delivered and continued efforts by the government are made to actively decolonize its practices and structures.

Weiss (2020), a US settler scholar who examines discrimination against women in Colombia, makes a point central to my analysis: signing this agreement does not equate to Peace (p. 100). Even though this article is not limited to Indigenous women's experience of discrimination, Weiss (2020) reexamines violence against women as an intentional weapon of community displacement to take control of the land (p. 105), an experience shared by many Colombian Indigenous women at the hands of armed forces—both government sanctioned and rebel-led. Gruner et al. (2018) is a good place to continue with this line of inquiry. Gruner is a Canadian settler scholar accepted by Indigenous communities in Colombia for her extensive research *with* them and her access to publishing platforms, making her a valuable ally. Gruner et al. (2018) makes comparisons between Canadian and Colombian contexts which prove helpful for my understanding and knowledge as a Colombian student in Canada. Although this paper is not focused on the *Acuerdo Final*, it has a section about it. This article is useful for its research into the history of colonization, its legacy today, and the importance of territory in Indigenous identity through the Americas (Gruner et al., 2018). In the article, Gruner et al. (2018) reveal the realities of violence against racialized bodies, including Indigenous Peoples who have a strong

connection to their ancestral territories. This information informs my research as these dynamics come into play in the peace talks. Violence against racialized bodies will continue to be perpetuated if not otherwise opposed. In Colombia, there can be no Peace, Truth, or territorial autonomy without ethnic voices. The *Acuerdo Final* could not have happened without the ethnic voices spearheading the fight for justice, despite constantly being overlooked. A peace agreement that aims to be inclusive and to end violence should not make decisions about justice, truth, and territorial autonomy without Indigenous, Afro-Colombian, and Campesino voices (Gruner et al., 2018).

Meertens (2016), a Colombian mestiza scholar, suggests that peace negotiations in Colombia started without Indigenous women voices and that the *Acuerdo Final* has ambiguous language which makes it harder for Indigenous communities to engage with and advocate rights on their terms. For example, in terms of guaranteeing women's safety through the restitution of titles to land for Indigenous and Campesina women, land titles represent a formal recognition of their autonomy. But it does not guarantee their safety or a change in the discriminatory behaviours that led to their dispossession. Therefore, the promise of land restitution creates the impression that justice is being fully delivered, when in reality it is more limited (Meertens, 2016, p. 93). This makes it harder for women to keep advocating for their rights when the government believes what has been promised has been delivered. Hence, Meertens (2016) calls for a redistribution of power through empowering Indigenous women to reconstruct the fabric of society (Meertens, 2016, p. 92). Reading the work of

Meertens (2016) made me view my research questions in a different way. I wanted to look more closely into the methods applied by the government in the collection of testimonies from the different Indigenous communities in the country, and whether these methods were decolonial in nature or if colonial research was utilized to extract information from the Indigenous communities in Colombia during this process.

I was excited to encounter the work of González Villamizar et al. (2021), Colombian mestizo scholars who incorporate the perspectives of Arhuaco Indigenous Women in examination of the peace process surrounding the *Acuerdo Final*. González Villamizar et al. (2021) propose an “ethnic methodology” (p. 166) approach to research and peace, where “the documentation process and methodological design ... must be agreed upon with ethnic traditional authorities and women belonging to ethnic groups, in order to consider their experiences and knowledge, as well as those of their communities and organizations, with regard to the... information gathering in their contexts” (González Villamizar et al., 2021, p. 166); and call out the Colombian government for their past and present failures to keep Indigenous women safe. They mention that the ethnic approach to peace needs to focus on racial discrimination against Indigenous, Afro-Colombian, Raizal, Palenquero and Rom people (González Villamizar et al., 2021, p. 166), and also consider oral literature as a fundamental source of information, thus, “recognizing cultural diversity and value forms of production, narration,

and dissemination of ethnic groups' knowledge and experience by means of the cultural and artistic expressions manifest in their worldviews" (González Villamizar et al., 2021, p. 166).

Ruiz Moreno and Postigo Gómez (2023) write about the experiences of Nasa Indigenous women in the implementation of the *Acuerdo Final* and what they have to say about the lack of resources promised. This article is important because it uses Indigenous women's *testimonios* for community-oriented research to show that almost everything this group of women have achieved after the *Acuerdo Final* and the work of the *Comisión* has been of their own initiative. A variety of community-wellness projects have been successfully created through the efforts of the community members themselves and the support of allied external entities without the government (Ruiz Moreno & Postigo Gómez, 2023, pp. 15–16). Thus, this community has been positively transformed through community led initiatives guided by women rather than the implementation of the *Acuerdo Final* (Ruiz Moreno & Postigo Gómez, 2023, p. 16). In doing so, they call attention to the unfulfilled promises the government made and criticize not the accord itself, but the ways in which it has or has not been carried out.

The book *Des/Dibujando el Pais/aje: Aportes para la Paz Con los Pueblos Afrodescendientes e Indigenas. Territorio, Autonomia y Buen Virir [Drawing/Blurring the Landscape: Contributions to Peace with Afrodescendent and Indigenous People]* by Gruner et al. (2016) is a valuable source for my research. This book is a compilation of articles, interviews, statements and stories of Indigenous, Black

and Campesino voices pertaining to the peace talks and the ways in which Truth and Peace were conducted and constructed (Gruner et al., 2016). In Gruner's (2017) *Territory, Autonomy, and the Good Life* she strongly suggests that the different ethnic groups not only successfully fought for their place at the table during the 2012-2016 peace talks (which they should have already been a part of), but that they fought against capitalist and colonial ideas upheld by the government and thus proving that the need for uplifting and centering Indigenous voices is only one step towards a decolonial Colombia:

In the face of policy, resource, and security challenges, the organizational capacity of Indigenous and Afro-Colombian ethnoterritorial movements and communities is nonetheless astounding ... reached in the midst of violent internal conflict that has produced mass physical and cultural displacement, and ongoing threats posed by illegal and legal capitalist accumulation processes aligned with racist, neocolonial, and patriarchal ideological logics. Grassroots, territorial communities affected by war have the ability to change the dynamic in the post-accord period if afforded the opportunity." (Gruner, 2017, p. 180)

Conclusion: Criticism in the Times of Post-Accord

Bailey (2016) reminds us that "agreements are often just paper. Harassment, inequality and racial discrimination are the overwhelming reality" (p. 17). This, unfortunately, is the reality many Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities still face in Colombia. The violence has not stopped. The promised restitutions, along with other actions intended to help the victims of the violent armed

conflict, have not been delivered in full. The Peace in Colombia has stalled (Ruiz Moreno and Postigo Gómez, 2023, p. 10), but it is not gone. Like Gruner (2017) writes, “the overall number of displacements and deaths linked to the conflict has substantially decreased since the unilateral and subsequent bilateral ceasefire agreements (...), which is an important indicator for the success and potential for peace in Colombia. Yet the systematic and selective attacks on leftist, Afro-Colombian, Indigenous, and campesino leaders have led to deep concerns for the postaccord period” (Gruner, 2017, p. 179). There is still much work to do. And how we act will determine the ways in which we move forward. We need to understand the implications of our current actions for Indigenous and other marginalized communities. Colonial powers may seek to renegotiate and reclaim power and the groundwork done here can shape the ways we face those battles in the future. This is why my inquiry matters; the process is ongoing and the ways in which we move forward as a country need to center Afro-Colombian, Indigenous, and Campesino voices so that we can collectively build a future for all.

I want to remember the words of Filomena Rodríguez from the Pijao community in Tolima as she speaks about the tragic realities of the war in Colombia and how it has affected the lives of her loved ones (Canal Trece Colombia, 2022, 14:15). She talks about the struggles of displacement: we know how to keep ourselves and our families alive in the countryside/campo, but in the city we don’t know how to live and we are threatened into those spaces without care for our lives (Canal Trece, 2022, 14:15). Visitación Chanchi, from an Indigenous community in Putumayo, shares: where we are now is

not where we have always been (Canal Trece, 2022). Carlos Ponare, from an Indigenous community in Vichada, asserts: we don't have anywhere else to go, we are from this territory and here are our lives (Canal Trece, 2022, 22:00). Carlos Ponare's (Vichada) words stay in mind:

All we can do is work to open doors so that we have a future. We work for a collective benefit, for the guarantee of life with dignity in the future. We educate our future generations to know who we are and what we have been through so that they can use the doors we have fought to keep open. (Canal Trece, 2022, 13:35)

As I hear the voices of these Indigenous leaders who have lost so much, I remind myself of the reasons why this research matters. It is not only about Peace and Truth, but also about life. What work are we doing as a country after the conclusion of the *Comisión* to support these communities in navigating the challenges ahead? How can we continue to put pressure on the government to deliver on what was promised and create new policies that continue to address systemic issues of racial and gendered discrimination beyond the *Acuerdo Final*? We know that “unresolved issues related to land restitution and victims’ reparation policies for Indigenous and Afro-descendent communities are clear indicators that the legal and policy arenas need significant attention” (Gruner, 2017, p. 180). As Cree and Saulteaux scholar Starblanket (2023) argues, Indigenous Peoples have to “contend with the often prohibitive choice between immediate needs and long-term political visions” (p. 87). For the Indigenous communities in Colombia, the fight happened in multiple stages: they fought for space at

the peace talks, and then to continue living in their ancestral territories. Challenging our perception of this important historic moment for Colombia matters now, maybe more than ever. The Colombian Congress provided a 10-year estimate for delivering on the promises made to the victims (Meertens, 2016, p. 95); the progress to this day leaves a lot to be desired.

^[1] Indigenous Peoples are in capital and plural form to counter colonial writing that would have capital E in English or W in Western but not in I for Indigenous, furthering the colonial hierarchy of Indigenous bodies as inferior to those of Western origin. Peoples is plural to dignify the multitude of Indigenous people that belong to a diversity of Nations. In sum, 'Indigenous Peoples' stands as a challenge to Western grammatical laws, as well as PanIndigenous terminology.

^[2] Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia

^[3] Some of my sources are exclusively in Spanish. Going forward, if you find a direct citation in English from a source originally in Spanish that means I have done the translation myself.

^[4] An expression meaning 'good living'. It has its roots in Indigenous worldviews.

^[5] The Ethnic Chapter was being signed at the end of August 2016 in preparation for the plebiscite in October 2016

^[6] Campesinos is a word that loosely translates to farmers. They have strong connections to the land and Indigenous worldviews which inform their living.

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