

TELENOVELAS AND NARCONOVELAS: LOVE AND INTIMACY IN CALI,
COLOMBIA

by

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DEDICATION PAGE

This thesis is dedicated to my parents for their endless effort and support throughout my life. For always encouraging me to learn English, even though I did not want to. For pushing me to learn this beautiful language when it seemed like I did not care.

This thesis is also dedicated to my grandma, because she means a lot to me. This research idea is inspired by her stories and our amazing conversations over *agua de panela* [sweet boiled water] and *pandebono* [bread]. This is my way of honoring her.

This dedication cannot be completed without including my closest friend and soul sister, Ingrid Gutierrez, who flew across the continent to take care of me after my knee surgery. By doing that, she witnessed the last stage of my writing and enjoyed reading these words aloud to me. She knows she is an angel in my life and I will be forever grateful.

Finally, I dedicate this thesis to all the individuals who took part in this research. I hope their narratives are taken into account in the struggle for gender equality in Colombia.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the importance of Latin American soap operas – henceforth telenovelas – and narconovelas – contemporary audiovisual productions inspired in the phenomenon of drug trafficking in Colombia – in the understandings of participant’s interpretations of love and sexuality in Cali, Colombia. To examine this connection, this thesis takes into consideration the perspective of the participants who took part of this research. Female and male participants inform about not only how love and sexuality is portrayed in telenovelas and narco-series, but also how they understand these notions in their personal experiences. The findings from this intersection suggest there is a counter-narrative that challenges a hegemonic vision on how gender relations should operate, indicating some sort of agency in the production of meaning. Also, love and sexuality are located within a narco-culture – a culture permeated by the phenomenon of drug trafficking – that reinforces old patriarchal values in which heteronormativity rules.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

CNMH	Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica
CNTV	Comisión Nacional de Televisión
DANE	Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia
GAD	Gender and Development
GBV	Gender based violence
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
VAW	Violence against women
UN	United Nations

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

According to Lopez (1987), the 20th century did not have a communication tool that was more important than television. Television is considered a social phenomenon, a historic document, and an active piece in the construction of collective memory for all (Banco de la Republica, n. d). In this context, Lopez (1987) argues that telenovelas, or Latin American soap operas,¹ are the most widely broadcasted product. This statement is reinforced by Mazziotti (2006) who contends that telenovelas constitute one of the most important television products that, belonging to the fictional narrative genre, have been produced in Latin America since the 1950s.

In Colombia, television has been part of the daily life of Colombians for the past 60 years (BBC Mundo, 2014). According to a survey conducted in 2009 by the National Television Commission (CNTV) and the National Administrative Department of Statistics, commonly referred to as DANE, television has historically been characterized by its high consumption rates from the national population, occupying an important space in the lives of Colombian citizens. The survey shows that 85.3% of Colombian homes have a color T.V. Individuals who are 18 years old or older, watch in average 3,1 to 3,7 hours of television during the week, and between 2,7 and 3,6 hours during weekends. Entertainment programs are the preferred option for 84,3% of the people consulted. They choose this option over news (70,8%), sports (29,1%), or educational programs (27,6%). More affluent Colombians prefer to watch news and business programs on TV, while lower classes prefer entertainment programs. The middle class watch both news and

¹ According to Barker (2003), telenovelas, unlike American soap operas, do have an ending, usually after 150 hour-long episodes. In addition, they are broadcasted during prime-time hours. However, episodes may be repeated during daytime. Also, telenovelas engage large general audiences instead of focusing solely on women.

entertainment. The survey also indicates that Colombian citizens prefer local programs over international productions.

According to Mato (2005), telenovelas play a key role in the success of television. 11 telenovelas, 3 narconovelas, and 6 reality shows are part of the 20 most seen shows of Colombian television (Rating Colombia, n.d.). From this list, the telenovela *Yo soy Betty la fea [Ugly Betty] [Ugly Betty]* achieved a total rating of 17.4% during its 3 years on air (1999-2001). This popular success has located *Betty* in the 4th place of the most seen shows of Colombian history. Similarly, the telenovela *Café, Con Aroma de Mujer [Coffee, with a woman flavor]* (1994 – 1995) was the most watched program in the history of Colombian public television (1954-1997).

According to Devia (n.d.), a new form of social awareness was born in Colombia in 1996 when writers found in television the bridge that connected society with their written books through the phenomenon of drug trafficking. The authors never imagined that the boom of the rating was going to be so successful and that a new era in Colombian television would emerge. In fact, different narconovelas were broadly accepted among the population of Colombia, registering high rating rates. Some examples include: *Sin tetas no hay paraíso [Without Tits there is no Paradise]* *El capo [The drug trafficker]*, *Las Muñecas de la Mafia [The Mafia Dolls]* or *el Cartel de los sapos [The Cartel of the Snitches]*. The birth of narconovelas, those telenovelas based on historical and real events from the phenomenon of drug-trafficking, led to controversies among different sectors of society who argued that moral values are sacrificed for the economic rewards found in the cultural industry. In fact, narconovelas became “a gold mine at the international level” (Devia, n.d., p. 2). The contemporary Colombian fictional brand is now embodied in the

character of Pablo Escobar. As an international export product, the story of Escobar has institutionalized a worldwide Colombian brand by colonizing the US market through Netflix.

The evolution of telenovelas in Colombia has shifted from traditional stories, in which romantic love was the perfect excuse to access the world of the rich, to narconovelas, in which the body of women is completely sexualized, portraying sexual scenes on television. Traditional telenovelas focus on the recurrent plot of the poor and beautiful woman who falls in love with a gorgeous, often, successful businessman. However, they face challenges attributed to the bad characters of the story who are meant to separate the loving couple by making the life of the good characters impossible. Despite of these situations, they manage to get married and form a family, reinforcing a social system in which dominant patriarchal values, such as family unity and long-term marriage sustain a social and ideological hegemony. In fact, when telenovelas highlight the significance of marriage, producers are talking directly to those women, perpetuating the notion that marriage is their major dream in life.

Traditional telenovelas portrayed marriage as the final stage in the story of a heterosexual loving couple, however, similar to conflicts occurring within the real Colombian family, the marriage also faces difficulties portrayed on television. Some of these difficulties are affairs, frustrated loves and betrayals. Often, it is the woman who suffers for her man and she has to forgive him in order to preserve the union of the family. This situation is reinforced in narconovelas where the female character has to let her partner have other women in order to preserve the family and the privileged position

attributed by being the official woman of the drug trafficker. In both scenarios, – telenovelas and narconovelas – men dominate the body of women.

Popular culture is considered to perpetuate structural relations of domination through forms of ideological subordination that Gramsci refers as hegemony. This form of ruling class domination over subordinate groups through the penetration of ideas in their common sense is based on methods of mass communication, such as newspapers, radio, movies, music, and television (Gitlin, 1980; Parker, 2011). These artifacts speak about patterns of inequality, domination and oppression (Griffin, 2015). In order to ensure popular consumption, which is essential for expanding the hegemony, it is necessary to make accessible the goods and symbols considered valid for the dominant class. Further still, a capitalist hegemony requires not only consent to operate, something suggested by Gramsci but also, it is strongly committed to generate divisions among people while contradicts the main principles of democracy established since liberalism was born: “recognize the plurality of opinions and different forms of life, learn to live with them”, and exercise critical thinking (Canclini, 1981, p. 97). When the cultural industry, through the institution of mass media tend to homogenize a dominant ideology, it is possible to argue that in Colombia democracy does not really work. In contrast, the market is strengthened through an ideological domination where consumption seems the passage to a modern world. In this vein, this thesis deals with the problem of a hyper-masculine popular culture that is further reproduced through tele and narconovelas. These cultural products have real impacts on the ways participants from this research understand their own experiences of love and sexuality. A feminist lens of this research suggests there is a hyper-masculine figure (the macho man) reproduced in tele and

narconovelas that undermines any female representation or behavior in both the public and private realms of intimate relations.

This research believes that it is in the spectrum of culture where it is possible to foster forms of resistance against dominant hegemonies. The central argument of this thesis suggests that there is a counter-narrative that challenges a hegemonic vision on how gender relations should operate. This statement indicates that this thesis does not focus solely on how messages are projected from producers to receivers, but also how receivers play an important role in making sense out them, sometimes resisting to them. This emphasis on the audience reinforces studies of popular culture that have focused on the concept of agency and how it takes place in the production of meaning (Kirsi & Pia 2014; Barbero, & Muñoz, 1992, Barbero, Lamus, & Muñoz, 1989; Barbero, 1987). Therefore, by giving a voice to participants, this thesis offers a different narrative that challenges dominant ideologies on television. These voices should be considered when portraying love and sexuality in television.

This research seeks to explore the influence of dominant ideologies about the bodies of women and men found in telenovelas and narconovelas. These ideas, disseminated through mass media products highly consumed by Colombian population, are believed to have an impact in the personal sphere of love and sexuality. Acknowledging that telenovelas and narconovelas are highly influential in the national life of Colombians, registering high consumption rates, this research seeks to investigate the impact of these fictional products in women's and men's interpretations of sexuality and love in Cali, Colombia.

1.1 IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH

The issue of sexuality has often been seen as a distraction from the “real concerns” of development, such as marginalization and poverty. The only time when sexuality is taken into consideration is when policy makers want “to reduce the incidence of unwanted pregnancy (which leads to population growth) and sexually transmitted disease (HIV/AIDS)” (Cornwall, Corrêa, & Jolly, 2008, p. 5). More recently, people have started to consider the rights of sexual and gender minorities; but for the most part, the narrow views in which sexuality is often seen, limits its scope. Sexuality as generally regarded as private, “something from which development should keep an appropriate distance” (Cornwall, Corrêa, & Jolly, 2008, p. 5). In actuality, sexuality goes beyond the simple notion of having sex. Sexuality speaks about the economic structures, the social rules, the political battles, gender power dynamics and the religious ideologies that walk along with physical expressions of intimacy and the relations in which these take place (Cornwall, Corrêa, & Jolly, 2008, p. 5). Therefore, this research is important because it not only seeks to go beyond the limited essentialist interpretations in which sexuality is often associated with but also, supports the recent focus on human rights in the work of development, in which, “sexual rights are human rights” (Cornwall, Corrêa, & Jolly, 2008, p. 7).

This research is also important because it takes into consideration telenovelas and narconovelas as a way of knowing, that is, it gives them a significance in the investigation of social phenomena. An epistemology of telenovelas invites us to reconsider the way we relate to the world of meanings and, therefore, it fosters democratization processes at the consumption level when it gives a voice to the audience.

Even though the participants of this research may constitute only a small sample of the total population of Colombia, their views are extremely important to understand either patterns of identification or complete rejection to what is portrayed on television. In fact, this study believes that it is in the arena of the cultural industry that forms of resistance against dominant ideologies can be pursued and therefore, changes in media representations can support wider changes in society (Barker, 2003, p.13).

This thesis focuses on interpretations of love and sexuality from the perspective of the participants who took part in this research. Therefore, female and male participants inform us how they understand the notions of love and sexuality based on their personal experiences and, also, how love and sexuality are portrayed in telenovelas and narconovelas. To examine the correlation between telenovelas and narconovelas and interpretations of love and sexuality, this thesis relies on a social-ecological framework to understand how narratives of love and sexuality are influenced by the individual's closest institutions such as the family, the community, and the media. The findings of this research can contribute to complement the agenda of gender and development in Colombia, arguing for sexual rights – something supported by many of the participants –.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTION

Taking into consideration that telenovelas and narconovelas have revealed high consumption rates in the history of Colombian television, this research address the following question: *How have Colombian telenovelas and narconovelas impacted women's and men's interpretations of sexuality and love in Cali, Colombia? In order to answer this question, some sub-questions need to be considered:*

1. How do women and men interpret love and sexuality?
2. What do telenovelas and narconovelas tell about love and sexuality from the perspective of participants?
3. How similar or different are representations of love and sexuality portrayed on television from participants' understandings?
4. What is the importance of community based initiatives in influencing participants' interpretations of love and sexuality?

These questions are important because they indicate if participants simply accept and internalize the hegemonic attitudes, values and ideas that are projected in telenovelas and narconovelas, or if they resist to them (in complex and not always consistent or coherent ways). In these vein, these questions help to understand if hegemonic gender norms are reproduced as a result of telenovelas and narconovelas (as suggested on secondary literature), or if participants challenge and confront them, indicating that the reproduction of gender norms is more complex than is often recognized. Overall, these questions address the implicit tension about the reproduction of hegemonic norms.

1.2.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this research are to:

- Explore the interrelation between telenovelas and narconovelas, and participants' interpretations of love and sexuality.
- Analyze the influence of an institution such as the media in individuals' interpretations of love and sexuality.
- Identify participants' standpoints with regards to dominant ideologies portrayed on television about love and sexuality.

- Understand the impact of three community-based initiatives in influencing participants' interpretations of love and sexuality.

1.3 METHODOLOGY

1.3.1 DATA COLLECTION

Research was conducted in Cali, Colombia during the period of September-December 2016. One community-based organization and two groups related to gender issues were essential for the recruitment of participants. For confidential purposes, the real names of these have been changed to: *Casa Mujer*, *Hombres*, and *Proyecto Ser*. This research relies on qualitative methods. According to Cresswell (2009), “qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 4). In this spirit, qualitative research involves building inductively from particulars to general themes focusing on individual meaning. Therefore, the researcher plays a key role by interpreting the meaning of the data (Cresswell, 2009). Normally, qualitative research prefers words over numbers and open-ended questions over close-ended questions. Thus, this study is part of a narrative research in which a qualitative approach, in the form of focus groups discussions (6 groups of 5 people), individual semi-structured interviews (24), and qualitative data analysis is employed. Focus group discussions concentrated on discussions around representations of love and sexuality in telenovelas and interviews dealt with personal interpretations of love and sexuality (based on the personal experience of participants). In both scenarios individuals participated voluntarily in a friendly conversational environment. Participants discussed the topics in the focus groups while giving their

personal opinions in the interviews. The questions used for the focus groups and the interviews are semi-structured and open-ended. Literature related to body politics, political economy, telenovelas and narconovelas, gender relations, and *machismo* in Colombia was consulted as well.

1.3.2 FOCUS GROUPS

The sample was made of six groups of five people (four groups of men and two groups of women). Groups of the same gender are likely to feel more confident discussing representations of love and sexuality portrayed on television than those of mixed gender. Except for one session, all group discussions were conducted by me. In the only case I was not the moderator, I served as an assistant for the discussions with men from Proyecto Ser. This activity was voluntarily conducted by one of the members of the group because participants felt more comfortable that way.

1.3.3 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Except for a few individuals, the majority of participants who took part in the group discussions participated as well in voluntary semi-structured interviews. A total of 24 participants (12 women and 12 men) were interviewed by me. This number is considered appropriate for the timeframe at disposal while still offers a rich qualitative insight to the study.

This research considers the perspective of men and women equally important to understand the gender dynamics involve in love and sexual relations. In fact, both perspectives allow exploring how women and men negotiate, reproduce or oppose patriarchal norms and expectations manifested in melodramas as well as in their personal

lives. There were no screening procedures in place; except that participants had to be 18 years old or older since this is considered the legal adult age in Colombia. Also, participants had to be members (or voluntary assistants) of the affiliations previously described (*Casa Mujer, Hombres, and Proyecto Ser*). I am aware that participants' membership to either one of these organizations may affect the findings of this research since their standpoints may be permeated by a critical understanding of gender issues. The reason to particularly seek for organizations with explicit focus on gender obeys the fact that the central argument of this thesis suggests there is a counter-narrative that challenges a hegemonic vision on how gender relations should operate. Therefore, I was consciously looking for individuals who, influenced by their membership to any gender organization, could challenge mainstream gender norms. Moreover, tele and narconovelas speak mainly about the reproduction of hegemonic gender norms, indicating the importance to include organizations with a gender perspective that could give their opinions on the issue. I am aware that the findings of this research could be completely different if I would have chosen organizations with less critical gender perspective on tele and narconovelas. Also, I am aware that the standpoints of my participants do not represent the general views of Colombian society since my participants explicitly challenge mainstream gender norms. In other words, I acknowledge the limitation of this thesis regarding the fact that the organizations I dealt with focus on gender relations and I realize that the individuals involved in these groups are not representative of the general Colombian population since they discuss issues of masculinity and femininity, and gender discrimination.

A total of 34 individuals (19 women and 15 men) participated in this research. To enable further analysis, general information about participants was collected (please see Appendix A. Information of participants). Please be aware that the selection of participants was not influenced by any type of criteria based on class, race, education or any other similar factor. This information was not taken into consideration as an inclusion or exclusion criteria. In fact, because of the make-up of the groups I studied, there was less racial diversity amongst the women than is representative of the population in Cali.

The women are members of *Casa Mujer*. The 15 men are either members of *Hombres* (6 men) or *Proyecto Ser* (9 men). While the majority of men from *Hombres* are straight, all men from *Proyecto Ser* are gay. Although all the participants of this research lived in Cali, the majority of women (12 out of 19) come from rural areas and migrated to the city. In contrast, the majority of men (9 out of 15) come from urban backgrounds. The average age of participants is 57 years old. In fact, the women of this research are older than men. The average age for women is 63 years old while the average age for men is 43 years old. With regards to social-economic classes, 68% of the women belong to the working-class (13 out of 19), 21% belong to the middle class (4 women) and only 2 women who represent the 10% are part of the upper class. On the other hand, 73% of men (11 out of 15) are part of the middle class, 20% (3 men) are part of the working class and only 1 man represents the 6% that belongs to the upper class. All the names given to participants in this thesis are pseudonyms, not the actual names.

By focusing on ordinary people's narratives of love and sexuality, we get a sense of their identities, as well as the social role stories play in a wider social order. It is precisely the diversity of these stories that their political importance relies. According to

Andrews (2008), one of the significances to focus on narratives relies on the fact to be able to investigate not only how stories are structured and the ways in which they work but also, “who produces them and by what means; the mechanisms by which they are consumed; and how narratives are silenced, contested and accepted” (in Periera 2014). For instance, the case of Colombian telenovelas and narconovelas allows one to study not only factors concerning representation, that is, the broad set of cultural values and beliefs exchanged in its content but also, aspects concerning production and consumption, including which narratives are silenced, accepted or rejected. Similarly, it is considered that institutions tell stories too and their stories constitute the cultural and institutional foundations of how they present or represent themselves to the world. In this context, it is interesting to think “why are particular institutional narratives told and not others” (Pereira, 2014, p. 21) and therefore, “among multiple narratives in circulation, which institutional narratives get heard and which ones are silenced?” (Pereira, 2014, p. 22). Also, it is important to consider that interpretations of love and sexuality, which are informed by tensions and contradictions, may constitute the foundation as well for mainstream narratives produced by institutions such as the law, public policies, religion, or by cultural arenas such as the media. These interpretations may also constitute the foundation for counternarratives produced by women and men at more intimate levels. Here, the concept of ‘counternarratives’ is introduced by Pereira when she cites Andrews (2008): “dominant narratives may be challenged by alternative versions or counter narratives” (p. 100).

1.4 ETHICAL ISSUES

Any research that examines gender issues and the sphere of love and sexuality requires special efforts to ensure the comfort and well-being of participants. Due to the sensitive nature of these issues, special attention was paid to the physical and psychological health of both the participants and the researcher. To minimize any risk of those participating in the study, some considerations were discussed and clarified with participants. For instance, participants were free to decide what information to share. In other words, they were not forced to share information they felt uncomfortable with. Most importantly, they could withdraw at any time from the study. Due to the nature of this research, information disclosing abuse was revealed to me. I knew beforehand about the possibility to find these cases during my interviews. When this occurred, I made the participant aware of programs and institutions that work in addressing physical and emotional abuse. Similarly, if the individual agreed, there was always the option to report the case within the organization in order to consider further steps. However, none of my participants agree to take any of these options since the abuses occurred in the past. In these lines, child abuse was revealed to me, however, participants did not want to take any further step since the cases occurred long time back. Direct quotes are only used with previous permission from participants.

1.5 CHAPTER OUTLINE

The purpose of this first chapter has been to present the objectives of the research project, introduce the topic and provide a general background to the importance of telenovelas and narconovelas in Colombia. Chapter Two focuses on the Social Ecological

(SE) framework which constitutes the theoretical lens from which the data of this research is analyzed. Chapter Three offers some background about gender relations in Colombia, including the importance of *machismo*, which is still predominant in Colombian culture. Chapter Four introduces readers to the organization, *Casa Mujer*, and the groups, *Hombres and Proyecto Ser*, that took part in this research. This chapter offers a frame of reference with regard to these associations and the work they perform. Chapter Five presents the findings of the discussion groups with regard to representations of love and sexuality on telenovelas and narconovelas. A brief framework about melodramas in Colombia is offered at the beginning of the chapter. An analysis of the significance of these findings is also presented. The last chapter focuses on individuals' interpretations of love and sexuality. Similarly, to the previous chapter, this chapter starts by introducing a general information on participants followed by a final section that seeks to answer the main research question of my thesis: *How have Colombian telenovelas and narconovelas impacted women's and men's interpretations of sexuality and love in Cali Colombia?*

CHAPTER TWO THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Relying on a social ecological framework (SEF), this thesis considers that interpretations of love and sexuality are the result of an interplay of factors working at the individual, interpersonal, organizational and societal levels. It is through the SE lens that the present study looks at how ideas, values and beliefs present in Colombian telenovelas and narconovelas inform and permeate the different layers. Broadly speaking, this SEF is concerned with the ways in which humans interact with and are influenced by their environments. The chapter is divided among the following sections. To start, a brief introduction of the SEF is presented along with different examples that illustrate the utility of the framework. Then, the chapter focuses on the macro, exo, and micro systems, the 3 of the layers highlighted by SEF and explored by this research. Following this section, readers are introduced to some approaches, such as Political Economy (PE) and body politics. These approaches help exemplify the relationship between individuals and their surrounding environment. On the one hand, the interplay of political and economic forces affecting individual's lives shows how a top-down analysis can take place when studying interpretations of love and sexuality. On the other hand, the practices and policies through which powers of society regulate the human body also explain how institutional, economic, and personal power work in intimate relations. Finally, some benefits and limitations of using a multilevel perspective will be presented at the end of the chapter.

2.1 SOCIAL ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

This framework believes that the interplay of factors or forces, such as institutions or structures, working at multiple analytical levels help illustrate both particular social

phenomena and the enduring political and social values of cultures. Acknowledging that telenovelas and narconovelas constitute a mainstream narrative in Colombian society, this thesis relies on a SE framework to understand how these fictional productions inform and permeate societal narratives and counter-narratives of love and sexuality constructed at the societal, organizational, interpersonal and individual levels.

This model finds its roots in human ecology. Early definitions suggest that human ecology constitutes the way human beings relate to their ecosystem, what Oetzel, Dhar, and Kirschbaum (2007) define as the study of the relationship between organisms and their environment (as cited in Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This framework suggests that the environment is composed of several contexts or layers and that the relationship between these layers with the organism is complex. In this regard, similar to what organisms experience in the web of life in which adjustments become the result of a “mutual or collective phenomenon”, human ecology deals “with the adjustments of man [sic] to habitat as a process of community development” (Hawley, 1944, p. 405). According to Oetzel, Dhar, and Kirschbaum (2007), the levels or layers mentioned above correspond to environmental influences distributed among the following levels: macro, exo, meso, and micro systems. The microsystem refers to face-to face interactions between individuals in particular contexts, such as peers, work colleagues and school mates. The mesosystem encompasses the interrelations amongst the various actors and environments of the microsystem. For instance, while family and peer groups are individual parts of the microsystem, the connection between these two groups represents a mesosystem. The exosystem implies forces within the larger social system that an individual may not be directly involved in, but by which they are indirectly affected or influenced. These may

include for example, informal social networks, neighbourhood communities, and government agencies. The macrosystem is the system of overarching structures which implicitly and explicitly define and influence the exo, meso, and microsystems. Thus, human ecology represents an integrated analytical framework that takes in consideration the relationship between individuals with their environment.

The SE model has traditionally been used in the field of Violence Against Women (VAW), Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), child maltreatment and family systems. However, other scholars such as Oetzel, Dhar, and Kirschbaum (2007), have incorporated this framework into areas such as intercultural conflict. Scholars using this frame may refer to the levels in different ways, but overall the model refers to similar concepts represented through the environmental influences previously described. The following example of STI/HIV (Sexually Transmitted Infections /Human Immunodeficiency Virus) interventions for youth, outline the utility of the framework.

When reviewing STI/HIV prevention and intervention programs for youth involved in the juvenile justice system from a Social Ecology Framework, some key environments should be considered: family, peers, and school (Hong, Voisin, & Crosby, 2015). According to the authors, individual factors relate to personal dimensions such as age, gender, and psychological state that may affect sexual risks. Familial factors may consider family financial resources, household composition and supervising norms and functions. Extra-familial domains may include community, school engagement, and other contextual variables, such as cultural, political, and economic factors (p. 2770). It is through the workings of these environmental influences, that sexual behavior can be seen as the result of individual characteristics plus contextual systems. Similarly, different

forms of violence exposure may result from “individual, familial and extra-familial domains” (Hong, Voisin, & Crosby, 2015, p. 2770). Therefore, the authors encourage making use of the framework especially when few STI/HIV programs for juvenile delinquents have considered relations among these environmental influences.

The socio-ecological framework used in this thesis will focus on the interdependent layers of the macro, exo, and microsystems as explained below².

2.1.1 MACROSYSTEM: According to Heise (1998), the macrosystem includes “the broad set of cultural values and beliefs that permeate and inform the other three layers of the social ecology” (p. 277). This layer refers to the formal and informal social structures or the cultural, political and economic factors affecting the micro, meso and exosystems. For instance, patriarchy, as a macro level factor, influences not only the organization of power in community institutions but also the distribution of decision-making authority in intimate relations. Some social-ecological factors of this layer may include the structure of laws, public and economic policies as well as cultural norms and symbolic structures such as the media or the significance hidden in the structure of language. This thesis considers Colombian telenovelas and narconovelas the main focus for macrosystem analysis. Chapter 3 will also offer some perspective on this layer by examining the political and economic forces shaping the country’s social system in which gender relations are constituted. Overall, this layer represents the factors in which societal and organizational levels influence other variables and structures lower down in the system of the web of life (Heise, 1998, p. 277).

² The mesosystem is not explored in this thesis as there is no interaction between the 3 organisations upon which this thesis is based.

2.1.2 EXOSYSTEM: The exosystem level involves the social structures and the formal and informal institutions that surround the microsystem: the workplace, the neighborhood, the school, social networks, and identity groups (Heise, 1998). Some scholars may include in this level the concept of community, which refers to the community a family lives in. The exosystem level of this research will be concentrating on the organization and the two groups which agreed to participate in this thesis: *Casa Mujer* (women's organization), *Hombres* (a group formed by mostly heterosexual men), and *Proyecto Ser* (a group formed by mostly gay men). Other considerations may include the community or the neighborhood.

2.1.3. THE MICROSYSTEM: The microsystem refers to that hybrid between the most inner dimension that each individual brings to the web of life and the immediate context in which face-to-face interactions take place. The history of an individual may be shaped by both biological factors (Oetzel & Duran, 2004) and individual interactions (Heise, 1998). Often, this layer helps illustrate wider complex relations (Druckman, 2003). The microsystem enables the understanding of linkages between lower levels of the frame and their influence in higher structures.

Individual or intrapersonal: The individual or intrapersonal aspect of the microsystem represents the most inner dimension that each individual brings to the web of life. It includes the history of the person as well as some biological factors that are understood in here as issues concerning gender, race, and class, among others. (Oetzel & Duran, 2004). Other individual characteristics may include aspects of education, age, employment, income, and nationality (Heise, 1998). For the purpose of this research, intrapersonal factors may include personal history including the individual's family and

place of origin as well as sexual identities, desires, and orientations. Issues of self-esteem are also considered.

Interpersonal: This aspect of the layer refers to the immediate context in which first face- to- face interactions take place, often “it relates to those interactions in which a person directly engages with others” (Heise, 1998, p. 269). Frequently, they occurred between couples, and other small groups, in which family and friends become significant. Some interactions may be also the result of influences of teachers and peers. Some factors to take in consideration here may include household composition, family financial resources, family bonds and support, gender roles within the family, use of alcohol in the family, marital conflict, infidelity, male dominance in the family, among others. For instance, social-ecological factors of family violence may refer to those variables affecting a family’s capacity to function and care for its children, such as unemployment, chronic poverty, and financial difficulties (Holden & Nabors, 1999, p. 134-135). Also, factors such as family environment, family interactions, and parenting skills are significant. Even though friends are important in this layer, this thesis focuses mainly on the family and intimate partner relationships at the interpersonal level. In this context, an approach of body politics helps illustrate interactions linking love and sexuality with microsystem contexts.

The previous section illustrated the different layers interacting at the macro, exo, and micro levels. The next section explains how Political Economy (PE) and body politics are being used to exemplify the relationship between individuals with their environment.

2.2. BODY POLITICS

The concept of body politics refers to the practices and policies through which powers of society regulate the human body and struggle over the degree of individual and social control of the body. The powers at play in body politics include institutional power expressed in government and laws and power in economic production (the macrosystem), and personal power negotiated in intimate relations (the microsystem). This approach promotes an intimate relation between power and sexuality, in which the body plays an essential role. It considers the relation between sexuality and gender significant and the fact that power is structured to accommodate male, heterosexual bodies. This concept is particularly useful in this thesis as a feminist lens through which to explore the SEF and participants' perceptions of love and sexuality in a context within which the bodies of women and men are impacted by patriarch norms and expectations.

According to Pereira (2014), heterosexuality is not only the intersection between power and sexuality, but it uncovers the interplay of sexual and non-sexual aspects of social life. Jackson (2006) states that heterosexuality orders “not only sexual life but also domestic and extra-domestic divisions of labor and resources” (in Pereira, 2014, p. 107). The notion of body politics introduces the concept of ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ of which one aspect is the “institutionalized, normative heterosexuality [that] regulates those kept within its boundaries as well as marginalizing and sanctioning those outside them” (Pereira, 2014, p. 105). Work in this field problematizes issues of sexual orientation, including the control of homosexuality and, in the case of women’s studies, emphasizes how heterosexual women are affected by heteronormativity and how they react to it (Pereira, 2014).

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Traditional works in this area include the links between heterosexuality and the gendered divisions of labor and how men take possession of women's reproductive and productive capacities. Some feminist analytical and political work includes relations of intimacy, the workings of power and agency, and the body among others. This concept has contributed to debates and activism around sexuality, including political battles that are concerned with sexual and reproductive rights, as well as claims for sexual pleasure and sexual power. In fact, those who advocate for sexual rights consider "sexuality a practice of freedom, based on principles of equality, responsibility and choice" (Pereira, 2014, p. 11). In a context of sexual rights, issues of reproduction and health are contemplated. Similarly, in the area of HIV/AIDS, sexual rights involve the negotiation of safer sex.

The work on body politics has, as well, addressed issues of VAW, IPV, abortion and other issues concerning women's discrimination. Work in the field has advocated for better services for women who suffer violence, as well as the prevention and punishment of such violence. In this context, VAW is understood as a situation perpetuated by states, not only to reinforce women's oppression, but also to gain control of women's bodies, labor and their productive capacities (Omvedt, 1990).

The different forms in which the powers of society regulate the human body are presented throughout the different layers of the SEF. Institutions such as the church, the media, or the health system may use their power to socially control the body of women. However, findings from this research show how informal networks, such as organizations and support groups use their power to produce counternarratives to challenge these dominant ideologies at a societal and individual level.



2.3. BENEFITS OF A MULTILEVEL PERSPECTIVE

One of the benefits of using the social ecological framework is that it integrates research across levels or contexts, allowing for multilevel analysis (Oetzel, Dhar, and Kirschbaum, 2007). Even though the tendency in most studies is to focus on either micro or macro processes, the authors insist that studying something at a single level, will ignore how individuals, organizations, communities and cultures are interconnected. Also, those working in the field of IPV and child maltreatment argue that a multilevel approach challenges professional biases, protects against simplified explanatory short cuts, and allows for better consideration of those victims of family violence (Little & Kantor, 2002). Thus, any research that focuses only on a single level will underestimate the effects of other contexts, leading to simplistic solutions to complex problems (Oetzel & Duran, 2004)

2.3.1. LIMITATIONS OF THE FRAME

While very useful, it can be challenging for the social ecological framework to deal with the large number of potential relevant concepts and variables, making it difficult to determine the scope of the research. Also, data collection and analysis might be a difficult task (Oetzel, Dhar, & Kirschbaum, 2007). Other challenges are related to researcher's abilities to work with the model (Klein et al., 1999 in Oetzel et al., 2007). "Multilevel frameworks are considered to present more complexities than single level approaches and it is through this complexity that social reality is represented" (Klein et al., 1999, p. 195). Despite these challenges, Oetzel et al (2007) aspire to have more scholars joining multilevel approaches as a form to provide rich theoretical and practical

layered insights. As they state: “the approach is challenging to say the least, but the rewards are potentially great” (p. 201).

Following a multilevel perspective, this thesis incorporates multiple dimensions when understanding sexuality. In order to better comprehend this concept, it is essential to consider the relation between the body and its surrounding environment, taking the “personal” to “public” matters, and facilitating linkages with the political and economic forces interacting at personal and public spheres. Going beyond the simple notion of sexuality referring to the physical act of having sex, this research follows the approach of Cornwall, Corrêa, and Jolly (2008), in which sexuality speaks about the economic structures, the social rules, the political battles and the religious ideologies that walk along with physical expressions of intimacy and the relations in which it takes place. This work believes that sexuality is a narrative shaped by multiple sub-narratives and counternarratives working at different levels of the social-ecological frame – the micro, exo and macro systems that relate to the individual, intrapersonal, organizational and societal contexts. There are social-ecological factors giving form to those constructions and this thesis seeks to highlight them.



CHAPTER THREE GENDER RELATIONS IN COLOMBIA

Gender relations in Colombia are sustained by a patriarchal system that has reinforced a hegemonic masculinity in the social order, privileging men over women. Those privileges were initially supported in civil, penal, and political structures that, sharing a close relation with the Catholic Church, attributed more benefits to men, fostering gender inequality in the country. The influence of Catholicism has been crucial in reinforcing a binary relation of what it means to be a woman and what it means to be a man. Often, the Church has regulated women and men's behaviors, constricting those with other gender identities and sexual orientations. The Catholic Church, in association with the state, has also attributed a profound importance to family, reinforcing traditional ideas about the role of women in society. Colombia's violent history, and the phenomenon of drug-trafficking have also influenced Colombian culture, affecting the way women and men relate to each other.

This chapter discusses machismo and its influence on gender relations in Colombia. In order to do that, this chapter starts by introducing the concept and the different forms in which it is supported. The chapter explores how gender relations in Colombia are permeated by the Catholic Church, as well as by an unequal political and civil system that reinforces *machismo*. Finally, the chapter examines war and drug trafficking and how the dominant and aggressive masculine image perpetuated by these two phenomena sustain gender inequity in the country.



3.1 MACHISMO

According to Williams and Guerrieri (1991), as a result of colonial influence, Colombian society adopted a culture in which men occupy a dominant role within the household as breadwinners and disciplinarians. Also, men assume responsibility for maintaining family pride and position within the community. Even though gender roles have changed with the migration from rural to urban areas, the family and household organization that is still marked by a sexual segregation and a difference between male and female goals and aspirations. Indeed, *machismo* still permeates Colombian society.

According to Brusco (1986), in the majority of Colombian households, conjugal roles are influenced by machismo. Machismo refers to a male personality and a behavior pattern characterized by “exaggerated aggressiveness and intransigence in male-to-male interpersonal relations, and arrogance and sexual aggression in male-to-female relationships” (Stevens, 1973, p. 90 in Brusco, 1986). *Machismo* is a kind of male culture in which pressures and sanctions promote the values and behaviors of being *macho*. The Spanish, the word *macho* used to refer to the sex of animals (not humans) and is used in Colombia to refer to the biological sex. In other words, *machismo* describes both the state of being male (as a biologically given) and the social interaction that results from men acting in a particular way. Being *macho* implies command, including command over women. An ideal of maleness as a type of wise, honest, effective, and successful masculinity, is difficult to achieve for a variety of reasons, including economic constraints. In fact, according to Brusco (1986), there is a high probability that machismo may be a response to the failure of achieving this impossible ideal. Three attributes commonly found in machismo are aggression, womanizing, and drinking (Brusco, 1986).

Although not particular to Cali, where this research takes place, Uribe (2009) describes a type of *machismo* that is predominant in her home, the Atlantic coast of Colombia. In her work *Las cajas de Pandora que explotaron dentro de mi [The Pandora boxes that exploded within me]*, she argues that there is a masculine cultural image that permeates all social classes and it is accepted by both sexes. She explains that men prove their virility through their male descendants who can carry their blood as well as their family name. A good number of sons shows men's reproductive capacity while reinforcing extra-marital relationships. Having different women and children is directly related to a man's social status and economic power. In fact, men from the same social cycle tend to compete among themselves.

Uribe (2009) highlights that there is not any other region in Colombia that gives this particular significance to the reproductive and sexual organs of men. It is believed that men's genitalia give them a special status within the community. Since they are young boys, they are stimulated with regards to the pride of being male. For instance, mothers and nannies make male infants sleep by caressing their genitals and in the form of affection, they kiss them or incite them orally, making children aware of their sexuality at an early age. Older people also applaud and celebrate the erection in children as well as their attempts to seduce either girls of their age or older women. The language instilled in children is also phallic and encouraged by older people (Uribe, 2009). This process of sexual discovery is supported by popular culture and it creates a supremely aggressive sexual personality in men. A typical macho of the Atlantic region is the one that dominates his women, considering them as the weak sex.

Machismo puts a special emphasis on demonstrating virility, including

domination over many women, and the effectiveness of a macho man in providing for his family or families. This can become very difficult when he has more than one woman. Often, problems associated with *machismo* deal with the abandonment of a woman and their children, considered the ultimate failure of a husband when he is not able to provide for his family. However, if he becomes a family man, that is, if he is responsible for his wife and children, then he is also breaking with the norms of *machismo*. *Machismo* is treated with an attitude of submissive tolerance by women, who recognize it as the cause of their own sufferings (Brusco, 1986).

The sufferings women go through when they marry a *macho* man is explained as part of the conjugal role. In regard to this, when women were asked why they think men find it so difficult to follow a home life, they responded that it is their nature to be sexually active. Under these circumstances, “the lack of conjunction between male and female values and aspirations, combined with the dependency of women on male earnings in post-peasant society, poses the central problem for women in terms of providing for the household which is their main arena” (Brusco, 1986, p. 134). The wife is the one who keeps the household running in a conjugal relation shaped by both the fulfillment of male desires and the dominance of a *macho* personality.

Uribe (2009) argues that Colombian underdevelopment does not only carry political and economic implications. In the Atlantic coast, underdevelopment has prolonged a colonial culture in which a special significance has been given to “the masculine”. In fact, she argues that women play a key role in supporting this hierarchy in which men occupy a higher position in a region where daily life keeps close similarities with colonial times. She explains that due to the legacy of colonization, the port region is

today highly dominated by Afro-American descendants. However, two other groups of people also remain in the area: descendants from Spanish colonizers and a Syrian-Lebanese group. Since the African influence is higher, the way of living and the culture of the region is the result of the African legacy and the slavery structure imposed by settlers. For instance, black slave women were obligated to sexually please their “owners”. Also, women in general, both black slaves and those of Spanish and Syrian-Lebanese descent, were the vehicle to reproduce the lineage of men, both black slaves and white slave owners, without giving them any responsibility to nurture their children. According to Uribe (2009), this historical fact explains why the practice of polygamy may take place in some areas of the Caribbean, registering high cases of common-law relationships. Also, one of the five top crimes of the region is food absenteeism, i.e. a concept attributed to men who do not provide the minimum food quota to their children (Uribe, 2009).

3.2 THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

In Colombia, there has been a complete fusion of the Roman Catholic Church, the State and society. The Catholic Church in Colombia has a reputation throughout South America of being particularly powerful and influential in national life. In fact, the Colombian State delegated public authority over major areas of the lives of its citizens to the Catholic hierarchy, including education (Brusco, 1986).

Historically, the contents disseminated in public schools were regulated by the church. While men received a conventional education that guaranteed their access to higher education, women received a basic education associated with domestic work and

childcare, thus limiting women's access to professional careers (Wills, 2007). Religious instruction was obligatory and "education at all levels was to be maintained in conformity with the dogma of the Catholic religion" (Brusco, 1986, p. 59). In contemporary Colombia, education is still permeated by Catholic dogmas.

The church has contributed to the reinforcement of stereotypes regarding the role of women in the social order by giving special significance to marriage and by supporting the unit of the family as the only institution able to ensure a place for women in society. By supporting a clear distinction between the public and the domestic life of women, the church promoted that the proper behavior of women was based on their nurturing of their children and their loyalty to their husbands, whom they have to respect, obey, and sexually please. For Catholics, conjugal sexuality only fulfills a procreative function. In other words, a good wife is not supposed to enjoy sex. She accepts it as part of her "sacred duty" (Brusco, 1986, p. 195). According to Brusco (1986), pleasure and procreative purposes are at odds in Colombian Catholic conjugal sexuality. In fact, man's sexual affairs outside of marriage contributes to reinforce his wife's pure image. Similarly, his wife's lack of sexual pleasure reinforces the idea that "the union between husband and wife is primarily for procreative purposes" (p. 196). Marriage was strongly positioned under Church's control. Therefore, the Concordat, an agreement signed in 1887 between the Colombian government and the Vatican, gave the Church significant power to intervene in aspects of marriage as well as in civil legislation and the life and behavior of women (Wills, 2007).

3.3 POLITICAL AND JUDICIAL SYSTEM

Male dominance is also embodied in the country's political and judicial system. In Colombia, like in other incipient democratic nations of the 20th century, women were not able to vote until 1957 and could not participate in politics. Both traditional political parties (liberals and conservatives) believed that politics was not meant for women, suggesting that even though both parties had clear political differences, they shared a similar position with regards to the place women had to occupy in society. According to Wills (2007), both liberals and conservatives defended a type of femininity that was apolitical, modest, and prudent. A femininity that could only fulfill a maternal role. Indeed, liberals and conservatives thought that women's suffrage was something men had to decide without considering women's opinions. Further, liberals were afraid that women could have an inclination for conservative ideologies, which could represent conservative votes.

Some forms of *machismo* are evident across political movements, parties and trade unions. Even though women were eventually accepted within these movements, groups and political parties, they were asked to remain modest and decent. Further still, their personal life could be scrutinized, sometimes, harming their roles, such as the case of a state governor who had to resign her position since the Catholic Church put a lot of pressure on her status as a divorce woman (Wills, 2007). This scrutiny, sometimes public, suggests that men protected the honor of their political party by controlling women's behavior. In other words, it seemed the honor of the party depended on the sexual behaviors of the female members. In a similar vein, those women who were able to participate in politics within the traditional political parties, did not receive the support expected. According to Wills (2007), their colleagues did not understand the

discrimination women faced, which explains why so few laws were approved to improve women's rights in the 1960s. According to Moreno (1972), men underestimated the capacity of women to take part in politics, which in some cases, fostered a difficult environment where women really thought they were incapable. Moreno argues that the lower rates of women participating in leftist movements and political parties, demonstrated how the party was unable to reinforce equal rights for women and men. (p. 164).

In Colombia, the beginning of the XX century was particularly difficult for women. The Criminal and Civil Codes deprived women from any possibility of building an autonomous and independent individuality. Also, these political tools regulated the sexual behavior of women. The Marital Power Act, enacted before the 1930s, established that women could not exercise any control over their own property and salary; they could not hire employees or appear in court. They also could not accept any property that was inherited and could not do any type of economic transaction without the written consent of their husbands (Wills, 2007, p. 93). In fact, marriage constituted the vehicle where women lost their own economic independence. This legal figure was also extended to the daughters of the family who, once old enough, could not make any decisions over their inheritance, leaving the control of the properties in the hands of their fathers or brothers (Wills, 2007). During the period of 1920-1957, the Criminal Code punished cases of adultery in women, but omitted sanctions for the infidelity of men. Therefore, the Civil and Criminal Codes unjustly penalised women. While women lost control over their children and their property in cases of adultery, men did not receive any sanction at all (Wills, 2007).

When the political power shifted from the Catholic Church to the Constitutional Court in 1991, new sexual agreements arose, implying other ways to relate between women and men. In particular, the new constitution supports pluralism in both the public and personal arenas. In fact, the following political achievements demonstrate how the personal sphere was considered a public concern. For instance, Law 294 of 1996 punishes family violence. In this context, even though the Colombian Constitutional Assembly did not recognize that different forms of family exist, which is still a public debate, it defined that family relations are based on equal respect among its members and therefore, equal rights and responsibilities are shared between members of the family. This gave a victory to women who advocated for “democracy in the house and in the public plaza” (Wills, 2007, p. 251). The new constitution also brought more political rights that were protected under new legal institutions: The Ombudsman Office promoted and defended human rights and the Constitutional Court was in charge of its preservation. In 2003, a national health policy brought sexual and reproductive rights to the public agenda. However, despite these improvements achieved within the political system, there is still a clear gender gap that reinforces gender inequality, violations of women's rights and VAW (Lizcano and Orstavik, 2013).

3.4 VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN (VAW)

Lizcano and Orstavik (2013) highlight a recent national study that shows how 37 percent of married women admit to having been physically abused by their husbands.

Only ten percent of the women reported their case and six percent declared that the rape was committed by someone different from their husbands. The study reveals that only 21 percent of physically abused women reported visiting a doctor or health Centre for treatment and information. A full third of those who did seek help were not informed about possibilities for making a formal complaint. In fact, reporting abuse to authorities or seeking medical support carries risks too. There are common stories of degrading treatment and abuse perpetuated by the police and medical practitioners (Lizcano & Orstavik, 2013). Furthermore, the country has been recently shocked by cases of femicides invading the news, including the case of Rosa Elvira Cely, a woman who was brutally raped before she was killed in Bogota in 2012 or the case of Yuliana Samboni, a 7-year-old indigenous girl who was kidnapped, tortured, raped, and killed in 2016 (Semana, 2012, & Semana 2016). According to El Tiempo (2017), VAW has increased in recent years.

Calderon, Lopez and Murad (2013), published a study on VAW in Colombia based on the National Demographic and Health Surveys for the period of 1990-2010. The authors explore the relationship between the exercising of sexual and reproductive rights of women and the VAW perpetuated by their husbands or partners in Colombia. According to their study, 18.8% of Colombian women declared in 1990 that their husbands, or partners physically abused them. This ratio incremented 18 percentage points by 2010, reaching 37%. In terms of sexual abuse, 8.8% were victims in 1990. This number incremented to 9.7% by 2010. The intensification of cases shows that more women recognize that their relationship with their partner is an abusive one. They realise that it is unacceptable, and therefore, they report it.

The findings of Calderon, Lopez and Murad's (2013) study are important to understand the complexity of VAW in Colombia. To start, the research reveals that there are two types of violence – economic and psychological – that are less recognized. However, their emotional effects are the most highlighted by individuals. The investigation reports that those men who were abused when they were younger, tend to have a higher chance to replicate violent behaviors, either in the public or private spheres. Similarly, the study shows that those women who have been victims of violence by their husbands or partners are less likely to exercise their sexual and reproductive rights. In fact, these women tend to legitimize violence. Also, the conditions surrounded the victims' environment are very poor when seeking protection. The institutions available to help women do not really respond to the victims' needs, indicating that the State is also responsible for not guaranteeing the rights of these women. According to studies such as Calderon, Lopez and Murad (2013), authorities have not been really effective in promoting women's rights in Colombia, and, in fact have perpetuated VAW in the public sphere (Calderon, Lopez & Murad, 2013).

According to Olivares (2009), although VAW is a multi-causal phenomenon that has both private and public expressions, its foundation is inequity between women and men. In Colombia, the rigidity of gender roles establishes a regime of sexual division in society where men and women must obey cultural mandates, otherwise, they will meet social sanctions in attempts to keep order in society. For men, the fulfillment of his male role speaks about his honor, character, and status. For women, the failure of their female role questions their capacities, goodness, and her 'feminine nature' (MDGF, 2010 in Calderon, Lopez & Murad, 2013). This argument is reinforced by UN Women, which

claims that “Cultural and social beliefs lie at the heart of gender inequality” (United Nations, 2013, para. 1). Furthermore, “social and cultural beliefs deeply rooted in Colombian society, generating rigid gender roles and patterns of sexist, patriarchal, and discriminatory behaviors, facilitate, allow, excuse or legitimize VAW” (United Nations, 2013, para.4). A set of structural, political, institutional, and symbolic norms differentiate and position people according to their sex of birth. This situation produces, sustains and legitimizes violent acts. In this context, a social acceptance of violence is required to support a hierarchical order that reinforces the status quo in Colombia (Calderon, Lopez & Murad, 2013).

To make significant changes in the situation of GBV in Colombia, discriminatory ideas and practices historically embedded in the population need to be challenged (United Nations, 2013). Lizcano and Orstavik (2013) believe that gender policies of equality should engage with citizens by educating them about the social construction of gender roles that are keeping the country back. They emphasize that for a narrative of development to be completed in Colombia, gender inequities, harmful social attitudes, and gender stereotypes need to be visibly challenged in the public debate and personal arenas.

3.5 WAR

Even though the Colombian war has been brutal for both women and men, it continues to touch the bodies of women in a specific way. According to Ruta Pacifica de

las Mujeres (2013), the logic of war reinforces the control and the patriarchal domination over the bodies and the lives of women. This domination does not only occur in the territories where conflict takes place, but also happens in all the spaces where women perform their daily routines. The bodies of women, especially the bodies of young, peasant, black, and indigenous women, work as places of intersection where discriminated identities encounter each other within a patriarchal society such as Colombia. According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, women keep visible and invisible marks on their bodies left by war as a sign of affirmation of the patriarchy. These scars are the result of a war that was not chosen. They represent deaths, disappearances, massacres, sexual violence, femicides, and displacement (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, n.d., as cited in Wills, 2007). These violations have encouraged political activism by some women who politicized their roles as mothers in a society highly affected by the armed conflict. Their slogan “we women do not give birth, nor do we rear children for war” illustrated how maternity represented not only a link of blood ties in the ‘natural order’, but also a strong weapon used in the political arena to get their voices heard.

3.6 DRUGS

The phenomenon of drug trafficking is closely related to the Colombian armed conflict. It arose when agricultural policies implemented in rural areas resulted in the concentration of land in the hands of a few people. Some of them found marijuana crops more profitable than coffee, which led to the use of lands to grow marijuana, despite the illegality of such an activity (Giraldo, 2014). In addition to marijuana crops, there was a

rapid proliferation of laboratories to transform cocaine paste. When paramilitary groups³ increased their violent activities, they needed financial support - not only from economic elites, but also from drug dealers who wanted to be protected from the guerrillas' threats and extortions (Giraldo, 2014). This is how drug trafficking started to overlap with the armed conflict in Colombia. According to the Centro Nacional de Memoria Historica (CNMH) drug trafficking became "the easiest way to make money and gain social status" (CNMH, 2012, p. 145 in Giraldo, 2014, p. 43). Drug trafficking still has a great impact on the Colombian economy and the armed conflict. In fact, it is not a secret that drug trafficking has become the main financial source of all armed groups. The reliance on the business has allowed these groups to strengthen their war strategies as well as their troops (Giraldo, 2014).

Historically, the effects of the phenomenon of drug trafficking has affected gender dynamics in Colombia. In fact, the impact of this reality still affects the way women and men relate to each other. Castañeda (2016) argues that even though cultural changes enabled some positive transformations in terms of gender dynamics during the 20th century, - women achieved civil and political rights previously denied and men slowly started to reconsider the way they relate to women - the hegemonic discourse established by the phenomenon of drug trafficking have reinforced old patriarchal traditional values and practices where "the masculine is the dominant, the strong and the feminine is the passive, the weak" (p 67). The gender discourse promoted by the phenomenon of drug trafficking "keeps close similarities with the official hegemonic gender patterns established in Colombia since it was born as a Nation-State" (Castañeda, 2016, p 67). In

³ Paramilitary groups are considered armed groups associated with the national army to eliminate guerrilla groups.

fact, these patriarchal values are still significant in the country.

When drug trafficking became stronger in the 1980s (even though it existed earlier), a narco-masculinity needed to be strengthened in a criminal world that required a warrior man who could protect his business from external and internal threats, using weapons and high levels of violence. By strengthening its power, it exacerbated a hegemonic masculinity that undermined any democratic improvements that had improved gender interactions (Castaneda, 2016). The following quote by Foley (2011) provides some characteristics of a hegemonic masculinity and how it affects gender relations.

One of the most important factors of a hegemonic contemporary masculinity is that it focuses on heterosexuality, subordinating the homosexual (...) There is a close relation between power and a hegemonic masculinity. Power is defined as the capacity to dominate, to repress, to censure, control or subordinate acts, desires and the spaces of the other. These power relations are the result of inequalities, divisions and imbalances happening in society or in a particular sector of society (p. 15, 17 in Castañeda, 2016).

The phenomenon of drug trafficking created in the country a culture that educated girls from an aesthetic perspective and constructed violent boys with respect to their relations with girls and women. Gender stereotypes constructed within the universe of drug-trafficking suggest that we inhabit a narco-culture that is as well permeated by a narco-aesthetic, that is, an aesthetic that is ostentatious and exaggerated: “expensive cars, silicones, and farms, where gorgeous women are as well virgins and mothers” (Rincon, 2009, p. 147). This aesthetic might not only be a snapshot of Colombia, but also a

snapshot of popular cultures around the world: those communities who do not have anything but still are tempted by modernity, finding in money the only possible way to participate in a market society and therefore, exist in the world (Rincon, 2009, p. 147).

3.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter highlighted how gender relations are unequal in Colombian society; historically, privileges given to men, and not to women, were sustained by the political and civil systems in the country. However, the new constitution of 1991 brought some positive changes that made personal matters a public concern. Despite these improvements, there is still a clear gender gap that reinforces gender inequality, violations of women's rights and VAW (Lizcano and Orstavik, 2013). To make significant changes in the situation of GBV in Colombia, discriminatory ideas and practices historically embedded in the population need to be challenged (United Nations, 2013). In other words, cultural and social beliefs lie at the heart of gender inequality which constitutes the foundation of VAW.

Cultural and social beliefs around gender relations in Colombia were initially influenced by the Catholic Church and later, by the phenomenon of drug trafficking. Machismo has been part of Colombian culture, permeating all social classes and is accepted by both sexes. This masculine cultural image puts special emphasis on demonstrating virility, including domination over many women. The Roman Catholic Church has also contributed in the shaping of social constructs around the role of men and women in society. For men, the fulfillment of their male role speaks about their honor, character, and status. For women, the failure of their female role questions their

capacities, goodness, and ‘feminine nature’ (MDGF, 2010 in Calderon, Lopez & Murad, 2013).

The rigidity of gender roles establishes a regime of sexual division in society where men and women must obey cultural mandates; otherwise, they will face social sanctions in an attempt to keep order in society. The Church reinforced the boundaries between the public life of men and the domestic life of women. The role women play in the social order was supported through the unit of the family and the institution of marriage. The proper behavior of women was based on their nurturing of their children and their loyalty to their husbands, whom they have to respect, obey, and sexually please. This idea about the place women had to occupy in society was reinforced through the political system of Colombia. Both traditional political parties (liberals and conservatives) defended a type of femininity that was apolitical, modest, and prudent. A femininity that could only fulfill a maternal role.

The effects of the phenomenon of drug trafficking has affected gender dynamics in Colombia. In particular, it has reinforced old patriarchal traditional values and practices where “the masculine is the dominant, the strong and the feminine is the passive, the weak” (p 67). These opposite social constructs around values attributed to the masculine and the feminine is known by Castañeda (2016) as narco-masculinity and narco-femininity. The former is embodied in a heterosexual, fearless, warrior man while the latter represents a beautiful, sexy woman whose value is only measured in terms of how far or how close she follows beauty stereotypes, established by a narco-aesthetic, in which the body plays a key role. Narco-masculinity is strengthened in a criminal world that requires a warrior man who could protect his business from external and internal

threats, using weapons and high levels of violence. This behavior may explain the high rate of VAW in Colombia. Thus, a hegemonic masculinity undermines any democratic improvements that had improved gender interactions in Colombia (Castaneda, 2016).

CHAPTER FOUR

COMMUNITY BASED ORGANISATIONS IN CALI: WORKING FOR GENDER EQUITY

While the previous chapter explored how the patriarchal legal system and cultures in the macrosystem impacts individuals and their relationships in the micro system, this chapter focusses on organisations (the exosystem) and how they challenge the gender discriminatory elements of the patriarchal system and culture. In this vein, the previous chapter showed how the Church, legal system and the culture of *machismo* interact and reinforce one another to create, sustain and reproduce a patriarchal system that reinforces a hegemonic masculine social order, privileging men over women. This chapter introduces the community-based organizations that took part in this research: *Casa Mujer* (women's organization), *Hombres* (a group formed by mostly straight men), and *Proyecto Ser* (a group formed by mostly gay men) and shows how these groups foster different forms of resistance to patriarchy. By highlighting the ways in which men and women construct a relationship with themselves and other individuals within the microsystem, one of the purposes of this chapter is to highlight the implied tension about the reproduction of hegemonic gender norms. Secondary literature suggests that hegemonic gender norms are reproduced as a result of telenovelas and narconovelas, however, gender organizations may challenge them, indicating that the reproduction of gender norms could be more complex than is often recognized. This tension reinforces the central argument of this thesis in which there is a counter-narrative that challenges a hegemonic vision on how gender relations should operate, suggesting the inclusion of organizations with explicit focus on gender that could challenge mainstream norms in this research.

This chapter is also significant because it illustrates the importance of these groups in the lives of women and men in Cali, Colombia – not only its members, but all the people touched by their work. This chapter describes the groups involved, the ideas that support their work and the approaches used when working with women and men. The information presented here serves to describe the perspective from which participants interpret love and sexuality. These narratives are commonly crossed by a gender equity approach that is more evident in some organisations than others.

4.1 CASA MUJER

According to the official web site of the organization, *Casa Mujer* is an autonomous civil organisation that is independent from the church, the State or any political party. Drawing on the belief that women are excluded by a patriarchal and capitalist society, *Casa Mujer* sees its role as supporting women by “reinforcing their self-esteem and strengthening their rights”, as well as “encouraging social and political participation in their neighborhoods and communities” (Casa Mujer, n.d., para. 6). Their vision is to foster active resistance to patriarchy by promoting principles of equity, diversity and empowerment among women and children. Overall, the organization gives support to women who are willing to adopt an autonomous critical consciousness in different aspects of their personal, social, and family lives (Casa Mujer, n.d.).

The organization was originally formed in 1976 when some secular Christians and religious women were highly inspired by a social and theological movement called Liberation Theology. This movement, that enabled an integration of Christian belief with political action, emerged in the late 1960s as a result of Christians’ reflections around

their own faith, hopes, and praxis, embodied in utopian visions of a better world for the most oppressed, that is, the poor (Poyer & Cormie, 2003, p. 111). According to Maria Antonia Velez, a 64-year-old professor and one of the founders of the *Casa Mujer*, “we were part of this movement because it was a school of thought strongly accepted in Latin America, especially when working with the poor” (October 20, 2016). She remembers how the leaders of the organization were strongly seduced by this movement that proposed the liberation of Latin America.

Liberation theology questions the “will of a loving God” in the struggles of poor individuals and communities for life, liberation, and inclusion. Also, it suggests looking at the structural causes of poverty within an economic system of dependency on industrial capitalism. It was the beginning of the 70s and Latin America was experiencing a time of extreme poverty, oppression, and social exclusion. In this context, revolutionary movements, including guerrillas and political parties of the left were growing to oppose right-wing political economies and military dictatorships. In fact, some Christians supported the emergence of these revolutionary movements associated with Marxist/Leftist ideologies that were as well founded on the principles of liberation theology. There was a common assumption in Latin America that Soviet countries had fairer and more egalitarian societies (Celis, 2016; Dawson, 2007; & Klaiber, 1998). It was believed that Colombians needed to follow that model in order to achieve the same results. The movement proposed to change the unjust system of Latin America to a more egalitarian socialist one.

According to Dawson (2007), the role of the *catequistas populares*, those secular leaders who were trained to conduct catechetical work within the social movements in

local neighborhoods, was fundamental when leading meetings two or three times a week with the local religious community. During the meetings, the community read the bible, prayed together and sang hymns (Dawson, 2007 as cited in Poyer & Cormie, 2003, p.29, 30). Nevertheless, the case of the *Casa Mujer* was slightly different since there was no need for *catequistas populares*. The leaders of the organization, mostly feminist theologians who supported the ideas of liberation theology, advocated these ideas to the women with whom they worked. In fact, the bible reading sessions of *Casa Mujer* were considered one of the ways in which the ideas of liberation theology were spread out. Margot Salas, a 66-year-old divorced mother of two children who works as an instructor, highlights these sessions as something unforgettable. “We always related the content of the bible with our personal lives. It was different. It was special” (October 8, 2016). For the leaders of *Casa Mujer*, it was important that the women could easily interpret the message contained in the bible. According to Carmenza Nunez, a 65-year-old professor in literature and gender studies, and Director of *Casa Mujer*, “we worked for a while under the perspective of something called feminist biblical hermeneutics, which was basically reading the bible with the eyes of a woman. But all this was still part of liberation theology” (October 20, 2016).

One of the benefits of liberation theology is that it “mobilizes people around common themes and aims, in promotion of a Christian commitment to liberating practices” (Dussel, 1992, p. 394 in Poyer & Cormie, 2003, p. 38). In fact, through the different activities offered by *Casa Mujer*, women were able to coordinate cooperative and social efforts to improve their living conditions. For instance, women asked the municipality to provide drinking water to the entire neighborhood, something they

achieved after protests. Recent efforts involved walks against cases of femicides that took place in Colombia during time of my fieldwork (in particular the case of Yuliana Samboni previously described). Other activities may struggle against the rising cost of living, unemployment, and the claim for basic living conditions, such as electricity or public transportation (Poyer & Cormie, 2003).

Due to a number of factors, including repression by some ecclesiastical leaders and political-military regimes as well as the defeat of socialism in Eastern Europe, liberation theology experienced a death in Latin America. In fact, feminist voices claimed that the discourse about social justice was never about gender equality. This argument is supported by the leaders of *Casa Mujer* who also consider that liberation theology is based on a patriarchal structure that leaves women completely absent from liberating practices. The following comment by Carmenza Nunez explains why by the year of 2000 the organization did a self-evaluation of their approach in which they acknowledged the necessity to incorporate a gender perspective in their work.

We questioned liberation theology. Why? Because it was ruled by men: bishops, priests, but what about women? Also, we realized that several of our peers who walked in the same path as we were manipulating the theology to take people to the guerrillas, often, without telling them what was really happening. We were against it. At the end of the years '98, '99, 2001, we started to question ourselves. We looked to ourselves in different forms. That is, over the big body of liberation theology, the feminist theology is born and that's where we started walking. When I consider myself a feminist theologian, it means there are some ruptures with liberation theology, not only because it

has a patriarchal structure but also, because the languages around God are masculine and patriarchal and I consider this should be changed so that women can have some source of identity with the divine. (October 20, 2016)

Feminist theology emphasizes that women cannot exert their rights if they do not recuperate their being, their identity. Only when women become autonomous, it is possible to think of a world where social, political and economic relations are different. *Casa Mujer* conceives that in order to create a society where women are visible, it is indispensable to liberate women from their submission. Under this framework, the organization reaffirmed their vocation as a community-based feminist education and therefore, initiated different groups of feminine auto-consciousness in different localities within the community either in private houses or community buildings. Also, the organization created different activities and services that seek to strengthen women's critical consciousness and autonomy, supporting their leadership and empowerment in a patriarchal society that reinforces forms of exclusion and oppression against women (Casa Mujer, n.d.). The following pages introduce readers to some of these services and activities described in the organization's website.

Judicial and Psychological Counseling: Even though these two services were created in 2005 for the entire commune⁴, it is predominantly women who seek advice in

⁴ A commune refers to an administrative unit that helps divide the urban area of the city. Formed by different neighborhoods, *Casa Mujer* is located in the Commune 18, considered part of the periphery of the south of the city. Hoping to find a better future in the city, these neighborhoods have received people who fled from areas of conflict or fled from poverty in rural areas. In recent years, more people keep coming to this area, building provisional homes on the hills of the community. The activities and services offered by the organization are meant to help women and children. Nevertheless, this chapter only focuses on their work with women.

matters such as demands for food supplies, divorces, social service insurances, domestic violence, sexual abuse, orientation for the children's education and the like. The organization believes that processes of self-realization are strengthened with psychological and judicial advice, enabling women to better exercise their rights.

Female Club: This program was initiated in 1992 as a way to integrate three important aspects of the lives of the women from Cali's poor neighborhoods: education, recreation and integration. All these aspects have in common a gender perspective. Over the years, the program has dealt with various topics associated with the strengthening of women's self-esteem, the consolidation of their rights, education, and care about women's bodies and their health. As a result of the success of the program, there are currently seven groups spread in the community.

Literature Course: This activity seeks to spread and study in more detail Feminist literature, promoting literature by female writers with a gender perspective. This activity recognizes and honors female writers that have left an important heritage in history. It seeks to also revise and question the conventional established narrative that has ignored women in literature.

Female Spirituality: *Casa Mujer* believes that a feminine spirituality improves women's self-esteem while it enables a better consciousness of what it means to be a woman. It reinforces a conscious knowledge about the rights of women and it encourages participants to fight for those rights. In fact, the organization considers that spirituality is associated with happiness and therefore, in order to be happy, it is important to exercise women's rights. Spirituality is also a path of wisdom, love, and justice. Women's rights

synchronize with love and with social sorority. In fact, spirituality is conceived as a way of healing since it takes individuals to liberating experiences. This search to healing and happiness is made up of the following activities: education about feminine spirituality through working groups, seminars, and forums, and participation in women's networks and collectives that undertake other approaches towards feminine spirituality.

Spiritual Groups – Tai Chi: Due to the influence of an American network that focuses on practices of healing, the organization believes that through listening, responding and living with the wisdom of body-mind-spirit, it is possible to heal, to become empowered and to transform life itself; impacting the family, the community and society. With the vision to foster peace in order to heal and transform the world, the organization creates permanent programs where simple practices of healing, development of leadership, and individual development are practiced in the commune.

Artistic Groups: Since 1995, *Casa Mujer* promotes and supports artistic groups of theatre, singing and folkloric dances, which seek to foster a choreographic participation and expression of women, expanding their knowledge and making them familiar with traditional folkloric expressions. Participating in these groups has given women more power and consciousness over their bodies and their expression. In 2003, the organization initiated the idea of Gender Theatre. Since then, more than 15 pieces have been presented, which deal with topics such as the Colombian armed conflict, peace, gender violence, and women's rights. As a result of this process, women have been able to perform complex theatre pieces. In fact, they have learned to use their voice and body to stand on stage. Also, they have been more conscious about their role in society.

According to the organization, women did not have the opportunity to develop such artistic capabilities in the past and therefore, these performances on stage have improved their self- esteem.

Workshops in Handicrafts: This is one of the first services offered by *Casa Mujer* since 1976. Due to the necessity of women to learn something that would provide them with additional economic income, these workshops were created to also encourage friendship and support between women while they strengthen their self- esteem. One of the initiatives within this service is the artisanal group “Our Hands”.

Since 1991, *Casa Mujer* has promoted this initiative through persistent capacity building, promotion and sales of women’s products. The majority of the women who are part of the group are single mothers with various children. They use this alternative to help sustaining their families. Their products are made of recycled and organic material, such as leaves, wood, and fabrics. They produce cards, bags, pillow cases, little painted (jewel) boxes, and liturgical stoles among others. This group also receives a holistic education with gender perspective.

Participation in Networks with other Women’s Rights Organizations: The organization collaborates with other Women’s Rights Networks that also dream with a society of peace and equity. By doing this, it is possible to have a real impact in a patriarchal society. Therefore, *Casa Mujer* cooperates with different networks locally and nationally through organizations such as: *Red Nacional de Mujeres*, *Colectivo de Mujeres Pazificas*, and *Plantón de las Mujeres de Negro*. The organization also collaborates with other movements that promote life, human rights, respect for the environment, and

defense of public services, among others. Thanks to these alliances, *Casa Mujer* have coordinated various events and campaigns with regional impact.

According to the organization's web site, more than 300 women have successfully changed and transformed intimate relations with their families, their children, and their friends, "becoming every day more autonomous and more conscious" (Casa Mujer, n.d., para. 29). Some have committed themselves to a permanent campaign for VAW. In fact, the cases of Rosa Elvira Cely and Yuliana Samboni motivated these women to engage in peaceful marches in the city.

The women of *Casa Mujer* have been able "to exercise their rights to relax, to health, and to education. Many of them have pursued an education and some have left abusive family members with the support of the organization, such as the case of Margot Salas, a 64-year-old widow whose husband cheated on her with other women from the neighborhood (Casa Mujer, n.d., para. 29). Since she was very afraid to leave him and was not sure about what to do, she decided to go to the organization and ask for support. She was surprised when the "nuns", as she called them, asked her to leave him immediately. The following comment best illustrates this experience that she still remembers with affection: "they told me you have to leave that asshole now! What have you been waiting for?". Even though it can be hard to prove the real impact that *Casa Mujer* has in the lives of women, experience from my fieldwork confirms some of these statements.

Almost all the women interviewed for this study expressed their gratitude to *Casa Mujer*. They affirmed that this organization saved their lives. Margot Salas states "that

place is my spirituality” (October 8, 2016). Lucerito Villalba, a 45-year-old divorced mother of two children who works as an instructor, mentions: “I am forever thankful with the *Casa Mujer*. Those nuns saved my life”. Similarly, Lucero Valencia, a 58-year-old married housewife of 4 children, says: “*Casa Mujer* means everything to me. I have learned so much and I will keep learning”. For most women, the *Casa Mujer* is their support, personally and sometimes economically. It becomes the place where women make friends and create supportive networks with other women, which at the same time are also their neighbors. In fact, some may refer to the people of the *Casa Mujer* as their family.

4.2 HOMBRES

The group Hombres is made up of approximately 14 men of different ages and backgrounds who discuss aspects of masculinities. Most of the men in the group have tried, since very young, to challenge social inequalities in their communities, including contexts such as the neighborhood and the university. In fact, one member joined an armed revolutionary group. All of them have had a common desire to have an equal society for all, something that can easily identify participants with left political ideologies. They gather together to reflect upon different topics that range from public issues to personal matters. Overall, the members of the group recognize how their struggle for gender equality embodies previous battles for social justice.

The group admits their ideas come from feminism. In other words, they recognize that studies of masculinities are derived from reflections feminists have proposed to challenge gender inequalities. Further still, members of the group support the feminist

claim that suggests that women are oppressed by a capitalist system - a system that perpetuates unequal social and economic distribution of resources, in which women are particularly marginalized. Diomedez Palacios, a 47-year-old married father of one daughter, claims that when women work without a salary at home, they are supporting a capitalist system that gives privileges to men who can work outside of the home. “This society would not be the same if women refused to work at home. Societies would no longer exist” (November 8, 2016). In a similar vein, Federico Carvajal, a 33-year-old sociologist and political activist, claims that the core of the debate about gender, including masculinities, questions the political, economic, and social structure in which patriarchy is consolidated. The following quote exemplifies the importance of gender equality when challenging social inequalities brought by capitalism:

If you commit with gender equality, you should also compromise to transform the social economic system we are located in, which is capitalism, and capitalism has a patriarchal base, right? In fact, the idea behind studying masculinities is that it invites people to reconsider completely their relationship with the other: it can be another man, woman, the diverse, the disabled, even animals, and nature. It can be anything because patriarchy and especially the machismo is established against everything. In other words, to destroy the world is something super macho, super capitalist. (Federico Carvajal, October 15, 2016)

The group believes that social class is a determinant factor of exclusion. “I definitely think there is an economic factor that does differentiate those social realities that are not the same” (Diomedez Palacios, November 8, 2016). For instance, the

working-class is considered a homogenous reality when in contrast, “the oppressed are absolutely diverse but invisible” (Diomedez Palacios, November 8, 2016). Therefore, the group targets a specific population, that is, the less privileged. “The people that historically have been excluded, oppressed and exploited, and of course, it is not all of the population” (Diomedez Palacios, November 8, 2016).

Hombres take intersectionality into account, that is, they consider in their work aspects of race, economic class, gender identity or sexual orientation. Diomedez Palacios questions how gender organizations, movements and groups often take in consideration gender relations without questioning other forms of inequalities: “these groups only focus the debate from the places they are located without really thinking about other forms of oppression” (November 8, 2016). The group also supports projects where diversity is taken into consideration. “I understand a diverse world as fairer. I believe in the recognition of diversity, equality, and justice. I would not support a world that is supposed to be egalitarian but that in reality excludes a lot of people” (Diomedez Palacios, November 8, 2016). Overall, *Hombres* dream about a society where all the people have equal rights to exist and to live by their own sexuality.

The group considers interpersonal relations essential to build another type of society. In other words, *Hombres* considers that special care should be given to those social relations that constitute the individual’s closest support, such as the family, the partner, and friends. They claim that only in transforming the way we relate in our interpersonal relations is it possible to transform the society in which we live. Otherwise, “it would be more like a cosmetic solution, it would not really transform anything” (Diomedez Palacios, November 8, 2016). Tito Rey, a 39-year-old -divorced father of one

son who is a political activist and a photographer, argues that the work of the group is not about walking in skirts or walking with big posters or flags. In contrast, they want to validate the feminist premise in which the personal is political, a subject that is often forgotten or considered secondary by social movements and political organizations. “Our goal for next year is less streets, less noise outside and more in the inside, and that does not mean we cannot go out and protest when we do not like something” (November 20, 2016).

According to Federico Carvajal, a new society requires building democracy in all aspects of life, that is, there should be a coherence between the public and the private life: “if I am projecting something to the outside but in my personal relations I act completely different, I am contradicting myself. Then it is pointless” (October 15, 2016). According to him, intimate relations are an expression of what happens in social relations: “there is always a power dynamic taking place” (October 15, 2016). In fact, it is in the interpersonal relations that gender roles are reproduced, perpetuating inequalities for women and social privileges for men. Therefore, the pillar of the organization’s work relies on giving importance to the private sphere, a subject that historically, according to them, has not been taken into consideration: “the hegemonic model tends to separate the private from the public and it is in the construction of the private sphere that relations that support the social system are structured” (Diomedez Palacios, November 8, 2016).

Hombres insists that women are not the only ones affected by a patriarchal culture within capitalism; men are also victims of a system that reinforces an aggressive hegemonic masculine model. They claim that men face a harder challenge when they should accomplish both goals: reconsider their construction as men and reject the

privileges given by a patriarchal society. Therefore, the group has a big focus on promoting workshops around non-hegemonic masculinities, that is, they recognize there is a hegemonic masculine norm that excludes other forms of being and feeling male. They argue that most men try to follow a hegemonic masculinity, something that becomes harmful for both those who do not follow it and those who do.

Even though some men have acknowledged the struggle of women and some may have opposed VAW, Tito Rey highlights that there is still a lot to do in terms of masculinities. In particular, he refers to self-reflection exercises about man's identity and considerations about what exactly it means to be a man, something that may help to understand how a masculine identity is constructed and what possible transformations can be done towards a more equal, progressive, and transformative individual: "we can all offer new ways to relate to the world and with other people" (November 20, 2016). In fact, the group argues that it does not matter how much the country has conquered in terms of gender equitable laws if men do not question themselves. When men question a hegemonic masculinity, they are not only breaking with the hegemony itself but also, they are questioning their own identity. The group concludes that if men do not feel themselves in different forms, it is very difficult to see a real transformation.

Hombres dreams to build a more just, equalitarian, and inclusive society. To achieve this, three approaches constitute the main pillars of their work: the first one relates to the empirical aspects of life, that is, all the personal experiences and feelings. Members of the group consider this is a space for themselves, that is, they can talk to other men about what is happening in their lives. The second approach deals with education. They consider it important to educate themselves as well as other men. The

third approach, called political incidence, deals with public engagement and activism. Some of the activities may include peaceful protest in the streets and engagement with social networks, such as feminist labor unions and students. In this way, even though their main priority is concentrated on their personal sphere, they consider it relevant to work with other men “because patriarchy affects everyone, so it becomes everyone’s struggle, right?” (Tito Rey, November 20, 2016).

4.3 PROYECTO SER

Proyecto Ser has created a space that, open to the general public, proposes different reflections and activities around LGBTQ matters. It is an alternative for gay men to be, feel and express themselves freely while discussing aspects that affect their lives and their community. Even though the group formally includes lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender women and men, *Proyecto Ser* is essentially composed by gay men. Nevertheless, the only transgender and lesbian women who participated in this research are also part of this group. Unfortunately, this situation limits our understanding of the real dynamics of the LGBTQ community in Cali when only one narrative is told from the perspective of gay men. Readers must know that the information presented in here only corresponds to one of the groups that exist in Cali; however, there are other groups, but I did not have the opportunity to be familiar with their work.

According to my participants, the LGBTQ community in Cali is highly disjointed when lesbians, bisexuals, transgender women or men, queer individuals and gay men are working separately, fostering divisions that affect common interest and achievements for the community. In fact, some of the implications are associated with the distribution of

financial resources in which particular groups may get more benefits in comparison with others. Also, the unity of the community is broken when different positions and ideas separate common goals. Divisions within the community are reinforced through hegemonic power dynamics based on looks, status, class, and age. Members of *Proyecto Ser* affirm that these features respond to a dominant masculinity required to be gay. The following comments support this argument:

In this community, you have to be good looking, you have to be healthy, you got to have money and status. I mean, you have to fulfill so many requirements within the community; there are some clear characteristics of a gay man: he has to be young forever, he got to talk about international trips; a gay man has to look good in order to get a partner; if you are not a good-looking guy, you will get the waste. If you are not muscular or you don't fulfill a masculine stereotype, then you are excluded. Also, you got to have volume. You have to prove that you got 20 centimeters. (Focus group discussion with gay men from *Proyecto Ser*, December 12, 2016)

According to one participant, the group was originally formed on the 17th of August of 2000. Since this time, the screening of homosexual films has constituted one of the main activities of the group. Even though movies were shown more often during the group's initial period, it is still considered an important activity that most members highlight. Fercho Cifuentes, a 34-year-old technician who left his conservative rural town to find a free atmosphere in Medellin and then Cali, illustrates the importance of movie forums in the group:

A friend of mine told me that there was a LGBTQ group that get together to watch movies. I told him that I also like movies, especially when it is hard to find them. The movies are different because they have an LGBTQ perspective. Obviously when you go to a commercial cinema, you will not find them there. The group enables discussions around movies. I always learned something new. In fact, that's how I got invited to the group. (December 15, 2016)

By institutionalizing a movie screening activity that focuses on LGBTQ stories, members of the group can see themselves on the screen. However, Fercho Cifuentes claim: "it is very hard to compare a European society or a European partner with their idiosyncrasy and opportunities, with a Latin local reality" (December 15, 2016). He highlights how *Proyecto Ser* has recently considered to include more local realities. The following abstract illustrates this argument.

We know that there are very interesting LGBTQ stories in our region and that's the main challenge for next year. We want to see more real situations. Not so much about stories from the upper class: men or women who own cars, houses, etc. or those endings so perfect. We want to see more common stories that you find just next to you, from middle and lower classes, something that belongs more to the people. At least, something similar to Latin American societies. (Fercho Cifuentes, December 15, 2016).

When *Proyecto Ser* was formed, health advocates constituted the first wave of leaders who claimed for health rights in Cali. In particular, a special emphasis was given to HIV/AIDS prevention. Indeed, the first national meeting of the community focused mainly on raising awareness on HIV/AIDS matters. From 2001 to 2008, *Proyecto Ser* was motivated by a period of human rights advocacy for the community. Some of the outcomes from this time can be appreciated in the following comment:

We were the ones who asked the Office of the Ombudsman to start awareness processes with public servants in the city. In 2007, we were the ones who gained the first right of petition that ordered policemen to receive lessons about LGBTQ rights. I think it is the Article 50 that talks about free movement in public areas and all that. (Eustacio Ramirez, December 4, 2016)

Proyecto Ser recognizes that their struggle requires significant socio-cultural changes in a society affected by both *machismo* and the dogmas of the Catholic Church. Indeed, participants express their fears about the extreme conservative wing that is challenging all the successes achieved by the LGBTQ community. Further still, they recognize that their battles are symbolic. In other words, they struggle for sexual practices in a culture that has both undervalued the feminine and fostered inequalities among different forms to be and feel masculine. *Proyecto Ser* is aware that the solution to achieve gender equality is to have the right to express equally the masculine and the feminine in all bodies. “The problem is to keep patriarchal relations which are basically power relations. The problem is to preserve undervalued relations of the feminine with regards to the masculine” (Eustacio Ramirez, December 12, 2016).

4.4 CONCLUSION

These organizations introduce us to the perspective from which participants understand interpretations of love and sexuality. All of them recognize a hegemonic masculinity that is harmful for the way individuals construct their relationship with themselves and others. Located within this understanding, some individuals may be more conscious than others about how patriarchal relations affect their public and private lives. Thus, this chapter serves to understand how individual's interpretations of love and sexuality are influenced by their membership with one of these organizations.

CHAPTER FIVE: LOVE AND SEXUALITY IN TELENOVELAS AND NARCONOVELAS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter draws on participants' narratives as well as relevant literature to explore the importance of Colombian telenovelas and narconovelas in the understandings of participants' interpretations of love and sexuality. The popularity of these genres

makes them highly influential in Colombian culture, individual self-perceptions and gendered interpersonal dynamics. Telenovelas and narconovelas both reflect and perpetuate *machismo* and discriminatory gender relations. The purpose of this chapter is to explore how a hyper-masculine popular culture is further reproduced through even more hyper-masculine telenovelas and narconovelas, impacting the ways in which participants of this research understand their own experiences of love and sexuality. In fact, this chapter deals with the feminist lens used in this research that suggests there is a hyper-masculine figure (the macho man) reproduced in tele and narconovelas that undermines any female representation or behavior in both the public and private realms of intimate relations. Further still, this chapter also explores the central argument of this thesis in which there is a counter-narrative that challenges a hegemonic vision on how gender relations should operate.

This chapter is organized into the following sections: First, there is a brief historical context of the development of radio and television and its importance in Colombia's political economy. Based on literature review, this chapter then describes the themes commonly portrayed in the evolution of Colombian telenovelas and narconovelas. The third section focuses on the data collected from participants with regard to representations of love and intimacy in telenovelas and narconovelas. At the end of this chapter, an analysis on the significance of these findings is presented. In this regard, some of the key findings of this chapter suggest there is a hyper-masculine figure (the macho man) reproduced in tele and narconovelas that undermines any female representation or behavior in both the public and private realms of intimate relations. This finding reinforces the problem explored in this thesis in which a hyper-masculine popular culture

is further reproduced through telenovelas and narconovelas, impacting the ways participants of this research understand their own experiences of love and sexuality.

While traditional telenovelas focused on romantic love, narconovelas emphasize on sexuality. Love is shown from relations of dependence that involve suffering and crying, features considered inherited from Mexican productions. Even though both female and male participants recognize that the audience can easily be captured by ideologies in which the poor can access the world of the rich, consolidating happy endings most people are expecting; participants agree that these happy endings are unrealistic. Also, romantic love is associated with the submission of women when it is always the poor woman who reaches another status, either because she marries a rich man [it can be a Capo], or she works hard, facing different challenges. Narconovelas, on the other hand, are considered to be too sexually explicit by most participants. However, gay men insist that representations of sexuality in contemporary telenovelas and narconovelas are not explicit at all. They argue that Colombian society is extremely conservative and that is what limits sexual diversity and free expressions of sexuality on television. They observe that love and intimate relations in telenovelas and narconovelas are 100% heterosexual. Homosexual relations are either disguised, hidden, banned or nonexistent. Further still, participants highlight how women's expression of sexuality is more open in contemporary telenovelas and narconovelas.

Participants agree that traditional tele and narconovelas reinforce patriarchal relations where there is always a *macho* man who conquers the woman and the woman lets herself be conquered. They believe that *machismo* constitutes a common feature when men are portrayed as dominant in telenovelas. They have money, influence and

status. Further still, the capo is portrayed as a violent man who objectifies and sees the woman as a sexual object. On the other hand, women are still hardly the ones who have power in a relationship. Even though there might be some changes in regard to women's emancipation, telenovelas still portray women who depend on men to achieve their dreams. Participants also argue that archetypes are highly reinforced in narconovelas due to a cultural heritage taken from the world of drug trafficking in which weapons, money, and women become means of power. In this context, while women are constructed from an aesthetic perspective, men are constructed from a violent perspective. All these social constructs portrayed in tele and narconovelas are challenged by participants who reject the reproduction of hegemonic gender norms in their personal experiences, suggesting there is a counter-narrative that challenges a hegemonic vision on how gender relations should operate.

5.2 DEVELOPMENT AND IMPORTANCE OF RADIO AND TELEVISION IN COLOMBIA

The role of telenovelas in Latin America took on a particular importance when the majority of countries wanted to unify their nations at the beginning of the 20th century by not only connecting “the center” (the capital city) with its “periphery” (the regions or provinces), but also reinforcing a single unified vision of nationalism. This nationalism implies two interrelated factors: a national culture, or more accurately, a national sentiment that could be shared among different cultures and regions, and a political

structure based on a central model that fosters a national culture by homogenizing gestures and practices (Barbero, 1987; Cervantes, 2005). However, even though the development of radio was intended to contribute to this purpose by nationalizing a language, it did it by conserving certain rhythms, dialects, and accents (p. 212).

According to Barbero (1987), radio, and later television, played an important role in introducing ideas of modernity and progress that were aligned with the hegemonic economic, and political powers of the time. In Colombia, the first telenovelas were broadcast through radio. Relying on theater, these stories were adapted from literature in which actors performed on stage, imitating voices, sounds, and real environments. The scripts were based on novels that actors read by episodes. Radio and television were both considered essential to achieve political democracy, something relevant for nations that sought economic growth. In the following quote, Pareja (1984) illustrates how people living in different regions and provinces of Colombia experienced the first real proximity to a modern nation through radio.

Before radio was nationally institutionalized, the country was a regional puzzle highly locked within its pieces. Colombia could perfectly be called more a “country of countries” than a nation (...). Radio broadcasting enabled the experience of an invisible national unity, something like a “cultural identity” shared by *costeños*, *paisas*, *pastusos*, *santandereanos*, and *cachacos*⁵ (Pareja, 1984 in Barbero, 1989, p. 179).

⁵ These words refer to the colloquial names attributed to the people belonging to the following regions in Colombia: The Caribbean, Antioquia, Nariño, Santander, and Cundinamarca. Nevertheless, *cachachos* may refer in particular to the people belonging to the capital city: Bogota. Similarly, *costenos* refer to a vast area

By exploiting its popularity, that is, its particular ways of understanding and relating to popular cultures, radio targeted different audiences, something Barbero (1987) called pluralization. When television started to grow in the 1960s, radio had the advantage of being accessible to a wider audience which included poorer and rural audiences. By instructing individuals how to live in the city, radio accompanied processes of immigration from the rural to the urban life. In particular, radio spoke directly to those women who, often performing housework or being around the neighborhood, may have found the new city a challenging place to live. When radio described the problems women faced outside and inside the home, it failed to distinguish between public and private spheres, serving as a bridge between the domestic life of women and the life of the working-class sectors (Barbero & Muñoz, 1992). Therefore, by mediating between tradition and modernity, radio incorporated values from the rural culture and the new urban sensitivity.

Influenced by the production of radio-dramas, telenovelas of the 1960s were adapted from classic literature or existing radio scripts. These productions included stories from broad sectors of society. Often, they presented a mixture of intrigue that involved a happy ending for the main characters (Banco de la Republica. (n.d). According to Pepe Sanchez, one of the most popular directors of Colombian telenovelas, “that first period was basically a time of national affirmation. It was the initiation of our own understandings of what the country meant” (Sanchez, 2014 in Rincon & Triana, 2015, 23:40-23:51).

that may include cities such as Barranquilla, Cartagena, Santa Marta, Valledupar, Monteria, Sincelejo and Riohacha.

Venezuelan and Mexican stories dominated the production of telenovelas in the seventies and eighties; in fact, they were the reference in Latin America. Colombia needed to challenge this hegemonic pattern in the production of telenovelas, which included similar characters and recurrent stories (Banco de la Republica. n.d). According to Barbero (1987, 1992) this pattern of frequent characters associated with positive and negative connotations are explained within the dramatic structure of melodrama (one of the television genres that is most accepted in Latin American societies) which is based on four basic feelings (fear, enthusiasm, sorrow, and happiness) represented in four characters (the traitor, the avenger, the victim, and the fool).

The character of the traitor is sociologically constructed as “an evil aristocrat, a megalomaniacal bourgeois or even a dirty cleric” (Barbero, 1987, 129; Barbero & Muñoz, 1992). The traitor is the terrible character who produces fear in the audience, but also fascination. The main dramatic role of this character is to spoil the life of the victim, who is often the heroine, a woman, of course, who represents virtue and innocence. According to Frye (1992): “the romantic ethos considers heroism more in terms of suffering, tolerance, and patience” (Frye, 1992 as cited in Barbero, 1987, p. 129). It is precisely the misery suffered by a weak character which creates in the audience, especially women, a double effect: virtue is a strength that evokes in the audience both admiration as well as a sense of protection. On the other hand, the avenger – usually a male - is that character who in the end, punishes the traitor and saves the victim, with whom there is either a love or a blood relation. The avenger has the essential role of unravelling the conflict of the drama by exposing the truth, while the “fool” is in charge of bringing comedy into play (Barbero, 1987; Barbero & Muñoz, 1989; Barbero &

Muñoz, 1992; Cervantes, 2005; Galindo, 2014). All of them integrate genres such as comedy, tragedy, epic novel, and crime novel.

In order to challenge a melodramatic structure in Colombia, producers gave importance to the literary narrative. In other words, during the decade of 1974 to 1984 telenovelas gave a special emphasis to both national and Latin American novels. First, producers focused on adapting great works of Colombian literature. Once they accomplished this stage, they extended their horizons to other novels from Latin America. According to Pepe Sanchez: “we wanted to do literature television. There was a tendency to recreate literature novels, things that dealt with the human soul. There was such a deep humanistic approach in the purposes of television and that will never be repeated again” (Sanchez, 2014 as cited in Rincon & Triana, 2015, 37:20 – 37:37). In a similar vein, David Stivel, one Director of Colombian telenovelas states: “I think the big achievement we made was to bring big authors of Latin American literature into the screen” (Stivel, 2014 as cited in Rincon & Triana, 2015, 37:44-37:58).

With a necessity to innovate while addressing more real contexts, the telenovela of the nineties took a more dynamic approach in its themes. Keeping a touch of both fantasy and fiction, telenovelas intermingled the local and regional with the world context. In this vein, stories of the nineties introduced big markets while focusing on the common story of the poor and beautiful woman who falls in love with a gorgeous, often, a successful businessman. This is the story of *Café con Aroma de mujer* written by Fernando Gaitán whose success in Latin America was significant.

Between 1994 and 2004 new formats and programs from other parts of the world were brought to Colombian television. This decade was known for portraying stories that were more international than local. According to Rincon and Triana (2015), “Colombian telenovelas of this time got lost in their way to find the world” (Rincon & Triana, 2015). Similarly, Patricio Wills, president of a Colombian televisual production company called RTI, argues that those successful telenovelas produced earlier, in which the regions of Colombia and their traditions were highlighted, were soon absorbed by globalization. He argues that international stories that were able to keep a Colombian perspective, dominated the local market.

Even though production companies had to decide between global or local contexts to portray, the story of *Betty la fea* [*Ugly Betty*] (1994) proved that local national references are more accepted than foreign productions. *Betty* has been broadcasted in different places and has been remade in 40 countries of the world, including the U.S.A. According to Rincon and Triana (2015): “since then, to be successful we take into consideration our own identity” (Rincon & Triana, 2015, 1:13:00). In addition, Fernando Gaitan, the creator of *Betty*, said that the story showed a type of television that was not done in any other place. “*Betty* occupied a place in a market that we were never part of” (Gaitan, 2015 as cited in Rincon & Triana, 2015, 1:13:07-1:13:16).

5.3 POPULAR THEMES OF TELENOVELAS AND NARCONOVELAS IN COLOMBIA

5.3.1 TELENOVELAS

Telenovelas' success may be associated with the emphasis given to the ordinary rather than extraordinary stories (Escobar 2012). The stress on the common and the popular is what captures the public's attention. Escobar states that "it creates a very close dialogue with the audience when it reveals what we all experience in daily life: falling in love, crying, having a child out of wedlock, having an affair, loving several people at the same time, etc" (Escobar, 2012). The way realities are shown enable people to identify with the characters and with the stories portrayed. Cervantes (2005), Barbero, and Muñoz (1992) agree that part of the popular success of telenovelas is associated with the drama of recognition. Some of the popular themes of telenovelas in Colombia identified in the literature include, but are not limited to, rural-urban migration, and marriage and family.

Rural-Urban Migration

Due to the high levels of migration from rural areas to urban cities in the second half of the 20th century, traditional telenovelas have exploited this rural-urban dichotomy in a country that paradoxically has become highly urban. In this context, if the state needed to foster a political hegemony based on a national sentiment, it had to do it by integrating the nation "from the bottom" (Barbero & Muñoz, 1992, p. 77). In other words, Barbero and Muñoz (1992) argue that part of the success of Colombian telenovelas has relied on "building the national from the regions" in a country that is highly centralized but fragmented (p.77). For instance, the telenovela *San Tropol* illustrates towns in which social relations are not completely honest, a feature considered part of the rural universe. *San Tropol* portrays neighborhoods where people (often displaced poor farmers) create new precarious ways to survive in the city, relying on solidarities and values brought

from their rural towns (Barbero & Muñoz, 1992). This constant exchange between the rural town and the urban neighborhood creates in the audience a double attachment: a fascination with exploring the new city and a nostalgia felt for their past, something especially hard for those who, living in new cities, are still attached to their rural backgrounds. This binary relationship is also associated with modernity and tradition (Medina and Montoya, 1989). Nevertheless, Barbero and Muñoz (1989, 1992) claim that modernity is constantly challenged in telenovelas by a reality of a country with a clear socio-cultural diversity.

Café con aroma de mujer (1994) illustrates the dichotomy between the rural and the urban world. More than a difficult love between individuals from opposite social classes and regions, the story of *Café con aroma de mujer* recreated two completely opposite atmospheres: tradition, embodied in the figure of *Gaviota* whose work in coffee plantations recreated rural Colombia, and modernity, personified in the character of *Sebastian Vallejo* who runs an important coffee export company located in Bogota, the capital city. The production emphasized ideological and cultural values from the region where coffee is produced (Bustamante, 2016). Also, the telenovela highlighted both the culture around seasonal coffee crop pickers and aspects concerning the National Federation of Coffee Growers of Colombia.

Marriage and family

Considering that a marital life shows how men become conscious of their responsibility towards women and women accept their submission to men, the evolution of stories in telenovelas have focused on how women and men negotiate marital

difficulties. Medina and Montoya (1989) claim that marriage in telenovelas depicts a utopia based on the life of a stereotypical monogamous, heterosexual family who have economic security and enjoy an honorable life. Also, it promotes an ideal of a legitimate partner with whom you can have a loving family.

Telenovelas' director Julio Jimenez's explains that all his scripts are written around families because, "family stories are more universal and produce more identification since that is what we all have in common" (in Rincon, 2015, p. 74). Also, Medina and Montoya (1989) argue that when different threats have affected the reality of Latin America, such as different forms of violence and exclusions, telenovelas have emphasized the importance of the family when it represents a society where "everyone finds their place, their meaning" (p. 71). The family is a social and political institution that has the big challenge of supporting both society and culture and is also where conflicts may arise with its members, revealing the complexity of modern social relations (Barbero, 1987, p. 131; Barbero & Muñoz, 1992, p. 49).

According to Lopez (1987), the family constitutes the perfect setting to transmit cultural dominant ideologies, values, beliefs, and attitudes. He insists that family becomes the holy place where social and ideological hegemony can be sustained, in part, for the essential role played by housewives in not only keeping a sacred harmony within that universe, but also fostering consumption when they become the most important potential consumers in society. This statement is reinforced by Medina and Montoya (1989) who argue that family may be the only institution able to give security to the working-class women: "for women of these social sectors, conforming to a family becomes one of the few forms in which they have access to social recognition in contrast to other forms of

entities that have been denied” (p. 75). In fact, Osuna (1985) argues that the only possible way that women can be portrayed as heroines is through the family, the only institution where they have a main acting role in society (Osuna, 1985, p. 131 in Lopez, 1987, p. 157). However, telenovelas from the 90s and the beginning of the 21st century challenged these institutions.

Telenovelas from the 90s, such as *Señora Isabel*, *Las Juanas*, *La Madre*, and *Betty la fea*, show “the weakening of the marriage institution and the empowerment of women as the head of the family” (Ramirez, 2016, p. 57). Women of this decade were considered part of the economic force, indicating initial attempts of reducing the competitive gap between women and men in the workplace. This situation explains why telenovelas of the 90s showed women who were able to contribute financially at home while they were gaining more professional responsibilities. The telenovelas from the beginning of the 21st century, such as *Pedro el escamoso*, *Sin tetas no hay paraíso*, *Las Muñecas de la Mafia* [*The Mafia Dolls*] and *La viuda negra*, portray women who gained autonomy in issues such as separation, divorce, and sexuality. Also, the women depicted in this period overcome the moral censorship of being single-mothers. In addition, narconovelas brought to the screen the drama of those widows and mothers whose children, husbands, and relatives were killed by the brutal war between the State and the drug traffickers (Ramirez, 2016). Violence is believed to start in ‘the home’, and therefore, families also serve to portray the reality of those individuals who are victims of domestic violence. According to Duplat, Miranda, and Navas (1997), family is the scenario where domestic violence is cultivated, fostering violence at different levels of society. The authors believe that by showing the dynamics inside ‘the home’, it is

possible to challenge “that terrible evil [violence] that tears our society” (Duplat, Miranda, & Navas, 1997, p. 104).

5.3.2 NARCONOVELAS

While the success of telenovelas is because of its emphasis on the common and the popular, the success of narconovelas is based in part in its apparent challenge to Colombian society’s inequality, as well as its emphasis on an idealised type of masculinity and femininity. This section focuses on these two themes.

Social inequality and injustice

Narconovelas reveal, through the stories of the big “drug lords”, aspects of poverty, marginality, and social injustice generated by the violent “structural capitalist system in which we live” (Trujillo, 2015, p.260). These stories speak directly to those Colombian and Latin-American citizens who, living in poverty and misery, find in these programs a pure symbolic and imaginary satisfaction to the shortcomings they face in real life. In other words, when individuals’ rights are violated by an unequal and unjust system, narconovelas creates an illusion of equality that paradoxically, serves the status-quo without challenging it (Trujillo, 2015). Similarly, Rincon (2013, 2015) explains: “we are societies of exclusion and inequity where legal forms of social climbing are not possible ... When there is a necessity to get ahead no matter what, options are reduced to either sports, prostitution, corruption, crime or drug-trafficking” (p.46). He asserts that we are survival societies who dream about progress, liberty, and equality, traditional values of modernity. However, in a country where big narratives of modernity were never established and actually failed, the symbolic and cultural role of narconovelas became

essential to homogenize the ethnic and cultural diversity of Colombia. This apparent challenging task could only be possible by reinforcing capitalist categories and hierarchies existing within the culture of drug trafficking. Therefore, narconovelas play a sedating role in societies that have not recovered yet from the failure of big social emancipation projects in which old modern aspirations of justice and equality were never achieved (Trujillo, 2015).

Masculinity and Femininity

Narconovelas reinforce associations such as the masculine is ‘strong’ and the feminine is ‘weak’. The capo, the colloquial Spanish name for drug trafficker, is portrayed as a macho man who is violent enough to protect his business from external and internal threats, perpetuating violence against women and men when the aggressiveness of a macho man is taken to the personal sphere (Castañeda, 2016). According to Foley (2011), a narco-masculinity is embodied in a heterosexual, fearless, warrior man. Women, on the other hand, are objects of desire and their bodies, often being their husbands’ and fathers’ properties, are now essential tools to conquer a drug dealer. “Their sexuality is the entry point to love and love works as a commercial good that may guarantee economic success and social status” (Castañeda, 2016, p. 72). Men are willing to pay any price in order to get the women they desire. Often, these women are “exposed as a trophy” and their value is only measured in terms of how far or how close they follow beauty stereotypes established by a narco-aesthetic, in which their body plays a key role. According to Castañeda (2016), in these stories the feminine is completely sexualized to serve the market and men. This logic also requires women to remain beautiful and desirable while their loyalty is devoted exclusively to their

husbands, even though they might be affected by death threats and murders. It is in this context that aggressive, hegemonic masculinities punish, within the masculine, every feminine feature. In a similar vein, narco-femininities strengthen antagonistic social roles and behaviors between women and men, emphasizing old patriarchal values. Overall, narconovelas contribute to reinforce archetypes where men are typically “macho” and women are traditionally “voluptuous with long smooth hair”. (Rincon, 2013, 2015, p. 47).

5.4 PARTICIPANTS’ REPRESENTATIONS OF LOVE AND INTIMACY IN TELENOVELAS AND NARCONOVELAS

During fieldwork, participants discussed in group sessions their position with regard to telenovelas and narconovelas. By doing that, it was possible to explore the central argument of this thesis that suggests there is a counter-narrative that challenges a hegemonic vision on how gender relations should operate. Also, these conversations helped understand how a hyper-masculine popular culture is further reproduced through telenovelas and narconovelas, impacting the ways in which participants of this research understand their own experiences of love and sexuality. Moreover, the discussion groups were important to identify if participants highlight the feminist lens used in this research that suggests there is a hyper-masculine figure (the macho man) reproduced in tele and narconovelas that undermines any female representation or behavior in both the public and private realms of intimate relations.

Even though the majority of participants dislike these fictional products, participants discussed what they regarded to be some of the key themes associated with these productions in Colombia. The key themes highlighted by participants are presented

in the following order: Masculinity and Femininity, Love and sexuality, and Violence and Armed Conflict.

5.4.1 MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY

Both the men I spoke to from *Proyecto Ser* and the women from *Casa Mujer* claim that traditional telenovelas and narconovelas reinforce patriarchal relations where there is always a *macho* man who conquers the woman and the woman lets herself be conquered. They believe that *machismo* constitutes a common feature when it attributes a special significance to men: “men are dominant in telenovelas. They have money, influence and big egos. Also, they are very proud of themselves. They have always been *macho* and that will never change” (Rosa Arenas, November 17th, 2016). For instance, “*Don Armando* from *Betty la fea* and *Sebastian* from *Café con aroma de mujer* were both considered ‘men’ from a patriarchal point of view. They were the protagonists, the empowered ones, the ones with status who come from a high class” (Fercho Cifuentes, December 15, 2016). In fact, some argue that even though women may seem more empowered in contemporary productions, “the man keeps being *macho* and the woman keeps being feminine” (Eustacio Ramirez, December 4, 2016). Women have little agency over their own sexual relations. According to Luciano Ramirez, a 44-year-old single gay topographer, it is easier to see either a heterosexual or gay man having an affair than a woman ever having another lover (December 5th, 2016). In this vein, some participants associate women with suffering. Women and men both agree that women suffer a lot in telenovelas. According to Luciano Ramirez women’s suffering constitutes the main foundation of telenovelas, otherwise, “what is the story? There is no lesson. Each person has to draw their own conclusions” (December 5th, 2016). The following comments by

discussion group participants support the argument made by interviewees that women are shown to have a submissive position in telenovelas:

This type of abuse and seeing manipulation taken to this extreme enrages us. She is an individual who has no right to decide for herself since she is between the sword and the wall; (Participant F, discussion group from *Casa Mujer*, November 17th, 2016).

She accepts to marry this man only for her father who is clearly a macho man, closed and locked in himself. He is not able to accept that she is a person who has rights and who is able to decide what she wants or to make her life as she wants. He does not leave her to decide for herself; (Participant G, discussion group from *Casa Mujer*, November 17th, 2016).

It was even more difficult to be a woman at that time since Colombian society was highly influenced by machismo. You could see that on the radio dramas of the time; (Participant H, discussion group from *Casa Mujer*, November 17th, 2016).

However, some participants claim that since the 1990s another type of woman is portrayed. They believe women are no longer represented only performing house work. They have different roles in the workplace or do activities outside of the home, such as studying or starting a business. These types of modern telenovelas show a type of woman who is more independent and more empowered. According to Lucero Valencia, a 58-year-old Catholic woman who has four children and stays at home to raise them, “today women work. They are not submissive anymore. It is not like before, when they suffered

different humiliation, and nothing happened. Women are not stupid anymore, they protest, and this can be seen on television” (October 28th, 2016). According to some participants, there is clearly a new era of liberation where women challenge *machismo* and do not accepted it as the norm. In other words, the assumption that a woman needs a man to succeed in life is no longer a requirement. Contemporary telenovelas portray women who can make decisions by themselves and who can pursue their dreams without a man. However, participants from Proyecto Ser argue that women, based on a clear patriarchal hierarchy, are still hardly the ones who have power in a relationship. They mention that even though there might be some changes in regard to women’s emancipation, telenovelas still portray women who depend on men to achieve their dreams: “a completely independent woman does not exist. We went from traditional soaps where women married the first guy they met to dramas where women are more empowered, but still depend on a man”. (Luciano Ramirez, December 5th, 2016).

Female and male participants argue that archetypes are highly reinforced in narconovelas. According to Tito Rey (November 20, 2016), there is a cultural heritage taken from the world of drug trafficking in which women are constructed from an aesthetic perspective and men from a violent perspective. In fact, the role of men is justified in terms of the classic *machismo*. Therefore, narconovelas reinforce a type of masculinity in which the capo is a violent man who objectifies and sees the woman as a sexual object.

Rosa Arenas, a 71-year-old woman who lost her husband when her daughter was little, argues that, “the woman is a super model. The capo gives her everything and she is just a plate of food. He runs over her, uses her and mistreats her” (November 17th, 2016).

In fact, Pablo Escobar is portrayed as a loving husband who was able to do everything for his wife and children: “he gave the children everything, but in return, his wife had to endure him having other lovers” (Rosa Arenas, November 17th, 2016). In this context, Margot Salas, a 66-year-old divorced mother of two children who works as an instructor, claims that weapons, money, and women become means of power for men in the world of drug trafficking.

It is common to see how women, most of them beauty queens or models, in effect sold themselves to the highest bidder. They use their bodies and attributes as weapons to get the richest man and in return, they get fame or the most expensive watch, or the prettiest, most expensive dress. The *capos* also expose them as trophies and show their attributes. Unfortunately, most of these women end up either dead or in jail.

Some women in Colombia may be seduced by the power of a *capo*. His money may help these women to get elective plastic surgery at a very young age (Castañeda (2016). In fact, the men participating in this research are tired of the same repeated stories of *Sin tetas no hay paraíso* [*Without tits, there is no paradise*] in which women get plastic surgery to get bigger breasts and, therefore, are able to seduce “*the capo*”. The following collection of comments illustrates female participants’ frustration with narconovelas:

How come they ask their parents to get them tits as a quinceañera⁶ gift? What are the parents thinking when they accept? What happens to these girls when they undergo these surgeries and marry the one that best provides the money? We see

⁶ “*Quinceañera*” refers to a traditional Latin American celebration organized by parents to commemorate their daughter’s fifteen birthday. This age is considered important as it represents the transition from childhood to young womanhood.

that the girls want to copy the same model, the same pattern, the same ass. They get big asses and we are not only a pair of tits and a big ass. We think, we have feelings, we are valuable beings. Each person is individual, unique. (Participant C, discussion group from *Casa Mujer*, November 10th, 2016)

Each time more women seem to be identified with superficial things and they forget that we are valuable; (Participant F, discussion group from *Casa Mujer*, November 10th, 2016).

We have to look inside. Otherwise, we will always be dissatisfied. If I do not love myself, I will start doing things just to be accepted and valued (Participant H, discussion group from *Casa Mujer*, November 10th, 2016).

This society sells the idea that for money everything is allowed, that for money I have to go against myself and expose myself to be hurt because they are paying me a lot of money. That is another form of violence, and when I see violence I reproduce violence. That is opposite to our values, because how can I sell my values? for what? If I go with a guy just for money, for the material, it is like I am betraying my values (Participant M, Discussion group from *Casa Mujer*, November 10th, 2016).

5.4.2 LOVE AND SEXUALITY IN TELENOVELAS AND NARCONOVELAS

Male participants support the arguments made by women in this study surrounding *machismo* and how it governs intrapersonal relations, in particular, love and intimacy. According to Jairo Benavidez, a 31-year-old divorced father of two children who works with popular education and theater, in telenovelas and narconovelas “it is very

common to see how two women fight for a guy and the guy is the main character, the gorgeous. The women are always pulling each other's hair and fighting. That's horrible. It is a clear example of *machismo*” (November 14th, 2016). Federico Carvajal argues that love relationships in telenovelas and narconovelas are conceived from a different place that does not take into consideration notions of freedom, liberty and recognition of the other person. “It is hard to see a relationship where both individuals learn from each other and build a project together” (October 15, 2016). In contrast, love is shown from relations of dependence that involve suffering and crying, features considered inherited from Mexican productions. Participants believe that the plot of these fictional products could be more exciting. In fact, they are tired of the same themes: frustrated loves and betrayals. However, Teresita Villalba, a 60-year-old divorced mother of two children who worked in a clothing factory, highlights that telenovelas and narconovelas are useful because they teach about how love and intimate relations work in real life (October 8th, 2016). While traditional telenovelas focused on romantic love, narconovelas emphasize on sexuality. This rationale explains why participants discussed either romantic love in traditional telenovelas from the past (mostly women), or sexuality in narconovelas. The following section explores these boundaries, including their place of intersection.

Romantic love

The women participating in this research defend romantic stories because they consider love an essential aspect of everyone's lives. Rosiani Paredes, a 62-year-old mother of five children who works inside the home, states: “feelings are a fundamental aspect of human beings. Who does not fall in love? Who lives without love? We all live for love. Every person dreams of love, with a partner. It is part of being human” (October

22nd, 2016). Maria Valverde, a 58-year-old married mother of two children who comes from a rural background, admits she loved traditional telenovelas from the past because she likes romance. “I like when couples have a crush on each other and start dating” (October 16th, 2016). Joelia Batista, a 75-year-old widow, mother of three children who works as a weaver and who was constantly displaced by armed groups, argues that she used to follow telenovelas because “marriage was supposed to be the best event in a woman’s life. Watching these stories about marriage was a type of escapism” (November 8th, 2016). Men, however, have a different perspective. Luciano Ramirez admits that he used to watch a lot of telenovelas from Mexico and Venezuela “for the stupid idea of love. I used to dream of the idea that a poor individual could marry a very rich person. I thought it could happen to me, so I dreamed” (December 5th, 2016). Similarly, Jeffrey Benavidez, a 34-year-old man who considers himself an entrepreneur, thinks there is a big difference between ideas portrayed in telenovelas and what happens in real life. “If I am with a partner, it is important I remove that romantic gaze promoted in telenovelas in which the couple is loyal and are forever together. In real life, relationships end. Individuals cheat on each other. It happens” (December 4th, 2016).

There has been a common assumption that telenovelas were exclusively designed for women’s consumption. Federico Carvajal claims that it is often “the poor domestic female servant who follows these stories” (October 15, 2016). Male participants claim that the sphere of love, including romantic portrayals, is consumed by women while sexuality is consumed by men. Even though these associations may not correspond to who really watches melodramas and why, they do explain why the data presented in this chapter speaks about a high identification of women with traditional telenovelas from the

past that focused on romantic love. In this vein, the assumption that sexuality targets a masculine audience excludes women from the arena of sexual pleasure. Male participants believe that by showing explicit sex in narconovelas, the cultural industry is targeting men to increase profits. In fact, the body of women is used as an advertising strategy to increase men's consumption. According to Federico Carvajal, "the body of women is more suggestive than men's bodies" (October 15, 2016). Nevertheless, aesthetic stereotypes of men are also reaffirmed in narconovelas. When men are portrayed in intimate scenes, participants stressed that it is often "those who care about exercising who are exhibited on television. It is a compliment to the body" (Federico Carvajal, October 15, 2016). Some examples can be seen in *El cartel de los sapos* (2008), *El Señor de los cielos* (2013), or *El capo* [The drug trafficker](2009).

Participants are tired of the same clichés of good-looking men and women portrayed in telenovelas and narconovelas. In fact, these beauty stereotypes are something they would like to change in local productions. "We are tired of the same pretty woman loving a well-mannered, good looking boy" (Jeffry Benavidez, December 4th, 2016). Eustacio Rivera highlights that even though Colombia may consider foreign productions when working with telenovelas and narconovelas, producers incorporate beauty stereotypes and archetypes that not only fuel consumption through the beauty industry, but also enslave women when they become only an object of desire. As discussed above, women would do everything possible to follow the standards seen on television. In order to achieve perfection and to imitate certain patterns, "women start getting buttocks and lipo-sculpture" (Joelia Batista, November 8th, 2016). Therefore, the powerful tool of

beauty reinforces the melodramatic assumption in which the poor may access the world of the rich.

Even though both female and male participants recognize that the audience can easily be captured by ideologies in which the poor can access the world of the rich, consolidating happy endings most people are expecting; participants agree that these happy endings are unrealistic. According to Luciano Ramirez, the emphasis on the rich and the poor is what makes people tired of telenovelas and narconovelas. “The way they portray this relationship between the rich and the poor is unrealistic. It’s pure fiction, so that’s extremely boring and discourages people” (December 5th, 2016). Similarly, Joelia Batista adds: “it is always the domestic servant who marries the son of the owners of the house, so the family makes her life miserable. That is such a lie” (November 8th, 2016). Luciano Ramirez argues that romantic love is associated with the submission of women: “It is always the girl who is born poor and reaches another status in different ways: either she marries a rich man [it can be a Capo], or she works hard, facing different challenges. That is the main plot of telenovelas and narconovelas. It is a fairy tale” (December 5th, 2016).

Sexuality

Women and men claim that narconovelas are too sexually explicit. Federico Carvajal states that before, intimate scenes were treated with care. It was more a game of cameras. In fact, telenovelas did not show much but if they were going to show a part of the body, these scenes were broadcasted later in the night. He contrasts this feature with

contemporary productions in which it is common to see an ideal romantic couple having sex (October 15, 2016).

Even though both women and men agree that sexuality has become more explicit, there are some differences among the groups: women are more conservative in regard to intimate scenes on television. They do not consider it right to show “everything” in front of little children or in prime time: “every time you switch on the T.V. they show those vulgarities in front of the kids, such a horrible thing. Before, it was nothing like this” (Maria Valverde, October 16th, 2016). Also, women claim that “everything is done quickly”, fostering a bad reference to young generations who may think that that is how relationships are conceived. “Those teachings degrade society” (Teresita Villalba, October 8th, 2016). The following comments made by women illustrate a common rejection to the predominance of sexual scenes in narconovelas:

There is a lot of pornography these days. They show everything livestreaming. They do not respect when a couple is having their intimate relations. That is bad. (Participant L, discussion group from *Casa Mujer*, November 17th, 2016).

There is a vulgarization of sexuality because there is no notion of eroticism. (Participant K, discussion group from *Hombres*, October 10th, 2016).

Everything these days focus only on the bed part and it is not even love anymore. (Participant S, discussion group from *Casa Mujer*, November 17th, 2016).

Although this sense of moral scandal is less prevalent in men, they also admitted that “there is no appropriate processing of erotic scenes. Everything is more sexualized” (Federico Carvajal, October 15, 2016). Men from the group *Hombres* referenced the telenovela *Bruna* regarding the way it dealt with sexuality. *Bruna* is the story of a young woman who decides to get involved in sex work at the age of 16 years old. “That telenovela is super sexualized. It is more than eroticized because it is very explicit. Even to watch the commercials is quite disgusting” (Federico Carvajal, October 15, 2016). Jairo Benavidez reflects about a series that deals with unwanted teenage pregnancies. He argues that even though these kinds of programs are meant to reduce the rate of unwanted pregnancies, they produce the opposite reaction. “you can see children being parents at very young age, they have not even finished high school and they are already playing with real dolls made of flesh and bone and that happens because of the influence of television” (November 14th, 2016). He recognises that this series is supposed to teach parents about how to deal with sexuality talks with their children, but; unfortunately, it uses the wrong approach: it frightens parents. “In pedagogical terms, it does not have the desired effect. In fact, it reproduces stereotypes when it is always the girl who comes from a very poor neighborhood and what is worst, is that it increases the pregnancy rate” (November 14th, 2016).

Participants highlight that there has been a transformation with regards to women’s search for their own sexuality. In other words, women’s expression of sexuality is more open in contemporary telenovelas and narconovelas. “Women not being submissive is not a taboo anymore” (Eustacio Ramirez, December 4th, 2016). According to men, the telenovela *Las Vegas* shows a woman undressing and there it is not a big

scandal anymore. “Now you can see that there is more expression for women’s sexual taste” (Luciano Ramirez, December 5th, 2016). However, the “bad” character is often the woman who not only explores her own sexuality, but also is the one who conspires, who is not submissive and therefore, can be considered a hypocrite. These features create in the audience a common rejection of this ‘bad’ character while fostering solidarity towards the “good” character – often a female who fits the stereotype of the ‘good woman’. Henry Palacios, a 47-year-old single man who works in the popular education sector, states: “the audience that does not identify with the stereotype of the bad woman shows solidarity towards the good character and becomes enemies of the bad one. That speaks a lot about the impact of gender constructions in society” (December 14th, 2016).

The arguments expressed by participants are supported by Medina and Montoya (1989) who insist that women’s sexual pleasure has been punished in traditional melodramas. They claim that female characters who play an active role in negotiating sex are often condemned. Due to its instinctive nature that challenges rationality, Medina and Montoya (1989) explain that passion has been associated with a violent and asocial behavior, like an illicit attitude, something more related to the irrational. In fact, it is transitory, and it only takes place in the finitude of the present time. Traditionally, if sexual pleasure does not take place within a marital relationship or if it does not fulfill a reproductive role, it does not deserve social recognition or approval; therefore, it is unlawful and can only be allowed if it appears the two individuals will get married. Sexuality has not typically been seen in telenovelas as an intense moment of passion with no moral regrets (Medina and Montoya, 1989), until recently.

Contrary to the opinions of the women from *Casa Mujer* and the men from *Hombres*, participants from *Proyecto Ser* insist that representations of sexuality in contemporary telenovelas and narconovelas are not explicit at all. They argue that Colombian society is extremely conservative and that is what limits sexual diversity and free expressions of sexuality on television. In fact, they observe that love and intimate relations in telenovelas and narconovelas are “100% heterosexual. Homosexual relations are either disguised, hidden, banned or nonexistent” (Eustacio Ramirez, December 4th, 2016). In other words, heterosexuality dominates the production of telenovelas and narconovelas. When participants from *Proyecto Ser* were asked for examples they remember and why, different references were highlighted in which heterosexuality had been challenged in television. These men agree that most characters who have different sexual orientation are ridiculed in telenovelas. The gay character is portrayed with specific features in which the feminine is exaggerated and gossiping is part of his identity. Even though these representations around gay identities contribute to reinforce and perpetuate prejudices in the audience, some participants from *Hombres* believe that there is a high correlation between the stereotypes portrayed on television and the reality of the gay community. In other words, they believe that gay individuals follow the same stereotypes portrayed in telenovelas. On the other hand, men from *Proyecto Ser* critique how no value is given to the individual's own life in these productions: “who is he, with whom does he relate, how does he live” (Jeffrey Benavidez, December 4th, 2016). In contrast, the gay character appears only to be “the ridiculous”, to bring “the spicy and the laughter”, to be “the weird one” in the story but “none knows who he really is” (Luciano Ramirez, December 5th, 2016).

In contrast to telenovelas, representation of gay characters in narconovelas reveals a different narrative. Since the business of drug trafficking implies the use of power to get status and social recognition within the network, gay capos are often admired, and their sexual orientation is not questioned. This is the case of Pacho Herrera, one of the Capos from the Cali Cartel. The popular series of *Narcos* portrays a scene where Pacho invites his partner to the dancefloor in the middle of a crowded party. The *bolero dos gardenias* is playing in the back while Pacho and his partner (a black young man) start getting closer and closer. The scene reaches its climax when they kiss each other with passion while the people around watch astonished. Considering the scene recreates the 80s and 90s in Cali (a hard time for homosexuality), the sexual orientation of Pacho was not questioned. In contrast, people respected him for being one of the leaders of the Cali Cartel.

5.4.3 VIOLENCE AND ARMED CONFLICT IN COLOMBIA

Although violence currently serves as the main ‘theme’ in telenovelas and narconovelas, displacing representations of love, violence is rejected by all the individuals participating in this research, reinforcing a counter-narrative that challenges a hyper-masculine popular culture further reproduced in tele and narconovelas. Chava Sinisterra, a 46-year-old married woman of three children who is not employed outside the home, states that: “it is sad to go from traditional telenovelas such as *Efrain and Maria* that did not have violence at all, that showed the beautiful landscape of this land, to watch the landscape of today full of dead people” (November 8th, 2016). This nostalgia expressed by Chava Sinisterra for older telenovelas contrasts with other critical analysis of contemporary narconovelas, suggesting the construction of meaning is often more

complex than producers may think. By resisting to a mainstream narrative of violence, there is a counter-narrative influenced by social values, beliefs, and attitudes in which participants rely on to make sense of meaning.

Men argue that most of these stories perpetuate a type of masculinity that is violent towards women and men. Women add that contemporary productions portray all the violence of the neighborhoods and there is no control on what is represented. In fact, they become bad examples to younger generations when “they do not respect family hours, are extremely violent, use raw language and swear in front of children” (Chava Sinisterra, November 8th, 2016). These concerns highlighted by Chava Sinisterra challenge traditional cultural values. The following comments illustrates why violent stories are rejected by participants:

Imagine a country so violent (because this country is pretty violent) and showing all those dead bodies in television. What is even worse, you can see how the father is killed, how the neighbor is killed, how a trap is set, you see the assassination, that is bad for you (Participant A, discussion group from *Casa Mujer*, November 10th, 2016).

What do we do for the youth? So much violence on the streets, what are we teaching? I ask myself why we want to watch injustices in telenovelas when we see them in real life? It is basically the opposite to scenarios of love (Participant B, discussion group from *Casa Mujer*, November 10th, 2016).

5.5 ANALYSIS

When understanding what telenovelas say about love and intimacy in Colombia, different considerations should be taken into account. First, it is important to acknowledge that love and intimacy are located in the heart of a culture permeated by the phenomenon of drug-trafficking. This particular spectrum, seen in contemporary narconovelas, reinforces old patriarchal traditional values in which men hold power and status, used to also control women. In this vein, men dominate the public life while women are expected to stay at home. This is rejected by the participants of this research who do not internalize nor accept the messages about gender norms, sexuality, and love reproduced on television; showing some sort of agency in the production of meaning. The rejection of these messages by participants suggest mainstream gender norms do not simply travel from producers to receivers, but viewers challenge them.

The phenomenon of drug trafficking shares a close relation with the brutal history that Colombia has experienced for more than 60 years. When a snapshot of these real-life events is taken into the world of fiction, love and intimacy, scenarios are provided where violence is reproduced in both the public realm of violent conflict and the personal sphere of intimate relations. In both situations, men dominate the bodies of women. In fact, this aggressive type of masculinity excludes any other way of being a man. Therefore, when Colombian society lives in a violent narco-culture that is highly influenced by *machismo*, the representations of love and intimacy found in telenovelas and narconovelas are not very distant from this reality. However, most of the participants of this research (including men), reject violence in their public and personal lives, challenging the hyper-masculine figure reproduced in tele and narconovelas. Even though violence may

represent broader social trends of Colombia, it does not accurately reflect the real life of viewers.

The evolution of televised dramas in Colombia has shifted from traditional stories, in which love was the perfect excuse to access the world of the rich, to narco-series, in which weapons, money and women constitute the means of power. In both scenarios, beauty archetypes and stereotypes have worked as a tool of power for women's 'social climbing'. Even though beauty stereotypes may affect both women and men, women's bodies receive greater pressure when they are meant to "look good" in order to have a place in society. In other words, it seems that the value of a woman is only measured in terms of how beautiful she is. Men have also the responsibility to follow a hegemonic masculinity based on a "macho man" who can dominate and control adversities. In this context, representations of love and intimacy are patriarchal. They reproduce features of *machismo* and mimic a pattern of heteronormativity that not only undervalues the feminine but also preserves conservative values based on a long-term marriage and the unity of a heterosexual family. Gendered power dynamics have attributed women an inferior position with regards to men, who have taken control over women's bodies. These ideologies reproduced on tele and narconovelas do not reflect the beliefs, attitudes and values of the participants of this research. In contrast to these narratives, participants do not use "love" as an excuse to improve their living conditions. In a similar vein, they reject the idea to use weapons, women or money to get power. Beauty archetypes are not really followed by participants. Also, male participants particularly challenge a hegemonic masculinity in the public and private realms of intimate relations. Further, conservative values based on long-term marriage and the unity

of a heterosexual family are specially confronted by gay and straight men. Overall, tele and narconovelas encourage participants to confront patriarchy in their own experiences of love and intimacy.

According to participants of this study, representations of love and intimacy in telenovelas and narconovelas should break with this patriarchal pattern. They should consider different types of relationships that are not exclusively patriarchal and heterosexual. In fact, the constitution of families should be understood differently. Families are no longer always composed of a mother, a father, and the products of their love. There are various alternative ways that families can be constituted. Similarly, representations around heterosexual long-term marriage need to be challenged. In other words, these conservative ideas are challenged by modern social relations that propose different ways to relate between women and men, men and men, and women and women. In this context, equal value should be given to all forms of being masculine and feminine. If this aspect is taken into consideration, telenovelas and narconovelas may be able to break with hegemonic archetypes and stereotypes and, therefore, diversity may take “the main acting role on stage”, highlighting the different forms in which individuals understand their identities, express their own sexuality and construct their social relations, including the sphere of love and intimacy.

CHAPTER SIX: PARTICIPANTS' INTERPRETATIONS OF LOVE AND SEXUALITY

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In order to explore the interrelation between telenovelas and narconovelas, and participants' interpretations of love and sexuality, this chapter focuses on interpretations of love and sexuality from the perspective of individuals who took part in this research. By exploring how women and men interpret love and sexuality, this chapter explores the central argument of this thesis that suggests there is a counter-narrative that challenges a hegemonic vision on how gender relations should operate. By doing that, it is possible to identify how similar or different are representations of love and sexuality portrayed on television from participants' understandings. Also, it is possible to analyze the influence of an institution, such as the media, on individuals and finally, the standpoint of participants with regards to dominant ideologies portrayed on television can also be explored. This chapter expects to find a counter-narrative that challenges the reproduction of hegemonic gender norms through tele and narconovelas. Further, this chapter expects to find different ways in which individuals make sense of their own experiences of love and sexuality.

The first section of this chapter focuses on the commonalities found in the personal lives of participants, focusing particularly on women, as well as gay men and to a lesser degree heterosexual men. The second section of this chapter introduce readers to participants' interpretations around love and sexuality. An analysis on the importance of telenovelas and narconovelas to understand the significance of these findings is provided at the end of the chapter.

6.2 FEMALE PARTICIPANTS – HOME LIFE

Female participants (12 in total) were raised in a patriarchal environment where the catholic church played an important role in their lives. In fact, all the women from

this research believe in God and most of them have a strong Catholic faith. They relate everything that happens in their lives - all their glories and sufferings - to God. God is the perfect excuse for everything: he allows them to be grateful, but also to ask for support. Nevertheless, 5 women are aware that the church may constitute a form of oppression that emerges from their patriarchal society.

The majority of female participants had to perform housework duties while men worked in the field. In fact, some of these women reproduced this pattern with their own children. Some male participants remember how their female relatives and friends were highly controlled in opposition to the freedoms they had when growing-up.

Women believe that education is one of the different ways to challenge patriarchy. Since 16 female participants were unable to have a professional career, women have attributed a special significance to education. Education was considered unimportant when women were going to marry a man who could bring home everything that was needed. In other words, pursuing a degree was something unthinkable in a time where men were the breadwinners and women's role was to take care of the family. Due to these assumptions and other related factors, such as unexpected pregnancies and a lack of financial support, the women participating in this research were unable to complete their education. However, they did not want to reproduce the same pattern with their children, in particular, with their daughters whom they consider more vulnerable in a patriarchal environment. Ermita Velasquez, a 60-year-old woman who was brought to the city of Cali to work at the age of 14, told her daughter to learn something, "so you don't need to depend on a man" (December 11th, 2016). Unfortunately, her daughter got pregnant at a

very young age and her partner did not support their children, putting more responsibility to Ermita Velasquez, who had to support both her daughter and grandchild.

Marriage becomes a seductive alternative for women when the State denies them basic conditions to live in Colombia. In other words, when education and work were complicated scenarios for women, marriage became an attractive alternative to get a place in society. That is the case for the majority of women participating in this research. Having few options to choose from, found in marriage the only possibility to escape from the hard situations they were going through. In fact, conflicts within the family (such as poverty, animosity between parents and between parents and their children, lack of emotional support) also contributed in putting more pressure on these women to get married. Thus, there is a high chance that women may accept the only individual who recognizes them in society when other opportunities have been denied. For instance, Ermita Velasquez could not go to school and instead was taken as a domestic servant to work and live with a family that was not her own. Under these circumstances she met her future husband whom she married and had children. She claims that she was alone, and she did not have anyone to trust. Therefore, she states: “that is why I think I rely on the only person who shows me a little bit of care” (December 11th, 2016). Unfortunately, marriage is not always the right solution.

The female participants who took part in this research believe that while men tend to be unfaithful, women have a high level of commitment (even though they may make the decision to get married hastily). The process of establishing a family took place quickly for the women in this research: they married the first boyfriend they had and had children with him. Unfortunately, for 11 of these women the kind gestures the men

showed during the courtship period soon disappeared. Once these men married their women things changed and issues related to *machismo*, such as drinking and womanizing, soon emerged. Sometimes, these men did not want to lose the comfort and emotional stability given by their wives, but at the same time they were willing to have extra marital relationships.

Women prefer to nurture their own children instead of giving that responsibility to another individual. In fact, all female participants not only nurture their children, but also their grandchildren. In most cases, it is the husbands of these women who asked them to perform that role, a request they agree to since they found it fair to raise their own children: “when you have your own children you see it as the best gift you could ever have, it is very hard to give the responsibility to another person” (Chava Sinisterra, November 8th, 2016); “I never felt like a slave. I did it with love” (Rosa Arenas, November 17th, 2016); “children have to be with the mother because we have that sixth sense to take care of them” (Rosiani Paredes, October 22nd, 2016). These statements are also shared by Chava Sinisterra’s husband who advised her not to work because, “the children are only fine with the mother, you got to understand that”. Chava Sinisterra ended up following her husband’s advice since she thought he was right. When Maria Valverde decided to work, both of her children lost that academic year, because she was not able to support them as needed.

Marital life sometimes leads to suffering; domestic life became the place where different ways of oppression occurred for these women. These oppressions were not only associated with taking care of the children, but also most women faced conflicts with their partners; there is a common narrative of unfaithfulness and non-physical violence.

Some cases also depict fathers who did not engage in childcare or any type of involvement in raising their children, letting this responsibility to the women. Unfortunately, this pattern was sometimes reproduced by their own sons.

Even though most female participants were living in abusive environments, they were unable to leave their partners for a couple of reasons: women always put the wellbeing of their children first and those women who experienced cases of infidelity did not want to find another partner. They believe that is not the right example for their children. In the same vein, some women were afraid that the impact of the divorce would affect their children negatively, making them choose “the wrong way” and become gangsters or drug addicts in a time where the Cali cartel was recruiting young people to join their organizations. Financial dependency on men is one of the most common ways to reinforce male domination over women. Such women do not feel confident enough to be independent and cannot leave abusive environments. Blanquita Penagos, a 60-year-old mother of two children who was not able to leave her intimate partner after repeated situations of infidelity, states, “I wanted to leave but I did not know how to work, so I had to stay” (November 30th, 2016). However, few brave women were able to work on their own to challenge men’s control. Amanda Mesa, a 57-year-old woman, whose parents were alcoholics, stresses, “when I gained economic independence he finally realized that the slave was free” (October 9th, 2016). This situation challenged the power dynamics within the household, enabling Amanda Mesa to have more control over her own life, while her abuser understood he could not dominate the private terrain of the domestic life.

Women's devotion to the family and women's financial dependence on men, contribute to keep women within abusive marital situations. When men hold the economic control over the household, they are reinforcing unequal power dynamics with their partners. Unless, there is mutual consent between the couple, men's economic control supports patriarchal relations. In this context, it becomes difficult for women to leave abusive environments. Some women from this research expressed they were afraid to leave their homes since they did not work and relied on their partners financially. The decision to leave is harder when they are unable to leave their children, and therefore, they feel afraid of not having enough resources to sustain the family.

Women play an essential role in maintaining the harmony of the family and protecting their children's well-being. In fact, they highlight the significant role they played in their families in opposition to the role played by men. Some women claim that their husbands were absent when their children needed strong leadership at home. The women I interviewed believe that their perseverance and hard work are also essential features to never give up despite challenges and struggles they faced inside and outside the home. According to my respondents, their sacrifices mean that their children were able to have a decent education and most of them own a house that belong to the family. Most women recognize their essential role in protecting their children. Also, they are very aware that the unpaid work they perform at home is often not recognized by their families or society.

Women attempted to give their children the best they could; often, what they never had. For instance, in Chava Sinisterra's story, which embraces other women's stories, she emphasizes the education of her children since she could not finish high

school because she was pregnant. Similarly, the story of Joelia Batista, a 75-year-old woman who was constantly displaced by armed revolutionary groups in Colombia, depicts a woman who wanted to give her children something that could not be taken by anyone: “the only thing I wanted was to have something that none will steal from me. I wanted a property owned by my family – a house for my kids so that none could kick them out” (October 17th, 2016). In a similar vein, Amparito Gutierrez, a 54-year-old mother of two children and owns a hair salon, did not have a nuclear family. Her dream was to have one: “when I got married I wanted to give my children what I did not have: a decent home. I have given a special meaning to ‘the family’ just because I did not have one” (September 8th, 2016). Overall, women tried to give a decent education to their children despite the difficulties they faced. Most importantly, they raised them with essential values considered important to live in society.

Female participants attribute a special value to friendship. Some women even claim that friends replace their families. They highlight the support and solidarity they have found in the women from *Casa Mujer*, who happen to be also their neighbors. In particular, women support each other regarding issues such as domestic violence, womanizing, and drinking. This solidarity may be even more important among women than kinship relationships. For instance, female participants defend their daughters-in-law when their own sons are perpetuating cases of domestic violence.

Some female participants experienced physical and non-physical violence in their domestic life. When Rosma Salcedo, a 61-year-old single mother of 11 children, was pregnant with one of her sons, her partner at the time asked her to go with him for drinks. She told him drinking and smoking was harmful for the baby. Unfortunately, her partner

got very upset and took her by the arm. He threw her against the closet. However, she was able to defend herself and also took him by the hair. She told him to respect her because she was carrying a baby that was also his son. She told him that if she was rejecting the invitation it was for her own health and the health of the baby who was coming. He never understood these words and kept insisting that she did not want to go drinking with him because she was hiding from another lover whom she supposedly had in the neighborhood. Similarly, Ermita Velasquez declares, “that man [her intimate partner] almost killed me. I don’t want to even remember it. It was horrible. He was strangling me. The neighbors had to come to defend me”. Ermita admits in her narrative that her new partner also used to beat her: “he used to beat me but actually right now he does not beat me anymore” (December 11th, 2016). Extreme cases of possessive love can also be seen through the case of Eliza Gutierrez, a 52-year-old school teacher who is currently divorced from the father of her son. In her situation, her ex-husband almost killed her when he realized she was having an affair with another woman: “he was a macho man. He had a strong personality, he was very possessive. There was a revolver at home, so when he found out he was very upset. He almost killed me with that revolver” (December 15th, 2016).

Intimate partner violence can take non-physical forms. Women may feel pressure from their partners to have sex even though they do not have to obey men’s sexual desires if they do not want to. In fact, this was the reason why the marital relationship of Minerva Perez deteriorated. In this regard, she claims, “I told him that I was his wife, but it did not mean that I was going to have sex any time he wanted” (November 29th, 2016). After Minerva refused to have sex couple of times, her husband took her to the

Department of children's welfare. He considered it punishable that a wife did not want to have sex with her husband, and therefore, he believed the children of the family may also be affected. Minerva states, "I was not being an irresponsible mother, so he was wrong, and they could not do anything against me. I was not ill-treating my children. That was the main reason why we got divorced" (November 29th, 2016). Non-physical violence can also be verbal abuse. For instance, Amanda Mesa remembers how her partner always told her she was not able to do anything. He told her that she could not learn anything because she was old. These words, she remembers, "killed my self-esteem" (October 9th, 2016).

The story of Sari: The story of Sari Cardozo, a 47-year-old single woman who studied fashion design, illustrates the difficulties individuals face when they are born in the wrong body. Since she was born she knew her body did not correspond to how she perceived herself - she was born in a man's body. When she started to grow up, she used her body to show the world her gender identity – she incorporated male and female clothing in her daily life: "I used to wear pants with female blouses and a lot of accessories" (December 11th, 2016). Even though Sari started to use hormones 27 years ago, she regrets not starting to take them when she was a teenager. Taking hormones at a younger age would have made her look more feminine, although she would not have been able to give birth. According to her, that is the main drama of being born in the wrong body. She claims that she would love to have a child who comes from her own being, a child who has her blood, but also she would love to give that child to the man she loves: "I would love to have something from him. A child becomes the seed of that love" (Sari Cardozo, December 11th, 2016). Sari asserts that even if she would have gone for a sex

change surgery, she would not have the possibility to give birth. Also, she would not have had the privilege to experience pleasure. According to her, “I would satisfy the man but that’s it. In fact, those individuals who claim that they have orgasm they are lying” (December 11th, 2016). Even though she rejects cases of infidelity in all possible scenarios – either with someone from the same or the opposite sex, she had to accept her partner having a child with another woman while they were together.

6.3 MALE PARTICIPANTS

Heterosexual and homosexual male participants are both challenging patriarchal relations in their public and personal lives; however, this section focuses more on gay men. The findings from my research suggest that their bodies are impacted more due to the narco and patriarchal culture of Colombia; therefore, it is important for the readers to know their struggle. People of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity struggle in a patriarchal order that does not accept their diversity.

Gay men highlight how the process of self-acceptance is often hard for most participants who tend to care more about what their families would think than what society thinks. Once an individual decides to tell their families, they face either acceptance or rejection from their closest support system. Except for few exceptions, most gay men who participated in this study did not face rejection from their families. However, this information may take some time for their families to accept. For instance, the case of Eustacio Ramirez highlights the friendly environment in which he grew up in contrast to other discriminatory stories from the LGBTQ community. In this regard, he states: “I was not raped, my parents did not kick me out from home, my parents love me.

In other words, even though I am gay, I am still a human being, I am an individual” (December 4th, 2016). The story of Eustacio Ramirez contrasts with those from Fernando Trujillo and Fercho Cifuentes, whose parents did not accept them initially.

Achieving self-acceptance is often extremely difficult for individuals who keep their homosexuality to themselves. Jaimito Cano, a 52-year-old single man who studied visual arts, claims that repressed individuals suffer a lot. He underlines that self-acceptance processes are auto-destructive: “there are no doubts this process is often very repressive and painful” (November 22nd, 2016). Jaimito Cano remembers how all his self-denial of being homosexual produced in him a migraine he carried for years. In fact, he had to seek for professional support when he was not able to handle his pain anymore: “the psychologist asked me if I thought that my problem was sexual or emotional. I told her I think I am gay, I like men, and I have kept this secret for years of silence, but I can’t anymore” (November 22nd, 2016). Similarly, the family of Fernando Trujillo, a 42-year-old single man who is currently studying to become a health professional, only accepted himself after he almost died for a complicated illness. In this regard, he declares: “it is very easy to get sick since most illnesses are associated with anger, resentment, things that hurt you and you keep accumulating” (December 16th, 2016). Further, Fercho Cifuentes admits that he reached a point where he was not brave enough to kill himself, so he decided to leave his town and go to a big city, such as Medellin. That was the only escape he considered at that time: “if I am not brave enough to make a tragic decision such as taking my life, then I have to fight for this life” (Personal communication, December 15, 2016).

Most gay participants faced bullying when they were in high school. Some men may argue that bullying was even harder for those older men who attended school during the 70s, 80s and even 90s. These decades are considered extremely conservative and a difficult period to be gay in Cali. Fernando Trujillo highlights that most of his self-destructive thoughts were strengthened during his school years. In fact, common narratives of discrimination led to implications associated with learning and speech difficulties. These limitations may complicate educational achievements and may constrain working opportunities. Some male participants declare that once they were able to overcome personal conflicts associated with self-esteem and acceptance, they were able to fulfill their professional career.

The self-acceptance process involves a phase of forgiveness and reconciliation with themselves and with their closest relatives. Fercho Cifuentes explains that he could not forgive himself for the feelings he had for other men: “a man produces in me so many beautiful things, special feelings and I was not able to forgive that. I was not able to accept it” (December 15th, 2016). Similarly, some male participants had to forgive their own parents who, in some cases, were the first individuals who discriminated against them for being gay. Luciano Ramirez emphasizes that a process of self-acceptance implies defending a political position in society, something extremely hard for those who have not accepted their homosexuality openly.

The need to love themselves is recurrent in the narratives of men with diverse sexual orientation. Some of them have recognized that their self-esteem used to be very low and therefore, they have worked hard to recover that self-love. The following comment illustrates how self-esteem is a serious struggle among gay men:

There was a time where I could not look myself in the mirror nor did I like to be photographed by people because I felt, and I saw myself ugly. I thought I was insignificant, I thought I was a little thing. Now I know that in order to have someone who loves me, I need to love myself first. Now my attitude towards life has radically changed (Fernando Trujillo, December 16th, 2016).

6.4 INTERPRETATIONS OF LOVE AND SEXUALITY

The previous section provided a brief context of the struggle men faced for being gay. This section focuses on participants' interpretations of love and sexuality, and how they relate to telenovelas and narconovelas.

In contrast to the support given to romantic stories in telenovelas, most female participants faced serious struggles in their marital life, making almost impossible to believe in romantic love in real life. In fact, some women believe that love constitutes a form of oppression. Amanda Mesa also considers that love relationships are located within a patriarchal system that gives more privileges to men than women. In this logic, female narratives around love are reduced to the importance women give to the *Casa Mujer*, their faith, friends, and families.

In opposition to the men of this research, female participants seem more conservative when discussing love and sexuality. Even though narconovelas tend to emphasize sexual pleasure, most women attribute a special meaning to intimate relations despite of all the difficulties they faced in their marital lives. All women except for one consider that intimate relations are significant only if they take place with that 'special someone' who gives them love and respects them.

Interpretations of love and sexuality may be affected by the different forms of sexual abuse that women and men have experienced. These can vary from nasty and discriminatory comments in the streets to harassment to cases of domestic violence to sexual violence.

Even though female and male participants consider it important to have intimate relations with someone who cares not only for the physical body, but also for the individual, the gay men interviewed think that contemporary relations among gay men are primarily based on pleasure. One woman interviewed, Amanda Mesa, says it is hard to find a man who really cares for the individual. She argues that all men care about is sex. She claims: “men only use women for their own satisfaction or at least that happens in my personal experience” (October 9th, 2016). Eustacio Ramirez explains that this tendency, permeated by features of individualism and selfishness, is due to modernity [that requires mass media artefacts to disseminate its ideas]. In this vein, there is a high co-relation between the emphasis given to sexuality in contemporary telenovelas and narconovelas, and modern gender relations based on sexual pleasure. However, the invisible representation of erotic scenes between gay men on telenovelas and narconovelas contradicts the reality of this community, highly dependent on sexual pleasure. The following abstract explains Eustacio’s perspective of how pleasure has taken control over love in gay relationships:

People just want to fuck and that’s it. People don’t want commitment.

People don’t want love relations, nobody wants to fall in love, none.

Sometimes I think maybe it is because I am old, so I may not look that great

but no, I have gorgeous friends who are desirable and alone. They can have

all the sex they want but not a love relation, nothing. There is a tendency these days to go from sample to sample. It is only a pleasure sample. We look at things only from pleasure and we are highly concentrated in this area (pointing to the pelvic area and the butt). (Eustacio Ramirez, December 12, 2016)

Gay and straight men understand sexuality from the exploration of the body – their own body and the body of the other person. They think not only about their own pleasure, but the pleasure of their partner. Tito Rey, a 39-year-old man, father of one son who studied eight semesters of journalism and who is originally from Peru, feels sorry for all the women who are unable to enjoy pleasure due to some individuals who only think about their own satisfaction. In addition, Tito believes that it is better to have sex with passion than a type of sex that is just ejaculatory. In this regard, Jefry Benavidez, a 34-year-old single man who is an independent entrepreneur, has no doubt that sexuality goes beyond sexual intercourse. He states that sexuality is about touching, feeling, looking, and even enjoying nice conversations with the other person. It is also about sharing time together, something hardly seen in contemporary telenovelas and narconovelas. He claims: “I have a broader understanding of what sexuality is. Otherwise, I can just masturbate myself” (October 19th, 2016). Luciano Ramirez also considers it important to have a sexual partner who it is possible to have a nice conversation after sex. In fact, Razari Vega claims that when passion and love are balanced it is possible to have a life-partner. In contrast, he assures that when people focus only on sex it is easier to get divorced. Even though traditional telenovelas focused on romantic love and narconovelas

on sexuality, there are few examples where couples found the perfect balance between love and sexuality on television.

Opposite to what is often portrayed on telenovelas and narconovelas, some male participants from *Hombres* and *Proyecto Ser* understand love and sexuality from the notion of freedom, that is, the understanding that the body of the other person is nobody's property. These men claim that if individuals understand that, it is easy to move forward to healthy relationships in which aspects of jealousy and possession do not take part of constructions of love. Eustacio Ramirez claims, "we tend to believe that the body of the other person is our possession and that is when cases of jealousy and femicides take place" (December 12, 2016). In fact, he highlights that what is portrayed in telenovelas is not far away from reality since "we live in a patriarchal, machista and misogynist world in which it is common to see a macho man killing a woman" (December 12, 2016). The gay men interviewed for this study claim that possessive love is harder to challenge between men since 'two machos' are fighting to gain control over the relationship "we become very vulnerable in terms of letting someone go. It is hard" (Eustacio Ramirez, December 12, 2016). These opinions highlight a tension between the reproduction of patriarchal values reflected in tele and narconovelas (as well as in the broader society), and the critical analysis of participants who do not really follow these values in their personal experiences. This tension may suggest that perhaps the values considered mainstream are not really predominant in Colombia.

Similarly, straight men also face difficulties with their partners when they try to deconstruct expected conditions to be followed in a heterosexual relationship, such as rules of communication, time, or future plans. Federico Carvajal claims that making

projections into the future contradicts principles of freedom. He thinks those projections enslave relationships and often it produces frustrations when other options cannot be explored. For instance, if an individual determines that in a certain number of years he or she will have a family, all his or her actions will focus on that:

to only consider one path is not fair with yourself, right? Because you can reach that stage through different ways. I think If you accept only one truth without being open to self-criticism, you are not an autonomous human being from my perspective (October 15, 2016).

Most of the social constructs previously described are rejected by participants who challenge the reproduction of hegemonic gender roles in tele and narconovelas, giving a different meaning to representations of gender, sexuality, and love. On the one hand, participants claim that healthy relations are hardly seen on television, making it difficult to challenge aspects of possession and jealousy, common themes of these fictional productions. On the other hand, participants do not like how telenovelas and narconovelas tell individuals how [heterosexual] relations should be, including what is expected when dating.

Unfaithful love: discussions of love and sexuality are permeated by narratives of unfaithfulness. Female and male participants agree on the fact that infidelity corrodes love relationships, such as the case of Eliza Gutierrez. She admits that her love was gone when she found out that her husband had another relationship (the other woman was pregnant at the same time she was). This situation, commonly seen in telenovelas and narconovelas, affects both women and men equally. However, while betrayals were

normally committed by the male characters on traditional telenovelas, women have slowly started to have extra-marital affairs on contemporary telenovelas and narconovelas.

Cases of infidelity were discussed by women and men in heterosexual and LGBTQ relationships. Gay men claim that even though bisexual men respect their wives and are loyal to them with respect to other women, they have sex with other men. In this regard, Fernando Trujillo believes that it is human nature to be unfaithful. He states that individuals are born unfaithful, however, once they grow up they learn to be loyal. In fact, he assures that human beings will take advantage of any opportunity they have to experience pleasure. In contrast to this argument, female participants reject the idea of having extra marital relationships. They think is illogical for women and men to have another person when the desired partner is found. Also, they consider being loyal an aspect of respect. Indeed, of all the female participants of this research only one woman considers it important to forgive and give second opportunities. She defends the idea of reconciliation under the assumption that “our husbands are the fathers of our children and we can’t forget that” (Blanquita Penagos, November 30th, 2016).

Love and money: some female participants acknowledge that love relationships are based on material stability, that is, more than feelings of caring, partners remain together for economic reasons. This financial dependency becomes more predominant when there are children involved. For instance, Eliza Gutierrez remembers how her parents advised her not to divorce her partner because he had a good economic position needed for her and her son. Even though individuals may try to marry a rich person who can guarantee comfort and better living conditions, both female and male participants

claim they never used love as an excuse to improve their economic standards and climb in society. In fact, all women from this research married the man they loved, and men also declare they do not like to take advantage of someone who has money. However, when gay men are in a relationship or they are looking for one, they consider it important to find an individual who is economically stable. When telenovelas and narconovelas highlight the relationship between love and money, they are revealing a truth some people may refuse to accept: love is one of the easiest, feasible, and legal forms to achieve social climbing.

Maternity: the opportunity women have to give birth puts women in an advantaged position with regards to men. In particular, women may feel more empowered when they use their bodies for their own purposes. Women can also protect themselves from pregnancy without telling their husbands, such as the case of Minerva Perez in which she states: “he never came to know that I went to a health institution to be protected. That was before we got married and I did not want to start having children right away, so that is why I did it” (November 29th, 2016). In the opposite scenario, women can get pregnant while telling their partners they were under birth control methods. In one of the focus groups discussions respondents indicated that, women can lie pretending to be pregnant when they are not. Women can choose the father of their children. Moreover, women’s bodies can be used to increase a woman’s social status. In this regard, they may use their bodies to either marry a rich man (it can be a *Capo*) or have a child by that man.

To avoid a large number of children, female participants have tried different options including abortion, female sterilization, and birth control methods. The majority

of female participants used different birth control methods that according to some women “create an impact in women’s bodies” (Minerva Perez, November 29th, 2016). They think it is unfair that the female body is the only one receiving the side effects of taking pills. A few women decided to be sterilized; however, they needed their husband’s written consent to undertake the procedure⁷. From the three cases of sterilizations, two partners signed the consent. In only one case was it not necessary since the woman had the support of her doctor: “he asked me to sign the consent for my own well-being” (Rosma Salcedo, November 22nd, 2016). Only one woman in this research had two abortions when she was younger. Even though she supports abortion, she regrets having to take that decision. In fact, she believes that it is the reason why she feels lonely even though she already asked for forgiveness: “I asked the divine force to forgive me for denying them the right to live. I also told them that I would have liked to be their mom. I ask them to forgive me for being so cruel” (Amanda Mesa, October 9th, 2016).

Active and passive roles: Both heterosexual and homosexual intimate relations are ruled by a pattern of active and passive roles. In this patriarchal model, the active role is often associated with masculinity, while the passive with femininity. The gay men in this study explain that there is a hierarchy located within the masculine discourse in which a man who is considered dominant must look masculine within homosexual relations. Otherwise, if he shows a sign of femininity, he is considered passive. They insist that there is a general discrimination towards those considered passive. According to Luciano Ramirez: “if you openly call yourself passive, that’s how people will see you: passive,

⁷ Even though three women from this research mentioned the need for their partners’ written consent, this is no longer a legal requirement for female sterilizations in Colombia. There are campaigns implemented by the government in which women and men from lower-incomes can access these procedures for free.

like if ass means vagina, like if being passive means a total degradation” (December 12, 2016). However, Eustacio Ramirez considers positive the increase number of gay men who like to be penetrated. In fact, he admires how these men are not ashamed of their sexual role and in contrast, admit their preferences in public. “I found that very cute because when you say I am passive, it reaffirms that discourse and it is not a sin” (December 12, 2016).

Some gay participants encourage gay men to try active and passive roles when having sex. In fact, they consider selfish those men who only choose one side of the spectrum. According to Eustacio, the majority of people do not look for a balance between passive or active. They either like to be penetrated or they like to penetrate: “sometimes it creates problems in the relationship and that is why men leave”. Thus, male participants emphasize the importance to brake with that dichotomy. They encourage men to find an equilibrium, what some gay men called being “versatile”.

Active and passive roles can also take place in the courtship phase. Luciano Ramirez claims that in a homosexual relationship there should not be established roles. He dislikes the idea to be either the one who conquers or the one who let himself be conquered in a relationship. He states: “if someone believes that I am passive just because I express myself with feminine gestures, they are totally wrong”. Also, there are assumptions associated with race. In this regard, Luciano claims that often people believe he is active just because he is black: “if I am supposed to be the active that leads to other things, right? I am supposed to be the one who calls, who proposes, who stablish rules and so on, but I don’t like that” (December 12, 2016).

Similar to homosexual relationships, active and passive roles also affect heterosexual relationships. Federico Carvajal claims that sexuality is often the scenario where dominant expressions of power and hierarchy are perpetuated. He explains that if someone assumes an authoritarian or privileged role in his or her daily public interactions, associated with an active role, there is a high chance to perpetuate this hierarchical relation in personal relations, including intimacy. He argues that sexuality is highly patriarchal when it portrays the idea of the *macho* man who has to show virility. In the following comment, he invites us to reconsider dominant expressions of sexuality in our lives:

It is important to ask ourselves how we behave in our personal relations: for instance, if in our sexual relations we are authoritarian or if we do not recognize the body of the other person, then we should start thinking. Also, if we are the ones who determine circumstances such as when, how, or sexual roles, we are probably reproducing a hierarchic scheme of power in our sexual relations. I insist: my internal struggle is with the *macho* I have inside. In fact, our first struggle space against how *macho* we are, is in the bed right? With our partner, in our relationship. It is there where we should disarm all our violence, we should stop giving orders and stop always exerting right. The sexual is highly oppressive and we need to learn about how to relate with sexuality right? (October 15, 2016)

6.5 THE EFFECTS OF TELENOVELAS AND NARCONOVELAS IN LOVE AND INTIMACY

Even though telenovelas and narconovelas may suggest that relations of love and intimacy may be permeated by a patriarchal culture, the voice of participants challenge

this mainstream narrative. Female and male participants understand their experiences of love and intimacy in different ways, suggesting there is a counter-narrative that challenges a hegemonic vision on how gender relations should operate.

In Colombia, the patriarchal culture highlighted on television is also affected by war and the phenomenon of drug-trafficking. This seductive business offers easy ways to achieve power to an unequal society that dreams of better living conditions. In this logic, weapons, money, and women have replaced traditional ideas in which romantic love worked as a possible way to dream with a better future. Narco-series have drastically shifted traditional conservative values in which sexuality only took place within marriage – to fulfill reproduction purposes – to heterosexual relations that are highly based on sexual pleasure and less on love. In fact, these representations on television may explain why participants in this research of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity find it easy to have sexual encounters, but struggle to find ‘real love’. Further still, narconovelas promote a culture based on beauty archetypes that subject women’s and men’s bodies in different ways. However, this research believes that female bodies are impacted more since women are considered to be sexual objects that satisfy the state, the market and men (Castañeda, 2016). Therefore, interpretations around love and intimate relations are located within a narco-culture that reinforces unequal gender dynamics in which women have an inferior position with regards to men who have taken control over women’s bodies (Paramo, 1999, Rincon, 2009).

The narco-culture suggested in contemporary narco-series promotes a hegemonic type of masculinity - ‘the macho man’- and a hegemonic femininity—the beautiful voluptuous sexy woman’. This culture, extremely violent and sexual, puts big pressure on

men who have to constantly show their dominance to survive in a culture full of ‘macho men’. This rationale may explain, but does not justify, the cases of intimate partner violence that were found in this research. In narco-series, this aggressive type of masculinity does not recognize other forms of masculinity or ways of being a man and highlights a gendered power imbalance and heteronormativity through storylines that represent continuous verbal and physical violence against women, portray women as dependent on men, and as individuals who attain status through men or their families.

Telenovelas and narconovelas reinforces heteronormativity as the only possible story-line to understand gender relations, and interpretations of love and intimacy. This pattern of heteronormativity – based on monogamous relationships that take place within marriage, and only with the opposite sex – may explain why the women who participated in this research reproduce traditional melodramas in their personal lives. In other words, they married the first man they met, formed a family and nurture not only their children, but grandchildren. The family is often the only institution capable of providing women with a place in society; however, it is also the place where conflicts arise (Barbero, Lamus, & Muñoz, 1989). When telenovelas have emphasized the important role women play in preserving societal values based on long-term marriage and the unity of a heterosexual monogamous family, it is easier to understand why the women from this research are unlikely to consider divorce as an option despite the multiple challenges they face in their marital life (Medina & Montoya, 1989). Due to the normalization of such relations, women reveal a natural devotion to their families that seems voluntary. The ideological domination reinforced through telenovelas and narconovelas strengthen

patriarchy when the bodies of women are meant to be subjugated to male dominance (Atara, 2011, Canclini, 1981, Cervantes, 2005).

When telenovelas reinforce only one possible model of understanding love and intimate relations, they are excluding different types of relationships that are not exclusively patriarchal and heterosexual. In other words, there are other forms of relationships in which individuals understand their identities, express their sexuality and construct their social relations differently than how these are portrayed in narconovelas and telenovelas. Interpretations around love and sexuality are based on personal experiences in which the body of women and men play an essential role in these understandings. For instance, Jairo Benavidez understands love and sexuality from the perspective of a mestizo young heterosexual man who has been raised in one of the working-class neighborhoods of Cali. Fercho Cifuentes may have a different standpoint based on his experience of being a gay young mestizo man living in Medellin after leaving his rural town. On the other hand, Eliza Gutierrez may have a different story supported on her lesbian gender orientation combined with her previous marital life with the father of her child. The examples are infinite since each and every individual represents a different story where sexual identity and orientation take an important role in understanding social relations.

The findings of this research show how the bodies of women are oppressed by institutions such as the church, marriage, and the family. In fact, the media is the main institution responsible for disseminating dominant ideologies. The State may also oppress women by denying basic opportunities such as education and work. As a result, the women who participated in this research often find themselves economically dependent

on men and struggle to escape abusive relationships. However, when women confront the patriarchal ideologies in which they were raised and decide to raise their children in a different way – with equal respect for their own bodies and the body of their partners – they are challenging unequal power dynamics within the household, impacting patriarchal relations in the public sphere. This choice demonstrates how women do not reproduce in their personal lives the norms projected in *tele* and *narconovelas*.

Men are also perpetrators of violence when the body of women is only taken into consideration for their own sexual pleasure. These assumptions suggest how the body becomes a political issue when women struggle to gain control over their own sexuality and fertility. The two cases in which a man's written consent was mentioned by women in order to undergo female sterilizations (in the case of Rosma Salcedo and Rosiani Paredes) suggests that the health system in Colombia produced and reinforced control over women's bodies in the past.

Participants from this study challenge the assumption that women's bodies have been socially constructed for both male pleasure and reproduction. The family, the community, the media and the State have contributed to glorifying ideologies of motherhood “and the importance of having a biological child” (Gopal, 2010). In this context, women are either stigmatized for not having children or they are blamed for having too many. Further, women are condemned if they decide to remain virgins and never explore sexuality. The case of Amanda Mesa illustrates how some women have to carry a moral burden that affect their bodies physically and psychologically in cases of abortion. However, the transgender experience of Sari Cardozo complicates these understandings further, since her sexual identity cannot be complete when she is unable

to give a child to the man she loves. Overall, female and male participants confront social constructs in which women's bodies are only designed for male pleasure and reproduction purposes.

The consumption of the body for male pleasure – reinforced in *narconovelas* – forms the basis of the market manipulation of women's bodies (Gopal, 2010). The pressure women face to imitate ideal types of feminine beauty brings into the discussion the effects capitalism and patriarchy play in the body of women. Indeed, the objectification of the body for the male gaze has taken women to painful and expensive procedures that women from this research cannot afford. In fact, it is clear that they do not want to be part of the game. In contrast, women challenge the market manipulation over their bodies when they not only refuse to undergo any cosmetic surgery, but also when they teach their daughters to love their bodies the way they are. These teachings at home restrain the reproduction of a cycle that is harmful for the bodies of women, and also, it shows some sort of agency in the production of meaning. In a similar vein, when women resist to use their bodies as a mean to improve living conditions – either because they marry a wealthy man or because they work in the sexual industry or in the entertainment business – they are assuming a political position of resistance to the aggression of capitalism in their bodies. In fact, some female and male participants suggest how love can work to either alleviate or make harder the burdens of capitalism. This relationship between love with the material world enables the understandings of successful stories in which romance is intertwined with economic success, which in Colombia may come from legal or illegal sources. Even though female and male participants declare they do not use someone's feelings for their own economic benefits,

gay men emphasize the importance to find a partner who is economically stable. Thus, a type of material love emerges in participants' narratives when the effects of capitalism impinge upon individuals' survival to the system.

The bodies of male participants also suffer the consequences of patriarchy when telenovelas and narco-series portray a narrow vision to conceive gender identities and relations of love and intimacy. These dominant ideologies are accepted by the majority of society and affect especially those individuals of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity. The findings from this this chapter illustrates how discrimination affects the body of men physically and mentally, impacting significantly their health, but also the love for themselves. In fact, interpretations of love start from there. Often, they start with the process of forgiveness and reconciliation with themselves and their relatives.

Similar to the women in this study, the bodies of the gay men are oppressed by multiple institutions - the family, the State and the media. This constant oppression explains why Fercho Cifuentes considered suicide as an option. Nevertheless, he opted to escape to a bigger city as an alternative to kill himself (Fercho Cifuentes, December 15th, 2016).

While heterosexual men believe in intimate relations that could include passion and love, gay male participants emphasise sexual pleasure. This particular perspective facilitates in gay men a clear distinction between relations based on pleasure and relations based on love. However, gay participants acknowledge that these relations can be mutually inclusive. Both heterosexual and homosexual men support a type of sexuality that is not only ejaculatory. They understand sexuality from the exploration of the body –

their own and the body of the other person – Nevertheless, there is a common eagerness in gay men’s narratives to find that ‘special someone’ who really cares for the individual and not only for the material body.

In a culture where a hegemonic masculinity undervalues any expression of ‘the feminine’, participants encourage individuals to deconstruct active and passive roles in the public and private realms, indicating a form of resistance to the reproduction of hegemonic gender norms in tele and narconovelas. This position of resistance is associated with participants’ gender identities, but also with their sexual desires and orientation. For instance, when an individual assumes either an active or passive role in society, he or she is denying other forms to feel masculine or feminine. Also, these roles may condition sexuality by limiting the exploration of the own body and the body of the other person.

CHAPTER SEVEN CONCLUSIONS

Relying on a social-ecological framework (SE), this research sought to explore the central argument of this thesis that suggests there is a counter-narrative that challenges a hegemonic vision on how gender relations should operate. The SE provides the conceptual tools to understand the relationship between individuals’ narratives and

their surrounding environment, something particularly helpful when solving the research question of this project: *How have Colombian telenovelas and narconovelas impacted women's and men's interpretations of sexuality and love in Cali Colombia?*

This thesis considers that interpretations of love and sexuality are the result of the interplay of factors working at multiple levels. In particular, the discussion and analysis of this research is concentrated on the following interdependent layers: **the macrosystem**, which corresponds to the cultural, political and economic factors informed in Colombian telenovelas and narconovelas, **the exosystem** relations embody in the organizations that took part of the study, and **the microsystem** layer based on the interpersonal and individual contexts of the women and men participating in this research. Considering that the macrosystem represents “the broad set of cultural values and beliefs that permeate and inform the other three layers of the social ecology” (Heise, 1998, p. 277), telenovelas and narconovelas give us some clues with regard to the cultural system of Colombia.

At the macro level, **Colombia inhabits a narco-culture that is violent, patriarchal, and highly influenced by machismo**. This culture is not only part of the legacy of the phenomenon of drug-trafficking; the Colombian armed conflict also shares a close history with this illegal business. In both scenarios – drug trafficking and the armed conflict – there is an aggressive type of masculinity that is portrayed: ‘*the macho man*’ who is brave enough to kill, occupy territories and dominate extensive portions of land, including the body of women. This hegemonic type of masculinity reinforces old patriarchal traditional values in which men are constructed as strong and women as the opposite. In this vein, men are supposed to dominate the public life while women are

constrained to the domestic life. Violence is reproduced in both the public realm and the personal sphere of intimate relations. Further still, this narco-culture promotes a pattern of heteronormativity that not only undervalues the feminine but also preserves conservative values based on a long-term marriage and the unity of a heterosexual monogamous family. A narco-culture also promotes constructions around the feminine and the masculine that are highly based on beauty archetypes. In this particular cultural system, gender relations are affected by social-class as well. In this spectrum, love and sexuality are understood from relations of power where money, beauty, and weapons play an essential role to dominate the body of individuals.

There are other political and economic forces shaping the country's cultural system that are not really shown on telenovelas and narconovelas. For instance, today **the country faces a reality of VAW as a result of inequities between** women and men (Calderon, Lopez & Murad, 2013; Lizcano and Orstavik, 2013; Olivares, 2009). The increase of cases of violence against women seemingly contradicts the significant improvements achieved in terms of legislation and other efforts to challenge this reality in Colombia. The State is considered responsible for not guaranteeing the rights of the victims when seeking for protection, however, **the foundation of VAW is rooted on cultural and social beliefs widely approved by Colombian population** (United Nations, 2013, para. 1). Telenovelas and narconovelas could contribute to challenging discriminatory ideas and practices historically embedded in Colombian society; however, in contrast, these shows reproduce rigid gender roles and patterns of sexist, patriarchal, and discriminatory behaviors that facilitate, allow, excuse and legitimize VAW (United Nations, 2013, para.4). Thus, **for a narrative of development to be completed in**

Colombia, gender inequities, harmful social attitudes, and gender stereotypes need to be visibly challenged on television.

Telenovelas and narconovelas are strong cultural products that could contribute to keep an order in society by establishing a regime of sexual division in which men and women must obey cultural mandates, otherwise, they could carry social sanctions. However, the participants in this research do not provide evidence to support this assumption. In contrast, their opinions indicate that the viewers of tele and narconovelas are very capable of critically analyzing the messages portrayed, showing agency in the production of meaning. Also, they do not automatically internalize all the messages projected.

In Colombia, *machismo* constitutes another form of reinforcing male dominance over women and men. Even though *machismo* is often not perceived by society, telenovelas and narconovelas have portrayed a masculine cultural image based on an “exaggerated aggressiveness and intransigence in male-to-male interpersonal relations”. Similarly, “an arrogance and sexual aggression in male-to-female relationships” is also portrayed in these dramas (Stevens, 1973, p. 90 in Brusco, 1986). This type of man, clearly seen in the figure of a drug trafficker, represents a masculine cultural image that is predominant in the public and private spheres of Colombian citizens, impacting all social classes and both sexes (Brusco, 1986 and Uribe, 2009). Even though participants in this research recognize the existence of this type of hegemonic masculinity, they challenge this construction in their personal lives.

Even though telenovelas and narconovelas portrayed common features of machismo such as aggression, womanizing, and drinking, they fail to explain the reasons why men have more privileges over women. Those privileges were initially supported in civil, penal, and political structures that attributed more benefits to men, fostering gender inequality in the country. Historically and still today, male dominance was supported politically through institutions such as the judicial system and the Catholic Church (Brusco, 1986 and Uribe, 2009).

Traditional telenovelas have reinforced the influence of the Catholic Church in Colombian society. Historically, the country has built a close relation among the State, society, and the Roman Catholic Church. In fact, the Church, in association with the state, has regulated women and men's behaviors, constricting those with other gender identities and sexual orientations. In this vein, telenovelas have reproduced Catholic values through the importance given to the heterosexual family, reinforcing traditional ideas about the role of women in society.

The exosystem layer of the SE frame introduces us to the perspective from which participants understand interpretations of love and sexuality. **The three organizations that participated in this research exist in order to challenge a hegemonic masculinity that is harmful for the way individuals construct their relationship with their body and the body of others.** However, some participants are more conscious than others about how patriarchal relations affect their public and private lives. Nevertheless, all participants find in their organization an important support with regard to the sufferings they all experience in their daily lives. These solidarity nets, often based on friends, become essential to overcome common struggles associated with patriarchal relations in

daily interactions. This layer of the SE frame helps us understand how individual's interpretations of love and sexuality may be influenced by their membership in these organizations. Also, conducting research with individuals who are associated with these 3 organizations shows that the reproduction of hegemonic ideas and values is not easily transmitted. In contrast, many of the people interviewed critically questioned the messages about sexuality, love and gender norms in tele and narconovelas. In other words, participants did not simply internalize and accept these messages. Further still, this layer suggests that the individuals who took part of this research, mostly middle and lower-class ordinary people, are not represented on television. It seems that their lives and feelings are not reflected in tele and narconovelas, complicating their own understanding of what happen in their personal experiences.

The body becomes a political terrain where different struggles take place at a micro-system level. The body of women is oppressed by institutions such as religion, marriage, and the family, but media, such as telenovelas and narconovelas, becomes the institution responsible for disseminating these dominant ideologies. The State also contributes to this oppression of women's bodies when it denies basic opportunities such as education and work. As a result, many women exist only in the domestic realm, in the household, often, affected by contradictions and struggles that are very difficult to escape - especially if there is an economic dependence on a male in that household.

Participants from this study challenge the assumption that women's bodies have been socially constructed for both male pleasure and reproduction. The family, the community, and the media have contributed to glorify ideologies of motherhood "and the importance of having a biological child" (Gopal, 2010). In this context, women are either

stigmatized for not having children or they are blamed for having too many. These assumptions suggest how the body becomes a political issue when women struggle to gain control over their own sexuality and fertility. In this regard, female participants show signs of power over their bodies when they are able to control the number of children to have.

The consumption of the body for male pleasure – reinforced in narco-series – forms the basis of the market manipulation of women’s bodies (Gopal, 2010). Indeed, the objectification of the body for male gaze has led women to painful and expensive procedures that most participants criticized (especially women). These pressures women face to imitate ideal types of feminine beauty brings a discussion on the effects capitalism and patriarchy play in the body of women. In fact, some female and male participants suggest how love can work in favor to either alleviate or make harder the burdens of capitalism. Thus, a type of material love emerges in participants’ narratives when the effects of capitalism impinge upon individuals’ survival to the system.

The body of male participants also suffer the consequences of patriarchy when telenovelas and narco-series portray a narrow vision to conceive gender identities and relations of love and intimacy. These dominant ideologies accepted by a major sector of society affect those individuals with diverse sexual identity and orientation. The findings from this research illustrate how discrimination affects the body of men physically and mentally, impacting significantly their health, but also the love for themselves. In fact, interpretations around love start from there. Often, they imply processes of forgiveness and reconciliation with themselves and their relatives.

Similar to women, the bodies of gay men are also oppressed by different institutions, such as the family, the State and the media. In other words, while women are constricted to domestic life, men are also confined within their own bodies. The body becomes 'the place' where men can exist in the world. However, for some of these men, the body is the place where real struggles take place. This constant conflict within themselves explains why Fercho Cifuentes considered suicide as an option. Nevertheless, he opted for escaping to a bigger city as an alternative to kill himself slowly when he was not able to kill himself quickly (suicide) (Fercho Cifuentes, December 15th, 2016).

Female and male participants struggle against any form of aggression towards their mental and physical bodies. They stand up for the right to walk freely not only in the streets, but also in their homes, with no fears for sexual harassment or any form of discrimination or violence. Men with diverse sexual orientation struggle for pleasure rights and the right to love other man. Further, they support love and intimate relations that are constructed from the position of freedom. Also, they understand sexuality from the exploration of the body – their own and the body of the other person. Nevertheless, there is a common eagerness in gay men's narratives to find that 'special someone' who really cares for the individual and not only for the material body. These struggles to make sense out of their own lives and feelings in relation to the gendered norms projected in telenovelas and narconovelas reinforces the central argument of this thesis in which there is a counter-narrative that challenges a hegemonic vision on how gender relations should operate. In this vein, participants do not simply accept and internalize the hegemonic attitudes, values and ideas projected in tele and narconovelas. In contrast, they resist them in complex and not always consistent or coherent ways.

The basis of these findings relies on the stories told by participants. Their narratives, affected by the relation they construct with their own body and the body of others, **represent a voice of resistance to the broad set of cultural values and beliefs exchanged in the symbolic world of production and consumption of melodramas. This counter-narrative speaks about a constant struggle for equality between feminine and masculine representations.** Further still, love and sexuality deals with the relation between the body and its surrounding environment, taking the “personal” to “public” matters, and facilitating linkages with the political and economic forces interacting at personal and public spheres. The findings of this research are important because they reinforce initial considerations in which sexuality and love are affected by the economic structures, the social rules, the political battles and the religious ideologies that walk along with physical expressions of intimacy and the relations in which takes place (Cornwall, Corrêa, and Jolly, 2008).

However, I acknowledge the limitation of this thesis regarding the fact that the organizations I dealt with focus on gender relations and I realize that the individuals involved in these groups are not representative of the general Colombian population since my participants explicitly challenge mainstream gender norms. Also, they discuss issues of masculinity and femininity as well as they struggle against gender discrimination.

The findings from this research suggest some areas for further research. In particular, representations of love and sexuality on television from the perspective of participants. The different stories highlighted in here suggest there is only one type of narrative that is portrayed on telenovelas and narconovelas. However, there are counter-narratives to be told. Further research could explore these stories in which a different set

of values and beliefs could be exchanged on television. This exploration may also help to challenge profound ideas considered valid for the majority of the Colombian population. By doing so, it is possible to start confronting patriarchal relations in daily interactions. Also, cases of VAW may decrease in Colombia and *machismo* may no longer govern the public and private lives of women and men.

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APPENDIX

A. INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS

Table 1 General Information about Participants (women)

Pseudonym	Age	Social Class	Area of origin	Marital status	Children	Education level	Employment	Religious beliefs
Chava Sinisterra	46	3	Rural	Married	3	Professional	Housewife	Catholic
Rosma Salcedo	61	1	Urban	Divorced	11	Elementary school	Independent (informal sector)	“God”
Blanquita Penagos	60	2	Rural	Married	2	High School	Housewife	“God”
Rosa Arenas	71	2	Rural	Widow	1	High School	Retirement salary of her husband	Catholic
Mariani Santamaria	68	2	Rural	Divorced	2	3rd year of high school (Not finished)	Independent- Informal Sector (weave)	Catholic
Rosiani Paredes	62	2	Rural	Widow	5	3rd year of elementary school (not finished)	Housewife	Catholic
Joelia Batista	75	2	Rural	Widow	3	Elementary School	(weave)	Catholic
Amparito Gutierrez	54	2	Rural	Married	2	High School	Hair saloon	Jehovah's witnesses

Lucerito Villalba	45	2	Urban	Divorced	2	High School	Instructor	N.A.
Margot Salas	66	3	Urban	Divorced	2	High School	Instructor in home duties (Ciencias del hogar).	Catholic
Teresita Villalba	60	3	Urban	Divorced	2	1st year high school (not finished)	Employee (Clothing Factory)	Catholic
Ermita Velasquez	60	1	Rural	Common law	3	5th year high school (not finished)	General Services (Clinic).	Catholic
Lucero Valencia	58	2	Urban	Married	4	High school	Housewife	Catholic
Maria Valverde	58	2	Rural	Married	2	Not finished high school	Housewife	Catholic
Minerva Perez	68	2	Rural	Divorced	3	Not finished High School	Weave	Catholic
Luisa	65	2	Rural	Divorced	3	Not finished High School	Weave	Catholic
Chava	44	3	Rural	Common law	1	Technical	Teacher	Catholic
Carmenza	65	5	Urban	Single	0	Master Degree	Professor-	Catholic

Nunez							researcher	
Maria Antonia Velez	64	5	Urban	Single	0	Professional	Teacher/ Professor	Catholic
Amanda Mesa	57	2	Urban	Married	1	Not finished High School	Seller –Weave	Spirituali ty
Eliza Gutierrez	52	3	Urban	Common law marriage	1	Professional	Teacher	Catholic
Sari Cardozo	47	3	Urban	Single	0	Technical	Fashion Design/ Independent: weave, fashion	None

Table 2 General Information about Participants (men)

Pseudony m	Ag e	Socia l	Area of	Marital status	Childre n	Education level	Field of study	Employ ment	Religiou s beliefs
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		Class	origin						
Fercho Cifuentes	34	3	Rural	Single	0	Technical	Computer Science	Informational sector (security)	N.A.
Eustacio Ramirez	57	5	Urban	Single	0	Professional	History and arts	Independent (projects with the government in LGBT Q issues)	Atheist
Fernando Trujillo	42	3	Urban	Single	0	Studying University	Health	No job	“God”
Jefry Benavidez	34	3	Rural	Single	0	Technical	Business Administration	Sales, skill jobs	None
Fabrizio Lopez	52	2 (Rural)	Rural	Divorced	1	Professional	Economy	Independent	Catholic

Henry Palacios	47	2	Rural	Single	0	Professional	Education	Educational projects	“The life”
Tito Rey	39	1	Urban	Divorced	1	8 semesters of University	Social Communication	Skill jobs, photography	Atheist
Jairo Benavidez	31	3	Urban	Divorced	2	High School	Popular education, theater	Popular education projects, grassroots projects	None
Federico Carvajal	33	4	Urban	Single	0	Professional	Sociology	Formal job in sociology	Atheist
Razari Vega	68	4	Urban	Single	0	Technical	Drawing	Formal job with a company	Catholic

General information of participants

Except for three women, the majority of women participating in this research did not have a professional degree. Some of them completed their high school studies (6 women, 31%) but the majority did not finish high school (9 women, equal to 47%). Two women are professional, one woman has a master degree, and one holds a technical degree. In contrast to women, the majority of men either have a technical or a professional degree (12 men, 80%). From the three men who do not have either degree, one is currently studying his profession in health, one completed 8 semesters in social communication without finishing his career and one completed high school studies. The majority of participants, including both women and men perform skill jobs: the majority of women have found their financial support in weaving. Others have worked as domestic servants, few have worked as hairdresser and all also work at home as housewives. Few work as professors and instructors, and only one receives salary from her husband who passed away. One work in a clinic in the area of general services and one worked in a clothing factory from where she retired. Informal jobs of men go from teacher of Italian to photographer. Also, some men work in the field of security, sales, business, education, and arts. Three men have contracts with the government with regard to gender issues. One works with popular education and grassroots communities. Three have formal jobs in their area of study: one in sociology, one in topography and one with a company as an industrial designer. Overall, the majority of participants express they feel identified with Catholicism. Few individuals admitted believing in God and three men recognized to be atheist. Other beliefs are associated with “the life” and the Jehovah's witnesses.

The majority of women are either marriage or divorced. From a total of 63% (12 women), 36% (7 women) are divorced and 26% (5 women) are married. Only three women who represent the 15% are widows, two live in a common-law relationship and two are single, each of them contributing to the 10% of the sample. In opposition to women, 73% of men (11 out of 15) are single except for three men who are divorced, representing the 20% and one who is married (6%). In this context, all women except for two have at least one child. 14 women have between 1 and three children. One woman has 4, another one has 5, and one has 10. In opposition to women, only four men have children: three men have one child and one man has two.