

## THE DEMOBILIZATION OF TWO ILLEGAL ARMED GROUPS: ANALYSIS OF THE COVERAGE BY NATIONAL PRESS

### LA DESMOVILIZACIÓN DE DOS GRUPOS ARMADOS ILEGALES: ANÁLISIS DEL CUBRIMIENTO POR LA PRENSA NACIONAL

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#### ABSTRACT

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**Key words:** *news reports, content analysis, journalism ethics, war, demobilization, paramilitary, FARC guerrillas*

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*Given the start of new peace talks between the FARC guerrillas and the Colombian government, it is crucial to understand the role of Colombian journalists in reporting peace and war. This article presents an analysis on the National Press coverage of the demobilizations of a paramilitary group (Bloque Cacique Nutibara) and a section of the FARC guerrillas (Bloque Cacica Gaitana) within a frame that reflects over the ethical practice of journalism in the context of war. The results are consistent with literature arguing that ethical codes are not documents dictating how journalists should do their job, but rather they represent political acts of communication which allow journalists to reclaim their professional independence from sources and defend themselves from threats. The paper also discusses the apparent tension between journalism ethics, and the barriers imposed by the media's informational needs and the strategic military aims of armed groups.*

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## RESUMEN

**Palabras clave:** noticias, análisis de contenido, ética periodística, guerra, desmovilización, paramilitares, guerrilla de las FARC

*En un momento en el que nuevos diálogos de paz entre la guerrilla de las FARC y el gobierno colombiano se están llevando a cabo es crucial entender el rol que juegan los periodistas cuando informan respecto a la paz y al conflicto armado. Este artículo presenta un análisis del cubrimiento de la prensa nacional a la desmovilización de un grupo paramilitar (Bloque Cacique Nutibara) y de un bloque de la guerrilla de las FARC (Bloque Cacica Gaitana) en el marco de una reflexión sobre el ejercicio de la ética periodística en un contexto de guerra. Los resultados son consistentes con la literatura según la cual los códigos éticos no son documentos cuya función sea dictaminar lo que un periodista debe hacer sino que se trata de acciones de comunicación de carácter político cuyo objetivo es reivindicar la independencia profesional de los periodistas frente a las fuentes y defenderse de las amenazas que reciben. El artículo también discute la aparente tensión que existe entre la ética periodística y las limitaciones impuestas por los medios de comunicación y los objetivos estratégicos de los grupos armados.*

The news coverage of the Colombian conflict provokes a large amount of criticism. Journalists are accused of not being ethical because they disrespect victims or favor particular armed groups. Actually, ethics in journalism are usually associated with ideas of how journalists should do their job (Sanders, 2010, p. 531). Ethics codes are documents which clarify principles and standards about what journalists should do in a specific situation (Ward, 2009, p. 296). Discussions about journalism ethics are not new. Actually, Stephen Ward identifies five stages in the development of journalism ethics: a) the invention of an ethical discourse during the seventeenth century, b) the creation of a “public ethics” based on the idea that the press play the role of a Fourth State, c) the liberal theory of the press during the nineteenth century, d) the development and criticism of this liberal doctrine resulting in a professional ethics of objective journalism and e) a “mixed-media” ethics that lacks consensus on which principles apply across different types of media (Ward, 2009, p. 295). Since the profession began, journalists have worried about the right way to report news. Nonetheless, a significant number of cases show that journalists constantly transgress their own professional codes, especially in

wartime. Such is the case of the coverage of the demobilizations of two illegal groups in Colombia. While Colombian journalists commit to reporting truthful, accurate and balanced information in the “Code for the coverage of the Colombian armed conflict” (Márquez González, 2003), the case of these demobilizations illustrates that this commitment is often violated. The confessions of some former combatants and the current investigations carried out by the Colombian justice system have proved that these demobilizations were false. Government representatives and military officers may have staged the demobilization ceremonies according to a strategic military and political plan. Based on this specific case, this paper seeks to address the following questions: ¿how did Colombian journalists cover the two demobilizations, what do these cases say about the ethical principles of journalists in wartime?

The hypothesis is that the reporting of news in wartime is influenced by three kinds of variables which are not compatible: journalism ethics constraints, media’s informational needs and the strategic military aims of the armed groups. More specifically, this paper argues that the ethics code behind the coverage of the conflict in Colombia is not in fact a professional document addressed to journalists telling them

how to cover the conflict. The code is a political act of communication addressed to the armed groups (journalists' sources), media owners and managers and audiences. The reason why the principles set in the code seem to be contradictory to the context in which journalists have to do their job is that the strategy of the code is to claim editorial independence from media organizations and armed sources as well as to justify professional and ethical mistakes to various audiences. This argument is consistent with literature advocating for a more comprehensive approach to ethics in journalism (Ward, 2005) and the definition of journalism ethics codes as documents framed by specific ideological, political and social influences (Wilkins & Brennen, 2004, p. 308).

In order to provide a more comprehensive approach to journalism ethics, this paper is organized into three sections. The first summarizes the main issues regarding the demobilizations and journalism ethics in Colombia. The ethical code for the coverage of the armed conflict, written in 2003, is then presented and discussed in order to clarify how journalism ethics may be understood in wartime. The second section explains the methodology. The last section presents the results of the analysis and discusses the apparent tension between journalism ethics and strategic military aims.

## Ethics and journalism in Colombia

### The false demobilization of a paramilitary group and a section of the FARC guerrillas

The Colombian armed conflict has for more than 50 years involved three main armed actors: the military representing the government, the paramilitary and the guerrilla groups (of whom the FARC and ELN are the most important) (Azcárate, 1999; Barclay, 2004). During this time several attempts to negotiate an end to the conflict have been unsuccessful and none of these groups have won the war. While the government of the former President Pastrana (1998-2002) based its policy on a discourse of

peace<sup>1</sup>, the government of the former President Uribe (2002-2006 and 2006-2010) sustained a discourse based on its promise to dismantle the FARC guerrilla, which it was unable to accomplish<sup>2</sup>. In addition, in 2003 Uribe announced negotiations with the confederation of the main paramilitary groups, AUC (*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*)<sup>3</sup>, while continuing to fight the guerrillas.

In this context, in November 2003 the Colombian government invited the mass media to cover the demobilization of *Bloque Cacique Nutibara* (BCN), a section of the paramilitary confederation known as the AUC. It was the first demobilization of a paramilitary group since the negotiations with the AUC had started. Next, in March 2006 the Colombian government invited the mass media to cover the demobilization of *Bloque Cacica Gaitana* (BCG), a section of the FARC guerrilla. Because the FARC is the main enemy of the Colombian government, this demobilization was presented as an important victory against the FARC. The two decommissionings of weapons were presented as a step towards peace in Colombia (Agudelo & Darío, 2009; Fisas, 2010; Gutiérrez-Coba, 2007; Restrepo Echeverri & Franco Restrepo, 2007).

However, since the demobilizations were announced and the ceremonies took place, unofficial sources such as journalists, the civil population and representatives of NGO's and international organizations have pointed out that there were some problems with these demobilizations: the weapons returned by the BCN group were not those the combatants used to use; the combatants of the BCG did not look like guerrilla fighters who had been in combat in the mountains for years, amongst other issues. Moreover, in February and March 2011, ex-paramilitary and ex-guerrilla fighters who had participated in these demobilizations asserted that these two acts of peace were false and that the Colombian government

<sup>1</sup> Unsuccessful negotiations were carried out with the FARC guerrilla between 1999 and 2002. At the same time, President Pastrana reinforced the Colombian armed forces.

<sup>2</sup> New peace talks between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrilla officially started on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2012.

<sup>3</sup> United Self-Defence Groups of Colombia.

had staged the ceremonies strategically. These confessions and the current investigations suggest that the two demobilizations were a ‘media operation’. Military media operations consist of disseminating information through the mass media in order to achieve a military strategic aim (Maltby, 2012). Knowing that, one can ask what role journalists played in these acts of war carried out through the media and why they seem to have violated their own ethical principles. Before we can answer this question it is necessary to analyze how journalists define and practice ethics in Colombia.

### **The code for the coverage of the Colombian armed conflict**

The concern of the Colombian journalists regarding how to report news in an ethical way is shown by the “Code of ethics and responsibility of journalists”. The purpose of this code is to “point out to journalists a set of basic principles of behavior based on rational principles of ethical and professional behavior” (CPB, 1990, p.1). The code proclaims the ideal of the veracity of news, independent from sources. It is said that the main obligation for journalists is to inform in an accurate and comprehensible way. Besides this general code, in 2003 a code for coverage of the Colombian armed conflict was written by the head of the *Centro de Solidaridad de la Federación Internacional de Periodistas*<sup>4</sup> and founder member of the professional association *Medios para la Paz*<sup>5</sup> (Márquez González, 2003). At that time, the situation for journalists in Arauca (one of the regions where the conflict has been the most intense) had become very difficult. Most of the journalists covering the conflict in Arauca had left because of threats from the armed groups. This was the reason why a code applying exclusively to the coverage of the armed conflict was published. The document is organized in three parts<sup>6</sup>: an outline of the issues, a list of standards that journalists commit to, and a conclusion. The first part states three considerations on which journalists base the code:

The first consideration refers to the right to information and the political commitment of journalists to society and to the truth from an ethical point of view; in second place, overing the armed conflict supposes that any message provided by an armed group, legal (the military) or illegal (paramilitary and guerrilla groups), may be propaganda which seeks to favor the particular interests of the group, and the third concibes that journalists are citizens whose mission is to inform other citizens by working towards the common good. For journalists information is a social good. They condemn violence as a method of solving conflicts. They recognize that their duty is to cover war, without hiding or exaggerating its causes, consequences and context.

These three first considerations illustrate the ideal of accurate, truthful and balanced reporting. This approach to journalists’ work is what Stephen Ward calls *the objectivity and social responsibility model* (Ward, 2009, pp. 298–299), which means that journalists adhere to “objectivity” as a dominant ethical idea. This ideal of objective news reporting includes the claim of independence from government and business influence and a strict distinction between news and opinion. This model corresponds to one of Ward’s five ethics development stages: the development and criticism of the liberal doctrine during the 20<sup>th</sup> century resulting in a professional ethics of objective journalism (Ward, 2009). These three considerations also show journalists’ awareness of the manipulation exerted by the armed groups. Nevertheless, the code is a document written only by journalists. Audiences and actors involved in the conflict did not participate in writing it. Thus standards set in the code correspond exclusively to journalistic logic.

The second part of the code lists nine principles to which journalists commit. Five of them concern the relationship with sources (state, legal and illegal social groups): a) “We will maintain a strictly professional relationship with our sources (...). We reject discrimination, coercion, intimidation or any privilege which could compromise our independence”; b) “We will not reveal the identity or location of sources

<sup>4</sup> Centre of Solidarity of the International Federation of Journalists.

<sup>5</sup> Media for Peace.

<sup>6</sup> The author of this paper translates and summarizes the most important parts of the text.

if asked (...); c) “We will make a particular effort to verify information with different sources. We will compare and verify any statement provided during interviews, press conferences or through press releases. (...) If we have only one source, we will explain that the report is based on only one version”; d) “We will enrich the agenda about the war by allowing any citizen to express their opinion and peace proposals. We think that peace is the most important outcome (...); e) “Under no circumstances will we assume the functions of any legal state institution or an illegal center of intelligence or any humanitarian organization (...)” (Márquez González, 2003, pp. 1–2).

A second group of principles involves the format of news:

“We will use an adequate lexicon which avoids qualifying expressions and adjectives used by the groups in conflict. We will respect the right to the presumption of innocence and refer to a person suspected of have committed a crime as a “suspect” until the issuing of a final and appealable conviction. For no reason should a journalist be an instrument of war”.

“We are not responsible for the final news outcome because professional practice determines that journalists are only responsible for the coverage and writing of news. The titling, editing and broadcast or publication of a news report are the responsibility of media owners and managers” (Márquez González, 2003, pp. 1–2).

The last principles involve victims of the conflict, and the journalists’ role with regard to the media and the state:

“We will respect the privacy of citizens involved in or affected by the armed conflict provided that this silence will not compromise the public interest. In all cases we will respect the grief of the victims”.

“We will fulfill our duties of loyalty and availability as media within the framework of journalism ethics, which requires truthful information and sets aside any economic interest, within the limits of security [for journalists]. In order to ensure our inde-

pendence, we need sufficient and adequate salaries (...) and also means of transport which are not owned by parties to the conflict” (Márquez González, 2003, pp. 1–2).

The code concludes by stating that “when an armed group thinks that they have the right to use, manipulate or intimidate a journalist, they do so because they think that reason comes from weapons. For journalists, reason comes exclusively from truth” (Márquez González, 2003, p. 2).

### **Ethics in wartime**

In order to understand what this code means in the context of the Colombian armed conflict, it is necessary to remember that news reports are not only a matter for journalists. Previous research has shown that the form and content of the news produced and broadcast are influenced by media, journalistic and war communications considerations. These variables also play a role in journalism ethics, as this paper seeks to show.

Media and journalistic variables refer to the obligation for journalists to follow the demands imposed by media organizations including political bias, formatting constraints and rating requirements – while taking care to maintain credibility and dealing with the pressure exerted by sources (Berkowitz, 2009; Carlson, 2009; Lemieux, 2000; McQuail, 2010; Rincón & Ruiz, 2002a). Thus, when journalists state in their code that they will keep an independent relationship with sources and verify information provided by them, they are setting principles which underestimate the context in which they produce news. For instance, in Colombia, news production and broadcasting is the function of private media owned by the richest families in the country who also have relationships with the government. The main newspaper, *El Tiempo*, is owned by the family of the current president.

Moreover, some media owners have decided to support the state and put pressure on their employees (journalists) to favor official sources when they cover the conflict (Medios para la Paz [MPP], 2006). In other words, current working conditions are in contradiction to the ethical principles claimed by journalists. In their ethical code, journalists acknowledge that

good salaries and resources for covering the conflict are indispensable. However, economic constraints lead media owners to reduce human and technical resources allocated to covering conflict zones. In order to respond to the pressure exerted by the armed groups, journalists have created some professional myths. For example, they prefer to quote the position of the Church because it should be neutral. Journalists also think it is better to voice the opinion of official sources because they must take responsibility for whatever is said (Giraldo, Roldán, & Flórez, 2003; Rincón & Ruíz, 2002b). The main problem with this is that official sources, government, military and state representatives are also parties to the conflict and are therefore not impartial.

This point is related to the third group of variables involved in the production of news, war communications variables, because armed groups and official sources involved in the conflict are interested in winning the war rather than informing citizens (Hoskins & O'Loughlin, 2010; Maltby & Keeble, 2007; Maltby, 2012). When they talk to journalists, their motivation is to make journalists talk about the war from their own point of view, that is, to justify their violence and discredit the adversary (Barreto, Borja, Serrano, & López, 2009; Borja, Barreto, Alzate, Sabucedo, & López, 2009).

In the particular case of Colombia, the military requires the unconditional support of journalists. The government does not accept that journalists should give the same treatment to legal armed forces and guerrillas. The Colombian state has made arrangements to prevent journalists from using members of illegal groups as sources (Comisión Nacional de Televisión [CNTV], 1997). In this sense, when journalists say in their code that armed groups use them to disseminate propaganda, they are recognizing that news is not only their preserve but that other social actors play a role in the reporting of news. One might therefore ask why journalists then set standards as if news reporting depended exclusively on them. In fact, they are not allowed by the state to interview all the actors involved in the conflict. Through the National Television Authority, the former National Commission of

Television, (agreement 017, chapter IV, article 21, 1997) the Colombian government prevents journalists from disseminating any guerrillas', delinquents', rebels' or terrorist groups' message or press releases<sup>7</sup>. Journalists are not able to respect the plurality and balance of sources. In this sense, the context of war interferes with journalists' ethical principles. However journalists mainly adopt an internal approach in their discussions and initiatives regarding ethics. Actually, Stephen Ward argues that "efforts to reform news media practices are polarized between two inadequate approaches, an 'internal' approach which considers journalism ethics the exclusive domain of journalists, and an 'external' model that believes reform requires the imposition of external regulations and regulators on news media" (Ward, 2005, p. 315).

## Method

Given that: a) the confessions of some former combatants and the current legal investigations are proving that the ceremonies of the BCN and BCG demobilizations in 2003 and 2006 were staged ('falsified') and that, b) journalists have stated in their ethics codes that they have to use different sources, avoid the war lexicons of the armed groups, stay independent from sources and publish 'truthful' information, which is in contradiction to the context of war, this study analyzes the coverage of the BCN and BCG demobilizations in order to provide some useful clues for better understanding journalism ethics in wartime.

## Sampling

The study presented in this paper is part of a research project which will analyze news published by Colombian newspapers from the time of the announcement of the demobilizations until the recent trials in which some members

<sup>7</sup> "Artículo 21. *Informaciones sobre delitos contra el orden público. En tiempo de conmoción interior, los programas de televisión no podrán difundir comunicados ni declaraciones que provengan de grupos guerrilleros u organizaciones delincuenciales vinculadas a la subversión o al terrorismo, o de sus miembros, o que sean atribuidos a ellos*". Retrieved from [http://www.antv.gov.co/normatividad/acuerdos/1997/acuerdo\\_017.pdf](http://www.antv.gov.co/normatividad/acuerdos/1997/acuerdo_017.pdf).

of the former government are involved. Up to this point more than 500 articles have been collected: 41 were published at the time of the announcement of the demobilizations, 136 after the demobilizations and before 2011 when former combatants confessed the demobilizations were false. Another 81 were selected because they mentioned one or both demobilizations while covering another topic. Finally, more than 300 have been published since the trials began. However, this body of reporting is not complete because the trials are still in progress.

Thus this paper focuses on the coverage, by the national press, of the announcement of the two demobilizations. This corresponds to the 41 articles published in the three weeks before and after the demobilization ceremonies. More specifically, three national newspapers were included: *El Tiempo* (the main daily newspaper), *El Espectador* (the second daily newspaper, which by the time of the demobilizations had become weekly because of its financial problems) and *Semana* (main opinion weekly magazine).

**Coding**

A content analysis (Bardin, 2001; Krippendorff, 2004; Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005) was carried out in order to determine which demobilization received more attention from press and the framing given by press to the announcement of the demobilizations. These two variables were examined from a journalist’s ethical point of

view, based on the standards set in the code for the coverage of the Colombian armed conflict (Márquez González, 2003).

The first variable was analyzed in order to determine the extent to which journalists gave credibility to the official version of events. For this purpose, the role assigned by journalists to the official version was observed by identifying the sources that journalists voiced in their reports: official sources (military, state and government representatives), civil sources (civilians, civil organizations), illegal armed groups (representatives of the demobilized groups) and media sources.

The analysis of the framing of articles in press consisted of examining whether newspapers announced the demobilizations as a step towards peace (the official version) or whether they pointed out the controversies regarding the demobilization ceremonies. The framing was also analyzed through the qualifying expressions used by journalists to describe the demobilizations.

**Results and Discussion**

Most of the articles published about the demobilizations are related to the BCN (paramilitary group) demobilization. Only 22% refer to the BCG demobilization. *El Espectador* was the only newspaper which did not publish any article about the BCG demobilization (Figure 1).

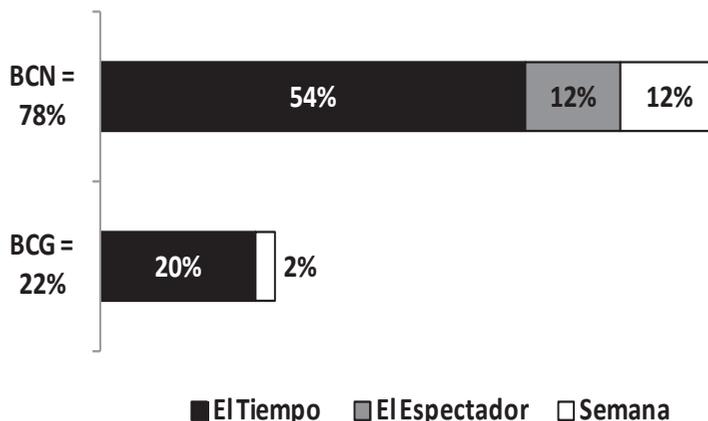


Figure 1. Proportion of articles published by each newspaper and magazine to announce the demobilizations.

This difference in press attention may be due to the different strategic targets of the military and the Colombian government. The information revealed in the trials suggests that the demobilization of the BCN paramilitary group was a media operation directed at public opinion while the demobilization of the BCG seems to have been a media operation directed at the enemy, the FARC guerrillas. In the first case, the purpose was to win the support of the population for the negotiation with the paramilitary groups. In fact, this negotiation was criticized by specialists in conflicts resolution and human rights (Andreu-Guzmán, 2005; Comisión Internacional de Juristas [CIJ], 2005) because of the impunity of crimes against humanity committed by paramilitary and because these groups keep on committing crimes. In the second, the strategy in demobilizing a FARC section was to show the enemy that some of its members had decided to betray the group and obtain economic and legal advantages from the government, as the High Commissioner for Peace said in press articles. Because this strategy was different from the first, the government did not need to use the media in the same way. More media coverage was necessary in order to convince the population of the demobilization of the paramilitary group. Being an official source, the government and the military had more opportunity to disseminate these strategic versions through the media.

However, attention given by press to a topic is not only revealed by the number of articles, but also by the discursive positioning of reporters. If, on the one hand, the press seems to have given credibility to the official version announcing the demobilization as a step towards peace, on the other hand journalists showed significant detachment through their headlines in the case of the BCG demobilization. All nine articles published about this demobilization were given a title that indicated problems and lack of transparency: “*a not very transparent episode*”<sup>8</sup>, “*the surrender was not staged*”<sup>9</sup>, “*More fooling around*”<sup>10</sup>. In

contrast, journalists show a more engaged discursive positioning in the official version of the BCN demobilization through the headlines: “*an unprecedented demobilization*”<sup>11</sup>, “*the first step*”<sup>12</sup>, “*the change from guns to words*”<sup>13</sup>.

Almost half the 32 articles were given a title according to the government version which sought to show that the government was controlling the demobilization process (47%) and that it would contribute to peace (22%) (Figure 2). Thus articles actually support the official version by explaining that by laying down their weapons the combatants were showing their commitment to peace and their willingness to submit to the rule of law. Press articles also highlighted that the role played by the government was important because it would guarantee educational and working conditions for former combatants.

In the corpus, 33 expressions were found to qualify the BCN demobilization (one qualifying expression on average per article) and 24 to qualify the BCG demobilization (3 qualifying expressions on average per article). The analysis of the lexicon used by journalists to refer to and describe these demobilizations confirms that they engage more easily with the official version in the case of the paramilitary group demobilization (BCN) than with that of the FARC guerrilla section (BCG) demobilization. Only a third of the expressions describing the BCG demobilization follow the official version. In this last case, most suggest that the demobilization was staged (Figure 3).

These results suggest that, as voiced in the ethics code, journalists are more wary of armed groups. In fact, while official sources are the most quoted in both cases (Figure 4), news reports about BCN demobilization mainly quoted a representative of the government (the High Commissioner for Peace); in other words, an official, but non-armed, source. In contrast, news reports about the BCG demobilization are mainly based on the accounts given by the military, an official and armed source.

<sup>8</sup> “*Un episodio poco transparente*”, *El Tiempo*, 26<sup>th</sup> March 2006.

<sup>9</sup> “*La entrega no fue un montaje*”, *El Tiempo*, 12<sup>th</sup> March 2006.

<sup>10</sup> “*Otro oso!*”, *Semana*, 11<sup>th</sup> March 2006.

<sup>11</sup> “*Una desmovilización inédita*”, *El Tiempo*, 24<sup>th</sup> November 2003.

<sup>12</sup> “*El primer paso*”, *Semana*, 17<sup>th</sup> November 2003.

<sup>13</sup> “*El cambio del fusil a la palabra*”, *El Tiempo*, 14<sup>th</sup> December 2003.

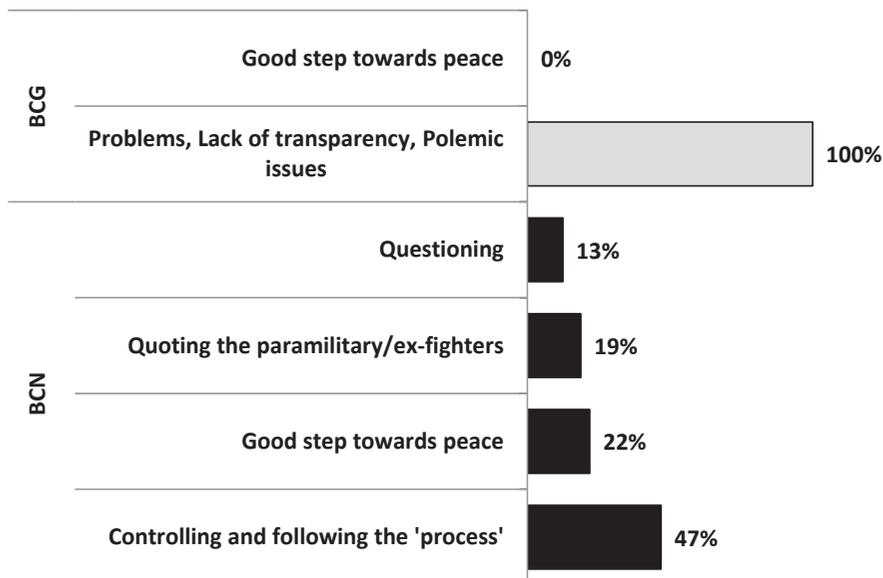


Figure 2. Framing given to news reports in headlines.

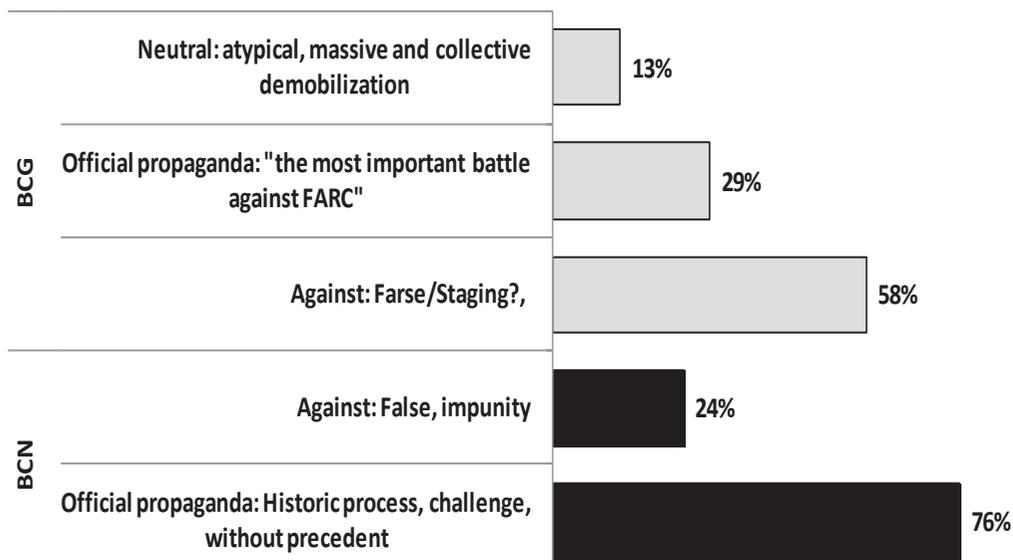


Figure 3. Qualifying expressions.

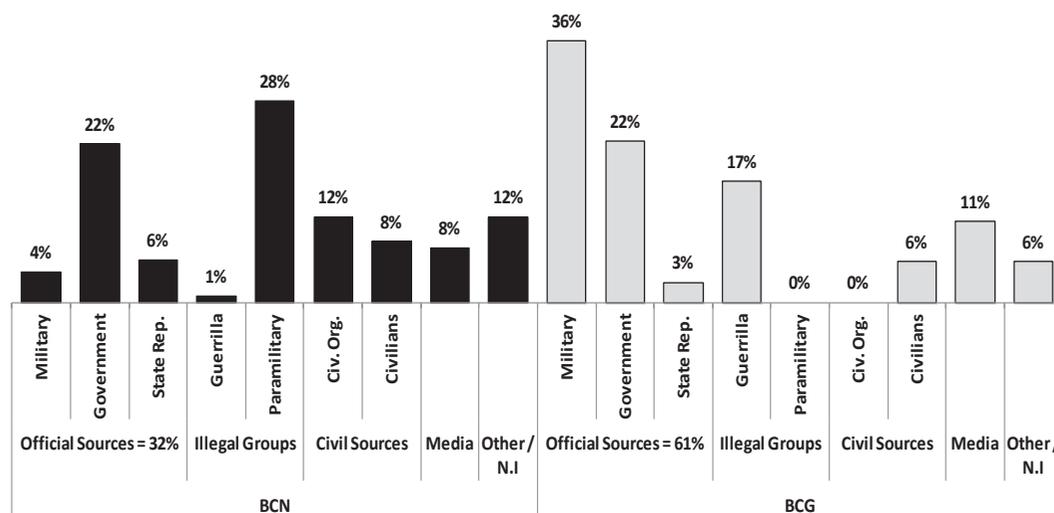


Figure 4. Sources quoted by journalists.

As it has been said before, in their code journalists acknowledge that the military, as an armed group, is biased. This could be the reason why the press gave less attention to the demobilization of the BCG. In addition, the place given to illegal groups as sources varies. In the coverage of the BCN demobilization, the percentages of official sources and of paramilitary leaders quoted in news reports were similar. In the government's logic of war communications, it was important that the civil population recognize paramilitary fighters as human beings who wanted the same things everyone wants: a job, a family and to live in peace. For instance, quotations from paramilitary representatives highlighted their emotional discourse regarding their lives, motivations and aspirations.

The paramilitaries' activities were legitimized by referring to them as "social work with communities". In contrast, for the military, it was important to show the enemy (the FARC guerrilla) a huge coup against him by showing a large number of guerrilla fighters demobilized. The official information was not clear about this: news reports talked about 65, 70 or 80 guerrilla fighters demobilized. Moreover, when ex-guerrilla fighters were quoted, it was not to

show that they had reformed as people, but to explain all the suspicious aspects of the demobilization ceremony.

In the code for the coverage of the conflict, journalists commit to using a plurality of sources in order to be able to verify information and provide public opinion with different versions. Despite this, the three newspapers analyzed accorded little space to dissident voices in both cases. The voice of civilian victims is hardly present in newspapers (BCN = 8% and BCG = 6%); the few cases in which journalists quoted civilians they were relegated to the last part of the article.

At this point it is interesting to ask about the role of media in the military's war communications. As discussed above, newspapers mainly quote the government and social actors who shared and engaged with the official version (BCN = 32% and BCG = 61%). This official version is also supported by the representatives of the BCN and BCG as printed in newspapers' articles (BCN = 28%, BCG = 17%). By doing so, journalists contributed to the war communications of one of the parties to the conflict. At the same time, and as a strategy used by journalists in order to show a balanced and neutral positioning,

newspapers noted doubts and problems with both demobilizations. In the case of the paramilitary group, journalists criticized what seemed to them an improvised process which led to impunity for the crimes committed by the paramilitaries as illustrated by the headlines mentioned above. Moreover 13% of the articles mentioned that the weapons laid down by the BCN were not the same as those seen before the demobilization, and pointed out that the number of paramilitary fighters was not clear (either 868 or 800). However, even if articles present the official version along with some criticism, the fact is that these two versions are not balanced and journalists mainly quoted the official version as if official sources were not involved in the conflict or as if they were impartial.

In the case of the BCG, most of the articles focused on the odd aspects journalists saw in the ceremony. Only the army could talk to the guerrilla fighters participating in the demobilization and as a consequence, journalists could not verify the information on the ground. Despite this, no journalists dared to talk about censorship or reporting restrictions. Journalists also pointed out that fighters were wearing new uniforms at the demobilization ceremony and that the leader had long hair, which they know is forbidden by the FARC. They were very surprised that the BCG possessed a plane since the FARC was not known to have this kind of weapon. However, for journalists official sources are legitimate and thus may be quoted in news reports. Even if journalists quote other sources, official ones are most often used. Again, these reports contribute to the government and military's war communications.

Under these circumstances the commitment of Colombian journalists to be independent from sources, and to quote different and contrasting sources is in contradiction with the context of war because, as has been noted, official sources are not impartial. They are at war with the guerrillas and demand that journalists not relay the guerrillas' press releases and messages.

Thus, the results presented in this paper raise the following question: why should journalists set in their code of ethics principles they know in

advance they will not be able to follow because of the constraints resulting from the context of war? What is the reason why journalists establish a code in which they commit to reporting truthful and balanced information when official sources are directly involved in the conflict and have the legitimacy to prevent journalists from verifying information with sources who do not agree with their point of view?

The analysis carried out here indicates that more than a document telling journalists how to cover the armed conflict in a responsible way, the targets of the code are media owners and managers, armed groups and media audiences. In this sense, the code is a "political act of communication" (Ward, 2009) responding to a particular context (Wilkins & Brennan, 2004). With the code, Colombian journalists are telling the armed groups that their motivations and aims are not the same, that they defend different principles and that they disapprove of the coercion exerted by the armed groups. Journalists are also telling their audience that their margins for maneuver are limited because of the pressure of the armed groups, which could explain their "mistakes". Thus if they publish information which is inaccurate and biased it is not their fault, but that of the armed groups who manipulate them and of the media owners and managers who do not provide them with appropriate working conditions. Finally, Colombian journalists are also demanding editorial independence from media owners and managers.

On the basis of the foregoing, the analysis presented suggests that the way in which scholars and journalists have studied news reports and journalism ethics in wartime needs to be discussed comprehensively way. First, news reports on war result not only from journalists' work and media organizations' constraints. In times of war media is one of the "weapons" used by the parties to the conflict in order to communicate their legitimizing discourses (Barreto et al., 2009; Hoskins & O'Loughlin, 2010). Therefore, there is no reason for ignoring this fact when discussing journalism ethics in wartime. Second, concerning the code for the coverage of the armed conflict, Colombian journalists wrote this because of the

threats they had received from armed groups and therefore the code was not created with the purpose of professional training or as a guideline for journalists.

In this sense, this study supports Ward's proposal (Ward, 2005) regarding the need to adopt a holistic ethical approach in order to take into account the role of sources and audiences in the making of news reports by journalists. This holistic approach to journalism ethics would allow journalists to establish clearer codes for training in how to respond to the constraints of a context of war.

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