

**PILAR GARCÉS and ESMERALDA BONILLA, Great Wars**

**Translated by Caroline Asiala**

*The following song is written by Pilar Garcés, a Colombian refugee woman in Ecuador. The accompanying narrative is written by Esmeralda Bonilla, who is also a Colombian refugee in Ecuador and a founding member of Mujeres Libres Sin Fronteras (MLSF). Caroline Asiala has provided translation. MLSF is a network of refugee women in Ecuador, a country with the largest recognized refugee population in Latin America. MLSF aims to raise awareness of women's rights and refugee rights issues and participates in policy advocacy efforts to find innovative and sustainable solutions to the economic, social, and cultural barriers women refugees face every day.*

♪ Hoy contarles a todo lo que puedan oír	Today we tell you all that you can hear
♪ Ya vengo desde Colombia para refugiarme aquí No fue por mi propio gusto que yo vine hasta aquí	Now, I come from Colombia to seek refuge here It wasn't for my own liking that I came here
♪ El terror de grandes guerras me sacó de mi país	The terror of great wars took me away from my country
♪ Huyendo con mis hijitos por el miedo de morir	Fleeing with my children from the fear of dying
♪ Dejamos mi bella tierra Sin pensar que ha de venir Con yanto dentro de mi alma Queda atrás mi por venir	We left behind my beautiful land Without thinking that it would come to pass With tears in my soul, I leave it behind to come here
♪ La guerra es cosa terrible, Dios nos libre de tal mal Ver cómo muere tu padre, tu hermano, y tu mamá Cómo matan tu hijo y tu sin poder hablar	War is a terrible thing, God, save us from such evil Look how your father, brother, and mother die How they kill your son and you cannot speak
♪ Y porque soy colombiana, No me quiera Usted juzgar En mi tierra hay gente mala No lo voy a negar, pero somos más Los buenos se los puedo demostrar	And just because I am Colombian, I don't want you to judge me In my land there are bad people, I won't deny it, but we are more - I can show you the good people

**Narrative: *Grandes Guerras***

This song comments on the violence in Colombia. We stress that we fled Columbia only because we had no other choice. We had to come to Ecuador where, despite the country facing its own difficulties, our families were taken in. Having escaped Colombia to Ecuador with the little that we could carry from our homes – we identify ourselves as displaced, asylum seeking and refugee women.

We called Colombia the ‘beautiful land’ because it was paradise to us; it had beautiful places, like the sea and the rivers that flowed by my house. It was the land that I wanted for my children. I built a big house for them and on Sundays we would go to the sea to swim. And every year we would go to my father’s farmland and we would plant fruits and vegetables. We planned to take care of our children in Colombia.

We named our song *Great Wars* because, for many years, my city and my country of origin have experienced war. From the time I can remember, I witnessed death and had to dodge bullets. We had to see people cut up. My mother and father protected me, my brothers and my sisters so that the bullets would not reach us. My mother screamed that they would not be permitted to do that to her children.

As the war continued, mothers became widows. The father of my four children lost his life to the war. We had to get out, and I fought hard so that we could live.

We say ‘war is a terrible thing’ because we cannot speak even when they kill our family. Pilar, our friend who wrote this song, was selling things on the street with her son by her side. Some men appeared and began to shoot at her son. She tried to get close to her son, but the men were coming closer with their weapons. They came to her with their weapons and told her not to speak or scream. In agony, she took some sand from the ground and stuffed it into her mouth.

My mother-in-law also knew who had killed my husband, her son. They came on the day of the wake and told her not to talk or say anything to the police or they would kill the rest of her children.

But life in Ecuador is not perfect.

There is discrimination in Ecuador, but there are almost no murders like there are in Colombia. Once, when my grandson had just started talking, there was a gunfight and we had to run into a house. There was a confrontation with the police and my grandson saw them and said, ‘Mami, the police are coming to kill us’. These are harsh realities.

As we say in the song, ‘just because I am Colombian, I do not want you to judge me’. When we go out into the street or when we speak, some Ecuadorians say that the Colombians are thieves and the women are prostitutes. There are Colombians that have done harm in Ecuador, but we cannot say all Colombians are bad. I would like to integrate into the Ecuadorian society so that they can see that we are humble, collaborative, and decent people. We can show them that we can build our lives and work honorably. I sell coconut juice, my daughter works at a beauty salon, and my son works cleaning windows. It is not the work that we are used to doing – but we are able to support ourselves.

But life in Ecuador is better.

In Ecuador, my daughter can go to a class or go to a friend's house and I do not have to be afraid that she will be tortured, raped, or killed for refusing to be someone's girlfriend. We do not have to ask our neighbours to help get our sons away from the hands of the Urabeño, an armed group in Colombia. In Ecuador, we do not have to run from the sound of bullets. In Ecuador, we do not have to be afraid that we will be killed. I have the satisfaction of knowing that my four children and my grandson are alive.