The Multiple Constructions of Gender in the Wake of Armed Struggle:

An Intersectional Study of Ex-combatants in Colombia

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Abstract

The constructions of gender are not static, but processes of constant transformation that manifest large variations, especially in conflict-affected settings. Former combatants often experience particularly significant and rapid changes in gender roles, practices, and identities, not only within armed groups but also after demobilization. Gender is transformed in several, often contradictory and complex, ways as men, women and sexual and gender minorities assume both traditional and non-traditional gender roles during and after armed struggle. As the reconstruction of militarized gender identities has started to be considered an integral part of reintegration programmes, there is a growing interest among scholars and practitioners to understand how these transformations take place.

This research explores how gender is constructed through a comparative study of ex-combatants from three different armed groups in Colombia: the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC); the 19th of April Movement (M-19); and the United Self-Defenders of Colombia (AUC). It draws on 55 interviews with ex-combatants of different genders and sexual orientations using a gender and intersectional approach.

This research demonstrates that there is large variation and multiple ways in which gender is constructed and formulates four different pathways of constructions of gender among ex-combatants: through advancing gender equality; (re)constructing traditional gender roles; maintaining militarized gender constructions; and finally, an analysis of gender constructions among sexual and gender minorities. I show that leaving war may generate opportunities for particularly significant transformations for LGBT ex-combatants. I also explore the extent to which ex-combatants exert agency across these varied pathways, as well as the impact of gender constructions on the long-term possibilities of reintegration and constructions of more gender-equitable societies. I conclude that reintegration programmes should incorporate a gender and intersectional perspective that builds on the understanding of these multiple pathways of constructions of gender among ex-combatants.

Key Words: DDR, Reintegration, Gender, LGBT, Colombia

Dedication

To my children, Laila, Leandro and Amaia

Acknowledgements

Abbreviations

ACR	*Alta Consejería para la Reintegración* – High Counsellor's Office for Reintegration (until 2011) / *Agencia Colombiana para la Reintegración* – Colombian Agency for Reintegration (2011-2017)
ARN	*Agencia para la Reincorporación y la Normalización* - Colombian Agency for Reincorporation and Normalization (2017 onwards)
AUC	*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* – United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia
CONPES	*Consejo Nacional de Política Económica y Social* – National Council on Economic and Social Policy
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
ELN	*Ejército de Liberación Nacional* – The National Liberation Army
EPL	*Ejército Popular de Liberación* - The Popular Liberation Army
ERG	*Ejército Revolucionario Guevarista* - The Guevarista Revolutionary Army
ERP	*Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo* - The People's Revolutionary Army
FARC-EP	*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo* – Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army
FMLN	*Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* – Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (El Salvador)
IAWG	Inter-Agency Working Group on Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (UN)
IDDRS	International Disarmament Demobilisation and Reintegration Standards
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex
MAPP–OEA	*Misión de Apoyo al Proceso de Paz en Colombia de la Organización de los Estados Americanos* - Support Mission for the Peace Process in Colombia by the Organization of American States
M-19	*Movimiento 19 de Abril* – 19th of April Movement
PTSD	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNVMC	United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

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1. Introduction

This thesis contributes to understanding the processes of constructions of gender among ex-combatants after leaving their respective armed groups. Gender is not static, and there is not just one pattern of masculinity and femininity in any given time or place. On the contrary, gender is socially constructed and manifests variations across and within cultures, as well as changes over time (Connell 1995, Goldstein 2001, Vylder 2004, Theidon 2007, 2009, Dolan 2012). While the transformation of gender roles, practices and identities is a global phenomenon, these changes are often particularly significant in conflict-affected contexts. Former combatants are a fascinating subject of research as they often experience particularly large and rapid changes in gender roles, practices and identities, not only whilst part of armed groups but also after their demobilization (Eriksson Baaz & Stern 2010, UNDP & IAWG 2012, Cockburn 2013). Gender is transformed in several, often contradictory and complex ways, as men, women and sexual and gender minorities assume both traditional[1] and non-traditional gender roles in armed groups and the subsequent processes of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR).

Women combatants often experience large changes as they transgress traditional gender norms through taking up arms. At the same time, armed conflict often reinforces traditional gender roles of women through, for example, women taking up traditionally feminine support roles in armed groups. Much has also been written about the marginalization of women after leaving the armed struggle and how they often tend to reintegrate into more traditional roles (see e.g. Barth 2002, Meintjes 2002, Pankhurst 2004, Mazurana 2005, Londoño & Nieto 2006, UNDP & IAWG 2012, Dietrich Ortega 2017). At the same time, conflicts often generate changes that significantly alter

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[1] Throughout the thesis I refer to "traditional gender roles". Here, I seek to analyse the gender roles ascribed by culture, traditionally often placing men in the role of 'provider' and women the role of 'caregiver' where women ex-combatants are often expected to return to domestic and caretaking roles or to employment in sectors that are culturally ascribed and acceptable for women (IAWG 2018). While this division of gender roles is, on the one hand, relatively cross-culturally consistent across reintegration settings (see e.g. IAWG 2018), I do, at the same time, acknowledge the heterogeneity of traditions, both in practice and interpretations, as well as acknowledge that traditions and gender roles are dynamic and changing over time.

not only the gender roles and identities of women, but simultaneously alter those of men. Male combatants often experience changes since armed conflicts tend to shape traditional gender discourses that promote militarized forms of masculinities. As the combatants hand in their weapons and are reintegrating into their respective societies, scholars have therefore argued that it is important to "disarm" the gendered discourses that are instrumental to conflict (Theidon 2009b). Along these lines of thought, the militarized masculine identities and practices need to be deconstructed in order to break the cycle of violence and decrease the risk of remobilization and recidivism in the post-war period (Theidon 2009b, UNDP & IAWG 2012).

The reconstruction of gender has started to be considered an integral part of peacebuilding and reintegration and there is a growing interest among scholars and practitioners to understand how these transformations take place. In addition to the need to further unpack the multiple constructions of gender among male and female combatants, extremely little is known of the experiences of constructions of gender among sexual and gender minorities, both within armed groups and after leaving war. Overall, the thesis serves as a contribution and an extension of the existing, growing body of work on gender and reintegration. In certain cases, it also challenges and surprises existing literature in its efforts to further the understanding of ex-combatants as a highly heterogenous group that constructs gender in diverse and multiple ways. My research makes a unique contribution in its focus on LGBT ex-combatants.

This thesis is a comparative study of the processes of constructions of gender among ex-combatants from three different armed groups in Colombia. The research builds on semi-structured in-depth interviews with 55 former combatants of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the 19th of April Movement (M-19) and the United Self-Defenders of Colombia (AUC). Using a gender relational and intersectional approach, which places particular emphasis on the interrogation of the intersection of gender, sexuality and armed group factors, the research includes interviews with men, women and sexual and gender minority ex-combatants. Since very little is known of the experiences of LGBT combatants who have operated within different armed groups, and their transition to civilian life following demobilization, my explorative research makes a first and unique contribution to the field of gender studies by broadening the conceptualization of gender in DDR beyond a narrow, binary understanding while also pointing to the need for further intersectional analysis to understand the experiences of ex-combatants. By introducing the long-

overlooked topic of DDR and sexual and gender minorities, this thesis seeks to contribute to more inclusive DDR research, policy and programme implementation.

In this thesis, I contribute to advancing the analysis of gender as relational and socially constructed processes through the conceptualization of different pathways of gender constructions among ex-combatants. The research also places special emphasis on the effect of these pathways, both in terms of agency of individual ex-combatants in the constructions of gender, and the effect of the varied gender constructions on the society and peacebuilding processes. There is a lack of understanding of how ex-combatants have experienced the processes of gender constructions embedded in the broader processes of reintegration and peacebuilding. It is therefore important to analyse the specific conditions under which ex-combatants exert agency, and strengthen the understanding of their subjective experience of gender constructions post-demobilization. Limited attention has also been given to how gender transformations may contribute to a more equitable post-war period (Manchanda 2002, Meintjes et al. 2002, Kampwirth 2004, Eriksson Baaz & Stern 2010, UNDP & IAWG 2012, Viterna 2013). This thesis therefore explores the effects of each of the pathways of gender constructions on society, in particular in relation to the processes of reintegration, peacebuilding and more inclusive societies.

This thesis therefore advances research within the interdisciplinary field of gender and intersectionality studies, critical masculinity studies and peace and conflict studies, as well as the field of transitional justice, and informs policymakers and practitioners seeking to make reintegration programmes gender transformative.

In this first chapter, I will provide an overview of what is known about the diverse gendered experiences of reintegration among both women, men and sexual and gender minorities, as well as an introduction to DDR and gender. It also includes an outline of the aim of the research and my key research questions This is followed in chapter two by the presentation of the theoretical framework, focusing on the concepts of gender transformation among combatants and ex-combatants, intersectionality and gendered agency among ex-combatants. Chapter three introduces the methodology. Chapter four offers a brief contextualization of the Colombian conflicts, gender and reintegration processes. Chapters five to eight present the results of the thesis. These chapters include an analysis of the processes of constructions advancing gender equality

(Pathway One), (re)construction of traditional gender roles (Pathway Two), as well as the processes by which ex-combatants maintain or re-enforce militarized gender constructions (Pathway Three). Finally, I analyse gender constructions among sexual and gender minorities, and show that leaving war may generate particularly significant and rapid transformations for LGBT ex-combatants (Pathway Four). The results capturing LGBT ex-combatants' experiences are among the unique contributions of my thesis. This last empirical chapter both builds on and is analysed in relation to the previous three pathways. The concluding chapter includes a summary of the key research findings and highlights the contribution of this research to scholarship, as well as its practical application for gender-transformative DDR programmes. It also points to further areas of research.

1.1 Understanding the Diverse Gendered Experiences in Reintegration

In this section I will describe how the field of DDR has evolved and how gender has started to be considered a critical part thereof. I then outline the current research on women, men and sexual and gender minority ex-combatants.

1.1.1 The evolving field of DDR and gender

Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programmes have been considered central to international efforts to build sustainable peace across the world (United Nations 2000a, 2001, 2011, 2019, Nilsson 2005, Humphreys & Weinstein 2007, Muggah 2010). They have also been considered critical to the current global agenda to reach the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), in particular to reach SDG 16 on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions as well as for SDG 5 to Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (UN 2019).

While combatants have returned to their communities after war throughout history, since 1989, the United Nations has supported DDR programmes to dissolve armed groups and return former fighters to their communities. The disarmament and demobilization phase is often a time-limited and, ideally, fairly short phase. Reintegration, on the other hand, is thereafter a long-term, indeed open-ended, process. As constructions of gender and changes in gendered practices, roles, identities and norms also tend to develop over time, the reintegration phase constitutes the key focus of my research. The UN defines reintegration as a:

process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income. Reintegration is essentially a social and economic process with an open time frame, primarily taking place in communities at the local level (United Nations 2006).

From having been primarily focused on individual-level programmes where ex-combatants register for economic reintegration support, such as cash payments and training, DDR programmes have come to focus more on community-based forms of reintegration where assistance is provided to communities with significant populations of ex-combatants (Humphreys & Weinstein 2007, UN 2019). Similarly, the UN has recognized that economic aspects alone are often not sufficient for the sustainable reintegration of ex-combatants (UN 2011). Increased attention has therefore been placed on social and political aspects, including through interventions such as psychosocial support, mental health counselling and clinical treatment and medical health support, as well as reconciliation, access to justice/transitional justice and participation in political processes (UN 2011, UN 2019).

This research includes ex-combatants from three very different armed groups that demobilized through different DDR processes spanning over the last three decades, and in that context it is important to bear in mind how the broader field of DDR and gender has evolved. Since 1989, DDR interventions have shifted from a relatively narrow preoccupation with ex-combatants as perceived security threats/spoilers, and with reductions in national military expenditure, to a broader emphasis on sustaining peace, prevention, peacebuilding, development, community violence reduction, transitional justice, deradicalization and countering of violent extremism, and, most recently, coordination of health aspects in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic (see e.g. Humphreys & Weinstein 2007, Jennings 2008, Lekha Sriram & Herman 2009, Patel 2009, UN 2009, UN 2019, Hansen & Lid et al. 2020). Through the course of this evolution, much has been written about the shortcomings of DDR, including programmes being implemented in a disjointed way with poor coordination, planning and support, tensions between competing demands, and a lack of evaluation of results (see e.g. Nilsson 2005, UN 2006, Jennings 2008, Lekha Sriram & Herman 2009). While the development of the UN Integrated DDR Standards represents an attempt to put in place a more standardized and integrated approach to DDR (United Nations 2006, 2019) this runs up against the reality on the ground of DDR programmes being increasingly implemented in more complex peacekeeping and non-peacekeeping contexts. As the fields of peacekeeping, peacebuilding and DDR continue to evolve, there are now programmes that are implemented as

alternatives to the classic DDR implemented in accordance with a peace agreement. The concept of "Second Generation DDR" (DPKO 2010) includes programmes that apply an alternative sequencing, for example implementation of DDR before a peace agreement has been reached. This is the case with the reintegration process with the FARC in Colombia, which allowed individual ex-combatants to desert the guerrilla group and demobilize before the peace agreement between the Colombian Government and the FARC was reached in 2016 and where DDR has been implemented in the midst of ongoing conflicts. It is against the backdrop of this shift from a more minimalist/security-focused approach to a more integrated and transformative approach in increasingly complex settings that gender has started to receive more attention.

Engendering DDR

The importance of ensuring that DDR programmes apply a gender perspective has been acknowledged by the international community and got a breakthrough with the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UN 2000b) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). In this resolution, the UN Security Council:

> *encourages all those involved in the planning for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration to consider the different needs of female and male ex-combatants and to take into account the needs of their dependents.*

Subsequent UN Security Council Resolutions and policy guidance on women, peace and security have reinforced the importance of a gender perspective in all aspects of peacebuilding.

The embedding of gender responsiveness within DDR programmes has demonstrated an overlapping mix of security oriented, development oriented and transformative objectives. There has been a security-oriented argument made that women and girls, contrary to general assumptions, can contribute to insecurity and violence in post-conflict situations and that their participation in DDR therefore will improve the chances of achieving more effective DDR (United Nations 2006). There has also been a more developmental focus on women's specific needs and vulnerabilities to allow them to benefit from DDR as a realization of their equal rights to participate in relevant programming (United Nations 2000b, UNIFEM 2004, United Nations 2006). Finally, there have been more transformative arguments made that gender-responsive DDR offers a rare opportunity to transform war-torn communities and contribute to sustainable and equitable peace and

development (see e.g. UNIFEM 2004, UNDP & IAWG 2012, DPO 2021). Policymakers and scholars have also started to recognize that gender is not only for women and girls but that gender responsive DDR also should deal with gender issues for men and boys (United Nations 2006, Theidon 2007, 2009, 2015, Eriksson Baaz & Stern 2010, Bleie 2012, UNDP & IAWG 2012). These arguments have often been made from a security standpoint, where the socialization into violent forms of masculinities may pose security challenges and undermine effective DDR.

In terms of the operationalization of gender commitments, the UN Integrated DDR Standards (UNIDDRS) have outlined a large number of gender-aware and female-specific interventions to ensure women's full and equal participation. In spite of these efforts, DDR programmes have continued to fall short, and receive criticism particularly for neglecting the specific needs of women and girls in all aspects of the DDR processes (Watteville 2002, UNIFEM 2004, Theidon 2009, Mendez 2012, Amling 2019, FBA 2019). Finally, LGBT ex-combatants have been completely overlooked by DDR international policies and programme guidance to date. While no reference has been made to sexual and gender minorities, non-discrimination and fair and equitable treatment are, however, considered core principles in both the design and implementation of integrated DDR processes. According to the UNIDDRS (United Nations 2019: 22), DDR shall not "discriminate against individuals on the basis of sex, age, gender identity, race, religion, nationality, ethnic origin, political opinion, or other personal characteristics or associations".

The following section provides a global overview of some of the conditions for women, men and sexual and gender minority ex-combatants, respectively. Chapter four will then look more specifically at the conditions for ex-combatants participating in the various DDR processes in Colombia.

1.2 Invisible Women in DDR

Over the last three decades, there has been an increasing recognition among both scholars and policymakers of the importance of understanding the gender dimensions of conflict (e.g. Enloe 1990, United Nations 2000b, Stern & Zalewski 2009, Sjoberg 2014). While women have often been associated exclusively with victimhood and peacemaking (Rehn et al. 2002), they in fact play multiple roles in conflict-affected settings. Women and girls are involved in armed conflict in different capacities and roles, including as combatants, as women associated with armed forces

and groups, as dependents and family members of combatants, and as community members,[2] and should therefore be eligible for different types of support during disarmament, demobilization and/or reintegration phases (United Nations 2006). Yet, women and girls have often been rendered invisible as armed groups are demobilizing, and their specific needs neglected in these processes (Watteville 2002, McKay 2004, UNIFEM 2004, Coulter 2009, FBA 2019). While DDR programmes have often focused on "men with guns", policy guidance has now pointed to the importance of ensuring women are included within the different phases of DDR (United Nations 2006).

Scholars and UN agencies have pointed to a large number of challenges in respect to facilitating the inclusion of women in DDR globally (Watteville 2002, McKay 2004, UNIFEM 2004, Nilsson 2005, United Nations 2006, Annan et al. 2011, Bleie 2012), starting from the very beginning of the processes, with the DDR eligibility criteria and obstacles to women's registration in the programmes. Common challenges observed in different DDR processes include commanders of armed forces and groups who deliberately deny female combatants the opportunity to register, and commanders hiding abducted women and girls for fear of legal and social consequences. DDR programmes have often failed to adequately assess the number of female combatants, supporters and dependents, meaning that they are neither expected nor catered for. Early DDR programmes, not in Colombia but in numerous other countries, also often required combatants to hand over a weapon as a requirement for registration in DDR programmes. Women in non-combat support roles were thus excluded from the programmes, as well as women combatants who did not have access to a weapon at the launch of the programme. Other challenges include women's fear of association with an armed force or group during peacetime, particularly when they were coerced to join, as well as women's' security concerns, including the fear of exposure, or re-exposure, to sexual and gender-based violence.

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[2] The UN (2006) provides the following definitions of these categories: "Female combatants: Women and girls who participated in armed conflicts as active combatants using arms. Female supporters/Females associated with armed forces and groups (FAAFGs): Women and girls who participated in armed conflicts in supportive roles, whether coerced or voluntarily. These women and girls are economically and socially dependent on the armed force or group for their income and social support. Examples: porters, cooks, nurses, spies, administrators, translators, radio operators, medical assistants, public information workers, camp leaders or women/ girls used for sexual exploitation. Female dependents: Women and girls who are part of ex-combatants' households. They are primarily socially and financially dependent on ex-combatants, although they may also have retained other community ties. Examples: wives/war wives, children, mothers/parents, female siblings and female members of the extended family."

Women combatants, supporters and dependents who, in spite of these challenges, managed to register for DDR, have been reported to not have equally benefited from the programme services, cash incentives, health care, training, travel remittances, small business grants or housing support that often flow to their male counterparts as part of DDR packages. Women's unequal access to DDR is preoccupying, even more so because women have been reported to face even greater reintegration challenges than male DDR participants, and thereby would be in even larger need of support (Annan et al. 2011, Bleie 2012). For example, while both female and male ex-combatants face obstacles in respect to social approval and inclusion, women have often faced larger challenges (Bleie 2012). Women also tend to face greater barriers to their economic reintegration (Coulter 2009, Upegui & Thylin et al. 2010, Thylin 2011).

The multiple roles women play in armed groups, and their gender roles, are often constructed, negotiated, challenged and reinforced in diverse, complex and sometimes contradictory ways during conflict, as well as post-conflict. This leads to questions concerning the ways in which changing gender norms, roles and identities may influence or limit ex-combatants' and associated groups' ability to reintegrate in post-conflict settings. Women in armed groups often experience a strong transformation of their traditional roles, and women combatants often deemphasize their traditional femininity (Mendez 2012, Bleie 2012). This transgression against traditional roles can make it harder for women to reintegrate in their communities once they demobilize. Much has also been written about the relatively cross-culturally consistent tendency of women ex-combatants reintegrating into more traditional roles. As the wars in which they are involved end, many of the gains made by women in terms of participating in non-traditional activities during war tend to be reversed (Hale 2002, Meintjes 2002). For example, Bleie (2012) has identified that one of the important challenges for women ex-combatants in Nepal is how to transfer to the old community the more equitable conjugal relations established within the armed group. In spite of the large contextual differences, this tendency has been observed across Latin America, Africa and Asia (see e.g. Barth 2002, Meintjes 2002, Pankhurst 2004, Mazurana 2005, Londoño & Nieto 2006, UNDP & IAWG 2012, Dietrich Ortega 2017, Weber 2021a).

In addition, women who have been exposed to sexual violence as well and women and girls who are mothers have been identified as particularly vulnerable (Annan et al 2011, United Nations 2006). Female DDR participants who are mothers have often faced greater difficulties in

benefitting from the training and services offered by DDR programmes (United Nations 2006, Weber 2021a). Ingrained gender-differentiated ideas of sexual morality often act as an additional barrier to community acceptance of women's military experiences and the possibility of returning home with perceived pride and dignity intact. Due to exposure to sexual and gender-based violence, as well as due to a perception that women in armed groups are promiscuous, women often face additional stigma in the processes of reintegration (McKay 2004, Bleie 2012, Mendez 2012). In Nepal, for example, during the long cantonment period of the DDR programme, most of the demobilized women married, often with comrades from other castes and ethnic groups. The social stigma of these inter-caste marriages was greater for female ex-combatants during the reintegration process, as they sought to establish a life in their in-law households. Many female ex-combatants also faced allegations of moral corruption on account of their perceived "sinful cohabitation" during the war and in the cantonments (Bleie 2012). In Guatemala, Weber (2021a) argues that persistent stigma produced anxiety among women ex-combatants and that the absence of gender-sensitive reintegration strategies generated difficulties in emotional and family relationships, mental health struggles and violence. In Sierra Leone, McKay's (2004) research show that girl mothers face particular challenges since their children make it impossible for them to deny that they had experienced under-age unmarried sexual relations or sexual violence during their time in the armed group. While my research includes only adult ex-combatants, many interview participants still entered the armed groups as minors and some demobilized as minors. Within the literature on child solders, however, there has been an increasing recognition of gender dimensions and girl soldiers' particular vulnerabilities. Girl soldiers fall within the special category of minors, and their experiences within the armed group and within the processes of DDR, is highly gendered (Özerdem & Podder 2011).

1.3 Men and Masculinities in DDR

Conflicts often generate changes that significantly alter not only the gender roles, relationships and identities of women, but of men as well. While the importance of ensuring that DDR programmes are responsive to women's needs has been recognized by the international community and in DDR policy guidance (UN Security Council 2000, UNIFEM 2004, United Nations 2006), the gender norms, roles and identities of male participants in DDR have been largely ignored.

While men make up the large majority of ex-combatants and DDR participants, their gendered identities have still been left largely unexplored. In the efforts to gender mainstream DDR, "gender" has often been used as a synonym for "women". "Men" could therefore be understood as a generic category of "human" against which the crosscutting issues/categories in DDR policy guidance—such as women, youth, children, migrants and people living with disabilities—are measured against. or from which they somehow deviate (Theidon 2009).

Over the last decade, DDR practitioners have started to problematize understandings of the transition from combatant to civilian as a gender-neutral technical affair. The UN guidance states that "*Gender-responsive DDR should also deal with male concerns and broader gender-related issues*" (United Nations 2014: 207). While the debate on women in DDR has focused first and foremost on women's specific needs and vulnerabilities, the analysis of the gender dimensions of men's DDR processes has focused primarily on the socialization into violent forms of masculinities. In its guidance, the UN acknowledges that notions of masculinity are often linked with possession of weapons for DDR participants. It is therefore important to consider men's gender identities, roles and relations in order to transform a violent masculine identity into a non-violent civilian identity. Theidon (2007, 2009) is one of the scholars who has drawn attention to this area. She argues that DDR programmes require a gendered analysis that include an examination of the links between weapons, masculinities and violence and the way in which certain forms of gender norms and masculinities are essential to the maintenance of militarism. According to this line of thought, the re- or deconstructions of gender roles in ex-combatants is a crucial factor for the success of DDR processes, and for the prospects of breaking cycles of violence and preventing ex-combatants from continuing to reproduce violence in the processes of reintegration.

As men demobilize, they tend to experience losses as they become a civilian, often including loss of prestige, and the inability to provide for and protect their family (Eriksson Baaz & Stern 2010, UNDP & IAWG 2012). Male ex-combatants who are unable to fulfil their traditional role as the breadwinner of the household are often challenged or threatened as livelihoods are destroyed and economic opportunities contract in conflict or post-conflict settings. The inability to assume pre-war traditional gender roles, paired with the socialization into violent forms of masculinities, may generate particular challenges for male ex-combatants as they return to civilian life (UNDP &

IAWG 2012). This can lead to an increase in both self-inflicted, as well as interpersonal or community-level violence, including domestic violence, suicide and alcohol/drug abuse. The UN guidance has therefore recommended that DDR programmes should not reinforce men's stereotypical gender roles, but rather encourage proper counselling mechanisms and flexible socioeconomic support (United Nations 2006).

Along the same line of thought, incipient efforts have been made by the UN Inter-Agency Working Group on DDR to understand the gender dimensions of DDR, and the impact gender has for the continuation of violence in the aftermath of ex-combatants' demobilization (UNDP & IAWG 2012). The Working Group has pointed to a relationship between ex-combatants' and associated groups' inability to break down restrictive gender norms, and their inability to address their violent pasts by implementing behavioural changes and successful coping mechanisms. Mazurana et al. (2018) have argued that deconstructing militarized masculinities requires that DDR satisfies needs that were previously addressed by the armed group, including securing livelihoods and protection, and providing social services. If livelihood and protection needs are not met, this can make men more susceptible to recruitment by armed or criminal groups. Gender therefore affects DDR participants' chances of achieving successful reintegration and the risk of conflict reoccurring (UNDP & IAWG 2012).

While there has been incipient attempts by scholars and the international community to analyse the constructions of masculinities in DDR, this knowledge has not been easy to translate into practical implementation. Theidon (2009) is one of the scholars that have been calling for DDR programmes to "disarm" the gendered identities that are instrumental for war. She argues that DDR programmes should transform "hegemonic, militarised masculinities that characterize former combatants" (Theidon 2009b: 34). Carayannies et al. (2014) have criticized Theidon, arguing that it remains unclear how this should be achieved, or even how the reshaping of gender roles would be perceived in the reality of the local contexts (which I will discuss further in the following chapter). While the focus on militarized masculinities has opened new and interesting fields of research, scholars such as Dietrich Ortega have criticized the stereotypical gendered assumptions, including the understanding of armed conflict as a predominantly male endeavour and of masculinity as necessarily being linked to militarism (Dietrich Ortega 2017: 17–18). She argues that this has overlooked guerrilla constructions of masculinity that operate in militarized contexts,

while refraining from gender-specific violence or devaluation of their female comrades. While questions of motherhood within armed groups and among ex-combatants have received attention, little is known of male ex-combatants who are fathers. Madhani and Baines (2020) have described how fatherhood is an important social identity in which many men inform and perform a paternal masculinity. Based on research with former LRA soldiers in northern Uganda, they have examined the gendered expectations of marriage and fatherhood post-conflict, and the particular reintegration challenges experienced by fathers to children 'born of war'. Their research shows that these ex-combatants face unique challenges, including social stigma, isolation, and exclusion given their role in the war and the conditions in which they became fathers. Still, these challenges do not render men without agency or desire to become fathers. While studies of masculinities and ex-combatants have tended to highlight how demobilization is experienced as emasculation which often leads to violent performances, their work on paternal masculinity shows that this is far from always the case.

An area that has been even more problematic to operationalize has been the UN's call for attention to male victims of SGBV (United Nations 2014). The UN guidance states that it is essential to pay special attention to male victims of SGBV. The UN argues that this is important both because male victims are less likely than women to report incidents due to cultural taboos in most societies, but also because attention to male victims/survivors of SGBV is considered an important measure to prevent SGBV from reoccurring post-conflict. Flawed DDR, or exclusion of certain armed groups from DDR processes, has been recognized as a significant threat to communities, and the correlation between sexual violence and flawed DDR in the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan has been highlighted by the UN Secretary-General (United Nations 2013). The impact of the unaddressed needs of male victims of SGBV remains largely unexplored, as does the impact of perpetration and victimization of sexual violence among combatants for the perpetration of SGBV in the post-conflict period.

1.4 Overlooked Sexual and Gender Minorities in DDR[3]

While the importance of ensuring that DDR programmes apply a gender perspective has been increasingly recognized by the international community, neither WPS nor other international DDR policy nor guidance have been inclusive of ex-combatants who do not conform to a narrow, binary, understanding of gender and make no reference to sexual and gender minorities. Scholars such as Hagen (2016) have described this neglect as, in part, the result of heteronormative assumptions in the framing of the WPS agenda. Hagen has called for the application of a queer lens, and for the development of a framework for the WPS architecture that responds to the needs of those who are vulnerable to insecurity and violence because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. In this context, the peace process between the Colombian Government and the FARC has been celebrated as a global precedent for broadening and queering the WPS agenda (Hagen 2017), as I will describe further in Chapter four.

While sexual and gender minorities have been overlooked in DDR, LGBT persons have participated in wars throughout history and there is evidence of several cultures having viewed homosexual behaviour among combatants favourably dating back to ancient Greece and Rome (Goldstein 2001, Burg 2002). Despite this history, policies and practices governing sexual orientation and gender identities in armed forces and groups often have a legacy of discrimination and violence. Little is known of both their experiences in armed groups and subsequently in the processes of reintegration. Scholars have underscored this gap and described the methodological difficulties to conduct research in this area, including the engrained secrecy surrounding deviation from heterosexual norms among combatants (Theidon 2009, Mendez 2012).

1.5 Aim of Research

The aim of this empirical research is to contribute to an enhanced understanding of constructions of gender among ex-combatants. The research contributes to the interdisciplinary field of gender, masculinity and intersectionality studies, peace and conflict studies as well as the transitional justice field. The research objective is to contribute to policymakers and practitioners seeking to

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[3] This section builds on extracts from two articles I have published, respectively, in the journals *Women, Gender and Research* (Thylin 2018) and *Sexualities* (Thylin 2019).

make reintegration programmes more gender transformative and also to contribute to advancing gender equality in transitional contexts.

The overarching research question is therefore: How is gender constructed in the processes of the reintegration of ex-combatants in Colombia? Based on the analysis of the multiple expressions of gender transformations, the research will examine the different patterns in which gender is constructed in the processes of reintegration. The main aim is to contribute to the conceptualization of the diverse patterns of gender constructions in the processes of reintegration, and this is done through the development of pathways of gender constructions. This includes the conceptualization of pathways that contribute to increased gender equality among ex-combatants, either through the maintenance of egalitarian advances within armed groups as the ex-combatants transition through civilian life, or through the transformation of gender roles towards more gender-equitable constructions. It also examines the constructions of traditional gender roles in the processes of reintegration, as well as the re-enforcement of militarized gender roles, practices and identities. Finally, the constructions of gender among sexual and gender minorities identifies both opportunities for particularly rapid and significant gender transformations, as well as obstacles faced by LGBT ex-combatants due to discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

The research analyses the multiple constructions of gender in demobilized populations from a comparative intersectional perspective. Consequently, it analyses similarities and differences in gender constructions experienced by former members from three different armed groups (FARC, AUC and M-19), as well as similarities and differences in gender constructions experienced by male, female and sexual and gender minority ex-combatants. Given both that gender is not limited to a binary concept of heteronormative male-female differentiation (Connell 1995, Winker & Degele 2011), and the extremely limited previous research on sexual and gender minority ex-combatants, this research places special emphasis on gender constructions among LGBT ex-combatants. In addition to these constitutiveprinciples, the way in which the ex-combatants lives are formed at the intersection of several different power structures affected by conflict is analysed, paying particular attention to the roles formerly played within the group, the ideology of the group and the time since their demobilization.

Finally, the thesis places special emphasis on the effect of these pathways in terms of both ex-combatant agency and effect on the society and peacebuilding processes from a micro-perspective. The research question asks: To what extent do ex-combatants exert agency in the processes of constructions of gender? Placing the ex-combatants' subjective experience at the centre, the research examines the conditions under which ex-combatants exert agency over the processes of gender transformations. Lastly, as the redefinition of gender has started to be considered an integral part of long-term peace-building, and the prospects for more gender-equitable post-war periods, the research asks how these gender constructions among ex-combatants affect the peacebuilding processes and the society as a whole.

This first chapter has introduced the aim of the research as well as some of the gendered experiences and gendered challenges encountered in DDR programmes. In the next chapter, I will deepen that analysis by examining key theories to understand the experiences and transformations of gender among ex-combatants.

2. Theoretical Framework: Gender Transformation, Intersectionality and Agency in Reintegration

My research brings together different theoretical and conceptual elements originating in the field of feminist, gender, intersectional and critical masculinity studies. In this section, I describe key elements related particularly to the constructions of masculinities and femininities in conflict-affected settings, intersectionality and concepts of gendered agency. I use elements from this rich theoretical framework to construct the results framework through which to analyse the multiple constructions of gender for ex-combatants in the processes of reintegration.

2.1 Gender Transformations in Conflict-affected Settings

My research explores the constructions of gender and experiences of gender transformations through the subjective experiences of ex-combatants. Definitions of gender transformations tend to focus on the re-definition of women's and men's gender roles and relations to promote shared power, control of resources, decision-making, and support for women's empowerment (UN Women 2017). The UN has also defined gender transformations as: "*Interventions that seek to target the structural causes, as well as the symptoms of gender inequality, leading to lasting changes in the power and choices women (and men) have over their own lives.*" (CARE 2016, IASC 2017).

The approach to integrated DDR is striving to be "gender-responsive" (UN 2019), understood as programmes that are planned, implemented, monitored and evaluated to meet the different needs of female and male ex-combatants, supporters and dependents (UN 2006). Abductees/victims, civilian returnees and community members should also be taken into consideration (UN 2019). A *gender-transformative* programming approach is understood, however, to go beyond responding to different needs and ensuring equal access to services so as to provide a substantive contribution to gender equality and long-term changes in power relations. Understanding gender equality as

central to gender transformations, the UNIDDRS (United Nations 2006: 9) defines gender equality as the "equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys".[4]

For the purpose of this explorative research, however, I refer to "gender transformations" in a broader sense, as processes of socially-constructed changes in gender roles, relations, practices and/or identities. While "gender transformation" tends to be understood as "positive" changes that advance gender equality, I do not limit my understanding of gender transformations or place a judgement on the type of change entailed. Instead, I include changes that can both advance or generate a backlash against gender equality objectives.[5] I also acknowledge that the subjective experiences of gender transformations may display different perspectives among people in conflict-affected settings, e.g. changes that both advance or hamper gender equality may be perceived as either positive, mixed or negative by people in conflict-affected settings (Dietrich Ortega et al. 2020).

The experiences of the ex-combatants may therefore indeed differ from the conceptualization and aspirations of the DDR policies. Peacebuilding actors have described early recovery and reintegration processes as an "window of opportunity" to address harmful gender norms, and to reinforce positive changes in men's and women's identities and roles (UNDP & IAWG 2012). However, many scholars have problematized the effort to construct gender and produce different forms of masculinities and femininities based on feminist convictions of how people should live their lives (Stern & Zalewski 2009, Schöb 2021). It often remains unclear how these gender roles would be perceived in the reality of the local context (Carayannies et al. 2014). In her research in Colombia, Schöb (2021) has described this as a tension between western feminist politics and the empirically grounded, context-sensitive gendered reintegration practices. Transforming femininities and masculinities among all ex-combatants would require "a full-scale transgression of these regional gender norms that is perceived as unthinkable, undoable and undesirable by many

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[4] The full definition used in the UNIDDRS (2006: 9) reads "Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same, but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, while recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not a women's issue, but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centred development."

[5] In this thesis, I also use the terms "gender-equitable patterns", "more equitable gender relations" and "non-hegemonic gender relations" interchangeably to describe different aspects related to the advancement of gender equality.

of the ex-combatants and reintegration workers she has interviewed. Just as both gender transformations, women's rights and LGBT rights have been framed as western ideals or as cultural imperialism, other scholars have argued that this is part of the global backlash against women's rights and LGBT rights (Céspedes-Báez 2016). Thus, understanding the tensions between cultures and gender transformations is important, just as it is important to acknowledge that human rights are universal. For the purpose of this thesis, I consider the goal of global feminism being to reach out and join global struggles to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression everywhere (bell hooks 2014). In my research, I place the lived experiences of the ex-combatants at the centre to understand their agency and choices in the multiple construction of gender and its practical implications in the wake of armed struggle.

2.1.1 Comparative research of gender constructions in different armed groups

While the focus of this thesis is on the gender constructions in the processes of reintegration, this requires an understanding of the constructions of gender experienced by the ex-combatants within their respective armed groups. In this section, I outline some of the scholarly theories of constructions of femininities and masculinities in conflict, with specific emphasis on Mendez' (2012) concept of militarized gender performativity. In chapter four, where I provide an overview of the Colombian context, I describe the gendered practices and policies of the particular armed groups included in this research.

Several scholars have argued that militarism and war systems are dependent on the constructions of certain types of gender identities (Connell 1995, Goldstein 2001, Theidon 2009, Hale 2012). Research has shown that there is a strong association between gender inequality and violence; for example that sexist attitudes, among both men and women, are associated with violent attitudes and participation in political violence (see e.g. Bjarnegård et al. 2020). Bjarnegård et al. (2020) has shown that these hostile attitudes towards gender equality seem to matter more than many other factors commonly thought to drive political violence (such as religiosity or religious ideology, poverty, education levels, age or marital status). Theidon (2009b: 3) has argued that "*militarism requires a sustaining gender ideology as much as it needs guns and bullets*". Research on the interconnections between the production of hegemonic and militarized masculinities and violence (see e.g. Connell 1995, Goldstein 2001, Vylder 2004, Enloe 2007, Dolan 2012) is central to this line of thought. Connell (1995) has described how certain patterns of masculinity are more

respected than other patterns and defined the term "hegemonic masculinities". This is the pattern celebrated symbolically in a given context and thereby acts as a norm and is presented as an ideal to boys. Hegemonic masculinities are therefore not a fixed character type but are the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given context. The hierarchy of masculinities is always contestable and therefore an important source of conflict and violence according to this line of thought. The subordination of other patterns of masculinities, for example gay, bisexual, transsexual men, or men of marginalized ethnic groups, sustains this order, as does the subordination of women. In conflict, the constructions of these militarized masculine identities often starts before men take up arms, through gender norms that generate salient links between weapons, masculinities and violence. In situations of rising tension, masculine ideals of behaviour often become more rigid, and the notion of "masculine" as protector, citizen and soldier are constructed (Goldstein 2001, Stern & Nystrand 2006). These archetypical male gender roles in conflict are constructed in relation to, and most often in opposition to, feminine gender roles in conflict. Militarism, and its state and non-state actors, are therefore understood to shape patriarchal gender relations that reinforce traditional gender roles.

While these overarching principles for the organization and participation in armed groups are cross-culturally relatively consistent (Goldstein 2001), a closer look at armed groups reveals that several armed groups simultaneously foster transgression against traditional gender norms, most evidently through the participation of women in non-traditional gender roles as combatants. As armed groups reframe masculinities to meet the aims of militarization, women in armed groups are often required to adhere to dimensions of military gender identity. Scholars have described distinct elements that shape constructions of femininities in accordance with time- and context-specific militarized institutions, such as the armed forces and peacekeeping missions (Enloe 2007, Sjoberg & Gentry 2007, Hale 2012, Roth 2017, Stur 2017, Rupesinghe et al. 2019). Enloe (2007), for example, has argued that in dominant masculinized military cultures women have often adopted more masculinized behaviours, including more masculinized humour, lower voice registers and masculinized modes of walking. Hale (2012) suggests that changes in the gendered dynamics of military institutions result in the development of female hegemonic masculinities. She argues that the process of militarization has provided women with a means of developing masculine identities that they would have been unlikely to develop in civilian life. As for the constructions of femininities within non-state armed groups, scholars have identified different

constructive principles (Mendez 2012, Viterna 2013, Dietrich Ortega 2017). Mendez (2012) has pointed to the lack of a theoretical framework to approach not just state armed forces and peacekeeping missions but non-state illegal armed groups. She therefore advances the concept of militarized gender performativity, which draws on the works of Cynthia Enloe on militarized masculinities (e.g. 1990, 2007) and Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity (1990). According to Butler (1990), gender is performative and constructed through repetition of acts, such that "*gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed*" (Butler 1990: 25). Building on these ideas, Mendez (2012) has argued that women's gender identity is not necessarily "hyper-masculinized" in the same way as their male peers when they join armed groups. Gender differentials and the dual way of constructing gender are not eliminated during the militarizing processes. Her research demonstrates how women participate in armed groups while having their femaleness, and certain traditional characteristics considered feminine, militarized in ways that maintain clear boundaries between genders. The women, therefore, experience a militarization of their gender identity, which is illustrated by gender transformation combined with a certain level of retention of traditional concepts of gender. Mendez describes this as a "hyper–masculinization of femininity" whereby women perform some roles that are traditionally associated with men, while some traditional female values, such as motherhood, become appropriated by militarism in a way that is considered beneficial to the particular organization.

Both conflicts and armed groups are tremendously diverse, and even while operating in the same context may display different purposes, rules and meanings. As a starting point, my research interest was shaped by the new wave of scholars (see Cohen, Hoover Green & Wood 2013) who have pointed to differences in ideologies related to gender norms as consequential to the strategies and large differences in the repertoires of violence committed by different groups. Furthermore, the understanding of organizations as gendered constructions (Acker 1990) has been applied to analyse armed groups as gendered institutions (Dietrich Ortega 2017). Gender operates here, not only on the level of the individualized gendered selves of combatants, but also through the cultural norms and expectations of appropriate masculinities and femininities, to shape the organization of the group (Budgeon 2014, Dietrich Ortega 2017).

In order to understand the constructions of gender among ex-combatants, it is important to understand their background, and how gender was constructed within their respective armed groups. A number of comparative studies (Kampwirth 2004, Hoover Green 2011, Mendez 2012, Dietrich Ortega 2017) have been particularly useful to examine the differentiated processes of gender constructions across different groups, and the varied gender norms promoted as part of the ideologies of these groups. Several scholars have debated whether women in armed groups, particularly in groups that have incorporated the emancipation of women among their goals, have made significant progress in terms of gender equality (Watteville 2002, Kampwirth 2004, Nilsson 2005, Bleie 2012, Viterna 2013). Women in armed groups have been reported as having escaped traditional gender roles by joining militarized groups (Kampwirth 2004). Moghadam (1997) has classified revolutionary movements into two categories where some movements and armed groups are modernizing and egalitarian and subscribing to women's emancipation as an explicit goal, and other revolutionary armed group are patriarchal, tying women to the family and stressing gender differences rather than equality (Moghadam 1997, Kampwirth 2004). While this analytical framework is interesting, it creates a dichotomous understanding of participation in armed groups as either empowering or victimizing. This tiered debate should be superseded by a more nuanced analysis of the specific conditions under which women are victimized and/or exert agency. Dietrich Ortega (2015) has contributed to a more nuanced picture as she instead describes how patterns of hegemonic and non-hegemonic gender relations can co-exist in armed groups. Analysing guerrilla movements in Latin America, she argues that, the operational efficiency of these armed groups operating in the context of asymmetric warfare makes it necessary for them to include women in their cadres and that the introduction of gendered difference and strict sexual division of labor would hamper their operational efficiency (ibid). While the same argument of operational effectiveness has been made for inclusion of women in state forces (Belkin 2014), the particular demands of asymmetric warfare can be seen as critical to explaining why many guerrilla movements have often adopted gender-inclusive practices long before state forces. Dietrich Ortega (2015: 5) further argues that the reconfiguration of gender relations in these guerrilla movements amounts to "*alternative, non-hegemonic constructions of insurgent masculinities and femininities that refrain from legitimizing hierarchical gender relations*". She points, however, particularly to the emergence of parallel structures, whereby non-hegemonic gender relations in the operational

sphere served the political-military struggle while, in contrast, affective relationships became a particularly notorious space in which to assert hegemonic patterns of gender relations.

While the differences in ideologies between armed groups are significant, several scholars have pointed to the difficulties of applying progressive teachings on gender equality among recruits who have grown up in patriarchal societies with restrictive gender roles (e.g. Hoover Green 2011, Mendez 2012). However, the gender norms and roles in armed groups may still vary considerably, even within the same country, despite their soldiers' experience of a similar patriarchal culture. Hoover Green's (2011) research in El Salvador shows how the Salvadoran army promoted more rigid gender norms than their guerrilla opposition. She argues that these differences in gender norms were consequential to the strategies and differences in the repertoires of violence committed by the different groups. It is therefore important to analyse the particular armed group in order to understand how gender is constructed within it. Armed groups do not necessarily need to be understood as a bastion for gender inequality but can promote more gender equal relationships than the societies in which they operate. The fact that armed groups operating *within* the same country have proved to display considerable variation in gendered norms, roles and practices (see Hoover Green 2011 and Cohen et al. 2013), despite soldiers' experience of a similar patriarchal culture, makes comparative studies of several armed groups within the same country particularly relevant.

As for the policies and practices governing diverse sexual orientations and gender identities in armed groups, very little is known. Scholars have argued that conflicts and the process of militarization tend to promote hegemonic militarized masculinities, gender hierarchies and normative heterosexuality, which fuel violence and discrimination against LGBT persons (see Connell 1995, Goldstein 2001, Myrttinen & Daigle 2017). Indeed, armed groups of very different ideological persuasions have been reported to use targeted violence against LGBT individuals and communities, ranging from jihadist groups such as the Islamic State (IS) to Maoist groups such as the Shining Path (Myrttinen & Daigle 2017, Tschantret 2018). From the British Navy in the nineteenth century to the Nazi SS, homosexuality has also been considered a capital offence within military ranks (Goldstein 2001, Giles 2002).

Over recent decades, advocacy for LGBT rights has led to changes in military policies in several countries and, in certain cases, to shifts in the policies of non-state armed groups. Increased attention has also been paid to targeted violence against LGBT civilians in conflict. In 2015, the UN Security Council convened for the first time to discuss LGBT rights, and the UN has acknowledged the attacks on LGBT individuals as a form of "moral cleansing" (United Nations 2015). While this has generated an increased understanding of the experiences of LGBT combatants in state forces, as well as of LGBT victims/survivors and people displaced by non-state armed groups, little is known of the inner workings governing sexual orientation and gender identities within non-state armed groups. In pioneering research, Alburo (2011) has described how gay cadres negotiate their sexual identity in the context of military masculinities in the New People's Army of the Philippines following the armed group's change of official policy on sexual relations and official recognition of same-sex relations within its ranks. In non-state armed groups that do not have an official policy recognizing sexual and gender minorities within their ranks, however, the topic continues to be challenging to research, and thus the experiences of LGBT combatants tend to be left unnoticed in the fog of war.

In an effort to contribute to critical thinking about constructions of gender among ex-combatants, this thesis acknowledges armed groups as gendered institutions and examines how the socialization of ex-combatants into these different gendered norms, identities and practices translates into civilian life. Given the research gaps in understanding the constructions of gender among LGBT combatants within armed groups, this research makes additional efforts to understand the experiences of LGBT combatants so as to better understand their transition to civilian life.

Finally, while an analysis of the ideology of the group is an important starting point, it does not explain the variety of women's, men's and LGBT persons' experiences and gender constructions within these groups, which I will reflect more upon in the following sections on intersectionality and agency.

Scholars have pointed to the need to understand combatants' diverse wartime roles and experiences in order to promote gender transformation for equality and to deconstruct militarized masculinities that contribute to continued violence in public and private spaces after armed struggle (Mazurana

et al. 2018). All of the above needs to be taken into account in order to understand the diverse experiences with which ex-combatants enter DDR programmes.

2.1.2 Gender constructions in the processes of reintegration

As described in the previous chapter, many scholars have pointed to the need for, and failures of, DDR programmes to deconstruct militarized masculinities (Theidon 2007, 2009a, Mazurana et al. 2018), and demilitarize femininities (Mazurana et al. 2018). Extensive research has also pointed to the global tendency of marginalization of women ex-combatants and a return to traditional gender roles after armed struggle (see e.g. Barth 2002, Meintjes 2002, Pankhurst 2004, Mazurana 2005, Londoño & Nieto 2006, UNDP & IAWG 2012, Dietrich Ortega 2017). It remains critical, however, to address the questions of which models can help us explain the constructions of gender among ex-combatants and under which conditions, or 'how', gender is transformed, maintained or re-enforced.

While military socialization aims to deconstruct combatants' civilian identities and construct militarized gendered identities, during reintegration, that process needs to be reversed (Myrttinen 2019). DDR research (UNDP & IAWG 2012) has described how the shift in gender identities and norms generated within armed groups may not be welcomed in the post-conflict society, and thus how the adaptation to new identities and norms can be difficult for both male and female ex-combatants. Myrttinen (2019) argues that the ease or difficulty of this process depends both on the individual factors of the combatant, such as their level of investment in a militarized identity and their past experiences and skills (e.g. conflict-related trauma, skill set that is useful in civilian life), and on structural and historical factors (such as the available support systems, the ability of the economy to absorb the combatants, societal perceptions of the ex-combatants, etc.). Bleie (2012) has broken down the ways in which DDR intersects with post-war gender orders along three sub-systems. The first dimension focuses on the level of impact that reintegration of ex-combatants has at large on women's and men's agency as individuals and collective actors, which I will analyse further in the coming section. In respect to the second dimension, she argues that the gender policies pursued in the post-war period (including DDR policies and programmes) can legitimize and scale-up incipient positive changes from the war period and delegitimize sexual violence and gender discrimination. Finally, in the last dimension she focuses on the level of exclusion or inclusion, and acceptance of returning ex-combatants shown by key moral and social

gatekeepers in the society. Both scholars and UN policy guidance point to the need for DDR programmes to support the processes of reintegration through working with gender-identity related aspects (UN 2014, Mazurana et al. 2018, Myrttinen 2019,).

Drawing on social and behavioural theory, the Social Ecological Model can be useful to understand these multiple factors and contexts contributing to changes in the constructions of gender, and gendered practices in conflict-affected settings. UNDP & IAWG (2012) has used the ecological model particularly to understand how violent behaviours among ex-combatants are sustained and entrenched with gender identities. According to this model, there is no single factor that explains an ex-combatant's behaviour. Instead, a combination of factors are at play within different domains of the ex-combatant's environment, including at the individual, interpersonal, community and societal levels. According to this line of thought, DDR programmes need to address the factors of vulnerability at these different levels through an approach that takes into consideration the gendered dimensions, in order to transform militarized and violent forms of gender identity and enhance resilience.

Within the broader field working on masculinities and engagement of men in gender-related change and violence prevention, there is also increasing evidence pointing to successful approaches for sustained change among men (Greig & Flood 2020). Central considerations include: a coordinated focus on multiple risk factors and ecological levels encompassing the comprehensive application of multiple strategies at multiple levels; basing programmes on robust theories for gender-transformative change; being relevant to local communities and contexts, and; engaging both men and boys, and women and girls, in gender-transformative ways to reflect on and change gender roles and relations (Greig & Flood 2020).
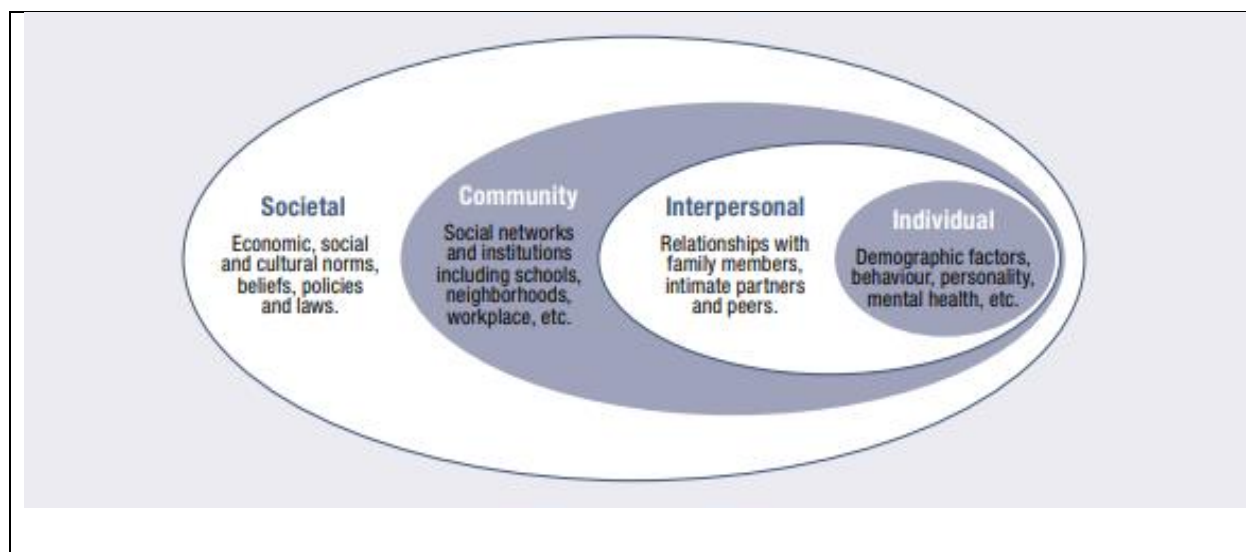
Figure 1: Ecological Model (IAWG/UNDP 2012)

Acknowledging the number of factors and contexts contributing to changes in the constructions of gender among ex-combatants makes research in this area even more complex. While many scholars have pointed to the challenges faced by both male and female ex-combatants, there is a growing interest to understand how or why gender roles, practices and/or identities have been transformed or maintained in different settings (e.g. IAWG & UNDP 2012, Viterna 2013, Theidon 2015). However, analyzing the examples through the ecological model, research tend to be focused on only a limited number of the contexts.

Although there is still limited research on the interplay of the multiple factors contributing to transformation of gender roles, practices and/or identities among ex-combatants, one study of particular interest for this thesis is Theidon's (2015) work on the role of the evangelical churches in forging 'alternative masculinities'. Theidon (2015: 468) has argued that DDR and transitional justice researchers and practitioners should design strategies for "*changing the configuration of practices that signify not only what it means to be a man but also what it means 'to be good at being a man'*". In this respect, she argues that the evangelical churches are one site for forging these "alternative masculinities". In her case study of the evangelical church in the Urabá region in Colombia, she has described how evangelical Christianity has an important role to play in

helping ex-combatants find ways of effecting change, including through promoting "alternative masculinities" (2015: 468). She points to the similarity between how transitional justice functions create a "before" and an "after" violence, and how evangelical religious practices construct a new "sacred self" via rituals of ruptures, e.g. repentance, confessions, being "born again", etc. She understands these practices as key to the changes that leaves ex-combatants' former identities behind (2015: 456). From an ecological model perspective, this case study serves as an example of the influencing factors that lie particularly in the community context, and its social networks and institutions.

With regards to women ex-combatants, meanwhile, several researchers have debated women's empowerment and progress in terms of gender equality through armed struggle (Watteville 2002, Kampwirth 2004, Nilsson 2005, Bleie 2012, Viterna 2013). Still, after wars end, the marginalization of female combatants and their reintegration into traditional gender roles have proved cross-culturally consistent in many DDR processes. Scholars such as Hale (2002) argue that no liberation or revolutionary struggle to date has empowered women and men to sustain an emancipating atmosphere once the conflict is over. Studies from African countries such as Angola, Sudan, Somalia and Uganda, have shown that gender roles changed over the course of the war, but have done so in line with existing gender ideologies (El-Bushra 2003). Contrary to these findings, however, some researchers of revolutionary movements in Latin America have argued that women who were mobilized in guerrilla movements during the revolutionary processes powerfully reshaped their gender ideologies and went on to become feminist activists in the post-war period (Kampwirth 2004). This leads to the question of how the various role changes brought about by war create opportunities to forge new social relationships and identities, including those based on gender, for both ex-combatants and their communities (Manchanda 2002, Meintjes 2002). Viterna's (2013) research in El Salvador is particularly interesting for the purpose of this thesis as it points to some of the factors underpinning the variation in gender roles and post-war gains among women ex-combatants. Women experience tremendous losses in war, but there are also women who make certain gains (Bop 2002). The key factor described by Viterna (2013) points back to the positions and networks formed during wartime. In El Salvador, women ex-combatants were indeed more likely to participate in community life after the war than women who had not joined the guerrilla, but were less likely than their non-guerrilla counterparts to be community leaders or to hold gender-equitable beliefs (Viterna 2013). Viterna (2013) argues that guerrilla participation did

transform women's skills, resources and commitment, and did spawn feminist organizations after the war, but that, despite this, the guerrilla experiences failed women. While all women guerrilla members likely experienced a transformation of their identity in some manner, it was the ones who gained wartime skills that were valued in the post-war period and those who, through their participation in the guerrilla, got connected with powerful others who went on to realize new post-war opportunities. Interestingly, the lives of women combatants who fought on the frontlines, and thus transgressed traditional gender roles the most, changed the least. Their skills did not translate as well as educational or political credentials, and nearly all of them assumed traditional roles dominated by care work for their family in the post-war period. It was instead women who transgressed traditional gender roles the least, the ones who stayed furthest away from combat where they got well connected to guerrilla commanders and international organizations, that were most able to leverage their guerrilla experience into post-war gains. Virtena (2013) concludes that there is nothing in particular about gender-bending roles that are conducive to the development of a feminist identity or post-war economic, educational or political opportunities. Instead, her research unveils critical dimensions related to the social networks fomented before demobilization. Finally, once again, research on constructions of gender among LGBT ex-combatant constitute a gap in previous research.

2.2 Intersectional and Gender Relational Perspectives on Gender Constructions

To understand the constructions of gender among ex-combatants of different genders, sexual orientations and background, I build on intersectional theory and the understanding of how people's lives are formed at the intersection of several different power structures (Connell 1995, de los Reyes & Mulinari 2005). Intersectionality builds on an understanding of power as a multidimensional construct where gender, class, sexuality, age and ethnicity are constitutive principles. While there are many different understandings of intersectionality, for the purpose of this research I am using the following definition:

> *Intersectionality is a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences. The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor. They are generally shaped*

by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. When it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other. Intersectionality as an analytical tool gives people better access to the complexity of the world and of themselves. (Hill Collins & Bilge 2016: 2)

The concept of intersectionality was originally developed by the black feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) to reveal the multidimensionality of black women's experience of inequality and discrimination in the USA. Since then, intersectionality has a prominent standing in contemporary feminist theorizing and activism, and has been applied across a wide array of disciplines, including in conflict studies (Rooney 2018). Intersectionality is now an analytical tool that can be used to understand any context of intersecting systems of oppression (Ackerly and True 2008). For the purpose of this research, I use intersectional theory to understand the experiences of multidimensional constructions of gender among ex-combatants at the intersection of multiple axes of social stratification, primarily gender and sexuality, and to a more limited extent class, age, ethnicity and health/disability. To add further layers of complexity and intersecting axes, I am also paying attention to other factors of particular relevance for ex-combatants, such as former armed group, roles and position assumed within the armed group, motivations, time spent in the armed groups, etc., in order to reach a deeper understanding of the diversity of experience in the transition to civilian life (Özerdem & Podder 2011, UNDP & IAWG 2012). I choose to interrogate this intersection of gender, sexuality and armed group factors because it is not the intersection to which most scholars attend and because in so doing, I seek to invite critical engagement from both DDR, feminist and non-feminist scholars and practitioners.

	Intersecting axes to understand the multiple constructions of gender among ex-combatants	
	Key axes analysed	Additional axes considered (to a more limited extent)
Constitutive principles:	- Gender - Sexuality	- Class - Ethnicity - Age - Disability/health
Armed groups factors:	- Group ideology - Role within the armed group	- Time within group - Political convictions and motivations for mobilization and demobilization

Figure 2, Intersecting axes analysed for the purpose of the research

While intersectional perspectives can be said to have become a new paradigm in gender studies, they have also given rise to a diverse array of criticism. This includes the contention that intersectionality has become nothing more than an attempt to be inclusive of a minority group while maintaining a still largely unquestioned mainstream (Ferree 2015). Another criticism, of very practical relevance for my research project, is the questions raised by researchers such as Winker et al. (2011) regarding which intersecting vectors of power should be considered, and how many of them can be handled in a practical way in any particular research project. I reflect on the methodological challenges posed by the large number of factors that are critical for the understanding of the experiences of ex-combatants, as well as other limitations from an intersectional perspective, in the methods chapter, where I also outline key choices made within my research design.

My theoretical framework is also anchored in an understanding of gender as a relational concept. There has been an important shift in research on gender and armed conflict from a *sole* focus on women, to an understanding of how gender as a relational and socially-constructed concept of masculinities and femininities relates to armed conflict (Stern & Nystrand 2006). Gender is hereby understood as a relationship of power and as a culturally-specific practice and concept. This implies that what is considered "masculine" cannot be understood separately from what is

considered "feminine" (Goldstein 2001, Stern & Nystrand 2006). Acknowledging gender as a relational concept highlights the importance of not limiting the research to one gender, but instead studying the experiences of different genders as co-constructive processes. Recent scholarship has also emphasised the importance of going beyond the gender binary in order to enhance the field of gender and conflict studies (Hagen 2016, 2017). Nonetheless, up until this point, the vast majority of research on gender and ex-combatants has focused solely on women (Kampwirth 2004, Mendez 2012, Viterna 2013) or, within the relatively new field of masculinities in DDR, incipient attention from scholars and the international community to analyse the constructions of masculinities in armed groups, focusing exclusively on men (Hitgate & Hopton 2005, Theidon 2009, 2015, Eriksson Baaz & Stern 2010, Hale 2012). This thesis is based on a relational understanding of gender, where the constructions of masculinities and femininities, as well as other gender identities, are considered as being co-constructive processes that therefore benefit from being studied in conjunction. Given that gender is not limited to a binary concept of heteronormative male-female differentiation, but closely related to sexual orientation and diverse gender identities, special emphasis has been placed on the inclusion of LGBT ex-combatants. My research is the first of its kind in its comparative focus on both women, men and sexual and gender minorities.

2.3 Gendered Agency Among Ex-combatants

Intimately linked to the elements of gender and intersectional theory, as well as the feminist and critical masculinity theory described above, is the concept of agency, which constitutes the last key element of my theoretical framework.

Agency as defined simply, has to do with the human capacity to act (Björkdahl & Mannergren Selimovic 2015). In other words, in its most fundamental meaning, it represents the "*ability to define one's goals and act upon them*" (Kabeer 1999: 438) which should be understood as "*processes by which choices are made and put into effect*" (Kabeer 2005: 14). It therefore encompasses more than observable actions, including the meaning, motivation and purpose which individuals place on their activities, i.e. their sense of agency (Kabeer 1999). These actions are not exercised in a vacuum but rather in a social world in which structure exists in and through the use of resources (Giddens 1986, Kabeer 1999) and where human agency shapes, and is shaped by, social relationships and institutions in a constant interplay (Cleaver 2007). I am particularly

interested in the practical manifestations of agency where emphasis is placed on the relational process, in which the human subject is always in the process of becoming (Baines 2016). Key emphasis is placed on how gender is constructed as part of the reconfiguration of the new life and focus on the constant change in the context of the everyday practices and, what Baines (2016: 14) refers to as, "matters that give life meaning". Agency, understood as the ability to act, tends to be different for men and women due to gender norms and perceived notions of appropriate gendered behaviours (Gardiner 1995). Questions related to agency have therefore been central to feminist theory. A prominent strand of work has focused on the concept of agency and embodiment, which views gender identities as a lived set of embodied potentialities, instead of as externally-imposed constraining norms (McNay 2000). Judith Butler (1997: 17) has described how "*agency is implicated in subordination*", and her work on performativity has had a large impact on feminist work on gender identity. The central thought is that performative constructions of gender identity underpin agency, since the subject is capable of resisting the gender-based norms (Butler 1993). While it has also generated considerable debate and criticism, her work continues to influence recent conceptualizations, including the militarized performativity of ex-combatants described above (Mendez 2012). While agency is implicated by subordination and interdependence, the dominated "*always have certain capacities, and sometimes very significant capacities, to exercise some sort of influence over the ways in which events unfold*" (Ortner 2006: 144). This exercise of agency spans from outright rebellions on the one hand, to a kind of "*complex and ambivalent acceptance of dominant categories and practices*" on the other (Ortner 2006: 144). Self-disciplining agents can therefore "*accept and even endorse relations of inequality as they enrol in projects of others and internalize hegemonic norms*" (Björkdahl & Mannergren Selimovic 2015: 170). This type of agency that upholds prevailing power hierarchies, often at the expense of limiting other women's agency, can be rewarded by patriarchal structures (Björkdahl & Mannergren Selimovic 2015). At the other end of the spectrum, agents "*exercise forms of critical agency to challenge power relations, question existing norms and practices, confront inequitable distribution of resources, and claim and extend their rights*" (Björkdahl & Mannergren Selimovic 2015: 170). While there is a tendency to associate agency primarily with such resistance, Madhok (2013: 7) sees both the overemphasis of subordination and silencing of agency, and the overplaying of episodes of resistance, as "misdescriptions" of agency. It is easy to view resistance and oppositional agency as attractive, particularly in conflict-affected settings or in the context of

severe oppression. Madhok (2013: 7) further argues that these challenges in the face of domination are seen as reflective of the "*exercise of free will and free acts and a refusal to be determined by the will of others*", while useful in certain sentences at the same time reproduces these very misconceptions of agency. Baines (2016: 10) has, in her fascinating research in northern Uganda, focused on political agency of what she calls "complex victims", those implicated in the same violence they endure. She has documented different forms of political agency within spaces of extreme violence and how women and girls abducted by the LRA and forced into marriage and motherhood exercised political agency, including acts of protest, negotiation and dissent as demonstration of resistance to power (Baines 2016: 133). At the same time, Baines doesn't limit her research to acts of resistance to power, in that she also describes how agency unfolds in relations of power where women held positions of relative privilege and authority within the LRA. Through recognizing victims as political agents this provides insights towards a more transformative consideration of what it means to live through violence, and together again after it.

In part due to the changing nature of economic and social structures arising from the processes of (post)modernization and globalization, and the transformation of gender relations and the social status of women over the course of the last half a century, questions of agency have received increased attention in feminist theory (McNay 2000). McNay (2000: 1) has described these changes in gender relations as "ambiguous" in that, while they do not straightforwardly reinforce historical gender inequality, they also cannot be regarded as fully emancipatory. Instead, she argues that new forms of autonomy and constraints are emerging, and interplay in ways that require a more intersectional analysis of the inequalities emerging along generational, class and ethnic lines. Giri (2021) has used such an intersectional analysis to show that women ex-combatants' experiences of the insurgency and post-insurgency lives in Nepal have been molded by their intersectional positions and identities in complex ways. Giri followed the stories of five women ex-combatants from the same rank but from different caste, class, ethnicity, marital status, social status, education status, and geographical location and argues that their experiences of war and post-war "peace" cannot be detached from their multiple statuses, positions, and identities. Furthermore, McNay (2000) argues that an intersectional analysis also shows that structural divisions *among* women or men can be as significant as divisions *between* men and women (ibid.).

While the majority of feminist scholars have focused on questions regarding women's agency, McNay opens the way for an intersectional understanding of the agency of sexual and gender minorities, as well as of men's agency. Men have tended to be considered as "active and autonomous agents" whose position of power limits women's agency within gendered social roles (Gardiner 1995: 2) and side-lines other gender identities (El-Bushra, Myrttinen & Naujoks 2014). The ways in which gender norms and perceived notions of appropriate gendered behaviours also affect men's ability to make choices have started to be highlighted, however. In conflict-affected settings, scholars have pointed to male vulnerability, with particular groups of men, such as refugees, and sexual and gender minorities, facing exacerbated risk (El-Bushra et al. 2014, Dolan 2018). Petesch (2018) argues that men's agency and women's agency are tightly interdependent and together shape prospects for more equitable gender norms in conflict settings. Petesch (2018) goes on to describe the polarizing effects of conflict on women's and men's agency whereby conflict-affected men tended to report themselves as losing control and authority, while women, in the midst of hardship, reported a stronger sense of increased agency, often due to a relaxation of gender norms brought about in conflict. Apart from these examples of women's and men's agency becoming increasingly polarized, an example from Liberia is also used to illustrate how a dual increase in both women's and men's agency can lead to favourable development outcomes. Men often experience a disempowerment in conflict settings brought about by the shattering of their gender-ascribed roles as leaders, protectors and providers (UNDP & IAWG 2012).

As for combatants, Theidon (2009b: 23) has described how the ex-combatants in her research on militarized masculinities in Colombia were "*in part the product of limited life options and pervasive violence*", where their own "*bodily capital —and the high premium placed on physical force and prowess with a weapon—may be all they have to trade on the labor market*". Since programmes, including DDR programmes, are now seeking to contribute to gender transformations for men, scholars like Myrttinen (2018) have noted that placing men's agency at the centre of the activities risks cementing and transforming, rather than challenging, patriarchy, thus contributing to the continued marginalization of women and sexual and gender minorities.

Analysing questions related to ex-combatants' agency requires further unpacking of the concept of gendered agency. Peacebuilding and transitional justice practices tend to re-entrench gendered hierarchies and not understand women's and men's multiple roles, and the conditions under which

they exert agency. A growing number of feminist scholars have focused on questions of agency of women (ex)combatants (e.g. Alison 2004, Sjoberg & Gentry 2007, Coulter 2009, Bleie 2012, Åhäll 2012, Dietrich Ortega 2016, Baines 2016, Giri 2021). Women are often considered solely as passive victims in need of protection. Women's agency within victimhood, such as in resisting and coping with personal victimization, but also through opposition to violence, as well as the multiple ways women build peace, have often been overlooked (Kelly 2000, Baines 2016, Björkdahl & Mannergren Selimovic 2015). Women who participate in armed groups and the perpetration of violence, meanwhile, have been depicted as deviants, thus denying them agency, rationality and womanhood (Alison 2004, Sjoberg & Gentry 2007). Motherhood is often conceptualized as a meta-discourse limiting representations of women's agency (Åhäll 2012). Sjoberg and Gentry (2007: 12) argue that there are three dominant narratives of women engaged in violence. "The mother" stereotypes women who fulfil their biological destinies and need to nurture and be loyal to men. "The monsters" are women who are pathologically damaged and therefore drawn to violence, and "the whores" are women whose violence is inspired by sexual dependency and depravity. In Colombia, Schmidt (2021) has showed how a similar narrative depicting women combatants from the FARC as rape victims, failed mothers and narco-terrorists have generated a compounded stigma which restricts women's alternatives. All of these narratives ignore questions of agency, and depict women combatants as betraying social norms that assert that women are passive, non-violent and peaceful.

Furthermore, for combatants of all genders, the division between victims and perpetrators is central to questions of agency. Baines (2016) has argued that this binary framework fails to fully grasp the complexity of violence and the capacity of those who were violated to act politically. This dichotomy dehistoricizes the particularity of victim experiences and how they respond to their experiences. Here she highlights the experiences of both abducted girls and child soldiers and the way in which complex victims – those implicated in the same violence they endure – act in settings of coercion and deprivation. Weber (2021b) has applied Baines lens in her research in Colombia where she has shown that women ex-combatants can also be understood as complex political perpetrators, many of whom have suffered structural and direct violence prior to or during their membership in armed groups. This analysis of complex political perpetrators opens up possibilities for a more nuanced understanding of women's' experiences, including responsibility for actions, victimizing experiences and agency at the same time. Other categories of victims come to mind,

and I will apply the concept of complex victims as I analyse the experiences of LGBT ex-combatants. In the mutually-constitutive relationship between structure and agency, DDR programmes intersect with ex-combatant agency and post-war gender orders. Bleie (2012) has pointed to the level of impact the reintegration of ex-combatants has on women's and men's agency, both as individuals and as collective actors, and has described how these programmes may pursue either progressive, conservative, or genderblind agendas. Why many women ex-combatants become marginalized, and peace ultimately provokes disappointment and disillusionment (Barth 2002, Pankhurst 2004, Mazurana 2005, Dietrich Ortega 2017) can be analysed through an agency lens. In insurgent organizations where women described experiences of empowerment, and were offered wider spaces for participation and agency, the transition to civilian life generated a resurfacing of gendered differences limiting their agency (Nieto Valdivieso 2017: 87). Dietrich Ortega (2017) has underlined that the analysis of these processes of agency among women combatants does not imply buying into a dichotomous understanding of women combatants as either empowered or abused within armed groups, but opens the way to new explanations. She has explored spaces of women's agency within the context of insurgent armed struggle, looking particularly at agency in terms of the actions of combatants as political actors, thus recognizing both the capacities of the people who exercise that agency, and the spaces generated by the structures in which the person is immersed. She argues that gender inequality resurfaces as combatants demobilize and identifies the patterns of marginalization of former female combatants (Dietrich Ortega 2014).

As described earlier, male ex-combatants often experience losses as they demobilize, such as a loss of prestige, but also a lack of ability to provide for and protect their family (Eriksson Baaz & Stern 2010, UNDP & IAWG 2012). These losses are intimately linked to the inability to assume traditional gender roles, and can lead to an increase in both self-inflicted, as well as interpersonal or community-level violence, including domestic violence, suicide and alcohol/drug abuse (UNDP & IAWG 2012). This raises questions of agency, both in terms of ex-combatants' abilities to exercise agency in their own lives, and in terms of their abilities to exercise power over the lives of others. Kabeer (1999) has argued that agency has to do with the meaning, motivation and purpose which individuals place on their activities, with their sense of agency being the expression of "the power within", as well as the "power to" define life choices and to pursue their own goals, even in the face of opposition from others. Furthermore, agency is not only relevant for self-

determination, or resistance but also for domination. People in positions of power possess what Ortner (2006) describes as the ability to dominate others. Kabeer (1999) therefore highlight that agency does not only have positive connotations in relations to power, but also negative expressions. Here, agency can be exercised as 'power over', where the capacity of an actor, or actors, limits or over-rides the agency of others; for instance through the use of violence, coercion and threat (Kabeer 1999: 438). This points to the multidimensionality of agency, which can be further used to explore the effect of ex-combatants' constructions of gender, both in their own lives and in the overall peacebuilding processes and society as a whole.

I draw on this rich body of thought on agency in this thesis, while at the same time acknowledging that gendered agency in peacebuilding continues to be under-conceptualized (Björkdahl & Mannergren Selimovic 2015), including in relation to the processes of reintegration of ex-combatants of different genders. My research contributes to efforts to contrast the dominant gendered narratives in conflict that do not explore the varied and multifaceted condition under which women, men, and sexual and gender minorities exert agency in conflict-affected settings. I focus my interest particularly on the extent to which ex-combatants exert agency in the processes of gender constructions during reintegration. I look at the ex-combatants' subjective experiences of their desire, and ability, to choose gendered identities, roles and practices after leaving war in a mutually constructive relationship both with the broader structures in society and with the impositions of the DDR programmes. To date, the agency of LGBT ex-combatants has not been researched, and the thesis therefore makes a first contribution in this area.

In conclusion, this chapter has laid out the major theoretical pillars that guide the thesis and that have been used to inform my empirical fieldwork and data analysis. Within the broader fields of feminist and gender studies, peace and conflict studies and critical masculinity studies, my applied results framework (presented in the introduction to the results chapters) builds particularly on these theories of intersectionality and agency informing the understanding of constructions of femininities and masculinities in conflict-affected settings.

3. Methodology

In order to understand the constructions of gender in the processes of reintegration as experienced by ex-combatants, a qualitative study based on semi-structured in-depth interviews with a selective sample of ex-combatants was undertaken. The reason for choosing this method is that qualitative approaches are of specific relevance when trying to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, and to unfold the meaning of peoples' subjective experiences (Kvale 1996). The empirical material was analysed using a hermeneutic approach in relation to the theoretical framework of the research. Feminist peace research and feminist approaches to methodology as a critical perspective on social and political life, have informed my work. Emphasis has been placed on questions about unequal gender relations and power structure within the conflict environment and the "analysis of the everydayness and possibilities of peaceful coexistence and conflict transformation and prevention" (Wibben 2019: 87). Thereby, I have been guided throughout the research process by the following question, posed by Confortini (2019: 88): "how does my research contribute to human flourishing, gender justice, and a gender-informed positive peace?". This section describes the methods for research design, data collection, data analysis and methodological concerns.

3.1 Selection of Sample

Due to the comparative element of the research, the selected sample included former members of the M-19, FARC and AUC. These three groups were selected due to their differences and since they constitute major, distinct demobilization processes in Colombia that have taken place over the last three decades. As described in greater detail in the following chapter: M-19 was the first organization to demobilize in Colombia and offers an important comparative to the other two groups historically. The FARC was the largest guerrilla organization in Latin America, and was at the time of my field studies just embarking on the process of their full demobilization following the peace agreement. Finally, in contrast to the other groups, AUC stands out as it was a right-wing paramilitary group and has been the major, polemic demobilization process under the Government of Alvaro Uribe. Having two different left-wing guerrilla groups and a right-wing

paramilitary group offers opportunities to analyse ideological differences and similarities and its effects on the constructions of gender in the processes of reintegration.

Acknowledging gender as a relational concept, interviews were carried out with both male and female former members of these armed groups. Emphasis was also placed on ensuring that ex-combatants who do not conform to a narrow, binary understanding of gender were included in the sample.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with a total number of 55 former members of the M-19, the AUC and FARC. The sample included 24 women, two transgender women and 29 men. The selected sample included a balanced number of ex-combatants with regards to both gender and former affiliation with armed group. Among the 24 women, eight were former members of M-19, nine former members of FARC and seven former members of AUC. Among the men, nine were former members of M-19, eleven former members of FARC and nine former members of AUC. The sample included a total of eleven ex-combatants whose sexual orientation, gender identity and/or sexual practices fall outside normative heterosexuality. Two of the interviewees self-identify as lesbian women, four as homosexual men, two as bisexual men, two as transgender women and one as a heterosexual woman who had a same-sex relationship while part of the armed group. Within this group, four were former members of M-19, five were former members of FARC and two were former members of AUC.

	M-19	FARC	AUC	
Women	8	9	7	24
Men	9	11	9	29
Other genders		1	1	2
Total				55

Table 1: Gender and former affiliation with armed group of research participants

To understand how gender is constructed in complex and sometimes contradictory ways, the research is based on an intersectional perspective. As described in the previous chapter, while intersectional perspectives are starting to become a new paradigm in gender studies, researchers such as Winker & Degele (2011) have raised questions regarding which intersecting oppressions and vectors of powers should be considered and how many of them can be handled in a practical way in any particular research project. Recognizing this, priority axes for analysis, in addition to sexual orientation and gender identities, was the ideology of the former armed group as well as the former roles assumed within the armed groups. Women, men and non-binary individuals who carried out different roles in the armed groups, including those carrying out support roles, soldiers and middle-level commanders were interviewed. The research was limited to adult ex-combatants and only reflects upon class, ethnicity and age to a limited extent. The ex-combatants were all between 19 and 70 years old by the time of the interviews and, with the exception of two women who had not yet formally demobilized but who were representatives of FARC in the peace process, all participants had demobilized between one and 27 years before the interviews took place. The interview participants had spent different amounts of time within the armed groups, ranging from three months to 36 years. Half of the interviewees (27 out of the 55) had entered the armed groups as minors. Three of the interviewees had disarmed as a child (*desvinculado*) and thereby first entered into the programme for former child soldiers run by the Colombian Institute for Family Wellbeing (ICBF), before joining the reintegration programme after turning 18 years old. The sample included 14 former senior and mid-level commanders, six interviewees who had primarily assumed support roles, as well as 35 soldiers and militia members. Among the commanders, one former commander of AUC had just been released after eight years of incarceration as part of the provisions of the Justice and Peace Law provisions which granted limited penalties to those responsible for human rights abuses.

	M-19			FARC			AUC			
	Women	Men	Other gender identities	Women	Men	Other gender identities	Women	Men	Other gender identities	
Commanders (senior and mid-level)	2	3		3	3		1	2		14
Soldiers (including urban militia)	6	6		4	8	1	3	7		35
Support roles				2			3		1	6
Total										55

Table 2: Former role within armed group

Sample size was defined using the guiding principle of data saturation, taking into consideration that the research sought to capture the experiences of a heterogeneous group through applying an intersectional design. Although data saturation was ensured within the sub-set of men and women, as well as within the sub-set of interviewees formerly associated with the three armed groups, the sub-set of LGBT ex-combatants remained limited. Given the differences within the sub-groups of lesbians, gay, bisexual and transgender combatants, a larger sample would have been beneficial. Still, considering the almost complete lack of research on LGBT ex-combatants, and the considerable methodological challenges in conducting research in this area described by other researchers, including the engrained secrecy surrounding deviation from heterosexual norms among ex-combatants (Theidon 2009, Mendez 2012), the limited sample of LGBT ex-combatant remains highly unique. Indeed, it is the largest sample of people who are characterized as having a non-normative heterosexual identity of any comparable study of combatants in Colombia or elsewhere. Thus it can still serve as a starting point and important resource for further exploration

of the experiences of LGBT ex-combatants in the processes of reintegration in Colombia and elsewhere.

3.2 Recruitment of Participants

Various strategies were used to recruit interview participants. The majority of the former members of the FARC and AUC were identified and approached through the Colombian Agency for Reintegration[6] (ACR) as they were current or former participants in the Colombian government-led reintegration programme. A request for research support was sent to the ACR seeking their assistance in the recruitment of interview participants and permission to utilize their office facilities for conducting the interviews. The Agency has extensive collaboration with students and researchers interested in conducting research focused on the reintegration process. As per the Agency's procedures, a thorough research application was submitted, including the draft semi-structured interview guide. Following the approval of the request, an agreement was signed outlining the responsibilities regarding confidentiality, project plan and commitments. In relation to the interview participants, the agreement ensured support from ACR personnel to recruit interview participants enrolled in the Government-led reintegration programme who were former members of AUC and FARC. In practice, this meant that ACR personnel called the ex-combatants and asked if they would like to come to their offices to participate in the interview. At the time of the fieldwork, ACR personnel at the Government run service centres also approached ex-combatants who happened to be at the service centres at the time I was there in order to ensure a sufficient number of interview participants. A total of 29 interviews were conducted with former members of the AUC and FARC through the support of the ACR. The remaining 25 participants, including five former members of AUC and FARC as well as all the former members of M-19—who are not part of ACR's caseload—were approached through the support of my personal network of UN representatives and Government officials from my previous work experience in Colombia. They were recruited through snowball selection and through the network *Red Nacional de Mujeres Excombatientes de la Insurgencia* (National Network of Insurgency Ex-combatant Women).

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[6] Now called the Reincorporation and Normalization Agency (ARN)

Given the difficulty in identifying LGBT ex-combatants, various strategies were used to locate potential interviewees. While the research proposal submitted to ACR was approved without requiring any modification, ACR recommended reducing the solicited number of interviews with LGBT ex-combatants or to recruit them without the support of the Agency. The reason that the inclusion of LGBT ex-combatants was identified as an obstacle was that the Agency had only identified two LGBT participants in the process of reintegration. Furthermore, an assessment carried out by the Agency during 2017 only managed to interview three LGBT persons. Potential interviewees whose sexual orientation, gender identity and/or sexual practices fall outside normative heterosexuality were therefore contacted through all of the above-mentioned strategies, i.e. through ACR personnel, through snowball selection, and through the network of women ex-combatants. I had also met a transgender ex-combatant in 2011 in a conference who I managed to contact through social media. One man and one woman who did not identify publicly as LGBT, and whose sexual orientation and non-heterosexual practices were disclosed during the interviews as part of the overall sample, are also included. Their participation allowed me to capture experiences of ex-combatants who do not disclose their sexual identities and practices.

Relying on a Governmental institution to recruit interviewees may generate a potential risk of selection bias. Even though the Agency's personnel might not have the intention of selecting participants with specific characteristics, such as participants who are particularly positive towards the reintegration process, there might be a risk of such a selection bias. This risk was assessed as low due to the large sample and the multiple strategies to approach participants, often based merely on the availability of ex-combatants coming to the offices. While some interviewees expressed appreciation for the opportunity to participate in the interview, several participants had already participated in other interviews. A certain level of interview fatigue as well as previous less positive experiences of interviews with both researchers and media could therefore have made it more difficult to recruit interview participants. One transgender ex-combatant declined the invitation to participate stating that she had previously participated in an interview where her confidentiality was compromised. Certain challenges in recruiting former members of the AUC were also encountered. Ex-combatants from this group demobilized in 2005-2006 and the large majority had therefore completed their government-led reintegration programme. Those who were still enrolled in the programme had often faced some challenges that have made them unable to graduate. The sample therefore includes a mix of participants who had already graduated, as well

as participants still enrolled in the Government-run reintegration programme who have encountered a variety of obstacles during their reintegration process. For example, interview participants from this group described challenges related to untreated psychiatric disorders and how they had re-engaged in criminal activities. Their inclusion further lowers the potential risk of a selection bias of ex-combatants particularly positive towards the reintegration processes.

Access to research participants is impacted by both the researcher's positionality, contacts, and external events that's out of the researcher's control (Fattal 2018, Schöb 2021). As described, in this research, access to the participants were in most cases gained through gatekeepers, i.e. primarily the reintegration agency and members of my personal network. While I went through the same requirements as other researchers to gain support by the ACR, it is likely that my previous experience working with the agency facilitated the process. Other scholars have described the process of gaining access to research participant through their support as an "unfeasibility game" that lasted for several years and consisted of a "*constant 'on' and 'off' in the communication with the headquarters' research section (the 'gatekeeper' for admission of external researchers), unfulfilled promises and schedules, long silences, and sudden access possibilities that were too spontaneous to be realistic for most researchers*" (Schöb 2021: 148). While I indeed had to demonstrate persistence, commitment and follow up with the agency, this was still far from my experience. The agency and the reintegration workers were accommodating my requests to the extent possible. Furthermore, my personal network proved particularly important in securing interviews with several of the former members of the superior command of M-19. In these cases, contacts were made through a former member of the M-19 who I knew through his former work with the UN. As these former commanders were by the time of the interviews holding senior position within their respective fields and were all very busy, it might have been hard to secure these interviews should I not have counted on the support of this well connected former ex-combatant. On one occasion, I got the sense that one of these former commanders agreed to meet with me exclusively because I had received her contact information through this former ex-combatant and that her expectations of the interview was low. She started the interview with a sigh, followed by the statement "*I hope you will not ask the same questions that everyone else have already asked me*". This also points to some of the power dynamics between the researcher and research participants, that in my cases spanned from this experience with a confident, highly educated former commander, to many interviews with marginalized former combatants who in

some cases started the interviews appearing quite shy. The research was informed by feminist and intersectional approaches to methodology, which seek to understand these dynamics of power as multidimensional constructs, including through taking into consideration the power inequalities between researcher and participants (Gorelick 1991). Attentiveness to the relationships among all stakeholders remain a key element of feminist research ethics (Ackely & True 2020) and the efforts to problematize the intersecting vectors of power and stereotypical perceptions of women, men and non-binary ex-combatants were central to the research.

3.3 Data collection and Anonymisation

Fieldwork was carried out in Colombia during February and March 2017. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ex-combatants in the cities of Bogota, Cali and Villavicencio.[7] These sites were selected in order to secure the participation of my research sample. As the most challenging part was to reach LGBT ex-combatants, research locations were chosen based on where I was able to identify and interview these hard-to reach participants. One interview was exceptionally conducted through Skype with an ex-combatant living in exile in Spain. This was an interview with an ex-combatant I made extensive efforts to reach as I learned that he had established a small unit within M-19 comprised exclusively of homosexual men.

The interviews were conducted by me in Spanish, which I am fully fluent in. The interviews lasted between 40 minutes and four hours, with the average interview time being approximately one and a half hours. The research was undertaken in accordance with the ethical guidelines of informed consent, confidentiality and consequences (Kvale 1996, Vetenskapsrådet 2002) as well as feminist research ethic as a methodological commitment to research practices that "critically reflect on

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[7] As Colombia's regions are highly diverse, Villavicencio in Meta, southeast of Bogota, Cali in Valle del Cauca in southwest Colombia and the capital Bogota are very different sites of research. Additionally, there are large variations within the cities themselves, and I did conduct interviews spanning from marginalized peri-urban areas as well as in the apartments and offices of ex-combatants in the capital city center. The ex-combatant population is also highly mobile, and my research therefore included ex-combatants originally coming from different regions. As I have experience of previously undertaken work with the Colombian DDR programme in 15 different departments of Colombia, I acknowledge the important regional differences. However, for the purpose of this research, due to the large number of intersectional axes of analysis, geographic location did not constitute a priority variable of analysis and I am therefore not providing an in-depth reflection regarding the way in which location affect ex-combatants' experiences of gender constructions in the processes of reintegration. Other feminist scholars, such as Schöb (2014, 2021), have studied reintegration processes from a regional perspective.

dynamics of power, knowledge, relationships and context throughout the research process" (Ackerly & True 2019: 2). All respondents were informed of the overall purpose of the research, that data would be handled with respect for confidentiality and for academic purposes only, and that their participation was voluntary. All interview participants granted informed consent and none of the participants chose to end the interview or opt out of answering any specific question. All participants except one granted permission for the interview to be recorded.

The interviews that were not organized by the ACR took place primarily in the homes of the ex-combatants or in the building where I was living. All of the interviews were conducted without anyone else present except for me and the interviewee. Conducting interviews in the private residence of the ex-combatants often generated a more intimate and comfortable interview setting. It also presented potential security risks, however, including while traveling to less secure areas of Bogota. Ex-combatants from the AUC and FARC also suffer high levels of post-traumatic stress disorder and other trauma-related illnesses, as well as high levels of abuse of alcohol and psychoactive substances (ACR 2011). Additionally, some ex-combatants have re-entered into criminal activities, including as members of new paramilitary groups. This may generate security risks for the interview participants as well as for me as a researcher. The interviews conducted at the ex-combatants' homes or my temporary location were primarily with former combatants from M-19, with the exception of five former members of AUC. These five ex-combatants had graduated from the government-run reintegration programme and had distinguished themselves through assuming leadership roles in their communities, e.g. through establishing their own non-governmental organizations or participating in reconciliation programmes. This made me comfortable to set up the interviews in more private settings. In addition to these interviews, another three interviews were conducted in separate rooms at the offices of the ex-combatants who were all directors or part of the senior management of these three respective organizations. Three interviews took place outdoors in a park and in a café. These interviews took place in a separate part where no one could overhear the conversation.

Respondents formerly associated with the AUC and FARC who were active in the Government-led reintegration programme were interviewed at the local Service Centres of the Colombian Agency for Reintegration. The Government of Colombia has 32 local Service Centres across the country, established to respond to the needs of the ex-combatants. Several other students have used

these facilities in order to conduct research (e.g. see Mendez 2012 and Sjölander 2016) and I have previously conducted in-depth interviews and focus group discussions in seven of these centres. The interviews scheduled by the ACR were conducted at five different Service Centres, where all interviews took place in a private room. Although people were walking through the areas next to these rooms, the risk of overhearing the interviews was very small. An advantage of conducting the interviews in these Service Centres was that these interviews took place in locations the ex-combatants were familiar with. The privacy provided gave me the impression that the participants were comfortable with the interview situation.

Three interviews scheduled by the ACR took place in separate areas at a community centre and a local library outside of Bogota that the Agency uses for some of its activities. In one of the interviews with an ex-combatant who expressed strong worries about his overall personal safety and fear that one of the new emerging criminal groups would seek to assassinate him, the interview setting might have impacted the data collection. The interviewee was concerned that having to attend ACR activities made it possible to identify him as an ex-combatant. While he agreed to participate in the interview, it was clear to me that he felt unease in general. This interviewee was the only participant who did not grant permission for me to record the interview.

Conducting interviews at the Governmental-run Service Centre may generates certain dilemmas. First and foremost, based on the reflections of potential security risks for me as a researcher, this arrangement was sought as a security measure. Potential negative consequences of conducting the interviews at the Governmental-run premises include that ex-combatants may be intimidated as they might doubt that the results will not be shared with the Government. The perceived risk of facing negative consequences if they are not adhering to Governmental policies and/or reflect critically upon the Government-led reintegration process may negatively impact the result. During her interviews with women ex-combatants in Colombia, Sjölander (2016: 23–24) noted that the respondents provided "*somewhat more cautious answers to questions regarding the reintegration program*" which she expected was as a result of ACR arranging and hosting the interviews. However, since my research did not aim to evaluate the reintegration programme, or particular services provided by ACR, I did not encounter this type of challenge. Emphasis was also placed during the introduction to the interviews on the assurances of participant anonymity and that the data would only be used for academic purposes and not shared with any ACR staff member.

Efforts to ensure participants' confidentiality and security were crucial and went beyond normal research protocols. Measures were taken to ensure anonymity and security of the interview participants throughout the research process. While the ACR was aware of the identities of the participants whom they assisted in scheduling, the risk of identification was generally very low. The participants were part of five different service centres, and over 40 per cent of the total sample was recruited through other channels. For some of the LGBT ex-combatants, however, such as the two transgender ex-combatants interviewed, it might be possible for the ACR personnel who work with them to link certain testimonies to these participants. This was discussed with the participants and they declared that this was not a problem. On the contrary, both expressed the view that they liked to conduct interviews, not just with academics, but also with the media. In respect to two of the interviewed women, who both held prominent roles within their organizations, a conversation regarding their anonymity was conducted. They were both offered anonymity through not specifying their roles within their respective organizations, but both expressed a preference for appearing under their own name. Therefore, Vera Grabe, the only woman who was part of the superior command of M-19, and a former congresswoman, as well as Victoria Sandino (Judith Simanca Herrera), a former FARC commander, the head of the sub-commission on gender during the peace negotiations in Havana and after the 2018 elections, Senator of the Republic of Colombia for the FARC political party (Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común), both appear with their real names in this research. They both signed an agreement allowing the use of their real name in the research. There were several other former members of the M-19 who expressed their willingness, or preference, to appear with their real names. In these cases, a conversation was held where emphasis was placed on the way in which anonymity is preferred from a research perspective as it allows research participants to speak as freely as possible. As for the two participants who appear with their real names in the research, the potential security risks that this may pose to these women was understood as low as they are both public figures engaged in the current peacebuilding debates in the country. Except for these two cases, all other names used are fictitious in order to protect the identities of the participants.

3.4 Data Analysis

The interviews have been transcribed into Spanish and selected quotes translated into English by myself. Quotes were modified to a certain extent in order to make sense in English, but care was

taken to ensure that the core meaning was maintained. All transcripts and recordings were analysed using the qualitative software NVIVO and by applying ad hoc methods and a hermeneutic approach. Ad hoc meaning generation is based on a free interplay of techniques during the analysis in order to bring out connections and structures significant to the research project (Kvale 1996). The interviews were first analysed to get an overall impression, then specific passages were analysed for both meaning condensation and meaning interpretation, before finally undertaking quantifications of certain attitudes, beliefs and experiences. The materials were analysed using a hermeneutic approach, that is, to see the overall picture of the research problem through understanding the meaning of each part in relation to the whole (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2000). The analysis of the interviews was therefore based on an interpretation that is pending between the details, such as a quote, and the overall picture, such as the interview in length. Coding of the data took place without applying a pre-existing coding frame, i.e. through adhering to a data-driven analysis. Themes were identified and analysed to create larger main- and sub-themes. For the purpose of the research, the Colombian Agency for Reincorporation and Normalization (ARN) also provided me with access to an anonymized database of demobilized persons in the process of reintegration or reincorporation, which allowed me to analyse sex-disaggregated data as related to characteristics and issues such as former group affiliation, re-engagement in criminal activities etc. All data was analysed in relation to the theoretical framework of the research, using gender, intersectional, feminist and masculinity theory, as well as previous research on gender and reintegration. Since this is a qualitative study based on a selective sample, the constructions of gender must be understood from its unique standpoint without an ambition to generalize. Nonetheless, depending on the different contexts, findings may still be transferable or relatable to other societies where ex-combatants are reintegrated into civil society. The results of this study may also inform further research on the constructions of gender in the processes of reintegration both in Colombia and beyond.

3.5 Methodological Reflections

Studying the constructions of gender in the process of reintegration of ex-combatants is supremely challenging. This section outlines some of the key limitations linked to conducting research in a context of conflict and violence, and the methodological concerns surrounding topics related to violent experiences engrained with social taboos, stigma and intersecting vectors of power. First,

it is important to acknowledge that it is enormously challenging to study protracted conflicts academically. For the people who have been engaged in war, the different motivations are extremely difficult to pin down and understand (Gutiérrez 2008, Jonsson 2014). Throughout this research, memory is therefore considered to be a series of constructions, likely affected by multiple factors, including each individual's current state of mind, experiences, interests and loyalties. Feitlowitz (1998: 16), states "*Depending on the circumstances, memory can be clear or dim, fluid or clotted. There may be guilt, resistance, fear, fury, suspicion, distrust, despair. When boundaries between past and present are weakened, belief in the importance of giving testimony may diminish or intensify*". Researchers such as Theidon (2009) have argued that relying on interviews to gather sensitive information in a context of conflict and distrust may be limited. Furthermore, an area that is included as a sub-theme in the research but which is particularly challenging to study is sexual and gender-based violence. Strict adherence to international standards and guidelines on researching violence against women was ensured while approaching this topic (Amnesty International 2004, Ellsberg & Heise 2005, IASC 2005). Since different groups in Colombia's conflict have perpetrated different forms of SGBV both against the civilian population as well as within the armed groups (Oxfam 2009, Mendez 2012, CNHM 2015), it was expected that there would be ex-combatants who had both perpetrated, witnessed and/or been subjected to different forms of SGBV among the respondents. Several researchers have described the silence surrounding SGBV (Fujii 2010, Mendez 2012). My previous research experience (Upegui & Thylin et al. 2010), as well as the experience of the current fieldwork, show that while SGBV is a highly-sensitive topic for Colombian ex-combatants, many are willing to talk about issues related to SGBV. Female ex-combatants brought up painful experiences of rape and forced abortions. On one occasion, a male participant also described how he had been subject to sexual violence in detention. While conducting interviews in Colombia, Mendez (2012) ensured that questions presented to ex-combatants were phrased in a way to allow participants to answer in general terms, without necessarily giving information about their personal experience on sensitive topics such as forced abortions. While most answers began with general statements and slowly became more detailed and personal, Mendez acknowledge that engaging in conversations with individuals who have experienced physically and emotionally difficult situations can affect the quality and quantity of information gathered. Researchers such as Eriksson Baaz et al. (2010) have also researched the perpetration of sexual and gender-based violence among male ex-combatants in the DRC. They

noted that the perpetration of sexual violence was discussed openly and freely by many soldiers interviewed, but they also noted a greater reluctance and fear among the soldiers to speak about SGBV following cases of prosecutions for sexual and gender-based crimes in the DRC (ibid.). In my research, ex-combatants rarely described the perpetration of SGBV. In one case, a male nurse brought up his role in the perpetration of forced abortions. A combatant who was the medical doctor of one of the large blocs of FARC expressed concerns about prosecution for sexual violence. He forcefully denied claims against him of having perpetrated forced abortions. While proven challenging to conduct research with perpetrators of SGBV, the findings of Ericsson Baaz et al. (2010) have provided important new insights and widened the research field of sexual violence in conflict which has been taken into consideration throughout this research.

The role of the researcher is another important methodological concern. Having lived in Colombia and worked with the Colombian DDR process between 2009-2012, I embarked on this research journey with certain level of contextual understanding and network. I had first-hand experience of engaging with ex-combatants demobilized from the FARC and AUC, although much less experience working with ex-combatants demobilized from the M-19. Having been part of the International Expert Working Group on DDR and Gender, led by the UN Inter Agency Working Group on DDR (IAWG DDR), I also had the opportunity to collaborate and learn from many different DDR processes globally which increased my interest in comparative elements. Finally, working with the UN, for the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (UN-LiREC) and thereafter as a staff member of the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) in New York (2012 onwards), I had experience of both policy and programming related to gender equality in crisis-settings. This background has influenced my research as I, throughout the process, wanted to ensure that my findings help bridge the understanding between academia and practitioners. Engaging in the field of DDR as a highly male dominated area, I have embraced the view of my feminist scholarship as a transformative part of social science, not outside of it, and a way of being a feminist researcher "working within the mainstream to broaden its boundaries" (Ackley & True 2020: 10).

Furthermore, while interviewing, "*the importance of the researcher as a person is magnified because the interviewer is the main instrument for obtaining knowledge*" (Kvale 1996). Being a

foreign researcher could possibly increase the risk of role expectations and intercultural misunderstandings. In order to minimize these risks as much as possible, follow-up questions were used frequently to avoid misunderstandings. My previous experience of living in Colombia, as well as my proficiency in Spanish, further mitigated risks of intercultural misunderstandings. In particular, my previous experience of having worked for two and a half years directly with demobilized populations in Colombia, as well as of conducting both in-depth interviews and focus-group discussions among ex-combatants and their family members, served as an important preparation for the data collection. On the other hand, being identified as a foreigner and, as such, unambiguously removed from an identification with any political or social constituency in Colombia, can at times make research participants more at ease and allow for a more intimate conversation. In addition, being a female researcher can have both problematic and beneficial effects on the results (Repstad 2007, Theidon 2009). I have particularly reflected on my position as a female, foreign cis-gender researcher in relation to the two participants who did not identify publicly as LGBT and who disclosed their sexual orientation and non-heterosexual practices during the interviews. One of these participants expressed that she had not told anyone about her lesbian experience within the paramilitary, which she still considers the gravest sin that she "asks God for forgiveness for every day". I am still humbled that she shared this with me, and I am still intrigued as to why she chose to do so. Acknowledging that feminist research is sceptical of supposedly universal, objective truths, including the "truth" of interpretation, and rather considers "their social construction as often, if not always, the result of an operation of gendered power" (Confortini 2019: 88), its very likely that the interplay of being a female, cis-gender and foreign researcher contributed to the way in which this interview evolved. In addition to my questions which showed an interest in LGBT issues, being foreigner might have generated the expectation that I would be more open to LGBT rights. It was also a long interview where trust was built. In fact, it was towards the end of a four-hour interview that took place in the apartment I was renting, and perhaps importantly, after breastfeeding my 5-month-old baby during a moment of the interview, that this woman told me about this well-kept secret of hers. At times throughout the research process, I considered it a dilemma, or a "weakness", being cis-gender and seeking to understand the experiences of LGBT ex-combatants. At the same time, in the cases where ex-combatants considered their non-heterosexual experiences as sinful, it might have proved easier to tell a heterosexual woman about these feelings of guilt. Additionally, I believe that not focusing

my research exclusively on LGBT ex-combatants created the opportunity to include the experiences of these ex-combatants who do not openly disclose their sexual orientation and/or non-heterosexual practices, which are extremely hard individuals to reach.

Finally, while fully acknowledging the multitude of methodological challenges in studying the gendered experiences of ex-combatants, including but not limited to the reflections outlined above, it remains clear that without this understanding, the specificity of war as a distinct human activity is lost (Gutiérrez 2008). The fact that the gender dimensions of conflicts are so supremely challenging to study is at the same time what makes the efforts to unveil at least part of all that is lost in the fog of war extraordinarily worthwhile (Jonsson 2014).

4. Gender, Conflicts and Reintegration in Colombia

This chapter starts by providing an historical overview of the long trajectory of intersecting conflicts in Colombia. Thereafter, the gender dimensions of the three armed groups that the thesis focuses on are explored, including in relation to women's participation, gender constructions, conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence, and sexual and gender minorities. Finally, the last section focuses on gender in the aftermath of conflicts, including the historical attention to gender and LGBT issues in the 2016 peace agreement, as well as the emergence of gender perspectives in the DDR processes.

4.1. Historical Overview of the Colombian Conflicts

4.1.1 The long history of violence

Colombia has struggled with conflicts and challenges to exert control over its extensive and geographically diverse territory ever since the liberation from Spanish colonialism during the early 1820s. The centralized, but poorly functioning, governmental system inherited from the Spanish colonizers meant that the Colombian state exerted a relatively strong presence in the urban centres, while being largely absent from the rural areas. Kline (2003) describes how Colombia began as a "weak state" and how this generated a tradition of private justice and a violent history. Most notorious in Colombia's violent history has been the enduring conflict between liberal and conservative parties. After a series of brief conflicts fought throughout the nineteenth century, the liberals started the first major revolution in 1899 in response to their exclusion from power, corruption and economic crisis. The subsequent War of a Thousand Days resulted in the death of approximately 100,000 Colombians before ending in a victory for the conservatives (Keen et al. 2000). In the 1940s, major political tensions and unrest resurfaced, leading to a decade of war between liberals and conservatives called *La Violencia*. The outbreak of the conflict was triggered by the assassination of the charismatic liberal leader, *Jorge Eliécer Gaitán,* who was a popular advocate for socialist reforms. It is estimated that between 200,000 and 300,000 Colombians lost their lives during the conflict between 1948 and 1958.

4.1.2 The rise of FARC, M-19 and AUC

The FARC-EP trace their roots back to the period of *La Violencia* and to the establishment of a liberal self-defence militia in Tolima (Jonsson 2014). After *La Violencia* ended, the group did not demobilize but established control over what they called "independent republics". Most analysts set the founding date of FARC to 1964. In this year, government troops attacked the region to re-establish government control, but the leader and founder of the FARC, Pedro Antonio Marín, alias Manuel Marulanda, managed to escape into the mountains with a group of fighters. FARC describe themselves as an organization applying the principles of Marxist-Leninism to the Colombian reality and as inspired by the revolutionary thinking of the Liberator Simón Bolívar, in respect to anti-imperialism, the unity of Latin America, equality, and the welfare of the people (FARC-EP Estatuto). Over the course of the succeeding half century, FARC would become the largest and oldest guerrilla group in Latin America, but at this time the group was merely one out of at least seven small- to medium-sized left-wing rebel groups in Colombia (Jonsson 2014).

A second generation of guerrilla movements emerged in Colombia in the 1970s and 1980s. One of these movements, the Movimiento 19 de Abril (M-19), was founded in 1973 in response to the political dynamic following the allegedly fraudulent presidential elections of 1970 (Boudon 2001). M-19 was an urban guerrilla group, which made them different from the other rural guerrilla movements of the time, such as the FARC. M-19 included a combination of middle-class students and graduates, who were critical of armed peasant resistance as a long-term strategy (García-Durán et al. 2008). M-19 also sought to break with international models and emerged as a critique of the existing left-wing groups in the country. Instead, M-19 advocated for a nationalist, Bolivarian,[8] anti-imperialist, anti-oligarchic model, and a Colombian-style socialism (ibid.). The M-19 guerrilla group became known for some of its high profile actions, including the siege of the Dominican Republic's embassy in Bogotá in 1980 and the Palace of Justice siege in 1985.

In the early 1980s, the FARC started to engage increasingly in extortion and in the emerging drug trade in Colombia. The increased funding arising from this, paired with a stronger military focus, led to an exponential growth of the FARC and its military capacity. As the group became stronger,

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[8] Inspired by the military and political leader Simón Bolívar who led the liberation from the Spanish empire throughout much of South America in the 19th-century, this Bolivarian model encompasses socialist and nationalist ideals against injustices of imperialism and inequality.

it was increasingly viewed as a threat to power by the country's regional elites, as well as by organized crime seeking control over the drug trade. Against this backdrop, wealthy landowners and drug traffickers started funding private militias or paramilitary groups to stop the political, social, economic and territorial expansion of the guerrilla groups (Mendez 2012, Jonsson 2014). In 1997, these paramilitary groups merged and formed the umbrella organization Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC). While the FARC and other guerrilla groups had for long carried out kidnappings, executions of civilians and other human rights violations, the paramilitary groups applied a different repertoire of violence and made "dirty war" tactics their modus operandi. Their presence in a region most often started with a wave of indiscriminate violence that included massacres, mutilations, torture, and the destruction of property. Thereafter, they switched to more selective violence, extortion and the assassination of specific targets (Gutiérrez 2008). Despite having similar financial bases the left-wing and right-wing armed groups in Colombia exhibit systematic differences regarding both social composition and behaviours. There are also other important differences in the social composition of the three groups, including M-19 being a more urban group with members from the middle-class (Boudon 2001) and FARC having a more peasant and less educated cadre than the AUC.

4.1.3. DDR processes in Colombia

Colombia has engaged in peace-building efforts with armed groups for decades, and therefore has a long experience of DDR processes of former combatants. M-19 was the first of several guerrilla groups in Colombia to start a negotiation process, which concluded in a final peace agreement involving its demobilization as an armed group and leading to some of its members founding a new political party (García-Durán et al. 2008). In 1989, the M-19 guerrilla group became the M-19 party called the Alianza Democrática M19 (AD-M19). They thereby switched from armed subversion to the ballot box as the principal means of effecting change (Boudon 2001). As the case of Colombia illustrates, however, demobilizing in the midst of conflict generates particular challenges, including ensuring the security of former combatants. In 1990, the former M-19 commander, Carlos Pizarro, was murdered by assassins, supposedly on the orders of drug cartel and paramilitary leaders. The AD-M19 did at its inception manage to influence the reform of the Constitution, and the new leader, Antonio Navarro Wolff, was even considered the front-runner for the presidency in 1994 (Boudon 2001). While the party did not manage to effectively

consolidate itself and quickly lost influence, former M-19 members are still active in politics, including the former Mayor of Bogota, Gustavo Petro.

In 2002, the newly-elected Colombian President Uribe initiated a highly controversial negotiation process with the right-wing paramilitaries who had close ties to both security forces and politicians (HRW 2020), which would lead to the collective demobilization of AUC. Formal conversations were initiated following the signature of the *Acuerdo de Santa Fe de Ralito I* in 2003, where AUC committed to a ceasefire (Theidon 2009). The legal status of the ex-combatants proved to be the most controversial aspect of the process. In 2005, Law 975 (*Ley de Justicia y Paz*), provided amnesties and limited penalties for human rights abuses. As part of the amnesty, the former paramilitaries were required to give testimonies about their crimes. The law manifested strong tensions between peace and justice, and victims remained dissatisfied with important aspects, including their rights to truth, justice and reparation (Theidon 2009). The following DDR process has been heavily criticized as fundamentally flawed and because many members reorganized into new paramilitary groups that have remained active and continue to commit violations of international law (HRW 2020). Furthermore, following the demobilization of the AUC, the extensive links between the paramilitary, drug traffickers and politicians were revealed (known as "*parapolítica*"). In 2018, the Supreme Court also started an investigation into whether former President Uribe has committed acts of fraud, bribery, and witness tampering. This includes the examination as to whether he tried to influence the testimony by pushing a former paramilitary member to retract statements which linked the former president to the creation of paramilitary groups. A series of Colombian presidents have attempted to conduct peace negotiations with the FARC. Under the administration of President Belisario Betancur (1982-1986), a ceasefire agreement was signed but disagreement halted the process. Thereafter, every president has made some attempt to initiate negotiations with the FARC (Mendez 2012). After the failure of the negotiations between the Government of Pastrana, President Uribe came to power promising a hard-line military approach against the guerrillas. During President Uribe's time in office (2002-2010), FARC sustained substantial battlefield losses, but perhaps even more importantly, over 15.500 members of the FARC also chose to defect and demobilize individually (Jonsson 2014).[9]

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[9] Colombia is an example of what has been called Second Generation DDR (DPKO 2010). This includes programmes that have an alternative sequencing, where DDR is implemented in the midst of conflict and not

This "individual demobilization" of combatants took place at the same time as the "collective demobilization" of the paramilitary. From having had a record number of 30,000 members in 2002, FARC had reduced to 9,000 members by 2012, which Johnson and Jonsson (2013) argue as in part explaining FARC's decision to engage in renewed peace negotiations with the Government of President Juan Manuel Santos in 2012. While President Santos originally set November 2013 as a deadline for the negotiations, they were extended until 2016. The final peace agreement between the Colombian Government and the FARC was ratified by the Colombian Congress in 2016, following revisions after a referendum to ratify the peace agreement resulted in a narrow rejection. By the time of my fieldwork, in 2017, there were already delays in the implementation of the agreement and one of the challenges at this early stage was the construction of transition zones where members of the FARC were to gather and hand in their weapons. As described earlier, except for two women, the vast majority of the former combatants from the FARC that participated in my research were therefore individually demobilized before the peace agreement. It was only a couple of months after I finished my data collection, in June 2017, that the disarmament phase of FARC was completed (McFee & Rettberg 2019). As FARC swopped bullets for ballot boxes, the political party the Common Alternative Revolutionary Force (*Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común - FARC*) was formed as the political successor of the guerrilla group, now called the Commons (*Comunes*). The election of President Iván Duque in 2018, who ran a campaign against the peace agreement with the FARC, appeared to mark a significant political shift (Murphy & Grattan 2018). However, once in office, Duque's government expressed its commitment to the peace agreement, including the reintegration of former FARC members (UNSC 2020a). Still, civil society and political actors continue to express concerns regarding the slow pace of implementation and compliance with the agreement (ibid.). A major concern has been the assassination of former combatants, and the United Nations has, as of September 2020, verified a total of 297 attacks against former FARC members, with eight targeting women ex-combatants (ibid.). Despite the process of reincorporation of Colombia's largest guerrilla group, FARC dissident groups have emerged, with fighters who refused to disarm or who disarmed initially but then joined or created new groups (HRW 2020). There are still at least five different armed conflicts left co-existing within the country, between paramilitary groups, guerrilla groups and the

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necessarily after a peace agreement. Colombia has allowed for combatants to defect from their respective armed groups and demobilize on an individual basis.

State (ICRC 2018). The now-oldest guerrilla group in Latin America, ELN, initiated formal peace negotiations in 2017 but these proved unsuccessful (La Semana 2019). Efforts to date, including the group's proposal of a bilateral ceasefire in 2020 have also not been fruitful (UNSC 2020a). As several conflicts continue to co-exist in Colombia, the current DDR processes are unlikely to be the last.

4.2 Gender and Armed Groups in Colombia

Gender relations, norms and policies in Colombia, as well as within the different armed groups, have transformed throughout the half a century of intersecting conflicts. Gender has both been formed by, and has shaped, the historical contexts of militarism and the conflicts in the country (see e.g. Theidon 2009). This section focuses in particular on women's participation in the armed struggle, gender constructions within the armed groups, conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence, as well as sexual and gender minorities as key areas of analysis.

4.2.1. Women's participation and roles in armed groups

There are notable differences between FARC, M-19 and AUC in terms of the participation of women and gender policies and practices. Both guerrilla groups had a large percentage of women. M-19 has been described as the Colombian armed group most open to women's participation and they were estimated to include between 28.6 and 31.5 percent women (Londoño & Nieto 2006). As for the FARC, 23 percent of the demobilized combatants are women (ARN 2021). The FARC and M-19 guerrilla groups not only incorporated women in their ranks; they also subscribed to ideals of gender equality, with a discourse that explicitly linked class and gender equality, and an organization without a traditional gender division of labour (Gutiérrez & Carranza 2017). While FARC started out as an all-male guerrilla group in the 1960s, Gutiérrez and Carranza (2017) have argued that the massive recruitment of women as combatants was a prerequisite, or at least a highly-relevant condition, for its exponential growth and transformation from a peasant self-defence organization into a people's army. Specifically, they argued that insurgent groups benefit from developing feminist agendas to mobilize women because their need of human resources is greater than that of their opponents', and as a result their leftist ideology trumps traditional patriarchal structures in what could be interpreted as an instrumental use of ideology. Thereby,

ideology and organizational needs interacted to generate a feminization of the guerrilla group (ibid.).

While FARC included a large number of women in combat roles, with women also holding roles as commanders, there was a rather low ceiling for advancement. It was not uncommon for women to serve as first or second officers of small units (12–26 combatants) but they have not assumed the top leadership roles within the organization. No woman reached the Secretariat, which served as FARC's main decision-making body. This illustrates how gender hierarchies and gendered division of labour were still present. It was M-19 that was the first armed group in Colombia to include women in their Superior Command (Londoño & Nieto 2006). Former guerrilla soldiers within M-19, however, have also described the disjunction between the ideals of gender equality promoted by the group and the practical implementation and patriarchal attitudes of male combatants (Boudon 2001, Londoño & Nieto 2006). In spite of this gender inequality, former female commanders from the Network of Women Ex-combatants from the Insurgency (*Red Nacional de Mujeres Excombatientes de la Insurgencia*) which is comprised of women ex-combatants from guerrilla movements in Colombia, including M-19 and FARC, have described their participation in the guerrillas as empowering (Small Arms Survey 2014). Women in M-19 were engaged not only as entry-level combatants but also as top commanders, and M-19 are believed to have had more women amongst their national leaders than any other guerrilla movement in the country (Boudon 2001). Both of these guerrilla groups thereby stand in sharp contrast to the paramilitaries. Of the 33,064 demobilized former members of the AUC, just 6.8 percent are women (ARN 2021). The members of the AUC participating in armed activity, according to estimations based on different data sets, included only 1.5 to 2 percent women (Gutiérrez 2008). Women in the AUC also tended to exercise predominantly supporting and political roles rather than combat roles (Gutiérrez 2008, Comisión Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación 2011). The AUC also differs from the guerrilla groups in that they had no official commitment to gender equality, either in relation to women within the group or in terms of an agenda for changing women's status in society (Mendez 2012). Mendez (2012) has described how unequal gender relations were assumed to be the foundation within the AUC. Although some women performed the same military roles as men, the expectations placed on them were lower in comparison to their male peers.

4.2.2 Gender constructions in armed groups in Colombia

In line with the trends described in the theoretical framework above, the constructions of militarized masculinities in Colombia often starts before men take up arms, through gender norms that generate salient links between weapons, masculinities and violence. Theidon (2009) argues that joining an armed group in Colombia is closely associated with a militarized model of masculinity, where having a weapon equals power. Theidon (2009b: 16) has described how the context of violence that categorizes Colombia has generated a culture that fuses masculinity, weapons and power, where "*cycling through an armed group is a rite of passage for many young men*". As men join, or are forcibly recruited, into an armed group, the militarized forms of masculinities are often further strengthened as they experience a transformation of their identity from civilian to combatant. These hegemonic masculinities sustain a heteronormative order where gay, bisexual and transsexual men are subordinated. While this has not been researched directly within armed groups in Colombia, Theidon (2009) interviewed a homosexual ex-combatant from the FARC who expressed that the armed group did not allow deviances from the heteronormative order. Indeed, that ex-combatant still guarded his secret after having demobilized. This raises important questions, not only regarding the subordination of sexuality and gender identities within armed groups, but also regarding how gender identities are constructed in the processes of reintegration for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual ex-combatants (which I will analyse in depth below).

Hegemonic masculinities not only subordinate alternative forms of masculinities but also femininities. Londoño & Nieto (2006) have described how women in M-19 paid a high price by having to negate aspects of their gender identity by assuming traditionally male gender roles. Former combatants of M-19 have at the same time described the organization as respectful to women and even "very feminine", in so far as both women and men were permitted to be sensitive and express feelings. There have even been arguments made that M-19 used women in negotiation roles with the Colombian Government, such as in the important negotiations following the siege of the embassy of the Dominican Republic, as a strategy based on the acknowledgement of gender difference wherein a woman negotiator was perceived as better able to facilitate a de-escalation (ibid.). Dietrich Ortega (2014) has analysed the opportunities for this enhanced agency in contexts of armed conflict and argues that the gender arrangements in M-19, similar to other insurgent

movements in El Salvador, Colombia and Peru, can be divided in two levels. First, a level where the operational functionality of the armed groups is dominant and where she identifies a disposition towards change. Then, on the other hand, a level associated with emotional relations where masculine privilege tends to be enforced. Mendez (2012) has made a comparative study of women in the FARC and AUC and she argues that women's gender identities, and not just masculinity, can be militarized in both complex and contradictory ways. She has also pointed to important differences between AUC and FARC, such that in the former, women were generally considered to be inferior to men, and therefore often not required to give up salient elements of their traditional gender identity to the same extent as women in the FARC. Indeed, in the latter, the tendency to control women's sexual and reproductive rights is particularly noteworthy. FARC controlled romantic relationships and the sexuality of both male and female combatants, yet the organization had different expectations of women when it came to their sexuality. Mendez describes how the female soldiers were often expected to bear the moral responsibility not just for their actions but for their partners' as well. These examples illustrate how an armed group like the FARC that subscribed to ideals of gender equality and sought gender-neutral practices still controlled women's sexuality and constructed submissive forms of militarized femininities (Mendez 2012).

4.2.3. Conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence in Colombia

Conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence has been rampant in the Colombian conflicts, and continues to be a major concern up to this day given that illegal armed groups and criminal organizations are still reported to use SGBV as a means of intimidation and as a tool for territorial and social control (Oxfam 2009, UNSC 2020a). Many NGOs have reported on the perpetration of sexual violence by state military forces, paramilitaries and guerrilla groups (Amnesty International 2004, Oxfam 2009, Campaign Rape and other Violence 2011) and some have claimed that all of the armed groups involved in the half-century long Colombian conflict have used SGBV as a weapon of war (see Oxfam 2009). In 2008, the Colombian Constitutional Court ruled that sexual violence committed in the midst of Colombia's armed conflict ought to be considered widespread and systematic in nature.

Azuero Quijano et al. (2012) have criticized the general absence of attempts to delineate the differences in how the various armed groups in Colombia perpetrated sexual violence. While wartime rape and sexual violence have for long been widely considered as omnipresent and

unavoidable in conflicts, a group of scholars have started to research the variance in prevalence between different armed groups (Wood 2009, 2012, Hoover Green 2011, Cohen 2013a, 2013b, Cohen et al. 2013). This is important to generate a more nuanced understanding of the perpetration of SGBV by the different armed groups in Colombia instead of a more general narrative embarking all armed groups. Another criticism levelled by Azuero Quijano et al. (2012) concerns the limited attention paid to male victims/survivors of sexual and gender-based violence in Colombia. They have been largely rendered invisible, despite data from National Forensic Medicine Institute pointing to 15 percent of victims being male (Azuero Quijano et al. 2012). Women, both civilian and combatants, have been described as the victims in narratives of sexual violence in the conflict, whereas women as perpetrators of SGBV have also been largely left unexplored. A more nuanced understanding of SGBV in Colombia is vital in order to develop ways of preventing and responding to violence more effectively, but it is also important to understand how the perpetration and victimization of SGBV affects male and female ex-combatants in the processes of reintegration, as well as the perpetration of SGBV post-demobilization.

One area known to exhibit a large difference between the armed groups is in relation to the perpetration of forced abortions within their own ranks. In the FARC, sexual violence against women combatants included forced contraception, forced abortions, having to give up motherhood as an option and being forced to give children away with little likelihood of seeing them again (Mendez 2012). Women were generally not allowed to have children since the group considered participation in their revolutionary struggle a life-long commitment to the exclusion of all else. While the organizational policy was for abortion as a first option, in cases where this was not viable, women were required to entrust their new-borns to a relative or leave them with a peasant family (Gutiérrez & Carranza 2017). While there were exceptions, for example partners of commanders being allowed to have children, forced abortion and an aggressive policy of compulsory birth control was practised in the FARC (Amnesty International 2004, Mendez 2012, Upegui & Thylin et al. 2010, Gutiérrez & Carranza 2017). Gutiérrez and Carranza (2017) have described how the recruitment of women in the FARC transformed the organization and created spaces in which gender inequalities were renegotiated and rethought. Brutal trade-offs were made between the social advancement of women and organizational risks, and they describe forced abortion as the key point of contention between the FARC and women combatants. Forced

abortions, sometimes on repeated occasions, deeply disillusioned and traumatized women combatants and have been described as one of the main causes of individual demobilizations/female desertions (ibid.). In stark contrast to the FARC reality, women in M-19, on the other hand, were allowed to become mothers (Boudon 2011) and forced abortions were not common in the AUC. Women in the AUC were instead permitted to take maternity leave, making it more viable to assume motherhood and parenthood in general in the paramilitary group than in the FARC. Mendez (2012) has pointed to the importance of understanding women's sexual and reproductive health and rights as well as the crimes suffered in all their specificity in order to design a DDR programme that can fully meet their needs.

Another important area of selective SGBV by armed groups in Colombia is violence against LGBT persons. Identifying, or being identified as belonging to a sexual and gender minority often adds additional layers of vulnerability to lives already under threat (Myrttinen & Daigle 2017). LGBT persons have been severely affected by the Colombian conflicts and specifically targeted by different armed groups, including state actors such as the armed forces and police, and armed groups such as guerrillas, paramilitaries, post-demobilization paramilitary groups and drug trafficking groups (Payne 2007, Gill 2009, Amnesty International 2011, Serrano Amaya 2014, National Center for Historical Memory 2015, United Nations 2015, Myrttinen & Daigle 2017). Up to this day, illegal armed groups and criminal organizations are reported to target women and girls, particularly from indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, as well as the LGBT population (UNSC 2020a).

The human rights violations of LGBT persons in Colombia include actions aimed at establishing or maintaining heteronormative social control, such as arbitrary beating and detention and so-called "social cleansing".[10] The expulsion or "elimination" of LGBT persons and people living with, or believed to have, HIV/AIDS became part of the strategy of armed groups to demonstrate how effective they were at "establishing order" and "cleansing the community of undesirables" (Amnesty International 2004). These violations also include selective threats, assaults, torture, forced displacement and assassination. Various forms of sexual violence against LGBT persons

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[10] Social cleansing *(limpieza social)* refers to targeted physical attacks, including murder, of socio-economically marginalized persons considered "undesirable", such as suspected sex workers, drug addicts, people who are homeless or living on the street.

have been perpetrated, including forced nudity, rape and sexual slavery, with both opportunistic and strategic character. Furthermore, the human rights violations of LGBT persons have been committed by different armed groups such as guerrillas, paramilitaries and post-demobilization paramilitary groups, as well as by state actors including the Colombian armed forces and police, and in some cases by drug trafficking groups (Colombian National Center for Historical Memory 2015). The Colombian National Center for Historical Memory has, however, noted variations in the actions of different armed groups according to the historical moment, the territorial contexts, as well as the respective gender principles and ideological differences between each group. While both right-wing paramilitary forces and leftist guerrilla groups have been associated with human rights violations against LGBT persons, the paramilitary AUC was by far the most excessive and frequent perpetrator of targeted violence against LGBT persons (Payne 2016, Tschantret 2018). While FARC engaged in targeted violence against civilian LGBT persons, researchers such as Tschantret (2018) have argued that the group did not systematically persecute sexual minorities. Tschantret argues that not only do the attacks by FARC amount to a small fraction of those committed by the paramilitaries but that there is also "considerable doubt" that the targeting of LGBT persons reflected group policy (Tschantret 2018: 270). However, Tschantret's research is limited to civilian LGBT persons and does not analyse the violence perpetrated within the organization against its own members. In addition to the perpetration of targeted violence against LGBT persons in the civilian population, this type of heteronormative violence exists within the armed ranks, against combatants who deviate from heterosexual norms. Payne (2016) has described accounts of members of the paramilitary who witnessed extreme sexualized violence followed by execution against members of their own group due to deviation from heterosexual norms. Information on the inner workings of these groups is scarce, however, and lacks the perspective of the LGBT persons who were part of these groups. The Colombian National Centre for Historical Memory (2015) has not explored these violations extensively thus far, although has expressed the need for further exploration of the functioning of heteronormativity within the armed groups. That combatants were socialized in violence against LGBT population is also something that has not been either researched or addressed as part of the reintegration processes.

4.3. Gender and the End of Armed Struggle

This section analyses how progress has been made in incorporating gender in both peacebuilding and reintegration processes. This progress can be interpreted as an example of the advances in the rights of women and sexual and gender minorities in the country, and as progress made in spite of the formidable and continuing challenges posed by structural legacies of exclusion, discrimination and conflicts.[11] While Colombia has emerged as a global model for gender-inclusive peacebuilding and DDR, this section also illustrates that gender and LGBT rights continue to stand out as highly controversial issues in the Colombian society to which the ex-combatants are expected to reintegrate (Krystalli & Theidon 2016, Céspedes-Báez 2016).

4.3.1 Gender and LGBT issues in the Colombian peace processes[12]

The latest peace negotiation process between the Colombian Government and the FARC is widely regarded as one of the most gender-inclusive processes and has been celebrated as an international model for gender-sensitivity and the inclusion of women's rights (see UN Women 2016, Alvarado Cóbar 2020, UNVMC & DPPA 2020). The Final Peace Agreement has been described as embodying the vision and principles of the UNSCR 1325 and the WPS agenda. While neither WPS nor other DDR guidance have been inclusive of ex-combatants who do not conform to a narrow, binary understanding of gender, and have made no reference to sexual and gender minorities, the Colombian Peace process has been seen as a global precedent for the broadening and queering of the WPS agenda that could be leveraged for further inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity in peacebuilding processes (Hagen 2017).

While issues related to gender and sexual orientation were overlooked in the previous peace negotiations with both M-19 and the AUC, the peace process with the FARC made unprecedented strides in this area (Bouvier 2016). It marked the first time LGBT voices were included in the official peace negotiations for responding to injustices suffered during an armed conflict (Hagen 2017). The establishment and work of the Gender Sub-Commission has been described as a "*unique mechanism in the history of conflict resolution*" by the United Nations (UN Women 2016),

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[11] For a general overview of the trajectory of women's empowerment and progress on gender equality in Colombia see e.g. Domingo (2015), UNDP (2019).

[12] This section builds on extracts from two articles I have previously published in the journals *Women, Gender and Research* (Thylin 2018) and *Sexualities* (Thylin 2019).

and provided a platform to articulate the particular impact of the war on women, and more recently, on LGBTI persons (Bouvier 2016).[13] By acknowledging the rights of the LGBT community, the guerrilla organization has changed its policies in a remarkable way. For the purpose of this research, the leader of the Gender Sub-Committee, FARC commander Victoria Sandino, described this policy shift as a direct result of the dialogue with representatives from social movements during the peace negotiations. The final peace agreement (2016), which "*places special emphasis on the fundamental rights [...] of the LGBTI community*" was signed after revision by Congress following a referendum to ratify the deal that failed to pass by a slight margin. The international community, as well as segments of the Colombian society celebrated the historical gender provisions in the peace agreement, but other segments opposed the gender provisions and especially the inclusion of LGBT rights. In fact, it has been argued that the inclusion of gender and LGBT rights prompted socially conservative voters to reject the referendum (Krystalli & Theidon 2016, Céspedes-Báez 2016). Former Colombian President Álvaro Uribe led the opposition to the peace accords in a campaign against what was framed as attempts to promote a confused "gender ideology" and communist dictatorship. Both the Evangelical Christian community and former President Uribe called for the strengthening of religious family values and argued that the content of the Peace Accord dismantled traditions, the biological difference between man and woman, the importance of the heterosexual family, and the place of religion in public life (Céspedes-Báez 2016). After the peace agreement was modified and passed by Congress, Colombia's religious groups continued to be powerful actors in the post-plebiscite conversation, arguing that the LGBT provisions in the agreement may infringe upon evangelical principles (Krystalli & Theidon 2016). This points to the opportunities for inclusion that peace processes can generate, but also to the need to work in a careful and circumspect way to avoid increasing the vulnerabilities of sexual and gender minorities or by generating a societal backlash.

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[13] While the peace agreement refers to LGBTI persons (with "I" standing for intersex people), for the purpose of this research I use the widely-used abbreviation LGBT as I did not interview any intersex persons. While other formulations include LGBTQ, the sample does not include any ex-combatant who self-identify as queer either. For the purpose of this article I also use "sexual and gender minorities"(SGMs) to refer to people whose sexual orientation, gender identity or sexual practices fall outside of traditional norms. I also refer to "sexual orientation and gender identity" (SOGI), which does not indicate a particular group, as all humans have a sexual orientation and different gender identities.

The inclusion of gender and LGBTI rights in the final agreement continue to be important not only for the receiving communities but also for combatants of all genders. During the peace negotiations, there was a particular case where an incarcerated FARC combatant engaged in a romantic relationship with a transgender woman in prison. As this relation challenged the conception of hetero-normative revolutionary masculinity, other incarcerated FARC members condemned their comrade, labelled him a traitor and requested that he should be expelled from the ranks of the FARC. Following this abuse, FARC-EP Secretariat circulated a written communication requiring its incarcerated members to stop harassing their comrade (Bueno-Hansen 2017). This is an important illustration of the shift within FARC towards its own combatants. This also resulted in a collaboration with the Trans Community Network (Red Comunitaria Trans) who were invited to the pre-concentration zones in preparation for the final demobilization process (ibid.). Nonetheless, in spite of the emphasis in the peace agreement on the impact of the war on LGBT communities, FARC has not acknowledged the harm done to its own combatants. There is no acknowledgement of the violence that was perpetrated against LGBT persons within the organization because of their sexual orientation and gender identity, nor adequate considerations of their needs as they transition to civilian life.

4.3.2. Gender and Reintegration in Colombia

Since embarking on the first process for the DDR of ex-combatants, the Colombian government has gradually started to acknowledge the importance of gender and, more recently, sexual diversity. Out of the 69,434 persons who have demobilized from armed groups (including from AUC, FARC, ELN, ERG, EPL, ERP and others) between 2001 and 2020, 15 percent (i.e. 10,640 ex-combatants) are women (ARN 2021). Out of the 31,592 former members of the FARC, 23 percent are women. For the 33,064 demobilized former members of the AUC, 6.8 percent are women (ARN 2021). In addition to this number, 5,700 combatants from guerrilla groups, including M-19, demobilized during the 1990s (República de Colombia 2008). While data is lacking for sexual and gender minorities for the previous reintegration processes, the National Policy for Social and Economic Reincorporation of former members of the FARC-EP (República de Colombia 2018) estimates that 98.9 % of the former members of the FARC self-identify as cisgender and 1.1 percent with diverse gender identities (República de Colombia 2018).

Scholars have described how women from the guerrilla groups that demobilized in the early 1990s were made invisible, not accounted for, ostracized and stigmatized when they returned to civilian life (Londoño & Nieto 2006). Many of the women who demobilized in the 90s returned to traditional gender-assigned roles, but there were also many women who engaged actively in the political, social, economic and cultural spheres (Londoño & Nieto 2006, Mendez 2012), although Londoño and Nieto (2006) argue that they only developed a consciousness about gender issues long after their demobilization.

Following this largely gender-blind early reintegration processes, after the demobilization of the paramilitary AUC and individual demobilizations by combatants from the FARC and other armed groups, the Colombian National Policy for Social and Economic Reintegration committed to the application of a gender and diversity perspective within its strategies, focusing both on gender equality, women in the process of reintegration as well as on masculinities (República de Colombia 2008). The policy does not include LGBT ex-combatants and only makes one reference to the respect for the diversity of "sexual options". Nonetheless, the government-led reintegration programme's gender strategy built on this policy and sought to "*contribute to the reflection of the aspects of masculinities and femininities that affect the reintegration process for women and men*" (ACR 2014:4-5).[14]

While policies and programmes committed to address the gender dimensions of DDR, challenges remained in implementation, as well as a lack of robust evaluation of how gender dimensions contribute to the processes of social, economic and political reintegration and viable post-conflict opportunities for male and female ex-combatants. Evidence has indicated that reintegration in one dimension (social, economic or political) is also typically not a good predictor of reintegration in another dimension (Humphreys & Weinstein 2007). Different processes therefore appear to underlie distinct facets of social, economic and political reintegration. My analysis of sex-disaggregated data from the Colombian reintegration programme (Thylin 2011) also indicates that ex-combatants may progress differently as relates to social and economic reintegration respectively, but with clear gender dimensions. While female participants showed stronger results in relation to social reintegration outcomes (such as less alcohol or substance abuse and higher

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[14] My translation

participation in education) they appear to face greater challenges in economic reintegration than their male peers. While 69 percent of male DDR programme participants reported having a formal or informal occupation, the corresponding figure for women DDR programme participants was only 36 percent. This could be interpreted as reintegration in one dimension in Colombia may not be a good predictor of reintegration on another dimension, and that gender related obstacles to reintegration may vary across different dimensions.

There has been substantial criticism of the efforts of the Colombian Governments to incorporate gender in the processes following the demobilization of the AUC and individual demobilization of FARC members (2003-2017). Criticism ranges from those who argue that the reintegration processes have completely neglected women combatants (e.g. Amling 2019) to those who have argued that the specific needs of women were still not sufficiently understood (e.g. Mendez 2012). MAPP-OEA (2012) also made several recommendations on how to strengthen the gender responsiveness of the programme, including pointing in particular to the importance of ensuring the participation, and leadership of women in the process of reintegration. While the reintegration process has been criticized for lack of gender-responsiveness, Colombia has also been highlighted in international comparative studies for having implemented gender programming (UNDP & IAWG 2012). OECD (2019: 18) describes how, globally, there has been a large variation in the degree to which issues of gender and attention to masculinities have been integrated into DDR processes, from "*simplistic and often gender-blind "guns, camp, cash" approaches to more sophisticated and individualized processes such as the latter stages of the reintegration programmes for former Colombian paramilitaries and guerrillas in the mid-2010s*".

With the peace process with the FARC, however, Colombia came to be widely acknowledged as an "*international model for gender-sensitivity and the inclusion of women's rights*" (UNVMC and DPPA 2020: 9) and LGBT inclusion (Bouvier 2016, Hagen 2017, Alvarado Cóbar 2020). In line with the peace agreement, the National Policy for Social and Economic Reincorporation of former members of the FARC-EP (República de Colombia 2018) mainstreams gender with an emphasis on the rights of women and LGBTI former combatants. Even at the time of my field work in 2017, before the policy was adopted, the Colombian Agency for Reintegration had started paying incipient interest to LGBT ex-combatants and described the identification of needs and strengthening of services for sexual and gender minorities as a challenge (Agencia Colombiana

para la Reintegración 2014 & 2017). While progress has been made in the implementation of the gender commitments since 2018, it has been slow and remains challenging (UNVMC and DPPA 2020). The UN Secretary General (UNSC 2020a) has pointed to challenges, including the limited participation of women ex-combatants in economic reintegration and decision making. Still, there is acknowledgement of the resilience and leadership that women former combatants continue to demonstrate in spite of those challenges (ibid.).

While the armed groups and conflict dynamics are different and changing, several scholars (see Mendez 2012, Londoño & Nieto 2006, Dietrich Ortega 2017) have argued that the current and previous reintegration processes offer fertile ground for learning to strengthen the incorporation of gender in both the ongoing and potentially future reintegration processes. Although progress has been made since the first experiences of reintegration, there is still a lack of understanding of how gender is constructed in the processes of reintegration among both male, female and sexual and gender minority ex-combatants. There is also a lack of understanding of the impact of gender constructions on the long-term possibilities of reintegration and constructions of more gender-equitable societies.

5.   Pathway One: Advancing Gender Equality

5.1 Introduction to the Pathway Results Framework

The results of my research demonstrate that there are multiple ways in which gender is constructed in the processes of reintegration. The result chapters introduce four different pathways of constructions of gender among ex-combatants. I start, in this chapter, by analysing the conditions under which ex-combatants construct increasingly gender-equitable patterns within the processes of reintegration (Pathway One). Chapter 6 is devoted to the analysis of the processes through which male and female ex-combatants assume traditional gender roles in the processes of reintegration (Pathway Two). Thereafter, I analyse the processes of maintaining or re-enforcing militarized gender constructions after demobilization (Pathway Three – Chapter 7). In Chapter 8 I analyse the gender constructions among sexual and gender minorities, and argue that DDR processes may generate particularly significant and rapid transformations for LGBT ex-combatants (Pathway Four).

The pathways in this and the following chapters have been developed both in relation to my theoretical framework, and to key intersecting axes of power and contextual factors. These are summarized in Figure 3. First, the intersecting axes analyses both characteristics and factors of all three armed groups, as well as ex-combatants' structural position. The variations related to the characteristics of the different armed groups include factors such as group ideology, including in respect to gender policies and practices, time spent within the group, role assumed by the ex-combatant and their political convictions and motivations for both mobilization and demobilization. In addition to gender, ex-combatants' sexual orientation, class, ethnicity, age and disabilities/health status are analysed using an intersectional perspective. In the development of each pathway, gender roles, practices and identities have been analysed in relation to both social, economic, political and community-based reintegration. Throughout the result chapters, these factors are highlighted in the analysis where particularly prominent. The pathways encompass an analysis of the ex-combatants' constructions of gender in relation to their individual characteristics and characteristics of the former armed group in combination with the experiences following demobilization within their relationships or family, the community and the broader

societal/institutional level. The pathways for gender constructions are developed to conceptualize the varied lived experiences by ex-combatants as they transition from the gender regimes, social norms, laws and policies within the armed group to those in wider society, taking into account how they are affected by DDR programmes and peacebuilding opportunities (contexts).
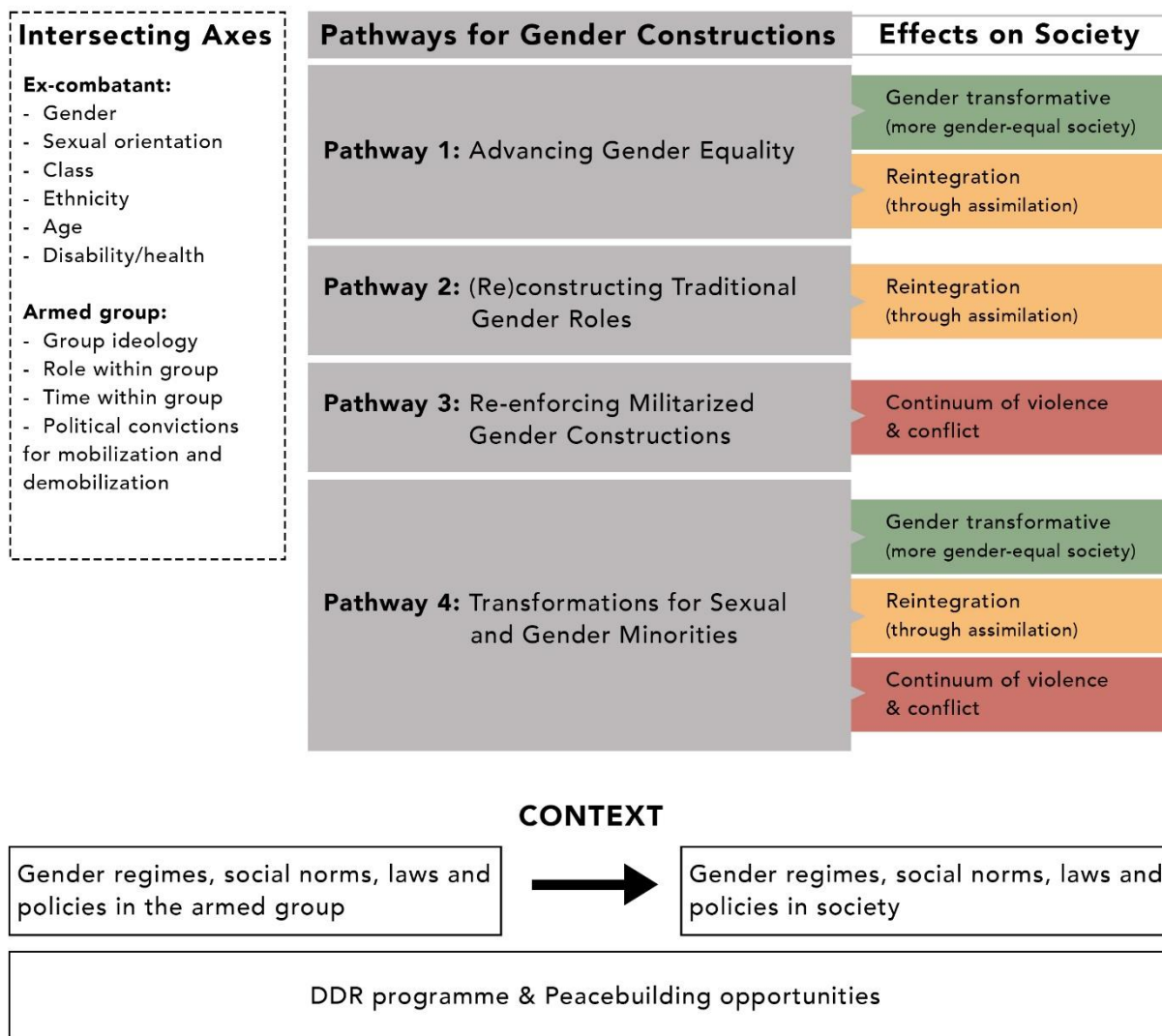
Figure 3: Pathways for Ex-combatant Gender Constructions, Results framework

In looking at the diverse experiences and gender constructions of ex-combatants, the pathways should not be understood as mutually exclusive. On the contrary, as pointed out throughout the results chapters, there is a high degree of co-existence of elements between different pathways among ex-combatants. While the pathway focusing on gender-equal patterns and the pathway of re-enforced militarized gender constructions can be analysed as opposites, there are at the same time a certain level of fluidity between all pathways, which I will describe in detail. While many ex-combatants' maintain or re-enforce gender constructions from the armed groups and embark on a single route, others change pathways as they pass through different phases of gender transformations during their reintegration process. Therefore, the pathways do not seek to compartmentalize the ex-combatants lived experiences. Instead, they should be considered as fluid, co-existing and in conjunction. Furthermore, while "gender transformation" tends to be associated by policy and practitioners with a perceived "positive" change towards greater gender equality that contributes to "desirable" behaviour and gender-related outcomes, the pathways developed here reflect a more nuanced understanding of the complexities and contradictions of gender constructions among ex-combatants. My research shows that maintaining, re-enforcing, deconstructing and/or transforming gender are experienced differently by the ex-combatants. Each chapter, therefore, ends with an analysis of where the respective pathway leads by describing its effects in the lives of the ex-combatants, as well as on the society in the process of reintegration (i.e. the effects on reintegration). My research shows that ex-combatants in different pathways experience different levels of agency and satisfaction in the processes of constructions of gender and that the varied gender pathways have a discernible effect on the society.

5.2 Introduction to Pathway One: Advancing Gender Equality

The remainder of this chapter is dedicated to examining Pathway one: the conditions under which ex-combatants construct increasingly gender-equitable patterns[15] within the processes of reintegration. This pathway includes two different routes: First, the maintenance and/or advancement of elements of non-hegemonic patterns in gender relations that were present in the armed group. Thereafter, the deconstructions of hegemonic patterns in gender relations that were

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[15] In this thesis, I also use "gender-equitable patterns", "more equitable gender relations" and "non-hegemonic gender relations" interchangeably as short-hand terms to describe the range of different aspects related to the advancement of gender equality.

present in the armed group through the processes of reintegration. Finally, I analyse where this pathway towards more gender-equitable patterns leads, by describing its effects in the lives of the ex-combatants as well as on the society in the process of reintegration.

5.3 Maintaining and/or Advancing Non-hegemonic Patterns in Gender Relations from an Armed Group

While scholars have described how militarized hegemonic masculinities and femininities are constructed by war, armed groups do not necessarily need to be understood as a bastion for gender inequality but can promote more gender-equal relationships than the societies in which they operate. Acknowledging how hegemonic and non-hegemonic patterns in gender relations may co-exist in different armed groups, particularly left-wing guerrilla movements (see Dietrich Ortega 2017), this section questions the call for DDR programmes to "disarm" the gendered identities that are instrumental for war (Theidon 2009). While the need to deconstruct militarized gender identities is relevant in many instances, as I will describe later in this chapter, policymakers and practitioners need also to understand and support those ex-combatants who seek to maintain and advance non-hegemonic patterns in gender relations.

5.3.1 Women and men maintaining non-hegemonic patterns

Ex-combatants from M-19, both male and female, described how they have maintained elements of more gender-equitable patterns after their demobilization. Women described how they had transgressed against traditional gender roles through taking up arms, and men described how more gender-equitable relations was something normal and "natural" to them within the armed group. Fernanda stated:

> *Being part of the insurgency was already a rupture with traditional schemes. In all cases, I had a position even though I did not know if I was a feminist or not, nor did I question it. I did not even ask myself that. But I was thinking; the same things I tell you, I thought from a very young age. I was a rebel and about my rights too, so I demanded, and if I saw that I have to be paid the same because I have this and I have that. So it was like I was always demanding my rights, but in an individual way and more like: I'm standing here and I speak and I know, I say, I get on, I know it, in whatever way.* (Fernanda, former member of M-19)[16]

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[16] As described earlier, pseudonyms are used throughout the thesis to protect the identity of the interviewees.

Similar to Fernanda, male combatants also recounted these more equitable gender roles stemming from their upbringing before joining M-19. During the process of reintegration, ex-combatants who had already assumed more gender-equitable attitudes before joining the M-19, were less likely to deconstruct more gender-equitable gender roles after demobilization. While many ex-combatants reintegrate into traditional roles, these ex-combatants had less traditional roles to "return" to. For these individuals, there is a continuum in the constructions of more gender-equitable patterns from prior to joining the M-19, within the armed struggle and post-demobilization.

Maintained gender-equitable patterns did not become static, however; acknowledging the constant transformation of gender throughout life. For ex-combatants, even if this was not a disruptive process, there were elements of significant transformations linked to the return to civilian life and the ordinary tasks of daily life. Women demobilized from M-19 described how they continue to confront stigma due to having transgressed against traditional gender norms by taking up arms and how they thus continue to fight to defend their right to assume another role as women.

> *After the demobilization, in my personal life, I say that I have had to fight to defend a different role for women. Like the right to participate in politics and the right to take part in public electoral politics.* (Paola, former member of M-19)

Many of the women who sought to maintain non-traditional roles described how they have continued this struggle within different spheres of life, within their own families as well as in the professional and political realm. Londoño and Nieto (2006) have described how women who demobilized during the 1990s were ostracized, invisible and not counted for in the DDR process. My research shows that, almost three decades after their demobilization, ex-combatants in this pathway have at the same time mobilized against patriarchal norms and are firm in the way they have assumed an alternative femininity shaped by their experiences as insurgents. While Paola continues to fight for space for herself, as well as women within the political space in general, other women described how they applied the thinking they has developed within M-19 after demobilization by becoming engaged in community-based work. Others, still, described how they continue to break cultural taboos with their family, intimate partnerships or in relation to their sexual emancipation.

They [male ex-combatant friends] worried about me, yes! Moreover, I told them in a very funny way when some of them asked me: "But why do not you have a partner, a boyfriend?", I would say: "But why a boyfriend, a partner, if I can sleep with three at the same time and be fine? So, why am I going to limit myself to one?". Then they looked at me like this with a lot of mistrust, this one is crazy. (Sofia, former member of M-19)

Women described how their responses to questions regarding their sexual life have always been controversial, both during the armed struggle and within the process of reintegration, even among male colleagues who formed part of M-19. One ex-combatant described how she received considerable criticism from male ex-combatants from M-19 after she had written within her memoirs about her experiences of multiple sexual relationships during her time within the group. This can be seen as an example of how these male ex-combatants continue to erect hierarchies and seek to exercise control over ex-combatant women's sexuality through gendered expectations and ideals of fidelity and monogamy. Previous research on gender relations within the M-19 has pointed to affective relationships as a space to assert hegemonic patterns of gender relations (Dietrich Ortega 2015). The example above illustrates the way in which male ex-combatants seek to exercise control not only over the romantic partners but also "power over" ex-combatant women's sexuality decades after the group demobilized, and importantly, the way in which demobilized women forcefully resist these attempts. Just as women in this pathway did not consider that demobilization disrupted gender constructions and did not see the process of reintegration as entailing a significant transformation of gender constructions, male ex-combatants from M-19 also described demobilization as a continuation of the same gender expressions, gender identities and gender practices. Men described how, within M-19, they had the possibility to express themselves in different ways and open themselves up more. After demobilization, men in this pathway described how they continued to uphold these values and practices through, among other things, continuing to express more affection among men and sharing responsibilities for household chores. Although, for women ex-combatants, maintaining elements of non-hegemonic patterns of gender constructions was often described as a challenge, for the men this was something they considered normal and not a struggle. Just as the women, however, men described that gender was not something that they considered explicitly back in those days. Some stated that M-19 was more on the vanguard in the treatment of women than in the society at large at that time. Men like Esteban in the quotation below, however, expressed how they learnt more after their

demobilization, and how this helped them to reconsider some of their past experiences within the group. He explained:

> *I believe that we, let's say, had several women leaders with responsibilities. Well, what happens is that I feel that afterwards [after the demobilization] there was a debate, a discussion, about the gender perspective and we realized that we were not so ahead and in the vanguard. Or I realized, I don't know, we never discussed it as such, that we were not so in the vanguard. What happens is that we [as a society] were too far behind and someone who took a step forward already seemed to be very advanced. (Esteban, former member of M-19)*

Among women ex-combatants from M-19, there were those who pointed to the fact that the men in M-19 had assumed more gender-equitable practices and that they know of male ex-combatants who have advanced gender equality through having learned and worked on gender-related issues after demobilization. There were also women, however, who described all their former male colleagues as "*machistas*" and who thus see a need to work on new forms of masculinities. These different accounts of the male ex-combatants could be understood by looking at gender constructions in the spectrum of co-existence of the hegemonic and non-hegemonic patterns of gender constructions that existed within M-19, and that continue to evolve through the process of reintegration. While the men in this pathway had not devoted the same level of reflection to gender as the women, they still expressed gender awareness and elements of more gender-equitable practices that demonstrated the maintenance of elements of more gender-equitable patterns than exist in the society they reintegrated into.

Both men and women in this pathway highlighted parenthood as a crucial dimension of gender equality after demobilization. Several ex-combatants had become parents during the armed struggle and left their children in the care of family members. Demobilization now allowed for women to be reunited with their children.

> *I feel sometimes as if there was a line, like peace is like a process of very complicated rupture, but for me it was like a liberation. Then being a woman in what sense? To allow myself the daily routine, but not because I had to, but because I reunited with things. Reunited with my daughter.* (Vera Grabe, former member of M-19 and member of its Superior Command)[17]

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[17] As described in the methodology chapter, Vera Grabe appears in the research with her real name.

While women described it as a liberation and a choice to be able to reunite with their children, others described motherhood, and the feelings of guilt they carried with them after having left their children, as one of the major challenges after demobilization:

> *When there is a withdrawal from life that has been dangerous, then the temptation is to be united with the children again since it had not been possible to be with the children. However, this was not my case. It was not my case, first because my oldest son had died, but secondly because I did not have the conditions to take care of my youngest son. So it was easier for my son to continue staying with his paternal family. But of course, there are a lot of feelings of guilt, discomfort, and dispossession that you have to work a lot on, because the blame is the first thing that falls on us who are women who have transgressed the roles. So we have to work on the guilt and I really believe that I worked through this to the point that it did not harm me.* (Sofia, former member of M-19).

For male ex-combatants who had become fathers during the armed struggle but had not participated in the upbringing of their children due to their commitment to the revolutionary struggle, demobilization also provided opportunities to assume an active fatherhood. While some became fathers for the first time after demobilization, others already had children. Andrés had two children who were living with their mother abroad. Since he continued his engagement in the armed struggle and separated from the mother of his children, he was never present in their daily life. After demobilization, however, he formed a relationship and had a third child. His partner had to go back to work two weeks after the delivery so he was the primary care giver for their child.

> *I had all the everyday life with the child. Emilia [his partner] went to work in the mornings, sometimes she came at noon, sometimes not, well... But I was the one who looked after him, changed him, bathed him, gave him food, took him for a walk, and over there [pointing] in my studio, I worked there for two years and he was always with me. There he learned to walk between the books, to stand on the piles of books that I had there. So it was a very close relationship that developed between us. It was the most natural, most natural thing. It was part of complementing each other, for me it was two years with him that were vital, vital. That today my son and I have a very good relationship, I think that is thanks to those two years too.* (Andrés, former member of M-19)

While women ex-combatants tended to reunite with their children they had during the armed struggle, several men (such as Andrés above) did not but, rather, formed new families in which they assumed a more active fatherhood. On the one hand, active fatherhood was not learnt within the armed group. However, for men who assumed active fatherhood, this could be interpreted as an extension of the emphasis in the armed group on the equitable division of what is considered

traditionally more female and male roles that these men applied to the new context within civilian life.

A key aspect for the maintenance of non-hegemonic patterns of gender is the internalization of the elements of more gender-equitable values promoted within the armed group. As this section has showed, this pattern is particularly clear among ex-combatants from the M-19, which, among the three groups of study, is the one that has been described as providing the most prominent role to women and as demonstrating the clear existence of patterns of non-hegemonic gender relations. Their combatants also displayed a high degree of political conviction[18] and, as an urban middle-class guerrilla group, their cadre also had a higher degree of education, that may have contributed to the ex-combatants' gender awareness and their maintenance of more gender-equitable relations post-demobilization. Several ex-combatants in this pathway also pointed to academic studies undertaken during their process of reintegration as an important factor for having started to reflect on issues related to gender equality.

FARC, on the other hand, was a guerrilla that also embraced elements of gender equality (see e.g. Mendez 2012, Gutiérrez & Carranza 2017). However, among the ex-combatants interviewed from the FARC, only a few – all former commanders – expressed a desire to maintain the values of more gender-equitable relations promoted within the group. Giovanni, a former FARC commander, described how combatants often assumed a gender-equitable division of labour within the group not due to awareness and conviction but because they were obliged to. As FARC grew exponentially, this led to a decreased focus on the political training of its combatants which may also have affected the way in which its combatants construct gender in the process of reintegration. It is also possible that the FARC combatants who demobilized on an individual basis by deserting the group are more prone to reject the group's values. Further research would be needed to understand if there may be more FARC ex-combatants with a desire to maintain elements of gender-equitable gender relations experienced within the group following the peace agreement.[19]

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[18] Political conviction manifested itself in ex-combatants joining the guerilla due to political motives, participating in the demobilization and peacebuilding efforts because of political convictions and an interest in pollical objectives.

[19] 17,548 former members of the FARC defected from the guerrilla movement and demobilized on an individual basis before the collective demobilization of the group following the peace agreement in 2016 (ARN 2021). Since the vast majority of the FARC ex-combatants in this research demobilized individually through deserting, this marks a large difference not just to FARC soldiers who demobilized following the peace agreement but also a difference with the ex-combatants who demobilized collectively following the peace agreements with M-19 and AUC.

Giovanni, who himself demobilized because he was captured by the military rather than because he had sought to desert, pointed to the importance of internalization for ex-combatants to seek to maintain more progressive values; values which he argued should not be 'disarmed'.

> *You look at all the armies of the world and they are all men. It's just in the revolutionary organizations that there are women. Why should you "disarm" those ideas [that exists within revolutionary organizations]? Because you learn good things, you learn many values, many things, but they say that, "because the insurgents, you have to disarm them, disarm them and disarm their heads of all they learned there". Well, I think you're going to keep the ideas, but the bad things, like disarming those ideas of violence, yes.* (Giovanni, former member of the FARC)

Giovanni makes a comparison with the military to illustrate how the society in which FARC is operating is less gender equal in this aspect. DDR policy and practitioners should therefore be aware of the gender policies and practices within armed groups and support ex-combatants who seek to maintain and/or advance elements of more gender-equitable patterns throughout the processes of reintegration.

5.3.2 Advancing gender equality

While many ex-combatants maintained elements of non-hegemonic patterns of gender that existed within the armed group, there were also women ex-combatants who described how they had engaged in a process of re-evaluating past gender policies, practices and experiences from the armed group, out of which some also became engaged in the feminist movement.

5.3.2.1 Re-evaluating gender

In the processes of reintegration, there were women from both M-19 and FARC who described how they have started to re-evaluate the gender policies, practices and experiences within their respective groups. The idea that women and men have to be the same with the same responsibilities was a central idea that women in this pathway started to question after demobilization. For example, it was perceived as unequal that women, despite generally having less muscular mass than men, were forced to carry the same amount as men. During the time Rosalba acted as a squad commander of the FARC she did not question the policy that men and women should do everything equally. After having demobilized, however, she started feeling regretful of the way she had treated other women under her command:

I got furious when we said, "All the same", and I saw that some woman did not do the activity, and I said: "No! You have to do it because if I do it, you have to do it". But I ended up realizing that I was selfish because there are women who are not the same as others. You have a certain capacity and I have another. I can do it with 75 pounds, and if you cannot, you cannot. But I said, "No, it's that you have to be able". But you do not have to be able, because if you get 20 pounds to carry, with the rest and the rifle, how much is this weighing? So then there were women who started crying and now I think, it should not be like that. (Rosalba, former member of the FARC)

Former female members of both FARC and M-19 started analysing the right to be different, and pointed to the physical needs they had within the armed groups. Fernanda explained:

It is a way of understanding how this is translated into the logic of peace, not from the logic of war, because from the logic of war, demanding the right that I cannot carry so much but I can carry this much, I can do these other things. This does not mean it's better or worse, it means that I'm different. Right? And there are other things, for example, women are much lighter, then they always go ahead, those things in the war that I don't care about anymore. But those logics, we need to understand them, but now in projection of a logic of building peace or sowing peace that allows us to understand that this difference is fundamental. (Fernanda, former member of M-19)

Fernanda applied this thinking not only to gender but also in arguing for a more intersectional approach where the different needs and capacities regarding age, ethnicity, people living with disabilities and gender are considered. María had always learned that she had to be tough and masculinized as a man in order to be a "good guerillera". This was a concept she only started to question almost 15 years after her demobilization. She described how she embarked on a process of "rebirth".

It was a process that I did much later. I mean, it was a process that maybe I would say it was "my rebirth". That I say no, I should not have been a tough one. The truth is that to be there, they tell you to be a badass and you have to be something more masculine and as the men. And with the men I think—I know—there was not a gender perspective there, and today I look at it from the outside, there was not one [gender perspective] because I never felt it, because yes, because you have to take care of the woman, because the woman is I do not know what, weaker, but those capacities that women have are not recognized. (María, former member of M-19)

What sparked this process of re-evaluation of gender was that she started a course in gender studies as part of her PhD programme. This course made her reflect and she started approaching this process from both an academic perspective and from that of her subjectively experienced practice.

She started studying gender theory and applying the concepts to her own life. She also started to question the sexual relationships she had engaged in during her time within the armed groups that had just been for sexual pleasure. Today she regrets having engaged in those relationships and thinks that she just became an instrument for someone else's pleasure. At the same time as she has re-evaluated many of the practices experienced within the group, she still considered M-19 as a refuge, because she came to the group with a large baggage of sexual abuse from her childhood. Overcoming this trauma also became a cornerstone of her healing process of rebirth through which she started valuing her feminine side. She thus came to re-evaluate not only the constructions of gender within the armed group but also her experiences both before and after her participation in the armed struggle.

5.3.2.2 Feminist awakening

Despite the extensive participation of women in M-19, the group did not have a policy on gender equality. Women ex-combatants from M-19 described how gender and feminism were topics they only started to be interested in after their demobilization. While several women pointed to the engagement of M-19 former commander Vera Grabe within this area during her time as a senator immediately following their demobilization, it was not until a decade after their demobilization that many other women ex-combatants started becoming interested in gender and feminism. Vera herself described how gender was not considered a central issue at this time:

> *I always say that I learned the word gender with the peace. We did not talk about gender before. In the M [M-19] women met, discussed, proposed, generated a structure with peace to move forward. But to work it as "gender" was with peace. When I entered Congress, the first legislative unit that spoke of gender in the congress of the republic, it was the one that I was part of. Because it was not a topic like today. There just started to be talk about gender, not like today, where all women parliamentarians talk about gender and gender equality and well, all those debates that surely you have seen. It's not that there was not any awareness of women's issues in some way, and to confront macho attitudes and all that, but because at that time there was no [UNSCR] 1325, I mean, we must also locate ourselves in the context, you have to see it in its moment, you cannot see things from the awareness of today, because that's an anachronism. So, that is to say that they did not have a gender awareness, although there were feminists in the 70s or 80s, but I think that we have to see things in their moment, in their stage, in its context. (Vera Grabe, former member of M-19)*

Other ex-combatants, however, described how they became interested in issues of gender, feminism, the role of the women ex-combatants and insurgent memory a decade after their

demobilization. The network *Red Nacional de Mujeres Ex-combatientes* was formed by women from the different guerrilla movements that had demobilized in the 1990s. Several women and men ex-combatants described the engagement in feminism and women's rights as a process that took time and was "overdue". Sofia was one of the founders of the network and she described how it was formed:

> *I think there is always an external question that leads us to internal reflections. In this case it was a journalist who had participated as press officer during the government of Betancur, during the Palace of Justice siege, who upon her return to the country after many years living abroad, wondered what happened to the women ex-combatants during these last ten years. And this question made us organize a first meeting and be able to see that we had been marginalized. We were marginalized from a lot of activities, especially political and party activities and that our everyday life had led many women to have to deal with all of the work traditionally assigned to women and that had frustrated them a lot. Many frustrations surfaced and we decided to organize ourselves. So here started the idea of forming a national network of ex-combatant women, not only with women from M-19, but also picking up other companions (from other guerrilla groups). And in 2000-2001 we started the first meetings.* (Sofia, former member of M-19)

Women described how the network faced resistance from some male ex-combatants. Male ex-combatants from M-19 confirmed these statements and while some were supportive of the network from the start, others felt offended that they were not allowed to participate in gender-segregated spaces only for women. Miguel was among the latter and stated that "feminists are the worst". Additionally, the emergence of an ex-combatant women's organization faced resistance not only from men, but also from other women's groups. Women ex-combatants, as former agents of war, posed a conceptual challenge to the feminists within the area of women, peace and security that draw on essentialist arguments depicturing women as "peaceful" by nature. Fernanda explained:

> *For the women's movement it takes a lot of effort for them to recognize us. Because feminism and the current discourse in Colombia, not for everyone, but the predominant thinking among women's organizations, is that women are fundamentally "beings of peace" and this is not the case. Women we have been warriors, we have participated in many ways in the wars. And precisely, we have taken on many things.* (Fernanda, former member of M-19)

While it took a decade after their demobilization for a larger number of women from M-19 to become interested in gender issues, the peace process between the Colombian Government and the FARC allowed for the organization to start developing a feminist analysis. FARC commander

Victoria Sandino, who headed the sub-commission on gender during the peace negotiations in Havana, described how, as a result of this process, FARC now has started theorizing around gender equality, as well as the concept of new masculinities and what she calls a "new feminism".

> *We are in the elaboration of this new feminism, but the starting point of this feminism comes above all from our practice, from the insurgent practice we have. [...] In our practice we have levels of equality, conditions of equality. And in the everyday guerrilla practice, the established roles have been broken, that this is for women or this is for men. It doesn't mean that there are not [unequal] practices that still persist, but the norm, in everyday life, and in everything that is programmed, these roles do not exist. So this is a great advantage for us and something good for a revolutionary organization that fights for the emancipation of humanity, for the happiness of humanity, for independence, for freedom, that is to say, for a series of principles and values. It is obviously very difficult to deny this specific claim for women's rights. So this feminism, which we men and women pursue, that we women insist very much in developing, is based on this, this practice, starts from this daily practice, and we are obviously in the theoretical elaborations.* (Victoria Sandino, former member of the FARC)[20]

The peace agreement with the FARC has been celebrated for its focus on gender, and it is therefore the first time that gender has been taken into account from the onset of the process of disarmament of ex-combatants. Several of the women ex-combatants who were members of the network *Red Nacional de Mujeres Ex-combatants* also described how they had travelled to Havana and shared their experiences during the peace negotiations. While women from both the FARC and M-19 described that it would be challenging to ensure a gender-responsive reincorporation of FARC, many described it as a significant victory that gender had been acknowledged in the peace agreement.

5.4 Deconstructing Hegemonic Gender Relations for the Constructions of More Gender-equitable Patterns

The second route of this pathway analyses the ex-combatants who deconstruct hegemonic patterns in gender relations that they were socialized into within the armed group for the construction of more gender-equitable gender relations. Starting with an analysis of the deconstructions of the militarized masculinities of paramilitary ex-combatants, the men in this group fit very well with Theidon's (2009) call for DDR programmes to "disarm" the gendered identities that are

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[20] As described in the methodology chapter, Victoria Sandino appears in the research with her real name.

instrumental for war. Researchers such as Carayannies et al. (2014) have criticized Theidon, arguing that it remains unclear how this should be achieved. My research contributes to an understanding of these processes. It shows that while DDR programmes *can* contribute to the deconstructions of hegemonic militarized masculinities for the construction of more gender-equitable relations, these processes of deconstruction require profound change. I argue that only the individual can deconstruct hegemonic militarized masculinities assumed during war, but that DDR programmes can provide support that can encourage ex-combatants in these processes. For women, I argue that the processes to transform hegemonic militarized forms of femininity into the empowerment of ex-combatant women are very different to those of male ex-combatants. I analyse ex-combatant women from the AUC that have deconstructed militarized and violent expressions of hegemonic femininities but at the same time maintained and leveraged elements of capabilities and execution of power gained during the time within the armed group.

5.4.1 Deconstructions of militarized masculinities

In this section I describe the processes of two men who described how they have fully turned from the ideology of the former armed group, including its gender norms and practices, and constructed more gender-equitable gender relations. While these are exceptional cases, they provide important insights into the profound changes required for the promotion of alternative masculinities. With regards to men who have deconstructed elements of hegemonic masculinities but not to the extent that they have assumed more gender-equitable patterns are analysed as part of Pathway Two (Constructions of traditional gender patterns).

The paramilitary AUC did not have any policy for gender equality and was known for its brutality. Felipe's gender analysis shows how the organization socialized its members into hegemonic masculinities:

> *You cannot show symptoms of weakness, any symptoms of weakness, sadness, crying, those are symptoms that you cannot show, which are symptoms of weakness. The rifle is turned into some kind of a phallus, an extension of the phallus. So it continues all the time.... This is also a symbol of patriarchy. It is the symbol of power over others, of being a man.* (Felipe, former member of the AUC)

The paramilitary ex-combatants, Felipe and Orlando, are different in many aspects. While Felipe came from the army and only spent three months within the AUC, Orlando spent close to two decades within the group. While Felipe deserted, Orlando was part of the group until its demobilization, upon which he was one of the paramilitaries that collaborated with the justice system and got a reduced jail sentence of eight years which he had just completed at the time of the interview. What stands out as a crucial common factor for the deconstructions of hegemonic masculinities between these two individuals is the importance of finding spiritual healing and faith. In a case study of the evangelical church in Urabá in Colombia, Theidon (2015) has described how evangelical Christianity has an important role to play in helping ex-combatants find ways of effecting change, including through promoting "alternative masculinities" (2015: 468). My research supports this finding that Christianity can work as a source of help for ex-combatants to find ways of effecting change, that includes changes in gender constructions. Felipe's experiences also show that other religious and spiritual practices can serve a similar purpose. In the first two years after his demobilization, Felipe started to use more drugs. He described how he was suffering from PTSD and was consciously worried about his security, to the extent that he even slept with a gun under his pillow at night to be able to defend himself at any time. He then started to change through spirituality after a friend had introduced him to Zen meditation. He first went to a spiritual retreat and thereafter he started to get interested in Buddhism. He started to study sociology and get engaged in women's and LGBT rights through the centre, "La casa de género", where he started to teach yoga. This also transformed the way in which he considered masculinity and femininity:

> *It helped me a lot to approach the women's movements. To go to spaces where women are. In part for my inner process and this whole theme, and to approach my own femininity and thereby understand that the feminine and the masculine is a duality. In China it is the symbol of ying and yang. Where yang is, is ying. Where ying is, is yang.* (Felipe, former member of the AUC)

Felipe also started using an earring to remind him of his feminine side, and he now works for an ecological foundation and for peace. Felipe has pursued elements of non-hegemonic alternative masculinities which transgress gender norms in both gendered practices and expressions. These expressions are examples of gender performativity (Butler 1990, Mendez 2012) and the way in which performative constructions of gender identity causes agency since the subject is capable of resisting the norms (Butler 1993). Felipe's account also provided examples of gender-equal

practices related to emotional relations and parenthood. For example, he described how he is considering moving to Ecuador because his partner wants to undertake postgraduate studies and he would join her to take care of their daughter. This can be interpreted as an example of how he is putting his increased awareness of gender equality into practice in supporting the development of his partner as well as assuming an active role as a father. He has continued to solidify his gender identity, expressions and practices through his spirituality. He also described how speaking out on LGBT rights and the way he has transformed has generated irritation and criticism from other ex-combatants.

Orlando developed his faith during his jail sentence. While hegemonic masculinities were maintained, and he described that command structures remained intact and many ex-combatants continued to engage in criminal activities from prison, he himself started to break away from these structures and change as he found God and he got closer to a small group of other believers in the prison.

Orlando described how the ego of a paramilitary man was "like Rambo" and that he previously considered women inferior. When he started to study the Bible, however, he began to change the way he thinks of women:

> *It's pretty, let's say, difficult. But thank God, there are principles and there are values, and they have taught us that I have to reach my values and respect the values of others. And today we understand that we have the same rights both women and men, and that both women and men deserve to be respected, something that was not the case before. I thought women were the weak sex, that they were there just for cooking, washing and so on. But no, today I think differently, thanks to God. And we were not aware of this before, it was not until after the demobilization, after the programmes, workshops, seminars, the teachers.* (Orlando, former member of the AUC)

While Orlando described that change stems from his faith, he also noted that the support of the psychologists in the prison was crucial for his change. This shows how DDR programmes can play a role in supporting ex-combatants who are seeking to deconstruct hegemonic masculinities. After the psychological interventions, he described how he started listening to his wife. He also started changing his behaviour, and to his wife's surprise, started to engage in the reproductive work at home after he was released. He recalled with laughter how he learnt how to use the washing machine:

Once I was washing, I put on the laundry, the washing machine. And the washing machine completes its cycle, but since I didn't know how to handle it, I would pour water on it. "Did you spend all the water I had accumulated! [said his partner]" There are some tanks that are used for three loads, but I spent it all on a single wash! (Orlando, former member of the AUC)

This is an example of Orlando's efforts to change his behaviour and the gendered practices in his daily life. In relation to the truth and reconciliation process, Orlando described how it was a relief to confess his crimes and ask the victims for forgiveness. He would now like to tell his wife the whole truth about the crimes he committed. He wants to continue to study a diploma in Bible theory and hopes God will continue to guide him.

I argue that both Orlando and Felipe have, through their spiritual practices, sought to effect change which encompass the deconstruction of hegemonic masculinities and the pursuance of more gender-equitable relations than they experienced within the armed group.

5.4.2 Deconstructing militarized femininities to advance gender equality

Women ex-combatants from the paramilitary AUC described how they "became like men" or "became animals" during the time they spent in the armed group. Mendez (2012) articulates this as a "hyper–masculinization of femininity" when women experience a militarization of their gender identity, which is illustrated by gender transformation combined with certain levels of maintained traditional concepts of gender. Following the demobilization of ex-combatant women, the processes to transform hegemonic militarized forms of femininity into more gender-equal patterns of gender are very different from those for deconstructing the militarized masculinities of male ex-combatants. For women ex-combatants in this pathway, three themes stand out as central to the transformation of gender for the pursuance of more equitable constructions of gender: the deconstruction of violent traits traditionally considered "hyper-masculinized" and the recovery of traditionally feminine traits; the transformation of capabilities and execution of power traditionally considered masculine, and finally; the processing of experiences of sexual and gender-based violence.

Just as with male ex-combatants, women in this pathway embarked on a process to deconstruct violent traits traditionally considered as hyper-masculine. Ethel's mother started calling her "the matches" after her demobilization because she was always getting "fired up" very easily. She

described how she was always in a bad mood and acted aggressively with everyone around her. Slowly, she started changing her behaviour, including the most intimate relationships with her son and partner:

> *I hated to be hugged, hated, hated, nobody... I didn't like anyone to touch or embrace me. No, no, no. What do I tell them? I did like this to my son at first [shows how she moved away]. I said "Oh no. What is this?". Then the child said "Mommy, hug me". But no, no, take him away. No, no, no, don't touch me. My mom used to say: "You are a man". I didn't realize it, until one day my boy told me: "but Mommy, can't you be hugged?" And it was true. I just left, I couldn't trust. I was insensitive. "I am insensitive? No, wait a minute" I thought to myself. Even in sexual relations, I realized a long time later that I didn't even caress. I was like: ok, ready, that's it.* (Ethel, former member of the AUC)

Women described how they sought to stop "acting like a man" and Ethel proudly described that today people no longer notice that she had been part of an armed group. This illustrates how she has successfully managed to deconstruct many of the hyper-masculinized gendered expressions associated with combatants. While women in other pathways also deconstructed hegemonic militarized femininities, women in this pathway have at the same time maintained elements of the capabilities and execution of power that they gained during their time within the armed group. These capacities tend to be considered traditionally "masculine" and I argue that women within this pathway have leveraged these skills to expand their choices and gain power and control over their own lives. Adriana is today working in logistics and using the organizational skills she developed within the paramilitary. She quickly assumed managerial responsibilities and she believes that the capacities she developed in the armed group have been crucial for her performance. At the same time, women described that when they do exercise leadership they are perceived as a man. Ethel, who also described that she developed capacities to become a leader and an inner strength within the paramilitary, described the balance between the traditionally-considered masculine and feminine traits she exercises today in her role as a social worker:

> *Like not to melt down for anything or so, but at the same time to be very sensitive. I mean, in addition to that I am the strong one too, to become sensitive when it comes to things. That I say: "No, this cannot make me melt and we have to move this forward, and do it and be able to help these women so that they also empower themselves of their lives".* (Ethel, former member of AUC)

Ethel spoke of herself as an empowered leader and she has received acknowledgement for her work as the founder of a foundation that works with women and for reconciliation. Women such

as Alejandra also described how they value the discipline and those capacities considered traditionally masculine developed within the paramilitary and how they do not want to change this.

> *Not because I don't want to change this. It's that people are very permissive, people are very relaxed, as if one allows them this then they think: "Ah! Let's do it because they won't tell us anything!" No, things are, well… right now for example with the construction of my house. The workers did what they wanted, and I was like "no, this is not how it is". Then one of them said to me: "If you know so much why did you hire us?". And I said to him: "I didn't study this but the one who is going to live here is me. The house is mine and the house has to be as I like it. Because you are not the one who will live here." In fact, there was one man who was putting a broken tile on the floor, and I asked: "and why did you put that tile there?". He responds: "This will be fixed when it is grouted". And I was like: "but it looks ugly". And he: "no, no, stay calm, let me do my job". I said "no I don't want it like this." [Him:]" Why? So what do you want me to do?" And I spoke to him like that, in a strong tone. "That you take it away and replace it with a new one! I'm paying for you to do a perfect job, not that you do whatever you want. Because if you want to do it at your liking, do it in your place, not in mine!" And Lord, the man tore off that tile and threw it like this in anger. I said "I'm sorry, if you are doing a job and you are not going to do it well, go to your house, because why should you come to do things badly. That tile costs me, the mixture you lose costs me. You are not giving me anything for free!" Well, I spoke to him like that with this rage. So he went and complained to his boss, to the owner of the company, saying that he did not want to work for me because I was so rude. I said " I'm not rude, I'm demanding. That's different"* (Alejandra, former member of AUC)

These type of incidents show how ex-combatant women effectively defend their rights, but it also raises a question of the line between deconstructing or maintaining militarized traits versus the maintenance of traits considered traditionally masculine.

For the women ex-combatants, the deconstructions of hyper-masculinized traits, while simultaneously leveraging capacities traditionally considered masculine, was part of a process to reclaim traditionally feminine traits. For some women, starting to accept their body and eventually starting to care for it, was a lengthy process. For some, it took over a decade to start using makeup or feeling comfortable with putting on a dress again. For women in this pathway, the experience of sexual and gender-based violence within the armed group continued to affect them throughout the processes of reintegration. Women described how they had been subjected to sexual violence including multiple rapes, forced abortions as well as been forced to witness the most brutalized lethal sexual violence committed against women and very young girls. Despite the psychosocial support received through the DDR programme, women described how it took them over a decade to start processing these experiences. This confirms previous research that has pointed to women's

greater exposure to sexual violence as a driver of social and psychological problems among females (Annan et al. 2005). Women in this pathway had received support, through for example attending healing retreats or engaged in a therapeutic theatre project for reconciliation, that became crucial for their ability to cope with these traumas. While many women in all pathways spoke of the continuous trauma they carry with them from their experiences within the paramilitary, it was only the women in this pathway that expressed that they had engaged in in-depth therapeutic exercises and that these were starting to help them process their experiences. There is a need for an analysis of the gendered differences and specific conditions under which women and men have exerted power within the armed groups, as well as those under which they have been victimized. While the women in this pathway described how they process the subjection to SGBV, my research also includes the experiences of men like Francisco who described how he was subjected to sexual violence during torture by state forces in detention. While the need to pay attention to male victims of SGBV has been highlighted, men in this pathway also described how they are processing their experiences of perpetration of violence, including SGBV, which can be seen as a central part of assuming more gender-equitable patterns.

Finally, the processes of the women ex-combatants in this pathway are very different from the processes of the male ex-combatants for several reasons: First, while both women and men embark on processes to deconstruct violent masculine traits, women are confronted with the choices of to what extent they want to recover what are considered traditionally feminine traits. My research also shows that women in this pathway maintain certain traits traditionally considered masculine that they leverage within the processes of reintegration. While these women tend to seek to blend in and do not want to appear as masculine, they also leverage some of these traits to expand their choices in a society where women are subordinate.

5.5 The Effects of Pathway One

This section analyses the effects of the pathway to maintain and advance gender-equitable patterns in the lives of the ex-combatants, as well as on the society in the process of reintegration. My research shows that ex-combatants who construct more gender-equitable patterns exert a relatively high degree of agency in the constructions of gender in comparison with ex-combatants forming

part of the other pathways. They also contribute to constructing a gender transformative, more inclusive and gender equal, post-conflict society.

Figure 4: Pathway 1 and its effect on society

5.5.1 Ex-combatant agency

My research shows evidence that the ex-combatants who construct more gender-equitable patterns through the different routes described in this chapter exert a relatively high degree of gender awareness in comparison with ex-combatants of the other pathways. There were both men and women in this pathway who had knowledge of gender and feminist theory and could use gender terminology to analyse their experiences. In contrast to women in other pathways, there were women in this group who referred to global instruments like UNSCR 1325, and who called themselves feminists. There are therefore examples of women and men in this pathway who were able to analyse and express commitment to women's rights and more gender-equitable relations. These ex-combatants also often had a higher level of education, with several having completed PhD studies in different disciplines, and some had studied gender as part of their education. While the DDR programmes have generated opportunities for ex-combatants to study, Sofia pointed out that not all women were able to access this support:

> *The government reinsertion programmes opened the door to education, which was one of the successful programmes. What happened with the education? Many of the women, especially rural women, indigenous women and women from marginalized sectors were unable to access the education because they had to take care of children and families and were left alone. Our fellow male guerrilleros [ex-combatant men] wanted submissive women, women who do not question them, so then they got very submissive young women and formed new families. They [the women ex-combatants] were left alone with the children they had and could not access the studies, indigenous women, peasant women, women disabled by war. So: Who managed to access the studies? Middle layers, middle-rank commanders, women who to a certain extent had some family and political networks that could help them take care of the children. We were the ones who managed, but other*

women didn't access. (Sofia, former member of M-19)

An intersectional analysis therefore suggests that women and men who have maintained or advanced gender equality as part of the processes of reintegration often had a privileged position which allowed them to benefit more from the DDR programme support.

My research also shows examples that suggest that the construction of increased levels of gender equality during the processes of reintegration is associated with a subjective experience of higher level of agency among the ex-combatants during those constructions of gender. While development actors have described reintegration processes as an "window of opportunity" to address harmful gender norms and to reinforce positive changes in men's and women's identities and roles (UNDP & IAWG 2012), other scholars have problematized the effort to construct gender and produce different forms of masculinities based on feminist convictions of how people should live their lives (Stern & Zalewski 2009). My research shows that while DDR programmes can, in certain cases, support the processes of constructions of non-hegemonic gender patterns, the narrative of the men and women in this pathway shows that they have made conscious choices to construct more gender-equal relations. Ex-combatant women from the M-19 expressed satisfaction with the way they continue to transgress against gender norms and the increased freedom this provides, and referred to themselves as "*women who has liberties and autonomy*" and "*are able to take my own decisions*", while Ethel from AUC referred to herself as "empowered" and a "leader" in her community who wants to support other women to empower themselves.

The deconstructions of militarized femininities so as to allow the constructions of more gender-equitable patterns among ex-combatants from the AUC is closely linked to the process of empowerment of women. Clearly, no one can empower another person (UNESCO 2003, UN Women 2017), only the individual can empower him or herself. Nonetheless, the DDR programme can support processes that can nurture the self-empowerment of ex-combatant women. Women described the importance of the support they received from psychologists as part of the DDR programme, but also the support to pursue studies and a career. There were also women from M-19 who did not want to compromise their own autonomy and therefore had opted to be alone. These women expressed that the "men of their generation" are not gender-equal partners. While some men from M-19 have maintained elements of non-hegemonic gender patterns, the women

who felt that they had autonomy and freedom were not interested in a relationship that would not be fully equal:

> *I don't want anyone to take the control from me, like the remote control of the TV. I don't want them to take the remote control, to fill my bed with crumbs and then tell me "Hey, I feel like eating now, don't you? " None of that is what I want. That means, I want to be free.* (Paola, former member of M-19).

The ex-combatants who maintain the non-hegemonic patterns of gender relations learned from the armed group included both women and men. However, in terms of the advancement of gender equality, women were in the driving seat. Women in this route had developed an in-depth understanding of gender, mobilized as women, and applied feminist thinking to their experiences as ex-combatants. For many of the men, they had internalized certain elements of non-hegemonic patters but did not describe the same conscious efforts, neither to further advance gender equal practices in their own lives nor to contribute to a more gender equal society. The effect of their pathway is therefore more limited to certain spheres of their lives, e.g., as active fathers caring for their children and/or the professional sphere. For these men, there is therefore a large overlap with the next pathway which maintains traditional gender roles and the effects are less prominent in terms of contributing to a more gender-equal society. However, their gender practices, relations, expressions, and identities should still be understood as integral to their transition as civilians in the reintegration process. This highlights a significant difference between the men and the women within this route. Women from M-19 therefore called for a larger focus on "alternative masculinities", which was also described by FARC commander Victoria Sandino as a central theme for FARC's first gender trainings following the peace agreement.

There were also significant differences between those in the first route of this chapter, who comprised mainly ex-combatants from the M-19 as well as a few commanders from FARC, and those in the second route (ex-combatants who have deconstructed hegemonic gender identities), who comprised mainly ex-combatants from the paramilitary AUC. As the chapter indicates, not only did they come from organizations with different ideological backgrounds in respect to gender, but ex-combatants from the AUC tended to have assumed more hegemonic gender relations before joining the armed group as well. Since a large proportion of the ex-combatants from M-19 came from an urban educated middle class, there were examples of ex-combatants from the M-19 having

assumed less rigid gender norms before joining the armed struggle. In contrast, ex-combatants from the AUC described how they came from a conservative background or from places with a "macho" culture. While the ex-combatants from both routes have constructed more gender-equitable relations, there are still large differences between them. Some, like Orlando, had moved away from a highly gender unequal background where he had not at all valued the opinions of women, to now make conscious efforts to engage in reproductive work and to respect women. While he holds conservative and certainly less gender equal values and attitudes than many of the ex-combatants from the left-wing guerrilla groups in this pathway, this has nonetheless been a large and rapid transformation of gender relations for Orlando. The significant differences within the constructions of gender among the ex-combatants within this pathway must therefore be seen in terms of their respective points of departure, including both the ideology of the armed group they participated in, but also intersectional factors such as education and class and the gender roles they were socialized in before taking up arms.

5.5.2. Societal transformation

My research shows that ex-combatants in this pathway contribute to constructing a more inclusive and gender-equal post-conflict society. While the gendered practices, relations, roles, expressions, and identities all can be seen as integral to the ex-combatants' transition as civilians, many also rejected the concept of "reintegration" and emphasised their aspirations to transform society.

While policies and programmes have made efforts to address the gender dimensions of DDR through a transformative approach, researchers (Carayannies et al. 2014) have highlighted that there is still a lack of understanding of the processes of transformation of gender roles in DDR, as well as a lack of robust evaluation of the results of DDR to confirm its importance for "successful reintegration". My research shows that former guerrilla ex-combatants who are part of the first route rejected the concept of "reintegration". They called it an "ugly" concept and argued that they had always been part of the society, and that they continue to fight for a better society without arms. Francisco explained:

Because we dreamed of a different country, we fought for a different country. No, I don't want to reintegrate into this corrupt society, no. That is an absurdity, a disequilibrium. […] Now I will raise a conceptual issue. These are the elements, that even though one does not believe it, has

weight. When does one start to say: yes, I am reinstated? Reintegrated to what? What model of society? And what model of a state? And what model of democracy? For the society which I have been fighting and I continue fighting for? It is something different. And I have never ceased to be either politically or socially part of this society. (Francisco, former member of M-19) "Successful reintegration", interpreted as a form of assimilation into the society, is therefore not a goal for these ex-combatants who seek to continue to work for the transformation of the country. I argue that, in terms of gender, the way in which these ex-combatants maintain and advance non-hegemonic patterns of gender does not necessarily contribute to their reintegration back into the society, but goes further, in that it contributes to transform the society to become more inclusive and equal. Women described how they have continued their struggle as active citizens and by forming the network of women ex-combatants, these women also contributed to the peace process with the FARC by sharing their experiences in Havana. While this pathway shows an effect at both individual, family, community and society level, women who successfully advocated for gender and LGBT rights during the peace process in Havana is a prominent example of the latter. As part of the women's movement, they successfully contributed to this historic peace process that has been celebrated as a global precedent for the way in which it included women and LGBT rights.

Women also described examples where their continued "insurgent thinking" for the defence of their rights had led to stigma, and also how they lost work opportunities as they were critical of the institutions they worked for. These cases could be analysed as an example of how an insurgent identity, including the transgression of gender norms, may facilitate political participation but does not facilitate economic reintegration. This also shows the complexity of the concept of "successful reintegration" and the way in which more gender-equitable constructions contribute to the multiple processes of social, economic and political reintegration. Finally, my research shows that the ex-combatants who construct more gender-equitable patterns expressed strong commitments to continue their life in peace. This aligns with research from other parts of the world, where women have tended to break links to their faction to a larger extent than male ex-combatants (Humphreys & Weinstein 2007) or where male ex-combatants are more likely to report aggressive behaviours (Annan et. al 2005). This is significant in the context of Colombia, since recidivism and dissident groups continue to pose serious security challenges (UNSC 2020b), but limited sex disaggregated data is available. According to official statistics from the Colombian Agency for Reincorporation and Normalization (2021), however, of cases of recidivism where ex-combatants have committed

crimes after their demobilization, one percent of female ex-combatants in the process of reintegration have reengaged in criminal activities while the corresponding figure for male ex-combatants is nine percent.[21] The research presented in this chapter contributes to an explanation for this trend.

Another important factor for recidivism is the armed group the ex-combatants demobilized from. Members of M-19, despite demobilizing in the midst of war, expressed that they were convinced of that the peace agreement was the correct way forward. One woman and one man demobilized from M-19 described how they initially considered joining another guerrilla group after their demobilization. Lucía collaborated with both FARC and ELN for a period, but she said that she wanted to be free and did not appreciate the more rigid control of other guerrilla groups. My research shows that more gender-egalitarian groups may be attractive to women who seek to escape traditional gender roles but that women from these groups may be less attracted to re-mobilize into other more rigid groups that they consider less egalitarian.

That many of the male ex-combatants from M-19 described how they had already assumed more gender-equitable roles could contribute to understand why they became attracted to M-19. Thus, promoting gender equality may not act as a deterrent to recruitment into groups that are more egalitarian for people who share these values. Similarly, the only former FARC members forming part of this pathway were commanders. While they expressed that they were committed to the peace process, one of them, who demobilized because he was caught by the military, expressed that he would have been interested in re-joining FARC. This shows that this commander, just as he maintained certain elements of the non-hegemonic gender relations that he experienced within the group, also continued to be in agreement with the group's other values and armed struggle. Research has shown a strong association between sexist attitudes and violent attitudes and participation in political violence among both men and women (see e.g. Bjarnegård et al. 2020). In fact, Bjarnegård et al. (2020) has shown that hostile attitudes towards gender equality seem to matter more than many factors commonly thought to drive political violence (such as religiosity or religious ideology, poverty, education levels, age or marital status). While my research does not

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[21] This figure does not include demobilized FARC soldiers in the process of reincorporation who demobilized following the 2016 peace agreement. Updated data for this group, including sex disaggregated data of members of the new FARC dissident groups would be urgently needed.

question this generally strong association, it provides nuances that show that both men and women can be attracted to more egalitarian armed groups.

The new wave of paramilitary successor groups has pointed to the substantial amount of recidivism of male former members of the AUC (HRW 2020). In that context, it is striking how Orlando and Felipe, who had both deconstructed hegemonic masculinities, expressed full commitment to the demobilization process. The deconstructions of hegemonic masculinities were part of a comprehensive change of their lives, not only to leave the armed struggle behind but also to reconcile with their communities and victims. Felipe works with his own foundation for reconciliation, and Orlando seeks to become a biblical teacher and support his fellow human beings. I argue that the deconstructions of hegemonic masculinities were a central part of their transformation, and that assuming these more gender-equitable patterns contributes to building resilience to re-engagement in violence.

Women ex-combatants from AUC are at lower risk of re-engaging in criminal activities. Nonetheless, the women in this pathway, just as women in other pathways, described how new paramilitary groups had tried to recruit them. Flora was one of the first batches of paramilitary ex-combatant to graduate successfully from the reintegration programme and has exercised leadership in her community following her demobilization. Still, in the interview with her, she described how she had considered re-engaging in an armed group as recently as the year before. This illustrate how women that are part of this pathway may be at risk under certain circumstances of re-directing their leadership, and re-enforced militarized gender identities to re-engage in criminal activities. Women who have deconstructed certain hyper-masculinized militarized traits, but leveraged certain capacities and leadership skills considered traditionally masculine, may therefore maintain skills that are valued by the new paramilitary groups. Applying the theories of gendered agency, this illustrates the relevance of the concept of agency as related to both positive and negative expressions of power; i.e. on the one hand, the empowerment of women and, on the other, expressions of domination. These women have received attention as examples of empowered ex-combatant role models, and have displayed agency to define their life-choices and to pursue their own goals (as "the power within" and the "power to"). At the same time, the risk of recidivism illustrates the fine dividing line to negative expressions of agency exercised as 'power over'; i.e. where the capacity of an individual limits or over-rides the agency of others, for instance through

the use of violence, coercion and threat (Kabeer 1999: 438). This points to the multidimensionality of agency, a concept that can be further used to explore the effect of ex-combatants' constructions of gender, both in their own lives and for the overall society and peacebuilding processes.

Finally, while the constructions of non-hegemonic patterns of gender may have had a rather mixed effect on the members of the guerrilla groups in this pathway, I argue that the largest effect for sustaining peace and/or peacebuilding of the constructions of more gender-equitable patterns is shown for the group of men demobilized from the paramilitary. The positive effect of the constructions of more gender-equitable patterns among the male ex-combatants from the AUC is of particular importance as these ex-combatants come from the group at greatest risk of re-engaging in criminal activities, according to official statistics from ARN (2021).[22]

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[22] The data does not include demobilized FARC soldiers in process of reincorporation who demobilized following the 2016 peace agreement. Updated data for this group, including sex disaggregated data of members of the new FARC dissident groups is needed.

6. Pathway Two: (Re)constructing Traditional Gender Roles

Gender is often transformed in multiple, contradictory and complex ways as men and women combatants assume both traditional and non-traditional gender roles in armed groups. This pathway outlines the processes by which male and female ex-combatants assume traditional gender roles in the processes of reintegration. First, I describe the processes of constructions of traditional gender roles as women ex-combatants reintegrate into patriarchal society. Thereafter, I describe the ways in which male ex-combatants (re)construct traditional gender roles as they disarm the gender regimes, values and practices from the armed group. While male combatants from both M-19, FARC and AUC tend to assume traditional gender roles, the chapter shows the variations in the routes followed according to former group affiliation. As for women, the chapter is dominated by the experiences of female FARC foot soldiers and lower rank commanders. While the experiences of female former members of M-19 and AUC are also included, the women foot soldiers and lower rank commanders who deserted from the FARC have almost exclusively followed this pathway. Finally, I analyse where this pathway of the constructions of traditional gender roles leads by describing its effects in the lives of the ex-combatants, as well as on the society in the process of reintegration.

6.1 Women's Reintegration into Traditional Gender roles in the Patriarchal Society

Women combatants often experience large changes in gender roles since the act of taking up arms in itself represents a significant transgression against traditional gender norms. At the same time, armed conflict can often reinforce the traditional gender roles of women through, for example, women taking up different traditionally feminine support roles in armed groups. The women who are part of this pathway therefore carry with them varied experiences and gender roles from their time spent in armed groups. Their backgrounds span from women who have transgressed gender norms by taking up arms, and sometimes command roles, to women who during their time associated with their respective groups carried our traditionally feminine support roles, some of whom never left their own home or village to do so. For some of the women, the process of

reintegration has included the *reconstructions* of traditional gender roles. These are women who, having transgressed gender norms by joining an armed group, return after demobilization to the traditional gender roles they were socialized into before joining the armed group. For others, the process of reintegration has instead generated the *constructions* of traditional gender roles that they had previously not experienced. This group includes ex-combatants who joined the FARC at a very young age as girl soldiers. While they had certainly been socialized into traditional gender roles from an early age, they had not assumed "womanhood" or passed through the gendered processes as adolescents. Finally, others *maintain* or *re-enforce* traditional gender roles they assumed within the armed group. The AUC had a larger proportion of women associated with the group in support roles and who worked from their homes within traditionally female domains, or those such as Isabel, who observed the roads from her house and operated a radio. Among the interviewees, there was also a woman from the FARC who had never joined the group but who became associated with the guerrilla as she discovered that her boyfriend was a FARC commander. She started supporting the group by cooking and cleaning from her home. What women in this pathway have in common is that while they in different ways adhered to the gender regimes of their respective armed groups, after leaving the war they reverted to all intents and purposes to the gender regimes of the society that they are reintegrating into. In the discussion that follows, I will outline three processes that contributed to the women's diverse experiences of assuming more traditional gender roles as they reintegrate into the gender regimes of the society.

6.1.1 Reclaiming femininity

Drawing on the work of Butler and Enloe, Mendez (2012) has proposed the concept of "militarized gender performativity" to analyse the experiences of ex-combatants. Militarized gender performativity is described as "*the way gender is militarized within illegal armed groups, and the way this manifests itself in combatants' bodies, understood as performative products of a signifying process (militarization)*" (Mendez 2012: 41). Mendez argues that this concept is useful in explaining the way in which bodily gestures, movements and styles can distinguish women civilians from women in illegal armed groups. Women interviewees in this study were indeed aware of these distinctions and tried to transform their behaviour, manners, interest and appearance to become "a normal woman". As Salome stated:

> *For one reason or another you always stand out, for your speech, for your way of standing,*

for your way of sitting, for being so rough. So it's always like saying "No, wherever I go they will notice that I'm different." They ask me: "Hey, but where are you from? You're different. Your way of being is different. Your speech is different. Your way of standing is different. You dress very much like a man." And I then started to say to myself: "No, I want to be like a normal woman and wherever I go that it doesn't notice so much." But well, no. There is still a lot missing, but I'm working on it. (Salome, former member of the FARC)

The quote reveals that, even though it has been seven years since Salome demobilized, she is still struggling to change the way she speaks and that she feels that she is "rough" (*brusca*) when she moves or touches someone. The women of this pathway described how it has been a gradual and long process to transform the way they speak, walk, stand and dress so as not to be identifiable and stigmatized as a "demobilized woman". In the armed group, some were not very interested in their physical appearance, make-up and clothes, while others used just simple earrings and some make-up. Some, in fact, had never used high heels by the time that they left the FARC and the jungle, and described it as a process to start using make-up and to gain the courage to put on a dress again. Rosalba recalled:

I felt bad [starting to use civilian clothes]. I was going to wear a pair of jeans and I thought: "This is too tight for me. This doesn't fit me well." To comb my hair. What am I going to do with my hair? In the guerrilla, you just do a bun. The girls and my siblings were looking at me with my hair loose and I tied my hair like this in a coil and I felt bad. And my siblings told me "Remove that bun!" Then my brothers just, pum! They turned me around and let my hair loose. And I was like... oh. And then, little by little, I got used to it. And over there with the boots. I looked at my sisters and the others with flip flops, and I said hmm flip flops, but then I put on my boots. At home walking around with boots while everyone... until I started leaving these boots, little by little. (Rosalba, former member of the FARC)

Women in this pathway described how after they demobilized they started being conscious about looking good, being "more feminine than masculine" and learning "how to be feminine".

Women like Rosalba explained how her siblings played an important role in her transformation, while others described how it was their female friends or male partners that encouraged them to start developing a more feminine appearance. At the same time many described that they felt good reclaiming feminine traits, and that this was something they sought. Particularly for former members of the AUC and FARC, not being identified as "demobilized" and hiding their past was a major reason for women to transform.

While some women expressed awareness of the way in which gender roles are performed in the

armed groups and in society more widely, Eva described how she managed to preserve her sensitive "feminine essence" during her time in the guerrilla.

> *I had different phases but I never lost like my style, my essence. No. Well, there were times when you have to bring out the warrior woman; at times I had to. But there were times where I said: "No, I'm myself again. This is me".* (Eva, former member of the FARC)

Eva believed that it has been easier for her to reintegrate because she was still "herself" in the guerrilla group and had not become like a man. Her experience within the FARC was affected by her role as the partner of the commander. She recounted that she joined the FARC when she was 18 years old because she had fallen in love with a commander. She explained that because he was twice her age, he adored her and did everything she wanted to please her. This illustrates that the roles and relationships established within the armed group also affect the way in which women assume femininity, both within the armed groups and subsequently in the processes of reintegration.

While many women who had transgressed gender norms by taking up arms embarked on a process of transformation to reclaim their femininity after their demobilization, women who had held more traditionally female support roles, as well as women from urban militias, did not experience such a need to transform gender expressions. That said, women in other pathways did seek to change aspects of their femininity. As described in the preceding chapter, women in Pathway One deconstructed hyper-masculinized traits as part of their efforts to reclaim traditionally feminine traits, but the difference with those in this pathway is that they simultaneously maintained and leveraged capacities traditionally considered masculine. Similarly, as I will describe in the next chapter, women in Pathway Three have to a larger extent failed to credibly perform traditional femininity, thus differing from those in this pathway who, to a large extent, managed to transform their behaviour, manners, interests and appearance to adhere to traditional gender regimes and stereotypes.

6.1.2 Motherhood

Women from different armed groups face different opportunities and challenges in regard to motherhood once they demobilize. They are in different ways impacted by their experiences of the different policies of their respective armed group. In the FARC, women were generally not allowed

to have children, or were forced to give their new-borns away with little likelihood of seeing them again While there are exceptions, of for example partners of commanders being allowed to have children, women in the FARC had to give up motherhood as an option and forced abortions and forced birth control was widely practiced (Amnesty International 2004, Upegui & Thylin et al. 2010, Mendez 2012). Women in the M-19 on the other hand, were allowed to become mothers, and indeed several of the interviewees had children while in the armed group. While one interviewee former member of the AUC described how she had been subjected to a forced abortion, this type of violence was not common in the AUC. Instead, Mendez (2012) has described how women in the AUC were permitted to take maternity leave, making it more possible to assume motherhood and parenthood in general in the paramilitary than in the FARC. These differences in policy across the various armed groups mean that the women in this pathway face different opportunities and challenges in regard to motherhood once they demobilize. Still, what women in this pathway have in common is that motherhood often became the center piece of their new life. Rosalba described her family and children as the most important change she sought for after leaving the FARC.

> *Over there [in the guerrilla], you don't have a family. The only family of yours is supposedly the rifle. Well, when you have a family, I have freedom, and over there I didn't have that. Now I have the love of my children. And there I didn't receive love from anyone, from no one. (Rosalba, former member of the FARC)*

For the women from M-19 and AUC in this pathway who had borne children while in the armed groups, demobilization offered the opportunity, and challenge, of reuniting with their children, who were often in the care of relatives. For some, the first meeting became a "horrible experience" that marked the start of a long process to re-establish a relationship between mother and child.

> *You don't know the horrible emotion I felt when seeing my son, and my son ... I arrived and he didn't recognize me. I stopped on the road and he came out and said "Hi!''. I thought he was going to run to me when he heard my voice but no! He ran the other way, to my mother. He didn't recognize me.* (Ethel, former member of AUC)

Others started a family and became mothers after demobilization. Women ex-combatants from the FARC who had been denied the right to choose motherhood described how they established a family after leaving the armed group. Women who had children within the FARC, and who had to leave them with some relatives or community members, also described how they reunited with

their children. Sometimes, however, the children continued to live with the relatives that they were used to. Women from the three groups who had left their children often struggled with feelings of guilt. Camila described that she has a 15-year-old daughter with whom she maintains very little contact. Her daughter still lives with her relatives while Camila lives in another city because of security risks in her home town. She struggles with the fear that her daughter might not understand why she left her, and with the feeling that she is not a "real mother" to her first daughter.

> *Being a mom, I mean, being a full time mom. Because, for example, I am the mother of my other daughter, but as one girl once told me: "You are a mother and you are not. Because you have your daughter, you had her, but you have not raised her". So then I say: "Well, yes." Because this is a very big change for me. Imagine having been there, now when I have my little girl, sometimes I regret having left the other. Because I think of all that I missed with my girl. What if she loved me? Because I know, I am aware, that she does not love me. She thinks: "My mother did not love me. My mother left me. She abandoned me." She will think all that but up until now I have never explained why I left her. But I am planning to do so, but when she understands more. Well, I know that she already understands right now and everything, but perhaps I don't know.* (Camila, former member of the FARC)

Although Camila initially did not want to have a second child, her new partner convinced her and now she has a second daughter. Other women also described how they had not wanted to have children, or not to have as many children as they in fact did have. This points to the importance of women being able to choose motherhood freely, and for DDR programmes to meet women's diverse sexual and reproductive health needs and rights. Women in this pathway also described how they started to assume traditional roles as stay at home moms as they found it difficult to work or study when they have small children and no child care support. While motherhood is something that many of the women sought for, the lack of child care services and effective family planning strengthened the traditional reproductive role of women. For women former members of M-19, for example, Sofía complained that many of the services provided through the DDR programme had not reached women in rural areas, indigenous women and women from marginalized areas because they had to assume responsibilities for their children and were not able to benefit from those services. She therefore argues that it was women who had support networks, and often women former commanders that were able to access the benefits. Her argument highlights the importance of an intersectional analysis of motherhood and reintegration. Finally, while interviewees expressed that they wanted to take care of their young children, other women from

different groups within this pathway also described how they did not want to be a housewife and that they do not like to bear the sole responsibility for washing, cooking, cleaning and taking care of the children. Women like Ana described how she would like to work and earn her own money and that she feels "suffocated" when she is only at home.

6.1.3 The continuum of gender-based violence

For women in this pathway, the experience of sexual and gender-based violence within the armed group continued to affect them throughout the process of reintegration. Among the women former members of the FARC that were part of this pathway, the experiences of forced abortions within the group were described as the hardest experiences from the war. Some said that it had "marked them" for life. Others described how they decided to demobilize because they were pregnant or because they had been forced to abort. Gina was forced to abort when she was six months pregnant, and described the nightmares that haunted her long after demobilizing:

> *In the beginning I dreamed a lot about a baby, so much. And I was dreaming that I was looking at a baby and it was always a girl. It was as if I was always trying to identify the baby and I said, "it's the baby that I lost".* (Gina, former member of the FARC)

Others described similar nightmares. Despite the psychosocial support received through the DDR programme, women described how it took them a long time to process the pain. Rosalba wanted to commit suicide after she was forced to abort but now, twelve years since her demobilization, and having established a new family, the pain has become less.

> *It hurts [the forced abortion], but very little because the children I have make you forget. Although my son will never be forgotten. Before I had my [other] son I dreamt, and while I was there [in the guerrilla] I dreamt… I heard him cry. I didn't know if it was him, because I heard a baby cry, and I said, it is my baby who is crying. But then there they tell you: "A baby has no meaning, a baby has no soul, has no life, still doesn't have anything". By four months, a baby can be a little baby.* (Rosalba, former member of the FARC)

This is a form of sexual violence that the FARC has not acknowledged, despite the focus on gender in the peace agreement with the Colombian Government. In my interview with her, FARC commander Ivana recognized that "errors are made during war", but she applied a narrative that describes the abortions as a right and choice of women, effectively omitting the point that they were forced. Similarly, FARC commander Victoria Sandino emphasized the importance of

decriminalizing abortion in Colombia,[23] instead of acknowledging forced abortion as a crime under international law.[24] Ivana further reduced the trauma to a moral and religious question.

> *I think that now there is going to be a lot of talk about psychological reparations. Because we are taught since childhood that abortion is a sin and that it is a crime and that it is immoral. So this is a very complicated thing because you do not have the theoretical elements to defend this, to understand it. Moreover, I recently remembered how when I had just joined I had to talk to the women who entered [the guerrilla] about the fear that women had of family planning because they had in their head that family planning was a sin. They had been taught this in the church, their families had taught it to them, so to assume abortions is very complicated. [...] When you look at the women who have had possibilities for more training, not only academic, but those who have been closer to certain cultural factors that allow them to understand abortion more, not as a moral problem or a religious problem but rather as an option for women, a decision made by women about their bodies, then those who are clear about this have less trauma than those who do not, than those who believe it is a religious or moral problem.* (Ivana, former member of the FARC)

Ivana herself was one of the women who were allowed to become a mother despite the rules of the organization not permitting it. She was a commander herself, and importantly, the partner of one of the members of the Secretariat, FARC's highest command. This points to the importance of women's former positions within the group, both in terms of rank and emotional relationships, in the understanding of their experience of reintegration. In contrast to the women foot soldiers who comprised a large proportion of the women in Pathway One, women commanders have assumed more gender-equal roles following demobilization, yet have shown themselves to be unwilling to acknowledge the violence and pain suffered by women who fought in their ranks. This reveals that some woman who were previously commanders exhibit both hegemonic and non-hegemonic gender attitudes in co-existence.

While the legacy of forced abortion has marked the lives of many women former members of the FARC within this pathway, following demobilization, women from both AUC and FARC described how they have been subjected to other forms of gender-based violence. Women

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[23] Access to abortion is legal in Colombia only in cases of rape, incest, unwanted artificial insemination, severe fetal abnormality and to protect the person's life or health (Casas 2020).

[24] Forced abortion can be charged as both crimes against humanity and war crimes under international law (Ribeiro et al. 2017). In Colombia, the Justice and Peace Tribunal of Medellin held that the forced abortion of female combatants by their own armed group during the Colombian internal armed conflict amounted to a violation of their fundamental rights and a war crime (see case of Olimpo de Jesús Sánchez Caro, from the guerrilla group ERG, December 2015) (ibid.)

described how, while they were within the armed groups, men were not allowed to perpetrate violence against their partners. After demobilization, however, this control exercised by the armed group vanished and several women described how their long-term partners became violent. Isabel became associated with the AUC one year before their demobilization when her boyfriend asked her to operate a radio in her house. He was not perpetrating violence against her while he was part of the AUC but after they demobilized and she got pregnant she started to understand "who he really was".

> *After I left him he began to threaten me, that he was going to kill me and kill the children because I had left him. We have now been separated for six years. So I have never seen him again because I have not returned either.* (Isabel, former member of AUC)

Today, Isabel has remarried a man from the military and has continued to maintain traditional gender roles. Women who choose to leave abusive partners from the AUC described how they have learned to cope with the fear of their ex-partners. Several women also described how they continue to live with abusive partners. Marta described how her partner became more "*machista*" after they demobilized and how he started to beat her.

> *Because there [in the FARC] if a man mistreats his girlfriend, they [FARC] punish him. But here in Bogota yes, he mistreated me, because during a long time… I complained here [to ACR], that's why he has changed, I see that he is different now, he has changed. But he used to treat me bad, to mistreat me a lot.* (Marta, former member of the FARC)

Marta is currently a housewife and economically dependent on her partner. There was a point where she thought she had to start looking for any work opportunity in order to be able to separate from her abusive partner. Now that her youngest son has become a little bit older, she would like to start studying and eventually start her own business. Marta's experience shows how traditional gender roles as housewives, and the resultant economic dependence on the partner, makes it more difficult for women to leave abusive relationships. This points to the intrinsic links between ex-combatant women's economic reintegration and their right to live life free of violence.

6.1.4 Gender stereotypical economic reintegration

Women in this pathway are either housewives or engaged in traditionally female sectors of work with low remuneration. All the women foot soldiers and those with lower level command responsibilities that were interviewed from the FARC expressed that they were interested in

working in the traditionally female beauty sector, i.e. beauty, hairdressing and manicure. The women were either interested in studying this field, or had already studied beauty courses and were working in this field. One woman was also the owner of a beauty salon that she had to close temporarily when she got pregnant. Some of the women expressed that this had been a long-term interest and dream. Juliana is a demobilized child soldier who was forced to join the FARC when she was 13 years old. The reintegration process has now provided her with the opportunity to study something she said she was always interested in.

> *It caught my attention from when I was very young. When I was together with my sister, I think we were five years old, I played with my sister, combed her hair, put it up in a topknot. I told my mom that I wanted to study beauty.* (Juliana, former member of the FARC)

While Juliana chose this field of study because it was something she liked, others were not very interested in beauty for themselves. While some described that it was uncommon for women in the guerrilla to use make-up or take care of their nails and that they still do not use much make-up themselves, others argued that women in the guerrilla still care for their physical appearance and arrange their hair and nails. Women like Gina explained that she chose to study beauty courses even though it was not what she would have ideally liked to study. Gina was a nurse within the FARC and would have preferred to pursue studies within that area of work, which she is passionate about and experienced in. Studying to become a nurse is harder economically, however, and she therefore opted to study integral beauty in order to then start working doing manicures and be able to earn some extra money in order to fund studies to become a nurse in the future. Others described that their husbands had encouraged them to study beauty as it is something that they could combine easily with their reproductive responsibilities while complementing the income of the male breadwinner. The experience of Gina shows that while some women choose traditional female economic reintegration options because they are interested in this field, others could be better supported by the DDR programme to pursue other fields of work that would provide them with a larger remuneration and work in formal sectors of the economy. One key factor affecting women's choices was the lack of childcare support to pursue studies and work. This confirms the relevance of the UN Integrated DDR Standards (UN 2006) which states that women's access to education and training will be greatly improved if efforts are made to provide child-care services.

The UN Integrated DDR Standards acknowledge that women and girls should be given a say in

determining the types of skills they learn. The standards also highlight the importance of providing women with:

> *...options that will allow them to build on useful skills acquired during their time with armed groups and forces, including skills that may not usually be considered 'women's work', such as driving or construction jobs. They should be taught vocational skills in fields for which there is likely to be a long-term demand.* (UN 2006: 22).

Despite having fulfilled non-traditional gender roles in the FARC, women in this pathway had not considered engaging in a non-traditional female sector. Some expressed that they would be willing to do so if it were necessary in order to support their family, but they expressed that they were now free to choose something they liked more. Alma left the FARC twelve years ago but never presented herself to the government authorities. She only entered the DDR programme two years ago when the Government authorities identified her. She expressed that she had previously been interested in working as a police officer and had experience working as a security guard. Since she entered the DDR programme, however, she has decided to start studying hairdressing. Women's choices for their economic reintegration should also be analysed in light of the wish of women ex-combatants to not be identified as ex-combatants due to stigma. While some women described how their customers sometimes comment that their "hands are heavy" and not as "smooth" as women's hands normally are, they felt that taking up work opportunities in non-traditionally female sectors would make them stand out more. In that sense, the societal pressure to conform with gender norms coincides with gender stereotypical DDR reintegration support to encourage women's assimilation into the patriarchal society through assuming traditional gender roles.

6.2 Men's Reintegration into Traditional Gender roles in the Patriarchal Society

Armed conflict tends to shape traditional gender discourses that build on the stereotypical images of men as strong, warriors and protectors, to create hyper-masculinized forms of masculinities. These discourses in armed groups may co-exist, however, with traditional and non-traditional gender roles for men. In the Colombian context, varieties of masculinity can be found across the different armed groups. Researchers such as Dietrich Ortega (2017) have shown how non-hegemonic and hegemonic gender patterns co-existed in armed groups such as the M-19, and Medina Arbeláez (2009: 17) has described how militarized masculinity in the paramilitary was

more destructive and reckless than in the left-wing guerrilla groups. While my research shows that male combatants from both M-19, FARC and AUC assume traditional gender roles in the processes of reintegration, the discussion that follows shows how the route to those traditional roles varied depending on former group affiliation.

The men in this pathway have been socialized into different gender regimes in their respective groups. Their experiences span from men who worked under female command, and who expressed great respect for their female comrades, to men who perpetrated the most horrendous forms of sexual and gender-based violence against women during their time in the armed group. For some of the men, the process of reintegration has included the *deconstructions of hyper-militarized traits* assumed in the armed group. For others, the process of reintegration implies *deconstructing the gender-equal practices* and non-hegemonic gender patterns assumed in the armed group. While these men *reconstruct* the traditional gender roles they were socialized into before joining the armed group, there are also men, primarily from the M-19, who do not consider that their gender roles have changed during reintegration. On the contrary, they describe a continuum where they have *maintained* elements of traditional gender patterns from the armed group. While the men in this pathway continue to be a very heterogenous group even after demobilization, what they have in common is that they have, albeit to different extents, assumed traditional gender roles as they reintegrate into the gender regimes of the Colombian society.

6.2.1 Masculinity, arms and power

DDR policymakers and researchers have recognized that notions of masculinity are often linked with possession of weapons (Myrttinen 2003, UN 2014). The UN has described how disarmament may therefore affect gender identities by generating a perceived loss of power, respect and status and a symbolic loss related to feelings of manhood, protection and power (UNDP & IAWG 2012).[25] The UN therefore argues that DDR programmes should "*explore ways of transforming and redefining the concepts of masculinity that are linked to the use of weapons*" (UNDP & IAWG 2012: 37). Male interviewees that were part of this pathway displayed different relationships to arms and their notion of masculinity. There were men from all groups who described how they

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[25] While the UN has described that female ex-combatants may experience a perceived loss of some degree of equality, respect and protection gained in relation to male counterparts as a result of disarmament, the symbolic value of arms affected men to larger extent than women in my research.

had been and, in some cases, still are attracted to weapons and their connotation of power. Men like Carlos, for example, described how they had joined the FARC because they wanted to have a weapon and the respect it brings.

> Question*: Why did you join the FARC?*
> *Carlos: I don't know. The weapons really drew my attention.*
> Question*: You liked the arms?*
> *Carlos: A lot.*
> Question*: Why?*
> *Carlos: I don't know. I watched both the guerrilleros and the army, with their uniforms… So I don't know, I thought "uy, I want this".*
> Question*: To have a gun?*
> Carlos*: Yes, and to walk like that with the camouflaged uniform. Most of all for that.*
> Question*: And what attracted you to weapons?*
> Carlos*: Something like "power". That power in a certain type...*
> Question*: And what was it like when you got your rifle?*
> Carlos*: Well, the truth... What you feel like when you are given your rifle, you feel like more... although within the organization not so much because everyone has one, well. It was more when you went out to the civilian population. Obviously people—because of hypocrisy or not—treated you well, greeted you well. So there in that sense, yes, one felt like they respected you more. Right? But when you were a civilian, you were treated like any other person, but when you are being armed, they treated me with more respect.* (Carlos, former member of the FARC)

For some of the men, the possession of arms provided a symbolic value and a symbol of status. Ignacio, however, had been part of the military before joining AUC, and he described the difference in the power and abuse he could exercise with a weapon within the paramilitary.

> *Imagine, in the army you cannot come and say: "Come and sleep with me, otherwise I'll shoot you". But in an illegal group they have no laws or anything, so they say: "Hey, come here, I want to sleep with you now". So since you already know how it is, if you don't sleep with him they will kill you, so that's why, well… (Ignacio, former member of AUC)*

In stark contrast to the description of Ignacio, ex-combatants from M-19 described how weapons should not be used to exercise power. While some men within M-19 described that they had enjoyed possessing weapons, or still do so, M-19 demobilized before the "dirty war" started and their repertoire of violence and experiences were very different. While several men from FARC and AUC described the weapon as the "goal" they wanted to achieve and possess, there were men

from M-19 that instead described weapons as a "means" or as a "necessary instrument" to achieve their political goals.

> *Weapons were not the fundamental part of our political-military training. Weapons were an instrument; they were an instrument… And there was something my partner taught me: We should not fear the weapon, but we have to respect it. Right? And it is not an element to exercise power, it is a tool to make politics.* (Diego, former member of M-19)

There were also men from M-19, as well as from the two other groups, who described how they never had liked possessing weapons, even though they had to learn how to use them. At the moment of demobilization, the interviewees therefore had very different relationship to weapons and their connotation of power and status. Mn from M-19 described how they did not miss the sensation of possessing a weapon because they were in full agreement with the peace agreement and started using other political tools to continue their struggle. Many of the combatants who demobilized from the FARC, meanwhile, expressed that they were tired of the war and thus overcame the sensation of loss of power rapidly. Carlos continued to explain the changes he had experienced:

> Question*: When you demobilized and handed over the weapon, how did you feel? Did you miss that feeling of power?*
> Carlos*: Well, not much. Well, at the beginning, the first day, yes, but later, when they brought me to Bogota and from there to Villavicencio, already by that time… I arrived one night in Villavicencio, and the next day I got up and found some companions there who had demobilized too, and they were there, and well I don't know, life takes an impressive turn that one feels more like liberated. No one is commanding you; no one is telling you anything.* (Carlos, former member of the FARC)

For others, the process to replace the weapon as a symbol of status and power took longer. Paramilitary ex-combatants described how they entered the DDR programme without handing over the weapons. Some described how they continued to sleep with a gun under their pillow for a long time. In the next chapter, focusing on the re-enforcement of violent gender constructions (Pathway Three), I will analyse the experience of those ex-combatants who continue to associate masculinity with the possession of weapon. The common factor for men in this Pathway of constructions of traditional gender roles is that they through the processes of reintegration managed to redefine or de-link the possession of weapons to their notion of masculinity.

6.2.2 Transforming expressions of militarized hyper masculinities

The concept of militarized gender performativity (Mendez 2012) is useful for analysing not just the way in which militarization manifests itself in the bodies of women ex-combatants but also how bodily gestures, movements and styles can distinguish male ex-combatants from male civilians. While male ex-combatants have often not transgressed gender roles, their gender identity and expressions have been militarized. Interviewees explained how anyone can recognize someone who has been in a military organization because of their appearance, the way they stand, the short haircut, the type of clothes they wear.

> *I talk to some of them and, well, they ask. And because I… you can always tell, anyone recognizes you because of how you stand. Whoever has been a soldier, you can recognize his posture.* (Alberto, former member of the FARC)

Like Alberto, Raúl demobilized a year before I interviewed him, and he also thinks it is difficult to change his appearance so that people do not notice his past. He described how this is a process that takes time. He had always been interested in fashion, and after he demobilized he put back the small earring that he was not allowed to use while in the group. He said that he has changed a lot but that he thinks that it is easier to change one's clothes than to change the corporal habits developed within the group. Although women in armed groups often assumed the same corporal habits as the men, they were transgressing gender norms in doing so, whereas the male combatants instead extended stereotypical ideas of masculinity to an extreme expression of violence and hegemony that subordinated other forms of masculinities. While some referred to the idea of themselves exercising power and command within their respective groups when they left the armed group, there were also young former foot soldiers who described that they struggled with being shy and insecure. While some men described themselves as acting like "Rambo" when they left the group, others revealed that they were shy and had to make a conscious effort to try to become someone who could engage in an interesting conversation. Raúl described how he had always been shy but that within the FARC he had become even quieter in order to keep a low profile and not get into trouble.

> Raúl*: Well, I would like to be more, be more like, more, more talkative. Yes? Because, I mean, I almost don't ... I'm very ... with words I'm very... I'm very quiet.*
> Question*: Would you like to change this? Be more talkative?*
> Raúl*: Yes, right now I would like more ...to talk more. I mean, express myself more... think*

more things.

Question*: How would that be? Can you give an example?*

Raúl*: Yes, more like, think more things, many things. To be a very intelligent one and explain things. That people ask you: "Well, what do you understand by such and such thing?". Of course, one would like to know a lot for one to be able to explain. Because well, that's something good.*

(Raúl, former member of the FARC)

Raúl described how he would now like to take advantage of the DDR programme and its educational opportunities to overcome his shyness. While research on male ex-combatants tends to focus on their hegemonic position and execution of power, it is important to understand the subordinate performative roles and forms of masculinities that are constructed within these groups. The militarization of gender performativity is a process that needs conscious effort from male ex-combatants to transform independently if they find themselves on the top or bottom of the hierarchy. Finally, just as with ex-combatant women, men who had been part of urban militias did not experience a need to embark on a process to transform militarized gender expressions.

6.2.3 Traditional gender roles at home

Ex-combatants described the challenges in constructing a home after having been part of a "collective life" in an armed group, where all work was carried out jointly. Men and women from the M-19 described how many couples who demobilized together ended up separating. Some men described how they had to change roles after demobilization. Francisco was one of the senior commanders of M-19, and after demobilization he had to come to terms with the realization that he was no longer in command.

> *Since we met in the war, of course, I was the boss. Now well, I'm not the boss in the house, she's the boss. That's the big change.* (Francisco, former member of M-19)

Francisco and his partner are one of the couples who have remained together having originally formed a relationship while within the armed group. The idea that women are in charge within the context of the household is a common traditional gender-based value. At the same time, Francisco described the co-existence of a mix of both traditional and non-traditional roles that he and his partner continue to assume in their relationship. For example, they have maintained the habit of sharing household chores like cooking, washing and cleaning.

Former members of FARC tended to make a clear distinction between women's reproductive roles and men's productive ones. While men had carried out traditional female tasks such as cooking, cleaning and washing when they were within the armed ranks, if they had a female partner after demobilization they tended to revert to the role of the breadwinner and not continue to share domestic responsibilities. Women ex-combatants from the FARC, meanwhile, explained how they were frustrated with the way in which their male partners from FARC resumed these traditional gender roles.

> *I was getting tired of being the one who washed, the one who cooked, and he didn't… He came home from work and laid down on his back. I was the one who changed the children and he was like: "No, I'm tired after work. I'm tired, how do you want me to help you?". On weekends it was the same thing. Then I said "But if you cooked there [in the FARC]. If you washed there. Why can't he do it here?". This is something I didn't like. I really didn't like it. Because I said "Well, one comes from there and that's it." Then I told him: "Look, I'll work and we can fulfil this role. We'll come back together and together we'll made dinner." Then he said: "No", and that's when they start with this crap that the woman is the one who belongs in the house, the one who takes care of the children, the one who cooks, the one that this and that, so then I said: "But this is a job where no one is grateful, where I don't earn a salary and I have to do everything, and if I don't have money." Then I said: "No!".* (Gina, former member of the FARC)

Gina decided to separate from her partner because she did not like this traditional gender-based division of labour. Other women described how they do not want to separate despite their discontent. Male ex-combatants on the other hand had not reflected thoroughly on why they had changed these roles. They described the more gender-equitable practices as something that was part of the past and only applied within the armed group. Giovanni, who is a former commander of FARC, pointed to the importance of internalizing the group's values in order to maintain a more gender-equitable division of labour after demobilization. In other words, when soldiers were only following orders, they will be less likely to maintain these practices after demobilization. While several of the men described that they had wanted to form a family and have children, they also considered the care of the children to be the primary responsibility of the mother. Several male ex-combatants also described how they had children during their time in the armed groups. Some of them had re-established contact but others had neither provided economic support nor established contact with their children. Some, like Roberto, a former member of the AUC and father of seven, described his family as the reason why he worked hard and complied with the requirements of the DDR programme. This is an example of where paternal masculinity becomes a motivation for ex-

combatants to provide their children with a better life path than their own, demonstrated through their actions in nurturing, protecting, and educating their children. Madhani and Baines (2020) have argued that ex-combatants often face unique challenges as fathers related to social stigma but that these do not render male ex-combatants without agency or desire to be a father. My research shows that this is applicable in Colombia as well. Men and women from all three groups described how being part of an armed group affects their intimate relationships in a number of ways. On the one hand, sexuality and sexual relations were strictly regulated by the FARC and to a lesser extent controlled by the AUC (Kunz & Sjöberg 2009; Mendez 2012), and combatants had to request permission to engage in an encounter or relationship. On the other hand, interviewees described how their hearts were hardened by the constant fear of separation and risk of death in an armed group. Starting to express love and feelings was therefore difficult for many women, and often even more difficult for many men. Camila described how it was difficult for her to start expressing affection for her partner and that he did not respond as she wished.

> *When you would say: "I love you", well he was like: "Ah, well." You expected a: "me too" but he said "ah, well"", and I said... Then in the end one does not try to say or maybe make an effort with something small when they don't....* (Camila, former member of the FARC)

Male ex-combatants from the FARC also described how they did not show their feelings and found it challenging to deal with the feelings of their partners. Romelio described how he prefers to just leave the house for a while if his partner is sad.

> Romelio*: Well, the truth is that when I see that she gets very, you know like crying and all that, I prefer to let her cry.*
> Question*: You go away?*
> Romelio*: Yes, I prefer to let her cry.*
> *Question: Don't you hug her?*
> Romelio*: Very little, very little, very little.*
> Question*: Why?*
> Romelio: *Because I think that sometimes it is as if she wants to get attention with all that crying and I just think: "No, let's take it another time".*
> Question: *What does she tell you after that?*
> Romelio: *That I don't understand her. Sometimes she says that I have a heart of stone.*
> (Romelio, former member of the FARC)

Even though they have now been together for several years, he explained that he still has this "hardness" in him.

In M-19, Dietrich Ortega (2015) has pointed to affective relationships as a space to assert hegemonic patterns of gender relations. While the organization made gender difference less important in the distribution of tasks, and granted access to command positions based on merit and capacity, she argues that this did not necessarily translate into gender-equal affective relationships, meaning that hegemonic patterns of gender relations in the M-19 were more salient in the affective partner sphere. Dietrich Ortega (2015) points to examples of hegemonic qualities that were asserted with M-19 including the enforcement of gendered difference that allowed men to maintain multiple concurrent affective relationships, while gendered expectations for women established an ideal of fidelity and monogamy. My research shows that these hegemonic patterns have continued to affect the ex-combatants after demobilization. Ángel, for example, described how he "unfortunately" has continued to struggle with being faithful in his relationships after his demobilization, while at the same time he would not like his partner to engage in multiple concurring relationships.

> *What happens is that we [men] find it difficult that women are able to assume their sexuality in the same relaxed way as we men, do. I mean, for me it's cool if I'm able to be with ten women, for me that's awesome. But if a woman does the same thing, for me it becomes difficult. It is a very macho concept, too much machismo. And it is not that women are promiscuous, I mean, I don't think it's an issue of promiscuity because in the end of the day it's about exercising the control over their body.* (Ángel, former member of M-19)

Other male former members of M-19 were also able to analyse and articulate the challenges they faced to create more gender-equal relationships after demobilization. Francisco explained that "*it was not easy for us to defeat machismo. We as men found it harder to defeat machismo than the women did*". Women ex-combatants from M-19 concurred with this view, and called the male ex-combatants "terribly machista". Some women said they could never enter into a relationship with one of their former colleagues as they did not feel that they were able to assume a role as an equal partner. Some saw this as not something related to the former group affiliation but a generational question. These men grew up in a time that was more patriarchal, and they have not transformed at the pace of their female colleagues. Several of the women ex-combatants complained that many of their former male companions have established relationships with younger women, which the

women ex-combatants view as an expression of patriarchal relationships. There were male ex-combatants who concurred in this criticism self-critically. Francisco has a long-standing relationship with his partner and expressed how he still is tempted to become that older man who chases after young girls.

> *You also get trapped in this macho society. When do I appear like that? When do I behave like an "viejito verde" [literally: little green old man]? Do you know what a un "viejito verde" is? A "viejito verde" is an old person like me who begins to look with desire at a young girl. This is what machismo does. This is a behaviour called "viejito verde", it's when an older person believes he is young and that whole thing, and you find yourself in this way like... What does it mean being a machista? Do you think you are right? To belittle the value of a woman's position, even if she is totally against you or thinks that its better if she just agrees with you. That is machista. Yes? Sometimes one gets entangled with all of this. But we keep fighting against these bad habits*. (Francisco, former member of M-19)

While male ex-combatants from the M-19 to a large extent tend to also assume traditional gender roles in the process of reintegration, they still differ significantly from male ex-combatants from AUC and FARC, not the least in their ability to be able to reflect critically on traditional gender roles.

When looking at these diverse experiences and gender constructions of ex-combatants, the pathways should not be understood as mutually exclusive. On the contrary, as pointed out earlier, there is a high degree of co-existence of elements from different pathways among ex-combatants. There were women from the AUC and FARC in this pathway who described how their male ex-combatant partners, in addition to assuming traditional gender roles, have started to perpetrate both self-inflicted violence as well as intimate partner violence. For men from the AUC and FARC in this pathway, this indicates a close association between the construction of traditional gender roles and elements of the next pathway, which describes ex-combatants who continue to reinforce militarized violent gender identities in the processes of reintegration.

6.3 The Effects of Pathway Two

This section analyses the agency exerted by the ex-combatants during their (re)construction traditional gender roles as well as the effects on society in the process of reintegration. My research shows that women ex-combatants are often pressured to assume traditional gender roles by both the gender regimes and norms of the society, as well as, to a certain extent, by the DDR

programme. While there is large variation within this group, there were elements of traditional gender roles that women sought, as well as dissatisfaction with many traditional feminine roles and household responsibilities. Male ex-combatants in this pathway tended to abandon more gender equal as well as gender unequal practices from armed groups as they reintegrated into the gender norms of the society. My research also shows that while the (re)constructions of traditional gender roles contributed to the assimilation of the ex-combatants into the society it potentially hampered the long-term goals of a more gender equal and inclusive post-conflict society.
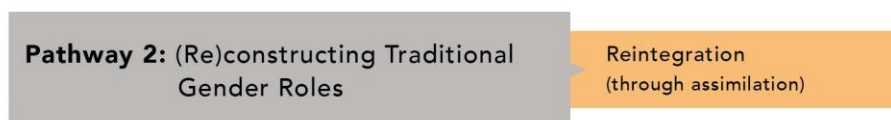
Figure 5: Pathway 2 and its effect on society

6.3.1 Ex-combatant agency

My research provides evidence of women ex-combatants who assume more traditional gender roles being associated with a subjective experience of lower level of agency in the constructions of gender. Women like Gina displayed an understanding of the effect of the transformations of gender roles in the process of reintegration and a strong dissatisfaction with the outcome. Women described how they found the new roles "unfair" and that they did not like to do all the unpaid care work and the reproductive chores. They described how they did not understand why they suddenly had to assume the role of housewife just because they were women. In contrast to women in the first pathway, women in this group did not refer to feminism or gender equality, but rather spoke about "unfairness", placing more emphasis on the practical implications generated by gender roles, norms and practices in their daily lives. Women in this pathway were to a large degree pressured by the society, including by their families, partners and the communities, to assume traditional roles. There were also examples of where the DDR programme, particularly in the area of economic reintegration, further exacerbated the pressure to assume traditional roles. This was particularly evident in the examples of women who chose to pursue training courses associated with traditionally female roles, such as in beauty and make-up, despite wanting to study something

else. This confirms the relevance of the exhortation in the UN Integrated DDR Standards to provide women with an array of options, as well childcare services, to allow them to benefit fully from the reintegration programme.

The experiences and backgrounds of the women in this pathway were very diverse, however. There were women who described the assumption of traditional roles as an active choice arising from their desire to preserve "their feminine essence" which they felt had been compromised while in the group, and reflecting things that they had always wanted to do. While motherhood was an important topic for all women in this pathway, for former members of the FARC, who had not been allowed to have children during their time in the group, motherhood was something many had sought for and which put them on the path to assume more traditional gender roles. At the same time, there were women who expressed that they did not want to have children, and/or that they had ended up having more children than they had wanted due to lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services and agency over their own bodies.

Male ex-combatants in this pathway tended to renounce both the more gender equal as well as gender unequal practices from armed groups as they reintegrated into the gender norms of the society. The experiences of men in this pathway were highly diverse, although there were correlations with the gender regimes of their respective groups. There were several men from the AUC who had developed a particularly brutalized militarized form of masculinity with a strong linkage between arms and notions of masculinity. Sometimes, ex-combatants deconstructed more violent forms of masculinities to assume more traditional roles. In contrast, other ex-combatants abandoned the more gender-equal values and practices from the armed groups. This includes members of the FARC, who immediately abandoned the practices of gender-equal division of labour. Finally, many men from the M-19 did assume more traditional gender roles despite not going through the same large transformations as ex-combatants from the AUC and FARC. These ex-combatants from the M-19 did instead maintain and reinforce some of the hegemonic patterns from the armed group, particularly in the affective space. What the male ex-combatants from this pathway have in common is that they expressed less evidence of having made conscious choices regarding the constructions of gender. In comparison with their female colleagues, they tended to have reflected less on the changes of gender relations, and naturalized the process to a larger extent than women ex-combatants. While men are certainly also pressured by society to assume gender

traditional roles, the societal norms afford them a more privileged position in comparison to their female partners. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that the men were less inclined than the women to express dissatisfaction with these traditional gender roles. The men thus expressed a lower level of gender awareness and a higher level of satisfaction than their female colleagues within this pathway.

Alongside these differences between men and women in terms of how gender roles were reconstructed, there were also differences based on the membership of particular armed groups and based on roles within the armed groups, as well as personal characteristics. For example, both men and women who had been members of urban groups and militias, including the majority of the interviewees from the M-19, did not go through the process to transform militarized gender expressions experienced by many of the, male and female, ex-combatants from the FARC and AUC.

6.3.2 Societal effects of assimilation

My research also shows that the (re)constructions of traditional gender roles contributed to the reintegration of the ex-combatants into the society. In particular the assumption of traditional gender roles allowed women and men to assimilate into the society. This was particularly important for ex-combatants to be able to "hide" their past and thus avoid the stigma associated with being "demobilized". This suggests that there may be a level of conflict between the strive for reintegration, when understood as assimilation, and the goal of DDR programmes to promote a more gender equal and inclusive post-conflict society. For example, DDR support for economic reintegration can favour stereotypically feminine activities in preference to supporting the women to engage in more stable and better remunerated work opportunities in the formal sector. While the research suggests that, in the Colombian context where ex-combatants have been highly stigmatized, assuming a gender-traditional work opportunity may still contribute more to women's assimilation into the society than assuming work in a male-dominated sector, or work that offers the opportunity to build on skills previously gained from the armed groups. However, when ex-combatants' previous experience and expertise are not being leveraged, they are not able to realize their full potential within society.

7.   Pathway Three: Re-enforcing Militarized Gender Constructions

Participation in a DDR programme does not necessarily generate transformations of the gender regimes assumed in the armed group. On the contrary, my research shows that ex-combatants within this pathway maintain or re-enforce militarized gender roles. This section first outlines how militarized masculinities are re-enforced among former paramilitary ex-combatants, and argues that these militarized gender regimes contribute to this group experiencing high recidivism in violence. I then outline how militarized femininities are maintained among former paramilitary ex-combatants. Thereafter, I reflect on militarized gender regimes and recidivism among former guerrilla members. Finally, I analyse where this pathway of re-enforcement of militarized gender regimes leads, by describing its effects in the lives of the ex-combatants as well as on the society in the process of reintegration. The chapter analyses the links with both intrapersonal and self-inflicted violence among both women and men ex-combatants, and illustrates clear links between the re-enforcement of militarized masculinities and recidivism as exhibited through participation in organized armed violence and new armed groups.

7.1 Re-enforcing Militarized Masculinities Among Former Paramilitary Members

Scholars have argued that militarism requires the constructions of militarized masculinities as much as it needs "guns and bullets", and that DDR programmes therefore require a gendered analysis that includes an examination of the salient links between masculinities, weapons and violence (Theidon 2009b: 3). One of my interview participants, Saúl, described how the paramilitary turn the combatants into bloodthirsty animals. "*One is not born, but becomes, a paramilitary*" he explained. Theidon argues that DDR programmes therefore need to "disarm" the gendered identities that are instrumental for war (Theidon 2009). The experiences of the male former paramilitary ex-combatants in this pathway are examples of how the militarized forms of masculinities they were socialized into have not been disrupted by their participation in a DDR programme. Instead, men within this pathway have maintained, or even re-enforced, militarized forms of masculinities.

7.1.1 Continuum of violence

Ex-combatants in this pathway spoke openly about how they had continued to work with new paramilitary groups and conduct assassinations or robbery directly after their demobilization. Some interviewees also described how they were still continuing to perpetrate violence even up to the point of the interview. Other former paramilitary soldiers described how they have been struggling to keep out of illegal activities.

Saúl said that he was forced to join the paramilitaries but deserted one year after he had become part of the group. Even though he described how he risked his life to leave the AUC, he was still not able to disrupt the circle of violence. He described how he had become "*Someone very bloodthirsty. You become someone who takes up arms, drinks. You become a gunman; one becomes a badass.*" He described how this process started from the first day he entered into the paramilitary group:

> Saúl: *I had to dismember people. The first time I cut the head off a woman, I had been in the military training for three days. They killed a woman and they killed two guys as well, and I never imagined that this was something that I would have to do. Then a commander called us. This commander was called 3-50. He was the "right hand" of the commander of the self-defence. He had spent fifteen years in the military life. He too was dismembered eventually. And he was a very bloodthirsty guy. He was our commander, and he gave us tremendous military training. He killed them. He killed them himself. He put gasoline on people and put them on fire. He was a person who liked to kill. He was a person that people were afraid of, or he made people panic. He was a gunman. We had been in the training for three days when they were killed. He killed one girl and killed two more because they were trying to escape. The girl was killed because she had a disease called gonorrhoea, she ...*
>
> Question: *And when you had to decapitate this woman, what did it do to you as a person?*
>
> Saúl: *When they killed that woman we had to do that. And after we cut off her head, then her arms... one guy opened her stomach and took out a foetus, a child already formed...*
>
> Question: *Ah, she was pregnant!?*
>
> Saúl: *Yes, she was pregnant. He removed the foetus, and a large umbilical cord came out from inside like an intestine... They cut it with a machete and threw it into the hole with the foetus. And they finished dismembering her arms, legs, everything, and buried her. Then the other two boys were buried too and I went to the bush, and tears started to come. I cried because my heart is not bad like that. I mean, I was basically obliged to be there, but once when I was there inside [the AUC] I realized that life is worth a lot, I realized that you can't do whatever you want; people's lives must be respected, and just as the life of one person is valuable, so that of the other person is valuable. But there they don't see this.*
> (Saúl, former member of AUC)

Saúl's quotes help illustrate the paramilitary process of becoming this "bloodthirsty animal" that many ex-combatants in this pathway described. While paramilitaries from all pathways described how the paramilitary brutalized the combatants, it was only some of the ex-combatants in this pathway who on their own initiative started to narrate in detail what they had done and how they are still haunted by these memories. Once he had deserted, Saúl described how he was unable to continue on the legal path and how he quickly started to engage in criminal activities and violence. Others, like Edgar, described how they had never really intended to change and continued to engage in crime since the day they demobilized:

> *I demobilized in 2005 and we returned to Medellin, with our families and all, but we continued to commit crimes. This is the only truth. Each one in their [new paramilitary] group. Well, we have our rifles and you have yours, then you are there and we are here. Then some began to do what they used to do first: to extort, to kill, and we didn't want to. There many people died, more than half of the characters that started out ended up dead.* (Edgar, former member of AUC)

Edgar described how he in fact had still not disarmed. More than a decade after entering into the DDR programme, he is in possession of his weapon, adding that "*using arms is what one still likes to do*". During the interview with Edgar, he outlined how he first continued to work with a new paramilitary group but eventually had to flee because many of his friends were killed in internal disputes between the new paramilitary groups. He was then active in the DDR programme while at the same time committing what he described as "*a bit of all types of crimes*" including assassinations and armed robbery. He also worked as an armed guard for a while, as well as in a restaurant. Since he found this work boring, however, he immediately accepted an offer to head off to work with another new paramilitary group when he was offered money to do so. After some time he ended up leaving this group since he thought that they did not pay him enough money. At the time of the interview, he described how he was considering heading to the border to Panama on the basis of an offer by a paramilitary group. The description of Edgar's twelve-year process of reintegration is a brutal account of a continuum of organized crime and violence, despite the fact that during this time he has also benefitted from the support of the DDR programme. The way he spoke with ease of his criminal activities while being interviewed in the Government-run reintegration centre could also be interpreted as an illustration of how he was not fearful of any repercussions or accountability.

7.1.2 Ghosts from the past

While many ex-combatants in different pathways described how they suffer, or have suffered from different trauma-related illnesses, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or depression, this was a particularly significant theme in this pathway. Some, such as Saúl, described how they are haunted by the memories from the armed group.

> *I have nightmares. I still have moments when I am sleeping and I start to dream that I am running with a rifle, shooting. I dream that I am being followed. That they are shooting at me. That they will kill me. I dream of people screaming. I hear that sound of lead, "ta, ta, ta", with that sound. I dream of those orders they gave us. I dream that I am washing in blood. I dream of people that I dismembered. They look at me and they ask me "why I did it?!". I dream of shooting. I dream that I am running through those mountains in rubber boots with a camouflage, with an AK47 that I carried, an AK47, a rifle. I have these nightmares, I can't sleep. And the years have passed and I still haven't been able to erase this from my mind and my dreams. [...] The only way I rest is when I wake up, because while I am in that nightmare it is something impressive, which is a panic and a terror, I cannot be calm. I wake up sweating. I have to drink water. I have to pray. I can't sleep. I start to shake like this.* (Saúl, former member of AUC)

Others, such as Ignacio, described especially significant mental health problems, in his case bipolar disorder, and recounted how they are living in constant fear of being targeted by former paramilitary colleagues. After having been identified and threatened by former paramilitary colleagues through social media Ignacio experienced what he described as a mental crisis at the airport in Bogota where he was working. He was sent to the hospital and is now taking medication, but has been unable to return to his work. He described how he really wanted to change his life after demobilization but that the security threats and mental health problems have made this difficult. Many ex-combatants within this pathway described both how new paramilitary groups are trying to recruit them and/or how they live in constant fear that they, or someone in their family, will be targeted and killed, always looking over their shoulder to see if someone is after them.

> *It's like a delirium of persecution. Yes, I suffer, because this is the anxiety, that someone is looking at me. [...] Well, look, I couldn't sleep because of this, this anxiety that at any moment they can be doing you a raid and you get like that and they kill you there, and that's it, and that's it.* (Ignacio, former member of AUC)

Female former members of the paramilitary also described how they have been approached by new paramilitary groups. Women, however, did not express this same level of fear of their former

colleagues and in only one case did a woman—a former female commander—express that she was actively hiding from new paramilitary groups. It is possible that new paramilitary groups are more accepting that women are less open to re-mobilization than male ex-combatants. It is also possible that the skills of the former male members are more highly valued for the new armed groups, given that many women in the AUC occupied more traditionally female support roles.

While ex-combatants from different pathways may suffer from trauma-related illnesses, some of the male ex-combatants in this pathway went further to make a link between mental health problems and self-inflicted violence such as abuse of alcohol and drugs, and in turn, inter-personal and community level violence.

7.1.3 Booze, drugs and prostitution fuelling violent masculinities

Some of the interview participants referred to themselves as acting as some kind of "Rambo" with a lethal mix of booze, drugs and crime. Their descriptions demonstrated clear accounts of rigid gender norms, where not only being the breadwinner, but having abundant money for buying presents were perceived as crucial for a man's ability to attract a women. Women were described as sexual objects and as inferior.

Many ex-combatants in this pathway described how they had started using more alcohol and other drugs once they left the armed group. Once the control of the armed group disappeared, many described how they developed a heavy addiction that some confessed they were continuing to struggle with even up to that time. Several described how they felt depressed and isolated after demobilization, and many became particularly misogynist and violent after drinking alcohol. Saúl said "*I hung out with prostitutes. Taking drugs, having sex, drinking liquor, consuming coke, marijuana, wasting money with prostitutes, spending even the money I didn't have*". Viewing women as sexual objects can also be interpreted as a heritage from the AUC where in some places the only interactions with women were when sex workers and/or sex slaves were brought to the paramilitary camps. When he was at his lowest point, Saúl's family started bringing him to church and he found strength to change some of his behaviours and stop committing crime. That religious groups can play an important role in transforming militarized masculinities has been argued by Theidon (2015) and in the chapter of Pathway One, I also describe the role religion can play in underpinning profound change. In the case of Saúl, however, after a while he relapsed and

continued to abuse alcohol and commit different types of crime. Juan also described how he spent his entire DDR allowance on alcohol, which had a devastating impact on his relationships and family:

> *After I demobilized, I was drinking over a period of four years. I received the salary from the Government—now I no longer receive it—and with that money I drank. Every month. For example, what I didn't do during the month, I did it at the end of the month. I had another job. I worked on a farm and from there I got other money. Sometimes I started drinking and forgot about my son, I forgot to buy things for my daughter. I drank Saturday and Sunday, and sometimes I neglected other things. Like my children, I drank and forgot about them.* (Juan, former member of AUC)

Juan described how he managed to drink less after a while but admitted that he is currently drinking a lot once again, especially after his pregnant wife was incarcerated after she was caught at the airport in Bogota trying to smuggle cocaine out of the country.

Women ex-combatants with former partners that were demobilized from the AUC also concurred with this picture. They described how their partners started to abuse drugs, engage in criminal activities and perpetrate domestic violence. Isabel was pregnant with her first child when she started to understand how her partner was acting:

> *Marijuana and coke. When I realized, I saw him consuming. And I started to fight with him because of that, and he was hitting me because I was fighting with him. He told me that he was working and I didn't know that he was going out stealing, and he told me when he arrived with money that he was working. He had a motorcycle, and with the motorcycle he committed crime, and I didn't know. He came home to me with money. I was about 19 years old and he hit me and I just had to stand it, to take it. In all of this I had the two children... We lived together, he was in jail, he came back, he left and so on, until I decided to get away from him.* (Isabel, former member of AUC)

While the male ex-combatants spoke less openly about perpetration of domestic violence, the women who had been in relationships with former male paramilitaries described how they and their children have been subjected to both violence and death threats.

> *After that he started calling and threatening me, and he threatened the children too. That he was going to kill me and he was going to kill them too*. (Jaqueline, former member of AUC)

After Jaqueline left her abusive partner, he continued to threaten her and she had to change her phone number and live in constant fear:

> *He sent me many voice messages threatening me, or telling me he was already here... He called me and said, "Open the door, I'm here outside", that's what he told me. "I already know where you live, I am out here" or he said to me "as soon as you go out, I will be waiting for you in the corner and I will cut your face". That's what he told me, so I was traumatized. I went out and it was like that. I went out and nobody could approach me or pass by the side without me jumping thinking it was him, but never. .. and sometimes they told me that they had seen him here but no, I think he never came because I never saw him. I never saw him. I had to change my mobile number, and after that he stopped bothering me.* (Jaqueline, former member of AUC)

While women described their former partners as completely unable to change, several men in this pathway described how now, as they are getting older, they have become tired of the life of crime and drugs and that they want to find and maintain a relationship with a partner. Edgar described how he was seeking a traditional relationship with a woman but complained that he only found women who were not loyal and were only searching for the money and presents he could provide through his criminal activities.

> *That's life. Here in Bogota, this woman had a husband and I gave everything to her, everything, everything... I provided her with nice shoes, 200, 300, 10, 20 pairs, jackets, everything, food, whatever she asked for. But the thing is that women... Perhaps when I met her she already had another boyfriend. Right? And she never told me. I heard it, a friend told me. So I caught her. I went there with my friend and looked at her, and she was like... I told her: "No, leave. Do not go to the house not even for the clothes." And she sent her mother: "Ah, to give her the clothes!".*
> Question: *Oh, she wanted the clothes and the 300 pairs of shoes?*
> Edgar: *Everything! She was only interested in clothes and the things one gave to her, but it was better that way, because someone who cheats, you have to be grateful that nothing happened, that she just left. Because she could have done something to me too. The thing is that women don't think. There are women who don't think.* (Edgar, former member of AUC)

Several ex-combatants described how it was harder to attract women when they were not wearing a uniform and if they did not have money. The perception that women only want men with a lot of money and strength, even when obtained through illegal means, is an example of how militarized masculinities are maintained after demobilization. It is also an example of the continuum of co-constructions of wartime femininities and masculinities after demobilization.

7.2 New and Old Expressions of Militarized Masculinities Among Former Guerrilla Soldiers

Limited comparative research has been conducted on the variations in the constructions of militarized hegemonic masculinities between different armed groups, and even less on understanding of the impact this has in the constructions of gender post-demobilization. In Colombia, researchers such as Gutiérrez Sanín (2008) have described variations in the repertoire of violence between the paramilitary AUC and guerrilla groups, while Medina Arbeláez (2009: 17) has described how militarized masculinity in the paramilitary was more destructive and reckless than in the left-wing guerrilla groups. My research confirms this finding through the description of the re-enforcement of these reckless militarized masculinities among former paramilitary ex-combatants in this pathway. While former guerrilla members in this pathway did not express the same, close to archetypical, re-enforcement of militarized masculinities exhibited by many of the former paramilitary combatants, my research shows important commonalities, as well as variations, in the constructions of militarized masculinities. I will first describe the experiences of re-mobilization into armed violence among male former members of the M-19 and FARC, before going on to describe the development of new behaviours of self-inflicted and inter-personal violence. Finally, I will describe constructions of memories of perpetration of violence.

7.2.1 Militarized masculinities and the re-mobilization in armed groups

While many former paramilitary ex-combatants in this pathway maintained militarized masculinities and engaged in a continuum of violence, the experiences of former members of the FARC and M-19 show how demobilization entailed a disruption of guerrilla life. To a certain extent, depending on the previous role within the group, this included some immediate disruption of gendered roles and responsibilities. To understand the variation in re-engagement in violence, and its salient links to the formation of militarized masculinities and weapons, it is important to take into consideration not only the participation in the respective armed groups but also a number of other factors, including the motivations for demobilization. For instance, M-19 underwent a collective demobilization of its full ranks and showed low levels of recidivism. Interviewees who were ex-combatants from the M-19 described the broad-based commitment among the former members of that group, and the strong consensus about and agreement with the peace process. In respect to former members of the FARC, however, it is important to note that almost all my

interviewees had undergone an "individual demobilization", meaning that they had either risked their life by deserting from the FARC, or demobilized after having been captured by the Colombian armed forces. There is therefore an important difference in terms of the process followed by the ex-combatants that demobilized individually, as interviewed in this research, and the FARC combatants who disarmed collectively following the peace agreement with the Colombian government in 2016. Indeed, FARC dissident groups have grown rapidly since the peace agreement came into effect, although it is not possible to define the number of members of these groups that were previously demobilized compared to new recruits (Ideas para la paz 2018).

While the links with militarized forms of masculinities are less salient than in many cases of former paramilitaries, my research shows examples of guerrilla ex-combatants re-mobilizing. For example, Romelio was responsible for logistics within the FARC and was captured and incarcerated in 2004. As soon as he was released, he immediately returned to FARC and worked with the group until he was captured again in 2008 and then decided to leave the armed struggle behind him.

> *What happened was that when they captured me, I was still very committed. I had my ideology very well rooted. So it was very difficult to change it, and well, here the support is like saying "come here, let's get there". I mean, at that time I was captured, the option was to go to jail. So one did not have the slightest idea of staying, as they say, in the civilian population.* (Romelio, former member of the FARC)

Romelio points to his political commitment to the organization, which stands in stark contrast to the reason for re-mobilizing expressed by ex-combatants joining the paramilitary groups. Former paramilitary descriptions depicted one of the crucial factor in remobilizing as the ability to continue to gain money and thus to be able to maintain status and power directly linked to their sense of masculinity. In contrast, the link with the constructions of militarized masculinities is less prominent for combatants with a strong ideological conviction. Still, Romelio displayed traits of militarized masculinities and exerted command within the group.

Political commitment was also very evident among the ex-combatants of M-19 who I interviewed. Indeed, there were examples of ex-combatants from M-19 who still identified as active members of M-19. Ángel, for instance, still believed in the necessity to use violence, and has maintained networks and contacts with combatants from different armed guerrilla groups.

> *Throughout these twenty and more years since we left the arms, you receive proposals and I can tell you honestly that I have been invited by comrades from ELN. They invited me at the time. I received invitations from the FARC comrades [...] At any time, I can tell you that a few days ago a comrade from ELN approached me and told me that I could make a very good process there. I said: "No brother, now I would not be able to take it on even with an oxygen tube".* (Ángel, former member of M-19)

Apart from the former guerrilla members who have re-mobilized within different left-wing guerrilla groups, former FARC combatants also described how they know of former colleagues who have joined paramilitary groups. There was a clear difference, however, in respect to the openness with which former paramilitary combatants and former FARC combatants spoke about re-engagement in organized crime and new paramilitary groups.

7.2.1 State obstruction of deconstructions of militarized masculinities

Although disarmament entailed a disruption of guerrilla armed struggle, for some, it entailed a continuum of violence incentivized by the state. The Colombian Ministry of Defence has offered payments to demobilized individuals, primarily demobilized from the FARC, in return for information and the surrender of war materials (Arias et al. 2010). The use of the demobilized former combatants, particularly mid-level and high-level commanders, has therefore generated important intelligence for the Colombian armed forces, which has been vital in a large number of attacks against the FARC (Arias et al. 2010). This has led to researchers like Arias et al. (2010: 14) arguing that demobilized persons have been used as a "weapon of war", questioning whether the DDR process has in fact been a strategy for war rather than one for peace.

My research demonstrates that, from the onset of the DDR programme, the state institutions responsible for the initiation of this process work against the ability to deconstruct militarized masculinities. Furthermore, my research shows how this violation of the rights of the demobilized persons also continues to constitute an impediment for the processes of reintegration for the individuals interviewed. Starting the very process of leaving the armed struggle by contributing to attacks against their former organization clearly does not provide an enabling environment to start the process of deconstructing militarized masculinities. On the contrary, I argue that this contributes both to increase ex-combatants' distrust in the state authorities responsible for the process of DDR and to cement the utilization of militarized and violent masculinities. Individuals who provided intelligence to the Colombian army also became key targets for the FARC. Samuel

collaborated with the military, and when I interviewed him in a small village outside of Bogota, he described how he had been moving around so as to avoid being identified. He was living in constant fear of being targeted by the FARC because of the information he provided to the military, and he described how he had not been provided with any security by the authorities and that he was now deeply regretful for having collaborated with the military.

José is another ex-combatant who described how he turned himself into the military to demobilize at 7 pm in the evening, and how by 6 am the following morning he had been picked up by a helicopter and brought back to the jungle against his will. There he described how he was forced to provide information and participate in military operations.

> José*: I had never received so much humiliation as the army put me thorough, the greatest of humiliations!*
> Question: *What did they do?*
> José*: The way they talked about me, the way they approached me, the way they treated me out in the bush...*
> Question: *Did they threaten you?*
> José*: Yes, that they were going to kill me! While in the guerrillas I never experienced something like that. To say that they [FARC] enter a home and kill, I never experienced that. I never had to see that. They gave several opportunities, they caught your attention, they gave physical punishments, they made ways, they warned you. If they didn't want to change, it ended up with execution, by the third warning they made. But with the army I had to see this. Up until today I have a problem thanks to the army, when I was in the bush with the 11th army brigade, they committed the "falsos positivos" [extrajudicial killings of civilians]. They took a dude sleeping at home with his wife and their three-month-old baby. They tied him up, gagged him, took him with them, shot him, made him appear as a guerrilla fighter and now they discovered this and now the key piece of the investigation according to them, was me. (*José, former member of the FARC)

José described how he has now been called by the judicial system as a witness in the ongoing investigation of the so called "false positives" (*falsos positivos*), which refers to incidents where members of the Colombian Armed Forces were involved in the assassination of innocent civilians who were then presented as guerrilla soldiers killed in combat. The objective of these extrajudicial killings was to demonstrate that the Colombian army brigades were achieving improved results. As well as being concerned about the security of his family because of the harm he did to the FARC, José felt distressed about the lengthy legal process he is now called to participate in by the office of the Inspector General.

Among my interview participants, both women and men demobilized from the FARC reported that they had been offered compensation in exchange for information or participation in military operations. It was only a couple of men, however, who reported that they had accepted, or been forced by the military, to attack their former comrades in the FARC. One reason why only men reported having collaborated with the military might be that the information from commanders was particularly valuable for the military, and women are underrepresented in the command structures of the FARC. Gina, however, who demobilized together with her male partner, described how they pressured her partner more than her despite both of them being foot soldiers and she believes this is due to "machismo" in the military:

> Question: *And when you demobilized, did the army offer you money for information or something?*
>
> Gina: *Yes, it was something... I mean, to my children's dad. Yes, to him most. They offered him money to go to the area ...*
>
> Question: *And why him more than to you?*
>
> Gina: *I think it's because of the machistas, that they believe that men can do more than women, so I think it's more that they think that…I've seen cases where they have gone with the army to the field, but ...*
>
> Question: *And your former partner accepted?*
>
> Gina: *No, he didn't. He never accepted. He said no, that he wanted to leave the past behind him.*
>
> Question: *But they didn't offer you, only him?*
>
> Gina: *Only him. But he said "No, going back there with you is like being in the guerrillas, looking for ..." So no.* (Gina, former member of the FARC)

Starting the transition from illegal warfare by being pressured, persuaded, incentivized and/or forced to continue combat against one's former comrades and/or being witness to the execution of civilians by the hands of the state re-enforces rather than disrupts the constructions of militarized masculinities.

7.2.3 Self-inflicted and intimate partner violence

In Colombia, 33 percent of ever-partnered women aged 15-49 years have experienced intimate partner physical and/or sexual violence at least once in their lifetime and 18 percent of ever-partnered women have done so in the last twelve months (Profamilia 2016). This makes Colombia one of the countries in the Americas with the highest prevalence of intimate partner violence (Bott et al. 2019). Violence against women is deep-rooted in society and affects all groups. While some

male ex-combatants had perpetrated various forms of gender-based violence while within the group, there were also male ex-combatants in this pathway who only started to perpetrate intimate partner violence after demobilization.

Men and women from FARC described how male ex-combatants started to perpetrate both self-inflicted violence and intimate partner violence after demobilization. Many ex-combatants described how they were no longer obliged to follow regulations and rules they had lived by in the armed groups, and how they started abusing alcohol after demobilization. The descriptions of female partners of male ex-combatants from the FARC illustrate how men's changing gender roles started to generate intimate partner violence, often in conjunction with abuse of alcohol.

> *There [in the FARC] they can't beat a woman, there they can't dominate because men are not giving anything. But then when we got here, because he worked ... then that meant "he was the man of the house", that he was this, that "he was the one who provided for me". So then he came back drunk and was beating me, was mistreating me already by then.* (Gina, former member of the FARC)

While male ex-combatants noted that it was not allowed to perpetrate violence against a female partner in the FARC, some described how they learned that in the patriarchal society they were reintegrating into it is better to "avoid getting involved" when they witnessed gender-based violence in order to avoid problems. Romelio gave an example of how he witnessed a man beating his wife on the bus. When a bystander tried to intervene to stop the violence, Romelio described how the woman who he was trying to defend started beating the person who was helping her. Romelio's reflection shows how he started to adhere to the gender norms of the society where intimate partner violence is tolerated. While intimate partner violence is common in Colombian society and does not only affect ex-combatants, the perpetration of both self-inflicted and inter-personal violence shows that there is a strong co-existence of patterns of traditional gender roles and hegemonic expressions of violent masculinity within this pathway among former members of the FARC. These experiences of self-inflicted and domestic violence also demonstrated similarities with the patterns described by some of the former combatants from the AUC. As for the former combatants from the M-19, neither men nor women described former male members of M-19 as having entered into this vicious circle of violence following their demobilization. While research has shown the co-existence of hegemonic and non-hegemonic gender relations within the

M-19 (Dietrich Ortega 2017), the militarized masculinities and largely urban militias did not report the same level of violent expressions following demobilization.

7.3 Maintaining Militarized Femininities

My research shows that there are large differences between the ways in which militarized masculinities and femininities are constructed in the processes of reintegration. Male ex-combatants are reintegrated into a conflict-affected society where militarized forms of masculinities are to a large degree accepted, or even promoted, which leads to ways in which they can maintain, adapt or even re-enforce militarized forms of civilian masculinities. Women who demonstrate militarized forms of femininities, on the other hand, are deviating from gender norms and are therefore immediately identified, stigmatized and ostracized if they do not transform their gender performance.

Mendez (2012) has used the concept of the "hyper-masculinization of femininity"—whereby women experience a militarization of their gender identity, illustrated by gender transformation combined with the maintenance of some traditional concepts of gender—to describe the process undergone by women demobilized from AUC and FARC. My research shows how many women former members of the FARC, as well as women who assumed roles as soldiers within the AUC, described how they "became like men". While women ex-combatants from both FARC and AUC described how they embarked on a process to start "acting as a woman" immediately upon their demobilization, certain traits of militarized femininities were described as lingering for years after their demobilization. These traits therefore co-existed, albeit to varying degrees, with the patterns of assumption of more gender-equitable and/or traditional gender roles described in Pathways One and Two.

While Mendez's (2012) research points to the common process of hyper-masculinization of women, irrespective of armed group and roles assumed within the group, my research shows that the militarized femininities in the group of weapon-carrying female AUC combatants tended to be more profound. Similar to former male colleagues from the AUC, women AUC soldiers also described a process of socialization into brutalized violence and how they "became animals" and had to learn how to act "without mind and heart". While former AUC women in this pathway are conscious of the militarized and hyper-masculinized traits that they have sustained, in this section,

I also analyse the case of former paramilitary commander Silvia, who, eleven years after her demobilization still maintains to a very large degree the militarized femininity she was socialized into within the paramilitary. While traits of hyper masculinization can be constructed and maintained among women in different roles and functions, my research shows that women who assumed more traditional female support roles in the AUC, or who engaged as urban militias with both FARC and M-19 do not demonstrate the same level of hyper-masculinization.

7.3.1 Maintaining traits of militarized femininities

The way in which the hyper-masculinization and militarization of the femininities of women was constructed within the armed groups are illustrated through defferent description of women in this pathway. Ethel described how this was a process, not just of masculinization, but a process of dehumanization that started from the day she was forced to join the AUC:

> *Like not feeling anything, turning into a stone, not having feelings. You don't react, you are not coherent, it doesn't hurt what someone else feels... I mean, it's becoming inhuman. That is to turn into an animal. "You should not feel any pain. You don't give a shit if they kill him, if they cut him into pieces, if they use a chainsaw to cut him into pieces, if…". You have to be like that all the time. To see that they kill a person and you cannot show a tear. Because it is the most terrible thing in the world to see that they cut off the hand of someone. "You have no command, you have no will, you are the garbage here, you are mine" as the boss said all the time. "It is what I say and what I command". Then one said… Well, this is also something that it's necessary to work on for long after you leave because you become very insensitive. If you think I cried, I did not cry.* (Ethel, former member of AUC)

As with many other women in this pathway, by the time of her demobilization Ethel had become "like a man" and a soldier in her gender expressions and gender performance. She described herself as being "extremely aggressive", dressing like a man, and as someone who burped loudly at the dinner table, to her mother's dismay. Adriana, meanwhile, described how immediately after her demobilization she also started drinking a lot of alcohol, partying and using other drugs. Many of the women in this pathway described how they continued to sleep with a gun under their pillow for years after their demobilization. Even though both Ethel and Adriana have transformed profoundly, they described how they still grapple with some traits that are illustrative of militarized masculinities. The ways in which they still act like soldiers, enforcing discipline and orders, were described through examples both from their work and their family life. Flora described how she still has not been able to modify, not just her "rude" vocabulary, but most of all the tone of her

voice, which had a military "ring" to it. She describes how her partner, demobilized from the ELN, has helped her to change a lot but that she still exercises a military regime at home:

> *It's that Diego, as my husband is called, he was urban [part of the urban militias]. He was not out in the bush like I was. So I am the soldier of the house. Sometimes he hears me—I have a twelve-year-old boy and I have a two-year-old baby, going to turn 3. So I start in the morning: "Juan Carlos, do this! This! This!". And then Diego tells me: "This is not the way anymore. Get this out of your mind. You don't have to give orders. This is not the orders of the day, that this is what you have to do". Then I tell him: "But I am not saying it in that way". But just look, the only thing missing is to put them in a line and say "you have to do this, you have to do that". My other son is called Brian, the little one, and he has a little box where he already has all his toys, and everything, "ta, ta, ta" all in order. But when he is with his dad, the dad goes behind him picking up everything. When he is with mom [herself] he picks up everything himself! But he [Diego] tells me: "You treat them as if they were soldiers". I say: "No, children have to be taught and disciplined!". Wash the plate where you eat whatever your age is. At age twelve I was doing many more things than he is doing, and we must accept that each one has a role and a responsibility. But my husband, he is too much of a mother, just too lax. He says: "No, do it with more love". No! You have to give them love, but you also have to demand, and that's how the discussion between us goes.* (Flora, former member of AUC)

 The way in which Flora at times referred to herself with the male pronoun (*el* soldado) and her husband with female pronouns (e.g. as the "mother") shows in a subtle and practical way how she still consider herself "masculine" to a certain degree. Women demobilized from the FARC in this pathway also described how they continue to maintain a military discipline. Just as women from AUC in this pathway, for some the process of starting to move, walk, sit, stand, touch in a more feminine way is still a continuous effort.

While men who maintain militarized masculinities have continued to engage in self-inflicted, intra-personal and community level and organized violence, women who remain traits of militarized femininities do not report the same level of recidivism in violence. Nonetheless, women did give examples, particularly from the early period after demobilization, of having used violence against their children or partner. Rosalba described how she felt a lot of anger and fury during the first year after demobilization. She wanted to buy a weapon and had repeated thoughts about killing people, including her husband.

> *Well, for example, in an argument, all I could think of was that. Or for any reason, I thought: Oh, I will shoot him, or I'm going to send him a "free ticket", which is the expression used, and then after a while I began to think and as if ... Yes, I mean, my nerves*

were very, very bad. But not now. I am another person right now. I don't think about any of that now. I have problems, perhaps in discussions like that with other people or comments ... but no, no longer to shoot and kill. (Rosalba, former member of the FARC)

Rosalba started to experience mental health problems and wanted not just to kill others but also considered killing herself following the forced abortion she was subjected to within the FARC. After the forced abortion she constantly requested to go to frontline and engaged heavily in direct combat before eventually deciding to defect. She described that the key turning point for her was when she delivered the son she became pregnant with after her demobilization. As for male ex-combatants, this illustrates a link between untreated war-related trauma and violence. For men, this trauma was typically related to the perpetration of violence when in the armed group, but for women it more usually related to having been subjected to sexual and gender-based violence. Understanding these experiences of what Baines refers to as "complex victims" (2016: 10) where combatants are both perpetrating and subjected to violence, is important in order to comprehend their experiences in constructing gender in the processes of reintegration.

Finally, while women are much less likely to re-engage in organized crime and violence than men (ARN 2021), my research also shows examples of the continued risk of re-mobilization, even among some women who have made great efforts to transform their lives. Flora has shown leadership in her community and has worked for over a decade with the Municipality of Bogota to support the reintegration process of other ex-combatants and to prevent violence. She described how she had been about to accept to start working with a new paramilitary group (called las gaitanistas) when she, ironically, was offered her first job with the municipality to work in schools for the prevention of recruitment of armed groups. A year before participating in the interview with me, she had lost her job with the municipality due to a change of administration, and she described how her former paramilitary bosses, with whom she is still in contact, again made an offer that she was tempted to accept.

Well honestly, honestly, I was about to say, "I'm leaving". [...] It's that the people, sone of those who are now the commanders of this [the new paramilitary group] were my bosses. So they tell me: "you are efficient, you can be useful." What they told me when they offered me that job was: "You are going to manage the databases. We send everything to you by mail. You don't have to move from your house and we are going to pay you 3 million [pesos]". One of the last times they told me: "Look, it's fine, we pay 5 million and once a month you have to go somewhere with the reports. We pay you the per diem or send you

someone to pick you up and go". When it's so easy, would you not do it? Of course you do it! Of course you go, because you know that the people will pay you and you will not have as much trouble as here. (Flora, former member of AUC)

While women in this pathway, despite traits of militarized masculinities, often described how they would never consider going back, it is important not to overlook the ways in which women may also be re-mobilized. As described in Pathway One, this further illustrates that, even if women might have transformed, both in terms of gender expressions and performance, and even if they have completed the DDR programme successfully, militarized traits may be profound and, depending on the context, risk leading to re-mobilization.

7.3.2 Case study of maintained militarized femininity

In this section I describe the process of a women former squad commander of the AUC who to a very large degree maintains the militarized femininity she was socialized into within the paramilitary. The experience of Silvia illustrates that the transformation of hyper-masculinized and militarized femininities is far from automatic and can prove very challenging for certain individuals. Silvia joined the AUC because she was in need for a job to provide for her children. She started cooking and eventually took up weapon-carrying roles as one of only two women among 6800 male combatants. She described how she changed a lot as a woman while she was part of the AUC, and how she has faced a lot of challenges since she demobilized. She struggles with health problems, both the parasitic disease leishmaniasis that she was infected with during her time in the jungle, as well as mental health problems such as depression, social phobia and isolation. Since her demobilization, her mother and children have not accepted her and she has very scarce contact with her children, who live in another part of Colombia. She lived on the street for over a year and right now lives at a shelter for homeless people. She described how she still has not been able to get rid of some of the military customs she was socialized into within the AUC, and her explanation illustrates how she still maintained a hyper-masculinized and militarized femininity. She expressed how these are traits she would like to change but that she feels unable to do so:

> *Silvia: I still have the softness of a woman, but the imposition is stronger.*
> *Question: Can you give an example of that imposition?*
> *Silvia: Well, when I'm going to speak and sometimes the people say, "but don't yell at me" and I'm not screaming, but it's perhaps the way I express myself to the other person, I don't*

know. (Silvia, former member of AUC)

Silvia deviates so much from normative femininity that people often notice immediately that she is a former paramilitary. She is currently working in a food truck and she described how clients sometimes notice immediately that she is an ex-combatant:

> *Silvia: So, I have this little food truck for hamburgers and fast food, and I am working with this man. Well, you learn to greet people and everything, but someone always says something to me. I mean, as soon as I get to any place, to any workplace, immediately it is like I had a sign on my forehead. People realize that I have been someone with the paramilitary or something.*
> *Question: Ah, why do you think they notice that?*
> *Silvia: Because of the posture. Maybe because of the behaviour, in the way of dialoguing with the other person as well. Well, yes, it is like the regime that one maintains. So, many times I hear: "You have been there in the bush?" or "You such and such thing", "You are a paramilitary?" People sometimes ask you when you are selling food, and they ask you.*
> (Silvia, former member of AUC)

She described how after a decade within the AUC her body had internalized all the movements and how she walks as if she was marching and stands as if she was holding her hand on the rifle. She also still dresses like a man and has not worn a dress since she demobilized, partly because of the skin sores caused by her untreated leishmaniasis. After demobilization, she chose to study to become a mechanic, but she was unable to find a job in this sector since most employers preferred men. While the UN Integrated DDR Standards encourage DDR programmes to support women to study and take up employment in sectors that are not traditionally female, Silvia's example illustrates how such efforts may hamper the economic reintegration of women ex-combatants. Although I have described the challenge of ex-combatant women being pressured into traditional occupations (see Pathway Two), women who seek to take on non-traditional roles face other challenges of potential discrimination and stigma. This points to the need for DDR programmes to invest heavily to overcome the intersecting challenges of women's economic reintegration, through flexible support that places women's agency and choice at the centre. While finding employment in a more lucrative non-female sector could allow women to pursue their life choices and increase women's economic empowerment, the case of Silvia also illustrates that it might not necessarily support women's ability to deconstruct hyper-masculinized and militarized femininities. However, still in the case of Silvia, who now works in a traditional female sector preparing food, the maintenance of militarized femininities is profound and all encompassing.

Two years after her demobilization, Silvia was subjected to a murder attempt and several new paramilitary groups have tried to recruit her. The last time she received an offer from one of them was a year before the interview. She constantly changes mobile number so she will not be contacted and she has moved because of threats. She described how she still always looks over her shoulder when she walks on the street. She became shy within the AUC and since her demobilization she has isolated herself, and most of the time she just stays at home at the shelter where she lives. She explained that she is far from the person she was when she joined the AUC:

> *Well, before I knew anything about these things there [in the AUC], I was so different. Like, I was outgoing and extrovert. But when I went there, I became like an asshole [pendeja]. I became like, I don't know, yes.* (Silvia, former member of AUC)

Silvia expressed in a myriad of ways how she was not able to change and how she does not feel reintegrated in the society. Her example shows how profound changes experienced within the paramilitary, particularly in combination with trauma-related illnesses and health problems, leads to the inability to deconstruct hyper-masculinized and militarized femininities and hampers the process of reintegration.

7.4 The Effects of Pathway Three

This section analyses the effects of the maintenance or re-enforcement of militarized gender regimes that have been described in this pathway in respect to the agency exerted by the ex-combatants and on the society in the process of reintegration.
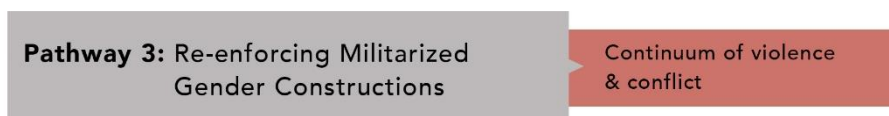

Figure 6: Pathway 3 and its effect on society

Male ex-combatants from the AUC in this pathway displayed an almost archetypical continuum of militarized masculinities following their demobilization, as well as low level of reflection on the different gender regimes within the armed group and the society. My research also shows large

variation, as well as commonalities, in the constructions of militarized masculinities depending on armed group. Women ex-combatants, even after a long process of transformation, are unable to deconstruct certain traits of militarized and hyper-masculinized femininities. In certain circumstances, illustrated by the case of Silvia, women are unable to deconstruct militarized and hyper-masculinized expressions and roles to the detriment to their own wellbeing and their process of reintegration. While women who maintain certain militarized and hyper-masculinized traits expressed conflicting opinions about this legacy of armed struggle, the more dominant and encompassing these expressions and roles proved to be, the more dissatisfaction women expressed. For male ex-combatants who maintain militarized masculinities, many have continued to engage in violent crime and new paramilitary groups, as well as in self-inflicted and domestic violence, with devastating effects for their reintegration process and the society at large. For women, militarized femininities did not present the same risk for re-mobilization in armed groups but were hampering both their wellbeing and their reintegration process.

7.4.1 Ex-combatant agency

In all the pathways, male ex-combatants from the AUC have described the process of brutal socialization in violence experienced within the paramilitary. What distinguishes male ex-combatants from the AUC that are part of this pathway from male AUC ex-combatants in the other pathways, however, is that they have maintained, and in certain cases re-enforced, the militarized masculinities after their demobilization. The men in this pathway displayed a variation in terms of the agency they exerted in this process, spanning from an expressed satisfaction with the money and power that comes with the participation in violent crime and conflict, and the legitimization of the continued perpetration of violence, to significant dissatisfaction with their life in general and an acknowledgement of the need to change. Agency in the process of construction of gender, understood as the meaning, motivation and purpose individuals place on their activities (see Kabeer 1999), was very low among ex-combatants of this latter group. On the other hand, among those who expressed satisfaction with their continued engagement in violent crime, agency did not have a positive connotation since it was exercised primarily to dominate others ("power over") through money, fear and violence rather than to define their own life-choices and pursue their own goals in the processes of construction of gender ("power to"). In comparison with ex-combatants in the other pathways, men who maintained militarized masculinities expressed low levels of

gender awareness, and made no references to gender and feminism, nor to practical implications of gender inequality. They expressed low levels of having made conscious choices in the construction of gender.

Men in this pathway also brought up challenges related to mental health and trauma-related illnesses, as well as abuse of alcohol and other drugs. While problems with mental health and abuse of alcohol and drugs are by no means limited to men assuming militarized forms of masculinities, ACR (2010) has noted that ex-combatants with these problems are often unable to establish and maintain social and family relations, assume responsibilities, tolerate frustration, interact with institutions in the process of reintegration and continue the components of the reintegration programme related to education, health and economic reintegration. The ACR also notes that the majority of the ex-combatants with these challenges are male. My research supports this analysis and shows both how the men in this pathway brought up these challenges more often during the interviews, reflecting their effect on sustaining militarized masculinities. While men in different pathways expressed less evidence than women of having made conscious choices regarding the constructions of gender, men in this pathway expressed little reflection and awareness of gender. Their life continued to be marked by militarization and, for many men in this pathway, it was a struggle for survival. Some did not experience a disruption in the perpetration of violence, never handed in their weapon and went straight into new paramilitary organizations, thus limiting their ability to embark on a process of gender transformation. Those male ex-combatants who were complying with the DDR programme, meanwhile, were less pressured by the society to change their gender identity. This contrasted with women who immediately experienced how militarized femininities constitute a deviation from traditional gender norms. Furthermore, in a county that is still experiencing conflict and militarization, there are more avenues for men to continue to maintain militarized masculinities. Such expressions of masculinities found avenues both within illegal realms (to re-engage in crime or abuse illegal drugs), and within legal realms (such as in night life and bars, or establishing affective relations built on an idealization of strong, powerful toxic masculinities). Still, while some expressed feelings of power, this was, among all pathways, the group of men who expressed the lowest level of satisfaction with their life situation. My research does not make claims as to causality, but just notes the co-existence of militarized masculinities, trauma-related illnesses and a high level of self-inflicted, intra-personal and community level violence within this group. Men in this group that maintained militarized

masculinities also expressed more fear about the risk of being subjected to fatal violence by an armed actor.

Another strand of variation was that the links with militarized forms of masculinities were less salient among former guerrilla soldiers than among former paramilitaries. My research shows examples of guerrilla ex-combatants re-mobilizing in armed groups as well as examples of how militarized masculinity among former FARC soldiers has been reinforced by the Colombian State through the utilization of ex-combatants for intelligence. Men who had collaborated with the Colombian army described a low level of agency and even having been forced to engage in continued warfare. Following a similar pattern as several paramilitary ex-combatants, male former FARC soldiers in this pathway also engaged in self-inflicted and domestic violence. While former paramilitary descriptions depicted the ability to continue to gain money as one of the crucial factors behind their maintenance of militarized forms of masculinity, since this offered a route to maintain status and power, the links with the constructions of militarized masculinities were more prominent for combatants with a strong ideological conviction. While ex-combatants from the FARC described that they had knowledge of other former FARC soldiers joining new paramilitary groups, it would have been interesting to also analyse the connections between militarized masculinities and re-mobilization. Since the collective disarmament of FARC has gone hand-in-hand with the rapid emergence of both FARC dissident groups and the growth of paramilitary groups, this emerges as an important field for further research. As for the M-19 ex-combatants, while they displayed a co-existence of hegemonic and non-hegemonic gender relations, they otherwise differed substantially from former FARC and AUC combatants in terms of maintenance of militarized masculinities and did not continue to engage in violence to the same extent.

My research also shows that women ex-combatants in this pathway were unable to deconstruct certain traits of militarized and hyper-masculinized femininities, even after a long process of transformation, sometimes to the detriment to their own wellbeing and their process of reintegration. While these women expressed conflicting opinions about this legacy of armed struggle, the more dominant and encompassing these expressions and roles proved, the more dissatisfaction women expressed.

7.4.2 Effect on violence and conflict

My research shows that male ex-combatants in this pathway who maintain and/or re-enforce militarized gender regimes to a large extent contribute to violence and conflict through the engagement in new armed groups and organized crime. Interview participants in this pathway described how after their demobilization they have continued to commit a variety of crimes and engage in new paramilitary groups. The interview participants spoke about their re-engagement in violence openly, even in those interviews that took place in the Government-run reintegration centres, which can be interpreted as indicating both that they did not seem to feel a need to display a correct attitude, and as a sign that they did not fear any risk of repercussions. Using the facilities of the Government, as I describe in the methodological chapter, was primarily a security measure and I considered it a potential limitation to conduct the interviews in this environment as it might generate hesitation among interview participants to speak freely about experiences. While at the start of the interview I assured anonymity, it is clear that these individuals did not display any fear that I would pass the information onto the Government or that any legal action would be taken against them. Eriksson Baaz and Stern's (2010) research on the perpetration of sexual violence among former soldiers in the DRC showed that the soldiers changed their perceptions and their openness to speak about these crimes over time due to the increasing number of convictions of perpetrators of sexual violence. At the beginning of the research project, or in areas where soldiers had no close knowledge of convictions, interviewees spoke openly and freely about perpetration of sexual violence. By the later stages of the project, however, soldiers were more reluctant and seemed to feel a need to display a correct attitude. While the contexts are different, it is possible that the ex-combatants in this pathway spoke freely because they were not fearful of repercussions. Several described how they had left the reintegration programme and been engaged in armed violence and later re-activated to comply with the requirements posed by the Government. In my interviews, one ex-combatant who seemed to feel a need to display a correct attitude in relation to violence committed and ensure his innocence, was José, a former medical doctor of the FARC. While several lower-level ex-combatant nurses openly described how they had to undertake forced abortions, some at a stage where the babies where very developed, José provided a contrasting narrative. He agreed that women were not permitted to have children but said that women who failed to comply with the regulation were indeed able to give birth but had to leave the children with a relative. He described how he as the responsible doctor only provided abortion medication

to women who wanted an abortion. However, José went on to describe, how he has been accused by a women ex-combatant from the FARC of subjecting her to a forced abortion and how he was thus now under investigation.

> José*: There was a case of a woman. This case left me traumatized. It was unknown how many months pregnant she was. She didn't allow us to make examinations. I was always very temperamental, but this case traumatized me. She took the pills [for abortion] and she locked herself in at a health centre, in a room. The next day they [other combatants] got to where she was and they told me to go to the bathroom to pick it up. It was a fully formed child, with nails and everything...! I went to pick it up, and I freaked out. We tried to revive it, take it to the hospital closer, but this idiot [the woman] had thrown it in the toilet… when she felt he was coming out...*
>
> Question: *So he drowned in the bathroom?*
>
> José: Exactly! And I apologized to my God once and a thousand times, because I was the one who gave her the [abortion] pills although I didn't do anything more... I ask for forgiveness...to God. It makes me angry that this idiot demobilized and said that I had forced her to do it!
>
> Question: *She accuses you of having forced her to do it?*
>
> José*: According to her and according to the investigators, I forced her!*
>
> Question: *That's a crime.*
>
> José*: Yes, against humanity... and it was not like that. SHE did it this way.* (José, former member of AUC)

The quote shows that José was aware that perpetrating a forced abortion is a crime against humanity, for which the DDR programme does not provide amnesty. That he stressed his innocence supports the idea that ex-combatants' discourse is clearly different if they fear that they will be held accountable.

Thus, my research suggests that many of the male ex-combatants in this pathway were not only maintaining militarized gender identities and continuing engagement in violence but many who spoke openly about past and current crimes were also confident that they would not be held accountable for past war crimes and crimes against humanity, for which there is no amnesty, and that they are not fearful about facing repercussions for new crimes committed. Importantly, it should be noted that neither those who fear accountability, like José, nor the ex-combatants in this pathway who speak openly about the crimes committed since demobilization are contributing to transitional justice efforts to ensure truth and reconciliation. This stands in stark contrast to the

case study described in Pathway One, where the ex-combatant Orlando has effectively deconstructed militarized masculinity, confessed his crimes and asked the victims for forgiveness.

Finally, my research shows that the maintenance of militarized masculinities has a very different effect on society than the maintenance of militarized femininities. Militarized femininities did not present the same risk for re-mobilization in armed groups but hampering the reintegration process and wellbeing of the women. At the same time, it should not be overlooked that women can also become spoilers of the peacebuilding process, albeit to a lesser extent. My research shows that in particular former paramilitary women combatants in this pathway, like women in the other pathways, described that new paramilitary groups had tried to recruit them. I have described a case of a woman who exercised leadership following her demobilization, who was still considering re-engaging in an armed group in the year before her interview. In Pathway One I have also discussed how women that managed to transform their gender performance may still under certain circumstances be at risk of re-directing their leadership to re-enforce militarized gender identities and re-engage in criminal activities, revealing that there is sometimes a fine line between the different pathways.

8.   Pathway Four: Transformations for Sexual and Gender Minorities.[26]

While the importance of ensuring that DDR programmes are gender responsive has been increasingly recognized by the international community, policy guidance has failed to include ex-combatants who do not conform to a narrow, binary understanding of gender and make no reference to sexual and gender minorities. Similarly, LGBT ex-combatants have been overlooked by scholars and very little is known of their experiences both within armed groups and as they transition to civilian life. Due to the lack of research in this area, this chapter takes a step back and starts by exploring the experiences of LGBT ex-combatants within their respective former armed groups. While LGBT combatants are often in a highly vulnerable position, my research reveals large differences between the armed groups, as well as important exceptions within groups that contribute to LGBT combatants' varied experiences. It is important to understand these variations in order then to examine the LGBT ex-combatants' experiences after demobilization. In the second part of this chapter, therefore, I examine the experiences of LGBT ex-combatants in the processes of reintegration. My research shows how DDR processes may generate particularly significant and rapid transformations for sexual and gender minorities. The chapter also outlines some of the particular challenges faced by LGBT ex-combatants due to discrimination based on their sexual orientation and gender identity. Finally, using an intersectional approach to gender and sexuality, I analyse the LGBT ex-combatants' experiences in relation to the three pathways. I explore the effect of these pathways, both in the lives of the LGBT ex-combatants and in the society in the process of reintegration. I argue that policymakers and researchers should incorporate a gender perspective in DDR that moves beyond a narrow, binary understanding of gender in order to respond to the needs, ensure the participation, and protect the rights of LGBT ex-combatants.

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[26] This chapter builds on two articles I have written in the journals *Women, Gender and Research* (Thylin 2018) and *Sexualities* (Thylin 2019). Text in the first two parts of the chapter has previously been published in one of these articles, focusing either on the experiences of LGBT ex-combatants after leaving armed struggle (Thylin 2018), or their experiences within their respective former armed groups (Thylin 2019).

8.1 From Assassination to Acceptance: The Variation in the Experiences of LGBT Combatants Within Armed Groups

Identifying, or being identified by others, as belonging to a sexual and gender minority often adds additional layers of vulnerability to lives already under threat in conflict (Myrttinen & Daigle 2017). My research shows that this is largely true not only for civilians but also for combatants in different armed groups. This research also demonstrates that significant differences, ranging from assassination and other forms of violence to relative tolerance and inclusion, exist between different armed groups and describe how they impact the combatants' varied experiences.

8.1.1 Assassinations and sexual violence in the AUC

The paramilitary organization AUC was known for brutal violence and "social cleansing" operations against LGBT individuals and communities (Gill 2009, Amnesty International 2011, Serrano 2014, National Center for Historical Memory 2015, Myrttinen & Daigle 2017). LGBT ex-combatants attested to this picture by describing the inner workings of the fierce treatment of LGBT persons within their organization's own ranks. They described how sexual minorities were not tolerated in the civilian population, and the communities where they were operating, and how it was absolutely forbidden to deviate from heterosexual norms within the group. Interviewees also described incidents in which homosexual combatants were executed immediately after their sexual orientation was revealed.

Sexual violence was used as a punishment for deviation from heterosexual norms within the AUC. Payne (2016) has previously described incidents of extreme sexual violence followed by assassination perpetrated against homosexual combatants within the ranks of the AUC. In my interview with her, ex-combatant Adriana[27] described an incident in which three of her paramilitary colleagues subjected her partner to an anti-lesbian gang rape.

> *The two of us were staying together in a room when they entered. They opened the door and they were going to rape me. I didn't let them and it was at this moment she said: "Don't do anything to her, do it to me instead!" She did everything for me. Then she was raped by*

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[27]All classifications of ex-combatants' sexual orientation and gender identity are based on their self-identification.

three men, three of them. (Adriana, heterosexual,[28] former member of AUC)

This incident of sexual violence was interpreted by Adriana as an attack based on sexual orientation in order to impel the women to change their behaviour and adhere to heterosexual norms. Shortly after her demobilization, Adriana's partner disappeared, and she believes that her partner was assassinated by her former paramilitary colleagues.

8.1.2 The double threat of death in the FARC

Among the Colombian guerrilla groups, FARC is known for forcefully upholding the prohibition of LGBT persons in their ranks (National Center for Historical Memory 2015, Theidon 2009). In this research, both LGBT and heterosexual ex-combatants from the FARC concurred that deviation from heterosexual norms was absolutely forbidden in the organization. They described how the common course of action when deviation from heterosexual norms was revealed was to be put before FARC's internal "war trial" and thereafter executed by shooting. That LGBT combatants were condemned to death by FARC's internal war trial indicates that this violence was condoned by the organization and reflected group policy. LGBT ex-combatants described how they were living under the double fear of death; of being killed by the enemy or by their own organization if their sexual orientation was revealed.

In certain cases, LGBT combatants were discharged from the organization. Ex-combatants described that whether or not an LGBT combatant was executed or discharged depended on several factors, including their previous behaviour within the guerrilla group but also their family's history and support of the group. In my interview with him, Pablo described how he had received warnings from the commanders that he would be brought before the war trial because of rumours that he was gay. His cousin, who was the girlfriend of one of the senior commanders, played a particularly important role in ensuring his release.

> *My cousin was the big reason why they let me go. I never told her I was bisexual but there were a lot of rumours. (…) She told me that this cannot go on like this and that she was going to talk to the commander to find a solution. "Because even if you are not executed here, if one day they would send you to another front you will be executed immediately,"*

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[28] Adriana, who self-identified as heterosexual, was included in this study due to her experience of sexual practices that fall outside normative heterosexuality. While she was part of the AUC she engaged in a sexual relationship with another woman.

she said. Everything then depends on the structure they have. She suggests, makes her comments with the commander, the commander meets with the superior command. They analyse my behaviour and trajectory of my family, and the support that my family has always given to the organization for many years. It was because of this that they released me. One day a letter arrived, and the commander called me and they said to me: "You are going home". They didn't articulate why, just because of "your problem." (Pablo, bisexual, former member of the FARC)

Despite the letter of discharge, the combatant feared that he would eventually be executed. While being accompanied to leave the guerrilla camp he described how he trembled as he suspected he would be shot as a way of getting rid of him discreetly. Ex-combatants described how they believed that LGBT combatants were executed not only because the organization considered them not fit for combat but because the organization did not want them to be discharged and returned to their communities to "spread homosexuality". While FARC has now come to recognize the rights of the LGBT community in the 2016 peace agreement, LGBT ex-combatants I interviewed criticized the lack of acknowledgement of the violence perpetrated against members of its own organization. In my interview with Mariana, who spent twenty years within the FARC, she called for accountability and justice for the execution of LGBT combatants during the conflict. Transitional justice mechanisms and policy interventions should not only ensure that these crimes are included in truth-seeking processes but also hold commanders liable for patterns of violence against sexual and gender minorities, including within their own ranks.

8.1.3 M-19 in the vanguard of inclusion

M-19 stands in stark contrast to both AUC and FARC when it comes to tolerance for diversity, and acceptance of sexual and gender minorities in its rank. M-19 emerged as an urban guerrilla movement, characterized by its insistence on equality (Madariaga 2006) and by the large number of women and of urban, middle class and university-educated members in its ranks (Londoño & Nieto 2006). This demographic influenced gender relations, and M-19 was considered more flexible and open than other guerrilla groups in Colombia (Dietrich Ortega 2017). Dietrich Ortega's (2015) research has shown how hegemonic and non-hegemonic patterns in gender relations co-existed in the group. While she did not analyse sexual minorities, my research shows a similar co-existence of hegemonic and non-hegemonic patterns governing sexual orientation.

While discrimination certainly existed, LGBT persons were not prohibited from participating in the organization. Both lesbian and homosexual interviewees described how they were openly living in homosexual relationships with other members of the M-19, as well as with people unrelated to the organization. During the time of its operation, neither gender, feminism nor LGBT rights were conceptualized by the organization, nor had it developed policy governing these areas. Elvira, who now considers herself a lesbian feminist, described how she was unaware of feminism and LGBT rights at this time. She first started questioning herself when she developed a lesbian relationship during her incarceration in a women's prison.

> *At this time, this [being lesbian] was not something you talked about and it didn't seem like a possible choice in life. Now I'm questioning why one kept quiet and hid it; why we never talked about it? Perhaps because one looked around and saw that this was not something normal, right? But at that time, I had not rationalized it, nor thought about it, nor questioned it. (...) But sitting in my cell, I began to question, and ask myself what was really happening to me. I still did not have the words lesbian or LGBT.* (Elvira, lesbian, former member of M-19)

Javier, who did not disclose his sexual orientation within the organization, described how he believes that the organization was a reflection of the wider society at the time, in which discrimination was prominent, but where the heterogeneity of the organization's members at the same time generated an increased tolerance and respect. There were also accounts of the top leadership not only being aware of the sexual orientation and gender identities of LGBT combatants but also protecting the rights of LGBT combatants. Marcelo, who came out of the closet before joining M-19, referred to incidents in which colleagues called him derogatory names, particularly when they had been drinking. He stressed that this was not accepted by the senior leadership, and pointed to one incident which was very important for him in which the leader of M-19 and members of the superior command punished his colleagues for this behaviour. Marcelo also established a small unit comprised solely of homosexual men in Bogota. The unit operated during a short period (from 1983 to 1984) and worked closely with young male sex workers. While not formally associated with M-19, these men supported the unit in different areas, for example hiding and storing weapons. Marcelo described how the unit provided him with a platform for vindicating the rights of sexual minorities:

> *The objective was to generate visibility within the Colombian left. As we were discriminated against, because of AIDS and other things, it was a way of demonstrating*

that we could earn this political space, to promote respect and set a precedent that we could be part of all the political spaces of Colombia. (Marcelo, homosexual, former member of M-19)

The formation of a unit of homosexual men within the M-19 illustrates how the organization was different from other organizations, and in the vanguard of inclusion long before these issues started to be more widely debated in the Colombian society. As a comparison, it was not until almost a decade after M-19 had demobilized that the Colombian Constitutional court ruled that the prohibition of homosexuals from serving in the armed forces was unconstitutional (El Tiempo 1999). This shows that hegemonic and non-hegemonic patterns in gender relations can co-exist in armed groups and that these organizations in certain aspects can promote more inclusive and equitable practices than the societies in which they operate.

8.2 Strategies for Survival: From Heterosexual Encounters to Demobilization

The LGBT combatants interviewed applied a range of different strategies to avoid violence and discrimination within their respective armed groups. The most common, and often a crucial strategy to survival, was to hide any deviation from hegemonic heterosexual identities or practices. While some of the ex-combatants from the M-19 I interviewed did not declare their sexual orientation openly because they considered it a private matter, or because they did not consider it a feasible way of life, several of the interviewees from the FARC and AUC described how they made extensive efforts to hide their sexual orientation and gender identity to stay alive.

8.2.1 Heterosexual encounters to affirm masculinity

The imperative to avoid any suspicion of deviation from heterosexual norms often led LGBT combatants to engage in heterosexual encounters, or develop close friendships to simulate a heterosexual relationship. One ex-combatant who engaged in heterosexual encounters to avoid suspicion on several occasions described how he, as a new recruit, was approached by the girlfriend of the commander.

> *She approached me. Since I was new, I could not reject her because she was going to say "No, he rejected me the first time, the second time, the third time ... well the man must be a fag!" So I made the decision [to engage in sexual encounter with her] so no one would think I'm homosexual. I thought at this moment that the only thing I can do is to do it, even if she was the woman of the commander. Really very complicated. But the only thing that*

could happen to me for having sex with her would be that they could punish me. They could not send me to war trial. They could sanction me, but not kill me. (David, homosexual, former member of the FARC)

This quote illustrates that sexuality and sexual relations, in general, were regulated by the FARC and AUC (Kunz & Sjöberg 2009, Mendez 2012), with combatants having to request permission to engage in heterosexual encounters or relationships.[29] In that context the quote also shows that affirming heterosexual hegemonic gender identities in order to avoid suspicion of deviation from heterosexual norms was more important for this combatant than potentially being punished for breaking the regulations about engaging in a heterosexual encounter without permission, and risking the jealousy of the commander.

8.2.2 "Cacorros" and the risk of mortal betrayal

In all three armed groups, ex-combatants described a cultural distinction between gender roles, sexual orientation and sexual practices, in particular a distinction between perceived masculine "activity" and feminine "passivity." While these distinctions have been studied in-depth in different parts of Latin America (see Kulick 1998, Prieur 1998, Parker 1999, Gutmann 2007), the implications in this particular context in the midst of conflict were described as a matter of life and death.

In Colombia, the word "cacorro" is used to describe a man who maintains what is considered an "active" attitude through penetrating his same-sex partner. While the cacorro does not compromise

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[29] Within the FARC, there were a set of rules governing romantic relationship. The couple had to ask the commander for permission if they wanted to sleep together with their partner and sexual relations may be limited to only specific days (Mendez 2012). Kunz and Sjöberg (2009: 29) has identify a hierarchy of four different types of relationships within the organization, including single combatants referred to as "libres", combatants with sporadic relationships, combatants who have a romantic relationship and who are allowed to sleep together and finally, those who are considered "married" which have been approved by the commander. While the latter group is allowed to live together in the camp and not be separated, all the other relationships can be terminated by a commander or by the transfer of one of the combatants to a different geographic location or front. Mendez (2012: 146) has also argued that while women's and men's sexuality indeed is controlled, there are ways in which "sexuality is controlled in a gender-specific way". For example, her research points to the way in which romantic relationships between a FARC member and a civilian are officially prohibited and can be severely punished. Still, FARC men were often allowed to have civilian girlfriends while women and girls were not given the same permission. In the AUC, regulations of romantic relationships were less strict than in the FARC, possibly due to the lower number of women and the more decentralized nature of the group. The regulations were therefore more dependent on the specific commander (Mendez 2012), which my research shows hold true also for non-heterosexual relationships.

his masculinity, the penetration feminizes the partner and construes him as homosexual (Serrrano 1997). David defined the "cacorro" in the following way:

> *The "cacorro" is a man who likes the ass as we say vulgarly, but without touching, without kissing, without caressing. Who simply wants to do it. An ass, he puts it in, he comes and that's it. That's the cacorro. And in the guerrilla there are too many people of this type. He is not considered gay.* (David, homosexual, former member of the FARC)

Cacorros were described by the interviewees to be plentiful in all three groups. Previous research by Payne (2016) has described an incident in which a paramilitary commander discovered two male combatants having sex. In this case, the man who had been penetrated was tortured, raped and killed, while his sexual partner was only punished. Payne argues that this casts the "passive" sexual role as more transgressive of normative expectations. Within the FARC, my research shows that cacorros were considered a major threat, as they could report their partner to the commanders. Several ex-combatants described cases in which a sexual partner had betrayed a homosexual or bisexual combatant and this had led to their assassination. Pablo was particularly frightened when one of his sexual partners reported a homosexual combatant.

> *I witnessed the case of one homosexual who was shot because he had been with a guy, whom I had also been with many times. This guy went and told the commander that the other guy was gay and that he had approached him to have sex. So the commander sent him to war trial and he was shot eight days later. After that, I had a conversation with the guy that I had been with sexually and I asked him why he had done this. With what intention? Since he had never said anything, never reported on me. Then he answered that the truth was, that the other guy was ugly, that he was tired of him and this and that. But then I asked him why he did this if he was like this too. I mean, maybe he never thought about this part, but, well, he was also bisexual. Then I asked him why he had never reported me. And he basically told me that it was because he liked me and that whenever we searched for each other, I always pleased him, that's why he didn't do it to me.* (Pablo, bisexual, former member of the FARC)

Several men were critical of this distinction between sexual orientation and sexual conduct and suggested it was contradictory to consider cacorros heterosexual. Within this complex reality, ex-combatants made different choices about whether or not to engage in LGBT relationships. While combatants such as Pablo, despite the fear of being betrayed, described how he enjoyed his sexuality, other interviewees did not engage in any sexual conduct during their time in the armed group as they knew that no one could be trusted with such a secret. Mariana, now openly living as a transgender woman, stayed in the jungle with the FARC without engaging in a sexual relationship

with anyone for twenty years. In certain cases, their sexual orientation and gender identity was part of the reasons why combatants left the organization. Apart from being discharged, several combatants left the group either to follow a partner that had demobilized or because they wanted to express their sexual orientation and gender identities.

8.3 Analysing Exceptions of Toleration

Inconsistencies and contradictions in the prohibitions against LGBT persons participating in armed forces have been noted around the world. This includes examples where prohibitions have been enforced rigorously at times, while in other eras, particularly during wars and when troops were in short supply, commanders have forced gay and lesbian personnel to remain in service even if they wanted to be discharged (Belkin 2014). While less is known about non-state armed groups, Dietrich Ortega (2017) has described how insurgent groups enhance operational functionality for armed struggle through the reconfiguration of power relations. In her comparative study of gender arrangements in Latin American insurgencies, Dietrich Ortega (2017: 256) has noted examples where "*homosexual orientation was constructed as irrelevant*", when the performance of the combatants added clearly to the insurgent cause. My research also reveals exceptions to the general practices that prohibited LGBT persons from being part of FARC and AUC. In this section I will analyse the cases of a transgender woman who was a member of the AUC, and a homosexual man who was part of the FARC. I will not analyse the cases of LGBT combatants who expressed their sexual orientation within M-19 because, even though discriminatory practices certainly existed (as described earlier), there was no prohibition on LGBT persons within this group.

8.3.1 Exceptions within the FARC and AUC

Alejandra, a transgender woman, described herself as a "special case." She was working as a hairdresser in her municipality when the AUC gained control of her region. She became acquainted with several paramilitaries when they came to cut hair and after a while she started going to paramilitary camps to work as a hairdresser. During one of these trips she fell in love with one of the bodyguards of the commander and they established a relationship. She thereafter became more and more involved and came to work in different capacities directly with the commander of the bloc. Alejandra described how the organization gave her respect and liberty to be who she is. When she joined the organization, she was dressing as a woman, had let her hair grow long and had

undergone surgeries. She completed her transition with breast augmentation surgery while she was part of the AUC.

Within the FARC, José provides an example of an important exception. He eventually became the medical doctor responsible for one large bloc. During his time in the FARC he requested permission from the commander to establish a relationship with another homosexual combatant and the two worked together inseparably. José looks back at his time in the FARC as a beautiful time in his life. As the experience of these two combatants stands in stark contrast to the experiences of other LGBT combatants, it leads to the question why they were accepted within their respective groups.

A couple of factors stand out as critical for analysing these two exceptional cases. A crucial factor is the acceptance of the commanders. Due to the AUC being a less centralized organization, their practices in regard to gender identities and sexual orientation varied to a certain extent, depending on each commander (National Center for Historical Memory 2015). In spite of the AUC being the armed group responsible for the vast majority of targeted attacks against LGBT persons, some of its paramilitary groups have been described as having shown greater tolerance towards the non-heterosexual practices of their combatants including acceptance of transgender partners (López Castañeda & Myrttinen 2014, National Center for Historical Memory 2015). In the case of Alejandra, she described how she was lucky to have a commander who treated her as a daughter and protected her against any discrimination.

> *He [the commander of the bloc] treated me as a daughter. He told me: "You will not have any problem here. You are well received here regardless of your gender. You will be respected. Nobody will make trouble for you and if that happens, you simply tell me and I will take care of the problem because they have to respect you as if you were a member of my family." So I felt very protected.* (Alejandra, trans woman, former member of AUC)

While the commander repeatedly demonstrated in actions that he protected her against discrimination from the combatants under his command, when meeting with other commanders of his same rank who might question her position within the group, he asked her to discreetly leave the camp and hide for a couple of days. This further illustrates how her participation in the group was fully dependent on this particular commander.

In contrast to the AUC, FARC was a more centralized organization in which the toleration of deviation from heterosexual norms was not dependent on an individual commander. José described how he was accepted by his line of commanders. It is clear from José's narrative that the commanders operated strategically as they considered that he had skills that were important for the organization.

> *I only once had a problem with a combatant who told me: "you should not be here". So I talked to a commander and he stopped him. He told him: "We need him more than we need you. Combatants can be found everywhere, but not doctors."* (José, homosexual, former member of the FARC).

Dietrich Ortega (2017) has described how a particular skill or capacity that is considered a strategic asset to a non-state armed group can overrule stigmatization dynamics that otherwise would sanction combatants who did not conform to the group's ideals. In addition to the organization's strategic interest in José's skill set, the commanders concluded that they "*knew who he was when he was brought so he therefore should be accepted*." Other ex-combatants described how LGBT persons who openly expressed their sexual orientation should not have been recruited and could therefore not be "blamed" for breaking the regulations. In these cases, the responsibility was placed on the recruiters who failed to adhere to the rules. The exceptional toleration of José's deviation from heterosexual norms demonstrates how the concept of enhanced operational functionality can help explain what appear to be contradictory practices of context-specific toleration of deviation from heterosexual norms within non-state armed groups.

8.3.2 Gender hierarchies among LGBT combatants

Both José and Alejandra gave examples of how their respective organizations, despite allowing their participation, did not accept other LGBT persons. This supports the conclusion that they were exceptional cases. Alejandra explained that on one occasion she had brought another trans woman to the paramilitary camp but that woman was not welcomed by the organization. Alejandra explains that the other trans woman was not accepted because "*she was kind of scandalous and she wanted to be the girlfriend of everyone*." Alejandra described how she, in turn, had gained respect within the organization, which led to it accepting her. In this setting, it was therefore not non-conforming gender identity but gender expression including non-conforming behaviours and practices that were considered disruptive to the group's social order and that were not tolerated.

Alejandra believed that transgender women should keep a very low-key profile. This also led her to defend the violence directed toward other LGBT persons when the AUC gained control of her region, arguing that they were targeted because of their "scandalous" behaviour and disorganized lifestyle.

Just as Alejandra distinguished herself from the majority of other transgender women, José distinguished himself from many other homosexual men. He saw a clear difference between himself as a "*serious*" homosexual man and other "*flamboyant, effeminate queens*." Both Alejandra's and José's arguments can be interpreted as an attempt to erect gender hierarchies among LGBT persons. As sexual minorities tend to be marginalized, it seemed particularly important for these two individuals to distinguish themselves from other LGBT persons in order to enhance their own position. José's usage of feminine pronouns (for example: *una mariquita, una loca*) when he spoke condescendingly about other homosexual men, and masculine pronouns when he spoke about himself and what he considered more "respectable" forms of homosexuality, illustrate how femininity is considered inferior in the struggle for positioning within the framework of hegemonic masculinities. That men who assume what is understood as the feminine "passive" sexual role are considered more disruptive to the organization's social order also illustrates how feminization is used as strategy for subordination among LGBT combatants. This has led researchers to suggest a link between violence against sexual minorities and the oppression of women in a context marked by misogyny and patriarchy (Payne 2016).

In certain cases, this construction of gender hierarchies proved to have a significant impact on other LGBT combatants. In addition to expressing condescending opinions, José also admitted that he had discriminated against other LGBT persons. In one case, he even threatened to kill another homosexual combatant who was making sexual insinuations while a group of combatants were showering together.

> *I told the commander: You have two options: you remove him or I kill him. I'm not going to be surrounded by crazy queens. The commander responded: "Doctor", I said: "Yes camarada". "With all due respect, you are truly strange. You like to sleep with men and this guy is just like you". I said: "No, do not confuse me with him! He is a crazy queen, I am gay. When have you seen me going on like that? Send him back home because he is a disgrace to the organization."* (José, homosexual, former member of the FARC).

This incident demonstrates how LGBT identity was not the predominant salient factor among the combatants, and did not foment neither trust nor support among LGBT combatants within the AUC and the FARC. On the contrary, this incident demonstrates how José's privileged position enabled him to uphold the hierarchical, hegemonic and gender-discriminatory system as he proved himself more intolerant than his superiors. This illustrates the importance of understanding agency of LGBT ex-combatants not limited to analysing acts of resistance to power but also how the ability to act unfolds in relations of power (see Baines 2016). This serves as a testament to the intersecting vectors of power and identities which influenced the varied experiences of LGBT combatants. The understanding of the varied experiences of LGBT combatants that is presented here lays the foundation for an understanding of their transition to civilian life.

8.4 Leaving War and the Closet?

The transition to civilian life is a process that often generates opportunities for multiple profound changes for the ex-combatants. My research shows that sexual and gender minorities may experience particularly significant and rapid transformations of roles, identities, expressions and practice following their demobilization. After having been forced to hide their sexual orientation and gender identity within their respective armed groups, demobilization allowed interviewees to embark on the process of disclosing their sexual orientation and gender identity. Among the ex-combatants who were able to express their sexual orientation and gender identity while within their respective armed groups, demobilization provided a higher degree of autonomy to make decisions regarding their sexual relationships and future. At the same time, my research unveils the ways in which other interviewees grapple with questions surrounding their sexuality and/or do not wish to disclose their sexual orientation.

8.4.1 Embracing sexual orientation and gender identity

Among the ex-combatants who were forced to hide their sexual orientation and gender identity in the armed groups, transition to civilian life provided opportunities for the transformation of roles, identities, expressions and practices. The opportunity to be their "*true self*" was also a reason for some of the ex-combatants to leave the armed group. For some, one of the first things they did after leaving the war was to disclose their sexual orientation to their families.

> *When I had just left the Peace Home [the Government's demobilization centres], I arrived*

at my new place in Villavicencio. One of these days, I made the decision. I called my mom on the phone and I told her, crying, I told her. I wanted her to know, to know who her son is (Pablo, bisexual, former member of the FARC).

Ex-combatants described how several of their family members, although conservative in their views, still accepted their sexual orientation and gender identity, either gradually or in some cases, instantly. In the context of war, David described how his mother thought she had lost her son and that he had been killed during a large bombardment of the camp where he was located. When they reunited after his demobilization, she decided to stand by his side.

My mom told me: "Don't worry my son, if you are homosexual I will not lose you again. I will not bury you again. I will support you. I will respect you. You can count on me from this moment and the rest of my life." So she gave me that encouragement. I said to myself: Who else do I fear? Let's come out of the closet as they call it. (David, homosexual, former member of the FARC).

For others, this journey took longer and included embarking on the process of transitioning. Mariana spent twenty years in the jungle with the FARC without being able to express her sexual orientation and gender identity. She defected from the organization with the plan to transition from male to female and let people know who she is. This required her to go through several phases, which implied starting to identify as gay/homosexual, and finally, as a trans woman.

I always had the intention of starting this process, from being a homosexual at the time when I left there [the FARC]. Then I decide to take the step, even if I had difficulties; I wanted to take the step to become a trans girl, because seeing the body of a woman is the most beautiful. I always wanted to have the body of a woman.(Mariana, trans woman, former member of the FARC).

Two years after her demobilization, Mariana built up the courage to walk around her neighbourhood with makeup, dressed like a woman. She described this as a gradual process which she is still in the midst of. She has not been able to disclose her gender identity in all contexts and she also struggles to sustain her transgender hormonal treatment due to financial constraints.

For others, demobilization was not such a decisive moment. Elvira engaged in her first sexual experience with another girl when she was twelve years old. During her time in M-19, she had one romance with a woman but except for this experience she only engaged in sexual relationships

with men. Twelve years after her demobilization she left her longstanding partner with whom she has three daughters after falling in love with another woman.

> *It was an attraction so strong that I said to myself: "I have always denied myself this opportunity. I have never let it prosper. This time I am going to take the fight." At this time, I knew very little about LGBT. I knew very little about lesbians. I knew very little about this world, but I told myself that I was going to give myself this opportunity. I will not deny it. My two oldest daughters were teenagers, 14 and 13 years old, and my youngest daughter was eight-years-old, and I lived with Luis [her former partner]. I started to feel this sensation.* (Elvira, lesbian, former member of M-19).

Elvira described how up until this point she had not been aware of her rights and did not consider a same-sex relationship a feasible way of life. She now identifies as a lesbian feminist and she and her partner are both engaged in the women's rights movement in Colombia.

My research also shows that among those ex-combatants able to express their sexual orientation and gender identity within the armed groups, demobilization still provided them with greater autonomy to make decisions regarding their sexual relationships and their future. Alejandra, a trans woman who was part of the paramilitary AUC, described the transition back to civilian life as 'smooth'. However, even though she described how she had been accepted as a trans woman within the armed group, the process of reintegration provided her with more personal freedom.

> *I have more freedom here and now, because I run my world. I handle all aspects. I decide if I want to go out with someone, or I say no. If I invite someone to my house, it's my own decision. If I'm going on a trip with someone, it's because I want to, and I do not have to tell anyone or ask anyone permission. I don't have to ask a Commander "Hey! I'm going to go to this place!" No. So there is a big difference in this aspect because over there [in the AUC], if I had a close relationship with someone, it was very secret because we had to keep a low profile, for the boys primarily. Because for me everyone knew my condition, but many men want to be with us trans or gay people, but only in secrecy because of fear.* (Alejandra, trans woman, former member of AUC).

Among the ex-combatants who engaged in secret sexual encounters within their respective groups, the ability to establish long-term relationships represented a significant change in their lives. Similarly, ex-combatants made a distinction between the ability to enjoy sexual encounters and the lack of opportunities to allow oneself to fall in love. Pablo described how he enjoyed his sexual encounters in secrecy within the FARC, but how he always longed for a "*serious, stable and beautiful relationship*". After demobilizing, he had to learn how to express affection and love.

It was very strange in the beginning because I felt embarrassed. I hugged him, and I felt like if he was going to turn away from me. As if he was going to reject me. Because it had always just been sex and nothing more. So I felt very shy. I became very cold when he hugged me, when I was going to… When I started to tell him the first beautiful words of love it was very difficult because my tongue just got stuck, I just couldn't! So I thought it was better to not say anything since I was used to this. I wanted to say it, but I just couldn't. Then, little by little, I started doing it. And when I saw that he did not turn away or feel sorry for me, then, well, it became normal. Touching him became easier because I knew he was not going to reject me. I prepared myself psychologically to touch him. Then I touched him, caressed him, gave him a kiss on the cheek, looked at him, his face. Caressing him was complicated but little by little I started doing it. I started discovering. I started doing what I wanted to do and enjoy it the way I wanted to enjoy it, to show what I felt for this person. (Pablo, bisexual, former member of the FARC).

Pablo's partner also demobilized from the FARC. However, since he had spent most of his time in an urban militia, he had been able to engage in sexual relationships. He was therefore less intimidated and able to show more affection. This illustrates how the transformation of roles, identities, expressions and practices that LGBT ex-combatants experience are affected not only by the regulations of the armed groups they formed part of, but also by the roles they held within the armed groups.

8.4.2 Uncertainties, secrecy and non-disclosure

While leaving armed groups can offer opportunities for combatants who had not been able to express their sexual orientation and gender identity, my research also shows how other ex-combatants chose not to disclose their sexual orientation and gender identity because they considered it a private matter. Others grappled with questions regarding their sexuality. Ramón, a former child soldier, described how he was disclosing his sexual orientation and attraction to men, but repeatedly said that he is still confused. Another ex-combatant struggling with questions regarding her sexuality was Adriana. She identified as heterosexual and it was only after several hours of interviewing that she revealed her lesbian experience. This was something she had not told anyone about before. Adriana described how, while she was part of the AUC, she had a heterosexual relationship with a man who was eventually executed by the organization on a charge of treason. After his death, she started spending more time with another woman with whom she initiated a sexual relationship.

I didn't want to have anything more to do with men. I was focused on something else. I didn't find another person, a man for me, right? I started going out with a woman. I started

to like women at that time because I started to feel a lot of hatred towards men because of everything I had seen. But it was not something that was born within me. It was something that developed, because within the group, I met a friend. There was always something between us and we went out together. She accompanied me a lot of times to the base, and little by little, I don't know, things started to happen between us. (Adriana, heterosexual, former member of AUC).

Adriana was planning to start a new life with her lesbian partner after she demobilized but her partner suddenly disappeared. She believes that her former paramilitary colleagues assassinated her because of their transgression of heterosexual norms. Although she is currently living in a heterosexual relationship she is still tormented by the hatred towards men that she started to feel after witnessing the cruelty of the men that were part of the paramilitary.

8.5 Particular Challenges for Ex-combatants of Sexual and Gender Minorities

While transitioning to civilian life may generate particularly large transformations and new opportunities for sexual and gender minorities, the LGBT ex-combatants interviewed also described particular challenges they face due to belonging to a sexual and gender minority. Researchers, policymakers and practitioners should consider, and further explore, these challenges to ensure that DDR processes are inclusive and responsive to LGBT ex-combatants.

8.5.1 Confronting multiple layers of discrimination

My research shows that LGBT ex-combatants are often exposed to multiple layers of discrimination based on their sexuality, gender and class as well as other socially constructed categorizations such as the stigma associated with being identified as a "demobilized" person. Pablo described how he is perceived as an *'assassin and bacteria'* in the society:

There are people who see the demobilized as assassins and there are people who see homosexuals as some kind of bacteria in the society. So for me this is something similar. It's the same type of destructive criticism. Because at the end of the day this is not benefiting the person: they are always trying to destroy the person. (Pablo, homosexual, former member of the FARC).

These multiple layers of discrimination were described to affect the social, economic and political reintegration of the ex-combatants. Mariana, who transitioned from man to woman, reflected on the new layers of discrimination she faces as a woman vis-a-vis as a transgender woman. She currently works in an automobile repair workshop where she is unable to express her gender

identity. While she would like to seek another job in a traditionally female sector, she notes that the wages in female-dominated sectors are much lower, which is a detriment for both cisgender and transgender women. In other contexts, she faced discrimination due to being transgender; such as in educational establishments, where she was not allowed to access the facilities dressed as a woman. Others, such as Elvira described how she was marginalized in her political ambitions by male ex-combatants, not because of her sexual orientation but because of her gender. While LGBT ex-combatants are exposed to multiple layers of discrimination, my research also shows that the LGBT ex-combatants are often resourceful as they confront this discrimination. After having been denied access to her school, Mariana mobilized other trans women which led to the abolition of this discriminatory practice:

> *I started talking to the rest of the trans girls, and we said that we feel uncomfortable having to come here dressed as a man. We want to be who we are! And I told them: Why don't we take the fight? I took the fight because I wanted to be free. I thought that now I want to be accepted by the institutions. [...] It was something marvellous because I met with other trans girls and they saluted me for what I did. I fought for our freedom. I have always wanted to get further. I think there are many trans girls who cannot leave their houses, cannot be happy as they wish to, and I always thought they could come further. I would like to be a political leader.* (Mariana, trans woman, former member of the FARC).

Mariana points to the fact that, despite just having started her transition process one year earlier, she took the initiative to defend the rights on behalf of all trans women. She described how as a demobilized trans woman she has to be willing to "*work twice as hard and fight twice as hard*".

8.5.2 Overcoming current and past violence

The decades-long conflict in Colombia has made it difficult to draw a line between structural discrimination and the conflict-related violence suffered by LGBT persons in the country (National Center for Historical Memory 2015). The interviewed ex-combatants described incidents of heteronormative-based violence directed towards them because of their sexual orientation and gender identities, before, during and after having participated in their respective armed groups. My research shows that this targeted violence against sexual and gender minorities impedes the ex-combatants' processes of reintegration.

Ex-combatants described how violence, as well as the fear of violence, limits their freedom. After his demobilization from the M-19, Marcelo immediately started working to support young

homosexual sex workers, and became a strong defender of LGBT rights. After denouncing violations of the rights of LGBT persons. and what he described as a social cleansing operation and assassination of sex workers carried out with the support of state actors, he survived two murder attempts. Due to his engagement as a defender of LGBT rights he was forced to flee the country and was eventually granted asylum in Spain where he still resides and continues to be an LGBT rights activist.

Ex-combatants also described how they continue to be haunted by trauma due to having been exposed to targeted sexual violence during their time spent in the armed groups. Adriana recounted how her lesbian partner was subjected to an anti-lesbian rape by three of her paramilitary colleagues. While ex-combatants from different armed groups welcomed the FARC's changing policy regarding LGBT persons, others called it a "farce". Among the Colombian guerrilla groups, the FARC is particularly known for forcefully upholding the prohibition of LGBT persons in their ranks (National Center for Historical Memory 2015). Mariana called for accountability and justice for the execution of LGBT combatants during the conflict.

> *They have to acknowledge that they had homosexual people in the ranks and that they were killed. The other day we were in a foundation and two representatives of the FARC came to talk about what they think publicly and they referred to the LGBT issue. But sooner or later they have to recognize that there were people they shot. And they have to recognize that there are still gay people in their ranks and they have to respect their rights.* (Mariana, trans woman, former member of the FARC)

This highlights the importance of transitional justice mechanisms and DDR programmes contributing also to accountability for crimes committed against LGBT combatants during conflict.

LGBT ex-combatants also described how the reintegration process has helped them overcome trauma related to their exposure to sexual violence before joining the armed groups. Ramón was sexually abused by several family and community members from the time he was seven years old. He became a member of the FARC when he was eleven years old, after having left his family. He described how the psychosocial and legal support he received as part of the DDR programme has helped him move on.

> *I have gotten over it. I have forgiven the people who hurt me so much. They are in the*

processes of investigation and will pay for it. (Ramón, homosexual, former member of the FARC).

The ex-combatants' experiences underline the importance of justice and comprehensive services for survivors of heteronormative and sexual violence perpetrated before, during and after participation in an armed group.

8.5.3 Establishing new support networks

Demobilization interrupts the belonging to a group and often strips ex-combatants of their entire network. Community support has therefore been identified as one important factor in generating resilience and contributing to reintegration, and indeed supporting ex-combatants to form new social networks has been described as critical for DDR programmes (UNDP & IAWG 2012). However, for LGBT ex-combatants, discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation and gender identity may in certain cases make it more difficult to build up these networks. The ex-combatants interviewed in this research described how they were living in isolation, without friends or family to support them.

Christian groups have been described as a source of help for ex-combatants to find ways of effecting change (Theidon 2015). In a case study of the evangelical church in Urabá in Colombia, Theidon describes how evangelical Christianity has an important role to play in helping ex-combatants find ways of effecting change, including through promoting "*alternative masculinities*" (2015: 468). However, Theidon makes no reference to sexual and gender minorities.

In contrast, the experiences of the LGBT ex-combatants in my research show how Christian groups, instead of promoting alternative masculinities, exacerbated heteronormative rigid gender norms and supported the constructions of hegemonic masculinities that not only subordinate but condemn non-heterosexual men. Ramón was placed in foster care after he left the armed group, and it was through his foster family that he came into contact with the church. The placement of Ramón in a foster family that did not accept his sexual orientation shows how failing to pay attention to the needs of sexual and gender minorities may cause additional harm to these individuals.

> They took me to church to forget all of this. I went to church with them, but I still like men. We did spiritual retreats for me to change my way of being, because of all that had

happened to me, to forget and become another person, but no. I changed but they wanted me to change my sexuality. Because it has to be a man with a woman, this is what God says. I know I am committing a sin… But my inclination is this, I like men. (Ramón, homosexual, former member of the FARC).

LGBT ex-combatants described how they experienced feelings of guilt and shame when turning to the Christian faith. Adriana, who was part of the paramilitary AUC, believes that the largest crime she has committed, and for which she asks God for forgiveness, is having engaged in a lesbian relationship.

While LGBT ex-combatants spoke of the importance of social networks, few had engaged with LGBT organizations. The only ex-combatants that had sustained their engagement in feminist and LGBT organizations were former combatants from M-19 who expressed a larger interest in political participation right from the time of demobilization. In contrast, other LGBT ex-combatants tended not to identify or engage with the LGBT organizations they had been introduced to. Alejandra described the LGBT organizations as decadent, reduced to distributing condoms and promoting prostitution. She did not want to take part in festivals or marches as she finds these activities "scandalous".

> *When they organize the demonstrations, the marches, the festivals, like the celebration of the international day of the LGBTI community, what do they do? They go out. I do not say that WE go out because I do not participate! They go out for the whole world to see them, almost naked, speaking vulgarly with their tits in the air, with their butts in mini shorts, as if they were on the beach. And this is not what we should show to the public, to an audience including children. So I know that people will say: "That's who they are! They have nothing else to show!" If they want to earn the respect of the society, look at what they are doing. What is this good for? To show themselves, to walk naked, to be prostitutes, thieves, consumers of drugs and alcohol and to make scandals? So I criticize them and they don't like it.* (Alejandra, trans woman, former member of AUC).

Ex-combatants' condescending description of other LGBT persons can be interpreted as an attempt to distinguish themselves and to erect gender hierarchies among LGBT persons and should be analysed against an understanding of heteronormative policies and practices within their former armed groups. Scholars have argued that armed conflict promotes and is dependent on a rigid heteronormative, hegemonic and gender-discriminatory system, and that DDR practitioners therefore should think of ways to "disarm" these hegemonic gender systems after conflict (Theidon 2009). LGBT ex-combatants such as Alejandra have also been socialized into this heteronormative

gender-discriminatory system. At the same time, my research points to the large variations between the experiences and attitudes of the interviewees, ranging from ex-combatants who expressed condescending or discriminatory attitudes towards other LGBT persons to those who consider themselves feminist and LGBT rights activists. Understanding these variations is of outmost importance for DDR processes in order to better respond to the needs of the diverse group of LGBT ex-combatants.

8.6 The Effects of Transformations Across the other Pathways

This section uses an intersectional approach to gender and sexuality to analyse the LGBT ex-combatants' experiences in relation to the other three pathways. As LGBT ex-combatants are not a homogenous group, I describe how they based on the specificities outlined in the current chapter assume different pathways, towards more gender-equitable patterns (Pathway One), (re)-constructions of traditional gender roles (Pathway Two) and/or the re-enforcement of violent gender identities (Pathway Three), which in turn are influenced by the intersection of gender identity and sexual orientation. My research shows that LGBT ex-combatants tend to experience higher levels of agency in the constructions of gender after their demobilization. Ex-combatants that were part of armed groups that prohibited sexual and gender minorities tended to experience a significant increase in agency in the constructions of their gender identities and expressions in the processes of reintegration. My research also shows examples of how, in comparison with heterosexual cis-gender ex-combatants, LGBT ex-combatants may experience particularly rapid and significant transformations. I thereafter analyse the effect on the society and argue that policymakers and researchers should incorporate a gender perspective in DDR, transitional justice and peacebuilding that moves beyond a narrow, binary understanding of gender in order to create a more inclusive post-conflict society.

8.6.1 Ex-combatant agency

LGBT ex-combatants assume different pathways towards more gender-equitable patterns (Pathway One), (re)-constructions of traditional gender roles (Pathway Two) and/or the re-enforcement of violent gender identities (Pathway Three) and experienced different levels of agency in the processes of constructions of gender in intersection with sexuality.

Among those who assumed a pathway towards more gender-equitable patterns, many embarked on a process to disclose their sexual orientation and gender identity following their demobilization. However, there were also ex-combatants who *remained* open about their sexual orientation, and who *maintained* more gender-equitable attitudes from their time in the group. On the other hand, there were those, like Javier, who chose not to disclose his sexual orientation but who started promoting alternative forms of masculinities both in his personal and professional life. During his time living in exile in Sweden, Javier became the manager for a gender-equality programme within the local municipality where he was living. LGBT ex-combatants who formed part of this pathway experienced a higher degree of agency in the constructions of gender. Those who had been forced to hide their sexual orientation and gender identity within their respective armed groups, and who were able to embark on the process of disclosing their sexual orientation and gender identity after demobilization, experienced particularly large and rapid transformations. While these processes were also challenging, these ex-combatants experienced a particularly large increase in agency and freedom to be "who they are" after demobilization. This illustrates their increased ability to act, their agency in the process of becoming, to feel what they want to feel and express what they want to express in the wake of armed struggle. My research also shows that, among the ex-combatants who were able to express their sexual orientation and gender identity within the armed groups, demobilization still provided them with greater autonomy to make decisions regarding their sexual relationships and their future. Finally, there were also ex-combatants who considered their sexuality to be a private matter and who expressed a high degree of agency while not disclosing their sexual orientation.

Among the ex-combatants who (re)-constructed traditional gender roles (Pathway Two), interviewees grappled with questions surrounding their sexuality and/or did not wish to disclose their sexual orientation. Similar to experiences of heterosexual ex-combatants, interviewees experienced a societal pressure to conform with traditional gender constructions. For LGBT ex-combatants, however, this pressure had an additional dimension in depriving them from the right to their sexual orientation. There were also examples of where this societal pressure was exacerbated by the DDR programme. The example of the former child soldier Ramón is particularly disturbing since he had received counselling and legal support for processing sexual violence against him which had been non-discriminatory and supportive of his rights. However, when he was placed in foster care after he left the armed group, the government run programme

for former child soldiers failed to protect his rights as a sexual and gender minority. Ramón's foster family did not accept his sexual orientation and the example painfully illustrates how failing to pay attention to the needs of sexual and gender minorities may cause additional harm to these individuals. LGBT ex-combatants within this pathway did exert low level of agency and expressed dissatisfaction as they grappled with uncertainties surrounding their sexual orientation. In comparison with heterosexual ex-combatants within this same pathway, they expressed lower levels of agency and greater dissatisfaction. A large body of scholars (see e.g. Barth 2002, Meintjes 2002, Pankhurst 2004, Mazurana 2005, Londoño & Nieto 2006, UNDP & IAWG 2012, Dietrich Ortega 2017) has described how ex-combatants tend to be pressured into traditional roles, and explored the effects of this, particularly on women ex-combatants, but it remains important to expand this research and explore the effect on sexual and gender minorities.

Finally, my research also shows examples of LGBT ex-combatants who continue to re-enforce violent gender identities (Pathway Three). As described in depth in the preceding chapter, there were examples of male ex-combatants who, just as heterosexual men, had collaborated with the military after their demobilization. One of those homosexual men had a particularly troubling experience where he claims that he was forced to accompany the military in combat for three months after his demobilization and was subjected to sexual harassment due to his sexual orientation. Having become a witness of the systematic assassination of civilians (of the so called "*falsos positivos*"), he is now drawn into the legal process as a witness. As I argue in Pathway Three, starting the route to peace by being exploited for military purposes, against international law, is detrimental to the process of deconstructing hegemonic masculinities and instead re-emphasizes violent masculinities and/or hampers the processes of reintegration of ex-combatants, independent of their sexual orientation. It also hampers ex-combatants' agency to embark on the process of transformation, including transformation regarding gender. My research also includes examples of LGBT ex-combatants who were contemplating reengaging in armed struggle. Lucía described how she, after demobilizing from M-19, for a short period collaborated with two other guerrilla groups, and contemplating joining their ranks. In her case, however, the more rigid gender norms of the other guerrillas discouraged her from joining. In more detail, during her time in M-19, Lucía was openly living in a lesbian relationship, and while she said that she did not think specifically about the policies of the other guerrillas surrounding deviation from heterosexual

norms, she described the overall rigidity of the other guerrillas as not compelling after having been part of M-19.

Lastly, while scholars have argued that conflicts, and the processes of militarization, tend to promote hegemonic militarized masculinities, gender hierarchies and normative heterosexuality, which fuel violence and discrimination against LGBT persons (see Connell 1995, Goldstein 2001, Myrttinen & Daigle 2017), my research shows that LGBT combatants within armed groups may attempt to erect gender hierarchies among LGBT persons. As described in-depth above, since sexual minorities tend to be marginalized, it seemed particularly important for combatants who had assumed exceptional acceptance to distinguish themselves from other LGBT persons in order to enhance their own position. Similarly, in the processes of reintegration, these ex-combatants tend to continue to hold discriminatory attitudes against other LGBT persons. Ex-combatants who expressed these attitudes tended exert "power over" and a perceived stronger agency over the way in which they have constructed more "respectable" forms of deviation from heterosexual norms. I argue that these attitudes should be analysed against an understanding of heteronormative policies and practices within their former armed groups, and the ways in which both heterosexual and LGBT combatants have been socialized into this heteronormative gender-discriminatory system. While these attitudes are clearly anchored in the pathway of reenforcing or maintaining hegemonic violent gender identities, they are particularly prominent among some of those interviewees who at the same time had assumed more gender-equitable (Pathway One) or gender traditional (Pathway Two) roles. This demonstrates how elements of different pathways may co-exist, and how heteronormative gender discriminatory systems are particularly deep-rooted including among some LGBT ex-combatants.

8.6.2 Societal effects

My research shows that LGBT ex-combatants not only assume elements from different pathways but that these pathways subsequently affect the society into which they are reintegrating in different ways. Among those who assumed the pathway toward more gender-equitable patterns, LGBT ex-combatants contributed to constructing a more inclusive and gender equal post-conflict society, but there were also those embarking on pathways that led to reintegration and/or continuum of violence and discrimination against other LGBT persons.
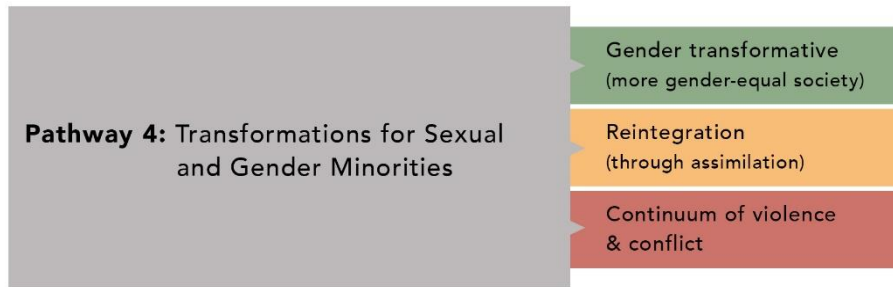
Figure 7: Pathway 4 and its effect on society

While my research shows how LGBT ex-combatants are subject to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination based on their sexual orientation and gender identity, it also reveals that LGBT ex-combatants not only embrace their new-found freedom, and embark on particularly significant and rapid transformations in the processes of reintegration, but are often resourceful in resisting and combatting these multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and may exercise leadership skills to defend their rights and contribute to the creation of more inclusive post-conflict societies. Some described how they were setting their own personal examples, through mustering the courage to express their gender identity in spite of the fear of discrimination, rejection and/or violence among their friends, family and/or neighbourhood. Others fought discrimination in society and institutions. Others, predominantly former members of M-19, engaged in feminist and LGBT rights organizations. Marcelo became a strong advocate for LGBT persons' rights after his demobilization, and exposed "social cleansing" operations conducted by public forces. Marcelo eventually had to seek refuge in exile after being subjected to two murder attempts because of his engagement as a defender of LGBT rights. Elvira, also a former combatant of M-19, is today engaged in the feminist movement and is an advocate for LGBT rights. In this capacity, she has contributed to the social mobilization in favour of the peace agreement with the FARC. She described how strongly she felt about the successful inclusion of women's and LGBT rights in the final peace agreement.

> *The day the bilateral ceasefire was announced, when we were here in the centre of Bogota, watching on the huge screen on June 23 last year [2016], when I heard Timochenko's [leader of the FARC] speech and heard him say "las, los, ellas, ellos, las guerrilleras, los guerrilleros" [using gender-inclusive language/ female and male pronouns], I said: "This, only this little bit is an achievement. To hear this man change language". And then when he mentions the LGBT sectors, I thought: "No, definitely this, I cannot believe it!" That day we were many [muchas y muchos] who cried at the Plaza Bolivar in the centre. We said:*

> *"This is an achievement that we never thought was possible, to get to see it, to feel it, to have it!". The reality that... I say that we felt a fundamental part of this very good achievement. Of the peace negotiations in different countries, in Africa, in Asia, in some cases the gender issue was moderately present, in some there was some participation of women, in very few women had the decision-making part. But the LGBT issue, I think this is the only one [peace agreement] in the world! I've never seen it or read about it, in any other space, any other...* (Elvira, lesbian, former member of M-19)

Placing the peace agreement in the historical context, Elvira has experienced how the issues of gender and LGBT that were absent from the negotiations leading to her own demobilization 27 years ago, have today become a reality and she expressed that she will continue to advocate for these rights.

My research also shows that the (re)constructions of traditional gender roles contribute to the reintegration of both heterosexual and LGBT ex-combatants into the society. LGBT ex-combatants are able to assimilate into the society by assuming traditional gender roles. However, the LGBT ex-combatants in this pathway tend to be dissatisfied and grapple with questions around their own sexuality. This means that they do not contribute fully to the construction of a more inclusive post-conflict society for themselves and others. Lastly, LGBT ex-combatants who reinforce militarized forms of gender identities in the processes of reintegration may continue to exhibit self-inflicted or inter-personal violence, or use violence within new armed groups. While descriptions of engagement in violence were very rare among the LGBT ex-combatants, the re-enforcement of heteronormative gender discriminatory attitudes proved persistent and deep-rooted, particularly among ex-combatants from the FARC and AUC who had gained acceptance within their respective groups. In settings where armed groups have promoted heteronormative norms and targeted violence against sexual and gender minorities, it is therefore important for DDR programmes to "disarm" the heteronormative elements of violent gender identities, not only among heterosexual combatants but also among LGBT combatants who have been socialized into these discriminatory norms, so as to ensure violence and discrimination does not continue to be perpetuated against sexual and gender minorities in conflict-affected societies.

9.   Conclusions

In this chapter, I present the conclusions of this research and describe its contributions to the understanding of the multiple constructions of gender among ex-combatants. I thereafter discuss the implications for researchers, practitioners and policymakers working on DDR in Colombia and beyond.

This thesis has explored the constructions of gender among ex-combatants through a comparative study of former combatants from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the 19th of April Movement (M-19) and the United Self-Defenders of Colombia (AUC). The study has sought to enhance the understanding of how gender is constructed in the processes of reintegration of ex-combatants in Colombia and has contributed to the conceptualization of the diverse patterns of gender constructions in the processes of reintegration, through the development of pathways of gender constructions. Using a gender relational and intersectional approach, this research includes men, women and sexual and gender minority ex-combatants. The focus on LGBT ex-combatants is unique since sexual and gender minorities have been almost completely overlooked by researchers, policymakers and practitioners working on DDR.

9.1 Summary of Key Findings

This research has demonstrated that there are multiple ways in which gender is constructed among ex-combatants. It has contributed to the conceptualization of these diverse patterns through the development of pathways of gender constructions among ex-combatants after leaving armed struggle. This includes an analysis of the processes of constructions advancing gender equality (Pathway One), of (re)constructing traditional gender roles (Pathway Two), as well as the processes of ex-combatants maintaining or re-enforcing militarized gender constructions (Pathway Three). Finally, the analysis of gender constructions among sexual and gender minorities shows that leaving war may generate particularly significant and rapid transformations for LGBT ex-combatants (Pathway Four). After providing an overview of these pathways, I will also describe their effects and finally reflect on the comparative elements of the research as well as the effects of these pathways on the individual ex-combatants and the society.

9.1.1 The multiple pathways of gender constructions

The pathways were developed in relation to my theoretical framework, and in relation to a number of key characteristics and contextual factors. Figure 3 provides an illustration of the key factors and processes that formed part of this analysis. Based on comparative, intersectional and gender-relational approaches, this results framework placed special emphasis on the characteristics of the three different armed groups, as well as ex-combatants' individual positions. In the development of each pathway, gender roles, practices and identities were analysed in relation to both social, economic, political and community-based reintegration. The pathways encompass an analysis of the ex-combatants' constructions of gender in relation to their individual position and the characteristics of the former armed group, in combination with the experiences following demobilization within their relationships or family, the community and the broader societal/institutional level. The pathways for gender constructions were developed to conceptualize the varied lived experiences by ex-combatants as they transition from the gender regimes, social norms, laws and policies within the armed group to those of the wider society, and are also affected by DDR programme and peacebuilding opportunities (contexts).
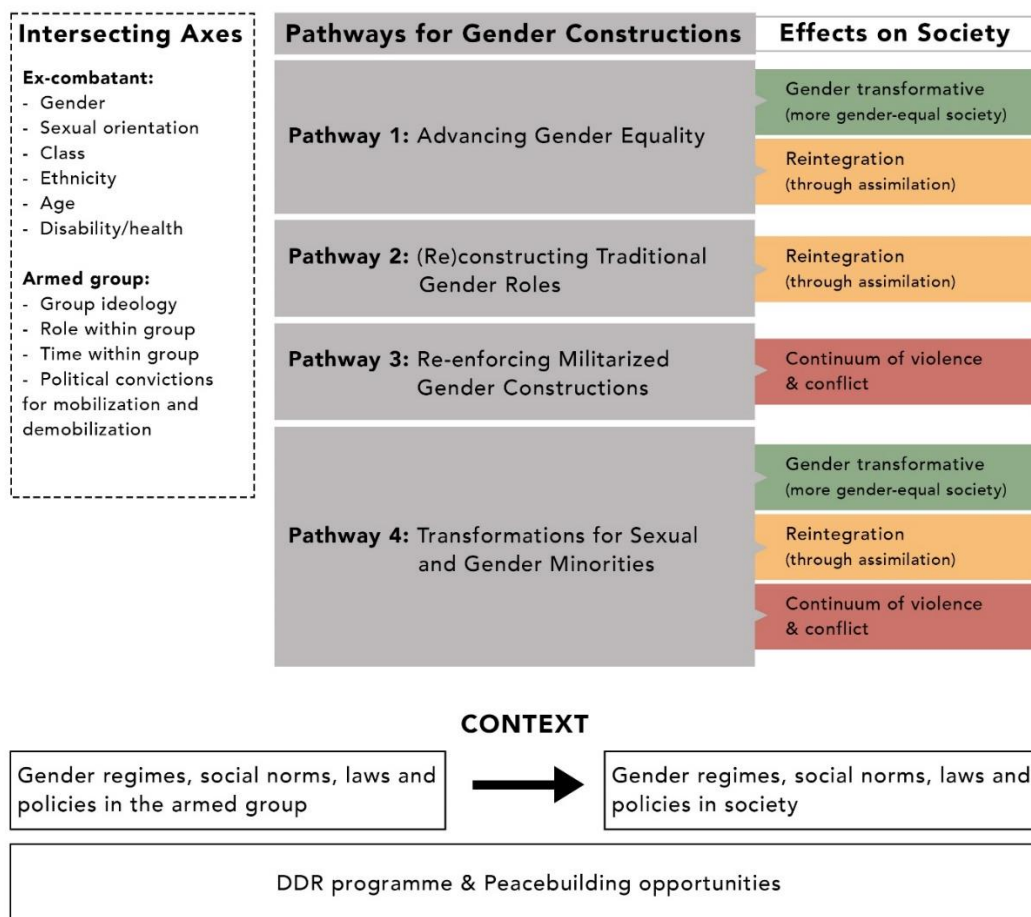
Figure 3: Pathways for Ex-combatant Gender Constructions, Results framework

The pathways should not be understood as mutually exclusive. On the contrary, there is a high degree of co-existence of elements from different pathways among ex-combatants. While many ex-combatants' maintain or re-enforce gender constructions from the armed groups and embark on a single route, others change pathways as they pass through different phases of gender transformations during their reintegration process. The pathways therefore move beyond a simplistic understanding of ex-combatants' experiences as either "empowering" or "victimizing", and do not seek to compartmentalize the ex-combatants lived experiences. Instead, they should be considered as fluid, co-existing and in conjunction. While "gender transformation" tends to be associated by policy and practitioners with a perceived "positive" change towards greater gender equality that contributes to "desirable" behaviour and gender-related outcomes, the pathways

developed in this thesis contribute to an understanding of the complexities and contradictions of gender constructions among ex-combatants.

In Pathway One, I examined the conditions under which ex-combatants construct increasingly gender-equitable patterns within the processes of reintegration. This pathway includes two different routes. First, the maintenance and/or advancement of elements of non-hegemonic patterns in gender relations that were present in the armed group. Thereafter, the deconstruction of the hegemonic patterns in gender relations that were present in the armed group through the processes of reintegration.

While all ex-combatants in this route constructed increasingly gender-equitable patterns, the two routes highlight the different points of departure. While scholars have described how militarized hegemonic masculinities and femininities are constructed by war, armed groups do not necessarily need to be understood as a bastion for gender inequality, but can promote more gender-equal relationships than the societies in which they operate. Acknowledging that hegemonic and non-hegemonic patterns in gender relations may co-exist in different armed groups, particularly left-wing guerrilla movements (see Dietrich Ortega 2017), is important in order to support ex-combatants who seek to maintain and/or advance elements of non-hegemonic patterns in gender relations that were present in the armed group. While this route questions the call to "disarm" the gendered identities that are instrumental for war (Theidon 2009), ex-combatants in the second route provide examples of ex-combatants who had assumed hegemonic militarized masculinities and femininities but who, following demobilization, embarked on a process to deconstruct those hegemonic patterns and construct more equitable gender relations.

In Pathway Two, I examined the processes through which male and female ex-combatants assume traditional gender roles in the processes of reintegration. Women combatants often experience large changes as they transgress traditional gender norms through taking up arms. At the same time, armed conflict often reinforces traditional gender roles of women through, for example, women taking up traditionally feminine support roles in armed groups. The women in this pathway therefore carried with them varied experiences and gender roles from the time spent in the armed groups. Their backgrounds span from women who transgressed gender norms by taking up arms, and sometimes command roles, to women who carried our traditionally female support roles

during their time associated with their respective groups, some of whom never left their own home or village to do so. For some of the women in this pathway, the process of reintegration has included the *reconstructions* of traditional gender roles. These are women who, after having transgressed gender norms, return following demobilization to the traditional gender roles they were socialized into before joining the armed group. For others, the process of reintegration has instead generated the *construction* of traditional gender roles that they had previously not experienced. Finally, others *maintain* or *re-enforce* traditional gender roles they assumed within the armed group. What women in this pathway have in common is that they have in different ways adhered to the gender regimes of their respective armed groups and, after leaving war, have effectively adhered to the gender regimes of the society that they are reintegrating into.

For male combatants, armed conflicts tend to shape traditional gender discourses that build on the stereotypical images of men as strong, warriors and protectors to create hyper-masculinized forms of masculinities. At the same time, traditional and non-traditional gender roles may also co-exist for men in armed groups. The men in this pathway have been socialized into different gender regimes in their respective groups. For some of the men, the process of reintegration has included the *deconstructions of the hyper-militarized traits* assumed in the armed group. For others, the process of reintegration implied *deconstructing gender-equal practices* and non-hegemonic gender patterns assumed in the armed group. While these men *reconstructed* traditional gender roles that they were socialized into before joining the armed group, there were also men who did not consider that gender patterns have changed during reintegration. On the contrary, they describe a continuum where they have *maintained* elements of traditional gender patterns from the armed group. While the men in this pathway continue to be a very heterogenous group, even after demobilization, what they have in common is that, to different extents, they have assumed traditional gender roles as they reintegrate into the gender regimes of the Colombian society.

In Pathway Three, I examined how militarized gender constructions are maintained or reinforced in the processes of reintegration. The ex-combatants in this pathway illustrate that participation in a DDR programme does not necessarily generate transformations of the militarized gender regimes assumed in the armed group. The experiences of the male ex-combatants in this pathway are an example of how the militarized forms of masculinities they were socialized into have not been disrupted by entering into a DDR programme. Instead, men within this pathway have maintained

or even re-enforced militarized forms of masculinities. My research shows that there are large differences between the ways in which militarized masculinities and femininities are constructed in the processes of reintegration. Male ex-combatants are reintegrated into a conflict-affected society where militarized forms of masculinities are to a larger degree accepted, or even promoted, which leads to ways in which they can maintain, adapt or even re-enforce militarized forms of civilian masculinities. Women who demonstrate militarized forms of femininities, on the other hand, are deviating strongly from gender norms and are therefore immediately identified, stigmatized and ostracized if they do not transform their gender performance. Still, women in this pathway describe how they have been unable to change.

Finally, in Pathway Four, I examined the transformations of sexual and gender minority ex-combatants, analysing the specific opportunities and challenges in terms of gender constructions that the reintegration processes pose to them. My research shows examples of how, in comparison with heterosexual cis-gender ex-combatants, LGBT ex-combatants may experience particularly rapid and significant transformations of gender roles, identities, expressions and practice following their demobilization. Since ex-combatants who do not conform to a narrow, binary understanding of gender have been overlooked by DDR researchers, policymakers and practitioners, very little is known of their experiences, either within armed groups or as they transition to civilian life.

My research shows that LGBT ex-combatants are a very heterogeneous group with highly varied experiences, both from their time within their respective former armed groups and in the processes of reintegration. For LGBT ex-combatants who were forced to hide their sexual orientation and gender identity within their respective armed groups, demobilization gave them the opportunity to embark on the process of disclosing their sexual orientation and gender identity. Among the ex-combatants who were able to express their sexual orientation and gender identity within their respective armed groups, demobilization provided a higher degree of autonomy to make decisions regarding their sexual relationships and future. At the same time, my research unveils the ways in which other interviewees grapple with questions surrounding their sexuality and/or do not wish to disclose their sexual orientation.

9.1.2 Comparative analysis of former armed groups

The multiple constructions of gender among ex-combatants, as summarized above, are dependent on the multiple and complex factors and contexts outlined in the research framework (see Figure 3). Ex-combatants are a heterogenous group and in order to understand their experiences in the processes of reintegration it is crucial to understand the gendered practices and norms they have been socialized into within their former respective armed groups. My research shows that the former armed groups are an important factor influencing ex-combatants' pathways of gender constructions. One of the clearest examples of this is this shown in Pathway One, among ex-combatants who maintain and/or advance non-hegemonic patterns experienced within the armed group. This route requires that the armed group had assumed gender-equitable practices and the vast majority of the ex-combatants in this pathway were former members of the M-19, which had the most progressive practices in respect to gender of the three armed groups analysed in this research. There were also former members of the FARC in this pathway, but they were exclusively commanders. I argue that these individuals were to a higher degree politically convinced about the ideology of the group, including gendered practices, than many of the other former combatants who instead embarked on other pathways. Several of the commanders that sought to maintain elements of non-hegemonic practices had not chosen to defect from the organization but had demobilized after having been captured by the Colombian armed forces. This may indicate an interesting difference to gender constructions among the FARC combatants who did not desert the guerrilla but who disarmed collectively following the peace agreement. The second route of Pathway One, comprised of ex-combatants who deconstructed militarized gender identities and assumed more gender equal practices, also contained ex-combatants from the paramilitary AUC. These tended to be exceptional cases of male and female ex-combatants who had embarked on a process of profound transformation.

As for ex-combatants who assume traditional roles in the processes of reintegration, this second pathway included ex-combatants from all three groups. While ex-combatants from all of the groups to a high degree tended to assume traditional gender roles and practices, the research points to variations associated with their former group affiliations. Furthermore, the experiences of the ex-combatants in this pathway were influenced not only be the policies and practices governing gender within the armed groups, but also by the role the individuals had assumed within the armed

groups, as well as by other factors, such as the relationships they had constructed within the armed groups. While the guerrilla groups tended to promote gender equal divisions of labour, there were also cases of women who had assumed more traditionally female support roles, and women who had assumed a more privileged position due to romantic relationships with commanders. As for women, this pathway is dominated by the experiences of female FARC foot soldiers and lower ranking commanders. While the experiences of former female members of M-19 and AUC are also included, the women foot soldiers and lower rank commanders in my research who deserted from the FARC have almost exclusively followed this pathway. In respect to the AUC, meanwhile, women largely assumed traditionally female support roles, although my sample did include female weapon-carrying combatants and commanders as well. Due to these differences in practices within the same group, the ex-combatants' constructions of gender in this pathway show both important similarities and differences.

Male and former weapon-carrying women ex-combatants from the AUC tended to *reconstruct* traditional roles they were socialized into before joining the armed group through the *deconstructions of hyper-militarized traits*. For others, the process of reintegration has instead generated the *constructions* of traditional gender roles that they had previously not experienced. This group consists primarily of ex-combatants who joined the FARC at a very young age as girl soldiers. While they had certainly been socialized into traditional gender roles from an early age they had not assumed "womanhood" or passed through the gendered processes as adolescents. Ex-combatants from the guerrilla groups, who to different extents demonstrated a co-existence of elements of both hegemonic and non-hegemonic practices, reconstructed traditional roles through *deconstructions of the more gender-equal practices* and/or *maintenance* or *re-enforcement* of the traditional gender roles they had assumed within the armed group. While the rupture in gender regimes was quite marked in former FARC members, members of M-19 described demobilization as less of a change, including in this pathway. There were men, primarily from the M-19, who did not consider that their gender constructions had changed during reintegration. On the contrary, they describe a continuum where they have *maintained* elements of traditional gender patterns from the armed group. Finally, women who had assumed traditionally female support roles, primarily in the AUC but also occasionally in the FARC, described how traditional gender constructions had been maintained before, during and after leaving the armed group. While ex-combatants in this pathway have in common that they had all adhered to traditional gender regimes

in the processes of reintegration, they demonstrate large variations dependent on their former armed group affiliation.

As for ex-combatants who maintain or re-enforce militarized gender identities, former male members of the paramilitary AUC are dominant and provide archetypical descriptions of the continuum of gender constructions imperative to violence. There were also examples of women former members of AUC who had been unable to deconstruct militarized femininities. At the same time, while the links particularly with militarized forms of masculinities are less salient than in many cases of former paramilitaries, my research shows examples of guerrilla ex-combatants engaging in self-inflicted, interpersonal or re-mobilization/community violence. In respect to the latter, the reasons for remobilization expressed by ex-combatants vary according to the group. While former FARC soldiers point to their political commitment to the organization, or the need of money for survival, former paramilitary descriptions depicted the ability to continue to gain money to maintain status and power as one of the crucial factors. While the paramilitary ex-combatants' descriptions often linked very directly to their sense of masculinity, the links with the constructions of militarized masculinities is less salient for combatants with a strong ideological conviction. With the large resurgence in FARC dissident groups following the peace agreement it would be interesting to analyse the differences between individually demobilized ex-combatants and those disarming collectively following the peace agreement. It is possible that ex-combatants who defect and demobilize individually, independent of former armed group affiliation, to a larger extent seek to construct a new life, in which deconstructions of militarized gender identities are a central part.

While LGBT combatants are often in a highly vulnerable position, my research reveals large differences between the armed groups, as well as important exceptions within groups, all of which contribute to the LGBT combatants' very varied experiences. Understanding these variations is important in order to then examine the LGBT ex-combatants' experiences after demobilization. While discrimination has been recounted in all three groups, the AUC and the FARC were reported to have prohibited, punished and executed LGBT persons in their ranks. Within the M-19, on the other hand, hegemonic and non-hegemonic patterns governing sexual orientation and gender identity co-existed. M-19 practices, therefore, stand in stark contrast to the other two groups. Not only were LGBT persons permitted and accepted, but during a brief period the organization even

had a special unit comprised exclusively of homosexual men. The research also demonstrates that, even in the AUC and FARC, there were important exceptions and inconsistencies in how LGBT combatants were treated. The research shows that, in the more decentralized AUC, individual commanders could allow for deviation from heterosexual norms. Inconsistencies also existed in the FARC, despite being a more centralized organization. In these cases, however, the exceptions seem to have been related to the skill set of the combatant being of strategic importance to the organization.

In the processes of reintegration, LGBT-combatants assume different constructions of gender, both more gender equal, traditional and/or militarized. The LGBT ex-combatants interviewed in this research constitute a highly heterogenous group, ranging from ex-combatants who expressed condescending or discriminatory attitudes towards other LGBT persons, to those who consider themselves feminist and LGBT rights activists. These differences are influenced by their former group affiliation, with former members of M-19 dominating the latter group. LGBT ex-combatants who have operated in armed groups with prominent heteronormative practices, and/or who perpetrated targeted violence against sexual and gender minorities, can also have been socialized into this heteronormative gender-discriminatory system. The re-enforcement of these heteronormative gender-discriminatory attitudes proved persistent and deep-rooted, particularly among ex-combatants from the FARC and AUC who had gained acceptance within their respective groups.

9.1.3 Gender equality, agency and peace: the effects of the pathways

This section summarizes the analyses of where the varied pathways experienced by the interviewed ex-combatants lead, describing their effect in the lives of the ex-combatants, as well as on the society in the process of reintegration. My research shows that ex-combatants in different pathways both experience different levels of agency and satisfaction in the processes of constructions of gender and that the varied gender pathways have different effects on society.

First, my research shows that ex-combatants who construct more gender-equitable patterns (Pathway One) experience a relatively high degree of agency in the constructions of gender, in comparison with ex-combatants forming part of the other pathways. Ex-combatant's relatively high degree of agency was associated with the meaning, motivation and purpose which the ex-

combatants placed on their gender constructions, and with their 'power to' define their life-choices and pursue their own goals. While my research shows that DDR can in some cases support these processes of construction of non-hegemonic gender patterns, women and men in this pathway had often made conscious choices to construct more gender-equal relations. These ex-combatants also experienced a relatively high level of gender awareness, and there were many women and men in this pathway who were able to analyse and express commitment to women's rights and more gender-equitable relations. From an intersectional perspective, these ex-combatants also often had higher levels of education.

My research has shown substantial similarities, and differences, between the men and the women in this, and all other, pathways. While there were both men and women who had maintained non-hegemonic patterns, women were in the driving seat for the advancement of gender equality. Women ex-combatants maintaining elements of non-hegemonic patterns of gender constructions described how they have continued to struggle within different spheres of life, within their own families as well as in the professional and political realm. Women in this route had developed an in-depth understanding of gender, mobilized as women and applied feminist thinking to their experiences as ex-combatants. For the men, maintaining certain elements of non-hegemonic practices was something they considered normal and not a challenge. I therefore argue that the agency of women ex-combatants was restrained by structural gender inequality and that these women resisted and had to fight harder for their autonomy.

My research shows that the ex-combatants who construct more gender-equitable patterns expressed strong commitments to continue their life in peace. Many also contributed actively to constructing a more inclusive, gender-equal and peaceful society. However, in relation to DDR, this did not necessarily mean that gender transformation contributed to reintegration. Where policies and programmes have made efforts to address the gender dimensions of DDR through a transformative approach, researchers have criticized the continued lack of robust evaluation of its results to confirm its importance for "successful reintegration" (Humphreys & Weinstein 2007, Carayannies et al. 2014). My research shows that former guerrilla ex-combatants who are part of the first route of this pathway rejected the concept of "reintegration". They argued that that they had always been part of the society, and that they have continued to fight for a better society without arms after their disarmament. "Successful reintegration" was interpreted as a form of

assimilation into the society and therefore not a goal for these ex-combatants who seek to continue to work for the transformation of the country. I argue that, in terms of gender, the way in which these ex-combatants maintain and advance non-hegemonic patterns of gender does not necessarily contribute to their reintegration back into the society, but goes beyond, in that it contributes to transform the society to become more inclusive, gender equal and peaceful.

Ex-combatants' (re)constructions of traditional gender roles (Pathway Two) were associated with a subjective experience of lower level of agency, and substantial gender-based differences. My research has shown how women ex-combatants are often pressured to assume traditional gender roles by the gender regimes and norms of the society, by their families and partners, by their communities, as well as, to a certain extent, by the DDR programme. While there were large variations within this group, there were elements of traditional gender roles that women sought, alongside dissatisfaction with many traditional feminine roles and household responsibilities. Many women displayed an understanding of the effect of the transformation of gender roles in the process of reintegration, and a strong dissatisfaction with the outcome. Women described how they found the new roles "unfair", and how they did not like to do all the unpaid care work and the reproductive chores. At the same time, the experiences and backgrounds of the women in this pathway were very diverse; and there were also women who described that assuming traditional roles were an active choice.

What male ex-combatants from this pathway have in common is that they expressed less evidence of having made conscious choices regarding the constructions of gender. In comparison with their female colleagues, they tended to have reflected less on the changes of gender relations, and they naturalized the process to a larger extent than women ex-combatants. While men are certainly also pressured by society to assume gender-traditional roles, they are generally, at the same time, also obtaining a privileged position, not in the society, but in comparison with their female partners. It is therefore not surprising that the men, in contrast to the women, did not express dissatisfaction with these traditional gender roles. They expressed a lower level of gender awareness and a higher level of satisfaction than their female colleagues within this pathway.

My research also shows that the (re)constructions of traditional gender roles contribute to the reintegration of the ex-combatants into the society. Both women and men are able to assimilate

into the society by assuming traditional gender roles. This is particularly important for the ex-combatants to be able to hide their past in order to avoid the stigma associated with being 'demobilized'. This points to the possibility for a level of conflict between the goal for reintegration, when understood as assimilation, and the aim of DDR programmes contributing to the promotion of more gender-equal, inclusive and peaceful societies.

Ex-combatants who maintain or re-enforce militarized gender constructions (Pathway Three) again demonstrated large variations between women and men, both in level of agency and effect on society. The men in this pathway displayed differences in terms of the agency they exerted in this process, spanning from an expressed satisfaction with the money and power that comes with the participation in violent crime and conflict, and the legitimization of the continued perpetration of violence, to a profound dissatisfaction with their life in general and an acknowledgement of the need to change. While some expressed feelings of power (i.e. understood as domination of others and "power over"), this was at the same time the group of men among all pathways who expressed the lowest level of satisfaction with their life situation (i.e. "power within" and "power to"). While men in all the pathways expressed less evidence than women of having made conscious choices regarding the constructions of gender, men in this pathway expressed very little reflection and awareness of gender. As for women who maintain certain militarized and hyper-masculinized traits, the more dominant and encompassing these expressions and roles proved, the more dissatisfaction they expressed. For male ex-combatants who maintain militarized masculinities, many described how they had continued to engage in violent crime and new paramilitary groups as well as in self-inflicted and domestic violence. Thus, the effect on their reintegration processes and the society at large was devastating. Militarized femininities did not present the same risk for re-mobilization in armed groups but was hampering the reintegration process and wellbeing of the women. At the same time, that women can also become spoilers of the peacebuilding, although to a lesser extent, should not be overlooked. For those who were complying with the DDR programme, the male ex-combatants are less pressured by the society to change their gender identity. Men have more avenues to maintain militarized masculinities in a country that is still experiencing conflict and militarization, whereas women immediately experienced how militarized femininities constitute a deviation from traditional gender norms. This created avenues to re-enforce militarized masculinities, both within illegal and legal realms.

My research has also shown how leaving armed struggle may generate particularly significant and rapid transformations for LGBT ex-combatants (Pathway Four), providing opportunities for a perceived increase in agency. Ex-combatants that were part of armed groups that prohibited sexual and gender minorities tended to experience a significant increase in agency in the constructions of gender identities and expressions in the processes of reintegration. In particular, those who were able to embark on the process of disclosing their sexual orientation and gender identity after demobilization experienced a significant increase in agency and freedom to be "who they are". My research has also shown that even those ex-combatants who had been able to express their sexual orientation and gender identity within the armed groups found that demobilization still provided them with greater autonomy to make decisions regarding their sexual relationships and their future. Finally, there were also ex-combatants who considered their sexuality a private matter and who expressed a high degree of agency while not disclosing their sexual orientation.

Among the LGBT ex-combatants who (re)constructed traditional gender roles, interviewees grappled with questions surrounding their sexuality and/or did not wish to disclose their sexual orientation. Similar to experiences of heterosexual ex-combatants, interviewees experienced a societal pressure to conform with traditional gender constructions. For LGBT ex-combatants, however, this pressure had an additional dimension in depriving them of the right to their sexual orientation. There were also examples of where this societal pressure was exacerbated by the DDR programme. In comparison with heterosexual ex-combatants within this same pathway, they expressed lower level of agency and greater dissatisfaction.

Finally, while scholars have argued that conflicts and the process of militarization tend to promote hegemonic militarized masculinities, gender hierarchies and normative heterosexuality, which in turn fuel violence and discrimination against LGBT persons (see Connell 1995, Goldstein 2001, Myrttinen & Daigle 2017), my research shows that LGBT combatants within armed groups may themselves attempt to erect gender hierarchies among LGBT persons. Since sexual minorities tend to be marginalized, it seemed particularly important for combatants who had assumed exceptional acceptance to distinguish themselves from other LGBT persons in order to enhance their own position.

My research shows that LGBT ex-combatants not only assume elements from different pathways but that these pathway subsequently affect the society into which they are reintegrating in different ways. Among those who assumed the pathway toward more gender-equitable patterns, LGBT ex-combatants contributed to constructing a more inclusive and gender-equal peacebuilding and society.

While my research shows how LGBT ex-combatants are subject to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination based on their sexual orientation and gender identity, it also reveals that LGBT ex-combatants not only embrace their new-found freedom and embark on particularly significant and rapid transformations in the processes of reintegration, but are often resourceful in combatting these multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, and may exercise leadership skills to defend their rights and contribute to the creation of more inclusive and peaceful societies.

The differentiated effects of these gender pathways for both male, female and LGBT ex-combatants, as well as for society more broadly, have implications for DDR programmes, which will be discussed in the next section.

9.2 Applications for Reintegration Programmes

The objective of this thesis is to improve policymakers' and practitioners' understanding of how to make reintegration programmes more gender-transformative and better able to contribute to gender equality in transitional contexts. At the time of writing (2021), ex-combatants who disarmed following the peace agreement between the FARC and the Colombian Government are in the process of transitioning to civilian life. Despite the reincorporation of the country's largest guerrilla group, there are at least five different armed conflicts co-existing within Colombia between State, guerrilla groups and paramilitary groups (ICRC 2018). The findings from this research could therefore inform both current and future DDR processes in Colombia and beyond. That the peace negotiations between the Government of Colombia and the FARC have been celebrated as a global precedent, both for their focus on gender, and thereafter the attention to the particular impact of the war on LGBTI persons (Bouvier 2016, UN Women 2016, Hagen 2017), makes these findings particularly valuable evidence for other processes globally.

9.2.1 Enhancing flexible support for gender-transformative reintegration

This thesis has enhanced the understanding of the multiple constructions of gender among ex-combatants. Reintegration programmes should incorporate a gender and intersectional perspective that builds on the understanding of these multiple constructions of gender. The pathways developed as part of this thesis could be used, and further developed, by programmes to better understand these variations. Such a perspective would entail broadening objectives that currently focus solely on "disarming" militarized masculinities, or seeking to ensure that DDR programmes are inclusive of women, to a more comprehensive understanding of the variations of the lived experiences of ex-combatants. This requires moving beyond stereotypical assumptions of gender, and would span from acknowledging and supporting ex-combatants who seek to maintain non-hegemonic gender patterns assumed within armed groups with elements of gender-equitable policies or practices, to intensified efforts to support ex-combatants as they seek to deconstruct militarized masculinities as well as femininities. It also entails a critical examination of the reintegration into traditional gender roles. In all of these processes of constructions of gender, questions of ex-combatants' agency should be central.

Beyond enhancing understanding, the critical challenge for DDR programmes remains how to translate these insights into practical implementation. While the constructions of gender among ex-combatants is affected by multiple factors and contexts, as illustrated by the results framework in this thesis, there are several entry points where reintegration programmes can contribute to more gender-equal constructions of gender. The pathways demonstrate that there is no "silver bullet" to ensure such a gender-transformative approach that contributes to a more inclusive and peaceful society, not least because the ex-combatants, and their experiences and choices, are highly diverse. Reintegration programmes therefore need to move beyond stereotypical assumptions and be flexible in supporting multiple forms of gender-transformation. Measures that have proven promising for ex-combatants in one route may prove counterproductive for ex-combatants in another pathway. Scholars such as Mazurana et al. (2018) have argued that, to enhance gender responsiveness, DDR programmes should move away from a project approach to offer instead a portfolio of options for ex-combatants. Such an approach could promote more meaningful participation and agency among ex-combatants. In this thesis I have, where relevant, pointed to occasions where DDR programmes have supported or hampered ex-combatants' agency in the

processes of constructions of gender. Looking at examples of where DDR programmes have hampered women ex-combatants' agency in constructions of gender, many critical cases stem from lack of implementation of international guidance already provided in the UN IDDRS. While new, and enhanced, approaches are certainly needed, I would argue that, in many cases, efforts should immediately be made to implement current guidance fully. In regard to male ex-combatants, the gender guidance provided in the UN IDDRS, as well as evidence-based approaches, are much more scarce and in urgent need of further development. As for LGBT ex-combatants, international policy and guidance have to date made no reference to sexual and gender minority ex-combatants. A gender-transformative approach therefore needs to pay particular attention in this area.

9.2.2 DDR beyond the binary

DDR policy and programmes have overlooked ex-combatants who do not conform to a narrow, binary understanding of gender. The currently ongoing process of revision of the gender chapter of the UN IDDRS (2006) has provided an opportunity to start addressing this gap in international guidance. The 2016 final peace agreement between the Colombian Government and the FARC has also been celebrated for including an unprecedented specific focus on LGBTI rights. Nonetheless, the rights, needs and vulnerabilities of LGBT combatants as they transition to civilian life continue to be overlooked in Colombia. My thesis offers a unique understanding of the particular challenges faced by this group due to discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Policymakers, researchers and practitioners should incorporate a gender perspective that moves beyond a narrow, binary understanding of gender to respond to the needs, ensure the participation and protect the rights of LGBT ex-combatants. I argue that it is important that these DDR policies and programmes take into consideration both the heterogenic experiences of LGBT ex-combatants and the large variations between different armed groups in Colombia.

This thesis has explored the way in which LGBT ex-combatants may experience particularly significant and rapid transformations of their gender identity, practices and expressions following their demobilization. It has also pointed to some of the challenges that are particular to LGBT ex-combatants in the processes of reintegration, which should be seen as entry points for DDR programmes to provide more suitable support. It has shown how demobilized sexual and gender minorities are exposed to intersecting layers of discrimination and heteronormative-based

violence, based on their sexuality, gender, class and other socially-constructed categories, such as the stigma of being identified as a "demobilized" former combatant. These multiple layers of discrimination affect the LGBT ex-combatants' social, economic and political reintegration.

My thesis provides a starting point for reintegration programmes to identify entry-points to respond to the needs of LGBT ex-combatants. Two measures stand out as particularly critical for DDR programmes to take into consideration: First, the results point to the importance of the creation of new social networks to support the ex-combatant in the processes of reintegration. However, for LGBT ex-combatants, discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity may in certain cases make it more difficult to build up such networks. Common supportive networks, such as Christian groups, which have often been described as supporting ex-combatants to effect change (Theidon 2015), instead contributed to feelings of guilt and shame for LGBT combatants because they exacerbated heteronormative rigid gender norms. Although other LGBT ex-combatants spoke of the importance of social networks, few had engaged with LGBT organizations. In certain cases, LGBT ex-combatants expressed condescending opinions about other LGBT persons, which made it harder to build up a supportive network.

Secondly, in settings where armed groups have promoted heteronormative norms and targeted violence against sexual and gender minorities, it is important for reintegration programmes to adapt a comprehensive approach that is not only "inclusive" of LGBT ex-combatants but that seeks to "disarm" the heteronormative elements of violent gender identities among all the ex-combatants, of all genders and sexual orientations. This includes violence prevention and norm changing programming for heterosexual ex-combatants, but also, where applicable, for LGBT ex-combatants. My research shows that LGBT ex-combatants who have operated in armed groups with prominent heteronormative practices, and/or perpetrating targeted violence against sexual and gender minorities, can also have been socialized into this heteronormative gender-discriminatory system, and it is therefore important for reintegration programmes also to "disarm" the heteronormative elements of violent gender identities among LGBT combatants if they are to ensure that violence and discrimination does not continue to be perpetuated against sexual and gender minorities in the post-conflict society.

Finally, the fact that the inclusion of LGBT rights in the peace agreement between the Colombian government and FARC prompted socially conservative voters to mobilize against the agreement (Krystalli & Theidon 2016), points to the need to work in a careful and circumspect way to avoid increasing the vulnerabilities of sexual and gender minorities, or causing a societal backlash.

7.2.3 Enhancing accountability for gender-based crimes experienced by ex-combatants

Efforts have been made in recent years to make DDR programmes more accountable and better coordinated with transitional justice processes, to better support the transition from conflict to sustainable peace (Lekha Sriram & Herman 2009, UN 2009). In this section I will briefly underline my unique findings in relations to accountability for gender-based crimes against combatants within armed groups.

In post-conflict settings, there is often a rigid divide of victims and perpetrators, and although ex-combatants have in some cases themselves experienced extreme victimization, they have often been reluctant to participate in transitional justice initiatives or to identify themselves as victims (Patel 2009). However, transitional justice mechanisms may help break down these rigid representations and support accountability by allowing perpetrators to voice their own stories of victimization (Patel 2009). Understanding what Baines (2016: 10) refer to as "complex victims", persons subjected to violence in which they are also complicit, is important as it allows us to work towards a more transformative consideration of what it means to live through violence and together again after it.

In Colombia, as described previously, victimization of ex-combatants within the armed ranks has been widely documented, including sexual and gender-based violence, forced abortions and forced contraception (Amnesty International 2004, Mendez 2012, Upegui & Thylin et al. 2010, Gutiérrez and Carranza 2017). The legacies of these crimes also stand out as a major challenge for many ex-combatants in the processes of reintegration. Forced abortions remain a crime that FARC has still not acknowledged, and former FARC commanders like Victoria Sandino, who headed the Gender Sub-committee during the peace negotiations in Havana, spoke about abortion during my interview with her as a women's right, without acknowledging the perpetration of forced abortions within the ranks of the guerrilla.

Another area which is much less documented, and where my research makes a unique contribution, relates to the crimes committed against LGBT combatants within the AUC and FARC. While armed groups, irrespective of their different ideological persuasions have been described as a breeding ground for violence and discrimination against LGBT persons, my research points to important distinctions between different armed groups. This shows that armed groups do not necessarily need to be understood as a bastion for hegemonic norms governing sexual orientation and gender identities but, as in the example of M-19, can sometimes promote more equitable practices than the societies within which they operate. Understanding differences between armed groups within the same country, as well as the potential for evolution of policies and practices within armed groups, is also particularly important as it indicates that things can be done differently. Regimes governing gender and sexuality are in constant transformation, and peacebuilding can therefore create opportunities for change and more inclusive, gender-equal peaceful societies. Understanding that violence against sexual and gender minorities in armed groups is neither ubiquitous nor inevitable suggests that transitional justice mechanisms and policy interventions should not only ensure that these crimes are included in truth-seeking processes but also hold commanders in effective control of their troops legally liable for violence against sexual and gender minorities, including within their own ranks. While scholars have argued that the violence perpetrated by FARC against civilian LGBT persons was not systematic and that there exist "considerable doubts" that this violence reflected group policy (Tschantret 2018: 270), my research shows that executions of LGBT combatants within the organization's own ranks were certainly carried out in line with policies and practices condoned by the organization's internal war trials. The LGBT ex-combatants that I interviewed called for recognition as well as accountability for these crimes.

Finally, my research has also pointed to the lingering challenges of victimization in the processes of reintegration, including in relation to the deconstructions of militarized gendered identities, generated not only by the respective armed groups but also by the Colombian Ministry of Defence's use of demobilized persons for intelligence and military operations. This has previously led to researchers like Arias et al. (2010: 14) argue that demobilized persons have been used as a "weapon of war" and question whether the DDR process in fact has been a strategy for peace or a strategy for war.

The lack of accountability for all these crimes—of forced abortions, execution of LGBT combatants as well as utilization of ex-combatants for intelligence and military operations—has both affected the constructions of gender in the processes of reintegration and constitute a critical gap in truth and reconciliation efforts.

9.3 Further Research

This thesis has developed a framework to analyse the multiple constructions of gender among ex-combatants which it has used to explore new areas of research. This invites further research to enhance the understanding of this fascinating field of interdisciplinary research. Where this comparative research has examined the variations among ex-combatants demobilized from different armed groups within Colombia, further research could explore new DDR processes in Colombia with new actors. While this thesis includes ex-combatants from the FARC who demobilized individually before the peace agreement between the Government of Colombia and FARC, the framework could also be used to analyse the reincorporation process of former FARC soldiers who disarmed after the peace agreement. Since the thesis has demonstrated how the comparative study of different armed actors within the same country can offer important insights, a next step would be to apply and enhance the research framework developed for this thesis for analysis of different armed groups in other countries, and/or a comparative research including armed groups from different ideological and geographic contexts.

This thesis has also made a first explorative contribution to the field of research on sexual and gender minorities in armed groups and in the processes of reintegration, thereby opening up a very interesting field for further research, in Colombia as well as other settings. The research shows that armed groups do not necessarily need to be understood as a bastion for hegemonic norms governing sexual orientation and gender identities but, as in the example of M-19, can sometimes promote more equitable practices than the societies within which they operate. This invites further research to understand how the differences in norms governing sexual orientation and gender identities relate to variations in military strategies and repertoires of violence applied externally and internally by different armed groups, as well as the conditions for the transformation of policies governing sexual orientation and gender identities within non-state armed groups. While it is particularly challenging to investigate the subjective experiences of ex-combatants who do not disclose their sexual orientation and gender identity, my sample still includes the varied

experiences of two ex-combatants who did not disclose their sexual orientation. Understanding this diverse group of ex-combatants further, and how DDR programmes can better cater to their needs, emerges as a challenging and intriguing field of further research.

Finally, while research in this field has usually focused exclusively on either male or female ex-combatants, this thesis has applied an intersectional approach including men, women, sexual and gender minorities, as well as drawing on other intersectional factors such as rank, age and ethnicity to the extent possible. This intersectional approach could be further expanded to include additional constitutive principles of analysis. In particular, former child soldiers, and the intersection of gender, age and sexual orientation and gender identity, is an area that has not been explored in this research and which requires further attention. These are examples where further empirical studies of the constructions of gender may be developed in order to place the subjective experience of ex-combatants and agency at the centre of DDR programmes and contribute to more gender-equal and peaceful societies.

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