Going back or moving forward?

Gender, change and reintegration in Colombia

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Abstract (English)

This thesis aims to explore how former female combatants from the largest left-wing insurgent group in Latin-America – the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia–People's Army (FARC-EP) – experience their transition from life as combatants to life as civilians in post-conflict Colombia. After President Santos and the leaders of the FARC-EP signed the Final Peace Agreement in 2016, reports show how former female combatants face particular challenges in their reintegration process. I examine what their stories can tell us about traditional gender norms, roles and stereotypes in the Colombian society in particular, and about the complex gender dimensions of reintegration in general. The thesis is situated within the interdisciplinary field of feminist- and gender studies, drawing on a critique of traditional research on post-conflict processes as well as Demilitarization, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) efforts' exclusion of women. The masculine image of war marginalizes women's active participation in armed insurgencies, their reasons for rebelling and the different roles they take on, by reducing them to the *victim*. By conducting semi-structured interviews with former female FARC-EP combatants in Colombia, and employing a thematic analysis, the purpose of the thesis is to shed light on their experiences of the reintegration process while living in reincorporation camps (ETCRs). According to my findings, the participants' experiences can be conceptualized as a transition 1) from collective to individual dealings with political, economic and social issues, 2) from *guerrillera* (female combatant) to civilian, and 3) from radical to traditional gender roles. These dimensions of reintegration are discussed through theoretical conceptualizations of gender, identity and hierarchy. My findings support that female combatants from left-wing Marxist insurgencies not only make up a large percentage of the combatants in these groups, but that they often have temporary experiences of more levelled gender relations, take on radical gender roles, practice insurgent femininity and gain greater autonomy within the ranks of these insurgent groups. When returning to civilian life, many experience a pressure to take on traditional gender roles, and see this as 'going back'. To combat this, they hold on to a strong group identity as *compañeros/compañeras* (fellow comrades) in the reincorporation camp – a site providing fertile ground for negotiating alternative gender norms, roles and relations post-conflict. By valuing and practicing gender equality, through e.g., shared house- and care responsibilities, this is perceived as 'moving forward'. I argue that experience-based and gender-sensitive research on the topic is useful for researchers and decision-makers, as successful reintegration is a prerequisite for stable and lasting peace.

Sammendrag (norsk)

Denne avhandlingen tar sikte på å utforske hvordan tidligere kvinnelige stridende fra den største venstreorienterte opprørsgruppen i Latin-Amerika – Colombias revolusjonære væpnede styrker-Folkets Hær (FARC-EP) – opplever overgangen fra livet som stridende til livet som sivile i post-konflikt Colombia. Etter at president Santos og lederne av FARC-EP signerte den endelige fredsavtalen i 2016, viser rapporter hvordan tidligere kvinnelige stridende møter på særlige utfordringer i reintegreringsprosessen. Jeg undersøker hva deres historier kan fortelle oss om tradisjonelle kjønnsnormer, roller og stereotyper i det colombianske samfunnet spesielt, og om de komplekse kjønnsdimensjonene ved reintegrering generelt. Avhandlingen er situert i det tverrfaglige kjønnsforskningsfeltet og trekker på en kritikk av hvordan kvinner blir ekskludert i tradisjonell forskning på post-konfliktprosesser, samt i demilitarisering, demobilisering og reintegrerings (DDR) innsatser. Det maskuline bildet av krig marginaliserer kvinners aktive deltakelse i væpnede opprør, deres motivasjoner og ulike roller under krig, og reduserer dem til rollen som *offer*. Ved å gjennomføre semistrukturerte intervjuer med tidligere kvinnelige FARC-EP-stridende i Colombia, og ta i bruk tematisk analyse, er hensikten med denne oppgaven å belyse deres erfaringer av reintegreringsprosessen i reinkorporasjonsleirene (ETCRs). Ifølge mine funn kan deltakernes erfaringer konseptualiseres som en overgang 1) fra kollektiv til individuell håndtering av politiske, økonomiske og sosiale utfordringer, 2) fra *guerrillera* (kvinnelig stridende) til sivil, og 3) fra radikale til tradisjonelle kjønnsroller. Disse reintegreringsdimensjonene diskuteres i lys av teoretiske konseptualiseringer av kjønn, identitet og hierarki. Mine funn støtter at kvinnelige stridende fra venstreorienterte, marxistiske opprørsgrupper ikke bare utgjør en stor prosentandel av de stridende i disse gruppene, men at de ofte har midlertidige erfaringer med jevnere kjønnsrelasjoner, går inn i radikale kjønnsroller, praktiserer opprørsk femininitet og oppnår større makt på innsiden av disse opprørsgruppene. Når de vender tilbake til det sivile liv opplever mange et press om å påta seg tradisjonelle kjønnsroller, og ser på dette som å 'gå tilbake' et steg. For å bekjempe dette holder de fast på en sterk gruppeidentitet som *compañeros/compañeras* (medkamerater) i reinkorporasjonsleiren – et sted som gir grobunn for å forhandle frem alternative kjønnsnormer, roller og relasjoner post-konflikt. Ved å verdsette og praktisere kjønnslikestilling, gjennom for eksempel delt hus- og omsorgsansvar, blir dette sett på som å ta et steg 'fremover'. Jeg argumenterer for at erfaringsbasert og kjønnssensitiv forskning på temaet er nyttig for forskere og beslutningstakere, da suksessfull reintegrering er en forutsetning for stabil og varig fred.

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Conflict of interest

There has been no conflict of interest. I want to add that I was an exchange-student at the National University of Colombia (Universidad Nacional de Colombia) in Bogotá from August-December 2019, and had an internship at FOKUS in Colombia from October-December 2021. My husband worked as a Norwegian diplomat (first secretary) at the Norwegian Embassy in Colombia, Bogotá, from 2019-2022, but this has not affected this thesis.

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Glossary and abbreviations

Abbreviation	English	Spanish
ARN	Agency for Reincorporation and Normalization (2017-)	Agencia para la Reincorporación y la Normalización (2017-)
AUC	United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia	Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia
CNR	The National Council for Reincorporation	Consejo Nacional de Reincorporación
Comunes	The Commons, Political Party (Successor of the FARC) (2017-)	Comunes, partido político (Sucesor de las FARC) (2017-)
CSIVI	Commission for the Following, Impulse and Verification of the Final Agreement	Comisión de Seguimiento, Impulso y Verificación a la Implementación del acuerdo Final
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration	Desmovilización, Desarme, Reintegración
ELN	National Liberation Army	Ejército de Liberación Nacional
ETCR	Territorial Spaces for Training and Reincorporation	Espacios Territoriales de Capacitación y Reincorporación
FARC	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (1964-1982)	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (1964-1982)
FARC-EP	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia–People's Army (1982-2017)	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia–Ejército del Pueblo (1982-2017)
FOKUS	Forum for Women and Development	Foro de Mujeres y Desarrollo
LGBTI	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex	
M-19	19th of April Movement	Movimiento 19 de abril

NAR	New Areas for Reincorporation	Nuevas Áreas de Reincorporación
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization	
NSD	Norwegian Centre for Research Data	
Post-conflict	The phase after an official agreement between two or more conflicting parties leading to the end of the conflict	
Reintegration	The action or process of integrating individuals/groups back into society	
Reincorporation	Terminology used about the 'reintegration' of former FARC-EP combatants in Colombia after the 2016-Peace Agreement	
SSI	Semi-structured interviews	
TA	Thematic analysis	
UN	United Nations	
UN WOMEN	The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women	
WPS	Women, Peace and Security (referring to the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 [2000])	
ZVTN	Transitory Normalization Township Zones	Zonas Veredales Transitorias de Normalización

1   Introduction

Colombia reached the headlines of newspapers and television channels all over the world in November 2016, when the Final Peace Agreement (2016) between the Colombian government and Latin-Americas largest left-wing guerrilla group – the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia–People's Army (FARC-EP) – officially ended the over 50 yearlong civil war in the country. The international community took a particular interest in the future of Colombia when President Juan Manuel Santos received the Nobel Peace Prize (2016) the same year, for his efforts to end the armed conflict in the country – "by peaceful means" (Nobel Prize, 2016; Schumann, 2021). The signing of the Final Peace Agreement (2016) gave many Colombians hope for a better future, and as a result of the agreement, more than eleven thousand FARC-EP combatants laid down their weapons – as a part of the official Demilitarization, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) process. This meant that their path to civilian life had begun.

This thesis aims at shedding light on the last phase of the DDR process in Colombia, namely the reintegration process of former female FARC-EP combatants living in Territorial Spaces for Training and Reincorporation (ETCRs). Many of the former FARC-EP combatants moved to these spaces, commonly known as temporary reincorporation camps, where they would get help to build a sustainable future for themselves and their families post-conflict[1]. Knowing that almost half[2] of the combatants within the ranks of the FARC-EP in Colombia were women, I ask: *How do the former female FARC-EP combatants experience their transition to civilian life in Colombia, and what do their stories tell us about the gender dimensions of reintegration?*

This is a broad and complex research question that can be answered in different ways, depending on what aspects of the reintegration process one chooses to focus on. To be able to narrow down the scope of this study, I ask three sub-questions:

1) *What challenges do the former female FARC-EP combatants face on their path to political, economic and social reintegration?*

2) *In what ways do gendered narratives about the guerrillera (female combatant) affect the former female FARC-EP combatants post-conflict?*

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[1] Since the Colombian Conflict *formally* ended with the 2016-Peace agreement between the FARC-EP and the Colombian Government, I use 'post-conflict' in this thesis, still acknowledging that other armed actors did not lay down their weapons.

[2] Numbers from the 2010s show how almost 50% of the FARC-EP combatants were women (Brittain & Petras, 2010, p. 28). Other sources operate with a percentage between 20-40% during the same period (Herrera & Porch, 2008, p. 612-613).

3) *How do the former female FARC-EP combatants experience the reintegration process from a gender role perspective?*

      To answer these questions, I carried out semi-structured interviews (SSI) with former female FARC-EP combatants living in temporary reincorporation camps (ETCRs) in Colombia in November 2021. I also interviewed professionals/experts working in the field of gender, peace and conflict and reintegration in Colombia, to get a comprehensive picture of the DDR process in the country. After conducting the interviews, I used a thematic analysis to map out the patterns of commonalities and shared experiences of the former female FARC-EP combatants, as well as allowing for singular stories and a diversity of voices to be represented in the final findings. The analysis and findings are presented in three parts, based on the former female FARC-EP combatants experiences of the transition 1) from collective to individual dealings with political, economic and social issues, 2) from *guerrillera* (female combatant) to civilian, and 3) from radical to traditional gender roles. I take on a critical, feminist approach in the analysis, which includes investigating how gender and power is entangled and shape people's lives (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018, p. 20), and the theoretical framework includes different conceptualizations of gender, identity and hierarchy.

      I aim at presenting how former female combatant's experiences within the FARC-EP – such as being part of a collective, political struggle, taking on radical gender roles and practicing more levelled gender relations with men (Ortega, 2014) – may affect their path to civilian life and make them question patriarchal hierarchies and traditional gender norms post-conflict. I draw on former research on gender and reintegration from Asia, Africa and Latin-America (Ortega, 2014/2012; Skjelsbæk & Smith, 2001; Sabogal, 2020; Henshaw, 2016/2020, Herrera & Porch, 2008; Gluecker et al., 2022; Schumann, 2021 etc.), to see how the Colombian case is similar and different to other DDR processes in the world in terms of e.g., approaches to, and experiences of, reintegration.

1.1   Why study reintegration in Colombia?

Traditional research on war have excluded women's participation in armed conflict, their reasons for rebelling and the different roles they take, because of the masculine image of war. Seeing women as merely *victims*, rather than perpetrators of violence does not only undermine their agency as political actors, but it reduces their experiences of conflict before, during and after war (Skjelsbæk & Smith, 2001; Sabogal & Richter 2019; Hauge, 2020). Feminist scholars have worked to shed light on women's experiences of war from a non-

paternalistic perspective, aiming for a more complex image of the different actors and victims of violence. Earlier research finds that female combatants – especially from left-wing and Marxist-inspired insurgencies – not only make up a large percentage of the overall combatants, but have had temporary experiences of gender-equity and power within the ranks of the insurgent group (Ortega, 2014; Sabogal & Richter, 2019; Gjelsvik, 2010; Hauge, 2008/2020). I wonder what happens to these women when returning to civilian life, in terms of challenging, or accepting, traditional gender norms, roles and stereotypes.

This thesis aims at shedding light on the gender dimensions of a fairly recent reintegration process in Latin-America, namely the Colombian one. The Final Peace Agreement (2016) between President Santos and the leaders of the FARC-EP was an ambitions one. The Peace Agreement became historic for its comprehensive inclusion of gender, which gave many feminists, human rights activist and supporters of gender equality high hopes for the future impact and participation of women. But reports from e.g., the UN Mission (2021[2]) shows that a lack of implementation hinders the potential for structural and cultural change in Colombia – including the reintegration of former combatants from the FARC-EP. I seek to examine what challenges the protagonists of the Demilitarization, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) process in Colombia – namely the former FARC-EP combatants themselves – experience on their path to civilian life. By focusing on former *female* combatants, and emphasizing the diversity within this group of participants, I want to contribute to an already existing body of research looking into gendered perspectives on conflict and reintegration.

I argue that the Colombian case is particularly interesting due to the collective approach to reintegration, and how the temporary reincorporation camps (ETCR) can be conceptualized as liminal spaces where gradual change in gender norms, relations and stereotypes can happen and be negotiated (Nieto-Valdivieso, 2020, p. 95). This study does not fill a gap in the literature *per se*, but aims at supporting earlier findings on e.g., the positive assets of continuing a strong group identity between the former combatants post-conflict. Finally, the study argues that experience-based and gender-sensitive research on the topic of reintegration is essential to facilitate the former combatants' transition from life as combatants to life as civilians. Historical and contextual knowledge of the conflict, as well as understanding the different roles the former *female* combatants' occupied and experiences they had during war, can help map out the challenges they face post-conflict and implement specific measures to support their reintegration (Hauge, 2008/2020; Skjelsbæk & Smith, 2001; Henshaw, 2020).

1.2   Thesis outline

The thesis is divided into seven main chapters. After the initial introduction chapter follows chapter two, background, that seeks to establish a historical framework of the thesis and situate it in a broader context. A short introduction to the Colombian conflict (1964-2016), the Final Peace Agreement (2016), and the reintegration process of former FARC-EP combatants in Colombia is presented. I outline some challenges related to the political, economic and social reintegration of the former FARC-EP combatants, as well as security issues that may hinder their path to civilian life. In chapter three, I present the analytical framework of the study, including theories and conceptualization of gender, identity and hierarchy that are used in the thematic analysis. Furthermore, I argue that intersectional thinking is a good theoretical tool to demonstrate the diversity within the group 'woman' and 'former female combatants'. Then, the Demilitarization, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) process in Colombia is presented with an emphasis on the particular *collective* approach to reintegration in the 'Santos-FARC DDR' in Colombia. That is followed by important non-English terminology and group identities – like *compañera* – because of its relevance to the empirical findings of the study. Chapter four explains the chosen method and methodology of the thesis, introducing qualitative semi-structured interviews (SSI) and thematic analysis. Advantages, disadvantages, and challenges in relation to the choice of methods, selections and data collection are discussed, as well as situating the thesis within the interdisciplinary field of feminist- and gender studies. Chapter five reflects upon ethical concerns, including my role as a researcher, potential biases and ethical guidelines provided by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). Chapter six presents the analysis and findings of the study and is structured into three main sections: each section elaborates on a dimension of the participants' transition from life as combatants to life as civilians and corresponds to three sub-questions asked in the introduction chapter. Finally, the seventh and last chapter offers conclusions and suggestions for policy makers and academic researchers in the field of reintegration in the future. It aims at showing how the reintegration process of former female FARC-EP combatants in Colombia can tell a story about potential change in gender norms, relations and roles in post-conflict countries, but that this requires listening to women's own experiences and working specifically on the implementation of gender-sensitive responses post-conflict.

2   Background

This chapter aims at sketching up a short background of the Colombian Conflict (1964-2016), the Final Peace Agreement (2016) between the Colombian state and the left-wing guerrilla group FARC-EP, and the last phase of the Demilitarization, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) process in the country: the reintegration of former combatants to civilian life. A contextualization is important to understand the historical, cultural and political roots of the armed conflict in Colombia, as well as reflecting upon why *women* take up weapons to rebel against the state, and what challenges the former female combatants face when returning to legality post-conflict.

2.1   The Colombian Conflict (1964-2016)

The Colombian Conflict (1964-2016) is commonly described as a low-intensity civil war between left-wing socialist guerrilla groups on the one side, and the Colombian state and right-wing conservative paramilitary groups on the other (Brittain & Petras, 2010). The conflict has roots in the famous *La Violencia* (1948-1958)*,* which was a 10 yearlong civil-war in Colombia fought between the Conservative Party[3] and the Liberal Party[4] in the 1940-50s. La Violencia (1948-1958) was mainly battled in rural areas of the country, between right-wing conservative and left-wing liberal peasants (Brittain & Petras, 2010). Over 200.000 people lost their lives during the conflict, which formally ended with the National Front Agreement (1958): an agreement based on a rotation of power between the two political parties. In the aftermath of La Violencia (1948-1958), the Colombian society went through large economic changes. During the 1960-70s, a centralization of power and industrialization of the agricultural sector took place, and small-scale farmers felt forgone by large landowners and high-scale commercial farming, which led to increased dissatisfaction with the right-wing government and the *bourgeois state* (Brittain & Petras, 2010, p. 6-7). The new economic model, as well as corruption, electoral fraud and political repression, can be seen as driving factors for the rise of left-wing insurgent groups like the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) (Brittain & Petras, 2010; Carranza-Franco, 2019; Schumann, 2021).

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[3] Partido Conservador Colombiano.
[4] Partido Liberal Colombiano.

2.1.1 *FARC-EP: aiming for socialist revolution in Colombia*

The FARC claimed to bring the needs, interests and well-being of the peasant population in Colombia to the forefront of their fight, and their overall goal was a socialist revolution and seizure of power (Brittain & Petras, 2010; Ortega, 2014). The Marxist-Leninist guerrilla group was established in Marquetalia (Tolima) in 1964, and declared that their warfare was a result of an already ongoing class-struggle between the bourgeois class (upper class) and the proletariat (working class) in Colombia. By taking their destiny into their own hands, the proletariat would get power over the means of production, and a socialist society could occur (Stølen, 2022; Brittain & Petras, 2010).

Over time, the FARC became the largest insurgency in the history of Latin-America, with a high percentage of female combatants in their ranks (Brittain & Petras, 2010; Carranza-Franco, 2019). This in contrast to the Colombian military, where the vast majority were – and still are – men. In the 1980s, the FARC had a significant growth, and by the 1990s the guerrilla group had an overwhelmingly high number of combatants: estimated between 35-50.000 (Brittain & Petras, 2010, p. 16). The guerrilla group had fronts spread over 60% of the country, and the rapid geographical emerge can be explained as a lack of state presence in the rural territories, where the guerrilla group could fill the void of the military, police or other institutional state presence.

After changing their name from FARC to FARC-EP in 1982, the group was no longer just a defensive collective, but a revolutionary guerrilla movement – a People's Army (Brittain & Petras, 2010, p. 25). FARC-EP kept gaining support in rural Colombia, and underwent a symbolic and formative change by e.g., including a political program to their insurgency, but the guerrilla group was constantly seeking ways to pay for the warfare (Gluecker et al., 2022, p. 359). To fund their armed struggle, they began with strategic kidnapping of people from the upper class and political elite in change for ransom (Brittain & Petras, 2010, p. 118). Like the right-wing paramilitary groups, FARC-EP was also involved in the illegal drug trade, by for instance offering coca farmers protection in exchange for taxes (Schumann, 2021, p. 56-57). The guerrilla group, who started out as a revolutionary insurgent group fighting for the rights of the peasants, became an important, armed actor in the international narcotrafficking business.

2.1.2   Motivation for rebellion and female combatants

There are many possible answers to the question why people rebel and join armed groups, that in turn may impact the former combatants' reintegration to civilian life post-conflict – which is the focus on this study (Sabogal, 2020; Henshaw, 2016/2020). As understood through Collier and Hoeffler (2004): "(…) rebellion needs both motive and opportunity" (p. 563), and the traditional literature on war can be broadly divided into theories on greed or grievances as underlying reasons for why people take up arms and civil wars emerge.

In Colombia, the FARC-EP traditionally recruited marginalized groups, such as peasant men and women, ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples, and poor youth and children (Sabogal, 2020; Gluecker et al., 2022; Schumann, 2021). The combatants were given basic needs like clothing and food, which made the group attractive for many people in rural areas. Together with repression, violence, a lack of possibilities, poverty and an overall distrust in the Colombian state and institutions, there were many driving factors explaining why people joined[5] the FARC-EP (Carranza-Franco, 2019; Gjelsvik, 2010).

To answer the question why *women* rebel, the research of Henshaw (2016) finds that economic, ethnic, religious and political grievances are key. She argues that women and men have different motivations for joining armed groups, and even though women are largely represented as armed combatants in insurgent groups in every region of the world, they are underrepresented in research on recruitment (Henshaw, 2016). This in contrast to the gendered narrative about women's role in literature on conflict – namely as passive *victims* – overseeing their participation as active, armed combatants or insurgents (Skjelsbæk & Smith, 2001; Sjöberg & Gentry, 2007/2008). Henshaw (2016) finds that women are more likely to participate in armed insurgent groups that promotes a redistributive ideology, such as Marxist-socialist ideology, and they take on different roles within the ranks of the armed groups (Henshaw, 2016, p. 205). This is especially interesting in the case of Colombia, where numbers from Brittain & Petras (2010, p. 28) estimate that almost 50%[6] of all the FARC-EP combatants were women. Herrera & Porch (2008), on the other hand, reports that women constituted between 20-40% of the combatants in the FARC-EP, emphasizing that there were large variations between the different fronts (p. 612-613). The roles women occupied within the ranks of the FARC-EP also varied from region to region and front to front, ranging from

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[5] Insurgent groups like the FARC-EP in Colombia have also been accused of forced recruitment (Ortega, 2014, p. 101).
[6] Numbers from the 2010s (Brittain & Petras, 2010, p. 28).

commanders to sexual slaves (Brittain & Petras, 2010, p. 28; Schumann, 2021, p. 100; Herrera & Porch, 2008, p. 612-614).

2.2   The Final Peace Agreement (2016)

The over 50 yearlong civil war in Colombia has affected many generations, and figures from 2021 show a high number of victims: over 450.000 people have lost their lives, approximately 8 million are internally displaced, 9 million are victims of political violence and more than 120.000 are missing[7] (Comisión de la Verdad, 2022; Le Monde, 2022; Schumann, 2021, p. 65; El Tiempo, 2021). It was therefore a historical moment when the two conflicting parties, represented by Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos and Commander-in-Chief of the FARC-EP Timoleón Jiménez[8], signed the *Final Agreement to End the Armed Conflict and Build a Stable and Lasting Peace* in 2016 (Carranza-Franco, 2019). The Final Peace Agreement (2016) consist of six chapters, in which all had an inclusive gender-based approach: 1) Comprehensive Rural Reform, 2) Political Participation: A Democratic Opportunity to Build Peace, 3) End of the Conflict[9], 4) Solution to the Illicit Drugs Problem, 5) Agreement regarding the Victims of the Conflict, and 6) Implementation, Verification and Public Endorsement (p. 10-231).

By emphasizing how the armed conflict affected women, vulnerable social groups, ethnic groups and the LGBTI[10] community in different ways, the Final Peace Agreement (2016) was historical as it took "a territorial-based, equity-based and gender-based approach" (p. 6) to combat the structural inequalities that led to war. The gender-based efforts were a result of the continuously work put down by the Colombian civil society, UN Women and the *Subcomisión de Género* (Gender Subcommission) – which was the first of its kind in the world at the time (Schumann, 20201, p. 65-66). Many feminists and women's rights activists had high hopes for the Final Peace Agreement's (2016) "potential to transform gender relations, stereotypes and roles in Colombia" (Downing et al., 2021), but five years after its signing, progress has been slow.

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[7] Often referred to as *desaparición forzada,* which translates to enforced disappearance (Comision de la Verdad, 2022).

[8] Also known as Rodrigo Londoño Echeverri/Timochenko/Timochenco.

[9] In this thesis, I mainly focus on Chapter 3 (End of the Conflict), point 3.1 and 3.2, related to the Demilitarization, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) of former FARC-EP combatants.

[10] "LGBTI stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex" (OHCHR, 2022)[1].

2.2.1 *Voting 'no' and gender ideology*

To understand how politicized the discourse surrounding the Final Peace Agreement (2016) and the following DDR process of the former FARC-EP combatants in Colombia is, the referendum on the 2nd of October 2016 was crucial. This day became historical as 50,7% of Colombians voted 'no' to the Peace agreement (Schumann, 2021, p. 60). The no-side was mobilized by former president Álvaro Uribe (2000-2010), who joined forced with conservative politicians and Christian groups in claiming that the Peace agreement was too radical on three points: demobilization, amnesty and gender (Schumann, 2021, p. 60). By creating a narrative about the gender perspective in the Peace agreement as destructive of the nuclear family, people voted 'no' to a *gender ideology* challenging traditional 'family values' and gender roles, opposing the agreement's notions on LGBTI people and women's extensive rights (Schumann, 2021, p. 61). The referendum can be criticized from many different perspectives, but it clearly showed how divided the Colombian people were on the topic of signing a Peace agreement with the FARC-EP, and what role gendered narratives and stereotypes played when describing the former female FARC-EP combatants in particular.

Finally, in November 2016, a revised Peace agreement was signed. President Santos received the Nobel Peace Prize the same year, for his efforts at bringing the civil war in Colombia to an end, even though many have questioned why the FARC-EP was not awarded the Peace Prize as well (Schumann, 2021, p. 62).

2.3 Reintegration in Colombia

From a historical perspective, Colombia has a long history of reintegrating former combatants from different guerrilla- and paramilitary groups. Carranza-Franco (2019) writes that the country has gone through six large peace processes and amnesties during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Over 25,000 former combatants from left-wing guerrilla groups – such as FARC-EP, ELN and M-19, amongst others – were accredited as part of a national reintegration program in Colombia between 1982-2006 (Carranza-Franco, 2019). Even though many guerrilla and paramilitary combatants have demobilized and began their path towards civilian life as a result of these peace processes, it has not put an end to the armed conflict in the country. As for why Colombia relapse into conflict, several scholars emphasize the continuous high levels of repression and violence (Carranza-Franco, 2019, p. 8, 49; Gjelsvik, 2010).

In 2017, pictures of thousands of FARC-EP combatants turning in their weapons to UN officers became the symbol of a new beginning and hope for a stable and lasting peace in Colombia (Carranza-Franco, 2019). As a result of the two first phases of the Demilitarization, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) process in the country, 11,049 FARC-EP combatants were to begin their path towards civilian life – 77% men and 23% women (Carranza-Franco, 2019, p. 12). Five years later, the UN Mission in Colombia (2021[1]) operates with a number of 13,613 former FARC-EP combatants, who are now following the official *reincorporation route*, aiming to facilitate the former combatants' political, economic and social reintegration post-conflict (Final Peace Agreement, 2016; ARN, 2019). As for the scope of this study, recent research from Colombia shows how women "remain ignored in all of the three aspects of reintegration: political legitimacy, economic empowerment, and social cohesion" (Sabogal, 2020, p. 93). This is why I take on an experience-based and gender-sensitive approach to the question of reintegration in this study.

2.4   Security issues and the future

The Kroc Institute evaluates the implementation of the Final Peace Agreement (2016) and their report from 2021 shows that even though significant progress has been made, political polarization, negative social- and economic effects of COVID-19 as well as violence by illegal actors are challenges facing Colombia's path to peace (Kroc Institute, 2021, p. 9). A lack of security guarantees for former FARC-EP combatants, as well as for social leaders[11] from indigenous/afro/rural communities, have resulted in terrifying assassination figures in Colombia the last years (Amnesty International, 2022; UN Mission, 2021[1]; Sabogal, 2020). Statistics from the 30th of November 2021 show how 1,270 social leaders, human rights defenders and environmentalists have been killed since the signing of the Final Peace Agreement in 2016. As for the former FARC-EP combatant population, 299 murders have been reported during the same five-year period (Indepaz, 2021, p. 1-5). The alarming numbers make Colombia one of the world's most dangerous countries to live in for environmental- and human rights defenders (Amnesty International, 2022; Indepaz, 2021), and "violence against former combatants remains the single greatest threat to their transition into civilian life" (UN Mission, 2021[2], p. 9). Even though killings of former FARC-EP combatants have decreased by 27%[12] between 2020-2021, the UN Mission in Colombia (2021[2]) confirms a growing trend

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11 "(…) social leaders – a term used in Colombia to describe activists, community representatives and rights defenders" (Alexander, 2022).
[12] Numbers from 2021, UN (2022).

where armed insurgent groups threaten former FARC-EP combatants who participate in collective initiatives. This hinders the political participation of former FARC-EP combatants in general, and women in particular. Women are specifically "targeted by illegal armed groups (…) to discourage them from participating in political, social and peacebuilding processes" (UN Mission, 2021[2], p. 11). This sheds light on what Henshaw (2020) argues is Colombia's atypical feature: many of the former female combatants claim to be registered as both victims and former FARC-EP combatants in the aftermath of the 2016-Peace agreement, due to the circumstances that led them to war, their experiences during the armed conflict, and the targeted violence they face post-conflict (p. 67-68).

The threat comes primarily from illegal groups, that took advantage of the power vacuum in zones where the FARC-EP was present prior to the 2016-Peace agreement: the guerilla group National Liberation Army (ELN), paramilitaries, narco cartels and FARC-dissidents[13] (Colombia Reports, 2021). The illegal organizations use different tactics to control the population in these areas, including threats, imposing rules, restricting people's movement and targeted killings (OHCHR, 2022)[2]. Following Carranza-Franco (2019), security risks pose a great threat to the future of a stable and lasting peace in conflict-affected countries like Colombia, as it increases the chances of former FARC-EP combatants joining dissident groups or other armed actors.

This thesis is looking into the reincorporation of former female FARC-EP combatants living in reincorporation camps in 2021, a year prior to national elections in Colombia; meaning that Iván Duque was Colombia's President. His right-wing conservative party, Centro Democratico (CD), believed that the Final Peace Agreement (2016) gave the former FARC-EP leaders and combatants too much power and benefits, and have been criticized for deliberately slowing down the implementation of the agreement (Alsema, 2022[1]). In 2022, Gustavo Petro was elected as the first left-wing President in the history of Colombia, and with the afro-Colombian Francia Marquez as his vice-president, the Petro administration is seen as representing a shift in Colombian politics. As for the relevance of this study, important lessons from the 'Santos-FARC DDR' can contribute to Petro's aim for a *paz total* (total peace) in Colombia, with the goal is to disarm and reintegrate all illegal armed groups in the country.

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[13] Numbers from 2021 show how approximately 300 former FARC-EP combatants have withdrawn from the Final Peace Agreement (2016) (Schumann, 2021, p. 75).

3 Analytical and theoretical framework

Returning to the research question, the aim of this paper is to answer: *How do the former female FARC-EP combatants experience their transition to civilian life in Colombia, and what do their stories tell us about the gender dimensions of reintegration?* In this chapter, I present the chosen theories, literature and relevant studies to answer the research question, as well as an introduction to the concept of DDR, collective reintegration and the Colombian reincorporation camps (ETCRs). Together, this constitutes the analytical and theoretical framework of the thesis. As I will return to in chapter six, the analysis and findings are based on semi-structured interviews (SSI) with former female FARC-EP combatants and their experiences of the reintegration process, focusing on their transition 1) from collective to individual dealings with political, economic and social issues, 2) from *guerrillera* (female combatant) to civilian, and 3) from radical to traditional gender roles. In this chapter, I present how theoretical conceptualizations of *gender*, *identity* and *hierarchies* relate to these three main dimensions of reintegration, drawing on literature from feminist- and gender research as well as peace and conflict, DDR and Latin-American studies.

3.1 Demobilization, Demilitarization and Reintegration (DDR)

According to the United Nations (UN) definition, "the objective of the DDR process is to contribute to security and stability in post-conflict environments so that recovery and development can begin" (UN, 2022). A DDR *process* is an all-inclusive umbrella term that refers to a series of actions in a post-conflict setting, beginning with disarmament of the illegal actors (UN, 2022; Carranza-Franco, 2019, p. 3-4). A DDR *program* is a more specifically intended set of institutions, policies and practices aiming at the demobilization and reintegration of former combatants, including security measures (Carranza-Franco, 2019, p. 4). The overall aim of a DDR process is the "disbandment of armed groups that jeopardize the state's monopoly of force" (Carranza-Franco, 2019, p. 1) and to manage the population of former combatants. This thesis will focus on what Carranza-Franco (2019) calls the 'Santos-FARC DDR', and the last phase of the DDR process, namely *reintegration.*

      Carranza-Franco (2019, p. 8) write that the Santos-FARC DDR is atypical in light of the existing literature on DDR because of its four main features: 1) Colombia has had many peace processes where insurgent groups have demobilized, but the conflict in the country continued, 2) the peace processes have included very different insurgent groups, which in turn have been approached differently in terms of DDR, 3) the DDR processes have been led by

the Colombian government (nation-led) and 4), even though Colombia is a democracy, the levels of repression are still very high (Carranza-Franco, 2019, p. 8). I argue that insights about the reintegration process of former FARC-EP combatants in Colombia can bring important contributions to the DDR literature as a whole, because of the *collective* approach to reintegration, the organization of the reincorporation camps (ETCRs) and the comprehensive gender approach in the Final Peace Agreement (2016), which aims at taking specific measures to ensure political, economic and social reintegration of *all* former combatants.

3.1.1 *Collective reintegration and temporary camps*

When negotiating a final draft of the Peace Agreement with the Colombian government, it was important for the FARC-EP to have a *collective* approach to reintegration to maintain its unity, structure and organization during the DDR process (Carranza Franco, 2019; Sabogal & Richter, 2019). The dialogues between the Colombian government and the FARC-EP resulted in an emphasis on both individual *and* collective reintegration of the former combatants. In short, this ensured that all former combatants in reintegration process can exercise their individual freedoms and rights, as well as promoting measures for collective reincorporation[14] (Final Peace Agreement, 2016, p. 69). The latter resulted in a political reintegration where the FARC-EP transitioned into the legal political party Comunes[15], in which the former FARC-EP combatants and others could become members, and the creation of Territorial Spaces for Training and Reincorporation (ETCR).

  After the demilitarization and demobilization processes ended, the Colombian Government set out to establish Transitional Local Zones for Normalization (TLZNs) where the former combatant population from FARC-EP would begin their first preparatory phase of the reintegration process as a collective (Final Peace Agreement, 2016). The aim was, as stated in the Final Peace Agreement (2016), to facilitate former combatants' transition from life as combatants to life as civilians – a transition towards legality. In 2017, the Zones (TLZNs) were changed into Territorial Training and Reincorporation Spaces (ETCRs), administered by the Colombian Reintegration Agency (ARN) who would implement, assist and follow up on the projects, activities and population living in the temporary

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[14] In the Final Peace Agreement (2016) the term *reincorporation* is used instead of *reintegration.* This is why I use *reincorporation* when referring to specific parts of the Peace agreement, and choose *reintegration* as an overall term in the thesis. This is discussed later on.
[15] The political party FARC changed their name to Comunes in 2017 (Comunes, 2021).

reincorporation camps (ETCRs). The purpose of the reincorporation camps (ETCRs) in Colombia was to facilitate the former FARC-EP combatants' political, economic and social reintegration, through agricultural projects and other educational and productive initiatives to help them build a basis for a sustainable future in line with their own interests (Final Peace Agreement, 2016; ARN, 2019).

Recent reports show that the largest percentage of former combatants (approximately 10,500 people) now live in large municipalities or cities, a third have moved to unofficial New Areas of Reintegration (NAR) and that the rest of the former combatants have continued their reintegration process in the official reincorporation camps[16] (ARN, 2019; UN Mission, 2021[2]). The lack of productive projects, dignified housing, economic prospects, security issues and the desire to be reunited with their families are some of the reasons why many of the former combatants left the reincorporation camps after they were granted full citizenship (Carranza-Franco, 2019). This study has several limitations, and one of these is that I only conducted interviews with a small selection of former female FARC-EP combatants living in the official reincorporation camps (ETCRs). This due to accessibility, security risks, time and scope of this study. In chapter 7, Conclusions, I argue that future research should examine the former combatant population living in the New Areas of Reincorporation (NARs), since little information about this population has been accessible for the public.

3.2   Theories and conceptualizations

In this section, I seek to present theoretical conceptualization of gender, identity and hierarchy. These are used to discuss and present the empirical findings of the study, and help guide the analysis. Firstly, *conceptualizations of gender* examine how essentialist and social constructionist understandings of gender portray the categories woman/man as either stable and biologically determined or changeable and in constant negotiation in relation to others and the social world (Skjelsbæk & Smith, 2001). I take on a social constructionist approach in this study, which makes it important to define and distinguish from other positions. Further on, a feminist criticism of traditional literature on war and conflict is presented and discussed in light of negative gender stereotypes and gendered narratives about female combatants, which is presented through Sjöberg & Gentry's (2007/2008) theory of *mothers*, *monsters* or *whores*. Finally, an introduction to the topic of *insurgent femininities* and *masculinities*

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[16] The reincorporation camps (ETCRs) were initially meant to last for 24 months, with a transitory legal status ending by August 2019 (ARN, 2019), but in 2022 they are still operative.

provides a fertile ground for discussing the former female FARC-EP combatants' experiences of radical gender norms, relations and encouraged behaviors during war, and how the *guerrillera* (female combatant) was a 'new kind of woman' in comparison to the civilian one (Ortega, 2012).

Secondly, *conceptualizations of identity* are presented through theories on how we understand ourselves and the world through concepts of role identity, social/group identity and personal identity (Burke & Stets, 2000/2009). These identities are multiple, changing and occasionally in conflict, which is evident for the former female FARC-EP combatants who participated in this study. Their intersectional identities (Crenshaw, 1989) – a term used to understand how people's sexuality, ethnic background, age, disability etc. intersect with e.g., their gender identity – shape their experiences and opportunities when returning to civilian life. Lastly, Fangen's (2010) concept of *stedsdimensjonen,* translated to the spatial dimension, is introduced to conceptualize the reincorporation camp as a temporary site where group identities can continue, and change may occur.

Thirdly, *conceptualizations of hierarchy* include theories on gender order and gender regime (Connell, 2002/2009), patriarchy and *machismo* (Henshaw, 2016/2020; Schumann, 2021), the latter being particularly important when discussing women's oppression in Latin America. Hierarchy is entangled with questions of power, dominance and equality, and the transition from a radical gender order (during conflict) to a traditional gender order (post-conflict) is challenging for the former female FARC-EP combatants as they seek political, economic and social reintegration. A discussion of hierarchies is seen as fruitful for the analysis in different ways, especially concerning how many of the former female FARC-EP combatants' in this study seek to challenge the patriarchal gender order in the Colombian society by negotiating e.g., alternative parental roles post-conflict.

3.2.1   Conceptualizations of gender

Given that this thesis is focusing on women's experiences, the category 'woman' and different conceptualizations of gender should be defined. Hesse-Biber & Yaiser (2004) argues that gender can be theorized in various ways, where all approaches have their own possibilities and limitations. From a historical perspective, one could present two very different conceptualizations of gender as either *essentialist* or *social constructionist* (Skjelsbæk & Smith, 2001, p. 3). Knowing that the interdisciplinary field of gender studies includes a manyfold of theories and strands of thinking about gender, these positions are

chosen and seen as useful to discuss gender norms, identity and hierarchy in post-conflict Colombia, due to historical and contextual aspects of the two parties in the Colombian Conflict (1964-2016): between a more traditional and conservative Colombian Government and the radical and socialist-communist FARC-EP.

In the essentialist or biological determinist position, gender is understood as given by nature and/or God (Skjelsbæk & Smith, 2001). In this approach, which Laqueur (1990) calls the two-sex model, men and women are seen as opposites and inherently different, because of their anatomical and biological differences. The social constructionist position, on the other hand, is built on an understanding of the social world as continuously changing, where gender is social, dynamic, relational and interactional (Skjelsbæk & Smith, 2001). Conceptualizing gender as a social construct makes it open for change, and it interacts with – but is different from – sex and anatomy (WHO, 2022; Skjelsbæk & Smith, 2001). The main critique of the essentialist position is that it is built on an understanding of gender as inherent characteristics that can't be changed (Skjelsbæk & Smith, 2001). A critique of the social constructionist position, on the other hand, could be that feminist- and gender theories underestimate that women and men are born with a set of *differences* in their anatomy and biology, and that we cannot – and should not – ignore this.

The essentialist/constructionist conceptualizations of gender are relevant to this study, because of the overall gender dimensions of peace and war in general, and the gender dimensions of the reintegration process of former combatants in Colombia in particular. By joining the ranks of the guerilla group FARC-EP, many women challenged typically 'female characteristics' and behaviors, and performed military tasks on the same footing as men (Sabogal & Richter, 2019). Through an essentialist approach, one could argue that these women were unique expressions of deviant behavior or biology; what Sjöberg & Gentry (2007) call the *mother, monster* or *whore* narrative, which is presented later on. Women who practice violence, terrorism or in other ways enter into masculine and male spheres such as war and conflict, can be explained as 'outcasts' which upholds the gendered dichotomies of man/woman, war/peace, public/private and the patriarchal gender order in society. The essentialist approach to gender is also prominent in the *anti-gender* movement in Europe and the Americas, where conservative (religious) forces promote a complementary understanding of women and men as ontologically different, fighting to erase 'gender' within e.g., legal frameworks (Sosa, 2021, p. 7). To fight the so-called 'gender ideology' means fighting the rights of LGBTI people – such as same-sex marriage – abortions, women's participation and gender-based violence, amongst others (Sosa, 2021, p. 8). These thoughts were evident in the

'no' campaign leading up to the referendum about the Final Peace Agreement (2016), and still shapes the way gender is understood in traditional and conservative countries like Colombia (Schumann, 20121).

In this study, I am taking on a social constructionist approach, understanding gender and gender identities as socially constructed categories that we practice and negotiate in different societies at different times (Skjelsbæk & Smith, 2001; West & Zimmermann, 1991). Following the social constructionist approach, gender is not a story about inherent differences across different contexts, but emphasize how norms and values are highly situated within cultural contexts (Haraway, 1988). Through this approach to gender, women who have participated in war and conflict – as the former female FARC-EP combatants in this study – are understood as actors with agency, will and political convictions, rather than singular deviations to the category 'woman'.

It may seem like a paradox that I have chosen 'former female combatants' as the selection in this study, because it could appear as 1) an essentialization of the category 'woman', 2) reinforcing the idea that gender research is solely concerned with women's issues and/or 3) strengthening the view that gender is binary. This is not my intention. From my perspective, choosing a population based on their group identity 'FARC-EP' and gender identity 'woman' is rather to examine and discuss how the individuals in this study shape and are shaped by gender norms, expected roles, behaviors and stereotypes on their process towards civilian life post-conflict. When using the term 'woman', this includes all individuals that identify with this category. I acknowledge that the category 'man' is equally *gendered*.

3.2.1.1 Gendered narratives and stereotypes

As seen in earlier research on reintegration, former women and girl combatants face different forms of stigmatization and discrimination post-conflict than men and boys (Wessells, 2016; McKay & Mazurana, 2004; Ortega, 2012/2014; Sabogal, 2020; Tonheim, 2017; Hauge, 2021). Sjöberg & Gentry (2007/2008) argue that this is related to specific, gendered narratives and myths about women as political actors and perpetrators of violence. Dominant narratives about the *mother,* the *monster* and the *whore* are used to account for women's violence: the mother narratives describe women's violence as a result of needing to belong, nurture and take care of men; the monster narratives label violent women as insane, irrational and non-human; and the whore narratives portray women's violence as based on their extreme sexuality, sexual deviance and/or through being men's sexual possessions (Sjöberg & Gentry,

2007, p. 13). These narratives serve to undermine women's agency and motivations for rebelling, and has been reproduced across cultures, geographic borders and time (Sjöberg & Gentry, 2008, p. 8).

In line with the theory of Sjöberg & Gentry (2007), the former female FARC-EP combatants in this study have disrupted traditional gender norms and *gender stereotypes* by joining an insurgent guerrilla group in Colombia. Following OHCHR (2014), the definition of a *gender stereotype* is:

> "(…) a generalized view or preconception about attributes, or characteristics that are or ought to be possessed by women and men or the roles that are or should be performed by men and women. Gender stereotypes can be both positive and negative for example 'women are nurturing' or 'women are weak'" (OHCHR, 2014).

Violent women, female terrorists and combatants disrupt gender stereotypes and the feminine ideal of women as helpless, peaceful and *victims* during war (Sjöberg & Gentry, 2007; Henshaw, 2020; Ortega, 2012). This is in line with a common, feminist criticism of the traditional literature on war and DDR, where women's roles in conflict often have been reduced to the role of the victim. By ignoring women's active participation in insurgencies, one marginalizes their agency and experiences of power both during conflict and in its aftermath (Sabogal, 2020; Skjelsbæk & Smith, 2001; Ortega, 2012/2014; Steenbergen, 2021; Henshaw, 2020; Sjöberg & Gentry, 2007). In more recent research on women's participation in conflict, it is evident how women occupy different roles during war, how their reasons for joining are diverse, and that their experiences of empowerment/agency often are complex and multidimensional (Henshaw, 2016/2020). In this thesis, I mainly draw on the theory of Sjöberg & Gentry (2007/2008) to explain how the former female FARC-EP combatants in the study experience stigmatization and judgement based on their former roles as *guerrilleras* (female combatants) and the negative stereotypes and narratives attached to this role. As civilian women, they have to negotiate new narratives that fit with their own experiences of the war, as they gradually change their identities and roles from *guerrillera* (female combatant) to civilian woman. This is explored in chapter six, Analysis and findings.

3.2.1.2 Reintegration: femininities, masculinities and gender roles
As for *why* gendered narratives and stereotypes about the *guerrillera* (female combatant) persist, this can be explained as related to how war and warfare are gendered phenomena,

which historically have been explained through masculine images and narratives (Ortega, 2012; Skjelsbæk & Smith, 2001). The 'soldier' is a role identity that is inherently male and hyper-masculine: associated with aggression, violence and men as the main perpetrators of war (Ortega, 2012, p. 85-86). The 'victim', on the other hand, is associated with femininity and women: they are peaceful, apolitical and the primary victims of war (Ortega, 2012, p. 85-86). Drawing on interviews with former male and female combatants from different insurgent groups in Peru, El Salvador and Colombia, Ortega (2012) argues that a dilution of the dichotomies between men/women and masculinity/femininity within these insurgent groups during war, make alternative roles and relations between female and male combatants emerge. As their class identity (proletariat) or group identity (peasants) and comradeship (*compañeros/compañeras*) become essential, their gender-based identities are less important (Ortega, 2014, p. 86). Similarities between women/men and femininities/masculinities occur and is promoted within the insurgency through the role identity *la guerrillera (*the female combatant) and *el guerrillero* (the [male] combatant) and practices of *insurgent femininity/masculinity* (Ortega, 2012).

Within the insurgent gender regime in the FARC-EP, femininities and masculinities were practiced differently than within the context of the Colombian society in general. These so-called *insurgent femininities* were expressed through the identity of *la guerrillera* (the female combatant). She was a 'new kind of woman', completely "different from the mother, wife, sister, daughter or lover" (Ortega, 2014, p. 105). In traditional, patriarchal and conservative countries like Colombia, women are expected to take on traditional gender roles associated with care and the private/domestic sphere. Women are subordinate to their husbands in terms of power, but also worshiped as they fulfill their role as a 'good mother' and a 'good wife' (Schumann, 2021, p. 45). Earlier studies show how women who join insurgent groups can transgress traditional gender norms, become political actors, achieve a higher level of agency in the public sphere and experience intellectual and bodily autonomy (Ortega, 2014; Henshaw, 2020; Skjelsbæk & Smith, 2001).

For a man, the *insurgent masculinities* and the identity category *guerrillero* (the [male] combatant), was not a 'new kind of man', but rather an empowered version of the peasant, marginalized and racialized man (Ortega, 2014, p. 105). His traditional gender role as 'head of the family' was not ruptured during conflict, but rather expanded to include the whole Colombian people; the people he sought to protect, defend and liberate through armed revolution (Ortega, 2014, p. 105). Ortega (2014) claims that the insurgent femininities did not constitute a threat, neither implied a loss of power, to the male combatants and their

masculinities. By reducing the overall significance of gender, the level of gender equity rose, and women were able to access and compete for positions of power on the same footing as men (with the exception of the highest rankings in the guerrilla group) (Herrera & Porch, 2008). "In this way, insurgent organizations install gender relations in which militant women 'win' while militant men don't lose" (Ortega, 2014, p. 116). An insurgent gender regime "breaks with identity constructions based on the difference between genders and constructs a political identity that does not require a binary, hierarchical gendered framework" (Ortega, 2014, p. 115).

3.2.2 Conceptualizations of identity

Identity is a large and complex concept, which is used in everyday speech as well as a theoretical concept in various academic fields. From a historical perspective, the focus on people's *role identities* arose from structural symbolic interactionism, emphasizing the meaning of language, signs and symbols in the social world (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 10-11). This strand of thought sees society as a structure that shapes – and is shaped by – individuals' actions (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 4). From a structural point of view, one can talk about roles as something all people play, where the script is given by an external structure that directs the individuals' actions. From an agency perspective, people themselves engage and create different roles which are negotiated and compromised. Agency, in this context, can be defined as people's opportunities to make choices for themselves, given their social location in society (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 5). Shortly put, in symbolic interactionism, the interaction between structure and agents are key. In this thesis, a structure can e.g., be the patriarchal gender order in a traditional-conservative country like Colombia, whilst the agents are former female FARC-EP combatants, as understood through this sociological theoretical approach.

Within social sciences like sociology, the concept of identity has become known through *identity theory* (Burke & Stets, 2000), whilst in social psychology the *social identity* theory (Tajfel, 1969 & Abrams and Hogg, 1990 in Burke & Stets, 2000) became influential because of its understanding of identity and how individuals see themselves as members of social groups (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 114). In black feminist- and gender theory, the emphasis on how people's multiple identities *intersect* – which in turn affect their vulnerabilities towards, and experiences of, oppression and discrimination – has been influential in this regard (Crenshaw, 1989). In the following section, I aim to bridge these conceptualizations of identity and discuss how they are useful to understand the different

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processes that the former female FARC-EP combatants in this study go through when returning to civilian life.

3.2.2.1 Role, group and person identity

Identity theory can help us understand what individuals prescribe meaning, how they are in relation to other people and society, and how their multiple identities influence how they think, feel and behave (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 3). Following Burke & Stets (2009, p. 3): "An identity is the set of meanings that define who one is when one is an occupant of a particular role in society, a member of a particular group, or claims particular characteristics that identify him or her as a unique person". In sum, all individuals have multiple identities that can be divided into role, group and person. The individual's *role* is explained through one's social structural position as being, for example, a 'mother' or 'soldier'. Belonging to a *group*, or *social identity,* this is defined as the individual's membership in e.g., a 'family', 'peasants' or 'FARC-EP' (Hogg & Abrahams, 1988 in Burke & Stets, 2000, p. 225). Burke & Stets (2000) write that the distinction between role-based identities and group-based identities is important; "the basis of role identity resides in the *differences* in perceptions and actions that accompany a role as it relates to counterroles" (p. 226, *my emphasis*). The group-based identity, on the other hand, is defined through the *uniformity* of perceptions and actions among group members, and how individuals who identify with e.g., 'FARC-EP' want to participate in the group's culture, even though they might be a low-status minority in the society (Burke & Stets, 2000, p. 226). The group identity includes evaluating and creating boundaries between in-groups and out-groups, implying that being an in-group always is favorable (Hogg, 2016, Wessells, 2016). It is important to mention that one cannot easily separate role identity ('mother') from group identity ('family'), not analytically nor empirically, because individuals always occupy roles and belong to groups which influence and shape their perceptions and behaviors (Burke & Stets, 2000, p. 228). Lastly, an individual's *person* is related to characteristics and internalized qualities, such as seeing oneself as more or less 'outspoken' or 'aggressive' (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 3).

A common critique of the term 'identity' is that it is too static or fixed, as if the individual or group can be understood through a set of permanent characteristics (Tetzchner, 2022). To avoid this, I aim at showing how identities are both stable and open for change, and that one's identity is formed through a process of *identification* or *self-categorization* (Burke & Stets, 2000, p. 224). Burke & Stets (2009) claim that when identity change occurs, it is

often gradual, as will be discussed in relation to the transition that many of the former female FARC-EP combatants in this thesis go through, especially when becoming mothers.

3.2.2.2 Reintegration: group identity and gender

Earlier research on former combatants in reintegration processes have used gender- and/or social identity theory to explain how people experience different challenges when transitioning to civilian life (Wessells, 2016; McKay & Mazurana, 2004; Sabogal, 2020; Ortega, 2012/2014; Gluecker, et al., 2022). Wessells (2016) writes about the role of social identity in both recruitment and reintegration of child soldiers, referring to the conflict in Sierra Leone, Mozambique and Palestine, amongst others. He argues that during reintegration the child soldiers face mainly two challenges; they are 'othered' by their families, communities and societies because of their 'soldier' identity, and they might cling to their 'soldier' identity themselves due to fear and stigmatization by the civilian community. This results in them 1) taking up arms again, or 2) that they seek anonymity in large cities and/or 3) gradually change their identities as reintegration strategies (Wessells, 2016, p. 112-113). From a gender perspective, the research of McKay & Mazurana (2004) and McKay et al. (2011) illustrates how former girls or women combatants in Liberia, Sierra Leone and northern Uganda face difficulties in reintegrating to their communities due to social isolation, stigma and marginalization. Tonheim (2017) emphasizes that the stigma former female combatants experience in their homecoming in DR Congo, was particularly challenging due to their gender. All this research has informed my thesis, and are important as I have found similar patterns in my thematic analysis, which are presented in chapter 4, Analysis and findings.

From a Colombian perspective, Gluecker et al. (2022) argue that the collective approach to reintegration in the Santos-FARC-EP DDR process in Colombia allows former combatants to use the FARC as a source of social identity post-conflict, and that this leads to different paths of reintegration, including their relations to society and the Colombian government (p. 359). This in contrast to many UN-led DDR processes in the world, including former DDR processes in Colombia, which have adopted a more *individual* approach to reintegration. The individual approach meant that when the armed groups' combatants gave up their arms, they also gave up their identity as part of the insurgent group – and the group itself dissolved (Gluecker et. al, 2022). Since the FARC-EP transitioned to a legal political party, and a collective approach to reintegration was established, the former FARC-EP combatants didn't necessarily have to give up their group identity or sense of collectivity as

part of their reintegration process (Gluecker et al. 2022, p. 361). I draw on these findings, and at the same time emphasize a gender perspective in my analysis, which the study of Gluecker et al. (2022) lacks. Sabogal (2020) and Sabogal & Richter (2019) have studied former female combatants from guerilla groups in Colombia in particular, emphasizing how they struggle with political, economic and social reintegration post-conflict, which have informed my analysis and will be discussed later on.

In this paper, the reincorporation camps can be conceptualized as a place facilitating a continuation of the *group identity* of the former FARC-EP combatants (Wessells, 2016, Gluecker et al., 2022). I argue that the reincorporation camp (ETCR) can be conceptualized as a *liminal space* (Nieto-Valdivieso, 2020, p. 95), a temporarily location and community with its own norms, rules and values. From a theoretical perspective, understanding space as more than a geographical location is both interesting and important when investigating a population. Fangen (2010) calls this *stedsdimensjonen*, or the spatial dimension, referring to the cultural, structural and institutional limitations that people interact within (p. 95). Earlier research on reintegration in Guatemala shows how national and international actors saw the former combatants' strong group identity as a negative asset post-conflict, and collective reintegration in cooperatives were discouraged (Hauge, 2020, p. 221). As Hauge (2008/2020) argues, this study aims to shed light on the positive assets of the former combatants' strong group identity and collective reintegration, and how this may facilitate their social and political reintegration.

3.2.2.3 Intersectionality and multiple inequalities

As mentioned, in black feminist theory the concept of *intersectionality* became famous through the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989). It is a concept that can be used to understand how people's different identities intersect with each other, and how people are situated within different hierarchies of domination at the same time. Through her work as a lawyer in the US, Crenshaw (1989) saw how "the experiences and struggles of women of color fell between the cracks of both feminist and anti-racist discourse" (Davis, 2008, p. 68), emphasizing the marginalized position of black women in society. Stemming from black feminist thought, intersectional theory has become very influential for feminist scholars in many academic disciplines. By including the intersections of people's gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, age and other categories of difference in their research, they examine the affect it has on people's lives, social practices, institutions and ideologies, and the outcomes of inequalities of power

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(Davis, 2008, p. 68; McCall, 2005). Hesse-Biber & Yaiser (2004) argue that it is central to practice a sensitiveness to differences within the group 'women' in research, and Henshaw (2020) takes on an intersectional approach when raising questions about whether international organizations understand how former female combatants have contextual and intersectional needs in reintegration processes.

Even though many researchers have been preoccupied with how people's multiple identities and roles affect their experiences of exclusion and subordination, it was after Crenshaw (1989) coined the term intersectionality in the late 1980s that it became what critics have claimed to be a "buzzword" (Davis, 2008) and "catch-all-phrase" (Carbin and Edenheim, 2013). The concept has been criticized for being too open and vague (Davis, 2008), and Carbin & Edenheim (2013) argue that the focus on inclusion and the "dream of a common language" (p. 237) may exclude important and necessary conflicts of different strands of research and theory. In this paper, I strive to have a multi-faceted and sensitive analysis, including people's different social categories as well as the conditions that produce inequalities (Christensen & Jensen, 2014; Henshaw, 2020; Hesse-Biber & Yaiser, 2004). For the scope of this thesis, I mainly discuss how the former female FARC-EP combatants' different sexualities and ethnic backgrounds may affect their transition to civilian life – a focus I mainly include in the section "From *guerrilleras* (female combatants) to civilian" in chapter 4. In that part of the analysis, I follow the research of Thylin (2018) and how she argues that demobilized people from sexual and gender minorities face different challenges when returning to civilian life, given their "intersecting layers of discrimination" (p. 107). She finds that many former combatants from different insurgent groups in Colombia were forced to hide their sexuality completely, or engaged in secret relationships, during wartime. Even though some LGBTI combatants were able to express their sexual orientation and gender identity (e.g., trans or non-binary) within the ranks of their respective groups, all the former combatants in her study articulate that they gained greater autonomy *after* they had left the insurgent group (Thylin, 2018, p. 102). This in contrast to what several of the heterosexual participants in this study express, namely that they had greater sexual freedom within the ranks of the FARC-EP. As for the scope of this thesis, it is interesting to see that transformation of roles, identities, practices and expressions related to gender and sexuality is perceived differently depending on the former female combatants' intersectional identities and how the reintegration process becomes a liberating way for e.g., lesbian women to live out their *true self* (Thylin, 2018, p. 103, 101).

From a security and violence perspective, Myrttinen & Daigle (2017) write that violence against sexual and gender minorities "exists within a continuum that crosses time and space" (p. 15), meaning that repression often starts before the outbreak of conflict, persists during conflict, and continues post-conflict. The scholars point to examples all over the world where legal and illegal armed actors target sexual and gender minorities as well as LGBTI activist communities; ranging from pre-conflict Syria, during conflict in Ukraine, Bosnia Herzegovina and Honduras, as well as in EU countries that are usually considered peaceful (Myrttinen & Daigle, 2017, p. 15). This is further discussed in this thesis in light of the security risks former female FARC-EP combatants from the LGBTI community may face.

3.2.3   *Conceptualizations of hierarchy*

Lastly, I will present the chosen literature on the topic of hierarchy in this thesis. Theoretical terms like *gender order* and *gender regime* (Connell, 2002/2005), *patriarchy* and *machismo* (Ortega, 2014; Henshaw, 2020; Schumann, 2021) are seen as important for the scope of the study. These terms and themes are closely related and can in many ways be understood as different ways of organizing and structuring society based on a set of values. In chapter 4, Analysis and findings, I show how the hierarchies within the FARC-EP were less gendered than in the overall Colombian society, and how the former female FARC-EP combatants express that e.g., *machismo* culture hinders their reintegration process in particular, and women's opportunities to exercise their basic human rights in general. In the end of this section, I present the theory of *semiotic violence* (Krook, 2022) to shed light on how the participants' experiences of political exclusion, marginalization or fear are similar to the hinders that women face in political spheres all over the world – based on their gender.

"Throughout history, women's involvement with war and violence has challenged the stability of the 'gender hierarchy', creating fears that 'society was on the brink of disaster'" (Sjöberg & Gentry, 2008, p. 8). Following Sjöberg & Gentry (2007), gendered narratives and myths about women's violence – as the *mother, monster* or *whore* – uphold the *gender hierarchy* and stability in society given that women are still subordinate and inferior to men, or not even categorized as women or humans when violent (p. 13). Understood through Connell (2002/2009), gender hierarchies can be conceptualized through the terms *gender order* and *gender regime.* Connell (2009) uses gender order to explain how the wider gender patterns in society – that occur within historical contexts and societal models – are lasting and reproduced over time. While the gender *order* defines the society as a whole, the gender

regime applies to organizations and institutions, such as schools and offices, but also police forces and guerrilla groups (Connell, 2009, p. 72-73). The gender patterns and arrangements tell us something about relationships between people, groups and organizations, and includes conceptions of masculinity/femininity, gender roles and encouraged and legitimate behaviors of men and women (Connell, 2002 in Ortega, 2014, p. 92). This does not mean that the gender order in society, or a gender regime within a specific organization, is fixed and cannot change, because "Gender relations are always being made and re-made in everyday life" (Connell, 2009, p. 73). Usually, the gender regime will mirror the overall gender order in society, but sometimes it deviates from it, something Connell (2002/2009) argue is important for change. Ortega (2014) connects Connell's (2009) terminology of gender order and gender regime to armed struggle, by emphasizing how all organizations and institutions develop gender regimes, and how guerrilla groups that are fighting against the social order also develop internal gender regimes that might deviate from – or fight against – the overall gender order (p. 92). This was the case for the FARC-EP in Colombia, which makes it relevant to this study.

In patriarchal societies, the overall gender order is a hierarchy where women are subordinated and inferior to men (Ortega, 2014). Henshaw (2020) writes that gender is used as an ordering principle in societies, where the masculine is valued and the feminine is devalued (p. 68)). This based on essentialist or biological determinist understandings of gender, negative gender stereotypes and/or narratives and myths about women/femininity and men/masculinity that are embedded in our society, institutions, cultures and religions etc. Other hierarchies that are entangled in patriarchal gender orders and gender regimes are sexual, racial and class hierarchies, as understood through Crenshaw (1989), amongst others. This is relevant in this study, because many of the participants claim that the Colombian society is patriarchal, heteronormative, racist and classist: women/femininity, sexual- and ethnic minorities and people from the lower-classes and rural areas are seen as less valuable and subordinate to men/masculinity, heterosexuality, being white/light-skinned and middle/upper class in cities/urban areas. These hierarchies are expressed in different ways, and practiced both consciously and unconsciously by women and men, especially through the *machismo* culture.

3.2.3.1 Reintegration: machismo and traditional gender roles

From a Latin-American perspective, patriarchy can be understood through the term *machismo*. In machismo culture "there is a supreme valuation of characteristics culturally associated with the masculine and a denigration of characteristics associated with the feminine" (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2020)[1]. It is a term used to describe *hypermasculinity,* as a perception and perpetuation of power, that has been present in Latin-American politics, culture and society for centuries. It stems from the Latin-American term *caudillos,* translated to 'military dictators' or 'leaders', who personified machismo with their bold, authoritarian and violent approach to governing (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2020)[2]. "Machismo is also often underpinned by strong cultural norms that allow a man to drink a lot of alcohol, abuse his wife and children and demand that his wife stay at home to concentrate on being a 'good woman'" (Schumann, 2021, p. 40). As illustrated through Connell (2002/2009), gender roles are closely connected to power and politics, and countries like Venezuela, Chile and Colombia bear with them a strong colonial history where the patriarchal gender order and machismo culture can be traced back to ideas from the Spanish catholic church (Schumann, 2021, p. 39). It is important to mention that Colombia has a diverse population of indigenous peoples and ethnic groups, who practice other gender norms, relations and roles, but this is outside of the scope of this study.

I find an interesting theoretical connection between the term machismo and Connell's (2002/2009) definition of a gender order and gender regime, bridging the idea of patriarchy and gender relations, and connecting a Latin-American concept with a more European/Western one. The patriarchal *machismo* culture in Latin-America in general, and in Colombia in particular, can be seen as a root cause to why women joined the FARC-EP in the first place, and why they face different struggles when reintegrating into society post-conflict. The interviewees use the word 'machismo' frequently to describe how and why men are controlling, manipulating and violating e.g., their female partners and how Women's Associations and Gender Committees in the reincorporation camps (ETCRs) are seen as sites for cultural change. It can also be understood as a site for fighting patriarchy, through their emphasis on the importance of women's autonomy, which will be discussed in the Analysis and findings-chapter.

From the perspective of political reintegration, I found that the theoretical concept of *semiotic violence* (Krook, 2022) is useful when approaching the question of how patriarchal hierarchies are reproduced within traditional masculine spheres – such as high-level, national politics – and how this affects women negatively. Krook (2022) defines semiotic forms of

violence as words, images and body language that are used to harm, "injure, discipline, and subjugate women" (p. 372). She argues that these types of violence against women restricts both *who* participates and *who* are seen as legitimate participants in politics and public life (Krook, 2022, p. 371). Amongst physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence, the semiotic violence is conceptualized as a fifth form of violence that is very apparent in the political sphere. Including invisibility, objectification, a use of masculine grammar and sexist language, ridiculing and mansplaining, the concept of semiotic violence is understood in relation to the notion of a *continuum* of violence against women (Krook, 2022, p. 374). I find it important to include the approach of Krook (2022) in my analysis, because "structural, cultural, and symbolic violence naturalize and defend gender hierarchies in reflexive and unconscious ways" (p. 374), something that feminist scholars like Krook (2022) make visible in her research on women's participation in politics.

Lastly, when referring to *traditional* attitudes and gender roles, these concepts are connected to the CEDAW Committee's definition of gender stereotypes, as mentioned earlier in this section. A traditional attitude towards women could be that they are subordinate to men (OHCHR, 2014). They are encouraged to take on feminized work and roles, such as nursing and caretaking in the home, following an essentialist understanding of gender where men and women are inherently different. This can be harmful and limiting for girls and women, as well as boys and men, who feel the pressure to take on traditional gender roles and practice femininity/masculinity in ways that are within the norms of their society. The CEDAW Committee highlights that harmful gender stereotypes, and sex- and gender-based roles, "limit women's and men's capacity to develop their personal abilities, pursue their professional careers and make choices about their lives and life plans" (OHCHR, 2014). From the perspective of the former female FARC-EP combatants in this study, a harmful gender stereotype is that they – based on their gender – are inherently weaker and more caring, and therefore should be the primary caretaker of the children, elderly and animals within the household etc. These responsibilities are conceptualized as a 'double burden' within the frame of this thesis, given that a double work-load (paid work and unpaid work) falls on her due to gender norms and gender stereotypes (OHCHR, 2014).

Herrera & Porch (2008) write that "The contrast between the relative freedom and control over their choices in the FARC and the subordinate position held by women in Colombian society makes reintegration into civilian life especially difficult for former *guerrilleras*" (p. 611). Within the insurgency, the *guerrillera* (female combatant) was a 'new kind of woman' (Ortega, 2014, p. 105), different from the mother, daughter, lover and wife.

By taking up arms and joining the guerilla group, she *transgressed* the boarders of both the social order and the gender order and *destabilized* normative femininity (Clisby, 2020). In the thesis, 'transgression' is used symbolically to shed light on how the women not only broke the "normative rules of play" (Bataille, 1986 in Clisby, 2020, p. 3), but by becoming *guerrilleras* (female combatants) these rules, norms and boundaries of 'the woman' were made even more visible. I use 'transgression' and 'double transgressors' (Nieto-Valdivieso, 2020, p. 95) as terms to explain how the former female FARC-EP combatants in this study have crossed social, cultural and symbolic boundaries and destabilized the peace, patriarchal gender hierarchies and traditional conceptualizations of femininity/masculinity in Colombia.

3.3   Non-English terminology and symbolism

Since the thesis first and foremost is built on findings from semi-structured interviews conducted in Spanish, it has been important to try to grasp the historical, cultural and community specific meaning of words and expressions that the former female FARC-EP combatants use to describe their own experiences. The Spanish *camarada/camarado* or *compañera/compañero* (comrade) are important signifiers of the former female combatants' group identity as both former combatants and women. In the following sections I present a short introduction to relevant words/terminology and the role of language and symbolism that emerged as relevant topics in the thesis.

3.3.1   *Camarada, compañera and guerrillera*

Deriving from the Marxist-Leninist ideology of the FARC-EP, it is common to use the Spanish word *camarada/camarado* to denote the fellow soldiers and companions within the organization. *Camarada/camarado* translates to comrade in English, and originally stems from "one who shares the same room" or "fellow-soldier" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2022). It has socialist and communist connotations, and was used "… as a prefix to the surname, to avoid such titles as 'Mr.' Hence, a (fellow-) socialist or communist" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2022). In the Colombian context, *camarada/camarado* has been used by left-wing insurgent groups as well as left-wing political parties to build and maintain a sense of unity, equity and cohesion, which can be said to be important pillars in particularly communist-oriented organizations (Gluecker et al., 2022). In addition, earlier studies as well as my own data collection show how *la compañera/el compañero* (the fellow female comrade/the fellow [male] comrade) and *la guerrillera/el guerrillero* (the female combatant/the [male]

combatant) often are used synonymously with *la/el camarada/el camarado*. This as a way of describing one's personal identity ('I') and group identity ('we') both during and after the armed conflict.

I've chosen to use Spanish terminology throughout the thesis due to the specific historical and ideological/political connotations of some words and expressions – and for grammatical reasons. In English, which is a Germanic language, one uses indefinite (a/an) or definite (the) articles in front of nouns. Like most English nouns, a/the comrade is gender neutral. To emphasize gender in English one normally adds *female* or *male*. Languages like Spanish almost always use gender nouns and feminine/masculine articles and endings. *Una/la compañera* (singular) refers to a/the *female comrade*, while *unas/las compañeras* (plural) refer to *several/the female comrades.* From a gender perspective, the Spanish language can be said to be both dichotomous, patriarchal and exclusive. In a group of 50 women and one man, the grammatically correct way to refer to the group of people would be to use the masculine form. Even though feminists in many Spanish speaking countries, like Colombia, are challenging the patriarchal roots of their grammar, it is interesting to note how statements like *mis compañeras y yo,* which directly translates to *my female comrades/companions and I,* have an even greater and profound meaning in Spanish, because one is referring to *female comrades* only, as if men are not present – symbolically and physically.

When the interviewees in this study use *la compañera/el compañero* or *las compañeras/los compañeros,* this in itself bears with it a symbolic, cultural and contextual meaning, which is important to highlight in the analysis. Given the topic of this thesis, namely the experiences of former *female* FARC-EP combatants, it has been interesting to investigate how the interviewees talk about themselves, the women's collectives they participate in and/or how they continue to refer to their fellow former female combatants as their *compañeras*. In contrast, when the participants in this study laid down their weapons and began their reintegration process, they were no longer *la guerrillera/las guerrilleras,* which translates to female combatant/s. The *guerrillera* and *compañera* were the same identity during conflict, but as understood through interviews with the former female combatants in this thesis, many hold on to the group identity *compañera* post-conflict. The transformation from *guerrillera* (female combatant) to civilian is expressed as a challenging and complex process, which is why I have dedicated section two in the analysis to present and discuss these issues.

3.3.2 Language and symbolism

Given that Spanish is my third language, I've spent a lot of time translating and transcribing the interviews in order to obtain the information from the interviews as precisely as possible. My role and position as an 'outsider' in the Colombian society may offer both advantages and disadvantages in terms of language and cultural understanding, which is discussed later on. In this section, I sketch out how language and symbolism became important for the FARC-EP during the Peace Talks leading up to the Final Peace Agreement (2016) in Colombia, and how this affects my terminology in the thesis.

Many scholars, international organizations and national institutions use the term DDR to explain the FARC-EPs' Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) process post-conflict in Colombia. The leaders of the FARC-EP, on the other hand, rejected the idea of a DDR process, because they wanted to distance themselves from earlier DDR processes that had taken place in Colombia (Carranza-Franco, 2019). FARC-EP opposed the terms *demobilization* and *reintegration,* and used *remobilization* and *reincorporation* about their path to legality (Carranza-Franco, 2019). As part of their political reintegration, the FARC-EP agreed on giving up their weapons in exchange for transforming into a legal, political party (Comunes), which is formally known as their *remobilization* process. The term *reincorporation* was connected to the FARC-EPs distrust in the Colombian Agency for Reintegration (ACR), which was created by right-wing President Álvaro Uribe (2002-2010): systematic killings of politicians from the Patriotic Union (UP) and attacks on left-wing politicians in the aftermath of La Uribe Agreement (1984)[17], made FARC-EP claim that the ACR favored the right-wing political agenda and the paramilitaries. The term *reintegration* had historical, contextual and symbolical meaning, which resulted in FARC-EP opposing it.

Following the Final Peace Agreement (2016), a number of new councils and institutions (CSIVI, CNR, ARN) were created, consisting of both the Colombian Government and the FARC-EP. They were responsible of implementing the parts of the Final Peace Agreement (2016) related to the reintegration of former FARC-EP combatants (Carranza-Franco, 2019, p. 44, 12-13), and in 2018 a new public policy on reintegration was installed (CONPES 3931) (ARN, 2018). In this study I have chosen to use *DDR* and *reintegration* when referring to the Colombian case and these processes in general, to follow the norms that researchers, NGOs and most national institutions use. I do stick to the *reincorporation* term

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[17] *Acuerdos de la Uribe* (La Uribe Agreement) (1984) (Carranza-Franco, 2019, p. 43).

when referring directly to text from the Final Peace Agreement (2016) and the temporary camps (ETCRs).

In the initial phase of this master's project the title was 'Las Farianas – the gendered reintegration process of former female FARC-EP combatants'. The term *las farianas* was something I had come across in Colombian newspapers as well as in earlier research on the FARC-EP population. When discussing my interview guide with colleges from FOKUS in Colombia, as well as with people in my professional network in Bogotá, I was recommended not using this umbrella term to name the former female FARC-EP combatants as it could be interpreted as judgmental and politically incorrect. Referring to their group identity as primary 'FARC-EP' both during and after conflict could possibly *restigmatize* the population I wanted to study and make them distance themselves from me as a researcher, given the fact that not all former combatants want to adhere to the social/group identity 'FARC-EP' post-conflict. Focusing on their identity as 'former female combatants' and 'signatories of peace' was perceived as more in line with the political- and academic discourse in Colombia at the time (2021). To me, this illustrates the importance of practicing cultural sensitivity, listening and self-reflection during the whole research process, which is further elaborated in the next chapter on methods and methodology.

4 Methods and methodology

4.1 Qualitative methods and semi-structured interviews (SSI)

Since I seek to investigate the lived experiences, thoughts and perceptions of individuals within a specific group in the Colombian society, it seemed appropriate to use qualitative methods and *semi-structured interviews* (SSI). SSI are often conducted in a one-on-one interview situation, consist of both closed- and open-ended questions and give room for follow-up questions like *why, how* and *can you tell me more about that* (Adams, 2015, p. 493). At the same time, having a semi-structured interview guide was helpful in terms of specifying topics of conversation and clarifying the main interests of the study. Unlike standardized surveys, SSI can capture different topics during the interview and its flexible design allows for follow-up questions based on a dialogue between the interviewer and the interviewee (Adams, 2015).

In this study, the SSI seemed suitable because I was interested in researching a smaller population within a specific community or group: former female FARC-EP combatants who lived in a reincorporation camp (ETCR) in Colombia. The method allows for flexibility and

in-depth conversation and enables talking-topics that individuals might not feel comfortable talking about in a focus group, which in this study were related to e.g., challenges in the community, gender relations and family-planning (Adams, 2015). On the other hand, the disadvantage of the SSI is that it is "time-consuming, labor intensive, and require interviewer sophistication" (Adams, 2015, p. 493). In sum, the semi-structured interviews helped me gather the data I was interested in, thematic analysis allowed me to examine commonalities and shared experiences within the data, and the theoretical framework helped me make sense of the findings (Nygaard, 2017, p. 29).

4.2   Selection, recruitment and generalization

The participators in this study are chosen based on a *topic-* and a *geographically defined universe* (Fangen, 2010). A topic defined universe is understood as the participators joint trait or identity, which in this case is being a former FARC-EP combatant in a reintegration process (after the 2016-Final Peace Agreement) and identifying as woman/female. Given the thesis' gender perspective, it could have been interesting to interview people who identify as men/male and/or non-binary as well, acknowledging that they also have *gendered* experiences of being in a reintegration process. Due to a complex recruitment process, and to narrow down the scope of the thesis, the main focus is on former female FARC-EP combatants' experiences – allowing for differences within the group and showing how intersecting identities like sexuality and ethnicity shape their transition to civilian life (Crenshaw, 1989), as discussed earlier.

From an age perspective I was interested in interviewing adult women. This was mainly a choice based on 1) avoiding complex, ethical issues that arises when one interviews children and youth, and the fact that 2) children and youth often are enrolled in different reintegration programs or efforts, and 3) wanting to interview women of childbearing age that were not classified as 'children' (0-18 years) (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). Earlier research on girl's and children's reintegration processes post-conflict has informed this study (e.g., Hauge, 2021), but mainly as secondary literature. Beyond the age component, the initial goal was to reach out broadly when it comes to showing the diversity within the group 'woman/female'. Because the recruitment process was challenging, and I was not able to recruit a larger and more representative sample, I was left with a sample based on *convenience* and *snowball sampling* that one cannot generalize from. These sampling methods will be highlighted later on, as well as the topic of ethical concerns, approval from the

Norwegian Center for Research Data (NSD) and how I gained access to the interviewees in the study.

A *geographically defined universe* is, as the term implies, related to where the participators are located or live (Fangen, 2010, p. 55-56). The second group of interviewees (professionals/experts in the field) live in Bogotá or other big cities in Colombia, while the first and main group of interviewees (former female FARC-EP combatants) live in two, different reincorporation camps in Meta (called *Yarí*) in Guaviare (*Las Colinas*). These reincorporation camps will be shortly presented in the following sections.

Historically, both of the departments of Meta and Guaviare have been highly affected by the Colombian conflict (1964-2016), and due to the presence of other armed actors in these areas, the security risks are still considered relatively high. Bad roads and a lack of infrastructure are challenges facing all the former combatants living in the reincorporation camps (ETCRs) in Colombia, limiting the populations mobility and access to e.g., public schools and medical centers. To reach Yarí (Meta) and Las Colinas (Guaviare) I had to flew from Bogotá to a small airport/military base and travel 3-5 hours by car, and slept in a basic housing facility within the zone of the reincorporation site[18].

According to figures from December 2021, the reincorporation camp Yarí (Meta) consists of 69 accredited people, 16 accommodations/temporary houses (ARN, 2022)[2], an outdoors common area, provisional health clinic and a shut-down care facility. Yarí is one of the smaller reincorporation camps (ETCRs), and when I visited in the beginning of November 2021, it seemed like an abandoned village. An empty building with *Comité de Mujeres Rocío Beltrán* (The Rocío Beltrán Women's Committee) painted on it illustrated how it used to be a reincorporation camp with political meetings and social gatherings. Walking through the reincorporation camp now it is quiet and nearly uninhabited. As mentioned earlier, many former combatants have left the reincorporation camps: some have reunited with their families elsewhere, while others have fled due to security risks or taken up arms once more (OHCHR, 2022)[2]. In Las Colinas in Guaviare, on the other hand, the first impression and atmosphere were radically different. The population in this reincorporation camp consists of 193 accredited people, 242 accommodations/temporary houses (ARN, 2022)[1], has a health clinic, temporary school for smaller children, but no daycare facilities. In comparison with Yarí, Las Colinas is a lively place, with people passing by on motorbikes, playing volleyball or working in their small garden lots. A lot of children are playing outdoors, community

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[18] One needs to have a permission to enter the reincorporation camps, which I got through travelling with FOKUS in Colombia and Oriéntame.

gatherings are held in the common areas, and signs with *Asociación de mujeres Jaime Pardo Leal* (The Jaime Pardo Leal Women's Associations) adorned the entrance of a newly built community center. Even though there are huge differences between the two reincorporation camps (ETCRs) in terms of productive projects, schooling for children and political/social community meetings, it became evident in the interviews with the former female FARC-EP combatants in both camps that they face similar difficulties on their path to civilian life. The other group of interviewees consist of professionals/experts in the field.

4.2.1   *First selection: former female FARC-EP combatants*

The first group of interviewees are *former female FARC-EP combatants,* and the study is first and foremost based on the findings from these interviews. I was able to recruit six interviewees in this group; three in Meta and three in Guaviare. The women are between 25 and 45 years old, identify as women/female, have diverse ethnic backgrounds (Afro/indigenous/mestizo), have children/no children, are co-parenting/single mothers, have different levels of lower/higher education, are enrolled in different productive/educational projects in the reincorporation camp (ETCR) and all joined the FARC-EP approximately between the age of 10 and 20 years old. Their stories about being voluntary/forcefully recruited to the FARC-EP were initially not a part of the scope of this study, neither their age when they joined. Since all participants reflected upon their reintegration process in light of the number of years they had spent as part of the FARC-EP, as well as reflecting upon their voluntary recruitment as e.g., politically motivated, this was later included in the data collection and the final analysis. To maintain the privacy of the interviewees, the names of the former female FARC-EP combatants who participated in the study are randomly chosen from a list of Popular Girls' Names in Colombia the last five years: María Victoria (35-40 years), Juanita (35-40 years), Luna (25-30 years), Valentina (40-45 years), Isabella (25-30 years) and Marta (30-35 years). One of the former female FARC-EP combatants in this study belongs to both this selection and the 'professionals/experts in the field' selection, so when sited in the analysis she is called Celeste. Because of her political position, it seemed reasonable to not mention her age or other features that were not explicitly relevant for the study.

4.2.2 Second selection: professionals/experts in the field

The second group of interviewees is called *professionals/experts in the field*. I conducted seven interviews with people from this group, both in person and virtually. When searching for interviewees to the second selection, the goal was to recruit professionals/experts who work within the field of reintegration of former FARC-EP combatants, on implementation of the stipulations on gender in the Final Peace Accord (2016), with The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda in Colombia and/or productive/educational projects in the reincorporation camps (ETCRs). The participators in this sample worked in the UN Mission in Colombia, UN Women in Colombia, FOKUS (Forum for Women and Development) in Colombia, Fundación Oriéntame (Colombia), in Colombian politics and in an *unnamed development project* (Colombia/Sweden)[19]. After a long process of trying to recruit participants from the Agency for Reincorporation and Normalization (ARN) in Colombia, I was unable to get an interview with them, due to a long and troublesome bureaucratic process. Official documents and articles from their webpage have been the main source of information on the *reincorporation route,* quantitative statistics about the population in the different reincorporation camps (ETCRs) etc.

4.3   Field trips, gatekeepers and sampling methods

The geographically defined universe of the thesis was first and foremost chosen due to practicalities. Given the complex security situation in many departments of Colombia, including those where the different reincorporation camps (ETCRs) are located, I quickly figured out that the best solution was to travel with an organization that was familiar with the area and had contacts in the reincorporation camps (ETCRs). It was through an internship in FOKUS (Forum for Women and Development) in Colombia that I was able to participate in health brigades to two different reincorporation camps (ETCRs). The health brigades consisted of doctors, nurses and social workers from Oriéntame, travelling to reincorporation camps (ETCRs) to accommodate the former combatants and the nearby population with information and medical services related to sexual and reproductive health (FOKUS, 2022). Even though I was an intern at FOKUS at the time, I travelled as an independent researcher and wore private clothing when I visited the reincorporation camps (ETCRs). I did this to make sure that the former combatants I spoke to didn't feel pressured, nor scared, to participate in my study because of my relation to FOKUS or Oriéntame.

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[19] Two of the participants didn't want their projects' name written, which is why *unnamed project* is used.

In this particular study, great *resources* were spent on travelling to, and staying in, the reincorporation camps. My travels were financially covered by FOKUS, but it required a great amount of time in terms of planning, organizing, preparing and conducting interviews, as well as transcribing, translating and categorizing the findings afterwards. As a researcher I had to be flexible to sudden changes in the travel itinerary, and in relation to the actual interviews, since some of the participants either did not show up to our initial meeting, or spontaneously initiated an interview themselves while we were in the reincorporation camp (ETCR).

As for recruitment, Fangen (2010) writes about the *gatekeeper* as a metaphor for the person who guards the gate to the field and the people one wants to get in touch with as a researcher. This can be the leader of the group, or an influential person with some sort of authority within the community (Fangen, 2010, p. 68). On the field trips, the coordinator in Oriéntame introduced me to their 'health contact' in the reincorporation camp (ETCR), with whom I tried to build trust and present my master's project the first day of the trip. In one of the reincorporation camps (ETCRs), the health contact seemed unmotivated and indifferent to receiving the health brigade in general, and a master's student in particular. To be able to recruit participators to the study there, I needed to change my strategy and get in touch with another gatekeeper. I managed to speak with a former female FARC-EP combatant the first day, who showed interest in my project due to her personal interest in gender related issues, which in turn became an important contact and resource when working with recruiting participants to the study.

In the first selection of interviewees – the former female FARC-EP combatants – I used the *snowball sampling* method, meaning that the first participant helped recruit the next, which in turn helped recruit more participants to the study. This method proved to be useful, and helped me gain trust within the community and with the participators (Fangen, 2010; Bakkalbasioglu, 2020). It was also *convenience sampling* given that the participants in the study were chosen due to their accessibility, which unfortunately could increase biasing effects in the selection (Adams, 2015, p. 496). In the second group of interviewees, I used a *purposive sampling method,* which is common in 'elite interviews' (Bakkalbasioglu, 2020, p. 688). In my study, I have chosen to avoid that term and rather use 'professionals/expert interviews', where all the participators were selected based on their academic, political or professional profile. It was easier to recruit these participators for many reasons: several of them had professional e-mail addresses open to the public, given their knowledge of the University in Oslo they were immediately positive in meeting with me, and since their participation in the study was based on their expertise in the field, rather than their personal

experiences of belonging to a marginalized group in society, this made the threshold for participation lower. The snowball sampling method was useful in the recruitment process with this group as well, where several of the interviewees put me in touch with other professionals/experts. An experience I had was that out of all the organizations/institutions/political circles I approached, and out of all professionals/experts I was advised to contact, almost all of the professionals/experts were women. This may have been coincidental, or it may reflect the preponderance of women working on gender issues in both national and international organizations in Colombia.

It is important to clarify that like in many qualitative studies, the *non-probability sampling* methods made it hard to avoid *sampling bias* in this study (Adams, 2015). This means that some individuals within the population were more likely to participate than others. Because of the small *sample size* it is not possible to generalize based on the findings in this study, and as for *representativeness,* the interviewees in the first selection can be said to show some diversity within the group 'former female FARC-EP combatants' without the selection being representative *per se* (Fangen, 2010; Adams, 2015).

4.4 Feminist approach: pre-understandings and reflexivity

"According to Martin Heidegger (...) pre-understanding is a fundamental pattern in human existence" (Habermas 1984, p. 107 in Fangen, 2010, p. 47). Following this statement, one cannot be freed from one's own pre-understanding of a topic. In the earlier stages of the thesis project, it became important to map out my own pre-understandings, personal interests and potential biases, to reflect upon *what* they were and *how* they might affect the study (Hesse-Biber, 2009). This practice of reflexivity is related to power, especially in the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee (Fangen, 2010; Hesse-Biber, 2009).

In my study, I tried to build a relationship of trust and equal respect between me as an interviewer and the former female FARC-EP combatants as the interviewees. In a post-colonial country like Colombia, reflecting upon my identity as e.g., white, middle-class/higher education and Norwegian/Western made me realize that some of the interviewees might experience a sense of distance and submissiveness to me in the interview setting, because we do not share the same nationality, ethnicity or culture. Our most obvious shared position was the gender identity 'woman'/'female', which may have been beneficial in the recruitment process based on factors like perceived sisterhood and trust. As for my age, I shared age position with some of the interviewees, and all of the participant in the age range 25-30 asked

me about my age and family situation. When they figured out that we were approximately the same age, this gave a sense of belonging and closeness, which in turn resulted in the interviewee being slightly more open and relaxed. I believe that my position and visibility as a 'foreigner' gave me several advantages, such as being met with great understanding and goodwill when questioning e.g., Spanish terminology, linguistic/cultural nuances or historical references that the participants' used to explain their own experiences during the interviews. My nationality as Norwegian functioned as a door-opener and an ice-breaker in several of the first encounters with the participants, either because they knew about Norway's role as a facilitator and guarantor country during the Peace Talks (Havana, Hurdal) and in the Final Peace Agreement (2016), or because of their lack of knowledge about my country of origin. Their curiosity towards me as an 'outsider' was primarily positive, even though my role as a researcher may have been intimidating to many of the potential participants, which made recruitment difficult.

The importance of practicing reflexivity and problematizing the hierarchy between the researcher and the researched has been one of many important, feminist contributions to the field of social sciences since the 1960s (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008, p. 341). Väyrynen et al. (2021, p. 3) writes that the process of self-interrogation and reflexivity is key in feminist methodologies, while others would claim that this has become a standard in all qualitative research the last decades. I argue that this study is feminist – or includes a feminist perspective –based on the chosen theory, literature and participants, as well as having a normative aim and critical approach, which is discussed in the following sections.

From a historical perspective, feminist approaches grew out of a critique of positivist epistemologies, which in turn were criticized for overlooking gendered power dynamics. Positivist epistemology presented academic research as deductive, objective and value-neutral, the critics claimed, and not considering that *who, what, where* and *how* the research was conducted could – or would – affect the findings (Hesse-Biber & Yaiser, 2004, p. 5). Rather than seeing the world as ordered, logical and predictable, feminist researchers emphasized the understanding of the social world as situational and complex (Hesse-Biber & Yaiser, 2004; Haraway, 1988; Beauvoir, 2001). But "What makes a research project feminist?" (Hesse-Biber & Yaiser, 2004, p. 4). Hesse-Biber & Yaiser (2004) claim that the answer to this question is not defined by the project's method *per se*, but emphasizes the feminist *perspective* in research (Hesse-Biber, 2009). One cannot talk about one unified feminist perspective, approach or theory in research, but rather a plurality of *feminisms* and *feminist approaches* that have different historical, geographical, cultural and

ideological/political roots – just such as the essentialist and constructionist theories on gender (Shepherd, 2013 in Väyrynen, 2021, p. 3; Skjelsbæk & Smith, 2001). Knowing this, Hesse-Biber & Yaiser (2004) do argue that feminist research has two things in common: firstly, it aims at gaining knowledge about women's and marginalized groups' lives, experiences, oppressions and understandings of the social world, and secondly, feminist research is normative, aiming at social change (Hesse-Biber, 2009). It is not easy to define what makes a 'good' feminist researcher, Henshaw (2020) writes, but she agrees with scholars like Hesse-Biber & Yaiser (2004) about the fact that awareness of power is key. In feminist security studies, as for many branches of feminist research, the normative goal lies in "improving women's lives" (Henshaw, 2020, p. 64).

One could easily follow up the statement of Hesse-Biber & Yaiser (2004) by asking: What makes a research project *gendered*? Given the inherently inter- and transdisciplinary field of gender research, it can be hard to describe this type of research in other terms than revolving around – or being interested in – gender. It is important to note that not all gender research is inherently feminist. This thesis is situated within the field of gender research and feminist research because it draws on gender theory and feminist literature, investigates a specific group of women and aims at shedding light on the experiences of these women due to the marginalization of their voices in post-conflict Colombia. I argue that by listening to the experiences and stories of a stigmatized group in society, which in this case is former female FARC-EP combatants, one can break down harmful and negative gender stereotypes about this group in particular – and about women in general – by looking at the "root causes of exclusion" (Henshaw, 2020) of women in both DDR processes and academic research. This in turn can bring about positive change for all genders, knowing that gender stereotypes affect men and women's ability to practice their fundamental human rights (OHCHR, 2014), as mentioned in chapter three.

According to Alvesson & Sköldberg (2018), *reflective research* is defined by careful interpretation and reflection (p. 11), which I have strived towards in the process of writing this thesis. Interpretation includes levels of cognitive, and intellectual abilities, perceptions, theory/literature, language and text and is highly influenced and shaped by political, cultural and historical events and ideas (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018; Hesse-Biber & Yaiser, 2004). Reflection should not only manifest itself at the level of language, and the political and social aspects of terminology, but include "significant elements of contrasting of logics and inspiration" (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2018, p. 340). To constantly reflect upon the advantages and disadvantages of the chosen methods and theories, as well as trying to challenge my own

pre-understandings and ways of thinking, the goal is to avoid reproducing ideas that are problematic or hurtful (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018). At the same time, reflexivity and creativity can be used to interpret, (re)construct and present an image of the social reality that might not have been visible before (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018, p. 11).

4.5   Interview guide and field notes

In the initial phases of working with the interview guide, I talked to friends and professional contacts in Bogotá who either had knowledge about the Colombian context and/or had worked with the topic of former combatants and reintegration. Discussions with my supervisors, as well as my fellow colleges at FOKUS, made me reflect upon different approaches to the subject, which resulted in the main topics that I based my interview guide on:

- Identity and identification
- Experiences of life in the reincorporation camp (ETCR)
- Relations between people (men, women, former combatants, the civilian population etc.)
- Opportunities and challenges: education/training and work
- Similarities and differences between the roles of women/men
- Paid/unpaid work
- Thoughts about the future

In addition to that list, I added a question about "community" and tried to touch upon the topic of the Women's Associations/Gender Committees in the reincorporation camps (ETCRs), because these themes came up during the first interviews. As mentioned in the section on semi-structured interviews (SSI), I chose open-ended questions that could facilitate a conversation about gender, gendered differences, gender equality, multiple identities, stigma and discrimination etc. This in relation to the former female FARC-EP combatants past, present and future, but with a special focus on a here-and-now in the reincorporation camp. When translating the interview guide to Spanish, I used a free, online translator called *DeepL Translator*[20], which I find more accurate than e.g., *Google Translate*[21]. This was also used to transcribe the records from the interviews, which will be presented later on. Since all the

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[20] Available from: https://www.deepl.com/en/translator
[21] Available from: https://translate.google.com

interviews were conducted in Spanish, which is my third language, it became important to practice the questions from the interview guide beforehand and bring a printed copy to the actual interview. This helped me stay on track of the main topics of interest, and at the same time made me feel calm and relaxed, which gave me the confidence to ask follow-up questions based on topics that emerged in the interview situation.

As my own process shows, observing the interaction between people in the given population – and asking open-ended questions – makes it easier to ask good and relevant follow-up questions (Fangen, 2010). In line with Fangen (2010), I argue that being open and sensitive to the field increases the chances of making good field notes and being able to understand cultural codes and non-verbal communication. During my field trips to the two different reincorporation camps (ETCRs) in Colombia, I always had a small notebook with me, so I immediately could write down situations and experiences. Since the field notes only were used by me, I allowed myself to divide the field notes in two categories: 1) linear, concrete and descriptive notes, and 2) fragmented flows of thoughts and feelings. Following Heidegger (1927 in Fangen, 2010), intuition, feelings, bodily reactions and pre-linguistic experiences are sources of knowledge (Fangen, 2010, p. 105), which became evident in my own process of learning how to take good field notes. Going back to my field notes a few weeks after visiting the reincorporation camps (ETCRs), this helped me realize how the place in itself could be conceptualized as a space for e.g., a continuity of their social/group identities during war and gradual change of norms and roles: concepts that later became important for the overall theoretical framework and themes in the analysis.

4.6   Thematic analysis

Nygaard (2017) writes that "One of the biggest challenges of analyzing qualitative data is simply getting the sheer amount of it into manageable chunks, which is kind of like trying to wrestle a pack of lions into dog cages" (p. 158). This was very relatable as I worked on the analysis of this thesis, because the data collection was large, and the different topics and themes were many. Given the flexible design of the study, the methods for analyzing the data were not determined or fixed from the beginning, but rather choices I made during the research process. This also applied to the theoretical framework for the study, where choosing theory and relevant literature to interpret the data was an ongoing process as the study progressed (Nygaard, 2017, p. 24). I landed on choosing a *thematic analysis* (TA), because of its flexibility, accessibility and how it offers an "insight into patterns of meaning (themes)

across a data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 57). It also seemed suitable for my thesis, because of my interest in the participants' experiences, understandings and perceptions (Clarke & Braun, 2016, p. 88 in Fisher, 2022, p. 45). Braun & Clarke (2012, p. 57) emphasize that the thematic analysis (TA) is a method for systematic identification- and organization of data that allows the researcher to discover collective and shared meanings. After conducting the semi-structured interviews with the former female FARC-EP combatants that participated in this study, as well as with the professionals/experts in the field, I quickly realized that my data collection was large and potentially pulling in different directions. TA made it easier to focus on the data relevant to the scope of the thesis, and what patterns that emerged based on the specific research question: *How do the former female FARC-EP combatants experience their transition to civilian life in Colombia, and what do their stories tell us about the gender dimensions of reintegration?* and its sub-questions: 1) *What challenges do the former female FARC-EP combatants face on their path to political, economic and social reintegration?,* 2) *In what ways do gendered narratives about the guerrillera (female combatant) affect the former female FARC-EP combatants post-conflict?* and 3) *How do the former female FARC-EP combatants experience the reintegration process from a gender role perspective?*

When I was ready to start working on the analysis, I strived to follow Braun & Clarke's (2012, p. 60-69) six-phase approach to a thematic analysis: 1) Familiarizing yourself with the data, 2) Generating initial codes, 3) Searching for themes, 4) Reviewing potential themes, 5) Defining and naming themes, and 6) Producing the report. Initially, I got familiar with the data by looking at my field notes and listening to all the audio files while taking notes. Then, I listened to the audio files again, as I began transcribing them; a phase where I continuously took notes and highlighted topics and words that could be relevant to answer my research question. In phase two, I began a systematical coding of the data, based on phrases and words the interviewees used (e.g., 'children of peace' and 'machismo') and my own conceptualizations based on former knowledge, theory and literature (e.g., 'traditional gender roles' and 'intersectional identities'). This shows how the codes were both descriptive and interpretative, and that the goal was for them to make sense to me as a researcher (Braun & Clark, 2012). The interviewees did not necessarily use words like 'intersectional identities' when describing themselves or others, but through statements about how e.g., lesbians are "super stigmatized, physically or verbally, in our culture" (Valentina) this can be interpreted as claiming that a woman's sexual identity intersects with her gender, and that this result in a greater – or different – form of stigmatization, in line with the theory of *intersectionality* (Crenshaw, 1989).

I did not use Nvivo or other software to code the data, but rather coded the transcribed and translated interviews manually. This was time-consuming, and if I were to write a larger thesis in the future, I would consider using software. This time around, I highlighted the potentially relevant sections/parts of the transcripts, coded them, copied and pasted the parts that seemed relevant to answer the research questions into a separate excel sheet.

From a time perspective, I was interested in the participants' *transitional phase* from life as combatants to life as civilians and how the reintegration *process* included experiences of different forms of change and in-betweenness, especially since the participants in this study still live in the reincorporation camps. This meant that I had to take the past, present and future into consideration in the thesis, which made me phrase the analytical themes within a "from" and "to" structure. Eventually, the dimensions and main analytical categories developed into: 1) from collective to individual dealings with political, economic and social issues, 2) from *guerrillera* (female combatant) to civilian, and 3) from radical to traditional gender roles. These three processes stood out as the main commonalities, or themes, in the data collection after having asked the former female FARC-EP combatants about their life in the reincorporation camp, their challenges and perceived gender differences etc. (see appendix A and C). Even though the semi-structured interview opens up for new topics, and a flexible research design make the analysis and ongoing process, my knowledge and interest in the topic – that the questions in the interview guide were based on – clearly gave the research a direction, that again influenced the data and my interpretation, coding and analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Nygaard (2017). As mentioned in the section on reflexive methodologies and my role as a researcher, I had an ongoing internal dialogue throughout the whole research process about my own positionality and potential biases, and how these may affect the study (Hesse-Biber, 2009; Väyrynen et al., 2021).

Following Braun & Clarke (2012), the TA is a good method to be able to examine and make sense of shared experiences; to see commonalities, relations and connections. This made it possible to state that e.g., within the selection of 'former female FARC-EP combatants' in this study, three participants talked about 'motherhood' in positive terms (as something planned, long-awaited), whilst three participants used more ambivalent language and focused on negative consequences of motherhood (as something expected, involving pressure). In the analysis, I could show how 50% of the former female FARC-EP combatants who participated in the study relate positively to the idea of 'becoming mother' and/or 'being a mother', while 50% are ambivalent, negative and/or critical towards the idea of 'motherhood' and/or 'being a mother'. These patterns were important and the main focus of

the thematic analysis, as well as allowing for atypical or individual experiences in the final report. An example of the latter is data from the interview with Valentina, where she talked about adopting away her child during war.

As mentioned, the strength of TA is that it is flexible, accessible and merely an analytical method, rather than a qualitative research approach *per se* (Braun & Clark, 2012, p. 58). This in contrast to e.g., a discursive analysis (DA), which implies that the researcher is familiar with the complex theoretical underpinnings that this approach demands, in terms of conceptualizations of language as what creates reality (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 58). My main struggle with the TA was to understand how to categorize the data into codes and meaningful themes: it was time-consuming and difficult to group the codes, and understand their significance, which is why I asked my supervisors for guidance in these particular phases of the analytical- and writing process. Discussing the data with them made me see the connections between the codes more clearly, making it easier to cluster them together under main titles and themes, in line with phase four and five of conducting a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012). A guiding principle became to always remind myself of what kind of story this study could tell "because the world generally does not organize itself into obvious categories for your convenience", as Nygaard (2017, p. 158) writes. The last phase of the thematic analysis is producing the report, but this is not a phase that "only begins at the end" (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 69), and was a back-and-forth process which ended up as the final analysis, presented in chapter six, Analysis and findings.

4.6.1   *Transcription and translation*

Transcription can be done in different ways (Braun & Clarke, 2012), and with the help of the built-in transcription tool *Dictation* in Microsoft Word, I was able to do the transcription more efficiently than without a digital tool. The words or phrases that the application was not able to grasp or transcribe in a correct manner, I manually transcribed. Details like sounds (*ah, m-hm*), hesitations (*hm, eh*), pauses ('*…*') or [pause] were marked in the transcription. I noted down particular body language (*points at her daughter, shrugs*) in my notebook, so I could go back to my field notes when working on the analysis and get a fuller understanding and greater foundation for my interpretations during the process of analyzing the data. Braun & Clarke (2012) argue that "details can be revealing" (p. 60), which is why they suggest to not 'clean up' the transcripts during the analytical process, but keep it rich in details. I kept a relatively high level of detail in the transcriptions, and carefully 'cleaned up' the quotes I

wanted to use when presenting my findings – to make them grammatically correct, shorten them through the markup (…) and keeping important body language and/or pauses with '…' or [pause] (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 60). An example of this is the quote from the interview with Luna where she talked about her uncertainties regarding her future. Her long pauses made me realize how she was very serious, afraid and potentially hopeless as she said: "The future is uncertain, we don't really know what is going to happen… I could be alive today, tomorrow I could be dead…" (Luna).

As mentioned, a free translator tool was used to transcribe the interview guides as well as the recordings from the interviews. To maintain the content, cultural- and potentially symbolic meanings, slang and historical references, I wrote down key words and concepts in both Spanish and English in the transcriptions, such as *compañera* (female comrade) and *guerrillera* (female combatant): terminology discussed earlier in the paper. When I was unsure about certain words, phrases or statements in the process, I was able to reach out to my colleagues at FOKUS, to a Colombian friend and/or look for support in earlier studies from Colombia (Herrera & Porch, 2008; Ortega, 2012/2014; Gluecker et al., 2022 etc.), and their use of the terminology like *compañera* and *guerrillera.*

5   Ethical concerns and NSD

Fisher & Anushko (2012) write about four, main areas of ethical concern in social research, namely "conflict of interest, informed consent, cultural equivalence, and the use of monetary incentives" (p. 98).When doing research in conflict-affected areas and involving stigmatized/vulnerable populations, the primary ethical concern could be articulated as not exposing the participants to harm or *revictimization.*

As for *conflict of interest* and the use of *monetary incentives*, this thesis is neither sponsored nor commissioned by a company or an organization. As mentioned, my husband worked at the Norwegian Embassy in Bogotá from 2019-2022, but this did not present a conflict of interest. Additionally, no gifts have been received, and the participants in the study have not been paid. Even though monetary incentives can be ethically justified to recruit research participants, the interviewees in this study didn't have any expenses to cover (e.g., travel/transport), and the interviews only lasted between 1-1,5 hours (Fisher & Anushko, 2012), which was perceived as achievable for the participants in the study.

Before conducting the interviews, all interviewees were given a physical information letter and consent form (see appendixes B, D). The letter stated the study's relevant topics,

scope and aim, to which the interviewees would give their *informed consent* (Fisher & Anushko, 2012, p. 100). Some of the key information in the letter was:

- A short introduction to the scope of the study

- Participation in the study is voluntary

- You can withdraw your consent at any time

- All information shared during the interview is highly confidential

- Your privacy is protected, and you will be anonymized

- The audio recordings of the interview are stored safely and in line with the national guidelines of the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD)

As for the recordings of the interviews, these were conducted with a separate voice recorder (and not my iPhone), which was important in order to comply with the guidelines of the University of Oslo and NSD. The recordings made it possible to transcribe the answers from the interviews in full-length and provided the data collection a high degree of detail, which became useful in the final analysis. The NSD approved the application of the master's thesis in October 2021, and the interviews was conducted in November the same year.

In terms of *cultural equivalence*, it has been important to show the diversity of the group 'women' interviewed in this study, and describe the population in the most inclusive and respectful way in terms of e.g. ethnicity and sexuality (Fisher & Anushko, 2012, p. 105-106). Social science can reproduce injustices by "over- or under-identification of socially meaningful characteristics" (Fisher & Anushko (2012, p. 106), meaning that while some social labels or identity categories might be helpful to describe the population in one community, they might be wrong or harmful when directly applied to e.g., another ethnic group or community.

The Ministry of Education in Colombia defines *vulnerable populations* as "Ethnic communities (indigenous, Afro-Colombians, *Raizales*[22] and Roma people) (…) Uneducated youth and adults (…) Minors at social risk [working minors, adolescents in conflict with criminal law, and children and adolescents in need], Dispersed rural population and Border inhabitants" (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2005, p. 8, *my translation*). These are at risk of being recruited by illegal armed groups, but also struggle to reintegrate to society after

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[22] *Raizales* or *población raizal* refers to a specific ethnic group in Colombia. "The Raizal ethnic group of the Archipelago of San Andres, Providencia and Santa Catalina has been settled in the Colombian islands for approximately 400 years. Descendants of indigenous people, Europeans and Africans, with their own language, culture and religiosity, have allowed them to form a unique ethnic group in the country" (Portal Colombia Aprende, 2020).

they, or their parents, have demobilized. As mentioned, this thesis is not focusing on the reintegration of children and adolescents, but knowing that many of the interviewees were recruited at a young age, it is important to bear in mind that their *circumstances* or *situatedness* may have affected them in the recruitment process of becoming FARC-EP combatants. Following Henshaw (2016) there are multiple factors that interplay in why people rebel, and in the case of FARC-EP it is important to mention that many were also forcibly recruited. To avoid *revictimization* and *restigmatization* of these people is in the interest of the researcher either way.

5.1   Personal and sensitive data

As stated in my application to the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD), I only collected personal data that was relevant to answer the research question. This includes the interviewees name (written consent), sound recordings, background data (such as geographical area/location, age and gender), racial/ethnic origin and sexual orientation. The two latter categories of personal data were collected through answering open questions like "How do you identify?", "Where are you from?" and "What is your current situation regarding family and/or partnership?" This to avoid direct questions about delicate topics that the interviewees might find sensitive and too private. The interviewees were also made sure that they could always choose not to answer a question.

Other sensitive information that was either irrelevant for the study, or categorized outside of the permits obtained by the NSD, was left out of the transcription documents, drafts and the final thesis. This to ensure the participants' anonymity and privacy, and to make sure I followed the ethical guidelines for research posed by the University of Oslo and NSD. All the interviewees are given pseudonyms and their age is listed as within a 5-year interval, for the participants anonymity, as mentioned earlier.

6   Analysis and findings

Returning to the main research question, the aim of the analysis is to answer: *How do the former female FARC-EP combatants experience their transition to civilian life in Colombia, and what do their stories tell us about the gender dimensions of reintegration?* Based on the findings from the semi-structured interviews, this chapter is divided into three sections. Each section corresponds to a sub-question (presented in chapter one, Introduction) to help map out the main themes in the data collection and analyze these. With support from the analytical-

and theoretical framework of the thesis, I will present and discuss the participants' experiences, perceptions and thoughts about their own reintegration process in Colombia – emphasizing patterns of shared experiences (Burke & Stets, 2000/2009) and allowing for individuals' singular stories.

6.1   Structure of the analysis

The first section of the analysis examines the former female FARC-EP combatants' transition from collective to individual dealings with political, economic and social issues. The purpose of this section is to answer: *What challenges do the former female FARC-EP combatants face on their path to political, economic and social reintegration?* To answer this, I focus on the participants' transition from being a part of an armed *group* to dealing with issues as an *individual.* From a political reintegration perspective, the practice of *machismo* (Schumann, 2021) and *semiotic violence* (Krook, 2022) stand out as challenges that hinders the participants' political opportunities in conventional high-level politics in Colombia. In non-conventional politics on local/grassroot level, on the other hand, the participants' have positive experiences of empowerment and reconciliation. This is exemplified through their participation in Women's Associations and Gender Committee's in the reincorporation camps. The goal of these grassroot organizations is connected to the goal of the economic reintegration process in general, namely economic independence. The latter is facilitated through educational/productive projects (ARN, 2018), and the analysis illustrates how the non-gendering of tasks and jobs within the FARC-EP are in stark contrast to the gendering of tasks – and gendered division of labor – in civilian life (Sabogal, 2020). Lastly, I focus on the collective approach to reintegration in the Santos-FARC DDR, and how a feeling of *collectivity* is facilitated, and somehow manifested, through the existence of the reincorporation camps (ETCRs). The social aspect of the reintegration process is related to a continuity in the participants' social/group identity post-conflict, as understood through Hogg (2016), Wessells (2016) and Gluecker et al. (2022), which is facilitated by the reincorporation camp as a *liminal space* (Nieto-Valdivieso, 2020, p. 95). The participants talk about their life in the reincorporation camp through notions of social and emotional belonging, unity and community, but I show how an overemphasis on the collective – and a continuity of unequal and gendered power hierarchies from the fronts of FARC-EP – is problematic when entangled in notions of 'speaking with one voice' (interview with 'Valentina') and loyalty (Wilson, 2019).

The second section of the analysis examines the former female FARC-EP combatants' transition from *guerrillera* (female combatant) to civilian. The purpose of this section is to answer: *In what ways do gendered narratives about the guerrillera (female combatant) affect the former female FARC-EP combatants post-conflict?* The participants interviewed in this study talk about the transition from *guerrillera* (female combatant) to civilian as a challenging identity process, due to stigma and discrimination. By joining the FARC-EP, the female combatants transgressed both the social- and the gender order (Nieto-Valdivieso, 2020), and became part of an insurgent guerilla group with a radical *gender regime* (Connell, 2009) that promoted insurgent femininities and masculinities (Ortega, 2012/2014). In contrast to the overall gender regime and image of the 'ideal woman' in the Colombian society in general, the *guerrillera* (female combatant) was a 'new kind of woman' – different from the civilian wife, mother and daughter (Ortega, 2014, p. 105). This study shows how negative gender stereotypes and narratives about female combatants as *monsters* or *whores* (Sjöberg & Gentry, 2007) may affect their reintegration process negatively, as they strive to be socially accepted by the society, community and their families. Several of the interviewees distance themselves from the monster- or whore narrative by telling their own version of why they rebelled against the state and their roles during conflict, which is included in this section. Following Crenshaw (1989) and Davis (2008) the topic of intersectionality and diversity within the category *la guerrillera* (female combatant) is important to include in the analysis, and this section aims at providing insight into the particular challenges and 'effects' that gendered narratives and stereotypes have on women from sexual and ethnic minorities post-conflict. Based on the research of Thylin (2018), laying down their arms can also mean becoming their 'true selves', because they no longer had to keep their sexuality a secret. These themes are included to illustrate the paradoxes between the gendered narratives and lived experiences of the *guerrilleras* (female combatants): a lesbian woman fits into the negative gendered narrative about the *guerrillera* (female combatant) as non-heterosexual and a deviant to the category 'woman' (Sjöberg & Gentry, 2007/2008), but as Thylin's (2018) studies show, she cannot be both *guerrillera* (female combatant) *and* live out her sexuality as a lesbian, which is why I ask if it could be understood as a paradox. An indigenous *guerrillera* (female combatant) face different challenges when returning to her tribe/culture, which is also included in this section. Lastly, a focus on the *continuum* of violence (Krook, 2022; Myrtinnen & Daigle, 2017) against sexual minorities in countries like Colombia illustrate how they are a vulnerable group that needs particular protection from a peace and security perspective.

The third and last section of the analysis examines the former female FARC-EP combatants' transition from radical to traditional gender roles. The purpose of this section is to answer: *How do the former female FARC-EP combatants experience the reintegration process from a gender role perspective?* Based on findings from the semi-structured interviews, I start by sketching up the contrast between the 'no children norm' within the ranks of the FARC-EP and the 'baby boom' within the former FARC-EP population post-conflict. If becoming a mother means taking on a traditional gender role, where she is responsible for all the unpaid house- and care work, this is perceived as a hinder for the participants' political, economic and social reintegration. The contrast between occupying radical gender roles during war and taking on traditional gender roles post-conflict is perceived as a step-back for many of the participants in this study, in line with what Ortega (2014) calls a "transition to marginalization" (p. 105). My findings show that motherhood – whether it is desired, accidental or as a result of pressure – pose a shift in gender roles for the former female FARC-EP combatants in this study, because of the traditional gender norms in the Colombian society. At the same time, taking on the role as the 'good mother' means that the former *guerrillera* (female combatant) confirms to the overall cultural and societal norms and breaks with the image of the former female combatant as a *monster* or *whore* (Sjöberg & Gentry, 2007). By negotiating what it means to be a woman, a former female combatant and a mother, I show how the reincorporation camp can be a site for practicing gender equality – in contrast to the Colombian society in general (Hauge, 2021). The reincorporation camp can offer fertile ground for negotiating alternative gender roles, parental roles and collective care solutions, such as shared house- and care work and daycare for the youngest children, which would leave the former female FARC-EP combatants with less burdens.

The sections of this chapter have been divided into three dimensions for analytical reasons: aiming to clarify and present the main processes of transition that the former female FARC-EP combatants go through on their path to civilian life in Colombia. In reality, these processes are closely connected, very complex and affect women's lives in different ways – and at different times – during their reintegration process. Even though one cannot generalize based on the findings in this study (as argued in chapter 3, Methods and methodology), I argue that the thesis can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the gendered challenges and opportunities that the former female combatants' face in their reintegration process post-conflict.

6.2 From collective to individual dealings with political, economic and social issues

This section examines how former female FARC-EP combatants experience their transition from collective to individual dealings with political, economic and social issues in post-conflict Colombia. As stated in the Final Peace Agreement (2016), all former combatants are to have a political, economic and social reincorporation to civilian life "in accordance with their interests" (p. 62). In the following section, I seek to answer: *What challenges do the former female FARC-EP combatants face on their path to political, economic and social reintegration?* The aim is to shed light on the gendered challenges the participants in this study encounter in the transition from being part of an armed insurgent *group* to facing society as an *individual*. The purpose is also to show how the collective approach to reintegration in the Santos-FARC DDR facilitates a continuity of their social/group identities post-conflict, and how this is made possible through the construction of the reincorporation camps (ETCRs).

6.2.1 Political reintegration

From an individual perspective, the political reintegration of former FARC-EP combatants meant that they were able to vote and register as political candidates at national and local level (Sabogal & Richter, 2019). Reports show that former *female* FARC-EP combatants are often willing, but hindered, to take on roles as political leaders. For instance, as stated in the Final Peace Agreement (2016), the political party Comunes (earlier FARC) were guaranteed ten seats in the Senate, but only two of these (20%) were occupied by women[23] (Sabogal, 2020, p. 93-94). One of the former female FARC-EP combatants who participated in this study occupied a high-level political position[24] in Colombian politics, and explain how the transition from being politically active at the margins of the law (as a FARC-EP combatant) to legality (as a Comunes representative) was very complex and hard. She relates her experiences and political activism to the *machismo* culture in Colombia:

> "I tend to say that my profession is to be a revolutionary and a feminist. I have always rebelled against machismo, or what I first identified as machismo, and what I came to identify as patriarchy later (...) [In political debates] they created obstacles for me, set up pitfalls, and hid

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[23] Victoria Sandino (Judith Simanca) and Sandra Ramírez (Criselda Lobo Silva) (Carranza-Franco, 2019, p. 152).

[24] Generalized to preserve the anonymity of the participant.

information from me, so they could ridicule me (…) [to] make women's work and my work invisible" *Celeste*

As this quote illustrates, the male politicians and fellow colleagues of Celeste practiced different forms of *semiotic violence* (Krook, 2022) – such as *withholding information, ridicule,* and *invisibility* – to harm and exclude female politicians like herself. These practices can be said to be embedded in the *machismo* culture, where men exercise power and perpetuate different forms of violence to "injure, discipline, and subjugate women" (Krook, 2022, p. 372). They undermine values like democracy and gender equality, which the former female FARC-EP combatants in this study express as important ideals for a just and well-functioning society. When asked what they think about the political aspect of their reintegration process, several of the participants in this study express that standing out as a political- or social leader in Colombia includes taking a *huge risk* and crossing *boundaries*:

> "We rebelled against the state, and we fought for the rights of the poorest half of Colombia (…) If, for example, I'll do an interview with a communication channel in Colombia, I have to know to whom and what I am going to say, because they can change what I say in favor of their own narrative. The *uribismo*[25] is very strong and tense, so if I am going to speak up against them, or stress that what they are doing is wrong, that is a huge risk. A risk for all the signatories of the peace agreement, but even more so for the *caras visibles* (visible faces)" *Valentina*

> "There are too many boundaries for us, you know, for women in politics. It is dangerous – being a social leader in Colombia is very, very dangerous (…) Also, I don't have the training to lead, because I have always been a *guerrillera* (female combatant) who have followed orders. But Victoria[26] became an important role model for many of us… Telling us that we could do it, become politicians" *María Victoria*

These quotes are in line with what several of the interviewees in this study express related to women's challenges when entering politics. Seeing female role models in national politics (like Victoria Sandino), give the former female FARC-EP combatants hope that change can

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[25] *Uribismo*: A common term used to describe the political movement following the right-wing conservative politics of former Colombian President Álvaro Uribe (2002-2010) (Loaiza, 2022).
[26] Victoria Sandino is a former commander of FARC, was the leader of the FARC-EPs women's delegation during the Peace Talks in Havana (2012-2016), and is a former Comunes politician and Member of the Senate of Colombia (2018-2022) (Schumann, 2021).

happen. Two of the interviewees explicitly talk about change in conventional politics in Colombia in terms of gender *representation*:

> "Now and then we see a female mayor, president, vice-president, well, over there in the Senate there are many women participating in politics. So we are already seeing a generational change, it is not like it was in the past – that it always had to be the man who came up with political ideas" *Marta*

> "For example in politics, one sees very few women. If it were to be 50/50 [of women and men] someday, well yes, I would like that. But no: out of ten politicians there are maybe three women, or there's no participation of women at all (…) Even though there have been many laws and many changes for the benefit of women, there is still a lot of work to be done" *Valentina*

In sum, seeing other women in power is perceived as generally positive in five out of six interviews in this study. Only one of the interviewees does not express her opinion on the subject. Seeing other *compañeras* (fellow comrades) in power – such as Victoria Sandino – is talked about as a victory and an inspiration post-conflict. The quotes above (Marta, Valentina) partly reflect the reality in Colombia: there has been progress in terms of women's political participation in the country[27], but numbers from February 2021[28] in Colombia show that the gender gap between women and men participating in national politics in still is huge. In 2021, women held only 18.8% of the seats in Parliament, and at local level, the proportion of women in deliberative bodies of government were even lower, with 17, 9% the same year (UN Women, 2021). This may give an indication on how the political sphere still is a masculine sphere in Colombia, which hinders women's political participation in general (UN Mission, 2021[2]).

6.2.1.1 Non-conventional politics: a site for power and reconciliation?

Even though many former female FARC-EP combatants do not participate in national or high-level politics, they participate actively in different non-conventional forms of politics,

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[27] This reflects President Iván Duque's (2018-2022) government, knowing that by the time this thesis is submitted there is a higher percentage of women in high-level politics in Colombia, including cabinet ministers etc. (Alsema, 2022)[2].

[28] Numbers from 2022, a year after conducting the semi-structured interviews with the former female FARC-EP combatants in this study, show a higher proportion of women in the Colombian Congress under President Gustavo Petro: e.g., out of a total of 18 cabinet ministers 9 are now women (50%) (Alsema, 2022)[2].

like voluntary and/or communal work (Sabogal, 2020). My findings are in line with Sabogal (2020), namely that the former female FARC-EP combatants take part in political decision-making processes at the local level by being part of boards, associations and committees in their reincorporation camp. In this section, I will mainly focus on how the interviewees in this study talked positively about participating in a Women's Association and/or Gender Committee in their reincorporation camp, and how this work is connected to their thoughts about empowerment, reconciliation and political reintegration.

The idea of creating Women's Associations and Gender Committees initially came from the Subcomission on Gender, who were involved in the Peace talks in Havana (2012-2016). The goal with these initiatives were to strengthen and facilitate women and girl's grassroot organizations in the territories, so they could become economically independent. This is still seen as the most important work of the associations and committees in the reincorporation camps, as understood through several of the interviews with the former female FARC-EP combatants who participated in this study:

> "We are three women in the Gender Committee here, and the goal for the Committee is first of
> all to look for projects, for financing, so we as women can be able to be economically
> independent" *Isabella*

> "We are some women from here and the outside that are a part of the Women's Association,
> and we have a meeting every month (…) We want to start one project that we can invest in,
> that is what we want, and we have been fighting for that project for two years" *Juanita*

As Juanita explains it, one of the challenges that the former female FARC-EP combatants face in light of their political- and economic reintegration process is to access financial resources to fund their initiatives (ARN, 2022)[1]. This is further elaborated later. Another important part of the associations and committees is to build relationships with, and include the rural women who live in the nearby villages of the reincorporation camps. In 2016-2017, so-called 'gender schools'[29] were established in 12 reincorporation camps in Colombia, where two experts on gender offered training and tools on how the former female combatants and rural women could organize themselves:

> "This whole process of training and organization building generated a very important activism
> for the guerrilla women in the territories (…) and it helped them to strengthen the dialogue

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[29] Supported by the Norwegian and Swedish Embassy (Professional/experts interview 1).

between themselves, and with rural women in the area. They got the confidence to begin a process of communication and reconciliation, well, that was a very nice and very important process" *Professional/expert interview 1*

Two of the professionals/experts in this study explicitly speak of the Women's Associations and Gender Committee's as positive contributions to the lives of the former female FARC-EP combatants in the reincorporation camps, and both of the interviewees from this selection talk about the organizations as political and social bodies. As for the former female FARC-EP combatants who participated in this study, all of them define the associations and committees as collectives of women working together towards economic independence, while three of them mention that it is a site for discussing gender related topics like *care:*

> "I am a part of the Women's Association, and I like the topic of gender, care and community work (…) We discuss this in our meetings. I'm in charge of *different projects[30]* and have to participate in many meetings, yes. You know, one has to make the most of one's time here" *Isabella*

> "The Women's Association is working on hiring a professional to work at the care center (…) so that we can live our lives, because without it, this is useless (…) here we all go to the meetings with our children, knowing that we have to go back home to make lunch. Sometimes we cannot go [to the communal meetings] because we are tired, or because the children are crying – they get stressed in the meetings. So… That is why there are many women who do not participate in the meetings: it is not because they don't want to participate, but because they cannot" *Valentina*

Many of the interviewees experience being part of a Women's Association or Gender Committee as an important part of their individual and collective path towards civilian life, but that participating in meetings are time-consuming and not always compatible with being a mother of young children. The latter point is mentioned by the vast majority of the participants in this study, and will be discussed in relation to traditional gender roles in the last section of the analysis.

> "For example, there are some women who are single mothers, right? And they have to look after their children on their own (…) The purpose of the committee is to strengthen us as an

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[30] The names of the projects are not mentioned to preserve the anonymity of the participant.

organization and as women, and to be able to help women from the outside. Those who are not former combatants, but who depend on us to understand and empower them" *Juanita*

Conceptualizing the grassroot organizations as sites for reconciliation and *empowerment* between civilian women and former combatant women is expressed in four out of the six interviews, including the one with Juanita (quote above). This may show how mobilizing on their shared social/group identity as 'low-class', 'rural' and 'women', and fighting for a shared cause (economic independence and resources that can help improve women's lives) have the potential of bringing rural women and former combatant women closer together. As stated in the Final Peace Agreement (2016), and discussed in many post-conflict countries in the world, acceptance, forgiveness and reconciliation are necessary to be able to envision a shared and peaceful future (Tonheim, 2017; Gluecker et al., 2022). The Women's Associations and Gender Committees may facilitate this at a local level, following the overall findings from this study.

In sum, the former female FARC-EP combatants in this study is perceived their political reintegration as challenging and/or involving fear and a lack of experience as an *individual* in high-level and national politics. On the contrary, the participants speak of political participation as easier, necessary and rewarding as a *collective* in grassroot organizations and/or in local politics at lower-level. I have chosen to include this perspective in the analysis, even though only one of the interviewees have worked as a politician in Colombian high-level politics, for two main reasons: firstly, because several of the participants in the study reflected upon their political reintegration when asked general questions about the Women's Associations and Gender Committee's in the reincorporation camp and/or about their hopes for the future. Secondly, because of the emphasis on the former FARC-EP combatants reintegration as *threefold* in the Final Peace Agreement (2016): they are to have a political, economic and social reincorporation to civilian life (p. 70, 77). The following section examines the second part of this, namely the economic reintegration.

6.2.2 *Economic reintegration*

To get a job, a stable income and gain economic autonomy, is an overarching aim of the reintegration program and process of the former FARC-EP combatants. In order to access the benefits of the reintegration program, the former combatants are obligated to follow the *reincorporation route*, consisting of "Academic Training, Training for Work and Human

Development, Psychosocial Accompaniment and Income Generation" (ARN, 2019). In 2017, the Colombian Government and President Iván Duque signed a new National Development Plan, aiming at strengthening the economic benefits for the 13194 former FARC-EP combatants in reintegration process at the time (ARN, 2019). These benefits are meant to guarantee a sustainable social and economic reincorporation and include a basic monthly income (90% of the minimum wage[31]), social security, a one-off normalization allowance, access to education and productive projects for a more sustainable and long-term reincorporation (Final Peace Agreement, 2016, p. 77-78). Since the minimum wage in Colombia is very low, several of the former female combatants experience that their basic income is far from enough to cover the monthly costs of themselves and their family:

> "I sell empanadas, because with two children I don't always earn enough to provide for them. The week is always hard and, well, there is almost no work here" *Marta*

> "Right now, to get a job, that requires a minimum of two years of work experience, but how are we going to get that if they don't give us the opportunity in the first place? To get experience I have to work, but to work I have to have experience*" Valentina*

A lack of work opportunities is described as challenging and related to a lack of productive projects, a lack of land ownership and a lack of social reintegration – given the stigmatization that former combatants experience in the labor market. These factors are described in different ways in four out of six interviews with the former female FARC-EP combatants in this study. Sabogal & Richter (2019) write that the opportunity to own land is crucial for the former FARC-EP combatants on their path towards a dignified, sustainable and independent life (p. 769). At the same time, the 'practical-legal aspect' of economic reintegration – as expressed by one of the interviewees in my study – revolves around understanding the capitalist model of the Colombian society, where goods and services have a cost. Three of the interviewees mention that having an income, which in turn must be used to cover basic living costs and expenses, is a big transition and a learning process. Valentina explains the transition from collective to individuals dealings with economic issues as connected to this *huge change*:

> "It was very hard for me to face the reality of civilian life, that you have to *buy* everything (…) back then, you would tell the *comandante* (commander) 'I need socks', or 'I need clothes', or

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[31] "90% of the current legal minimum wage" (ARN, 2019).

'I'm lacking sanitary towels', and they would give it to you, and you didn't even know what it was worth. That was a huge change here" *Valentina*

"Life being here is very different, because we have to know how to handle the money from the monthly payment, the little that we get for our necessities" *Juanita*

Like these quotes illustrate, managing money and understanding the *worth* of e.g. clothing, was a learning experience. The exchange of labor for money, and having to get a job to cover their basic necessities, is seen as hard. Becoming a legal citizen is a part of the reintegration process, and obtaining an identification number (and an ID-card) is crucial to apply for schools and work, but this is perceived as burdensome and challenging for the former combatants. Many of the interviewees in this study have had a hard time finding a job, and they explain it partly as related to stigma and discrimination:

"We rebelled the state and all of that, which is why it is difficult getting a job. Because when one finds a job and then presents herself, the stigmatization begins. Starting with the number of our ID card and then questions like 'why doesn't she have any [work] experience?'" *María Victoria*

Several of the interviewees find that having a gap in their resume, due to their participation in the armed struggle within the ranks of the FARC-EP, is hindering them post-conflict as their knowledge and experiences are not formalized. Many of them lack formal diplomas of lower or higher education, but say that they learnt many skills from the training programs of the FARC-EP, such as reading, writing, sewing and nursing. Three of the interviewees reflect upon the skills they achieved, and roles they had, during war by reflecting upon how they spent more years as *guerrilleras* (female combatant) than civilians:

"My life as a *guerrillera* (female combatant) has lasted longer than my life as a… civilian, let's say. I joined when I was 18, I think, and I was in the guerilla for more than 20-25 years[32] (…) The last 8 years my feet were hurting and they [commanders in the FARC-EP] couldn't give me any more tasks, so they sent me to a course to learn how to make uniforms. And I have to confess right now, that I wasn't really good at it [laughing]. Well, I've also learnt a lot through *Google* and *Youtube*, and now I can even sew diapers for children!" *Valentina*

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[32] Use of interval to preserve the anonymity of the participant.

"I'm from Guaviare[33], but because I joined the war at age 15, and participated for 15-20[34] years, I usually say that I just grew up in several departments (…) and have 15-20[35] years of work-experience (…) I carried a weapon all those years" *Celeste*

"I worked as a nurse during the war, taking care of the wounded and sick people. But that education, the one from within the guerrilla, that is not worth anything out here" *Juanita*

These quotes illustrate how some of the participants experience that their skills and education from the FARC-EP are not valued post-conflict. They also illustrate the fact that the former female combatants took on different tasks during the conflict, which is further elaborated in the following section.

6.2.2.1 Regendering of tasks and work

The type of education/training/jobs that former female combatants engage in post-conflict can be said to mirror the gendered division of labor in society (Henshaw, 2020). Schumann (2021) argues that some former female FARC-EP combatants only get educational/work-related options that are typically *feminine* during their reintegration process, like nursing or hairdressing (p. 109). This is not evident in this study, but figures from the ARN (2022)[1, 2] show how women take on different jobs in their reintegration process. Statistics from the productive projects in the two reincorporation camps Yarí (Meta) and Las Colinas (Guaviare) show that both women and men participated in livestock farming, tourism, sugar cane production and restaurant projects. The biggest gender gap is seen in projects like transportation and comprehensive farming (predominance of men) and projects involving sewing/production of clothes and cultivation of fruit (predominance of women) (ARN, 2022)[1, 2].

Sabogal & Richter (2019) claim that education and training are important factors in former female combatants economic reintegration, and that women 1) want to have a free choice, 2) make choices based on their health/family situation, and 3) take an education/training related to the skills they acquired during wartime (p. 769). All of these factors are related to gender norms, and my study is in line with the findings of Sabogal & Richter (2019), namely that some of the women want to take on training/jobs that are coded as

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[33] Use of different department in Colombia to preserve the anonymity of the participant.
[34] Use of interval to preserve the anonymity of the participant.
[35] Ibid.

typically feminine, whilst others do not give it any additional meaning or thought. One of the professionals/experts in this study claim that women to a large degree also take part in training/productive projects in the reincorporation camp (ETCR) that is typically *masculine*, but that it doesn't go the other way around.

The findings from the interviews conducted in this study suggest that the division of labor between women and men is related to difference in gender norms, difference in interests, and difference in opportunities – the latter pointing towards a gender gap where men to a large extent can take on (paid) work outside of the home (UN Mission, 2021[2]). As for the experiences of the former female FARC-EP combatants who participated in this study, many of them argue that women and men take on the same kind of jobs, implying that the non-gendering of tasks and work within the FARC-EP is a continued practice in the reincorporation camp. Two of the interviewees talk about this as desirable and a way to change gender norms:

> "I want to teach my young son and daughter that a son can do every job, even though he is a man" *Isabella*

6.2.3 Social reintegration

During war, the guerrilla front was a militant and social community consisting of FARC-EP comrades; a passage in life shared between fellow *compañeros*/*compañeras*. The combatants had to trust each other with their lives, and day-to-day responsibilities like care-taking, cooking and washing clothes was often shared amongst both men and women in the temporary camps in the jungle (Schumann, 2021). Based on interviews with the former female FARC-EP combatants in Meta and Guaviare, it seems like even though the different guerilla fronts were dissolved after the demilitarization- and demobilization process of the FARC-EP, the idea of a social community was continued in the reincorporation camps. When talking about it, several of the participants in the study refer to life in the reincorporation camp through experiences of community, collectivity, and *unity*:

> "What I like, is that there is a lot of *hermandad* (sisterhood/brotherhood) here, a lot of hospitality. Everyone takes care of each other, and if you need a favor here, anyone will do it for you. As you can see, we are very united (…) there is an order, a discipline, and that is good. We know our *vecinos* (neighbors), in the city nobody knows who lives next door to them, they don't know their neighbor. Here we all know each other" *Isabella*

By using words like *hermandad* (sisterhood/brotherhood) and *vecinos* (neighbors), life in the reincorporation camp is portrayed through a notion of closeness and safety. These feelings may be related to their shared experiences and social/group identities during war, namely 'FARC-EP' and '*compañeros/compañeras'* (fellow comrades). Following Hogg (2016) and Wessells (2016), group identities describe groups of people who share the same values, behaviors and characteristics. This is illustrated through the quote of Isabella: collective care-taking, hospitality, unity, *order* and *discipline* are part of how the former female FARC-EP combatants see themselves and want to be perceived by others.

Wessells (2016) write that group identities reflect a distinction between the in-groups and out-groups and that this happens by drawing a line between 'us' and 'them'. Continuing with the quote of Isabella (above), she sketches up a traditional dichotomy between a rural/urban and collective/individual way of life, where the rural and collective lifestyle is idealized and considered to be two sides of the same coin. Given that the majority of the former FARC-EP combatants come from rural areas, and that their collective grievances as 'peasants' (the proletariat) were among their expressed motivations for joining the insurgency, it is not surprising that the ones who choose to stay in the reincorporation camps (ETCRs) distance themselves from values associated with urban and individualist lifestyles. This way of distinguishing themselves as a group is present in several of the interviews in this study, where the division between us/them is explained through dichotomies of comrades/civilians (or family) and values such as gender equality/machismo:

> "Look, this community is very different from all the others because we come from a
> community where there are duties, rights and values where women and men are equal. But we
> have been losing them because it is not only us who are here – many of our family members
> are here, who come with these flaws, discrimination and *machismo*" *Valentina*

In this quote, it becomes evident how Valentina ranks the shared values of the in-groups of the 'FARC-EP' and 'fellow comrades' above the values of the out-groups (here: civilian family members). She also expresses a certain fear related to how the out-groups' *flaws, discrimination* and patriarchal *machismo* has a negative effect on the norms and values of the community in the reincorporation camp. Several of the interviewees in the study share the same fear as Valentina, and express a perceived threat from the 'outside' which will be

discussed later. In terms of investing and helping their community, this is emphasized by many of the former female FARC-EP combatants that participated in this study:

> "To work collectively, for me, is to work hand in hand with each other, that the *hermandad* (sisterhood/brotherhood) has not been lost" *Isabella*

> "(…) we think about growing as a community and growing as women in order to help our families. My goal is to help the community, but also to help my family" *Marta*

As expressed by Marta, she wants to *help* the collective project (the community) as well as focusing on her individual project (grow as a woman, help her family). This in contrast to life within the ranks of the FARC-EP, where the collective project (armed struggle, seizure of power) had to be put above one's individual projects (like e.g., having children) (Ortega, 2014, p. 90). To achieve full dedication, commitment and devotion to the collective project, guerrilla groups like the FARC-EP, used socialization, solidarity norms, moral narratives and fear (Ortega, 2014, p. 90; Wilson, 2019). Building a strong group identity as 'FARC-EP' and '*compañeros/compañeras*' was crucial for the survival of the guerrilla group, where the feeling of togetherness and comradery between the combatants was an important strategy to keep their insurgency strong (Ortega, 2014). When talking to the former female FARC-EP combatants in Meta and Guaviare post-conflict, their dedication and loyalty to FARC-EP or the political party Comunes, is still very strong. Only two of the interviewees (Celeste, Juanita) express that they are disappointed with the fragmentation of the political party, or claim that there have been internal problems and a lack of women's political representation in the party. The complete loyalty the others express may be rooted in their personal, political beliefs and the continuation of identifying as 'FARC-EP' and 'compañeros/compañeras' post-conflict. This is further discussed in the next section of the thesis.

Now, the collective project of the FARC-EP has been reformulated from armed struggle and seizure of power to legal political struggle, as stated in the Final Peace Agreement (2016). At the local level, as expressed in several of the interviews in this study, an investment in the collective/community, coincides with maintaining a set of values and norms from the guerrilla group:

> "Then, we used to talk about the community all together, that is, speaking with one voice amongst all of us (…) A collective is when something is beneficial for everyone, and that is what we try to do here" *Valentina*

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What several of the professionals/experts in this study point out is exactly how the norm of *speaking with one voice,* that the FARC-EP promoted during war, can overshadow the needs, interests and opinions of the individual. When the hierarchy from the different fronts of FARC-EP is maintained or reproduced in the reincorporation camps, this may challenge values like democracy and gender equality. Even though several of the former female combatants in this study claim that flaws like discrimination and machismo belong to the civilians ('them'), the professionals/experts in this study claim that patriarchal and paternalistic practices occur within the former FARC-EP combatant population ('us') in the reincorporation camps (ETCRs) as well. *Speaking with one voice* reflect the Marxist-Leninist roots and the militant hierarchy within the FARC-EP, and as I interpret Valentina, she rather sees the reincorporation camp as a collective beneficial *for everyone.*

6.3   From *guerrillera* (female combatant) to civilian

This section examines the former female FARC-EP combatants' transition from *guerrilleras* (female combatants) during conflict to civilians post-conflict. The aim is to answer the question: *In what ways do gendered narratives about the guerrillera (female combatant) affect the former female FARC-EP combatants post-conflict?* First, the characteristics, roles and ideals associated with the identity 'guerrilla' are presented through her differing from the 'civilian woman' (Ortega, 2014). Then, gendered and patriarchal narratives about the female combatant as a *monster* or *whore* (Sjöberg & Gentry, 2007) are discussed in light of how the interviewees experience that society at large sees them – and how they see themselves. Further on, I present a diversity of challenges that 'queer guerrilleras' and 'indigenous guerrilleras' might face during their reintegration process, and finally how the former female combatants' multiple and intersectional identities shape their vulnerability and experiences of violence before, during and after conflict.

6.3.1   *Las guerrilleras: the transgressive women*

The identity *la guerrillera* (female combatant) promoted a 'new kind of woman' (Ortega, 2014, p. 105) in contrast to the civilian woman. By joining the armed ranks of the FARC-EP, women became 'double transgressors', Nieto-Valdivieso write (2020, p. 95). Firstly, they were transgressing the *social order* by enlisting themselves as part of an insurgent group, operating outside of legality with an overall revolutionary goal to change the society.

Secondly, they were transgressing the *gender order* by taking up arms and becoming active perpetrators of violence, rather than taking on the roles as passive victims of war (Nieto-Valdivieso, 2020). From the perspective of the insurgent group itself, the FARC-EP constructed a radical gender order within the organization, giving many women a feeling of gender equity, empowerment and agency that will be further discussed in this section.

Ortega (2014) argues that insurgent organizations, like the FARC-EP in Colombia, used gender strategically to 1) create a distance between their insurgent project and the broader social order, 2) achieve external legitimacy of their cause and improve the combatants performance, and 3) maintain control and order within the group (p. 95-96). Firstly, by disrupting the gender order in the Colombian society, FARC-EP could distance themselves from the overall gender order and construct one of their own; a radical gender order (Ortega, 2014). This was in line with their interest and nature to separate themselves from – and fight – the social order and *status quo*. Women and men could take on the same tasks, carry weapons and (to a certain degree) achieve power and leading positions within the insurgent group (Schumann, 2021). Secondly, the guerrilla group used *gender stereotypes* as a tactic to gain legitimacy and obtain control over their combatants. As Ortega (2014) explains it, insurgent groups can either reduce or reenforce gendered dichotomies between men/women and masculinity/femininity to serve their cause, for instance through narratives like 'even women support our armed struggle' or 'if a woman can bear a weapon, then a man should be able to do it too' (p. 95-96). The latter enhance a form of *machismo,* where negative gender stereotypes about women's 'natural' inferiority to men is used to e.g., recruit combatants. Thirdly, as my own investigation and other studies show (Ortega, 2014, Thylin, 2018), the sexual relations and partnerships formed within the FARC-EP was mediated or controlled by the *comandantes* (commanders) of the guerrilla front. This served to maintain an internal order, where unwanted and transgressive behavior was sanctioned with punishment. This shows how insurgent groups, like the FARC-EP, conceptualize gender to build their own, insurgent gender regime (Ortega, 2014, p. 96), and should not be mistaken for being inherently *feminist* or fighting for women's liberation in general. Sabogal & Richter (2019) argue that the "wartime empowerment is temporary and ambivalent" (p. 760), which I argue is the case for the former female FARC-EP combatants in this study.

As a Marxist-Leninist group, the focus in the FARC-EP was on their members shared class identity ('proletariat') and group identity ('peasants'), which were drivers for the insurgent group's rebellion (Brittain & Petras, 2010). The differences in gender and ethnicity, amongst others, was downplayed and understood as less important within the militarized

context (Ortega, 2014). The result of their radical gender regime, on the other hand, was that many female combatants' had temporary experiences of gender equity. This was *different* from their earlier gendered experiences in their family, community and society, and being *equal* is seen as something positive:

> "We lived very different lives, because we were not submissive to a man, and the man neither"
> *Juanita*

> "Honestly, between men and women, we were equal within the organization. When we became guerrilla fighters, that is, the tasks were the same for men and women. Women did the same work that men did" *Luna*

FARC-EP needed people with diverse experiences and skills in their ranks, functioning as armed combatants, administrative- and political leaders and nurses etc. Ortega (2014) argues that skills and functionality was more important than peoples genders, which resulted in women being included, valued and respected for their knowledge and participation. The non-gendering of work tasks led to experiences of equality, as expressed by the interviewees in this study, but at the same time the militant organization can be said to be based on a masculine norm. As the statement above illustrates, *women did the same work that men did,* meaning that women stepped out of their traditional roles, transgressed the boundaries of expected practices of femininity, and became the identity category *guerrillera* (female combatant). Gluecker et al. (2022) uses social identity theory to illustrate how belonging to a group could boost individual's self-esteem and differentiate themselves from other groups or communities in a positive way (p. 360). Building a group identity, based on a set of political beliefs, norms and values, would therefore help recruiting individuals to the insurgency, and tie bonds to each other by promoting a *guerrillera* (female combatant) identity in contrast to the civilian identity.

When returning to civilian life, on the other hand, the participants' experiences of gender equality/equity within the insurgency might make it harder to accept that the civilian identity includes a re-gendering of household tasks, subordinate gender roles and unequal gender relations. As mentioned in chapter 3, Analytical and theoretical framework, the practice of insurgent femininities and masculinities within the FARC-EP meant that many women gained greater autonomy, sexual freedom and agency during conflict than pre- and post-conflict (Ortega, 2014). This did not mean that men, on the other hand, 'lost' anything during war, because their insurgent masculinity and *guerrillero* ([male] combatant) identity

was not constructed within an exclusionary and binary hierarchy with the insurgent femininities and *guerrilleras* (female combatants) – where one has to 'lose' something for the others to 'win' (Ortega, 2014, p. 115-116). Several of the participants in the study emphasize that they want gender equity in the future, and that they call themselves *feminists* for fighting against patriarchy, but not *against men*:

> "I am a person that… [pause] I can't say that I'm a feminist, because there are some women who are radical feminists, which is feminism misinterpreted. I'm more like a fair-minded person, and I don't want to say that I'm a feminist meaning that I'm going to go *against* men, no. I know that my rights end where the rights of others begin, so what I want is equity" *Luna*

> "I identify as feminist and Marxist. Because I'm interested in work related to gender, women's rights and everything that deals with sexual and reproductive health issues" *María Victoria*

> "I am 40-45 years old[36] and, well (…) I am a feminist one hundred percent, yes" *Valentina*

6.3.2 'Monsters' and 'whores': experiences of stigma and discrimination

Following Tonheim (2017), and her study on former girl soldiers' experience of 'homecoming' in eastern DR Congo, she emphasizes that although stigmatization affect both girls and boys, it seems to be particularly challenging for former *female* combatants to return to civilian life due to stigma (p. 430). Their social reintegration to their families and communities are challenging because they are perceived as threatening; socially, health- and security vise. Earlier research from Sierra Leone, Mozambique and Palestine suggests similar findings, where former combatants are 'othered' because of their identity as 'soldiers' (Wessels, 2016) whilst former *female* combatants are particularly vulnerable for social exclusion, isolation and marginalization (McKay & Mazurana. 2004; McKay et al., 2011). In this study, I mainly focus on how former female FARC-EP combatants in Colombia are perceived as 'others' through narratives about 'monsters' or 'whores' (Sjöberg & Gentry, 2007), which deals with their perceived motivations for joining, and their roles within the guerilla group FARC-EP during war. This, in turn, hinders their social reintegration to society after laying down their weapons:

> "Many people see us as monsters, and they've made us look like monsters" *Valentina*

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[36] Use of interval to preserve the anonymity of the participant.

The *monster* narrative is common in media coverage of members of insurgent groups, Sjöberg & Gentry (2007) writes. In the quote above, the interviewee talks about *us* as the group 'former FARC-EP combatants'; a stigmatized group in the Colombian society, due to the guerilla groups' role in the Colombian conflict (1964-2016), their practice of violence and murder, and the media coverage, discourses and narratives about the FARC-EP members. The stigma has roots in the deep, political division between the political right and the political left in the country, each with their own interests entangled in their versions of the truth about the armed conflict and its actors. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, the influential politician and former president Uribe (2002-2010) was key in the no-campaign leading up to the referendum about the Peace Agreement in 2016, portraying FARC-EP as narco terrorists and not acknowledging them as an armed actor (who started out as an ideological, revolutionary group of peasants). The political left, on the other hand, emphasized how a continuum of repression, political exclusion and corruption had to be fought, with or without weapons. This political and public division was present during the conflict, sparked interest with the referendum pre-agreement, and still shape the life of the former combatants in reintegration process post-conflict, due to stigma and discrimination based on their group identity as 'former FARC-EP combatants'.

In the quote above, the *us* might also be interpreted as 'las compañeras', knowing that the *monsters* narrative historically has been highly gendered. Understood through Sjöberg & Gentry (2007), women who have transgressed the boundaries of femininity and traditional gender roles in society are commonly portrayed as *monsters* in media coverage on war. The female combatant is a monster; a deviant from the category 'woman' and to the female ideal in conflict, namely the *victim*. Traditional literature on peace and conflict have portrayed women as merely victims in war, opposing the idea of women perpetuating violence that others should be protected from (Sjöberg & Gentry, 2007, Henshaw, 2020). These gendered narratives shape the lives of the former female combatants as they feel judged and misrepresented post-conflict:

> "There is a lot of discrimination. You know, society was not prepared. They are always going
> to look at *las guerrilleras* (the female combatants) like those who kidnapped, those who are
> thugs, those who used weapons…. So if they don't look at her as she is now, nor as she was
> when she was inside the guerilla, they will only look at her the way the propaganda of the
> Government has portrayed us, that they have sold to the television channels (…) They do not
> know the reality, so it is easy to judge" *Isabella*

Both of the interviewees (Valentina, Isabella) use *they*, either as an overall distinction between former combatants and civilians, or as a distinction between the two parties in the conflict; the FARC-EP and the Colombian Government/state. Isabella does not recognize herself in the image of the *propaganda*; she does not identify as a monster, a whore, or a victim. Not during war, not now. Later in the interview, she felt an urge to explain that she joined the insurgency voluntarily and that she never worked as a sex slave or were raped. From a theoretical perspective, one could claim that she wanted to break with the negative stereotype of the *guerrillera* (female combatant), by taking control over her own story and narrative as a political actor with agency.

This is in line with testimonies from other insurgencies, like Nepal's Maoist insurgency. By joining the insurgency, the women could escape the violence in their homes, avoid forced marriage and other expectations related to their gender identity as 'women' (Henshaw, 2020, p. 67). As *guerrilleras* (female combatants) they were freed from this, and could practice insurgent femininities, taking on tasks on the same footing as men. The *judgement* that these women have to face post-conflict, be it in Congo, Nepal or Colombia, can be understood through the stigma of being a former female combatant. Negotiating new identities as civilians can be challenging, especially given their backgrounds.

Touching upon the topic of loyalty, the former combatants' loyalty to the insurgent group, or in the case of Colombia – the political party Comunes – may affect how stories from the war are being told in its aftermath. By leaving out details and certain experiences, one can avoid hurting the FARC-EP's collective narrative about the war and women's roles within the ranks. Testimonies received by Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica (National Center for Historical Memory) in Colombia show a more complex picture of women's roles in the insurgency. Some of the *guerrilleras* (female combatants) within the FARC-EP participated in armed combat, while others were left with care related tasks. Some experienced empowerment/agency and sexual freedom, while others were victims of violence and rape. Stories about forced recruitment, kidnapping and sexual violence conducted by the FARC-EP and paramilitary groups are an important part of telling the truth about the war, as well as acknowledging that violence was perpetrated by both illegal and legal actors during conflict, including the Colombian military (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2013).

6.3.3 *The queer guerrillera: an impossible identity?*

Even though many combatants experienced a rupture of traditional gender norms within the insurgency, the heteronormative and monogamous ideal was not ruptured within the FARC-EP ranks. Neither was there room for polyamorous/alternative sexualities and partnerships within the insurgent group (Thylin, 2018, p. 98). "Hierarchical relations between women and men are inscribed within insurgent organizations through the normalization of heterosexual partnerships and the maintenance of male privileges in the affective sphere" (Ortega, p. 107). Understanding male desire, sexuality and domination as 'natural', and women as inherently different from men, meant that the gender hierarchy and difference was highly intact in the private/individual sphere during the war. From a LGBTI perspective, this meant that people who had sexual identities that did not affirm to the heterosexual norm, had to hide or *play along*, as one of the interviewees in this study argues:

> "You see, I know some *compañeras* (fellow female comrades) who were gay, or lesbians. I heard stories about other fronts where they had to like play along and be with *muchachos* (guys) (…) But it was not always like that, no" *Marta*

Based on the findings of Thylin (2018), where she examined the experiences of LGBTI former combatants from three different armed groups in Colombia, she found that the participants felt that they could become their *true self* (p. 101) after demobilizing and no longer being part of the guerrilla group. During war, they felt like they had to hide their sexual and/or gender identity – as transgender, gay, bisexual or lesbian. Some of the former combatants in her study had emotional- and sexual relationships with same-sex partners within the insurgent group, but these were kept secret (Thylin, 2018, p. 102). This is in line with the quote (Marta) above, claiming that some of her lesbian *compañeras* (fellow female comrades) had to act out a heteronormative sexuality within the ranks of the FARC-EP. Unfortunately for this study, only one interviewee identified as non-heterosexual, while several women did not reveal their sexual identity. Valentina explains that the discrimination of *personas queer* (queer people)[37] during war continues in the reintegration process:

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[37] "Queer is a word that describes sexual and gender identities other than straight and cisgender. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people may all identify with the word queer" (Planned Parenthood, 2022).

Returning to the theory of Sjöberg & Gentry (2007), the *guerrillera* (female combatant) is portrayed as the 'monster' due to her deviance from the feminine ideal of the 'woman'. Her motivation for joining the insurgency and taking up arms, is explained through an understanding of her sexual abnormality; she could not find a husband, have children or was a lesbian (Sjöberg & Gentry, 2007, p. 10). Being a lesbian is incompatible with the idea of a correct and 'good woman', just as the *guerrillera* (female combatant) is. The negative gender stereotypes about lesbians and guerrillas can be said to coincide, as they both transgress women's encouraged roles in society as mothers (within a heteronormative family). María Victoria, who is quoted above, explains the stigma of sexual minorities as embedded in the Colombian *culture,* which in this thesis is conceptualize as *machismo* – an expression of patriarchy. From a perspective of oppressive hierarchies, heterosexuality is not only dominant to homosexuality, but homosexuality is often portrayed as an abnormality (Sjöberg & Gentry, 2007) and something that should be *cured.* This is evident in what is often referred to as "the paradox between law and practice" (Bocanumenth, 2022) in Colombia.

The Colombian paradox (Bocanumenth, 2022) refers to how Colombia, in comparison to all other countries in Latin-America, has one of the strongest legal frameworks defending LGBTI rights, but these are seldom enforced in practice. From the perspective of the interviewees in this study, they all express openness and see themselves as accepting of other sexualities and genders. Marta claims that the overall Colombian culture, where LGBTI people are excluded and discriminated, is not reflected within the reincorporation camp (ETCR), because:

"We treat everyone here the same. There is only one person in the community, a boy, who is gay, and we respect and talk to each other, and there is no discrimination" *Juanita*

"I'm not anti-gay. There are people who are anti-gay, and they are not very respectful. Everyone is free to make their own decisions and have their sexual preference, I say" *Luna*

6.3.4   The indigenous guerrillera: traditions and rituals

The intersections of gender, ethnicity and class are significant when analyzing and discussing former female FARC-EP combatants transition to civilian life (Henshaw, 2020). Following earlier research on former female combatants with indigenous backgrounds, many of these women experience a special stigma when returning to their communities (Herrera & Porch, 2008). They "are considered tainted by interaction with non-indigenous society, and are welcomed back in their communities only after they have undergone lengthy purification rituals", Herrera & Porch (2008, p. 626) write. The former female indigenous combatants experience this as burdensome, shameful and frustrating.

In this study, two of the participants (María Victoria, Celeste) say that they identify as Afro-Colombians, and Celeste says that she is a *proud* of her roots:

> "My mother is from Choco[38] (…) I joined the guerilla when I was very young, I am proud of my roots. My roots are very important" *Celeste*

Both María Victoria and Celeste refer to their return to civilian life as reuniting with their biological family, but they do not say anything else about their reintegration process in terms of their ethnicity/roots/background. Due to the lack of information from the interviews, I rather emphasize this perspective in the analysis through earlier studies about 'indigenous guerrilleras'.

In Sierra Leone, former female combatants with tribal backgrounds faced challenges when returning to their communities, because they had missed out on important local or community-specific ceremonies and traditions marking their passage from childhood to adulthood. After their demobilization, they still saw themselves as children, even though international agencies – and potentially their own communities – categorized them as adults (McKenzie 2012 in Henshaw, 2020, p. 71). This shows how war interrupts traditions that are important for the individual's group identity, and how transitioning from *guerrillera* to civilian is a complex process for all former combatants, but that their intersecting and multiple identities shape the way they are seen – and see themselves – after demobilizing and returning to legality, their families and communities (Henshaw, 2020, Herrera & Porch, 2008; Thylin, 2018).

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[38] Use of other department in Colombia to preserve the anonymity of the interviewee.

In Colombia, the issue of land rights, social stigma and reintegration to their former communities, affect women differently than men, especially in indigenous/ethnic minority communities:

> "Coming back, some of the men returned to their families and got a piece of land, they inherited their part. But for us women it was different. Still, there are many that don't inherit land, or their parents don't accept them as family, especially in the indigenous- and afro communities we see how this has been hard: how former female combatants can't return to their communities, how they are left with nothing" *Celeste*

From an intersectional feminist perspective, especially focusing on the intersection of gender and ethnicity, the lack of social accept in the e.g., indigenous communities might hinder the successful reintegration of former female FARC-EP combatants belonging to these groups. The report of the UN Mission in Colombia (2021[2]) argues that measures that facilitate the reintegration of former FARC-EP combatants from indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities remain limited. At the same time, the report (2021) emphasize that ethnic authorities show support and are welcoming former FARC-EP members back into their communities, as exemplified through the Afro-Colombian community of the Curbaradó River (Chocó) where community leaders have reached out to lend former combatants pieces of land to implement productive projects (UN Mission, 2021[2], p. 14).

6.3.5 Security issues: multiple identities

From an intersectional perspective, Afro-Colombian/indigenous groups and the LGBTI population are targeted by armed actors in Colombia, making them particularly vulnerable for violence. The Afro-Colombian- and indigenous communities are at greater risk of mines, (death) threats, forced displacements and killings of community leaders, the UN Mission Report (2021[2]) states. "Additionally, forced recruitment is disproportionately affecting ethnic communities" (UN Mission, 2021[2], p. 14).

As for the LGBTI community in Colombia, including former combatants, the violence is increasing. Justice for Colombia (2021) writes that between 2017 and 2020 the numbers of assassinations of people from the LGBTI community rose by 170%. One can argue that these statistics tell a story about an increase in awareness of the specific violence directed at LGBTI communities, the categorization of these violations, and an increase in reporting, but the quantitative figures available show that people from sexual and gender minorities are at great

risk of discrimination and violence. The incidents are mainly taking places in the Northern Caribbean region, and in rural parts of the country, where both illegal actors (guerilla groups, narco cartels etc.) and legal actors (military and police officers) are violating gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender peoples' universal human rights, as "the right to life, liberty and the security of person" (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948).

Following Myrtinnen & Daigle (2017, p. 15), violence based on people's sexual and/or gender identity exist across time and space, and Colombia is not an exception. Numbers from Indepaz (2021) and Justice for Colombia (2022) illustrate that homo-, bi- and transphobic motivated violence have increased post-conflict, something which could be related to the referendum in October 2016. This sparked the discussion on family, gender and sexuality in Colombia, and the polarization between liberal and conservative voices in society led to increased attention. Based on the interviews with former female FARC-EP combatants and professionals/experts in this study, I argue that the referendum possibly led to an increasing vulnerability of sexual and gender minorities in the country. People whose gender and sexual identity disrupt the idea of the nuclear family, the heterosexual norm and/or a binary understanding of gender are considered a threat to traditional and conservative ideals, as seen in anti-gender movements in Europe and the Americas (Bocanumenth, 2020; Sosa, 2021).

Feminists and advocates for LGBTI people's right, as well as sexual and gender minorities themselves, are portrayed as *traitors*. Following the use of the word traitor, this is frequently used by the participants in this study, but with other connotations. Testimonies and news articles revolving around former FARC-EP leaders and combatants tell stories about how dissident groups see the demobilized combatants as *traitors* (e.g., France 24, 2020), meaning 'those who betrayed the (political) cause' or 'those who made an agreement with the enemy', the state etc. Interviewees in this study, on the other hand, conceptualize the *dissidents* as traitors. When asked about how the security situation in the area of the reincorporation camp is, Isabella looks over her shoulder before whispering:

> "A lie. Because, of course, the others went up there [pointing at the mountains close by], the *traitors*" *Isabella*

6.4   From radical to traditional gender roles

The last part of the analysis examines how the transition from life as a combatant to life as a civilian may involve a transition from radical to traditional gender roles. The aim of the section is to answer: *How do the former female FARC-EP combatants experience the*

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reintegration process from a gender role perspective? I have chosen to answer this question by discussing the 'no children' norm within the FARC-EP during the conflict and the contrasting 'baby boom' in the former combatant population post-conflict. The meaning and consequences of motherhood – whether it is desired, accidental or as a result of pressure – is discussed based on the experiences of the participants in this study, and related to questions on gender norms, the 'mother' role and hierarchies within the family. The section seeks to understand how women who have fought in rebel groups with radical gender regimes, such as the former female FARC-EP combatants, experience the encounter with traditional gender regimes post-conflict and how the reincorporation camp can be a site for negotiating e.g., alternative parental roles and collective care solutions.

6.4.1 The 'no children' norm within the insurgency

Becoming a mother was highly discouraged within the FARC-EP during the armed conflict in Colombia. Ortega (2014) write that a pregnant woman, a woman giving birth or a woman raising small children suggests a 'double risk' for the insurgent organization; she is both shifting focus from the collective project (armed struggle) towards an individual project (starting a family, raising children), and is less mobile, which propose a security risk for the combatant herself and her front (p. 102-107, 112-113). The overall role of a 'mother of young children' was seen as incompatible with being a part of the insurgency, and even less compatible with being an armed combatant (Ortega, 2014). This is supported by e.g., the work of Hauge (2021), claiming that the argument of the FARC-EP was that it was dangerous and difficult with children in the jungle (p. 22-24).

The 'no children' norm within the FARC-EP has been criticized for having paternalistic roots, because it conceptualized childrearing and care tasks as mainly the female combatants' job. Feminists claim that this limited women's right to practice bodily autonomy and individual freedom (Ortega, 2014; Cárdenas et al., 2017). While male combatants were allowed to have families with civilian women outside of the ranks of the FARC-EP, former female combatants did not have the same privileges of forming a family (Ortega, 2014; Cárdenas et al., 2017; Hauge, 2021). While the former female FARC-EP combatants interviewed in this study hesitate to discuss pregnancies during war, or explicitly argue that they could never envision themselves having children as *guerrilleras* (female combatants), all of the professionals/experts interviewed touch upon the topic of forced abortions, adoptions

and use of contraceptives during war. One of the professionals/experts expresses the 'no children norm' as a 'double standard' within the FARC-EP:

> "They say that within the FARC everyone was equal, but when you look at the topic of family and sexual and reproductive rights, the male *comandantes* (commanders) or *compañeros* (fellow comrades) could have children with civilian women in the nearby village, while *las farianas*[39] who got pregnant had to either get an abortion or adopt their baby away"
> *Professional/expert interview 5*

This statement is representative for this selection, meaning that the professionals/experts who participated in this study generally are critical of how the FARC-EP controlled, limited and/or deprived women from exercising their human rights, such as bodily autonomy, inside the ranks of the guerrilla group. This is supported by figures from Cárdenas et al. (2017) reporting that approximately 32 abortions were carried out in the FARC-EP front *Marco Aurelio Buendía* in Guaviare between 2007-2008, leaving many women with psychological- and physical problems and trauma after having surgeries in the middle of the jungle (p. 21-23). This signals how the topics of abortions, adoptions, contraceptives and 'motherhood' may be a sensitive and personal topic to discuss for many former female combatants – also for those who participated in this study.

Two of the former female FARC-EP combatants in this study explicitly said they believe that being a *guerrillera* (female combatant) is incompatible with being a *mother,* and they both emphasized that they never saw themselves having children during war. The research of Ortega (2014) and Herrera & Porch (2008) demonstrate the same, namely that the prohibition of pregnancy within insurgent groups like FARC, M-19 or other Marxist insurgent groups in Colombia was not considered unfair by the female combatants in their ranks (Herrera & Porch, 2008, p. 625). Four out of six interviewees in this study reflect upon giving up motherhood as a part of giving up their civilian identity during war. One of the former female FARC-EP combatants explain how she completed a pregnancy as a *guerrillera* (female combatant), which led to an adoption of the child:

> "I had a girl during the war, but I handed her over when she was about a year old. I handed her over to a civilian family, because I couldn't find my biological family (…) So I gave her a family" *Valentina*

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[39] Former female FARC-EP combatants were often referred to as *las farianas* (Sabogal & Richter, 2019).

The interviewee uses the phrasing *handed her over,* implying that it was a consensual act, rather than something she was forced to do against her will. Putting the insurgent group's needs ahead of one's own can be an expression of a total devotion to the struggle, and/or a consequence of being socialized into a militant culture of hierarchy, rules and norms that were to be followed at all costs. The personal cost of handing over one's child to an unknown, civilian family, as was the case of the interviewee in this study, should be viewed as a serious and potentially traumatic experience. On the other hand, the act of adopting away a child can be understood as consensual and desired, illustrating how the former female combatant in this study saw it necessary to give up motherhood in favor of being a *guerrillera* (female combatant) and a *compañera* (fellow female comrade) during conflict.

Even though Valentina's story was the only one within the data collection expressing a personal experience of being pregnant during war, I found it important to include it in the analysis to illustrate how the *meaning* of motherhood and *identification* with the role 'mother' is expressed in different ways by the participants in this study. When asked if she has contact with the civilian family now, she shaked her head and explained how her *frente* (front) always were on the move, and that she couldn't stay in touch with *the girl*, as she phrases it. She never uses the word *daughter,* possibly because she doesn't see herself as a *mother,* and/or as a coping strategy to keep an emotional distance to what happened during the war. When the 2016-Peace agreement was signed, Valentina had turned 40-45[40] years old and was no longer of child-bearing age, as she says herself. She expresses gratitude for being able to survive almost 20 years of war, even though it has had its costs on her mental and physical state, and she expresses joy when talking about the children running around in the reincorporation camp now:

> "You see, these are the future, these are *the children of peace*, as we call them here" *Valentina*

6.4.2 *Good mothers and the children of peace*

After the signing of the Final Peace Agreement in 2016, a 'baby boom' occurred in the former FARC-EP combatant population (Janetsky, 2021). On the one hand, it became a symbol of how former combatants in reintegration processes finally were able to start a family and live a 'normal' life. On the other, it tells a story about the population's lack of access to

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[40] Use of interval to preserve the anonymity of the participant.

contraceptives and information about family planning, and how women were assumed to become mothers after laying down their arms.

> "I want to talk about the whole issue of the *children of peace*, that's what we call the children here. Many of us wanted to have a child, maybe two, maybe three, this was something that we already had planned, like 'I want to have a child, I'm getting old, I want a child before it's too late', so these were planned pregnancies" *Marta*

The *children of peace* is a term that points towards a peaceful and better future for the coming generations in Colombia (Janetsky, 2021). The term appears in five out of six interviews with the former female combatants in this study, and was therefore a clear pattern in the data collection. As the quote above illustrates, some of the interviewees reflect upon the children of peace in relation to a long-awaited wish of becoming mothers. 'Motherhood' is conceptualized as something the former female FARC-EP combatants had *planned* (three participants)*,* while others see it as a pressure and an expectation (three participants), based on women's traditional roles:

> "After *las compañeras* (the female comrades) returned here, they returned to their traditional rules and roles. From participating in *la lucha* (the struggle) to become the center of the home; responsible for the upbringing, maternity, well, it is also very hard because women were assumed to become mothers" *María Victoria*

As María Victoria argues in the statement above, the transition from being *guerrilleras* (female combatants) and a part of *la lucha* (the struggle) to being civilian women, housewives and mothers within the frame of legality, is a great contrast in terms of expected gender roles, gendered tasks and a division between the private and the public spheres. As I interpret the interviewees, many of them express that returning to civilian life means 'going backwards' in terms of gender equality.

The ideal of the 'good mother' can be conceptualized as the opposite of the 'transgressive woman', the *guerrillera* (female combatant) – she who couldn't have children or was less of a woman (Sjöberg & Gentry, 2017). Becoming a 'good mother' can therefore be considered a social reintegration strategy in itself; she breaks with the *monster* or *whore* narratives (Sjöberg & Gentry, 2007), because she shows that she can have a husband, children and that she is not a lesbian. She takes on a traditional role that corresponds to the cultural and social norms that apply in the society she is to be reintegrated into, and might find comfort,

sisterhood and social acceptance through taking on the role as 'mother' and 'wife'. From a gender equality perspective, being a 'good mother' has practical-, cultural- and social implications, in that women are expected to be faithful and family-oriented, amongst other characteristics. Men and 'fathers' on the other hand are less socially sanctioned for crossing the boundaries of e.g., a monogamous and family-oriented lifestyle:

> "We all dream about this balance between men and women, but there's always this burden on the women (…) based on the simple fact that we are women. If a woman has a boyfriend outside of her marriage, she is *mala* (bad) in the face of her husband, her children, her community. But a man does not look *mal* (bad), or he will be applauded, for having two wives. A woman can't do that, then she will be *la mala madre* (the bad mother)" *Isabella*

These different gender norms can be traced back to essentialist or biological determinist understandings of gender, where women and men are perceived as exclusively different from 'nature'. Men are more aggressive, have a stronger sex drive and cannot (and should not have to) tame their sexual desire. In this view, women are more passive, caring and peaceful by 'nature', and behaviors that does not fit this image of the 'woman' are sanctioned through e.g., calling her *la mala madre* (the bad mother) (Sabogal & Richter, 2019; Ortega, 2014). From a social constructionist approach to gender, which I take on in this thesis, gender is understood as historic, cultural and contextual, meaning that gender norms can be challenged and changed (Skjelsbæk & Smith, 2001). From the latter perspective, the quote above can be interpreted as Isabella experiencing unequal treatment for equal actions based on conservative and traditional gender norms and stereotypes, stemming from essentialist and patriarchal notions of gender within the Colombian society. This limits the sexual freedom of women, but also absolves men of the responsibility of being faithful partners and/or taking care of their children.

Recent studies from Colombia show how not only men, but also women, uphold these gender stereotypes, and in that way contribute to uphold gendered inequalities (Downing et al., 2021). As for the interviewees in this study, two of the former female FARC-EP combatants talk about their civilian families as those reproducing traditional gender roles – based on a belief that women and men should take on different roles in society – and that this goes for both men and women:

"My mother comes from a different generation and culture and says: 'you make Eduardo[41], my husband, cook and wash', and I respond 'no, mother, I don't *make him* cook or wash, we are equal'" *Valentina*

"The issue of legality is what I think has affected all of us, women and men, and it has been very complicated. Because we are used to another kind of life, to a collective where everything was shared, it is true. And when we arrived here, we found that nothing has changed" *María Victoria*

Ortega (2014) show that women who participated in the insurgency in El Salvador, Peru and Colombia have in common that many experience their transition to 'normality', 'legality' and civilian life 'post-conflict' as a "transition to marginalization" (Ortega, 2014, p. 89). As María Victoria expresses it: *nothing has changed.* As I interpret several of the interviewees in the study, many of them claim that the gender norms and roles that women and men take on in the Colombian society are more or less the same now, as they experienced them before they joined the insurgency. 'Nothing has changed' after the 2016-Peace agreement. In the case of Colombia, one could ask what the former female FARC-combatants gained in the long run if the gender equity they experienced in the ranks of FARC only was a temporary escape from the everyday *machismo* and patriarchal gender order (Ortega, 2014). I argue that this affects how the former female combatants in this study perceive themselves, their future and what it *means* to become and be a 'mother'.

Three of the interviewees in this study have children, whilst the other three are voluntarily/involuntarily childless. Amongst the former female combatants in the selection that do not have children, only one of the interviewees express that she does not want to have children due to security risks and because she does not see herself as a *motherly type:*

"No. I don't have them, and I don't want them [children]. The future for us is very uncertain, look at the times we're in, I don't know if you are aware that more than 300 former combatants are dead, in some cases they have killed the man and the woman, and the child has remained. There is a lot of insecurity, you go out on the streets, and you don't know if you are going to get back alive. I would not like to have a child and leave it there, leave a child to chance (…) I'm really not a *persona maternal* (motherly person) either'" *Luna*

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[41] Pseudonym.

Drawing focus towards the security issues affecting the former combatant population, Luna explains how external factors impact her choice of not becoming a mother. The interviewees in the study who already have children also emphasize how the ideal picture of the *children of peace* have cracked; initially, they were bearing with them a hope for a better future, but due to a lack of implementation of the Final Peace Agreement (2016), including a lack of protection, the former female FARC-EP combatants who live with their children in the reincorporation camps are expressing a slight loss of hope for their own and the future generations in Colombia. At the same time, all the interviewees express that they would never go back to war, never take up arms again, which illustrates that the transition to civilian life is tough, but that war is even tougher.

An evident pattern in the thematic analysis is how the former female FARC-EP combatants hold on to their social/group identity *compañeras* (fellow female comrades) post-conflict, this involves wanting to maintain a feeling of cohesion between themselves and at the same time keep fighting for a more gender equal society. Four of the interviewees talk about reaching *gender equality* or *equity* within the community and the family as important goals, including the fact that women have the right to choose if, when, with whom and how many children they want to have. Following Burke & Stets (2000, p. 226), one could see the *guerrillera* (female combatant) as the *counterrole* of the 'mother'. The *guerrillera* (female combatant) was encouraged to not have children, while the civilian woman is encouraged to take on the role of the 'mother' to become the ideal, 'good woman'. This shows how both roles – combatant and mother – have conflicting or competing interest (Burke & Stets, 2000, p. 226). Even though all the former female FARC-EP combatant gave up their *guerrillera* (female combatant) role when they demobilized, I argue that they still have to negotiate their new roles as civilian women in relation to the different roles and identities she had during war.

6.4.3   The 'double burden'

During war, the *guerrilleras* (female combatants) gained a lot from more levelled gender relations (Ortega, 2014, p. 107), but as earlier research shows, these relations have to be negotiated within the frame of the gender norms in society when returning to civilian life. Ortega (2014) argues that the gendered *provider/carer model* was ruptured during conflict, but that this was merely a consequence of the nature of life during war; the productive/reproductive matters were more or less taken care of and controlled by the

organization – not the couples. When returning to civilian life post-conflict, the traditional roles of women and men within the private/public sphere was reinforced, because they were to provide for themselves and their families (Ortega, 2014, p. 102). From an economic perspective, which I have briefly discussed earlier in this thesis, the vast majority of the former female combatants who participated in this study explain how they are left with less income, because they either lack the opportunity to take a paid job, or they are expected to be caretakers and housewives and not take on paid jobs. For those who take a paid job in addition to the unpaid work at home, end up with a *double burden:*

> "(…) the care work falls on women and because of the stereotype, well, the role women have, like 'women are more caring' and 'women are weaker', this results in a double burden with both care work and other work" *María Victoria*

Throughout the patterns I found in the thematic analysis, paid work is conceptualized as both liberating and empowering on the one side, and an extra burden on the other. All of the former female FARC-EP combatants explain that the overload of domestic work and women's assumed role as the 'natural' care giver, hinders their political, economic and social reintegration:

> "From the point of view of the reintegration process and society in general, women are always responsible for the issue of care, all care falls on women, in terms of the care work and upbringing of children and to take care of the elderly people, as well as the animals" *Valentina*

> "To be able to participate in workshops, or take an education, you have to leave your children, and if you have a husband he can interfere and say: 'why don't you have the coffee ready by 10, what about the food' and what not, because of the studying. Well, we are not only taught to stay in the house up here, but to study, to educate ourselves (…) but to not let that *machismo* reign in the house is a difficult task for all the women here" *Isabella*

Being responsible for all the care work in the family and the community is an unpaid and time-consuming labor, involving practical and emotional tasks. As the latter quote illustrates, both FARC-EP *guerrilleros* (male combatants) and *guerrilleras* (female combatants) were encouraged to study and learn new skills during war. After war, the women are met with gendered expectations such as to *stay in the house,* like the quote of Isabella illustrates. Many of the former female combatants in this study see this as the opposite of following one's own life projects and aspirations outside of the domestic sphere by e.g., wanting to take a higher

education, work politically etc. This study shows that when returning to civilian life, traditional gender norms and *machismo* hinder the former female FARC-EP combatants' possibilities outside of the home, and this is also evident inside the reincorporation camp. When it comes to the topic of gender equality, several of the participants in this study experience inequality in opportunity and inequality in outcome; they are less likely to study, be economically independent, have political careers and be socially reintegrated into their communities. This is in line with earlier research, e.g., the work of Ortega (2014), Herrera & Porch (2008) and Hauge (2021), amongst others.

To fight *machismo* in the private sphere, as the interviewee (Isabella) puts it, is a challenge. She explains it as an internalized idea that both civilian and former combatant men and women have, especially those who joined the guerilla at an older age. This contrasts with the gender regime within the FARC-EP, which resulted in a non-gendering of tasks and alternative insurgent femininities and masculinities (Ortega, 2014). When returning to civilian life, men also struggle with finding their role in the society, community and the family. If their partners challenge traditional gender norms and sought to negotiate different ways of being e.g., a 'family', a 'mother' and a 'wife', this might be interpreted as threatening to their pride, respect and masculinity – understood from the cultural ideas embedded in the overall gender regime in the Colombian society (Connell, 2002/2009). The former male combatants might cope with this by limiting their female partners' freedom through different controlling mechanisms, such as violence. My point is – without depriving women of their agency to make independent choices post-conflict – that the former female FARC-EP combatants in this study find it *harder* to accept these traditional and conservative gender relations and roles due to their experiences of temporary gender equality within the ranks of the insurgent group. In sum, the transition from radical gender roles during conflict to traditional roles post-conflict should be understood as huge changes in the former female combatants' identities, roles and thoughts about who they are – and want to be – as civilians and mothers.

6.4.4 *Negotiating gender equality and alternative parental roles*

Hauge (2021, p. 31) argues that gender equality is valued and practiced within the reincorporation camps in Colombia, something that my findings both support and challenge. The Women's Associations and Gender Committee's in the reincorporation camps (ETCRs) have become sites for discussing gender related issues, such as how projects in the reincorporation camps should be designed and carried out (Hauge, 2021, p. 31) and where to

look for resources to facilitate projects that the women in the reincorporation camp find necessary.

The issue of *daycare* became an important theme in all six interviews with the former female FARC-EP combatants in this study, and is supported by findings from several of the professional/expert interviews as well. Both the former female combatants who have children (three interviewees) and the ones without children (three interviewees) talk about the lack of a daycare center, kindergarten, or a pre-school for the youngest children as something they need in the reincorporation camps (ETCRs) and/or the nearby village. The lack of these care institutions is seen as crucial, as they could help facilitate the interests and needs of the former female FARC-EP combatants who are mothers. One of the professionals/experts tell me that in the cities, where *guardarías* (early childcare centers) are more common, this is a concept primarily used by the middle- and upper classes in e.g., Bogotá. Also there, most mothers are expected to be home with their child/ren up until the age of 1,5 years. For low-income families, where both parents work full-time, the cultural norm is for the children to stay with their grandparents or other family members until they start school at the age of 4-5. Without having a network of family and/or grandparents that can help take care of the youngest children during the day, the interviewees living in the reincorporation camps of Las Colinas (Guaviare) and Yarí (Meta) express frustration and hopelessness regarding the lack of possibilities to manage being mothers and providing money for their families in the reincorporation camp (ETCR):

> "(…) we can't go to work here, because there is nowhere to leave our children, so yes, a *daycare* is very important for a mother to be able to go to work. We have struggled with a daycare project for a long time, and nothing has been achieved since she was born [points at her daughter], and she will turn four years next month" *Juanita*

In the interview with Juanita, who is a single parent, she expresses that she has been unable to take on paid work at all, which puts her daughter and herself in a critical economic position. She lived in Yarí (Meta) when we met in November 2021, where there had been, but no longer was, a daycare center for the youngest children living in the reincorporation camp. In Las Colinas (Guaviare), a daycare facility was under construction, and something the Women's Association had worked hard for. Now, the construction work was put on hold because there were not enough resources to keep up the building process, and the lack of finances made it hard to hire a professional to work there (based on interviews with Valentina

and Juanita). Whereas all the interviewees see the lack of a care institution as a throwback for women's reincorporation, two of the interviewees also see it as a disadvantage for the children's development:

> "Firstly, there are so many children here and they need to interact and learn skills like sharing with each other, that is to say, to begin to have a social life. Children who are all alone at home become very rebellious and restless, they need to start weaving that *tejido social* (social fabric). Secondly, it gives the mothers more opportunities because the parents are able to work"
> *Valentina*

Emphasizing the *tejido social* (social fabric), meaning that the children learn from making connections to each other, and gain emotional skills, this can also be interpreted through the understanding of collectivity, as discussed earlier in the thesis. Working together, and seeing the society as a social fabric, that everyone is entangled in, gives value to relations and community-thinking.

Even though there's been a lack of resources to build and sustain a daycare in the two different reincorporation camps that I visited, the Women's Association in Las Colinas (Guaviare) have been able to organize a temporarily offer, where one of the mothers in the association take care of several children, so the rest can participate in communal meetings and/or take on paid work outside of the reincorporation camp some days of the week. This shows how the notion of collectivity, community and an extended understanding of 'family' is embedded in the group identity *compañeras* (fellow female comrades). At the same time as the transition to civilian life means that the former female combatants must let go of the *guerrillera* (female combatant) identity or role, holding on to the *compañeras* (fellow comrades) identity – which Ortega (2014, p. 115) calls a *political identity* – seem to strengthen their feeling of belonging to a group and working towards a shared goal, e.g., with the work of the Women's Associations and Gender Committee's in the reincorporation camps. The alternative daycare project in Las Colinas (Guaviare), illustrates how a lack of resources and external support to build a sustainable daycare for the youngest children, they practice 'solidarity' and 'sisterhood' – which are words that appeared in the thematic analysis with great frequency – within the group 'women' within the reincorporation camp. In contrast, in Yarí (Meta), the former female combatants with children emphasized that the lack of resources to *all* kind of projects made them question what the future holds for themselves

and their children, which was reflected in what seemed as a much smaller and fragmented community, with no operative[42] Women's Associations or Gender Committee's.

All of the interviewees in this study emphasize that even though women are assumed to take on the responsibility of care- and housework, they all know *compañeros* (fellow comrades) in the reincorporation camps who take on more radical, non-traditional or alternative roles as participating fathers and equal care givers. In some households in the reincorporation camp, the division of labor is somewhat equal and gender neutral, meaning that women and men take on the same tasks – as they did during the war within the ranks of the FARC-EP. This is in line with what Hauge (2021, p. 31) claims to be an emphasis on gender equality within the context of the reincorporation camps. One of the interviewees who lives in the reincorporation camp in Guaviare, says it is common that both parents contribute and are responsible for the child's upbringing in their community, and that her partner does house chores in their day-to-day life. These new gender roles are conceptualized – more generally – through terms like 'good fathers' and 'good husbands', throughout the data collection in this study.

> "So, we start a normal day at 5 a.m., and thanks to God, I have a good husband, we share the tasks here. One day he cooks, another day I cook, one day I am home, another day he is at home. It is like that here, there is no discrimination in that sense, and besides that, we come from a background where men and women are all equal, so I am not overloaded with a lot of work, we divide it between us" *Valentina*

> "Look, here you don't find it strange to pass by a house where a man is mopping or taking care of his children (…) everything is shared (…) I have even met *compañeros* (fellow [male] comrades) who do not see that as strange, and they say that they are mopping, bathing the children, taking care of them. That's normal here, that's very normal" *Marta*

As Valentina and Marta put it (quotes above), women and men's experiences of gender equity within the ranks of the FARC-EP may affect their lives post-conflict, by e.g., making it easier to negotiate a division of labor in the family and the community within the frame of the reincorporation camp. Based on the interviews with former female FARC-EP combatants, as well as my own field notes from two reincorporation camps in Colombia, I argue that there are examples of practicing radical gender roles and relations within the former combatant population in the reincorporation camps. They contrast the overall traditional gender roles and

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[42] When I visited in November 2021.

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relations in the country, and may be a site for gradual identity change, role change and possibly social- and cultural change. New parenting roles and gender ideals could occur within a population like the former FARC-EP combatants living in reincorporation camps, because they have positive experiences of radical or *deconstructed gender differences* (Ortega, 2014, p. 115), that they want to practice post-conflict.

On the other hand, it is important to mention what became a clear pattern in especially the interviews with professionals/experts in the field, namely that former female FARC-EP combatants living in the different reincorporation camps in Colombia also express how they feel marginalized, subordinated and pressured to take on traditional gender roles, such as forced motherhood, experiences of gender-based violence and an idea of being more equal than they practice in reality. The latter became evident in two of the interviews with the former female FARC-EP combatants as well, touching upon the difference between an *ideal* and reality:

> "(…) it is so much intolerance, so much *machismo*. Although it has always been said that gender equality is important, there are cases here where that is not complied with (…) the ideal of equal partnership. A man can be mopping and cooking, a man can share tasks with the mother of his children… But there are cases of care sharing (…) and cases where that does not happen, let's say it like that" *Isabella*

6.4.5 *Security and the future*

Lastly, as for the prospects of their future, several of the former female FARC-EP combatants in this study express thoughts about their future through notions of economic stability, housing, having a career and to reconcile with the civilian population:

> "Firstly, my hope for the future is to give my child a home, and that is a very good future. I will fight more than everything for our future to be good (…) I will work hard and get a ranch for my daughter and I" *Juanita*

> "I talked to my husband about it today because we saw that the people in Yarí have been displaced, and I was thinking 'someday they will take away that basic income', and so what if one of these days we don't have anything (…) I am investing my money now, so that the day they end this [she looks around her and waves her hand as referring to the reincorporation camp], I will have to live off my business, which is sustainable. We want a house, my husband and I, and need to think about financing our retirement as well" *Valentina*

"My future? Well, I don't know. I think a lot about my future. I see myself as a businesswoman (…) I want to continue studying to contribute to the society, perhaps as a way of asking for forgiveness, too. There were times where I caused them a lot of damage, so I want to compensate that through educating children" *Marta*

Some of these quotes illustrate how the *future* can be better than the *past*, and that change and reconciliation is possible. By investing in a *home,* a *business* and society (or the community), individual and collective obstacles can be overcome. These themes are evident in all of the interviews with the former female FARC-EP combatants in this study, when asked about their hopes and dreams for the future. At the same time, several of the interviewees talk about their future in more negative terms, focusing on a lack of resources and *insecurity* as a great part of why they don't know what the future holds for them:

"We want our initiatives and projects to get resources, but… We feel like the forgotten ones" *Juanita*

"I don't know if you know this, but they are killing us. Many hundreds of our *compañeros* (fellow comrades) are dead (…) The future is uncertain, we don't really know what is going to happen… I could be alive today, tomorrow I could be dead…" *Luna*

As Luna puts it, the *feeling* of security and protection is not evident in the reincorporation camp where she lives. This due to the lack of implementation of the Final Peace Agreement (2016) in general, and possibly a lack of trust in the military and police forces in particular. Earlier research connects the feeling of security to how former combatants are used to carry weapons, which could also be an explanatory factor for the former combatants interviewed in this study: "The weapon is seen as an object of security, protection and power; for this reason, when they leave the organization, handing over the rifle or pistol often generates a feeling of defenselessness" (Humanas, 2015, p. 108).

During their reintegration process, the former combatants therefore have to reconceptualize 'protection', including building trust to the government and military and believing that they will provide this service. Humanas (2015) write that it affects the former combatants decision on e.g., whether to study or not; if studying means having to drive a long way from their home, they may turn it down because it means compromising their security. This was not evident in the data collection in this thesis, which could be a result of me not asking questions directly related to the use of weapons and protection. What *was* evident in all

the interviews is the lack of protection – or feeling of safety – they experience within the reincorporation camp, and how this relates to the prospects of their future. In future research, it could be interesting to examine whether the transition from radical to traditional gender roles implicitly requires women to enter the role of 'those who should be protected', while men must enter the role of 'those who protect', in line with traditional gender roles during peace and war.

7   Conclusions

In this thesis, I have explored how the former female FARC-EP combatants' experiences of reintegration to civilian life tells a story about potential change in gender norms, roles and stereotypes in the Colombian society in particular, and about the complex gender dimensions of reintegration in general. Based on qualitative semi-structured interviews with former female FARC-EP combatants living in reincorporation camps (ETCRs) in Colombia[43], and by employing a thematic analysis, I have found that the participants' experiences can be conceptualized as transitions 1) from collective to individual dealings with political, economic and social issues, 2) from *guerrillera* (female combatant) to civilian, and 3) from radical to traditional gender roles. All three dimensions have been presented and discussed through theoretical conceptualizations of gender, identity and hierarchy. The aim has been to shed light on the participants' shared experiences, thoughts and perceptions, as well as providing space for some individual stories.

In the first section of the analysis, I explored how the former female FARC-EP combatants experience the transition from collective to individual dealings with political, economic and social issues. I argue that former female combatants' face particular challenges with political reintegration because of *machismo* and *semiotic violence* (Krook, 2022) that hinders their participation in the political sphere. Several participants express that seeing other *compañeras* (fellow female comrades) in national politics is inspiring, a victory and a positive change in terms of representation. However, they say that the risks of involving themselves in politics are very high. All of the participants are/were part of the Women's Association or Gender Committee in their respective reincorporation camps, which function as social- and political bodies on a local level. By mobilizing on their shared identity as 'women', both former female FARC-EP combatants and civilian women from nearby villages get together to

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[43] Conducted in November 2021.

initiate collective projects, aiming for economic autonomy, empowerment and reconciliation. These organizations appear to be important and easier to get involved in, partly because they are a collective and operate at grassroots level.

In relation to economic reintegration, the participants experience a significant change from having had all costs covered by the FARC-EP to managing their individual economy post-conflict. The lack of productive projects in the reincorporation camp and work opportunities in general is a challenge for all former combatants, but my findings support recent reports (e.g., UN Mission, 2021[2]) stating that former *female* combatants' overload of domestic- and care responsibilities hinders their economic reintegration. My findings also show how the non-gendering of tasks and jobs within the FARC-EP stand in stark contrast to the gendered tasks in civilian life, and that women to a greater degree choose work that have both feminine and masculine connotations, while men take on jobs with masculine connotations in the reincorporation camps. This may give an indication of a re-gendering of tasks, and a gendered division of paid and unpaid labor, post-conflict, where the latter challenges the participants' aspirations for a more gender equal society.

From a social reintegration perspective, the collective approach to reintegration seem to facilitate a feeling of community and belonging post-conflict, because of a continuity in the participants' social/group identity 'FARC-EP' and/or '*compañeros/compañeras'* (fellow comrades) within the reincorporation camp. The overemphasis on this group identity, and the idea of a *collective*, is discussed through examples where unequal and gendered power hierarchies from the fronts of FARC-EP during war are reproduced in the reincorporation camps post-conflict. In turn, this may undermine values of democracy and gender equality. The ideal of 'speaking with one voice' and being loyal to the collective cause can hinder individual social reintegration because the collective's opinions and wishes come before the individual's voices and choices.

In the second section, I examined the former female FARC-EP combatants transition from *guerrillera* (female combatant) to civilian. Several of the participants' face stigma based on gendered narratives and negative stereotypes about the *guerrillera* (female combatant) as a *monster* or *whore* (Sjöberg & Gentry, 2007/2008). They perceive these narratives as false stories about women's motivations for rebellion, and their roles and experiences during war, and the participants in this study distance themselves from these narratives. The former female combatants strive to be socially accepted by the society, community and their families, and based on earlier studies and the findings from the semi-structured interviews in this study, I claim that former female combatants who belong to sexual and/or ethnic minorities face

different challenges and opportunities post-conflict. A lesbian woman may feel liberated, as she can become her 'true self' (Thylin, 2018) post-conflict, while an indigenous woman may experience tribal 'cleansing rituals' as burdensome as she returns to her community. This shows how a focus on intersectional identities and the diversity within the group 'former female combatants' is necessary to fully understand the complexity of issues involved in their transition to civilian life, including questions about identity and roles.

In the third and last section, I showed how the radical gender roles the participants occupied during war often are replaced with traditional gender roles post-conflict – especially when becoming mothers. A pressure and an expectation to become responsible for house- and care responsibilities, and not take on paid work, are entangled in patriarchal gender relations and *machismo*. Several of the participants reflect upon taking on traditional and subordinate gender roles post-conflict as 'going backwards' in terms of gender equality. To combat this, they try to negotiate alternative gender norms, roles and relations – similar to the positive experiences they had during the war – in the reincorporation camps. Sharing e.g., care responsibilities, practicing new parental roles and having opportunities to participate in educational/productive projects and take on paid jobs, are seen as positive steps in 'moving forward'.

Based on a feminist critique of traditional literature on war, in which women have been portrayed as victims – rather than active participants – in violence and conflict, this thesis aims to shed light on how former female combatants' experiences during war affect the way they see their lives, and seek change, after conflict. This is particularly evident in cases such as the Colombian one, which focuses on former female combatants of the Marxist-Leninist leftist insurgent group FARC-EP. Even though a radical gender regime, with practices of radical gender roles and insurgent femininities and masculinities, was used strategically to serve the collective cause during conflict, all of the women in this study express that they had temporary experiences of more even gender relations within the insurgent group (Ortega, 2012/2014). This contrasted with the gender relations they were used to before the war, and with which they were confronted when they returned to civilian life post-conflict. Although the women express that they would never want to take up arms again, they want a better future for themselves and the *children of peace*: they value the community, equal gender relations, economic independence, political participation and autonomy, which became evident in the interviews in the study. For this change to be possible, structural and cultural change must happen. In Colombia, the potential for this change lies in the very text of

the Final Peace Agreement (2016), but due to slow and lacking implementation of many of its stipulation, critics argue that change is on hold in the country (Janetsky, 2021).

As stated in the Final Peace Agreement (2016) in Colombia, the former FARC-EP combatants were to have a political, economic and social reintegration according to their own interests and wishes. To facilitate this, measures should be taken to include the particular challenges the former *female* combatants face when returning to civilian life, such as resources for daycare facilities and other initiatives brought forth by the Women's Associations and Gender Committees. Even though this study has its limitations, by e.g., focusing on a small selection of a particular group of former female FARC-EP combatants living in reincorporation camps (ETCRs) in Meta and Guaviare, it may contribute with insights for future research on gender dimensions of post-conflict processes. In Colombia, future research on DDR processes could examine the former FARC-EP combatants living in the unofficial New Areas for Reincorporation (NARs). This is interesting as a third of the total former FARC-EP combatant population now live in these reincorporation zones (UN Mission, 2021[1]), while there is little information and research on their challenges and opportunities. It is important to mention that many supporters of the Peace agreement express that the election of the new Colombian President in 2022, Gustavo Petro, have made them regain hope for a comprehensive peace in Colombia.

Finally, to pin-point my main findings and answer the research question about what the reintegration process of former female FARC-EP combatants in Colombia can tell us about the gender dimensions of reintegration in general, I have shown how this is related to the masculine image of war and the 'soldier' (Ortega, 2014; Skjelsbæk & Smith, 2001). This shapes gendered narratives about women's participation in conflict, and may have negative effects on their reintegration process due to stigma, discrimination and other challenges related to their identities and roles post-conflict. Additionally, political exclusion or marginalization, a lack of economic independence and a pressure to take on traditional gender roles post-conflict are amongst the findings in the study that supports the claim that reintegration includes different gender dimensions. Interestingly, the stories of former female combatants from left-wing Marxist guerrilla groups, like the FARC-EP in Colombia, may contribute to push forward values like gender equality post-conflict due to their experiences of more levelled gender relations during conflict (Ortega, 2014). I argue that examining post-conflict processes from a qualitative, experience-based and gender-sensitive perspective can bring forth the different challenges that the group 'former insurgent combatants' face on their path towards civilian life. By acknowledging women's motivations for rebellion and their

different war-time roles and experiences, one can avoid marginalizing their voices and necessities post-conflict: on their path from life as combatants to life as civilians.

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All sources are listed.

Appendixes

Four appendixes are attached.

Appendix A: interview guide for selection 1 (former female FARC-EP combatants)

Appendix B: information letter and consent form for selection 1

Appendix C: interview guide for selection 2 (professionals/experts in the field)

Appendix D: information letter and consent form for selection 2

Note: all the appendixes were approved by the NSD, and then translated to Spanish.

Appendix A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interviews with former female FARC-EP combatants

1. Hi! How are you? Will you please tell me your age and where you are from?

2. How do you identify?

3. How long have you been living here in the ETCR (reincorporation camp)?

4. Overall, how do you experience life here?

    a. What do you like about it, and what do you find difficult?

5. How would you describe relations between the people here; between men and women etc. in the ETCR?

6. May I ask how a regular week looks like for you here in the ETCR?

    a. Are you enrolled in an educational training program now?

        i. If yes: what kind of program?

    b. Have you been enrolled in an educational program earlier?

        i. If yes: what kind of program? How long ago?

    c. What is your job/field of work now?

    d. Do you have any experience with this field of education/work from before? How did you choose this education/work?

    e. How do you experience this (educational program/job)?

    f. The way you see it: are there any differences between the work that men and women participate in?

        i. If yes/no: what do you think about that?

        ii. Why do you think it is it like that?

7. I have heard that there is a Women's Association/Gender Committee in this reincorporation camp (ETCR), are you involved in that?[44]

    a. If yes/no: why/why not?

    b. What is the aim of this association/committee?

8. My interpretation is that the sense of 'community' is important here. If I say 'community', what does that mean to you?[45]

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[44] This question was included in the interview guide after conducting the first semi-structured interviews, since it seemed relevant for the topic of the thesis.

[45] Ibid.

     a. A feeling of being a part of a community?

     b. Which community do you feel like you are a part of? / Not a part of?

9. How do you see your future?

     a. In relation to family, education/ work, living situation etc.

     b. What are the major challenges you see in realizing your plans?

INFORMATION LETTER AND CONSENT FORM
Would you like to take part in my research study?

Before you decide, you need to understand why the research is being conducted and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully, and ask questions if anything you read is unclear or if you would like more information.

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Las Farianas – the gendered reintegration process of former female FARC combatants*
This title may be changed

WHO I AM?

My name is Hanne Frostad Håkonsen, and I am a master's student at the University of Oslo, Norway. I am an independent researcher from Norway, who lives in Bogotá. My e-mail is
hannefh@hotmail.no if you need to get in touch with me regarding this study. The responsible institution for this study is the University of Oslo and my supervisor and project leader is Anne-Kathrin Kreft.

WHAT IS THIS STUDY ABOUT?

The study is a part of my master's thesis in Gender Studies, where I want to investigate how former female FARC-EP combatants in Colombia experience their lives after laying down their weapons. If you want to participate in this study, I invite you to an informal interview, where we talk about the following topics:

- life at the reincorporation camp (ETCR)
- training/education and work
- family and community
- hopes and plans for the future

I want to ask you to participate in my study, because you live in an ETCR and might provide important insight and information relevant to this study.

ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

The interview will be a conversation between me (the researcher) and you (the interviewee). All the information that you share will be highly confidential. When I'm writing my master's thesis, the information all the participants have shared will be anonymized, so that no one can trace the information back to you.

The interview will be recorded for practical purposes only. The recordings will not be shared with anyone, and will be stored safely. The recordings will be deleted when my master's thesis has been delivered to the University of Oslo, approximately in November 2022. A transcript of interviews, anonymized, will be stored after the end of this project. You are entitled to access the information you have provided at any time.

I will only use the information about you for the purposes I have described in this article. I treat the information confidentially and in accordance with the privacy regulations.

YOUR RIGHTS

As long as you can be identified in the data material, you have the right to:

- access to which personal information is registered about you, and to receive a copy of the information
- to have personal information about you corrected
- to have personal information about you deleted
- to send a complaint to the Data Inspectorate (Datatilsynet) about the processing of your personal data

IT IS VOLUNTARY TO PARTICIPATE!

It is completely voluntary to participate in the project. If you choose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving any reason. All your personal information will then be deleted. It will not have any negative consequences for you if you do not want to participate or later choose to withdraw.

CONSENT

We process information about you based on your consent. On behalf of the University of Oslo, NSD – Norwegian Center for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with the privacy regulations.

I have received and understood information about the project *Las Farianas – the gendered reintegration process of former female FARC combatants (draft title)*, and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I agree:

0   to participate in an interview

0   that my personal information is stored after the end of the project

I agree that my information will be processed until the project is completed (by December 2022 at the latest). By signing this letter, I give my consent to participate in this study.

Meta, October 2021/
Guaviare, November 2021

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Participant's signature   Researcher's signature, Hanne F. Håkonsen

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Professional/expert interviews

1. Hi! How are you? Will you please tell me your nationality and in which organization/embassy you are working for?

2. As you know, my master's thesis is about former female FARC-EP combatants' reintegration and transition to civilian life in Colombia. The (name of the organization/embassy) support/monitor/work with this topic. Can you tell me more about the role of the (organization/embassy) in this?

3. If supporting projects in the ETCRs: what kind of projects are you supporting, and what are their aim?

4. Do you generally perceive that the population in the ETCRs have different needs and priorities?
   a. Based on gender, ethnicity, age, family situation etc.
   b. How do you address that in your work? Specific gender focus/ perspective?

5. Would you say that women in ETCR's are generally interested in gender and gender equality issues?

6. The FARC-EP are often presented as having been relatively gender-equal. Do you agree with that assessment?
   a. If yes/no: why?

7. How do you perceive the challenges that former female FARC-EP combatants face in their transition from life as combatants to life as civilians?

8. Are education/work programs suitably tailored to women and men alike?

9. How do you perceive that the former female combatants experience stigmatization, discrimination?

10. Some critics claim that the stipulations on gender in the Final Peace Agreement (2016) are lacking implementation – or are implemented in a slower speed that other stipulations in the agreement. How do you think this affects the reintegration process of former female FARC combatants?
    a. Political reintegration?
    b. Economic reintegration?

    c. Social reintegration?

    d. How to change this? Depending on which factors?

11. I want to ask you a question about 'family' and 'community'. Which norms and ideals would you say are impacting the stories about being a family in Colombia today?

12. Many reports and stories from former female FARC combatants illustrate how sexual and reproductive rights was an issue within the ranks of the FARC-EP. Guerilla groups like the FARC-EP have been accused of using forced sterilizations, forced abortions and forced use of contraceptives as a part of their warfare. At the same time, the lack of information, education and access to birth control is a challenge for many Colombians in general.

    a. How would you describe the status of women's sexual and reproductive health issues in Colombia today?

    b. Would you say that the former practices of forced sterilization, forced abortion etc. affect the reintegration process for former FARC-EP women?

        i. If yes: how?

        ii. If no: why not?

13. Would you like to add something?

Note: each of the professional/expert interviews were adapted to the specific organization/embassy and my knowledge of their work with the former combatant population of the FARC-EP in Colombia.

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WHAT IS THIS STUDY ABOUT?

The study is a part of my master's thesis in Gender Studies, where I want to investigate how former female FARC combatants in Colombia experience their lives after the demobilization process. If you want to participate in this study, I will invite you to an informal interview, where we talk about the following topics:

- different training/work related programs in the ETCR
- issues related to gender, gender equality, family, community
- the implementation of The Final Peace Accord (2016) and the stipulations on gender
- women's sexual and reproductive rights in Colombia
- traditional gender roles and motherhood
- other relevant topics

I want to ask you to participate in my study, because you work/have worked in an NGO/at an embassy in Colombia that is engaged in projects in the reincorporation camps (ETCRs) in particular, or with the former FARC-EP combatant population in general. You might provide important insight and information relevant to this study.

ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

The interview will be a conversation between me (the researcher) and you (the interviewee). All the information that you share will be highly confidential. When I'm writing my master's thesis, the information all the participants have shared will be anonymized, so that no one can trace the information back to you.

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0   to participate in an interview

0   that my personal information is stored after the end of the project

I agree that my information will be processed until the project is completed (by December 2022 at the latest). By signing this letter, I give my consent to participate in this study.

Bogotá, October/November/December 2021

_____   _____

Participant's signature   Researcher's signature, Hanne F. Håkonsen