

Militarized Gender Performativity:  
Women and Demobilization in Colombia's FARC and AUC.

by

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Program in the Department of Political Studies  
in conformity with the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Queen's University  
Kingston, Ontario, Canada

August, 2012

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## **Abstract**

Women are usually represented as victims in the literature on conflict and conflict resolution. While women are indeed victims of violence in the context of conflict, this representation excludes the experiences of women who have joined and fought in illegal armed groups. Little is known about the lives of women who fight alongside men in illegal militarized organizations. These women are often overlooked during peace negotiations and in the design and implementation of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration programs, affecting their conditions and experiences during the transition to civilian life. The Colombian conflict presents an important case study regarding the militarization of women in illegal armed groups, and the experience of demobilization, and is the focus of this dissertation. To address this case study, the concept of “militarized gender performativity” is advanced, drawing on the works of Cynthia Enloe and Judith Butler. In the Colombian case, both left-wing and right-wing armed groups have incorporated women into their ranks. This research elucidates the effects of non-state militarism on the social processes that produce and reproduce gender systems in two of Colombia’s illegal armed groups, uncovering how the FARC and the AUC construct, negotiate, challenge, or reinforce gender roles. The research indicates that there are significant differences in the way this is done. Interviews with ex-combatants from the FARC and the AUC show that women’s sexuality plays a central role in the militarization of women combatants in both organizations, but there are specific policies that establish the nature of the relationships in each group. These differences represent distinct militarized femininities which maintain aspects of traditional gender relations while transforming others according to the needs of the organization in question. The transformation of gender identities in each of the armed groups reveals the performative nature of gender roles in a militarized context.

## **Acknowledgements**

There are a few people whom I would like to acknowledge, for without their insights, support, and encouragement, my dissertation would not have been possible. I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisors Dr. Catherine Conaghan and Dr. Abigail Bakan. Their guidance and wisdom over the last five years have been extremely important to me. They have both shared relevant insights and knowledge and have inspired me with their hard work and diligence. For this, I am indebted to them. I would also like to thank Dr. Jacqueline Solway at Trent University for encouraging me to pursue post-graduate education. She has influenced my studies in more ways than she will ever know. In the Political Studies Department at Queen's University, I would like to thank Dr. Zsuzsa Csergo for her encouraging words and thoughtful advice over the last five years, and Barb Murphy for her constant help in making sure my student permit was always renewed on time. I am also very grateful to Angela Pietrobon for her assistance in the final stages of preparation of the dissertation and for her help in copy editing, proofreading, and formatting it. I would also like to thank the Alta Consejería para la Reintegración Social y Económica de Personas y Grupos Alzadas en Armas in Colombia for their guidance and for facilitating the interviews with former members of the FARC and AUC.

I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to my husband for his pragmatism, my son for his presence, my father for his positivity, my mother for helping me to see the bigger picture, my sister for her sense of humour, and all of my extended family for supporting me in any way they could. They have been there for me unconditionally to acknowledge my efforts and encourage me through the demanding times. I would also like to thank my friend Maaike for looking after my son on many occasions so that I could work on my dissertation. I owe her much gratitude.

## **Dedication**

*For my son.*

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## List of Acronyms

**ACCU.** Autodefensas Unidas de Córdoba y Urabá (United Self–Defence Groups of Córdoba and Urabá).

**ACR.** Alta Consejería para la Reintegración Social y Económica de Personas y Grupos Alzadas en Armas (High Commission for the Social and Economic Reintegration of Armed People and Groups).

**ANC.** Asamblea Nacional Constituyente (National Constitutional Assembly).

**AUC.** Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (United Self–defence Forces of Colombia).

**BACRIM.** Bandas Criminales Emergentes (Emerging Criminal Groups).

**CEDAW.** 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

**CONPES.** Consejo Nacional de Política Económica y Social (National Social and Political Assembly).

**CONVIVIR.** Servicios Especiales de Vigilancia y Seguridad Privada (Special Vigilance and Private Security Services).

**CPJMF.** Consejería Presidencial para la Juventud, la Mujer y la Familia (Presidential Counsel for Youth, Women, and the Family).

**CRS.** Corriente de Renovación Socialista (Socialist Renovation Current).

**DDR.** Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration.

**ELN.** Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army).

**EPL.** Ejército Popular de Liberación (Popular Army for Liberation).

**FARC.** Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia).

**FMLN.** Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (Farabundo Martí Front for National Liberation).

**GDP.** Gross Domestic Product.

**ICBF.** Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar (Colombian Family Welfare Institute).

**ICT.** The Israel Institute for Counter–Terrorism.

**IDDRS.** Integrated Demobilization Disarmament and Reintegration Standards.

**M–19.** Movimiento 19 de Abril (19<sup>th</sup> of April Movement).



**MAPP–OEA.** Misión de Apoyo al Proceso de Paz en Colombia de la Organización de los Estados Americanos (Support Mission for the Peace Process in Colombia by the Organization of American States).

**MIR–COAR.** Movimiento Independiente Revolucionario–Comandos Armados (Independent Revolutionary Movement –Armed Comandos).

**MORENA.** Movimiento de Restauración Nacional (Movement for National Restoration).

**NACLA.** North American Congress on Latin America.

**NGO.** Non Governmental Organization.

**PAHD.** Programa de Atención Humanitaria al Desmovilizado (Program for Humanitarian Attention to Demobilized Persons).

**PCC–ML.** Partido Comunista Colombiano –Marxista Leninista (Colombian Communist Party – Marxist Leninist).

**PCP –SL.** Partido Comunista del Perú –Sendero Luminoso (Communist Party of Perú –Shining Path).

**PRT.** Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (Colombian Revolutionary Workers’ Party).

**PTSD.** Post–Traumatic Stress Disorder.

**SIDDR.** Stockholm Initiative on DDR.

**UN.** United Nations.

**UNDDRUN.** Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Resource Center.

**UNIFEM.** United Nations Development Fund for Women.

**URNG.** Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union).

**UP.** Unión Patriótica (Patriotic Union).

## Chapter 1. Introduction

Colombia has a long history of internal violent conflict, dating back to its independence from Spain in 1810. Virtually all of its presidents since the 1940s have attempted to implement a successful conflict resolution strategy with different degrees of success. The largest strategy thus far began in 2003, when approximately thirty–five thousand combatants gave up their arms as part of a peace negotiation between the government of President Álvaro Uribe–Velez (2002–2010) and the paramilitary group *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*, the AUC (United Self–defence Forces of Colombia). The demobilization of all units belonging to the AUC is a success in terms of disarmament in a country that has made modest gains in demobilizing other illegal armed groups during the last fifty years.<sup>1</sup> However, there are still approximately ten thousand active combatants from left–wing guerrilla groups who are armed and waging a war against the government and numerous drug cartels operating both locally and internationally. One of these groups is the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, Ejército del Pueblo*, the FARC–EP<sup>2</sup> (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, People’s Army), the oldest guerrilla group in Latin America. Since the 1980s, all Colombian presidents, including President Uribe, have tried to negotiate a demobilization program with the FARC, but all have failed.

The demobilization of the AUC was met with skepticism by some sectors of Colombian society and in the international community regarding issues of transitional justice and the reintegration of ex–combatants into civilian society. Controversy has also been generated within

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term “illegal armed groups” to refer to the left-wing guerrilla groups and right-wing paramilitary groups in an effort to be consistent with the terminology used under Colombian law. Under Colombian law, these groups are illegal and are referred to as *grupos al margen de la ley* (groups at the margins of the law) or *grupos armados ilegales* (illegal armed group). I employ the latter term while acknowledging the diversity and modes of operating between the different groups that fall under this category. The use of the term “illegal armed groups” is not meant to imply that other parties in Colombia’s conflict (e.g., army, police) always act within the legal framework. Members of the armed forces and police have been accused, and in some cases convicted, of crimes. Other ways of referring to illegal armed groups are “non-state actors,” “non-state armed actors,” “violent non-state actors,” among others.

<sup>2</sup> I use FARC hereafter, instead of the longer former name FARC–EP.

the country and abroad in terms of irregularities in accountability, justice, and reparation to the victims of the AUC. Furthermore, the recent emergence of criminal bands composed of some ex-combatants of the AUC who participated in the demobilization program, is calling into question the success of this program. Another issue which has received less attention is the lack of an adequate demobilization platform that could successfully address the needs of women ex-combatants, as well as guarantee their successful reintegration into society as civilians.

This dissertation research seeks to elucidate the effects of non-state militarism on the social processes that produce and reproduce gender systems in two of Colombia's illegal armed groups by uncovering how the FARC and the AUC construct, negotiate, challenge, or reinforce gender roles. The research focuses on Colombian women who joined the ranks of both the left-wing guerrilla group FARC, and the right-wing paramilitary organization AUC. I examine the national Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programs carried out by the administration of President Uribe, beginning in 2003. This DDR process is unique in that it was carried out while the conflict was ongoing, and because it was comprised of two parallel DDR processes: an individual process for the on-going demobilization of deserters from any guerrilla group, and a collective process for the collective and complete demobilization of AUC members, which came to an end in 2006.

The exact number of women in the Colombian illegal armed groups is unknown, but it is believed that women constituted 12 percent of the AUC and constitute 30 percent of the FARC (Cockburn 2007, 15) Women in active illegal armed groups such as the FARC will be participating in a demobilization process if there is a successful peace negotiation with the government, thus it is important to determine the specific challenges that will be faced by women *and* men. Current president, Juan Manuel Santos (2010–2014), has attempted to set the terms for

a potential negotiation with the FARC.<sup>3</sup> In the meantime, a demobilization program is in place for combatant women, men, and children who choose to leave these groups voluntarily. The reintegration of these individuals and all DDR participants into society as civilians has been fraught with many challenges. Unemployment, social stigma, and rearmament, to name just a few, are threatening the incorporation of these individuals into civilian life and are thus reducing the chances of a complete end to the Colombian 60 year old conflict. The successful reintegration of all combatants as civilians requires an examination of their experiences as combatants in illegal armed groups.

Taking into account that “women are militarized in different ways and to fulfill different militarizing functions” (Enloe 2000, 295), I carry out a comparative analysis of the FARC and the AUC, using the working hypothesis that militarization of women in all illegal armed groups has similar tendencies, yet distinct characteristics, depending on the type of armed group. I will argue that women’s presence in these groups disrupts traditional gender roles by militarizing them. Men and women become hyper-masculinized in this process, each from their own gender identities and in gender-differentiated ways. Women combatants in illegal armed groups do not simply “become like men,” but they go through a nuanced process in which their traditional gender identities are juxtaposed with the militaristic requirements of their particular organization. Their roles, experiences, and expectations are embedded in specific patriarchal and militaristic demands within the context of Colombian culture and society. This makes the transition to civilian life a gendered process in which gender roles must be manifested in new and unexpected ways. In other words, traditional gender roles in militaristic organizations are indeed redefined, but not necessarily in a way that successfully overturns gendered hierarchies. As combatants,

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<sup>3</sup> On September 4, 2012, President Santos announced that the Colombian government will begin peace negotiations with the FARC.

women are given the chance to perform the same roles as men. What makes this complicated is that the standard which is already in place to evaluate their performance is masculine by definition, since militarized organizations are built on hyper-masculinized ideals. This challenges claims to gender equality made by illegal militarized organizations such as the FARC and the AUC.

I argue that gender, not just masculinity, is militarized in illegal armed groups and that this has profound impacts on women combatants' experiences in terms of their reproductive rights and sexuality. The way that gender is reconfigured and performed within illegal armed groups depends on the particularities of the organization in question. The left-wing guerrilla group FARC upholds a type of gender equality that does not recognize difference, while the right-wing paramilitary group, the AUC upheld a type of gender equality that recognized difference. For instance, women in the FARC are required to give up the option of motherhood as a condition of joining the organization; in comparison, women in the AUC were allowed to have children and still remain in the organization. The way in which different illegal armed groups choose to integrate women into their ranks has significant implications for the experience of gender, through a process in which both masculinity and femininity become militarized. In the case of the AUC, pregnancy and motherhood were militarized and incorporated as elements that constituted the ideal AUC female combatant. The militarization of gender requires incorporating particular elements traditionally associated with each of the two genders—such as motherhood—in ways that reflect the specificities of each organization, its military needs, and its ideology. Militarized gender and the way it is lived and performed reveals the different ways women and men experience violent conflict as gendered subjects, showing what particular needs should be addressed in a comprehensive DDR program.

The FARC and the AUC have similar financial bases, but different historical roots, social bases, and internal/external behaviour (Gutiérrez–Sanín 2008). According to Gutiérrez–Sanín, both groups attract different types of recruits in terms of gender, education, and occupation, due to the “set of organizational devices that structure the quotidian life of the fighters” (ibid. 5). Gutiérrez–Sanín goes on to argue that each group employs different strategies of adaptation and transformation (6). The FARC uses different methods than the AUC to socialize its recruits, and different practices of soldiering (transforming civilians into combatants). They also have different repertoires of violence: the FARC engages in more violent confrontations, including higher numbers of kidnappings, but fewer massacres than the AUC (ibid., 6). In addition, the guerrillas openly shoot people who refuse to cooperate and the AUC used the method of disappearances (Rozema 2008, 441). Using disappearances as a strategy of war was employed by the Nazis to generate uncertainty and terror among the Jewish population. This strategy was later used in Argentina during the military dictatorship in the 1970s and 1980s to the same effect (Feitlowitz 1998). Camila Medina–Arbeláez (2009, 2) worked with the *Programa de Atención Complementaria a la Población Reincorporada con Presencia en Bogotá* (the Program for Complementary Attention to the Reintegrated Population in Bogotá), a government initiative to understand the Colombian DDR process as it was unfolding. Medina–Arbeláez found that in order to fully comprehend the Colombian DDR process, it was necessary to differentiate between the experiences of the participants according to the group to which they belonged. This criterion had a significant influence on the way the participants behaved, related to each other, talked, dressed, and how they viewed their role in the world (ibid., 2–3).<sup>4</sup>

Despite these differences, both the AUC and the FARC have been accused of using sexualized violence against female members, including rape as a form of punishment, forced

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<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all source translations are my own.

contraception and abortions, and forced prostitution (Amnesty International 2004). Amnesty International (2004) published a report about sexual violence against women in the Colombian conflict (both civilians and combatants) titled *Colombia: Scarred Bodies, Hidden Crimes: Sexual Violence Against Women in the Armed Conflict*. The report outlined several practices carried out by both guerrillas and paramilitaries including the FARC and the various groups that were part of the AUC. According to this report, both civilian women and girls are targeted by all the armed groups for being related or having emotional ties to people from competing armed groups. All of the groups, including the army, have been accused of raping their victims and using other forms of sexual violence before killing them (ibid.). The report also found that these acts of violence have been intended to send a general warning to the women who live in a particular area, both civilian and those belonging to armed groups. However, there have been no in–depth studies disaggregating sexual violence by group which take into account how this type of violence is employed against women in the armed groups. In general, it is assumed that women receive the same treatment with respect to their sexuality regardless of the group they belong to.

With this in mind, I carried out a study of gender politics of guerrilla and paramilitary warfare and the micro–cultures of both organizations, particularly in relation to women’s sexuality and reproductive rights. These two areas have been determined to be relevant for DDR programs in general, but have been largely ignored in the Colombian demobilization programs. I provide a critical examination of how knowledge about women and gender is produced through the practices of the AUC and the FARC, and about how this knowledge affects the transition from combatant to civilian life. In the Colombian context, this is relevant for two reasons: first, although the paramilitary group AUC has demobilized in its entirety, the FARC and other smaller guerrilla groups which are active in Colombia face the prospect of future demobilization.

The success or failure of the AUC demobilization experience in general, and in terms of the reintegration of its women members in particular, will be of value when designing a new DDR program. Second, the last years of the AUC demobilization program saw the emergence of neo-paramilitary groups throughout the country, signifying the re-arming of some DDR participants, including women. Understanding and addressing this phenomenon and its gender implications requires an adequate understanding of the gender aspects of the AUC DDR process.

This study is based on thirty-two interviews with men and women ex-combatants from the AUC and the FARC who are participating in the Colombian DDR process. The interviews were carried out in Bogotá, Colombia in the summer of 2010. Some of the key research questions grounding this study, and including interview questions, include: How are the FARC and the AUC defining gender and gender relations, femininity, and masculinity? Why and how does war magnify already existing gender inequalities? To what extent do these experiences affect the transition from combatant to civilian and the ways in which women perceive their gender roles before, during, and after this transition?

In Colombia, like in any other country experiencing the ravages of war, considerable attention has been given to the design of a coherent DDR which aims to guarantee stability and long-lasting peace. DDR programs are established to allow combatants who are willing and able to give up their arms, either as part of a collective agreement or due to voluntary disengagement, to return to society. Although these programs have to meet the needs of ex-combatants from diverse and competing social groups, female combatants' needs are often overlooked, and women receive much less support than male fighters in DDR programs (Potter 2008, 105).

Women combatants in both illegal and legal armed groups challenge traditional ideas about war, peace, and gender roles (Alison 2004). Although these women have fought alongside



men, they have been invisible in terms of their needs and experiences, and have suffered great difficulties in relation to DDR programs and post-conflict situations (Barth 2002; Alison 2004; Londoño and Nieto 2006). Despite efforts made by international organizations, such as the United Nations and non-governmental agencies such as Oxfam and Amnesty International, to incorporate women in DDR planning and implementation, the experiences of women combatants in illegal militias has remained a relatively understudied topic in Political Science and Gender Studies. As such, the study of the effects of non-state militarization on gender is under-theorized.

DDR programs have short term goals (the disarmament of combatants) and long term objectives (the successful reintegration of ex-combatants into society as civilians). The success of a program thus depends on both sets of goals being met. Women ex-combatants face specific challenges during disarmament and demobilization as well as during their reintegration into civilian communities, many of which are not keen on welcoming former combatants of illegal armed groups. Many of the short and long term challenges women face during DDR programs are gender specific, and they are at risk of domestic violence, reproductive health complications, and social stigma. Academic literature on conflict and conflict resolution has focused on women civilians, thus resulting in dominant representations of women in war primarily as victims. However, the majority of social processes associated with the effects of war, including sexual violence, affect women both as civilians and as combatants. Women combatants in illegal armed groups are, thus, both victims *and* victimizers. The primary focus in the literature on conflict and conflict resolution in terms of women (women as victims) ignores the experiences of women in organizations such as the FARC and the AUC. On the other hand, those accounts that highlight women's presence in illegal armed groups, such as reports from human rights organizations,

highlight their experiences as victims of sexual violence. However, the experiences and identity of women combatants in illegal armed groups cannot be reduced to single instances of victimization and negative empowerment. The main characteristic of women's experiences and women's identity in illegal armed groups is ambiguity: they are victims *and* victimizers, and have both masculine *and* feminine characteristics.

The overall objective of my research is to build a comprehensive analysis of the experience of gender in illegal armed groups in the context of war, both during times of combat as well as during transition into civilian life. This analysis will examine the ways in which traditional gender roles are altered, and the potential this has for giving women the opportunity to gain greater control over their lives once they return to civilian life. It will also expose the heterogeneity of the category 'woman' by looking at the wide range of women's experiences in the context of war, and the contradictions this entails given that the boundaries between victims and perpetrators are often porous and unstable in a war setting. Taking into account the scarcity of studies on women combatants in illegal organizations, I seek to make a contribution to better the understanding of the demobilization of women combatants in Colombia and in other conflict as well as post-conflict societies.

Some feminists have made contributions to the study of women in the military (Herbert 1998; Enloe 1989, 1993, 2000, 2004, 2007; Riley 2008). Nevertheless, these studies have focused primarily on women's presence in the military in developed countries (Jacobson et al. 2000). A gap remains in the literature on women and war with respect to women combatants in illegal armed groups in developing countries. Overall, a gendered focus has escaped the study of conflict and conflict resolution, in that "the extent of women's involvement in violent acts in warfare remains poorly understood, and violence is still commonly believed to be the main

preserve of men” (Kelly 2000).

Military institutions are one of the most controversial spaces within which women have attempted to assert gender equality. Redefining the scope of the behaviours and attitudes traditionally associated with ‘female’ in a setting characterized by masculine ideas and attitudes has raised interesting issues in the study of women and war. In challenging traditional gender roles as soldiers, women combatants threaten ideas of femininity and masculinity that define what are perceived as gender-specific capabilities (Riley 2008, 1201). The extent to which women combatants can successfully redefine traditional gender roles and achieve greater control over their lives in one of the most gendered institutions in society is debated among many feminists. (Chenoy 1998; D’Amico 1998; Herbert 1998; Feinman 2000; Barth 2002; Enloe 1989, 1993, 2000, 2004, 2007; Theidon 2007; Riley 2008). Some feminists contend that allowing women to join the military can lead to greater female participation in the political sphere. However, most feminists are critical of women joining the military as they think it is unlikely that they will benefit from a patriarchal organization that is based on the exaltation of masculine values.

This debate is representative of feminism as a political project since feminists vary in what they consider are the most efficient and adequate methods of achieving women’s emancipation. However, underpinning feminism’s heterogeneity is an effort to explore, study, and analyze aspects of women’s lives that are taken for granted and considered “natural.” In doing so, feminists expose “taken for granted” issues and turn them into political issues (Enloe 2007, 9). One of these efforts has focused on analyzing the experiences of women in the military and in other militarized organizations.

Most feminists agree that militaries are hostile settings for women because harassment

and sexual abuse are common. These feminists have established links between militarism, masculinity, and patriarchy (Chenoy 1998; Herbert 1998; Barth 2002; Enloe 1989, 1993, 2000, 2004, 2007; Theidon 2007, 2009; Riley 2008). Sheila Jeffreys argues that women in the military find themselves in a situation of double jeopardy as they are in danger from both the enemy and from their own colleagues (Jeffreys 2007). Underlying the debates on women in the military is the conflict between the institutional needs of the military and what feminists see as the basic requirements for gender equality. This conflict takes the form of a dialectical link between militarism and patriarchy as the military relies on male privilege and female subordination (Turpin 1998). Scholars writing on the topic identify a fundamental contradiction inherent in the process of women joining the military: becoming and being a soldier requires the exaltation of masculine characteristics and the degradation of feminine characteristics (Herbert 1998; Turpin 1998; Cockburn 2007; Enloe 1989, 1993, 2000, 2004, 2007; Theidon 2007).

Despite these complexities, military establishments around the world have found it increasingly necessary to enlist women, as the pool of young men available and willing to join the military is in constant fluctuation. Cynthia Enloe (2004) argues that femininity is manipulated in order to make the participation of women in otherwise masculine activities acceptable. Women's presence in the military has increased over time, with more and more women being allowed to join the ranks of armies. Women have fought alongside men in numerous wars: with the Chinese communists in the 1930s–1940s, in the African National Congress in South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s, in Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s, in El Salvador in the 1980s, and in the Gulf War in the 1990s, just to list a few.

Elise Barth (2002) notes that in Sri Lanka, 30 percent of the Tamil Tigers are women. The same was true for the revolutionary guerrillas of Nicaragua and Eritrea (Knight and

Ozerdam 2004, 503). Barth also found women were present as combatants in liberation movements and guerrilla organizations in countries such as Ethiopia, Namibia, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Liberia, Uganda, Guinea–Bissau, Sierra Leone, and Djibouti. In Latin America, 30 percent of members in the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) in El Salvador were women. In Guatemala, women composed 15 percent of the members from the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG). The numbers were higher in Perú, where 40 percent of the Partido Comunista del Perú – Sendero Luminoso (PCP–SL) were women. In this case, more than 50 percent were part of the Central Committee (Luciak 2001). In Colombia, it is estimated that women composed 24 percent to 27 percent of the membership of the different guerrilla groups that demobilized in the 1990s (Londoño and Nieto 2006, 12).

Despite these numbers, women who join the military are often given second-class status, and very few women occupy high–ranking positions. Ironically, women have been marginalized within both the war and official peace processes. Furthermore, as the experiences during armed conflicts reveal, once the conflict comes to an end, women tend to return to their traditional roles (Turpin 1998; Hale 2002; Meintjes et al. 2002; Meintjes 2002; Alison 2004; Knight and Ozerdem 2004; Enloe 1989, 1993, 2000, 2004, 2007; Potter 2008). However, conflict can alter gender roles, “exposing how the post–conflict period can bring a complex time in which society (including women themselves) tries to adapt to women’s newfound identities and roles, or, more commonly, tries to put women back into their pre–conflict gendered roles” (Potter 2008, 109). This refers to how women are expected to revert back to their pre–conflict traditional gender roles, which are aimed at avoiding women’s participation in the public sphere.

Issues associated with women in the military are more complex in many societies where wars are waged not just between formal national armies, but also among illegal militias. These

militarized organizations are not always part of a state and are prone to carry out human rights violations against civilians, rivals, and their own members. Diane E. Davis (2003) explains that these “irregular armed forces” can range from paramilitaries to the police to vigilantes, terrorists, and militias. Women in conflict societies have increasingly joined these parallel armies in countries such as Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Colombia. Their reasons for joining these groups are linked to extreme social and political situations. In fact, many have done it guided by their social consciousness, others due to the need to survive, to defend themselves and their families, due to their necessity to partake in production, others because of a feeling of injustice or to defend and conserve their children and their lifestyles. In moments of extreme social conflict, organizational chaos, or chaos of values, women have entered the struggle. (Fernández 2000, 29–30)

DDR processes around the world reveal that the ways in which these programs are planned and implemented “have significant implications for the reintegration of former combatants and peace–building processes” (Knight and Ozederm 2004, 500). The types of medical care, childcare requirements, and educational needs of women ex–combatants are different from those of men ex–combatants as well as children ex–combatants (de Watteville 2002). A DDR program which acknowledges women’s experiences and vulnerabilities, and meets women’s needs in a comprehensive way could avoid reinforcing unequal gender power relations and could prevent a reversal to pre–militia gender roles. In the case of Colombia, where the conflict is ongoing, it could also prevent the re–armament of women ex–combatants. Special assistance for women ex–combatants has the potential to grant them full and equal participation in social, economic, and political life (Knight and Ozederm 2004, 503). This gives women the experience needed to redefine gender standards in post–conflict situations (Potter 2008, 109).

Whether or not this awareness translates to empowerment depends upon, among other things, a successful DDR platform that adequately meets their needs. A first step in this direction implies recognizing their experiences in the AUC and the FARC in their own right, and not as appendixes of their male peers.

An area of relevance of my research concerns the on-going Colombian DDR planning and implementation and its implications for gender relations during the transition from conflict to post-conflict society. The experiences of women in general, and in the Colombian illegal armed groups in particular, remain poorly researched topics (Estrada-Mesa 1997; Londoño and Nieto 2006). As of 2006, the literature on this topic in Colombia was sparse. It comprised two research papers on women's war and DDR experiences, one paper on the situation of girl combatants, two autobiographies by ex-combatant women (both from the left-wing guerrilla movement M-19), a few magazine and newspaper articles, two university theses, and one journalistic paper (Londoño and Nieto 2006, 22). Even though this area has garnered more attention during the last five years, it requires further in-depth studies (MAPP-OEA 2012). My dissertation will seek to fill in some gaps in this literature and will also have practical value. A DDR that is grounded in a methodological, conceptual, and procedural framework is key in any attempt at a post-conflict transition. I will also seek to contribute relevant insights to theoretical debates on gender maintenance, disruption, and creation, as well as its militarization. Finally, the policy-design aspect of my dissertation will derive from the effort to better inform all those involved in conflict resolution of the underlying power struggles concerning gender which will allow them to make informed decisions.

### **Organization of the Study**

Chapter two presents a literature review on the topic of women and war, including feminist approaches which examine the presence of women in the military. It also presents the

theoretical frameworks that ground the present study of women in the AUC and the FARC, and puts forward a new concept to approach the case study at hand. The theoretical framework is presented as the synthesis of two influential feminist theories: Cynthia Enloe's theory of militarized masculinity, and Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. These two approaches ground the concept of "militarized gender performativity" which is central throughout the analysis and the comparisons of the experiences of women in the FARC and the AUC. Chapter two also outlines the methodology employed in this study, as well as some of the challenges encountered while conducting research on an under-researched topic and attempting to carry out fieldwork in Colombia.

Chapter three explores the historical background of the Colombian conflict and looks at the emergence of its main actors. It also considers the historical relationship between these actors, taking into account the transformations of the conflict over time. It examines the role of women in Colombian society and in the conflict from a historical perspective. Chapter four gives a detailed overview of the Colombian demobilization program during Álvaro Uribe's presidency. It also considers efforts made by other presidents to negotiate with the armed groups from the 1980s onwards, and the impossibility thus far of establishing a collective DDR program for all FARC members despite several official peace negotiations between the government and this organization.

Chapters five and six present an account of the situation of women in the FARC and the AUC respectively. These chapters incorporate a significant amount of testimony collected during my fieldwork in Colombia. The testimonies are complemented with insights and information from existing literature on the experiences of women in these two illegal armed groups. Chapter seven presents a comparative analysis of the experiences of women in the FARC and the AUC,



taking into account the concept of militarized gender performativity. Important differences in the ways these two organizations incorporate women into their ranks is considered in order to highlight the specific needs these women have during demobilization and reintegration.

The conclusion to the study considers areas of further research, encompassing studies on intersectionality which would incorporate other social divisions into the analysis, including, but not limited to, race, age, and ethnicity. The conclusion also discusses some limitations of my research and provides some closing remarks with respect to the experience of gender in armed conflict.

## Chapter 2. Women and War: Recognizing Multiple Voices

Feminists who can be referred to as “third wave,” such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Judith Butler, and Cynthia Enloe, have challenged the view of gender as a natural and fixed dichotomy as female/male, and have put forth a notion of gender as a social construction which is culturally specific. During the 1980s, these feminists challenged the notion of universality in the feminist movement and focused on the multivocality of women’s experiences worldwide. They did this while attempting to form and maintain strategic coalitions of women across race, class, and nationality. In this regard, black feminist Audre Lorde stated, “It is not our differences which separate women, but our reluctance to recognize those differences and to deal effectively with the distortions which have resulted from the ignoring and misnaming of those differences” (1984, 342).

The dual categories *masculine* and *feminine* have become a structural feature of social reality, and a way to understand the differences between women and men; these categories have been cemented in dominant institutions such as marriage. However, in the nuanced view of gender put forward by third wave feminists, *feminine* and *masculine* are approached as normative constructions based on hierarchical and oppositional categories. Cynthia Enloe argues that constructing ideals of masculine behaviour in any culture will always require the construction of supportive and complementary ideals of femininity (2007). In this sense, men are represented as dominant and women as subordinated. These binary oppositions are interdependent. Thus, “the first terms depend on and derive their meaning from the second to such an extent that the secondary terms can be seen as generative of the definition of the first terms” (Scott 1988, 448). It is in this way that the differences attributed to the duality women/men become a structural feature of social reality: “the duality this opposition created draws one line of differences, invests

it with biological explanations, and then treats each side of the opposition as a unitary phenomenon” (453). Critical feminists have worked to uncover and analyze seemingly fixed gender categories as normative constructions that rely on specific definitions and understandings of sexual difference. They argue against the existence of a “female essence” understood as a natural and unchanging female quality. This female essence is understood as being the result of the social production and organization of difference which configures the map of social relations in a binary and oppositional manner. This critique of dual gender constructions has been the point of departure for many contemporary feminists who reject essentialism and approach gender as a complex and contradictory social construction. For instance, queer and post-structural feminist theorist Judith Butler argues that gender is not a state of being, but a performance which often follows established gender norms:

there is neither an ‘essence’ that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires, and because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. (Butler 1990, 190)

This view follows from an understanding that identity, including gender identity, is produced always in relation to the ‘other,’ what Butler calls the “unbearable relationality” bonding people together (Butler 2005, 20, 100). This approach is useful when analyzing women’s and men’s roles during times of violent conflict since both men and women can be victims and perpetrators of violence. Men are not prone to violence by nature just as women are not averse to violence by nature. However, it is men who engage in violent activities to a greater extent than women because of the way their identity has been constructed. Men are socialized to associate their identity with strength, aggressiveness, and competition (Enloe 2007, 219). In this sense, their

idea of gender (masculinity) makes them prone to engaging in violent acts. Butler's view of gender further challenges the dominant view of gender as a unitary phenomenon.

The complex role women play in violent contexts is often ignored by dominant representations of women in conflict which tend to focus on women as victims. Dominant representations of women in literature on war depict them mostly as victims, following a dichotomous construction that posits men as perpetrators. Thus, according to Riley, "cultural norms about gender have a profound impact on how women are regarded in relation to war, what they are expected to do, and the strength of the repercussions suffered for acting outside the gender boundaries within particular spaces" (2008, 1192). This means that the heterogeneous quality of the categories 'women' and 'men' is overlooked, constructing them in opposition to each other (Bop 2002; Manchanda 2002; Alison 2009). However, a nuanced view of gender reveals that women (and men) can be actors, resisters, victims, *and* perpetrators (Moser and Clark 2001).

When gender is deconstructed and denaturalized, it is possible to understand that women can play a role in perpetuating and maintaining systems of domination and violence. However, women who engage in such activities, such as women combatants in illegal armed groups, are the exception rather than the norm since most societies approach violent activities as unnatural to women (Enloe 2007). Feminists like bell hooks who focus on the heterogeneity implicit in the concept of "women" have shown that both women and men have \

the capacity to dominate and be dominated depending on their socioeconomic status, race, and ethnicity (bell hooks 1989, 465).<sup>5</sup> Therefore, women's experiences of war are never one-dimensional and can be conflictive and contradictory (Jacobson et al. 2000; Alison 2009).

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<sup>5</sup> This author uses lower-case letters to spell her name.

Women in developing countries are more likely to experience war through their sexuality by being subject to rape and forced abortions, and are more likely to be driven out of their homes. Four-fifths of war refugees are women who, due to their situation, are forced to become the head of their family, challenging traditional gender roles (Moser and Clark 2001). Some of the women affected by conflict choose to join militias, reasserting their identity as perpetrators, while others become victims of sexual abuse within militarized organizations.

Violence against women is, regardless of whether they are predominantly victims or perpetrators or both, widespread in militarized contexts. Women experience war much differently than men, and often through their bodies in distinct ways—through abuse of their sexuality and their reproductive capacities. Women suffer sexualized violence in a disproportional way, and “suffer particular attacks whose form is defined by distinct notions of feminine sexuality” (Sideris 2002). Rape continues to be used as a weapon for ethnic cleansing in nationalist conflicts (Riley 2008). Rape in a context of war ceases to be only an attack on the body, and instead becomes an attack on the ‘body politic’ as it is aimed to control and influence entire socio-political processes (Sideris 2002). For these reasons, feminists have identified wartime rape as a sign of war’s gendered nature (Turpin 1998; Meintjes et al. 1998; Sideris 2002; Enloe 2007; Riley 2008; Sjoberg 2007). The occurrence of sexualized violence is also significant when attempting to analyze women combatants’ experiences since, despite being labeled as perpetrators, they can also be considered victims when they have suffered sexual harassment within the organizations to which they belong. The ambiguity of identity in a war setting is better understood when taking into account that each individual is positioned in more than one dimension of difference (Cockburn 2007). For instance, women’s gender identity intersects with ethnicity and class, making their experiences even more complex. In some cases,

such as those of women combatants who are also victims of sexual violence, these experiences are contradictory, as they are simultaneously victims and perpetrators of violence. When assessing the constructions of gender in a militarized setting, it is important to consider these alongside the constructions of race, ethnicity, and their intersection with social categories of class and nation as well as the dimensions of the conquered and the victor (Meintjes et al. 2002; Cockburn 2007). For example, poor women from minority groups tend to be disproportionately recruited (Turpin 1998). These women might face more barriers when reintegrating into civilian society than women who are not considered minorities.

Women are victims of violence during wars and other types of armed conflict in multiple ways; therefore, the dominant characterization of women during war as *only* victims can be problematic. This is because such a characterization ignores and silences women who are perpetrators and have committed human rights abuses against other women and men, and also because it justifies conceptions of gender in dichotomous and hierarchical terms that perpetuate oppression. Not only does the construction of women as passive victims and men as active perpetrators reproduce structures of oppression, but it also makes it difficult to analyze situations in which female perpetrators are victims of sexual abuse by their male peers. This is not to say that women are not primarily victims of sexual abuse during times of violent conflict; but it is necessary to generate discussions regarding instances in which women have repeatedly engaged in violent acts (Gentry 2012, 79). Discussions about women who participate in political violence, organized international crime, or genocide, can reveal important information about women's agency during extreme social situations (ibid.).

These dominant dual constructions of gender, men–perpetrator/women–victim, have been challenged by women who are perpetrators, but also by women who struggle to avoid

victimization. Women in contexts of war are victims, but have also organized and mobilized as peace activists, in their struggle to oppose the militarization of their society and their role as helpless victims within it. In Argentina, for instance, women have mobilized to oppose state repression and to demand accountability in the disappearance of their loved ones. These efforts are referred to as the ‘motherist view’ since this group is mostly made up of mothers demanding accountability for the disappearance of their sons and daughters. These types of mobilizations have been very controversial among feminists since they operate within a binary understanding of gender. Although ‘mothering’ can be practiced by both women and men, it is still associated with traditional women’s roles. Thus, it is a source of debate among feminists as to whether it can break down the traditional duality male/female (York 1998; Cockburn 2007). Jodi York (1998) notes that this position ignores and downplays the role that women play in the service of war and does not critically question traditional conceptions of femininity. Furthermore, Cockburn argues that this over-identification of women as mothers excludes women who do not have children, and those who do not see themselves as peace-oriented (2007). Moreover, this view has influenced dominant representations of third world women in mainstream media as passive and traditional (Mohanty 1991). Mohanty argues that western feminist scholarship has constructed an “average third world woman,” portrayed as leading an “essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being ‘third world’ (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family oriented, victimized, etc.)” (1991, 374). This view is in direct contrast to first world women who are displayed as having the opposite characteristics (ibid.).

The image projected by mainstream media during peace negotiations has remained consistent with dominant representations of gender roles. This has had negative implications

regarding the incorporation of women in conflict resolution processes. Women's issues during peace talks, for example, has indicated "the tendency to contrast the image of 'women of peace' with 'men of violence' which has the effect of excluding women from the 'hard' conflict resolution process which is conceived of as a male political domain. If women tend not to be the ones with guns (and therefore, it is assumed, power or political aspirations), why discuss decommissioning with them?" (Potter 2008, 110). The image of civilian women as peace activists is in line with dominant perceptions of women as inherently peaceful, and violence as natural to men, rather than an expression of a structure of power, perpetuating traditional gender roles. Women combatants who defy traditional gender roles are left out of this frame, rendering invisible important processes that have a direct impact on their future and their quality of life.

The association of women as victims and as peace activists obscures the fact that many women experience war as combatants. bell hooks argues that women "can and do participate in politics of domination as perpetrators as well as victims" (bell hooks 1989, 464). These women are silenced or, in the words of Clemencia Rodríguez (2001), "are not seen." Their presence, role, and experiences are not usually dominant in people's general awareness of socio-political processes (Riley 2008; Gentry 2012). The situation of these women demonstrates the complexity of war experiences and the fragility of identity boundaries as it is possible to understand their experiences in war from different and contradictory perspectives (Moser and Clark 2001). Women's co-responsibility in regard to violence does not necessarily mean that these women and men stand in an equal relationship. Such an assumption would obscure the fact that wars are gendered processes occurring in gendered societies, and are based on gendered institutions such as armies (Jacobson et al. 2000).

Some feminists contend that women's experiences as perpetrators in war contexts have



important social, political, and economic consequences in the transition to a post–conflict situation and the establishment of peace, and that they should be taken into account (Reiman 2001; Barth 2002; Enloe 2007). Women’s participation in wars as well as their experiences during the demobilization process and their return to civilian life are felt, thought, and lived in a different way than men (Bennet et al. 1995).<sup>6</sup> Barth (2002, 10) further argues that any analysis of a conflict cannot be considered complete if it only relies on information that does not take into account women’s points of view. The experience of women combatants in the aftermath of war is linked to their training for combat, the conditions of their demobilization, and the services available to them, especially for the disabled (Meintjes et al. 2002). In developing countries such as Sierra Leone and Eritrea, DDR processes have resulted in the alienation and impoverishment of ex–combatant women in post–conflict reconstruction as they struggle to negotiate their pre–war and post–war gender identities (Bop 2002). Amelia Potter notes that conflict can alter gender roles, “exposing how the post–conflict period can bring a complex time in which society (including women themselves) tries to adapt to women’s newfound identities and roles, or, more commonly, tries to put women back into their pre–conflict gendered roles” (2008, 109).

Due to the fact that most violent conflicts unfold in developing countries, the study of women who fight in illegal non–state armed groups poses challenges when analyzing these contexts using a western lens and a western feminist point of view. This topic is under–researched in dominant studies of women and war. The ambiguities and complexities inherent in the experiences of these women and the academic isolation of this topic are other challenges in this area of study. Scholarship on women in the military which can serve as a fruitful point of departure for mapping the experiences of women combatants in illegal armed groups is that of

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<sup>6</sup> Bennet et al. (1995) interviewed women survivors of wars in Liberia, Ethiopia, Uganda, Somaliland, Sri Lanka, India, Vietnam, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Lebanon, Croatia, and Bosnia.

women in official militaries.

### **Women in the Military**

Most liberal feminists adhere to the militarist approach which contends that increasing women's participation in the military is beneficial for the achievement of gender equality in society (Feinman 2000). The rationale underlying this view is that higher numbers of women can help redefine the military as an institution, and can also open doors for women to hold high political office as many respected political leaders have a background in the armed forces (Turpin 1998). For instance, Ilene Rose Feinman argues that women should not be banned from military service as this would contribute to their marginalization. Instead, society should re-define citizenship so as to reduce the significance of military service (2000). Enloe calls advocates of this position 'optimists' who believe a greater presence of women in the military can make the institution less hierarchical, less focused on a threat-filled world-view, and more committed to humanitarian operations (2007).

This position is rejected by those who believe that "masculinization, militarization, and patriarchy don't just roll over in the face of change" (Enloe 2007, 79). Feminists who are critical of the militarist approach contend that the military is a gendered institution in which denigration of the feminine is central (Chenoy 1998; D'Amico 1998; Klein 1998; Enloe 2007; Riley 2008). Enloe refers to this as "the subtly gendered process of militarization" (2000: xix). She defines militarization as the "step-by-step process by which something becomes *controlled by, dependent on, or derives its value from* the military as an institution or militaristic criteria" (ibid.). She argues that militarization is a two-way process and that socio-political processes that have been militarized can be demilitarized and remilitarized (ibid.).

The militarization of any society is a gendered process. It is also a process fraught with contradiction (Enloe 2000). The essence of military training consists of the subordination of the

individual to the institution, a desensitization to violence, and a dehumanization of the potential opponent. For male recruits, it also includes a process of masculinization where female and feminine are defined as the 'other' and as unworthy (D'Amico 1998, 123). Soldiering requires the construction of an 'other' (the feminine) which is belittled. Kimberly Theidon (2009) argues that in contexts of war, masculinity becomes militarized and certain images and practices associated with masculinity become associated with violence, aggression, and weapons. Recognizing the diversity of men within a militarized group requires acknowledging that underneath that diversity, all men share a hegemonic masculinity (Theidon 2009, 7). This is problematic in cases where women join the military because women's presence disrupts the basic foundations of a militarized group. Cheney argues that militarization requires the subjugation of women for the sake of sustaining male privilege and patriarchy (1998). D'Amico believes that women entering the military are successfully militarized, but not necessarily empowered (1998).

Enloe (2007) has also studied the complex experiences of women joining men in military ranks, addressing the question of whether the patriarchal inclination to privilege masculinity is lessened as more women join the ranks. She contends that more women in the military can both sustain and challenge patriarchy. However, according to Enloe, the military cannot become a less masculinized institution because this would require it to be less effective in its coercive capacities, and fewer men would find it appealing to enlist. In this sense, Enloe argues that the process of women entering the military is not necessarily liberating from a feminist point of view because it assumes that with women's entry into the military, this institution will become more democratic; in fact, however, women become militarized upon becoming members of the military. Therefore, Enloe argues that the analytical focus shifts from questioning equality in the

military to questioning militarism itself (1993). In this respect, women entering the military creates a ‘patriarchal challenge’ which results in practices that are confusing, contradictory, and harmful to women recruits. Furthermore, during war it becomes difficult to sustain the “naturalness” of the dichotomy between feminine and masculine, as well as the accorded gender rules. This ‘patriarchal confusion’ is often heightened during wartime or when a government prepares for war. Enloe (2007, 80) argues that any patriarchal system is perpetrated if its leaders and members agree on and sustain a standard of what should be a ‘proper’ femininity”. In sum, critical feminists contend that the needs of military institutions, and not women’s needs, determine women’s role in military settings, and they identify both sets of needs as incompatible.

Women combatants in non–state militarized organizations have also faced situations of patriarchal confusion. In Sandinista, Nicaragua, for example, the guerrilla organization rejected gender hierarchies and struggled for equality, but found it difficult to balance the needs of their military organization with the needs of women combatants (Mulinary 1998). The extent to which women fighting in illegal guerrilla groups have made significant progress in terms of achieving control over their lives is still debated among scholars studying gender and revolutionary processes. Karen Kampwirth (2001) argues that in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chiapas (Mexico), and Cuba, women managed to escape their traditional gender roles by joining militarized groups. According to Kampwirth, many women who were mobilized in guerrilla movements during the revolutionary process went on to become feminist activists. However, Diana Mulinary (1998) contends that in the case of revolutionary Latin America, equality for women was defined as ‘women fighting as men.’ Men remained the standard to which women fighters had to aspire. Women who reached high–ranking positions claimed that gender was irrelevant during the struggle as they were able to live up to the expectations set by the organization and ‘earned’

men's respect (Mulinary 1998). In Sandinista discourse, women who did not join the revolution as combatants were given the role of 'mothers' and 'girlfriends' of the revolution, not necessarily breaking down traditional notions of gender but rather deepening them (ibid.). In the Peruvian case, despite the fact that women were present at all levels inside the Shining Path movement, their needs and interests were not successfully incorporated and women's presence remained instrumental (Manchanda 2002). This is true of most progressive movements which have incorporated the emancipation of women among their goals. Sandra Hale argues that, to date, no liberation or revolutionary struggle has empowered women and men to sustain an emancipating atmosphere once the conflict is over (2002, 123).

Many of the gains made by women in terms of participating in non-traditional activities during war are reversed once the fighting is over. This has been the case in revolutionary struggles in both Africa and in Latin America, including Nicaragua (Hale 2002; Meintjes 2002; Enloe 2007). In a similar way, in African countries that have undergone armed conflict and war such as Angola, Sudan, Somalia, and Uganda, studies have shown that gender roles have changed over the course of the war, but have done so in line with existing gender ideologies (El-Bushra 2004, 164). However, the role changes brought about by war such as those lived by women in combat create opportunities to forge new social relationships and identities, including those based on gender (Manchanda 2002; Meintjes 2002; Enloe 2007; Potter 2008).

### **Theoretical Framework: Militarized Gender Performativity**

The lack of theoretical studies on the presence and experiences of women in illegal armed groups has left a gap in conceptual frameworks to approach and analyze the situation and experiences of women combatants in illegal armed groups in Colombia. The conceptual frameworks developed by feminists studying militarization, such as the approaches of Sandra Whitworth (2004) and Cynthia Enloe (1989, 1993, 2000, 2004, 2007) regarding the notion of

*militarized masculinities* are useful and insightful, although their focus is the study of male soldiers in legal armed groups and peacekeeping missions. However, the concept of militarized masculinities, which refers to a soldiering process in which masculine identities become hyper-masculine, is key in attempting to develop a conceptual lens through which to study the experiences of women combatants who have joined illegal armed groups. Militarized masculinities creates an ‘ideal soldier’ who is strong, threatening, aggressive, loyal, rational, and heterosexual. This ideal soldier represses emotions, vulnerabilities, and compassions, all of which are perceived to be feminine qualities. Looking deeper into Enloe’s concept of militarized masculinities denaturalizes soldiers’ hyper-masculine identity, and allows consideration of the identity implications that joining a militarized organization can have for women.

Enloe (1993, 2000, 2004) outlines the difference between militarism and militarization. According to Enloe, militarism is an ideology, a compilation of assumptions, values, and beliefs about the military which carry specific values about what is good, right, proper, and improper. However, militarization is a socio-political process involving the transformation of assumptions, the reassessment of priorities, and the evolution of values about the importance of militarism (2004). This process is not inevitable, and occurs during both peace and war when any part of a society becomes controlled by or dependant on the military or on military values and ideas (Enloe 1993). Militarization relies on specific notions about masculinity which become dominant through a process of legitimation, in which both men and women play roles which affect both women and men inside and outside the military (ibid.). This process is in line with the way patriarchal society is organized. Enloe defines patriarchy as “the structural and ideological system that perpetuates the privileging of masculinity” (2004: 4). According to her, patriarchy infantilizes, ignores, and trivializes what is thought to be feminine (ibid.).

From a feminist point of view, militarization as a process (rather than an event) is analytically comparable with processes such as industrialization, colonization, division of labour, reproduction, and sexual harassment (ibid.). It is also the glue that holds militaries together, since (male) members share an understanding of what it means to be male in their particular context. The militarization of masculinity is revealed through routines, policies, debates, and language within the military (ibid.). For instance, through the use of feminine adjectives to humiliate soldiers whose performance is below the expected average. As the analysis of women in the FARC and the AUC will show, these factors can and should be taken into account to study the ways in which femininity and, more generally gender, is militarized in illegal armed groups.

Enloe (1993, 73) proposes a three-part feminist analysis to study militarism. The first part of her analysis begins by approaching militarism as constructed and sustained by both state officials and social understandings of masculinity. In other words, militarism is both the result of concerted decisions made by groups of individuals pursuing specific interests, as well as based on cultural and social values. The second part, according to Enloe, should take into account that militarism relies on specific forms of masculinity. Militarism and masculinity are not synonyms and should not be approached as such; instead, militarism is based on certain kinds of values associated with masculinity. These are, according to Enloe, different from culture to culture, resulting in different varieties of militarized masculinity. In the Colombian context, varieties of masculinity can be found across the different armed groups (guerrillas, paramilitaries, the army, drug cartels) engaged in the local conflict. For instance, militarized masculinity in the paramilitary group was more destructive and reckless than in the left-wing guerrilla groups (Medina-Arbeláez 2009, 17). Enloe also acknowledges variation between militarized groups in the same country; she argues that the Nicaraguan Contras and the Nicaraguan Sandinistas posed

different challenges for “demilitarizers” (1993, 132). The third part of Enloe’s feminist analysis of militarism is based on the understanding that women play specifically feminine roles in the success of militarized masculinity (ibid., 73). Here, Enloe is referring to all the women who are directly or indirectly related to the militarizing process: wives and girlfriends of soldiers, women holding administrative positions in the army, and sex workers around military bases, among others. Enloe argues that militarization is a subtle process which goes beyond joining the military. According to her, militarization occurs in what people think, how they live their daily lives, and what goals they aspire to, which will affect their children and society. Thus, in Enloe’s words, militarization “creeps into ordinary routines” (2000, 2).

Enloe’s theory of militarized masculinities assumes, to a certain extent, that soldiers are male. Therefore, according to Enloe, women do partake in the militarization of masculinities in a myriad of ways, both directly and indirectly: as wives and girlfriends of soldiers, as secretaries in government defence institutions, as sex workers around military bases (2004, 149). Nevertheless, it is men who appear to be Enloe’s focus as soldiers. Although Enloe (1993, 2000) does engage in discussions about women who enter the military as soldiers, this is not her primary focus. Furthermore, Enloe’s analysis is based on legal militaries in developed countries. Although she mentions leftwing guerrilla movements in her analysis of US foreign policy in Latin America, she does not delve into the implications that the illegality and informality of these groups may have in the process of militarization, or what this means in terms of her concept of militarized masculinities.

Enloe’s framework is useful in addressing the situation of women in illegal armed groups, but needs to be complemented to consider the unique elements of these experiences and contexts. It is for these reasons that it is not possible to completely rely on Enloe’s theory to



analyze the situation of women combatants in illegal armed groups. However, Enloe's analysis is useful in analyzing the experiences of these women because she offers a comprehensive feminist view of militarization. For example, her analysis is relevant when looking at the daily experiences of women combatants as reflected in the answers to my interview questions. These experiences show the direct and indirect ways in which masculinity and femininity are militarized. Enloe asks the question "where are the women?" and proceeds to uncover the many and complex ways in which women take part in and comprise the process of militarization. Enloe (1993) argues that without a feminist view of militarization, we would not be able to reverse these trends. In her view, omitting gender from an analysis of militarization yields a flawed political analysis accompanied by unsuccessful efforts to roll back militarization (ibid.). She shows the ways in which men have become the primary actors in violence and war, unravelling the view that attributes this to their "nature." Rather, she shows that men are predominantly more violent because of social processes and structures that have excluded women of any political position with influence over the state's force (1989). All of these contributions are relevant in studies of a country like Colombia which continues to struggle against illegal militarized groups.

However, and beyond Enloe's argument, the experiences of women combatants in the AUC and in the FARC show that femininity, not just masculinity, can also be directly militarized in complex ways in illegal armed groups. Women who join illegal armed groups as combatants do not simply become like men; they go through different and contradictory processes which affect their feminine identities in a context of militarization. As the discussion on women in the AUC and the FARC will reveal, some women imitate men and adopt a militarized femininity as their gender identity in these groups. According to Enloe (1993, 174), militarized femininity relies on the manipulation of women and ideas of femininity in generating dominant ideas of

militarism. The presence of militarized femininity implies that some aspects of femininity are acceptable and desirable within militarized organizations. Although there are differences between the FARC and the AUC in this regard, female sexuality appears to be a central element in militarized femininity in these organizations. Just as Enloe argues that some values (strength, aggression, rationality) are necessary for militarized masculinities, so are specific feminine values associated with militarized femininity.

In her study of the United States army, the capture and rescue of Private Jessica Lynch in Iraq, as well as the torture scandal in Abu Ghraib in 2003, in which three women were accused of torturing and photographing Iraqi prisoners, Laura Sjoberg (2007), discusses the concept of militarized femininity. She states that militarized femininity is made up of stories about women's roles as soldiers which are told on the basis of their gender (83). Sjoberg contrasts the experiences and portrayal in the mainstream media of Jessica Lynch (victim), and Sabrina Harman, Megan Ambuhl, and Lynndie England—the three women involved in torturing Iraqi prisoners (victimizers)—to show that the ideal-type of militarized femininity is complex and contradictory. The kind of militarized femininity accepted and promoted in the U.S. military is one which reflects Jessica Lynch's toughness, but downplays the violence of the three women involved in the torture scandal. It endorses bravery, but not self-sufficiency, frailness, but not fear, and gives emphasis to the need to be rescued (93). Relevant for this discussion is the fact that militarized femininity in the US army relies on the idea that women soldiers should be masculine, but not above femininity. Although the experiences of members of the illegal armed groups studied are different from those of members of official military organizations that can be held accountable under specific rules and regulations, the ideal of militarized femininity as incorporating masculine *and* feminine ideals is also present in the Colombian illegal armed

groups. However, unlike the US media, which focused on Lynch as representative of women in the US military (to note, to the exclusion of other women captured with her including a black Hispanic women), the Colombian media has focused on the Harman, Ambuhl, and England types within the illegal armed groups. In this sense, illegal and legal armed groups and the media and the government, through DDR programs, include women in specific ways by interpreting and appropriating their complex experiences with militarized femininity.

Postmodern feminist and Queer theorist Judith Butler's insights on identity and gender identity, more generally, are relevant in considering how militarized masculinity and militarized femininity are lived by individuals in armed groups. Butler has advanced a theory of gender performativity, useful when looking at the situation of women in illegal armed groups, considered through Enloe's theoretical lens. Butler's body of work has been influential in feminism, gender studies, queer studies, and identity politics. Her approach to identity has challenged the assumptions underpinning the politics of identity, particularly in the areas of feminism, and gay and lesbian liberation movements (Lloyd 1999, 195). Butler's work has generated numerous philosophical and political debates, among other reasons but also because she presents subjects who are contingent and dependent on the recognition of the other (Salih 2004, 2). Underpinning Butler's theories is the idea that identity is a contingent construction which, despite its multiple forms, presents itself as singular and stable (ibid.). Butler has inquired as to how subject positions are assumed, and has challenged the belief that identity, including gender identity, has spatial and substantial qualities (Lloyd 1999, 196). In other words, she rejects the idea that gender identity has specific boundaries that separate one gender from another, as well as the belief that gender has an essence prior to the process of engendering (the attribution of feminine or masculine qualities).

According to Butler, gender identities are constructs and processes occurring in a culture. They are both performative and mimetic in the sense that there is no original gender, but that the illusion of an original gender is generated through the performance and repetition of specific gender roles. Gender, according to Butler, is not a substantial model of identity, but a constituted social temporality and is expressed through acts that give the appearance of substance (1990, 191). The importance of repetition and naturalization is key in Butler's theory of performativity, which states that, "what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body" (1990: xv). In other words, there is no original that is being imitated. Rather, gender is a copy of a copy, and the performativity of gender set forward by Butler operates under the belief that "the anticipation of a gendered essence produces that which it posits as outside itself" (ibid.). However, the subject does not possess radical free will to mould and shape the performance as he or she pleases. Rather, the subject is done by gender, at the same time that he or she is doing gender: "if the 'causes' of desire, gesture and act can be localized within the 'self' of the actor, then the political regulations and disciplinary practices which produce that ostensibly coherent gender are effectively displaced from view" (Butler 1990, 186). When this happens, gender seems to stop being political and discursive and adopts the appearance of a psychological core (ibid.). In Butler's words then, gender is "a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and perform in the model of belief" (192).

Performativity is both linguistic and theatrical, making gender identity impossible to internalize because it cannot be embodied. Gender identity, according to Butler, is organized, instituted, and inscribed on the *surface* of the body. Therefore, "such acts, gestures, enactments,

generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence of identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means” (Butler 1990, 185). Butler approaches the body not as a being, but as a variable boundary and a surface whose permeability is regulated in a political way (ibid., 12). In this sense, the body is a signifying practice within a cultural field of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality. Gender, on the other hand, is viewed by Butler as a corporeal style and an act, and thus “ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*” (191). It follows that gender is produced through the stylization of the body. Bodily gestures, movements, and styles constitute the illusion of an abiding gender (ibid.).

Butler argues that gender identity cannot be expressed because this implies it is something that individuals internalize. Since gender identity is performative, gender attributes constitute the identity they are said to express (ibid., 185). Butler argues that it is important to distinguish between expression and performativeness:

If gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no pre-existing identity by which a body shows or produces its cultural signification... an act or attribute might be measured there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction. That gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender’s performative character and the performative possibilities

for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality. (1990, 192)

The performative possibilities which Butler refers to include drag and parody. These cultural practices reveal the ways in which it is possible to re-enact gender in ways against the heterosexual grain, destabilizing distinctions between sex and gender, body and psyche, homosexuality and heterosexuality, masculinity and femininity. Drag, according to Butler, subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and calls into question the notion of true identity (1990, 2006). Drag does this by being contradictory in relation to the distinction of the anatomy of the performer and the gender performed: “*In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency*” (Butler 1990, 187 her emphasis). In this sense, drag parodies the belief in a true and original gender identity. Butler identifies drag and parody as instances which reveal the temporal and contingent aspects of gender identity as well as examples of the ways in which gender identities change. Thus, “the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found precisely in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a failure to repeat, a deformity, or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction” (ibid., 192).

Butler highlights the difference between performance and performativity. According to her, drag is a performance no less real and no less true than the performance of gender. In Butler’s “Changing the Subject: Judith Butler’s Politics of Radical Resignification,” drag is described as a “moment in which that performance is rendered explicit” (quoted in Butler 2004, 344). This does not mean gender can be performed in whatever ways someone pleases. Drag is a performance which reveals the performativeness of gender. According to Butler, gender performativity does not imply radical free will, but a free will constrained by “norms that

constitute, limit, and condition me; it's also delivering a performance within a context of reception and I cannot fully anticipate what will happen" (345). Gender performativity includes an aspect of performance, but that alone implies that the meaning of the performance is established by the intention of the actor. What is being performed and what distinguishes performance from performativity are cultural norms that condition and limit the actor, as well as cultural norms of reception of an audience that render the performance legible or illegible (ibid.). Gender is performed even if the audience is imaginary (Butler 2004).

Gender performativity places both dominant and non-dominant gender norms at the same level, since both are shown to be constructed. However, some of the "performative accomplishments" claim the place of nature, "and they do this only by occluding the ways in which they are performatively established." (ibid., 209). Gender performativity allows us to see the ways in which the norms that govern reality operate, and also allows us to grasp one of the mechanisms by which reality is reproduced and altered in the course of that reproduction (ibid.). Butler therefore argues, "genders can be neither true or false, neither real or apparent, neither original nor derived. As credible bearers of those attributes, however, genders can also be rendered thoroughly and radically *incredible*" (1990, 193 her emphasis).

Butler's theory of performativity has been controversial and subject to both praise and criticism (Lloyd 1999, 3). However, this theoretical framework is considered Butler's best-known and most misunderstood theory (Salih 2004, 90). One main point of contention is the relation between performance and performativity and its implications on agency. Butler's view of gender as something which cannot be expressed, but which is performed suggests that individuals have unconstrained free will in a manner that implies that "we can have whatever type of gender we want" (Probyn 1995, 79). Thus, if gender is performed, it is (mis)understood

that subjects can decide what gender to be in a manner as simplistic as changing clothes. Butler has both addressed and clarified this reading of her theory of gender performativity (Osborne and Segal 1994; also see preface of the 1999 anniversary edition of *Gender Trouble*). One of her responses involves clarifying the distinction between performance and performativity, and showing that agency is both constrained by gender performativity and freed to determine its own course (both clarifications are built into the explanation of Butler's theory of performativity presented in previous pages).

Taking into account Butler's clarifications on her theory of performativity, her theoretical framework is useful in explaining the case study at hand. In the case of women combatants in a context of protracted conflict, bodily gestures, movements, and styles distinguish women civilians from women in illegal armed groups. Gender transformation, using Butler's framework, is pervasive in both the FARC and the AUC as women have to abandon, transform, and adopt different aspects of a gender identity (in a performative way) once they join a militarized group. This happens within the cultural, political, and social context of Colombian society. Each organization has specific ideas on militarized femininity (and militarized masculinity) and each of these militarized genders comprises a specific realm of performativity. Women who join these organizations disrupt (civilian) traditional gender relations and enter a field of illegal militarized gender relations.

Both Butler (1990, 2004) and Enloe (1989, 1993, 2000, 2004, 2007) highlight the relevance of variation and contextual particularities. For instance, Enloe argues that notions of masculinity differ from one generation to the next and across cultural boundaries. Masculinity, according to both Enloe and Butler, is not abstract or monolithic, and this also applies to femininity, and gender in general. Enloe states that, "acknowledging varieties of masculinity



bound by time, culture, and subculture need not induce intellectual paralysis, such an effort could show us what any government serious about demilitarization, needs to do” (1993, 99). This statement is key in the study of women in illegal armed groups in Colombia, as differences among the groups should be relevant in the kind of services provided by the government as part of its DDR programs to women of different groups.

Theoretically, Enloe and Butler seem to have divergent views of agency. Enloe believes that, “women’s myriad relationships to militarist practices and to the military are far less the result of amorphous tradition or culture than they are the product of particular—traceable decisions” (2000, 34). For Enloe, actors in different levels of the government, and in the army, craft policies in ways that maintain specific notions of gender which are compatible with defence. On the other hand, in “Changing the Subject: Judith Butler’s Politics of Radical Resignification,” Butler contends that individuals are conditioned and limited by cultural norms, which means that their intentions can result in situations which they did not anticipate (quoted in Butler 2004, 345). In her words, “the performance of gender is also compelled by norms that I do not choose...the norms are the condition of my agency, and they also limit my agency...what I can do is, to a certain extent, conditioned by what is available for me to do within the culture and what other practices are and by what practices are legitimating” (345). However, Enloe’s view of agency acknowledges that decisions concerning gender and militarism are rooted in cultural context and operate within established assumptions. Similarly, these decisions can yield unexpected results. According to Enloe, different types of militarization can shed light on tensions and contradictions within those military systems and expose them as more fragile, impermeable, and changeable (1993, 86). Despite differences, therefore, there is a common potential for change which is present in both Enloe’s and Butler’s analysis. Similarly, Mohanty

argues that “it is only by understanding the *contradictions* inherent in women’s location within various structures that effective political action and challenges can be devised” (1984, 376).

Taking these insights into account, I propose the concept of “militarized gender performativity” to analyze the experiences of women and men in both the FARC and the AUC. This concept borrows central theoretical insights from both Enloe and Butler, and is presented as a synthesis of these two theories in relation to the militarization and performativity of gender. It maintains Enloe’s view of militarization as a process and acknowledges that this process involves gender in general, not only masculinities. My view of gender is in tune with Butler’s theory of gender performativity. Militarized gender performativity makes reference to the way gender is militarized within illegal armed groups, and to the way this manifests in the combatants’ bodies, understood as performative products of a signifying process (militarization). Militarized gender performativity is sustained and reproduced by notions and rules about masculinity and femininity, as well as by the way these notions and rules are performed on a daily basis. The notion of change implied in a DDR process (a transition from combatant to ex-combatant) is in line with both Enloe’s and Butler’s view of change. Militarized gender performativity, therefore, is a synthetic approach, a bifocal lens, through which to understand the experiences of ex-combatant women in Colombia. Militarized gender performativity is useful in approaching and analyzing the differences and similarities between the FARC and the AUC in terms of gender relations within these organizations. It is important to keep in mind that this is a study of illegal armed groups. It would, therefore, be more appropriate to present the concept of *illegal* militarized gender performativity. This would highlight the specific ways in which gender is militarized in organizations that are not accountable to legal frameworks, and, as a result, are more arbitrary than legal militarized organizations. However, since the concept of militarized

gender performativity can also be used to study gender in legal militarized organizations, it will be presented solely as militarized gender performativity and applied to the Colombian illegal armed groups.

Variation exists in Colombia between the FARC and the ACU as they employ tactics and strategies to keep their military machine running smoothly. These differences, as noted by Gutiérrez–Sanín (2008), include different ways of socializing female and male recruits. Both groups have a militaristic structure. However, they branch out based on their preferred view of the role men and women should play as members of their organization. There are various ways in which militarized gender performativity is moulded and experienced in each group. Both groups have different policies regarding relationships, contraception, pregnancies, and motherhood. These rules create a distinct female subject, militarized in different ways compared to her male peers as well as to her female peers in different armed groups. However, there are also multiple ways in which these militarized gender performativities overlap and converge. As we will see, the militarization of gender has hyper–masculine characteristics regardless of the illegal armed group. Similarities exist between the two illegal armed groups presented, as well as in the state’s view of these two groups.

The figure of *desmovilizado* has emerged in Colombia’s social and political consciousness as a result of the DDR programs established by the government. *Desmovilizados* are generic subjects constructed as male and disengaged from the group they were part of. The Colombian state, and the efforts carried out by state officials to ensure that the DDR process is successful have overlooked the different ways in which women combatants are socialized in each group. In other words, the DDR process has silenced the diversity that exists in relation to the militarized gender performativity of each group and has presented a unified *desmovilizado*

which is predominantly male. Not only are women silenced by the state's efforts, but their differences (and the differences between men and women in each group) are ignored and underestimated. This has been the case even though it is the state's role to design a comprehensive DDR agenda that addresses the needs of individuals according to both the group they belonged to and depending on their gender.

In employing the concept of militarized gender performativity as a synthesis of Enloe's and Butler's theories, the originality of this dissertation lies in the application of this adapted approach to an original and under-researched case study. This study will also be informed by the literature on women in war, and by the debates on women in the military in industrialized countries. I will also look at the emerging, but limited literature on women in illegal armed groups in developing countries. I will work with these various sets of studies, taking into account the literature on women in non-industrialized and non-state armies. I will, accordingly, interpret and rework the contributions made available by researchers and scholars who study women in developed countries.

### **Scope and Methods**

My research methodology is qualitative. For my primary research, I travelled to Colombia to carry out a total of 32 interviews with individuals who are part of the demobilization program established by the government of Colombia (five women from the AUC, eight women from the FARC, eleven male ex-members of the AUC, and eight male ex-members of the FARC). As part of the interview process, I also met with government officials working with the DDR program, and with a Scandinavian gender advisor who was hired by the Colombian government to assess, develop, and implement a gender lens to the DDR process. The interviews were carried out during the months of July and August 2010 and lasted between one half hour and two hours each. I visited one of the *Centro de Servicios* established by the *Alta*

*Consejería para la Reintegración Social y Económica de Personas y Grupos Alzadas en Armas*, or ACR (High Commission for Reintegration). This centre is located in a residential neighbourhood in Bogotá. The centre was established to serve the needs of Colombian ex-combatants. Services include: psychological assessment and help; advice on job-hunting and education; keeping track of their development within the DDR process. Ex-members of the FARC, the AUC, and the left-wing guerrilla movement *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN) converge in these centres, and there is no disaggregation according to which armed group individuals have been part of.

This study is based on two sets of methodological approaches: (1) the ethnography of violence, and (2) feminist approaches to methodology. Most research on conducting fieldwork in conflict and post-conflict contexts comes from anthropologists who have engaged in theoretical and normative discussions on the topic (Fujii 2010, 239). According to Fujii (239), there have been less reflections among political scientists on collecting data in these settings. In terms of feminist approaches to methodology, this study takes into consideration the insights provided by feminist engaged in discussions about methodology such as Gorelick (1991), Oakley (1998), and Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002). These scholars are all concerned with devising ways to carry out research that is aware of power inequalities between researcher and participant. These two sets of methodological approaches, ethnographic and feminist, ground the present study.

### **The Ethnography of Violence**

Kovats-Bernat (2002, 212) argues that violence can distort reality, generate confusion, paralyze, and misinform, and that this affects ethnographic analyses. For this reason, methodology on research in “dangerous fields” should be approached “not as rigid or fixed... but, rather as an elastic, incorporative, integrative, and malleable practice. It should be informed by the shifting social complexities unique to unstable field sites” (210). This makes reference,

among other things, to the difficulty of following a previously devised methodological plan and to the importance of improvisation. For instance, Kovats–Bernat has carried out research on street children in Haiti and has found himself at risk on several occasions. He has found that the information gathered through these experiences makes of the ethnographic environment, data in itself (ibid., 212).

I did not experience any known risks during my fieldwork in Colombia. However, the process of carrying out the interviews and the setting in which they were carried out, presented me with information I did not expect. For instance, it was interesting to find individuals who had been members of competing groups sitting side by side in a small and crowded waiting room in the Centro de Servicios where I conducted the interviews. The Centro de Servicios which I got assigned to by the ACR was in a residential area, on a quiet street. It operated in a white row house with no signs indicating it was part of the DDR program. After ringing the doorbell beside a door made of frosted glass and iron spindles, a security guard welcomed me (after checking the content of one's bag, and carrying out a quick body–search on male visitors) into the waiting area. There were a few chairs clustered together with people sitting on them. Several people would be waiting to be seen by psychologists or social workers. This was the scene during most mornings when I arrived. Individuals were asked for their identification number, the purpose of their visit, and were asked to wait. I was also asked to wait while the receptionists announced that a researcher was present and looking for volunteers to participate in an interview. This, I was told, was the standard procedure. I was also unable to find out which organization an individual belonged to until I was interviewing him or her. As I waited in this small room alongside DDR participants, I was able to listen to and participate in informal conversations. I was surprised to hear ex–members of the AUC and ex–members of the FARC engaging in casual conversations,

sharing jokes, and being courteous with each other. I had expected a tense environment fraught with feelings of suspicion and mistrust among members of the DDR program, most of who had been fighting each other for many years. It was interesting to be able to witness these interactions. Despite the fact that the Colombian conflict continues to be waged, and despite the animosity that existed (and continues to exist) between the different armed groups in the battlefield, there was no apparent tension in the Centros de Servicio.

I carried out the interviews in a small office close to the reception. None of the interviews were terminated by participants, and none opted out of answering any specific questions (see Appendix 2 for interview questions). In terms of content, the interviews with women probed how they viewed their experiences in light of gender roles, and whether or not they saw themselves as challenging and breaking down traditional gender roles during the time they were combatants. The interviews also addressed their experience during the demobilization program and their expectations of civilian life. In a similar way, the interviews with men explored their perceptions and understanding of fellow women combatants, and their views of women's roles during and after the DDR program. The two sets of interviews (from women and men DDR participants in the AUC and the FARC) elucidate differences and similarities in perceptions in both groups.

Fujii (2010) carried out fieldwork in Rwanda as part of her research on violence after the genocide in 1994. She reflects on the meta-data embedded in testimonies of genocide survivors, which she defines as “spoken and unspoken expressions about people’s interior thoughts and feelings... include rumors, silences, and invented stories” (232). According to her, the value of oral testimonies collected in contexts of pervasive violence lies not only in the truthfulness of their content (231). Silences carry meaning with them and can hide as well as reveal important information that would otherwise go unnoted (237). Silence also has different connotations

depending on the context. For instance, Marguerite Feitlowitz (1998, 34) notes that the Argentinean slogan “silence is health,” which made reference to a governmental campaign to reduce the unnecessary use of beeping in Buenos Aires before the coup, became an expression understood to make reference to the dangers of speaking against the military regime.

Fujii (2010, 238) encountered silence surrounding the topic of sexual violence during the Rwandan genocide. However, she notes that she did not ask any questions on this topic during her interviews, considering it “too invasive.” Instead, she waited for participants to bring it up (but very few did) (ibid.). This reveals the sensitive nature of carrying out fieldwork on topics related to sexuality and sexual violence, both which are prevalent topics in this study. None of the participants in this study refused to speak about issues surrounding sexuality during our interview. The questions presented to them were phrased in a way that allowed participants to answer in general terms, without necessarily giving information about their personal experience on sensitive topics like abortion. Most answers began with general statements and slowly became more detailed and personal. Despite the willingness to share anecdotes and information about this and other topics, there were occasions in which silences occurred during a particular testimony. These unspoken expressions (as well as others such as laughter), are noted in parenthesis in the quotations from the interviews presented in this dissertation. Taking into account the above considerations, this study approaches narratives of violence as valuable.

My empirical research was challenging in several ways. Despite the fact that none of the individuals whom I interviewed expressed concern regarding my interview questions, interviewing men and women about abuse, punishment, forced contraception, and forced abortions within their organizations can be fraught with many challenges. Indeed, as Amnesty International’s report notes, “there are considerable difficulties for research in the field of



violence against women, particularly in making direct contact with survivors of abuse, many of whom fear retaliation attacks or being shamed by their family and community” (2004, 5).

Engaging in conversations with individuals who have experienced difficult situations, both physically and emotionally, can affect the quality and quantity of the information gathered.

There were instances during my field research in which an individual would gladly share details of their experiences. There were also times, however, when individuals agreed to be interviewed, but were not too keen on giving details about their personal experiences as members of an illegal armed group. A small number of these individuals steered the interviews towards a general discussion of the FARC and the AUC and gave vague statements. This is visible in my analysis since there are individuals whose testimony is more widely cited. However, I made an effort to include all of the material gathered during my interviews.

It is worth mentioning that some of the ex-combatants in the Colombian DDR program are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD occurs to some individuals in the aftermath of a traumatic event in which their physical integrity was threatened (DeJonghe et al. 2008, 294). PTSD causes several psychological and physiological disorders including, but not limited to, anxiety and depression (Flannery 1999). Most individuals who experience traumatic events show symptoms of PTSD, but the disorder is considered to be present if these symptoms continue for more than three months (ibid.). Multiple victimization experiences and prolonged exposure to a distressing event increases the likelihood of an individual developing PTSD (Hattendorf et al. 1999; Cascardi et al. 1995; O’Keffe 1994). Victims of PTSD are at risk of engaging in substance abuse and committing suicide (Bergman and Brismas 1993; DeJonghe et al. 2008). All members of the Colombian DDR program are required to attend meetings with a social worker, and the program offers additional access to psychologists. PTSD is a factor that

can affect the answers given by the individuals I interviewed.

Motivations to join an illegal armed group are another challenging topic of research, particularly when inquiring about it with individuals who are no longer active members of an organization. Motivations, in this respect, are fluid and change in the way the individual accounts for them and how they are verbalized, depending on whether or not the combatant has demobilized: “soldiers can simply have mixed, confused or even contradictory motivations... but without understanding them, the whole specificity of war as a distinct human activity is lost” (Gutiérrez–Sanín 2008, 20). In my analysis, war is approached as a distinct *gendered* human activity grounded on an uncertain and shifting context, and I recognize that military organizations construct their members through organizational means and practices of war. These individuals are situated in specific regions and in concrete time–frames (Enloe 2000). The authenticity of the information gathered in the interviews I carried out has to be approached taking into account the context, as “perpetrators of violence have reasons to conceal their crimes... out of fear of retaliation by armed groups” (Rozema 2008, 426). Relying on interviews to gather information is limiting in a context of ongoing conflict and widespread distrust (Theidon 2009, 11). All of the testimonies were given during a time in which these individuals were no longer part of an illegal armed group and they spoke about memories they had about their time as active combatants. In addressing such interviews, Marguerite Feitlowitz, who interviewed survivors of torture after the military dictatorship in Argentina, states: “Depending on the circumstances, memory can be clear or dim, fluid or clotted. There may be guilt, resistance, fear, fury, suspicion, distrust, despair. When the boundaries between past and present are seen to weaken, belief in the importance of giving testimony may diminish or intensify” (1998, 16).

These challenges were magnified taking into account that there have been few in depth comparative studies made between the FARC and the AUC, due to the lack of information available and the illegal nature of both groups. Several field studies and journalistic accounts have generated a limited pool of empirical knowledge on the topic. Notably, Gutiérrez–Sanín states that there is “no possibility of making a systematic statistical comparison between the two groups” (2008, 28). Furthermore, there is no agreement in terms of quantitative data concerning demobilized combatants in Colombia (Londoño and Nieto 2006, 92). Londoño and Nieto found significant inconsistencies in data provided by different government entities and NGOs involved in DDR processes (ibid.). This means that data is not concentrated in a unified information system. In terms of data concerning gender, Londoño and Nieto note that the only figure that is disaggregated by gender is that of the total number of individuals demobilized, and this too is a highly contested number. These discrepancies, and the absence of data on women, makes it challenging for researchers to carry out gender studies on the topic of DDR programs in Colombia (ibid., 94). Furthermore, discrepancy and lack of information help to perpetuate the belief that women are either not present in illegal armed groups, or that their presence is not significant enough to merit recognition (ibid., 94–95).

In taking this concern into consideration, I have ensured that my analysis relies on empirical and (limited) statistical data presented by Amnesty International (2004), Caicedo (2005), Cárdenas–Sarrias (2005), Londoño and Nieto (2006), Schwitalla and Dietrich (2007), Gutiérrez–Sanín (2008), Kunz and Sjöberg (2009), Medina–Arbeláez (2009), and Theidon (2009), as well as journalistic accounts about the experiences of women in the Colombian armed groups, most notably the book titled *Las Mujeres en la Guerra* (Women in War), by Patricia Lara (2000). All of these studies together ground the set of interviews I conducted in Colombia

during my fieldwork.

The Colombian DDR process is unique because it unfolded, and continues to unfold, during ongoing conflict. There is no such thing as a post-conflict society serving as a backdrop to the process, and this presents challenges to the study of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of combatants. Ex-paramilitary members gave up their arms during a period which did not include a demobilization process of the guerrilla groups. The demobilization of AUC members occurred parallel to the continuous recruitment of civilians by leftwing guerrillas like the FARC. The integration of ex-paramilitary members into society is happening in a context in which the militarization of Colombian society is pervasive: drug cartels continue to operate throughout the national territory, guerrillas continue their fight against the government, and the armed forces continue trying to maintain a firm grip on the country's security. Some ex-AUC members have opted to re-mobilize under what has come to be known as *Bandas Criminales Emergentes* (BACRIM) (Emerging Criminal Groups). These groups are different from the previous AUC units and are considered to be a hybrid of drug mafias, paramilitary groups, and common delinquency (Porch and Rasmussen 2008).

### **Feminist Approaches to Methodology**

In an attempt to avoid the methodological issues generated by women-only samples such as the bias outlined by Oakley (1998), I included male ex-combatants in my interview process. This is in tune with a conceptual understanding of "gender" as not only being synonymous with women, but also including and referring to men (Theidon 2009, 7). Gender is understood, in other words, as a social construction, a "dramatic and contingent construction of meaning" (Butler 1990, 190). Men's experiences are constitutive of gender relations and, in the Colombian case, of the militarization of women's lives as combatants and members of the DDR program established by the government. Men's experiences during conflict relate to women's

vulnerability in conflict and post–conflict situations, and to the higher likelihood that women will face domestic violence (Potter 2008, 109). The methodology I applied during my interviews was fully informed by ongoing debates on feminist approaches to methodology, which attempt to uncover hidden relationships of oppression and the power inequalities between researcher and participants (Gorelick 1991). Feminists approach to methodology is consistent with feminism’s basic tenets and is responsive to debates, disruptions, challenges, and changes within feminism itself. In the words of Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002): “Feminist methodology implies a connection between politics, ethics, and epistemology, whether researchers like it or not.” This relationship exists because feminist theorization is first and foremost about knowledge production, knowledge disruption, and knowledge reproduction. Its main objective is to challenge dominant constructions of objectivity as predominantly masculine, on the grounds that it produces and reproduces a biased hierarchical and oppressive way to understand women in society. In this sense, hegemonic knowledge production in the West is organized and legitimized under certain methodological models. In questioning, challenging, and disrupting dominant frameworks of knowledge, feminists have also disrupted dominant ways of acquiring knowledge—that is, the dominant methodological models associated with patriarchal knowledge creation. In doing this, feminist academics face constraints in terms of research that stems from their own epistemological foundations and commitments vis-à-vis dominant ways of conducting research which are considered to be objective.

Feminist approaches to methodology are, thus, self–conscious and nuanced in the sense that this type of research “requires that someone be able to step back and do that analysis... raising again the questions of the segregation of milieus, the social biography of researchers, the research–participant relationship...” (Gorelick 1991, 473). Kovats–Bernat (2002, 213) argues

that experience in the field allows researchers to “read” their environment, and creates a deep understanding that goes beyond what can be gained at a distance through formal methodologies. From a feminist point of view, my position as a researcher is integral and inseparable from the process of knowledge production. My background is Colombian, I speak the language, I was able to pick up on social cues, and I was sensitive to local references during the process of interviewing ex-combatants from the Colombian illegal armed groups. Furthermore, I was able to “read” my environment, and was able to navigate the city taking the appropriate and familiar precautions to ensure I minimized any potential risk to my well-being.

I am also a student who has carried out all of her post-secondary education in Canadian universities in a foreign language, and who has been exposed to predominantly western frameworks of knowledge. These particularities are insignificant from a broad methodological perspective, but within feminists’ methodologies they are relevant in the nature of the relationship between interviewee and interviewer; how this relationship is constituted and understood is of political, ethical, and epistemological concern and must be made explicit (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002). Although I based my interviews on a set of questions which I had formulated beforehand, I allowed the individuals whom I interviewed to guide the discussion (as much as possible). For instance, if the person in question was more interested in talking about the DDR program than about personal experiences as a member of the FARC or the AUC, I did not interrupt or pressure them to talk about something else. Respecting individuals’ preferences was key in maintaining feminist principles during the interview process. In addition, I let the participants know that they could ask any questions they would like to have answered about the interview topics or about my research. These efforts, although not exhaustive of feminist approaches to methodology, allowed me to ameliorate the power inequalities that exist between

researcher and participants.

One final methodological consideration within the area of feminist approaches to methodology concerns the literature on intersectionality. This literature occupies a central space in feminism (Yuval–Davis 2006, 206). It refers to the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination (gender, race, class, ethnicity, disability status, sexuality, nationality, age, geography, immigration status, religion, and others) (ibid., 193–195). Intersectionality analyses attempt to avoid “categorical hegemony,” which involves prioritizing one form of discrimination (e.g., gender) over another (e.g., race) (Creese and Stasiulis 1996, 8). When considering gender above all other social divisions, categorical hegemony runs the risk of generating an “ahistorical image of women as universal victims” and it assumes that women are inherently opposed to oppression and violence (Trotz 2004, 9–10). Acknowledging that gender issues within the FARC and the AUC operate in a racialized context, and that Afro–Colombian female combatants experience armed conflict in a specific manner, is important in intersectional analyses.

This study acknowledges the importance of intersectionality, although it remains primarily focused on gender. At present, accessing information on other social divisions, particularly from the FARC, is nearly impossible. Without this information, attempting an intersectional analysis would imply studying different identities under one (gender). Reducing one social division to another is a misleading way of approaching intersectionality (Creese and Stasiulis 1996; Yuval–Davis 2006; Dhamoon 2010). This is because each social division has a distinct ontological basis and each prioritizes different spheres of social relations (Yuval–Davis 2006, 201). This study recognizes the specificity of gender in the context of other forms of difference, and acknowledges that women participate in the production of difference and in the oppression of other women based on the grounds of social divisions such as race (Trotz 2004,

10). In the case at hand, this would include hierarchies within each illegal armed group as well as differences between the armed groups.

The theoretical, empirical, and methodological complexities of this study are all part of studying a relatively under-researched topic in a context which is equally complex. As a result, the present study yields as many questions and spaces for further research as it does answers. Thus, this study is located in a dynamic juncture which continues to move in unexpected ways. Uncertainty over the success of the Colombian DDR program and the future demobilization of the FARC and the ELN, as well as the magnitude and consequences of the emerging criminal bands post-DDR are just some factors which will influence the future of the Colombian conflict, and which will affect the lives of women (and men) who have been part of it, in one way or another, for generations.



### **Chapter 3. Armed Struggle and War in Colombia**

Dominant representations of Colombia in international and national media, politics, and academic discourses show the country as predominantly violent and dangerous. According to Colombian scholar Clemencia Rodríguez (2001), this portrayal attributes a particular gender to the country following dominant representations of gender roles: “In an organized system of cultural codes in which the signifier ‘violent’ is closely linked with the signifier ‘masculine,’ the later ends up being associated with Colombia. Hence, Colombia becomes, in the collective imagination, a masculine term itself” (489). Rodríguez writes that in relation to development discourse, dominant western accounts of the war on drugs construct Colombian civilians as “impotent victims to be rescued from warring forces” (ibid., 482). In these discourses, women are invisible and their existence becomes activated only through male desire. According to Rodríguez, “this is a type of patriarchal cultural universe wherein men see through women to interact and engage with other men; and although women are present in flesh, bone, and history, they are not seen” (484–485).

In this context of conflict, it is not easy to identify women’s voices. French–Colombian feminist Florence Thomas argues that the existence of a patriarchal culture that refuses to acknowledge the historical presence and agency of Colombian women has made them invisible in areas such as economics, politics, and development (1997, 20). Scholarship on Colombian women is mostly produced in historical accounts of their achievements in Colombian society, highlighting women’s traditional roles as mothers, educators, and nurturers (Jaramillo–Castillo 1995; Londoño 1995; Marulanda–Álvarez 1995). The focus has primarily been on issues that are associated with traditional gender roles, such as those related to children’s organizations, charity, education, and health.

## Women in Colombia: From Independence to the National Front

Clemencia Rodríguez argues further that Colombian women's general invisibility can be explained because "the imagined community of Colombia is grounded in a discourse of masculine images and metaphors" (2001, 489). Little is known of the role Colombian women have played as perpetrators of violence at different points in time. Recent studies have shown that women have been not only helpless victims of national violence, but also empowered actors who have both resisted and promoted violence (Lara 2000; Moser and Clark 2001; Londoño and Nieto 2006; Medina-Árbelaez 2009). Political violence has been present in the history of Colombia since its independence from Spain in the first half of the nineteenth century, and women have been part of the struggles at both ends of the spectrum since then.<sup>7</sup> The presence of women in illegal armed groups is thus not new. However, the numbers of women who join these types of groups and the roles they play as members have changed over time. Furthermore, the exact role of women in the process of independence remains unclear because it has not been recorded historically (Jaramillo-Castillo 1995, 360). Colombian women were officially excluded from the military aspect of the process of independence, but are believed to have made their way to the ranks illegally (ibid.).

Attempts to create a sense of cohesion after independence focused on transcending ethnic differences for the sake of national unity. These efforts gave rise to the notion of *mestizaje* (racial 'mixture') which gave the *Creole* elites a sense of distinctiveness from the Spanish empire as well as a way to address the question of difference.<sup>8</sup> During this time, difference was politicized

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<sup>7</sup> Gran Colombia (1819–1830) was the name given to the newly independent republic in 1819, which was territorially composed of present-day Panama, Ecuador, Colombia, and Venezuela. The constitution, drafted in 1821, declared it a federal republic, but some of the constitutive units were unwilling to cooperate and disagreements regarding the future of the republic propelled its decline.

<sup>8</sup> *Mestizo* is a racial category which was initially used by the Spanish to designate people who had both Indigenous and European blood. Due to the high levels of intermarriage between the different races, *mestizo* came to signify the general state of the population; this was a meeting point which made reference to a Latin American (as opposed to

for the most part as ethnic. In Colombia, as in the rest of Latin America, states and societies were constructed through the conquest, domination, and exploitation of indigenous peoples (Van Cott 2000, 2). Since the establishment of the Republic, the interests of the elites have overridden ethnic struggles and silenced women's nonconformity. Elites have focused on managerial concerns, such as the role of the Catholic Church in political affairs and the level of centralization considered beneficial for the unity of the Republic. Most recently, the violent conflict, approached as a public matter, has been at the centre of political discourse. From a feminist perspective, this is one of the reasons why women, whose domain has historically been assumed to be the private realm, have been largely excluded from the political process due to their condition as women.

Patricia Londoño (1995) notes that the main characteristics of the feminine ideal during the nineteenth century in Colombia revolved around the domestic/private realm. The most important and religiously-enforced behaviour was that of being docile, compliant, and faithful to their husbands (309). In a letter from 1878, writer José María Vergara y Vergara wrote:

...for men, the noise and the thorns of glory; for women, the roses and the comfort of the home; for him, the smoke of the gun powder; for her, the smoke of the stove. He destroys. She conserves. He creates disorder. She cleans; he swears, she blesses; he complains, she prays. (quoted in Londoño 1995, 312)

Historically, the Catholic Church has played a prominent role in the political and private spheres in Colombia. Constitutionally, and until 1993, the church was directly involved in maintaining

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Spanish) identity. In a discussion regarding the importance of this category in the national imaginary of most South American countries, Antonio Cornejo Polar states: "what mestizaje does is to offer a harmonious image of what is obvious disjointed...only relevant to those for whom it is convenient to imagine our society as smooth and non-conflictive spaces of coexistence" (2004, 76). In his discussion about the emergence of nationalism and the significance of the American independence movements, Benedict Anderson defines *Creole* as a person of pure European descent but born in America who was excluded from important official positions which were only granted to Spanish people who were born in Spain. This vertical immobility was the main reason for seeking independence (1983, 58-59).

social order through a pact with the government called the *Concordato*. This pact was signed in 1887 between the Colombian state and the Vatican. It gave power to the Catholic Church in matters of education and civil legislation (marriage in particular). *Potestad Marital* was passed in the civilian code; it obliged women to give up the right to administer their property, inheritance, and salary. Until 1932, women were required to seek the authorization of their husband if they planned to engage in any type of commercial activity (Wills–Obregón 2007, 93). Furthermore, it severely punished adulterous behaviour and women found guilty of the act could be sent to jail for up to four years. Men were not subject to such legislation; if they were found guilty of uxorial murder (the murder of a woman by her husband), they would be exonerated if it was proven that their wife had been unfaithful (ibid., 94).

The power of the Catholic Church in matters of the state had a great impact on the role of women in both the private and the public spheres, and a particular type of femininity and masculinity was promoted. Schools were gender segregated and curriculum for girls emphasized domestic chores and child–rearing. Although women were allowed to attend university, men were more prepared academically through a curriculum that emphasized scholastic areas, and they were thus more likely to be accepted than women (Wills–Obregón 2007, 94). This, along with traditional perceptions of women’s roles as homemakers, explains why there was a large gap in numbers between men and women attending university until the middle of the twentieth century (ibid.).

In general, Latin Americans have been codified as mestizos in dominant historical discourses of the region. The concept of mestizo derives from historically dominant representations of indigenous mothers raped by the European colonizers. This has led to a collective obsession with purifying women’s bodies, along with the idealization of women

around the Catholic code of the two originary women: Mary and Eve (Thomas 1997, 24).

Florence Thomas argues that Colombian women have been seen as either asexual Marys or over-sexualized Eves, and that this categorization has led to decentred subjects who get lost in the goals, needs, and desires of others (ibid.). The duality between Mary and Eve is inscribed in the feminine with respect to particular physical territories; women located inside the home are interpreted as Marys, whereas women in the public space become sexualized Eves. An idealized view of femininity based on the image of Mary is popularly known as *marianismo* (Quiñones-Mayo and Resnick 1996, 263). This view, along with the Latin American construction of masculinity through *machismo*, has shaped the presence of women in public spaces (Rodríguez 2001). Machismo is a popular term that makes reference to Latin American masculinity. This type of masculinity is constructed based on an image of a male who is caring, responsible, and strong, but also emotionally insensitive and promiscuous (ibid., 264). Both machismo and marianismo have been influenced by Catholic traditions although their characteristics vary depending on the country.

Gender inequality was not a salient political matter during the years following independence. However, starting in the 1870s, voices of dissent began being heard in public life. Many of the dissenters concerned with gender equality were educated men who had travelled to Europe and the United States and who had been exposed to progressive ideas (Londoño 1995, 314). Nonetheless, these critics were inconsistent in their views and conduct. Their “modern ideas” and their traditional roles in a national reality that was not open to changing women’s roles were contradictory. This situation started to change and the decade of the 1920s saw the first mobilizations by women to demand equal rights. The 1930s was a decade in which various women’s organizations in Colombia managed to abolish and amend legislation pertaining to

women. For instance, in 1933, women were offered standard education and equal opportunity to attend college. In 1936, they were allowed to hold public office. This last constitutional change was paradoxical since women were still not citizens with the same rights as men (Wills–Obregón 2007, 98). Protests and collective unrest grew as countries in Latin America legalized women’s suffrage. Colombian women gained the right to vote in 1954, during the short–lived military dictatorship of General Gustavo Rojas–Pinilla.<sup>9</sup> During this administration, women formed a coalition across political parties and worked together to be granted the right to vote (ibid.). Political affiliation was closely related to the type of agenda these women promoted. While many conservative women did not challenge the assumption that women’s natural role was to remain mothers and wives, leftist women fought for women’s rights within the larger framework of worker’s labour struggles (ibid., 99). This difference between Conservative and Liberal women was in tune with the widespread partisan conflict of the time.

Political disputes became polarized early on after independence under the Liberal and Conservative political parties, which, in principle, governed in the name of all the citizens of the Republic. Over time, membership in each of the parties became associated with primordial sentiments. People believed themselves to be born into one of the two parties: “Most Colombians, when asked about their loyalty to one or the other party, give answers [such as] because my father was a Liberal... because of blood... because I was born a Liberal...” (Dix 1967, 211). In his studies on political violence in Colombia, Daniel Pécaut identifies the type of violence that arose from party membership, and which reached its climax in the late 1940s as ‘hereditary hatred’ (1987, 16). This historical period (1946–1958), known as *La Violencia* (the violence), began escalating a few years before the assassination of Liberal leader Jorge Eliécer

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<sup>9</sup> The first country in Latin America to legalize women’s suffrage was Ecuador in 1929, and the last one was Paraguay in 1961.

Gaitán in Bogotá, April 9, 1948. After sixteen years of Liberal presidents, Conservative candidate Mariano Opina Pérez (1946–1950) won the presidency in 1946. This, and the removal of Liberal officials from important government posts, intensified the tensions between the two political parties (Offstein 2003, 101). The assassination of Gaitán in 1948 was the climax of the violence between the Liberals and Conservatives as the former accused the latter of assassinating him. A decade of violence followed Gaitán’s assassination, as Liberal peasants armed themselves to fight against police-backed Conservative peasants (Molano 2000, 24).

Paradoxically enough, the social and cultural differences among the two parties, as well as their ideological differences, were trivial (Uribe 2004, 83). María Victoria Uribe (2004) argues that the type of violence experienced during *La Violencia*, which relied on tactics to terrorize society such as massacres, is similar to the ones employed a few decades later by the guerrillas and paramilitaries in Colombia. She notes that *La Violencia* stands out in terms of its magnitude (over 200,000 dead) and the impunity surrounding the devastating crimes that were carried out during those years (ibid., 82).

Most academic works on *La Violencia* do not show women as being direct participants of the violence that spread throughout the country during this period since they played a secondary role in party politics. Elsy Marulanda-Álvarez (1995), who has studied women and violence in Colombia during the 1950s, notes that although women have been present in all phases of national violence in every region, they have to a large extent been considered the defendants of the physical integrity of the family. This does not necessarily imply women’s victimization, but shows how women’s involvement in the conflict has historically been as “differentiated actors” who experienced violence as combatants or victims always in their condition as female (ibid., 95). Marulanda-Álvarez also notes that sexual violence has been common as an act of violence

against not only women themselves, but also against “other” men (i.e., Liberals and Conservatives). Sexuality has therefore been an important element in women’s historical experiences of war in Colombia. Furthermore, the control of women’s reproductive capacities also appears to be of significant importance for women who joined militias during the twentieth century; in fact, female militia members suspected of being pregnant were murdered (ibid.). This “appropriation” of women’s sexuality and reproduction has specific characteristics in the Latin American region that can be linked to the impact of the region’s colonial history and Catholic discourse (Rodríguez 2001).

Jaramillo–Castillo (1995) notes that women’s involvement in warfare can be traced back to the 100 Day War (1899–1902) between the Liberal and the Conservative parties (the Conservatives were in charge of the government at this point in time). Jaramillo–Castillo’s findings situate women’s roles in national violent episodes prior to *La Violencia*, showing that women’s involvement began during the periods of violent confrontations between the two official parties. Thus, despite not participating in the public sphere in the same way as men, women played numerous roles during violent periods in Colombian history. Some of these conformed to the expected gender roles, but others challenged them.

In the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century, women engaged in violent confrontations between the two parties. They provided logistical support, carried out domestic chores, and supplied food, weapons, and health care. They acted as messengers and spies, became members of urban organizations to support the fighting, and worked as grave diggers (Jaramillo–Castillo 1995, 362–372). Jaramillo–Castillo also notes that, although it was not the norm, some women did participate in the conflict between Liberals and Conservatives as combatants. There was a difference between the two parties in this regard: women were official



members of the Liberal militias (between 6 percent and 22 percent according to military reports of the time), but not of the Conservative army (*ibid.*, 372). The Liberals organized as “guerrillas” of irregular character which facilitated the participation of women. Having to abide by the law, which stipulated that women could not be soldiers, Conservatives fought in the National Army and could not incorporate any women in their ranks (375). Despite this difference, Jaramillo–Castillo notes that Conservative women organized in parallel military groups. There was only one woman recorded joining the National Army at the beginning of the twentieth century, Blancina Ramírez (375). This discrepancy explains why women in the Liberal guerrillas occupied middle ranks and could become battalion officers. Jaramillo–Castillo argues that during these early wars, women who joined the ranks as combatants were not given the same treatment as men, but were treated with respect following appropriate gender codes of the time. They were also subject to punishment specifically designed according to traditional gender roles; they were shamed in public by tying their long skirts over their heads to expose their underwear (384).

Bipartisan violence was reduced with the establishment of a power–sharing arrangement, expressed in the National Front (1958–1974). Representatives of the Conservative and Liberal parties agreed to establish a consociational agreement by signing the Declaration of Benidorm on July 24, 1956 and the Declaration of Sitges on July 20, 1957. Both parties alternated the presidency every four years and were entitled to one half of the legislative seats. The main objective of the National Front was to reduce the levels of bipartisan violence throughout the country. Liberal Alberto Lleras Camargo (1958–1962) was the first president under the National Front agreement. In an effort to reduce violence and rural discontent, President Lleras launched an agrarian reform program in 1958 (Offstein 2003, 102). However, lack of funds and corruption affected the efficiency of land redistribution. The failure of the government to establish a

comprehensive agrarian reform was a factor which played an important role in the consolidation of the Colombian guerrilla groups, including the FARC (Lee 2012, 30). In addition, high unemployment and the absence of basic services in urban and rural areas continued to generate more discontent (Offstein 2003, 102).

Although the National Front is seen as marking the culmination of the historical period of *La Violencia*, it did not prove successful in ending political violence in the long-term (Bushnell 1993). Instead, it became “a model of coercion and political exclusion that opened the doors to a wave of violence which the country is still experiencing” (Cepeda–Castro 2004). The links between the National Front and the present state of affairs in Colombia is traced back to the exclusion of non-elites and marginal sectors from the decision-making process (Offstein 2003, 101; Romero 2003, 182; Posada–Carbó 2007, 120). The effects of excluding small political parties from the government were enhanced by the Colombian presidential system which, until the constitutional change in 1990, was characterized by a centralized and relatively autonomous executive. Liberals and Conservatives controlled who accessed state power at all levels of government, making it impossible for smaller parties to have any influence in governmental matters. For instance, the president chose regional governments directly, who then appointed municipal mayors. Governors and mayors were popularly elected as late as 1990. For this reason, small parties, including left-wing parties, became radicalized during the National Front. Many of their members joined the illegal militias that would eventually become illegal guerrilla groups fighting to overthrow the state.

The National Front ended with *La Violencia*, seen as a historical period of armed confrontation between the two biggest parties, but it did not end with *la violencia* (violence). The transformation in the Colombian conflict is representative of the protracted character of the

Colombian conflict over time. According to Brecher and Wilkenfeld (2000, 5), protracted conflicts extend over long periods of time, fluctuate in frequency and intensity, and are experienced as events *and* processes. In Colombia, this also includes the existence of several competing actors which have experienced changes and transformations over time.

### **Colombian Women: Democracy, Collective Action, and Inclusion**

During the 1970s and 1980s, women mobilized to demand the legalization of abortion (1978) and organized the first feminist assembly (1981). Conservative sectors and the Catholic Church expressed their disagreement regarding these demonstrations, but there were no violent retaliations (Wills–Obregón 2007, 190). It is worth noting that political disappearances and homicides were on the rise during these decades. Demands related to class and dominant economic interests were seen as a threat by the state, but demands related to gender were either ignored or dealt with through legal channels (*ibid.*, 190). Wills–Obregón (2007) argues that this indifference could be seen as an expression of the *machista* nature of state institutions as public officials assume feminist organizations cannot destabilize the regime. However, this began changing in a gradual way during the late 1980s as the conflict escalated and became more complex.

Constitutional change occurred in 1991 after several years of public and private deliberation. This generated big expectations regarding the consolidation of democracy in Colombia. In fact, Wills–Obregón argues that the constitutional changes were so deep that it is possible to compare them to those that occur during a regime transition. With the implementation of the new constitution, Colombia went from a democracy based on institutionalized cultural arrangements and in many cases authoritarian, to a multicultural democracy with a much more equitable balance among the three branches of the government (*ibid.*, 212). Regarding women, the new constitution represented a valuable platform for women’s organizations to come together

in an attempt to define a position on the inclusion of women in public office. Furthermore, these constitutional negotiations, carried out under the name *Asamblea Nacional Constituyente*, or ANC, prompted women in different parts of the country who had never been interested in women's issues to learn more and engage in public deliberation. According to Wills–Obregón, the mobilization of women during the years of the ANC became an opportunity for raising awareness regarding gender issues. Feminists took advantage of this opportunity to link gender issues to the expansion of democracy expected from the new constitution (223).

Some of the requests made by feminist and women's groups during the ANC were:

- The implementation of gender-sensitive language in the text of the constitution and the revision of official documents to correct this.
- The inclusion of gender in anti-discrimination legislation.
- The redefinition of reproduction as a human right and responsibility, and not as a biological act regulated by religious dogmas.
- The implementation of sexual and reproduction rights, recognizing that women can freely choose to become mothers and redefining the rearing of children as a responsibility of both parents with equitable rights and responsibilities.
- The provision of necessary services by the state needed to raise children in an integral manner.
- Recognizing the social function of domestic work in the production and reproduction of the labour force, and the need for the state to guarantee social security to those who carry it out.
- The official acceptance of multiple conceptions of family and the necessary legislation to guarantee social support for non-nuclear families. (Wills–Obregón

2007, 223)

Women's organizations received support from various members of the Liberal party and from members of the *Alianza Democrática M-19*, the party created by ex-members of the M-19 guerrillas. Most gender-related requests received support; however, sexual and reproduction rights, as well as different conceptions of family were controversial and were dropped from the ANC (Wills-Obregón 2007, 223). The issue of sexual and reproduction rights became a recurring subject of debate in the different commissions of the ANC. It was finally subjected to anonymous vote with the following results: 25 in favour, 40 against, 3 abstentions (ibid., 222).

Despite some drawbacks, the results of women's activism translated into further rights, liberties, and protections for women. Most feminist and women's organizations recognized the importance of institutional change in their struggles to improve the situation of women in Colombia and took advantage of the opportunity. A national organization was created to further the integration and cooperation of gender organizations throughout the country. The *Red Nacional de Mujeres* was created with this purpose in 1991, and the government instituted the *Consejería Presidencial para la Juventud, la Mujer y la Familia* (CPJMF) in 1992. Although these two institutions did not manage to work together in a parallel and coordinated manner, they did mobilize women from different backgrounds who became involved in and committed to women's issues. This was seen as a direct result of the openings made by the new constitution in terms of diversity. Indigenous women, Afro-Colombian women, women with different religious backgrounds, and demobilized guerrilleras all became a part of the attempts to widen the scope of gender in the Colombian democracy (Grabe 2000; Wills-Obregón 2007).

A couple of years later, *Ruta Pacífica* (Peaceful Route), another national umbrella women's organization, was created. This organization represented the displeasure many

women's organizations felt in having to work with the state. *Ruta Pacífica* was the result of an understanding among women's organizations that it was necessary to gain some distance from the state and become involved directly with civil society. Their efforts were initially geared towards a negotiated end to the conflict in which women's voices were central. Through their anti-war demonstrations and initiatives, *Ruta Pacífica* politicized motherhood with their slogan: "*No parimos hijos para la Guerra!*" (We do not birth children for war!). This sentiment became a focal point of mobilization for women who had never participated in social groups and who, until then, had not considered themselves political actors (Wills-Obregón 2007, 234). *Ruta Pacífica* became a focal point regarding the ways in which many women understood the conflict and its effects on gender and gender relations. It became clear to the members of these organizations that the Colombian conflict was being fought in women's bodies and that this was an issue directly affecting women.

Women's participation in official institutions grew during this decade, but this did not translate into greater representation. For the most part, women prioritized their party membership and only in exceptional cases were they able to act as representatives of women's issues (Wills-Obregón 2007, 228). Vice-presidential candidate María Emma Mejía stated in 2000 that being a congresswoman and bringing women's issues into congress was very uncomfortable. For Mejía, the internal dynamics of congress are so imposing that they force women to give up women's issues, or else the men in congress will *castrate* them (quoted in Wills-Obregón 2007, 228). Thomas argues that very few women have engaged in dominant political discourse from a women's perspective, and that in this sphere women continue to work "dressed as men" (2003, 102). The position of feminist and women's organizations regarding the conflict has been mostly to remain at a distance from all of its violent manifestations. Particularly from the 1990's

onwards, these organizations began distancing themselves from the guerrilla movements which they consider to have lost their political commitment, ethics, and honesty (ibid., 231).

During the presidency of Andrés Pastrana, legislation was passed to guarantee a number of women in designated governmental positions (*Ley de Cuotas*). This dramatically increased the presence of women in public office. From 1940 to 2002, Colombia had the largest number of female head of ministries in all of Latin America with 43, followed by Venezuela with 41, and Costa Rica with 24 (Wills–Obregón 2007, 124).

### **The Rise of the Armed Groups**

The different armed groups involved in the Colombian conflict (guerrillas, paramilitaries, and drug cartels) have various degrees of unity and different internal structures as well as diverse and usually conflicting interests and strategies. Although the Colombian conflict has been ongoing for over five decades, the different groups involved and their specific power struggles have evolved over time. In this sense, Colombia has experienced a protracted, but changing internal conflict. The conflict has also been played out in an uneven way geographically, with some areas affected by violence more than others (Medina–Arbeláez 2009, 9). The Colombian state was weakened by assaults from all of the armed groups, particularly during the 1980s and 1990s. During these decades, it was unable to enforce the rule of law and state security became privatized (Áviles 2006, 381–382). At the same time, the country experienced several political reforms aimed at democratizing the state. This was done in an “intimidating atmosphere of internal armed conflict” (Posada–Carbó 2007, 116). The establishment of a new constitution in 1991 was the most significant institutional change of the past five decades. Changes brought about by the new constitution included: the creation of an autonomous central bank, an independent Constitutional Court, the popular election of department governors and mayors (who had been previously appointed by the executive), the decentralization of fiscal revenues,

and the inclusion and representation of minorities, including indigenous groups and women (ibid., 117).

The two decades after the constitutional reform have also witnessed the end of bipartisanship in Colombia as other parties have entered the political sphere. However, political parties, including the surviving Liberal and Conservative parties, are characterized by being weak and internally fragmented (Avellaneda and Escobar–Lemmon 2012, 114). Both the FARC and the paramilitary groups have managed to survive all the political changes of the last two decades. It was only with the election of President Uribe, that changes in the state began affecting the armed actors in the Colombian conflict.

At the time of the presidential inauguration of Álvaro Uribe in 2002, the guerrilla groups had reached their height in terms of size. These groups had approximately twenty–two thousand members; eighteen thousand belonged to the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), the FARC, and four thousand belonged to the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army), the ELN (Sweig 2002, 123). Both groups have been active throughout the national territory for decades. After Uribe’s military offensive against left–wing guerrillas, these numbers decreased, and it is believed that by the end of his two terms in power in 2010, the FARC had nine thousand members (Saab and Taylor 2009, 257).

Paramilitary groups and regional drug cartels are also two main actors in the Colombian conflict. Paramilitary groups, which demobilized during Uribe’s time in power, claimed that their objective was to defend civilians who were being attacked by left–wing armed groups. They justified this by arguing that the government and the National Army were failing at guaranteeing citizens’ security and wellbeing (Echavarría 2010, 27). Although the paramilitary



groups demobilized, the presence of drug cartels throughout the country continues to pose challenges to the stability of the government.

Women have been victims of violence within the different armed groups in Colombia. They have also played a part in the armed conflict in a direct ways throughout the years: “All of the current actors in the Colombian conflict have women participating in the war–making efforts; armed forces, paras, guerrillas...however, they are poorly represented in the official demobilization statistics” (Kunz and Sjöberg 2009, 6).

### **The FARC**

The largest, most notorious, and longest surviving guerrilla group still active today in all of the Americas is the FARC (Eccarius–Kelly 2012, 236). This illegal armed group is also the oldest guerrilla group in Latin America. In the preface to his in–depth study on the FARC, James Brittain states that this guerrilla group is one of the world’s least researched politico–military organizations (2010, 7). Both the emergence of the FARC and its ideology are historically contingent and comparable to other guerrilla movements in Latin America during the 1960s and 1970s. However, over time, the FARC has changed along with Colombia’s political, economic, and social context; once present in more than one third of the Colombian territory, it is presently concentrated in the south and east of the country (Eccarius–Kelly 2012, 236). The presence of a strong drug economy, for instance, has influenced the FARC, giving it unusual and distinct characteristics that set it apart from other guerrilla movements in the region. In this sense, the longevity of the FARC can be understood by its corporate character, derived from its intricate relation to the diverse drug cartels. The FARC is at the core of the Colombian conflict. It has fought against not only the government but also the paramilitary groups, civil society, minority groups, competing drug–cartels, and international NGOs.

The FARC is characterized by being predominantly rural. Unlike other guerrilla

movements in Colombia and Latin America in general which developed a strong urban wing, the FARC has a peasant origin and has remained mostly rural (Medina–Arbelaéz 2009, 10). It was inspired by the Cuban revolution and the belief that armed forces could defeat national armed forces through a revolution before all conditions for it were met (Lee 2012, 30). However, it distanced itself from the Cuban revolutionary experience by focusing on military power at the expense of political and ideological power (ibid.). The FARC was founded in 1964, by forty–six male and two female peasants, in the town of Marquetalia, in the department of Tolima. Initially a self–defence group in the departments of Tolima, Quindío, Caldas, Risaralda, Huila, and parts of Cauca, Cundinamarca, and Meta, it became a guerrilla movement in 1966, and a people’s army in 1982 (adding *Ejército del Pueblo*, or EP, after FARC). The FARC espouses a Marxist–Leninist ideology that seeks to overthrow the government and establish a communist state. The Colombian Communist Party (CCP) played an important role in the formation of the FARC (Offstein 2003, 103; Brittain 2010, 4). The CCP provided financial support and political orientation to the FARC during its first years. During this time, the FARC struggled to set itself apart from groups of Liberal and Conservative bandits that continued to commit violent acts throughout the country. While bandits assaulted peasants’ homes and inter–city buses, the FARC and other guerrilla groups, such as the ELN and EPL, focused on specific political goals (Offstein 2003, 104). Over time, the FARC became a “self–funding organization” as it began operating without the financial backing of powerful patrons (Eccarius–Kelly 2012, 239). Despite its relative autonomy, the FARC has made several failed attempts to work with the Colombian left (Lee 2012, 33). For instance, despite efforts to work in collaboration with the ELN in the 1980s, these two organizations have been engaged in constant military disputes (ibid.). In this sense, “the FARC has embarked on a double campaign of excluding its nonstate political rivals

and of delegitimizing the government” (Rochlin 2003, 143).

The FARC has a hierarchical internal structure that favours a centralized structure (Eccarius–Kelly 2012, 237). It is composed of The Secretariat of the Central High Command Central, The High Command, seven blocks which are organized by geographical regions (and various urban structures that carry the same function as the blocks), and over sixty *frentes*, or Fronts (see appendix 3 for detailed structure). The Secretariat of the Central High Command Central is composed of seven members and leads the military organization. A woman has never been one of its members. The High Command consists of twenty–five members from seven blocks and is in charge, among other things, of electing the members of The Secretariat of the Central High Command Central. The FARC’s seven blocks (and its urban structures) are subject to an *estatuto* (statute) outlining disciplinary rules and internal commands. In addition, the blocks have their own internal command norms. The FARC’s sixty Fronts are subdivisions of the seven blocks and are scattered throughout the national territory. These follow the same *estatuto* as the blocks, and commanders report to the different levels of the military structure and are expected to follow orders passed down from the High Command.

The FARC also has members who do not fit into any of these four categories. They are mostly *milicianos* (militias), young women and men between the ages of fifteen and thirty–five who have been trained by the FARC, and who live in small towns and cities (Brittain 2010, 17). These members provide technical support, information, and intelligence. There are also *milicias urbanas* (urban militias) which are similar to the militias, but operate in big cities such as Bogotá, Medellín, and Cali. Other members are called *milicias populares* (militia members). These are mature men and women who are not formally trained by the FARC, but who provide logistical support and are in solidarity with the guerrilla group. This group includes shopkeepers,

teachers, and health-workers among others.

The growth of the FARC has reflected the particularities of Colombia's protracted conflict. Camila Medina-Arbeláez (2009, 24) identifies several stages in FARC's historical development. From its founding in 1964 to 1980, the FARC remained mostly rural, establishing itself as a communist revolutionary group in the region of the Magdalena Medio. During these years, the FARC remained small and relatively isolated (Herrera and Porch 2008, 613). From 1980 to 1995, the FARC underwent a period of modernization and expansion beginning its involvement in the drug trade; it took up the role as the "middle man" between the growers and distributors, providing security to drug-traffickers and taxing coca-growers. Furthermore, it imposed taxes on coca crops (Eccarius-Kelly 2012, 240). The FARC charged coca farmers and coca and cocaine traffickers between 10 and 15 percent of the total value of each shipment (ibid.). From the mid 1990's onwards, the FARC experienced revitalization in terms of expansion and military improvements. This involved more large-scale confrontations with rival groups, mostly the army and the paramilitaries, although there were also some confrontations with other left-wing guerrilla groups such as the ELN. During this time, the FARC complemented its income from drug-trafficking and taxing with extortion (e.g., demanding money from oil companies to avoid having their oil pipelines bombed) and kidnappings (Eccarius-Kelly 2012, 240-243). The kidnappings included taking mass numbers of hostages in small cities and towns as well as the execution of hostages. According to The Israel Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT), kidnapping accounted for 65.8 percent of the FARC's total violent activities between 1980 and 2002 (ibid., 244).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Other activities during this period included hostage taking (7.9 percent), bombings (7.9 percent), car bombs (5.3 percent), mortar attacks (5.3 percent), shootings (2.6 percent), rocket attacks (2.6 percent), and hijacking (2.6 percent) (Eccarius-Kelly 2012, 244). The Israel Institute for Counter-Terrorism does not include drug-trafficking and other violent FARC activities, such as the widespread use of anti-personnel mines, in its numbers.

The significant growth of the FARC in the 1990s is explained as a reaction to neoliberal economic policies and the increasing levels of repression from the state (Brittain 2010, 16). During this time, the FARC established several urban branches throughout the country and expanded to over 60 percent of the national territory (ibid.). This period is also notorious for the peace negotiations carried out between the FARC and President Andrés Pastrana–Arango (1998–2002) who gave the FARC a demilitarized zone the size of Switzerland as part of the peace process. The peace process, which began in 1999 and lasted three years, failed to dismantle the guerrilla group. In addition, as will be discussed at further length in the next chapter, the FARC did not participate in a demobilization process as a result of these talks. President Uribe took a different approach to the conflict than did his predecessor. With the financial backing of the United States, he set out a highly militaristic strategy to combat the FARC (Medina–Arbeláez 2009, 10–11). Historically, the FARC was centralized and highly hierarchical, but it began to decentralize at the end of the failed peace negotiations in 2002 when Uribe became president. As will be discussed in detail in chapter three, Uribe’s military attacks have challenged both the stability and cohesiveness of the FARC. In the last ten years, the FARC has lost several key figures including four of its seven Secretariat members (top leader alias, Manuel Marulanda, Central High Command member, Raúl Reyes, and the head of the Central Block, Ivan Ríos) (ibid.).

The involvement of the FARC in the Colombian drug trade starting in the 1980s affected its credibility, prompting the public to dismiss their ideological objectives altogether. The coca trade, which is embedded in capitalist social relations of production, stands in contradiction to the FARC’s central ideological framework. Although it is not known how much profit from drug–related activities the FARC makes, the United States Government Accountability Office

suggested that in 2009, the FARC benefited from approximately 60 percent of the cocaine that entered the US market (Eccarius–Kelly 2012, 240). Its role in the international trafficking of cocaine as well as in extortion and taxing peasants, make the FARC a “full–service organization” (ibid., 240). The FARC is now involved in all stages of cocaine trafficking: cultivation, processing, and trafficking (ibid.). The FARC initially denied its ties to drug trafficking despite a great deal of evidence to indicate that the contrary was true (Lee 2012, 34). It has also blamed its participation on the drug trade on the high demand for cocaine in the USA and Europe (ibid.).

Despite its involvement in criminal activities, some analysts still deem the FARC’s ideological framework as relevant (Gutiérrez–Sanín 2004; Brittain 2010). Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín (2004) considers ideology relevant with respect to the main organizing principles of the organization. For instance, the FARC includes a political and political–military area in its structure (another is military). The political wing of the FARC is responsible for the educational aspect of the organization. Members have to attend cultural meetings in which they discuss current political developments. The FARC has a radio channel called *La Voz de la Resistencia* (The Voice of Resistance), which broadcasts revolutionary music and political propaganda. Membership in the FARC is permanent, and members are not allowed to leave the organization after a three–month trial period is over (Lara 2000, 105). Desertion is considered high treason and is one of the worst offenses, punishable by death (Cárdenas–Sarrias 2005, 125). All of the FARC members are required to sacrifice their life as civilians in their commitment to dismantling the Colombian state. However, the FARC has failed to create a substantive political network of support. Eccarius–Kelly (2012, 248) states that “the FARC has been so discredited in vast segments of Colombia, that the organization now seems less concerned about its reputation than with shoring support from remote farming communities in its remaining jungle

strongholds.” Despite its many years attempting to overthrow the Colombian government, the FARC has been unable to propose a solid alternative or present a “refined political approach” that goes beyond critiques of the state and puts forth a broad-based platform (Lee 2012, 32). Due to the aggressive military offensive launched during Uribe’s time as president, the FARC has fragmented into autonomously operating fronts or “multiple-decision modes” that have logistical trouble communicating with each other (Eccarius–Kelly 2012, 249–250). This has disrupted the organization’s discipline, which is affecting its women recruits in particular ways since there is less accountability to superiors.

In Colombia, different guerrilla groups were created each with their own vision and understanding of women’s roles. For instance, the *Ejército Popular de Liberación* (Popular Army for Liberation or EPL) was a leftwing guerrilla group formed in 1967 as the armed branch of the *Partido Comunista Colombiano –Marxista Leninista* PCC–ML. In their initial years, women members were grouped in a special unit called “María Cano.” Eventually, women were integrated into co-ed units (Londoño and Nieto 2006, 23). However, the presence of women in the organization’s hierarchy was not proportional to men’s as they were relegated to educational roles (ibid., 25). In this case, having children and/or a romantic relationship were both seen as limitations for women who aspired to occupy higher positions in the EPL (ibid., 27).

The FARC claims to be a feminist organization. In an interview with journalist Patricia Lara, FARC commander alias Olga Lucía Marín stated that gender discrimination is prohibited inside the organization, and that women and men have the same rights and responsibilities (2000, 114–115). The number of women joining the FARC has increased since the 1980s after they were formally recognized as equal to their male peers. An estimated 30 to 40 percent of FARC members are women. The FARC, however, is considered by some to be more gender biased than

other Colombian leftist illegal armed groups such as the ELN and the now defunct M-19 (Kunz and Sjöberg 2009, 7). According to Herrera and Porch (2008, 614), the FARC uses female fighters not only for combat, but also as part of its public relations efforts: female members of the FARC appear in photo-ops, interact with civilians, and play a role in settling community disputes. Females are also welcomed into the ranks of the FARC as potential sexual partners, which, it is believed, is essential for the morale of the (male) soldiers (ibid.). However, as Herrera and Porch (2008, 628) note, the experiences of women in the FARC are complex and contradictory since some women feel that the roles and responsibilities given to them in the FARC provide them with status and respect.

### **The Paramilitaries**

Most accounts of the paramilitary phenomenon agree that these forces have been linked either directly or indirectly with the security apparatus (army or police), and usually operate under direct or indirect state control (Sluka 2000). Iván Cepeda-Castro (2004) argues that paramilitary organizations are illegal complementary mechanisms used to solve problems which are outside the coercive capacity of the state. The exact links between the state and the paramilitaries are subject to debate. The Colombian paramilitaries have allegedly received the support of 'drug-traffickers-turned-landowners,' some business groups, and factions of the military (Romero 2003, 196). In a book of testimonies by combatants in the Colombian illegal armed groups, an ex-paramilitary member recounts the multiple occasions in which his unit worked alongside or cooperated with the National Army in fighting against guerrilla groups (González and Jiménez 2008). The details regarding this cooperation are unknown. However, in an interview with Scott Wilson from *The Washington Post* in 2001, AUC co-founder Carlos Castaño stated that there were approximately thirty-five officers, more than one hundred lower rank officers, and at least one thousand professional soldiers or policemen in his organization.



What makes the Colombian paramilitary groups different from others around the world is that they achieved a condition of partial autonomy. As was the case with the guerrilla groups, the paramilitary groups also forged links with drug-lords during the ‘drug-boom’ of the late 1970s in the rural areas under their control. The once government-reliant paramilitary groups became “corporative paramilitary structures” (Cepeda-Castro 2004). In the Colombian case, the economic self-sufficiency of the paramilitaries translated into a project of political autonomy which found support in Conservative circles and with members of the state. According to Fernando Cubides (1999), different conceptualizations of para-state groups serve different and often competing interests. “Self-defence groups” corresponds to a discourse that legitimates and justifies the existence of said groups, while the notion of “paramilitary groups” presents an opposing discourse which highlights the problematic behind the links between the government and said groups (Cubides 1999).

The formation and establishment of the guerrilla groups during the 1960s posed a direct threat to the interests of large landowners around the country. The “communist threat” represented by leftwing organizations like the FARC triggered the proliferation of private security groups which had come into existence during the period of bipartisan violence. Initially, the main objective of these scattered security groups was to intimidate peasants and keep them from joining leftist organizations through a series of violent practices such as torture and disappearances. Until their demobilization in the mid 2000’s, the main objective of the Colombian paramilitary group Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, or AUC, (United Self-Defence Groups of Colombia) was to stop the political, social, economic, and territorial expansion of local guerrilla groups. The paramilitaries also tried to prevent the democratization of the state in order to guarantee that dominant political and economic interests would not be

threatened. As Romero described, “the paramilitary itself can be analyzed from a perspective of the fears and unease generated by the political inclusion of groups considered by the privileged sectors to be infiltrators” (2003, 180). Colombian elites developed paramilitary groups because they feared social, political, and economic inclusion and its effects on their institutional power.

Although the paramilitary organization AUC was created in the 1990s, the history of paramilitarism in Colombia can be traced back several decades. Increasing threats to landowners by groups presumed to be “communists,” led the government to approve Decree 3398 in 1965, making self-defence groups legal. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, Álvaro Uribe (then governor of Antioquia and a landowner himself) proposed a legal civil-paramilitary force to fight the guerrilla groups. These privately co-financed surveillance forces were called CONVIVIR, Servicios Especiales de Vigilancia y Seguridad Privada (Special Vigilance and Private Security Services). By the mid 1990s, the group had approximately ten thousand members, especially in the departments of Urabá, Córdoba, and Antioquia. This was one of several attempts by Uribe to support civilian-based counterinsurgencies. CONVIVIR was made illegal in 1997, due to several reported human rights abuses and the risk of legalizing criminal activities (Romero 2003, 180). It is believed that many members of the CONVIVIRs joined the existing paramilitary groups (Saab and Taylor 2009, 46). Attempts by paramilitary supporters and members to participate in national politics were made in the 1980s with the creation of a political party by the name of Movimiento de Restauración Nacional MORENA (Movement for National Restoration). However, the Virgilio Barco administration (1986–1990) did not accept it as a legal political party because of its perceived links to paramilitary groups.

Until its demobilization, the main paramilitary group in Colombia was the AUC. It was an umbrella organization with six regional branches. This group was formed in 1997 under the

name Autodefensas Unidas de Córdoba y Urabá (ACCU – United Self–Defence Groups of Córdoba and Urabá) by brothers Fidel and Carlos Castaño who had been operating since the early 1990s in the region of the Magdalena Medio in Northwest Colombia.<sup>11</sup> The organization brought together the different private security groups that had been operating throughout the national territory for several decades.<sup>12</sup> Paramilitary groups in Southwest Colombia (in the departments of Nariño, Cauca, Tolima, Huila, and Caquetá) had more difficulty consolidating their base due to the established guerrilla presence in these areas. There, the conflict between guerrillas and paramilitaries was particularly violent as both groups fought for territorial control.

Initially, the ACCU (later AUC), presented itself as an alternative to the military which it considered was failing in guaranteeing safety and security to citizens throughout the country. More specifically, it considered itself an “anticommunist advance guard in defense of private property and free enterprise” and offered its service of protection to landowners and business owners (Romero 2000, 66). In the Washington Post interview, Carlos Castaño described the motives behind the creation of the AUC:

The AUC exists because...Armed Forces have not done their institutional duty of guaranteeing Colombians their lives, property, and honour... We are doing a patriotic duty that the military did not want to do or were not able to do...the AUC has played an important role in keeping this nation from a failed government...the AUC has prevented this country from falling into guerrilla hands. (Wilson 2001)

Many of those who bought the services offered by the AUC, such as the protection of land from the guerrilla groups, were drug traffickers. Revenues from drug trafficking allowed traffickers to

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<sup>11</sup> For the purpose of this dissertation, the different groups will be referred to as ‘paramilitaries’ or AUC without specifying regional groups since this is the standard reference in most scholarly work on the topic.

<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that the Castaño brothers did not see their organization as a paramilitary group. Rather, they referred to it as a ‘civilian self–defense organization’ (Cubides 1999, 66).

purchase approximately one million hectares of land between 1979 and 1988, in the departments of Magdalena, Córdoba, and Sucre (Saab and Taylor 2009, 461). These regions were the initial stronghold of the AUC.

Despite referring to paramilitary groups as “coercion entrepreneurs” for their standard practice of exchanging violence for money and other valuables, Romero (2003, 17) argues that the objectives of the AUC cannot be reduced to financial gains. According to Romero, the objectives of the AUC were to restore local and regional political regimes threatened by the democratization of the Colombian state (*ibid.*). Furthermore, he argues that the emergence of the different groups that made up the AUC was possible due to four factors: 1) political and economic support from the regional elites, 2) military advice or cooperation from the National Army, 3) leadership of groups or people linked to drug–trafficking, and 4) enough military and political pressure from the guerrillas to maintain unity among all the diverse groups. These four factors reveal that the phenomenon of paramilitarism in Colombia has been facilitated by dominant sectors: regional elites, drug cartels, the army, and the presence of guerrilla groups. Romero (2003) argues that, historically, the AUC operated as a response to progressive measures by the government and different segments of society to democratize political deliberation and participation which could grant political victories to the guerrillas. In this sense, regional and local elites, drug traffickers turned landowners, and segments of the Colombian military forces were all significant in the growth of the AUC and of paramilitary groups that existed before the official creation of the AUC (*ibid.*, 24).

Romero (2000, 24) notes a correlation between the governmental efforts to carry out peace negotiations with left–wing illegal armed groups in the 1980s and 1990s and the growth of the paramilitary groups. Efforts to negotiate with guerrillas and potentially include them in the

political arena were seen as a threat by regional political elites who were not ready to share political power with left-wing ex-combatants. Romero (2000) analyzes four main historical conjunctures which led to the strengthening of paramilitary groups in Colombia. The first occurred during the efforts made by President Belisario Betancur (1982–1986) to negotiate with left-wing guerrilla groups. The second was in 1988 when the first elections of mayors were carried out. The third historical moment occurred after the establishment of the new constitution in 1991, which guaranteed civil rights and political inclusion to previously excluded groups and facilitated the demobilization of five small guerrilla groups. Finally, in 1998, the fourth occurred when President Pastrana engaged in peace talks with the FARC and granted them a demilitarized zone. All of these instances signified a change in the balance of power in the political sphere and resulted in high levels of violence by paramilitary groups. In this sense, the consolidation of the paramilitary phenomenon was a reaction to the shifting balance of power at the regional and local levels in favour of the guerrillas and their sympathizers (ibid., 41).

The AUC was organized as a federation of regional movements which had cattle ranchers, ex-military members, and drug traffickers as its leaders (Gutiérrez-Sanín 2008, 14). The middle ranks of the AUC were made up by people with military experience, and the rank and file was composed of ex-gang members and manual workers (ibid.). The general staff of the AUC was made up of a representative from each of its six regionally-based groups. The ACCU was entitled to an additional representative. The different regional groups had autonomy in terms of financing, expansion, and alliances. The main pre-requisite to being part of the AUC was being faithful to the counterinsurgency objective of eliminating leftwing illegal armed groups and its sympathizers (Romero 2003, 196). Unlike the guerrillas, AUC members had a salary which, for combatants with military experience, was above the minimum wage (Theidon 2009,

12). Like the FARC, the AUC played a significant role in the drug economy. An estimated 70 percent of the AUC's revenue came from drug-related activities. The other 20 percent came from "contributions" and "donations" (the sale of security services to landowners, cattle ranchers, and businesses) (Saab and Taylor 2008, 466). Unlike the FARC, however, the AUC not only taxed coca growers, but established coca crops after displacing farmers and peasants from the land (*ibid.*). This, along with the violent confrontations between the AUC and left-wing illegal armed groups, contributed to an unprecedented humanitarian crisis as 13 percent of Colombia's rural population was displaced from their land (Bouvier 2009, 8). Despite this, the AUC was able to increase its social base among the poor by creating educational, commercial, and community programs in their areas of influence (Romero 2003, 199). The group experienced exponential growth in its membership during the first four years of its existence, reaching a total of eight thousand members. It had over fifteen thousand members by the end of the decade (Tate 2009, 111). Furthermore, unlike the FARC, the AUC's revenues from drug trafficking were distributed among members of all levels of the organization in the form of a monthly salary, which was attractive for potential recruits (Gutiérrez-Sanín 2008, 15).

In general, paramilitary groups were less equipped militarily and had less military power than the guerrilla groups (most notably the FARC). As such, they relied on strategies such as isolating the guerrilla blocks through the means of murdering supporters and blocking their supply delivery and access (Medina-Arbeláez 2009, 17). The main victims of the paramilitaries were innocent civilians caught in countless massacres. In this respect, the AUC claimed the organization was eliminating "guerrillas dressed as civilians" as well as spies and guerrilla supporters. Gutiérrez-Sanín (2008, 15) argues that paramilitary activity is divided into two categories, one "hot" and one "cold." The former is characterized by massacres, mutilations,

torture, and the destruction of property. The latter, on the other hand, is characterized by selective violence, extortion, population control, and the assassination of specific targets. People who are targeted include common criminals such as rapists, anyone suspected of being a traitor, anyone suspected of being a guerrilla collaborator, and social leaders such as trade unionists (ibid., 16).

As will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3, President Uribe initiated a controversial negotiation process with paramilitary groups in 2002, which led to the demobilization of all of its units throughout the country. According to Schwitalla and Dietrich (2007, 58–59), by July 2007, the AUC had undergone a collective demobilization of thirty-one thousand members, of which 6 percent were women. In addition, ten thousand members demobilized individually, of whom 14 percent were women (ibid.). The legal status of these ex-combatants proved to be the most controversial aspect of the DDR process. The *Ley de Justicia y Paz* (June 2005) limited penalties for human rights abuses to eight years. As part of this amnesty, the paramilitaries were required to give testimonies about their crimes; however, victims remained dissatisfied with the reparations promised by the government, and by the lack of accountability associated with crimes carried out by the paramilitaries (Rozema 2008; Theidon 2009).

Not much is known about women paramilitaries, and it is believed that not many women joined as combatants. An estimated one out of ten paramilitary combatants was a woman (compared to four out of ten in the guerrillas) (Medina–Arbeláez 2009, 79). This was due to several factors that characterized this group, such as tough military training, a widespread culture of violence, and machismo (ibid.). Most women who joined the paramilitaries were known to do political work and performed other roles that were considered gender appropriate (Lara 2000). However, there were paramilitary women who were combatants and who fought alongside men.

## **Comparing Combat: FARC and AUC**

Gutiérrez–Sanín (2008, 4) carried out a qualitative comparison of the guerrilla group FARC, and the paramilitary group AUC. He argues that while it is true that both groups have fought for the control of resources, the FARC and the AUC armies differ in composition (gender, age, education, and occupation) as well as in their exogenous and endogenous behaviour (how combatants relate to society, and the consequences of the internal organization on the behaviour of members) (5). In turn, both groups have crafted different sets of organizational devices that are not only strategic, but also contingent and historical. With respect to the social composition of both organizations, Gutiérrez–Sanín notes that the FARC has younger, less educated members, is made up predominantly of peasants, and has a higher presence of women than the AUC (*ibid.*, 6).

Gutiérrez–Sanín argues that the motivations to join the FARC and the paramilitaries have been relatively uniform between the two groups. These include the allure of military life, the escape from family problems, unemployment, and ideology among others (*ibid.*). However, Theidon (2009, 13) found that individuals who join the FARC did not do so for economic reasons, while individuals who joined the paramilitaries did acknowledge it was for economic benefits. The paramilitaries offered selective incentives (in the form of a salary) that the FARC does not, and this aspect affected both the cohesion and longevity of the groups (Gutiérrez–Sanín 2008, 25). Kunz and Sjöberg (2009, 20) argue that the reasons for an individual who joins an illegal armed group such as the FARC are gender–specific and youth–specific. There might not be significant differences between the paramilitaries and the FARC in terms of motivations to join these groups as pointed out by Gutierrez–Sanín, but there are important differences within these organizations depending on whether the recruit is an adult male or a young boy, or if it is an adult woman or a girl. According to Kunz and Sjöberg (2009, 21), these differences have



significant implications for the experiences of recruits during their time in the illegal armed group.

Gender-specific motivations for joining an armed group can include sexual abuse suffered at home, or workloads and household tasks that force girls to take responsibilities they are not prepared to handle (ibid.). Other gender-specific reasons to join outlined by authors include family or sentimental links to the armed group, protection, and vengeance. Stanski (2005) found that young girls are highly vulnerable to the FARC's recruitment tactics, especially if they experience boredom and/or abuse at home. Kunz and Sjöberg (2009, 1) note that, like their male counterparts, women also join these organizations to feel "empowered." However, for women, this mostly means escaping traditional gender roles. Some women join because they feel a "certain authority and recognition through wearing uniform and carrying a gun, and being part of a group" (ibid.). The FARC is believed to have a gender-specific recruitment technique that relies on seducing young girls to motivate them to join their ranks (ibid.; Amnesty International 2004). Male FARC combatants go to towns and small cities where they seduce young girls and convince them to join the organization. Kunz and Sjöberg (2009, 21) argue that in most cases, there is an "inter-linkage of causes" that can lead a person to join an illegal armed group, some of which are in contradiction with each other, and which can lead young girls in particular to be unable to verbalize reasons for joining the group.

According to Gutiérrez-Sanín (2008, 6), the main organizational difference between the FARC and the AUC is the way that the rank and file is mobilized for combat. The FARC employs collective and non-economic incentives, and appears to be more army-like than the paramilitary which relied on individualistic and selective incentives (mostly, but not limited to financial ones) (ibid., 14). According to Gutiérrez-Sanín, this helps to explain why desertions

were higher in the FARC than in the paramilitaries, even though this offence was punished with death in the former. It also helps explain the cohesiveness of the FARC, since “opportunists” are less likely to join if they think they will not personally benefit from their membership in this group. The cohesiveness of the FARC is also reinforced because membership in this group implies a lifelong commitment; combatants are not allowed to leave the organization after the three month trial period. Desertion is considered the worst offence, and is punished with death. In contrast to the paramilitaries, FARC combatants also give up their civilian life in its entirety. Any contact with family and friends is terminated, and they are not allowed to have any personal possessions, although the enforcement of this rule depends on the commander (ibid., 13).

### **Drug Trafficking, Guerrillas, and Paramilitaries**

The emergence of an extensive narcotics economy in Colombia occurred during the 1970s with the proliferation of marijuana crops in the northern regions of the country (Pécaut 1997, 892). During the late 1970s and 1980s, the focus shifted to coca and cocaine began being exported illegally. Drug trafficking was not a priority in public policy until the assassination of Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara in 1984 at the hands of narco-traffickers. Drug trafficking, and the confrontation between the Cali and Medellín drug cartels in the 1980s, increased the levels of violence throughout the country. At the same time, other illegal armed groups began getting involved in the drug economy. Revenues from drug trafficking made their way to the state apparatus and numerous officials were accused of corruption (ibid., 849). Drug trafficking violence peaked with the assassinations in the late 1980s and early 1990s of thousands of politicians at the hands of paramilitary groups financed by drug traffickers. Some key political figures murdered during this time included former *Unión Patriótica* Party (UP) presidential candidate Jaime Pardo Leal on August 27 1987, Liberal Party presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galán on August 18, 1989, UP presidential candidate Bernardo Jaramillo Ossa on March 22,

1990, and M-19 presidential candidate Carlos Pizarro Leongómez one month later (Crandall 2001, 101).

A key factor undermining the ideological and programmatic credibility of both the left-wing and right-wing armed groups is their close relationship with narco-trafficking. Any attempts by the FARC to make their official political platforms, including their policies towards female members, legitimate are constantly being thwarted by their involvement in the drug trade. The same was true for the AUC. The availability of resources from drug-trafficking has consequences for the alleged political project of the armed actors, particularly of the left, and for the type of violence experienced throughout the country: “The incorporation of narco-trafficking revenue is responsible for the... specificity that violence (*plural*) acquires in Colombia, compared to other countries of the region” (García-Villegas and de Sousa Santos 2004, 40).

Boaventura de Sousa Santos and Mauricio García Villegas (2004) argue that the drug trafficking operations in areas controlled by leftist guerrillas generated competition between the FARC and the AUC. On the one hand, coca production is guaranteed by the guerrillas’ protection of the crops in exchange for funds. On the other hand, the guerrillas have to protect themselves from paramilitary groups originally created by the drug lords to protect their properties from seizures organized by the guerrillas. On this point, Carlos Castaño noted: “This is not a conflict like those in the Cold War, rich against poor. Here we have a guerrilla with helicopters, Toyota 4 Runners, satellite telephones, dollars everywhere, cocaine, technology, air weaponry, and boats” (Wilson 2001).

The network of illegal actors competing for resources and seeking to legitimize their actions has created an ambiguous and confusing situation for civilians. For instance, in places where the government’s presence is precarious, “the state is perceived as another actor in the

conflict and its norms compete with other values and interests, especially with other actors selling authority” (García-Villegas and de Sousa Santos 2004, 56). The complex relationship among the armed actors has given the Colombian conflict, and its main actors, distinct characteristics that make them different from similar types of organizations in other parts of the world. As was mentioned earlier, the paramilitaries became notorious for having dominant business interests, which means that they have a strong influence in the production of coca unfolding in their areas of influence (Cepeda-Castro 2004). Similarly, the guerrillas are known as ‘narco-guerrillas’ referring to their role as middle men between drug-lords and coca-growing peasants (Romero 2000, 62).

Furthermore, revenue from narco-trafficking has fueled the armed actors’ obsessive struggle for territorial control. In order to secure their presence in a particular area, armed groups demarcate the boundaries of ‘their’ territory symbolically and strategically by waging a battle over a strategic river, a mountain, or a valley.<sup>13</sup> In areas where coca is cultivated, territorial control is manifested by achieving control of the production of cocaine (Taussig 2003, 118). If control of the zone in question is attained and competing groups are forced to withdraw from the area, the new group begins intelligence operations. This involves determining who was directly or indirectly aligned with the guerrillas (or the paramilitaries, depending on the case), followed by a premeditated and selective wave of assassinations of those identified as supporters. This type of political cleansing is meant to symbolize the presence of a new authority in towns and municipalities. The objective is to establish specific values and orientations among the population in order to consolidate the group’s control. This is also done through selective

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<sup>13</sup> For instance, the *Cerranía de Abibe* in the Urabá region was known as the ‘guerrilla sanctuary’ for decades since its location provides a panoramic view of the area, including the city of Apartadó, making it an advantageous site, while at the same time facilitating the group’s retreat into the mountainous area to protect themselves from attacks. The paramilitary offensive in this area concentrated on ‘conquering’ this spot for its symbolic and strategic value in order to consolidate their presence in the whole region in the 1990s.

assassinations of those who deliberately reject the presence of the new authority, often referred to as ‘internal enemies.’

Although the process through which territorial control is achieved follows different patterns depending on the group, it usually gives rise to retaliations. For instance, after the paramilitaries would arrive in a town which had been under the control of the guerrillas, the latter would react by carrying out selective assassinations and massacres in order to neutralize the entrance of the AUC and regain territorial control (Vargas 2004, 118). The particularities of the strategies employed by the AUC and the FARC to establish themselves as the authority in a particular area are different. While the guerrillas carry out “asymmetrical, arbitrary and unfair trials, they still allow local residents or guerrilla foot–soldiers to defend an individual who is going to be executed.” On the other hand, the paramilitaries were generally more drastic and place pressure on a given population “in the form of massacres and massive intimidation” (Gutiérrez Sanín 2001, 63).

### **BACRIMs: A New, but Familiar Challenge**

During the last years of the paramilitary demobilization, gangs began to emerge in some areas of the country. These criminal bands are known as *Bandas Criminales Emergentes* (Emerging Criminal Bands) or BACRIM. They have also been called neo–paramilitary groups, although it is still not clear the extent to which these bands mirror the old paramilitary groups in structure or practices. The only in–depth study on the BACRIMs to date was made by the NGO Human Rights Watch in 2010. *Paramilitaries’ Heirs: The New Face of Violence in Colombia* is a 114 page report linking the emergence of criminal bands to the “flawed demobilization” of the AUC. The BACRIM phenomenon has increased the levels of violence in Colombia: 7,200 out of the 15,400 homicides that occurred in 2010 were attributed to fights between BACRIM groups (Shumate and Fonseca 2011, 2).

The first report of neo-paramilitary criminal bands was written by the Organization of American States' Support Mission for the Peace Process (MAPP-OEA) in 2006. This organization had the responsibility of monitoring the DDR process, and the report warned about the emergence of criminal bands composed of AUC members who had not demobilized (Grajales 2010, 13). Some of these bands were led by AUC members who engaged in the demobilization program, but who created rearguards to protect their main interests from the guerrillas and the military, such as routes to smuggle drugs and weapons. However, some of these criminal bands collaborate with guerrilla groups, including the FARC (Shumate and Fonseca 2011, 2). This collaboration between left wing and right wing illegal armed groups is what most distinguishes the BACRIMs from the AUC.

According to the Human Rights Watch report, BACRIMS have carried out massacres, rapes, assassinations, and extortions, and have worsened the Colombian humanitarian crisis overall in relation to the number of internally displaced people (2010, 3). The report also states that the number of individuals linked to BACRIMs lies anywhere between 4,000 and 10,200. The bands include teenage boys and girls, as well as men and women (ibid.). However, it is unclear how many females have joined the BACRIMs or what their roles are. There have been reports of sexual violence carried out by BACRIMs, including the assault of the president of a popular women's organization in 2004 (ibid., 40). Civilian sex workers have also been threatened, raped, and murdered (ibid., 81). According to the reports, the threat of rape is commonly used by the BACRIMs to coerce people to follow their orders.

### **Women in Illegal Armed Groups in Colombia**

Both the FARC and the paramilitaries have been responsible for violence against women, including both civilians and their own members (Kunz and Sjöberg 2009; Medina-Arbeláez 2009; Theidon 2009; Londoño-Nieto 2006; Stanski 2005; Amnesty International 2004). The

United Nations' Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women defines "violence against women [as] any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women... whether occurring in public or in private life" (1993). According to the UN's declaration, gender-based violence inhibits women's ability to enjoy their rights and freedoms on an equal basis to men (ibid.). Kunz and Sjöberg (2009) and Stanski (2005) argue that it is important to understand the general context of gender-based violence in the Colombian conflict when analyzing the situation of women combatants in the FARC. In 2000, the United Nations reported that an estimated 60–70 percent of women in Colombia had been victims of gender-based violence, but less than half looked for help and only 9 percent made an official complaint (Amnesty International 2004). Women and girls in rural Colombia, where most combatants come from, are largely exposed to a poor standard of living and suffer gender-specific abuses and discrimination both within and outside the conflict context (ibid.). Gender-based violence is prevalent in rural Colombia and girls and women face numerous hardships, including domestic violence, sexual abuse, and undesired pregnancies that cannot be terminated due to legal and cultural barriers which do not give women the option to terminate a pregnancy. Furthermore, violence against women remains largely under-reported and very few perpetrators are brought to justice for these types of crimes (Amnesty International 2004). In this sense, the Colombian state has played a role by remaining passive and by not making concerted efforts to prevent violence against women and punish perpetrators. As stated clearly in Amnesty International's report, "when a state fails in its responsibility to exercise due diligence to prevent, punish and eradicate sexual and gender violence it sends out a message that such behaviour is tolerated or even condoned" (2004, 4). The Colombian state has signed and ratified the UN's *Convention on the Elimination of All*

*Forms of Discrimination against Women* and has developed legislation in tune with the recommendations made by the UN. However, it has lacked coordination, effectiveness, and adequate resources to enforce and uphold the law. Thus, the Colombian state has helped perpetuate and strengthen gender stereotypes that result in gender-based violence (ibid., 12).

The presence of women combatants in both leftist and right-wing organizations can be approached by studying western debates on whether it is empowering or oppressive for women to join the armed forces. However, there are some factors that call for a distinct framework such as the legal nature of the organizations and the effect this has on the quality of life of their recruits. In their study of demobilized women in Colombia in the 1990s (excluding groups which are still active today, including the FARC), Luz María Londoño and Yoana Fernanda Nieto (2006), note that the DDR process in Colombia is unique from a comparative perspective since it has unfolded in the midst of a war. DDR processes around the world are carried out parallel to a post-conflict transition. This difference is identified by Londoño and Nieto (2006, 14) as significant when considering the roles and vulnerabilities of demobilized women within the context of an ongoing war. This particularity of the Colombian case can influence demobilized women's incursion in the political sphere, their empowerment as civilians, and the meaning attributed to "demobilized women" (ibid.).

Elise Barth (2002) argues that women and girls, unlike men who become members of an illegal armed group, have to modify and reconfigure their understanding of traditional gender roles. This new understanding has to meet the standards set within each particular organization regarding the roles attributed to men and women. Taking into account that these organizations are constructed from a militaristic foundation, women's space to articulate their new gender identity is dominated by masculine principles. Thus, women will end up acting and thinking like



men. However, as the Colombian case shows, the reconfiguration of gender roles is much more complex and nuanced than women simply becoming like men. Depending on the organization, the configuration of gender identities relies on traditional gender roles, and on reinforcing, reinterpreting, and redefining them to fit the needs of the organization. Joan W. Scott (1988) argues that language is a meaning–construction system through which meaning is constructed and cultural practices organized. Scott asks, “how, in what specific contexts, among which specific communities of people, and by what textual and social processes has meaning been acquired? What do these processes reveal about how power is constituted and operates?” (ibid., 447). The FARC and the AUC have many features in common. They have both terrorized civilians, engaged in sexual violence, and engaged in drug trafficking. However, these two organizations have had different ways of rationalizing their actions. In this sense, the social processes through which meaning is acquired are different in the FARC and the AUC. These processes include the incorporation, justification, and rationalization of women recruits who are seen in specific ways.

Women in the armed groups are performing gender “as a *corporeal style*, as an ‘act’ as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where *performative* suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning” (Butler 1990, 190). Key to gender as performance is repetition, which “is at once a re–enactment and re–experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation” (ibid., 191). Herein lies the differences between the FARC and the AUC in relation to the ways in which gender has been experienced in each of these organizations. Militarized gender performativity in the FARC and the AUC reveals the malleability of gender, in line with Butler’s conception of gender as something that cannot be *expressed*, but is rather performed. The transition from

civilian to combatant to ex-combatant to civilian provides interesting insights on this. Studies of the experiences of women in the Colombian illegal armed groups should take into account the particularities of the Colombian context, its history of protracted violence, the historical role and gains of women, and the measures taken by the government of President Uribe during his two terms in power.

## Chapter 4. Disarming, Demobilizing, and Reintegrating in the Midst of Conflict

DDR processes are based on the commitment to move beyond identities, symbols, and behaviours which perpetuate violence. Although not always sequential, DDR processes are composed of several aspects. *Demilitarization* involves looking at the role of the military in society and its transformation as well as social transformations. During this stage, less importance is placed on violence and more attention is given to the peaceful resolution of conflicts. *Disarmament* is concerned with the reduction of weapons, and it can also be seen as a social contract between the government and the ex-combatants (Porto et al. 2007, 17). It is of a more practical and symbolic nature as it involves the ex-combatants renouncing an important aspect of their identity as combatants (Douglas et al. 2004). Long term processes of reintegration into civilian life and weapons collection are expected to continue long after the DDR process has been finalized. *Demobilization* is the formal and controlled discharge of active combatants from armed forces and other armed groups. *Reinsertion* concerns the assistance (orientation, food assistance, health and education, and cash allowance) given to ex-combatants during demobilization but prior to reintegration.

The latter is a longer-term process in which ex-combatants and their families are reintegrated into civilian communities (Knight and Ozederm 2004, 500). Reintegration is the least understood aspect of DDR processes (Porto et al. 2007, 17). It is a long term, continuous, social and economic process, and often includes a financial component and income generating support. Reintegration requires the normalization process of civilian life, and “requires the transformation of the individual: from a soldier, a combatant, a mercenary to a civilian, in fact, a citizen—transformation which is largely voluntary and whose success depends on the willingness and initiative of the former combatant” (Porto et al. 2007, 20). This is a slow social,

economic, and psychological process. Outcome depends on the level of commitment by ex-combatants and their families, the support from their communities, their government, and NGOs, and foreign development cooperation, as well as on a successful process of democratization (ibid.,18). Overall, DDR processes have a very important symbolic value in the period of transition from combatant to ex-combatant and civilian since these identities (combatant, ex-combatant, civilian) carry with them different kinds of status, and as DDR participants might require sacrificing what they see as benefits during their demobilization (Rozema 2008, 443).

There is a tension between “short-term emergency and stabilization (reinsertion) imperatives with longer term socio-economic reintegration and therefore development” (Porto et al. 2007, 20). This tension generates challenges during the DDR process and it is rarely resolved in the literature, as scholars go back and forth in stressing the importance of these two sets of priorities (ibid., 19). Porto et al. argue that this tension creates a paradox:

...by setting unrealistic aims and objectives for DDR programs, creating the expectation that DDR programs can, in practice, go beyond laying the groundwork for security to actually safeguarding and sustaining communities in post-conflict situations, policy makers and implementation agencies may inadvertently contribute to the failure of DDR. (2007, 20)

Several scholars argue that the nature of this process has not been specifically studied from the point of view of the people who are giving up their arms to return to civilian life (Porto et al. 2007; Gamba 2008). Instead, the focus has been on short term results and other practical concerns that have led international NGOs and international development and donor agencies to provide immediate post-war security and stabilization. Experience with DDR over the last two decades has shown that these processes should be regarded in a long term and developmental

way, approached as multi-actor and multi-dimensional (Porto et al. 2007, 2). Academic and policy oriented literature is lacking in participatory assessments of DDR, and the perspective and experiences of the individuals involved has not been significantly studied (ibid.). This includes the experiences of women and girls who have been part of illegal armed groups. Amelia Potter (2008) argues that this gap is due to the fact that women are still excluded from decision making in high-ranking levels of peacemaking and peace-building, and also because there is no awareness of the negative implication this exclusion has: “reality lags far behind rhetoric in women’s involvement in peace processes, to the great detriment of both” (105).

There have been two main efforts to organize and standardize DDR processes around the world. These are the Stockholm Initiative on DDR (SIDDR), and the United Nations’ Interagency Working Group on DDR which introduced the Integrated Demobilization Disarmament and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS) in 2006. These include policy guidance on gender aspects of DDR programs under the UN Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Resource Center (UNDDR). The SIDDR (2006, 14) highlights the importance of establishing a secure and stable environment that can guarantee the stability and success of peace negotiations. It also highlights the importance of going beyond a focus on disarmament and demobilization to consider the complex processes and social actors involved in the reintegration portion of DDR programs. In other words, it approaches the DDR process as part of a broader peace-building framework working in conjunction with other organizations and not as *the* peace-building framework (ibid., 19). The IDDRS also highlights the importance of including long term goals in DDR processes, namely those that go beyond the initial stages of disarmament and demobilization. These two initiatives have been influential in the design and implementation of DDR programs. Londoño and Nieto (2006, 59) argue that these initiatives have helped to attract

more attention to women's participation in war as combatants, making it a salient topic in international agreements and declarations. However, there are some ambiguities present in both initiatives, particularly with respect to long term goals (de Greiff 2009, 348). For instance, the IDDRS acknowledges the importance of the relationship between the long term goals of DDR and economic and social development, but does not specify what is meant by this, or what the responsibilities (if any) of the DDR program are in this regard (ibid.). Thus, it is still unclear what the long term expectations of DDR programs should be.

Despite these two efforts to provide concrete guidelines for DDR programs, the “key conceptual issues such as the nature of ‘reintegration’ and its relationship to citizenship in post–conflict societies are not properly understood or accounted for in the design and development of reintegration programs” (Porto et al. 2007, 2). These two initiatives, and the academic and policy oriented literature on DDR, are lacking in participatory assessments of these processes. Moreover, the perspectives and experiences of individuals involved have not been significantly studied (Porto et al. 2007; Gamba 2008). These include the experiences of women, children, and adolescents in general. According to Potter (2008), three intergovernmental documents are key in revealing the roles women can play in conflict–resolution: (1) the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); (2) the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action; and (3) the 2000 Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. All of these documents contain important ways to prevent ex–combatant women from being excluded during the short and long term stages of DDR processes. For instance, Resolution 1325 highlights the unique impact that violent conflict has on women, and recognizes that women's contributions to conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and peace–building are undervalued and underutilized. This resolution also calls for the active participation

of women as active agents in peace processes (ibid.). Resolution 1325 and other intergovernmental documents are, thus, important resources for those in charge of designing and implementing DDR processes since they can serve as a guideline to incorporate women in these programs.

The comprehensive inclusion of women in DDR processes is not only relevant in meeting their immediate needs, but also with respect to women's roles in post-conflict situations. Post-conflict contexts can often expose women to similar and often worse levels of violence than experienced during a conflict period (Potter 2008, 108). This includes domestic and sexual violence. However, post-conflict periods can also open spaces for women to assert their equality. The problem is that they have faced numerous obstacles in maintaining these gains (ibid., 109). There are very few cases where women have played a formal role either as representatives or third party mediators in peace processes and DDR design (e.g., Guatemala, Northern Ireland, and Somalia). For example, in Northern Ireland and Somalia, women organized across party, political, and clan lines to ensure that their voices were heard (109).

### **Colombian Peace Talks and DDR Processes**

The history of peace talks and DDR processes in Colombia has had a common backdrop. Different insurgent groups have been in competition for the control of zones that will fuel their finances, while the Colombian state has attempted, with different degrees of success, to extend its control throughout the country, improve its inefficient judicial system with respect to the prosecution of criminals and sentence enforcement, and eliminate its high levels of corruption. In Colombia, "the state's monopoly of the means of violence—an attribute that is often considered as given, permanent and even natural—is actually social and practical. Authority over the means of violence is contested and changing, and is, in fact, a variable quality of the state" (Romero 2000, 51). During the last two decades, the Colombian state has faced the challenge of regaining

its monopoly over the use of force lost to the “de facto partition” between left wing guerrilla groups and rightwing paramilitary groups (Pereira 2003, 397). Harvey F. Kline (2009) argues that because Colombia is the second or third most topographically challenged country in the world, there are multiple areas in which a group other than the government can make and enforce the rules by which people live. He calls these areas “political archipelagos” which include the existence of armed groups such as the FARC, the ELN, drug cartels, and the AUC (ibid., 11–12). Thus, the goal of Colombian presidents has been to reduce the number of political archipelagos throughout the country which indeed operate like de facto states.

Peace talks with illegal armed groups have been held by different administrations with varying degrees of success since the 1980s, and there have been several successes over three decades in terms of demobilization. Porch and Rasmussen (2008) state that Colombians have become “serial demobilizers” during the last half century. Illegal armed groups which have demobilized in the past include the Movimiento 19 de Abril (M–19) in 1990; the Ejército Popular de Liberación (EPL), the El Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (PRT), and the El Movimiento Quintín Lame in 1991; the El Comando Ernesto Rojas in 1992; the La Corriente de Renovación Socialista (CRS) (which was a branch of the ELN), the Milicias del Pueblo y para el Pueblo, the Milicias Metropolitanas y Milicias del Valle de Aburrá, and the El Frente Francisco Garnica de la Coordinadora Guerrillera in 1994; and the Movimiento Independiente Revolucionario–Comandos Armados (MIR–COAR) in 1998. These were all collective demobilizations and encompassed a total of 5,700 individuals. Furthermore, from 1998 to July 2002, 1,720 combatants gave up their arms individually (not tied to any official DDR program specifically tailored to an organization). From August 2002 to 2008, forty–nine thousand combatants demobilized both collectively and individually. Women constitute 9 percent of



individuals in the Colombian DDR processes. Of these individuals, 3 percent were part of an ethnic minority (of this 3 percent, 71 percent were Afro-Colombian, 26 percent were Native Indians, 1 percent were Rom, and 1 percent were Raizal) (Consejo Nacional de Política Económica y Social República de Colombia 2008, 11–13).<sup>14</sup>

Despite these successes with demobilization, no Colombian president has ever been able to carry out a comprehensive peace negotiation process with the FARC and the ELN, the two largest left wing illegal armed groups. President Belisario Betancur (1982–1986) was the first president to attempt to negotiate with the FARC. He granted amnesty (with some exceptions based on the magnitude of the crime) to those engaged in armed conflict against the government as an incentive to demobilize. Around four hundred members of the FARC, the ELN, and the *Movimiento 19 de Abril* (April 19<sup>th</sup> Movement), or M–19, guerrilla groups took advantage of this law (Law 35 of 1982) and gave up their arms.

Between 28.6 and 31.5 percent of members of the M–19 were women (Londoño and Nieto 2006, 32). Some of these women played a significant role in the demobilization process. For instance, M–19 women created a group called *Mujeres de Abril* (April Women) to deliberate on what the role of women should be in a guerrilla organization as well as in peace-building initiatives (ibid.). The M–19 was active during the 1970s and 1980s, and was an urban-based movement made up of students, social activists, artists, academics, and segments of the middle-class. After its demobilization, the M–19 was granted access to the political sphere through the creation of the political party M–19 Democratic Alliance. It was also granted seats in the Constituent Assembly that drafted the new constitution in 1991 (Porch and Rasmussen 2008, 524). Londoño and Nieto (2006, 31) argue that the active participation of M–19 women in the

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<sup>14</sup> Raizal is the name of the ethnicity of locals from the Colombian islands of San Andrés, Providencia, and Santa Catalina, located in the Caribbean Sea. Rom includes all the ethnic groups which are descendants of European Romani ethnic groups who migrated to America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

movement and in the demobilization process, including the peace negotiations with President Betancur, was due to the high levels of education among the members of this predominantly urban guerrilla movement.

Under the Betancur administration, cease fire agreements were signed with the FARC, but disagreements between the parties halted the process and there was no collective demobilization. Betancur's efforts were ultimately unsuccessful in the demobilization of the FARC as a whole, due to insufficient state investment in the process and the opposition of the military to the amnesty granted to guerrilla members (Porch and Rasmussen 2008, 523). Furthermore, the army sabotaged the efforts and defied Betancur's cease order after he cut the army's budget and did not consult the army on key issues related to the peace talks (Nasi 2009, 53–54). President Virgilio Barco (1986–1990) was successful in the demobilization of the guerrilla group M-19 and other smaller guerrilla groups, but was unable to reach an agreement with the FARC and the ELN.

President Barco's successor, President César Gaviria (1990–1994), carried out negotiations with both the FARC and the ELN, but they also failed to agree on an agenda and neither of the parties was willing to fulfill the other side's demands (Kline 2009, 20). However, during Gaviria's time in office, small left wing guerrilla movements demobilized, taking advantage of the democratization the Colombian political sphere went through with the adoption of a new constitution (Chernick 2009, 73). The mandate of President Ernesto Samper (1994–1998) was tainted with a corruption scandal when he was accused of receiving funds from the Cali drug cartel during his presidential campaign. Due to the amount of time and energy Samper spent defending himself, there were no major accomplishments in terms of peace negotiations with the guerrilla groups (Kline 2009, 21). In addition, the USA cut its aid to Colombia due to

the corruption scandal, and the FARC took advantage of this to launch a more aggressive campaign against the government which increased the levels of violence throughout the country (Porch and Rasmussen 2008, 525). However, his successor, President Andrés Pastrana did engage in promising negotiations with the FARC. During a time in which FARC violence was rampant and kidnapping had reached a historical high, President Pastrana conceded to the FARC's demands and granted this organization a demilitarized zone of approximately 42,140 square kilometers (Kline 2009, 22). Pastrana gave the FARC access to the demilitarized zone in January 1999, without a concrete demand by the government for the FARC to cease fire, and the FARC continued kidnapping high profile individuals as well as bombing towns and military targets (Chernick 2009, 77; Nasi 2009, 55). This area, which was known as "FARC-landia" in the media, became a training ground for FARC members (Porch and Rasmussen 2008, 526). After the hijacking of a commercial plane on which a senator was travelling in February 2002, Pastrana ordered the military to take over the demilitarized zone and ended the peace talks. The peace talks between the Pastrana government and the FARC were deemed a complete failure by the Colombian media, the government's opposition, and civil society (Chernick 2009, 76). The FARC's violence did not decline; in fact, violence in general increased, and no substantive matters were discussed during the three years the demilitarized zone existed (Kline 2009, 23). The election of President Uribe was in many ways a rejection of Pastrana's soft stance against the armed groups, and many of the policies established by Uribe were the complete opposite of those established by Pastrana during his negotiation with the FARC.

President Uribe was the sixth president to unsuccessfully negotiate with the FARC, and the only president who managed to carry out a successful paramilitary demobilization program. Before the AUC was officially established in 1997, paramilitary violence had already exceeded

that of the guerrillas, measured in the number of deaths attributed to each organization (Kline 2009, 15). However, unlike the guerrilla groups, the paramilitary groups did not have official political status; importantly, Colombian law did not allow its presidents to negotiate with groups which did not have political status. After being made illegal during President Barco's term, due to a massacre in La Rochela in which paramilitaries murdered a judicial commission investigating their crimes, paramilitary groups had tried to get political recognition (Porch and Rasmussen 2008, 525). However, they were not given political status by either Barco or his successor, President Gaviria. Instead, Gaviria gave paramilitary groups the same status as drug traffickers when legislation was changed to punish paramilitary crimes in the same way as those committed by drug traffickers (*ibid.*, 16).

President Samper approved the legislation that made the private security groups (CONVIVIR) legal, which allowed the different paramilitary groups throughout the country to consolidate under an umbrella organization: the AUC. Despite not having political status, the AUC managed to contact President Pastrana during the end of his mandate to express its willingness to negotiate (Kline 2009, 22). Pastrana passed the contacts on to newly elected President Uribe, who began making plans for a potential negotiation with the AUC during the months following his inauguration (Jones 2009, 353). Uribe had to make legal changes through the National Congress in order to allow Colombian presidents to negotiate with terrorist organizations that did not have political status. In a controversial move, congress passed the law on November 2002 that allowed Uribe to negotiate with the AUC, and the AUC expressed its commitment to a cease fire—Uribe's only condition to negotiate—starting December 1<sup>st</sup> (Kline 2009, 78).

### **Uribe's Democratic Security**

From the beginning of his term as president, Uribe focused on reducing violence

throughout the country based on a hard-line military approach which differentiated him from all the presidents before him (Chernick 2009, 65). What characterized this government's approach to conflict resolution was the aggressiveness and determination to regain territorial control and reduce the levels of violence inflicted by the illegal armed groups. In order to achieve this, Uribe focused on strengthening the military forces both in numbers and in capacity (Kline 2009, 23). During the Pastrana administration, the United States government had unveiled a plan of military aid to fight the war on drugs in Colombia. "Plan Colombia" consisted of 7.5 billion US dollars, which the Colombian government received over several years. According to Kline (2009), Plan Colombia changed the Colombian military both quantitatively and qualitatively, and was key in implementing Uribe's policies during his two terms in office. Although the funds from Plan Colombia were primarily to continue fighting the war on drugs by increasing the country's military spending, this had several implications on the fight against the illegal armed groups. One of the implications was that Plan Colombia allowed Uribe to establish a long term plan to increase national security through military means. His authoritarian style of governing, along with the large amount of military spending, allowed him to declare war against those illegal armed groups that did not commit to a cease fire. These included the FARC and the ELN. Kline argues that during the Uribe administration, "there was no division between him and the government. Constantly in the limelight, Uribe *was* the government" (2009, 43). Uribe was known for micromanaging all kinds of issues in his administration, from investigations on kidnapped landowners to inspecting airport bathrooms during every trip he took within Colombia to make sure they were clean (Duzán 2004, 27). He held his position of not negotiating with illegal armed groups that did not cease hostilities during his eight years in power.

The proposals to eradicate the illegal armed groups (either militarily or through voluntary

demobilization) and increase national security, which Uribe made throughout his presidential campaign were officially approved in June 2003, under Law 812 of that same year. They were framed as the “National Plan for Development for the Years 2003–2006: Towards a Communitarian State.” This document set out the basis for several of the government’s security policies. After the official inauguration of his mandate, there was a bombing by the FARC which killed seventeen people, and Uribe declared a ‘state of internal commotion’ (also known as a state of siege). Decree 1837 of August 2002 gave broad powers to the executive, allowing the president to override the legislature in the decision–making process. This decree had an impact on the relationship between the armed forces and the government, and was the mechanism Uribe used to bypass the congress and enact decisions in a rapid manner. For instance, the government initially declared some conflict areas to be ‘Rehabilitation and Consolidation Zones’ in which military officers adopted administrative functions, while being granted legal power to restrict people’s freedoms when it was considered pertinent, such as carrying out property searches without search warrants. This project was later declared unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court. The executive responded by reframing it under the ‘democratic security’ agenda.

Democratic Security was an approach to conflict management with two main objectives: (1) reinforce and guarantee the presence of the state throughout the national territory through the enforcement of ‘democratic authority’ (the free exercise of the authority of lawful institutions), and (2) active participation of citizens in common interest issues. In general, this document reflected the efforts of the government to mobilize as many resources as possible to strengthen security. During the first five years of the Democratic Security plan, military spending grew from 2.8 percent to 3.3 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Kline 2009, 41). This allowed for several military reforms which included giving large sums of money as a reward for

information related to the illegal armed groups, drug cartels, and crime in general, a large marketing campaign to get members of the illegal armed groups to desert, and the creation of informal networks of informants (Kline 2009, 39). In addition, the Colombian police and armed forces expanded during Uribe's first four years in power to include 4,355 new marines, 20,000 new mounted police, 14,000 new police aides, and 13,000 new soldiers (ibid., 41). This allowed Uribe to carry out his proposed "Plan Patriota" (Patriotic Plan), which came to be the most ambitious military operation in Colombian history aimed at disbanding the armed groups (ibid.,). Plan Patriota was carried out in coordination with the US armed forces and was in tune with the objectives of Uribe's Democratic Security Agenda. Its main target was the FARC and numerous resources were spent attempting a military victory (Chernick 2009, 93).

Within Uribe's plan of 'democratic security' and his objective of strengthening public force, was the establishment of civilian support networks as well as the organization of 'peasant soldiers,' both which were to aid the military units in the attainment of the aforementioned objectives. These two projects were highly controversial since they deliberately attempted to incorporate civil society in the government's conflict resolution agenda. One million citizens were expected to become part of the support networks, both in rural and urban areas, with the objective of facilitating the flow of information related to drug production, commercialization, and consumption, as well as kidnappings and extortions (Ministerio de Defensa Nacional 2003, 5). The 'peasant soldiers' project (also called *soldados de mi pueblo*, or 'soldiers of my town') was set forward by the military forces to enlist and train those interested in joining. This included the provision of incentives such as a monthly salary, social services, and a retirement fund, as well as a short training program in the management of firearms and military responsibilities.

Uribe's approach to conflict resolution fits Jennifer Turpin's and Lester R. Kurtz's (1997)

description of governmental policies to address violence. One of these policies is called the peace through strength approach, and it refers to the state opting for “use of tough measures, usually involving violence against deviant individuals or nations, to solve problems of violence” (336). Under this approach, violence must be divided between its legitimate and illegitimate forms since its use by the state is a ‘response’ rather than a deliberate action against the armed groups. The fact that it opts for violent measures should not imply that the state is an armed group itself, and this distinction must be clear for society in general to accept, normalize, and legitimate state actions, something which is not pervasive in Colombia. With Uribe’s strong approach, Colombian society became highly militarized during his administration. The Ministry of Defence made an evaluation of the first year of the ‘democratic security’ agenda and found that from the 150 municipalities where there was complete public force absence prior to 2003, 139 had been accessed by the military (Ministerio de Defensa Nacional 2003). Thus, Uribe’s policies reduced the levels of violence throughout the country. However, Porch and Rasmussen (2008) argue that Uribe’s approach has amounted to a transformed rather than terminated violence in Colombia.

### **Uribe’s Peace Talks with the AUC and the FARC**

The DDR program established during the Uribe administration was unprecedented in scope and size. The number of demobilized ex-combatants who gave up their arms and returned to civilian life totalled more than all of the previous individuals who had demobilized during the 1980s and 1990s. Furthermore, the demobilization program carried out during Uribe’s government was *sui generis* because it involved a group which was not fighting the state, but another illegal armed group which had targeted the state (Kline 2009, 27).

President Uribe engaged in peace negotiations with the AUC soon after it was legal for him to meet with AUC leaders for the purpose of engaging in peace talks. This organization



openly endorsed Uribe's presidential campaign and election as well as his hard-line stance against the FARC and other guerrilla groups (Jones 2009, 360). The preliminary negotiations were confidential, and the secrecy surrounding them was been questioned by both civil society and international observers (Barraza and Caicedo 2007, 42; Gutiérrez-Sanín 2008, 7). The AUC asked for the United Nations to serve as a mediator, but Kofi Annan, then UN secretary general, declined. Instead, the Organization of American states carried out the verification of the process, and although it could not directly intervene, it could make recommendations to both sides. The verification commission, Misión de Apoyo al Proceso de Paz of the Organization of American States (MAPP-OEA), reported that the paramilitaries continued to carry out human rights violations during the time they were demobilizing (Barraza and Caicedo 2007). This happened despite the fact that during the first year, 98 percent of the AUC had committed to a ceasefire (Kline 2009, 82).

The first AUC block to demobilize did so without a legal framework in place to specify the terms of their return to civilian life. Due to this, and to the internal divisions within the AUC, the Uribe government had to carry out several meetings in order to negotiate with regional leaders. Despite the animosity between some AUC blocks and the lack of a legal framework of reintegration, the rounds of negotiations managed to produce a common ground which was recorded on July 14–15, 2003 in Tierralta, in the department of Córdoba, under the title “Agreement of Santa Fé de Ralito to Contribute to Peace in Colombia” (Rozema 2008, 424). The main demand of the government was the complete demobilization of the AUC; the main concern of the AUC was the potential extradition of its leaders by the US government under drug trafficking charges. The legal framework approved in Congress in July 2005 facilitated the DDR process by creating legislation that would address the legal situation of ex-combatants from the

AUC, many of who had committed serious human rights violations.

The Justice and Peace law is the basis of a flexible DDR which offers amnesty and pardon to individuals who demobilize voluntarily. Even though the Colombian government has granted amnesty to combatants in the past (in 1953, 1954, 1958, 1981, 1982, 1990, 1991, and 1994), the Justice and Peace law has been highly criticized for its lack of reparation to victims, the high level of amnesty granted to ex-combatants, the lack of compulsory confession, and for the fact that it is very unlikely that the Colombian legal system can effectively handle the large number of investigations and judicial processes generated by the DDR program (Kline 2009, 69). León Valencia, a former ELN member, stated:

There is no public policy or stable institution for reincorporation. With a program of two years of subsidies and a few employment incentives, in a little while the country will have no fewer than 30,000 people without a sustainable program of reinsertion and with the constant temptation of reintegrating themselves into the war or into simple delinquency. (quoted in Kline 2009, 98)

The opposition engaged in numerous debates in congress and presented a counter-proposal with larger sentences and higher accountability to victims among other points. At the time of writing this dissertation, the Justice and Peace law continues to be debated in congress.

During the demobilization of the AUC, the Justice and Peace law worked in the following way: first, the demobilized combatant was interviewed by civilian and military authorities in order to determine if he or she had carried out crimes against humanity. This was done under the *Programa de Atención Humanitaria al Desmovilizado*, or PAHD (Program for Humanitarian Attention to Demobilized Persons), which was coordinated by the Ministry of Defence. If the demobilized combatant had not carried out crimes against humanity, the

individual was taken to an urban center where he or she had to stay in communal housing for three weeks and go through more interviews. During this time, ex-combatants could not leave the premises and were forbidden to drink alcohol. Their daily schedule included exercise, workshops, optional prayer hour, and a group assessment of the day (Kline 2009, 84).

Each ex-combatant who has demobilized has committed to abandon illegal activities, hand in their arms, contribute to ending their illegal organization, and to not start or join an illegal armed group again. If willing to do so, he or she has been granted a package of benefits including education, health, housing, therapy, and skill development. As part of their commitment, every demobilized combatant has also agreed to develop a long term plan related to education or business which he or she must work on for two years. Upon completion, each ex-combatant is expected to graduate from the demobilization program. The government's commitments have included recognizing and respecting the civil, political, and legal rights of ex-combatants as Colombian citizens.

Uribe's approach to the Colombian conflict and to the DDR process was based on efforts to regain the monopoly over the use of force. From this perspective, the causes of the conflict are not believed to be rooted in inequality, gender and ethnic discrimination, or in other forms of socio-political issues (Barraza and Caicedo 2007, 21). Uribe also attempted to carry out peace negotiations with the FARC and the ELN, both of which were unsuccessful.

The negotiations with the FARC were based on what is known in Colombia as "humanitarian exchange": the exchange of FARC prisoners for hostages held in captivity by the FARC. During the Uribe administration, the FARC demanded the release of five hundred FARC prisoners held in jails throughout the country. Upon their release, the FARC would free forty-five hostages, many who had been in captivity for several years (Kline 2009, 130). In addition,

the FARC demanded a demilitarized zone like the one granted to them during the government of president Pastrana, and would not commit to a ceasefire during negotiations. Uribe was not willing to negotiate in such terms, and the preliminary negotiations which would get the peace talks going reached a stalemate as neither side was willing to give in (ibid., 149). According to Kline, the success of the paramilitary demobilization and all its concessions and benefits, and the immunity given to AUC members, generated a sense of unease in the FARC which reduced the chance of a successful exchange with the government (149). Chernick (2009, 90) similarly argues that the FARC adopted a critical posture towards the amnesty granted to AUC members by Uribe; FARC leaders have openly demanded appropriate punishment for AUC members, as well as substantive reparations to victims of the AUC.

Negotiations between the FARC and the Uribe administration collapsed not over the agenda per se, but over transgressions on the battlefield (Chernick 2009; Kline 2009). Chernick (2009, 66) argues that the FARC have been historically consistent at the negotiating table, but that administration after administration has been unable to compromise on a solution. However, Lee (2012) states that the FARC has been successful in presenting criticisms of the Colombian state, but has been unable to develop a comprehensive political platform. These disagreements at the negotiations table have been fraught in tandem with transgressions on the battlefield. This has undermined any possible agreement between the FARC and the government. Chernick (2009) discusses two kinds of agendas during peace negotiations: a wide agenda, which includes structural changes in the political, economic, and social and/or cultural spheres, and a narrow agenda focused on the terms of the ceasefire, disarmament, and demobilization. Every president since Betancur has adopted one of these agendas with the FARC and all the other illegal armed groups which have sat at the negotiating table. Presidents Barco and Gaviria were successful in

the demobilization of small guerrilla groups by adopting a narrow approach, as was Uribe during his negotiations with the paramilitaries (ibid., 73). However, the FARC will only accept a broad agenda which includes specific proposals for political change better suited to a constitutional assembly (agrarian reform, strict policies on the conservation of natural resources, judicial reforms, political reforms to guarantee the expansion of democracy, agreements on international humanitarian law, armed forces, and international relations among others), as well as FARC access to power (ibid., 76). The two presidents who attempted to engage in negotiations on such issues (President Betancur and President Pastrana) could not reach an agreement. Pastrana spent three and a half years negotiating economic reforms related to employment without making any progress that would lead to a demobilization process (ibid.).

Apart from a detailed agenda, the FARC's demands have consistently included that negotiations take place in a demilitarized zone with no access by the military. Both President Betancur and President Pastrana accepted this condition. But President Uribe was adamant in his stance: no *zona de despeje* (demilitarized zone). Further, he demanded clear guarantees to prevent FARC prisoners released from prison under a humanitarian agreement from returning to combat (Chernick 2009, 81). The FARC insisted on *zona de despeje* and lowered its demands from a large area in the departments of Caquetá and Putumayo to a small area in the Valle department. Uribe agreed to this, but the parties could not agree on the terms of the *zona de despeje*. Negotiations became increasingly truncated in 2005, despite offers by the Venezuelan, French, and Swiss governments, and the Catholic Church, to mediate.

### **Colombian DDR: Individual and Collective Processes**

As a result of the agreement signed in Santa Fé de Ralito in July 2003, the government established a collective DDR program for the paramilitaries who were to demobilize collectively. Furthermore, an individual DDR program (Law 782 of 2002) was put in place to allow members

of guerrilla groups and paramilitary members who did not demobilize collectively to give up their arms. The parallel programs went through a process of verification carried out by the MAPP–OEA. Colombian combatants who demobilize individually generally do so voluntarily without prior approval from their armed group, and without previous negotiation between his or her organization and the government (Porch and Rasmussen 2008, 522). This is often preceded by the individual's disengagement from his or her armed group, and approaching the National Army with the intention of re-entering civilian life. This individual DDR program is supervised by the Ministry of Defence through the *Programa de Atención Humanitaria al Desmovilizado* (Program for Humanitarian Attention to Demobilized People). The PAHD provides immediate humanitarian assistance to the demobilized ex-combatant and the individual in question begins a three month psychosocial assessment; an investigation is also done to make sure he or she has not committed any human rights violations (Porch and Rasmussen 2008, 526). After these steps are completed, the individual is ready to become part of the reintegration program, handled by the *Alta Consejería para la Reintegración* ACR (High Commission for Reintegration).

The collective DDR process was different. In that program, groups of individuals guided by their superiors gave up their arms and re-entered civilian life. The block that was demobilizing produced a list of members and the MAPP–OEA was then in charge of verifying members' identities and carrying out an inventory of their weapons (Porch and Rasmussen 2008, 526). As mentioned earlier, this was preceded by a formal negotiation process, and an agreement with the *Oficina del Alto Comisionado para la Paz* (The Office of the High Commissioner for Peace). Once the individual in question was given the approval by the MAPP–OEA verification team, he or she was granted an identity card showing their status as a member of the DDR, and was then able to begin the reintegration portion of the DDR process.

The individual and the collective DDR processes merge into a common process once the demobilized individual is certified as a member of an illegal armed group (guerrillas or paramilitaries only). This process is headed by the ACR and the Ministry of Interior. Minors in both the collective (AUC) and individual programs have been sent to the *Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar*, or ICBF (The Colombian Family Welfare Institute) regardless of whether they demobilized collectively or individually. Collective demobilizations ended in August 2006 when thirty-eight out of thirty-nine paramilitary units gave up their arms with a total of 31,670 ex-combatants (Barraza and Caicedo 2007, 41). Since then, all demobilization attempts are considered as individual attempts, even though ex-members of the AUC are still in the reintegration stage of the collective DDR program.

Until 2006, the government was in charge of both DDR programs through the Ministry of Interior and Justice, with the guidance of The Office of the High Commissioner for Peace. The focus of this approach was short term, and was limited to humanitarian activities and other types of assistance. However, given the increasing number of individuals seeking demobilized status, the government created the *Alta Consejería para la Reintegración*, or ACR (High Commission for Reintegration) in September 2006. The ACR approaches DDR both as a process engaged in by individuals (ex-combatants and their families) and by the recipient communities, which may or may not be keen on welcoming individuals with demobilized status (Consejo Nacional de Política Económica y Social República de Colombia 2008, 8). Before this, the DDR's focus had been on the demobilized individuals and not the recipient community, nor the interaction between the communities and the desmovilizados (Barraza and Caicedo 2007, 21).

Members of the DDR are given benefits with respect to healthcare, vocational training, education, work, and the potential to start a small business by receiving training and micro-credit

support. Attendance at workshops is compulsory. Those who fail to attend stop receiving the monthly allowance they are entitled to as members of the DDR program. Amnesty has been granted to ex–AUC members who committed political crimes.<sup>15</sup> This has been done under the *Ley de Justicia y Paz* (Law for Justice and Peace). This law is very controversial as some people consider it unfair that former combatants are being “rewarded” with benefits (Rozema 2008, 425).

*The Consejo Nacional de Política Económica y Social*, or CONPES (The National Committee for Economic and Social Politics) was created in 1958 as an authority to assist the government in everything related to the economic and social development of Colombia. It issued a 2008 report containing several criticisms and recommendations for the Colombian DDR process. The report identified several barriers to the full social, economic, and cultural reintegration of ex–combatants into civilian life (ibid.,18). Recipient communities throughout the country are not always open to welcoming the demobilized. This is mostly due to the fact that people believe that violence would increase in their communities with the arrival of the desmovilizados. The government has identified the issue of trust as being particularly daunting when attempting to carry out a successful DDR process. This is coupled with other psychological and psychosocial aspects shared by most desmovilizados which are not being successfully addressed.

Continuous studies by the ACR have shown that most desmovilizados have social and moral values which are not congruent to those dominant in civil society, but that are suited more to violent, authoritarian, unjust, and unequal contexts (ibid., 20). Furthermore, the low

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<sup>15</sup> Under Colombian law, “political crimes” are those carried out by members of a politically motivated group with concrete political intentions such as substituting the state. At different points in Colombian history, crimes such as murder, kidnapping, and massacres have been considered political crimes. In many cases, people who are accused of having carried out a political crime are granted judicial immunity. What constitutes a political crime and the way it should be incorporated into the judicial system is highly controversial in Colombian politics (Restrepo 2005).



educational levels amongst the ex-combatants are not being improved during the DDR process due to the lack of opportunities congruent with the needs of this particular group of people.<sup>16</sup> CONPES has also found that the DDR program has been deficient in its staff, infrastructure, and in the educational programs offered to ex-combatants (ibid., 22). All of this, coupled with the ex-combatants' lack of work experience, affects the chances of individuals embarking on a successful career or their ability to be active in the labour market. CONPES found that most ex-combatants become dependent on the welfare provided by the DDR program and are not capable of making long term plans for their lives as civilians (ibid.). In this respect, Gamba's (2008, 180) contention that the wartime skills of people are very different to those needed during post-conflict reconstruction is of particular note. This poses a threat to the long term goals of reintegrating ex-combatants into society. Upon finding that some behaviours are not rewarded (like using threats to achieve goals), individuals often turn to criminal activities where they can apply the skills they acquired during their time as combatants. Two types of crime are common amongst demobilized individuals: common armed banditry, and organized crime (ibid.). The possibility of engaging in illegal activities was identified in the CONPES document as one of the main challenges to the Colombian DDR process.

### **Colombian DDR: The Reintegration Stage**

The aftermath of DDR processes is very complex in terms of post-conflict violence. Therefore, "war-torn countries with demobilized combatants... run the risk of returning to conflict, if they are not provided with a comprehensive reintegration strategy" (Knight and Ozederm 2004, 502). The collective Colombian DDR process has been questioned in recent years due to the increasing number of criminal groups which have emerged throughout the

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<sup>16</sup> CONPES identifies some of the main needs of desmovilizados to be: improving skills related to the responsible use of money and free time, following rules and schedules, as well as prioritizing their obligations (Documento Conpes 2008, 22).

country, and the large unemployment rate among ex-combatant members of the DDR program (Porch and Rasmussen 2008, 531). Although almost all the paramilitary units demobilized, the DDR did not address the network of criminal bands in which former paramilitaries were and continue to be involved (Rozema 2008, 425). In the words of Porch and Rasmussen, in Colombia, “the state lacks the power and legitimacy to enforce the agreements and the resources to integrate demobilized fighters into the legitimate economy” (2008, 521). In this sense, the paramilitary DDR program has been successful in disarming and demobilizing individuals, but faces numerous challenges in reintegrating them smoothly into civilian society. According to Porch and Rasmussen (2008), the Colombian DDR program is over-bureaucratized and lacks coordination between the different organizations involved, and between these organizations and local governments. As a result, ex-combatants are re-mobilizing and re-arming. It is in this way that they are transitioning from one violent organization to another (ibid., 521). In this sense, the fact that the paramilitary DDR program was implemented in a context in which the violent conflict between the government and the left wing guerrilla groups continues has made the reintegration stage of the program more challenging and complex.

President Uribe’s successor, President Juan Manuel Santos, who was elected in 2010 with the support of Uribe and who was Uribe’s Minister of Defence, has taken a similar stance to Uribe in terms of national security (Lee 2012, 32). Santos has continued the military incursions against the FARC, despite showing willingness to negotiate with this organization as well as with the ELN (Wills-Otero and Benito 2012, 91). In terms of the DDR process, Santos has made progress in addressing reparation to the victims of paramilitary violence, with the approval in June 2011 of Law 1448, also known as *Ley de Víctimas y Restitución de Tierras* (Law of Victims and Restitution of Land). This law has as its main objective returning land to the almost two

million individuals who were displaced by the violent conflict during the 1990s and 2000s. However, the MAPP–OEA, which continues to monitor the demobilization program in its stage of reintegration and reparation of victims, states on its report of the first trimester of 2012 that violence has increased in regions in which the transfer of land is being carried out (2012, 1). Furthermore, it states that the presence of newly formed criminal bands in these regions is threatening the return of displaced people as well as the smooth transfer of land, evidenced in the assassination of several leaders of the restitution of land process in 2011 (ibid., 5). Many ex–members of the AUC are joining these bands which are challenging the progress made by President Santos in terms of reconciliation between ex–combatants and their victims.

At the time of this writing, congress was in the process of modifying the Ley de Justicia y Paz, taking into account among other things the Law of Victims and Restitution of Land. This is being done in a context in which criticism of the Ley de Justicia y Paz continues to affect the reintegration process (ibid.). However, the MAPP–OEA notes that there have been several successes in terms of transitional justice during the last year, including the sentencing of three members of the AUC on charges of sexual assault—the first of its kind since the approval of the Ley de Justicia y Paz in 2005 (ibid.). A judge has been given the responsibility of addressing claims and accusations related to sexual violence, and the MAPP–OEA recognizes that modest efforts are being made in this regard. Despite these achievements, the MAPP–OEA highlights the importance of a comprehensive effort to include sexual violence and a gender focus in the process of transitional justice. Even though these crimes were widespread during the years the AUC was active, there have been only a few cases in which victims made claims for justice and even fewer cases in which ex–members of the AUC have confessed to such crimes (ibid.).

President Santos has also promoted reforms to the laws that set the terms of the

reintegration of demobilized ex-combatants. The *Plan Estratégico 2011–2014* was put forward by the government and the ACR to incorporate members of the DDR program directly, with the purpose of making adjustments to the reintegration program. This has been the first effort to create a two-way exchange between the ACR and ex-combatants in order to make changes to the structure of the ACR that reflect the needs and experiences of its members (ibid.). In this sense, the ACR has been creating specific plans of engagement in an individualized manner, taking into account the particular needs of its members. The downside, according to the MAPP–OEA, is that access to psychological and psychosocial help has been reduced in terms of duration, and access to financial benefits has been constrained (9).

Overall, President Santos has been more conciliatory and less authoritarian in style than his predecessor (Wills–Otero and Benito 2012, 105). However, the internal conflict continues unfolding and ex-combatants from the AUC and from the left wing guerrillas, who have demobilized voluntarily and through the collective DDR program, continue to have multiple options to return to illegal violent activities. The success of reintegrating ex-combatants will determine whether these individuals return to their previous life as armed combatants or to legal activities as civilians. It remains uncertain whether the paramilitary demobilization is another way in which the Colombian conflict is morphing into another stage rather than coming to an end.

### **Women and DDR in Colombia**

Londoño and Nieto (2006, 62) studied thirty documents related to the Colombian peace negotiations since the 1980s, including twenty five agreements, two bilateral declarations, one report, one act, and an agenda. Women were almost absent in these documents. Only fifteen signatures on these documents were from women; 280 were from men (ibid.). Of the fifteen women, only five were members of armed groups—four were representatives of the government

and six of civil society (ibid.). None of the documents mention women. Londoño and Nieto (2006) argue that women's absence in peace negotiations and DDR processes in Colombia had a negative impact on the reintegration of women, and that this explains their absence as active political actors after the DDR programs were over. The first attempt to incorporate women's issues in the DDR agenda was carried out in 1992 by female members of a small guerrilla group called *Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores de Colombia*, or PRT (Colombian Revolutionary Workers' Party). The PRT created an NGO after its demobilization which included a specific program for women. This has been the only women's program that received the government's support (ibid., 88). In 1998, Gloria Quiceno, a female ex-combatant from the M-19 was appointed director of the *Programa de Reinserción* (Reintegration Program). However, she did not include a gender component to the program and did not incorporate women's issues in the agenda during her six years as director. Londoño and Nieto (2006) conclude that, with a few exceptions, women have been absent in all sides of the peace negotiations in Colombia, including within illegal armed groups, governmental agencies, and civil society.

The paramilitary DDR process officially included a 'gender perspective' based on restoring the rights of girls and women ex-combatants. This initiative was established with the help of the *Consejería Presidencial para la Equidad de la Mujer* (Presidential Committee for Women's Equality). Despite this initiative, Porch and Rasmussen (2008, 531) argue that little effort has been made to "tailor the programs to the experience, ethnicity, gender or age of the participants, or to regional variants." CONPES identified several weaknesses of the DDR program in its 2008 report, and outlined some ways in which these flaws could be overcome. For instance, the CONPES report calls for gender sensitive ways in which the DDR can be made

appealing not only to men, but also to women. The marketing campaigns promoting demobilization and the return to civilian life, and the services offered by the DDR program itself, presented incentives which were more appealing to men than to women. The CONPES report called the Ministry of Defence and the ACR to make changes to these limitations (2008, 58). Furthermore, CONPES identified the need for early detection and prevention of violence against women as well as immediate assistance in cases where women are subject to violence. The CONPES report also called for the ACR, the Ministry of Welfare, and Profamilia to establish a sexual and reproduction health program as part of the DDR (ibid., 58). There was also a need outlined to include the topic of masculinity in the psychosocial workshops offered to both women and men ex-combatants. However, the CONPES document does not suggest that the needs and vulnerabilities of women ex-combatants could be different depending on the armed group they were part of, or if these differences would affect the success of the above mentioned initiatives.

According to the Ministry of Defence, during 2008, 21.3 percent of the total number of demobilized individuals from all non-state armed groups in Colombia were women (Ministerio de Defensa Nacional 2003). However, the DDR framework in place has not successfully addressed the needs of ex-combatant women and girls, such as those needs derived from experiences of rape, forced contraception, forced abortion, forced sterilization, sexual slavery, and forced prostitution (Schwitalla and Dietrich 2007). Demobilization pamphlets and guides, such as the *Manual de Inducción: Volviendo a la Vida* (Induction Manual: Returning to Life), provided by the government to guide those who wished to join the program, did not mention whether the program would be different for women and men. In the initial stages, it was taken for granted that the experiences of women and men were the same. The government established a

gender advisory panel for the program, but there was no analysis made regarding the particular experiences of women from different armed groups. It is assumed that FARC and AUC women have the same needs, and that they have to go through the same process as their male peers and ex-members of competing armed groups. This lack of recognition has meant that the needs of ex-combatant women were not assessed depending on whether they belonged to the FARC or the AUC. There is no comprehensive understanding of the particular needs and vulnerabilities of AUC and FARC women during the DDR process, or beyond. In Colombia, “in many cases of collective mobilization, former combatants suffered serious persecution, both from former enemies and from still active former comrades” (Tate 2009, 114). In this context, it is important to consider the ways in which women ex-combatants can suffer a wide range of negative consequences which are experienced from their condition and experiences as women.

As was mentioned earlier, recipient communities are wary of people with demobilized status. There is a very complex process of stigmatization among these communities towards desmovilizados which stems from the illegal nature of their membership in an armed group. CONPES found that many people in communities where ex-combatants settle down are resentful of the benefits that these individuals are given by the government. There is also a sense of unease regarding the prospect of victims and perpetrators living in the same community (CONPES 2008, 23). Women are expected to face these barriers during the process of reintegration into civilian life. This means that, although the barriers to re-entering civilian life may seem to be the same for men and women, women will experience them differently and will be more prone to face specific issues that would either not affect men, or which would affect men in a different way. For instance, a study of DDR in the Colombian department of Meta reveals that women ex-combatants tend to give their financial remuneration to their (mostly male) partners. This creates

a relationship of dependence that reinforces traditional gender roles and disadvantages women with respect to the benefits offered by the DDR process (Barraza and Caicedo 2007, 61).

Another recent study on gender and the Colombian DDR process shows that there are several factors that compromise women's security during this process, such as an increase in domestic violence among the members of the DDR program (Caicedo 2005). These factors should be taken into account when planning a comprehensive DDR process. For instance, there is a correlation between the number of desmovilizados (men) in a given location and violence against women (ibid.). This affects both civilian and demobilized women.

As Colombian women's groups and coalitions gain prominence, their role in the peace process is bound to become more important and influential (Bouvier 2009). Bouvier argues that the success of the Colombian peace process will depend on the ability to:

articulate a gender agenda for peace; to increase women's visibility and impact on key issues; to secure inclusion of women on national peace commissions or in peace talks, to establish violence against women as a key human rights consideration and a crime under the Justice and Peace Law; and to secure women's participation in decision-making bodies, including provincial councils, Constituent Assemblies, peace laboratories, and other development projects and political venues. (2009, 423)

These considerations apply both to civilian women and those women who are members of illegal armed groups. Women from the AUC, the FARC, and other active organizations like the ELN, need more visibility and participation before, during, and after DDR processes are negotiated. Women ex-combatants working alongside government officials and women's groups, as well as women ex-combatants from groups which demobilized in the late 1980s and 1990s, can present a concrete alternative to the gender-blind DDR process currently unfolding in Colombia.



## Chapter 5. Women in the FARC

*“There is more equality in the FARC than in society, but not more freedom.”*

– Flor, the FARC<sup>17</sup>

The FARC, like most other left-wing guerrilla groups in Latin America, has embraced “gender equality.” Most guerrilla groups that emerged in the 1960s were accessible to women, yet remained male-dominant, reflecting traditional gender norms present in civilian society in every case, though this changed over time. Initially, there were fewer women in these groups, and they were usually confined to supporting roles, such as the provision of medical care, cooking, and sending/receiving messages (Vásquez-Perdomo 2005, xi). This changed in some cases. For instance, by the time the Somoza dictatorship was overthrown in Nicaragua in 1979, one quarter of the Sandinista guerrillas were women (ibid., xii). However, higher numbers did not necessarily mean equal participation, or a deliberate attack against traditional gender roles. In cases such as the Peruvian guerrilla group *Sendero Luminoso*, where women occupied leadership positions, there was never a comprehensive women’s agenda as part of its ideology or structure (ibid., xii).

Colombian guerrilla movements have incorporated women into their ranks in different ways. During its first years as an organized guerrilla movement in the 1960s, the EPL created women-only troops with specific requirements and limited combat activities (Londoño and Nieto 2006, 23). Women’s roles were focused on logistics until the 1980s, when women began playing active roles both in combat and in political matters concerning the organization. However, women in the ELP were more active in the political wing of this organization, in contrast with the military matters which remained the domain of men (ibid., 26).

Another guerrilla movement in Colombia which incorporated women into its ranks was

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<sup>17</sup> All interviewees’ names have been changed to protect their anonymity.

the M-19. Being a predominantly urban guerrilla movement, the M-19 incorporated large numbers of educated women. In this case, several women participated in high ranking positions, representing 5 percent of high and middle ranking positions (ibid., 29). Women also played an important role during the peace negotiations with the government during the late 1980s that resulted in the demobilization of the guerrilla organization. The M-19 is considered the guerrilla organization that was the most open to women's participation (32).

Despite these differences, women have been incorporated into all left-wing guerrilla movements in Colombia. Since its origin, the FARC has officially been committed to gender equality. However, this has been inconsistent with its practices throughout the years (Medina-Arbeláez 2009, 80). The way in which the FARC has incorporated women into its ranks is characterized by the strict control of relationships, sexuality, and the demands placed on women's bodies.

### **Gender in the FARC: Rhetoric and Practice**

In the FARC, discrimination based on gender is punished according to the internal norms that guide the organization (Kunz and Sjöberg 2009, 9). In a press release, the FARC describes women in the organization as being "full-time combatants." Women are treated as men's equals with respect to uniforms, armament, training, tasks, risks, and responsibilities "according to their capabilities, experiences, and interests" (Comisión Internacional de las FARC-EP 2005). Women and men ex-combatants who were interviewed all agreed that, in theory, men and women in the FARC are equals. Hugo, a comandante from the FARC who was recruited at age 13, explained that men and women were considered to be equals in the organization: "They would tell you that women had to be the same as men, that is the ideology there, and they would

force that ideology on women, that women had to be like men.”<sup>18</sup> Hugo was considered the protégé of a front comandante who was in charge of 1700 men and women guerrillas. He was part of the comandante’s security team before he was promoted to comandante himself. Hugo explained that there were around fifty people on the security team, of which approximately eighteen were “women, more like girls. Their ages ranged from eleven to sixteen, there weren’t any above that age.” He also explained that they all had to behave “like men” and carry out security rounds, dig trenches, and go to combat. Hugo also stated: “Over there, for example, they would tell you that women are not just biology, that women have to be the same as men; that is the ideology there and they forced that ideology on women, that they had to be like men, and since men can’t have children, women couldn’t either, and the ones who became pregnant had to get rid of it, had to have an abortion.” Hugo also explained that most of the women who were recruited in the FARC were peasants without education and, therefore, easier to “convince” to join the organization. He stated that “almost all” of these women joined voluntarily, but he also said that in order to convince them, they would tell them that joining the FARC was like joining the army; people were there for two, three years maximum, and then they were free to leave if they didn’t want to stay. However, he recognized that these strategies of recruitment were lies, saying that, “in order to leave [the FARC], you have to leave dead, or you have to have a very serious injury from combat, and they would let them go to a peasant’s house to receive some kind of medical attention, but not even, because in these cases they preferred to kill her so she wouldn’t talk” (ibid.).

Women and men are required to go through the same process of soldiering when they join the FARC. However, taking into account the gender biases of soldiering processes shows

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<sup>18</sup> Hugo (comandante de escuadra, the FARC), interview and translation by author, August 3, 2010, Bogotá, Colombia.

that women and men are subject to different demands. In the FARC, you have to “learn to be a FARC member” (Gutiérrez–Sanín 2008, 26). This means that members have to meet the standards set by the organization that stipulate the requirements for becoming a FARC combatant. Women and men have to go through the same military training and are expected to perform the same roles and duties as combatants. As Hugo explained, training involves issues of physical capacity since men and women are expected to endure the same physical demands during these activities (Stanski 2005, 140). Furthermore, military training for superior positions in the FARC is based on merit and experience, and these remain highly male–dominated. Flor, who joined the FARC at 13 and deserted four years later, explained that women are told that life with the FARC is the same for men and women. However, she said that it was very difficult for many women to carry heavy loads, and that some men would “feel sorry” for them and offer to carry their load if, in exchange, they washed the men’s clothes.<sup>19</sup> During another interview, Aníbal, who was “persuaded” to join the FARC at age 16, and who was there for four years stated: “In combat, it is the same for everyone: men, women, children, and if women don’t learn and if they are good for nothing, they make a decision and they kill her. It is that simple, see?”<sup>20</sup>

Flor’s account and Hugo’s description reveal some of the challenges that arise in illegal military organizations when women are permitted to join in the same capacity as men. The challenges that women combatants face in hyper–masculinized illegal armed groups have specific characteristics which call for a gendered lens to analyze the various ways in which they respond, navigate, and resolve these challenges while trying to fulfil their roles. Women are subject to punishments that include death if they do not perform as is expected of them. As Flor stated: “In the FARC, women do what they are asked to do. If you don’t, you die. It’s that

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<sup>19</sup> Flor (combatant and radista, the FARC), interview and translation by author, August 10, 2010, Bogotá, Colombia.

<sup>20</sup> Aníbal (comandante de escuadra, the FARC), interview and translation by author, August 12, 2010, Bogotá, Colombia.

simple.” Despite official claims of equality between men and women, some of the demands placed on women are gender specific and this creates a specific type of female FARC combatant, with specific roles, values, and characteristics attached to the position.

Women are assigned a variety of duties while they are in the FARC. They attend political talks, dig trenches, engage in combat, carry out military training, cook, patrol, spy, deliver messages, are nurses, are *radistas* (record information in a secret code), and carry out miscellaneous duties (exchange dollars for pesos, buy supplies, and manage the arrival of trucks with supplies and medication). Kunz and Sjöberg (2009, 25) argue that the only role that is exclusively performed by women is that of being a sex provider, although not all women who are members of the organization are expected or required to perform such a role. Kunz and Sjöberg identify three main roles for women in the FARC: combat, support, and sexual services. They argue that the borders between the three categories are porous since life at the camps and combat life unfold in tandem (ibid.).

Organizations like Amnesty International (2004) have accused the FARC of carrying out gender-based violence in its organization as well as targeting civilian women when they are considered to support or befriend a soldier, paramilitary member, or a member from a competing group. I interviewed Laura, who joined the FARC after her nineteen year old daughter was murdered and her fourteen year old daughter was shot in the hand by members of the left-wing guerrilla group, the ELN. Her brother was also killed by the ELN. Laura’s family members had been accused of being supporters of the FARC, and were therefore attacked. Laura was a widow and her situation led her to join the FARC for protection. She took her fourteen and eleven year old daughters with her as well as her six year old son, and was given a support role in the organization. She stated that joining the FARC was “the worst mistake of my life” and that it

ruined her life, but that she had to choose that option because it was the only way to protect her children.<sup>21</sup>

The reasons for joining the FARC are very complex. Despite the risks involved in joining an illegal armed group like the FARC, some women like Laura see it as the only option in a context of violence and uncertainty. Despite the complex ways in which agency is embedded in power relations between illegal armed groups, women in the FARC are often portrayed as passive victims of sexual abuse. In this respect, Herrera and Porch (2008, 610) state that, “forced to perform arduous military duties and risk their lives in the service of a criminal cause, [women] are also treated as virtual sex slaves.” They also quote a former US special forces colonel “agreeing” that female guerrilleras are “just passed around” by their male colleagues (ibid.). Although it is true that women in the FARC face the risk of sexual violence and that this is a serious issue that must be acknowledged, statements like the above victimize all female members of the FARC. These types of statements also ignore the ways in which women in the FARC contest their victimization. Furthermore, they homogenize the experiences of women in the FARC. Natalia stated that:

In the FARC, they can't touch you. By law. Men can't hit you and not only because it is required that they don't touch you, but also because us women also carry guns so when you are there men respect you because you have a gun. If you touch me, I can shoot you. That is why there is less violence against women in the FARC than in civilian life. You don't have to wait for someone to defend you. You do it yourself. Now, when a guy hits you, you know that you have to make him respect you and I learned that in the FARC. In civilian life there is more violence and more impunity and those who carry out violent

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<sup>21</sup> Laura (combatant, the FARC), interview and translation by author, August 3, 2010, Bogotá, Colombia.

crimes don't get punished. In the FARC, they do. If you mess up, you pay for it.<sup>22</sup>

This testimony highlights the significance that guns play in the kinds of gender relations that are forged in illegal militarized organizations like the FARC. It also shows how guns and the threat they pose are one factor regulating the risk of sexual violence. To a certain extent, women can rely on their weapons for security and can contest possible risks to their wellbeing. Although this does not prevent violence against women from taking place in the FARC, it creates specific power relations based on the perceived power of guns. The contrast made by Natalia between civilian life and life in the FARC in this regard is relevant considering that women in the FARC are often portrayed as passive victims. Natalia's testimony shows that women in the FARC consider civilian women as victims who cannot defend themselves because they do not have a gun to threaten men. Instead, they have to "wait for someone to defend" them.

Despite this view of the threat of sexual violence by women in the FARC, and despite the FARC's official policies of gender equality, sexual violence is pervasive in this organization. Taking into account that all actors in the Colombian illegal armed groups have used sexual violence against women is relevant in understanding the vast differences and contradictions between official FARC policies and their practices when it comes to adhering to the specific parameters that each organization has. For example, the FARC's internal rules prohibit any offenses against civilians, including rape. However, Amnesty International (2004) identifies numerous ways in which civilian women have suffered sexual violence by one or more FARC members. This rule also applies to women in the organization and it is also easily transgressed there. However, most FARC ex-combatants that I interviewed were emphatic with respect to the prohibition of violence against women in the organization. In a similar way to Natalia, ex-FARC member Marlon stated: "In the FARC, you learn to respect women. If you don't, then they kill

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<sup>22</sup> Natalia (combatant, the FARC), interview and translation by author, August 10, 2010, Bogotá, Colombia.

you.”<sup>23</sup> The issue of sexual violence in the FARC cannot simply be described as involving passive female combatants who are the subject of uncontested sexual abuse and objects that are “passed around.” Although sexual abuse does happen in the FARC and most women are seen as sexual objects, women also assert their agency by relying, among other things, on weapons as deterrents against this kind of abuse.

Herrera and Porch (2008, 611) argue that in order to understand why women volunteer to join the FARC and why they claim they are fulfilled in this organization, it is necessary to go beyond the view of women as victims. It is important to note that this study of women in the FARC does not present a feminist view of their situation and is not grounded in feminist theory. For instance, the study concludes that women in the FARC are important actors in the organization, playing critical, operational, and tactical roles (ibid., 612). However, the authors’ interpretation of this is that “*guerrilleras* comprise a potentially critical vulnerability of the FARC. Yet... no concerted effort has yet been made, so far as the authors are aware, by counterinsurgency strategists to target potential female recruits and serving FARC *guerrilleras* with a concerted information–operations campaign” (ibid.). This statement highlights the differences in outlook between a study about women in the FARC and a feminist study about women in the FARC. The emphasis of women as active actors in the FARC is seen in the former as instrumental from a counterinsurgency point of view. A feminist view of women’s agency in the FARC, however, would problematize the potential objectifications of women for counterinsurgency efforts which are equally rooted in patriarchal power relations that appropriate women as instruments militarizing their agency.

Female FARC combatants’ experiences cannot be swiped under the blanket of victimization and this includes seeing them as a “critical vulnerability” of the FARC even when

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<sup>23</sup> Marlon (combatant, the FARC), interview and translation by author, July 29, 2010, Bogotá, Colombia.



this claims to make them the “lynchpin of the FARC organization, without whom the FARC would not survive as a rural insurgency” (ibid.). This approach constructs the FARC as a hyper-masculinized organization that has its greatest weaknesses in its female elements. Women’s experiences in the FARC do not create a group of passive victims nor are women the “lynchpin” of the FARC. It would be more accurate to suggest that *gender* relations sustain the FARC. Women’s experiences are constituted through specific attributes, and roles are given to them as members of this particular armed group always in relation to their male peers. This places them in a specific position from which they can exercise their agency, which in the FARC is always militarized (i.e., it is based on a patriarchal system of privilege). This defines women’s and men’s experiences in the FARC.

### **Soldiering: Daily Life and Discipline**

In his study of the FARC, Brittain (2010, 189) states that “little is known about the life-style and culture (i.e., the material and immaterial conditions) of those involved.” Although not much is known about the details of what being a FARC member entails, there have been several studies based on testimonies of ex-FARC members such as the one carried out by Medina-Arbeláez (2009). Field research such as this has uncovered some of the particularities of life in the FARC. For instance, it is known that the FARC regulates the daily life of its combatants through its rules, hierarchies, and practices (Medina-Arbeláez 2009, 59). The organization has stern rules outlined in three documents concerning combatant’s rights, obligations, and responsibilities: the *estatuto*, the *reglamento disciplinario* (disciplinary rules), and the *normas internas de commando*, or *régimen interno* (internal rules). The *estatuto* contains the ideological bases of the FARC, the rights and obligations of combatants, and other basic principles of the organization. The *reglamento* outlines the basic principles of the organization, and the *normas internas* contains basic day to day instructions for the different units that make up the FARC

(ibid.). In addition to this, the FARC issued a document outlining their “Rules of Conduct with the Masses” which was published by the Red Cross in 2011 (see appendix 6).

These documents provide a common behavioural code for the different fronts that make up the FARC and are the basis of soldiering in this organization. In the FARC, “...combatants must start a new life from scratch. So, becoming a soldier entails a process of embracing—learning—new preferences” (Gutiérrez–Sanín 2008, 26). This “new life” includes both men and women learning to carry out tasks usually associated with the opposite gender, some of which are outlined in the FARC’s *normas internas*. Men have to learn to cook and wash their clothes and women learn how to handle weapons and train to become combatants. Laura explained: “There is gender equality in the FARC because women learn to do men things and men learn to cook” (Interview.). This transgression of traditional gender roles is key when looking at militarized gender performativity in the FARC. Both genders are constructed as equal through the allocation of equal sets of responsibilities that are traditionally not shared: men fight and cook, and women cook and fight. In this sense, there is an appearance of gender equality, as Laura suggests in her testimony. However, analysing this claim in more detail and studying issues of sexuality and reproductive rights reveals how, in fact, gender in the FARC is constructed in different and unequal ways. Soldiering in the FARC is not based on an “ideal soldier”—it is based on an ideal *male* soldier and an ideal *female* soldier. Some responsibilities and expectations overlap, but there is clear understanding that male and female soldiers are not the same. These differences stem from the same traditional understanding of gender that the FARC claims to reject. In other words, traditional gender roles are altered, but aspects of each gender that are traditionally considered to be “natural” remain as the structuring framework for soldiering in the FARC. In the FARC, these differences are hidden behind the organization’s

claim to gender equality. For instance, testimonies on daily life in the FARC emphasise the same routine for all members, and individuals whom I interviewed all stated that men and women are considered equals in this organization.

Daily life in the FARC is meticulously planned and is subject to severe rules (Gutiérrez–Sanín 2008, 18). In this sense, FARC fighters are given less latitude than AUC fighters (ibid.). Activities such as sleeping, eating, and bathing are regulated by the organization and are carried out in a communal way. These activities are all subject to a strict schedule and constitute a discipline that seeks to construct a particular type of individual. The control of daily life in the FARC is an example of Enloe’s view that militarization, as a socio–political process, involves the transformation of assumptions, the reassessment of priorities, and the evolution of values (2004). According to interviewees, schedules in the FARC gave priority to aspects that were not relevant in civilian life such as preparing for combat. Flor explained:

We all have to follow a day to day schedule there. Everyone wakes up at 4:00 and by 4:30 we have to do physical activities until 6:00 and that’s when we get to eat something like broth and arepa [cornmeal patty], for example. Then at 7:00 we congregate and have a talk about the news or things that are happening. We take turns and you have to stand up and talk about something you heard on the radio, mostly we hear news through the radio, that is how we hear about the news. We also discuss FARC rules and sometimes the commander talks about these rules. Then you patrol, dig trenches or cook depending on what you’ve been told to do. Then we have lunch, clean up, and go back to digging, for example. You are always doing something, always, but you get used to it. (Interview.)

It is this concept of “always doing something” that is at the root of the FARC’s soldiering process.

As tasks that have been assigned to each individual are carried out daily, the militarization of the FARC unfolds collectively and in the lives of each of its members. There is no leisure time in which individuals can disengage from their responsibilities as members of the FARC. In this sense, combatants' lives unfold in a specific manner that does not include a private sphere (Medina–Arbeláez 2009, 64). FARC combatants do not have any social spaces outside the organization and their day to day socialization happens within the parameters established by the FARC. Cutting ties with their families is extremely important in this regard (ibid.). Some ex–combatants interviewed stated that they had voluntarily cut ties with their families, but most stated that it was required by the organization and that getting permission to visit family members was nearly impossible. The majority of individuals from the FARC interviewed mentioned “reuniting with family” as a reason for demobilizing. For instance, Flor stated that she felt very lonely in the FARC and that she missed her family. I interviewed Camila who was forcibly recruited when she was 15 years old. She lived in Bogotá and was “taken” by the FARC while she was visiting her family in the countryside. She explained she was “Comandante’s wife” in answer to the question “what rank did you have in the FARC?”. Camila then told some of her story:

I was forced to live with him even though we were not married. We were together the whole time I was there. I had a son [by him], but I left him with my mom and I went back to the FARC. Then I began thinking about escaping, just leaving, just like that. So I planned the escape with a friend, another combatant who was also fed up. I didn't tell my husband. I left him there. I think he also wanted to quit and leave, but we never really talked about it because you can't really talk about that over there. People are scared of talking about it because if someone finds out, if someone sells you out, they kill you. So I

left and I didn't tell my husband, I didn't care about him. I demobilized for my family and my son. To be with them. We were treated badly during training, physically and morally. I was hit during training. They hit me. They kept telling me that if my mom kept looking for me and pressuring me to leave, they would kill me. Stuff like that.<sup>24</sup>

The restoration of family ties can be seen as the restoration of these individuals' private life. From a feminist perspective, this is extremely problematic during DDR processes because it often involves complex and ambiguous transitions (from soldier to civilian, from armed combatant to unarmed ex-combatant) which affect power relations between men and women and usually increase the levels of domestic violence (Enloe 1993, 127). In this regard, Enloe states: that "post-war can be a time of difficult personal adjustments which should not be underestimated due to the fact that they occur in what is commonly known as the "private sphere" (2004, 206). Thus, from this viewpoint, the re-establishment of private life is as significant as the process of stripping FARC combatants of this aspect during the process of militarization. The process by which FARC members remove their private and family life as a prerequisite to joining the organization is evidenced in Camila's testimony which mentions threats as a tactic of disciplining in the FARC. In this organization, "disciplining and drilling are quotidian activities and constitute the core of the organization of everyday life" (Gutiérrez-Sanín 2008, 13).

The most common transgressions in the FARC include disorderly behaviour, failure to maintain soldierly standards like clean military equipment, lack of personal hygiene, alcohol-related problems, and violent behaviour against civilians (Kunz and Sjöberg 2009, 13).

Transgressions which are considered serious include desertion, theft, espionage, disobedience, loss of weapons, having a relationship with a hostage, or failing a mission (ibid.). In principle,

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<sup>24</sup> Camila (combatant/comandante's wife), interview and translation by author, August 10, 2010, Bogotá, Colombia.

discipline in the FARC is enforced equally for both men and women (Stanski 2005, 140).

Punishments mostly involve physical work: carrying more loads of wood, patrolling for longer hours, digging trenches, and cooking for the whole group. The death penalty is also enforced in the FARC for offences considered most serious, such as treason and desertion (Kunz and Sjöberg 2009, 13). These are mostly handled through a *consejo revolucionario de guerra* (revolutionary war council) also known as *consejo de guerra* (war council).

In the event of a violent act against a female peer, the following process is usually followed: the commander is notified, and depending on the seriousness of the event, he or she can make the case for a *consejo de guerra*. In the event of a war council, the whole front gathers to vote on whether or not the accused deserves the death penalty. The Colombian media has reported hundreds of cases in which FARC comandantes ordered the murder of members of this organization. The magazine *Semana* reported that FARC Secretariat member alias ‘Mono Jojoy’ ordered the assassination of 112 guerrilla members in the first two quarters of 2008 (2010). *Semana* published copies of notebooks belonging to FARC comandantes which were taken by the army during several military operations. All the above assassination sentences were recorded in the notebooks. Some members of the FARC who were sentenced to *consejo de guerra* were appointed a “lawyer” (another combatant) to present arguments in their defence. One of the notebooks seized by the army and published by *Semana* describes the experience of alias ‘Holman’ who was sentenced to *consejo de guerra* for stealing one cigarette. The notebook explains that Holman’s lawyer, Brayan, presented reasons for not sentencing Holman to *consejo de guerra*. Brayan states that Holman has accepted the charges and has explained that he committed a transgression because “he has been suffering and has not been welcomed with warmth, and he also does not understand the [disciplinary] documents. Let’s give him a second

chance” (quoted in Semana 2010). However, the group is reported to have voted for a second time and, after arguing that Holman’s actions go against “revolutionary morals,” he is sentenced to death (ibid.). Other reasons for killing a member of the FARC recorded in the notebooks published by Semana included listening to a radio without permission, accidentally firing a gun while cleaning it, buying candy without permission, and “wearing a silver hairclip that can be spotted by the enemy” (ibid.).

Regarding the way in which consejo de guerra is carried out in the FARC, Hugo explained:

*Consejo de guerra* is when they stand someone in the middle, in front of everyone, tied to a tree and they tell him: You will die because of this, because of what you did (silence) you can die for so many things! And then they shoot you and kill you in front of everyone.

A.M.V: Who shoots?

Whoever gets chosen. And you have to do it. If you say that you don’t want to, they tell you to stand in the middle and they kill you as well. (Interview.)

A Human Rights Watch report (2004, 109) states that the practice of consejo de guerra goes against international humanitarian law. This organization also found that children combatants were sentenced to death through a consejo de guerra for transgressions such as falling asleep while patrolling at night, trying to escape, not showing up at a designated spot, losing their weapon, or being a spy, among other faults (ibid., 111). The report also states that individuals who are subject to consejo de guerra, including children, are tied to a tree and have their hands tied back behind their back with a string that is connected to their neck in a way that makes it impossible to breathe when they move (112). Human Rights Watch also states that it is

impossible to know how many individuals are sentenced to death through consejo de guerra since the FARC does not give the bodies to the families of those who are murdered, but buries them. Women in the FARC are subject to consejo de guerra for the same transgressions as their male peers. However, there are other reasons women can be sentenced to death through consejo de guerra, related to relationships with male members; these reasons include pregnancy and refusing to have an abortion. Regarding this, Flor stated, “you can’t have children over there. You have to have an abortion right away, as soon as you find out you are expecting, and if you don’t want to or if you refuse, then they sentence you to consejo de guerra and they kill you” (Interview.). This is one way in which discipline in the FARC is experienced in a gendered way. Sexuality and reproduction are two areas which separate female and male combatants in the FARC, and which construct them into gendered combatants with different roles and expectations.

### **Sexuality and Reproductive Rights**

Due to the cohesiveness and isolation of the FARC, social bonds among members become very strong. The internal microcosm of the FARC “allows the fighter to develop a sexual and family life independent of any exterior link” (Gutiérrez–Sanín 2008, 26). However, romantic relationships in this organization are seen as a threat to the stability of the organization because a couple can leave the ranks (by deserting) if they decide they want to start a family (Kunz and Sjöberg 2009, 29). This type of bond creates a competing affiliation, and superiors can order the separation of couples regardless of the longevity of the relationship if required in the context of their war–efforts, or if they are responding to “their own desire of, for example, getting rid of the husband and taking his place” (Gutiérrez–Sanín 2008, 18). Although romantic relationships can receive approval, there is a fine line between accepting and monitoring relationships for revolutionary purposes and for each comandante’s personal reasons: “the commander’s



supervision serves as a median between combatants as revolutionaries and combatants as individuals” (Stanski 2005, 246). Comandantes are important in regulating women’s and men’s sexuality in the FARC. The figure of the comandante thus emerges as a powerful one and is largely mentioned in all of the ex-combatant’s testimonies. Hugo told the following story:

I was the boyfriend of a *compañera* [female peer] and someone told the comandante that we were together a lot and then they told him that we wanted to escape, but it was a lie, and they took her to a consejo de guerra and they killed her. People saw us a lot together and they said it was because we were planning on escaping together. That was a lie. And so they took her to a consejo de guerra and they tied her up to a tree in front of everyone

A.M.V: Only her or you as well?

No, only her. They tied her up and killed her in front of everyone. (Interview.)

Not only does this story show the tensions generated when two individuals from the FARC decide to have a romantic relationship, it also reveals the way in which discipline is enforced in a gendered manner. Hugo’s partner was judged and killed for a perceived act of disobedience that involved both parties, one male and one female. Laura also explained that “if two men fight over a woman or if she is causing trouble, and if the trouble she is causing is considered serious, they just kill her to solve the problem. Women get punished for being sluts” (Interview.). This is an example of the ways in which femininity (and more generally, gender) is militarized in the FARC. Enloe has argued that the militarization of masculinity is revealed through routines and policies (among other aspects) within the military (1993, 67). The same is true for the militarization of *femininity* in the FARC. The policies, as enforced by the comandante, outline the ways in which militarization in the FARC relies on specific notions about gender and the consequences of not performing your gender appropriately. The above

testimonies hint to some of the values associated with the FARC's ideal female soldier: she has a moral responsibility for her and her partner's actions, and she is expected to be submissive and not "cause trouble." The female soldier is trained alongside men for combat, but has different expectations when it comes to her sexuality.

The consequences related to the "bad behaviour" of a couple are believed to be equal for all members (according to the established rules), but are actually gendered in practice (as in the case of transgressions of romantic rules, as evidenced by the above testimony). Women are held responsible for faults or perceived faults that are technically the responsibility of a couple. Furthermore, the fact that women and not men are punished with death in cases such as Hugo's reveals the different value placed on women and men combatants in the FARC. Women's lives are given secondary status with respect to their male peers, reinforcing the idea that they are responsible for maintaining moral order inside the FARC while men are responsible for military aspects of the organization.

It is worth noting that gender-based violence has been more pervasive in the FARC since it began decentralizing as a result of Uribe's harsh military attacks against the organization. This is because the cohesiveness of the FARC has been undermined by numerous military attacks, giving more authority to comandantes and making them less accountable to their superiors (Kunz and Sjöberg 2009, 23). In recent years, there has been more variation in the numbers and intensity of this type of violence from front to front, as comandantes are either responsible for the violent acts themselves or are permissive of others' actions (ibid.).

I demobilized because I was tired. Things got difficult since Uribe became president.

Commanders were doing whatever they wanted. There were more problems inside the

group and no discipline with women like it was before.<sup>25</sup>

This testimony reflects the changing nature of gender-based violence and its contingency with respect to a myriad of internal and external factors. In the case of the FARC, military attacks from the army have severed communication between the different regional groups. This has increased the autonomy of regional comandantes who, due restricted communication, are no longer accountable to superiors.

In principle, there are a set of rules concerning romantic relationships in the FARC: they are not encouraged, but are generally permitted, albeit under strict control. A couple is allowed to have sexual relations only on specific days, and has to ask the commander for permission if they want to sleep with their partner (Kunz and Sjöberg 2009, 27). Otherwise, they each have to sleep in the place they have been assigned. Natalia explained:

There are some rules you have to follow if you want to be with someone. First, you need to be there [in the FARC] three months. If you are new, too bad, you can't have a relationship. Also, you have to ask your comandante for permission. It is up to him. If he says yes, then you can only get together with your boyfriend a couple of hours on Wednesdays and Sundays. You have to follow these rules. You ask for permission before 5:00 pm on those days and then the comandante reads aloud who is sleeping with who that night and you are allowed to sleep together apart from everyone else. It's up to the comandante and you can't take back your decision. Say you ask for permission to sleep with a guy you like and after the comandante reads the names aloud you think it over and don't want to do it anymore, too bad, you have to or you get punished. (Interview.)

In this sense, women's and men's sexuality is controlled in the FARC. However, there are several ways in which sexuality is controlled in a gender-specific way. For instance,

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<sup>25</sup> Fernando (combatant, the FARC), interview and translation by author, August 5, 2010, Bogotá, Colombia.

romantic relationships between a FARC member and a civilian are officially prohibited and can be severely punished. However, FARC men are usually allowed to have civilian girlfriends while women and girls are not given the same choice. Natalia explained:

You cannot have [romantic] relationships with kidnapped persons or civilians, but men can. With civilian women. They can have girlfriends outside if they want. Some have several girlfriends. For them, it is allowed, it is not a problem. They are even encouraged to get civilian girlfriends because then they can make them fall in love with them and then convince them to join the FARC. Many girls that join the FARC come chasing their boyfriends and then once they are inside and if they break up, too bad because they can't leave (pause). For us women, it is different. Getting a civilian boyfriend is seen as disrespectful to the organization. (Interview.)

This is an example of explicit gender discrimination in the FARC. Women are not allowed to have civilian partners because it is seen as disrespectful to the organization. In addition, the above testimony shows how FARC women combatants' bodies are a battlefield on which male-created aggression is carried out (Enloe 2007). The view that a relationship between a woman combatant from the FARC and a civilian is disrespectful of the organization, but not that of men combatants with civilian women, is evocative of the symbolism of women's bodies in nationalist conflicts: an assault on a woman's body, or establishing a relationship across national boundaries is seen as maiming, infecting, or polluting the purity of a given national group (Riley 2008). Riley argues that during times of war, "bodies are vulnerable to assertions of power and militarized masculinity" (ibid., 1197). By engaging with civilians, women are believed to be contaminating the FARC. There is also the risk that women will fall in love with a civilian and give away information that can put the FARC at risk. On the other hand, men have

no restrictions in this sense, and are “encouraged” to have several relationships with civilian women because this is seen as a form of recruitment (a tactic that is believed only works for men).

This form of recruitment, widespread in the FARC, has similar characteristics to Enloe’s concept of “camp followers.” Enloe has provided an analysis of civilian women who followed men soldiers during the mid seventeenth century, as well as in German camps during World War I (2000, 37). These women were referred to as “camp followers” and were deemed unclean, unrespectable, untrustworthy, sexually promiscuous, and parasitic. In the case of the German camps, there was a special police force sent to control their sexual activities (ibid.). According to Enloe, camp followers were tolerated unless they were seen as slowing the troop down, or as negatively affecting their reputation. If this was the case, these women were “purged” (38, 43). This included camp followers who became pregnant or who brought children along with them, as they were seen as negative for the troops (ibid.). In Colombia, some of the women who have joined the FARC (and the AUC) can be considered “camp followers” in the sense that they “followed” a male soldier and joined one of these groups for reasons related to their relationship. The difference in terms of the FARC, with respect to Enloe’s analysis of camp followers, is that these women actually join the militarized organization rather than remain at its margins. This has important implications which are absent in Enloe’s study. However, the risks these women face are the same as those identified by Enloe: camp followers were purged (in different ways) if they were seen as slowing the troop down, affecting its reputation, or if they became pregnant (2000, 39).

Most men and some women interviewed stated that women in the FARC were “easy,” “crazy,” “promiscuous,” and “a source of problems.” This is consistent with Enloe’s description

of the image of camp followers. Women's sexuality plays an important role in the ways they are perceived by their male peers. In this respect, anthropologist Beatriz Toro states:

The behaviour of women in guerrillas is interpreted and judged, even by women, according to how they handle their sexuality, among other things. Her performance in the military and political areas is obviously very important, but what is notoriously mentioned about women is the link with her body, while this does not happen for men.

(Toro 1994 quoted in Londoño and Nieto 2006, 46)

This point was evident in the interviews I carried out during my field research. Women's sexuality was often brought up in sharp contrast to that of civilian women. However, there were several individuals interviewed who had a romantic relationship with one or more members of the FARC while they were part of the group. Unless a women combatant was in a long and stable relationship with a FARC member, she would be subject to scrutiny and judgement based on her sexuality. In this regard, Sjöberg (2007) argues that the centrality of gender-based expectations of women who participate in wars has not disappeared. Despite the different roles given to women in the FARC, their sexuality is still appropriated and defined as something that holds the ideal female combatant together. Any sign of behaviour considered promiscuous threatens this ideal, and is therefore punished. However, women's sexuality in the FARC is constructed in different ways depending on how women "employ" it: sexuality is unacceptable if it involves civilian men, a serious offence if it involves a member of a competing group such as the AUC, and promiscuous if it involves a member of the FARC. Within the organization, there are different approaches to sexuality depending on the type of couple.

Kunz and Sjöberg (2009, 29) identify a hierarchy of four different types of relationships that exist in the FARC. First, *libres* refers to single individuals with no established link to

another combatant. Second, *fiancés* are individuals who have sporadic relationships and can be easily separated by hierarchy from casual or potential partners. Third, *asócies* are individuals who have a romantic relationship with someone from the same group and who are allowed to sleep in the same “bed” with their partner. These relationships are considered to be stable and long-term, and couples are required to obtain the approval of the commander. These relationships can be terminated under the orders of the commander by separating the couple geographically, or by transferring one of the individuals to a different front. The fourth type, *mariés*, refer to combatants who identify their relationship as a “marriage” which has first received the approval of the comandante. This type of couple cannot be separated and is allowed to “live” together in the camp. This hierarchy has connotations for women regarding their sexuality. For instance, women in stable relationships (*asociés* and *mariés*) do not have their sexuality scrutinized to the same extent as women in *libres* or *fiancés* relationships. Fernando explained:

If a couple is husband and wife or if they are in an *asocio*, then they don't have to ask the comandante for permission to sleep together. They can do this practically every night, like a regular couple, like in a real marriage, you see? You understand? So they can behave like a couple. But the problem is that if you don't want to be together anymore you can't ask for permission to sleep with someone else. That would not be allowed. No way. So you would go to the comandante to inform him that your marriage is over.

Usually what would happen is that the comandante would tell you and your ex-wife that you are not allowed to sleep with anyone for, I don't know, a few weeks, a month, or something like that. And then after that you would be like everyone else, having to ask for permission every time you wanted to sleep with someone and if the comandante says

you can't, you can't. (Interview.)

Despite the fact that relationships in the FARC unfold in the context of an organization that upholds “gender equality” as a guiding principle, romantic relationships have gender-specific implications for women since they take on added responsibilities that comply with traditional gender roles. Women in relationships wash and repair their partner’s clothes, and fetch his food (Kunz and Sjöberg 2009, 27). Natalia explained: “Once you are a couple, you behave like husband and wife. She washes his clothes, but not because she has to, but because she wants to. Not always, but most of the time” (Interview.). Not only is female sexuality normalized in “stable” relationships, women also perform traditional gender roles that were not expected of them before they had a partner. Natalia’s testimony shows how femininity is militarized in the FARC: there is some latitude in what constitutes the ideal female soldier. Some traditional aspects of femininity are militarized and incorporated, and women navigate a space that requires them to imitate men (e.g., in combat) while they maintain certain traits that are believed are “natural” to women. The responsibility of washing their partner’s clothes is a way in which the women perform their militarized femininity. The view of gender as performance implies that the reproduction of the FARC’s militarized femininity is done through the repetition of these “acts.” In other words, the practice of washing a partner’s clothes, to use Natalia’s example, constitutes the military gender identity as performative. These women are not expressing their militarized gender since they do not embody it. Instead, they are doing and being done by their gender (Butler 1990).

Another way in which women’s experiences are militarized is by setting rules on reproduction in the FARC. In order to avoid pregnancies, which are not permitted, women combatants in this organization are subject to mandatory contraception (Amnesty International



2004). This includes both adult women and girls (minors are individuals under 18 years of age according to Colombian law) regardless of whether or not they want to use contraception, and regardless of whether they are sexually active or not. There are several contraceptive methods used by the FARC. The method most common among the women interviewed was contraceptive injections. All men and women interviewed replied “avoid getting pregnant” to the question “what requisites do you/women have to fulfill to join the FARC?” However, there is a wide gender differential in the way the FARC handles contraception. Contraception is not required or expected from men. Men are also not warned about the consequences of an accidental pregnancy. Also, women who are found to be HIV positive are more likely to be killed than men who are found to be HIV positive (Amnesty International 2004). Women who are HIV positive are held responsible for transmitting the virus. Any member of the FARC who refuses to have HIV and AIDS tests is threatened (Kunz and Sjöberg 2009, 16). Regarding pregnancies, Flor stated:

The first thing they tell you when you get there is that you better take care of yourself so that you don't get pregnant. They make you get injections and you have to do it. They can send you to a *consejo de guerra* and kill you if you get pregnant. Mostly, they make you have an abortion. Some want to, but others don't. Only girlfriends of comandantes are allowed to have their babies. They wear a crown. I know of two cases of women who got pregnant. One won the consejo de guerra because the compañeros liked her so they voted against killing her and she had been hiding her pregnancy so she was already like five or six months pregnant. Otherwise, they would have killed her for being pregnant and for hiding it. You can't do that over there. The other one was the girlfriend of a comandante so she did not have to have an abortion, but what happened was that she

found out her boyfriend, the comandante, was sleeping with someone else so she got rid of the baby. Mostly, pregnant women have to have abortions. That or they die.

(Interview.)

Despite the fact that members of the FARC are allowed to have romantic relationships with members of the group, pregnancies are not permitted. It is understood that joining the FARC, as a lifelong commitment, implies that women have to give up the right to have children. In most cases, pregnant women in the FARC are forced to have an abortion (Amnesty International 2004; Stanski 2005; Kunz and Sjöberg 2009).

In an 1999 interview with Garry M. Leech, published in the North American Congress on Latin America – NACLA report on the Americas, FARC comandante and spokesman Simón Trinidad stated: “women guerrillas are treated the same as men. Some FARC units have female commanders... some women have relationships with male guerrillas, and we provide contraceptives. But some do get pregnant. If they don’t have an abortion, they have to leave the guerrillas” (2000, 25).<sup>26</sup>

Although the standard practice is to force pregnant women to have abortions, there are exceptions to this rule. Women who are in a relationship with a comandante are exempted from this rule and allowed to have children. However, having children generates numerous challenges for the women and for the organization, since it has to negotiate ways to incorporate aspects of life considered to be incompatible with the military needs of the FARC. FARC ex-combatant Fernando stated: “women have the same rights as men in the FARC; there is equality for women, but women without children. If they have children, it gets more complicated. You look after your baby or you look after your gun, you can’t do both. That is why women can’t get pregnant.”

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<sup>26</sup> Simón Trinidad was a professor of economics at Jorge Tadeo Lozano University in Bogotá, Colombia for ten years prior to joining the FARC in 1983.

(Interview.)

This policy on forced abortion, coupled with forced contraception, leaves little room for women to control their own bodies and make decisions regarding their reproductive and sexual life. In Butler's words then, the body, as a variable boundary and a surface, is regulated in a political way (1990). The demands placed on the body—that it forfeits its reproductive capacity completely or/and that it terminates an accidental pregnancy—are significant both as a radical departure from dominant notions of these functions as representations of a specific gender, and also as sites where militarized gender performativity occurs. In other words, motherhood and femininity are disengaged. This calls into question the notion of “true identity” commonly associated with traditional gender roles, only to inscribe upon the body specific gestures, movements, and functions that make up what it means to be a female combatant in the FARC. These women are denied the opportunity to make decisions concerning their own bodies in an effort to adhere to specific militarized gender performativity. The situation in which women's health is threatened is also created, as abortions are carried out under poor medical conditions with no guarantee that women will not suffer from long-term health problems (Kunz and Sjöberg 2009, 27). One interviewee described the process of FARC abortion:

Abortions happen in the mountains with a doctor. They [the FARC] have paramedics. Obviously, they give them things, remedies, and things like that so that they can have an abortion. I think they give them a pill called *tito* or *citote*. It is a pill that makes them have an abortion. To some of them. Others, I don't know, I think they insert something to get the baby out.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, the claim the FARC makes of being an organization in which all members are

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<sup>27</sup> Martín (comandante de escuadra, the FARC), interview and translation by author, August 5, 2010, Bogotá, Colombia.

treated the same regardless of their gender, is not only misleading, but also untrue. The reasons for carrying out practices such as forced contraception and forced abortions are based on the idea that motherhood is incompatible with armed revolutionary struggles (Enloe 1993, 221). In this sense, equality is being constructed from a male-dominated point of view in which women's reproductive choices are disregarded and seen as an obstruction to equality. It could be argued that this is a sacrifice women have to make to enjoy equality within this organization. However, this assumes the FARC is democratic as opposed to highly militarized and patriarchal. This is what Enloe is referring to when she argues that the analytical focus of militarization should shift from questioning equality in the military to questioning militarism itself (ibid.).

There are some exceptions to the rule of forced contraception in the FARC (Kunz and Sjöberg 2009, 28). In some cases in which pregnant women manage to hide their pregnancy until it is advanced, they are allowed to give birth. Pregnant women who are allowed to carry to full term are warned that they have to hand over their child to a relative or a peasant family with no real prospects of visiting him or her on a regular basis (Gutiérrez-Sanín 2008, 18). Hugo explained:

When the commander sees that the pregnancy is too advanced, because there are women who do not show, and when the commander finds out, it is too late and so they let her have the baby but as soon as it is born, they take it away. They allow them to stay in the group, but then they transfer her somewhere else and they don't even know where they left their babies. They do not see them again, they just lose track. (Interview.)

Several women I interviewed stated that, in cases in which women manage to hide their pregnancy, the comandante "punishes" the woman by forcing her to carry out harsh physical activities: "They blame the pregnancy on you. You let someone get you pregnant, so you are the

one who gets punished” (Natalia, Interview.). An ex-combatant from the FARC who was forcibly recruited at age 15 with a cousin said that her cousin was pregnant when the FARC captured them, but was unaware of it. When her superiors found out she was expecting, they forced her to carry out “hard military training to make her have a miscarriage and she could not say no, so she did what she was told and had a miscarriage.”<sup>28</sup>

There are some instances where FARC women are allowed to give birth. As pointed out by Flor, in cases where the baby’s father is a comandante, women are given special treatment and are allowed to go back to their family to give birth. In some cases, these women also have the option of staying with their baby, or re-joining the FARC. Having a relationship with a superior has been identified by many FARC women as an “advantage” in terms of getting preferential treatment, and other factors that are considered beneficial: improvement of their status in relation to their peers, improvement of their conditions at the camp, and protection from other men in the group (Kunz and Sjöberg 2009; Theidon 2009). Theidon (2009, 15) states that for women combatants, having a relationship with a superior can be seen as a strategy used to gain protection from their male peers. Natalia explained:

There is a difference. Comandantes’ girlfriends are allowed to have children. You have it easier there if you get together with a superior. Young women usually get together with a commander. I did it too at the beginning and was exempted from many things like not being able to have children. Comandantes are usually older. Not always, but most times they are. So they have more experience and they can help you adapt to the life there.

Because it is hard, it is a hard life, so they help you, they teach you how to survive over there. I got myself an older comandante. He was good to me. I don’t think I would have survived if I had not been with him. (Interview.)

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<sup>28</sup> Gladys (combatant, the FARC), interview and translation by author, July 27, 2010, Bogotá, Colombia.

All women interviewed agreed that women who become comandantes' partners are exempted from military requirements. However, women who have children and decide to go back to the organization after giving birth are judged by their peers (both men and women) for leaving their baby behind. Anibal said: "These women are warriors, they have no feelings, they are too attached to their guns" (Interview.). In a similar manner, Mariana stated: "These women love their guns more than their babies."<sup>29</sup> This statement reveals the tensions and contradictions regarding militarized gender performativity in the FARC. Women are held accountable to particular views of gender in the organization and are punished for transgressing these standards. However, if they do have to return to civilian life to give birth, they are judged according to "civilian standards," thus revealing the aspect of gender identity that Butler identifies with its instability and illusory qualities. Militarized femininity is constituted as a social temporality (Butler 1990, 191) corresponding to the microcosm of the FARC. Once this gender is performed outside this social temporality, it is unintelligible. In other words, it is seen as acceptable. It is expected that a female combatant of the FARC will "abandon" her baby, but this is considered unacceptable for civilian women. The problem is that these two identities overlap when FARC women have to "dress" as civilians to give birth.

Keith Stanski (2005, 137) argues that, in relation to women's situation in the FARC, "ideology allows substantial and substantive contradictions to pass unexamined." It is relevant to examine these contradictions as they show the possibilities of gender transformation (as well as its stubborn permanence). The fact that women in the FARC have to navigate between different conceptions of gender identity and performativity reveals identity "as a politically tenuous construction" (Butler 1990, 192). This is key during the DDR process as both men and women ex-combatants go through a complex identity transition, and a contradictory process of gender

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<sup>29</sup> Mariana (combatant, the FARC), interview and translation by author, August 12, 2010, Bogotá, Colombia.

transformation that gives priority to different values and roles.

### **Reintegration and the Future**

Most ex-combatants from the FARC have told researchers, including myself, that one of the reasons they demobilized was to reunite with their families (Theidon 2009, 16). Mariana stated: “If I didn’t have any children, I would probably still be there, but now it is just too hard to be away from them” (Interview.). However, once the ex-combatants reunite with their family, they experience difficulties in adapting to their new roles (Theidon 2007; Medina–Arbeláez 2009). Finding and reuniting with children they “left behind” is often a difficult and challenging process. Some women stated that their children were resentful and angry at them for having left them behind. They also mentioned that their families had been stigmatized and their children discriminated for having a guerrillera mom.

Mónica had a baby while she was an active combatant with the FARC. She was not forced to have an abortion because she had a stable partner, and because her comandante was “flexible.” She had to hand over her daughter 20 days after she gave birth, and saw her every 3–6 months thereafter. She demobilized when her daughter was 8 years old, but was unable to find childcare for her daughter while she was away fulfilling the requirements of the DDR program.

The program does not offer any type of support for single moms. I leave for work in the morning and leave food ready for my daughter. She gets ready on her own and goes to school and then comes home and is all alone in the house. Nobody looks after her. I am scared for her because children should not be alone, especially girls. What if a man gets in the house and does something bad to her? She gets scared of being alone, but what can I do? I have to work. So I am not completely happy with the [DDR] program. I would say I am more or less happy. I would like to have some kind of support for me and my

daughter.<sup>30</sup>

The Colombian DDR program offers no childcare provisions for children of its participants. This affects single-parents who are trying to fulfil their requirements in the program while looking for a job or working. In her study of DDR processes in Africa, de Watteville (2002, 14) argues that the provision of childcare is a “prerequisite to the economic reintegration of the target groups.” The lack of childcare affects female ex-combatants who are single parents as it is predominantly women who take on the responsibilities of looking after their children (ibid.). This makes it challenging for these women to follow training or engage in income-generating projects, and also puts them at a disadvantage with respect to other DDR participants.

Demobilized women from the FARC face many challenges during the DDR process and the transition from combatant to ex-combatant and from ex-combatant to civilian. Militarized gender performativity changes as ex-combatants go through these stages. Their life in each of these stages is bound by “specific cultural norms that condition and limit the actor” (Butler 2004, 345). All women (and men) interviewed recognized that their experiences in the FARC had changed them. There has been a disjuncture in their identity, once when they joined the FARC and once again when they demobilized.

Not only being in the FARC changes you as a woman. Also violence changes you because it makes you realize that women can do the same things men do. You are given responsibilities you never thought you could do. And you can't say no. You have to do it. But you also realize that women are not superior to men. I am still very sensitive. Now you see more *machista* men. In civilian life. Bosses are very *machista*. And now I know I will not let a man hit me. I learned that in the FARC. I have no weapon anymore, but I know that I won't let him hit me. I used to get scared easily before I joined the FARC.

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<sup>30</sup> Mónica (combatant, the FARC), interview and translation by author, July 27, 2010, Bogotá, Colombia.



Crossing the patio at night to use the washroom in my parent's house would scare me. I would get scared of shadows (laughs). In that sense, the FARC made me stronger. I am still a woman, but I am stronger, less naïve. (Interview.)

Women who join the FARC commit to an organization which requires them to renounce their civilian identities for good. This includes their gender identities as they have known them. This complex process can be analyzed using the concept of militarized gender performativity since the militarization of femininity occurs on the surface of women's bodies: they are required to adopt behaviours commonly associated with male soldiers and military training, and are given all the visible signifiers of a (male) combatant, such as a weapon and a uniform. At the same time, their sexuality is manipulated according to the perceived needs of the organization. This creates clear distinctions between female and male soldiers, and has specific impacts on the reproductive rights of women in this organization. They are required to completely forgo the possibility of having children by being forced to use contraception and by being forced to have an abortion if they get pregnant. Reproduction is, therefore, removed from the characteristics that constitute an ideal FARC female combatant, and priorities are organized in a way which departs from traditional conceptions of femaleness. In this sense, the bodies of women in the FARC go through changes that destabilize traditional gender roles in a context with double standards: those of the FARC, and those of civilian society to which these women are contrasted. However, this destabilization is key in understanding gender as flexible, and in imagining different ways of constructing gender in the process of demilitarization.

## Chapter 6. Women in the AUC

*“Who said pregnancy and war can’t go together? As long as you have fingers to pull the trigger, you can fight like the rest.”*

– Daniela, the AUC<sup>31</sup>

Unlike the FARC, which operates like an army-like organization, the paramilitaries operated as a flexible network for the provision of security. Also, unlike the FARC, paramilitarism in Colombia has historically been a fragmented phenomenon and has not had a solid and defined ideological discourse (Medina–Arbeláez 2009, 13). In relation to its female members, there was no official commitment to gender equality. Also in contrast to the FARC, there was no interest in changing women’s status in society as part of their struggle. In terms of structure, the AUC was less hierarchical than the FARC, and comandantes enjoyed more autonomy in both financial and disciplinary aspects. The AUC offered its combatants opportunities for social upward mobility through individual economic incentives (Gutiérrez–Sanín 2001). Furthermore, combatants were given more flexibility in terms of maintaining ties with their civilian life and keeping in touch with their families. This explains why the paramilitary had fewer desertions than the FARC (Gutiérrez–Sanín 2008, 25). Flexibility in terms of organizational mechanisms resulted in a more individualistic and arbitrary armed group than the FARC (Medina–Arbeláez 2009, 13). However, it did not translate to a less severe soldiering process. Although membership in the paramilitaries was not considered to be a lifelong commitment, leaving the organization was not easy.

### **Paramilitary Violence: Morality Under Siege**

The paramilitaries were notorious for their cruel soldiering practices, and the methods they employed to intimidate civilians, such as selective assassinations, massacres, and torture

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<sup>31</sup> Daniela (combatant, the AUC), interview and translation by author, August 17, 2010, Bogotá, Colombia.

(ibid.). For instance, Esteban, who was a comandante in the AUC, explained that he received military training and “assassin training” during his years in that organization:

I received military training and guerrilla warfare tactics training. That means that you learn about the guerrilla, how the enemy operates, you get to know them. I received American training that is a special kind of military training that self-defence groups offer to attack guerrilla groups. I also received training, like an urban course, for (laughter) to be an assassin on the paramilitary payroll. They said I was good and so they made me take this course, so I trained and I became a bodyguard for a superior, and I had to train hard, I mean, the simple reason that I made it alive from that course was very good, it was seen as an accomplishment. In that course you have to go and kill people, that’s the first test they give you for you to graduate from that course. And you have to pass if you want to live. Because if you were bad at it (silence) if you were bad, you would not come back, like the majority, I would say around 80 percent of those who took the course would not come back, they stayed dead in that school for having failed it. It is very difficult. They teach you many things. The most difficult part is when it’s your turn to kill someone, but after that, when they sent you to combat, it was good experience, because you had already practically [basically] killed other people.<sup>32</sup>

Esteban explained that he did not know any woman who had received this kind of training. He also explained that he had been in charge of a group of twelve people, and that only one was a woman. He said that larger groups had more women, including “combatants, *urbanas*, *milicianas*, and prostitutes. *Milicianas* and *urbanas* did intelligence in towns and cities and prostitutes would get recruited to do intelligence in guerrilla camps. We recruited everything,

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<sup>32</sup> Esteban (comandante de escuadra, the AUC), interview and translation by author, August 24, 2010, Bogotá, Colombia.

women, children, everything we could.” Women constituted a small percentage of the AUC, although many ex-members noted that it was not difficult for women to become members of this organization:

There were a bunch of us there. Some were more evil than others. It was not difficult to join the paramilitaries as a woman. On the contrary, there are many times in which there is more respect for these women who join because they say that, when it comes to fighting, women are tougher than men, that women are more arbitrary. In my group there were around one hundred combatants. Around thirty were women, but the group of one hundred was divided in smaller groups of around fifteen so some had more women than others.<sup>33</sup>

Like the FARC, the AUC has been accused of engaging in gender-based violence (Amnesty International 2004). However, their objectives and strategies were different. The AUC continuously engaged in political and social cleansing and enforced specific values and behaviours in society. Women who joined the ranks of the AUC were expected to follow these standards and had to conform to the organization’s unofficial rules of conduct. The AUC devised specific rules for the communities in their control, which included types of clothes allowed (nothing revealing for women), curfews, the prohibition of drugs, the persecution of drug addicts and sex workers through practices of social cleansing, and the resolution of domestic or family disputes (Amnesty International 2004). Esteban explained:

We had some rules for everyone, not just for our people, but also for civilians, you see? For example, being gay was not allowed. No, they would kill you if you were gay. It was not allowed. I know of some cases. I know of some cases. They killed two kids because of a rumour. Someone said “I saw them, I saw them, I saw them together” so the

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<sup>33</sup> Claudia (combatant, the AUC), interview and translation by author, August 12, 2010, Bogotá, Colombia.

comandante killed both of them. He killed the poor kids. One was around 15 and the other around 17. You need to know that over there [in the AUC] they tell you things and that is what it is: whoever smokes marijuana, dies; gays, die; robbers, die; rapists, die; rebels, die. These are rules for us and for the community, so that we can leave more peacefully, you see? (Interview.)

Tied to the AUC's social control and their practice of social and political cleansing, were their practices of rape, sexual abuse, and sexual mutilation of their civilian victims (Amnesty International 2004). This included sexually abusing pregnant women who were considered to be guerrilla supporters and torturing them by removing their foetuses (ibid.). It is not known to what extent these practices occurred within the organization. Esteban explained these practices in his interview:

Of course there were rapes. But people got punished. It was not allowed, it was a serious offence to touch women if they didn't want to. There was this black guy (silence) I am not racist or anything like that, but he deserved it. He raped a little girl who was twelve. A civilian. And the little girl accused him so we had to get him and we tied him up. The comandante ordered this. So they tied him to a tree, drenched him in gasoline, covered him with like six tires, and set him on fire.

The AUC did not issue statements specifying the role or situation of its female members, and there were no efforts to show that women were being treated in equal terms as their male peers.

Jaime, an ex-combatant from the AUC, explained:

You learn what the rules are, you learn what you can and cannot do. A *politico* would come and talk to you; someone called a *politico militar*, which is how they called them. A politico was like a comandante, he was high ranking in the organization and the politico

is the one in charge of telling you what you can do and what you cannot. To put it in another way, he is the one who brainwashes you, so to speak, to make you want to stay, that is actually what he did. So he told you about behaviour and discipline and made sure you understood.<sup>34</sup>

The decentralization of the AUC and the lack of internal rules makes the militarization of gender in the AUC more difficult to map than that of the FARC. The FARC had clear guidelines, despite the fact that these were often transgressed. Despite the absence of official rules, the practice of soldiering in the AUC reveals the efforts by this group to shape a specific notion of gender identities within this organization.

### **Soldiering: Daily Life and Discipline**

The AUC's control of its members' daily life was less rigorous and structured than those in the FARC and did not require a total adherence to the organization (Medina–Arbeláez 2009, 65). For instance, paramilitary members were not required to attend political discussions on a daily basis, and had more flexible schedules and free time to visit family or to go to towns and cities to spend time at bars or doing other leisurely activities (ibid.). Daily life did not follow a strict schedule in the AUC and was more unpredictable than in the FARC. Jaime stated: “On a day like today we would do several things. It all depended on the comandante, but we would be asked to patrol, for example. The group I was in was hired to take care of a mine, so we would patrol and then take breaks, depending on what the comandante wanted.” In this respect, the probability of unruly behaviour was higher in the paramilitaries than in the FARC (Gutiérrez–Sanín 2008, 25). Most people interviewed stated that the rules and schedules in the AUC were flexible and that they had free time. AUC members were not required to cut all communication

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<sup>34</sup> Jaime (comandante de escuadra, the AUC), interview and translation by author, August 17, 2010, Bogotá, Colombia.

with their families, and many of the ex-combatants interviewed stated that they kept in touch with their families and got the chance to visit every few months, depending on the flexibility of the comandante. Despite this, the AUC was a militarized organization and members had to adhere to a specific lifestyle which was grounded in military values. Discipline played an important role in the quotidian life of its members. Alexander explained:

When you are in the AUC, you have to ask for permission, you have to tell your commander, you tell him: ‘look, my commander, I want to go to town, I will be back.’ He would tell you: ‘ok, dress up as a civilian and you can go for three hours.’ If you leave during the day, you have to be back by 9:00 [p.m.] and if you are late, you get punished. They tie you to a tree and they leave you there without food for two, three hours, four hours, one day, depending on what you did.<sup>35</sup>

It was possible for AUC members to temporarily leave the organization “dressed” like a civilian. However, members who did not obey the comandante’s orders were severely punished. Unlike in the FARC, AUC combatants were sometimes punished through the withholding of individual incentives, such as not being paid for one (or more) month and/or not being able to visit relatives for long periods of time:

Over there, the comandante had a law: whoever got in an argument, they would get suspended and not receive payment, they would not get paid for a month. If you keep arguing, then nothing! They would not pay you. So people knew that if I don’t apologize, I am screwed this month. (Interview.)

The comandante was a powerful figure in the AUC, just as in the FARC. The AUC comandante, however, had more leeway than his or her counterpart in the FARC, due to the fact

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<sup>35</sup> Alexander (comandante de escuadra, the AUC), interview and translation by author, August 20, 2010, Bogotá, Colombia.

that there were not estatutos to regulate their actions. For this reason, comandantes in the AUC were more authoritarian when it came to regulating the behaviour of his or her troop. AUC comandantes had complete autonomy in terms of disciplinary punishments. These tended to be designed to maximize physical pain (Medina–Arbeláez 2009, 72). However, the actions of AUC comandantes were grounded in a common understanding of what was permissible and what was not, inside the organization. I interviewed an ex–Political Comandante from the AUC. His duties were to recruit and set the terms of individuals’ membership in the AUC, or as he called it “brainwash recruits”:

We have a code of behaviour, which is a way members should behave. I know this code and it was my job to outline the disciplinary measures for committing an offence like deserting, everything. During military training, the recruits had to attend two hours of “psychology” and you tell them: ‘this is like this, this works like that, you can’t run people over when you drive, you can’t steal, we will give you all you need.’ Everything they needed to know to be part of the group. After that they know what they can and cannot do. If not, they can ask their comandante.<sup>36</sup>

Despite the absence of official written rules concerning gender in the AUC, ex–members shared an understanding of what women could and could not do as members of the organization. This understanding was rooted in a profound rupture between civilian and AUC women:

Yes, of course, there is more equality there than here [outside the AUC]. Because in civilian life they treat women like we are useless. In the AUC they didn’t do that. They would give you the same obligations that they would give a man, they would give them to you too and you had to comply. For example, you had to walk the same distance as a man and if you had to fetch water, you had to, just like men did. Always, so to say. You

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<sup>36</sup> Mario (comandante político, the AUC), interview and translation by author, August 10, 2010, Bogotá, Colombia.



had to do whatever they told you to do. You have to act like you are one of them. There were times that it was difficult, that you wanted to quit... (pause) sometimes you wanted to quit, but you had to start again, from the beginning and be at the same level as them, obviously, with more strength, but you have to be the same as men, have the same strength and the same capabilities. There were times in which women didn't want to do things right and the comandante would tell them: 'ok, if you continue behaving like that, you are no longer useful for us.' And then they would try and make an effort. (Interview.)

This testimony reveals that the responsibilities given to women and the standards that women in the AUC had to meet were radically different from those traditionally associated with women in civilian society. Women made a conscious effort during times in which they found it difficult to navigate the defined area of expected militarized gender performativity. Claudia stated that "you have to act like you are one of them" and in doing so is exposing the illusory quality of gender identity in the AUC. In "trying," women were engaging in a process of producing cultural signification and were creating a specific female identity that gives importance to "being like men." A key member of the audience is the comandante, since he establishes and upholds the "norms of reception (of an audience) that render the performance legible" (Butler 2000, quoted in Butler 2004, 345). The comandante was there to notify women when they were not being masculine enough and, as will be discussed further on, the comandante was also there to let women know when they were being too masculine.

This was true for both men and women who were members of the AUC. Claudia also explained: "Men and women both had to do the same, like cook, and if men didn't know how to cook, they would pay someone to take their shift or they would have to come up with some kind of soup" (Interview.). Two important points are brought up in this statement. First, men's roles in

the AUC included some duties traditionally associated with feminine attributes like cooking. This is the same for men in the FARC. Another important aspect is that individuals in the AUC (unlike individuals in the FARC) could “pay” their way out of these tasks. The availability of money within the AUC allowed for non-compliance with these rules. This is just one example of the ways in which gender roles (and gender performativity) in the AUC were manipulated by members, as men who did not want to cook could pay someone else (usually a woman) to fulfill this responsibility for them. Jaime explained: “You had to learn to cook. If the rice is soggy, you do it again, and if you screw up, you get punished, they take it off your pay. So that’s why it was just easier to ask a woman to do it for you, because they know to do it right” (Interview.).

The lack of official gender equality policies in the AUC often resulted in situations which allowed individuals to negotiate their militarized gender performativities (within the confines of the militarized organization):

Women carry less things in their backpacks. There were women that were very weak to carry things so you would offer to carry things for them. If they made men carry fifty logs, women only had to carry twenty-five or twenty. Because they are women. They would treat them different, but there were women who didn’t want to be treated differently, but the same, like any other combatant, like any other men. There were women who were like that. Maybe it was because they understood that they can also be strong, that they can have the same strength as a man.<sup>37</sup>

To a certain extent, women in the AUC had the ability to choose if they wanted to be treated differently or be on the same terms as their male peers. They had some flexibility to place their militarized gender identity along the spectrum allowed in the AUC vis-à-vis the militaristic

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<sup>37</sup> Camilo (comandante de escuadra, the AUC), interview and translation by author, August 12, 2010, Bogotá, Colombia.

requirements of the organization. This degree of flexibility in influencing their militarized gender performativity reveals the ambiguous character of gender. Another male member stated:

Equality? No, we treat women differently because they are women. They are not going to do the same as us men. Women just can't carry the same as us in their backpacks. There are men who also get tired. And then there are women like Barbie. You had to carry Barbie's backpack and sometimes even her vest! I was never *machista*, but there were men that treated women bad.<sup>38</sup>

Some female combatants felt pressure to “be like one of them,” and men were blunt about the difference that, in their view, made women less valuable as combatants because they displayed characteristics that were not considered an asset in a militarized organization like the AUC. Medina–Arbeláez (2009, 83) found that, in general, paramilitary women were seen as weak and useless by their male peers. This is due to the belief that women are naturally incompatible with the military requirements of the AUC (*ibid.*).

In terms of discipline, ex-combatant Esteban stated: “Men get punished with physical work and women get punished with more hours in the kitchen” (Interview.). In this sense, discipline was enforced in a gendered manner (as is the case in the FARC) and this was done in an explicit manner (unlike the FARC). The punishments assigned to individuals who broke the rules, reflected traditional gender roles. However, the presence of women in the AUC did not mirror traditional female roles completely. Women who joined the paramilitaries were thought to be made up of part of a specific category of women related to, yet vastly different from, civilian women: they wore a uniform and carried a weapon. They lived away from their families and their places of origin. They made men respect them. They were aggressive and less

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<sup>38</sup> José (comandante de escuadra, the AUC), interview and translation by author, August 24, 2010, Bogotá, Colombia.

understanding. Jaime stated:

Very different, yes, of course. Different in the sense that women there feel big and important by the uniform they are wearing, by their weapon, and as I told you, they make you respect them, if you look at her weird, she will come and kick you and what can you do? How are you going to get in trouble with a *paraca* of that kind? Many women took advantage of their appearance, because it is an appearance, for me it was all an appearance, their power, the power they felt, all an appearance. If she treated you badly, you had to keep quiet, so there was some tension against women. Some were like that. Others were normal and made friends with other women and with civilians too. I don't think it was a good thing that women shared our experience there in the paramilitaries. It was hard for me so I thought it had to be worse for them, but some were tough and some were just like men. (Interview.)

These characteristics of women in the AUC outlined by Jaime were seen as being an “appearance”—something that deviated from the norm because they were given a weapon. Not only was their behaviour seen as inauthentic by their male peers, but most importantly, the power these women displayed by having access to a terrain dominated by men. Miguel stated:

There is a big difference between civilian women and women in the paramilitaries. Women from those groups have to go through a lot of things and get brainwashed, they change their personality, their way of thinking and become very aggressive, less understanding. They carry scars on them. The natural beauty of women gets ruined a lot over there in that sense and here women are more normal.<sup>39</sup>

Gender dynamics in the AUC entailed that in some instances, women and men engaged in militaristic matters as equals, since they both exuded the (perceived) power of carrying a gun

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<sup>39</sup> Miguel (combatant, the AUC), interview and translation by author, July 27, 2010, Bogotá, Colombia.

and wearing camouflage. However, for women, this was seen as abnormal and as ruining their “natural beauty.” This makes reference to the traditional feminine signifiers: tenderness, submissiveness, and an inclination to nurture, among others. This distancing from traditional gender roles was seen as negative, even though the same characteristics displayed by men in the AUC were considered in a positive light.

The testimonies of both Jaime and Miguel are significant not only because they show the ways in which women’s new roles (as opposed to their role as female civilians) in the AUC were interpreted, but also because they speak directly to the concept of militarized gender performativity. The transformation of assumptions, the reassessment of priorities, and the evolution of values involved in militarization, which affect gender identities and relations, occurs in a performative way (as explained by Butler’s theory of performativity). The demands placed on all members of the AUC imply a radical departure from women’s traditional gender identity, and imply the reinforcement and strengthening of men’s traditional gender identity. Women become less understanding and more aggressive in this situation, ruining their “natural” beauty. They become powerful to the extent that they are allowed to wear a uniform and carry a weapon (two symbols of power in most societies). Enloe (1993, 3) argues that militarism relies on specific forms of masculinity . In the context of the Colombian conflict, it could also be said that militarism relies on specific notions of *gender* since femininity within the illegal armed groups is subject to militarization as well. Women are considered to be weak and naturally incompatible with the military efforts of the organization, yet they are allowed access to military power in a way that is perceived to be temporary.

The experiences of women in the AUC show that militarism in the context of the Colombian conflict is based on specific values associated with gender. Masculine values are

exalted in the militarization process, but these values operate within a traditional binary structure of thought (male/female, body/soul, reason/emotion), and by relying and highlighting specific notions and values about masculinity, the militarization process is relying and indirectly highlighting the opposite notions and values about femininity. Nowhere is this more evident than in the conflict and tensions raised by Jaime and Miguel. What happens when women are allowed to get involved in the illegal militarization of masculinity? Jaime explained that this created a “tension against women.” The militarization of femininity is also based on the exaltation of masculine principles and values. But instead of remaining outside of this process, like the army wives and sex-workers around military bases studied by Enloe, AUC (and also FARC) women also partook in the overtly masculinized process of militarization alongside men. The perceived abnormality of this endeavour generates the tension identified by Jaime, as women began demanding respect from men and men felt powerless in the sight of a woman with a weapon. This changed the balance of power between women and men in the AUC.

The shifting power relations between the two genders in the AUC such as the one described by Jaime and Miguel is why the concept of militarized *masculinities* is fundamental to understanding the notion of militarized gender performativity. It is important to understand how militarization relies on specific notions of masculinity in the process of militarizing gender as a whole. Jaime and Miguel also brought up some key aspects discussed by Butler in her theory of performativity. Both testimonies highlight the perceived “abnormal” behaviour of women in the paramilitary. The aspects both men chose to employ as signifiers of this deviation were appearance and behaviour. Jaime stated that women in the AUC felt “big and important” because they were wearing a uniform and carrying a gun, and he also stated that these women took “advantage of their appearance.” Miguel stated that women in the AUC changed their

personality, their way of thinking, and behaved aggressively and were less understanding. Thus, these changes (and the reaction they generated) were being inscribed in the surface of these women's bodies. These women were not internalizing a masculine gender; their experiences challenged their gender identity in a way which is more nuanced than "women becoming men" because, as Butler argues, gender identity cannot be internalized as it simply cannot be embodied (1990, 45).

According to Butler, gender is organized, instituted, and inscribed on the surface of the body and this is where any change to gender identity takes place. According to this view, the "stylized repetition of acts" constitute gender identity. This includes bodily gestures, styles, acts, and corporeal signs. In this sense, women in the AUC were engaging in a performance that revealed what it was to be a *female* in the AUC. They were following the militarized standards set by their organization, and challenging the exchange through which gender comes into being. In "Changing the Subject: Judith Butler's Politics of Radical Resignification," Butler argues that performativity requires a cultural context of reception (quoted in Butler 2004, 345). Thus, the confusion, tension, and frustration expressed by Jaime and Miguel arose due to the fact that the performance of the traditional feminine gender identity they had been exposed to in civilian life had been altered. The internal tensions that arise from such shifts in performance of gender involve the perceived exacerbation of (masculine) power in a system in which the feminine is the distinguishing and complementary characteristic alternating with the masculine. This occurs at the same time as a dislocation of the feminine gender identity. The women in the AUC were not required to display obedience to their male counterparts, for example. These types of discontinuities are key for the potential changes that traditional gender identities can undergo in both Enloe's and Butler's theories (Enloe 1993; Butler 1990).

## Sexuality and Reproductive Rights

In the AUC, there were unwritten rules about relationships. Like in the FARC, the comandante also regulated whether or not two people could become a couple within the organization. However, Medina–Arbeláez (2009, 88) notes that the regulation of relationships in the AUC was less strict than those in the FARC. Medina–Arbeláez notes that this was due to the smaller number of women in the AUC as well as to the decentralized nature of this group. Individuals interviewed agreed that relationships were regulated in the AUC, but the extent to which this happened depended on the comandante. Ex–AUC member Claudia explained:

Yes, women could have civilian boyfriends too. They didn't like when women had boyfriends from the organization. That is just a source of problems. So they didn't like that. They could have one outside the group. When they got permission to leave for a few days, they would go and meet their boyfriends, and sometimes they could invite their boyfriends to the camp if they got permission and they got to see each other and all that. They had to ask for permission and if the comandante said no, you cannot bring anyone, then they couldn't. There were rules there. There was one rule that, for example, if you had your partner and say the man was in the jungle and the woman was in the camp fooling around with another guy, they would not accept that. That was not accepted. That was the end of the fun for her. That is how it worked there. If you messed up, you had to see what you could do to make it better. If not, they would give the order of *muerte súbita* to whoever screwed up. And that was it. (Interview.)

Women combatants in the AUC were allowed to have civilian boyfriends, unlike their counterparts in the FARC. The reasoning in this case was that relationships within the AUC could be difficult to manage if problems arose. However, relationships within the group were not banned. If they became a source of problems, the individuals in question could be subject to



*muerte súbita*. Unlike the FARC's consejo de guerra, in which an offender was punished by his or her peers depending on the outcome of a vote, the AUC's *muerte súbita* was based on a decision made by the comandante with no room for appeals. In most cases, the person sentenced to *muerte súbita* would be murdered in front of his or her peers as a way of warning others of the consequences of bad behaviour (Medina–Arbeláez 2009, 75). Claudia's answer to my question: "Did you know of anyone who was sentenced to *muerte súbita*?" was:

I (laughter)... I knew some girl that they were chasing to kill, but then nothing happened to her (laughter). She left. She managed to leave before they killed her because she was told in advance that it was better for her to leave... she had been with another guy. There was this guy who would bring us supplies from the town sometimes. And she was the woman of one of the combatants from the group and she did something with the supply guy and someone told the comandante and the comandante gave the order to kill her and so her husband warned her. He told her: 'leave now because they are going to kill you.' She ran. (Interview.)

This testimony reveals the relationship between sexuality, power, and militarism in the AUC. In particular, it points to the mechanisms through which sexuality is controlled to enforce a particular type of combatant. In the case of female combatants, the ideal was faithful, monogamous, and able to control her sexual impulses (Medina–Arbeláez 2009, 83).

Like the FARC, the AUC also used relationships as a form of recruitment. Several people whom I interviewed agreed that women would join the AUC because they had fallen in love with a combatant. Jaime stated:

Nowadays women like camouflage, I have always said that. They like those who are in camouflage, be it from the army, or whoever, what matters to them is that it is

camouflage. So women, mostly the ones that hang out in bars, or even the ones that stay at home, the peasant women, they would fall in love, they would fall in love with the camouflage, no matter who was wearing it, and the guy who might also be in love, he starts to convince her to come with him and then when they are in they regret it because it is not easy. It is not easy. It is a life I would not want anyone to have. It's one thing to face hardships here, but it is something else to face them there [in the AUC], do you understand me? (Interview.)

The influence and importance of camouflage as a signifier in a context of protracted armed conflict is brought to the foreground by Jaime in his testimony. Amnesty International has accused both the AUC and the FARC of using relationships as a strategy to recruit women to their ranks (2004). Testimonies such as Jaime's show how this form of recruitment is managed within the AUC. Women are thought to "fall in love" with the allure of camouflage. They are attracted to the power, respect, and recognition that the uniform signifies. Theidon (2009, 15) argues that, in contexts like these in the Colombia, women are attracted to armed men because it signifies security. The armed group they join is to a certain extent irrelevant since what matters is reaping the benefits that come attached to camouflage. The uniform as a symbolic force, then, is the bait in this strategy of recruitment which attracts women to groups such as the AUC and the FARC. However, once they are wearing camouflage and are required to live a particular type of lifestyle involving a particular militarized gender, some of these women "regret" having joined such organizations. As is the case in the FARC, there were also significant implications for those AUC women who manage to establish a relationship within their group:

Everything there is equal for everyone. Everything is equal. But, as I told you, if you find a guy for yourself, a partner, a boyfriend, then he will cover your back and he will take

on your responsibilities and his responsibilities to help you out. In a way, over there women get treated like they should be treated, like what they are: a woman. If a comandante sees that you can't carry as much as men, then he will just tell you: 'Diana' or whoever, 'go get me two or four chunks of wood, or however many you can' even if us men have to bring 20. So they [women] are treated well, they get the best treatment. Especially the ones that get together with a guy. (Interview.)

Several individuals I interviewed told me that it was possible to get married in the AUC. Once the comandante approved the relationship, a couple could organize a ceremony that mimicked a civilian ceremony. At the ceremony, the couple had to wear their uniforms and they would both be asked if they wanted to be with each other. In some cases, women carried a bouquet of wild flowers.

They sign a paper and that's it. It was done fast. They signed a paper and that was it. Over there, that means that if you cheated on him, you die, and if he cheated on you, he also dies. Neither of you could retract from the marriage because you had signed in front of someone, who then, and in the organization, was highly respected. A superior. Over there, you have to respect your superiors so if you were married, you were married. (Interview.)

In this sense, divorce was not an option and adultery was punished with death. The AUC had a very strict approach to marriage and fidelity both inside and outside the organization. Paramilitary groups enforced strict rules of fidelity in areas where they were dominant (Estrada et al. 2007, 276). They warned people about infidelity and punished those who were unfaithful. Women who were unfaithful to their husbands were tied up to a post or tree naked, with a sign that read "I am unfaithful to my husband" (ibid.). These women were also punished by being

forced to clean the streets and carry out domestic labour for the AUC. Inside the AUC, rules on marriage and fidelity were enforced by the comandantes who were the ones in charge of managing discipline within each of the different groups that made up part of the AUC. In the organization, marriage had consequences for women in terms of the role they were expected to play.

You have to deliver as a wife and respect your husband. If you get married, you have your priorities; you can't let your husband down. You don't have to patrol, you wash his clothes, his socks, you get everything ready for him, you get him his food, everything. You don't have to go to combat. There were women who were too blunt and said they didn't join the AUC to get a husband, and well, no one forced them. They would make them get a husband in a different way: they pressured them by giving them hard work and more work than they could take. They would pressure them until they had no choice but to get a husband. There were a few that were tough. Like *Tachuela*. She was tough. She never said: I have cramps or I have my period, nothing. She was tough. But the others? The others always gave up because they were women and as a woman you have to get tired easily, so they got pressured and they gave in. (Interview.)

Esteban's testimony reveals the consequences for AUC women who decided to get married: their priorities changed as they were expected to comply with traditional gender roles. They were also not required to go to combat. There were also implications for women who decided they did not want to get married: they were pressured to get married. In this aspect, the AUC was different from the FARC since getting married was not an option in the FARC. However, in the FARC, a couple can "formalize" their relationship, meaning that they cannot be separated (but can separate if they want to). Despite these differences, there are always

implications for women who enter into a formal arrangement: they have to comply with traditional gender roles, albeit more loosely in the FARC and to a greater extent in the AUC.

Formal relationships in both groups have required a readjustment of priorities for women and a readjustment of gender identities in general. In the FARC, women have to carry out the role of wife while at the same time engaging in military activities (with the help of their partner). In the AUC, women could be exempted from some military requirements (this fluctuated from group to group depending on the comandante). In different ways, these illegal armed groups have relied on specific notions about gender as they have negotiated the specificities of what it means to have romantic relationships within their organizations. Single women have been allowed to adopt masculine behaviours considered necessary for combat, and women in a relationship have been exempted from this and given other responsibilities. Most women in the AUC interviewed were aware of the perceived benefits of being in a formal relationship. Some stated that they would “get together” with someone in order to avoid harsh tasks because they knew their partners would take on some of their responsibilities. Esteban stated:

I didn't have a girlfriend from the same group. It's not that I didn't like them. Because I was a comandante myself, I always thought they would be with me to use me, you understand? I would tell myself: no, these women bring too many problems. What for? Every once in a while you would see how relationships ended in death and why would I want that? Why would I want to be with one of those women that I am going to have to hurt? Better to avoid that. I rather someone else kill her because I won't. (Interview.)

This testimony shows that men like Esteban were aware of the implications of having a girlfriend from within the organization. Esteban perceived AUC women as a source of problems and saw them as opportunists. Women's sexuality in the AUC implied specific relationships between

combatants and comandantes. This relationship had the potential of changing the nature of women's engagement in the organization. In doing so, the characteristics of their gender identity changed. Militarized femininity in the AUC was thus highly linked to women's sexuality: women who did not want to engage in what was commonly understood as a romantic relationship with a superior or a file and rank combatant, were attributed more masculine traits that those women who were in a relationship and were expected to behave according to traditional standards.

Unlike in the FARC, there were no rigid schedules in the AUC in terms of time for couples to spend together. It was the decision of the comandante that would allow a couple to spend time together. Jaime explained that the higher comandantes were not keen on romantic relationships in the group, but that it was always up to the middle-rank commanders to decide:

The middle-rank commanders knew that where there is a group of forty to fifty *paracos* and from those fifty, six, seven, or eight are women, he knows that those women can provide services to any of the men she chooses to fall in love with, so a comandante understands, they understand us, because it was technically not allowed to spend a night with a woman from the group, but they understand, and who is going to oppose that? Just imagine you spending all the time with women, working with women, at night. There you need a woman because you feel like you are suffocating. The comandante is not going to be on top of you twenty-four hours [a day] making sure you don't do anything to women. The one calling the shots was the comandante. I knew a girl who did not want to be with someone she was assigned to and they killed her. She was from the coast. She got assigned to another comandante and she didn't want to be with him. She had been brought for that, so that the comandante wouldn't get bored. Whoever did not want to be

in combat could stay as someone's partner. This girl fell in love with this guy they called *Barranquilla* and one night they got drunk. On our way to Casanare. So she cheated on the comandante with *Barranquilla*. And he found her. No one told him. He found her himself. So they tied her to a trunk and then the comandante said: 'kill her.' That is what he said. I went with him. We went over there, far away and (silence). And so the comandante, her husband, killed her. He killed her himself. Not her lover, but her own husband, the one who found her, he was the one who killed her. (Interview.)

This testimony reveals the gendered nature of relationships in the AUC. Women's sexuality became a function of men's militarized sexual desires and perceived needs. Women were "brought" to the organization for purposes that were related to men's sexual desires. Hayley Lopes (2011, 9) argues that militarized organizations support the perception that "soldiers are entitled to sexual services in order to fulfil their inherent 'masculine' needs and perform their military duties better." Some women in the AUC were assigned a particular partner regardless of their preference and willingness to be in a romantic relationship. However, Esteban explained that some women opted to have a relationship even though they didn't want to:

War was not made for women. If I were a woman in the AUC, it would be very difficult to sleep with someone I don't want to. Over there [in the AUC] it is necessary. But these women were also very smart. After seeing how difficult it was to train and to have your feet destroyed with all the walking with damp boots, because fungus eats your feet slowly we all suffered from this and it is very painful, so these women they knew how to free themselves from all that, they just approached a comandante and proposed to become someone's wife, you see? So they didn't love them or even like them, but they used them. (Interview.)

In this respect, Theidon (2009, 15) states that it was very common for women to engage in a relationship with a superior or a peer as a way to deviate the attention of other men and as a way to attain perceived benefits. Despite the potential benefits women got from engaging in a romantic relationship in the AUC, women who tried to make an autonomous decision and take control of their romantic lives by ending a relationship could be punished with death. Discipline was enforced in a gendered manner with respect to issues concerning romantic engagements, as women were held accountable for the dissolution of a relationship.

The gendered ways in which discipline was enforced in the AUC is revealed in the following testimony by Jaime:

If you are disrespectful to women, depending on the motive or reason, she will tell the comandante and the comandante will punish you. But if a woman was the one who started it and gave you a reason to disrespect her, if you are looking at them and chatting them up, and they are playing along and then something happens and she tells the commander, too bad because she asked for it. See? (Interview.)

“She asked for it” was a valid justification to punish (and even murder) women in the AUC. Again, the comandante decided how to proceed in cases such as the ones mentioned by Jaime. This testimony reveals the hyper-masculinized nature of the AUC and its effects on gender relations. The expected behaviour of male soldiers approaching civilian women as part of their militarized identity (Enloe 1993) was, in this case, extended to women within their own organization who were subject to the decisions made by their superiors. In this case, the responsibility of assaulting a woman was given to the woman herself, and the man was excused if it was believed that the woman provoked him.

Women were expected to be available and willing to engage in a romantic relationship. In



this sense, their sexuality was militarized to serve the organization, as is the case in the FARC. A significant difference between the AUC and the FARC concerns contraception and pregnancies.

Claudia explained:

We weren't forced to use contraception, no, but you would do it out of your own will. I did it because I wanted to, because too many children over there and so many pregnancies for what? There were several women who got pregnant and they had their babies. Normal. And they continued in the group and then we all demobilized. The ones that did not want to come back, would not come back, but most did. When I left to give birth, they kept paying me my salary. Sometimes they even, when I had the baby, they even gave me two, three million pesos for the baby. It was difficult to go back so soon after giving birth. That is why I changed life and when my husband told me we should demobilize, I was already tired of being there. I said: 'I have two children, my mom always takes care of them, I never see them, and when I do, they do not take to me because my mom is their mom.' (Interview.)

In contrast to the FARC, the AUC allowed women to get pregnant and did not directly force them to use contraception. As Claudia notes, many did out of choice, but those who did not do so and got pregnant, did not face the same consequences as their female counterparts in the FARC. These women were allowed to carry full-term and were allowed to give birth. In the case of Claudia, she also got paid and got a "bonus" (between \$1,000 and \$1,500 CAD). Other ex-combatants I interviewed stated that women who got pregnant were allowed to leave the organization to give birth and they were allowed to return one or two months after giving birth. An important observation made was that these women could *choose* to return. They could also choose to stay with their baby and not rejoin the AUC. However, it was noted that most women

returned to the AUC after a few weeks of giving birth and left their baby in the care of family or friends. Some women, like Claudia, did this on several occasions. In Claudia's case, she returned because she wanted to be with her partner and because of her salary. The latter is another difference between the AUC and the FARC. Financial compensation was a factor in deciding whether or not to return to the AUC after having a baby. If pregnancies were allowed in the FARC, it would be much more difficult to guarantee the return of women combatants without this incentive. Claudia also stated:

When I joined the AUC, I didn't have any children. Whenever I got pregnant, I would come back to give birth and then I would return, I would go back. Over there, anyone who got pregnant would get sent back home. Just like that. Then if you wanted to come back, they would take you back. It was normal. When I got pregnant, the commander was notified and he told me: 'ok, leave.' So I left when I was about five months pregnant. I stayed there until I was five months. Then I left to give birth and when my son was three months, I left him with my mom and went back. I would see him every six months.

(Interview.)

Male ex-members I interviewed were aware of the implications that pregnancies had in the AUC: "If you get pregnant, it is very easy. They transfer you so you don't have to be in combat and they take you to the clinic there. Our clinic. And she has the baby and they send her home. Or they send her home to have the baby there" (Interview.). Similarly, Camilo stated:

Those who got pregnant got transferred to do basic tasks, for example, like informants. They would tell us if the army or the guerrilla was on their way, they tell us through the radio and they stay in a town observing what goes on. They don't have to carry heavy backpacks or anything like that. I never heard of any woman who had to have an

abortion. They would just send them away and then they can come back afterwards if they want to. (Interview.)

Motherhood was part of the militarized femininity present in the AUC. Despite the perceived incompatibility between combatants and motherhood, the organization negotiated a way to incorporate both by accommodating pregnant women's situations and allowing them to stay in the organization. A female ex-combatant from the AUC whom I interviewed, but who did not agree to have her interview recorded, stated that she became pregnant and decided to stay in the AUC camp until she was seven months pregnant. She explained that she had to learn how to carry her weapon so that it would not hurt her stomach when she ran.

Every single ex-member of the AUC whom I interviewed stated that abortions (including forced abortions) were not practiced in the AUC. Most of them commented that forced abortions happen in the guerrilla, but not in the paramilitaries, and that if a woman wanted to terminate her pregnancy, she had to ask the comandante for permission to go to a civilian clinic where the procedure would be carried out illegally. Abortion, except with a few exceptions, is illegal under Colombian law. Jaime stated: "No, they never hurt them when they got pregnant. Never. Never. Never. Never. Never. Never. I know for sure. Never. During the time I was there, I never saw or heard that they made them have abortions or give their babies away" (Interview.).

### **Reintegration and the Future**

Unlike the FARC, the AUC has fully demobilized. All members of the paramilitary organization are taking part in the collective DDR program established by the Colombian government. They are presently in the reintegration stage of the process, and some have finished. The former combatants are studying, working, or trying to find employment while attending workshops and meeting with social workers. Most ex-AUC members expressed their satisfaction with the program, but they also voiced several criticisms (as was the case with the demobilized

combatants from the FARC). For instance, Jaime said: “I am happy with this program. Thank God. I don’t know why this program didn’t exist before. I think there would have been less violence and less displacement with a program like this” (Interview.).

All of the ex–AUC members whom I interviewed expressed their frustration with the social stigma surrounding ex–combatants. Some stated that they hid their ex–combatant identity from friends and family for fear of being rejected. Rosa stated:

I have a boyfriend now, but he doesn’t know I am a *desmovilizada* [ex–combatant]. He works in security and he got placed in one of the *centros de servicio* for desmovilizados just like this one. I didn’t know which one and one day I got there to a workshop and rang the doorbell and he opened the door! Imagine that! (laughter) He was surprised and confused, I felt bad for him. He asked me what I was doing there (laughter). I thought quickly about something so I told him I was visiting a friend (laughter). He told me in a whisper to leave that place right away, that that house was full of desmovilizados and that it was very dangerous for me to be there with all those people (laughter). Imagine! Imagine that! I still haven’t told him anything and he doesn’t know I was with the paramilitaries. He would die. People are scared, they are scared of desmovilizados. It is very hard. Being a desmovilizado closes many doors for you. I have been fired from two jobs when they found out I was a desmovilizada. I was the best employee and it didn’t matter. When my boss found out I was a desmovilizada, he kicked me out, he told me to leave and would not give me any references, he told me his shop would look really bad if people found out he was hiring desmovilizados. You see?<sup>40</sup>

The experiences with militarized gender performativity in the AUC had effects on both

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<sup>40</sup> Rosa (comandante contraguerrilla, the AUC), interview and translation by author, August 19, 2010, Bogotá, Colombia.

men and women. Most of the individuals whom I interviewed stated that they would not join the organization again if they had the chance, but a few explained that they felt loyalty toward their comandante and would return to an armed group if they were needed. Miguel stated: “It depends because as you know, money spoils your heart, but if you are okay and you know you will succeed in this life, then I would not go back there [to the AUC]. But if I am in financial need and they call me, I would consider it” (Interview.). In this sense, the prospect of a salary plays an important role in the probability that ex-combatants will return to illegal life.

All the ex-combatants from the AUC that I interviewed (women and men alike) stated that their experiences with the AUC had changed them and their lives. Claudia stated:

My mentality has changed now. Of course it has. Now I know that I can do the same things as men. Sometimes you get insecure just because he is a man, he can do better than me, but no, in the AUC you fulfill all those expectations and show that you are capable to do the same things as a man. Before, I would be a coward and I would tell myself: No, I won't be able to do that. But not now, being there, now my ideology has changed.

(Interview.)

This testimony exemplifies Butler's arguments on identity transformation: once an individual disrupts traditional gender performativity by re-enacting gender in other ways (such as through drag and parody), a space opens in which the imitative structure of gender is revealed (by failing to imitate in a traditional sense and in doing so in disparate ways) (Butler 2004, 218). Chilean cultural theorist, Nelly Richard (2004) discusses drag performances in Chile during and after the repressive military regime.

To make oneself doubly gendered through disguises that parody the merely ornamental clause of femininity in order to simulate-dissimulate solely through strategies of

appearance, to remit human expression and its phraseology of sincerity to a dramatics process... these are the acts that could only disappoint and ridicule the patriarchal faith in theologies of meaning upholding interior truths, the sincere expression of an authentic and profound “I.” (51)

By failing to imitate traditional gender roles in favour of militarized gender performativity, women (and men) in the AUC embarked on a process of identity transformation that continues through their demobilization (and expected de-militarization). Claudia’s statement that her “ideology” has changed makes reference to these changes and the potential for change inherent in gender identity. Claudia pointed out the changes that she noted in her husband who was also a member of the AUC:

My husband helps a lot at home. He leaves for work at six in the morning and gets home at six or seven in the evening. On Sundays we see each other all day and he helps around the house. Quite a bit. I have to give him credit. I think it is because of all the things he experienced, all the things he went through there. (Interview.)

Militarized gender performativity in the AUC had specific characteristics. Traditional gender roles were incorporated with respect to motherhood and childcare, for instance, for those women who decided to have children. Women and men were both required to perform outside of the traditional gender roles by engaging in activities usually associated with the other gender (cooking for men and combat for women). The salaried work and the lack of formal regulations or commitment to gender equality in the AUC meant that there was more leeway for individuals to resist these changes to their gender identities. Men could pay someone to take their cooking shift, and women could get romantically involved with a superior to be exempted from combat-related activities. However, the experiences of men and women in the AUC had important effects

on the way the women now see themselves and their capabilities. To what extent these changes are translated into independence depends, among other things, on the design and implementation of a comprehensive DDR program.

## Chapter 7. Women in the FARC and the AUC

*“Wars don’t simply end. And wars don’t end simply” (Enloe 2004, 193).*

DDR programs, including the Colombian program, are designed around the subject of the combatant/ex-combatant (*desmovilizado*). The complex ways in which this subject is constructed and the implications this has for both men and women have been largely ignored by those in charge of designing DDR programs (Theidon 2009, 7). Colombian officials in charge of the DDR program have designed this program around the assumption that all members share a unified identity of *desmovilizado*. This is problematic because this identity has been constructed based on the perception that all members of the DDR program fall under the broad category of “male combatant member of an illegal armed group.” Thus, the officials in charge of the DDR program have assumed that the experiences and needs of men and women ex-combatants are the same regardless of the organization to which they belonged. From a feminist point of view, this is problematic for two reasons. First, the construction of an all-encompassing image of *desmovilizado* excludes and silences women (and minors) as individuals who were part of the illegal armed groups, and whose experiences are as relevant as the male experience (*ibid.*). Second, the construction of *desmovilizado* excludes the important differences among women (and men) within and across armed groups.

From the perspective of militarized gender performativity, the construction of a universal *desmovilizado* implies that the lived experience of gender in armed conflict is unproblematic. In other words, assuming that all *desmovilizados* fit the category of “male combatant” precludes the possibility that both masculinity and femininity can go through a process of militarization that produces gendered combatants. The presumption, then, is that women who join an illegal armed group “become like men” whereas the experiences of women in the AUC and the FARC have



shown that the process of gender transformation is more complex. Not all women become like men upon joining an illegal armed group. In fact, the nature of the “men” they are expected to be like is itself a constructed identity. A group such as the AUC does not require women to be men’s equals, or to perform as such. Even an organization like the FARC, which has a formal mandate stipulating gender equality, has policies which demarcate the difference between women and men combatants, such as those surrounding sexuality and reproduction. These differences are key in understanding the ways in which “femininity,” and not just masculinity, becomes militarized within illegal armed groups. These differences also challenge and problematize a generic desmovilizado identity.

As has been shown in previous chapters, both the AUC and the FARC have utilized distinct mechanisms to incorporate women into their ranks. Regarding what contributes to constructing these mechanisms, Medina–Arbeláez (2009, 22) states: “processes and mechanisms of subject construction vary from one organization to another and depend on the military, political, and ideological strategy of each armed group, on the development of the conflict and on the concrete relationship between the armed group and the society in question.” These variances, as well as the differences between the status and experiences of women who belonged to the same groups (for instance, between girlfriends of commanding officers and girlfriends of combatants) are key in determining the specific needs of these women. Attention to these differences is central in guaranteeing a successful DDR program. Despite modest efforts, the Colombian DDR program does not represent individual experiences, and therefore does not successfully address the needs of women. As Butler reminds us:

The domains of political and linguistic ‘representation’ set out in advance the criterion by which subjects themselves are formed, with the result that representation is extended only

to what can be acknowledged as a subject. In other words, the qualifications for being a subject must first be met before representation can be extended. (1990, 2)

In this sense, women's experiences both in the AUC and the FARC have to come into the foreground in their own right if women combatants are to be included in a comprehensive manner in the Colombian DDR program. Only when women who fought alongside men in the AUC, and those who still fight in the FARC, are acknowledged as subjects can their participation in the DDR program be meaningful and their return to civilian society be successful. Meintjes et al. (2002) argue that the experience of women combatants in the aftermath of conflict is "linked to their training for war, conditions of demobilization, and availability of services" (51). The services and the gains of a reintegration platform will not extend needed benefits to women if they are not comprehensively represented in the DDR program. Free medical services are available for the physical and psychological needs of women (and men) ex-combatants. However, a fundamental understanding of the specific needs of individuals will allow the program to offer specific services according to the needs of those individuals. Given the gendered nature of the experiences of women in illegal armed groups, knowledge about gender identity is pivotal to being able to offer adequate health services.

Women who have experienced the Colombian conflict as combatants and who inhabit the tenuous domain created by the DDR program have already disrupted dominant gender roles. Despite doing so in hyper-masculinized organizations which are oppressive, these women have shown the flexibility of gender identity and have stripped it of its fixed and naturalized qualities. This is their main asset during their reintegration to civilian life, since they can reconstitute civilian gender identity as more empowering for women. Political deliberation surrounding the DDR program in which women ex-combatants from all illegal armed groups participate (as well

as representatives of women's and feminists' organizations, NGOs, recipient community members, and government officials) could be an inclusive platform from which to put forth alternative cultural configurations of gender during reintegration. Unfortunately, this has not been the case in the Colombian DDR experience. Only recently (as of 2011), have the government and the agencies involved in the DDR program given importance to gender issues (MAPP-OEA 2012, 3). The lack of a gender focus in the early stages of the DDR program has had negative consequences for demobilized women who are struggling to re-enter society. However, the magnitude of this impact is hard to measure because there is no data or information disaggregated by gender and armed group on the reintegration of women into society.

The challenges regarding how to integrate women into militarized organizations which have been posed by women from the FARC and the AUC have been resolved differently in each organization. These differences have an impact on the experiences women go through during their time as members of these illegal armed groups. It is for this reason that the government's construction of desmovilizados is problematic during the period of reintegration into civilian society. The construction of ex-combatant members of the Colombian DDR program as desmovilizados has had consequences for those individuals trying to become part of civil society once again. While there are common features of stigmatization that impact women ex-combatants from both the FARC and the AUC, there are also notable distinctions in terms of their sexuality and reproductive rights.

The first section of this chapter looks at the government's construction of the generic figure desmovilizado and the gender implications this has during the DDR process, particularly during the reintegration stage. The second section studies the construction of a specific type of combatant based on the structure, needs, and goals of the particular organization. Of relevance to

this study is the fact that, despite military efforts aimed at homogenizing troops, gender differences have manifested themselves in ways which maintain clear boundaries between males and females. The third section of this chapter examines two cases in which women adopted a militarized masculine gender identity and, in doing so, renounced most female signifiers. The section that follows examines militarized femininity as the most common gender identity among women in both the AUC and the FARC, discussing important differences in terms of sexuality and reproductive rights.

### ***Desmovilizados: A Stigmatized Identity***

Stigma has a gendered dimension, and women experience it differently from the traditional roles given to them. At the moment that all members of the DDR program become desmovilizados, they enter a grey zone in which they are no longer part of an illegal armed group, but are also not civilians. This is in part due to the stigma surrounding their identity and their rejection by recipient communities (Theidon 2009, 16). De Watteville (2002, 15) argues that recipient communities often reject ex-combatants. In the case of women and girls, this rejection stems from judgements regarding their transgressions of traditional gender roles (ibid.).

The image of desmovilizado brings with it specific implications, such as being untrustworthy, carrying an assumed risk of danger, and other aspects that stigmatize these individuals (Medina-Arbeláez 2009, 103). In Colombia, this is reinforced by the fact that the Ley de Justicia y Paz has not successfully punished perpetrators or benefited victims: “Most paramilitaries and guerrillas responsible for human rights abuses, including sexual violence, have not been identified and are thus not under investigation” (Amnesty International 2004, 36). In this sense, impunity is one of the factors fueling the stigma experienced by desmovilizados of all Colombian illegal armed groups. Many of the individuals whom I interviewed from both the FARC and the AUC stated that they face difficulties due to the stigma surrounding the image of

desmovilizado.

Stigma prevents women ex-combatants from being seen as victims *and* perpetrators, even though most have been subject to oppression within their respective organizations. Mónica, an ex-member of the FARC, did not tell her daughter, who was born while Mónica was in the FARC, that she had been with that organization or that she was a desmovilizada. Her daughter, who was raised by her grandmother, grew up thinking her mom worked with the police and that this was why she was constantly away from her. Mónica stated, regarding her decision to keep this part of her life so secret from her daughter: “I don’t want my daughter to know I was with the FARC. It is difficult to explain to her and there is a lot of stigma in society. People are scared of *desmovilizados*. They think you are going to do something bad to them and something bad to society.” Theidon and Betancourt (2006) identify a disjuncture between judicial and social processes in the Colombian DDR program. They argue that the Ley de Justicia y Paz gives a status of pardon to ex-combatants, but that this does not translate into social changes that will allow ex-combatants to feel welcome into civilian life (*ibid.*). The stigma surrounding desmovilizados of both the FARC and the AUC presents many challenges to the reintegration of these individuals. The Colombian DDR program “perpetuates their marginality without thinking how to help them and the recipient communities to develop tolerance that is not tied to fear and rejection, that is not poisoned with impunity which has characterized the process to date” (*ibid.*, 106). De Watteville (2002, 15) notes that women’s and female ex-combatants’ organizations are helpful for these individuals, assisting them in getting organized and giving them opportunities to exchange views and gain confidence. In taking into account that female ex-combatants’ interests are not usually represented in DDR programs and that these women do not get the opportunity to make decisions during this process, NGOs can facilitate and support capacity building in these

organizations (ibid.). Considering the testimonies offered by ex-combatants from the FARC and the AUC, these initiatives could also benefit from the participation of civilian women, providing a way of working together and breaking the stigma surrounding women ex-members of the illegal armed groups.

The gendered aspects of stigma among women ex-combatants from the AUC and the FARC during the DDR process set them apart from civilian women. This generates numerous challenges to their reintegration. This stigma, in contrast to their male peers, existed within the organization as well. Whereas male ex-combatants from the AUC and the FARC face stigma while attempting to reintegrate into civilian life, women ex-combatants from these organizations are stigmatized both as members of an illegal armed group and as members of the DDR program:

There is a difference. Civilian women, you have to respect. The name says it: civil. You cannot treat a civilian woman the same way you treat one from the organization. It is an armed organization. You cannot get those two things messed up. If you get involved with a civilian woman and you were disrespectful, you would get killed. To the ones in our group you could call them names, call her *capybara*, you could call her ugly, joking. She would tell the comandante and the comandante would tell you to do pushups, for example, and that was it. But it is another story with civilian women. If you messed with one, it could cost you your life. (Interview.)

This testimony highlights the difference between women in an illegal armed group and civilian women in terms of the stigma surrounding their presence in a territory traditionally seen as masculine.

Ex-combatant, María Eugenia Vásquez-Perdomo wrote a memoir of her two-decade experience as a guerrilla member in Colombia. Her book *My Life as a Colombian Revolutionary*

was the first autobiographical account of a guerrilla woman in the Colombian internal armed conflict. Vásquez–Perdomo belonged to the M–19 guerrilla movement. She joined as an anthropology student and was a militant during the key milestones of the organization. She had two children, who she left in the care of family in order to continue fighting. Her memoir addresses some of the difficulties encountered by women *guerrilleras*, mainly the impossibility of fitting into the category of a traditional mother, as well as the conflicting, and sometimes subtle, power relations between the female and the male members of such organizations:

...We had the courage to break with the reigning social norms, while... we found ourselves still trapped by these norms. We granted autonomy to the men that was not granted to us; in addition to being soldiers, we assumed the domestic and childcare duties that have always been the primary responsibility of women. We thought our *compañeros*' tasks are more important and we sacrificed our growth to support them... Still, our roles within the organization did expand the meaning of womanhood, not radically or permanently, perhaps, but measurably. (Vásquez–Perdomo 2005, 244)

Disaggregating the image of desmovilizados by group, gender, race, and age would reveal the complex and contradictory experiences of many of these individuals. In the case of gender, this focus shows that many women were perpetrators *and* victims during their time as members of the FARC or the AUC (Moser 2001). Women and girls are considered to be the hidden victims of the Colombian conflict since discrimination and impunity surround gender–based violence (Amnesty International 2004, 3). Although it is clear how this view applies to civilian women, the case of women in the FARC and the AUC is more complex. Their experiences with gender–based violence have been hidden, both during their time in these groups as well as during the process of reintegration into civilian society. Acknowledging and

understanding the specificity of women's roles in each group reveals the importance of including women in peace talks and in the design and implementation of DDR programs. This was certainly the case with the negotiations between the paramilitary and the Colombian government, and given that the FARC (and the ELN) are still active throughout the country, the potential to include women in peace talks still exists.

### **Soldiering and Militarized Gender Performativity in the FARC and the AUC**

Women in both the FARC and the AUC have transcended traditional gender-roles when engaging in combat and performing tasks normally associated with men. However, this does not necessarily mean that the women stand in a more equitable relationship with their male peers. In fact, "these transgressions can be experienced both as empowering and oppressing by the women themselves" (Kunz and Sjöberg 2009, 2). According to Londoño and Nieto (2006, 48), equality in these organizations has carried a high cost for female members, because in order to meet the dominant standard successfully they have had to compete with men and negate important aspects of their identity as women. In both organizations, the overriding referent has been masculine, requiring women to carry out a "significant rupture with the dominant model of being a *woman* in order to be *like men*" (ibid., 48–49). This statement assumes that aspects of being a woman cannot coexist with the imperative to perform militarily in a context defined by male standards. However, the notion of being like men is useful for analyzing militarized gender performativity in the AUC and the FARC because it highlights the imitative and performative aspect of women's presence in illegal armed groups. "Being like men," whether this involves the militarization of femininity or the negation of feminine qualities by women who strive to "camouflage" themselves as men, involves different areas of performativity: symbols, behaviour, and values (Londoño and Nieto 2006, 48–49). According to Enloe, symbols include uniforms, camouflage, weapons, and flags; behaviour includes coldness, military skills, leadership, and



efficiency; and values are predominantly those related to strength, resistance, domination, heroism, and emotional control (ibid.). These are all the features of life in an armed group that women, to one extent or another, have to adopt into their daily routine. The symbols, behaviours, and values make up their militarized gender performativity within their armed group, and have been the building blocks of group identity in the FARC and the AUC. However, for women, this implies different levels of rupture from their traditional gender identity depending on the policies of their organization as well as their own goals and preferences. The destabilization of gender as fixed shows the different areas involved in the transformation of gender identities. Butler states that:

This relationship or contextual point of view suggests that what a person 'is', and, indeed, what a gender 'is', is always relative to the constructed relations on which it is determined. As a shifting and contextual phenomenon, gender does not denote a substantive being, but a relative point of convergence among culturally and historically specific sets of relations. (1990, 14)

These constructed relations are what set the experiences of women in the FARC and of women from the ACU apart, since each organization is distinct in how they have incorporated women into their ranks. The ways in which the features of performativity are configured is an expression of the relations between the genders in each group, but are not in themselves a product of these relations. As Medina–Arbeláez (2009) and Gutierrez–Sanín (2008) suggest, these relations are determined by the structure of the organization, its needs, and its goals.

As all military organizations, for both the AUC and the FARC, the imperative to make their organization as homogeneous as possible has existed (Londoño and Nieto 2006, 19). The use of camouflaged uniforms is the most obvious example of the homogenization process in

these groups. There are other strategies used in these kinds of organizations to create a uniform and homogeneous group, and to create a clear demarcation between civilian life and life as a combatant. One of these strategies is the adoption of a nickname or an alias shortly after an individual joins the armed group.

In her memoir, Vásquez–Perdomo also discusses the importance of adopting an alias in these organizations:

The name change was one step toward the world of secrecy, where you hid your true identity and “disappeared” your personal history. In this atmosphere of covering up, the conspirator becomes anonymous and can assume multiple fictional identities... we made an effort not to talk about our past, not to mention the names of family members or loved ones.... (2005, 43)

The need for anonymity creates a misleading image of a generic combatant who is only differentiated by rank and military accomplishments. However, these processes also have a gendered dimension in illegal militarized organizations, which ascribes specific characteristics to individuals based on gender stereotypes. José, an ex–member of the AUC gave the following account of this process:

There were several women in my group: There was Barbie, Spider, Seven–Five...we were two hundred and around six were women. Barbie was the only one who went to combat. Barbie was a pretty girl, beautiful, with a great body. She was from Bucaramanga. She *is* from Bucaramanga. She was the only one from my group who was sent to combat and it was as a punishment. All the girls had nicknames. We all did. Seven–Five is the name of a door knob that has a funny shape so we all started calling her that name. Over there, once you join and the others see you, they immediately give you a nickname. They called

me Coyote because I was a fast runner. And so people give you nicknames so that they don't have to call you by your real name. (Interview.)

This testimony shows not only that combatants go through an overt process of identity transformation (they give up their 'real name' and are given a new one), but also the differences between men and women with respect to the nature of the nicknames. José was given the nickname "Coyote" and his "new" name displayed qualities relevant to the needs of his organization. However, the women in the group were nicknamed based on their appearance and their body shape. The nickname "Barbie" stands out as being in conflict with the needs and goals of any illegal militaristic organization such as the AUC. In José's testimony, Barbie is an example of women who did not necessarily give up aspects of their gender to become "like men" once they became members of the AUC. However, this example also shows that the more women maintained aspects of their gender, the less they participated in the organization as equals. It is notable that José states that none of the women from his group were sent to combat, except Barbie, as a punishment.

### **Karina and Rosa: Female Militarized Masculinity**

There were a few women interviewed from the AUC and the FARC who stated that they became "like men" upon joining their respective organizations. These women stood at the same level as their male peers with respect to military achievement in most AUC blocks which required them to train and fight alongside men. Their militarized gender performativity adhered to Enloe's militarized masculinities from a female perspective, rather than to militarized femininity. Militarized femininity has been the most common among women's gender identities found within both organizations. These women gave up their traditional female identity and performed as females imitating men's hyper-masculinized identity, while displaying some traditional feminine characteristics. In contrast, the few women who participated in either the

AUC or the FARC in a manner consistent with expected gender norms associated with militarized masculinity, gave up their female signifiers and adopted militarized hyper-masculinity as their primary identity. Some of these women have been accused of being perpetrators of sexual violence, an offence predominantly attributed to men (Kunz and Sjöberg 2009, 15).

The experiences of two female ex-combatants, Karina and Rosa, can illustrate the ways in which female militarized masculinity has operated in the armed groups, and the limitations of considering individuals as representative of all women in illegal armed groups (most of whom experienced their time in these groups as females who performed “militarized femininity”). Most female ex-combatants interviewed joined the FARC or the AUC and complied with the established gender relations within each organization. A few women, like Karina and Rosa, however, joined their chosen group seeking to become “like men.”

### ***Karina***

One experience has stood out in the Colombian media as being representative of the experiences of women in illegal armed groups. Ex-combatant alias ‘Karina’ who was one of the few women comandantes of the FARC has been accused of castrating men among thousands of other crimes (Kunz and Sjöberg 2009; El Tiempo 2010).<sup>41</sup> Karina was notorious for her cruel punishments and her reckless approach to combat. She was in charge of the *Frente 47* of the FARC which had 350 members. Karina left the FARC voluntarily in May 2008, and joined the individual DDR program.

Karina was a member of the FARC for over two decades. She joined the organization in 1984 when she was sixteen years old. She joined voluntarily, lured by the possibility of owning a gun and because joining the guerrillas was becoming a fad among teenage girls in the rural area

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<sup>41</sup> I was unable to interview alias ‘Karina’ due to security reasons.

of the Urabá region where she grew up (El Tiempo 2008; Semana 2008). In an interview with Colombian magazine *Semana*, Karina explained that as a teenager she wanted to be a nurse or a seamstress. However, she had to help her father on his farm, something she found extremely boring. At age fourteen, she asked one of her brothers who had joined the FARC to take her with him, but he refused and encouraged her to get a husband and have children. Karina got married and, although she did not have children, tended to her husband for two years. She then left her husband to join the FARC. She was a member of this organization for twenty-four years and carried out thousands of crimes, including ninety-two homicides and the recruitment of 108 children to the FARC (El Tiempo 2010). In a testimony given to a radio station in 2008, a peasant who was one of Karina's victims explained how he and other peasants who had refused to join the FARC in 2000 were castrated with a knife and left to die (W Radio 2008). A similar testimony was given by a policeman from the Urabá region (El Tiempo 2008).

Karina was nicknamed the “female Rambo” in the local and international media. At the time of her desertion, she had a crew cut hairstyle, had lost sight in one eye, had various visible scars on her face, had lost a breast, and had bullet wounds on one arm (McDermott 2008). She has also been referred to as a “monster” and a “war machine” in the Colombian media (Semana 2008). According to Enloe (1993, 75), Rambo is a masculinized and militarized cultural icon, admired for engaging in individualistic military adventurism and defying rules. However, Enloe notes that the way Rambo is interpreted varies depending on the context and the culture in question. Karina's image in the Colombian media as a ruthless combatant is one that fits the hyper-masculinized and militarized image of Rambo. She has been stripped of all her feminine qualities and has been placed at the same level as her male peers. Karina got pregnant while in the FARC, and is said to have “given her baby away without any doubts” (Semana 2008).

Karina has also been quoted as saying that she feels no remorse for all the crimes she carried out during her years as a member of the FARC. Combatants from the FARC and the AUC, as well as civilians who knew her, remark on her “coldness” (El Tiempo 2008). However, in a 2008 interview with the Colombian newspaper *El Tiempo*, Karina stated that there are many “myths” surrounding her name, saying, “It is probably due to my military accomplishments that I have acquired such a reputation.”

The Colombian military designed and executed numerous unsuccessful operations to capture Karina. During one of these operations, members of the Colombian military found a diary belonging to Karina. This allowed them to determine that she was in love with a fellow FARC combatant: “Karina, the death machine, who everyone feared, had in love and romanticism her greatest Achilles heel” (Semana 2008). Even though Karina was not captured, she abandoned the FARC with her partner after he was contacted by the Colombian secret service and was “talked into” convincing Karina to surrender and join the individual DDR program (ibid.).

The role of the media in portraying women combatants is relevant in highlighting the disparity between traditional feminine roles and qualities, and the requirements of militaristic organizations. Enloe (1993, 203) states: “When the state’s military—or an insurgent military aspiring to replace the state—comes to rely on women inside its uniformed ranks, that military provokes wide public concern about the meaning and uses of femininity.” Karina has been portrayed in the media as a subject who has lost all of her female signifiers, and who in doing so has gone further than being “like a man” to become an almost unreal, machine-like character. In her discussion of the women involved in torturing and photographing Iraqi prisoners, Sjoberg (2007, 89) states that these women’s portrayal in the media as tough and masculine had the

objective of presenting each woman to the audience as “less of a woman.” This, Sjoberg argues, is meant to separate these women from *real women* (ibid., her emphasis). In a similar way, Karina has been presented as an example and warning of what can happen to “real” women if they join an illegal armed group. After all, Karina used to be a “real” woman who worked for her father and later took care of her husband. It was only because she joined the FARC that she was transformed into a “death machine.”

As of December 2010, Karina had accepted responsibility for 218 crimes (Semana 2010). As part of the Ley de Justicia y Paz, she has received several benefits including a reduced sentence, and has been appointed peace spokesperson for the Colombian DDR program. She has appeared at events and in campaigns representing ex-combatants, a decision which has sparked popular outrage (ibid.).

### ***Rosa***

I interviewed Rosa, an ex-comandante of an anti-guerrilla group from the AUC who, at the moment of demobilizing, was in charge of sixty men. Two women were also members of her group, but were killed in combat. Rosa was a member of the AUC for eighteen years, and joined to seek revenge for the murder of her husband and her two daughters, aged four and six. Her family was murdered by Karina from the FARC who shot them outside of their house after accusing them of being paramilitary sympathizers. Rosa suffered two gunshot wounds and pretended to be dead. A few weeks later, while still recovering from her wounds, Rosa was on her way to Medellín from her home in Nariño, a town in the department of Antioquia, when she met a group of paramilitaries:

I asked them: what do I have to do for you to take me with you and they asked me why I wanted them to take me. I told them what had happened and after seeing my rage, they told me I could join right away and that they would train me to be a *comandante* so I

could seek revenge on the guerrillas. Of course! With all that rage and hatred I was feeling, I was a perfect candidate. (Interview.)

Rosa was an ideal candidate in the eyes of the AUC because she was determined to seek revenge against the guerrillas. Her traumatic experience convinced her that the guerrillas of the FARC were the enemy. Furthermore, her rage and strong desire to fight set her apart from other women candidates to the point that she was guaranteed a high position before even joining the organization. She went on to say:

I just wanted to kill Karina. I spent eighteen years fixated on killing her and hoping to find her and now we are both demobilized and we are both spokespersons in peace workshops! Imagine! Imagine that! I am still full of hate. I still have bad dreams about that day. I can see her perfectly. And now I come to find out that we have to work together! I haven't met her yet and I hope I don't because I don't know (silence). I am still in therapy (silence). So yes, joining any armed group, as a woman, is very easy if you are full of hate because they don't have to brainwash you, they don't have to plant the seed of hate in you, you see? (Interview.)

Rosa highlights an important aspect of the soldiering process: the fear and rejection of the “other” (Klein 1998; Enloe 1993). In this case, the “other” is the guerrillas of the FARC which are considered the enemy, and are seen as worthless and inferior. However, Rosa’s testimony also points out the gendered aspects embedded in constructions of the “other” within armed groups: the “other” whether insider or outsider is dichotomously opposite to the soldiered self, and is constructed as feminine, weak, unworthy (Turpin 1998; Enloe 1989, 1993). Rosa went through a profound transformation during the time she was a member of the AUC which was aimed at eliminating the “other” within herself:



I miss the AUC, mostly because I was used to it, because when I got paid, all the money was for me. You don't throw money away buying earrings or bracelets, see? When I was there, I used to shave my head. It was more comfortable since you could not wash your hair properly, being there. So I shaved my head. Then, when we all demobilized, President Uribe received me and my group, my men. We came in a truck, we were all at the back, wearing camouflage and with our faces covered. We all brought our guns just in case. So President Uribe, he told us to put down our guns when we arrived. But the army there had guns too, so I ordered my men to keep their guns ready, just in case. I told them to wait until the army put down their guns. It was tense. All of this was happening in front of the president. He told the army to put down their weapons. Then I gave the order to my men too and Uribe told us to uncover our faces. I stepped forward since I was in charge of the group, so I stepped forward and uncovered my face. Uribe froze and (laughter) and he opened his eyes. He never expected to see someone like me and he said: 'You are a woman!?' (laughter). It never crossed his mind that I could be a woman. All that time he had been thinking I was a man! (Interview.)

Rosa explained that with her face covered, it was easy to mistake her for a man. She explained that women in the AUC were not required to give up "girly things" like having long hair, painting their nails, and wearing some makeup (depending on the circumstances). In fact, all of the other AUC ex-combatants interviewed stated that they did not cut their hair when they joined the AUC, although some said it was more comfortable to tie their hair up. Rosa, however, gave all of these "girly things" up to the point that she managed to "camouflage" herself among her male peers.

In this sense, Rosa's experience is similar to those studied by Butler in her analysis of

drag and parody. According to Butler, drag implies re-enacting gender in a way that breaks the binary distinctions between sex and gender, body and psyche, and masculinity and femininity (1990, 187–188). Drag is one of the most direct and overt ways in which gender is revealed as something that is performed rather than embodied. During her years with the AUC, Rosa revealed the imitative structure of gender by ceasing to conform to the dominant hyper-masculinized femininity within the AUC. For instance, she did not “get a husband” like most of her female peers. She was able to set herself apart from other women in her organization by negotiating a gender identity according to the standards set by the AUC which allowed her to secure a command position for herself. Rosa was radical in that she chose to perform militarized masculinity by imitating her male peers, and to do so had to consciously “erase” the signifiers that did not correspond to this, such as shaving off her hair. This enabled her to break the distinctions between the genders in the AUC, which still maintained clear boundaries despite being militarized, and notably, hyper-masculinized.

Rosa was at one point the only woman in her group (the comandante) when the two women under her command were killed in combat: “I got left all alone when the two girls were killed. I wasn’t afraid, though, because I was in charge and whoever dared to touch me would die” (Interview.). Tina Sideris (2002, 49) argues that “the experience and threat of sexual violence is a consistent feature in the constructions of women’s subjective experience of themselves as women and as women in relation to men.” Sideris is referring to the construction of women predominantly as victims; but in the case of Rosa, this threat did not victimize her because of her role as a comandante in the AUC. Her role as an AUC leader gave her the chance, albeit violently, to gain control over her own sexuality within a hyper-masculinized organization. Rosa was known among her troops as being very authoritarian and a good leader.

Rosa said during our conversation that she used to “look scary” when she was in the AUC. However, at the time of our interview, she had long, bleached hair, wore tight jeans, make-up, and accessories, and had her long nails painted red. The appearance of Rosa during her time in the AUC is an example of what Theidon (2009, 18) calls “war masks” which are meant to scare and threaten others. Theidon explains that the appearance of combatants can be the difference between life and death, and thus changing appearance is an important part of adopting the identity of combatant (ibid.). War masks are an example of how the body is in itself a construction that “comes into being in and through the mark(s) of gender” (Butler 1990, 12). The marks of gender in this case involve threatening and intimidating qualities that make women like Karina and Rosa equally as threatening as their male counterparts and drastically different from their female peers. Theidon (2009, 18) states that a dangerous appearance becomes part of the history of ex-combatants’ bodies.

Both Karina and Rosa are exceptions in terms of the experiences of women in the AUC and the FARC. They both held high positions in their respective organizations and were in charge of troops consisting mostly of men. Karina and Rosa both altered and, arguably, voluntarily sacrificed most feminine signifiers and adopted a hyper-masculinized identity. Their militarized gender performativity masked their civilian gender identity to the point that they were recognized by their male peers as equals and superiors. Rosa and Karina managed to “fit in” with their respective organizations by performing their role at the same level as their male peers, though the nature of this equality was grounded in constructed militarized masculinity. They both changed their appearance and wore their uniforms in a way that made it easier for them to blend in with the majority of combatants. Londoño and Nieto (2006) argue that civilian clothes become a costume for women in the armed groups. Wearing camouflaged uniforms and adopting

the practice of head shaving, were ways for both Karina and Rosa to engage in what these authors refer to as cross-dress. In this alteration of appearance and in their behaviour, both Karina and Rosa challenged the correspondence of sex and gender. This was accepted within their own groups, but created difficulties for spectators outside of that context (e.g., President Uribe's reaction upon encountering Rosa). This is in tune with Butler's theory of performativity in the sense that the performer's agency is tied to his or her audience (1990).

Karina and Rosa performed the role of a hyper-masculine leader in a context in which the incongruities between gender and sex were acceptable as being part of a militarized project for few women. Most women did not have to adopt a hyper-masculinized identity as males, but a specifically hyper-masculinized femininity. However, taken out of that context, for women like Karina and Rosa, their incongruity becomes deceiving, their cross-dressing causes confusion, and their behaviour as a whole is subject to scrutiny by the media. In this respect, Cynthia Cockburn (2007, 208) argues that the gendered aspect of women's participation in war "is often neglected, misrepresented or exploited in the media, by politicians, and even by the anti-war movement." Like the experiences of the women who tortured Iraqi soldiers, Karina and Rosa stand out "as an interruption of dominant discourses about women's roles generally and about women's roles in wars specifically; this interruption shakes inherited images of women" (Sjoberg 2007, 96).

Most women in the FARC and the AUC have negotiated their gender in an attempt to become *female* soldiers according to their organization's requirements and socialization devices. Few women in these groups have been a 'Karina' or a 'Rosa.' Most have not held high positions, and most have not renounced their traditional gender identity completely. Enloe argues that "[a] woman serving in a militarized institution is likely to be marginalized. Thus pushed to the

institution's margins, she is less likely to be promoted, taken seriously..." (2000, 286). It is only by adopting masculine qualities that women can potentially advance in a militaristic organization (Riley 2008). Militarized gender performativity in the FARC and the AUC occurs on women's bodies, placing numerous challenges on them. There are specific demands on their physical capabilities (always evaluated against the standard set by their male peers) in tandem with a perceived threat of their sexuality which women must learn to manage (Theidon 2009, 21). In her memoir, María Eugenia Vásquez-Perdomo states:

We organized as a regional central command with a central command of columns under it. Most of the leaders were women. The *muchachos* (guys) called us the *Doñas* (Misses). It wasn't easy to win their respect because women in the political and military fields were underestimated. We constantly had to demonstrate to the men that we could do everything like them and more. We were famous for being hard and authoritarian, but it is the only way to command respect from the men. (2005, 189)

Butler argues that the body is constructed, moulded, and disciplined in a social way. She refers here to not just a biological body, but also a social, political, and symbolic body located in differentiated and hierarchical social orders (1990, 12). Both the AUC and the FARC have maintained unequal gender relations which draw the boundaries between female and male combatants. Women who have transgressed those boundaries are allowed to disrupt the power relations that perpetuate gender roles in these organizations. For instance, Karina was quoted as saying she never cried during her time in the FARC, but cried the day she demobilized and saw her daughter (El Tiempo 2008).

Karina and Rosa are good examples of militarized gender performativity in cases in which women performed their roles as combatants while at the same time disengaging from the

gender expectations placed on them by the rules and regulations of their organizations. Most women interviewed, however, did not become “like men,” but maintained gender differentials in tune with the expectations put forward in the AUC and the FARC.

### **Female Militarized Femininity: Sexuality, Reproductive Rights, and Motherhood**

#### ***Sexuality***

Enloe argues that war and militarized peace give sexual relations particular meanings (1993, 144). The management of sexuality in illegal armed groups such as the FARC and the AUC is key in understanding the ways in which women are, and have been, incorporated into these organizations. As was stated earlier, women from both organizations must undergo a process of soldiering which is important in learning the norms and rules that concern their bodies (Medina–Arbeláez 2009, 84). These norms and rules have been different in each organization, but in both organizations sexuality has been a central aspect of the way that women have been incorporated as members. The FARC deliberately incorporates women’s equality in the way the organization presents itself internally and externally. However, this does not translate into a comprehensive program to guarantee gender equality, and by no means does it guarantee that women will have a say in important matters such as their sexuality and their reproductive rights. The AUC did not have a women’s platform, but granted women some autonomy with respect to these two aspects despite the unequal gender relations structuring this organization.

Gutierrez–Sanín argues that the FARC is more internally demanding and more severe than the paramilitary groups, and that FARC members are more likely to be “killed, maimed, or jailed” than paramilitaries (2008, 17–19). However, from a gendered perspective, both organizations have been severe and demanding, in particular with respect to women’s sexuality: “Both the paramilitaries and the guerrillas appear to be competing to demonstrate that they are the guardians of a traditional form of sexual morality associated with the idea of order”

(Amnesty International 2004, 24). Amnesty International (2004) has found that policies regarding sexuality in the Colombian illegal armed groups seek to “control women as reproducers of the nation, community or social group.” This is also true for civilian women who have been subject to threats if perceived to be dating a paramilitary or guerrilla supporter or member of the ‘enemy’ organization. Estrada et al. (2007, 268) similarly argue that all armed actors in Colombia attempt to regulate women’s choice of males by designating some as legitimate and some as illegitimate.

Women’s sexuality inside the organization is controlled, but not for reasons associated with reproduction. The extent to which this is true differs between the AUC and the FARC since, unlike the FARC, the AUC allowed women to become pregnant and have children. This control of sexuality is carried out under the idea that in a militarized group, there is a belief that soldiers’ sexuality is driven by uncontrollable drives, and that their fighting effectiveness is jeopardized if these drives are not accommodated (Enloe 1993, 119). María Eugenia Vásquez–Perdomo states:

...in the intimate arena of couple relationships, our *compañeros* were like all the other Colombian men. We, the *compañeras*, the guerrilleras, paid a high price for innovating and transgressing the norms of matrimony, affection and sex. We were left all alone; not even the organization *compañeros* thought of us as wives. I don’t know if this was better or worse than the traditional arrangement and attitude. We were seen as perfect lovers, but not women to whom these men would commit themselves in marriage, especially if we were in positions of responsibility. (2005, 244)

In terms of reproductive rights and sexuality, women in both organizations have been subject to policies and practices that pose a threat to their health, both physical and mental: “By sowing terror and exploiting and manipulating women for military gain, bodies have been turned

into a battleground” (Amnesty International 2004, 3). In the FARC, these practices include: sexual abuse, forced contraception, forced abortions, having to give up motherhood as an option, and being forced to give their children away with little or no likelihood of seeing them again. These important aspects of women’s sexuality and reproductive health have to be understood in all their specificity in order to design a DDR program that can meet all the needs of women ex-combatants. For instance, forced abortion was not common in the AUC, but it is a prevalent practice in the FARC. The fact that women in the AUC were permitted to take time off for maternity purposes means that there were possibly more mothers (and parents in general) in the AUC than there are in the FARC. Women ex-combatants from the FARC may face more health complications derived from forced abortions carried out in poor conditions. Forced contraception in the FARC sexualizes young girls by stripping them of their control over their own sexuality. Forcing a girl to receive a contraceptive injection every month even if she is not sexually active assumes that she might become so, and that choice of whether or not to become sexually active is taken away from her as soon as she becomes a FARC member.

Both men and women who were interviewed stated that there was gender equality in the FARC and the AUC, and then proceeded to talk about numerous ways in which women are not treated like men. Theidon (2009) encountered the same experience when interviewing men and women ex-combatants from the AUC and the FARC. She also found that men from the AUC and the FARC, as well as the ELN, were not interested in having a relationship with a woman from their own organization because they were considered “promiscuous” (ibid., 21). In this sense, men’s reaction to women combatants in both groups is the same, clearly demarcating the civilian and military boundary. Enloe argues that “feminine” is often associated with the private sphere, the home, and remaining close to home: “A woman who travels away from the



ideological protection of ‘home’ and without the protection of a male escort is likely to be tarred with the brush of ‘unrespectability’. These women risk losing their honour or being blamed for any harm that befalls them during their travels” (1989, 21). In this respect, women’s sexuality is militarized, since leaving the private sphere makes them appear easily accessible to men regardless of their willingness to engage in, or refrain from, romantic relationships. Furthermore, this view attributes the responsibility of sexual abuse to women themselves.

### ***Reproduction and Reproductive Rights***

Amnesty International (2004) states that all of the armed groups in the Colombian conflict violate women’s reproductive rights. These rights include the right to have a satisfying and safe sex life and the capability to reproduce freely. Reproductive rights guarantee that women have information on and access to safe, effective, and affordable methods of fertility regulation, as well as access to appropriate healthcare services that will allow them to have a safe pregnancy and delivery (Amnesty International 2004). In this respect, both the AUC and the FARC violate women’s reproductive rights by depriving them of access to reliable healthcare services during pregnancy and childbirth. All members of these organizations have had only occasional access to makeshift clinics with poor standards of safety and with staff that have received inconsistent levels and quality of training.

Women and girls in both the AUC and the FARC have been given little leeway in terms of the quality of reproductive healthcare available to them. However, there are important differences between the FARC and the AUC in the way reproductive rights have been violated. These differences stem from the organizational particularities between the groups, and from their specific policies regarding the presence of women and girls in their ranks. These policies are imposed on women’s bodies and how women structure their roles, and on the specific ways in which power relations between men and women are structured and reproduced. Medina–

Arbeláez states that: “The controls and practices that are compulsorily imposed on the female body such as contraception and abortion, carry implicit notions about the masculine and feminine roles and about the masculine character of armed groups” (2009, 95).

During our interview, Claudia stated: “There were no abortions in the AUC. None. If a woman wanted to have one, that was her business; she would ask for a leave of absence and do her business as a civilian. But because she wanted. Most women had babies and there was no problem.” Women in the AUC were permitted to give birth and take some time off to be with their babies. In this sense, pregnancy was incorporated into a hyper-masculinized organization, which stands in stark contrast with all the values traditionally associated with pregnancy and childbirth. Members of the AUC whom I interviewed stated that women were not forced to use contraception, but were “encouraged” to do so. It was not clear from the interviews to what extent this encouragement could account to coercion, but it was agreed that women who became pregnant were not forced to terminate their pregnancy. Similarly, Medina-Arbeláez (2009, 95) found that forced contraception and abortions were “systematic practices” inside the FARC, but could not be accounted for inside the paramilitary groups. All members of the FARC whom I interviewed stated that women have to receive contraceptive injections compulsorily and are forced to have an abortion if they become pregnant. The only exception is if the father is a comandante. In this respect, the FARC’s policies on reproduction, unlike AUC policies, seek to suppress roles and functions that are seen as being incongruent with the organization’s needs and goals: maternity and motherhood. These policies are implemented on women’s bodies by regulating biological processes regardless of women’s choices (e.g., girls are subject to forced contraception despite not being sexually active). In another context, contraception and abortion could be seen as part of female liberation as they allow women to have more control over their

own bodies (Londoño and Nieto 2006, 46). However, in this context, these practices are dangerous and oppressive since they strip women of the freedom to decide upon reproductive matters concerning their own bodies. Furthermore, the study by Medina–Arbeláez (2009, 95), as well as the testimonies given by the ex–members of the FARC interviewed, show that women, and not the male and female couple, are held responsible for pregnancies. It is believed that women were not careful enough, or that they made a bad choice, and they are held solely responsible for pregnancy by being forced to have an abortion. In this way, women in the FARC have their biological processes related to reproduction controlled, thereby placing them in oppressive power relations in a manner that is distinct from what women in the AUC experienced.

The testimonies presented in previous chapters concerning the experiences of women who had to undergo forced contraception and forced abortion show how these concrete oppressive practices are lived on a day to day basis in the FARC. The mental, physical, and physiological repercussions of forced contraception and of forced abortions create specific needs for women who were FARC members. These needs overlap with the needs of women who were members of the AUC and who were also sexualized, but it cannot be assumed the needs are the same. As has been shown and also expressed in the testimonies of AUC ex–combatants, women from the AUC have other needs stemming from the permissibility of pregnancy in this organization. Childcare is a specific need that these women have and which has been underestimated by the Colombian DDR program.

Issues concerning reproductive rights are central to the understanding of the gendered characteristics of women’s involvement in illegal armed groups. These are also paramount in recognizing and understanding women’s experiences as being shaped by their respective

organizations. Both the AUC and the FARC violate women's reproductive rights, but it is only through understanding the nature of these violations that an adequate response can be devised to guarantee a successful transition to civilian life.

### ***Motherhood***

Both pregnancies and motherhood have been seen as problematic in both the AUC and the FARC, but have been addressed in different ways. These two aspects have not been considered problematic for male members because of traditional constructions of gender that give women the responsibility of childrearing (Londoño and Nieto 2006, 17). Enloe argues that motherhood is one of the most controversial aspects of mobilizing women in the military, due to the fact that it is believed they will have to leave their children behind or postpone having children (1993, 221). As has been shown, motherhood is more controversial and is perceived as being more problematic in the FARC than it was in the AUC. However, the permissibility of pregnancy and childbirth in the AUC does not mean that both parents shared the responsibility implied in parenthood equally, or that they experienced this aspect within a context in which the same expectations were placed on both of them equally. Upon giving birth either in an AUC camp or in a civilian hospital, the mother took time off to care for the newborn baby and made arrangements to be able to go back to the AUC. In cases in which both parents were members of the AUC and one decided not to return to the AUC, it was never the father who quit, but always the mother. In this sense, the permissibility of childbirth in the AUC attempted to reconcile motherhood and its assumed values (caring and nurturing) with the militaristic efforts of the organization and, in turn, with different assumed values (capacity to destroy, strength, and hatred); however, it did so within the traditional social and gender roles that allocate certain responsibilities to mothers and others to fathers. Pregnancy and childbirth changed the status of women members of the AUC, but not of men:

When we saw that a woman was pregnant we would treat her differently, we would help them out and would not let her do anything that she did before, like patrol, because that could be bad for her, you understand? You had to start treating her like a person, like what she is, a person. (Interview.)

This testimony shows that a woman's status as a "person" was restored once she was pregnant. Her peers treated her differently and she received help as the boundaries between combatant and civilian became more ambiguous. Pregnancy represented a return to civilian gender identity, and this was a way for women to restore their humanity in the eyes of their male peers (a humanity which was based on traditional gender roles).

In the FARC, in contrast to the AUC, the approach to motherhood is that of complete incompatibility with the organization's structure and goals. There is no attempt to reconcile motherhood and war, but there are some notable exceptions. As was discussed in previous chapters, women who have partners who are comandantes are allowed to give birth. These women are permitted to take a leave of absence similar to the one women took in the AUC, and for the same purposes. The "benefits" these women get by being the comandante's girlfriend are extended to motherhood. For these women, both pregnancy and motherhood are seen as strategies of resistance (Medina–Arbeláez 2009, 98). Getting a comandante boyfriend implies that women can hold on to aspects of traditional gender identity, and the expectations surrounding their performance within the organization are lowered to different standards. Similarly, getting pregnant means that they can escape the harsh conditions of the FARC. Medina–Arbeláez (2009, 98) argues that for these women, getting pregnant is a strategy of resistance to avoid performing military functions. This is also the case for women who do not have a comandante boyfriend, but who manage to hide their pregnancy (ibid.). In this case, these

women are using their bodies to challenge the rules, hoping that it will allow them to leave the organization.

This is an example of how women are able to manipulate their femininity for specific purposes. Women are shown to have “used” or “instrumentalized” their femininity by highlighting it or hiding it depending on the circumstances (Londoño and Nieto 2006, 50).

Vásquez–Perdomo stated in her memoir:

As a militant revolutionary, I used my femininity to good advantage. My gender was useful for throwing people off track, dodging searches, and getting information. The most macho men, the ones who underestimated us, wouldn't grant us the status of enemy, and we took advantage of that. But when they discovered that we had penetrated their territory, war territory, they became implacable forces. They punished us twice as hard, once for being subversives and again for being women. This is why, when guerrilla women are tortured, [being] raped or sexually assaulted in one form or another is almost always part of the treatment. (2005, 243)

This is an example of how women in illegal armed groups exert their agency within the constraints of a militarized organization. In this respect, Enloe states that “a camp follower is a woman who is performing her own manoeuvre. She consequently is not securely under patriarchal control. She is devising her own individualistic strategy for gaining whatever benefits she can from a masculinised military” (2000, 39). In this sense, women who choose to become the girlfriend of a superior to acquire benefits are devising their own strategies to cope with the challenges faced within a military organization. Many women who experience militarization do not see the negative implications of that process, and instead see militarization as opening doors and offering them opportunities they did not think possible (Enloe 2000, 129). They come to see

militarization as the solution to their own problems (ibid.). Both the AUC and the FARC have represented security for women who are fleeing domestic violence and abuse. The paramilitaries offered a stable income in a context of high unemployment and uncertain job security. In a militarized society like Colombia, being a member of an armed group implies status and perceived power. In this respect, Enloe argues:

When these women look at the gendered politics of militarization, they see male decision makers reluctant to integrate women fully into militarized roles. Patriarchy, according to their analysis, is not the bedfellow militarization; rather, patriarchy is the barrier to women's and girl's full militarization. (ibid.)

It is important to clarify that practices concerning sexuality, reproduction, and motherhood have made women's experiences in the AUC and the FARC different from men not because their "natural" roles as mothers are either suppressed or allowed. The experiences are different because gender relations in these organizations (and within civilian society, more generally) imply different gender experiences based on constructed gender identity and relations of domination and subordination between the genders.

Both the AUC and the FARC have transformed, but do not challenge, patriarchal society in line with their needs and goals. These organizations have reproduced gender roles in different ways while maintaining relations of domination and subordination between women and men, and they both have had double-standards when it comes to women in their ranks. This is more apparent in the FARC due to its ideological "commitment" to gender equality. The AUC's mandate did not include gender equality; women were not considered to be men's equals in the same sense as the FARC. This is not to justify the AUC's policies towards its female members as preferable to those of the FARC, but to show that women's experiences in militaristic

organizations are shaped by the specificities of their hyper-masculinized ideals. As stated before, this generates specific needs for women members of the AUC and the FARC. It also has repercussions that affect women during their transition from ex-combatants to civilians, something that happens gradually during the reintegration process.

### **Family Life, Domestic Violence, and Demilitarization**

The AUC has completed the stage of disarmament and demobilization, and their members are currently, alongside members of the FARC who have demobilized individually, in the process of reintegrating to civilian society. However, the recent rise of the emerging criminal bands, BACRIMs, throughout Colombia has called into question the effectiveness of both DDR programs. Bjørge and Horgan (2009) and Ribetti (2009) have found that there is a distinction in this regard between persons who leave an armed organization individually and those who do so collectively. Individuals who demobilize collectively have done so as an “order” regardless of their preference, and might be less likely to commit to a non-violent lifestyle than those individuals who have demobilized voluntarily (*ibid.*). In the Colombian case, this can help clarify why a large number of BACRIM members are former members of illegal armed groups, including of the AUC (Ribetti 2009). It is not clear how many of these BACRIM members are female ex-combatants, but the increase in criminal activities involving ex-combatants is a sign of the difficulties and challenges faced by all members during the reintegration stage of any DDR program. Furthermore, the process of re-armament shows that the models of masculinity that are dominant in a context of violent conflict such as in Colombia are restricted to a “militarization of identity empty of all political significance” (Estrada et al. 2007, 270). The criminal nature of BACRIMs represents the void of political awareness. As an example, in Colombia, children’s aspirations are influenced by the power of owning a weapon and they have no interest in the political matters affecting their everyday life (*ibid.*). Attention has been given



to the formation and proliferation of the BACRIMs, but little attention has been given to other illegal activities in which ex-combatants have been engaged during the years following their demobilization, such as domestic violence.

Post-war can be a time of difficult personal adjustments for ex-members of the armed groups. These changes and adjustments should not be underestimated, not least due to the fact that they occur in what is commonly known as the “private sphere” (Enloe 2004, 206). Psychological issues such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder can affect ex-combatants, making it challenging for them to have a healthy lifestyle. The changes involved in giving up their arms and the perceived loss of power this implies can affect the adjustment of ex-combatants to civilian life. For women ex-combatants, these adjustments involve re-negotiating their gender identity, between traditional gender roles and the militarized gender roles they adopted during their time in the armed groups. This ambiguous identity is no longer in line with their organization’s demands, but is also not the same as the one that ex-combatants had before joining the illegal organization. De Watteville (2002, 14) argues that in most cases, female ex-combatants are expected to obey their husbands and fathers after they have demobilized. This generates numerous challenges for these women. Many women ex-combatants refuse to reintegrate into their old communities because they have a hard time performing traditional female roles (ibid.).

Although reuniting with family is a reason for demobilizing and leaving a life of violence behind, it can also be a source of violence. Domestic violence is high among the demobilized population in relation to the civilian population (Theidon 2009, 22). This is, among other reasons, because demilitarization can lead to the re-masculinization of civilian life for men who shared the ranks with women combatants (Enloe 1993). If women were permitted to transgress

traditional gender roles to be part of the militarized organization it is seen as something that was temporary, and these women are expected to default back to their previous gender role. Domestic violence after demobilization can also be caused as a result of backlash, due to the unequal allocation of DDR resources among men and women since men can see women's entitlement to financial benefits as a threat (Meintjes et al. 2002). In the Colombian case, the armed actors have influenced traditional patterns of domestic violence, "instrumentalizing them, escalating their intensity, and militarizing intra-familial relationships" (Estrada et al. 2007, 275). In this sense, not only demobilized women are at risk of domestic violence, but also relatives (e.g., wives, sisters, and daughters) of demobilized men.

However pervasive domestic violence is among members of the DDR program, it has not been accounted for in the Colombian DDR program. In this sense, Enloe argues that: "When postwar local and international authorities treat 'private' violence against women as a non-priority, as an issue to be put off until 'later'... those same authorities perpetuate a dynamic of militarization in a time of alleged peace" (1993, 224). The Colombian DDR program has to incorporate policies that protect women from domestic violence as well as punish perpetrators. Although punishment does not necessarily halt domestic violence, impunity is one way in which this type of violence is made permissible in society and this can discourage women to report cases of abuse. Natalia, an ex-combatant from the FARC stated:

Before, I could defend myself. I had a weapon. Now, my partner hits me and I cannot get anyone to help me. There is no justice. I have denounced him twice and nothing! He does not get punished. Before, I could defend myself and now I have to wait and wait and wait and while I wait for justice, he keeps hitting me. (Interview.)

Domestic violence, and the potential for domestic violence, therefore needs to be incorporated

into public policy before, during, and after the peace negotiations and the DDR process. The availability and easy accessibility of a safe house or a women's shelter, for example, would give Natalia and any other female member of the DDR program the possibility to have greater control, rather than relying on an inefficient legal system which makes women's cases of sexual abuse and domestic violence difficult to prove (Garcés de Eder and Marulanda–Herrán 2005).

Domestic violence is tied to militarized identities. Addressing occurrences of this type of violence has to be part of efforts to demilitarize the identities of ex-combatants and the civilian population, in general. Enloe states that: "If the years of violent conflict have depended upon varieties of militarized masculinity, then successful demilitarization will require the reconstitution of each of these varieties into a form that fosters social reconciliation" (1993, 133). In the Colombian case, this is also true for the demilitarization of femininity, in order to guarantee that women can be reintegrated not merely as housewives and mothers, but also as students, workers, entrepreneurs, and professionals. In other words, it is essential to avoid a "rollback" that equates the return of women combatants to civilian life to traditional gender roles (Meintjes et al. 2002). Enloe helpfully notes that demilitarization is very complex, because men do not automatically turn into "blandly ungendered 'citizens', 'peasants', 'officials', 'investors', 'workers' simply because the shooting has (almost) stopped" (1993, 125). Furthermore, she argues that a feminist lens should be applied to approach any peace agreement (ibid.). Leaving women out of the peace process and excluding their experiences can affect relationships and can lead to high levels of domestic violence, as women try to adapt to old expectations and codes of behaviour.

Demilitarization takes time and it also requires structural changes, such as effectiveness in terms of justice and security. These two responsibilities of the state are lacking in the

Colombian context. Changes are necessary in terms of the hegemonic masculinity that permeates society as a whole (Theidon 2009, 24). Some of the women ex-combatants are convinced that their unconventional roles during the war were temporary, and are willing to return to “normal” after the war is over (Enloe 2004, 199). However, some women may see their experiences and skills as incompatible with pre-conflict ideas of what is “natural” and “proper” for a woman. These women might be reluctant to adopt pre-combat gender identities once again (ibid.). The extent to which women from the AUC and the FARC can challenge and redefine traditional gender roles once they have demobilized depends, among other things, on the type of demilitarization envisioned by the Colombian DDR program. It is assumed that demilitarization invariably widens the political space of a given society. However, it can also narrow it by assuming that demilitarization equals an uncritical restoration of social relations including oppressive gender relations (Enloe 1993, 141).

The transitional character of any DDR program opens a space for identity transformation, including gender identity. Butler argues that any radical political changes are unlikely without a drastic shift in notions of the possible and the real. Only then can “the sedimented and reified field of gender ‘reality’ be understood as one that might be made differently and, indeed, less violently” (Butler 1990, xxiv). Given that emotions and feelings are given a gender which combatants display according to what they think is better suited to the battleground, demilitarization requires that both men and women ex-combatants access the whole realm of emotions as well as new ways of communicating with and reaching out to others (Theidon 2009, 23). Understanding the specificities of women’s militarization and addressing their needs during the DDR process is an important step in fostering identity transformation independent from militarized values.

## Chapter 8. Conclusion

*“In war, many people die. We were many at war, but few lived to be at peace.”*

– *Jaime, the AUC*

This dissertation has explored the situations and experiences of women combatants who have fought with the non-state armed groups AUC and FARC in Colombia. The research agenda is inspired by the four crucial questions in feminist research formulated by Enloe: “Where are the women?”; “Which women are there?”; “How did those women get there?”; and “What do those women think about being there?” (2000). I have argued that central to understanding this case study is the analytical frame of gender and not just masculinity, which is militarized in illegal armed groups. I have also argued that this has profound impacts on women’s experiences both during and after demobilization. Despite dominant representations of women as victims in the literature on women and war, women are necessary for waging war in numerous roles, both as victims *and* victimizers. By approaching gender as a social construction rather than as a natural trait, it is possible to uncover the complex ways in which women, and not just men, engage in violent activities. Although women can be militarized to become perpetrators, the hyper-masculinity involved in this process, and the central role it plays in armed groups as an ideal and as an organizing principle, creates unequal power relations: most (not all) men as individuals are the ones who reap the long-lasting benefits of masculinization. In Enloe’s words: “A militarizing manoeuvre can look like a dance, not a struggle, even though the dance may be among unequal partners” (2000, 10).

In the Colombian case, women in the AUC and the FARC have been incorporated into their respective armed groups in distinct manners, and this affects the way in which their lives become militarized. The militarization of gender unfolds differently in each organization,

creating specific gendered experiences and generating different sets of needs for women combatants during demobilization. Given the lack of theoretical frameworks and studies in the area of women in illegal armed groups in existing bodies of literature, this discussion has relied on Enloe's theory of militarized masculinity and Butler's theory of gender performativity to generate a conceptual tool from which to approach the situation of women in the AUC and the FARC. The concept of militarized gender performativity is presented as a synthesis of both these theories and is used to carry out a gendered comparative study of women in the FARC and in the AUC.

In her extensive studies on militarization, Enloe has argued that male soldiers undergo a process in which their masculine identity is militarized. This means that their identity and, more specifically, their gender identity, becomes controlled and dependent on military values. Most feminists agree that military values require the exaltation of masculine ideas while degrading feminine ones. This makes the presence of women in militarized organizations highly problematic. Enloe argues that a woman's life also becomes militarized, but her focus is not on women in militarized organizations. Rather, she looks at the militarization of women as wives and mothers of recruits, sex workers around military bases, and women working in administrative jobs in the defence sector, among others. By doing this, Enloe shows how the process of militarization is depended not only on men, but also on women who play important roles in said process.

This study of women in illegal armed groups using Enloe's theoretical insights has shown that gender identity, and not just masculinity, can be militarized in both complex and contradictory ways. Women do not necessarily become hyper-masculinized in the same way as their male peers when they join a militarized illegal organization, because gender differentials

and the dual way of constructing gender are not eliminated during processes of militarization within illegal organizations that include men and women in their ranks. Most women participate in these groups by having their femaleness, and some characteristics considered feminine, militarized in ways that maintain clear boundaries between genders. Enloe's theory of militarized masculinity has been useful in exploring the militarization of *femininity* and gender in general. Considering the ways in which gender is militarized within illegal armed groups using Enloe's theoretical framework has given rise to the concept of "militarized gender." This concept assumes that gender as whole can be militarized in ways that transform, yet maintain, traditional conceptions of gender. Furthermore, it makes reference to the hyper-masculinization of femininity: females perform some roles traditionally associated with males, while some of their female values such as motherhood become appropriated by militarism in a way that is seen to benefit the organization.

The concept of militarized gender is useful in studying the situations and experiences of women combatants in the AUC and the FARC because any militarized institution depends on gender as a whole, and not just on masculinity. These two illegal armed groups encompass a wide range of experiences that depart from a traditional feminine standpoint and change according to the complex web of relationships that sustain and play an important role in the reproduction of militaries (Enloe 1993, 7). These different standpoints are usually silenced and ignored, and what is made problematic is the way in which *masculinity* is militarized. Femininity, in contexts like Colombia, is also militarized in very complex ways which need to be acknowledged and analyzed if there is to be an adequate response to the needs of *all* ex-combatants.

Butler's approach to gender as performative has also been extremely relevant in studying

the experiences of women ex-combatants from the FARC and the AUC. Butler puts forth a nuanced view of gender as not fixed and natural, but as an illusion maintained by dominant power relations. In her view, gender is manifested through instances of performativity and the repetition of acts that give the impression that gender is embodied. Butler includes both drag and parody as two examples of subversive performance that reveal that gender has no original, but is a copy of a copy. Drag and parody destabilize the traditional ways of *doing* gender. In doing so, they make it possible to consider and create different ways of doing gender.

Butler's view of gender as performativity also opens up a space in which to regard the (gender) identity transitions experienced by the women and men interviewed for this study. These individuals went through a process of identity transition upon entering an illegal armed group as well as upon becoming members of the DDR process that will enable them to return to civilian life. In terms of gender, women are required—to a different extent and in different ways between and within armed groups—to abandon their traditional gender identity and to adopt one according to their organization's standards and requirements. The shifting contexts and the different processes of identity transformation of women members of the Colombian DDR program reveal the performative nature of gender.

Butler's theory of performativity has also given rise to the concept of *militarized gendered performativity*. This concept was put forth as a synthesis of Enloe's theory of militarized masculinity and Butler's theory of gender performativity, and used to approach instances of "gender confusion" inside the AUC and the FARC as well as during the transition into civilian life. Militarized gender performativity is relevant within the existing literature on women and war, and could perhaps be used to help others study the experiences of women and men in other illegal militarized organizations around the world.



## **Results and Recommendations**

Militarized gender performativity has involved distinct characteristics in the FARC and the AUC. The diverging ways in which gender relations were structured in the AUC and are structured in the FARC are closely related to the ideological and militaristic features of each organization. Both organizations have controlled women's sexuality by devising rules and by making only some practices permissible. However, women were incorporated into the organizations with different ideas of what their role should be, and the particularities of each organization generate a distinct militarized gender performativity. Women experience conflict in different ways depending on which organization they belonged to, and these differences are relevant for the design and implementation of DDR programs in conflict and post-conflict societies. In the Colombian case, women in the FARC and women in the AUC experienced the conflict in different ways, particularly in relation to their sexuality and reproductive rights.

The FARC officially commits to gender equality and this is part of the organization's mandate. However, the existence of an ideological platform that includes equality between women and men in this organization does not automatically translate into consistent and comprehensive practices aimed to empower women in this organization. The testimonies of ex-combatants from the FARC revealed a contradiction between the organization's official stance on women and the actual practices routinely carried out. The most notorious issues in this regard are forced contraception and forced abortion. These practices violate women's reproductive rights and create specific needs among demobilized women from the FARC that should be systematically addressed in the DDR program. They also structure relations between men and women in a way that allows the organization to justify these practices as necessary to guarantee gender equality. However, these practices deny women the choice of deciding if and when they want to engage in sexual activities and have children, and are also problematic for women's

health given the precarious and unreliable medical care offered by the FARC.

On the other hand, the AUC did not express a formal commitment to equality between men and women members of that organization. In that case, unequal gender relations were assumed to be the foundation of the experiences of women and men in the AUC. Although some women performed the same military roles as men, the expectations placed on them in terms of military performance were lower in relation to their male peers. Women who joined the AUC were considered to be inferior to men and were not required to give up salient elements of their traditional gender identity. As opposed to the FARC, policies regarding contraception in the AUC were not always aimed at suppressing women's biological functions, and women who became pregnant were not forced to have an abortion. In most cases, they were allowed to take time off for maternity purposes and were given the option to return to the organization. This way of incorporating women and structuring gender was akin to (civilian) traditional gender relations. In this sense, the AUC did not approach motherhood as being a challenge to militarization, but on the contrary, as a "natural" element to be expected to happen in a woman's life. The solution, then, involved adjusting the organization's structure so as to allow women to carry out traditional roles such as becoming mothers.

Reproduction and motherhood were both militarized in different ways in the AUC and in the FARC. The distinct experiences of women in both organizations reveal the performative characteristics of gender and show that masculinity *and* femininity can both be militarized within illegal armed groups. Efforts to make these organizations homogeneous as part of a military strategy to generate cohesion are thwarted by the presence of specific notions of masculinity and femininity which are sustained by unequal power relations between men and women, and which set men and women apart. The differences in militarized gender performativity are key in

determining the needs of women from the FARC and in the AUC during demobilization and reintegration. The extent to which women ex-combatants can become politicized, and gain confidence in their abilities to act and get involved in the “public” sphere as a result of their experiences in an illegal armed group, is linked to the success of the DDR program, most importantly in the reintegration phase.

One area which appears to be in need of improvement in the current DDR program is the availability of childcare for its members. Due to the fact that women are considered to be primary caregivers, the extent to which they can take advantage of the benefits offered through the DDR program (workshops, training, career advice, etc.) is largely related to the availability of childcare. Single mothers, in particular, are finding it hard to fulfill their responsibility as caregivers while at the same time carrying out the requirements of the DDR program and taking advantage of its benefits. Not only is this negative for these women, their children are also put in risky situations since they are left to fend for themselves at a young age. Offering childcare as part of the benefit package for DDR participants would have an impact on both women’s wellbeing and on that of their children. Colombia has a legal framework in place to protect children’s wellbeing, and the Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar (Colombian Institute for Family Welfare) has programs to assist children including, *Hogares Comunitarios* (Communitarian Homes) which are subsidized childcare centres. The Colombian conflict presents security challenges to childcare provision which should be addressed when considering the expansion of Hogares Comunitarios to include children from ex-combatants.

Despite its numerous experiences with DDR since the 1980s, the Colombian government has a history of not taking into account women in peace and DDR processes. For this reason, there are no local experiences to rely on when designing a comprehensive DDR program that

diligently incorporates women's experiences and which is responsive to women ex-combatant's needs. This is even more problematic if it is taken into account that women in illegal armed groups in Colombia are ignored by the government, the media, and society. Despite recent efforts by the Colombian government and, in particular, the ACR, to incorporate gender into the DDR agenda, the specific needs of women are still not sufficiently understood.

The specific needs of women from the FARC and the AUC have to be successfully addressed in DDR programs if these are to offer participants viable post-conflict opportunities and guarantee long-lasting peace. A better understanding of the roles women play in violent contexts, both as victims *and* as perpetrators, is necessary when designing and implementing peace processes, including DDR programs. In Colombia, women ex-combatants from illegal organizations which have demobilized in the past, such as the M-19, can play an important role in the process of incorporating women into the DDR program. These women can raise important issues and provide relevant insights on the design and implementation of DDR programs, and can serve as a support network for women who are attempting to return to civilian life. They can also play an important role in fostering a welcoming atmosphere for women ex-combatants in the communities around the country into which these women are being reintegrated. The experiences of women ex-combatants of illegal armed groups which demobilized in the past are relevant and can enhance efforts aimed at bringing the experiences of women in the AUC and the FARC to the foreground. This is particularly true of women ex-combatants who have become active in the political, social, economic, and cultural spheres since disengaging from their respective armed groups in the 1980s and 1990s.

Inquiring about the impact of non-state militarization on gender implies opening up a space to discuss demilitarization in ways that put forth novel understandings of gender roles and

gender relations in order to prevent a “roll-back” to pre-conflict conditions and discourses of gender. Women ex-combatants from illegal armed groups are extremely valuable in this regard, and their experiences and voices should not be silenced by assuming they fit the generic category of *desmovilizado*. Demilitarization is also extremely important to prevent re-armament or involvement in criminal and violent activities such as domestic and gang violence among DDR participants.

The Colombian DDR experience that allowed the demobilization of all the AUC units is also extremely important in terms of possible future peace talks and DDR processes. Guaranteeing the active participation of women combatants in any future collective DDR process involving the FARC and other illegal armed groups like the ELN can allow women who have already demobilized to share relevant knowledge, which can benefit hundreds of women and encourage them to participate in grassroots programs. The role of Karina and Rosa as spokespeople is an adequate strategy only if their participation is accompanied by efficient and transparent judicial processes and comprehensive packages of reparation to their victims. Women who do not fit the profiles of those like Karina and Rosa should also be included in these efforts to create awareness of the diversity among women in different areas such as sexuality and reproductive rights. Karina and Rosa are representative of women as perpetrators, but it is important to reveal the ways in which women in illegal militarized organizations were victims as well as victimizers. The common perception of women as either ruthless perpetrators or passive victims is not representative of the complex experiences that these women went through, and are still going through.

Approaching ex-combatant women as victims and perpetrators is not meant as a way to justify their actions as members of the AUC and the FARC, but as a way to reveal the complex

and contradictory character of women's experiences in illegal armed groups. The incorporation of gender issues into DDR processes is the first step in widening the scope of study on women and war. This can be a starting point from which to study other less documented issues such as the experiences of girls in conflict situations, and the presence of sexual diversity in illegal armed groups and during DDR processes in Colombia and other societies experiencing violent internal conflict. Furthermore, this starting point can lead to inquiries about the ways in which race, ethnicity, and disability status, to name just a few social divisions, affect women's experiences vis-à-vis the gendered nature of their participation in illegal armed groups. Expanding the scope of the study of women and war can also provide interesting insights regarding the gendered aspects of re-armament, a phenomenon which is prevalent in Colombia today.

The United Nations Development Fund for Women, UNIFEM, has issued several recommendations to incorporate the needs of women and girls in DDR processes (UNIFEM 2004). These include allocating funds to train DDR leaders and staff on gender topic issues. According to UNIFEM, gender experts can gather gender-disaggregated data throughout the DDR process and can carry out routine interviews with women and girls who are ex-combatants (ibid., 4). In the Colombian context, this would be an adequate way of standardizing data on DDR which, at the moment, is inconsistent and difficult to access. Collecting, organizing, and disseminating data and information on women and girl ex-combatants is important to ensure gender parity during peace negotiations and during the process of designing and implementing DDR programs. Gender parity during peace negotiations is another recommendation of UNIFEM, which is relevant in the Colombian case given the presence of active illegal armed groups and the continuous efforts by the government to reach a peace agreement with these

groups. The importance of gender training highlighted by UNIFEM also lies in the role this plays in awareness efforts among women and girl ex-combatants (ibid., 5). Adequate gender training can ensure that women and girls understand the specificities of the DDR process and their entitlements. This can result in more active participation of women members of the DDR process. In the Colombian case, women ex-combatants from illegal armed groups like the M-19 can play an important role in awareness efforts among the newly demobilized combatants from the AUC, the FARC, and smaller guerrilla groups.

### **Limitations**

The novelty of the research topic covered in this dissertation as well as the lack of information on women combatants in illegal armed groups in Colombia presented some challenges to the research agenda. Although there is a large literature on women in the military, there are few theoretical studies on gender in illegal armed groups. This presented challenges in terms of theoretical frameworks to address the experiences of women in the FARC and the AUC. In addition, there are very few studies on women or gender in illegal armed groups in Colombia, and there are more studies on women in the FARC than on women from the AUC. These discrepancies are evident in the preceding chapters covering the situation of women in these organizations. Furthermore, the variation between many groups within both organizations, but particularly within the AUC, makes it challenging to make generalizations regarding the experiences of women in these organizations. This is worsened by the fact that information and data on illegal armed groups varies depending on the source consulted.

These challenges were addressed by relying on the literature on women in the military, which is extremely relevant in looking at the situation of women in organizations like the AUC and the FARC. My interviews with ex-combatants from the AUC were substantive in terms of quantity and quality, allowing the voices of the interviewees to add to the existing knowledge on

daily life, soldiering, and the experiences of women in this organization. Although it is difficult to present exact figures on the Colombian illegal armed groups and the Colombian DDR programs, the qualitative nature of this study meant that it was not affected by the inconsistency in figures.

In general, this study presents contributions to the study of women and war, conflict resolution, and militarization. Within the Colombian context, it has practical implications as the government continues its efforts to reach a peace agreement with the FARC and the ELN. Given that these organizations are still active, and that the FARC is said to have a large number of women combatants—an estimated 40 percent—studies that bring gender issues to the foreground are useful in opening a space to deliberate on the role women should and could play in future peace talks and in the design of DDR programs.

### **Further Research**

This dissertation has presented a gendered view of soldiering and DDR processes in Colombia. It is not comprehensive regarding the gendered aspects of conflict as a whole, and recognizes that there are numerous other areas in which this lens has to be used in order to gain an understanding of the situation, experiences, and needs of women. Issues related to the rise of BACRIMs, the presence of minors in illegal armed groups, the presence of sexual diversity within illegal armed groups, and the ways in which other social divisions such as race and ethnicity affect life in illegal armed groups merit further research. The Colombian conflict did not come to an end with the demobilization of the AUC. At the time of writing this dissertation, there are still several illegal armed groups operating throughout the country including the FARC and numerous criminal bands. The rise of BACRIMs, and the role that ex-combatants of the AUC (and to a lesser extent of the FARC) are playing in this situation, is generating numerous challenges in terms of conflict management and conflict resolution in Colombia. Their presence



and the increase in levels of violence in some areas of the country is also generating doubts about the success of the DDR program. A study of the presence and role of women in BACRIMs could be presented as a second part of this study, especially if the presence of women in BACRIMs includes women ex-combatants from the AUC and the FARC who have experienced the transition from civilian to combatant to *desmovilizado* to member of a criminal band. The number of women that belong to BACRIMs, and the role that women play inside these groups, is still unclear. Given the autonomous nature of BACRIMs, it is possible that the experiences of women in these groups are different from the experiences of women in organizations like the FARC and the AUC. A gender study of these groups could determine what differences and similarities exist between militarization and the experiences of women in illegal armed groups and their experiences in criminal bands. Such a study could also present links between the DDR program and the phenomenon of re-armament through which ex-combatants return to illegal activities.

There is an unprecedented presence of girl combatants in the Colombian illegal armed groups. According to Londoño and Nieto (2006, 9), from the illegal armed groups that demobilized in the 1990s, only 1.9 percent were girls. Between 1999 and 2003 (before the end of the AUC demobilization), 30 percent were girls (*ibid.*). Studying the experiences of minors from a gendered perspective would reveal the particularities of the lives of both girls and boys inside illegal armed groups. This can shed light on issues surrounding sexuality, such as sexual abuse, and, as is the case with women ex-combatants, can reveal the specific needs of these individuals after they have disengaged from their armed group. It can also shed light on the causes of their engagement in illegal armed groups, which is key in establishing preventative measures that can discourage youth from joining these groups or the emerging BACRIMs. In relation to my study,

further research on this area can cover the extent to which issues concerning women (such as forced contraception and forced abortion) apply to minors, as issues that have to be systematically addressed during the DDR process. The study of the experiences and reintegration of minors from a gendered perspective would contribute to the literature of gender and conflict as well as to the growing literature on children in illegal armed groups.

Sexual diversity in illegal armed groups is another topic which would be valuable to explore using the militarized gender performativity approach. This topic is highly under-researched and there are virtually no studies about it. However, there is a growing literature on this issue in the military, which can be useful when beginning to inquire about sexual diversity in illegal militarized groups. Although I included one question on sexual diversity in my interviews, this was not enough to carry out a comprehensive analysis on this topic. Both men and women reacted with surprise to the question on sexual diversity in the FARC and the AUC. Some laughed at the question, none of them said it was accepted in their organization, and most said it was not allowed. Most individuals answered the question by linking homosexuality to delinquency and rape. Men and women, both combatant and civilian, have been targeted by these organizations for attacks due to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity (Amnesty International 2004, 4). Butler's theories on gender and sex would be useful when inquiring about sexual diversity in illegal armed groups. Furthermore, Enloe's research on the topic could be used to gain a more detailed understanding of the characteristics of sexual diversity in illegal armed groups. This topic would enrich theoretical discussions on gender in militaristic organizations as well as the literature on queer studies.

A study of the experiences of women and men in illegal armed groups would be enriched by the incorporation of an analysis of intersectionality. Considering other social divisions, and

the ways in which they intersect to create a specific lived experience of the armed conflict in Colombia, would present a more comprehensive view of what it is like to be a member of the FARC and an ex-member of the AUC. Although social divisions are all equally relevant when it comes to carrying out an intersectionality analysis, race, ethnicity, class, and age are particularly relevant in the Colombian context. The presence of ethnic minorities is underreported, and it is not clear to what extent individuals from indigenous groups have joined guerrillas or paramilitary groups. The same is the case with Afro-Colombians and smaller minorities like Rom. It is also not clear how discourses on race and ethnicity intersect with discourses on gender to create the specific lived experiences of women from the AUC and in the FARC. The lack of information and data on these minorities is one challenge to carrying out a wide-ranging intersectionality analysis. However, data that is more easily accessible, such as on age, can be used to study the intersection of age and gender in an effort to understand the experiences of girls who join illegal armed groups.

A regional comparative analysis on the experiences of women in illegal armed groups in countries with a history of internal conflict such as Peru, Guatemala, and Nicaragua would be a valuable way to situate the Colombian experience regionally. These countries have carried out successful DDR processes and are still experiencing the long term effects of violent conflict. Women played significant roles before, during, and after demobilization in each of these cases, and their experiences can provide numerous insights in relation to the experiences of women in illegal armed groups in Colombia.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Militaristic institutions are one of the most controversial domains in which women have participated alongside men. The institutional needs of militaristic organizations stand in stark conflict with feminist principles. The Colombian case has shown that soldiering takes different

shapes in the process of resolving the challenges that women's presence in illegal armed groups create. It has also shown the flexibility of gender as a concept that is lived in particular ways in different contexts. Gender in illegal armed groups is manipulated in ways that serve militaristic purposes. In the same way, gender can be geared toward a process of demilitarization in a way that resists pre-conflict or traditional ways of organizing relations between women and men in society.

Even though it is nearly impossible for governments to guarantee that women's rights will be respected inside illegal militaristic organizations such as the AUC and the FARC, they can guarantee women's participation in peace talks and in the design of DDR programs. Demilitarization that redefines traditional gender relations and allows women greater control over their lives will bring benefits to women, men, and society in general. As women are allowed to make strategic claims in a context created by themselves, a novel sense of demilitarization can be put forth in which the subject and agency emerge in tandem to articulate new ways of living as civilians.

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## **Interviews**

### ***FARC Women***<sup>42</sup>

Ana. Miliciana (FARC member, years unknown). Interview by author. 27 July 2010. Written notes, translated by author. Bogotá, Colombia.

Camila. Combatant/ Comandante's Wife (FARC member, eight years). Interview by author. 10 August 2010. Recorded interview, transcribed and translated by author. Bogotá, Colombia.

Flor. Radista/Combatant (FARC member, four years). Interview by author. 10 August 2010. Recorded interview, transcribed and translated by author. Bogotá, Colombia.

Gladys. Combatant (FARC member, ten years). Interview by author. 27 July 2010. Recorded interview, transcribed and translated by author. Bogotá, Colombia.

Laura. Combatant (FARC member, twelve years). Interview by author. 3 August 2010. Recorded interview, transcribed and translated by author. Bogotá, Colombia.

Mariana. Combatant (FARC member, six years). Interview by author. 12 August 2010. Recorded interview, transcribed and translated by author. Bogotá, Colombia.

Mónica. Combatant (FARC member, thirteen years). Interview by author. 27 July 2010. Recorded interview, transcribed and translated by author. Bogotá, Colombia.

Natalia. Combatant (FARC member, thirteen years). Interview by author. 10 August 2010. Recorded interview, transcribed and translated by author. Bogotá, Colombia.

### ***FARC Men***

Aníbal. Comandante de Escuadra (FARC member, four years). Interview by author. 12 August 2010. Recorded interview, transcribed and translated by author. Bogotá, Colombia.

David. Comandante Político y Financiero (FARC member, years unknown). Interview by author. 5 August 2010. Written interview, translated by author. Bogotá, Colombia.

Fernando. Combatant (FARC member, eighteen years). Interview by author. 5 August 2010. Recorded interview, transcribed and translated by author. Bogotá, Colombia.

Hugo. Comandante de Escuadra (FARC member, ten years). Interview by author. 3 August 2010. Recorded interview, transcribed and translated by author. Bogotá, Colombia, August 3, 2010.

Jorge. Combatant (FARC member, twenty-two years). Interview by author. 29 July 2010. Written interview, translated by author. Bogotá, Colombia.

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<sup>42</sup> All interviewees' names have been changed to protect their anonymity.

Marlon. Combatant (FARC member, eight years). Interview by author. 29 July 2010. Recorded interview, transcribed and translated by author. Bogotá, Colombia.

Martín. Comandante de Escuadra (FARC member, twelve years). Interview by author. 5 August 2010. Written interview, translated by author. Bogotá, Colombia.

Rafael. Combatant (FARC member, years unknown). Interview by author. 3 August 2010. Written interview, translated by author. Bogotá, Colombia.

### *AUC Women*

Claudia. Combatant (AUC member, ten years). Interview by author. 12 August 2010. Recorded interview, transcribed and translated by author. Bogotá, Colombia.

Daniela. Combatant (AUC member, seven years). Interview by author. 17 August 2010. Recorded interview, transcribed and translated by author. Bogotá, Colombia.

Lorena. Combatant (AUC member, years unknown). Interview by author. 29 July 2010. Written interview, translated by author. Bogotá, Colombia.

Mariela. Combatant (AUC member, years unknown). Interview by author. 19 August 2010. Written interview, translated by author. Bogotá, Colombia.

Rosa. Comandante Contraguerrilla (AUC member, eighteen years). Interview by author. 19 August 2010. Recorded interview, transcribed and translated by author. Bogotá, Colombia.

### *AUC Men*

Alexander. Comandante de Escuadra (AUC member, seven years). Interview by author. 10 August 2010. Recorded interview, transcribed and translated by author. Bogotá, Colombia.

Camilo. Comandante de Escuadra (AUC member, five years). Interview by author. 12 August 2010. Recorded interview, transcribed and translated by author. Bogotá, Colombia.

Esteban. Comandante de Escuadra (AUC member, seven years). Interview by author. 24 August 2010. Recorded interview, transcribed and translated by author. Bogotá, Colombia.

Jaime. Comandante de Escuadra (AUC member, eight years). Interview by author. 17 August 2010. Recorded interview, transcribed and translated by author. Bogotá, Colombia.

José. Comandante de Escuadra (AUC member, years unknown). Interview by author. 24 August 2010. Recorded interview, transcribed and translated by author. Bogotá, Colombia.

Juan. Combatant (AUC member, years unknown). Interview by author. 12 August 2010. Written interview, translated by author. Bogotá, Colombia.

Mario. Comandante Político (AUC member, nineteen years). Interview by author. 10 August

2010. Recorded interview, transcribed and translated by author. Bogotá, Colombia.
- Mauricio. Combatant (AUC member, years unknown). Interview by author. 10 August 2010. Written interview, translated by author. Bogotá, Colombia.
- Miguel. Combatant (AUC member, nine years). Interview by author. 27 July 2010. Written interview, translated by author. Bogotá, Colombia.
- Pablo. Combatant (AUC member, seven years). Interview by author. 27 July 2010. Written interview, translated by author. Bogotá, Colombia.
- Ricardo. Combatant (AUC member, four years). Interview by author. 12 August 2010. Written interview, translated by author. Bogotá, Colombia.



## Appendix 2. Interview Questions

### Part I: Introduction

Age:

Gender:

Region of birth:

Marital status:

Education:

1. When did you join the FARC/AUC?
2. What was your main reason for joining? Was it voluntary?
3. How long were you a member of this organization?
4. What was your occupation before joining the FARC/AUC?
5. What was your marital status before joining the FARC/AUC?
6. Did you have any children before joining the FARC/AUC? If yes, how many?
7. If you had children, who took care of them during your time with the FARC/AUC?
8. Did you keep in touch with your family during your time in the FARC/AUC?
9. What was your main responsibility in the FARC/AUC?
  - combatant
  - health care provider/nurse
  - cook
  - porter
  - spy
  - messenger
  - administration



- radio operator
- public informant
- camp leader
- sex worker
- other

10. What was your rank in the FARC/AUC?
11. What training did you receive?
12. Describe your everyday tasks.
13. What tasks do you feel fell out of your responsibilities for which you received training?
14. Were you promoted during your time in the FARC/AUC? If so, to what rank(s)?
15. When did you demobilize?
16. What led you to demobilize?
17. Did you demobilize individually or collectively?

## **PART II: Identity and Negotiating Gender: Women**

18. What type of prerequisites do women have to meet to be able to join the FARC/AUC?
19. Was it difficult for you to meet these prerequisites? Why or why not?
20. Did you receive any type of training on gender equality during your time in the FARC/AUC?
21. What is the FARC/AUC's policy with respect to women?
22. Do you think that there is gender equality in the FARC/AUC? Why or why not?
23. Do you feel you were treated differently by your peers and supervisors because of your gender?

24. Did you feel you had to meet and or exceed the standards set by your male peers in terms of responsibilities?
25. Do you feel that gender expectations were different in the FARC/AUC compared to civilian life? In what ways?
26. Has your experience in the FARC/AUC changed the way you see and understand yourself as a female? (women only)
27. What are the most difficult things of being a female member of the FARC/AUC?
28. Do you miss anything about your life in the FARC/AUC?

### **Part III: Reproduction Rights and Sexuality**

29. Were you aware of rules and regulations in the FARC/AUC regarding relationships?
30. What were they like? Were there any exceptions to these rules that you are aware of?
31. Did you have a romantic relationship(s) during your time in the FARC/AUC?
32. Were you aware of rules and regulations in the FARC/AUC regarding pregnancy? What were they like? Were there any exceptions to these rules that you are aware of?
33. What happened if you did not follow this rules?
34. Do you know about cases of women who became pregnant in the FARC/AUC?
35. Do you know about cases of women who were forced to have an abortion or who had to give their baby away after giving birth?
36. Did you know about cases of FARC/AUC combatants who were homosexual?
37. What were the policies regarding homosexuality in the FARC/AUC?

### **Part IV: Reintegration to Civilian Life**

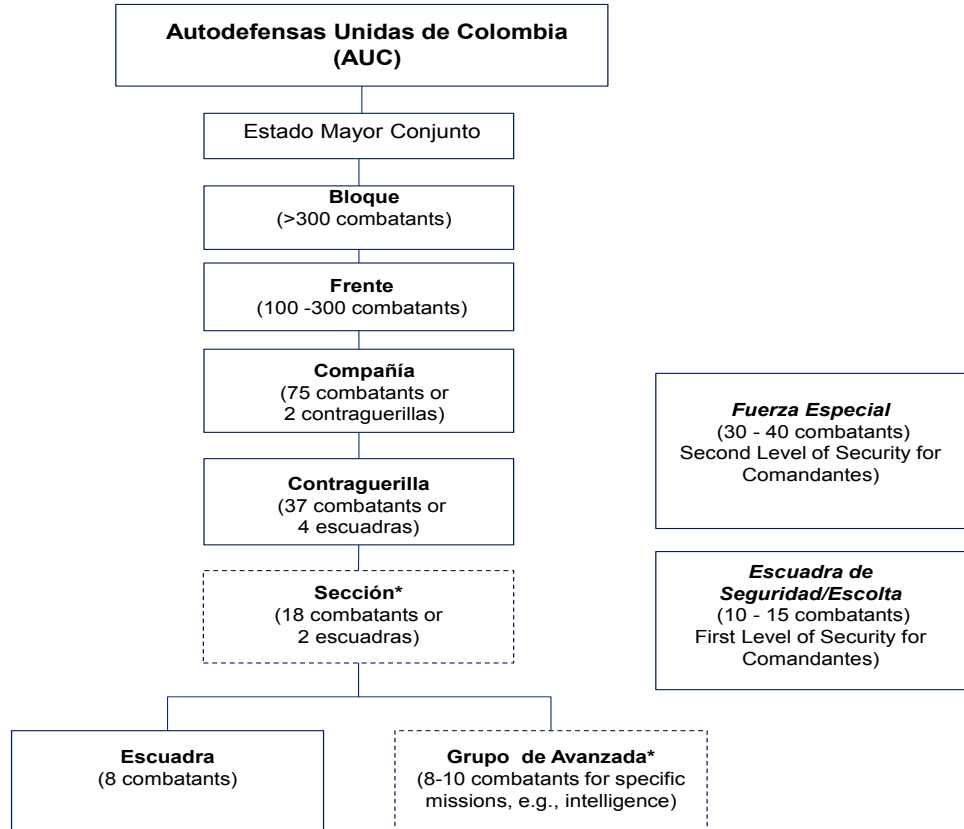
38. What are your primary goals/hopes/expectations from the demobilization program?
39. Do you feel that these goals/hopes/expectations will be or are being met?
40. Do you feel that your material and spiritual needs are being satisfied by the demobilization program? Why or why not?
41. What do you think will be the main obstacles that you will face in trying to return to civilian life?
42. Have you experienced any challenges joining your family and friends?

### Appendix 3. Internal Organization of the FARC



Source: "Así queda el Organigrama de las FARC," Noticias 24. Accessed July 20, 2012, <http://www.noticias24.com/actualidad/noticia/14544/asi-queda-el-organigrama-de-las-farc/>.

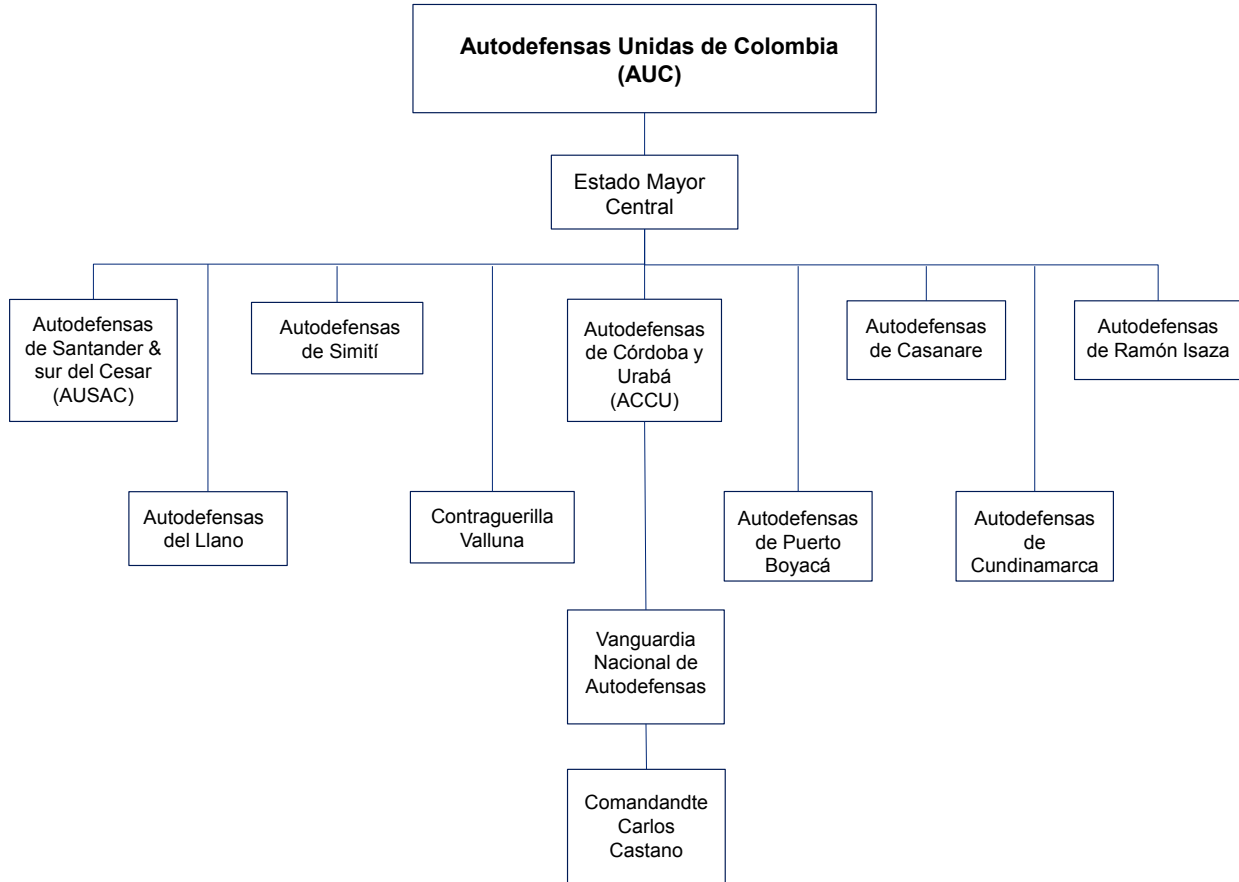
## Appendix 4. Internal Organization of the AUC



\* Both Sección and Grupo de Avanzada are temporary units formed for special missions

Source: *Dinámicas de las Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC)*, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia and Embajada de Suecia en Bogotá, August 2009), 10.

## Appendix 5. Paramilitary Groups Members of the AUC



Source: "Organigrama de las FARC in Verdad Abierta," Verdad Abierta, Organigrama de las AUC. Accessed July 20, 2012, <http://www.verdadabierta.com/archivos-para-descargar/category/40-historia-3#>.

## **Appendix 6. FARC Rules of Conduct with the Masses**

In the belief that we should embody new men and women, setting a revolutionary example to our people while behaving in an unassuming way, in order to rally them to our cause, the commanders of the Simón Bolívar Guerrilla Coordinating Board [Coordinadora Guerrillera Simón Bolívar, CGSB], gathered at its first ‘Jacobo Arenas’ summit, call upon Bolivarian combatants to abide by the following rules of conduct with the masses.

1. Our daily behavior, and in the purpose underlying our activities, should be borne in the people’s interests.
2. We should respect the political, philosophical, and religious ideas and attitudes of the population, and in particular the culture and autonomy of indigenous communities and other ethnic minorities.
3. We should not prevent people from exercising their right to vote, nor force people to vote.
4. The safety of working people and their homes and property should be taken into account when planning and executing political and military activities, and in our daily movements.
5. We should respect the various measures taken by collaborators to keep their links to us secret.
6. Care should be taken to maintain internal discipline when working with the masses, in order to protect innocent people and those friendly to our cause, ensuring that our mistakes or failures do not make them a target of terrorism and hatred at the hands of the official army and its paramilitary forces.

7. Wherever and whenever the masses are under attack from the official army and its paramilitary forces, subjected to bombardment and the destruction of their property, we must actively denounce and counter these terrorist activities so that the people feel supported by us.
8. Murder and any kind of proven outrages committed against the population should be seen as a crime.
9. We should not impose on the masses. We should try to ensure that they see our weapons as their own.
10. Accusations made by communities about attacks by combatants and other individuals should be investigated exhaustively with input from the community.
11. Leaders and combatants should study and comply with the rules of international humanitarian law that are applicable to our revolutionary war.
12. If it should prove necessary to detain a militant or supporter of a sister organization for alleged or proven wrongdoing, the case and, if possible, the individual should be handed over to said organization.
13. Our founding principle in all circumstances is respect for the right to life.
14. Leaders and combatants should bear in mind that executions may only be carried out for very serious crimes committed by enemies of the people and with the express authorization in each case of each organization's senior governing body. In all such cases, evidence must be examined and decisions taken collectively. The leadership must produce a written record setting the evidence.
15. Alcoholism, drug addiction, theft, and dishonesty are counterrevolutionary vices that damage people's trust in us.



16. We must avoid abusing people's trust and generosity. We must not demand goods and property for our personal gain.

Source: Red Cross. "A Collection of Codes of Conduct Issued by Armed Groups." *International Review of the Red Cross* 93, no. 882 (June 2011): 492–493.

## **Appendix 7. Normas Internas (Internal Rules) FARC–EP**

### CHAPTER 1

#### DISCIPLINE

ARTICLE 1. The actions that receive disciplinary punishments are:

##### SERIOUS TRANSGRESSION OF FIRST ORDER:

- a) Homicide attempt against compañeros or the masses.
- b) Fights between members of the movement.
- c) Using lies to justify yourself before superiors or before organs in the organization.
- d) Lack of team spirit and solidarity.
- e) Exhibiting laziness, cowardice, or irresponsibility.
- f) Dishonesty against the masses, peers, or against organs in the organization.
- g) Violating the Régimen Interno General y Particular, or marching/camping plans.
- h) Violating recruiting rules.
- i) Lack of morale that is believed could be overcome.

##### SERIOUS TRANSGRESSIONS OF SECOND ORDER

- a) Use of foul language from the comandante to the guerrilleros or from the guerrilleros to the comandante, or between each other, or against civilians.
- b) Gossip, or the use of offending nicknames, the use of threats against peers or against civilians.
- c) Disrespect from comandantes to guerrilleros or from guerrilleros against comandantes and between members of the movement against the masses.
- d) Gambling games and drunkenness.
- e) Pretending to be ill in order to avoid missions and responsibilities.

- f) Dishonesty against compañeros or guerrilleros.
- g) Playing with any kind of weapons.

#### NON-SEVERE TRANSGRESSIONS:

The ones that are carried out without the intention to cause damage to the movement or to compañeros.

ARTICLE 2. The punishments that are given to faults are administered by the unit to whomever committed the fault belongs to and he is assisted in his right to present reasons for transgressions outlined in article 1 under a) b) and c). It is unacceptable to give punishments that go against someone's physical and moral integrity or that will affect the personality of the individual who is being punished and it has to have an educational element in cases that are included in article one. This excludes other punishments that can be imposed by the comandantes directly, for faults that include the lack of service; these punishments are:

1. Constructive and honest criticism in a meeting from the unit imposing a punishment and a demand for a self-criticism to those who committed a transgression.
2. The right to have authority positions or to represent or other responsibilities, is suspended.
3. If there is to be a punishment for a unit, this will only be decided by the Estados Mayores de Frente, de Estado Mayores de Bloque, the Estado Mayor Central and its Secretariat.

ARTICLE 3. Transgressions inside the movement include:

- a. Murdering compañeros, men or women civilians.
- b. Dissension with or without weapons, money, or other assets belonging to the movement.
- c. Lack of morale that threatens the movement, its military plans or other important tasks.

- d. Treason of any kind or any way of voluntary collaboration with the enemy aimed to cause damage to the movement.
- e. Divulging movement secrets.
- f. Factionalism or any other type of activity that can threaten the movement or the political–military work that the movement carries out.
- g. Premeditated disengagement from orders and insubordination.
- h. Buying or selling war material or other assets belonging to the movement or losing them in an unjustified way,
- i. Abandoning patrolling duties.
- j. Sabotaging the movement.
- k. Rape.
- l. Stealing from compañeros, the movement, or civilians.
- m. Dishonest business against peers or against the masses.
- n. Drug consumption.
- o. Any activity that goes against revolutionary morale, against healthy civilian costumes, or that will affect the FARC –EPs prestige before the masses.
- p. Any activity aimed preventing believers to practice their religion.

ARTICLE 4. Punishments for transgressions are:

- 1. The temporary or definite loss of the right to have authority or representative positions.
- 2. Compulsory work on any activity used as punishment in the judgement of the respective unit.

3. For transgressions listed in a), b), c), d), e), f), g), h), i), j), k), l), and other transgressions the procedure is to call a Consejo Revolucionario de Guerra which has the following procedure:
  - A. The General Assembly of Guerrilleros elects through votes, the Consejo de Guerra, made up of a President, a Secretary, and five Judges, and an Attorney. The Lawyer is named by the accused among combatants assisting to the assembly. The verdict for a majority, made by the Judges, is of punishment or pardon and it is subject to the consideration of the assembly, which approves it and returns it to the judges to be modified and who makes the last decision is the assembly. Dissenters can be absolved or accused in their absence.
  - B. Members of the Estado Mayor or those making the convocation for the consejo de guerra, cannot be Lawyers. They cannot be part of the directives or be members of the jury. The first election for the development of a consejo de guerra will be the lawyer. He will have access to the written report and reasonable amount of time to talk with the accused.
4. Murdering the accused will only be done in extreme cases such as: treason, collaborating with the enemy, murdering compañeros or the masses, dissension with armament, money or other transgressions according to their severity.

The verdict will not be carried out until the unit in charge consults with the Secretariat.
5. When it is not possible to gather an Asamblea de Guerrilleros, the units involved will call a Consejo Revolucionario de Guerra in accordance to a) of this article. This type of consejo cannot be carried out with a number of participants bellow 25 (a guerrilla).

ARTICLE 5. In the FARC–EP, there are different units that punish transgressions according to the following procedure:

1. The political unit allocates punishments to non–severe transgressions of a political or moral nature, gives criticisms, and demands self–criticisms. For other type of transgressions, it asks political–military units to allocate punishments.
2. The Asamblea General de Guerrilleros, which gets together a minimum of once a year, is of an informative nature and is presided by the Estado Mayor del Frente, which presents the report for discussion. The Asamblea can be called unanimously by the Estado Mayor de Frente, when this unit considers it convenient or is demanded by the majority of guerrilleros. It can administer punishments to non–serious transgressions, faults of first and second order, that in the moment of an Asamblea, have not been established by the Estados Mayores de Frente, or the unit commandos, but they will be political punishments. Disciplinary punishments of military order are the jurisdiction of the Estados Mayores de Frente, Estados Mayores de Bloque, the Estado Mayor Central, the Secretariado and the Conferencia Nacional del FARC–EP.

ARTICULO 6. Leaving the ranks due to handicaps or physical defects that do not allow the combatant to carry out his missions will only be approved by the Estados Mayores de Bloque, in previous engagement with the Estado Mayor Central or its Secretariat.

Source: Camila Medina–Arbeláez. 2009. “No Porque Seas un Paraco o Seas Guerrillero Tienes que Ser un Animal” Procesos de Socialización en FARC–EP, ELN, y Grupos Paramilitares (1996–2006). Bogotá: Universidad de Los Andes: 133–136.

## Appendix 8. Ethics Approval Letter



May 01, 2012

Miss Andrea Mendez  
Ph.D. Candidate  
Department of Political Studies  
Queen's University  
Kingston, ON K7L 3N6

**GREB Romeo #: 6003239**

**Title: "GPLST-059-10 – Women in the FARC and AUC: Demobilization and Reintegration in Columbia"**

Dear Miss Mendez:

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB) has reviewed and approved your request for renewal of ethics clearance for the above-named study. This renewal is valid for one year from May 27, 2012. Prior to the next renewal date you will be sent a reminder memo and the link to ROMEO to renew for another year.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one year period. An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours. Report to GREB through either ROMEO Event Report or Adverse Event Report Form at <http://www.queensu.ca/ors/researchethics/GeneralREB/forms.html>.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example you must report changes in study procedures or implementations of new aspects into the study procedures. Your request for protocol changes will be forwarded to the appropriate GREB reviewers and/or the GREB Chair. Please report changes to GREB through either ROMEO Event Reports or the Ethics Change Form at <http://www.queensu.ca/ors/researchethics/GeneralREB/forms.html>.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your

research. Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joan Stevenson".

Joan Stevenson,  
Ph.D. Professor and  
Chair  
General Research Ethics Board

c.c.: Dr. Catherine Conaghan, Faculty Supervisor  
Dr. Andrew Lister Chair, Unit  
REB Dianne Flint, Dept. Admin.