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Beyond Revolutionaries, Victims, and Heroic Mothers. Reproductive Politics in War and Peace in Colombia

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Beyond Revolutionaries, Victims, and Heroic Mothers.
Reproductive Politics in War and Peace in Colombia

Dissertation presented
by
VANESA GIRALDO GARTNER

Submitted to the Graduate School of
the University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment of
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To María Paz, of course

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ABSTRACT

BEYOND REVOLUTIONARIES, VICTIMS, AND HEROIC MOTHERS.
REPRODUCTIVE POLITICS IN WAR AND PEACE IN COLOMBIA

MAY 2022

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During the 2016 peace negotiations between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), reproductive policies in this guerrilla group became a site of contestation in producing new discourses about peace, gender, and nation. This dissertation addresses this controversy and explores the implications of reproductive politics in war and peace among ex-combatant women. The data for this project was collected through archival research and a multi-sited ethnography in Caquetá-Colombia. It discusses the role of contraception in the transformation of the FARC from a grassroots guerrilla movement to a revolutionary army and analyzes the multiple discourses produced about contraception, abortion, and motherhood to advance meanings of the peace agreement. Furthermore, it studies the experiences of motherhood/mothering in the midst of war and in the aftermath of war by analyzing the experiences of women who demobilized before the peace agreement through an individual reintegration program and who demobilized collectively as a result of the agreement. This contrast highlights the different possibilities for reproductive and social justice advanced by programs designed

around creating individualized citizens under the premises of meritocracy, responsibility, and entrepreneurship versus those of collective community building.

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INTRODUCTION

During the failed peace negotiations in El Caguán, Caquetá (1998-2002) between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (FARC-EP), the mass media acknowledged that women were an important fraction of this guerrilla group. At that time, the “Ambassador of the FARC” declared that women were around 30% of the fighting force (Semana, 1999), and a female commander was designated as a member of the negotiating team. This was announced by a newsmagazine under the headline “The surprises in Caguán” (Semana, 2000).

Caquetá had been one of the most important enclaves of the FARC-EP since the 1970s (Valencia, 1998) and by the time of the negotiations they controlled most of the northern side of this Colombian state. Curious about this Marxist guerrilla movement that had survived since 1964, journalists traveled to the demilitarized zone that the government had granted for the negotiation, looking for interviews with civilians and combatants. They asked about the social order in the area, civilians’ perception of security, and gender relations in the organization. It was not the first time the press reported on combatant women. Female fighters had a key role in the former M-19 guerrilla movement and were highly visible in the news. Yet, the masculinized military language that always referred to combatants as “men” seemed to keep excluding women from national imaginaries.

Previous appearances of female fighters did not protect them from the sexist gaze of journalists who desperately tried to make sense of the meanings of womanhood in an armed group. In the article “Among lipsticks, panties, and rifles” the reporter Pedro Vargas (1999) says about a guerrilla woman that:

Her manners reveal that behind the girl dressed in camouflage, mud boots, a t-shirt with the image of Tirofijo on the front, Jacobo Arenas on the back [two FARC commanders], and a rifle on her shoulder, there is still air of femininity that the training routines, the sun, and the cold have not taken away from her.¹

Vargas asked about sexual life, romantic relationships, and contraception. Amidst its sexualizing tone, this article does state that women feel respected in the group and prefer military tasks over domestic chores. Still, focus on respect and military preferences remain scarce here, as well as in other articles of the time. Some chronicles of El Caguán made a point to describe the feminine items that guerrilleras consumed, including jewelry, perfume, and make-up. Others represented women as victims of their male comrades

Fifteen years later, during the peace process in Havana, Cuba (2012-2016), the high number of female fighters was presented again as a matter of eternal disbelief. In the report “From Rifles to High Heels: Women of the FARC in Cuba,” the journalist Jairo Tarazona (2016) describes his astonishment at the presence of stylish women representing this armed group. Similar to the article in 1999, he focuses on their exotic sensuality, which makes it difficult for him to picture them as warriors:

Camouflage was left in the forest, now they wear stretchy skirts, fashionable blouses, and pants that let you see their curves shaped by long walks. Boots have been replaced by high heels or sandals, and there is make-up on their faces darkened by the tough journey. Few would believe that those well-dressed girls, accessorized with necklaces and earrings, just left their guns in the forest to follow commands not for war but for peace.²

¹ “Sus modales revelan que detrás de esa joven vestida de camuflado, botas pantaneras, camiseta con la imagen de Tirofijo al frente, Jacobo Arenas en la espalda y un fusil en el hombro, hay todavía un aire de femineidad que los días del entrenamiento, el sol y el sereno no han echado a perder.”

² “Los camuflados se quedaron en el monte, ahora lucen faldas ajustadas, blusas a la moda y pantalones que dejan ver sus formas moldeadas por largas caminatas. Las botas han sido reemplazadas por tacones o sandalias y sus rostros morenos por el trasegar están maquillados. Pocos creerían que esas muchachas bien vestidas, adornadas con collares y aretes, acaban de dejar los fierros’ en el monte y ahora cumplen órdenes no para la guerra, sino para la paz.”

Like the woman interviewed in 1999, a FARC peace delegate named Camila Cienfuegos attempts in 2016 to overcome the assumptions of reporters about women in the FARC as she tells Tarazona about their role in the organization:

In the guerrilla movement there is no such thing as “my woman” or “my man,” there is not that patriarchal order that exists outside (the group) where women have to do the laundry, cook, and iron. We are more than 40% in the FARC, young, pretty, with political perspectives, with a country in our head. How are we going to let men attack us at this point? We are not forced (to do anything), or do we look upset to you?³

Both articles convey a similar sense of discovering female fighters’ womanhood because the reporters find hard to believe that a woman and a fighter can be the same person; one is always hiding within the other. In 1999, the journalist describes the woman behind the camouflage. In 2016, the reporter talks about the concealed rebel in the woman wearing “stretchy skirts” and “high heels”. Both interviewees also addressed very similar questions about gender relations; however, Cienfuegos’ last comment “We are not forced, or do we look upset to you?” is drawing attention to something else. She is contesting government accusations about sexual and reproductive violence against women in the FARC that populated the news after the unsuccessful peace negotiations in El Caguán.

The failure of the peace dialogues was followed by an intense military campaign against the FARC that included aggressive intelligence operations (Beltrán, 2013; Quiroga,

³ “En la guerrilla no hay esa connotación de que es mi mujer, o es mi marido, no hay esa carga patriarcal que existe afuera, donde la mujer es la que lava, cocina, plancha. Somos más del 40 % dentro de las FARC, jóvenes, bonitas, con perspectivas políticas, con un país en la cabeza, ¿cómo nos vamos a dejar agredir de los hombres a estas alturas, no estamos obligadas, o usted nos ve con cara de amargadas?”

2010) that aimed not only to unveil the military strategies of this guerrilla army, but also the intimate life of its members. Information from intercepted radio conversations between commanders, intrauterine devices discovered in the autopsies of female guerrillas, and the testimonies about forced abortion from former combatants who deserted the group, revealed that female fighters' reproductive behavior was strictly regulated. The government alleged that reproductive practices in the FARC were routine forms of sexual violence against combatant women.

Since the 2000, when the peace dialogues in El Caguán faltered, the national press published horrific stories of abortions as well as heroic testimonies of women who fled their squads to become mothers. The government used the symbolism of female victimhood for propaganda against the FARC, and nostalgic feelings about motherhood for counter-insurgency campaigns to encourage female fighters to demobilize (Fattal, 2018). Women in the FARC, however, were a military target just like men. Before negotiations in Cuba, their voices appeared through fragmented media narratives that portrayed them either as victims to be rescued or as wanted terrorists.

In the peace negotiations in Havana, female leaders of the FARC publicly responded to the government allegations. As part of a sub-commission on gender created for the negotiations, they argued that this guerrilla movement had always guaranteed women's right to decide whether they wanted to be mothers or not. They declared that combatant women are revolutionary subjects who fight for a better society and not victims of their male comrades. Subsequently, the political party of the FARC created after the peace agreement stated that they would continue defending the legalization of abortion in

Colombia where it is restricted to only three cases: health risks for the woman; severe fetus malformation; and rape, incest, or forced insemination.

While negotiations were concluding, the press replaced the atrocious stories of forced abortions with romantic images of guerrilla women in their camouflage carrying their babies to the disarmament areas, putting aside their rifles to take care of their babies. Those images became a symbol of the peace process that ex-combatant women also problematized. Once again, the press was erasing their political identity by assuming that being able to be mothers was their main victory after war. Nonetheless, beyond the stories of the “Baby Boom” in the FARC as a happy restitution of gender roles, motherhood was not a novelty for *farianas* (women in the FARC). The census of the FARC in 2017 reports that 54% of combatants had at least one child. Although some of them had their children before joining the group, many female fighters hid their pregnancies or convinced their commanders to allow them to have their babies while in the group. Many of these women were persecuted by their enemies when they left the guerrilla to give birth, and those who looked for help in hospitals ran the risk that their babies could be taken away from them and sent away for adoption. In addition, women had to leave their children with other families and face multiple difficulties to recover them after demobilization.

I was like most Colombians, in that the mass media shaped my idea of guerrilla women. The journalists’ sexualized descriptions as their only way to make sense of the existence of guerrilla women certainly irritated me, but I was also intrigued by the women’s presence in the peace negotiations in Cuba. I grew up in a small city at the center of Colombia listening to the stories of brutal men and victimized “girls” in the FARC who were sexually abused and not allowed to reproduce. Seeing them in a diplomatic setting

next to the usual male faces of the FARC, negotiating the end of one of the longest wars of contemporary history, disrupted my beliefs about gender configurations in the armed conflict. And it was not only the mainstream media that excluded female fighters from discourses of war; in pacifist feminist environments during Havana's negotiations it was common to hear "if men made war, women will make peace." "Do we look upset to you?" asks Cienfuegos, and I wondered if we even looked at them.

As a feminist, I also dealt with the political consequences of stories of reproductive violence in this armed organization when it came to advocating for the right to abortion. Anti-abortion movements have used the rhetoric of peace to defend the life of fetuses, stating that in a country in which a long history of armed conflicts have trivialized death, human life should be defended at every stage (Viveros-Vigoya, 1999). Yet conservatives have traditionally supported military operations against insurgent groups regardless of the presence of minors among them. With the stories of forced abortion in the FARC, they started to suggest that liberalizing abortion would lead to legalizing forced abortions, reinforcing a subtle connection between abortion and war. In order to make clear our condemnation of forced abortions, it was necessary to strengthen the argument of choice. Abortion should be defended as long as it is a woman's decision.

The peace negotiations opened a window for me to see women in the FARC and to listen to the stories of those represented as frustrated mothers who were forced to abort when abortion was denied for most Colombian women. As a result of listening to these women, the pro-choice approach revealed important limitations. It overlooked the history of oppression of women from marginalized communities who became part of armed groups, by reducing their reproductive experiences to individual decisions rather than

acknowledging the multitude of forces that conspire to prevent or force motherhood for some group of women. More importantly, the pro-choice approach offers few opportunities to understand the conditions in which women can or cannot be mothers.

In this regard, I found in the framework of reproductive justice possibilities not only to understand the complexity of reproductive experiences of ex-combatant women, but also to offer my humble support in their effort to have reproductive experiences in a safe and dignified context in civilian life. The term ‘reproductive justice’ was coined in 1994 by Black feminists as a contribution to critical feminist theory and a praxis through intersectionality. It recognizes intersectional oppressions that threaten Black women’s reproductive rights and goes beyond the debate on the right of abortion by articulating social justice at the core of reproductive rights (L. J. Ross & Solinger, 2017). Accordingly, the framework of reproductive justice interconnects three main principles: “(1) the right to have a child under the conditions of one’s choosing; (2) the right not to have a child using birth control, abortion, or abstinence; and (3) the right to parent children in safe and healthy environments free from violence by individuals or the state” (L. J. Ross, 2017, p. 290).

This framework amplified for me the scope of analysis of reproductive politics in the armed conflict by providing political elements to include the history of the oppression of women from marginalized communities who became part of armed groups. On the other hand, it extended my understanding of reproductive violence to take into consideration experiences such as ex-combatant women looking for their children who were placed for adoption by the state because they were the children of guerrilla parents, women who are parenting in the midst of war, and women who are trying to protect their children from the stigma of having an ex-combatant mother. Those experiences are not about decision-

making processes but about everyday life in disenfranchised communities. To explore what reproduction means for the military and political projects of war and peace, I also integrate into my analysis the concept of reproductive governance as “mechanisms through which different historical configurations of actors [...] use legislative controls, economic inducements, moral injunctions, direct coercion, and ethical incitements to produce, monitor, and control reproductive behaviors and population practices” (Morgan & Roberts, 2012a, p. 243). This concept allows me to understand how reproductive politics produced women as soldiers, defined the moral scenario for peace negotiations, and oriented ex-combatant women’s agenda in the aftermath of war.

This dissertation complicates the narratives of victims, heroes, and perpetrators by exploring the reproductive experiences of ex-combatant women, both those who demobilized individually before the peace agreement as part of the government’s counter-insurgency campaign and those who transitioned to civilian life as a result of the agreement. Through archival and ethnographic research, I reconstruct the history of reproductive practices in the FARC, the public debates about these practices, the implications for combatant women, and their consequences in the transition to civilian life.

Methods

This research was conducted in two sites of Caquetá: Florencia—the main town of this state—and Agua Bonita, a reincorporation area for ex-combatants who demobilized as a result of the 2016 peace agreement. Caquetá is located in the southwest of Colombia in a region that spans the Andean mountains and the Amazonian plains. This was an indigenous territory occupied by Andaquíes, Uitotos, Koreguajes, Macaguajes, Tamas, and Carijonas, among other communities. But since the mid-twentieth century it was rapidly occupied by

mestizo families fleeing from bipartisan political violence in the center of the country and encouraged by a government project to populate this area that was considered “wastelands.” However, the government never fulfilled the promise of “rural development,” and the lack of electrification, infrastructure, hospitals, schools, and support for agricultural production left the area vulnerable for the configuration of insurgent organizations that ruled the territory starting in the 1970s (Ciro Rodríguez, 2016; Valencia, 1998). Like in other conflict zones of the country, the dispute for territorial control, land property, natural resources, and drug traffic led to a bloody war that involved the military, insurgent groups and paramilitary forces, which have traditionally supported the military. Caquetá was also the setting for the failed peace dialogues between 1998 and 2002 and, therefore, the epicenter for the security policies implemented afterward.

During the most intense military operations between 2002 and 2016, a large population of combatants demobilized as part of an individual reintegration program coordinated by the National Council for Reincorporation and Normalization (ARN); 1,240 of them (22% women) stayed in Florencia (ARN, 2021). Ex-combatants who demobilized collectively (or as they prefer to call it, mobilized toward democracy) because of the 2016 peace agreement settled in twenty-five areas of the country and joined a program for collective reincorporation also managed by ARN. Two of those villages are in Caquetá.

This dissertation is informed by four years of work from 2017 to 2021, which included informal conversing, building friendships, working with grassroots communities, and witnessing the implementation of the peace agreement in Caquetá. As a more formal component of the research process, I also conducted a multi-sited ethnography with ex-combatant women in the individual reintegration program in Florencia and ex-combatant

women in the reincorporation program in Agua Bonita. I interviewed thirty ex-combatants in the individual reintegration program in Florencia, six ARN officials in charge of both individual reintegration and collective reincorporation programs, one representative of the Group for Humanitarian Support to the Demobilized (GAHD), two representatives of the High Commissioner for Peace (OACP), two employees of the state institution in charge of family reunification (ICBF), and four United Nation Officials in charge of the project "Sexual and Reproductive Health for Peace." Due to the political and security conditions in Agua Bonita, I did not conduct formal interviews with ex-combatants but visited the area regularly and worked for several community projects for reincorporation. I also facilitated one digital storytelling and one creative writing workshop with ex-combatants who wanted to write a story for their children. They created five videos about their most important moments as mothers and wrote seven stories about war and peace for their children. These stories were compiled in a children's book.

In addition, I conducted archival research to reconstruct the public debate on reproductive policies in the FARC. I collected and coded 253 reports from two national newspapers and one newsmagazine to analyze how the debate on forced abortion shaped the positions of the government, female leaders of the FARC, and international human rights organizations supporting the peace agreement. I also attended eight events in Caquetá and Bogotá about women in the peace process, where I had the chance to listen to and talk to representatives from the government, FARC, and NGOs to complement my archival data.

Chapters

I started my journey to Caquetá with my friend Itza. We met at a peace event at a university in the center of the country and kept in touch. After several cups of coffee, many laughs and encounters at other peace events, she told me that she had been in the FARC for more than ten years. Although it was not the first time I met an ex-combatant, it was the first time I met her as something else, in this case a student, before knowing about her past. Like other times when a guerrilla person stopped being a caricature in the press and became a human face, we talked and cried for hours. Since then, she insisted we should travel together to Caquetá where the most significant events of her life had taken place.

I call her Itza, but when I met her at the peace event, she introduced herself as María, a victim of the armed conflict. There, we participated in an experimental activity where we had to perform scenes that described our feelings about the armed conflict. I represented my constant fear and anxiety when I was a child. Itza acted out the moment she found out the military had assassinated her husband. She portrayed herself as a housewife doing the laundry when she heard the rumbling noise of helicopters over her head. She pointed up and covered her ears as a sign of despair. Then she ran and knelt down, as she was looking at her husband agonizing on the ground. Although she was not a housewife but a guerrilla woman trying to save her partner's life, in her performance she picked certain images, such as doing laundry, that concealed her identity as a former female fighter.

When I commented about the event with other participants, I realized that some of them called her Julia. The next time we saw each other, I asked her what name she liked better, María or Julia, and she responded "Itza," her indigenous name. She comes from two indigenous families from the south of the country that never agreed with her participation

in the guerrilla movement. Using this name, she told me, was a way to repair her indigenous identity in civilian life. Now she proudly represents her families as a member of several indigenous organizations.

We finally traveled together to Caquetá where another side of her was revealed to me. There, her acquaintances called her Karen and her friends Lisa. The initial confusion with the other three names prepared me to recognize that every time she was called a different name, another dimension of her life was exposed. Sometimes they intersected, sometimes one covered another, but in any case, she seemed comfortable navigating the multiple layers of her identity. María was the person allowed to express sorrow about her death partner without the stigma of having been a guerrilla woman. Julia was the student full of professional ambitions in the civilian life. Itza was the indigenous woman joining an ancestral struggle for justice this time without weapons. And Karen and Lisa told her story as the warrior who survived countless battles, the nurse who healed many of her comrades in the fragile margins of life, the guerrilla member who had to make difficult decision between her individual feelings and the principles of her army, and the woman who was forced to terminate a wanted pregnancy.

I tell this story to introduce my chapters because this was not the only time I had to learn about different names, understand what name I should use according to the time and place I had met a person, and be discrete about names I heard but should not repeat. It happened with most ex-combatant women I got close to and the women who appear in the lines of this dissertation. For their and my personal safety, I use pseudonyms for all their names although I believe that some women never revealed their real names to me. Like their shifting identities, all the chapters tell the stories of women's multiple transitions as

combatants and ex-combatants navigating the dark shadows of political violence in Colombia.

In Chapter One, I reconstruct the genealogy of reproductive politics in the FARC from its beginnings as a grassroots guerrilla movement in the 1960s, through its transformation into an army in the 1990s, to its reincorporation to civilian life in 2017. In more than fifty years of internal armed conflict, mechanisms to govern women's reproductive behavior and women's responses emerged in the violent tensions between the state and the insurgency. These mechanisms were central for the participation of women as combatants and therefore the consolidation of the FARC as one of the largest and oldest guerrilla armies in Latin America.

FARC reproductive practices became a critical topic of debate during peace negotiations between the FARC and the Colombian government. Chapter Two addresses these debates and studies how they defined the positions of different parties regarding the peace agreement. I identify four coexisting articulations of discourses (Slack, 2016) about farianas' reproductive lives that condense rationalities and sentiments about the agreement: the revolutionary woman who fights for women's rights, the female perpetrator, the heroic mother who vindicates the name of the FARC through the sacred symbols of motherhood, and the victim of gender based violence in search of recognition. This chapter discusses the political effects of these narratives for both the peace agreement and guerrilla women's struggles. Chapter Three takes a step beyond public discourses to analyze the intersections between maternal and military experiences. By weaving Cielo's story with conversations with other ex-combatants and civilians, I explore the emotional and bodily experience of

being a mother in the midst of war, the conditions of birth, the role of othermothers to take care of guerrilla children, and the separation between combatant mothers and their children.

Chapters Four and Five explore the challenges of reintegrating to civilian life before and after the 2016 peace agreement. In Chapter Four, I analyze the processes of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) of ex-combatant mothers in the individual reintegration program in Florencia, the capital city of Caquetá, who demobilized before the agreement. I pay attention to the common efforts of ex-combatants and reintegration professionals to deal with social inequality and gender-based violence in the aftermath of war under the frame of the individualizing logic of the reintegration program. In Chapter Five, I focus on the collective reincorporation program that resulted from the peace agreement. I discuss how ex-combatant women in Agua Bonita, a rural village in Caquetá, have taken advantage of the national and international networks that support the social, political, and economic transitions of ex-combatants as part of a collective effort. In this context, ex-combatant women who had children or brought their children to live with them in the peace villages are part of a collective project of mothering future generations that involves fathers, all members of the village, and institutions that support the agreement. Although the situation of the peace agreement in Colombia is still unfolding and its future is uncertain, this village has established its own dynamics to persist as a peace village.

I expose myself as a working class, white-mestiza, Colombian woman throughout this dissertation acknowledging how my biography and positionality influence my research. I share my own memories and family stories about the armed conflict and the way I relate to my participants. However, not only my social positions influenced my

research questions and analysis, the shifting positionalities of my participants also shaped the knowledge production of this dissertation. In England’s words, “fieldwork is a dialogical process which is structured by the researcher and the participants” (England, 1994, p. 80). Accordingly, each chapter shows different layers of my involvement as a researcher, an ethnographer, a friend, and an activist that emerge in relation to my participants as warriors, ex-combatants, victims, and peace activists.



Picture 01. Map of Caquetá

CHAPTER 1

THE POLITICS OF REPRODUCTION IN THE REVOLUTIONARY ARMED FORCES OF COLOMBIA

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) was constituted in 1964 by a group of peasant families resisting the government's anticommunist policies. It became the largest and oldest insurgent army in Latin America until its demobilization in 2016. A remarkable characteristic of this group was the high number of female combatants. Although there were women involved from the beginning, it is after the escalation of the armed conflict in the 1990s that women were massively enrolled as part of a militaristic, highly hierarchical, and self-contained scheme (Gutiérrez Sanín & Carranza Franco, 2017). Women reached up to 30% of the fighting force according to the state army intelligence reports (Gutiérrez Sanín, 2008) and 40% according to FARC's self-reports (Castrillón, 2015). Since the 1970s, the emergence of other guerrilla groups in Latin America that incorporated female fighters encouraged women in *farianas* to demand the same rights and duties as their male comrades, and to equally redistribute both military and domestic tasks between men and women. This redefinition of gender roles placed reproductive policies as a central issue for the transformation of women into combatants and political leaders. When the national government was still negotiating family planning with the Catholic Church and legal abortion was not even discussed, guerrilla women advocated for access to contraception and abortion within the revolutionary forces.

What had been a victory for *farianas*, however, turned into one of the most important forms of violence against women in the group. With the upsurge of violence in the 1990s, reproductive policies were made more severe in order to keep female soldiers

suitable for combat and limit affective relationships outside the group. These policies restricted pregnancies by making contraception compulsory and forcing some pregnant women to abort. Although not all abortions were forced, the testimonies of ex-combatant women confirmed that when contraception failed, during the most intense times of the armed conflict, the order was for them to abort or send the baby to a relative or a surrogate family in the area.

This chapter explores the history of women's participation in the FARC, drawing attention to how governing women's reproductive behavior in this guerrilla movement made possible women's participation as combatants. I argue that reproductive policies were a central part of the political and military transformation of the FARC from a grassroots guerrilla movement to a revolutionary army. Thereby, I draw on the concept of reproductive governance that Morgan and Roberts (2012b) propose and define as "mechanisms through which different historical configurations of actors [...] use legislative controls, economic inducements, moral injunctions, direct coercion, and ethical incitements to produce, monitor, and control reproductive behaviors and population practices" (p. 243).

This concept is shaped by the Foucauldian idea of biopower, which refers to mechanisms of government—discourses, strategies, techniques and knowledges—deployed to regulate life. Foucault asserts that since the eighteenth century Western societies shifted from monarchical states whose power relied on their faculty to decide who could live and who must die to liberal states where power is based on the governance of the body and life (Foucault, 1981, 2003). This power is deployed in two main ways: disciplining individual bodies to create docile, productive and integrated subjects, and

disciplining species body through the control of fertility, mortality, and health (Foucault, 1981). However, the frame of biopower seems to be insufficient to account for the violence in the mechanisms to govern combatants' reproductive behavior because the regulation of death, as well as the regulation of life, was a central part of the process. Reproductive policies aimed to produce women as combatants. Not having children allowed women to remain active in the armed group. And by producing women as combatants, reproductive policies were part of a military discipline that destined women to stay in war and put their life at stake on a daily basis.

In this sense, I use the notion of reproductive governance in the context of Colombian war taking into consideration authors from the global south who argue that, in the wars of the globalization era, bodies and populations are governed through the power of death, which they call necropolitics (Estévez, 2018; Gržinić, 2010; Mbembe, 2003). The dispute for territorial control between the state and insurgent forces produces a wide variety of military mechanisms that expose populations to a permanent status of "living dead." These mechanisms produce subjects for combat, forms of family and community relationships, and meanings of life and death. Biopolitics, however, remains as a form of power in these contexts deployed to manage subjects and populations. Hence, they address how regulation of life and regulation of death coexist or even mutually constitute each other (Estévez, 2018).

Drawing on archival research of two Colombian national newspapers and one news magazine (El Espectador, El Tiempo, and Semana), autobiographies of FARC members, and ethnographic interviews with thirty ex-combatants, this chapter tells the history of the FARC by reconstructing the genealogy of its reproductive policies. To that end, I follow

the Guerrilla National Conferences, which were the events where the FARC established its statutes, norms, and strategic plans. From 1964 to 2016, the FARC held ten conferences that marked its main transformations. Following the chronological order of the Conferences, I explore the reproductive ideologies of the FARC through its military and political transformations during 52 years of armed conflict⁴.

1.1 The Mothers of Revolution

The guerrilla groups in Colombia appeared in a context of historical exclusion of marginalized and racialized communities from the dominant political parties. Although the origins of guerrilla groups are diverse, the time known as “La Violencia” (1948-1959) reflects the political landscape where liberal and communist guerrillas emerged.⁵ “La Violencia” was a time of intense hostility between the liberal and the conservative political party, beginning with the assassination of the popular politician Jorge Eliecer Gaitán on April 9th, 1948. Gaitán was a member of the liberal party who gained massive support through his positions condemning traditional elites. His eloquent speeches denounced the exploitation of peasants and working-class communities and challenged the traditional narratives of liberals versus conservatives by talking about inequality, social class, and land dispossession. This is well illustrated in one of his speeches from 1946 when he was running for president⁶: “What is the difference between a child of a liberal peasant and a

⁴ The periods described in this chapter not only follow my archival and ethnographic findings about reproductive policies in war, but also the insights from my family’s narratives about our own stories of violence and grief in Colombia. In the footnotes, I will present excerpts of some of those stories to share with the reader the personal exploration that this research entails.

⁵ Uribe Alarcón states that La Violencia is the midwife of the contemporary history of Colombia and remains in the collective unconscious and the artistic creations of the last 50 years. (Uribe Alarcón, 2015, p.21)

⁶ I listened to this audio in an exhibition about Gaitán’s life at the Luis Ángel Arango Library in Bogotá in 2007 when I was still in college.

child of a conservative peasant? None! They are both malnourished, helpless, and abandoned to the cruelty of the chieftains of the elections who make life in rural areas impossible”⁷.

He was embracing the spirit of emerging socialist revolutions in Latin America but, most importantly, he was talking to the mass of landless indigenous, peasants, and workers who had never been represented by the traditional parties. His assassination led to a ten-year civil war between conservative armed groups, liberal guerrillas (called “limpios” - the clean), and communist guerrillas (called “comuneros”-the common).⁸

Liberal guerrillas surrendered to the liberal military government of Gustavo Rojas Pinilla (1953-1957), while communist guerrillas kept organizing in the rural areas and resisting anticommunist security policies implemented in Colombia and other countries of Latin America during the Cold War (Olave, 2013). Both a populist military government

⁷ ¿Qué diferencia hay entre el hijo de un campesino conservador y el hijo de un campesino liberal? Ninguna! ambos desnutridos, desamparados, entregados a la persecución de los caciques electoreros que hacen imposible la vida en el campo y las veredas

⁸ All Colombian families have a story of that day. At that time, my grandfather, a fervent liberal, was getting his medical education in Bogotá. In a letter to his parents, he told them that after learning about Gaitán’s murder, he ran out to the street to join the revolt of people running, crying, and screaming “Long live the liberal party!” and “Revolution, revolution!” The protest turned into violent chaos, leaving hundreds of people injured. People dismembered the body of the killer, who was allegedly working for the conservative party, while the monuments and buildings downtown burned in flames. My grandfather decided to take some of the wounded to a hospital where, coincidentally, the body of Jorge Eliecer Gaitán was being prepared for an autopsy. My grandfather wrote: “In a large room, surrounded by meritorious people, lay a fully covered corpse; someone unveiled its face and I had the bitter shock of finding myself before the inert body of our Great Gaitán. [...] at eleven pm, I came back home dressed in a student coat wet with the blood of the liberal leader. On my way, I ran into more than 30 wounded people and at least ten dead bodies lying on the sidewalks. The rest of the night went by in the middle of the worst restiveness. The most abominable and hateful demonstrations of popular wildness occurred with no interruptions.”

My grandma used to tell me that everyone adored Gaitán because he “helped the poor.” She remembers when the news announced his death on the radio. Her father left work hurriedly to take all his children home, where his wife broke into tears, mourning the departure of the man she had hoped would be the first president to guarantee women the right to vote. Gaitán was an active defender of women’s economic and political rights and had strong support from female workers, peasant women, and suffragist movements. My grandma says that after that day they could no longer visit their relatives in other towns. It was dangerous to travel, and they ran the risk of finding decapitated people on the road, hanged on the trees, or thrown in pieces in the middle of towns.

and the expansion of communist guerrillas threatened the stability of the two traditional parties, leading them to make a pact to rotate power. During sixteen years, conservatives and liberals alternated presidential terms every four years, excluding from representative democracy the communist party, which Rojas Pinilla had declared illegal (Duque Daza, 2012). In addition, women's movements were engulfed by this political experiment with minimal political representation and limited autonomy (Luna, L. G., & Villarreal, 1994; L. Luna, 2001). It is in this context of double exclusion that women participated in the constitution of guerrilla movements.

In this section, I reconstruct women's participation during these initial times through the autobiographies of three male FARC founders: Jacobo Arenas (1966), Ciro Trujillo (1974), and Jaime Guaraca (2017). Although women were the ones who taught children and other guerrilla members how to read and write, there are no published diaries or autobiographies by women. I follow the stories of female comrades and the "female committee" that interrupt the male-centered narratives of these autobiographies, revealing women's contributions to the movement through their political and communal work.

Initially, guerrilla movements consisted of groups of families that were constantly moving from one place to another, both to look for supporters and to protect themselves from military attacks. One of these groups comprised around four hundred families and settled in the south of Tolima, a department located in the Middle West of the country with a long history of indigenous resistance. This place, known as El Davis, reunited communist and liberal guerrilla groups, the former organized by Manuel Marulanda, Isauro Yosa, and Charro Negro. However, these two guerrilla groups ended in a confrontation and divided. In 1953, Manuel Marulanda formed a clandestine mobile command of 26 men and four

women and, after eleven years of government military assaults, this command became a Marxist-Leninist guerrilla force named “South Bloc” with seven other comrades, including two women, Judith Grisales and Myriam Narváez. Two years later they changed the name to Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and decided to initiate an offensive military strategy. The constitution of the South Bloc took place in the First Conference in 1964 and the adoption of the new name in the Second Conference in 1966.

Like other peasant-based movements, the beginnings of the FARC embraced a revolutionary endeavor attached to its community roots, not the army separated from civil society that it became later. According to the three autobiographies, combatants operated within the social structures of their communities. The movement kept growing and they all participated with their families. Everyone had to contribute to the movement:

[...] Under our protection, 220 families got together. Only men who could perform well with a weapon, even if they were under 15, and voluntary women performed military activities [...] In this environment, we continued with our agrarian activities because, despite everything, we wanted to keep working the land (Trujillo, 1974, pp. 6–7).⁹

Family structures preserved a sexual division of labor for the revolutionary movement, where women and men had different but complementary tasks. Some of the men’s responsibilities were growing food, keeping the settlement in good conditions, building basic dwellings for incoming families, and collecting materials to make shoes and other appliances. Although some women participated in military tasks, they were mainly

⁹[...] bajo nuestra protección, 220 familias de las cuales solo desarrollaban actividades militares los varones que pudieran desempeñarse con un arma, aunque tuvieran menos de 15 años y las mujeres que voluntariamente quisieran. [...] Dentro de ese ambiente desplegábamos nuestras actividades agrícolas, pues, pese a todo, queríamos seguir laborando la tierra (Trujillo, 1974, pp. 6–7).

assigned to men. Men also had a workshop to build and repair guns as well as explosive devices. Children from ten to fourteen had their own group called the Pioneers' Committee, where they learned how to read and write, took theater classes, and received instructions about basic military tactics for self-defense (Guaraca, 2017).

There was a female committee with at least four hundred women with representatives who organized and distributed women's work. Among their tasks were: looking for food and provisions; doing laundry, ironing, and, sewing; cooking, although this was not an exclusively female activity; taking care of children and instructing them about the revolution; teaching other members how to read and write; keeping records of all members of the group; and, occasionally, undertaking military tasks (Molano, 2016a). There was also a group of women trained in first aid named Red Cross. They inspected the hygiene and order of each shelter, took care of the wounded, provided medication and traditional remedies, and conducted preventive and therapeutic actions for the most prevalent diseases such as typhoid, dropsy, malaria, and venereal diseases (Alape, 1989; Moreno Patiño, 2019).

One of the main challenges of these years was maintaining good health conditions. Although military confrontations were not as common as they became in the following decades, infectious diseases, malnutrition, sunburns, and wounds were commonplace. Commanders also suspected that chemical warfare was part of the counter-insurgency strategies of the Colombian and the American government against them (Arenas, 1972).¹⁰ Hence, a health committee was one of the first policies of the organization. They carried a

¹⁰ Although official reports denied chemical warfare, guerrilla fighters denounced attacks with napalm (a highly flammable jelly). Some also said that after the attacks people got sick with smallpox and others described that planes dropped bacteria in little glass jars that polluted the rivers and the forest after breaking against the ground (Olave, 2013).

handbook of medicine and a first aid kit, preserved and labeled drugs, and took care of the sick. Every morning, those trained as nurses had to check on the ill and provide medications:

How important it is to have medicines in an armed movement and how important it is to have someone who knows them and knows how to use them! A handbook of medicine is very helpful. We have to take care of the handbooks we own and commission a comrade of the clinic and health committee to take responsibility for them (Arenas, 1972, p. 46).¹¹

With time, the FARC developed a sophisticated battlefield medicine that combined biomedical knowledge and practices with medical traditions from campesino, afro, and indigenous communities. Their medical knowledge and infrastructure played a fundamental role not only in preserving the life of combatants but also in maintaining relationships of solidarity in the territories where they operated. They received help from communities to take care of guerrilla members, and in return provided health services to civilians when they did not receive medical care from the official healthcare system. Later, the health committee and the subsequent groups that met this function became a substantial part of the group. One out of three combatants I met had been trained as nurses, bacteriologists¹², or physicians.

The autobiographies also show that women carved out a political space for the discussion of women's oppression as part of the revolutionary project of the FARC, with the support of some male comrades, and despite the opposition of others who feared that their wives and daughters would abandon their domestic chores. In *Diary of Marquetalia*

¹¹ ¡Qué importante son las medicinas en los movimientos armados; y qué importante es quien las conozca y maneje bien! El Vademécum es muy útil. Los que tenemos hay que cuidarlos y destacar un compañero del equipo de clínica y sanidad para que responda por ellos (Arenas, 1972, p. 46).

¹² In Colombia bacteriologists are health professionals trained to conduct lab tests.

Resistance, Jacobo Arenas (1972) describes an episode where women discussed their “triple slavery” and talks about the “beauty” of women’s reaction against men who opposed the female committee. He states, “now they discuss and assert their rights before their husbands and companions” (Arenas, 1972, p. 28). The “triple slavery” described women’s oppression based on gender inequality, lack of education, and work conditions. This idea draws inspiration from female workers’ movements in Europe in the early 20th century, such as the anarchist movement *Mujeres Libres* (Free Women) in Spain (Aiello Cabrero, 2012; Nash & Tavera García, 2003) that influenced revolutionary women in Latin America. The discussion of women’s oppression reveals that since the early beginnings of the movement revolutionary women were recognizing the intersectional and multidimensional conditions of oppression that put them in a challenging role.

The role of motherhood in relation to these forms of oppression is not mentioned in any of the autobiographies or the public archives of the FARC. However, two of the authors (Arenas, 1972; Guaraca, 2017) and the testimony of a woman who participated in El Davis (Guzmán, 1968) suggest that motherhood was a fundamental part of the political mission of guerrilla women. Giving birth to a new generation, teaching children about the revolution, and taking care of both their children and the children of those who died were fundamental contributions to the collective project of the FARC. Puna, a woman cited by Guzmán (1968), narrates the role of motherhood as follows:

We were a lot of women, some with seven and even ten children. Some children of our womb; and others were orphans we rescued and took care of them as our children. And to be honest, we made no distinction, we had no preference. What my child ate, all ate. (Guzmán, 1968, p. 172)

Motherhood either as a form of oppression or emancipation is always political and a target of political violence. Among the abundant evidence of killings, torture, and sexual violence against women during La Violencia (Uribe Alarcón, 2015), several testimonies describe special cruelty against pregnant women of the opposite party. After being assassinated, their bellies were cut, and their fetus replaced by stones or animals (L. Luna, 2001; Uribe, 2019). For revolutionary women, the burden of motherhood is not only about the unequal distribution of reproductive labor, but also about the risk of what they represent for their enemies. Motherhood is always a potential future in the hands of women.



Picture 02. “Comrade Myriam Narváez with her two children and a group of comrades,” 1965. Jaime Guaraca (2017)

1.2 Contraception Made us Combatants

After a military defeat, the third conference of the FARC in 1969 aimed to reconstitute the movement, restructure their military strategy, and strengthen their political blueprint. It was an agitated time in Latin America in which revolutionary armed forces

were organizing in at least seventeen countries of the region as a response to dictatorial or authoritarian governments that were receiving the support of the US in the context of the Cold War. Most of these movements were inspired by the Cuban revolution as well as other political events such as May 1968 in France and the Civil Rights movement in the US (Grabe Loenwenherz, 2015). Women were involved in many of these movements, which entailed a redefinition of gender roles in the political and military arena. This section discusses how sexuality and reproduction became part of the debate on women's participation in revolutionary movements as combatants.

The three FARC conferences that took place between 1970 and 1978 were instrumental in redefining the character of the FARC as a military organization. They created a structure based on one central command and several fronts, designed plans to expand to other areas of the country, and consolidated a military strategy. This reconfiguration occurred along with one of the main transformations in the fighting force: the official recognition of women as combatants with the same duties and rights as men, in 1970. This recognition gradually modified the structure of the FARC from a family-based movement to a military organization, attracting women interested in joining as independent combatants with possibilities of occupying leading positions. As Sandra Ramírez, a guerrilla woman who joined the FARC in the 1980s, states:

It caught my attention that there were women among them [the FARC]. But there was one in particular who shocked me. Her name is Eliana; she is still alive. At that time, she was about twenty-seven or twenty-eight years old. I was impressed to see her giving orders, how she related to other combatants, and how they obeyed her. On the third or fourth visit [to my house], this inspired me to ask them why she gave them orders and what women did in the guerrillas. It was men who explained to me because I was afraid to approach her. [I assumed that] If men obeyed her, it was because she had a strong character. They explained to me what guerrilla

women did and what I would do if I went with them. At that moment, I decided to say, “I want to go with you.” (Sandra Ramírez in: Millan, 2019, p.26)¹³



Picture 03: “Sandra Ramírez on the left, with a M1 rifle in her first years in the FARC-EP.” Source: FARC-Anncol Archive

Sandra Ramírez lived in a rural area in the northeast of the country where the FARC had recently been exploring. In another interview, she says that one of the things that enticed her to join the group was the idea of not having to ask a future husband for permission to do things like her mother used to do. In other words, for her the FARC was a vehicle for personal liberty and women’s liberation. She joined the 12th Front in 1982 at the age of 16 years old. There, she trained as a nurse and used her knowledge of typing, shorthand, and accounting to work closely with the FARC leaders, including the man who would be her partner for 24 years, Manuel Marulanda.

¹³ Me llamó la atención que entre ellos había mujeres. Pero hubo una, en particular, que me sorprendió. Se llama Eliana; ella todavía está viva. En ese momento, tenía unos veintisiete o veintiocho años. Me impresionó verla dar órdenes, cómo se relacionaba con otros combatientes y cómo la obedecían. En la tercera o cuarta visita, eso me motivó a preguntarles por qué les daba órdenes y qué hacían las mujeres en la guerrilla. Fueron los hombres quienes me explicaron porque tenía miedo de acercarme a ella. Si los hombres la obedecían, era porque tenía un carácter fuerte. Me explicaron qué hacían las guerrilleras y qué haría yo si iba con ellas. En ese momento, decidí decir: “Me quiero ir con ustedes.” (Sandra Ramírez in: Millan, 2019, p.26).

Although more women joined the organization, during the first years of the transformation into an army they were still mainly in charge of administrative tasks, and their participation in military activities was not usually part of their primary responsibilities. Olga Marín, who joined the FARC in 1981, narrates that single women who entered as independent combatants began to demand military duties. When participating in combat, leading troops, standing guard, and receiving military training acquired a higher status in the organization, women demanded to be part of the new strategy.

In the first guerrilla unit where I was, we had a situation. The five women, six with me, began to protest because they were not allowed to stand guard at the front line. Only the two oldest women did it. And why didn't they let us? The commander said: "Because women don't know ballistics." [...] That is when I said, "I do know ballistics." "No," said the commander. "Yes. I can teach you ballistics because they taught me," I replied. The truth is that he did not want to let us, women, because, at that time, the conception still was that war was a men's issue and women just decorated the road (p.59). [...] In the FARC, it was traditional that women were the ones who cooked because that is what peasants do. [...] Raúl and I had been together for less than a year, and I said: "You're not going to make me do the laundry and cook. I didn't come to the guerrilla to do that; I ran away precisely from that. If you're going to make me cook, we better separate." We began the relationship with that commitment that I was going to be anything but a housewife (Olga Marín in: Millan, 2019, p.67).¹⁴

¹⁴ En la primera unidad guerrilla en la que estuve tuvimos una situación. Las cinco mujeres, seis conmigo, comenzaron a protestar porque no se les permitía hacer guardia en la línea del frente. Solo las dos mujeres mayores lo hacían. ¿Y por qué no nos dejaban? El comandante decía: "Porque las mujeres no saben balística". [...] Fue entonces cuando dije: "Yo sé balística". "No," dijo el comandante. "Sí. Puedo enseñar balística porque ellos me enseñaron", le contesté. Lo cierto es que no quiso dejarnos a nosotras porque, en ese momento, la concepción todavía era que la guerra era un asunto de hombres y las mujeres simplemente decoraban el camino (p.59). [...] En las FARC era tradicional que las mujeres fueran las que cocinaran porque eso es lo que hacen los campesinos. [...] Raúl y yo llevábamos menos de un año juntos y le dije: "No me va a hacer lavar la ropa ni a cocinar. Yo no vine a la guerrilla para hacer eso; Me escapé precisamente de eso. Si va a hacerme cocinar, será mejor que nos separemos". Empezamos la relación con ese compromiso de que iba a ser cualquier cosa menos ama de casa. (Olga Marín in: Millan, 2019, p.67)

As women started to occupy military positions, they also asked for equal redistribution of labor between men and women to cook, clean, do laundry, and take care of the wounded. And their new role as combatants eventually minimized motherhood as one of the main contributions of *farianas*. Both Sandra and Olga had a child in the FARC and decided to leave them with their families to keep participating in the armed movement. According to my interviews, *farianas* also started to advocate for access to contraceptives and the right to abortion along with women in other guerrilla movements in Colombia and Latin America, where the transition from a community-based movement into an army also entailed a transformation in gender norms.

The transition of the FARC into a revolutionary army was part of a transnational transformation in the worldwide New Left and the Revolutionary Left of Latin America. Drawing inspiration from the Cuban Revolution and the Nicaraguan Revolution, leftist movements in Latin America radicalized their anti-imperial and anti-capitalist agenda by looking for a profound political, economic, and cultural change that included gender relations (Martín Álvarez & Rey Tristán, 2018). Women participated as active militants in many of these movements. Wickham-Crowley (1992) reports that the presence of female rebels in Latin America went from 0 to 20% in 1920 to even to 30% in some groups in the 1970s and 1980s, more than in any traditional political party. Several authors have reported that women's enrollment in guerrilla movements in Latin America challenged traditional gender roles, facilitated the conditions for female leadership (Garibay, 2006), opened spaces for women in politics (Wolff, 2011), supported policies for gender equality in education and the job market (López López, 2017), and conferred on women an important

role in the political history of Latin America (Delgado Romero & Fernandez Villanueva, 2011).

Through an egalitarian performance in war, the “revolutionary violence” modified the political and cultural conditions for women’s participation in revolutionary movements by recognizing them as combatants. A leader of the Uruguayan guerrilla movement Tupamaros illustrated this relationship between gender politics and military projects when he said: “a woman is never more equal to a man than when she is behind a 45 pistol” (Cited in: Wolff, 2011, p.21). Guns, one of the main symbols of the revolution, were represented in the propaganda of the guerrilla movements as an extension of a manly impulse towards action. In Wolff’s words: “they were consistently associated with courage, audacity, virility, action, and revolution” (Wolff, 2011, p.14). For women, weapons were a possibility to demonstrate their bravery by operating the ultimate expression of masculine power.

In Colombia, women in M-19, a guerrilla movement founded in 1970 by former members of the FARC, the National Liberation Army (ELN), and the Communist Youth, reacted to the discontent of some of their male comrades who suggested that neither the Soviet Army nor other revolutionary armies had included women as soldiers. Inspired by the Tupamaros’ motto “woman, without you, nothing is possible,” women in M-19 reaffirmed their role as combatants and achieved an ordinance that guaranteed fair conditions for their participation. Consequently, in 1982, the general commander of M-19 mandated the following (Grabe, 2000, pp. 167-168):

1. Promote military and political training among female combatants who should be able to take leading positions to overcome machismo in the group.
2. No discrimination against female combatants. They can be promoted and assigned any task or responsibility.

3. Physical or moral aggression against women is prohibited. No commander can abuse his power to push or blackmail a female combatant to establish romantic relationships or satisfy his personal needs.
4. The only restriction for combatant women is having children while they are in the military force. They have the right to contraception under medical supervision, and, in case of unintended pregnancies, they have the right to a voluntary abortion during the first two months.
5. All combatants have the right to have a private life as long as it does not interfere with our political and military project. All combatants can decide whom they want to live with, marry, not marry, or divorce, as long as they present their reason to the Combatants' Assembly.

An ex-combatant summarized this ordinance in an interview conducted by Beatriz Toro (1994) as: “no to abuse, yes to abortion, yes to birth control, same treatment for men and women, and education for women involved in guerrillas.” Such regulations resemble other actions to demand justice and equality for female militants, like the “Revolutionary Law of Women” approved by the EZLN in April 23 of 1993 (Jimenez Sánchez, 2014). The struggles of guerrilla women also inspired generations of young women in Latin America who saw a political space for them in the revolution.¹⁵

Reproductive politics were a fundamental part of guerrilla women's struggle to reformulate gender norms in the revolutionary armies. This challenged the initial opposition of the Catholic Church and leftist movements to birth control. The Catholic Church accused family planning of being an imposition from the North to destroy Latin American moral values (Medina, 2008). Leftist parties, on the other hand, interpreted “modern” reproductive policies as a US strategy to exterminate Third World populations

¹⁵ My aunt, who went to a public college to study Social Work, joined the Línea Pequín (Pekin line), a hardline Maoist group. “We were very serious about the revolution,” she says. She participated in the urban faction of the movement that would later be known as ELN (National Liberation Army), the oldest guerrilla force in Latin America, which is still active. However, the stories of torture and sexual abuse at the hands of the military against her female friends prevented her from enlisting in the armed factions of the group. My mom was “less serious” about the revolution. She did not join a group, but it was she who told me about M-19 and the hope that some guerrilla movements represented for the country before they “lost their ideals.” That is a popular opinion about guerrilla groups that got involved in narcotraffic and the bloody war of the 90s and 2000s. Yet, she still replies “present and combative” when someone calls her by her name at home.

and weaken the emancipation of these countries. Accordingly, revolutionary movements embraced in the 60s and 70s a form of pronatalist discourse that encouraged women to have and raise children (Martínez, 2018; Sapriza, 2009) as a long-term commitment to the revolution (Oberti, 2010). However, balancing militancy and maternal responsibilities on a daily basis was a double burden for women, especially because taking care of their children was considered an exclusively female duty. Motherhood limited their political participation and eventually excluded them from leadership positions. Furthermore, maternity was also a source of torture. Many women had their pregnancies while they were in prison or in clandestine detention centers, and some of them were forced to abort or to give their children to their persecutors (Oberti, 2010).

In Colombia, guerrilla women's demand for contraception occurred after a national population policy established by a liberal government in 1968 targeting poor and rural women.¹⁶ Similarly to other countries of the Global South, family planning policies in Colombia were introduced to prevent the rapid growth of marginalized populations as a requirement for economic development, not as an opportunity for women's liberation

¹⁶ My grandparents participated in the foundation of Profamilia in my hometown, an institution for providing family planning counseling. My grandfather, a liberal, was contacted by a physician from Bogotá who asked him to create a clinic for women's sexual and reproductive health. Profamilia, like other programs and institutions in Latin America for family planning, received funds from the International Planned Parenthood Federation and United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA). As preparation for this national and regional project, my grandfather was sent in 1970 to Chile for a two-month course to be instructed about the guidelines for the operation of the clinic. Profamilia provided free access to contraceptives, tubal ligation, cervical smear tests, and family planning counseling to low-income women. My grandmother says, however, that Profamilia served low-income women during the day and all kinds of women at night. After office hours, women went to have abortions. They contacted my grandmother, she took them to the clinic where my grandfather performed the procedure, and she took care of them after when it was necessary. She also advised women not to tell their priests even in confession. Although abortion was illegal, it was not the state but the Catholic Church that policed women's reproductive behaviors and punished those who aborted. She depicted this when I asked her if you could go to jail for having an abortion at that time and she replied: "Well, I don't know if you went to jail, but you went to hell." Despite the economic rationality behind family planning programs and the government efforts to convince the Catholic Church that these programs did not have an agenda for sexual liberation, women used these programs to open possibilities to make decisions about their reproductive lives.

(Hartmann, 1995; Necochea López, 2014). Indeed, talking about sexuality as part of family planning was censured in order to gain the support of the Catholic Church (Medina, 2008). Yet, feminists and guerrilla women took advantage of fertility regulation policies to gain reproductive autonomy and push forward the demand for voluntary abortion that in Colombia was partially legalized more than thirty years later in 2006.¹⁷

Nonetheless, the agenda of female combatants was not exactly aligned with feminists. Although struggles for contraception and abortion had common grounds among revolutionary and feminist activists, guerrilla groups distanced themselves from the feminist movement. The dominant ideology of these revolutionary movements remained attached to class struggles and considered women's oppression as a consequence of the capitalist relations of production (Hentz & Veiga, 2011; López López, 2017). It was assumed that once capitalist forms of oppression were defeated, all forms of oppression would be defeated too. Hence, feminism was accused of being an individualistic and bourgeois movement that would undermine class solidarity (Ferguson, 2014). For revolutionary women, postponing motherhood was a requirement to participate in the collective military and political project of guerrilla movements.

Despite the distance between the social justice and the gender equality agendas, it is worth noting that the increasing circulation of feminist ideas in Europe and Latin America influenced the high participation of women in revolutionary movements in Latin America (Wolff, 2007). In Colombia the struggles of feminists and revolutionary women eventually evolved into common issues such as the legalization of abortion in 2022 and the

¹⁷ In 2006, the Constitutional Court decriminalized abortion in cases that present health risks for the woman, severe fetus malformation, or rape, incest, or forced insemination.

gender perspective of the peace agreement between the Colombian government and the FARC.

The redefinition of reproductive policies within the groups allowed the consolidation of women as combatants. During that time, in most of the guerrilla groups that incorporated women as fighters (FARC, M-19, EPL), contraceptives were included as part of their supplies, and health providers of each group guaranteed access to abortion. As Lucía, a former combatant of M-19 explained to me:

Contraceptives did not just make us suitable for combat, it made us combatants! Men and women had to do the same. I fight, you fight, I cook, you cook. How could you be in a guerrilla movement if you were pregnant? A guerrilla life is all about running, you have to run all the time, and you cannot do that if you are pregnant. That's why contraceptives were part of your personal supplies, just like clothing or personal care items that we were provided.

Birth control was not only a military strategy, it also followed the conviction that bringing new life into a context of injustice, inequality, and oppression was a painful act and should wait until a better future arrived. This is depicted in a quote by María Cano often cited in relation to motherhood and revolutionary women: "I am a woman and my womb shakes with pain to think that I could conceive a child who would be a slave" (see image on a 1987 pamphlet below). Many of my research participants expressed their disapproval with campesinas and indigenous women who had many children despite their precarious living conditions, and in some places, the FARC provided contraception to women in rural areas.



Compañía de Milicianas

MANUELITA SÁENZ

'Soy mujer y en mi entraña tiembla el dolor de pensar que pudiera concebir un hijo que sería esclavo'

María Cano

MAYO DE 1987

MUJER, SIN TI NADA ES POSIBLE

COMPAÑERAS: EL PASO PRESENTE, LA... MUJERES EN LA GUERRA... LA GUERRA... LA GUERRA... LA GUERRA...

UNA COLOMBIA EN LA DONDE... MUJERES EN LA GUERRA... LA GUERRA... LA GUERRA... LA GUERRA...

REPRODUCIDAS POR LA... MUJERES EN LA GUERRA... LA GUERRA... LA GUERRA... LA GUERRA...

MUJERES EN LA GUERRA... LA GUERRA... LA GUERRA... LA GUERRA...

MUJERES EN LA GUERRA... LA GUERRA... LA GUERRA... LA GUERRA...

MUJERES EN LA GUERRA... LA GUERRA... LA GUERRA... LA GUERRA...

Milicias Bolivarianas

Picture 04: Compañía de Milicianas Pamphlet. (Vera. 2015)

Not all revolutionary movements held the same reproductive ideologies. It depended on the political and the military context, the characteristics of women's organizations inside the groups, national and international gender discourses, and the relationship with the Catholic Church. In the FARC, motherhood remained an essential contribution of non-combatant women to the movement. Peasant communities reported that in some rural areas, the FARC compelled families to send at least one child to the group as a donation for the revolutionary cause (CNMH, 2017).

The egalitarian performance on the battlefield made evident the extra burden of motherhood, allowing the ontological separation between the woman and the mother required for the acceptance of contraception and abortion. This happened in a time when birth control was not meant to support women's autonomy and abortion was illegal in most

Latin American countries¹⁸. Although some of these debates transcended to democratic regimes after the demobilization of guerrilla movements, the next section will discuss how, in the FARC, what had initially been a hard-won victory for female combatants turned into one of the most significant forms of violence against them with the escalation of war.

1.3 Egalitarianism on the Battlefield

In the seventh conference in 1982, the FARC officially declared its new identity as an army by changing its name to Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - People's Army (FARC-EP). This conference provided guidelines that would direct the organization during the following decades. It established different mechanisms to: expand their networks in rural and urban areas; find potential funding options; recruit men and women between 15 and 30 years old; define the fronts' obligations to the central command and commanders' obligations to their troops; expand their military control and political influence; and guarantee egalitarianism between men and women. The conclusion of the conference reiterated that women and men must participate in the same conditions as independent combatants. Although the FARC and most guerrilla movements were founded by families, the reconfiguration as a military organization imposed new restrictions to romantic relationships that sought to reinforce gender egalitarianism in the military arena. After this conference, women could not join the organization as the wives of male comrades, and romantic relationships required the authorization of the central command.

In the FARC-EP, there is no discrimination against women, they obey the same regulatory requirements as men, so they likewise have the same rights. Whoever

¹⁸ Cuba decriminalized abortion in 1965

discriminates against women will be sanctioned according to the regulations, regardless if they are commanders or soldiers. Women in the guerrilla movement are free, and so, they are not wives. They cannot choose any form of marriage arrangement before the approval of the central command that will decide if it is time for a guerrilla woman to become a wife, according to her behavior, reliability, and responsibility. Wives who are proven unfaithful are automatically free in the same way as men (FARC-EP, 1982).

This meant that in case of infidelity, the relationship could terminate and both parties were free to stay single or find another partner. According to the rules, men and women should join the movement as independent combatants. However, I knew high-ranking male combatants who maintained a relationship with a civilian woman and had children. While pregnancies among female fighters were strictly prevented, fatherhood, at least in the conferences, was never described as a threat to the movement.

Despite the transformation into an army, this conference also stated the possibility of looking for a political negotiation to end the armed conflict and create conditions for peace and social justice. In line with that spirit, the FARC-EP and M-19 published a joint declaration expressing their desire to initiate peace dialogues with the Government to address the political and economic crisis aggravated by cartel warfare and the emergence of paramilitary groups. This declaration created principles for a broader coalition between different guerrilla movements and other political groups that would lead to the constitution of the political party Unión Patriótica (UP).

In 1984, the Colombian government and the FARC-EP signed a peace deal in their main camp, Casa Verde, located in the state of Meta. Both sides agreed to a ceasefire and an initial agenda to end the social and armed conflict. Other guerrilla movements also undertook peace dialogues with the government, which fostered the creation and consolidation of UP that brought together diverse leftist political forces. The participation

of UP in the 1986 elections resulted in the highest vote for a left-wing party in the history of Colombia until 2018, with important victories in national and local appointments.

This new political project aspired to represent all struggles for social justice and peace, inviting workers, academics, students, small entrepreneurs, socialists, communists, artists, and anyone who supported a democratic reform in the country (Medina Gallego, 2006). However, the debate on women's rights that several guerrilla movements had initiated was not a priority for the UP agenda nor for the National Constituent Assembly that followed the peace agreement between the Government and M-19. There were only four women among¹⁹ a total of 70 representatives in the Assembly. Although they succeeded in including some of the women's movement's demands in the new constitution, such as equal opportunities, participation in political offices, and divorce, the debate on sexual and reproductive rights was rapidly discarded (Abadía, 2012; Wills Obregón, 2004). Most members of the Assembly decided to exclude this topic and did not advocate against the right to life from conception so that the Catholic Church would accept the inclusion of divorce (Viveros Vigoya, 1999). Not even all the four women of the Assembly supported the decriminalization of abortion (El Tiempo, 1991). And some women in M-19 remained skeptical of feminism, defending the idea that class struggles would eventually solve women's concerns. In contrast, others argued that women's rights required a separate and parallel fight.

While the peace agreement with M-19 reached a successful conclusion, violence perpetrated by paramilitary groups, cartels, and officials of the state armed forces against UP members and guerrilla groups compromised the deal with the FARC-EP. More than

¹⁹ Maria Mercedes Carranza and Maria Teresa Garcés Lloreda from M-19, Aida Avello from UP, and Helena Herrán de Montoya from the liberal party

four thousand members of UP, including two presidential candidates, five Congress members, and more than 150 politicians were assassinated or forcibly disappeared (CNMH, 2018). In 1987 the ceasefire ended, in 1990 Casa Verde was bombed, and in 1992 the president César Gaviria annulled the peace negotiations by declaring “integral war” against insurgency (Medina Gallego, 2006).²⁰ Consequently, the FARC-EP decided to take up arms again and strengthen their recruiting efforts, enlisting a large number of women, who made up 20% to 40% of the fighting force (Castrillón, 2015; Gutiérrez Sanín & Carranza Franco, 2017). The revolutionary atmosphere in Latin America, as well as the frustrating political situation of the country, inspired women from urban and rural areas to join the group.

Under the argument “We tried, we tried to make peace, but they betrayed us,” the eighth conference in 1993 reorganized the FARC-EP to take power through military mechanisms. They ended official relationships with the communist party that had been an essential part of their political faction, strengthened military structures, and developed a plan to control most of the regions of the country and to encircle the capital city, Bogota. This conference asserted once again that guerrilla women were free and had the same obligations and rights as men, and whoever discriminated against them would be sanctioned according to the statutes.

1.4 The War Inside Women’s Bodies

Despite reasserting women’s equality, the massive incorporation of women into the military structure also came with new measures to control their sexual and reproductive

²⁰ It is worth mentioning that this also occurred in the years that followed the fall of the Berlin Wall, when socialist movements in Latin America lost political and symbolic support.

behavior. Pregnancies were categorized as a public health issue because they jeopardized combatants' health and the security of the organization; pregnancy was one of the leading causes of desertion. Contraception, therefore, was declared mandatory, and hormonal implants were established as the primary method of birth control. Other methods were used in the following years. These measures also included a strict disciplining of sexual behavior. All formal couples needed to notify a superior about their relationship, and every casual sexual encounter required the authorization of a commandant, who determined a time and place for it. A former fighter explained to me that those rules were not only a way to regulate sexuality and reproduction, but also a safety measure since sex and torture sounds are similar and in a military camp it was important to know that everyone was safe.

In addition, the eighth conference created a plan to improve the FARC's healthcare system to avoid referring combatants to external hospitals and exposing them to state persecution.²¹ In this sense, they announced new strategies to prevent diseases, the reinforcement of internal medical capabilities, the construction of underground clinics, and a self-funding policy for their healthcare system. In the following decades, the healthcare system in the FARC-EP developed into a sophisticated network of health providers, a mobile infrastructure, well-established chains for health supplies and medications, and a school of Health Sciences. Caretakers in the ranks regularly received professional training

²¹ At that time, they were fighting what they called "microchip warfare," which was a successful strategy of the military to locate FARC camps by intercepting supplies and devices for the FARC and introducing microchips (El Espectador, 2021). Some FARC commanders asserted that they also found microchips in the bodies of spies. Therefore, they feared that attending hospitals not only exposed combatants to detention, but also that combatants were implanted with microchips during surgical procedures (Robles Gómez, 2018). I heard a story of a woman who had an implant in her vagina, which was discovered after a therapeutic intervention in the camp to treat her constant pain and infection.

and, occasionally, health professionals joined the military structures.²² Women's health was also part of this system. Each front had gynecological equipment and medicines, contraceptive methods, and feminine hygiene (Torres- González, 2018).

The FARC-EP healthcare system not only mitigated the physical damages of war by providing specialized care to combatants but was also an effective form of surveillance. This healthcare model established routines to check on each combatant every day and keep records of their treatments, medications, and, in the case of women, contraceptive methods. Every squad had a combatant nurse who woke up earlier than the rest to check on each *caleta* (provisional tents for sleeping), provide medication, and report health updates. The nurse was also the first person to notice if someone was missing and was obligated to report possible desertions. The same logic applied for birth control. The health personnel of each front were responsible for providing women with contraceptives, finding the most effective available method for each of them, and making sure that all of them were following the birth control plan.

Contraception was not the only form of birth regulation. The escalation of war in the 2000s made the provision of contraceptives more difficult, as well as the possibilities for women to leave the battlefield to have their babies. Voluntary and forced abortion became a regular practice (Rodríguez Peña, 2020). The sexual and reproductive rights women had promoted to participate as combatants turned into strict forms of control when women became essential for the military project. Itza, a former nurse, described to me how

²² Julián Orjuela (2017) calls it a “campesino and subversive healthcare system” because it was created in the middle of the war, provided healthcare where the state did not, and built an alternative to private health insurance based on community work and solidarity.

their military medicine incorporated reproductive practices to maintain women as combatants:

I took a 9-month training in an underground hospital; it had everything. It was a great hospital. I have been in many hospitals in my life, but I have never seen one like the hospital where I worked in the FARC. There were physicians from the city who worked there. I learned to do a lot of things. I learned how to perform amputations, treat wounds, and also abortions. We used Cytotec, Mifepristone, and Misoprostol. You put them in the cervix, and it is completely expelled. I don't feel good about that, but those were the rules. Women know when they join the group that they can't get pregnant. If they get pregnant, they have a war council and they must abort.

Itza has borne her share of grief. She had to perform abortions on her friends and was subjected to abortion and forced sterilization herself. She got pregnant while she was in the group and, despite her many attempts to hide it, was mandated to abort. But violence did not only come from the FARC. Women who managed to finish their pregnancies because they either received permission of the commanders, hid their pregnancy, or fled the group, were exposed to the state military force's and paramilitary groups' violence. They were persecuted when they left the battlefield to give birth or visit their children, and some of these children were lost or placed for adoption without their mothers' consent. Cielo, an ex-combatant who refused to abort against the orders of her commander, told me: "During Plan Patriota, if you had a baby, you couldn't even breastfeed him. You had to leave him in a farm with another family, like a dog." As it will be described in chapter three, Plan Patriota was the most aggressive military plan developed by the Colombian government and funded by the U.S., launched in 2004 to uproot the FARC-EP and ELN.

Voluntary abortions as well as forced abortions became common after the second failed peace negotiations in 2000 in El Caguán, Caquetá. People had predicted this failure

when Manuel Marulanda stood up president Andrés Pastrana in 1999. The president arrived at Caguán with the high commissioner for peace, Víctor Ricardo, to install the negotiating table in a public event broadcast on national television. Everything seemed to be ready: both sides had agreed to meet on January 7th, the zone was demilitarized, and the peace talks had strong political support. Pastrana waited for hours at the table in the central plaza of Caguán, but Marulanda never appeared.²³ The image of the president sitting alone with a gigantic Colombian flag waving behind him is known in national narratives as “the empty chair.” The FARC-EP had publicly embarrassed the president in front of the whole country and the world. Years later, I heard from members of the FARC-EP that they found snipers around the plaza and assured me that the meeting was a plot to kill Marulanda. This other version of the story will never be confirmed, but before the end of the dialogue, the Government had already planned to continue the war. The FARC-EP was included on the U.S. list of foreign terrorist organizations, and the same night the negotiations terminated, the state forces deployed its troops via land, air, and rivers to recover domain over the demilitarized zone. “It was like the apocalypse, I thought the world would end that day,” a civilian told me who lived in the area. This turn of events aligned well with the war on terror that reshaped the political map of the world after 9/11 and justified the future U.S. funds for the counterinsurgency war in Colombia.

The next president, Alvaro Uribe, capitalized on the resentment about the failed dialogues to win the election. He declared war against the FARC-EP, implementing an

²³ My mom and I were sitting on her bed watching the president alone in front of a white table where no one signed an agreement to give us all a break from war. She was full of indignation; I was scared. Days later, my aunt told us that she would carry a cyanide pill in her bag in case she was kidnapped by the FARC-EP in one of the retentions they used to call “pesca milagrosa” (miracle fishing). They were kidnapping civilians on the roads and extorting their families to collect money for their cause. All urban middle class families strategized ways to cope if a relative was kidnapped.

ambitious security policy that included expanding military troops and equipment, reinforcing military intelligence through a large network of civilian informants, supporting armed groups of civilians against the insurgency, and developing aggressive propaganda strategies against guerrilla groups.²⁴ Uribe built on the past government's alliances with the U.S to militarily defeat the FARC-EP, denying the existence of an internal armed conflict and declaring the FARC-EP a terrorist threat.

1.5 Victims and Terrorists

The intensification of the counter-insurgency attacks allowed the military to locate and destroy the underground hospitals of the FARC-EP, their medical equipment, and their network of health providers. In addition to the wound-care supplies, the military found equipment for other health services such as contraception and abortions (El Tiempo, 2003). Information gathered from intercepted radio conversations and testimonies of ex-combatants were also used to confirm that reproductive rules in the FARC-EP were strict, in particular after the escalation of war.

The first reports about reproductive violence in the FARC-EP occurred after the Berlin Operation in 2000.²⁵ This operation aimed to sabotage a FARC-EP expedition of 362 combatants, including 150 minors, who were walking from the demilitarized zone

²⁴At the end of the second failed peace process, the FARC-EP had built up their troops and were controlling a large part of the Colombian territory, and the state armed forces were preparing to exterminate them. That was the time when my cousin, an eighteen-year-old boy, was recruited for the military. He was greeted with "Welcome to hell."

And they could not find a better description for a battalion where young soldiers, including him, chanted each morning during their training: "I want to swim in a pool, in a pool full of blood, insurgent blood." War became real to me through his eyes. Like the horror tales we used to tell each other when we were children, he told us about the dismembered bodies he had to witness, the long nights with his rifle ready to shoot at any unidentified shadow, the attacks on the military base where he was, and the statue of the Virgin Mary that took care of the soldiers' souls.

²⁵ It is customary in the Colombian military to name important military actions.

between the provinces of Meta and Caquetá toward the Northeast of the country to recover territorial control of an area dominated by paramilitaries around 680 miles away. Six months after the beginning of the expedition, the military intercepted the FARC-EP group in the Berlín moorland, killing 180 combatants, 74 children among them (CNMH, 2017; Sánchez, 2019). Years later, some of the survivors declared that it was the Red Cross Committee that saved them from the brutality of the military (Verdad Abierta, 2016). The results of this operation revealed to human rights organizations the seriousness of children's recruitment in the FARC-EP and raised flags about children's rights violations in the FARC-EP. Furthermore, they found intrauterine devices in the autopsies of eleven female combatants, nine of them girls between 14 and 17 years old, and asserted that they found signs of sexual activity in their genitals (El Tiempo, 2000; Jiménez Becerra, 2012; Quintero, 2000). Consequently, human rights organizations investigated sexual violence in the FARC-EP and reported that female minors were forced to use birth control methods such as intrauterine devices, hormonal implants, pills, or condoms and that some of them had been forced to abort (Amnesty International, 2004; Human Rights Watch, 2003; Revista Semana, 2006).

This case established a chain of associations between girls, sexual abuse, and FARC-EP that dominated the narratives about contraception and abortion in this group. As a friend who worked for the Attorney General explained to me, this association obscured conversations about reproductive violence in the FARC-EP by exploiting the image of abused girls as a symbol of moral decay, overlooking the complexity of women's experiences in the armed group. In her words, "if you are a minor you are a victim who deserves protection from the State, but when you turn 18, you're a bitch who deserves

what's happening to you.” My friend's comment pointed out that the narrative of the abused girl excludes the recognition of the multiple struggles of female fighters within the armed group but also in a sexist, racist, and profoundly unequal society.

Later, the massive demobilizations during Uribe's term (2002, 2010) gave the government and the press access to the testimonies of ex-combatant women who deserted the movement and joined the state program for demobilization and reintegration.²⁶ Many of them confirmed that contraception was mandatory and reported that abortions were performed in case of pregnancy.

Paradoxically, guerrilla women were also essential targets of military strategies. The year Uribe took office, the National Army released a list of 51 most wanted women, 48 of them from the FARC-EP. The press announced that the National Forces were “obsessed” with these women and were offering generous rewards for them (Semana, 2002). Ironically, government officials also declared that women in high ranks of the guerrilla group were not common. According to them, their main roles were cooking, gathering firewood, and “providing sexual services.” (Semana, 2002). The Government accused the FARC-EP of recruiting women to provide sexual services to the commanders and making them abort when contraception failed. The media also published atrocious stories of abortions as well as romantic experiences of women who fled their squads because they were pregnant or wanted to have children. In national discourses, guerrilla women became both terrorists wanted dead or alive and victims who had to be rescued.

²⁶ Uribe's government demobilizations reached up to 20,989 combatants as follows: 2002:8 - 2003: 3510 – 2004: 5557 - 2005: 13198 – 2006: 20898 – 2007: 2944 – 2008: 3004 – 2009: 2804 2010:2229

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter analyzes how reproductive policies were a central part of the transformation of the FARC from a grassroots guerrilla movement to a revolutionary army. I presented two moments in which reproductive policies emerged as a result or a condition to advance a military and political agenda. In the late 70s and 80s, farianas demanded access to contraception and abortion to keep participating in the military project of the revolutionary movements. These demands not only destabilized the idea of motherhood as a contribution of women to the revolution that had been important in the beginning of the FARC, but also established a form of gender egalitarianism in which all caregiving activities (cleaning, cooking, taking care of the sick) were equally distributed. With the escalation of war, contraception and abortion stopped being a women's right and became a rule of war as well as one of the most important forms of violence against farianas, in particular after the failure of the second peace process.

During more than five decades of armed conflict, political and military regimes shaped reproductive practices and behaviors such as women's demands, rules of war, sexual violence, and women's rights. Mechanisms to govern women's reproductive behavior emerged in different forms and were contested by women through the belligerent tensions between the state and the insurgency. Not only did the mechanisms to govern reproductive practices and behaviors change according to the terms of women's participation in the movement, but the discourses to understand those practices have also been historically configured in different ways. The history of reproductive policies in the FARC shows us both how war creates states of exception where women can transform gender norms out of the legal constraints of the State and how war can institutionalize violence against women.

The violent tensions between the state and the insurgency gave rise to mechanisms to govern women's reproductive behavior as well as women's ways to support, resist or cope with these mechanisms. Reproductive governance in this context is part of the mutual constitution of life and death (Estévez, 2018) in the armed conflict. The regulation of women's sexual and reproductive behaviors had the double intention of controlling the population of the FARC and disciplining female bodies for war. It both produced female subjectivities as combatants and made them suitable for the military apparatus.

CHAPTER 2

REVOLUTIONARIES, VICTIMS, OR HEROIC MOTHERS? (DIS)ARTICULATING REPRODUCTIVE AND WAR DISCOURSES

After four years of tense negotiations and the signing of two peace accords, then-Colombian president Juan Manuel Santos and the supreme leader of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP)²⁷, Rodrigo Londoño, celebrated the disarmament of this guerrilla movement at a public event in June of 2017. In the presence of international delegates, government officials, and FARC representatives, the president said: "Today, we emotionally confirm the end of this absurd war that not only lasted more than five decades but also left more than eight million victims and killed thousands of fellow Colombians." To close the event, a fariana walked onto the stage with



Picture 05. Photo by: Camilo Rozo (Manetto, 2017)

a baby girl in her arms and passed her child to Santos and Londoño. They held the baby for a few seconds while news cameras captured the moment, then passed the baby back to the unidentified woman.

²⁷ The name FARC has had different meanings since the 1960s. In 1966, this guerrilla movement adopted the name of Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC); in 1982 they added the words "people's army" to embrace their identity as a military force (FARC-EP); and in 2017 they decided to keep the acronym to name the political party created after the peace agreement but with a new meaning: "the Common Alternative Revolutionary Force" (also FARC by its initials in Spanish). Furthermore, those who did not join the agreement, called by the media "the dissidents," are reclaiming the name FARC. To avoid confusions, this chapter employs the initials FARC to refer to combatants who participated in the peace agreement and are now in the process of reincorporating to civilian life.

The baby in this event was not an isolated image. Guerrilla mothers and their babies became a symbol of peace in Colombia after the signing of the peace agreement. National and international media published pictures of *farianas* with their babies in the provisional camps where they would start the reincorporation program,²⁸ representing the social transition of the FARC through the metaphor of exchanging rifles for babies. But public tributes to ex-combatant mothers not only portrayed a romantic idea of the restitution of gender norms in the aftermath of war, they also attempted to dissipate historical tensions between the FARC and the Colombian government related to reproductive practices in this guerrilla movement. As described in Chapter One, information from intercepted radio conversations between commanders, intrauterine devices discovered in the autopsies of female fighters killed in combat, testimonies about forced abortions from combatants who deserted the group, and NGO reports confirmed that in the FARC contraception was compulsory and in the event of pregnancy many women were forced to abort. This debate revived during peace negotiations after the capture of Héctor Albeidis Arboleda, known as “El Enfermero” (the Nurse), an ex-combatant implicated in performing at least 150 abortions on female fighters from the FARC, the National Liberation Army (ELN), and the Guevarist Revolutionary Army (ARG).²⁹ The Attorney General declared in 2015 that mandatory contraception and forced abortions were a widespread form of sexual violence in the FARC (Fiscalía, 2015). El Enfermero was accused of forced abortion on protected

²⁸ Although the process of integrating back into society is usually called reintegration in the literature, in Colombia, reintegration refers to the program for ex-combatants who demobilized individually, while reincorporation is the program for those who demobilized collectively as a result of the peace accord (see Chapters four and Five for differing aspects of these processes).

²⁹ No guerrilla group acknowledged the participation of El Enfermero in their troops.

person³⁰, among other crimes related to his collaboration with the FARC (Fiscalía, 2016), and sentenced to 40 years in prison in May of 2020.

The case of El Enfermero generated discursive formations that linked abortion with war and motherhood with peace that were incorporated into heated debates about the settlement between the government and the FARC at the conclusion of peace negotiations. Although the agreement did not propose radical political, economic, or cultural changes, it challenged the hegemonic structures that had maintained the armed conflict during more than fifty years. In this context, reproductive politics became a site of contestation about meanings of peace, gender, and nation. This chapter explores how different social groups produced discourses about reproductive politics and peace by articulating different meanings about abortion in the FARC. I will discuss, in particular, the public discourses of FARC leaders, anti-peace accord movements, the press, and feminist NGOs. I use the concept of discursive articulations (Slack, 2005; Sotirin, 2018) to understand how each party produced different associations about the same phenomenon to advance meanings and possibilities about the aftermath of the agreement.

I take the concept of discursive articulations from Articulation Theory, which is a theoretical and methodological approach to analyze the ways different elements are linked

³⁰ The 1949 Geneva Conventions and their 1977 Additional Protocols establish specific rights for certain categories of persons in times of international or internal armed conflict (Médecins Sans Frontières, n.d.). The International Humanitarian Law protects the following persons: “wounded, sick and shipwrecked members of the armed forces who have ceased to take part in the hostilities; prisoners of war; civilian persons who because of a conflict or occupation are in the power of a Party whose nationality they do not possess; medical and religious personnel; parlementaires; civil defence personnel; personnel assigned to the protection of cultural property” (International Committee of the Red Cross, n.d.). One of the lawyers who took the case of forced abortions in the FARC to the Constitutional Court explained to me that although combatant women are members of armed forces, a female fighter subjected to a forced abortion could be considered a protected person since at that moment she is in a helpless situation (estado de indefensión) and not participating in hostilities.

in social formations and affective relations of domination and resistance (Slack, 2016). Stuart Hall defines articulation as “the form of the connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time” (Hall, 1986, 53). Following Laclau, Hall continues: “the political connotation of ideological elements has no necessary belongingness, and thus, we need to think the contingent, the non-necessary, connection between different practices — between ideology and social forces, and between different elements within ideology, and between different social groups composing a social movement, etc” (Ibid). It is under distinct historical conditions that different discursive elements are linked and connected to certain social forces fixing temporary meanings. Thus, articulations operate in a double movement: elements are linked in particular discourses and those discourses are connected to political subjects (Clarke, 2015). In this case, we will look at discourses about abortions in the FARC and social groups with a particular agenda in the post-peace accord.

Slack (2005) stresses that articulations are not established connections but processes of making connections, that is, processes of articulating and rearticulating concepts that have no necessary correspondence because they do not necessarily belong together. At the end of the peace negotiations, there was an intense overflow of discursive practices combining different historical events, symbols, and narratives around reproduction in the FARC, producing meanings about peace, gender, and nation. In line with the notion of articulations, I explore how different discursive formations linked meanings and political subjects during a time of extraordinary dynamism. I suggest that

these discourses were contingent articulations that happened when a national pact to end the armed conflict was challenging hegemonic ideas about national identity.

All discourses are also produced in a particular place and time (Hall, 1990). Three of the discursive formations I analyze in this chapter—farianas' position on the accusations of the Attorney General, the responses to abortion of the campaign against the peace agreement, and the shifting media narratives about guerrilla mothers—happened at the end of peace negotiations, one of the most convulsed times in Colombian contemporary history. The last one—a legal action that a feminist NGO presented to the Constitutional Court—appeared three years after the signature of the agreement as a continuation of the controversy about abortions in the FARC. In the next section, I describe the social forces involved in these debates.

2.1 A Convulsed Peace

Several administrations since 1984 tried and failed to negotiate the end of the armed conflict, the Juan Manuel Santos' administration made it possible. Negotiations started in Oslo in 2012 and moved to Havana from 2012 to 2016. At the beginning, there were five male representatives of the government and five male representatives of the FARC. The gender constitution of the table as well as the scarce mention of women's leadership in community-based peace processes triggered strong reactions among women's movements. Long before the negotiations, women's organizations had advocated for a settlement between armed actors and worked in their territories to rebuild the social fabric destroyed by war (HUMANAS & CIASE, 2016). Hence, at the National Meeting of Women for Peace in 2012, 85 civilian organizations signed the manifesto "Peace without Women Does

Not Work!” (La paz sin las mujeres ¡no va!) demanding their recognition as essential interlocutors in peace dialogues by being “negotiators and not negotiated in a patriarchal system” (Encuentro Nacional de Mujeres por la Paz, 2012). Among their demands, they asked for the participation of ex-combatant women at the peace table.

In response, the plenipotentiaries agreed to establish a gender sub-commission to incorporate the voices of women and LGBTQ organizations and recognize the co-constitution of socio-political violence and gender-based violence. Although systematic violence against LGBTQ people has been more common among paramilitary groups, guerrilla movements such as the FARC and ELN promoted heteronormative discourses that led to discrimination and physical aggression against non-binary people (CNMH, 2015). The violence reported by LGBTQ people—combatants and civilians—during war reveals that the armed conflict has not only involved disputes for economic, political, and military orders but also the imposition of a heteronormative order (Ibid). The gender sub-commission was created in 2014 with five female members of the FARC-EP, led by the former commander Victoria Sandino, and five female members of the government led by Maria Paulina Riveros. Eighteen LGBTQ and women’s movements and organizations, ten former guerrilla women from South Africa, Northern Ireland, Guatemala, El Salvador, Indonesia, Uruguay, and Colombia, and ten Colombian experts on sexual violence participated as contributors to this commission. UN Women representatives and three experts in gender issues from Colombia, Cuba, and Norway supported the work of the commission. This commission had the support of international guidelines that acknowledge the role of women in peacebuilding processes. In particular, they called on

UN Resolution 1325, which recommends that states include gender perspectives in conflict prevention, management, and resolution efforts (*Resolution 1325*, 2000).

Colombian Women's movements and organizations proposed four principles that oriented the work of the gender commission. First, the peace negotiations should adopt a human rights framework including a differential approach for gender and ethnic minorities. Second, women must participate in all the agencies, councils, and committees created for planning, executing, monitoring, and assessing the agreement. Third, the peace agreement should adopt an idea of development that promotes human freedom as well as the preservation of humans and other species on the planet. Fourth, the demilitarization of life should be an ultimate goal of the peace process, which means fighting violent practices in everyday life and overcoming a military culture embedded in social life during decades of war (Cumbre Nacional de Mujeres y Paz, 2013).

Despite conflicts when it was uncertain if the parties would continue working on the agreement, the government and the FARC ratified their commitment and signed an accord in Cartagena in September of 2016. The settlement contained six points: rural reform;³¹ political participation;³² termination of the conflict;³³ solutions to the problem of illicit drugs; victims;³⁴ and the implementation, verification, and referendum to put the deal in place.³⁵ The gender sub-commission intervened in all points to make sure that the agreement addressed the co-constitution between socio-political violence and gender-

³¹ Land tenure for campesinos, support for rural economies, and participatory development.

³² Diversity in politics that guarantees the participation of the FARC and other sub-represented political movements, citizen participation, and the promise of never combining weapons and politics again.

³³ Abandonment of arms, reincorporation of combatants to civil life, and security for all.

³⁴ Truth, justice, victims' reparations, assurances of non-repetition.

³⁵ The agreement creates a committee for implementation and verification of the peace deal with international delegates.

based violence and explicitly addressed women and LGBTQ'S rights (J. Vargas & Pérez, 2018).

The agreement was expected to be endorsed by popular vote in a plebiscite³⁶ held in October 2016. It also aimed to unify the country to support the end of the armed conflict and solve the division of political elites deepened during the negotiations (Matanock & Garcia-Sanchez, 2017). Since his second term in office, Santos had distanced himself from his predecessor and then-senator Álvaro Uribe, who accused Santos of giving too many concessions to the FARC. The right-wing party under the leadership of Álvaro Uribe, evangelical churches, and some factions of the Catholic church funded by thirty anonymous donors and thirty companies,³⁷ developed an aggressive campaign to vote No in the plebiscite built upon three main narratives about the accord. They said that the accord would take resources (land, financial aid, income) from “good” people to give them to the FARC, would absolve combatants of any crime, and had a hidden agenda to impose “gender ideology,” which included the legalization of abortion. In an indiscreet interview, the director of the No campaign revealed that they developed a class-based strategy centered on indignation to make people vote angry (“*verraca*”) instead of informed (Ramirez Prado, 2016).

³⁶ In Colombia, a plebiscite is a vote to approve or disapprove a President's decision and a referendum is to approve or disapprove a law (Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil, n.d.)

³⁷ Although the economic interests of the donors were not transparent (some of them donated equally to the Yes and the No campaign), people in agricultural industry with large tracts of land have traditionally supported Uribe. This group could be potentially affected by land restitution in the accord, which aimed to return the land to rural families that were forcibly displaced by armed actors. This meant that civilians who acquired property over those lands by taking advantage of war dynamics would have to return them to campesinos.

Taking advantage of corruption scandals and the government's incompetency at protecting fundamental rights, the No campaign created radio advertisements for low-income people maliciously suggesting that the accord would reduce financial aid programs in order to provide health, education, housing, and generous stipends for ex-combatants. In middle-class media, they focused on a supposed tax reform, the fear of land expropriation, and resentment against the FARC by portraying the accord as a reward for criminals. But one of the most broadcasted messages was that the accord would attack the "original" constitution of families by imposing an ideology that erased gender divisions and legalized abortion. This message was linked to the controversy over abortions in the FARC after the capture of El Enfermero.

The polls showed that most Colombians would vote "yes," which made sense because the No campaign was proven to deceive people by distorting the content of the accord. Peace seemed like a self-evident good³⁸ and the Yes campaigners, including me, did not feel the need to describe the specific implications of it. Yet, on October 3rd, against all expectations, the accord was rejected by a narrow margin—50.21% voted No. We could not believe our eyes when we watched the news. The tension was even worse in regions largely affected by the armed conflict, where most people voted Yes (Semana, 2016b). Massive protests followed for days after, inundating the plazas of the main cities with people dressed in white demanding a peace deal (¡Acuerdo Ya!). The protests received the support of the international community when only four days after the plebiscite, the Nobel

³⁸ Povinelli (2002) states that liberal subjects experience certain values as self-evident and undeniable truths. Similar to her analysis on multiculturalism in liberal democracies, the abstract notion of peace entailed a liberal aspiration for the increased mutual understanding of political differences that would solve decades of socio-political conflict. However, the conflicting tensions between rational behavior and moral sensibilities behind these self-evident truths are evaded.

Peace Prize was awarded to the President Juan Manuel Santos. He agreed to meet with the opposition and make adjustments to the peace deal. The second and final accord was signed on November 24th in Bogotá. Despite the ultimate success of the accord, the results of the plebiscite undermined the credibility of the government and boosted the political capital of the opponents, who won the subsequent elections, hindering the implementation of the accord.

I will describe in the following sections the centrality of gender in the discursive articulations that emerged during the disputes about what a national pact for peace meant through the debate around contrasting views on abortions in the FARC. I will describe farianas' position on the accusations of the Attorney General that mandatory contraception and forced abortions were an ordinary form of sexual violence in the FARC, the No campaign's responses to abortion, and the shifting media narratives about guerrilla mothers. Finally, I will discuss a legal action that a feminist NGO presented to the Constitutional Court about forced abortion in the FARC.

2.2 Abortion as a Revolutionary Cause

The gender sub-commission gave insurgent women and women's movements for peace a space to discuss the connections between gender-based violence, heteronormativity, patriarchy, and war. Peace activists centered the conversation on the violence that armed groups perpetrated against women and LGBTQ people, but they also emphasized their condition as political subjects and not as passive victims. As a member of the Ruta Pacífica de Mujeres (Pacific Route of Women), an active organization in the gender sub-commission, explained to me: "this commission should present an idea of

women as subjects with rights (*sujetas de derechos*) who demand and exercise their rights. We don't want to be seen as just victims, like poor little things. We want the commission to acknowledge all our political capacities." Human rights provided a common language to rework gendered notions of victimhood. *Sujetas de derechos* involve female subjects actively demanding their rights and leading social change as they used to say: "we want to be negotiators, not negotiated."

It was also through the language of rights that FARC representatives responded to the debate about FARC reproductive practices that was revived after the capture of El Enfermero. Farianas who participated in peace negotiations replied publicly that the FARC had always guaranteed a woman's right to decide whether they wanted to be mothers, liberating them from the maternal roles imposed by a patriarchal society. Farianas declared that female combatants were political subjects committed to social justice who fought for a better society, not victims of their male comrades. As one of them told me: "war and motherhood are incompatible. That is why we don't have children. We are not victims; we are women with rifles." Like her, women who remained in the FARC as members of the political party expressed their open support for their leaders when it came to gender politics in the FARC. Other female combatants who demobilized individually and are not part of the FARC political party have condemned forced abortions in the FARC.

Victoria Sandino, the FARC leader in the gender sub-commission, addressed the accusations of the Attorney General in an interview talking about abortion in the FARC as a right by highlighting the connection between rights and guerrilla women's struggle:

War is not only about guns, bombs, murders, persecution, but also about slander. And beyond the slander is the ignorance about our struggle, the struggle of women who decided to make this step of being rebels, being

combatants, and fight for our ideals. They treat us as [victims], [...] not only the Attorney General but also the mainstream media. Now they are saying that there were 150 forced abortions in the organization. This is what we can say about it: first, the right to abortion is a right that we are going to defend, that we are going to reify because this has been a women's struggle all over the world. We [farianas] have that right, and we are not giving it up. Abortion in the organization is voluntary and free. The woman, the guerrilla woman, decides if she wants to have children or not" (Sandino, V. 2016, February 1st. Interview by INDEPAZ).

Similarly, Olga Marín, another FARC leader, explained:

We can't have children in a guerrilla army for a fundamental thing: there cannot be children in war. Second, if those children are born, they become a risk because they are used by the enemy to fight us. And third, because we can't bring children to this world to abandon them. That is why contraception is mandatory in the FARC (RCN, 2016, September 20th).

In this communication, Marín also explains that they incorporated family planning since the 70s and that abortion is part of women's right to make decisions over our own bodies.

In the same spirit of women's movements for peace, farianas reject the category of victim by vindicating their role in the armed movement. They talk about themselves as rebels, combatants, and revolutionary women. Although these categories have been present in the FARC, they were built under class identity: the working class and the peasant. During peace negotiations, the category of revolutionary women was reconstituted to incorporate gender as a central dimension of the revolutionary struggle. To give foundations to this identity, they align elements of their history in the FARC with their new position as peace delegates in the gender sub-commission in a way that seems coherent with the discourse of women's rights. In that regard, they connect gender egalitarianism in the FARC, including their recognition as combatants, with the feminist struggles that they started to support since their participation in the sub-commission. However, women's accomplishments in

revolutionary armies were not framed as feminist endeavors (see Chapter One). Feminism was perceived as a bourgeois movement that could jeopardize class solidarity. This is not to say that there were not commonalities between insurgent women and feminists before peace negotiations, but gender had a marginal place in the military fight against the oligarchy.

To talk about abortions in the ranks as a right required Victoria Sandino and other farianas to establish articulations that included certain elements of the FARC history and excluded others. They point out that women in guerrilla armies demanded access to contraception and abortion, that women and men in the FARC had the same status as combatants, and—building on the discussion in the gender sub-commission—that female fighters are not victims but women’s rights advocates. They excluded the testimonies of women who were forced to abort and the regulatory character of abortion in the FARC. In addition, they conveniently defined sexual violence exclusively as rape, which was explicitly condemned in FARC regulations with the maximum penalty being execution. Through these inclusions and exclusions, FARC leaders are not only articulating certain elements of their identity as farianas to claim that abortion was a right and not a rule—as many testimonies suggest—but also creating links with other political subjects, such as women for peace in Colombia and international feminists. Hence, they have openly supported the legalization of abortion in Latin America, including the recent victory of feminists in Argentina ³⁹.

³⁹ On August 8th of 2018, when the Argentinian senate debated a bill to make abortion legal, the FARC leader Victoria Sandino tweeted “Today is a historic day, the legalization of the voluntary interruption of pregnancy is democracy’s debt with women’s bodies and lives. All support and solidarity with our sisters in Argentina #LegalAbortionNow #LetItBeLaw.” At that time, the bill was rejected with 38 votes against and

2.3 The Fetus Victim

The FARC position on abortion had problematic repercussions in the public acceptance of the peace agreement. Right-wing movements utilized farianas' defense of abortion in the ranks and their support of LGBTQ rights discussed in the gender sub-commission to assert that they were aligned with the recently invented notion of "gender ideology." In line with other right-wing parties in Europe and Latin America (Corrêa, 2017; Wilson-McDonald, 2021), "gender ideology" was described as an international movement to corrupt children, promote homosexuality, impose communism, and destroy families (M. R. Viveros Vigoya & Rondón, 2017). The notion of "gender ideology" traveled from the Vatican to Latin America as a reaction against the political, cultural, and legal advocacy of feminist movements (Corrêa, 2018). It started as a response to the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994) and the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995), which for the first time started to incorporate longstanding feminist claims about gender inequality, diversity, and sexuality. Catholic and Evangelical churches united to respond to what they perceived as the moral degradation of the family, and the Vatican coined the term "gender ideology" to refer to different movements around the world advocating for sex education, LGBTQ rights, and the legalization of abortion (Faur & Viveros Vigoya, 2020). As stated by Corrêa "the semantic frame 'gender ideology' reveals itself as an empty and adaptable signifier, encompassing a broad range of demands" (Corrêa, 2017).

Some of the political impacts in Latin America of this transnational agenda against so-called "gender ideology" have materialized in the triumph of the conservative

31 votes in favor. But in December of 2020, abortion became legal on demand in the first 14 weeks of gestation after the Voluntary Interruption of Pregnancy Bill (Argentina) was passed by the National Congress.

presidential candidate Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil; the electoral capital of the Pentecostal pastor Fabricio Alvarado Muñoz in Costa Rica, who was the second highest-ranked presidential candidate in the 2018 elections; and the failed peace plebiscite in Colombia (Corrêa, 2018), where “gender ideology” was a central idea in the No campaign. According to the campaign, the accord attacked the “original design of the family,” promoted abortion, and contained measures that went against natural and divine laws of gender (Muelle, 2017). By “natural and divine laws,” these groups mean the heteronormative constitution of gender and the inexorable mother-child bond.

The most active members of this campaign were right-wing groups under the leadership of Álvaro Uribe, and evangelical churches. The position of the Catholic Church was, to say the least, ambivalent⁴⁰. As an institution close to the political elites, the Catholic Church did not openly defy the government but did not distinguish its disagreement with “gender ideology” from its position on the accord. Three months before the vote, the Colombian Episcopal Conference issued a statement warning about the hazards of gender ideology for families. They also condemned the importation of foreign educational models, referring to a 2016 initiative of the Minister of Education to protect LGBTQ rights in schools (Muelle, 2017; Serrano Amaya, 2017). Yet, the signing of the first accord in September was celebrated with a Catholic ritual.

Regarding abortion, the ‘No’ supporters were not only backed by transnational connections attacking reproductive rights in Latin America, but were also building on a complex historical articulation between abortion and war in Colombia. On the one hand,

⁴⁰ This also reflects heterogeneous positions within the Catholic Church. The president of the Truth Commission, the priest Francisco De Roux criticized the weak of support the Catholic Church to the peace agreement (De Roux, 2018).

since the 1990s, the Catholic Church has used the rhetoric of peace to defend the life of fetuses, stating that in a country where a long history of armed conflict has trivialized death, a radical commitment to life is necessary (Viveros-Vigoya, 1999). Although abortion was not even mentioned in the accord, this was not the first time that conservative leaders proposed criminalization of abortion as a condition for a settlement between the State and an insurgent movement. In 1991, the Constituent Assembly that followed the demobilization of the guerrilla movement M-19 refused to include “free choice to motherhood” in order to maintain the support of the Catholic Church (Viveros Vigoya, 1999). On the other hand, the No campaign utilized the FARC’s persistent defense of abortions in the ranks to suggest that the legalization of abortion meant the legalization of forced abortion. They took advantage of the public contradiction between the accusation against El Enfermero and the declaration of FARC leaders stating that abortion was a right in the FARC.

Like in most Latin American countries, the Catholic Church has been the most constant actor in the pro-life movement. However, in Colombia, the Catholic Church also managed to establish an association between abortion and war that was reinforced by the cases of forced abortion in the FARC. An example of this association is the following poster hung on the facade of a maternity store in the downtown of Florencia, Caquetá. “Is this the face of the enemy?” reads the poster with a newborn held by male hands. When I asked about it, the owner of the store told me that they were promoting a Catholic campaign to prevent abortions and help both guerrilla and civilian women who interrupted their pregnancies to heal from their experience. Unlike other interpretations of abortions in the FARC, the fetus is the main subject in Catholic rhetoric, not the woman.



Picture 06. Is this the face of the enemy? by the author.

In addition to images of fetuses, the No campaign ads always included a national symbol such as the Colombian flag or the name of the country, establishing a link between the fetus victim and the nation. Picture 06 reads: “NO to: - abortion - those who attack families – gender perspective. That’s why I say NO to the Havana Accord.” The flyer on the picture 07 states: “Do you know that by saying yes you are approving the implementation of gender ideology and abortion in Colombia?” Family, gender, abortion, and Colombia glued together a form of identity for the No followers that was embedded in a binary logic of what the nation is and what it is not, what it should be and what it should not.



Picture 07. “NO to: - abortion - those who attack families – gender perspective. That’s why I say NO to the Havana Accord.”(*Nulidad Electoral - Auto Que Admite La Demanda y Resuelve Sobre La Solicitud de Medidas Cautelares*, 2016)



Picture 08. “Do you know that by saying yes you are approving the implementation of gender ideology and abortion in Colombia?”. Sent via WhatsApp to the author in March 2016.

The actual effects of gender ideology discourse on the results of the plebiscite are still debated. Some sources suggest that at least two million members of evangelical churches voted “No” (Marcos, 2016) while others question the electoral capital of these churches (Gil Hernández, 2020; Ortega, 2018). The latter stress that not all evangelical factions disapproved of the peace accord and that the more active churches in the No campaign were those with stronger links to

Álvaro Uribe (Basset, 2018). Perhaps the main reasons for the defeat were the lack of pedagogical strategies to explain the concrete implications of the accord and assuming that peace was a self-evident value that did not entail major transformations in national identity. In any case, the “No” campaign articulated different social and political sectors protecting hegemonic ideas of gender (Serrano Amaya, 2017), and their victory gave them enough political capital and visibility to participate in the renegotiation of the peace deal (Gil Hernández, 2020). In the revision of the accord, they asked to replace “gender equity” with “equal opportunities,” “gender-based violence” with “violence against women,” “sexual diversity and gender identity” with “groups in vulnerable conditions,” “gender” with “sex,” and “gender perspective” with “affirmative actions” (Mazzoldi & Cuesta, 2017). These were not cosmetic details. The new terms excluded the demands of the LGBTQ movements discussed in the gender sub-commission and reinforced the violence inflicted on LGBTQ people during the conflict (Ibid). Since abortion was not mentioned in any section of the agreement, there were no changes in this respect. The protection of private property and objections to transitional justice and political participation were also re-framed for the second version of the document.

Although the Council of State⁴¹ determined that the campaign had massively and systematically lied to people by distorting the agreement's content (Semana, 2016a), this activism and its repercussions should still be taken seriously. Representing the followers as fanatic and irrational groups has prevented us from understanding both their political agendas and the knowledge they are producing (Rodríguez Rondón & Rivera-Amarillo, 2020). Behind the apparently senseless affirmations of the campaign, such as “the imposition of a homosexual dictatorship,” “we would be like Venezuela,” or “forced abortions will be legal,” the campaign

⁴¹ The Council of State is the supreme tribunal with jurisdiction over administrative issues in Colombia.

was protecting fundamental national values about private property, the revenge rationality of the armed conflict, and the heteronormative and patriarchal family.

2.4 The Heroic Mother

A change in FARC reproductive policies was a central part of the peace process. During negotiations, the pregnancy ban was one of the first rules to be removed. After the signature of the second accord, the Ombudsman's Office of Colombia warned about the need for maternal and newborn healthcare in the reincorporation areas that were not prepared for this side effect of peace (Defensoría del Pueblo, 2017). This social transformation of the FARC was promptly reflected in the media in line with the political turbulence after the plebiscite. The press was inundated with images of farianas in guerrilla uniforms, some with rifles on their backs, carrying their newborn children. The national media talked about these babies as “The Children of Peace” (S. Guerrero, 2017; Mojica Patiño, 2017; Navarro, 2017; Restrepo, 2017) while the international media used the more catchy and American History-based headline of “Baby Boom” (Brodzinsky, 2017; Cosoy, 2017; Godula, 2017; NBC News, 2017; NPR, 2017; Tobella, 2017), which eventually would be adopted by national media (Moreno, 2017).



Picture 09. Photo by: Jesús Abad Colorado (Semana, 2017)

The news had started to pay attention to the babies of guerrilla women at the Tenth Conference, the last conference of the FARC as an army in September of 2016, which happened a week before the signature of the first accord. The event gathered national and international journalists and researchers to register the last actions of the revolutionary army (Fattal, 2018). Some combatants arrived with their newborns and one of them, Patricia, gave birth during the event. Like the conference, this birth was announced as the beginning of the political and social transition of the FARC to a civil movement (Argüello, 2016). The story of Patricia and her baby was published along with Olga Marín's words about abortion and motherhood as women's choices at a press briefing during the Tenth Conference (La W, 2016). Later, other stories of guerrilla mothers were published showing the contrast between war and peace, frequently through the textual or visual metaphor of exchanging rifles for babies.

Picture 10. Photo by: Fernando Vergara/AP (Tobella, 2017).



The national news on the “Children of Peace” not only differed from the atrocious stories of abortions released during intense times of war (see Chapter One), but also involved a shift in the media's outlook on farianas. This time journalists were directly speaking with FARC members

without the mediation of military reports. Controlling information and representations of guerrilla groups had been part of counterinsurgency strategies after the failed peace negotiations in Caguán in 2002. Journalists could no longer cover war events directly; instead, they received a report from the government and produced the news from that (Uribe Rincón, 2013). My archival research suggests that after 2002 the primary sources for news on guerrilla movements were reports from the military, declarations of government officials, testimonies from ex-combatants in the state program for demobilization and reintegration, and reports from NGOs. Accordingly, the news on abortion aligned with the government narrative to support military actions to defeat guerrilla armies.

During that time, the press talked about reproductive violence against women in the FARC through two figures: the girl victim and the brave mother. Ever since the military found intrauterine devices in the corpses of underage combatants in the Berlín Operation in 2000 (see Chapter One), a link between girls, forced contraception, and sexual violence was established. Therefore, the evidence about abortions in the FARC was frequently described as sexual violence against girls, although all women were subjected to the same reproductive policies (Bedoya, 2011; *El Tiempo*, 2009a, 2009b, 2010a, 2010b, 2011c; D. Guerrero, 2009; Laverde Palma, 2013; *Semana*, 2010, 2015, 2004, 2006a; Springer, 2012). Furthermore, the media always treated abortion as forced abortion and as a sign of FARC's moral decay. In the words of the Defense Minister Silva Luján on this reproductive practice, "these people have no good conscience of any kind and no moral duty" (*El Tiempo*, 2010a).

The second figure, the brave mother, depicted women who escaped the ranks to have their children. Using declarations of the military and testimonies of demobilized women, the media presented these cases as exemplary women whose desire to be mothers gave them the strength to

defy the forces of war (El Espectador, 2014; El Tiempo, 2008, 2011b, 2011a; Semana, 2006a; Zambrano, 2014). Under headlines such as “‘Carolina’, the woman who fled from the FARC to be a mother” (Zambrano, 2014), the news described the heroic journeys of female combatants who were finally rescued by the military that helped them fulfill their maternal dream. Regarding one of these cases, an Army General stated: “this mother is an example to follow for all those women in the FARC that are still looking for a chance to escape and give a better future to their current children and those who are coming. The orders to abort continue to frustrate the dreams of female fighters” (El Espectador, 2014). From all the reports published about abortions in guerrilla armies from 2002 to 2017 in two national newspapers and one magazine, only one column mentions the violence that some pregnant combatants experienced at the hands of the military when they were captured or demobilized (El Tiempo, 2016). After the detention of El Enfermero, narratives moved from abortion as a moral degradation of war to the legal implications of this practice.

Despite the contrast between the stories of combatants who fled their troops to have their children and the mothers of the Children of Peace, they both have in common a heroic mother who chooses peace over war, babies over rifles. Just as the press considered all abortions to be forced abortions, they also assumed that all pregnancies were wanted pregnancies. In addition, a new character appeared in the narratives of the Children of Peace: the father. Male combatants were humanized through their fatherhood and what this means in terms of being a protector and a provider. This is well illustrated in the story of Jeronimo, also known as “Care Santo” (Saint Face). After describing the challenges of his partner’s pregnancy at the end of peace negotiations, the news reads:

[...] This is the same man who participated in the bloody attack on Puerto Rico [a town in Caquetá] and who was the kidnapper of Alan Jara, Eduardo Géchem, Gloria Polanco, and the General Luis Mendiata for two years during their prolonged and

infamous kidnapping. Currently, one can see him in a reincorporation area, in civilian clothing, wearing a t-shirt with a stamped picture of his daughter” (Restrepo, 2017)



El resultado estaba en sus manos. Jerónimo, o Care Santo, comandaba el Frente Séptimo y no le quedaba difícil conseguir que le hicieran otro examen. Se trata del mismo hombre que participó de la sangrienta toma de Puerto Rico y que por dos años fue el carcelero de Alan Jara, Edmundo Guzmán, Gloria Polanco y el general Luis Mendieta durante su prolongado y infame secuestro. Actualmente se le ve en la zona voredeal, de civil, con una camiseta que lleva estampada la imagen de su hija.

Pero ni el desescalamiento del conflicto, ni el cese del fuego bilateral y definitivo decretado en agosto del año pasado significaron que los guerrilleros pudieran moverse a sus nichos. Por eso en sus nueve meses de gestación Carolina no pudo someterse a ningún chequeo médico.

Picture 11. Photo by: Juan Carlos Sierra (Semana, 2017)



Jerónimo había dejado todo listo. Una vez en la sala de urgencias el médico le recordó lo cara que le podría salir la imprudencia: “La bebé está aparentemente bien”. ¿Cómo así?, preguntó asustada. “Usted no tiene líquidos. No le puedo asegurar nada” le dijo mientras la trasladaba para practicarle una cesárea. Luego la escuchó llorar y alguien en la sala dijo: “Es una hermosa bebé”.

Alix es una más de los 64 niños que a la fecha deja el acuerdo de paz que firmaron el gobierno y las Farc en el Teatro Colón. “Tiene muchos tos”, cuenta Jerónimo. Todos están pendientes de que no falte nada. A veces “quieren cargar y cargar a los bebés pero no hay que dejar que se malacostumbren porque si no ya no le gusta permanecer en la hamaca. Uno es el que se encarta”.

Picture 12. Photo by: Juan Carlos Sierra (Semana, 2017)

Although the press is not homogeneous, the discourses produced about reproductive policies in the FARC reflected government security and peace policies. Thus, the press, as the house of official discourses, responded to the upheavals of the plebiscite by rearranging the elements articulated in the narratives of reproduction in the FARC. This partially amended previous representations that had fueled the “No” campaign. Stories of abortion, sexual violence, and war were replaced by stories of pregnancy, family, and peace. Both women and men seemed to redeem the aberrations of war through parenthood and find a place in the heteronormative family that the conservatives call the “cell of society” or “the original design of family.”⁴² This discursive shift offered a new representation of FARC members as depoliticized subjects who do not jeopardize the gender order that the “No” campaigners established as a core of national identity.

2.5 The Ex-combatant Victim

At the time the press was publishing pictures of guerrilla mothers, I met a member of La Mesa por la Vida y la Salud de las Mujeres (Table for Women’s Life and Health), a feminist organization that does legal advocacy for the legalization of abortion. She had been asked to write a column for a news website about pregnancies in the FARC. “I don’t see that as a good or a bad thing in itself,” she told me. “If that is what they want, good for them, it is a matter of choice.” Consequently, in her column she urges the State to make sure that pregnancies in the areas where ex-combatants were preparing for reincorporation to civilian life “are really their choice,” acknowledging the evidence about forced contraception and abortion and questioning the media assumption that all women wanted to be pregnant (Vélez González, 2017). The distinction between forced and voluntary reproductive practices would be the key to defining victimhood for feminist groups

⁴² This notion avoids the possibility of historical transformations by referring to an original time that constitutes the foundation of a national identity.

doing legal advocacy for sexual and reproductive rights; nonetheless, this distinction does not always operate in a clear way in the context of war.

In 2019, Women's Link Worldwide (WLW)—another nonprofit organization that works to bring gender perspectives into human rights law—presented a case to the Colombian Constitutional Court to recognize the status of victims for former combatants subjected to forced abortions. The 2011 Victim's Law excluded all adult members of armed groups, including women combatants, from its beneficiaries. Therefore, they could not receive government aid for social, psychological, or economic reparations for victims. The 2017 Law for Victims of Sexual Violence in the Armed Conflict did not solve this issue, since it adopted the International Humanitarian Law definition of "protected person," which also excludes people belonging to armed forces.

WLW exposed this legal limbo to the Constitutional Court through a writ of protection of fundamental right in favor of a former combatant, who they called Helena to protect her identity. She was recruited by the FARC at the age of fourteen, subjected to mandatory contraception, and forced to abort with harmful consequences for her mental and physical health. The Court recognized this woman as a victim of sexual violence (specifically, mandatory contraception and forced abortion) and mandated the Unit for Comprehensive Victim Support and Reparations, known as the Victim's Unit, to include her as a beneficiary of their programs. This verdict aligned with the decision of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 2019 to declare guilty Bosco Ntaganda, a former commander of the rebel group Union of Congolese Patriots (UCP), of the war crimes of rape and sexual slavery against other members of the UCP. This was the first time that the ICC convicted a commander for sexual violence offenses committed against members of his own troops (ICC, 2019). The decision of the Colombian Constitutional Court represented another

international milestone by explicitly recognizing combatants subjected to sexual violence as victims.

Helena was unanimously acknowledged as a victim. Yet it is worth analyzing the discussion behind the decision. Most of the Constitutional Court judges agreed that the 2011 Victims' Law in Colombia should not exclude members of the armed forces who were themselves victims of sexual violence. However, the position of one of the judges helps us elucidate the intricacies of the definition of victimhood based on the premise of choice. He considered that the exclusion of combatants was not a problem in the Victims' Law. Still, he recognized that Helena deserved the benefits of Victim's Unit because she was not a combatant. In his account, she had not joined the FARC to reinforce their military structure, but to serve as a sexual and domestic slave. WLW, however, had not made this allegation before the Court. Indeed, their public report states that Helena's pregnancy resulted from a consensual relationship (Women's Link Worldwide, 2019). This judge's position highlights critical questions about the political and symbolic implications of understanding reproductive practices among female combatants through the framework of sexual violence. Following Das' (1996) analysis on rape and judicial discourse, by assuming that Helena was a sexual and domestic slave, the judge established a set of semantic transactions between her experience and the judicial discourse of sexual violence that produced a particular form of victimhood that can be recognized by law. To accept Helena's victimhood, this judge eliminated the possibility that Helena might have joined the guerrilla voluntarily. As Ross (2003) illustrates about women in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, definitions of "victim" and "violence" shed light on certain truths while obscuring others. The judicial discourse on sexual violence produces ex-combatant women as victimized subjects by eliminating their military identity, their political subjectivity, and their sexual agency.

2.6 Conclusion

Although the peace deal did not entail radical reforms, it proposed to recast a national pact to peaceful coexistence with one another (*refundar un pacto nacional de convivencia*), which required amending a historic debt with rural communities, diversifying political participation, committing to human rights, and challenging the patriarchal logics of war and peace. The agreement did not challenge the economic model or propose drastic legal, political, or cultural transformations; however, it called into question the values of a militarized society. This was perceived as a threat to the core of national identity or, as conservatives call it “the cell of society”: the heteronormative and patriarchal family.⁴³ In this context, reproductive politics became an arena to discuss the implications of a peace agreement for a national identity built upon a long history of war. These debates are also playing out in a global context in which reproductive governance is becoming central to political identities and the rise of the global religious nationalists.

In this chapter, I explored discursive articulations about abortion that linked political subjects and meanings on gender, nation, and war during a time of extraordinary dynamism. I suggest that these discourses were contingent articulations that happened when a national pact to end the armed conflict was challenging hegemonic ideas about national identity. Through different combinations of meanings about abortion, motherhood, war, and peace, at least four discursive formations about reproductive politics in the FARC were produced: the feminist revolutionaries who fight for women’s rights, the fetus victim of an immoral regime (“gender ideology”), the heroic mother who vindicates the name of the FARC through the sacred symbols of motherhood, and the victim of sexual violence in search of recognition. Multiple social groups were in one way

⁴³ In a country of absent fathers, Uribe is the abusive patriarch who teaches us about the values of a militarized nation.

or another connected to these discourses: farianas, right-wing political parties, evangelical churches, the Catholic Church, the government, the press, women for peace, reproductive rights activists, the Attorney General, and the Constitutional Court.

It is under specific historical conditions that these discursive articulations have emerged in response to relations of domination and resistance (Hall, 1986), but the meanings linked in these discourses have no necessary correspondence (Slack, 2005) and are as dynamic as the politics of war and peace in Colombia. Exploring the contingent character of these articulations helps us problematize associations between abortion and war that have long hindered both an agenda for reproductive rights and reproductive justice, and a peace settlement that fully includes women's demands in Colombia. This is not meant to relativize the violence that female fighters have experienced in the armed conflict, but to think critically about the discourses that acknowledge this violence. For instance, the decision of the Constitutional Court that conferred on an ex-combatant woman the status of victim, as well as the 07 case of the Special Justice for Peace (JEP) that is currently investigating sexual abuse and forced abortion against minors in the FARC, are remarkable precedents for Colombia and the world. These legal actions take a step forward in the recognition of the specific impacts of war on women's lives and develop mechanisms for justice and reparation. However, the ruling should also open a conversation about the possibilities and limits of the framework of sexual violence to approach the complexity of women's experiences in war. Highlighting the victimized part of women's experiences in the FARC while obscuring other dimensions has a depoliticizing effect on women's struggles. It could erase the complexity of their claims as guerrilla women, and blunt possibilities for freedom that they found in insurgent life to transform gender norms. It also excludes forms of reproductive violence that are perpetrated by other actors, including the state.

CHAPTER 3

DAR A LUZ EN LA OSCURIDAD. STORIES OF MOTHERING AND SURVIVAL IN THE MIDST OF WAR

I met the love of my life, Asdrual, on May 27, 2000, at 9:48 pm. We were part of an organization called FARC-EP, where we fought for ideals of equality, socialism, and well-being for people. It all started when I was 14 years old. My name was Cielo, but they also called me Fiera (Beast) because I have a short temper; everyone has nicknames there. I was in the Yari savannas in Caquetá with 450 other combatants in military and political training to respond to the repressions and attacks of the government. It was a time of great difficulties and suffering. We experienced hunger, thirst, and fatigue. Plan Patriota started in 2003, and I got pregnant in 2004. Despite the situation, I wanted to get pregnant. I was the one who administered contraceptives for women in my group and injected myself with a contraceptive different from the one I always used. When you change your method, you are not supposed to have sex for a month, but I did. I had two dreams when I was a girl, being a guerrillera and being a mom. I wanted someone to call me “mom.”

On December 24 at 3:15 pm, we were assaulted by the military. I will never forget that day. A commander and a combatant died, and two more were severely wounded. I was one month pregnant. Colombian and American troops attacked us day and night for weeks. We could not sleep for a month. Two months later, we had to move to the third front of the FARC-EP. We crossed the central mountain range to go from Doncello to Florencia. It was extremely risky because we had to pass near the Larandia military base. I was four months pregnant. We walked for days until we reached the village El Pará. That’s where it all got complicated for my baby and me. They found out that I was pregnant and Samuel, the commander, brought a lady from Florencia, Lourdes, who worked with the third front performing abortions on warrior women. We were two pregnant girls. Katherine let them take her baby out, but I said to Samuel: “I will walk as much as you want and do whatever you want, but don’t make me abort. I’m not gonna let you.”

I didn’t care if I had to die for my baby. I cried a lot. I asked God to give me the courage to revolt and have my baby. They gave me Cytotec⁴⁴ pills, but I put them under my tongue and then under the mattress. On the third day, Lourdes got into the room with Pitocin⁴⁵ in her hands. She opened the vial and prepared the needle, but she decided to go to the bathroom before injecting me. The nurse Natalia, a beautiful guerrilla woman, was there. She threw the liquid out of the vial, put serum, and left everything as Lourdes had left it. Lourdes injected me with serum and, after seeing that I did not respond to the medications, she called Samuel. They lifted the mattress and found all the evidence. Samuel asked Lourdes if he could give me all the pills ground in water, and she said yes. He was very upset.

“You made fun of me!” he yelled.

“I was very clear when I told you that I was not gonna let you do anything to my baby.”

“We will see,” he said in a threatening tone.

⁴⁴ Misoprostol

⁴⁵ A drug used to induce labor

He brought me the pills ground up in a glass of water, but before he forced me to drink it, I threw the glass away. I was afraid of being sent to a war council and killed, but God listened to my pleas and gave me courage.

“You will see what they are going to do to you,” Samuel said furiously, and left me crying. It was humiliating.

They sent Fernando, a guerrillero, to take me to Remolinos del Caguán, to a farmhouse next to Río Bravo in Caquetá. I arrived and saw the baby’s father, Asdrual. They had brainwashed him. They told him that I had taken medication and that the baby would be like a monster, sick and deformed.

“I don’t care if the baby is born headless. As long as he is born alive, I will love him anyway,” I said.

I was so mad and insulted everyone who was trying to convince me to abort. So, they finally let me have the baby. Comrade Gaitán, a commander, asked his partner Graciela to take me to her unit where I could stay while I was pregnant. It was an easy time for me. They didn’t make me do anything, and I could sleep and rest as much as I wanted.

That month, the third front initiated a terrain reconnaissance to attack a military checkpoint on the outskirts of Florencia. I was five months pregnant when the day of the attack came, that tragic day. The first shots began in the morning. Everything was going according to plan until we started to run out of ammunition. Someone sent a message in code to receive support, “we are running out of corn,” but the military intercepted that communication and knew what we meant. Then they asked for air and land reinforcements; everything happened so fast. Twenty-four combatants got lost amid the deadly military response, and it took them three days to find their way back to the encampment. But nine of them never came back, including my first man, the love of my life, and the father of my baby. I couldn’t believe it. I wanted to die. I loved him and still love him. I felt like half of my life was going away.

Days and months passed, and I was like the living dead, but at least I had one reason to keep going. I was waiting for my baby with eagerness and happiness. When I was about to give birth, they took me to El Tovar’s village, where a traditional midwife was waiting for me. She was very kind to me. At 9:00 pm, my contractions started, and at 1:40 am, on August 11, my princess was born. She was a beautiful baby, and I was the happiest woman and mother in the world. I thanked God that my daughter was born healthy despite everything they did to me. After finishing the dieta,⁴⁶ I went to Pará and then walked to La Esperanza carrying my baby.

One day, they took me to a hut where they ground sugarcane to make panela. In that damn hut, they snatched my baby from my arms. She was barely a month old. In those days, my cousin had also been killed. I had lost my cousin, the love of my life, and my daughter. I was about to lose my mind.

They took my girl to El Pará, where a militiaman was going to pick her up and hand her over to a surrogate family. But he never came, so they gave her to a group of combatants in a

⁴⁶ A forty-day postpartum period when women rest, drink hot beverages, and learn how to breastfeed with the help of an older woman. In rural areas, women are usually fed with hen soups and other kinds of food that help them recover from giving birth.

house near Pará to take care of her and find a family for her. They didn't have time. On September 20 at 5:00 am, when one of them was changing my baby's diapers, the military assaulted the house and killed seven of them. Three warrior women tried to escape with my baby. They ran to the forest but couldn't make it. When the fire ceased, the soldiers heard a baby crying. My baby was lying on the ground in only her diaper and was covered in scratches. They thought that one of the female combatants, the one who had recently had a baby and still had milk coming out her breasts, was the baby's mother. So, they took her with them to the nearest town, bought her clothes and diapers, and sent her to Florencia to the Forensic Medicine Institute. Then she was sent to the courthouse, and, finally, they took her to ICBF,⁴⁷ where they found a surrogate mother.

When I heard all this, I went to the commander and yelled at him:

"If my daughter is dead, it is your fault!"

"The baby is alive, and we are working to rescue her," he replied.

They asked a woman named Alicia, a guerrilla spy, to pass for the baby's mother. She told ICBF that she was in that house to buy some cows and left the baby because it was raining. But she also offered money to people in the Forensic Medicine Institute and told them the truth. They asked her to bring blood samples from the birth mother and a 24 million (8,000 USD) bribe to exchange the blood samples. When the DNA results came out, my baby was nine months old. They gave the baby back to Alicia, and the commander let me see her for fifteen minutes.

Days and months went by, and I didn't know anything about my beautiful princess. In 2008, the FARC-EP South Block gave the order to the command of the third front to release the area where they operated. We started the march towards the Block Guard. There were short clashes almost every day. We only had medicines and ammunition, a few personal hygiene supplies, and nothing to eat other than unpeeled corn and water. Some comrades died, and for five or six months, we could barely sleep or bathe. I missed my daughter and my love; only the revolutionary morale kept me on my feet fighting against the bourgeois, the enemy.

We finally reached the Caguán river. The military was patrolling the river in large armored vessels with heavy artillery, fifty point 120-millimeter mortars, among others. But we managed to cross the river and set up camp on the other side for fifteen days where we could rest and eat. Those were the best times. The same year, I was asked to join a flying column with other experienced and disciplined combatants. We had to march toward the fifteenth front to prepare politically and militarily for the upcoming challenges. They gave us all the food we wanted—tamales, masato, buñuelos, natilla, carne asada—hygiene supplies, medicines, and ammunition. We danced and celebrated for three days. I had beautiful experiences in the FARC-EP. I learned to be strong, brave, hardworking, and not to let anyone mess with me.

On December 5 at 2:40 am, the military attacked us. It was like the end of the world—helicopters shooting with machine guns, airplanes bombing, and enemy troops landing. We didn't know the area well, and a lot of our comrades died. The hostilities didn't stop, especially in the coca-growing areas, and I was severely injured in one of the attacks. They took me to a hospital in Florencia, but the military learned that I was there. I had to sneak out with the help of the

⁴⁷ ICBF (Colombian Institute for Family Welfare) is the state agency for minors' rights. It is one of the largest institutions in the country, with 33 headquarters and 214 service centers. Among its several functions, it is the only institution authorized to regulate adoption services.

hospital staff and was transferred to Ecuador to recover until 2012. For so long, I didn't know anything about my daughter. The only thing I knew was that someone named Pedro had picked her up and given her to his sister. I remained strong, but my nights were full of loneliness and sorrow.

[...]

One day, after I was sent back to Colombia, Comrade Luis Arenas visited us to take stock of the front's performance. I met with him to ask him about my daughter, and he told me that he would bring my petition to the main commanders. A couple of weeks later, Pedro, may he rest in peace, arrived at the front. I couldn't hide the smile on my face when I saw him; they had listened to my request.

"Fiera, come on," said Comrade Luis, nicknamed Guarapo.

"Yes, comrade," I replied.

"Ask Ana to go with you and Pedro. They are going to take you to see your daughter."

I couldn't believe it. I was crying and full of joy. There were so many mixed feelings that I almost went crazy. We were close to the house, but we had to go around a lake to get there. I did not hesitate, and without thinking, I threw myself into the lake and swam. I wanted to see my daughter, touch her, kiss her. I can't find words to express all I felt at that moment. Every time I think about it, I feel joy again. That was June 3 of 2012. My daughter was seven years old. When I got to that house, a lady was bathing a girl. I had tears in my eyes; I couldn't believe it. When the lady came to dress the girl, I also entered the room and saw my beautiful baby.

"Good morning," I greeted her.

The girl called that lady "mom." I understand that my daughter has had a good life thanks to her, but when she called her mom, I felt like my heart had been ripped out of my chest. I went out to cry; I couldn't stop crying.

I calmed down and went into the room again. The lady had already dressed her, and I asked the girl her name.

"Mariana," she said.

"What a beautiful name! And are you going to school?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Who are you?" the lady asked.

"I am Cielo, the girl's mother."

The lady began to cry and begged me not to take the girl away from her. She said that she loved her very much, that she was a well-behaved girl.

"No," I said, "I'm not going to take my baby away from you, I just want to spend time with her. You must understand that I am the birth mother, and I have the same rights as you. I'm not going to tell her that I'm her mother; I'm going to say that I am her aunt."

We spent three days together, talking, playing, enjoying each other's company; it was so lovely. When the day to say goodbye to my beautiful baby came, I felt like they were snatching her from my arms again; I wanted to die. I left my soul with Mariana. Before leaving, I wrote the lady's phone on a piece of paper so that I could communicate with her.

A couple of weeks later, we initiated a march toward another area to pay homage to Comrade Manuel Marulanda Velez and packed only personal supplies and ammunition for combat. The rest was buried in the forest. I decided to leave the number there in case I was killed or wounded because the military could use the number to take my daughter again. But the comrades who hid all our things didn't do it well, and the enemy found everything.

[...]

I lost track of my baby again and couldn't take it anymore. At the first opportunity I had to flee, I did it. I deserted on November 11 of 2012, at midnight, with Mariela, another comrade. We were in Santa Helena's village and arranged with a militiaman to wait for us in La Paloma. He had a bag with civilian clothes and a Nokia cell phone for me. But everything went wrong because we got lost and it took us four hours instead of two to get to La Paloma. The sun was rising. As soon as they noticed my absence, combatants were sent everywhere to look for us. We had to spend three days and three nights hiding in a pond without eating or moving. There were combatants dressed as civilians looking for us in the nearby towns, making checkpoints, and seizing the canteens in milk carts to see if we were hiding in there. After three days, we walked to the town of Doncello and left in two motorcycles at 2:00 am. Mariela's family was already waiting for her in Florencia, but I had no communication with my family. That was the last time I saw her. From Florencia, a civilian friend took me to San Vicente del Caguán. I didn't have an ID; I had never been issued one. From San Vicente, we traveled to San Juan de Losada, my hometown. I had been there when it was part of the demilitarized zone for the peace process with Pastrana, but many things had changed since then. My friend dropped me off by the Guayabero river, gave me some money, and drove back to Caquetá. I was terrified of both the military and the FARC-EP; at that point, both could kill me, but there was no turning back. I was determined to find my daughter.

A boy took me to Julia, a small town where my brother lives. I had to be very careful not to use words like comrade or compañero because he would know that I was a guerrillera. He dropped me off at a small store, where I asked for my brother, and they gave me his number.

"Hi, this is Cielo, your sister."

My awful brother was so nervous.

"Stay there. The military is everywhere, it's dangerous," he said.

The idiot arrived with my nephew. He sent us along a path close to a military base. While we were walking, he took another route and talked to a commander of the State Forces. The moron turned me over to the military for nine million pesos (3,000 USD). They captured me and sent me directly to Bogotá. After so many interrogations, they even bribed me by offering help to find my daughter if I worked for them. But I didn't; I didn't want to get in any more trouble. I also knew that I had to be careful about what I said because I could go to jail. They took a lot of pictures of me; my face, my eyes, my scars, my back, my fingerprints... everything.

[...]

Cielo was sent to a halfway home and then joined the state reintegration program.

I attended all the workshops of ACR (Colombian Agency for Reintegration) in Villavicencio. My daughter was always in my mind and my heart. I asked people in ACR and other demobilized friends to help me find her. The thought of her was slowly killing me. I was desperate; I even went to Evangelical churches to pray for her. At school, I met the father of my second daughter, Claudia. We were together for two years.

[...]

I cried thinking of my daughter, but every time I was about to give up, something told me that I would find her, and my friends like Lisa, Vanesa, and ex-combatant friends gave me hope.

One day, an ex-combatant who saw how they took my baby away from me sent me a Facebook request.

“I saw your daughter with a lady,” she said.

I couldn't believe it. She sent me pictures. My daughter was already a teenager. I was so excited; I can't find words to express what I felt and what I feel now. I even got sick. My friend told me how to find my daughter on Facebook. I contacted her, but it took her so long to accept to talk to me. When we finally spoke, my voice faltered.

“Don't be scared. I would never hurt you, my heaven.”

She told her mom, her other mom, that she was talking to me. Her other mom talked to another ex-combatant to confirm who I was and contacted me. She agreed to meet with my daughter and me, so I traveled with my two other children from Ecuador to their place. I was so nervous, but I asked God to put words in my mouth. I talked with the other mother first, and later I went to their house.

The lady took us to a room and said: “Mariana, this is your mom,” then looked at me and said, “This is your daughter.”

I felt my heart was jumping out of my chest. We hugged each other with so much love and I asked her to forgive me. We couldn't stop crying. I stayed there for a couple of weeks, she asked me all the questions she had, but I had to go back to Ecuador to work on a farm.

3.1 Motherhood and Militarism in the FARC

While forced abortions in the FARC have been widely debated, maternity and motherhood have been rarely considered. In Chapter Two, I paid special attention to how representations of

farianas' reproductive lives produce meanings that enable and disable political possibilities for ex-combatant women. This chapter takes a step beyond public discourses to explore the embodied experiences of having a baby in the midst of war. I focus on the voices of those who lived those experiences and the difficult conditions in which they were pregnant, gave birth, received help, and looked for their children. In other words, how war stories and maternal stories intersect in the fine line between life and death. In doing so, I follow a reproductive justice approach that contextualizes reproductive violence and reproductive resistance within a large matrix of oppression (L. Ross et al., 2017). By weaving Cielo's story with conversations with other ex-combatants and civilians who took care of these women and their babies in Caquetá, I argue that mothering in war is a praxis of survival that, through community networks of care, kept combatants and their children alive.

I met Cielo through a mutual friend who put us in contact via Facebook. I introduced myself, but she did not reply. Three months later, I received a message from a different Facebook account: "I want to talk to you about my daughter." We talked on the phone, and she told me that she had been looking for a child she had in the FARC-EP fourteen years ago. I offered her the resources of the peace institute I was working with at the time, including a lawyer and information about official channels to find her daughter. I tried, however, to be honest about my limited possibilities to help with the search. We promised to be in touch, but she stopped replying to my messages. A year later, she said hi from another Facebook account with a different name. Since then, we kept in contact regularly for four years. After demobilizing, she had two children who I have seen growing and witnessing their mother's struggles for a life of dignity.

After finding her daughter in 2019, Cielo told me she wanted to write her story. She knew about the children's book I created with other ex-combatants and felt inspired to do something

similar. During one of her unemployment periods, we used some of my funding for her to write. Every night, she sent me parts of her writing as text messages to proofread and save in a Word document, then we talked about the story and her feelings about it. At its completion, I shared the whole text with her, we read it together, and she authorized me to use some excerpts for this chapter while we are still working on creating a mini-book. Even though I made some edits and translated the story into English, I believe in the methodological and political value of quoting the central sections of the story at length. Cielo brilliantly describes the emotional and physical implications of being simultaneously an insurgent and a maternal body. Her narrative illuminates our understanding of motherhood and mothering in war, which is an overlooked experience of women combatants' lives. Drawing on the distinction proposed by Adrienne Rich (1995) between motherhood as an institution and mothering as an experience, I refer to the kin relationship that ties mothers (including othermothers) to children as "motherhood," and the everyday practices to monitor, nurture, and raise a child as "mothering."

Cielo's story starts in 2000 in the demilitarized zone that the government conceded to the FARC-EP during the failed peace negotiation in Caquetá (1999-2002), and the story develops during the most violent counter-insurgency military actions in contemporary Colombian history. The Plan Patriota that she mentions was part of Plan Colombia (1999-2015), a United States military aid that aimed to combat drug trafficking and guerrilla groups. It started its military actions in 2004 with a renewed discourse on terrorism after 9/11 that erased the division between drug cartels and insurgency under the unified category of "narcoterrorists" (Rustand, 2008). Plan Patriota has been the most aggressive deployment of military forces in the south of the country, with more than 17,000 troops along the Caguán River and Yari Savannas (Semana, 2006b). Ex-combatants I met who went through this time proudly presented themselves as survivors. The

details that Cielo generously provides about surviving every day in this context give us access to the embodied experiences of geopolitical events and the meanings of the landscapes of war (Katto, 2014). As Dowler & Sharp (2001) state, this kind of perspectives grounded in everyday actions and feelings rewrites the stories of women in armed conflicts from the complexity of their participation as warriors, citizens, and mothers.

Ex-combatants, from all sides, still remember the bombs' vibrations, the dismembered bodies of their companions, or the many scenes of what they thought would be the last vision in their life. As Cielo vividly describes, hunger, fatigue, lack of sleep, cold, humidity, fear, mistrust, betrayal, and mourning were part of everyday life during Plan Patriota. There were also moments of joy, victory, love, and empowerment, but they all concur that it was an intense emotional and physical experience. As I referred to in Chapter One, this was also the time when the FARC tightened reproductive policies for women. Abortions and forced abortions became common, and women who had their children under fire had to develop careful routines to cope with extreme violence. As Walker (2015) says about mothers in the Sri Lanka war "life was about learning to negotiate, to push at small cracks and spaces in the prevailing structures, and to work their lives around and beyond violence" (p.26).

Studies of motherhood and war usually address the experiences of non-combatant women. There is an extensive literature that critically analyses the narratives about the nationalist mothers or domestic soldiers who are expected to reproduce the values of their national political regimes (Davis, 2014; Ryan, 2014), the patriotic mothers of soldiers as sacrificial mothers (Jimenez Murguia & Peters, 2014; Slattery & Garner, 2007), and the civilian mothers in recent armed conflicts struggling to survive with their children as victims (Akesson, 2015; Walker, 2015). Yet, less attention has been paid to mothers as soldiers. Although all experiences of motherhood in

conflict share a common fight to survive and protect children from violence, the double role of mothers and soldiers complicates simple rationalities about maternal thinking as prone to peacemaking and militarism. Feminism is still developing frameworks to answer the question, in Zubytska's words (2015): "How are we then to make sense of maternal and militant experiences that run parallel for mother soldiers engaged in war?" In the following sections, I put Cielo's story in conversation with the voices of other combatant women who lived through Plan Patriota in Caquetá. I explore ex-combatants' narratives about pregnancy, childbirth, and separation from their children, as well as the narratives of civilian women and men who took care of combatants and their children.

3.2 Mothering as a Radical Act of Hope

– "What was your main motivation to have a baby?" I asked many times to women who had a child or wanted to have a child in times of war.

– "At least some of me would stay in this world," some of them answered.

The FARC premise that "motherhood and war are incompatible" excludes motherhood as part of women's political struggles and ignores the role of mothering in military life. The story of Cielo and hundreds of other women who had children before or during their participation in this guerrilla group shows that war and motherhood were, if not compatible, at least possible. The numbers also support this statement. The census of the 10,015 ex-combatants who signed the 2016 peace agreement reports that, despite the strict reproductive practices in the FARC, 54% of them (men and women) had at least one child by the time of demobilization (Universidad Nacional,

2017).⁴⁸ Although this information is unknown for people who demobilized individually before the agreement, the 2017 census gives us an idea of parenthood in the ranks. One could infer that the percentage of parents could be higher among those who demobilized before the agreement since, according to my interviews and press reports, motherhood was a leading cause of desertion.

The results of the census do not disaggregate between men and women, but there are reasons to think that fatherhood could also be common among combatants. When I asked about fatherhood in the guerrilla, women stressed that the no-children rule was the same for everyone, but it was easier for men to have children out of the group since they had to follow less strict contraceptive policies. In the case of women, reproductive rules varied according to their front, women's status in the group, their partner's status in the group, and political and military conditions—mandatory contraception and abortions were stricter after 2002 when the armed conflict escalated. Besides, many female fighters hid their pregnancies, feigned health conditions to avoid abortions, or persuaded their commanders to let them have their babies while in the group. Furthermore, some women joined the guerrilla group after having children as a way to escape from domestic violence, because they liked military life, or as an option to support their families. The latter was common among militiawomen who were often economically rewarded in exchange for joining specific missions. As one of them told me:

Life in my village is not easy. It's hard to make money for food, and it's even harder if you have a child. But working with the guerrilla group is pretty normal because they live among us. It's like joining the police. I had many friends there, so I used to go to work with them for a month or so and came back home. [...] I could make 300 or 400 thousand pesos (100-130 USD) depending on the job. But it's not standard, or like you're paid to do that. It is more like a voluntary tip. You do it as a contribution to the cause.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Although this is the technical term for standing down an armed force, FARC representatives of the peace agreement prefer to call it “mobilization toward democracy” to set a difference between them and those who deserted the group.

⁴⁹ La vida en mi pueblo no es fácil. Es duro conseguir plata para comer y todavía más si uno tiene hijos. Pero allá trabajar para la guerrilla es muy normal porque ellos viven con nosotros. Es como entrar a la policía. Yo tenía muchos amigos allá. Entonces yo a veces me iba a trabajar con ellos un mes o así y luego me devolvía para la casa. [...] Yo me podía ganar 300 o 400 mil pesos según la misión. Claro que no era fijo o como que a uno le pagaran por hacer eso. Era más como una propina. Uno lo hacía como una contribución a la causa.

Unlike members of militia, joining the FARC as a combatant was a life commitment. Incurable diseases and advanced age were the only legitimate reasons to retire. Having children while in the group was perceived as favoring personal interests over the greater struggle for social justice. Thus, couples who received authorization to have a child in the ranks had to convince their commanders of their absolute commitment to the revolutionary cause and that they would not abandon the group.

Marcela's story, a former combatant, illustrates this demand to show unconditional loyalty. She got pregnant with the child of a collaborator of the FARC, who she was instructed to seduce and convince to manufacture weapons for them. Marcela decided to keep her pregnancy a secret, but when she could not hide it anymore, the commander gave her the order to abort. The baby's father advocated for her by reminding the commander of all the work he had done for the movement and asked him to let them have the baby. As a tradeoff, Marcela's partner offered to join the forces as a fighter. Because of this enlistment, she received permission to spend the last months of her pregnancy at her mother-in-law's home and return eight days after her baby was born.

Not all women wanted to have children or to carry all their pregnancies to term. Different pregnancies had different meanings for women (Michaels & Morgan, 1999). While some women avoided motherhood during their time in the group, others, like Cielo and Marcela, decided to carry some pregnancies to term and not others. Those who chose to have a child told me that they tightly wrapped their belly hoping that by the time it was evident the commander would find it too late for an abortion, they doubled their physical activity to demonstrate that they could conduct military work while pregnant, or they planned to escape from the moment they learned about their

pregnancy. Many of them were subjected to forced abortion, and those who were authorized to have a child were required to return to the troops a few days after giving birth to prevent both desertion and being found by the military. Children had to remain with one of the parents' families or with a surrogate family.

When guerrilla women in the 70s demanded access to contraception and abortion, convinced that motherhood needed to be postponed until after the victory of the revolution, the armed conflict was not expected to last forever. Armed violence had a specific goal and a timeline. But in Colombia, the war has not ended: colonial violence, bipartisan violence, state violence, insurgent violence, paramilitary violence, and drug trafficking violence have intersected and reproduce each other in perverse loops, taking the lives of generations. Despite these despairing circumstances, many guerrilla women decided to become moms, "At least some of me would stay in this world," some of them answered when I asked about their motivations. I suggest that in a context where armed violence has been ingrained in everyday life for decades, giving birth is an act of radical hope. Women who hid their growing bellies under their camouflage were defying the death sentence of an endless war. They were resisting not only military control over their reproductive lives, but also the extermination of impoverished and marginalized communities.

3.3 Dar a Luz en la Oscuridad – Giving Birth in the Dark

Although some women gave birth on plastic bags sterilized with bleach in improvised huts in the forest assisted by combatants trained as nurses, most women were sent to a rural family before labor to receive assistance from a traditional midwife. Magdalena's family was one of them. They had a house at the edge of Caguán River. The FARC was present all over this area, as one

can infer from Cielo's story. She mentions several locations along this river such as El Pará, Remolinos del Caguán, and San Vicente. Magdalena's husband ran a boat transport company and was often asked to transport sick or pregnant combatants to his place, where Magdalena took care of them.

Magdalena is an indigenous woman from the Central-West Colombia who came as a child with her mom when Caquetá was a promised land for those who fled from the bipartisan violence (1940s-1960s) in the central region. Like most people in Caquetá, she had a complex relationship with the FARC. Caquetá has a long tradition of guerrilla movements doing grassroots work to encourage communities to fight against social and economic oppression and many people sympathized with these movements' ideas of justice and equality. As Cielo told me once: "People in Caquetá are very revolutionary. When you visited a community, they gave you food and treated you well, not like in other places."⁵⁰ Yet, the intimidating presence of armed actors and the abuses of power that come with it have also generated resentment among civilians against the FARC. Magdalena and her family shared this conflicting sentiment. While they were not immune to the violence perpetrated by both the guerrilla movement and the military; on many occasions, they were willing to offer their house and knowledge on medicinal plants to take care of combatants

When Magdalena was trusted with sick combatants, she hosted them in one of her places. Inspired by her indigenous and campesino heritage, she provided beverages, ointments, or plasters with medicinal plants until the person fully recovered or was asked to rejoin the troops. When home remedies were insufficient, she contacted a traditional healer for support. With pregnant combatants, Magdalena looked after them during pregnancy, and when labor started, she called a

⁵⁰ La gente en Caquetá es muy revolucionaria. Cuando uno llegaba a una comunidad le daban comida y lo trataban muy bien, no como en otras partes.

traditional midwife. She remembers that Rubi, a guerrillera, refused to see a health professional despite the warning signs during her pregnancy.

She gave birth in my house with a traditional midwife. She said she was afraid to go to the hospital and didn't want to go. Doña Dolores was the birth attendant. It was very complicated. I didn't know what preeclampsia was, but I think that's what she had. She was very swollen and could not breathe properly because of the high blood pressure. Doña Dolores gave her a lot of remedies, such as fig leaves, until the baby was born. [...] She was very stressed out about being caught because I lived close to a police station, but I would tell her that no one would have to know that she was a guerrillera. 'That's only for my husband, you, and me to know, not even my children know.'⁵¹

Rubi gave birth to a healthy baby that Magdalena took to Rubi's parents after she rejoined her guerrilla unit. Regardless of health conditions, attending a hospital was keenly avoided, even for complicated cases. Nonetheless, when going to the hospital was a life-or-death issue, Magdalena arranged a secret medical appointment with a doctor friend who agreed to see the patient under the promise of not being involved. Magdalena took the patient at night to the hospital, and if medical exams were required, a nurse, the doctor's wife, did them at Magdalena's home the next day. This was the case of Sonia, a combatant sent to Magdalena after her seventh abortion.

When she got to my house, I started to take care of her with vaporizations, rue beverages, chamomile, mugwort, and so on to stop the bleeding. 'Please, don't take me to the hospital; I'm scared. Bring a healer to treat me here,' she told us. We found Doña Lola, but she said that Sonia must see a doctor. So, I wrapped her with a sheet that night and took her to the hospital. Her cervix was completely destroyed because of abortions. Abortions in war are performed with dangerous techniques; it's not like a curettage; it's very rudimentary. That's why Sonia suffered that much.⁵²

⁵¹ Ella dio a luz en mi casa con una partera. Decía que le daba mucho miedo de ir al hospital y no quería ir. Doña Soledad fue la que atendió el parto. Fue muy complicado. Yo no sabía lo que era una preeclampsia, pero yo creo que eso era lo que ella tenía. Ella estaba muy hinchada y no podía respirar bien por la presión tan alta. Doña Soledad le daba muchos remedios, hojas de brevo y eso hasta que el bebé nació. [...] Ella estaba muy estresada porque la iba a agarrar porque yo vivía cerca a una estación de policía, pero yo le decía que nadie tenía que saber que ella era una guerrillera. 'Eso solo lo sabemos mi esposo, usted y yo, ni siquiera mis hijos saben.'

⁵² Cuando ella llegó a mi casa yo empecé a hacerle vaporizaciones, bebidas de ruda, manzanilla, artemisa, y así para parar la hemorragia. "Por favor no me lleve al hospital; a mi me da miedo. Traiga un remediario para que me cure aquí" nos decía. Nosotros conseguimos a Doña Lulu, pero ella dijo que a Sonia la tenía que ver un médico. Entonces

Hospitals are contentious spaces for health and citizenship in war zones. On the one hand, hospitals have several limitations on providing optimal medical assistance, including maternal healthcare. As reported in different studies, the destruction of health services and the difficulty of accessing healthcare in war-affected areas have detrimental consequences for reproductive healthcare (Akol et al., 2016; Mann, 2015a; Urdal & Che, 2013). Ostrach and Singer (2012) use the term “syndemics of war” to refer to the interaction between different conditions in war contexts that significantly increase morbidity and mortality. In Colombia, state and non-state armed forces have perpetrated attacks against health infrastructure, patients, health personnel, and medically equipped vehicles, in contravention of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) treaties concerning the protection of medical missions (Urrego Mendoza, 2015). Thus, hospitals in Caquetá have suffered the combined effects of a long history of armed conflict and the lack of health infrastructure in an area where the state prioritizes military actions over social investments. This is reflected in, among other things, high maternal mortality and infant mortality rates in war zones (Así Vamos en Salud, 2021).⁵³ The precariousness of maternal healthcare also affects civilian women who live their maternal experiences in the middle of the conflict.

On the other hand, hospitals were under constant military surveillance, and insurgents always ran the risk of being captured. Although IHL establishes that the wounded and the sick of

yo la envolví en una sábana esa noche y la llevé al hospital. Tenía el útero completamente destruido por los abortos. Los abortos en la guerra los hacen con unas técnicas muy peligrosas; no es un legrado; es muy rudimentario. Por eso es que Sonia sufrió tanto.

⁵³ These were the maternal and infant mortality rates during the time the stories in this chapter took place.

Maternal Mortality per 100,000

2005: Caquetá: 110 National: 73.0 per 100,000 live births

2009: Caquetá: 95.6 National: 72.9 per 100,000 live births

Infant Mortality per 1,000

2005: Caquetá: 23.4 National: 15.9 per 1,000 live births

2009: Caquetá: 19.5 National: 13.7 per 1,000 live births (Así Vamos en Salud, 2021)

all parties in an armed conflict must receive adequate medical care without discrimination, FARC combatants needed the collaboration of a provider inside a hospital to receive medical assistance. They either contacted someone willing to help or offered a bribe to be admitted with a fake ID. But even with the protection of health providers, it was common for combatants to sneak out from hospitals, sometimes barely conscious, because military troops were hovering around. This situation was even more tragic after giving birth. Many women had to leave the hospital without their babies, hoping that a relative could claim them.

When Marcela received permission to spend the last months of her pregnancy with her stepmother, her stepmother convinced her to go to the hospital to give birth. They went to a hospital in Florencia. The baby was born healthy, and Marcela remembers well when a nurse put him on her chest. But she could not stay. She learned that the military was asking for her and had to suddenly flee without her baby. Luckily, her stepmother had been at the hospital the whole time and could take the baby home.

Not everyone was so fortunate. In the north-west of the country, Andrea was sent to the hospital of Apartadó after a traditional midwife refused to assist her in childbirth. Her baby was put under observation, but she could not wait for him. Her commander was informed that the military was following her and ordered her to abandon the hospital immediately. “I am not going to see this child again,” she said to herself while leaving. The next day, she asked a friend to go for the baby, and, as she predicted, the military did not let her friend take the baby out of the hospital. She later learned through FARC intelligence that the ICBF, the state institution that regulates adoptions, placed her child for adoption a year later. She was threatened of being charged with child abandonment if she asked for her child, and, despite her efforts and her family’s, she

had not been able to find him after eight years, when she published her testimony on YouTube (Mujer Fariana, 2017).

It was community networks of care and not the official health care system that sustained pregnant combatants and their babies' lives. People like Magdalena have provided for maternal bodies in war by offering their knowledge, healing practices, and solidarity. Through medicinal plants, communities transformed the forest from a battlefield into a source of remedies, and the belligerent corporality of fighters into a body allowed to be vulnerable, in pain, and defenseless. Caring as practices of providing for others are always shaped by sociopolitical conditions (Aulino, 2019). In this context, Magdalena took the role of an older woman taking care of the moms-to-be, not through the emotional intention expected from female relatives but as an act of forgiveness. Although preparing ointments, providing beverages, cleaning wounds, and feeding combatants did not solve the tensions between civilians and combatants, victims and perpetrators, it humanized both.

3.4 Othermothers of Combatants' Children

Combatants' children survived thanks to "othermothers": relatives, or women from communities in the influence area of the FARC who took care of them. Othermothering as "the concept of accepting responsibility for a child that is not one's own in an arrangement that may or may not be formal" (Story, 2014, p. 5) has been broadly discussed among Black communities in the US (Edwards, 2000; James, 1993). Patricia Hill Collins (2000) states that Black women have practiced community mothering for centuries to support children and birthmothers in violent conditions, scarcity, and oppression. Othermothers and the support of extended family are essential in marginalized communities that suffer the devastating consequences of war and the precarization of their life conditions (Akeson, 2015). Sending children to other families has also been a common

practice among revolutionary movements in South America. Many of “the children of resistance,” as Castillo-Gallardo and González-Celis call the children of left-wing militants in Chile, grew up away from their biological parents. They were sent to other countries such as Cuba or had to cover their parents’ identity since they were little (Castillo-Gallardo & González-Celis, 2015; Castillo & Gremels, 2019; Vidaurrázaga, 2019). In the FARC, moving to other countries was only an option for the children of high-ranking commanders, most guerrilla women had to rely on othermothers in rural and marginalized areas.

Combatant women were asked to return to the group days after giving birth and arrange occasional and short visits when security conditions permitted. When sending a baby to her parents’ family or another combatant’s family was not possible, the FARC put the baby in a surrogate home in the area. They picked families that had proven their loyalty to the movement and that they trusted enough to leave a child with them. However, receiving a child from the FARC was more an imposition than a voluntary service because of the great responsibility and risks involved. Carolina, a woman from a rural village in Caquetá, recounted to me the night a guerrilla unit considered leaving a kid at her home.

It was pouring rain that night. The guerrilla troop stopped by our house, and we heard a child crying. We were all inside, but you know that in a wooden house, you hear everything that happens outside. They were telling him that he would have to stay there, but he kept crying. We were scared because we knew they were going to leave the child with us.⁵⁴

That time the boy kept crying, and the group decided to continue the walk with him. Still, all families in that community knew that receiving a child of guerrilla parents was a duty that could

⁵⁴ Estaba cayendo un aguacero tremendo esa noche. Un grupo de guerrillero paró al frente de la casa nuestra y escuchamos un niño llorando. Nosotros estábamos adentro pero usted sabe que en una casa de madera se escucha todo lo que pasa afuera. Ellos le decían que se tenía que quedar ahí pero él seguía llorando. Nosotros estábamos asustados porque sabíamos que nos iban a dejar el niño.

be assigned to them without prior notice or the option of saying no. A surrogate family did not usually receive economic support unless it was a commander's child; they had to take good care of her to avoid sanctions and punishments, and provide information about her every time they were asked to do so. Having a child of the FARC could also expose the surrogate family to military targeting, and losing the baby or sending her to child protection services could lead to a death penalty by the FARC. As don Roberto, a campesino, told me, "If you took one of those children to ICBF, you had better come back home with a coffin on your back."

Although pregnancies were strictly prevented, once a guerrilla woman had a child, the child became an extension of the movement. The FARC watched that surrogate families did not abuse them and carefully protected children from being identified by the military. There was a fear that enemies could take advantage of those children to locate guerrilla members, intercept conversations, or even use them as military devices. To explain the danger of having a child in war, I was told several times the story of Lucero Palmera, a renowned female commander who was bombed during her daughter's visit. Rumors say that her teenage daughter befriended an undercover cop who put a microchip in her clothes before she traveled to meet her mother. The military located the camp and killed both, along with more than twenty guerrilla fighters⁵⁵.

Children had to temporarily stay with surrogate families, but if both parents passed away, these families adopted them and raised them with their own children. Ex-combatants say that it was common to meet families on the way who were looking for the guerrilla parents of a child left with them or were asking for some financial contribution for the child's expenses. Yet, taking care of other children is a common practice in the area. Many parents send their children to relatives or

⁵⁵ A communist newspaper announced the death of Lucero Palmera and her daughter (Lozano, 2010), but the military only confirmed the death of Lucero and other FARC members (El Tiempo, 2010c). Several ex-combatants told me about the microchip, but I could not find a written source to confirm how the military located the camp.

other families to go to school, keep them from being recruited by armed groups, or because they cannot provide for them. Like in other marginalized contexts in Latin America, children circulate in a kinship network that is constituted and reconstituted to protect children from the effects of war and poverty (Leinaweaver, 2008). The circulation of children has historically been a strategy to endure economic conditions, strengthen social relationships that open opportunities for children (Leinaweaver, 2008), and as the only way to save children from the dynamics of armed forces in war contexts.

Othermothering also works as a flexible form of kinship that keeps children off of the radar of armed forces. In war contexts, kinship can expose you or save you from violence. Many of the atrocities committed against civilians by insurgent, military, and paramilitary forces were because of a kin relationship with someone directly involved in the armed conflict, also called “blood crimes.” By recognizing a guerrilla child as one of their own, civilian families were protecting her from armed forces’ actions against each other. Being hailed as the child or close relative of someone who is not a military target puts you in a social position that can prevent violent actions against you. Flexible kinship functions as a strategy to protect individuals from the focus of armed forces.

Likewise, for combatant mothers, their relationship with their children means a possibility of being interpellated out of their assigned positions as comrades or terrorists. When Cielo says, “I wanted someone to call me mom,” and writes about her deep sadness when she listens to her daughter calling someone else “mom,” she utters her desire to engage in a social interaction that

places her outside of the military positions.^{56 57} Consequently, combatant women talk about jeopardizing their relationship with their children by leaving them as one of the most painful moments they experienced in war. In the words of Lucía, an ex-combatant:

I went out at five in the morning the day I had to leave her. I remember leaving my house. I was by the Sports Hall, and I could hear her crying from there at five in the morning. They were heartbreaking screams. I thought, ‘fuck, this is hard.’ You feel like your soul is frozen, and the soul never comes back.⁵⁸

Cielo cannot hold her tears back every time she talks about the day her newborn was forcibly taken away from her and when she had to say goodbye to her daughter again seven years later. The distress of not being able to take care of their child adds to the intense guilt of abandoning them. But there was no choice. As Marcela explained to her stepmother, refusing to go back to the group exposed the family to persecution from the FARC, and staying in touch frequently could

⁵⁶ Although I am using the Althusserian notion of interpellation as the process by which one encounters and internalized the values of an ideology, unlike his concept of ideology (Althusser, 2001), in Caquetá and many other Third-World contexts the ideological apparatuses and the repressive apparatuses are not monopolized by the state. These apparatuses emerge in the violent frictions between state and non-state armed forces. There is not a central authority of ideology that produces individual subjects. Yet, there is a dominant war ideology that subjects individuals to specific positions in a social and military web. Flexible kinship interrupts this web and allows people to be placed out of this war ideology.

⁵⁷ I myself was adopted when I arrived in Caquetá to conduct my long-term fieldwork. After seeing me for the second time in her life at an event for women’s rights, Magdalena offered me a bed in her house during my first weeks in Florencia while I settled in. Magdalena moved from Cartagena del Chairá a couple of years ago and now lives in Florencia and works as a seamstress from home. Her neighborhood is well known for having a drug micro-trafficking street. During the day, the intense commercial activity of bodegas, auto repair shops, carpentries, and cafeterias makes it relatively safe to walk around. However, at night, when most stores close, people who come to sell or buy drugs, the “viciosos” (addicts), make circulation more difficult and tense. Some carry a knife, and it is common to hear fights or the screams of a bystander about to be assaulted. María’s house is right at the corner where that street starts.

The second day I stayed in her place, she asked me to come outside so she could introduce me to the “viciosos,” most of them homeless boys.

- Hey guys!—she said—this is my daughter, “la niña de la casa” (mama’s girl). Look at her, don’t you dare do anything to her!

They greeted me kindly and assured her that they would not do anything against me. She still asked me to be careful, but nothing has ever happened to me in that neighborhood, neither when I lived with my Caqueteña mom, nor in any of the many times I have visited her since then. María introduces me everywhere as her daughter, which not only makes me feel thankful and honored but also gives me a safe position to work in Florencia. Similarly, when I moved to another place, the owner of the house asked me to tell neighbors that I was her niece.

⁵⁸ Yo salí a las cinco de la mañana el día que me tocó dejarla a ella. Yo me acuerdo saliendo de mi casa. Yo iba por el polideportivo y hasta allá podía escuchar los gritos a las cinco de la mañana. Eran como gritos desgarradores. Yo pensé: “hijuemadre, esto es duro.” Usted siente que se le congela el alma y el alma no le vuelve.

expose them to the military's persecution. "My dear, you are a mother because you had him, but you will not know what it is to raise a baby,"⁵⁹ said her stepmother when Marcela had to leave. She was describing the feeling of motherhood without mothering that combatant women experienced after separation. The sore breasts, the milk wetting the uniform, the scars on their belly, and the pain reminded them that their maternal body had come back to war, and surviving was the only thing they could do to see their children again.

3.5 Legal Adoption and War

Unlike legal adoption, othermothering allows children to stay close to their communities and protects parent's right to see their children again. Bibiana, another ex-combatant friend, explained to me the significant difference between adoption and othermothering. She told me once that she would like to raise a girl who was not her own. I asked her if she would legally adopt a child through ICBF, and she firmly responded:

Of course not! I would never do that to a mom! I know how hard it is to leave your children because you can't take care of them. When I had to leave mine, another woman wanted to claim custody, so I could never see them again. That's so cruel! I would receive a girl or a boy, although I like girls better, and take care of her like she was my daughter. And when the mom could take care of her or wanted to see her, I'd give her back to her.⁶⁰

Bibiana and all women in war contexts whose children were placed for adoption without their consent challenge the idea of legal adoption as a child-saving practice. As Briggs (2012) defines it: "Stranger adoption is a national and international system whereby the children of

⁵⁹ Mami, usted es madre porque lo tuvo, pero no va a saber lo que es criar un bebé.

⁶⁰ -Ay no! Yo nunca le haría eso a una mamá! Yo sé lo duro que es tener que dejar los hijos porque uno no los puede tener. Cuando yo tuve que dejar los míos, una señora quería reclamar la custodia de ellos para que yo no los pudiera volver a ver. ¡Eso es muy cruel! Yo recibiría una niña o un niño, aunque a mi me gustan más las niñas, y me encargaría de ella como si fuera mi hija. Y cuando la mama la pueda cuidar o la quiera ver, pues yo se la devuelvo.

impoverished or otherwise disenfranchised mothers are transferred to middle-class, wealthy mothers (and fathers)” (4). When Cielo learned her daughter was in the hands of the ICBF, she knew that would mean never seeing her again. Losing her child against her will was so “cruel,” as Bibiana describes it, that the same commanders who attempted to force Cielo to abort agreed to use the political and economic power of the FARC to infiltrate a state institution and rescue her daughter.

Through a critical analysis of transracial and transnational adoption, Briggs (2012) invites us to examine the social geographies in which mothers from racialized and marginalized communities lose their children. Briggs (2012) shows that, through the 1980s, sending children overseas into adoptions was a common practice in Latin American countries that were going through civil wars or dictatorships. Through the activism of the Asociación Madres Plaza de Mayo and the Asociación Civil Abuelas Plaza de Mayo, the stolen children in Argentina is a well-known case. During the last military dictatorship in Argentina (1976-1983), the babies of left-wing activists were systematically stolen and sent to families that raised them according to the military ideology. Nearly 500 babies were stolen. The parents of these children were kidnapped, tortured, and murdered (Lis Wassmansdorf, 2020; Massa, 2016). However, in Briggs words, “where the problem was worst, we know the least.” Between 1973 and 1983, Latin America was a leading region sending children overseas into adoptions with Colombia, Peru, Guatemala, Chile, and Paraguay the most significant countries.

Between 1998 and 2006, Colombia remained among the ten countries sending the most children for intercountry adoption (Selman, 2009; United Nations, 2010), which coincides with

the escalation of the war in Colombia from 1996 to 2002 (Calderón Rojas, 2016).⁶¹ I heard from different people that during the most violent times, the director of ICBF in Caquetá was selling babies. I did not find any evidence or investigation to support this claim. Still, I could understand how taking children from marginalized families and placing them in a costly adoption process that privileges international adopters could be read as giving children in exchange for money. Regardless of whether the former ICBF director profited from adoption procedures, people easily equate the economy of adoption in this context with other forms of neocolonial relations between Colombia and wealthy countries, such as U.S. militarism, the extraction of natural resources, and drug trafficking. As Kim and Cho (2014) remark a critical analysis of the militarized humanitarianism in transnational adoption recasts the image of “the war orphan from an object of pity and humanitarian desire to a politically powerful subject at the crossroads of nations” (32). As the most important non-military tie between guerrilla movements and civil society, children of guerrilla parents are key political subjects in the local and global geopolitics of war.

3.6 No Access, No Choice

After Cielo demobilized, she asked all state agencies related to the reintegration process for support to find her daughter. As she narrates, the only help she was offered was in exchange for working for the military, which meant risking her life and that of her daughter again. So, she decided to continue with the search alone. Five years later, an ex-combatant friend shared with her the address of a woman who had been involved in taking her daughter out of ICBF. Cielo did not

⁶¹ According to the National Center for Historic Memory, between 1996 and 2002, the time with the greatest deployment of paramilitary forces, 1,089 massacres were reported—55% of all the massacres that happened from 1980 to 2012 (CNMH, 2013)

hesitate and traveled with Michelle, her four-year-old as soon, as she could. She told me about the trip, and a week later, I called her to ask how things were going.

“Vanesita, get me out of here,” she replied.

“What happened?”

“The lady was not here, but her son said I could stay while he communicated with her. But two nights ago, he gave me blackberry juice, and the next thing I remember is waking up in the morning. I still don’t know what happened.”⁶²

We managed to find an online bus ticket to Bogotá, where we met with Michelle. Cielo could not hide her anger and humiliation as she tried to recap the foggy images of the night when she drank the juice. We took turns playing with Michelle while we whispered curses against the man, hoping that “he had not done anything.” The doubts were cleared four months later when Cielo called to tell me that she was pregnant.

“I can’t have more children, you know my situation,”⁶³ she told me.

We tried to find a way for her to have a safe abortion in the rural area where she was working, a place with no hospitals and more than two hours away from the closest city. Since Cielo did not have a stable phone or internet connection, I called Oriéntame, a private institution that has provided safe abortions to women even before it was partially legalized in 2006.⁶⁴ They only have

⁶² -Vanesita, sáqueme de aquí – ¿Qué pasó? – La señora no estaba aquí, pero el hijo me dijo que me podía quedar mientras él se comunicaba con ella. Pero la noche antepasada, él me dio un jugo de mora y yo no me acuerdo de más hasta el otro día que me desperté por lo mañana. Yo todavía no sé qué pasó.

⁶³ Yo no puedo tener más hijos, usted sabe mi situación

⁶⁴ Abortion is legal in Colombia when the pregnancy is the result of rape, incest, or artificial insemination without consent, when the continuation of the pregnancy constitutes a danger to the mother's physical or mental health or life, or in case of medically certified serious fetal malformations incompatible with extrauterine life.

four clinics in the country, all of them in big cities, but offered me the contact of a national network of “ally physicians” who perform abortions in other towns. After many attempts to explain Cielo’s location to them, they gave me the numbers of doctors five or more hours away from where she was. They also provided me the information of Mesa por la Vida y la Salud de las Mujeres, a feminist organization that offers legal advice to women who want to end their pregnancy. Cielo had the option to either travel eight hours by bus to Bogotá, where she had no place to stay, and have the procedure at Oriéntame, or to travel two hours to the closest town to file a legal action against the abuser, submit a petition to her insurance company or a public hospital, and wait for the authorization of the abortion, which included finding a physician willing to do it. The first option could cost her more than what she earned in a month, and the second one could take weeks or even months. Even though I offered her my support for the former option, and she initiated the procedures for the latter, she ceased after the third unsuccessful attempt to file a legal action against the abuser. All the barriers she faced to finish an unwanted pregnancy in the civilian life felt as violent as being forced to abort in the guerrilla movement.

Twelve years after its partial legalization, having a safe abortion remains a class, race, and geographic privilege in Colombia, a highly centralized country. Like in other Latin American contexts, since women with economic resources and in big cities can afford and access safe clinical abortion it has been difficult to convince them and their partners to support safe abortion for all women (Htun, 2003; Kulczycki, 2007). The limited access to legal and healthcare services in rural areas distant from Bogotá or other big cities makes abortion and other sexual and reproductive services inaccessible to women in most rural communities. In the words of the SisterSong organization “There is no choice where there is no access” (SisterSong Organization, n.d.). Even in the cases permitted by law, such as Cielo’s situation, women face multiple barriers to have an

abortion. These barriers include, but are not limited to, providers' lack of information about the law, restrictive interpretations of the regulations (including the unconstitutional use of conscientious objection), deficient healthcare services, and administrative delays (Gonzalez Velez & Castro, 2017).

The situation is even worse for women who look for an abortion outside of the three decriminalized cases. Abortion is still in the Criminal Code, and 5,833 people have been prosecuted between 1998 and 2019 (El Espectador, 2020a). From these cases, 861 are men, and 64% of them are members of guerrilla movements investigated for forced abortions, which means that women who voluntarily decide to end their pregnancy and people who perform forced abortions are judged with the same section of the criminal code. In addition, 29% of the prosecuted women are also in other legal cases registered as domestic, physical, or sexual violence victims and most of them are low-income women (Gonzalez Velez & Castro, 2017).

Cielo had a beautiful baby boy who she considered leaving temporarily with a relative while she adjusted to the idea of having the child of her rapist. However, she never contemplated the option of giving him up for adoption. Indeed, when I suggested that adoption could be one of her options, she stopped replying to my messages for a couple of weeks. Now she lives with her three children battling the stigma, economic vulnerability, and psychological challenges of motherhood after demobilization (Jones & Denov, 2015), which I will discuss in the next chapter.

Despite the great attention to forced abortions, other forms of reproductive violence against female combatants are barely mentioned. Cielo's story forces us to develop a more comprehensive understanding of reproductive justice in war. Female combatants also survived sexual abuse, obstetric violence, separation from their children, adoption of their children without their consent, and forced pregnancies before and after demobilization. Likewise, they resisted in different ways

to each of these forms of violence. Without recognizing the complexity of combatants' experiences, the exclusive attention to forced abortions seems more a rejection of female bodies that are not allowed to reproduce than an interest in their reproductive wellbeing.

3.7 Conclusion

Whereas feminist approaches have criticized reductionist views of women in war and apolitical representations of motherhood, a conceptual framework to analyze the complex experiences of militant mothers is still developing (Zubytska, 2015). A central question relates to the presumed contradictions between motherhood/mothering and militarism. Sara Ruddick's concept of "maternal thinking" and its responses are perhaps the most developed debate on this matter. Ruddick posits that the maternal experience of having and/or raising a child ⁶⁵ leads to an ethical and political reasoning (Ruddick, 1980, 1989) that could be "an engaged critical and visionary perspective that illuminates both the destructiveness of war and the requirements of peace" (Ruddick, 2004). Although she does not defend maternal thinking as essentially antimilitarist, she suggests that mothers tend to develop a moral commitment to peacekeeping.⁶⁶ The universalist tone of this theory has been accused of being ethnocentric (Bailey, 1994; Keller, 2010), and different authors have challenged the association between maternal thinking and peacemaking (Moran, 2010; Scheper-Hughes, 1996).

Cielo's sentence "I had two dreams when I was a girl, being a guerrillera and being a mom" reconciles militarism and motherhood in the desire of a girl in a conflict zone who sees in both guerrillas and mothers a place for recognition. In marginalized and impoverished rural

⁶⁵ Three goals are central to this maternal practice: preservative love, fostering growth, and socialization for acceptance (Ruddick, 1989)

⁶⁶ "Peacemakers create a communal suspicion of violence, a climate in which peace is desired, a way of living in which it is possible to learn and to practice nonviolent resistance and strategies of reconciliation. This description of peacemaking is a description of mothering" (Ruddick 244)

communities in Caquetá, joining an armed force offers a hope of dignified life. For men, becoming a “patriotic soldier” by enlisting in the National Army appears a way to be visible as a citizen, one who risks his life in exchange for the nationalist symbols that make his death worth grieving. For women and men, becoming a “comrade” by joining the FARC, the people’s army, is a rebellious act against the oppressions of the nationalist project that the military reproduces. They both entail sacrificing life for a more honorable death. Not joining an armed force is an option, but escaping war is not. Hence, maternal experience cannot be reconciled with peacebuilding when peacebuilding is not an option. However, the experiences of combatant women teach us that even in a deadly context, mothering involves a commitment to preserve one’s life and the lives of one’s children, and holding on to the hope of seeing each other again. Or at least that some part of the mother “stays in this world.” In this sense, although I agree that maternal thinking and militarism are not necessarily incompatible, I take distance from Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1996) who states that maternal resignation in certain contexts displace resistance against war, “there’s a maternal ethos of ‘acceptable death’ without which political violence and wars of all kinds would not be possible” (Scheper-Hughes, 356). Not opposing war does not mean a resignation or acceptance of violent death as Scheper-Hughes suggests.

The lack of recognition of the maternal experiences of guerrilla women within and outside the guerrilla movement limits our understanding of guerrilla women as political subjects. In patriotic tropes of motherhood, female combatants are the anti-mother. In the mass media representations, they were either frustrated mothers whose bodies were not allowed to reproduce, or violent women incapable of love. From the perspective of the FARC, the premise of “motherhood and war are incompatible” excluded motherhood as part of their struggles as combatant mothers. Yet, hundreds of women had children before or during their participation in

this guerrilla group. This chapter explored the experiences of those combatant and civilian women who, through networks of care and community mothering, kept combatant mothers and their children alive.

CHAPTER 4

AN INDIVIDUAL STRUGGLE FOR REINTEGRATION

Motherhood was one of the leading causes of desertion among ex-combatant women I talked to. Some of them decided to escape alone or with their partners when they knew they were pregnant or wanted to get pregnant. Others left the ranks because they yearned to see their children again. Most of them were not interested in joining the state DDR program in fear of being tortured or having to share sensitive information about the FARC-EP. However, if the military identified them, they were forced to demobilize formally, or acquaintances in the program convinced them to join. Once they relinquished their weapons, they were sent to a military base to prove their identity as guerrilleras and provide information about themselves and the group through extensive interviews. Then, they moved to a halfway house (Hogar de Paz) for physical and psychological stabilization. And, finally, they joined the reintegration program that offers judicial, economic, and social benefits for combatants who are not accused of crimes against humanity.

Most studies on DDR programs either take the approach of analyzing national and international policies (Buxton, 2008; De Vries & Wiegink, 2011; Herrera & Gonzalez, 2013; McMullin, 2013) or of presenting the perspectives of the beneficiaries of these programs (Anaya, 2007; López et al., 2015; McFee, 2016; Nussio, 2012; Theidon, 2007, 2009). While this chapter follows the narrative of ex-combatants to understand the process of adjusting to civil life after leaving the armed group, their negotiations with state representatives in the reintegration program are an essential part of these stories. Instead of assuming a distant relationship between the subject and the state, I pay attention to the common efforts of ex-combatants and local officials to deal with the violence and social inequality of the reintegration in Florencia, the capital city of Caquetá. I argue that, despite these efforts, the premises of meritocracy and entrepreneurship of the

reintegration program exacerbates the structural socio-economic inequalities and conditions that led to war in the first place with harmful consequences for former female fighters and their children.

This chapter draws on interviews with thirty ex-combatants in the individual reintegration program in Florencia, six officials of the national agency in charge of this program (ARN) and one representative of the Group for Humanitarian Support to the Demobilized (GAHD). In particular, I follow Marcela's narrative, an ex-combatant in the reintegration program in Florencia who shared with me a set of drawings to illustrate her story about leaving the armed group and making a life in the city with her two children. Through her drawings, her voice, the voices of other ex-combatant women, and the narratives of reintegration professionals, I explore each stage of the Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration program and the particularities of reintegration in Florencia-Caquetá.

4.1 Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) in Colombia

DDR are the components of peace operations to remove weapons from the hands of combatants, take the combatants out of military units, and help them integrate socially and economically into society by finding civilian livelihoods (Peace Operations Training Institutes, 2017). Carranza Franco (2019) defines DDR as:

a process of building state and citizenship in the articulation between three dimensions: social (favoring both the breaking of factional ties and the creation of other social links); economic (creating skills and opportunities for livelihoods outside of the criminal or war economy); and political (through the creation of political parties and the individuals' transformation into law-abiding citizens). (4)

Since the 1980s, Colombia has experienced multiple peace negotiations (Villarraga, 2015), and all of them have included arrangements for ex-combatants' transition to society (Herrera & Gonzalez, 2013). Parallel to the negotiations with the paramilitary organization Autodefensas

Unidas de Colombia (United Self-Defense of Colombia) in 2003, the government began to develop more structured guidelines for DDR programs in line with the United Nation Integrated DDR Standards. Following this, two reintegration programs operated simultaneously: a program for combatants of any group who demobilized individually and a program for the members of the paramilitary organization who demobilized collectively (Herrera & Gonzalez, 2013)⁶⁷. In 2006, then-president Alvaro Uribe unified both programs and created the High Presidential Council for Reintegration, and in 2011 then-president Juan Manuel Santos founded the Colombian Agency for Reintegration (ACR), which changed its name in 2017 to Agency for Reincorporation and Normalization (ARN) after peace negotiations with the FARC-EP. I will refer to it as ARN. This agency is responsible for designing and executing reintegration policies.

Similar to other countries, military institutions manage the initial stages of the DDR, and civilian institutions manage the longer process of reintegrating into society (Carranza Franco, 2019). At the initial stages of the DDR process, the Group for Humanitarian Support to the Demobilized (GAHD), attached to the Ministry of Defense, is in charge of fostering demobilization and providing humanitarian services. Once an ex-combatant acquires the status of demobilized, they are handed over to ARN. To date, ARN has thirty-five offices, nine in the main cities of the country and twenty-six in medium and small cities, many of them in areas heavily affected by the armed conflict, including Florencia. They manage both the reintegration program for individual demobilizations of members of any “organized armed group outside of the law” and the reincorporation program for FARC-EP ex-combatants who joined the 2016 peace agreement. This chapter focuses on former FARC-EP members who demobilized individually before the peace agreement and joined the reintegration program. Between 2001 and 2020, 19,930 ex-

⁶⁷ 31,671 soldiers (6% women) demobilized from this paramilitary organization fragmented in different leaderships and structures (Valencia Agudelo & Alonso Espinal, 2008)

combatants from FARC-EP, 4,961 from ELN⁶⁸, and 608 from other armed groups have been part of this program (ARN, 2020).

Rather than following the United Nations conventions for DDR operations that promotes an agreement between the parties in conflict (United Nations, 2020), up until the 2016 peace accord with the FARC-EP, the Colombian government concentrated its efforts on individual deserters (Fattal, 2018). This was part of a counterinsurgency strategy during Uribe's administration (2002-2010) that combined the reinforcement of military actions against the FARC-EP and ELN with a humanitarian option for those who decided to abandon the ranks. Individual demobilizations undermined guerrilla movements politically and militarily by fragmentating the movements and by extracting information from ex-combatants who were required to provide intelligence material in exchange for judicial benefits. There were 23,001 individual demobilizations during the eight years of Uribe's government, of which 81.6% were members of the largest guerrilla movements: FARC-EP and ELN (Carranza Franco, 2019).

Once elected president in 2010, Santos continued to promote individual demobilizations but also advanced an agenda to negotiate with the FARC-EP. Although Santos' government also used individual demobilization as a military strategy, he implemented a stronger humanitarian component that resulted in a less violent attitude from military troops toward combatants who surrendered, as some of my participants reported in the interviews. This coincided with an essential turning point in the official discourse that accepted the existence of an internal armed conflict and not just a terrorist threat. Recognizing the internal armed conflict facilitated the implementation of the International Humanitarian Law, which regulates and limits the conduct of war, acknowledges the State's responsibilities, and establishes a legal fabric to recognize and repair the victims of

⁶⁸ The National Liberation Army, another insurgent movement.

guerrilla, paramilitary, and state armed forces actions (Law 1448). These important political, legal, and institutional consequences paved the way for the peace negotiations.

4.2 Disarmament: Leaving the Rifle as the No Turning Back Moment



Picture 13. Leaving the Rifle

This drawing is when I was there, standing guard in front of a wall, that is how we had to be. Sometimes it was sunny or rainy, day and night. You had to obey no matter what [...] I miss my rifle a lot. It was my protection. I don't know, after joining the group, I learned to love weapons. Many people are afraid of them, but I like them. It is a protection⁶⁹

Marcela arrived in the camp after marching for seven days, feeling light-headed and nauseous. Her partner, who saw her trying to vomit, asked her when she had her last period. She looked down in silence confirming his suspicion, and before she could react, he kicked her belly, yelling, “Are you pregnant again?” Marcela unsheathed her gun and shot at him while a comrade threw himself at her to prevent her from killing her partner. Attempted murder against a comrade is a major offense in the FARC-EP, punishable by death. But the comrades who witnessed the scene advocated for her, declaring that it was a legitimate reaction to her partner’s violence. She

⁶⁹ Ese dibujo es cuando yo estaba por allá que estoy prestando guardia al pie de un muro, así nos tocaba estar. A veces al sol, a la lluvia, de día y de noche. Tenía que cumplir con los deberes, llueve trueno, o relampaguee. [...] A mi me hace mucha falta mi arma. Era mi protección. La verdad yo no sé, después de que entré allá le cogí amor a las armas. Mucha gente le tiene temor, pero yo les tengo amor. Es una protección para uno.

was not executed but tied to a tree for fifteen days with no food, except some water and pieces of cassava bread that her friends secretly gave her. The thought of her new baby and the child she had left ten years ago with her stepmother gave her the courage to think that a life outside of the war was possible.

A couple of days later, Marcela was asked to escort a combatant to a town, but she did not finish the mission. When they arrived in the town, she told the other woman to wait for her while she bought some tissues. Instead, like in the routine she had rehearsed over and over in her head, she entered a store, cut her hair, took some civilian clothes, hid her camouflaged clothing, and ran to a riverbank. Paying attention to the landmarks around, she buried her rifle but kept a gun and two grenades. Then she walked to wait for a boat. Emboldened by a gun in her hands and twenty-three years of combat, she forced all the passengers to get off the boat and asked the helmsman to take her as far as he could. She walked twenty days through the forest before she could reach a safe place.

With the support of her stepmother, Marcela had her baby and reunited with her older child. They moved to three different towns until they settled in Florencia where a woman convinced Marcela to stop hiding and join the reintegration program. Despite her fears, she accepted under the condition of keeping her children through all the process. When the military contacted her, they gave her two options: officially demobilize or go to jail for thirty-six years. The gun she kept helped her prove her fariana identity and became a pass to initiate the DDR process, from the interviews at the military base to a halfway house and, finally, the reintegration program.

For all combatants, giving up the weapon was the most significant single act to leave the armed group and officially trust their lives into the hands of the state; however, the experience of disarmament drastically changed according to the security policies of the time. Marcela joined the

DDR program during Santos' turn, and she highlights the humanitarian component of the process. Those who did it during Uribe's term narrate the brutal actions of the military against them. Paradoxically, Santos was Uribe's minister of defense. In both cases, the government strategies to increase individual demobilizations were war strategies that aimed to undermine guerrilla movements, but a more humanitarian program changed the transition of combatants to civilian life, de-escalated the cruelty of war, and contributed to the achievement of the 2016 peace deal. This section contrasts the experiences of disarmament under Santos and Uribe's administrations.

As described in Chapter One, failed peace negotiations with the FARC-EP in 2000 propelled the government of Alvaro Uribe (2002-2010) to develop counterinsurgency strategies based on a militarist idea of security that undermined the possibility of a negotiation with the FARC-EP to end the armed conflict. Uribe's security policy sought to recover territorial control by strengthening the military forces,⁷⁰ which not only gave rise to military actions but also intensified the cruelty of conflict (Torres, 2012). Social movements, human rights organizations, and scholars have denounced the fact that during this time, the incentives in the fight against the guerrillas led to a perverse "body count" scheme, in which individuals received bonuses based on the number of people they killed (Bolaños Rojas & Benavides Silva, 2017; Buitrago, 2011; Human Right Watch, 2015; Londoño Berrio, 2018; Palencia, 2013). This led to one of the worst cases of human rights violations in Latin America known as "False Positives," referring to the at least six thousand four hundred and two (6,402) civilians assassinated and falsely portrayed as combatants (JEP, 2021). Many of these killings were perpetrated in collaboration with paramilitary groups (Vivanco, 2018).

⁷⁰ The security policy included: the development of high mountain troops, peasant soldiers, soldiers to patrol the roads, the extension of compulsory military service, a network of civilian spies and within insurgent organizations, flying squads, Fast Deployment Forces (FUDRA), as well as elite units known as Groups of Unified Action for Personal Liberty, and terrestrial, maritime and air military deployments (Torres, 2012, p. 51)

Criscione (2016) argues that Uribe's security policies worked as a technology of power⁷¹ to normalize a state of exception in which death practices were used to produce disciplinary effects. He refers to two forms of practices: execution and mechanisms of torture. Female combatants, in particular, were subjected to both. Many of them were physically and sexually abused before being killed. According to García (1999) "Besides the physical pain and moral degradation which torture produces (or tries to produce), women are subject to an additional dimension of suffering resulting from sexual violence (rape, sometimes followed by pregnancy) or the rituals of humiliation to which they are subjected because they are female" (464). Sexual violence against men is still a pending conversation (Wolff et al., 2016).

Under Uribe's presidency, an ex-combatant friend, Itza, decided to leave the movement after being forced to end her pregnancy, but she did not officially demobilize in fear of what she could experience at the hands of military forces.

I always said that if I were caught, I would kill myself. I knew they were going to make me talk and I also knew what they did to women. Once I saw how they raped a friend. They put the rifle in her vagina, tortured her, and killed her. I couldn't do anything because they would have caught me, but I listened to her screams. Once, they almost took me. They yelled, "It's a woman, it's a woman! Grab her!" But I was able to escape without dropping my rifle. Since then, I was more respected in the group.⁷²

The brutalization of war was literal and symbolic on both sides. The FARC-EP also intensified the atrocity of their actions by using more deadly devices such as landmines and gas cylinders. In her book "Anthropology of Inhumanity," Maria Victoria Uribe (2018) states that "the cruelest of cruelty is the dehumanization of victims before destroying them" (22). She analyzes

⁷¹ Rose (1999) defines technologies of power as "technologies imbued with aspirations for the shaping of conduct in the hope of producing certain desired effects and averting certain undesired ones" (52).

⁷² Yo siempre dije que si a mi me cogía, yo me mataba. Yo sabía que me iban a hacer hablar y también sabía lo que le hacían a las mujeres. Yo una vez vi como violaban a una amiga. Le metieron el fusil por la vagina, la torturaron y la mataron. Yo no pude hacer nada porque me hubieran cogido a mi, pero yo la escuchaba gritar. Una vez casi me cogen. Gritaban "es una vieja, es una vieja, agárrela." Pero yo me volé sin soltar mi fusil. Después de eso a mi me respetaban más en el grupo.

the mimetic structures through which different actors in the Colombian conflict have stripped away the identity of “the Other,” the enemy, to make them less than human and take them to a sacrificial space for a physical and symbolic *carnicería* (butchery).

Diana, an ex-combatant who was adopted by a guerrilla commander when she was four, grew up picturing soldiers as monsters with several eyes, green skin, and non-human limbs. Similar to Maria Victoria Uribe’s metaphors of the rituals of war as butchery, Diana’s adoptive dad used to tell her that the military were looking for her to kill her and eat her. Monstrosity is a common metaphor to portray the enemy; it draws the line between the good and the evil that operate on all sides of war (Devetak, 2005). One day, Diana saw a soldier in front of her in combat. She looked at him through the bushes and saw his head, his hands, his skin, and realized that he was someone just like her. Yet, her dad was not completely wrong. After being captured at the age of fourteen, she was raped in a military base.

By contrast, Santos reinforced the humanitarian component of DDR promoting a less violent attitude toward those who laid down weapons. As an official of the Group for Humanitarian Support to the Demobilized (GAHD) told me, “it required time and effort to convince military troops on the battlefield to respect the rights of the demobilized. ‘You must fight them, but if they drop their weapon, welcome them to civil society, treat them well, and respect their rights.’”

Santos reoriented the counterinsurgency strategy by combining marketing and military campaigns which promoted demobilization among combatants through nostalgic messages about family. As part of this strategy, the GAHD⁷³ attached to the Ministry of Defense established a partnership with the British advertising and communications agency Lowe/SSP3 (Fattal, 2018). This partnership developed multiple propaganda campaigns that included flyers that were spread

⁷³ At that time, the Program for Humanitarian Support to the Demobilized (PAHD)

throughout combat zones, radio ads, and installations in the forest that exploited the emotional vulnerabilities of guerrilla members promising reunification with their families if they demobilized (Fattal, 2018) or the possibility of going to school and finding a job in the civilian life. Marcela secretly took one of those flyers and put it in her pocket. She did not trust the government's promises, but the idea of being with her children and finishing high school fueled her desire of leaving the group. There were even specific advertisements for guerrilla women, representing demobilization as recovering lost femininity. Fattal (2018) describes a flyer imitating a lipstick advertisement with the script:

Long lasting lipstick, intense red
Freedom, love, tranquility, happiness
Smile with freedom with, a permanent effect
Call the closest military unit.
So you can smile and be the mother you've always dreamed of
Guerrilla, feel like a woman again
Demobilize (p. 242)⁷⁴.

Yet, despite the credit that Fattal (2018) gives to branding for massive demobilizations, all ex-combatants I interviewed or talked to in four years in Caquetá perceived these messages as a government trap. The sentimentalism of the flyers did not outweigh the fact that they were spread out on the same field where guerrilla fighters were being attacked. The government was certainly

⁷⁴ Labial de larga duración, rojo intenso
Libertad, amor, tranquilidad, alegría
Sonríe en libertad con efecto permanente
Llama a la unidad militar más cercana
Para sonreír cuando puedas convertirte en la mamá que siempre has soñado ser
Guerrillera, vuelve a sentirte mujer
Desmóbilízate (Fattal, 2019, p. 258)

exploiting one of the main motives to desert—reuniting with their family—but those campaigns were not enough to trust what the government could offer after demobilization. Most ex-combatants I met joined the DDR program after months or even years of leaving the group, or were forced to join when they were captured.

In addition to the marketing campaigns, the economic and political value assigned to combatants' bodies also changed through incentives for captures instead of killings. Adding combatants to the DDR program not only disintegrated the guerrilla movement but also gave the government the opportunity to extract information about the movement and keep ex-combatants under surveillance. The way these policies affected specific experiences of disarmament is well narrated by Natalia's account of the day she was arrested:

I dreamed about cows that night, I dreamed that they were trapped, and I knew that something would happen that day. The military ambushed us, and I ended up fighting alone. I ran as fast as I could, but I fell and ended up hiding behind a rock, and they caught me. [...] When I was lying on the ground, I heard one of them asking the other to kill me and the other replied, "Are you crazy? There is our vacation."⁷⁵

Natalia's capture was announced on the news as a voluntary demobilization, which she found abusive because she was portrayed as a betrayer to FARC-EP with the dangerous implications that this had for her as an ex-combatant. "That is a lie; I never surrendered to the government," she told me the afternoon she shared with me the old YouTube video with the news of her demobilization. Yet, she still remembers with a smile the soldier who spared her life. She even had the chance to say hi once when they bumped into each other in Florencia.

⁷⁵ Yo soñé con ganado esa noche, me soñé que estaban atrapadas y yo sabía que algo iba a pasar ese día. El ejército nos emboscó y yo quedé peleando sola. Yo corrí lo más rápido que pude, pero me caí y quedé detrás de una piedra, y luego me cogieron. [...] Cuando estaba ahí tirada en el suelo escuché que uno de ellos le decía a otro que me matara y el otro le dijo, "cómo se le ocurre, si ahí están las vacaciones."

After desertion or detention, ex-combatants were sent to a military base where they were told that they could either join the reintegration program and provide information to the military, or go to jail. They were asked to prove their fariana identity through tests such as assembling and disassembling a weapon, singing the FARC-EP anthem, and using the specific jargon of the group. Then they had to talk about commanders, other combatants, routes, money, and ammunition. Some women were offered work with the military in exchange for help finding their children or for protection for their families. The intensity of the interrogation in military bases lessened when thousands of combatants had already demobilized. However, this interrogation remained as the rite of passage to civilian life. Once they gave up their rifle and talked to the military, former guerrilleros crossed the line to the other side of war and became enemies for their former comrades.

4.3 Demobilization: The Fantasy of Capitalism in the Hogar de Paz



Picture 14. Welcome to Freedom

I was full of distrust when I met the militaries to join the reintegration program. They said “welcome to freedom, this is a new opportunity in life⁷⁶”

After disarmament, ex-combatants are sent for 60 to 90 days to a halfway house called “Hogar de Paz” (Peace Home), located in the countryside close to a big city (Bogotá, Medellín,

⁷⁶ Yo tenía mucha desconfianza cuando me encontré con los soldados para entrar al programa de reintegración. Ellos me dijeron “bienvenida a la libertad, esta es una nueva oportunidad de vida”.

and Cali). They can bring their partner, their children or a relative with them. Accommodation, food, a voucher to buy clothes, personal supplies, and a 2-dollar daily stipend for each of them are included. With the help of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Group for Humanitarian Support to the Demobilized (GAHD) tries to locate ex-combatants' families and bring them to the Hogar de Paz. From being considered as a bridge to reach combatants through military actions, as described in Chapter Three, families become a target of humanitarian actions at this stage of the DDR program. The program facilitates family reunions based on the assumption that combatants will break ties with their militarized past and return to their communities (De Vries & Wiegink, 2011). In the Colombian propaganda of demobilization, this assumption is entangled with the idea that families are on the government's side and that they are waiting for their prodigal sons and daughters to return. This is well portrayed in the most broadcasted radio advertisement for the DDR program: "Guerrillero demobilize, your family is waiting for you."⁷⁷ The notion of "family" in this catchphrase appeared as a euphemism for the state institutions that were waiting for combatants to demobilize.

Some combatants reunite with their children for the first time in the Hogar de Paz, and, under the supervision of social workers, psychologists, nurses, and teachers, they attempt to reestablish the lost bond. Luisa, for instance, left her son with her family to join the FARC-EP. Although she tried to be in touch with him, he did not recognize her as his mom: "I brought my boy there [Hogar de Paz] so he would learn how to call me "mom," not "aunt" as he used to when I was in the group." Marcela also enjoyed being with her children there. It was the first time she

⁷⁷ "Guerrillero desmovilízate, tu familia te espera." The informal pronoun "tú", instead of "usted," which is the most common form for "you" in rural areas, meant to convey a gentle image of the government camouflaged as families waiting for their sons. One could hear this advertisement at all soccer games broadcast on the radio and during national festivities such as Christmas and New Year's Eve. It was so popular that I remember using it as a joke with friends in high school and college when someone was rude—interpreting the notion of demobilization as a transition to a more "civilized" state.

spent time alone with them. Her children remember the house as a “clean and pretty” place better than where they live now, with ceramic floors and individual beds for each of them.

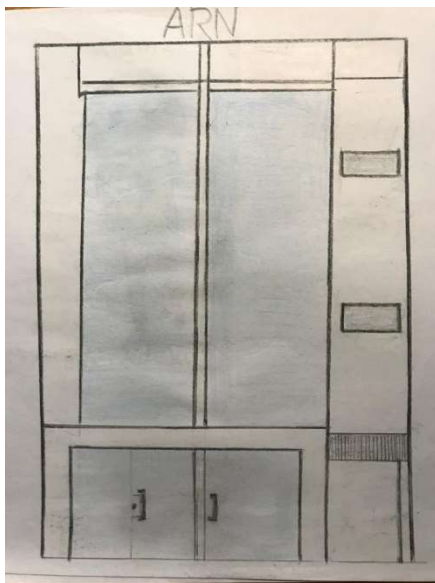
At least for those who demobilized during the last ten years, the experience at this stage of the DDR process is mostly pleasant. They take classes according to their educational level, have psychological appointments, and receive talks about personal growth. Through workshops in a cycle of eight weeks, they are instructed on topics related to domestic violence, respectful child-rearing, citizenship, emotion management, health and self-care, and a fundamental element of the reintegration route, “the life project.” This project is supposed to be like their roadmap for civilian life, it includes their family, social, economic, and education goals. They also spend time with their peers playing sports, visiting museums, and shopping at malls where they can use the voucher for clothes. The humanitarian care in these halfway houses gives the false idea of reintegration as a collective adaptation to civil life with the protection of the state.

They also open a bank account to receive a stipend during reintegration, get a debit card, and receive a certification issued that grants their status as demobilized ⁷⁸. Through humanitarian actions, ex-combatants are introduced to neoliberal citizenship by providing them the bureaucratic means and instruction to navigate civilian life as lawful and independent subjects, registering them in the financial system to receive the aid needed to survive during the first years of reintegration (bank account and debit card), and teaching them how to shop at malls. This humanitarian process has also a civilizing spirit that reproduces the idea of a temporal distance between war and peace and rural and urban. As a GAHD professional said: “They don’t understand the concept of a streetlight and don’t know what a savings account is. Some of them have even wrapped up their debit card in plastic, in the 21st century!” Duclos (2017) calls this transition from military to civil

⁷⁸ This certification is issued by the Operative Committee for the Abandonment of Arms (Comité Operativo para la Dejación de las Armas) and is the document is popularly known as “CODA.”

identity a dynamic of “civilianization” that passes through promoting new loyalties with the state and, I would add, the economic system. The transformation of ex-combatants into neoliberal citizens is supposed to lead them from backwardness to civilization, preparing them with social and vocational skills to survive as individuated subjects.

4.4 Reintegration in Florencia



Picture 15. The building

Florencia is a place of faces enduring the city after fleeing war in the countryside. Not only do most of the 1,240 ex-combatants (22% women) who have demobilized individually in Caquetá (ARN, 2021) live in Florencia, but so do more than 87,000 people (Soler Barón et al., 2020), almost 50% of the city’s population, who have been forcibly displaced from their land in rural areas at the hands of guerrilla movements, paramilitaries, or the National Army. Although most former fighters come from rural areas, the majority of them move to a city after their stay in a Hogar de Paz (Shaw-Crane and Vallejo, 2018). There are several reasons for this: most of them have no land, going back to their original places could put their lives at risk, and the ARN offices where they have monthly appointments and vocational training are located in cities.

The ARN office in Florencia is a three-story building with tinted windows close to the General Attorney's Office on a low-traffic street. The building has no address or sign on the door, and none of the taxi or moto-taxi drivers who took me there knew what ARN was or the location of the office unless they were ex-combatants themselves. At the entrance, there are two security guards who write down your name and national ID number, the person you are visiting in the building, and whether you have an electronic device with you. When electricity is working well, sitting in the waiting room with air conditioning is a nice relief during hot and humid days. One can watch TV and read the announcements on the wall, including information about upcoming workshops and the names of ex-combatants who have not contacted ARN or attended the regular meetings for more than two months and are in danger of losing the benefits of the program.

On the wall of the stairs leading up to the second floor, there are four silhouettes representing the reintegration process: a male shape with a military uniform and a rifle, the same shape but with just a military uniform and without a rifle, another male figure with civilian clothes and a briefcase, and a female silhouette carrying a baby. This wall art representation gives an idea of the emphasis of reintegration on the production of entrepreneur citizens and the frustrating dilemma of ex-combatant mothers between the masculinized ideal of a provider and the feminized idea of a caregiver. In the following sections, I will discuss how both ex-combatants and reintegration professionals navigate the challenges of reintegration under the neoliberal and patriarchal rationalities of the program.

4.4.1 Reintegration professionals



Picture 16. Reintegration Professionals

At the beginning, I was angry all the time, but they [reintegration professionals] taught me things I didn't know. One of them used to tell me that if I want to do something I can do it. They encouraged me to study even if I could not find a job and taught me relaxation techniques such as breathing and counting to ten when I was mad⁷⁹.

The UN defines reintegration as follows:

the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income. Reintegration is essentially a social and economic process with an open time frame, primarily taking place in communities at the local level. It is part of the general development of a country and a national responsibility and often necessitates long-term external assistance (United Nations, 2006).

DDR looks different on different scales. From a global perspective, one could trace standardized guidelines applied to different countries regardless of their particularities. From a national perspective, one could see how governments use these programs to advance their political and economic agendas. From a local perspective, the distinction between international policies and

⁷⁹Al principio yo estaba de mal genio todo el tiempo, pero ellas [los profesionales de la reintegración] me enseñaron cosas que no sabía. Una de ella me decía “querer es poder.” Me animaron a estudiar, aunque no pudiera encontrar trabajo y me enseñaron técnicas de relajación como respirar y contar hasta diez cuando me daba rabia.

national programs gets diluted in the daily interactions between state representatives and ex-combatants.

The ARN website and some principal officers at the national level refer to ex-combatants as “newborns of society⁸⁰” (ARN, 2013). However, none of the ARN representatives I interviewed in Florencia share this infantilizing idea of ex-combatants, which portrays the state as a benevolent and yet disciplining father that gives rebels a second chance. In places like Florencia, a small city in an area heavily affected by war, reintegration is a negotiation of positionalities and spaces that includes ex-combatants, their families, local communities, and reintegration professionals. During the reintegration process, a Person in Reintegration Process and her assigned reintegration professional work on the goals for the life project, get to know each other, and recognize why they are on different sides of the conflict. When I talked to Stella, a reintegration professional, about these moments of recognition, she said: “When I was going to work here, I feared meeting those people. But then I started to see them everywhere: selling cell phone minutes, selling sweets on the street, driving moto-taxis. They were always here.”

Sharing the specialized stories of the armed conflict in Caquetá and looking at its wounds are part of the encounters between ex-combatants and reintegration professionals in the city. Rodrigo, another reintegration professional, also told me that his wife felt unsafe with him working for ARN until they both started to understand, through the stories of Rodrigo’s participants, that the effects of war are at the core of the social fabric in Caquetá. “We have families in which one joined the guerrillas, another joined the paramilitaries, the mother is a victim of the armed conflict, and the ex-combatant daughter ends up marrying a soldier,” he told me. Reintegration professionals are the first to realize that the monstrosity of war is not performed by monsters but

⁸⁰ Recién nacidos de la sociedad

by marginalized campesinos. Reintegration, then, is not about adopting newborns or rehabilitating misfits but about learning where they come from and mutually adjusting to the space that they both inhabit. The following sections explore how ex-combatants and reintegration professionals face the economic and social challenges of reintegration.

4.4.2 The Promise of Entrepreneurship



Picture 17. Starting a small business

Here I am preparing yogurts, the ones I am producing to sell with all safety protocols. I took the food handling class and although I haven't found a job, I learned that I should not have rings, bracelets or make up when I cook. Sometimes I prepare yogurts at home, but I don't really make money out of it.

In the reintegration program, ex-combatants are called PPRs, which stands for Person in Reintegration Process, avoiding stigmatizing terms such as “reinserted,” the most popular term in Caquetá, or more political denominations such as “ex-combatants” or “ex-guerrilleros.” The first year of reintegration is called “stabilization.” Each PPR is assigned to a reintegration professional who helps them obtain a national ID, register with the social security system, find a school, and adapt to the city. This first year they receive a monthly stipend of \$480,000 (150 USD),⁸¹ regardless of their participation in reintegration activities. For the following two years, they receive

⁸¹ Although most of my interlocutors reported this amount, I found \$600,000 (200 USD) in 2020 reports, suggesting that stipends might have been adjusted. The minimum salary in 2018, when most of my participants were still receiving the stipend, was \$781,242, meaning that they received 60% of a minimum salary.

a monthly stipend of \$160,000 (50 USD) if they attend ARN activities, another \$160,000 if they go to school, and another \$160,000 if they go to vocational training called “education for work.”

The “Reintegration Route,” the name of the complete reintegration process, is expected to last six-and-a-half years. To finish the route, a PPR must attend at least 90% of the ARN activities such as talks and workshops oriented around participating in civil life, finish secondary school or at least fifth grade, take 400 hours of vocational training classes, and devote 80 hours to social service. They also must present a proposal called “Proyecto Productivo” (productive project) to start their own business that is expected to be related to their vocational training; they receive \$8,000,000 (2,500 USD) towards this end.

During the last five years, the ARN changed its emphasis from a psychological perspective intended to help PPRs overcome their violent past, to a business-oriented approach that allows PPRs to develop working skills for successful economic reintegration. The former was based on four social abilities: conflict resolution, responsibility, goal achievement, and assertive relationships. The latter is structured in nine dimensions: citizenship, education, family, habitat, personal life, productiveness, health, and security. Each dimension articulates the main goal of “overcoming poverty,” which one could easily translate to providing ex-combatants economic skills to survive in an extremely unequal society. Following national instructions, the ARN in Florencia started to replace psychologists with professionals with business degrees. Antonio, a reintegration professional in Florencia, explained the shift to me by saying: “We realized that a starving person can’t reintegrate.”⁸² Yet, instead of using this insight as an opportunity to recognize socio-economic inequality as a shared cause of both war and poverty, it was used to reinforce the

⁸² Nos dimos cuenta que una persona con hambre no se puede reintegrar.

myths of meritocracy and individual responsibility by structuring a plan that combines “education for work” and an entrepreneurship project.

A significant part of the time I have shared with ex-combatants has been helping them with their vocational training courses, organizing their CVs, and writing their business proposals. I have learned about education legislation for a preschool education course, criminology for a security guard course,⁸³ first aid for a nursing course, and have helped with dozens of English tests. I lost count of how many times I have re-written CVs to disguise the fact that the person was in a guerrilla group. The birthplace, the lack of work experience, and the completion date of their secondary education, which most of them finished as adults, are enough to raise suspicion. I have also served as a resource to search for the equipment they need for a street food cart, a carpenter shop, a drugstore, and a clothing store. However, as other researchers have reported (Fattal, 2018), none of my participants are currently making a living from their microenterprise projects. I have seen sewing machines, bags with new shoes, and cooking equipment under beds or in the corners of ex-combatants’ homes because despite the efforts of both ex-combatants and reintegration professionals, these productive projects do not meet the goal of supporting ex-combatants’ economic reintegration. Angela, another reintegration professional, expressed her frustration to me about the futility of these projects: “Why do we keep giving money for beauty salons? Do you know how many beauty salons there are in Florencia? There is one on every corner. Those productive projects are not going to work.”⁸⁴ She also mentioned that there is not a vision to

⁸³ This is not an ARN course. PPRs are not allowed to manipulate weapons until they finish the reintegration route. Nonetheless, many of them took these courses because they feel confident about performing as security guards and miss the protection of weapons. These courses, however, operate under the same logic of all vocational trainings: the promise of a future job after a couple of weeks of training and for a reasonable cost.

⁸⁴ ¿Por qué seguimos dando apoyo para peluquerías? ¿sabe cuántas peluquerías hay en Florencia? Hay una en cada esquina. Esos proyectos productivos no van a funcionar.

successfully integrate ex-combatants to the economic dynamics of the city and the productive projects end up being an unfulfilled promise and a requirement on a reintegration checklist.

Although the goal of the productive project is to promote economic self-sufficiency, many reintegration professionals are constantly and actively looking for job offers for PPRs among their relatives, friends, and acquaintances. Although they (house cleaning, babysitting, construction) are usually temporary and poorly paid, it is the reintegration professionals' hope that through these jobs ex-combatants start to establish contacts that open up other job opportunities to survive.

The fantasy of entrepreneurship assumes that they can circumvent the reconstitution of the social fabric that the war destroys. Even though Colombia has included a community-based component in the reintegration program, those activities are limited to reconciliation acts. The absence of a social pact that recognizes common causes between the highest social inequality in Latin America (Rodríguez Miranda & Vial Cossani, 2020) and the longest armed conflict in the world sustains the idea of ex-combatants as misfits, hindering their full participation as citizens and the reconstitution of the social network in the aftermath of war.

McMullin (2013) argues that success in DDR programs is better framed as reintegration back into poverty and the socio-political marginalization that provoked war in the first place. In this sense, a stable job after demobilization is considered an unrealistic expectation. In his words:

The international story about DDR, therefore, is one in which programs can train ex-combatants as carpenters but should not be judged harshly if ex-combatants can't find jobs as carpenters after the training ends. In fact, to expect actual employment after war is frequently characterized as a 'high' or 'unrealistic' expectation. (4)

Giustozzi (2012) see this approach to reintegration as part of "the neo-liberal school" that advocates for economic activities in the private sector and advances an agenda for market liberalization in connection with democratic institutions. The depoliticization of the socio-economic conditions that ex-combatants face after demobilization reinforces the neoliberal fantasy

of entrepreneurship. Vocational skills workshops and the microenterprise project work more as a cultural indoctrination on the tropes of individual responsibility, meritocracy, and hard work than as a real option to earn a living.

Vocational training also plays an important role in instructing women about the gendered division of labor in civil life. Mann (2015b) points out that in the aftermath of war, women face political and moral obstacles to reconciling their identity as fighters and gender expectations in a post-conflict setting. I suggest that more than an identity conflict, women confront a radical change from an egalitarian division of labor in war to gender-based discrimination in civilian life. Although all courses are open to all PPRs, the job market encourages women to take courses that prepare them to work in a beauty salon, a kindergarten, or a restaurant, while men tend to be the target for courses like construction. Courses to create and manage their own business, however, are highly recommended for all of them. The gendered logic of the vocational training is not disconnected from the patriarchal parameters of the job market. Marcela, for instance, took a food handling and a bakery course. Fernanda, her reintegration professional, helped her get the equipment and the uniform she needed for the classes. After completing the course, she applied for a position in a big bakery in downtown Florencia. Two men and another woman were also applying for the job, but the two female applicants were immediately disqualified. When Marcela asked for a reason, they said that they wanted a man who could operate the oven and carry flour sacks, suggesting that for pastry work she would have been considered. To convince Marcela that taking the course was worth it, Fernanda said “at least you know how to make bread for your children,” which Marcela took well. Holding onto the entrepreneurship ideals of her course on “managing your own business,” Marcela hopes to be able to buy an oven and sell bread in her neighborhood.

4.4.3 From militarized masculinities to female caregivers



Picture 18. With my kids at the park
Here I am with my kids at the park. I feel bad because most of the time they have to stay home.

I met most of my participants in an “education for work” class on hairdressing. At that time, there were two courses available: the one on hairdressing and another on construction. A reintegration professional told me that I could meet some people willing to join my research project in the first class, since most attendees were female ex-combatants. Yet she did not mention an important part of the attendees: ex-combatants’ children. I attempted to attend the class as a regular student. I tried to pay attention to the first lessons about nail cleaning for a pedicure and nail decoration, but the constant noises of kids holding back their impulses to play made it difficult for everyone to concentrate. The teacher looked clearly annoyed, while the moms unsuccessfully tried to entertain their children. So I decided to bring colored pencils and paper for the next class and proposed to both the mothers and the ARN employees that I take the children to another office with me. My suggestion was unanimously accepted and very much appreciated. But despite the enthusiasm for my idea, they could only offer me a storage room with some donated toys where I barely fit with the seven kids I was voluntarily watching. I prepared activities to play, color, read stories, and created a short puppet show that we recorded and shared with their parents. We tried

to stay busy, but we could not raise our voices or make any noise that disturbed people working in the offices next to us. I went every day for four weeks until they asked me to move to a corner of a hall because they needed to use the storage room as an office. I did not see how I could keep working with the kids in such a small space, and although I remained in touch with the moms and the kids, I stopped going every day.

The situation was not exceptional; all women complained that there was no place for their children in reintegration activities, and many of them had to drop out of school or stop going to vocational training for that reason. Despite the high participation of female combatants in guerrilla movements, and therefore in the reintegration program ex-combatant mothers not only face socio-economic inequalities but also gender-based barriers for economic reintegration. Yet all reintegration professionals acknowledge that children are the main motivation for PPRs (women in particular) to stay in the program.

4.5 Fixing Gender Inequalities in Civilian Life

With the scarce resources reintegration professionals have at hand, they develop multiple strategies to fill the gaps between the DDR program and the lived experiences of the population they work with. The project “Citizen Participation Transforms Women’s Lives” that promoted ex-combatant women’s connections with organizations advocating for women’s rights is a good example of these initiatives. This project won the Good Practices National Award, which is conferred to successful practices in a territorial group (in this case, Caquetá) and shared with all ARN offices in the country.

When Fernanda, the reintegration professional who developed this initiative in Florencia, was assigned mostly female PPRs, she rapidly recognized that the reintegration program did not address two main challenges for ex-combatant women: gender-based violence and economic

discrimination against mothers. Caquetá has the second-highest percentage (22%) of women in a reintegrating population in the country. In 2016, when the project was in place, there were 111 active female participants, 40 of them single mothers. Many of the PPRs in Fernanda's group experienced domestic violence aggravated by the financial dependency on their partners. She also learned about ex-combatant women's barriers to attending school and vocational training, and to finding a job where their children could be with them.

Gender-based violence is not exclusively a problem for ex-combatant women. The leader of *Plataforma de Mujeres*, the largest women's organization in Caquetá, always states that “a cow has more rights than a woman in Caquetá,” invoking the landlord tradition of extensive cattle farming in the area that has excluded women from the main industries of the region, limited their access to land, and reproduced a patriarchal system. The National Demography and Health Survey reported in 2015 that in Caquetá, at least 64.3% of women between 13 and 49 years old had experienced some form of gender-based violence (Minsalud & Profamilia, 2015). In 2018, domestic and sexual violence rates were 90.48 and 67.31 per 100,000, respectively⁸⁵ (Así Vamos en Salud, 2021). But feminist movements claim that these forms of violence are highly under-reported. Women complain that they are not taken seriously when they report a case of domestic violence and are told to solve the issues with the offender. Fernanda experienced these barriers when she tried to intervene in cases of gender-based violence. As she said: “We teach them [PPRs] that they have rights and that if they experience an episode of violence, they can activate the protocol [Ruta de Atención].⁸⁶ But the protocol doesn't work! It doesn't work because I tried to help a PPR who was being physically abused, and I couldn't.”

⁸⁵ National rates were 157 and 52.3 per 100,000, respectively.

⁸⁶ Rutas de atención (attention route) are protocols or packages of services that articulate different offices of local judicial systems to assist people in case of violence, including gender-based violence. In Caquetá, there are “attention routes” for domestic and sexual violence, illegal exploitation of natural resources, food assistance, and robbery or

Like most actions to stand in solidarity with women, Fernanda drew inspiration from her personal gendered experiences to create a strategy for women's inclusion. Therefore, she contacted different feminist activists to open spaces for ex-combatant women to participate in organizations and events. In Fernanda's words, these spaces were opportunities to meet "very empowered women" with a long trajectory of fighting for women's rights. It is noteworthy that most activists against gender-based violence are victims of the armed conflict. The endemic violence against women in Caquetá is both a cause and a consequence of war. While some women joined guerrilla groups to escape violence at home and in some areas guerrillas punished rape with death, the long presence of armed actors reinforced patriarchal structures that created an unsafe environment for women.

Although the encounters between former farianas and victims were not free of frictions, they were mostly welcomed in these spaces. Attempting to solve the tension between victim versus perpetrators that frequently hinders an understanding of gender-based violence against female fighters, Fernanda wrote in the final draft of this project:

Women in the reintegration process are an example of self-improvement since they are not only victims when they belong to the illegal armed group, but also as demobilized, they face situations of domestic violence and social exclusion due to our machista culture. With all these situations that these women have faced, special attention is necessary, taking into account the violent situations they have suffered.⁸⁷

Interestingly, Fernanda told me how the status of an armed group and carrying a weapon provided a form of protection for female combatants who escaped domestic violence in their places

extortion that were designed between state institutions, local NGOs, and the International Development Aid of the European Commission.

⁸⁷ Las mujeres en proceso de reintegración son muestra del deseo de superación, pese a que no solo son víctimas cuando pertenecían a un grupo armado ilegal, aun siendo desmovilizadas se enfrentan a situaciones de violencia intrafamiliar y a una exclusión social que se debe a la misma cultura machista en la que estamos. Con todas estas situaciones que han frenado a estas mujeres, se hace necesario una atención diferenciada de las mujeres a partir de las situaciones de violencia vividas.

of origin. This topic emerged in several of our informal conversations. Yet, she decided to establish a discursive bridge between victims and ex-combatants by victimizing the latter.

The intricate relationship between gender-based violence and armed violence enabled Fernanda to establish connections with different institutions to support her initiative, including a local feminist organization, two grassroots organizations for peace, and the ICBF.⁸⁸ With their guidance, she developed a project that aimed to: describe the conditions of women in the reintegration program, teach them about women's rights and gender policies, connect them with spaces for citizen participation, and promote labor inclusion. As a result, twenty-seven out of the thirty women who were part of the project engaged in some form of paid activities (most of them temporarily), some participated in events for gender equality, and five of them joined organizations of women for peace. These organizations are dedicated to advocate for women's rights in areas heavily affected by the armed conflict and are sustained by the work of volunteer women.

Despite these accomplishments, the project did not continue when Fernanda was promoted to another position. Although Tatiana, her successor, incorporated many of the teachings in her own work, she did not see how participating in women's events could solve the major concern of ex-combatant women: how to provide for their families. As she told me, "I went to some of the women's meetings, and they all say beautiful things, but what is the next step? I need economic solutions for these women." She was right. All ex-combatant women I met are financially struggling, and surviving is their main priority.

Encouraging political participation, or as the program called it, "citizen participation," was a remarkable step to connect ex-combatant women with civil movements for women's rights. It proved that the connection between women, regardless of their role in the war, develop powerful

⁸⁸ Colombian Institute for Family Welfare

alliances to advance a peace agenda and pull together against women's oppression. Nonetheless, it was an isolated initiative that could not disrupt a state policy that scatters ex-combatants and reintegrates them into civil society as individuals under premises of meritocracy and entrepreneurship. Thus, such initiatives were important for building social solidarity but unable to address the pervasive economic insecurity the women faced.

4.6 Building a Life in the Margins

When a combatant demobilizes, the military official who initiates the process should say, "Welcome to freedom" as part of the protocol. When I asked Marcela about the meaning of this sentence for her, she said, "my bed." With the money she saved during her last months in the guerrilla group and in the Hogar de Paz, where she received a 2.50 USD daily stipend, she bought the first bed of her life. Sleeping on a comfortable mattress, knowing that she would not have to run away from an attack or receive an order in the middle of the night made her feel free of the extreme embodied experience of war. No more endless marches, strict military routines, wet clothes, skinned feet, bleeding nails, thirst, and constant fear of death. "I am free," she said out loud the first time she jumped on her bed after coming back from the Hogar de Paz. Her bed is also where she lays down with her kids to play and watch TV together. Marcela has no doubt that coming out of the war was the right decision, but the challenges of surviving in civilian life have made her doubt the promises of the reintegration program.



Picture 19. My bed



Picture 20. My house

Marcela lives in a house she built herself. Her stepmother bought a plot of land on the outskirts of Florencia with some of the money Marcela used to send for her child when she was in the group, so that she would have a place to live after demobilizing. The plot is located in an area occupied by landless families that gained rights over the land and later resold it to other families. In the 2000s, the massive migration of internal refugees to Florencia, one of the ten cities most affected by forced displacement, led to an irregular urban development through clusters of informal settlements. In 2019, there were at least fifty irregular zones whose land tenure was not legalized, had no access to basic housing services (such as electricity, clean water, and sewage systems), and had a precarious infrastructure (Robledo-Caicedo, 2020). Initially, Marcela built a wood structure, which she has covered with zinc roof tiles, slabs of wood, plastic, and oakum over the last few years. Like her neighbors, she also installed electricity and an improvised sewage system. Although her children say that it is not as pretty as the Hogar de Paz where they stayed, she is proud of having a roof above their heads and relieved about not paying rent.

Marcela has not been able to find a job related to the vocational training she took, and not having certified work experience or contacts makes the process of finding a stable job hard.

Therefore, she cleans houses, cooks on a farm, and sells homemade food and beauty products to provide for her children. She could not get a job in a bakery because she was a woman, but a couple that knows her background has hired her to work in construction.

Although in places like Florencia the stigma of being an ex-combatant is not as difficult as in places that have not suffered the most intense part of the armed confrontation, ex-combatants must deal with resentment and possible reprisals from the victims of war. Hence, they are careful not to disclose their past fariana identity. The lack of a sign on the ARN building, as well as the rare occasions in which ARN officials wear their identifier vests, are part of the efforts to keep both ARN employees and PPRs safe. McFee (2016) noted how, in this process, ex-combatants have to “play double,” simultaneously embracing and disguising their identity as ex-combatants in order to survive. They must meet all ARN requirements to maintain their status as PPRs so they keep receiving the life-sustaining benefits of the program and, simultaneously, hide their identity as ex-combatants in their neighborhoods and workplaces to avoid stigma and keep themselves and their families safe.

But the difficulties of making a living are not just related to stigma or the consequences of their past as guerrilla fighters, but also about coming back to a system that gave them no choice to survive besides joining an armed group. The vast majority of former FARC-EP members come from rural and racialized communities. As Angela, who lives in Manizales (my hometown), put it, “They don’t hire me because I am black, and if they hire me, they fire me when they find out that I am an ex-combatant.” Angela came from a black community on the Pacific Coast and was relocated to Manizales, a profoundly racist city, as part of the program for demobilized minors. It is not safe for her to go back to her community, but living alone in Manizales, with no other

networks than the ones she has made through the DDR program, subjects her to a position of extreme economic and social vulnerability.

Racial tensions are less evident in Florencia because most ex-combatants who decide to live there come from rural communities of Caquetá or neighboring states, similar to many other forcibly displaced people living in this city. They all share the consequences of the structural inequalities between rural and urban populations in Colombia that are reproduced in the city, such as lack of social security and low levels of education. Irregular settlements in Florencia are populated by campesinos who lost their land, which was their main source of livelihood, and are now living in unsafe conditions in the city. However, the main difference between ex-combatants and the rest of the population is that ex-combatants have very precarious social networks. Many of them lost contact with their family of origin, and security issues prevent them from expanding their relations.

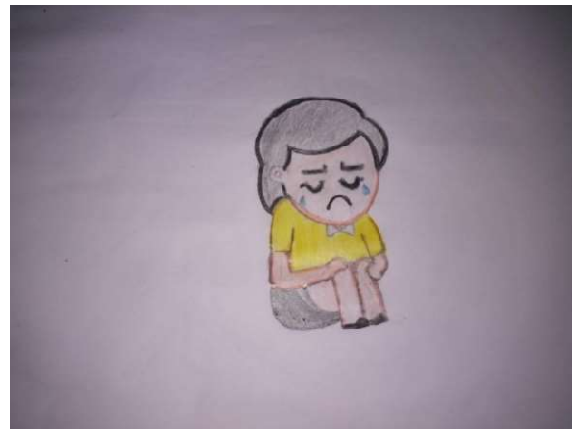
When Tatiana told me, “I need economic solutions for these women,” she was probably thinking of conversations like the one she had with Marcela during the Covid-19 pandemic. Marcela invested in a small production of cassava wraps (*envueltos de yuca*) to sell on the street, which she completely lost because of the lockdown in Florencia. With nothing else besides cassava wraps on her table and no money to pay her bills, she asked Tatiana if there was a way to request financial support for a microenterprise project so she could invest in a business that could help her and her children survive during the quarantine. Tatiana told her that she had not met the requirements yet, and Tatiana had no power to accelerate the process.⁸⁹ Marcela yelled at Tatiana saying, “Do you all want us to get a gun again? That’s why many of us have ended up as hitmen,

⁸⁹ After completing all the steps of the Reintegration Route, PPRs need to present a proposal for the microenterprise that must be reviewed and approved by ARN.

killing people on motorcycles, because they are not going to let their children starve. We did not die there [in the guerrilla army]; we are not going to die of starvation here.”



Picture 21. I like it when we spend time together



Picture 22. Sometimes I feel sad and desperate

During 2018 and 2019, many of the ex-combatants I contacted were constantly changing their phone numbers. Most of them sent me their updated numbers by Facebook or WhatsApp after weeks or months. Later, I learned that they were being contacted by the FARC-EP faction that did not join the peace agreement and was reorganizing at the time. They were targeting those who were struggling in civil society, taking advantage of their precarious conditions and their disappointment with the government. None of the women I know accepted the invitation. These women did not want to go back to war, there is no violent predisposition that makes this offer attractive for them, but they all understood why some decided to go back. “It is better to be here; you don’t have the constant fear you have there [in the armed group],” said Marcela. “But when I cried there, it was because I missed my children, not because I had nothing to eat. Here, I have had to put my children to bed without eating. There, I could send something for them.⁹⁰ And, despite

⁹⁰ Guerrilla fighters did not receive any payment, but, depending on their rank, they could receive some money to conduct missions that involved financial transactions, or in the form of tips from commanders or civilians. Most of them saved that money to send to their families. In some cases, the movement provided some form of financial support for children for food and education.

the fatigue, I put at least a piece of panela⁹¹ in my mouth at the end of the day.” Although DDR programs overstate ex-combatants as a security threat for the state and local communities, several studies have shown that ex-combatants do not usually go back to war or get involved in criminal activities (Nussio, 2018; Peña & Dorussen, 2020), especially if they are women or have children (Kaplan & Nussio, 2018). However, Marcela is aware that she is portrayed as a security risk and points out to Tatiana that surviving in conditions of poverty and socio-political marginalization should not be considered a successful reintegration.

4.7 Conclusion

Many women in Latin America and other parts of the world decide to join insurgent organizations to escape extreme poverty, gender violence, and oppression in their communities. Although there is a growing body of literature on women’s participation in armed struggles and its impact on local politics, little attention has been paid to the life of women as former fighters. One of the most important challenges for them is reintegrating into the patriarchal, racist, and impoverished society that they defied. Studies on women’s experiences of demobilization are usually not very optimistic. Women return to civilian life morally and emotionally defeated, face the stigma of having challenged the patriarchal balance of power, can barely use their military skills to find a job in civilian life, and experience numerous economic difficulties (Dahal, 2015; Mann, 2015; Meintjes, 2001; Meintjes, Pillay, & Turshen, 2001).

Londoño and Nieto (2006) state that women’s experiences after demobilization depends on: the socio-economic characteristics and the ideology of the group that they belonged to; the social and cultural characteristics of the community or region where they move after

⁹¹ A concentrated paste made from sugar cane juice.

demobilization; the historical moment when they were enrolled in the armed group and the moment when they demobilized; and the modalities of demobilization regarding the conditions of reintegration and whether it was individual or collective. These authors also identify that on a more personal level, the experience of reintegration is intrinsically connected to the person's experience in the armed group. It changes according to the position they had in the group and, consequently, the social and economic resources they have to reintegrate into civilian life. It also depends on the support of their families, their marital status, and whether they have children (Londoño & Nieto, 2006).

Londoño and Nieto remind us that reintegrating into civil life is a contextualized process rather than a universal transition from militarized subjects to citizens. Accordingly, this chapter paid special attention to how the specific conditions of the individual reintegration program shaped women's experiences of reintegration. Drawing on ex-combatants and reintegration professionals' narratives and Marcela's drawings, I explored the contradictions of a program that privileges economic reintegration while failing to recognize that the structural socio-economic inequalities and conditions that led to war are now the conditions that ex-combatants confront in trying to adapt to civilian life. While individual reintegration aims to produce neoliberal subjects through motivational talks, vocational training, and a business plan, it produces atomized subjects trying to survive the neoliberal rationality of returning to civil life.

Cielo's story, from the verdict to tie her to a tree instead of executing her when she was in the FARC-EP, to her everyday struggles to provide for her children in Florencia, illustrates—to use a Foucauldian approach—ex-combatants' transition from the sovereign power of war to a neoliberal governmentality. Read (2009) explains that this form of governmentality is a less corporeal but more intense form of power in which strategies of subjectification produce economic

subjects as self-governed entrepreneurs, “companies of one” (30). It “[...] works by dispersing bodies and individuals through privatization and isolation” (Read, 2009, p. 34). Neither productive environment nor social life is made up of isolated subjects; “the real environment is made up of collective individuals” (Negri, 1989, p. 206).

Ex-combatant mothers share three conditions in which building community and solidarity are essential to survive: economic insecurity, post-conflict violence, and parenting. The fantasy of entrepreneurship has no material possibilities in an impoverished environment in which marginalized and racialized people depend on each other to meet basic needs. Social reintegration requires the reconstitution of the social fabric destroyed by war in order to prevent the reproduction of violence in post-conflict scenarios. And, finally, reproductive labor “as the work necessary to the reproduction of the human life” in a broad sense (Briggs, 2017) has no place in the transformation pathway from militarized masculinities to productive masculinities. Although family is considered a vital component of reintegration, the unpaid care and domestic work that are mostly done by women are not taken into account in adjusting the needs of ex-combatant women. Despite the large percentage of female participants, the DDR program follows a masculine model of reintegration. As part of a counterinsurgency strategy, individual reintegration is unable to escape pervasive patriarchal structures of war.

CHAPTER 5

A COLLECTIVE DREAM OF REINCORPORATION

I visited Agua Bonita for the first time in 2017 as a member of a peace institute based in Manizales, my hometown. Agua Bonita is one of the two areas in Caquetá created after the peace agreement for disarmament, demobilization, and reincorporation of FARC members. At the peace institute, we planned to bring ex-combatants' voices to Manizales and other places in the center of the country, an area less affected than Caquetá by the armed conflict and yet more hostile to the agreement. Alicia, a future leader of women's reincorporation nationwide, was one of the combatants participating in the event we coordinated. For one of the activities, Alicia and I wrote together on a white poster the conclusions of a group activity about the vision, resources, and challenges of the FARC after the agreement. As part of the vision, our group stated the goal of "having our political and biological families in the same place," which lucidly described the spirit of the transition from a military to a family-centered way of life in the years to come.

After the signing of the peace agreement between the Colombian government and the FARC in November of 2016, 8,185 combatants, including 168 pregnant women, gathered in twenty-six zones of the country. The main purpose of these camps, located in rural areas and protected by National Armed Forces and United Nations security rings, was to provide a place for combatants to surrender their arms and begin the initial stages of reincorporation into civilian life. The Agency for Reincorporation and Normalization (ARN) would manage both the reintegration program discussed in Chapter Four and the reincorporation program that resulted from the peace agreement. The FARC demanded that the name of the agency be changed (previously called the Colombian Agency for Reintegration). They wanted to negotiate their own program for transition

to civilian life, called reincorporation. In August of 2017, the twenty-six zones became Territorial Spaces for Training and Reincorporation (ETCR), and two years later some of them began the legal process to be recognized as villages. During that time, these areas experienced substantial physical and social transformations as they became populated by ex-combatants and their families.

One of the most evident changes in reincorporation areas was the increase in fertility. When negotiations in Havana were successfully concluding in 2016, the pregnancy ban was removed.⁹² By the time FARC combatants were moving to the locations prepared for collective reincorporation, many of them were carrying newborns or reuniting with the children they had left with their families. Others were still looking for their children. In June of 2017, a census reported that there were 168 pregnant women and 98 children in the reincorporation areas (Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2017) and by December of 2018, 258 new pregnancies were reported (ARN, 2019). It was around this time that images of harmless moms putting aside their weapons to take care of their babies colonized popular representations of ex-combatants (see Chapter Two). However, ex-combatant women were doing more than exchanging rifles for babies. The transition from a military-centered life to a family-centered one involved substantial challenges, from access to healthcare services in rural and dispersed areas to the construction of safe environments for parents and their children.

This chapter tells the story of ex-combatant women in Agua Bonita. I analyze how they have used the framework of rights established during peace negotiations to advance a reproductive justice agenda by making arrangements with the national and international human rights institutions to create dignified conditions for their new reproductive experiences—pregnancy,

⁹² Although a pregnancy ban was never explicit, the establishment of mandatory contraception since 1993 (see Chapter One) and the testimonies about abortions (see Chapter Two and Chapter Three) indicate a systematic prohibition of pregnancies.

childbirth, and parenting. As Collins (2000) asserts, motherhood is a constant renegotiation of relationships that women experience with one another, with their children, and with their communities. Similarly, farianas were not only negotiating the conditions of the implementation of the peace agreement, but also making space for their new vital experiences in the political and economic projects of reincorporation. Drawing on periodic visits to Agua Bonita from 2017 to 2021, this chapter discusses how farianas have contested media representations about motherhood, demanded better reproductive health services, and negotiated the conditions for them and their children in reincorporation areas.

Through my visits to Agua Bonita, I witnessed an intense time of becoming (Biehl, 2017) in which a new social project for FARC members was being negotiated every day with the state, international organizations, NGOs, private companies, and the communities around them. During this time, Juan Manuel Santos, the president who negotiated the peace accord, was followed by Iván Duque, one of the leaders of the No Campaign (see Chapter Two). Despite this government's weak commitment to the implementation of the agreement, most FARC leaders have strategically used the national and international network that supports the agreement to move forward an agenda toward a successful reincorporation.⁹³ I conducted participant observation with ex-combatants as they took part in activities related to the reincorporation process, five interviews with state employees working for reincorporation, and one focus group with five United Nations representatives. I did not interview ex-combatants in the reincorporation process for this chapter. Although several journalists and academics visited the area with that purpose, I did not feel comfortable asking for interviews. First of all, I felt that it was me who should be contributing to the immense challenges they faced as they built a community after demobilization, rather than

⁹³ However, in 2019, a minority of FARC leaders decided to reorganize as an armed movement.

them devoting time to my research. Second of all, there were rumors that scholars were making money from ex-combatants' stories and I did not want to create space for that misunderstanding. Therefore, this chapter primarily draws on conversations with ex-combatants and my own experience in Agua Bonita planting sugar cane, cleaning communal spaces, organizing events for neighboring communities, and helping write proposals to obtain funding for infrastructure. My ethnographic experience navigates the dynamics of dealing with uncertainty and preparing for the unknowable futures of the agreement. My conclusions, like the reincorporation project itself, cannot be anything other than unfinished amid our hopes to sustain a fragile peace.

5.1 Farianas in the peacebuilding process

The literature on women in the aftermath of war reports that, despite women's involvement in armed conflicts as combatants all over the world, their participation in peace processes is low. In Tillman and Anctil Avoine's words, "[ex-combatant] women experience a double alienation: not only has their participation in the perpetration of violence been largely invisible, but this failure to recognize their presence in the conflict means that they are also being overlooked in peacebuilding processes" (Tillman & Anctil Avoine, 2015, p. 216). Similarly, Cynthia Enloe (2005) states that the gender dynamics of armed conflicts and peacebuilding efforts tend to be underestimated. For her, patriarchy is the main cause not only of armed violence, but also of failures to achieve long-term conflict resolutions (Enloe, 2005, p. 281). The case of women in guerrilla insurgencies is especially controversial. Some authors point out that expectations to include women's struggles in the agenda of revolutionary movements have been largely a disappointment even after transitions to democracy (Hauge, 2007; Heumann, 2014; Hohl et al., 2016; Luciak, 2001; Molyneux, 1985; Moran, 2010). According to these authors, the dominant

ideology of these movements remains attached to class struggles, and considers gender equality a “personal” and less relevant cause (Heumann, 2014). Yet, other authors state that despite the fragile agenda on gender, armed and non-armed leftist organizations facilitated political opportunities for women and enabled them to be involved in politics or activism (Kampwirth, 2001; Wolff, 2011).⁹⁴ In addition, women in these movements promoted a debate about gender that inspired questions and reflections among their male companions (Wolff, 2007). In any case, women’s formal participation in conflict resolution is still very limited and a gendered perspective in peace-building processes has not often materialized (Shekhawat & Pathak, 2015).

The peace process between the Colombian government and the FARC was exceptional in this matter. The constitution of a gender sub-commission within the peace negotiations established a remarkable precedent in the history of conflict resolutions. It brought together women from the FARC, the government, movements for peace, and feminist organizations as negotiators and initiated a debate about how gender norms govern the dynamics of war. The sub-commission advocated for the acknowledgement of gender inequalities and the specific effects of war on women and LGBTQ people, promoted rights for women in rural areas, and created spaces to improve women’s political participation (Navarro-Ruiz, 2019). Female FARC representatives have commented in public interviews that this also entailed negotiations within their own group about using more inclusive language and accepting sexual diversity.

International support and, more specifically, the UN Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security, played a major role in the constitution of this sub-commission. This resolution is a victory of local and international advocates for women and women's rights who have placed

⁹⁴ Wolff (2011) asserts, as proof of this point, that three female presidents in Latin America were militants from resistance movements.

pressure on the United Nations, international organizations, and governments to design and carry out peacekeeping and humanitarian operations with attention to gender (Mazurana et al., 2005). The debate on gender, armed conflict, and peace processes has been part of the international conversation on human rights since the 1990s and has affected the agenda of the peace negotiations, the constitution of negotiating committees, the strategies that women's movements employ to create a political space in the aftermath of war, and the experiences of reincorporation. In 2001, the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 reiterated the importance of paying attention to the impacts of armed conflict and peace interventions on women and girls, increasing the participation of women in conflict resolutions, and incorporating a gender perspective into "the policies, planning and implementation processes in all peace operations, humanitarian activities and reconstruction efforts" (UN Doc. S/RES/1325, 2001, p.3).

The debates on women and war have influenced former female fighters' opportunities and strategies for participating in politics and establishing alliances with other women's movements. Maria Teresa Blandón (2001) and Patricia Hipsher (2001) report that in Nicaragua and El Salvador women's organizations from different political sides created, not without tensions, coalitions to advance policies for gender equality after armed conflict. The international debate on women's rights allowed revolutionary women in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua to establish bonds of solidarity with other advocates for women's rights, and to gain independence from the agenda of the male-centered leftist movements in which they initiated their militancy (Garibay, 2006; Heumann, 2014; Luciack & Olmos, 2005). Similarly, *farianas* built upon the lessons of other ex-combatant women in previous peace negotiations in Colombia and elsewhere in Latin America, who warned them about the importance of assuring political spaces for women (Sandino, 2016). Accordingly, *farianas* articulated a conversation about gender that both aligned with the agenda of

human rights organizations and facilitated connections with women's movements for peace. In some cases, female ex-combatants were also able to take advantage of the international pressure for gender equality to demand spaces for political participation (Luciack & Olmos, 2005); for instance, *farianas* were granted a role in national politics as senators and in local politics as community representatives.

To highlight their political status both in the armed struggle and in peace-building efforts, *farianas* have publicly confronted discourses that reduce their participation in the armed movement to stories of either forced abortions or romantic images of women exchanging rifles for babies. Unlike other women's movements that have used motherhood as a symbolic platform to take active roles in conflict resolution efforts (Moran, 2010) and to disrupt representations of women as passive subjects in war (Aretxaga, 1997), *farianas* were careful about not using moral maternity as their entrance into politics in the aftermath of war. At the same time, they were embracing motherhood as a new challenge and an opportunity to reframe gender relationships in the aftermath of the accord.

In the literature on ex-combatant women, motherhood remains an underestimated dimension of women's reintegration. It is usually described as a status that envisions women as returning to the gender roles they defied during war (Khadka, 2012; Londoño & Nieto, 2006; Magadla, 2017) through the social capital that resettlement programs—and civilian society—confer on feminized domestic roles (McFeeters, 2021). Some authors also show how motherhood can limit ex-combatant women's opportunities to succeed financially after war (K. C. Luna, 2019). Furthermore, the relationship between motherhood and women's political participation is often trapped in the debate about motherism versus feminism. In line with authors who recognize motherwork as a central part of collective endeavors to resist marginalization and oppression

(Collins, 1994, 2007), I explore the revolutionary potential of maternal politics in the process of building a community based on social justice in Agua Bonita.

Although forced abortions in the FARC are an ongoing conversation, farianas do not want to be perceived as victims or sacrificial mothers. Instead, motherhood is leading the configuration of conditions for women, parents, and children in accordance with ideals of social justice and gender equality. The story of women in Agua Bonita shows how providing safe living conditions for parents and children is an important part of women's political participation in peacebuilding. The following section shows how farianas' new reproductive experiences were a contentious topic since the early stages of reincorporation.

5.2 Marching toward an Uncertain Tomorrow

In September 2016, nine days before signing the first peace agreement in Cartagena de Indias, the FARC celebrated in the Yari savannas⁹⁵ their tenth and last conference as an armed movement. The spectacular event included public speeches from FARC leaders and a big celebratory concert broadcasted by national and international media. Among the 1,500 combatants were a couple with newborn twins, at least five pregnant women, and one baby was born in the middle of the event. Journalists were fascinated with the contrast between combatants and mothers and made them central figures in their coverage. The images of guerrilla parents with their babies seemed like a straightforward symbol of a better time for new generations.

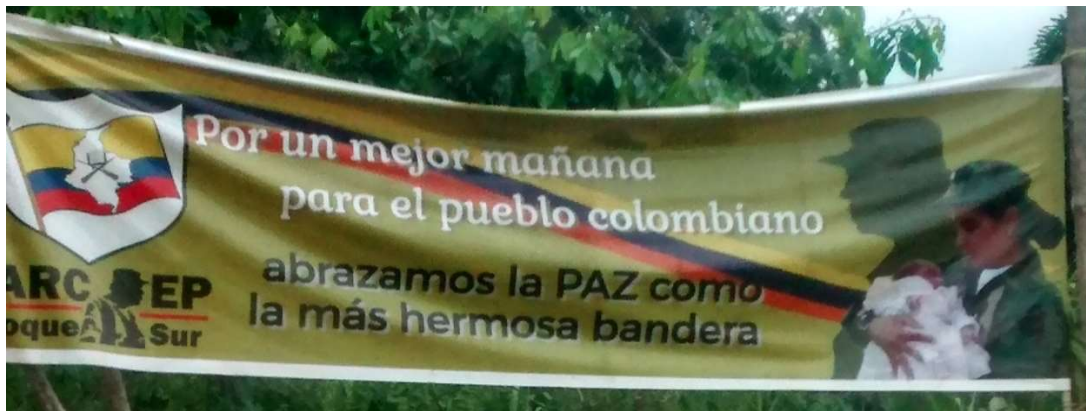
⁹⁵ An extensive area of forest and grasslands between Caquetá and its neighboring department Meta (741,316 acres) that represented an important corridor for the East and the South FARC-EP Blocks. See Molano (2016b).

This celebration of the first peace accord signed on September 26th was drastically interrupted by the results of the plebiscite on October 2nd that rejected the accord (see Chapter Two). While the enthusiasm for a long-awaited peace deal initially clouded the dissent of those Colombians who voted no, the plebiscite revealed the polarization of the country and deepened the divisions even within the FARC, despite the completion of an amended agreement on November 24th. Neither the pressure of the international community to find an alternative solution, nor the massive support for peace negotiations demonstrated for weeks on the streets when the agreement was at stake, could resolve the distrust exacerbated by the plebiscite. After this political upheaval, pregnant combatants and newborns became a contentious topic. The government knew that newborns were an extremely delicate issue in regaining the trust of the FARC. The FARC doubted the intentions of the government with their children and feared that they would be put into adoption. Those who opposed the accord speculated that pregnancies were a political strategy of the FARC to populate reincorporation areas. And the supporters of the accord exploited the images of guerrilla mothers and newborns to keep the hope for a peace accord alive. Women's reproduction was at the center of competing notions of governance, at the same time that different sides attempted to control how reproduction would be represented in the media.

This section describes the transition of three FARC fronts to Agua Bonita in the midst of these tensions. After the signature of the amended accord on November 24th, all FARC fronts (although not all groups)⁹⁶ started to march toward meeting points to meet government delegates and arrange the move to the twenty-six areas created for the reincorporation process. The third,

⁹⁶ Not all FARC-EP groups joined this last march. Since 2016, people in conflict zones had been talking about confrontations between those who supported the accord and those who later became what the press calls "the dissidents." The tensions escalated after the plebiscite, but popular support for the final agreement kept the peace process alive.

thirteenth, and fourteenth fronts of the South Block in Caquetá moved to La Arenosa and La Victoria where they would meet Jaime, an official of the High Commissioner for Peace Office (OACP by its Spanish initials). Jaime had two main concerns: the transportation of weaponry and the transportation of pregnant women and their newborns. In La Arenosa, he met with FARC commanders and members of the military, among them, two men who had been enemies for more than eight years. They sat at a table next to a large poster with the image of a guerrilla woman with a baby in front of the silhouette of Manuel Marulanda, the founder of the FARC. The poster read “For a better tomorrow for Colombian people, we embrace peace as the most beautiful flag.” Like most images of guerrilla mothers, this poster invoked a hopeful future; however, the conditions of this “tomorrow” or what made it better than the present were still a question.



Picture 23. For a better tomorrow for Colombian people. Photo by: Andrés Restrepo Correa

Jaime was aware of the fragility of the futurity that the poster conveyed. He knew that his work should honor the FARC’s reiterated position about their participation in the negotiations as a cohesive, qualified, and strong insurgent movement and not as a surrendering armed group. Accordingly, he worked to guarantee the best possible conditions for the transportation of combatants, the disarmament, and the initial stages of reincorporation. FARC representatives were open about information related to combatants and weaponry, but not about newborns. They were

keeping the number of pregnancies and newborns as well as moms' identities under strict protection, fearing that the babies would be taken away from them. They also denied Jaime permission to enter the camp with the International Committee of the Red Cross to assist pregnant women, and only shared information about mothers and their children once they confirmed with a third party that he was a reliable person. There were only five pregnant women and five babies and toddlers among the 324 combatants in the two meeting points.⁹⁷

Distrust grew on different sides of the negotiations. After the plebiscite, guerrilla women started to doubt the stability of the peace process and the authority of the government to make it happen. They feared that their children would be taken away from them, as had happened in times of war. A pregnant combatant illustrated the hopelessness of that time when my friend Itza asked her if she wanted to baptize her child; she replied that it depended on whether she ended up giving birth in another camp or in jail. Despite four years of peace negotiations and the signing of a final agreement, the result of the plebiscite reminded them that going back to war was always an option.

The opponents of the peace agreement, on the other side, interpreted the news about birthrates in the guerrilla movement as a war strategy to populate the areas where they would settle for reincorporation and suggested that having children was an order from the main leaders. The same parties that used cases of forced abortion to delegitimize the accord rumored that women were now required to get pregnant as part of the interests of the commanders to occupy the land and grow the movement.

The future that the images of the babies represented was a matter of constant tension. But on the ground, there was no time for these questions. Milena, another OACP official, told me about

⁹⁷ See: <https://www.lapazenel terreno.com/desplazamiento-combatientes-zonas-veredales-20180405>

the logistical challenges of the situation as follows: “when a government thinks about demobilizing an armed group, they think about men and weapons. They don’t think about women, babies, children, and animals. That was a surprise. We had to transport otters, cows, birds, everything! It was a lot different from what we expected, and it became a great challenge. We could not say ‘wait, let us prepare for this and we’ll be back.’ We had to find solutions along the way.”⁹⁸ The OACP also launched a campaign to donate baby nursery essentials for ex-combatants’ babies. In Caquetá, Jaime rented buses and trucks for combatants and weaponry and two 4x4 vehicles specifically reserved for pregnant women, women with babies, and their partners to transport them from La Arenosa and La Victoria to Agua Bonita. He also had to borrow tents to save the weaponry and bring the materials to build the camp that a couple of years later would become one of the most successful reincorporation areas in the country. This move of combatants all over the country to the reincorporation areas is known as “The Last March.” In February of 2017, locals welcomed the caravan of combatants arriving to Agua Bonita waving white flags, playing music, and showing peace messages along the road.

5.3 Contesting Representations of Women in a Possible World

As civilians, women started to make reproductive decisions. Some of them excluded motherhood from their personal plans, definitely or temporarily, because they believed that the end of the armed struggle was just the beginning of their fight for social justice; they wanted to be fully involved in the work of the movement as a political party. Others were still skeptical about

⁹⁸ The plans to demobilize guerrilla members did not consider the particularities of their everyday life. The FARC army was more than soldiers and weapons. There were couples with children, pregnant women, and different kinds of pets. The state representative was struck by uncommon pets such as an otter.

the peace process and felt that they needed more time to think about their reproductive options. As one of them stated, “Let’s see if this gets fucked up or not. I don’t want to leave a little creature abandoned if we have to go back to the forest.”⁹⁹ Others found reincorporation a good opportunity to have children or bring the children they had in war to live with them. And others were just open about having or not having children without any specific plan. Yet, regardless of these options, farianas started to feel that the emphasis on motherhood was obscuring their political struggle. For them, the “better tomorrow” that the former poster suggested involved better living conditions for them and their families but not returning to a hegemonic gender order that pushed them back to a domestic role. Instead, they were reshaping the potentiality of that future to promote women as political leaders in the new social project of the FARC and the nation.

In the temporary camp they built for disarmament and the early stages of reincorporation, the poster of a guerrilla mother and her newborn was replaced by posters about the role of women in peacebuilding, thus highlighting the centrality of conversations about gender and women’s rights during peace negotiations. Accordingly, one of the new posters read “No other world is possible or better without the ideas, courage, strength, and organization of WOMEN” (their emphasis). Other posters included the hashtag #MujerPorLaPaz (#WomanForPeace), showing the space that farianas carved out for themselves in new communication strategies, such as a website created to tell the history of women in the FARC, a Facebook account, and a Twitter account, among others.

⁹⁹ “Hay que ver si esto se putea o no. Yo no quiero dejar una criaturita abandonada si nos toca volver al monte.”



Picture 24. Initial camp. Photo by: The author

Farianas refused to remain objects of representation and started to actively produce narratives about themselves. In Agua Bonita, for instance, Olivia was recording the main events happening in the initial camp for reincorporation, interviewing visitors, and producing clips for the FARC YouTube channel NC Noticias (New Colombia News). She had been trained in the long tradition of telecommunications in the FARC that started with military radios and evolved into sophisticated strategies to produce propaganda and keep records. Since the negotiations in Havana, the FARC had created NC Noticias to counter mainstream media information about the negotiations and provide alternative information to combatants. After the signing of the accord, this channel as well as all the social media accounts became important platforms to circulate new discourses of farianas. Like Olivia, there were ex-combatants in all reincorporation spaces working for NC Noticias with FARC cameras and additional equipment donated by international NGOs.

Among many audiovisual works, farianas produced the documentary “Nunca Invisibles, Mujeres Farianas, Adiós a la Guerra” (“Never Invisible, Fariana Women, Goodbye to War”) about

their life in the FARC and their expectations for civilian life. As the introduction to the documentary states “[...] in this new stage we make memory so as not to be invisible, to resignify our lives, and to add our voice to the national memory” (Obando, 2018). The documentary underscores the role of women in the military and political victories of the FARC. It also addresses motherhood as an important aspect of civilian life that should not exclude them from the FARC as a political party. In the words of one of them: “We are the main characters of this struggle. We have been fully there and in addition to being moms we will support the construction of a new society” (Obando, 2018). Farianas were ready to articulate new stories about their past and their future, this time not only for combatants or ex-combatants but for a broad audience. In this process, they found allies among international organizations, artists, and scholars willing to support the production of books, films, and content for social networks. In addition to helping farianas disrupt previous representations of female combatants in the press, these allies have helped them make public the failure of the government to implement the peace agreement.

5.4 Reproductive Health Services as Part of the Peace Agenda

As ex-combatants settled down, reorganized their activities and working routines, changed their eating patterns, were less physically and mentally exposed to the distress of war, and welcomed new family members, the bodies of warriors faded and new demands for care as civilians emerged. The sophisticated battlefield medicine of the former guerrilla army not only became insufficient to take care of pregnant women, but also the state restricted its services since most of the practitioners did not have official diplomas. Both FARC practitioners and medical practices of the FARC were replaced by the national health care system, but not without political and bureaucratic difficulties. This was particularly tense when it came to pregnant ex-combatants

and their babies. The FARC medical system did not have the means to take care of women's reproductive health and the national healthcare system in rural areas was not responding promptly, as usual, to their needs.

As part of the reincorporation process, the government pledged to register ex-combatants in the national healthcare system, teach them how it works, provide healthcare services in the areas for reincorporation, provide special services for ex-combatants with disabilities, and certify medical knowledge for ex-combatants trained as health practitioners in the FARC to give them license to practice. This transition was a drastic change. While the FARC healthcare scheme had a strong component of primary health care, offered immediate treatment due to the availability of combatants trained as health practitioners, had access to basic supplies, and required minimal administrative procedures (Orjuela Benavides, 2017), the national healthcare system is based on individual insurance, concentrates services in urban areas, and is highly bureaucratic (Abadia & Oviedo, 2009).¹⁰⁰

The authority of the state to govern ex-combatant bodies was accepted in exchange for the knowledge and care that it provided to ex-combatant mothers and their babies. Therefore, failures in healthcare services provoked strong responses from the FARC, undermining the stability of reincorporation. As a Health Ministry official in Bogotá explained to me, "Healthcare is essential to build trust between the parties in the agreement. It is the first and most frequent contact with institutional authority, it is almost an everyday interaction [...] and also a condition for reincorporation. You can't start a productive project if you are sick."

¹⁰⁰ Abadía and Oviedo (2009) coined the concept of "bureaucratic itineraries" to refer to the complex administrative procedures within the healthcare system in Colombia that delay and limit care, resulting in deleterious effects on people's lives.

At the local level, Jaime from OACP faced the challenges of a precarious healthcare infrastructure in rural areas in Caquetá to solve health complications among ex-combatants. One night, he received a call from the hospital to his place in Florencia. An ex-combatant had given birth, but the doctor said that the baby would not survive. He had been born with a condition that could only be treated in three hospitals of the country, all of them in big cities. Jaime called a friend in the Ministry of Health, explained the situation, and warned him: “You know that it would be a big deal if we let this baby die.” Jaime knew that letting the baby die could seriously complicate his work with ex-combatants and seriously affect the implementation of the agreement. Thus, in an area where people spend hours and sometimes days to get to a hospital, Jaime’s contact managed to find an air ambulance to transport the baby and his grandmother to a city in the north of the country the same night (the baby’s ex-combatant parents were not authorized to leave Caquetá). The baby survived and his case was presented as one of the successes of reincorporation.

Ex-combatants took an active role at the national and local level to guarantee proper conditions for pregnant women in reincorporation zones and neighboring communities. They shaped the actions of the state and United Nation organizations. At the national level, the FARC advocated for long term actions to improve health services in rural areas. The peace agreement contained the creation of a National Plan for Rural Health to improve healthcare services in areas historically affected by the armed conflict. Regarding sexual and reproductive health, the peace agreement advocated for:

A differential and gender approach, which takes into account the health requirements for women according to their life cycle, including measures related to sexual and reproductive health, psychosocial care and special measures for pregnant women and children, in health promotion, prevention and care (point 1.3.2.1).

Rural communities in Colombia have more barriers to access healthcare services and poorer quality care than urban residents (Rodríguez & Benavides, 2016; Rodríguez Gutiérrez, 2019). In rural areas maternal mortality is 50% higher, neonatal mortality is 24% higher, and child mortality is between 33% and 40% higher than in urban areas (Rodríguez Gutiérrez, 2019). In 2016, while 45 women per 100,000 live births died in urban areas, 73 women died in rural areas. These rates have decreased for the whole country between 2005 and 2017 but the gap between rural and urban areas remains (Minsalud, 2018). Although the National Plan for Rural Health remained as a draft that was never executed by the new government, at the local level FARC members were strategically using the support of international organizations to shape state actions.

Santo's government could not solve decades of institutional lag between urban and rural areas overnight to respond to the health challenges of reincorporation in a timely matter. As a provisional measure, the Ministry of Health, with the support of the World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Population Funds (UNFPA), and International Organization for Migration (IOM), developed the Health for Peace Project, which continued during Duque's government. This project aimed to strengthen the capacity of healthcare institutions to guarantee the right to health in rural populations by training health practitioners and community leaders and developing a strategy for primary health care. It covered five main fields: sexual and reproductive health, children's health, mental health, substance abuse prevention, and nutritional health. The United Nations identified these areas as priorities after a survey they conducted among ex-combatants at the beginning of the reincorporation process.

Based on the results of the survey, the Health for Peace Project was designed to be implemented in the twenty-five municipalities where the sites for reincorporation were located, including both ex-combatant and rural communities. Regarding sexual and reproductive health,

the UNFPA found that maternal mortality in these municipalities was higher than the national rate—51.0 per 100,000 live births in 2017 (Herrera López, 2019).¹⁰¹ Accordingly, the Health for Peace Project included trainings on human rights, maternal health, obstetric emergencies, contraceptive methods, voluntary interruption of pregnancy, and sexual violence for health care providers in these municipalities. In areas with a long tradition of state militarization, the United Nations was reshaping state actions through the discourse of human rights in the post-peace agreement.

The language of human rights worked as bridge between the FARC, the government, and the UN to create a common agenda. In a focus group I conducted with UNFPA employees in Bogotá, they talked about empowering rural communities to demand their rights to healthcare and training health practitioners to protect those rights as a way to consolidate peacebuilding through the national healthcare system. In workshops they led in public hospitals, reincorporation areas, and rural communities on sexual and reproductive rights, they were supporting the restitution of institutional authority by defining the responsibilities of health practitioners as rights guarantors. To illustrate this, a UNFPA employee said, “I tell them [public hospital employees], you are not priests or judges, you are here to protect rights, that’s your job.”¹⁰² She was referring in particular to health practitioners’ moral judgments about the sexual and reproductive decisions of their patients.

As part of the Health for Peace Project, UNFPA also offered sexual and reproductive rights workshops in reincorporation areas. Nonetheless, farianas in Agua Bonita felt confident about their

¹⁰¹ The unpublished file of the project that a UNFPA employee shared with me reported that in La Montañita, Agua Bonita’s municipality, this rate was 892.86 per 100,000 live births in 2015. Nonetheless, I could not confirm this information with the available data on maternal mortality in Colombia.

¹⁰² “Yo les digo, ustedes no son curas ni jueces, ustedes están aquí para garantizar derechos, ese es su trabajo.”

knowledge in that matter and seemed more interested in participating as members of a health committee constituted by representatives of state institutions, UN organizations, and the FARC. This committee discussed and coordinated health interventions for ex-combatants and their families. Pregnant ex-combatants, children, ex-combatants with disabilities, and chronic diseases were central topics of these meetings.

UNFPA representatives noticed a remarkable difference between ex-combatant women and other women in rural areas. All the participants in the focus group agreed that in areas where civilian women could not even take contraceptives without their husbands' permission, *farianas* talked about their autonomy to make decisions over their own body. In the words of the UNFPA representative who worked in Agua Bonita:

Women in the ETCR are way more empowered about their sexual and reproductive rights, but the communities around them ignore those rights completely. The empowerment of women in the ETCR should be like a flower that illuminates other communities to free women from the oppression and violence that rural women experience.¹⁰³

The enthusiasm of the UNFPA employee about *farianas*' empowerment was related to their eloquence about gender, sexuality, and rights. Four years of negotiations in Havana, with the participation of the United Nations and the establishment of a gender sub-commission, aligned *farianas*' discourses with the international language of women's rights. Similar to other experiences in Latin America (Morgan, 2015), *farianas* have strategically used the human rights framework to connect their agenda for reincorporation with the mission of the institutions supporting the peace agreement. Speaking this common language has allowed *farianas* to become

¹⁰³ “Las mujeres de los ETCR están mucho más empoderadas en cuales son sus derechos sexuales y reproductivos pero las comunidades alrededor desconocen totalmente. El empoderamiento que tienen las mujeres del ETCR debería ser como una flor que irradia hacia las comunidades para sacar a las mujeres de esos procesos de sumisión y de violencia que sufren las mujeres campesinas.”

active participants in the decision-making processes of international organizations interventions. In addition, since it is a discourse with national and international recognition, framing women's struggles as human rights provides mechanisms to farianas for holding the government, private institutions, and international agencies accountable (Corrêa et al., 2008).

In the transition to a new form of governance—from a military regime to a bureaucratic state—farianas not only liberated themselves from the strict reproductive rules they had to follow as combatants but also demanded health services and facilities as well as policies to ensure proper care in their communities. The bureaucracies of the healthcare system, its individuated logic, and its limitations in rural areas remain a challenge in reincorporation. Yet, farianas took the transition to civilian life as an opportunity to transform the meaning of their reproductive bodies through the discourse of women's rights that international organizations and the gender sub-committee established for peace negotiations.

5.5 Building a place for political and biological families

When I visited Agua Bonita in 2017, combatants had built a temporary camp for 350 people. Four months later and a couple of kilometers further they moved to the houses that the government built for reincorporation areas. The move entailed a drastic transformation of everyday life. The implied communality of their previous military regime was gradually adjusted to new family-centered life. They modified the initial architecture of the houses to accommodate new family members, reactivated an abandoned elementary school, and built common spaces for their children. Likewise, the time spent in communal work was reduced as family and personal time increased, and gender dynamics began to shift in both public and domestic spheres. Among all

these changes, female leaders were particularly concerned about the impact of motherhood on everyday life. I heard countless times in casual conversations “We did not fight a war to end up having kids and staying home.” Consequently, female leaders have worked both to protect political and economic spaces for women and to create a safe space for parents and their children.

A waving Colombian flag with a white stripe added at the end welcomed the temporary camp built with logs, green tarpaulin, and black plastic. The FARC members’ tents were on one side of the road, where civilians were not allowed, and on the other side there was a tall structure that served as an auditorium. This area also included a hall with beds made out of logs, a tent with a fireplace to cook, and latrines for visitors. Despite its simplicity, the impressive functionality of the place revealed decades of experience living in the forest. At that time there was only one child one heard about, Juancho 15, a fake name made by combining a common nickname for children named Juan with the number of his mother’s FARC front. Few civilians had the chance to meet him when he was still a baby, but the rumors of his sweet presence not only disrupted the military nature of the camp but also announced the family dynamics of the future to come.

When the modular houses that the government built were ready, ex-combatants, now without weapons, moved from the camp to the Territorial Space for Training and Reincorporation (ETCR), known as ETCR Agua Bonita. All the houses were exactly the same, built with thin white walls made out of plaster and a metallic structure. Each house had five rooms, a bathroom, and a hall to the street. The idea of families was still foreign. As Adela explained to me when she was giving me a tour: “It is a house for two couples and a single friend, we all have a single friend.” The houses did not include a kitchen; instead, there was a communal kitchen for the whole village, which not only aimed to preserve the long tradition of eating all together, but also allowed women to protect their time for communal work by keeping distance from domestic life. As one of them

put it, “There is a lot to do at home, if I start to cook, I’m going to stay home the whole time, and when am I going to participate in the political process?”

During the first months in the ETCR, everyone was required to participate in communal work in the morning and could use the afternoon for their personal projects. Here is an excerpt from my fieldnotes:

A loud alarm rings at 5:30 am every day for people to gather at 6:00 am and be assigned a task. Every morning, early sunrays draw the silhouettes of women and men with picks and shovels on their shoulders walking from their homes to the kiosk at the entrance of the village. Former commanders, now civilian leaders, distribute the assignments, mostly related to agriculture, farming, cleaning, and building common areas.

At that time, there were still few children in the village and the news of pregnancies spread during the early work sessions. Female leaders encouraged women to keep participating in the communal activities despite their new family routines. I saw Alicia several times nagging at men when she suspected they were not permitting their partners to join. “Where is your woman? Didn’t you let her come?” she asked a guy while we were planting sugar cane. He smiled and looked somewhere else, so she said, “Women can participate too! Tell her to come next time.”¹⁰⁴

Although communal work in which everyone must be involved decreased from every morning to once a week and, finally, was reserved to specific volunteer duties, people continued organizing around collective projects. Activities related to the recently constituted political party, the peace agreement, the association founded by all ex-combatants, and the multiple groups and committees created to sustain social, political, and economic life remained as cooperative endeavors. In addition, unlike individual reintegration, productive projects in reincorporation have been mostly collective undertakings. In Agua Bonita, these include a shoemaking shop, a clothes

¹⁰⁴ “¿Dónde está su mujer? ¿No la dejó venir? ¡Las mujeres también pueden participar! dígale que venga la próxima vez.”

workshop, a carpentry shop, a free-range chicken farm, a fish pond, a fruit processing plant, and a medicinal plants processing plant, among others. All of them have high participation of women and some are primarily run by women, such as the medicinal plants workshop that was created by both female ex-combatants and victims of the armed conflict. More importantly, ex-combatants bought the land where the reincorporation area is located and own it as communal land.¹⁰⁵ Owning the land has allowed them to provide stability for both productive projects and families.

The changing architecture of the village tells the story of the transition from a military camp to a civilian community. Ex-combatants brought their civilian partners to live with them, some also brought their children and relatives, and many had babies. Likewise, they adapted their houses to the new social dynamics. Most houses became inhabited by two families. Many of them placed a wall in between, built their own bathroom and kitchen, and covered the hall to keep domestic life more private.

The new ways of experiencing public and domestic spheres involved everyday gender rearrangements that the Woman Gender and Diversity Committee of Agua Bonita carefully observed and intervened in. Alicia, for instance, took advantage of any occasion to lecture men and women about gender equality in reincorporation. Once she, her partner Carlos, and I were having coffee with other friends in the village. When Carlos finished his coffee, he handed the cup to Alicia. “What do you want me to do with an empty cup?” she yelled. “Do you see?” she continued, looking to the rest of us, “now they want us to go back to the kitchen. Don’t be so patriarchal!”¹⁰⁶ Then she made a joke about women sexually punishing men if they did not change

¹⁰⁵ This is not the case of most reincorporation areas. The peace agreement did not include land for ex-combatants. The government rented lands for the early stages of reincorporation but many ex-combatants have had to leave the areas when the rental period ended.

¹⁰⁶ The use of the word “patriarchal” shows the influence of international organizations in conversations about gender. A more common term for those situations in this context would be “machista,” which has been the Latin American

their sexist behaviors. Carlos smiled and took his cup to the kitchen to wash it. We all laughed and had a long conversation about gender norms in civilian life.

The work of the Woman Gender and Diversity Committee did not stop with personal anecdotes like the coffee cup. Taking advantage of the interest of international organizations appointed to the implementation of the peace agreement, this committee developed several campaigns to promote gender equality in the village and neighboring communities. One of the most popular was a social media campaign with the hashtags *Camarada#NoEstaBien* (*Comrade#ItIsNotOk*) and *Camarada#UstedTambienPuede* (*Comrade#YouCanAlsoDoIt*), which aimed to resist the adoption of gender norms in civilian life that undermined the tradition of gender egalitarianism in the FARC. With the support of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Embassy of Sweden, the Woman Gender and Diversity Committee designed eighteen flyers with the rights and wrongs of their comrades' new masculinities. These images encouraged men to avoid toxic masculinities, share domestic chores, support women's political participation, and be committed parents. According to Jenny and Alicia, this campaign helped their male comrades develop a critical perspective on their roles as civilians. As part of the same IOM-Embassy of Sweden alliance to strengthen the gender component of the peace agreement, in other ETCRs Farianas created radio shows, drawing contests, dance therapy sessions, and intercultural strategies to prevent gender-based violence and promote gender equality in reincorporation areas (El Espectador, 2020b).

way to refer to a male centered society. The word "patriarchal" as well as "sexism" have been recently introduced in workshops, talks, and brochures about gender equality by international NGOs and United Nations Organizations.



Picture 25. Comrade #ItIsNotOk that you get mad when your partner participates in meetings or community activities.

We all have the right to make decisions about our time to participate in community, political, social, educational or entertainment activities. Women's participation in political and social life is a right.



Picture 26. Comrade#YouCanAlso make lunch, so your partner can go to the meetings.

Everyday tasks should be shared with your partner, otherwise social and political activities could be limited and inequality deepened.



Picture 28. Comrade#YouCanAlso take responsibility for chores at home.

We [men] also have responsibilities in household tasks such as: cooking, washing, ironing, etc. It is our job and our duty.



Picture 29. Comrade#YouCanAlso leave machismo behind.

Men and women have the same rights, faculties, skills, and competencies to perform in social life.

While the gradual distinction between domestic and public spheres was inevitable in the transition to civilian life, women in Agua Bonita have resisted the gender norms traditionally attached to these spheres. Female leaders have protected spaces for women in reincorporation projects as much as they have insisted to their male comrades about their roles in domestic life. Accordingly, creating conditions for mothers in which they could embrace their new reproductive

experiences while continuing to participate in political and economic activities has been a high priority.

In addition to raising awareness about gender equality, ex-combatants have also used their connections with the parties involved in the implementation of the peace agreement to receive support and raise funding for infrastructure as well as educational and recreational programs for children. As soon as ex-combatants moved from the camps to the ETCR, they demanded that the government reopen an abandoned elementary school in the area for their children and children in the neighboring communities. The school was reactivated with a teacher hired by the state and with the same curriculum as all public schools. Yet, ex-combatants remodeled the building through communal work and decorated it with revolutionary symbols aligned with their political views. Similarly, they requested funds from the state, international organizations, and private institutions to build a daycare center and guarantee its long-term operation, but also asked for certain degree of autonomy to incorporate principles related to social justice and gender equality in their children's education.

To raise funds for the daycare center, Alicia, Jaime, and I wrote a proposal justifying the need for families to have a safe place to leave their children while they participated in the economic and political activities of reincorporation. We presented the project to international human rights organizations, state institutions (including the Colombian Institute for Family Wellbeing -ICBF- and the Agency for Reincorporation and Normalization-ARN), churches, and NGOs. Depending on the audience, we highlighted the contribution of this project to either women's rights and the democratization of care, the protection of children's rights, the realization of the peace agreement, or the success of productive projects for economic reincorporation. Like most negotiations ex-combatants have with the institutions that support the implementation of the peace agreement, we

attempted to adapt and articulate our discourse to what we believed were the priorities and values of each potential donor. Finally, some private donations and the International Red Cross Committee funded the construction of a daycare center and a playground. However, negotiations did not end with the funders. The project also required conversations with parents in the village. Although all of them agreed that caring facilities were necessary, some women stated that spending time with their children was an important part of how they wanted to live their motherhood in civilian life. It needed to be clear that taking the kids to the daycare center was an option and not an obligation.

To operate legally, the daycare center needed to be part of a state program for early childhood, so it became a center operated by ICBF. Like the school, this center was incorporated into a standardized educational plan with teachers trained for this purpose. We explored options to protect the autonomy of ex-combatants to raise their children in accordance with their revolutionary values. For instance, we attempted to register the daycare center in a category similar to that of certain ethnic groups that are able to claim the right to develop their own culturally specific educational plans. However, in the eyes of the state, a FARC community does not meet the requirements to develop its own educational plan, meaning they were not a recognized indigenous, afro-Colombian, black, raizal,¹⁰⁷ palenquero,¹⁰⁸ or Romani group. However, the ICBF accepted their request to hire two women from the ETCR as teachers, one ex-combatant and the partner of an ex-combatant, as long as they received the training and followed the guidelines for their everyday work. All parents I talked to about this caring facility acknowledged that it has made it easier to work and participate in communal activities. They agree that better conditions for

¹⁰⁷ Afro-Caribbean people native to the archipelago islands of San Andres, Santa Catalina and Providencia.

¹⁰⁸ People of San Basilio de Palenque, the first free African town in the Americas.

their new reproductive experiences do not end with the autonomy to have children or not, they require proper reproductive health services, safe spaces to raise their children, and opportunities for women to continue participating in the political project of the FARC.

Despite all the achievements, farianas keep battling the government's weak commitment to the peace agreement and resisting the threats and attacks against them, which have cost the lives of 286 ex-combatants all over the country since the agreement was signed. In the midst of these difficulties, the leaders of Agua Bonita have strategically used national and international networks that sustain the peace agreement to advance a reincorporation agenda that honors their ideals of peace and social justice for the "biological and political families" that inhabit the village.

5.6 Conclusion

The government's failure to fulfill its obligations with the agreement, the increase in paramilitary groups, the hostilities against ex-combatants, and the lack of stable economic, political, legal, and security conditions for ex-combatants, have complicated the continuity of reincorporation spaces. Yet, Agua Bonita has become an international example of a peace village. In Bodiou's terms, Agua Bonita is an event: "a rupture in the normal order of bodies and languages as it exists for any particular situation or as it appears in any particular world [...]. An event is the creation of new possibilities. It is not located at the level of objective possibilities but at the level of the possibility of possibilities" (Badiou, 2010, p. 242).

Farianas created new possibilities in the civilian life by strategically using national and international networks that sustain the peace agreement. Agua Bonita's leaders have managed to advance a reproductive justice agenda that honors their ideals of peace and social justice for the

“biological and political families” that inhabit the village. Farianas have disrupted representations as victims of sexual violence or sacrificial mothers in alliance with journalists, academics, and artists willing to produce and broadcast new representations about womanhood and motherhood in the FARC; they have achieved better reproductive health services for them and women in neighboring communities with the support of UN organizations; and they are building a village that seeks to protect women’s achievements in military life and welcome their new reproductive experiences in civilian life taking advantage of UN organizations, state institutions, NGOs, and academics/activists (like me) involved in the reincorporation process. It is not about the transformation of combatants into mothers, but the transformation of a military group into a community that commits with a collective effort to mothering future generations.

In the transition to civilian life, farianas’ reproduction was at the center of competing notions of governance. They went from a military regime that controlled their reproductive behaviors in order to produce them as combatants to a bureaucratic state that values people’s lives according to their socio-economic status, race, and geographic location. Using women’s rights discourse, they not only defended their autonomy over their reproduction but also urged the state to protect their lives and the lives of their children and have shaped the actions of national and international institutions to support the farianas’ agenda for reincorporation. As several authors have illustrated, the discourse on human rights can serve social movements to keep governments accountable (Corrêa et al., 2008; Morgan, 2015) but fails to address a broader notion of social and economic justice (Petchesky, 2000; Unnithan & Pigg, 2014). Farianas have used the rhetorical power of human rights in the context of peacebuilding and have pushed it to include a social and economic justice agenda that seeks dignified living conditions for women and their families.

CONCLUSION

In times of democratization, marketization or transition to new government regimes, reproductive politics commonly emerge as a controversial topic in the agenda negotiated by the actors trying to be part of the re-arrangements of power (Gal & Kligman, 2000; Htun, 2003; Kligman, 1998; Maleck-Lewy & Ferree, 2000; Mishtal, 2012, 2015; Sutton, 2010; Wolchik, 2000; Zielinska, 2000). In Latin America, gender politics, including reproductive politics, have been at the center of negotiations in the implementation of development policies (Medina, 2008; Necochea López, 2014), the mobilization of liberal and feminist reforms, transitions from dictatorship to democracy (Htun, 2003), and, in Colombia, settlements between the state and insurgent movements (Mazzoldi & Cuesta, 2017; Viveros-Vigoya, 1999). Reproductive politics pose fundamental questions about human rights and women's rights, the meanings and possibilities of citizenship, national identities, and the relationship of women's movements with governments and their alliances with political parties. They also articulate multiple spheres in tension during transitions to new orders, such as nation-state moralities, legal apparatuses, political traditions, economic transformations, and medical knowledge.

Reproductive politics were an essential element in the debates about the 2016 peace agreement in Colombia. This agreement entailed significant legal, political, and economic transformations to address the structural causes of war, establish a truth commission, develop a transitional justice system, guarantee political participation of ex-combatants and victims, and provide reparation for the victims. I show how in this transitional scenario, reproductive politics emerged as a site of contestation in which the actors that were trying to be part of the re-arrangements of power defined their position about militarization and peace negotiations through their position about reproductive practices in the FARC, and more specifically, about abortion.

Building on the notion of articulation (Hall, 1986), I suggest that social forces involved in the acceptance of the agreement articulated different pieces of information and sentiments about abortions in the FARC in order to produce meanings about nation, war, and peace. At least four discursive articulations were produced: the feminist revolutionaries who fight for women's rights, the fetus as victim of an immoral regime ("gender ideology"), the heroic mother who vindicates the name of the FARC through the sacred symbols of motherhood, and the victim of sexual violence in search of recognition. All of them produced effects and advanced meanings and possibilities about the acceptance and implementation of the peace agreement.

Forced abortions in the FARC are an ongoing conversation. The Case 07 of the Special Justice for Peace (JEP) is investigating this form of reproductive violence against minors and the gender component of the truth commission is collecting testimonies about violence against female fighters. Yet, the exclusive attention to abortion has overshadowed the centrality of reproductive policies and practices in both war and peacebuilding. Throughout this dissertation, I explore, in line with the notion of reproductive governance (Morgan & Roberts, 2012b), how diverse mechanisms to produce, monitor, and control the reproductive lives of ex-combatant women affected the participation of women in the FARC and shaped the conditions for their reintegration into civilian life.

To understand the controversy about abortions in this guerrilla movement, I take a step back from the discussions during the 2016 agreement and reconstruct the history of reproductive policies in the FARC through archival material. I suggest that reproductive policies were essential for the transformation of the FARC from a grassroots guerrilla movement to a revolutionary army. In the beginnings of the movement, motherhood was a valuable contribution of revolutionary women. Women were expected to take care of their children and the children of their comrades,

which helped maintain the family dynamic of the movement. When they and other guerrilla groups expanded military actions in the 70s, female members demanded the rights to contraception and abortion so they could postpone motherhood and enroll as combatants in the revolutionary project. As one of them told me “Contraception made us combatants.” Women found in this revolutionary project not only an opportunity to propose alternative political and economic regimes, but also a more egalitarian gender order. However, when violence escalated, contraception and abortion stopped being rights and became mandatory. Controlling women’s reproduction turned into a central strategy to discipline women as combatants and protect the FARC as a self-contained group. I argue that in this context of violence, women’s reproduction was governed through both the regulation of life and the regulation of death. Following authors who state that biopolitics is insufficient to make sense of power relations in places in which life is subordinated to politics of death (Estévez, 2018; Mbembe, 2003), I suggest that reproductive politics in the Colombian armed conflict do not obey the maxim of making people live and letting them die. Mandatory contraception and forced abortions were about both making women live by producing them as combatants and making women die by keeping them in war.

Yet the reproductive experiences of female fighters are not limited to contraception and abortion. As I show in chapter three, although pregnancies were strictly prevented, many women had children during their time in the armed group. Through their stories, I address Zubytka’s question (2015): “How are we then to make sense of maternal and militant experiences that run parallel for mother soldiers engaged in war?” Accordingly, I expand the view on reproductive violence in the armed conflict by analyzing the difficult conditions in which female fighters were pregnant, gave birth, received help, and looked for their children. I argue that mothering in war is a praxis of survival that, through community networks of care, kept combatants and their children

alive. While reproductive policies in the FARC aimed to preserve the army as a self-contained group, motherhood extended the ties of the group beyond combatants through their children and the communities that took care of them.

In the introduction, I stated that the controversy about abortions in the FARC reinforce a pro-choice narrative to establish the difference between the right to abortion and forced abortions. Farianas insisted that abortions in the guerrilla movement were based on women's choice while pro-choice feminist organizations condemned forced abortions in the FARC and emphasized their defense of voluntary abortions. Accordingly, one of these organizations developed a legal argument to recognize forced abortion as a form of sexual and reproductive violence, which led to the recognition of women who were subjected to this violence as victims of the armed conflict. The pro-choice argument offered a necessary distinction between voluntary and forced abortions to counter right-wing discourses against the peace agreement that gave the same treatment to both of them by drawing the attention to the fetus victim. However, the stories of ex-combatant women in this dissertation revealed important limitations for this argument. Thinking about reproductive rights in terms of individual autonomy does not let us ask broader questions about the political value of reproductive bodies in war and peace. First, it overlooks the history of oppression of women from marginalized communities who become part of armed groups and what their reproduction means for the military and political projects of war. Second, it limits our understanding of reproductive violence since it does not take into consideration experiences such as ex-combatant women looking for their children who were placed for adoption by the state because they were the children of guerrilla parents, women who are parenting in the midst of war, or women who are trying to protect their children from the stigma of having an ex-combatant mother. Those experiences are not about decision-making processes but everyday life in

disenfranchised communities. And third, it prevents us to see how these forms of violence are connected to international configurations of power, such as the relationship between armed conflict and international adoption. Instead, I find reproductive justice a more suitable framework to address the multiple forms of reproductive violence and resistance in the armed conflict and the transition to civilian life.

I propose that reproductive justice could articulate women's achievements in the peace agreement through the discourse of rights with the struggles for social justice. In a peacebuilding context the discourse of rights remains as a helpful platform to connect the different parties involved in the armed conflict, receive the support of international human rights organizations, and keep the government accountable. However, it is insufficient to address historical demands for social justice that have led to more than five decades of war. While the emphasis on race inequalities among feminist of color in the US differs from the emphasis on class struggle and colonial relations among farianas, they both make fundamental demands to improve the conditions in which reproductive care and parenthood take place.

Taking reproductive justice as a political and academic framework to understand the reproductive struggles in marginalized and impoverished communities, I explore the conditions in which ex-combatant women have children in two different scenarios: individual reintegration and collective reincorporation. The living conditions of women in these two programs shed light about the differences between a transition to civilian life under a military rationality and a transition to civilian life as a result of a broad deal for peace. I suggest that the individualizing logic of the first program replicates the counter-insurgency strategy of fragmenting guerrilla movements. Instead of addressing the structural causes of war, this program reintegrates ex-combatants as individualized citizens under the premises of meritocracy, responsibility, and entrepreneurship

exacerbating the socio-economic and gender-based violence that led women to join an armed group in the first place. In contrast, the national and international alliances developed during and after peace negotiations have allowed farianas in collective reincorporation to defend their demands for gender equality, carve out a space for them in national and local politics, and participate in collective business initiatives to fund the reincorporation project in the long term. I explore these possibilities through the lens of Agua Bonita, one of the more successful new communities formed through the collective reincorporation project. Although the peace agreement has faced serious challenges since 2018, Agua Bonita holds out hope of peace and new possibilities for social and reproductive justice through community building.

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