
MAKING USE OF INSTEAD OF BREAKING WITH THE PAST?

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF EX-COMBATANT
ORGANIZATIONS IN COLOMBIA AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION
TO POST-MILITANCY RE-ENCOUNTER AND IDENTITY
ACCOMMODATION (1990-2016)

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACCU	<i>Autodefensas Campesinas de Córdoba y Urabá</i> , Peasant Self-Defenders of Córdoba and Urabá
ACR	<i>Alta Consejería para la Reintegración Social y Económica de Personas y Grupos Alzados en Armas</i> , High Council for Social and Economic Reintegration of Armed Persons and Groups / <i>Agencia Colombiana para la Reintegración de Personas y Grupos Alzados en Armas</i> , Colombian Reintegration Agency for Armed Persons and Groups
AD M-19	<i>Alianza Democrática M-19</i> , Democratic Alliance M-19
ADO	<i>Movimiento de Autodefensa Obrera</i> , Self-Defense Labor Movement
AGC	Armed Group Cohesion
AMM	<i>Autodefensas del Magdalena Medio</i> , Magdalena Medio Self-Defense Group
ANAPO	<i>Alianza Nacional Popular</i> , National Popular Alliance
ANC	African National Congress
ANDES	<i>Asociación Nacional de Desmovilizados</i> (National Association of the Demobilized People)
ASOMAGS	<i>Asociación Maderera Agrícola y Ganadera del Sinú</i> (Agrarian Lumber and Cattle Association of the Sinú)
AU	African Union
AUC	<i>Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia</i> , United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia
BACRIM	<i>Bandas Criminales</i> (Criminal Bands)
CAM	Centre of Anthropology and Mind
CER	<i>Comandos Ernesto Rojas</i> , Ernesto Rojas Commandos
CERAC	<i>Centro de Recursos para el Análisis de Conflictos</i> , Conflict Analysis Resource Center
CINEP/PPP	<i>Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular/Programa por la Paz</i> , Centre for Investigation and Popular Education/Programme for Peace
CGSB	<i>Coordinadora Guerrillera Simón Bolívar</i> , Simón Bolívar Guerrilla Coordinating Board
CNMH	<i>Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica</i> , National Centre for Historical Memory
CNN	<i>Consejo Nacional de Normalización</i> (National Normalization Council)
CNR	<i>Consejo Nacional de Reincorporación</i> (National Council for Reincorporation)
CNRR	<i>Comisión Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación</i> , National Commission for Reparation and Reconciliation
CODA	<i>Comité Operativo para la Dejación de las Armas</i> , Operative Committee for the Abandonment of Arms
CODHES	<i>Consultoría para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento</i> (Consultancy for Human Rights and Displacement)
COMPAZ	<i>Compañía Nacional para la Paz</i> (National Company for Peace)
COOSERCOM	<i>Cooperativo de Seguridad y Servicio a la Comunidad</i> (Cooperative of Security and Service to the Community)
COP	Colombian Peso
CORPADEC	<i>Corporación para la Paz y el Desarrollo Comunitario</i> (Peace and Community Development Corporation)

CORPADES	<i>Corporación para la Paz y el Desarrollo Social</i> (Peace and Social Development Corporation)
CRO	<i>Centro de Referencia y de Oportunidades</i> , Reference and Opportunity Centre
CRS	<i>Corriente de Renovación Socialista</i> (Socialist Renewal Current)
DAS	<i>Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad</i> , Administrative Department of Security
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
DGR	<i>Dirección General para la Reinserción</i> (General Reinsertion Department)
DNP	<i>Departamento Nacional de Planeación</i> , National Planning Department
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EC	European Commission
ECOMUN	<i>Economías Sociales del Común</i> (Shared Social Economies)
ELN	<i>Ejército de Liberación Nacional</i> , National Liberation Army
EPL	<i>Ejército Popular de Liberación</i> , Popular Liberation Army
ERG	<i>Ejército Revolucionario Guevarista</i> , Guevarista Revolutionary Army
ERP	<i>Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo</i> , People's Revolutionary Army
EU	European Union
FARC-EP	<i>Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo</i> , Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army
FIP	<i>Fundación Ideas para la Paz</i> (Foundation Ideas for Peace)
FIPAZ	<i>Fundación Iniciativas por la Paz</i> (Foundation for Peace Initiatives)
FMLN	<i>Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional</i> , Farabundi Martí National Liberation Front
FRELIMO	<i>Frente de Libertação de Moçambique</i> , Mozambique Liberation Front
FUCUDE	<i>Fundación Cultura Democrática</i> (Democratic Culture Foundation)
FUNDADEM	<i>Fundación para la Atención y Defensa de los Desmovilizados</i> (Foundation for the Assistance and the Defense of Demobilized People)
FUNDAPAM	<i>Fundación para la Paz y el Medio Ambiente</i> (Foundation for Peace and the Environment)
FUNDAZCOR	<i>Fundación por la Paz de Córdoba</i> (Foundation for Peace Córdoba)
GAHD	<i>Grupo de Atención Humanitaria al Desmovilizado</i> , Group for the Humanitarian Assistance to the Demobilized
GAM	<i>Gerakan Aceh Merdeka</i> , Free Aceh Movement
GTZ	<i>Gesellschaft für technische Zusammenarbeit</i> (German Development Cooperation Agency)
ICBF	<i>Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar</i> (Colombian Institute for Family Wellbeing)
IDP	Internally Displaced People
ILO	International Labor Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IR	International Relations
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
LJP	<i>Ley de Justicia y Paz</i> , Justice and Peace Law
MAQL	<i>Movimiento Armado Quintín Lame</i> , Quintín Lame Armed Movement
M-19	<i>Movimiento 19 de Abril</i> , 19 th of April Movement
MAS	<i>Muerte a Secuestradores</i> (Death to Kidnappers)

MAPP-OEA	<i>Misión de Apoyo al Proceso de Paz – Organización de los Estados Americanos</i> , Mission to Support the Peace Process – Organization of American States
MIR-Patria Libre	<i>Movimiento de Integración Revolucionaria – Patria Libre</i> , Revolutionary Integration Movement – Free Fatherland
MIR-COAR	<i>Movimiento Independiente Revolucionario-Comandos Armandos</i> , Independent Revolutionary Movement - Armed Commandos
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NSAG	Non-State Armed Group
OACP	<i>Oficina del Alto Comisionado para la Paz</i> , Office of the High Commissioner for Peace
OAS	Organization of American States
ODDR	<i>Observatorio de Procesos de Desarme, Desmovilización y Reintegración</i> , DDR Observatory
OECD/DAC	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development/Development Assistance Committee
ONIC	<i>Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia</i> , National Indigenous Organization of Colombia
ONUCA	<i>Grupo de Observadores de las Naciones Unidas en Centroamérica</i> , United Nations Observer Group in Central America
PAHD	<i>Programa de Atención Humanitaria al Desmovilizado</i> (Humanitarian Assistance Program to the Demobilized)
PAPDRB	<i>Programa de Atención al Proceso de Desmovilización y Reintegración en Bogotá</i> , Assistance Program to the Demobilization and Reintegration Process in Bogotá
PC3	<i>Partido Comunista Clandestino</i> (Clandestine Communist Party)
PCC	<i>Partido Comunista Colombiano</i> , Colombian Communist Party
PCC-ML	<i>Partido Comunista de Colombia-Marxista Leninista</i> , Communist Party of Colombia – Marxist-Leninist
PLAN	People’s Liberation Army of Namibia
PPP	<i>Proyecto Productivo para la Paz</i> , Productive Projects for Peace
PPR	<i>Persona en Proceso de Reintegración</i> , Person in Process of Reintegration
PRIO	Peace Research Institute Oslo
PRT	<i>Partido Revolucionario de Trabajadores</i> , Workers Revolutionary Party
PRSE	<i>Política Nacional de Reintegración Social y Económica</i> , National Policy for Social and Economic Reintegration
PRVC	<i>Programa de Reincorporación a la Vida Civil</i> , Program for the Reincorporation into Civilian Life
PTN	<i>Puntos Transitorios de Normalización</i> , Transitory Normalization Points
REDEPAZ	<i>Red Nacional de Iniciativas para la Paz</i> , National Network of Peace Initiatives
RENAMO	<i>Resistência Nacional Moçambicana</i> , Mozambican National Resistance
RNI	<i>Red Nacional de Información</i> , National Information Network
RUV	<i>Registro Único de Víctimas</i> , Unified Victim’s Registry
SUIN	<i>Sistema Único de Información Normativa</i> , Single Information System Regulations
UCDP	Uppsala Conflict Data Programme
UN	United Nations

UNDPKO	United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations
UNICEF	United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund
UNIDDRS	United Nations Integrated DDR Standards
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNSG	United Nations Secretary-General
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WHO	World Health Organization
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front
ZVTN	<i>Zonas Veredales Transitorias de Normalización</i> , Transitory Rural Settlement Normalization Zones

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

On October 07, 2016, the Nobel Peace Prize Committee announced that the 2016 prize would be awarded to Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos (2010-present, Social Party of National Unity, *Partido Social de Unidad Nacional* or short *Partido de la U*) for his “resolute efforts to bring the country's more than 50-year-long civil war to an end”. It also paid tribute to the Colombian people in general, and in particular to victims’ representatives and those involved in the peace process (The Norwegian Nobel Committee 2016).¹ By the time the official Nobel Peace Prize ceremony took place on December 10, the former Defense Minister Santos had gone through 41 days of intense re-negotiations of a peace agreement with Colombia’s largest remaining guerrilla group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo*, FARC-EP²) – that had been unexpectedly rejected in a plebiscite on October 02.

The final peace accord had taken four years to materialize and hence the negotiations that led to it, with all their ups and downs, accompanied me all the way throughout the writing process of this dissertation. When this study was about to become more than a vague idea in 2010, President Santos had just been elected with a comfortable majority of 69% as the presidential candidate for the Social Party of National Unity. His administration departed from his predecessor Uribe Vélez’ (2002-2010, independent candidate) hardline policy and recognized the need for a political solution to armed conflict in Colombia. Major milestones of the Santos administration included Law 1448/2011 – the so-called “Victims’ and Land Restitution Law” (*Ley de Víctimas y Restitución de Tierras*, Congreso de Colombia 2011³) – the development of a Legal Framework for Peace (*Marco Jurídico para la Paz*, Congreso de

¹In addition, both the governmental and the FARC-EP negotiation team were awarded with Colombia’s national peace prize (*El Tiempo* 2016d).

²The FARC-EP evolved from a group with 44 members in 1966 into Latin America’s largest rebel group ever. Today, the FARC-EP is believed to have 7,500 combat troops and 8,000 unarmed militants, so-called *milicianos*. In 2012, when they started negotiations with the government, the FARC-EP was divided into seven major blocks operating in 30 (out of 32) departments of the country (ODDR 2012a: 3).

³Henceforth referred to as the Victims’ Law.

*Colombia 2012*⁴) enabling the creation of new transitional justice mechanisms and thereby laying the groundwork for peace negotiations, the rebuilding of relationships with Colombia's Latin-American neighbors, particularly Venezuela,⁵ and most prominently, negotiation efforts with the FARC-EP and the smaller National Liberation Army (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*, ELN⁶).

After six months of secret talks between the FARC-EP and the government (February-August 2012), official negotiations started in October 2012 in Oslo, Norway, from where they moved to Havana, Cuba. Both Cuba and Norway served as guarantors for the talks, while Chile and Venezuela acted as observers. A number of elements helped the negotiation process survive setbacks and crises, including the confidentiality of the talks, the conduct of negotiations without a previous ceasefire agreement but with a number of de-escalation measures,⁷ the support by several Latin American countries, the integration of potential spoilers through representatives of the military, police and the business sector, and unilateral reform measures by the government (see Herbolzheimer 2016, Cárdenas Sarrias 2015). Already throughout the negotiation process, the government had adopted various policy reforms in the area of rural development, political participation, and illegal drugs (see Herbolzheimer 2016). The Victims' Law in particular enshrines victims' rights to truth, justice and reparation, especially through a process of land allocation for the displaced victims

⁴ This new legal framework established the possibility for transitional justice mechanisms within the Colombian Constitution (see *Oficina del Alto Comisionado para la Paz* 2013). It was regarded necessary because the legal provisions for transitional justice mechanisms following peace negotiations in the 1990s (basically amnesties for political crimes) were no longer adequate in a context of stricter (inter)national norms on human rights violations. In addition, the transitional justice mechanism set up in the context of paramilitary demobilization – the so-called Justice and Peace Law (*Ley de Justicia y Paz*, LJP, *Congreso de Colombia* 2005) had largely failed to meet expectations (see 6.2.2).

⁵ This is particularly important, as the Colombian conflict had been increasingly affecting the border regions of Venezuela and Ecuador (see Medina Gallego 2009: 46).

⁶ The ELN is believed to be composed of approximately 1,450 armed militants (Gómez Giraldo 2016).

⁷ On the one hand, this has allowed the government to gain support from skeptical sectors of society. On the other hand, it has enabled the FARC-EP to declare unilateral ceasefires, thereby demonstrating the leadership's control over its troops and its sincerity to engage in a political negotiation process. In addition, various de-escalation measures were taken in the midst of ongoing conflict, including a temporary stop of guerrilla camp bombardments from the government's side, as well as jointly conducted de-mining activities.

of the conflict (*Congreso de Colombia* 2011). In addition, efforts were taken to involve civil society in the negotiations, despite the talks being held outside the country. Such efforts included the organization of public forums on different agenda items that produced recommendations to the negotiation teams, as well as visits by victims' and women's representatives to the peace table in Cuba. Ultimately, what helped the talks survive a number of crises was the clear political willingness of both negotiation parties to find a political solution. In an overall context of war fatigue, driving factors for the Santos administration to engage in serious negotiations were 1) the realization that, despite major military investments, the government would probably not be able to definitively defeat an ever-adapting guerrilla on the battlefield, 2) the possibility of receiving the historical credit for ending the war that had tormented the country for decades, as well as 3) the moral pressure to end the human rights violations committed by both sides. Beyond this symbolic value, there was also a strong desire to overcome Colombia's international bad image and provide more stability for foreign and national investment, particularly with regard to the exploitation of Colombia's rich natural resources.⁸

On the other side, the FARC-EP themselves have highlighted that their history has been one of negotiations in search of a political solution to the conflict. Throughout the course of their existence, they have indeed considered or even entered political negotiations with a number of governments, including those of the Turbay (1978-1982, liberal party), Betancur (1982-1986, conservative party), Gaviria (1990-1994, liberal party), and Pastrana (1998-2002, conservative party) administrations.⁹ The openness of the Santos government to engage in substantial negotiations after the clear counter-insurgency strategy by the Uribe Vélez administration thus provided a new window of opportunity for them (ONIC 2016). Analysts, however, have also highlighted the FARC-EP's military setbacks, who had been under

⁸ Apart from exploiting agricultural resources like coffee, bananas, flowers, and African palm, Colombia also extracts emeralds and ferronickel. The country is now Latin America's fourth largest oil producer and has also rich reserves in gas and minerals. The La Guajira department in the very northeast of the country is home to the world's biggest surface coal mine (*El Cerrejon*) (see *Planta* 2016b). Since the early 2000s, foreign investment in Colombia's oil and mining sectors has seen a real boom. With a growth of 73% between 2006 and 2009, foreign investment amounted to more than three billion US dollars (see *Jenss* 2015: 301).

⁹ See *Torres* 2016 for an overview.

pressure by Uribe Vélez' Democratic Security Policy (*Política de Seguridad Democrática*) and the increasing numbers of individual deserters attracted by the government's demobilization campaigns (see for instance ICG 2016a: 12).

Under the premise that nothing is agreed upon until everything is agreed upon, the parties reached consensus on all of the main negotiation items by August 24, 2016 and finalized the historic “Final Accord to End the Conflict and Establish a Stable and Lasting Peace” (*Acuerdo Final para la Terminación del Conflicto y la Construcción de una Paz Estable y Duradera, Acuerdo Final 2016a*).¹⁰ The agreement was signed on September 26, 2016 in the coastal city of Cartagena, in the presence of guests symbolically dressed in white, and applauded as a historic event by national and international observers alike. The ceremony was broadcast live on television and allowed FARC-EP leader Rodrigo Londoño Timoleón Jiménez alias “Timochenko” to address the nation for the first time, offering apologies to all victims of the conflict in the name of the FARC-EP (*LoMásTrinado 2016*). Contrary to the earlier peace processes in the 1990s, when structural reforms had been left to be dealt with in the Constitutional Assembly or – in the case of the paramilitary's demobilization process from 2003-2006 – were not part of the negotiation process at all, the final agreement touches upon important policy areas. It contains six main thematic negotiation items:¹¹ 1) rural reform, 2) political participation, 3) procedures to end the armed conflict, 4) victims, 5) illicit drugs and 6) implementation and verification procedures, and is deemed to “open a new chapter in Colombia's history” after more than half a century of internal armed conflict (see *Acuerdo Final 2016b*: 6). Specifically, the accord is considered as the starting point for a transition period, which will hopefully lead to a major integration of the Colombian territories, enhance

¹⁰ In what follows, the agreement will be referred to as the Final Accord (*Acuerdo Final*); the version signed on August 24, 2016 will be referred to as *Acuerdo Final 2016a*, the version signed on November 24, 2016 will be referred to as *Acuerdo Final 2016b*.

¹¹ The full title of each item reads as follow: 1) Integral Rural Reform (*Reforma Rural Integral*), 2) Political Participation: Democratic Opening to Build Peace (*Participación Política: Apertura Democrática para Construir la Paz*), 3) Bilateral and Definitive Ceasefire and Silencing of Arms (*Cese al Fuego y de Hostilidades Bilateral y Definitivo y la Dejación de las Armas*), including the sub-agreement on the economic, social and political reincorporation of the FARC-EP into civilian life, 4) Solution to the Problem posed by Illicit Drugs (*Solución al Problema de las Drogas Ilícitas*), 5) Victims (*Víctimas*), 6) Implementation and Verification Mechanisms (*Mecanismos de Implementación y Verificación*).

social inclusion, strengthen democracy, and provide (security) guarantees for those who actively participate in politics. In the preamble to the accord, the conflict parties asserted their willingness to put a “definitive end” to the armed conflict and the tragedy of millions who had fallen victim to forced displacement, conflict-related deaths and disappearances (ibid.: 4).

However, in order to become effective, the agreement had to be accepted by a national plebiscite for peace (*plebiscito por la paz*) on October 02, 2016. National and international observers were fully expecting the plebiscite to result in resounding agreement and popular ratification of the peace accord. However, against all expectations,¹² the plebiscite instead resulted in a tight victory – with an extremely narrow margin of 60,000 votes of the 13 million votes cast, or 50.2% to 49.8% – for those campaigning against the accord, led most prominently by former president Uribe Vélez and his Democratic Center Party (*Partido Centro Democrático*), former president Pastrana, representatives of the Colombian Conservative Party (*Partido Conservador Colombiano*), the Catholic Church and victims of the FARC-EP (see Bouvier 2016a for a summary). Immediately after the results became known, analysts provided manifold hypotheses to explain this unexpected result. These ranged from a manipulative campaign¹³ by those against the agreement, to the general ignorance of the content of the about 300-page-long accord (see ICG 2016a: 14) and confusion about the transitional justice regulations, along with the perception of parts of the population that the FARC-EP would receive a blanket amnesty,¹⁴ and a low voter turn-out of only 38%. Especially in the Caribbean region, people experienced difficulties accessing polling stations due to a hurricane on the day of the plebiscite. They also highlighted, however, that particularly the peripheral and rural regions most affected by the war had been champions in support of the agreement (*Semana* 2016c). After an initial shock however, the

¹² According to the press, pre-voting polls predicted about 66% for a positive outcome (The Guardian 2016).

¹³ The campaign against the peace accord stirred popular fears that the country would be sold out to or taken over by the FARC-EP. Interestingly, it also misrepresented specific gender provisions as the introduction of a new gender ideology that would bring about profound changes to the traditional role of women and men, an argument that frightened conservative and church-related sectors of society (see Unger 2016).

¹⁴ According to ICG (2016b), there was a widespread worry that former combatants would receive overly generous benefits, such as economic reintegration packages and alternative sentences without prison time for any former FARC-EP members who confessed their crimes.

unexpected victory of voters against the accord was also regarded as a chance for Colombia, as 1) it seemed to provide the opportunity to more strongly involve those sectors of society that had been rallying against the agreement, 2) it gave the Colombian peace movement a strong impetus (see Bouvier 2016b), highlighting especially the role of youth in mobilizing for peace, and 3) it led to the re-negotiation of a number of controversial clauses in the original accord. Indeed, the government's negotiation team and the FARC-EP underwent 41 days of re-negotiating the initial accord. On the basis of over 500 proposals gathered from the day after the plebiscite's negative result, the negotiation teams made adjustments in 56 of the 57 negotiation sub-points criticized by the campaigners against the accord. The only point the government considered non-negotiable was the possibility of former FARC-EP militants to participate in politics (*RT en español* 2016).

Finally, the new peace accord (*Acuerdo Final* 2016b) was signed on November 24, and ratified by the Colombian Congress¹⁵ (composed of the Senate and the House of Representatives)¹⁶ on November 30, however, without the votes of its opponents, who rejected the adjustments as merely cosmetic and abstained from voting – thereby leaving behind an even deeper political polarization.

Against this background, the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of FARC-EP's estimated 7,500 combat troops and 8,000 unarmed militants (*El Tiempo* 2016c) in the context of ongoing military operations by and against organized crime, and other smaller guerrilla outlets – such as the ELN, a splinter group of the Popular Liberation Army (*Ejército Popular de Liberación, EPL*¹⁷), as well as the so-called “criminal bands” (*bandas criminales, BACRIM*) that developed out of the partial paramilitary demobilization process – will remain one among many challenges for Colombia in the years to come. Several DDR processes have taken place in Colombia so far under different political circumstances and implementation modalities and with different outcomes, with ex-combatants becoming both a

¹⁵ Considering the risk of another rejection of the peace agreement by popular vote, the government decided to submit the peace agreement to ratification by the Congress only.

¹⁶ With the abstention of the representatives of Uribe Vélez' Democratic Center party (*Partido Centro Democrático*), which had collectively walked out of the chamber in protest before the vote took place, the Senate approved the accord with 75 votes, the House of Representatives with 130 votes and no dissenting votes (*El Tiempo* 2016e).

¹⁷ This dissident group is still active in the Norte de Santander department (ICG 2016a: 38).

threat and themselves being threatened after disengagement from armed militancy. This thesis engages with Colombia's recent history in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes (1990-2016) to shed light on the post-militancy trajectories of former combatants and the role of former combatants' organizations for building peace.

Despite following Colombia's efforts for peace for about 10 years,¹⁸ both from a research as well as a practical perspective throughout my work at the Berghof Foundation, I had not foreseen how dynamic Colombian politics would become throughout the course of this writing. Nor could I have guessed just how timely a retrospective analysis of ex-combatant organizations' experience in Colombia would be by the time this study was finalized – precisely when Latin America's oldest and largest remaining guerrilla group has started to hand in its weapons. As of December 01, 2016, the FARC-EP had 150 days to hand in all their weapons to a tripartite monitoring and verification mechanism, which the unarmed UN monitoring mission¹⁹ set up by the Security Council's Resolution 2261 of 2016 is part of.

While this thesis is restricted to the time span 1990-2016 and can therefore not deal in depth with the outcomes of the FARC-EP's negotiation process, the findings of this research are highly relevant to the forthcoming individual and collective post-militancy trajectories of former FARC-EP combatants, as they draw from two decades of Colombian experience with peace negotiations and reintegration processes with armed groups. I therefore hope that the findings of this study will not only contribute to the academic debate on post-militancy life trajectories of former combatants and the role of their organizations in shaping war-to-peace transitions and peacebuilding processes, but that it will also provide helpful reflections on the opportunities for future former FARC-EP combatants to contribute to peacebuilding in (post-conflict) Colombia.

The following sections introduce the reader to the problem statement and the main research question for this dissertation (1.1), outline the methodological and theoretical contribution to peace and conflict studies (1.2), and briefly sketch the research design, including the overall qualitative approach, the case selection and research methods (1.3).

¹⁸ See Planta 2016a and 2016b, Cárdenas Sarrias and Planta 2015, Planta and Unger 2014, Planta and Görzig 2012, Görzig and Planta 2009, and Planta 2006.

¹⁹ For further information, consult the mission's website at: <https://colombia.unmissions.org/en> (accessed February 20, 2017).

Closing the introductory part, section 1.4 provides the reader with information on the structure of the remainder of this study.

1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTION

For a long time, political scientists' analysis of organized armed violence in the world focused on understanding the causes and dynamics of inter-state wars, thereby either sidelining other expressions of armed violence such as civil war or intra-state/internal armed²⁰ conflicts completely or analyzing them from a state-formation perspective (see Schultze-Kraft and Hinkle 2014: 7, Chojnacki 2008: 4,). It was only with the end of the Cold War and the perceived – even though empirically not proven (see Schultze-Kraft and Hinkle 2014: 7) – sudden sharp increase in internal armed conflicts that interest in their causes, dynamics and actors slowly started to rise, reaching a peak after 9/11 (Schlichte 2011a: 89, Zahar 2009: 200).

According to a study by McQuinn and Oliva (2014: 2), the number of non-state armed groups (NSAGs) opposing governments within such a scenario of internal armed conflict has quadrupled just in the first decade of the new millennium. Whereas research had initially focused on understanding why people take up arms (Weinstein 2007, Viterna 2006, Humphreys and Weinstein 2006, Wickham-Crowley 1992, and Gurr 1970) and how they organize armed struggle, scholarly interest has shifted towards understanding how former armed groups and their members both individually and collectively demobilize and reintegrate into society and continue to shape society in the aftermath of armed militancy. Under the heading “security sector reform”, “security sector development” (Deng Deng 2012) or “security transition” (Dudouet et al. 2012a) scholars have, for instance, focused on rebel-military integration processes (e.g. Knight 2009, Schnabel 2009, Glassmeyer and Sambanis 2008, Hoddie and Hartzel 2003). Transitional justice perspectives concerned with accountability, impunity and victims' rights for their part have highlighted the impact of ex-combatants' participation in truth and justice commissions on shaping national discourses on

²⁰ The terms civil war, internal and intra-state armed conflict will be used as synonyms here.

the past (e.g. Cutter Patel et al. 2010). Contributions from the field of psychology have mostly dealt with the individual challenges (e.g. traumatization, stigma, guilt) ex-combatants face upon their return to civilian life (see for instance Castro 2001). Finally, research has also delved into the processes of political transformation or institutionalization of NSAGs and the integration of former rebels in legal politics. Studies have focused both on collective shifts (armed group to party formation) and individual career paths (rebels turned politicians), with a strong emphasis on the leadership level of armed groups (see Dudouet et al. 2016, Hensell and Gerdes 2014, Clapham 2012, Klapdor 2009, De Zeeuw 2008, Van Engeland and Rudolph 2008, Deonandan et al. 2007, Guáqueta 2007, Hauge and Thorensen 2007, Manning 2007, Söderberg Kovacs 2007, Allison 2005). In light of an empirical reality in which yesterday's non-state armed groups all too often transform into tomorrow's governments (the most prominent example being South Africa's African National Congress, ANC), research has explored the factors for successful group transitions from combined political-military struggle to politics (e.g. Dudouet et al. 2016).

However, a deeper look into NSAG dissolution, transition and re-organization processes has been greatly influenced by discourse on the type of conflicts these actors have been engaged in. Even though the literature on contemporary DDR processes rarely embraces a historical perspective, the post-militancy fate of former combatants is not a new topic, as societies have been dealing with the post-militancy life of combatants for as long as warfare has existed.²¹ What is new, however, is the security concern associated with combatants returning from the context of internal armed conflict. Evaluating the research on returning 20th-century members of statutory forces involved in inter-state war (e.g. war veterans from World War I and II) from a historical perspective (Duclos 2012b: 267), it can be noted that this literature contains “no negative judgment regarding [former combatants] but on the contrary, has a tendency perhaps to view them with empathy”, and argues that “today's combatants are more often than not considered suspect: moved essentially by the desire for

²¹ McMullin (2013: 47-52) traces the historical accounts of returning ex-combatants back to the Bible and legends of Ancient Greece and Rome. Historical records of army downsizing date back to the Roman Empire (Lamb 2008), and some authors suggest that the large demobilization initiatives following World War I and II in Europe should be counted as “first-generation DDR” (see Knight 2012).

monetary gain, their combat is devoid of the heroic qualities attributed to the former allied combatants of the two world wars” (ibid. 2012: 11, see also Schulhofer-Wohl and Sambanis 2001:1),

Contrary to the empathic approach towards former statutory forces, today’s discourses on former non-state combatants are far more ambiguous and tainted by divergent academic interpretations of the changing pattern of armed conflict in the world.²² New categorisations have been developed to distinguish different types of conflict and conflict actors, and to allow for an empirical classification and comparison of conflict events.²³ In addition, scholars have sought to explain the causes for internal armed conflict in a number of ways. Schultze-Kraft and Hinkle (2014: 9) highlight four main “schools of thought” that have sought to explain causal mechanisms of internal armed conflict – and hence have influenced analysts’ views on armed actors – focusing respectively on political issues including governmental crisis, uneven development, inequality and structural violence, the mobilization of identities, and economic incentives and control over natural resource exploitation. Especially the latter school of thought has received much attention. In the context of new global market opportunities, natural resources were seen as an important source of revenue for self-financing rebel movements, especially after supplies provided by the superpowers dwindled at the end of the Cold War (Ross 2004: 349). In the 1990s, together with the growing influence of (neo-classical) economic conflict analysis, this led to an increase in literature on the link between natural resources and conflict. This specific research subfield eventually reached its heyday in the aftermath of Collier and Hoeffler’s highly influential World Bank publication “Greed and Grievance in Civil War” (2002).²⁴ The authors answered the age-old question of why war

²² For an in-depth discussion of the construction of differences between the “African ex-combatant” and the “American war veteran” over time and space, see McMulin (2013: 67).

²³ One of the most commonly referred-to definitions of internal armed conflict is the one used by the Uppsala Conflict Data Programme (UCDP) which defines “major armed conflict as a contested incompatibility concerning government or territory over which the use of armed force between the military forces of two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, has resulted in at least 1,000 battle-related deaths in at least one calendar year. Conflicts that result in less than 1,000 battle-related deaths are accordingly defined as minor or low-intensity conflicts. See definition provided at UCDP website, available online at: <http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/definitions/> (accessed February 20, 2017).

²⁴ Investigating quantitatively the causes of 52 civil wars from 1960-1999, the authors used

happens by emphasizing rebel's greed and reducing grievances to mere narratives, thereby challenging traditional explanations for civil unrest such as political repression, social and economic inequalities, or ethnic identities. Following the economic turn driven by this study, research focusing on the economic drivers of armed conflict led to a prevailing perception of non-state armed groups and militants as apolitical and motivated mainly by economic self-interest. In addition, the international war on terror as well as greater access to information on human rights violations by conflict actors further explain the hesitance to regard ex-combatants as something other than a threat to national security (see Guáqueta 2007). In search for explanatory descriptions to grasp the shift from inter-state to internal armed conflict and formulate adequate policy responses, the concept of "new wars", as opposed to "traditional Clausewitzian warfare" in terms of "their goals, the methods of warfare and how they are financed" (Kaldor 2001: 6), was widely used and controversially discussed by analysts to refer to post-Cold War internal armed conflict (see Chojnacki and Namberger 2014 for a detailed critique of the "new wars" paradigm). Postcolonial approaches have particularly criticized the blindness of the "new war" thesis to political constellations outside the so-called Western world and to non-state armed actors harboring political motivations (see Chojnacki and Namberger 2014: 281).

It was only within the growing debate on the nexus between conflict, security and development that developmental perspectives influenced the perception of ex-combatants. Regarded primarily as a security problem, they were now alternatively perceived and labeled as a vulnerable group lacking formal education and professional training (see UNDPKO 2010, Rolston 2007: 261-263). In this logic, and drawing from stereotypes re-enforced by the media portraying barbaric male fighters on the one hand and meek female victims on the other (see Chojnacki and Namberger 2014: 186), specific sub-groups, especially disabled and

economic, social, political, historical and geographical variables to find out why conflict had broken out in these countries. They argued that high dependency on primary commodities (minerals, oil and gas, food and non-food crops) combined with two other factors – the proportion of young men and the level of education in a given society (as basic variables for income-earning opportunities) – were the main driving factors for civil conflict. Hence, they concluded that rebel greed instead of grievance was the major factor leading to civil war.

female ex-combatants as well as former combatants recruited under the age of 18 (child soldiers), are regarded as particularly vulnerable and in need of special attention throughout their reintegration process. While this shift in perception has broadened the notion of the monolithic ex-combatant and allowed a more heterogeneous approach towards the reintegration of former combatants, it has also underpinned an understanding of ex-combatants as either passive reintegration participants and beneficiaries, or security liabilities (see Dudouet et al. 2012b).

Thus, current international DDR practice often regards former NSAG fighters as security problems to be contained and managed away (Dudouet et al. 2012a, 2012b, McEvoy and Shirlow 2009), or alternatively to be transformed into new citizens who first need to break with their militant past and identity. Most DDR literature advocates for breaking the armed factions' chains of command and dissolving personal links between former comrades as crucial elements for establishing security and guaranteeing successful reintegration. Analogous to the individual combatant, ex-combatant organizations are regarded with distrust. According to Romund (2014), public opinion perceives ex-combatants' and war veterans' organizations as backwards, conservative and primarily interested in lobbying for their members' rights and entitlements. Peace activists shy away from collaboration with former war participants particularly often, as they perceive them as "enemies of peace" (Schmelzle and Konjikusic 2008: 2, see also Weltfriedensdienst 2012). The reluctance to engage with perpetrators was also aptly reflected by one of my interview partners in Colombia, who had been involved in designing the first systematic reintegration roadmap. They described former combatants as a "stigmatized population the civilian population was afraid of. [...] But still, they were there and somebody had to work with them. It was a bit like the leprosy cases, everybody knows they are out there and that somebody should do something, but nobody wants to get involved" (personal interview, *Centro Mundial* staff, May 28, 2012, Bogotá). While former NSAG combatants are labeled as "terrorists" or "spoilers" (see Nasi 2006) at worst, and "risk groups" at best (see Karamé 2009: 505), they are generally not considered active or relevant participants in peacebuilding or reconciliation (see Renner and Spencer 2012).

However, research has also highlighted the potential benefits former combatant organizational processes can have. According to Guáqueta (2005: 23), ex-combatant organizations in El Salvador have not only been found useful in identifying reintegration participants by liaising between governmental entities and the ex-combatant population, or in

executing projects and administering (inter)national funds, they have also been found useful in providing ex-combatants with trusted networks that can help them navigate the transition phase. In addition, the possibility to come together as a group can help members handle post-traumatic stress and facilitate the implementation of joint businesses (Guáqueta 2005: 23). In addition, empirical research and practical conflict transformation work in contexts as diverse as Northern Ireland, Mozambique, or Nicaragua (see Chapter III for a discussion) demonstrates the potential of former combatants to collectively contribute to peacebuilding, understood here as relationship (re)building (see Salter and Yousuf 2016, Lederach 1997). In line with this, this thesis takes an interest in the clash between the self-identification of former combatants as active drivers of social transformation or even “agents of peace” (personal interview, *Fundación Sol y Tierra* member, March 11, 2012, Popayán) and prevalent international DDR practice and discourse. Whereas existing studies provide us with ideas for potential areas of activities, target groups, (perceived) assets and challenges resting with ex-combatant organizations, they have produced little analytical knowledge about the micro- and meso-processes of (re)mobilization of former combatants or the specific organizational settings that nurture ex-combatants’ capacity to build new relationships or spaces of “re-encounter” – as Colombian ex-combatants have termed it themselves²⁵ – with society at large and accommodate their militant past in civilian life.

This thesis therefore investigates under which conditions ex-combatant organizations can facilitate processes of re-encounter and support the accommodation of militant identities into civilian life.

With this research interest, this thesis engages with a new current in DDR research that takes interest in the opportunities and risks of the “social capital” combatants accumulate during their militancy (see Torjesen 2013: 8), and aims to improve our understanding of the potential contribution ex-combatant organizations can make to peacebuilding. Based on qualitative research with former combatants of different non-state armed groups in Colombia, the objective of this endeavor is to come up with new analytical lenses that help:

²⁵ This terminology was used in various peace agreements signed in the early 1990s between the government under President Gaviria and guerrilla movements (see 2.3).

- 1) Improving our understanding of the processes of the de- and remobilization of former militants in ex-combatant organizations,
- 2) Improving our understanding of identity accommodation processes in transitions from armed militancy to civilian life,
- 3) Revising conceptualizations of ex-combatant organizations as a security threat and re-thinking (international) reintegration assistance targeting former combatants and their post-militancy organizations.

1.2 METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

Situated in the field of peace and conflict research and based on an explorative approach, this thesis brings together three research fields, each linked to broader academic debate: research on NSAG transition processes, policy-driven research on DDR programs, and research on identity transformation processes. The selection and combination of these research strands served to address blind spots within each field of inquiry and examine the social processes – the transformation of social actors, structures, norms, and practices (see Wood 2008: 540) – of building peace during and after armed conflict from different angles. The thesis focuses on the transformation or accommodation of war-related identities, the restoration or “transformation of broken relationships”, and strategies to deal with a violent past (see Salter and Yousuf 2016). It engages with and speaks to research programs that address the war-to-peace transition processes of non-state armed groups and the role of former militants from such groups in building peace after war. Specifically, it aims to complement existing research on the post-militancy trajectories of armed groups and their combatants in two ways.

First of all, this thesis will add more substance to the emerging research agenda on socio-political aspects of reintegration that is still lagging behind the thus-far predominant focus on security-related and economic aspects of DDR-programming. This is all the more important, as peace and conflict research has become more closely oriented towards the needs of international agencies and states (Debiel et al. 2011: 330), and research on DDR has been running the risk to promote “reactive agendas [that] prioritize disarmament and demobilization, thus curbing the expression of violence, rather than dealing with integration which would have addressed some of the root causes that lead to violence in the first place” (Zahar 2009: 203).

Conceived as an instrument to establish security and stability in fragile post-conflict situations or, to put it otherwise, to re-establish “the state’s monopoly of violence and control of force in the post-conflict phase” (Munive and Jakobsen 2012: 361), first internationally supported DDR programs started with the UN Observer Group in Central America (ONUCA) in 1989 and Namibia (see Knight 2012, Humphreys and Weinstein 2007). Since then, DDR programs for (former) combatants of NSAGs have become a major component, if not a *sine qua non*-condition (Sprenkels 2014b: 5) of post-conflict recovery and a standard element of UN peacebuilding operations in a broad variety of countries (for overviews see Berdal and Ucko 2009, Muggah 2009, Humphreys and Weinstein 2007, Pouligny 2004). According to the United Nations Integrated DDR Standards definition (UNIDDRS), DDR comprises the following steps:

“Disarmament is the collection, documentation, control and disposal of small arms, ammunition, explosives and light and heavy weapons of combatants and often also of the civilian population. Disarmament also includes the development of responsible arms management programs.

Demobilisation is the formal and controlled discharge of active combatants from armed forces or other armed groups. The first stage of demobilisation may extend from the processing of individual combatants in temporary centres to the massing of troops in camps designated for this purpose (cantonment sites, encampment, assembly areas or barracks). The second stage of demobilisation encompasses the support package provided to the demobilised, which is called reinsertion.

Reinsertion [as a part of the demobilization phase] is the assistance offered to ex-combatants during demobilisation but prior to the longer-term process of reintegration. Reinsertion is a form of transitional assistance to help cover the basic needs of ex-combatants and their families, and can include transitional safety allowances, food, clothes, shelter, medical services, short-term education, training, employment and tools. While reintegration is a long-term, continuous social and economic process of development, reinsertion is a short-term material and/or financial assistance to meet immediate needs, and can last up to one year.

Reintegration is 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 timeframe, 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 requires long-term external assistance” (UNIDDRS 2006: 4-5).

In sum and under the label “from minimalist to maximalist approaches”, the literature on DDR programs²⁶ hints to at least three major *caveats* relevant for this thesis that DDR research and practice have started to tackle in recent years. Firstly, the narrow security understanding of DDR as a policy for violence containment of first-generation DDR programs has been replaced by longer-term development policies linked to economic recovery and societal reconstruction (second-generation DDR) (UNDPKO 2010). As criticized by Zahar (2009: 204), the focus of both policy and research was for a long time primarily on the first two technical elements disarmament and demobilization, leaving reintegration to the “softer” social sciences such as anthropology: “State-centric tools of power-sharing and security sector reform dominate debates on restoring peace and human security at the expense of longer-term conflict prevention and combatant reintegration.” More recently, there is an increasing interest in the reintegration element as the ultimate challenge for and key to peace, with some authors even proposing a third generation of DDR programs characterized by an inverse sequencing

²⁶ Scrutinizing DDR literature, one can identify three main sets of writing. Practical policy papers produced mostly by and for implementing agencies provide operational guidelines, best-practice and policy recommendations (e.g. UNDPKO 2010, Gleichmann et al. 2004, International Peace Academy 2002, ILO 1997, Klingebiel et al. 1995). The most well-known guideline of this type is spelled out in the UNIDDRS, developed in 2006. Single-country case studies and comparative volumes assess the success and failures of individual DDR programs, often also aiming to generate lessons learned for policymakers. Conceptual reflections focus on the elements and linkages of DDR to other aspects of peacebuilding and statebuilding such as security sector reform, transitional justice and broader socio-economic reconstruction (see Knight 2012, Berdal and Ucko 2009, Greene and Rynn 2008, Lamb 2008, Muggah 2005, Knight and Özerdem 2004, Barth 2002, Spear 2002, Kingma 2000, Berdal 1996, Walter 1999). For a general assessment, see Banholzer 2014. The bulk of case study publications concentrates on (Sub-Saharan) Africa (Babiker and Özerdem 2003, Kingma 2000, Ball 1997), where many case studies focus on Liberia and Sierra Leone (see Munive and Jakobsen 2012, Pugel 2007, Humphreys and Weinstein 2006, Paes 2005, Desmond 2004) as well as South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Angola and Mozambique (see McMullin 2013, Dzinesa 2008, Gear 2002, Schafer 1998) and to a lesser extent on Uganda, Eritrea and Ethiopia. Within Europe, Northern Ireland and the former region of Yugoslavia have received most scholarly attention (see McEvoy 2012, Qehaja et al. 2012, Gormally 2005, Heinemann-Grüder and Pietz 2003, King 2000). There is less research on DDR cases in Asia (on Aceh see Marhaban 2012 and Wandu 2012, on Afghanistan see Bhatia and Muggah 2009 and Zyck 2009) and Latin America (see Martínez 2012, Hauge and Thorensen 2007, Oliver 2000, Spencer 1997).

(RDD), i.e. starting with offering socio-economic incentives and ending with disarmament (Munive and Jakobsen 2012: 362). Highlighting the reintegration aspect of DDR more strongly has also broadened the scope with regard to DDR target groups and objectives, bringing about a shift from ex-combatant-centered to community-focused reintegration approaches (see e.g. De Vries and Wiegink 2011: 40).

Linked to this, the timing for DDR has been broadened, with DDR no longer reduced to immediate post-conflict intervention (see Munive and Jakobsen 2012, Muggah 2009, Spear 2006). However, reintegration is still mostly studied under a narrow timeframe, with most research focusing on the immediate after-war period, or at best the crucial first five years after the signing of a peace accord, thereby underestimating long-term developments in the post-militancy life paths of former combatants (see Duclos 2012a: 7, NIZA 2006: 5).²⁷ Finally, another *caveat* consists in the neglect of ex-combatants' agency in self-organizing their post-militancy life trajectories. In that sense, this thesis responds to calls from academia to pay greater attention to the role of former combatants' networks and persisting links to former comrades and commanders in the post-militancy period (see Torjesen 2009).

Secondly, from a theoretical perspective, this thesis will make a contribution to existing research on identity (trans)formation or – as the term will be used here – identity accommodation processes in civil wars and their aftermath. While it does not aim to test or apply a specific theory – instead trying to develop its analytical framework from empirical findings – it does lean on socio-constructivist approaches or constructivism as an overarching theoretical paradigm to inform its subject matter. Basic propositions of constructivist approaches are the overcoming of dichotomous concepts such as subject/object, actor/structure, collective/individual, and the understanding of social reality – and the theories built on this “reality” – as a construction by individual and collective actors taking into account historical processes and everyday practices (Giménez 2000: 11, see below and 1.3.1 for a discussion of the methodological implications of a constructivist approach). Constructivism has evolved into a heterogeneous theoretical current within the social sciences

²⁷ For one rare example of longitudinal research on the post-insurgency lives of former combatants, see Sprenkels 2014b on the trajectories of former members of the Farabundi Martí National Liberation Front (*Frente Farabuni Martí para la Liberación Nacional*, FMLN) in El Salvador.

from the 1970s onwards. Within the field of International Relations, constructivist perspectives developed from the 1980s onwards. They not only challenged the static character that realism and institutionalism ascribed to (national) identities and interests in international politics, but also emphasized the importance of understanding identities and perceptions – beyond material structures – to explain the behavior of actors in international politics (Filzmaier et al. 2006: 98).

The constructivist turn in peace and conflict research more specifically takes an interest in understanding how conflict is constructed by discursive means, how terms are defined and used to legitimize certain practices and behaviors, and how images of oneself and of others can bring about conflict (Bonacker 2011: 59). This is a critical approach, as it aims to uncover the political intention behind labeling or naming groups or people in a specific way (Schlotter and Wisotzki 2011: 22).

In the field of peace and conflict research, identity is a crucial element for analyzing violent conflicts in the world, be it at the individual, group or national level (Ashmore et al. 2001: I). Peace and conflict scholars have, for instance, focused on the role of and links between individual and group identities in ethnopolitical or nationalist conflicts and their aftermath (for an overview see Austin and Fischer 2015). They have explored gender(ed) identities as an analytical category to e.g. investigate the consequences of militarized masculinities for peacebuilding (see Schroer-Hippel 2011) and (post)conflict-related violence against women (Wisotzki 2011, Engels and Gayer 2011, Schäfer 2010, Schoofs et al. 2010, Clasen and Zwingel 2009, Cockburn 2004). They have also taken an interest in the formation of different war-related identities, such as victim and perpetrator, and more recently survivor and rescuer identities (see Simić 2013). However, scholars have not only used constructivist approaches to describe and understand how enemy discourses and identities spur civil wars, but also to understand the reverse process and look into whether and how war-related identities can (and need to) be undone, and how victim or perpetrator identities can be transformed into citizen identities.

As outlined by Buckley-Zistel (2006), the construction of new identities after violent conflict can happen in antagonism towards or mutual acceptance of other parties to the conflict, thereby either perpetuating or reducing the potential for future violence. Specifically, Buckley-Zistel draws attention to the danger of prevailing antagonism when group identities shaped throughout violent conflict may become even more important in the post-war period, as shared experiences of violence and memories of pain reinforce a group's common identity

while reproducing the boundaries to others. Critically discussing discourses of victimhood and victims' identities, research has recently explored the drawbacks of perpetuated victimhood and closed victim identities (see Austin 2017). Far from arguing that people should "just move on", this research highlights the need to prevent victimhood from becoming a stumbling block for peacebuilding, for example by creating competition for victim status, deducing the right to revenge, deepening isolation and disconnect from society, and supporting parallel narratives without empathy (ibid.: 11). In the case of the former Yugoslavia, Simić (2015) has for instance highlighted the risk of the emergence of what Smyth (2003) has termed "professional victims". According to Simić (2015: 14), there is a risk that such victims limit their contact to people who subscribe to their self-affirmation as victims, thereby remaining caught within their own ethnic group and disconnected from cross-ethnic contact or the broader community. This can result in a situation in which victims' organizations transform into narrow interest groups that only pursue "their specific victims' interests, which are often not aligned to reconciliation" (ibid.).²⁸ Similarly, the relevance of group identity has been singled out as paramount for understanding reintegration processes and programming (see Torjesen 2009: 1). For instance, it has been discussed whether reintegration programs with an extended time horizon might not only increase dependency on state support, but also consolidate an ex-combatant identity instead of promoting a citizen identity (FIP 2005c: 1, see also Denissen 2010: 33). Regarding the identity transformation processes from combatant to civilian life, there is a rich literature that highlights the need for identity transformation of ex-combatants without, however, describing in-depth why and how such processes can and should occur. Two main themes are covered in this literature, the first being the conversion to civilians, and the second being the break with a military past. Bowd and Özerdem (2013: 460) for instance highlight the need for reconstructing ex-combatant identities into "that of a civilian in order to ensure their ability to effectively navigate the civilian environment and thrive in it" and to ensure that ex-combatants feel secure about their

²⁸ The danger of such a dynamic has also been highlighted in the context of a study on veterans' potential for peacebuilding by Schroer-Hippel (2011: 105). The author analyzed a dialogue initiative among former veterans, victims' representatives and peace activists in Croatia and found that victim representatives participating in the initiative faced the risk of being regarded as traitors by their peers.

own identity. They further highlight how crucial such identity transformations are by noting that “in the process of conflict transformation and peacebuilding such an identity cannot be understated, as it is this very transformation of identity that allows reconciliation to take place” (ibid.). Bowd and Özerdem cite previous work supporting these assumptions, calling for the “mental elimination of the perception of being [member to] a specific group” (Brito and Mussanhane 1997: 3, cited in Bowd and Özerdem 2013: 460) as a precondition for successful reintegration, and highlight ex-combatants’ need to “overcome [their] acquired identity as ‘a killing machine’” and regain a civilian identity by which they “become [...] a person again” (Lundin 1998: 12, cited in Bowd and Özerdem 2013: 460). Such arguments are also supported by Casas-Casas and Guzmán Gómez (2010: 58) who assert that “DDR contributes to achieving a lasting peace process where those involved directly in the conflict can break with the past.” However, research from the field of psychology adds more nuances to the challenge of “de- and reconstructing” (Londoño and Nieto 2006: 84) one’s own identity in the complex process of transitioning from armed militancy to civilian life. During militancy, personal identities are often extremely tightly bound to the group and the collective. As Schafer (2007: 12) puts it, war produces “a feeling of solidarity that goes beyond the usual limits of community and loyalties”. As a result, Hazen (2005: 5) has termed the process of joining an armed group as a person’s integration into a “war family” – a family that not only offers an important support network, but also a sense of identity, purpose and security, as well as access to basic goods. In such a scenario, demobilization can be regarded as a threat, as “combatants lose their social status, their sense of belonging, their sense of importance, their income or access to basic goods, their support network, and their identity” (ibid.). Research in the field of (social) psychology highlights that experiencing stigmatization and disorientation, which can be prominent features of demobilization, can cause a person to withdraw from society, seek refuge in peer groups, and even develop hostility towards the stigmatizing society. Thus, examining the role ex-combatant organizations play in supporting sustainable identity accommodation processes is crucial.

From a methodological perspective and in line with a constructivism, this thesis complements macro-political perspectives on reintegration with a micro- and meso-approach to former combatants’ post-life militancy trajectories, long called for in respective literature (Humphreys and Weinstein 2007). So far, most research focuses on the structural conditions at the macro-level necessary for reintegration processes to be successful, but provides less insight into ex-combatants’ trajectories at a micro- or meso-level, and even less from the

personal accounts of former combatants themselves (see Torjesen 2009: 419 and 2013: 2).²⁹ According to Koloma Beck (2012: 29-30, see also Schneider 2015), the micro-political turn in peace and conflict studies is characterized by a shift from quantitative towards qualitative studies and a stronger focus on studying the decisions and trajectories of more ordinary people in and outside of armed organizations rather than those of (political) decision-makers and high-ranking leaders. This helps highlight the heterogeneous character of conflict actors otherwise portrayed as monolithic blocs, be they perpetrators, victims, survivors, bystanders, rescuers, witnesses, (insider) mediators, or peacekeepers. In addition, from a broader peacebuilding perspective, the importance of moving away from the focus on high-level negotiation processes aimed at structural reforms – or at least complementing them with greater attention to the micro-processes of peacebuilding – is earning increasing recognition. Referring to Colombia, Grabe for instance (2014: 8) highlights that micro-level peacebuilding processes that have already produced notable results on the ground could serve as a starting point for a broader process, instead of the other way around. She concludes that it is “essential to move away from a focus on the macro level, in order to create space for greater reflection on the plurality of actors and pathways to peace” (ibid.).

To conclude, three notes of caution seem important. First of all, and against the background of DDR being a largely policy-driven field, it is important to point out that this thesis is not primarily about developing lessons learned or blueprint solutions for (inter)national peacebuilding programming in order to improve DDR practice or “create” ex-combatants-turned-peacebuilders, even though it critically engages with the flaws in current DDR practice. As highlighted by Zahar (2009: 203), “[i]n spite of the hopes of many policy-oriented academics, there is no one-to-one correspondence between our analyses and policies. [...] Worse, they might even contribute to the promotion of insufficient and problematic policies”. The focus here is therefore on improving our understanding of the strategies used by the very conflict actors themselves to make use of their militant past to build peace.

²⁹ For exceptions, see Menzel 2010, Annan et al. 2009 or Hill et al. 2008. For the case of Colombia, see Nussio 2012 and 2011, Flores-Morris 2010, Medina Arbeláez 2009, Cárdenas Sarrias 2005, Castro and Díaz 1997. See Restrepo and Contreras Rodríguez 2000 for a self-reflective analysis of the path from armed militancy to socio-political activism by former members of the Socialist Renewal Current (*Corriente de Renovación Socialista*, CRS) guerrilla.

Secondly, this thesis does not aim to promote ex-combatant organizations in general or depict them as appropriate spaces for peacebuilding under any circumstances. Rather, it is about investigating their *potential* to contribute to peacebuilding – including possible assets as well as limitations – from the perspectives and narratives of ex-combatants themselves.

Finally, this thesis also does not assume that ex-combatants necessarily wish to engage in an ex-combatant organization. Forced recruitment, (sexual) abuse, hardship and resulting traumatization are sadly no uncommon experiences for former combatants. As a result, some might want to turn away from their past and not wish to remain in touch or associated with their former armed group.

While a thorough analysis of the state of the art in research on ex-combatants' post-militancy trajectories and their involvement in peacebuilding in various countries requires taking into account existing literature and analysis on the subject matter (see Chapter III), in-depth field research is at the core of this thesis. Field research was conducted over a period of seven months to capture the narratives explaining (re)mobilization pathways and organizational processes from the perspective of former combatants themselves. Concentrating the research in one single country allowed for a fair amount of time for trustbuilding and in-depth observation. Looking at different experiences in Colombia during a time span of 26 years (1990-2016) guaranteed the consideration of a number of influencing context factors, such as changing reintegration policies and programs. The next section turns to the research design for this study, highlighting the qualitative and inductive approach, the case study design and research site selection, as well as the concrete operationalization of the field research through interviews and participant observation.

1.3 AN EXPLORATIVE, QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGN: MOTIVATION AND OPERATIONALIZATION

Classical political science approaches to the study of war are often based on utilitarian-rationalist theory and work with macro-quantitative methodologies (Schlichte 2011b). For a long time the dominant paradigm, such approaches have been criticized for exaggerating rationalism, disregarding context, and neglecting the micro- and meso-level of analysis (ibid.: 4-5). Considering this thesis' specific interest in the micro-and meso-level of organizational processes in the transition from war to peace, the multidisciplinary and systemic field of

peace and conflict research seemed particularly well suited to help answer the main questions of this thesis. Peace and conflict research as a “field of inquiry” or “set of research problems” (Everts 1989: 73 in Bonacker 2011: 66)³⁰ has not only borrowed many concepts from different disciplines such as sociology, psychology, cultural studies and political sciences, it has also incorporated a broader variety of methodological proceedings, including field research³¹ and approaches that place the subjective experience of actors center stage (Schlichte 2011a: 100). As outlined by Mac Ginty and Richmond (2013: 775), peace and conflict scholars increasingly draw from sociology and anthropology to find answers to their questions. For, as “[c]ritical and reflexive research methodologies have become more widespread, [...] there has been a growing acceptance that state-centric and institutionalist lenses can only give a partial picture.” Investigating its main research question from a peace and conflict research perspective, this thesis followed an inductive and qualitative research design based on historical process analysis and empirical data gathered in the field. Section 1.3.1 explains the motivation for choosing an inductive and qualitative research designs, including field research, and highlights the underlying principles of such an approach and how they were applied in this study. Section 1.3.2 then elaborates on the selection of a case study design and the appropriate research site before 1.3.3 describes the rationale for choosing interviews and participant observation as data-gathering methods in the field.

³⁰ It was only against the backdrop of the disastrous consequences of two world wars and the subsequent threat of nuclear destruction during the Cold War that a scholarly field developed to systematically investigate ways to prevent or resolve conflicts. Conflict resolution started to institutionalize as an academic field of inquiry throughout the 1950s and 1960s, creating its own academic discourse in journals, conferences, centers and curricula (e.g. Journal of Conflict Resolution, Journal of Peace Research, Centre for Research on Conflict Resolution, Peace Research Institute Oslo – PRIO – in Norway, Conflict Research Society at the University of London and the Centre for the Analysis of Conflict) while Adam Curle opened the Peace Department at the University of Bradford. For a discussion of the disciplinary debate in peace and conflict studies, see Bonacker 2011.

³¹ The recent boom of field research in conflict zones, including by students of peace and conflict study programs, and its specific challenges has been discussed by Buckley-Zistley (2012), Koltermann (2013) and Menzel (2014). For an in-depth discussion of field research procedures and challenges, see Chapter IV.

1.3.1 AN INDUCTIVE, QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH

In the absence of any existing rigid conceptual framework or clear-cut theoretical understanding of the former combatant organizations' roles in supporting peacebuilding processes, I started from the premise to "look and listen first" (Schlichte 2011b: 6), using an exploratory or inductive research design. This section briefly outlines the particularities and benefits of choosing an inductive approach for my research subject before delving into the principles of qualitative research.

In contrast to deductive strategies, inductive approaches to research start with observations, then move to regularities, patterns and tentative hypothesis, and from there to broader conclusions, generalizations or theories. General conclusions or theories are only formulated at the end of a study and based on the results of observations. The advantage of such an approach is that the researcher is still free to alter the study's focal direction after the research process has commenced. In other words, an inductive approach allows research questions to evolve and be further developed based on what the researcher sees and hears in the field.³² Following an interpretative tradition, qualitative research is primarily concerned with the meanings individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem and thus favors "the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes" (Creswell 2007: 36). Choosing such an explicit qualitative approach that would engage closely with the narratives

³² Seeking to explain social phenomena from within their context rather than aiming to develop a general theory applicable across time and space, inductive-qualitative proceedings have been prominently developed by the fathers of grounded theory, Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser. In 1967, they published "The Discovery of Grounded Theory" as a result of their qualitative sociomedical research on dying. Outlining the qualitative approach they had used to conduct this study, they did not only want to legitimize qualitative research, they also wanted to provide a new generation of students with guidelines on how to conduct qualitative research. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008:1), grounded theory is "a specific methodology developed for the purpose of building theory from data". This means that research based on grounded theory does not start with a set of hypotheses to be tested throughout the research, but rather with a general research interest and a set of initial questions. From the 1970s onwards, the fathers of grounded theory separately developed the approach further, providing different instructions for students and controversially discussing the writing of the other. As a result, research guided by grounded theory mostly turns to one or the other author for orientation, in addition to further developments by other researchers (e.g. Charmaz 1996 and 2000).

and the voices of ex-combatants themselves resonated well with academia's call for more substantive research on the micro-level and the "ex-combatants themselves and their encounters with social, political and economic challenges" (Torjesen 2013: 2, see also Humphreys and Weinstein 2007). The following briefly reviews the principles of qualitative research, including orientation towards the research subject, closeness to the field, a two step-approach of description and explanation, the recognition of the constructive character of research (interpretative paradigm) and the awareness of the limits of generalization (see Mayring 2002). Orientation towards the research subject means that the people concerned in or affected by the research question must be the starting point for investigation, and aims at understanding environments "from within", i.e. from the very perspective of the research participants. For this dissertation, a subject-oriented approach meant to start from the testimonies of ex-combatants themselves.

Secondly, the principle of closeness to the field refers to the fact that human phenomena are highly dependent upon situational factors and cannot be sufficiently researched with laboratory studies. While it must be acknowledged that each research situation already brings a distortion of reality, qualitative research tries to reduce the degree of distortion by seeking proximity to reality. For the purpose of this dissertation, direct contact to research participants and their living environments as well as participant observations were key to developing a deeper understanding of participants' daily lives. In practical terms, this meant that encounters took place as often as possible at interviewees' living or working places, or at least within their neighborhood. Closeness to the field, however, also implies a certain flexibility to take relevant themes from the field on board one's initial research questions, or even adapt research questions throughout the data gathering process. This process has been labeled "openness" for the field (see also Meinefeld 2008: 266).

Next, a two-step approach of description and explanation points to the need for a detailed description and an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon under scrutiny. This principle, put forward especially in phenomenological and ethnographical research approaches, should help focus on the facts from the field first and prevent the researcher from applying pre-built theories to her or his research subject. In the context of ethnography, Geertz (1973) has popularized the term "thick description" to refer to the importance of detailed description. Fourth, this thesis shares the interpretative paradigm. Human products are outcomes of subjective intentions and selective perception, including both the research subject as well as the research process. Largely developed by symbolic interaction, ethno-

methodology and constructivist approaches (Mayring 2002: 10, Flick et al. 2008: 14), an interpretative understanding of research therefore recognizes the constructivist character of research and the role of the researcher in producing specific research results. As outlined for instance by Strauss and Corbin (1994: 279): “A theory is not the formulation of some discovered aspect of a pre-existent reality out there. [...] Theories are interpretations made from given perspectives as adopted [...] by researchers.”³³ This implies, as “knowledge production occurs in place and time”, that research results must be acknowledged as “partial and situated” (Gallahar 2009: 133). However, it must not mean to ignore the relevance of objectivity at least as a methodological ideal, but rather to openly reflect on possible biases resulting from the researcher’s own understanding of the phenomenon she is looking at (Zahar 2009: 193). Finally, one could add context-specificity as a last element of qualitative research. Engels (2012: 15) points out that taking into account the specific economic, socio-cultural, historical and political context is of ultimate importance when explaining social phenomena.

As a result, qualitative research must be aware of the limits of generalization. As human behavior can hardly be explained by universally applicable laws, but is closely dependent on its situational and historical context, the aim of research in the social sciences is to establish common rules and patterns instead of universal laws. This does not mean that research results are fiercely restricted to the actual cases under scrutiny. Researchers should aim to identify transferable possibilities, while carefully assessing the limits of relevance for other, similar cases. This implies that the so-called “scope conditions”, the conditions under which findings are valid and might be relevant beyond the actual case, must be clearly outlined.

To comply with the requirements and principles of qualitative research, I opted for concentrating my research on one single country. The following sections briefly highlight the case study design, explain why Colombia was chosen as field research site, and provide details on the data gathering process.

³³ Chapter IV includes an in-depth reflection on the role of the researcher during the data gathering process.

1.3.2 CASE STUDY DESIGN: CHOOSING COLOMBIA AS THE RESEARCH SITE

Case study designs have a long tradition in qualitative research, where they have been used to gain in-depth understanding of the complexity of social phenomena within a time- and space-bound context. They are particularly useful to explore new topics and have been said to be best suited to contribute to hypothesis and theory development (rather than testing) (Häder 2010: 352).³⁴ With regard to an overall inductive research approach, case study research therefore seemed the most appropriate method for data gathering. According to Feagin et al. (1991: 2), a case study can be defined as an “in-depth, multifaceted investigation, using qualitative research methods, of a single social phenomenon.” Case study designs often imply relying on a detailed analysis of specific phenomena and are based on several data sources. The units analyzed in case studies can vary considerably and include individuals, organizations or entire groups of people.

In this study, ex-combatant organizations in Colombia are the case under scrutiny. Internal armed conflict, as well as the various conflict resolution attempts in Colombia will be the overall context under which examinations were conducted. Colombia presented a suitable field research “laboratory” for a number of reasons, including the vast variety of armed groups and the country’s rich experience in reintegration processes, the amount of ex-combatant organizations, the vibrant academic environment, as well as the need for a sound analysis of ex-combatants’ post-militancy life trajectories in the face of still active – and yet to be reintegrated – armed groups.

Colombia has been home to a whole universe of armed groups. Next to various left-wing insurgency movements of different sizes, ideological orientations, and regional bases, the country has experienced the growth of right-wing paramilitary forces as well as the emergence of an armed indigenous self-defense movement and urban militias. As a result of governmental efforts to tackle this multi-actor conflict scenario, the country has a long trajectory of negotiated peace settlements leading to various peace and reintegration processes in the 1990s, followed by a major demobilization program for paramilitary units and ongoing

³⁴ However, this is not uncontested. See for instance Flyvbjerg (2006) for a discussion of critical issues and limits of case study research.

individual reintegration schemes. These processes have brought forth a large number of ex-combatants, referred to over time as *amnistiadas/os* (people with amnesty), *reinsertadas/os*, *reincorporadas/os* (reinserted or reincorporated people) or *desmovilizadas/os* (demobilized people). The Colombian Reintegration Agency for Armed Persons and Groups (*Agencia Colombiana para la Reintegración de Personas y Grupos Alzados en Armas*, ACR) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working with ex-combatants generally use the terms “participants” or “beneficiaries”, or more recently also “person in the process of reintegration” (*persona en proceso de reintegración*, PPR, see ACR 2014) to refer to ex-combatants that take part in reintegration programs and activities. Taken together and counting only those who took part in official reintegration programs, the various transition processes in Colombia from 1990-2016 have contributed to an overall ex-combatant population of approximately 65,000 people (see Figure 9 in Annex 3). Approximately 60,000 of them demobilized in the first decade of the 21st century. Due to their accompaniment by the state-sponsored reintegration scheme, there is a lot of data available on this “recent” ex-combatant population in Colombia. The average PPR is male, with only 12% female participants, aged between 26-50 years and has a low educational profile when starting the reintegration process (personal interview, ACR staff, December 22, 2012, Bogotá). At the time of research, only roughly 200 ex-combatants registered with the ACR had an academic profile (*ibid.*). According to the ACR (2014: 22), 7 out of 10 ex-combatants are essentially analphabetic. What this basically demonstrates is that most ex-combatants were recruited from a highly vulnerable context that did not allow them to acquire a basic school education, not to mention professional experience or training, which makes their insertion into the labor market difficult. In addition, 9 out of 10 suffer from post-traumatic stress (*ibid.*). Furthermore, 80% of the ex-combatants settling in the city have a rural background, having grown up in peasants’ families, and have been operating in rural zones of the country, which makes it difficult for them to cope in the city. On the other hand, institutional challenges in attending to the ex-combatant population, including the lack of coordination between national and local reintegration measures and the insecure legal situation and structural problems, such as poor economic opportunities in many parts of the country, a fragile security situation, as well as stigmatization and “homogenization” (ODDR 2012c: 9) of a largely heterogeneous population by society hamper smooth post-militancy trajectories (see also DNP 2008: 19-25).

The different reintegration processes from 1990-2016 have resulted in a broad variety of ex-combatant organizations, which is ideal for the comparative analysis of different

entities. In some cases, the creation of ex-combatant organizations was part of the official peace accord, while in others, ex-combatant organizations have emerged from the initiatives of deserted individuals. Particularly former combatants of the guerrilla groups that collectively demobilized in the early 1990s have become known for their continuing political and social activism. Some of them have managed to become respected public figures, to engage in NGO work, to teach at universities, or to work with social movements advocating for peace (Villarraga Sarmiento 2013: 119). Besides these prominent examples, there are other less well-known initiatives of former combatants working in non-governmental organizations. According to Franco (2000: 120 in García-Durán 2008: 32), “[e]x-combatants have generated many initiatives to work on specific fronts or to develop actions of regional impact, building a rich experience that has generated more than one hundred NGOs.” A national survey of ex-combatants’ organizational processes between 2002 and 2009 counted 263 ex-combatant organizations, collectively gathering approximately 14,000 ex-combatants (ODDR: 2009). According to the survey, the vast majority (93%) of the 263 organizations under scrutiny between 2002 and 2009 were classified as formal organizations, registered at the chamber of commerce under different legal regimes, including as NGOs or private enterprises. Many of these organizations were created following the demobilization of paramilitary units. Often headed by former paramilitary leaders, they were meant to create job opportunities for demobilized paramilitary members and implicitly maintain commanders’ control over former militants. While the largest number of organizations was to be found in the Antioquia department, and more specifically in its capital city Medellín, Bogotá ranged second in former combatants’ organizational processes in 2009 (ibid.: 10 and ODDR 2011).

Colombia provides a unique setting for an in-country comparative analyse of divergent ex-combatant organizational processes. The variety of reintegration processes with regard to disengagement patterns (individual and collective, within or outside a negotiation process), reintegration actors (local, national), policies and programs, and the changing legal, institutional and political framework conditions over a time span of 26 years allows for a wide range of comparisons between different types of ex-combatants’ organizational processes. This setting also displays a great variety in armed groups, including insurgency movements, paramilitary groups, urban militias and armed indigenous self-defense organizations whose different group characteristics, wartime behavior and peace processes have also had an impact on the overall shape of ex-combatant organizations.

With the help of comparative analysis, this broad variation can be operationalized into different aspects of inquiry, among them the genesis of former combatant organizations (peace-agreement based or individually set up organizations), the type of group they had emerged from, the scope and site of activities conducted, as well as the type of activities they were running.

Next, the vibrant academic environment within Colombia and the relatively easy access to contact persons, enhanced through my language skills and previous work in Colombia, were highly promising with regards to the feasibility of field research. After five decades of civil war, Colombia's universities have educated a whole range of *violentólogos* (violence experts) who provide insightful analysis of their country. Within this context, a number of institutions and research centers have taken particular interest in following and analyzing ex-combatants' pathways after disengagement, including, among others, the DDR observatory of the National University of Colombia (*Observatorio de Procesos de Desarme, Desmovilización y Reintegración*, ODDR), the Conflict Analysis Resource Center (*Centro de Recursos para el Análisis de Conflictos*, CERAC), the Foundation Ideas for Peace (*Fundación Ideas para la Paz*, FIP) or the National Reparation and Reconciliation Commission (*Comisión Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación*, CNRR). In 2013, the Department of Political Science of the *Universidad de los Andes* dedicated one issue of its journal *Colombia Internacional* to the analysis of DDR processes in and beyond Colombia. This interest and academic production strongly facilitates access to expert knowledge and a more profound analysis of different reintegration processes. However, to-date policymakers and academic experts pay far more attention to the negotiation processes and their outcomes, including the political conversion of former armed groups, than to the long-term processes of post-militancy life trajectories or to ex-combatants' organizational processes. Thus, this thesis introduces a new view on the frequently studied history of conflict in Colombia. This is all the more important in light of the prospect of former FARC-EP (and potentially a much smaller but still substantial number of ELN) combatants returning to legality after 50 years of armed struggle. I hope this thesis can also contribute to a better understanding of the challenges and potentials of combatants ready to leave behind armed militancy in the future. As was outlined

by one interview partner during field research, the reintegration of NSAG combatants as well as soldiers of the statutory forces and the deconstruction of war discourses will remain a task for the next two generations to come (personal interview, *Centro Mundial* staff, May 28, 2012, Bogotá³⁵). This task will be carefully watched by an international community that has been paying increasing attention to Colombia's rocky way to a peace deal, and that will continue to closely follow whether the implementation of the peace agreement signed with the FARC-EP will help the country overcome some of its root problems.

It is worthwhile to close this section by situating the scenario of armed conflict in Colombia within the universe of civil wars and reintegration processes that have produced ex-combatant organizations in other countries, only some of which are engaged in peacebuilding. Between 1990 and 2016, the timeframe chosen for this study, a large number of DDR and reintegration processes were underway in different parts of the world, partly supported by the United Nations and its various agencies (e.g. UN peacekeeping missions, the United Nations Development Program UNDP, the United Nations Children's Fund UNICEF), partly by other international or regional organizations such as the International Organization of Migration (IOM) or the African Union (AU), as well as single-donor countries and NGOs. Summarizing official UN reports and information provided in the 2006 final report of the Stockholm Initiative on DDR (MFA 2006), McMullin (2013: 1) counts 36 internationally supported DDR initiatives from 1992-2005, most of them in Africa. According to the DDR yearbook of the School for a Culture of Peace (*Escola de Cultura de Pau*, 2009), DDR programs were running in 15 countries in 2008, including in Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Colombia, Republic of Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Eritrea, Indonesia, Liberia, Nepal, Rwanda, Sudan, and Uganda. As highlighted by Banholzer (2014: 8) and the Human Security Report for 2009-10 (Human Security Report Project 2010), DDR initiatives have increased nine-fold since the end of the Cold War. Each of these initiatives presents a unique case with distinct conflict dynamics that have resulted in differently shaped armed groups and subsequent ex-combatant organizations. With regard to participant numbers, DDR programs

³⁵ All quotes from interview partners in Colombia were translated from Spanish into English by the author herself. Full interview tapes and transcripts can be made available upon request; fragments cited in this paper are listed in the endnotes in Annex 8.

worldwide addressing former soldiers, ex-combatants of NSAGs and militias have ranged from 3,000 (e.g. the former combatants of the Free Aceh Movement – *Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*, GAM – in Indonesia) to over 150,000 people (in Eritrea and Sudan) (*Escola de Cultura de Pau* 2009). With 65,000 demobilized ex-combatants, and considering its different reintegration processes, this places the cases at hand in Colombia in an intermediate position. However, with regard to longevity and accumulated institutional experience, Colombia presents a unique context with 35 years of uninterrupted reintegration efforts (starting 1982 with the set-up of the first Rehabilitation and Reintegration Program, see 5.3), and nine different reintegration programs so far (see CNMH 2015: 30).

A number of peculiar Colombian features are noteworthy and relevant for any discussion of peacebuilding needs and actors in the country. First of all, internal armed conflict in Colombia is of essentially political origin. It was not based on an ethnic, nationalist or religious agenda, but started as a politically motivated conflict whose protagonists developed strong ties to criminal economic agendas over time. The political character of the various guerrilla movements, including the FARC-EP, was not only evident in the peace accords and the subsequent participation of insurgents in Colombian party politics, but most recently explicitly highlighted by President Santos when he explained why the guarantees for political participation of the FARC-EP, including its leadership, had not been removed from the Final Accord in the course of its modifications (*RT en español*, 2016). However, despite the conversion of different left-wing insurgency movements into political parties over time and individual electoral successes of their former members, they have not managed to significantly alter the political mainstream in Colombia, which is still driven by center-right political parties. This is one reason why the stigmatization of former combatants continues to be a serious issue in the country. As for right-wing paramilitary groups, they have also not managed to establish any serious legal political projects, but instead continue to undermine democratic politics behind the scenes with threats and violence. This brings us to another particularity in Colombia's history of reintegration processes: the existence of reintegration processes in the midst of ongoing war. The fragmented or parceled character of a DDR process that combines collective demobilization with a steady stream of deserters poses

specific problems, including in regard to former combatants' security, and hence additional challenges to former combatants' organizational processes (see CNRR 2011, Sanguino 2005: 78, 81).³⁶ With regard to the type of violence Colombia has been facing, the country sticks out for the continuity of its armed conflict despite varying heights and types of violence. While 220,000-260,000 conflict-related deaths might seem few compared to victims' tolls in other civil wars, Colombia occupies an unfortunate first place worldwide in terms of internally displaced people (IDPs) (UNHCR 2016). It also displays a combination of conflict-related, economic and social violence, with the latter having actually taken on more worrisome figures than the number of lethal victims of the armed conflict (see Chapter V for more details).³⁷ Another conflict feature is its strong urban-rural divide. Since the end of the height of the drug war, which heavily affected Colombia's major cities, especially Medellín, Cali and Bogotá, internal armed conflict has mainly affected the rural areas of the country. Since the demobilization of the paramilitaries in mid-2000, security – at least for the urban middle-and upper class – has considerably improved. Data from the Colombian National Planning Department suggest that 60% of conflict-related armed violence takes place in a few peripheral departments, including Norte de Santander, Cauca, Antioquia, Nariño and Putumayo (DNP 2014: 4). As a result, the director of the new National Memory Museum (*Museo Nacional de la Memoria*), Martha Nubia Bello, recently asserted that the urban population has “almost no clue” about the violence that has affected the countryside (Henkel 2017).

Finally, the nature of the regionally fragmented Colombian state is all but failed, fragile, or absent (see Jenss 2016 for a detailed Colombia-specific analysis, and Chojnacki and Namberger 2014 for a general discussion of the concept of a “failed state” from a postcolonial perspective)³⁸ and therefore differentiates the situation in Colombia from other reintegration experiences that are much more closely related to comprehensive statebuilding

³⁶ In 2008, the only other country that conducted a DDR program within ongoing war was Afghanistan (*Escola de Cultura de Pau*, 2009).

³⁷ According to numbers released in 2016, the conflict has resulted in about 260,000 deaths, 45,000 disappearances and almost seven million displaced people (*Semana* 2016b).

³⁸ Jenss (2016: 422) notes a withdrawal of the state with regard to social services to citizens but argues that the institutions responsible for security have been continuously extended and modified.

processes, often under massive international guidance. Characterized by little international intervention, DDR processes in Colombia can be considered home-grown (Villaraga Sarramiento 2013),³⁹ and, as a result of the consecutive implementation of various negotiation and reintegration processes, can today rely on a strong institutional landscape for reintegration. Next to the ACR, many other public entities are involved in the reintegration roadmap, including various ministries (e.g. Ministry of Health and Social Protection, Ministry of Education, Ministry for Culture, Ministry of Agriculture etc.), the Prosecutor's Office, the National Commission for Reparation and Reconciliation, as well as municipal and departmental administrations (see ACR 2014: 8, DNP 2008: 31). In addition, local administrations, most prominently the municipalities of Colombia's two biggest cities Medellín and Bogotá,⁴⁰ have set up their own public reintegration programs that often clash with national policy because of their differences in programming priorities (see CNRR 2011: 92-93). These programs operate under the name Peace and Reconciliation Program in Medellín (*Programa Paz y Reconciliación*) and Assistance Program to the Demobilization and Reintegration Process in Bogotá (*Programa de Atención al Proceso de Desmovilización y Reintegración en Bogotá*, PAPDRB).

Against this background, Colombia has taken up efforts to become a leader for South-South DDR cooperation and exchange.⁴¹ In addition, DDR-programming has become a standard public policy and tool to promote the government as a capable peacebuilder. This is

³⁹ According to Carranza-Franco (2014: 251), the national government had self-financed 97% of the paramilitary DDR processes by 2005, as international organizations were reluctant to support the controversial demobilization process of the paramilitary units. Referring to data from the National Planning Department (2007), the *Escola de Cultura de Pau* (2009) highlights that by 2007, various international donors (e.g. UNICEF, ILO) and bilateral development agencies (e.g. USAID, GTZ) contributed funding to the process.

⁴⁰ The latter, PAPDRB, was set up in 2005 under the administration of Mayor Alcalde Luis Eduardo Garzón (2004-2008) as a response to the crisis of the housing scheme (*albergues*). With Bogotá attracting a large number of former militants, a series of media reports scandalised the danger of ex-combatants for public security. When a car bomb exploded in front of one of the *albergues* situated in a centric neighborhood of the capital, the need for a complementary municipal reintegration policy became evident. See Carranza-Franco 2014 for a detailed analysis of the programs in both cities.

⁴¹ For instance, the ACR has organized four thematic South-South exchange events as well as an international summit for directors of DDR programs across the world (see ACR 2014: 23).

certainly also related to Colombia's economic situation. The country is ranked as an upper-middle income country by the World Bank,⁴² relatively better off than many other conflict regions in the world currently running DDR programs. However, as highlighted by Aguilera (2013: 153), a third of Colombia's population was living in poverty in 2010, with the highest poverty rates to be found in peripheral areas of the country. In addition, half of the population is estimated to work illicitly, leaving them without any legal protection or social insurance. Therefore, the implementation of the peace agreement with the FARC-EP will still strongly depend on international funding, with the European Union (EU) probably becoming the most important partner for Colombia.⁴³

As a result of these peculiarities, reintegration processes in Colombia are not necessarily comparable to other cases across the world. However, the objective of this study is not to test a universal hypothesis. Rather, it is about generating a fresh perspective from which ex-combatant organizations can be looked at by taking the specificities of each context into account.

1.3.3 DATA-GATHERING METHODS: QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS AND PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

Two different dynamics made field research for this thesis essential. First of all, the documentation and analysis of post-militancy processes across the world – and Colombia is no exception – still lag behind the interest researchers, practitioners, and the general public take in negotiation processes closely covered by the media. As a result, the more “silent” post-militancy trajectories are less well documented. Secondly, this is particularly true for post-militancy organizational processes that developed outside the framework of a collective negotiation or demobilization process. While the peace processes with various guerrilla organizations in the 1990s and the emergence of former combatant organizations have at least

⁴² See World Bank country information available online at: <http://data.worldbank.org/country/colombia> (accessed February 20, 2017).

⁴³ On December 12, 2016, the European Commission (EC) announced an “unprecedented” support package to the peace agreement implementation in Colombia worth almost 600 million euro (EC 2016).

been partly documented – often by the very organizations themselves, e.g. through evaluation reports – the work of smaller-scale initiatives resulting from individual disengagement processes has received very little, if at all any, attention. As a result, field research was essential to generate data on these processes. In the field, the main methods of data collection consisted both of semi-structured survey interviews and problem-centered interviews as well as participant observation. The seven months of field research (December 2011 to June 2012) consisted of two parallel and interlinked research processes that helped me 1) gain access to interview partners and obtain a broader understanding of the overall living conditions and challenges of former combatants, and 2) identify suitable ex-combatant organizations and collect specific information to answer my research question.

During a five-month work placement (December 2011 to April 2012) in the context of a joint research project by the Berghof Foundation and Oxford University on the cohesion of armed groups, I was tasked to conduct semi-structured survey interviews with ex-combatants in collaboration with a local research partner hired to this end. The two-year “Armed Group Cohesion” (AGC) project was run by three researchers based at the Centre for Anthropology and Mind (CAM) at the University of Oxford (Brian McQuinn, Dr. Caroline Bettrige and Prof. Harvey Whitehouse) and co-financed by the Berghof Foundation’s annual Grant for Innovation in Conflict Transformation. Its main objective consisted in investigating how NSAGs develop and sustain group cohesion, and the implications of cohesion patterns for negotiating with and demobilizing civil war armed groups. As the project was executed both in Colombia and in Libya, a common, semi-structured interview guideline was elaborated at the beginning of the project and adapted after a first set of interviews.

The 59 interviews I conducted for this project contained a wealth of information, e.g. ex-combatants’ own evaluation of their wartime experiences and the challenges they faced in their post-militancy lives, and also proved useful in the context of this dissertation. These interviews also helped me establish contacts and a rapport with interviewees that later facilitated my reach to local ex-combatant organizations. This was particularly important, as research involving ex-combatants in Colombia faces a number of challenges. As highlighted in the literature, ex-combatants are a difficult population to interview: fear of discrimination, a desire to avoid public appearance, and anxiety due to security threats may reduce willingness to participate in academic studies (Nussio and Ugarriza 2016). I therefore also used the contacts established throughout this research phase with social workers and psychologists in charge of supervising ex-combatants within the national reintegration agency

to gather additional information on and contacts to ex-combatant organizations based in Bogotá.

In parallel, from January to June 2013, a series of interviews was conducted with ex-combatants from various non-state armed groups, including former guerrilla and paramilitary combatants who today are engaged in ex-combatant organizations. For these interviews, I opted for a problem-oriented interview method (see Mayring 2002 and Chapter IV for a more detailed discussion) in combination with narrative elements.

Interviews were complemented with participant observation at various sites and documented in selective protocols. Informal participant observation also took place whenever visiting former combatants at their working or living places. At times invited to share a coffee or even a meal with interviewees and their families, I had the opportunity to gain insights into their daily routines, learn about their personal opinions on politics and life in general, and experience first-hand the living conditions in their respective neighborhoods.

Interviews were transcribed with the help of the open-source computer-based transcription tool F4; information from participant observation was stored with selective protocols. The information obtained through the interview process and during participant observation was triangulated with other sources, such as conversations with staff from different reintegration programs, expert interviews, information provided by relevant websites, governmental documents, newspaper reports and academic literature, as well as the original texts of relevant peace accords (see Figure 7, Annex 1 for a full list of interview partners). This way, the thesis combines the analysis of data gathered in qualitative field research with a historical process analysis of different reintegration instances.

For security reasons, interviewees will be referred to as members of their respective organizations and not presented with their individual names. Interviewees were guaranteed anonymity in order to allow them to speak freely about challenges and difficult personal circumstances. In cases where individuals made personal comments that had the potential to discredit their own or other people's organizations, or which could constitute a security risk for them, no attribution to the respective organization will be made either. This measure serves to ensure safety for interviewees who did not shy away from controversial or provocative comments. Short interview extracts will be referred to throughout the text; longer full quotes are additionally provided in Annex 8.

Having outlined the rationale and objectives of this study and the ways to address them, this introduction will close with an overview of the structure of the remainder of this study.

1.4 STRUCTURE OF THIS STUDY

In order to provide a sound basis for empirical analysis, Chapter II will provide the reader with a critical discussion of the key terms and concepts of this study, including “non-state armed groups”, “ex-combatants”, “reintegration”, “post-militancy life trajectories”, and “peacebuilding”. Highlighting the difficulties of doing research on non-state actors in a state-centered world, this chapter introduces identity as a central element for understanding non-state armed groups. It then turns to the making or un-making of former combatants through DDR programs and suggests the concept of post-militancy life trajectories as an alternative to the reintegration terminology. Finally, it critically analyses the emergence and development of peacebuilding as an international intervention tool and presents Lederach’s (1997) approach to “transformative peacebuilding” and his understanding of peacebuilding as relationship (re)building, which serves as the basis for this study.

Chapter III then revises the state of the art of research on ex-combatant organizations and their role in peacebuilding more specifically. The chapter contrasts international DDR approaches and their assumptions on ex-combatants with a number of practical examples of ex-combatants’ constructive roles in peacebuilding, and highlights the particular assets they are found to bring to peace work. It concludes by summarizing the findings generated from literature and addresses a number of issues that will further guide the subsequent analysis. The following chapters work through in-depth case study research on the challenges and limits of ex-combatants’ engagement in peacebuilding in Colombia.

Chapter IV provides a detailed overview of the field research process. This entails outlining the different access pathways to interviewees and the data-gathering methods, highlighting some limitations with regard to the data, and reflecting on challenges specific to field research. This chapter also summarizes the empirical material used for this thesis and the data analysis procedure.

Chapter V provides a brief overview of the genesis this particular armed struggle. It starts by highlighting the structural causes in Colombia, including political exclusion and

conflicts over access to land in the 19th and 20th century, which subsequently led to the emergence of various armed guerrilla movements from the 1960s onwards. The chapter then presents the universe of armed groups that evolved in the following decades, and finally outlines the conflict dynamics up until the start of a series of reintegration processes in the 1990s. Against this background, Chapter VI provides a comparative analysis of the different negotiation and reintegration processes that took place from 1990 to 2016, and the subsequent emergence, objectives and activities of former combatant organizations. In the process, it reviews the political, legal and institutional framework these developments took place in, the negotiation outcome (in the case of collective transitions) and specific governmental approaches to reintegration policies and programming. Building on these insights, Chapter VII discusses a number of factors aside from disengagement patterns that can explain the variety in ex-combatant's ability to serve as a resource for peace in Colombia, including the (political) identity of a group and its in-group ties, the group's "capital of relations", its ability to make use of militants' insider knowledge, as well as how opportunities for organizational development are shaped by reintegration policies. The conclusion recapitulates the research results, suggests possible avenues for further research, and analyses opportunities for future former combatants' organizational processes in Colombia.

CHAPTER II: MILITANT IDENTITIES IN TRANSITION – TERMINOLOGIES AND CONCEPTS

Chapter II discusses the main concepts that will be used in this thesis. The chapter starts with the epistemological difficulties linked to investigating non-state civil war actors in a state-centered world. Outlining the heterogeneous character of non-state armed groups, this section introduces the component of identity to defining these actors (2.1). It then turns to the individual perspective, looking at the “making” of ex-combatants through DDR programs (2.2). Critically engaging with the reintegration terminology, this thesis introduces the concepts of socialization and disengagement, and discusses Van Gennep’s concept of “*rites de passage*” to highlight the difficult process of transitioning from militancy to post-militancy life (2.3). It concludes with a discussion of the development of the concept and practice of peacebuilding, and outlines which approaches to peacebuilding will be the focus of this dissertation (2.4).

2.1 CHALLENGES TO RESEARCHING NON-STATE ACTORS, OR NSAGS AS IDENTITY GROUPS

In the first decade of the 20th century (2000-2009), 27 out of 30 major armed conflicts were asymmetric, intra-state conflicts fought in the so-called Global South (SIPRI Yearbook 2010: 64) between governmental forces and one or various non-state armed groups, thereby “challenging the state's monopoly of legitimate coercive force” (Policzer 2005: 8). In his 2005 essay “Neither Terrorists nor Freedom Fighters”, Policzer captured a highly political debate on the nature and essence of NSAGs. According to the analyst’s perspective, these are described on a continuum from sympathetic, to more neutral, to even discrediting labels such as “freedom fighters”, “resistance and/or liberation movements”, “power contenders”, “challengers of the state”, “insurgencies”, rebels”, “criminal gangs”, “warlords”, or “terrorists” (see Dudouet et al. 2012a: 3 for a discussion on the choice of terminologies). Research has already begun to explore the NSAG-black box and study the internal features and dynamics of these groups, as well as ways to support their war-to-peace transition processes. Publications such as “Inside Rebellion” (Weinstein 2007) and “In the Shadow of

Violence: The Politics of Armed Groups” (Schlichte 2009), research projects such as the Berghof Foundation’s “From War to Politics: Non-State Armed Groups and Security Transition Processes” (2009-2012), and policy events by international donor agencies (e.g. the UNDP workshop on “The Challenge of Political Transformation of Armed and Banned Groups”, June 2014, see Dudouet et al. 2016) demonstrate the increasing interest in understanding and eventually engaging (see Schneckener 2009)⁴⁴ with armed groups. In addition, the conventional focus on armed conflict stakeholders with primarily political agendas has recently been broadening to 1) give space to an ever-increasing understanding of the interlinkages between NSAGs’ political and criminal agendas, and 2) take into account new forms of armed actors operating in non-conflict scenarios (see e.g. Planta and Dudouet 2015, UNSSC 2015, Unger et al. 2015).

However, as Zahar points out (2009: 204), scholars interested in understanding non-state actors face the challenge that both contemporary research and political practice are biased by the “hegemony of the state [...] as universal organizing principle and an inescapable theoretical construct” that “mediates and influences scholarship on ethnic [armed] groups.” She further notes (ibid.: 200) how the state-centric focus of research has impacted our definitions and understanding of armed groups in two essential ways, namely by drawing clear demarcation lines between armed groups and 1) the (legitimate) governments they are fighting against, and 2) the assumedly vulnerable civilian population they “abuse or alternatively claim to represent and protect”. However, research has demonstrated that such clear-cut boundaries rarely remain intact in a much messier reality, and that they are seldomly accepted by the very actors themselves. A number of attempts have been made to make sense of the universe of non-state armed groups by providing criteria for their different

⁴⁴ In the last few years, reflections on how to engage with armed groups have not only been driven forward by scholars interested in political settlements with NSAGs, but also increasingly by humanitarian and development agencies such as the International Committee of the Red Cross or bi- and multilateral donor agencies. These actors have come to understand that they cannot effectively do their work without getting in (close) contact and engaging in negotiations with NSAGs controlling the territories aid actors need to access (see for instance Hofmann 2012, Grävingshold and Hofmann 2011, Schneckener and Hofmann 2011). In addition, organizations such as Geneva Call are trying to commit NSAGs to respect international humanitarian law and to shield the civilian population from violence.

characteristics while highlighting their common denominator, the use of coercive force. According to DCAF/Geneva Call, (2015: 7) armed non-state actors encompass “any organized group with a basic structure of command operating outside state control that uses force to achieve its political or allegedly political objectives”. Policzer’s definition cautiously adds a fourth dimension: On top of some level of organizational coherence or hierarchical structure, the use of force to explicitly political ends, as well as even the slightest independence from state control, Policzer also suggests a certain degree of territorial control as a defining factor (Policzer 2005). Next to attempts defining the commonalities of armed groups, further research has started to look into the differences between these groups and establish typologies along a number of varying indicators, including their motivation and goals, their organizational structure, their relation with the constituency, and the degrees and types of violence they employ. Schneckener (2009) for instance has established nine different armed group types according to four criteria: reform agenda (change vs. status quo), relation to territory, use of violence, and primary motivation.

Especially the last criterion has been taken up widely, with scholars often distinguishing between politically motivated and profit-driven armed groups. However, such typologies often fail to reflect complex realities in which most contemporary armed groups present a mixed set of motivations, especially along the continuum of political and criminal agendas. In addition to these fluid boundaries between groups, there might also be internal divisions, and some armed groups might in reality be much more heterogeneous or hybrid and non-cohesive than assumed for analytical purposes, displaying internal divisions between members driven by economic agendas, political objectives, or a combination of both. Finally, non-state armed groups – especially those that survive over a long period of time – are subject to evolutions over the course of protracted and volatile conflicts. Some NSAGs might emerge from political grievances and transform into mere war profiteers or criminals, while others are characterized by internal fractions; yet other groups develop political ambitions out of originally profit-driven endeavours (see Planta and Dudouet 2015: 2).

Next, there is also a problem with the (perceived) dichotomy between state and non-state actors. Research has shown that in some areas, groups have taken over key governmental functions and operate as a quasi-state, not only providing basic security but also other social services to the people living in their territories. In addition, many actors labeled “non-state” become governmental in the course of a conflict settlement (ibid.: 6). The fluidity of boundaries also holds true for the degree of independence from the state. While particularly

paramilitary troops might emerge from the direct control of statutory forces and with explicit or implicit backing from the government, they might over time evolve into independent actors operating on behalf of their own interests. In Colombia, for instance, paramilitary units – which are often excluded from the NSAG category – initially closely collaborated with statutory forces.⁴⁵ Finally, especially NSAGs that operate based on a primarily political agenda often argue against the legitimacy of the state and perceive themselves as the real – and legitimate – representatives of their constituency (ibid.: 7). Research has demonstrated that many NSAGs have originated from social or political (unarmed) movements and built their constituencies on the basis of a political program that they pursued parallel to armed struggle (Dudouet et al. 2016, 2012a, 2012b). Beyond a military structure, they often possess a political command structure, and their repertoire of interaction with society is all but restricted to coercion. Combatants of armed groups that maintained close relationships with their social constituencies – and at times were even protected and maintained by their social base – therefore reject these strict separation lines, as they overly emphasize their distinctiveness and separation from the community (see Cárdenas Sarrias and Planta 2015, Dudouet et al. 2012a, 2012b). Research from Afghanistan and Lebanon, in turn, has demonstrated that many militants participate in fighting in a seasonal way, moving back and forth from their home to the front or camps (see Zyck 2009 on Afghanistan, and Karamé 2009 on Lebanon), thereby staying in close contact with the civilian population. Finally, depicting ex-combatants as “individualized cases of violence in a normal or peaceful society”, as criticized by Van der Merve and Smith (2006: 9), overlooks the violent dynamics that civil war also has on the non-combatant population – which often by no means remains peaceful.⁴⁶

Being aware of these *caveats* and debates, and in line with the key research focus of this investigation, I suggest a slightly different approach to understanding armed groups. What seems to be missing from all these definitions outlined above is a basic element brought forward by sociology to understand any social group, which is identity. According to Arthur

⁴⁵ According to Arjona and Kalyvas (2006: 29), paramilitaries in Colombia were directly or indirectly linked to the state and its local agents, as they had been historically formed or at least tolerated by the state. However, they did operate outside the formal state structures and, over time, increasingly evolved independently from state support (see Chapter V for more information).

⁴⁶ See Wood (2008) for an in-depth description of the transformation of social processes in civil war.

(2011: 4), a constructivist view argues that identities are constructed by everyday practices, e.g. how we perceive and treat others, as well as through social relationships and the institutions in which we are embedded. In such a view, identities are not static, but adapt to their changing surroundings. They can be understood as “a person’s chosen (and often ascribed) membership of a social group” (Arthur 2011: 4). Identity groups are infinite and can be conceived on a large scale (e.g. gender, ethnic or religion) or in subgroups (e.g. professional women, disabled men, Catholic nationalists). An individual can hold several identities, although some are more salient than others (see Stets and Burke 2000 for a discussion of salience). Those who feel they belong to, or are thought to belong to, the same identity group are assumed to have a common set of characteristics, beliefs, values, practices, narratives and experiences (Arthur 2011: 4).

Pécault (1999) for instance highlights that the armed groups in Colombia fulfill a number of important roles – including the provision of identity, a sense of belonging, protection and social discourse, even for those who do not possess a clear political conviction – all of which are threatened by peace processes and ensuing transition processes from militancy to post-militancy. In the case of Colombia’s guerrilla movements in particular, Castro (2001: 49) has hinted to the extraordinarily strong personal ties and profound solidarity among militants of armed groups resulting from the extreme living conditions marked by “adventure, permanent risk and immediate threat”.

Giddens et al. define a social group as “a collection of people who share a common identity and regularly interact with one another on the basis of shared expectations” (Giddens et al. 2007: 129 in Torjesen 2013: 7). In line with this, and for the purpose of this dissertation, a non-state armed group will therefore be understood as a collection of people who share a common identity and regularly interact with one another on the basis of shared expectations using coercive force as one means to pursue some sort of shared political, economic and military agenda. In social identity theory, acquiring a social group identity requires the individual to undergo processes of self-categorization (as belonging to a social group) and social comparison with other contrasting categories (in-group vs. out-group) within a pre-structured society (see Stets and Burke 2000: 225). For armed groups, forging a strong common identity is functional in as far as research has found that in-group identification leads to greater commitment to the group and less desire to leave the group, even when the group’s status is diminished (ibid.: 226). However, the degree to which armed groups manage to establish and sustain a strong group identity varies, as does the degree to which individual

members identify with their group. To understand these differences, it is worth looking at the different socialization processes leading into, as well as the patterns of disengagement leading back out of armed groups.

According to Wood (2008: 546), the socialization process within a militarized context includes three main components: the adoption of new values and norms, the experience of violence in different forms and the emergence of new social network patterns. New values and norms are adopted through formal and informal elements, including active indoctrination, the sanctioning of deviant behavior, as well as daily routines and the portrayal of superiors and peers as role models. Research in Colombia has confirmed that armed groups subject their members to specific processes of adaptation and transformation (see Gutiérrez Sanín: 2008). Based on in-depth autobiographical interviews with 30 deserted ex-combatants from different groups (United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia, *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*, AUC, the ELN, and the FARC-EP), Cárdenas Sarrias (2005: 256-258) outlines how the way an armed group understands its struggle and the war determines their everyday socialization processes, their social relations within the group, and ultimately the group's overall identity. According to the author, some main differences between the everyday socialization processes within guerrilla and paramilitary groups in Colombia exist in relation to the political education, forms of recreation and remuneration the groups offers combatants. Thus, most guerrilla groups provide political education, complemented by pedagogical recreation and do not remunerate members, making their cohesion more identity-based, while paramilitary units offer little to no political education, but pay combatants for their time, making membership more of a financial decision. These findings were confirmed by research carried out in the framework of the AGC project, where one interviewee, who had first joined the FARC-EP and later was recruited by the paramilitary unit *Libertadores del Sur* (Liberators of the South), reported:

“Well, with the Libertadores, leisure time was bad because it was all about alcohol, betting games, drugs and prostitutes. With FARC on the other hand, leisure time meant going to the classroom, and some groups would prepare music, songs, poems, and theater or dance performances. People within FARC are much more prepared, and they like talking about politics. But within the Libertadores they honestly don’t. [...] This is why I say that the education within FARC was comprehensive, within the Libertadores it wasn’t. Within FARC we also studied the meaning of the anthem. We would learn about the meaning of every single word, everything was explained to us. And well, the anthem of the Libertadores also has a political meaning but people just sang the anthem for the sake of singing” (interview code PSTO46, AGC database).

The second element Wood highlights refers to the experience of violence from different perspectives: as perpetrators, witnesses and victims (2008: 546). Thus, an important element of combatants’ socialization is their exposure to the use of violence in the name of the group, whereby “[t]raining and socialization to the armed group take place both formally, through the immersion experience of ‘boot camp’ [...] and informally, through initiation rituals and hazing”. Exposure to violence is organized in different ways, thereby affecting how combatants identify with their group. As Cárdenas Sarrias (2005: 256-258) points out in Colombia, the subordination or even prohibition of emotions, feelings and any other perceived weakness in their members is one important element uniting all armed actors. However, each group has its own strategies of affective suppression. While guerrilla groups reinforce the revolutionary cause and the ideal of the collective over the individual, paramilitary units have been known to put new recruits through inhumane and cruel initiation rituals to make them more amenable to the group’s atrocities (Cárdenas Sarrias 2005: 256-258).

The third element refers to a change in the combatant’s overall social reference system. Mac Ginty (2010: 210) explains that militants experience the substitution of complex everyday ties and its overlapping networks of family, employment, and community by more one-sided ties with members of their armed group, which becomes their single major (identity) reference point. However, as pointed out earlier, the degree to which armed groups become their members’ prime identity marker varies. While some groups are built around extremely tight in-group and out-group polarization, others are more flexible and allow for the incorporation of various group identities. Thus, membership in the FARC-EP, for instance, was considered a life-long commitment; people wishing to leave the organization were seen

as traitors. Members of the Quintín Lame Armed Movement (*Movimiento Armado Quintín Lame*, MAQL), on the other hand, primarily regarded themselves as part of an ethnic indigenous group and only secondarily as members of an armed group.

While these processes might constitute important elements of a combatant's socialization process, it must be emphasized that individual experiences of militancy vary widely across and even within groups. According to the type of group and the individual's function therein, combatants might maintain more or less contact with the rest of the population. The degree to which relations with the non-combatant population or a wider social group were allowed to continue was at least one important finding from my field research in Colombia. Interviewed ex-combatants displayed a wide variety in terms of isolation from or connectedness with local populations (see AGC project database⁴⁷): While lower-ranking interviewees with predominantly military functions operating in remote areas often had very little contact with civilians and were thus much less exposed to outside social processes and alternative identity options, interviewees with more political or communicational functions at times even continued to live in the city and maintain close contact to their families and other social networks. In the case of the MAQL in particular, interviewees emphasized that their troops were maintained and fed by the local population, whom they in turn provided protection for. In addition, it was mentioned that a flexible and rotating recruitment system allowed militants to spend only a few months within the armed structure before they were sent back home (personal interviews, *Fundación Sol y Tierra* members, March 12, 2016, and March 13, 2016, Popayán).

This again highlights the reciprocity often overlooked in the analysis of armed groups, and the way militancy not only affects participating combatants, but also feeds back into society. In this sense, militancy should not be regarded as completely isolated from other social processes. On the contrary, there are many examples in which groups are very much embedded in local community structures – especially if they consider themselves the legitimate defenders of the community's socio-political grievances and act on its behalf. Drawing from these findings, this thesis understands integration into an armed group as an

⁴⁷ For more details, see Figure 11 in Annex 2.

important, but not exclusive, socialization process combatants go through during their militancy, and which later co-shapes their worldviews, life experiences and ultimately the range of identity markers available to them – even after demobilization.

As socialization processes mark the beginning of acquiring a new group identity, so disengagement from armed militancy can, but must not necessarily, mark the starting point for letting go of this identity, as will be discussed in Chapter VI. According to the Oxford Dictionary, disengagement can be understood as “the action or process of withdrawing from involvement in an activity, situation, or group”.⁴⁸ The modalities of disengagement vary broadly and can be voluntary or involuntary, as well as connected or not to the dissolution of the whole group (individual disengagement vs. collective demobilization). Most literature today focuses on negotiated peace settlements, with collective participation in DDR programs being the most common disengagement pattern. However, such an analysis neglects individual or group desertion (when disengagement is not permissible within a group), consented disengagement, or capture as a forced disengagement pattern. Desertion or permitted disengagement can take place unnoticed by governmental institutions, allowing for a return to legality without participating in official reintegration programs. In Colombia, individual disengagement, mostly non-consentend disengagement in the form of desertion,⁴⁹ constitutes a numerically relevant action and is often referred to as “individual demobilization”. However, in this thesis, the term individual disengagement and/or desertion will be preferred. As highlighted by the Historical Memory Group of the National Centre for Historical Memory (*Grupo Memoria Histórica del Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica*, CNMH 2015: 86), there is a conceptual difference between the terms “demobilization” and “desertion”, with the former referring to the dissolution an armed group, whereas the latter does not necessarily affect the group’s survival. Hence, it has been argued that individual

⁴⁸ Definition available online at: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/disengagement> (accessed February 20, 2017).

⁴⁹ Engagement in most of Colombia’s guerrilla groups is a lifelong commitment (“without exit possibility”, interview code PSTO45, AGC database) that cannot be reversed, under threat of deadly consequences. Especially the FARC-EP has been known for its strict punishment of attempts to desert. However, this does not exclude that exceptions of consented disengagement do exist, e.g. for health reasons, and that other groups have applied more flexible rules for disengagement (interview code BOG13, *ibid.*).

DDR processes are actually better described in terms of “decision, desertion and reintegration” instead of “demobilization, disarmament and reintegration” (ibid.).

To better understand such transition processes on the micro-level, the following sections will first introduce how ex-combatants have been technically identified through DDR programs, suggest an alternative definition, and then briefly present the concept of transition rituals as introduced by Van Gennep and further developed by Turner to reflect on the transition challenges from combatant to ex-combatant.

2.2 DECONSTRUCTING THE MAKING OF (EX-)COMBATANTS

Thinking about ex-combatants in the timeframe of this dissertation (1990-2016), it is hard not to picture ex-combatants as enrolled in a DDR program. The first part of this section will therefore analyze the “making” of ex-combatants through international DDR-programming, and critically engage with a definition of ex-combatants based on the possession of weapons and violent skills. In the second part of this section, I will then suggest understanding the process of becoming an ex-combatant as a social process, defined by disengagement from a specific, armed identity group, followed by the transition towards a new social role.

The line between NSAG members, supporters, and sympathizers is often blurry. According to Schlichte (2012: 722), the notion of membership in the context of NSAGs is less clear-cut than in conventional armed organizations, as “war participation might be extremely temporary, if repetitive. Supporters might help on some occasions but not always. Finally, blurring the line between combatants and non-combatants is a fundamental strategic element of any non-state armed faction.” Should peace negotiations lead to formal DDR processes, for instance, NSAGs might have strategic motivations to inflate or hide the number of their members, e.g. in order to elevate their bargaining power or receive more reintegration benefits on the one hand, or to be able to retain a number of troops active as protection mechanisms on the other (Dudouet et al. 2012a, 2012b). As NSGAs usually do not operate with official registration mechanisms, proof of (former) membership in a non-state armed group is not straightforward. As has been noted by Gutiérrez Sanín (2008: 7), even “in the midst of a demobilization process, it is difficult to differentiate combatants from other categories (friends, old-time supporters, opportunist, supporters, etc.)” As a result, DDR programs have used different technical selection criteria to identify and register NSAG combatants, including

the possession of weapon(s), arms management skills and specific insider knowledge, e.g. on troop movements, combat sites, and command structures.⁵⁰ Researchers have highlighted the political dimension of such technical selection criteria, as they ultimately define who will be entitled to (economic) reintegration benefits and are therefore strongly linked to the conflict economy. Torjesen (2013: 6), for instance, highlights how low-level combatants may become an “important political bargaining chip” for top and mid-level leaders fighting over positions and prestige in their post-militancy future. However, this also implies certain risks for individual combatants who want to break with their former network, as some of their former leaders will be inclined to keep their followers together for their own power-political advantage.

There is an increasing awareness among policymakers that, paradoxically, DDR programs might lead to the mobilization – instead of demobilization – into NSAGs because of the reintegration benefits offered. If criteria are too weakly defined and permit an easy reporting as combatants, the monetary benefit offered by participation in DDR might contribute to the making of combatants (for an in-depth discussion see Munive and Jakobsen 2012). However, it is also true that former combatants in some instances choose not to be included in official registration lists because of the social stigma or security risks associated with being identified as a former fighter. In addition, former combatants that had escaped their group by desertion might not wish to reconnect (see Tarnaala 2016). On the other hand, identification criteria have also been the subject of criticism for being too restrictive and excluding a significant number of potential beneficiaries. They rest on two basic assumptions: that (ex-)combatants possess firstly a set of particular skills (most importantly arms management) and secondly, war-related contacts and networks (within their respective former non-state armed group).

The narrow focus on weapons management skills leads to the neglect of NSAG members who did not serve in combat but in support functions, or did not possess their own weapons – especially women and child soldiers.⁵¹ In addition, it sidelines ex-combatants who

⁵⁰ See for instance Zyck (2009) on Afghanistan for an illustration of such selection processes.

⁵¹ Research on female combatants and their faith in DDR programs (for an overview see for instance Tarnaala 2016, Ollek 2007) has not only highlighted the different treatment of male and female

do not register for official programs, e.g. for security reasons, to avoid stigmatization, or because they are purposefully excluded from registration by their (former) superiors. Most importantly, it opens the door to a determinist image of ex-combatants as inherently violent, such as highlighted by Dzinesa (2008: 15): “by their very nature, ex-combatants possess certain qualities that predispose them to various forms of violence, including criminal and domestic violence, if they are unsuccessfully reintegrated.” Moreover, the innate nature of criteria based on violence-related skills and networks has been questioned, too. In the context of Liberia, Kaihkö (2014) questions the dichotomy between ex-combatants and non-ex-combatants, arguing that the three criteria most often associated with ex-combatants as a risk group – their readiness to employ violence, their reputation that attracts possible mobilizers and their access to weapons – are only met by a minority of ex-combatants in Liberia and, in addition, are valid for many non-ex-combatants, too. In a similar vein, research on former child soldiers in Uganda has stressed that ex-combatants are not more aggressive than non-combatant population segments in the post-conflict situation (see Blattman and Annan 2009: 113-117). Former combatants interviewed for this study in Colombia even strongly questioned whether the values of society at large could live up to their own standards, as precisely the values acquired in militancy, such as solidarity and respect, were deemed lacking in Colombian society (personal interviews, *Corporación ANDES* member, May 18, 2012, Bogotáⁱ, and *Red de Reporteros*⁵² member, May 10, 2012, Bogotáⁱⁱ).

combatants in reintegration programs, but also the different perceptions of male and female combatants upon their return to their communities, that are at times part of a larger “gender backlash” in post-agreement societies (see Barth 2002). In this context, female ex-combatants were accused of having abandoned their family more often than their male comrades, and their participation in violence was perceived as even more deviant than that of male combatants, which significantly hampered their reintegration process (see Luciak 2008: 251, Londoño and Nieto 2006: 154-161, Farr 2003: 7). With regard to child soldiers, they often face serious trauma, might suffer from drug dependencies, a lack of formal education, and have adopted new behaviors not accepted by their home communities. In addition, they have often been separated from their families (Galvanek 2008: 12). Taken together, this creates considerable challenges for their return to their families. In some instances, there is no family the children could return to any more. As a result, children’s reintegration is often managed by specialized entities.

⁵² The full name of this initiative is *Red de Reporteros de Convivencia* (Reporters’ Network for Peaceful Coexistence), henceforth referred to as *Red de Reporteros*.

As a result, researchers have highlighted the problematic stereotype “that ex-combatants are more prone to and more inclined towards criminality than others” (Van der Merve and Smith 2006: 9) and criticized naturalistic assumptions. Against such a background, Jensen and Stepputat (2001) even wonder whether it makes sense at all to distinguish between ex-combatants and non-ex-combatants, i.e. the assumedly civilian population. Here, it is argued that, while acknowledging the oftenly blurred lines between both categories, it does make sense to treat ex-combatants as a distinct population segment, as their very status as former war participants exposes them to specific challenges, including stigmatization. This was spelled out most clearly by one research respondent in Colombia, who asserted:

“I have to carry the burden of my past, of what I was. I was a guerrillero [guerilla fighter], I was a combatant. And this past is still alive, because if society learns who I was, they will treat me accordingly. Hence, the past keeps on being the present. For many sectors of society I keep on being a guerrillero, some approve of this, others don't. A large part of society does not approve of this and they stigmatize the ex-combatants” (personal interview, PAPDRB staff, May 11, 2012, Bogotá).

Hence, what could a more generic definition of (ex-)combatants look like, taking into account the heterogeneity⁵³ between groups (in terms of objectives and political orientation), the diversity of functions within groups (elite combat troops, civilian support activities, liaison officers etc.), the various position within a group's hierarchy (rank-and-file soldiers, middle-rank commanders, top-leaders), as well as the individual personal background of each ex-combatant with regards to education and professional background, exposure to violence (both as perpetrator and victim) as well as gender and age?⁵⁴

⁵³ See Van der Merve and Smith (2006: 10) for an in-depth discussion of the heterogeneity of ex-combatants' profiles, and Perrot (2012: 182) for an illustration of the political economy of labeling different ex-combatant segments.

⁵⁴ By now, the participation of women and girls in armed groups has been well-documented, demonstrating that they comprise on average 10%-30% of armed opposition groups, and in some cases even constitute up to 40%-50% of fighting forces (Dudouet et al. 2012a, 2012b, Dietrich Ortega 2009, Mazurana 2004). Research on women as agents of political violence has started to investigate the role of women within these movements and their identity as fighters (see Pankhurst 2008, Hauge and Thoresen 2007, Cockburn 2004, Meintjes et al. 2001). The bulk of research has focused on Latin

In this dissertation, the terms “ex-combatant/militant” or “former combatant/militant” will be used as synonyms for former members of a non-state armed group, regardless of their function within that group. This definition will also include people who are self-declared members of such groups and not necessarily enrolled in or identified by a formal DDR process or program (or what has been termed “self-integrated” by Torjesen 2013: 4).

Such a broad definition has two advantages: It not only includes people involved in armed activities, but also all those who (exclusively) fulfilled civilian tasks such as food provision, intelligence service or cooking in the service of the armed cause. It also includes all those who were not part of an official reintegration program, and might therefore not be officially registered as an ex-combatant. In many contexts, and this is particularly true in Colombia, where post-militancy trajectories have always taken place in a difficult security situation of ongoing war, former combatants prefer not to appear in official demobilization lists in order to minimize their security risks or avoid stigmatization – even if this means not accessing any official reintegration support (see Londoño and Nieto 2006: 163-166).⁵⁵

Contrary to definitions that focus on (ex-)combatants’ capacities and readiness to use violence, this dissertation highlights two elements for understanding the social processes of becoming a combatant, and then an ex-combatant. The first one relates to a person’s socialization process within an armed group, and the second relates to his or her experience of disengagement from this group and the subsequent transition process towards a new position in society, which the following section will turn to.

America’s guerrilla movements (see Herrera and Porch 2008, Londoño and Nieto 2006, Ibáñez 2005) and on civil wars in Africa (see Carlson and Mazurana 2004). Similarly, there is extensive literature on child soldiers and children associated with fighting forces, with many case studies covering recruitment processes and reintegration challenges of former child soldiers on the African continent (see Özerdem and Podder 2011, Gates and Reich 2010, Honwana 2007, Singer 2006, Brett and Specht 2004), including a number of autobiographic books (e.g. Jal 2010, Beah 2007 or Keitetsi 2003).

⁵⁵ Actually, about 15% of registered demobilized people in Colombia are not part of the ACR’s reintegration roadmap, see footnote 192.

2.3 REINTEGRATION OR POST-MILITANCY LIFE TRAJECTORIES

Based on their own experience as former guerrilla militants, Patiño et al. (2012: 43) highlight the multifaceted character of the transition process from militancy to civilian life:

“The transformation of an individual insurgent in the wake of a peace process involves multiple transitions from illegality to legality, from clandestine to open relations, from collective life to a life of individual responsibilities, from military to civilian life, from a nomadic to a sedentary life.”

This complex process is most commonly referred to in both the academic and policy-orientated literature as “reintegration”. Few definitions of reintegration in the context of DDR refer to it as an abstract concept. As highlighted by Sprenkels (2014b: 3), most literature on DDR is written in a guidebook or lessons-learned format and rests on a de- and prescriptive, rather than analytical approach. In turn, there is a plethora of over-detailed descriptions of what reintegration might entail, including actors (ranging from ex-combatants, to their dependents, the local community or displaced people), elements (economic, social, political, at times also legal or psychological), and goals (conversion of military to civilian identities, community acceptance, security and stability). The Collins Dictionary of Sociology (Jary and Jary 1991: 315) defines integration quite simply as “the extent to which an individual experiences a sense of belonging to a social group or collectivity by virtue of sharing its norms, values, beliefs etc.” Reintegration would then mean that an individual re-connects with this sense of belonging to society after a sort of militant hiatus. However, the term “reintegration” has been questioned from different sides and with opposing arguments for being misleading. On the one hand, former combatants often stress that there is no need for them to reintegrate into a society they had not only never ceased to be a part of, but had actively collaborated with, defended and protected (see Dudouet et al. 2012b: 49). On the other hand, some academic studies have precisely argued for the contrary. While reintegration suggests that ex-combatants at one moment in time were integrated in a society, it has been argued that some ex-combatants’ militant experience cover such a long time span, especially when they joined the group as minors (which is often the case in Colombia), that they were never really integrated in an unarmed environment to begin with. In addition, in many contexts, NSAGs do mainly recruit – or are voluntarily joined by – individuals who are already excluded and marginalized. In this context, reintegration might mean nothing more

than turning back to the pre-militancy situation of social exclusion and poverty (see McMullin 2013, Gear 2004). Finally, many ex-combatants do not reintegrate back into their home communities anyways – as has often been assumed – but settle elsewhere. Reasons for this are manifold. Ex-combatants might simply not be able to return to a home destroyed by internal displacement and destruction. They might find it more convenient (or might be directed to) to stay closer to certain areas, mainly urban centers, which offer better job opportunities or social assistance such as reintegration benefits. Some may also move to a distinctly rural or urban host community or even migrate out of the country (see Torjesen 2013). Finally, security concerns might influence their decision not to reintegrate back home (see Nussio 2011 for an in-depth discussion of security concerns).

As a result of these *caveats*, scholars have started to suggest a range of alternative terminologies, including “socio-economic facilitation” (Dudouet et al. 2012a, 2012b), “rehabilitation” (De Vries and Wiegink 2011), “assimilation” (Nilsson 2005, see also Bowd and Özerdem 2013), “reconversion” (Sprenkels 2014a) or “social reintegration” (Özerdem 2012) – approaches that place relationships with family and community, job opportunities and civic responsibilities center stage in ex-combatants’ reintegration processes. However, none of these terms has so far taken hold in the literature or been able to replace the reintegration terminology. In Colombia, the peace agreements with various guerrilla organizations that demobilized in the early 1990s used the term “re-encounter” (*reencuentro*) to refer to the reintegration phase (following an initial transition phase and followed itself by an evaluation phase) of former combatants, but also to a larger process of mutual rapprochement between former members of guerrilla groups, the receiving community and society at large.⁵⁶ As it best reflects the language of local actors, I will use the term “re-encounter” for the purpose of this study to emphasize the process of mutual rapprochement and refer to the understanding of peacebuilding as the (re)building of relationships (see 2.4).

I will use the term “post-militancy trajectories” (see Torjesen 2013, Duclos 2012) to refer to individual or collective pathways after disengagement in order to highlight the variety of

⁵⁶ See for instance peace accords with the MAQL, the Popular Liberation Army (*Ejército Popular de Liberación*, EPL), and the Revolutionary Workers’ Party (*Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores*, PRT) in Villaraga Sarmiento (2009: 173, 186, 203).

individual life paths and career choices after membership in an armed group and distinct organizational processes, independent from participation in formal DDR-programming.

The adjective “post-militancy” was chosen, because it emphasizes the individual transition from militancy in an armed group to post-militancy or “civilian life” as highlighted by former combatants themselves (see further below). This makes it better suited than the often-used labels “post-conflict”⁵⁷ or “post-agreement” to shift focus away from the structural macro-conditions of transition (conflict dynamics) towards the micro- and meso-level of analysis, and places the individual and collective experiences of ex-combatants as well as their attitudes and behaviors center stage (see also Torjesen 2013). In addition, the notion of post-militancy (instead of post-conflict or post-war) is of particular relevance in the Colombian context, where post-militancy life trajectories have until now, and despite the signature of a number of peace agreements with different armed groups, developed in the context of ongoing civil war. According to Torjesen (2013: 4), the notion of trajectories in turn captures the diversity of “movements that combatants undertake as they depart from an armed group”, which are not necessarily linear and basic (e.g. from disengagement to returning to home community) but can be much more complex and cyclic, especially in cases when former combatants experience re-recruitment.

Finally, a last useful element to analyze transition processes from militancy to post-militancy or civilian life in this thesis is taken from Van Gennep’s concept of *rites de passage*, which illustrates the process of oscillating between the past and the future, and the need for mutual – not one-sided – adaptation. Van Gennep (1981) originally introduced the idea of *rites de passage* as early as 1909 to describe how an individual’s shift from one clearly defined personal situation or social status to another is facilitated with rituals. Developing this work further, Turner (1967) then elaborated in more detail on the challenges of the grey zone between one situation and another. This phase, where the individual is accommodating itself to a new situation or status known as “liminality”, is characterized by moments of uncertainty, in which ordinary economic or legal rules do not apply, and in which the person under transition is being introduced to or socialized in its future new position in

⁵⁷ For an in-depth discussion on the contested notion of “post-conflict”, see Muggah 2005.

society. Karl (2015) for instance took up these ideas in her research on forced disappearance and victimhood in Mexico to describe a situation in which family members of disappeared people remain caught in a transitional state of liminality as their suffering continued being denied. In a similar vein, the concept of *rites de passage* can serve to analyze the situation of many ex-combatants who remain in a social grey area, an in-between termed by Turner (1967) as “betwixt and between”, throughout the transition from military to civilian life. No longer combatants, they are not yet fully accepted members of non-combatant society and do not only remain in a state of legal limbo, not knowing what judicial consequences their militant activities will bring, but also a social limbo, characterized by the uncertainty of how they will be received by the community. One interviewee in Colombia highlighted how participation in the reintegration scheme was regarded as an uncomfortable transition phase, something many ex-combatants wanted to simply get over with:

“A large part of society does not approve of this, they stigmatize the ex-combatants so you have to mimic society, you have to mask your past so that they never find out that you have been an ex-combatant ‘I hope this whole reintegration thing is over quickly so that nobody finds out’, that’s what many ex-combatants think” (personal interview, PAPDRB staff, May 11, 2012, Bogotá).

However, and as illustrated by Patiño et al. (2012: 44), the uncertainty linked to the transition process does not necessarily stop with the finalization of one’s “reintegration roadmap” but can continue well into civilian life, as: “[C]ivilian life is a field of uncertainties that lacks the well-defined boundaries of the battlefield and in which the notion of friends and enemies becomes less precise and relationships more unstable.”

However, it is not only the individual who must undergo a transition process. Taking up Van Gennep’s concept of *rites de passage*, Welzer (1997: 8) criticized that most research on biographical transition phases focuses on individual experiences in transition processes, thereby neglecting the surrounding community. This is also true for most DDR-programming, which has for a long time neglected the fact that the receiving community will also necessarily undergo some sort of transformation or transition in the process of adjusting its social order and routines to those in their midst attempting reintegration. The reluctance of the non-combatant society to undergo such a transitional process was also critically reflected upon throughout the interviews in Colombia. As one staff member of an NGO involved in

promoting ex-combatants' conflict resolution abilities highlighted: "I think that many people do not really want peace because it implies a personal contribution and a whole process of accommodation and change. That's why many people prefer the combatants stay in the mountains" (personal interview, *Centro Mundial* staff, May 28, 2012, Bogotá).

Rather than highlighting the need for a one-sided transformation of the ex-combatant population, it is therefore necessary to think of a transition process from armed to unarmed life that requires adaption or (identity) accommodation both from the ex-combatant and the surrounding community.

Having discussed the main terms used in international reintegration discourse and practice, as well as how they will be understood in this thesis, and where necessary having suggested alternative terminologies, this chapter concludes by introducing the notion of peacebuilding. Starting with a brief introduction of the emergence and the development, as well as the criticism of peacebuilding as an international concept and practice, the following section then outlines how peacebuilding will be understood in this thesis, namely in terms of relationship (re)building.

2.4 PEACE AND PEACEBUILDING AS A CONCEPT AND PRACTICE

Within a globalized world, and with most internal armed conflicts displaying a fair amount of international intervention, peacebuilding has come to be mainly understood as international intervention to (ideally) support stability and long-term peace. However, peace as the final objective of peacebuilding intervention is itself a contested notion and not equally defined – neither by the manifold local, national and international actors on the ground, nor by peace and conflict scholars. The field has been dominated by the discussion between proponents of a narrow, security-related understanding of "negative" peace as the absence of physical violence and a broader understanding of "positive" peace as the absence of direct, cultural and structural violence as proposed by Galtung (1971 see Schlotter and Wisotzki 2011: 23-25 and Bonnacker 2011: 53-60 for a discussion of the scholarly debate on peace as theoretical concept and the advantages and disadvantages of a narrower or broader definition). As wider notions of peace are admittedly difficult to realize, proponents of this approach usually regard peace rather as a process than an end result (Fielzmaier et al. 2006: 58).

In the context of this thesis, this scholarly debate can also be seen reflected in the development of Colombia's peace movement. To begin with, research by Colombian anthropologist Vera Grabe (2012) points to the lack of a unifying idea of what peace and hence peacebuilding entails. On the one hand, a narrow understanding has long focused on peace as the political solution to armed conflict, either exclusively driven by the fighting elites (government and armed actors) or actively supported by civil-society initiatives. In Colombia, however, this approach fell increasingly subject to question by civil-society organizations after the Cagúan peace negotiations (1998-2002) broke down, leaving the peace movement in a deep crisis and highlighting the need to broaden the scope of peace processes from many different angles beyond political negotiations. Since then, peace has become increasingly discussed in broader terms referring to Galtung's notion of positive peace. Grabe (*ibid.*, 16-39) went on to outline the various angles from which Colombian actors addressed such a broad peace agenda, and the implications this had for peacebuilding efforts. Thus, there was a focus for instance on sub-national approaches ("peace from the territories") and participatory approaches ("peace as social inclusion"), and a close tie between the notion of peace and a development agenda ("peace as development, democracy and human rights"). Debate in Colombia on whether peacebuilding should start from above or below (top-down vs. bottom-up), and whether the end to armed violence is a precondition for local initiatives or can be prepared by them in the midst of ongoing conflict (sequencing), had a direct effect on the strategies peacebuilding actors selected.

Grabe (2014: 9) further describes two different approaches Colombian peacebuilding actors take towards ex-combatants with regard to reconciliation projects. While some regard reconciliation as a long-term goal that can only be achieved after the end of armed conflict, others see it as a condition for peace that should be aimed for in the midst of conflict. As a result of these different conceptualizations, the latter sector encourages reconciliation projects that integrate ex-combatants and allow for conflict transformation at a local level. The former sector, in turn, gives priority to working with the victims of violence and questions working with ex-combatants, who are perceived to benefit from public resources that should instead be reserved for victim reparation (see also CNMH 2015: 208). This brief illustration from Colombia not only illuminates different understandings of the notion of peace, it also closely reflects international discourse on peacebuilding as a concept and practice. A contested buzzword in current conflict resolution discourse and literature, both top-down/internationally driven and bottom-up/civil-society driven peacebuilding has been the subject of numerous

case studies, lessons-learned reports, conferences, monographs and edited volumes, and is dealt with in-depth by entire peer-reviewed journals (e.g. *Peacebuilding*, *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*, *International Peacekeeping*). While policy and practice-oriented research has aimed to improve peacebuilding practice on various levels, critical reviews question the very assumptions of international intervention for building “liberal peace” (see Richmond 2010, MacGinty and Richmond 2009, Paris 2004). Hence, analyzing ex-combatant organizations and their potential contribution to peacebuilding requires an in-depth understanding of what peacebuilding entails and how it will be understood in the context of this thesis. Section 2.4.1 therefore explores the origin of peacebuilding as an international intervention practice, situates former combatants’ reintegration within the peacebuilding arena and engages with a number of principled problems identified in critical research on peacebuilding. Section 2.4.2 then positions the understanding of peacebuilding for this research, namely as the process of (re)building relationships.

2.4.1 SITUATING (DD)REINTEGRATION WITHIN THE PEACEBUILDING DEBATE

The term “peacebuilding” was first introduced by peace researcher Johan Galtung in the early 1970s, as opposed and complementary to peacekeeping and peacemaking. Criticizing the limits of (international) peacekeeping and peacemaking (establishing only negative peace), Galtung called for “associative peacebuilding” to create permanent structures for positive peace both between and within states, an idea today discussed most prominently under the terms “peace infrastructures” or “infrastructures for peace”.⁵⁸ Galtung’s idea of peacebuilding coined in his essay “Three Approaches to Peace: Peacekeeping, Peacemaking, and Peacebuilding” (1976) was then adopted by the international community in the early 1990s. At that time, the emerging post-Cold War era and the unblocking of the Security Council happened simultaneously with a number of intra-state conflicts that caught international attention. The genocide in Rwanda at the latest highlighted the international community’s

⁵⁸ For an in-depth discussion of the concept and its practical implementation, see Giessmann 2016 and Unger et al. 2013. The notion of negative and positive peace is one of the most well known concepts developed by Galtung, next to his distinction between direct, cultural and structural violence.

inability to prevent or at least properly react to mass murder, opening the door for an increase in international intervention.⁵⁹ In this context, the triangle of peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding was adopted by the international community as a response towards violent intra-state conflict and its consequences. While peacekeeping (encompassing the deployment of multinational troops to ensure peace by physically separating conflict actors or monitoring ceasefire agreements) and peacemaking (aimed at immediately ending ongoing violence with both civilian and military instruments such as mediation, sanctions or military intervention) primarily focus on establishing negative peace, or the absence of direct violence in the short-term, peacebuilding is meant to address the root causes and (long-term) consequences of war – i.e. destroyed infrastructure, food and health emergencies, weak state performance, the break-down of trust in norms and institutions, the erosion of social capital, unemployment and pervasive insecurity due to (transnational) criminal activities and armed violence – and to contribute thus to positive peace (Schneckener 2005). In this sense, positive peace is understood beyond the silencing of weapons as the reconciliation of popular divides.

In 1992, peacebuilding was prominently introduced in Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali's "Agenda for Peace"⁶⁰ (UNSG 1992) as a post-conflict "action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict" (UNPSO 2010: 47). According to the Conceptual Basis for Peacebuilding for the UN System adopted by the Secretary-General's Policy Committee in May 2007 (ibid.: 5), peacebuilding:

⁵⁹ Until 1990, the UN Security Council had authorized 15 peacekeeping missions in four decades. It authorized the exact same number in only the following four years (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2004).

⁶⁰ To be further developed in the "Supplement to an Agenda for Peace" (UNSG 1995) and the "Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operation", or the Brahimi Report (2000).

“...involves a range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundations for sustainable peace and development. Peacebuilding strategies must be coherent and tailored to the specific needs of the country concerned, based on national ownership, and should comprise a carefully prioritized, sequenced, and therefore relatively narrow set of activities aimed at achieving the above objectives.”

Peacebuilding was thus conceived as post-conflict intervention. Such a post-conflict understanding of peacebuilding was politically motivated, as a number of developing countries felt that a broader mandate for peacebuilding, including for instance preventive intervention, could threaten their national sovereignty (Schneckener 2005). However, the Secretary-General modified this position in the 1995 “Supplement to an Agenda for Peace”, where it was suggested that peacebuilding could also be preventive. Only five years later, the Secretary-General Kofi Annans’ report “We the Peoples. The Role of the United Nations in the 21st Century” further questioned the international community’s non-intervention in situations of gross and systematic human rights violations. One year later, the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty established by the Canadian government coined the term “responsibility to protect”, which further enshrined the international community’s responsibility to act preventively, including by military intervention (International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty 2001, Menzel 2008).

With regard to the elements of peacebuilding, scholars usually highlight four crucial areas of intervention, including a political (e.g. civil administration and institution building, democracy and rule of law, free and fair elections, constitutional reform, human rights), economic (e.g. economic rehabilitation, rebuilding of infrastructure, transformation of war to peace economies), psychosocial (e.g. rehabilitation of refugees and victims, reconciliation projects, dealing with the past and transitional justice) and a security dimension (e.g. security sector reform, justice reform and crime control, small arms control, conversion control, and DDR) (see Schneckener 2005).

In the context of this dissertation, DDR as one element of the security dimension to peacebuilding is of particular interest, as such programs have been increasingly responsible for channeling ex-combatants’ life after militancy. The importance of DDR as a standard intervention tool is not only demonstrated by its widespread practical implementation involving international agencies as well as national governments and (inter)national and local NGOs. It is also demonstrated in the bulk of literature and number of policy-oriented and

academic events organized on this topic, as well as in the emergence of specialized analysis centers and research initiatives on DDR-programs, such as the “International Research Group on Reintegration” at the University of Troms’ Centre for Peace Studies.⁶¹ Such research has also called for a more holistic view on war-to-peace transitions that should not only focus on the transformation of rebel structures, but also include reforms on the side of the state. Banholzer (2014: 1) for instance argues that DDR – as a process focusing on improving the situation of individual ex-combatants – must be accompanied by major reforms to improve the overall economic or political context. According to her, “[a] wider recovery strategy that embeds DDR in a multi-dimensional peacebuilding framework is therefore essential for success”. In a similar vein, Dudouet et al. (2012a) have suggested the term “security transition processes” to emphasize that post-conflict peacebuilding should not be restricted to a technical process of DDR, but also contain elements of security sector reform, transition or developmental⁶² measures on the side of the state, such as vetting or the integration of former rebels into statutory forces.

As a side-note, it is worth mentioning here that Colombia might be regarded as a poor example for reforms in the security sector. So far, negotiation and reintegration processes have always taken place in the midst of ongoing war, a situation that has hampered any major discussion of army downsizing⁶³ or reform. Historically, none of the formerly demobilized guerrilla or paramilitary forces have ever collectively joined, or even aimed at joining, armed forces as part of a peace deal, thereby becoming part of the security structure. The ongoing conflict neither allowed for a discussion on substantial security sector reform, nor did it seem to be feasible to systematically incorporate guerrilla segments⁶⁴ into national security

⁶¹ For more information, consult the center’s website at: <http://site.uit.no/irgr/> (accessed February 20, 2017).

⁶² In the context of South Sudan, Deng Deng (2012) for instance suggests that the term “development” is more appropriate, as security policies and institutions have to be created from scratch in a new state.

⁶³ As reported by the press, in the last 15 years the Colombian army has steadily grown in numbers. Today, army and national police make up for approximately 500,000 members and more than 100 counter-insurgency units of 500 soldiers each, making the Colombian military forces the second biggest security force in Latin America after Brazil (Lindsay-Poland and Tickner 2016).

⁶⁴ As reported by Henao (1997: 131), some former combatants of the guerrilla organizations that demobilized in the early 1990s individually joined the armed forces, while others continued to serve

institutions, which would then combat their still active former insurgency allies. In the case of paramilitary forces, in turn, their history of human rights abuses, their heavy involvement in drug-trafficking as well as their close involvement with the state's statutory forces made an official reintegration into the military inconceivable, as it would have negatively affected the statutory forces' legitimacy (see FIP 2005c: 2, Nussio and Howe 2012). Regarding the negotiation process with the FARC-EP, the peace accord continues this tradition. A debate over the possible incorporation of former FARC-EP combatants into a would-be rural police force in the post-conflict phase was ongoing during the time of research, but was ultimately not taken up in the peace agreement (see Valero 2015, see also 8.2). Considering the broad range of intervention areas, peacebuilding has not remained restricted to the field of conflict resolution or prevention, but has also entered and become mainstreamed in the broader field of international development cooperation. In the context of increasing funding opportunities for peacebuilding, a rising number of actors are communicating, coordinating and collaborating (and more often than not competing for their position) in the peacebuilding field. They have rightfully pointed to a number of real advances, including the development of a conceptual and methodological basis, the increasing variety and networking of actors aware of and engaged in peacebuilding around the globe, and the increasing efforts in capacity building and lobbying for peacebuilding, to name just a few (see Fisher and Zimina 2009 for an in-depth discussion). At the same time, however, many pitfalls and unresolved challenges remain. While peacebuilding has become accepted as the "most comprehensive label for working towards sustainable and just peace" (Ropers 2013: 2), international peacebuilding intervention has largely failed to produce the expected results both in terms of providing security and stability and furthering democratization (see Chojnacki and Menzel 2011, Zürcher 2010). An extensive scholarly, liberal peace discussion – complemented by self-critical assessments from the peacebuilding community (e.g. Fisher and Zimina 2009 or Schmelzle and Fischer 2009) – has evolved around what has come to be called state-centered, neo-liberal and technocratic peacebuilding (see Chandler 2010, Richmond 2010, Paris 2004 and 2010, Paris and Sisk 2009, and Darby and Mac Ginty 2008; for a summary on the

as security guards for their former leaders.

discussion of the contested correlations between liberal democratic regimes and peace, see Gleis 2001).

Two levels of criticism towards peacebuilding can be broadly differentiated. A first level of criticism addresses the inefficiency of international peacebuilding. A number of policy recommendations and lessons learned have been gathered to improve current peacebuilding practice. They call for more coordination among different donors and peacebuilding tracks, better trainings for practitioners, better analysis and evaluation tools and/or improved intervention designs, e.g. with regards to sequencing (see Barnett 2006 and Paris 2004 for a discussion of the institutionalization-before-liberalization debate). By focusing very much on what international third parties should do to improve peacebuilding's effectiveness and impact, these recommendations assume that the failure of peacebuilding is essentially the fault of external intervention, and thereby reduce local agents to passive aid recipients (see Chojnacki and Menzel 2011: 517, see Pouligny 2004 for an in-depth reflection on the interactions between peace operations, their staff, and the local population).

Another set of criticism is more substantive in nature, as it questions the underlying assumptions of peacebuilding and, taken to its extreme, calls for a radical break with current peacebuilding practice and thinking (see Duffield 2007). This set of criticism is for instance concerned with questions such as: "What if there are serious flaws in the whole process and vision, assumptions and values? What if there are contradictions at the heart of peacebuilding?" (Fisher and Zimina 2009). Essentially, criticism is directed at four assumptions. First of all, the unquestionable legitimacy of peacebuilding based on good intentions (and not on self-interest and geostrategic security considerations of Western donor states) is re-examined. Secondly, it questions the understanding of peacebuilding as inherently externally driven, whereby the international community intervenes – metaphorically spoken – as a doctor would for the "sick" or conflict-affected society (Daxner et al. 2010). Next, it questions the idea that peacebuilding is both feasible and measurable, highlighting that as of today, no solid empirical knowledge is available to test whether peacebuilding really has the impact it is claiming to make (Menzel 2008, Schneckener 2005). Finally, criticism has been directed against the lack of terminological clarity about the end goal of peacebuilding – peace – which is not equally understood and defined (or defined at all) by the manifold actors intervening in its favor (see Chojnacki and Menzel 2011). In search for a valid counter-concept to internationally led peacebuilding as described here, researchers and practitioners are therefore turning to alternative conceptualizations, such as the understanding of

peacebuilding as relationship (re)building developed by John Paul Lederach in the late 1990s (see Salter and Yousuf 2016 for a recent discussion of Lederach's approach from a practitioner's perspective).

2.4.2 A CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION PERSPECTIVE: PEACEBUILDING AS RELATIONSHIP (RE)BUILDING

With the increasing criticism of internationally led, top-down peacebuilding, a number of alternative concepts have made their way into scholarly debate and practitioners' handbooks. One of the most referenced pioneers for conceptualizing peacebuilding is scholar-practitioner John Paul Lederach. In his seminal book "Building Peace. Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies" (1997), Lederach applied a conflict transformation perspective to peacebuilding understood as "a comprehensive concept that encompasses, generates, and sustains the full array of processes, approaches, and stages needed to transform conflict toward more sustainable, peaceful relationships" (Lederach 1997: 20).

Four elements deserve to be highlighted. First of all, Lederach's approach to peacebuilding combines work on the structural conditions (or "root causes") of conflict, with a focus on relationship building. For Lederach, peacebuilding needs an integral approach that reconciles micro-level solutions for immediate issues with the tackling of large-scale structural concerns. Mechanical or technical solutions must be replaced by approaches that place the relations between different societal groups center stage. Consequently, Lederach's approach to peacebuilding draws attention away from resolving singular issues and redirects the focus toward the rebuilding of "relationships of the involved parties, with all that the term encompasses at the psychological, spiritual, social, economic, political and military levels" (ibid.: 8).

Secondly, Lederach's approach is driven by the idea that society at all levels must be engaged in peacebuilding – leaving this task not only to those at the top. Such a multi-track approach to peacebuilding focuses on the interlinkages between the top-leadership level (track 1), middle-out (track 2) and bottom-up or grassroots (track 3) actors. Track one represents a set of highly visible leaders of conflict parties who are, for instance, involved in peace negotiations. Recognized opinion leaders who are "likely to know and be known by the top-level leadership, yet they have significant connections to the broader context and the constituency that the top leaders claim to represent" (ibid.: 41) operate on track two. On the

basis of their capacity to “listen down and speak [...] up” (Salter and Yousuf 2016), they serve as a bridge between the top and the bottom. Level three leaders, finally, operate at the grassroots level based on their expert knowledge of the local situation. The major challenge at this level, for Lederach, constitutes the “survival mode” of many people “in which meeting the basic human needs of food, shelter, and safety is a daily struggle. Although unresolved human conflict is a central cause for their suffering, efforts directed at peace and conflict resolution can easily be seen as an unaffordable luxury” (Lederach 1997: 52). Ideally, actors on all three levels are linked horizontally to each in order to connect needs and concerns of the basis with decision making at the leadership level. In addition, connections that cut across the conflict divide and vertically connect social groups from both sides of the conflict are also regarded as essential. While the concept of multi-track peacebuilding with its horizontal and vertical dimension has entered standard peacebuilding jargon, it has also been complemented and adapted by more recent research. A recent Accord Insight series by the British NGO Concilitaion Resources, for instance, suggests understanding horizontal peacebuilding as peacebuilding among citizens, and vertical peacebuilding rather as the restoration of relationships and trust between citizens and the state (Salter and Yousuf 2016).

Next to broadening the perspective on the actors of peacebuilding, Lederach also broadens the timeframe of peacebuilding, which he understands as a long-term task relevant to all conflict stages, objecting to the understanding of peacebuilding as a post-war intervention tool only. However, this does not mean that peacebuilding is not limited to the post-accord period. On the contrary, Lederach (1999: 33) asserts that a peace accord or the end of hostilities does not present a closure, but “nothing more than opening a door into a whole labyrinth of rooms that invite us to continue in the process of redefining our relationships.”

Finally, a central aspect of Lederach’s peacebuilding concept emphasizes the reliance on local resources instead of outsider intervention. Lederach (1995: 212) formulated in his own words that:

“Conflict transformation must actively envision, include, respect and promote the human and cultural resources from within a given setting. This involves a new set of lenses through which we do not primarily ‘see’ the setting and the people in it as the ‘problem’ and the outside as the ‘answer’. Rather, we understand the long-term goal of trsansformation as validating and building on people and resources within the setting.”

While local approaches to peacebuilding have existed for a long time, they have now entered the focus of academic and policy interest, which is starting to envision peacebuilding less as an external intervention but rather as an interactive process between various actors. Zürcher for instance defines peacebuilding as a social process formed by the interaction between peacebuilders and local elites (Zürcher 2010: 20).⁶⁵ While Zürcher focuses here on local elites, a broader shift from the hyper-attention paid to international actors towards local actors has been described as “the local turn” in peacebuilding. This local turn is demonstrated by increasing calls for local ownership,⁶⁶ and research on resources for peace from within conflict-affected societies (see Pfaffenholz 2012, Miall 2004, Fetherston 2000), including indigenous or traditional approaches to conflict resolution and peacebuilding (see Galvanek and Planta 2017, Boege 2011, Mac Ginty 2008, Malan 2005, Zartman 2002), so-called “insider peacebuilders” or “insider mediators” (Ropers 2013).

In absence of a clear description of what peacebuilding from below or from within entails, a number of organizations and think tanks have tried to establish a set of work areas particularly relevant to peacebuilding, including fields of activities such as: education, capacity building and theory development, organizational development and alliance building for peace, campaigning and lobbying, reconciliation work including truth, justice and reparation efforts, reforms in the security sector including reintegration support for ex-combatants, broader policy programmes aimed at development, the redressing of socio-economic injustices and the strengthening of democracy (see Fisher and Zimina 2009: 21). Pfaffenholz and Spurk (2006) have outlined seven peacebuilding functions for civil society: protection, monitoring and accountability, advocacy and public communication, socialization and a culture of peace, conflict-sensitive social cohesion, intermediation and facilitation, service delivery.

⁶⁵ While the local turn in peacebuilding discourse has spurred increasing attention to the micro-processes of peacebuilding, international and local approaches to building peace do not act in separate worlds but are closely interconnected (see Richmond 2011). The concept of hybridity has been introduced to the field in recent years (see Mac Ginty and Richmond 2015, Richmond 2011 and 2010, Mac Ginty 2008).

⁶⁶ First introduced and mainstreamed as a concept and practice by development actors, “local ownership” is a vaguely defined term without standardized operationalization (see Chojnacki and Menzel 2011).

Chapter II: Militant identities in transition – Terminologies and concepts

Until today, Lederach's ideas have remained a standard starting point for many practitioners to reflect on peacebuilding from a conflict transformation perspective. For the purpose of this study, Lederach's model is useful as it resonates well with the micro-approach taken by this thesis and its interest in a specific set of local conflict actors and their potential contribution to building peace. With the (re)building of relationships at the heart of peacebuilding, the concept finally resonates with this thesis' central question as to whether ex-combatant organizations can support processes of re-encounter. Before turning to Colombia, the following chapter therefore discusses the main arguments upon which previous research has built on in order to assess the risks and opportunities of former combatants' post-militancy organizational processes

CHAPTER III: BREAKING TIES OR MOVING ON TOGETHER? RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF EX-COMBATANTS' ORGANIZATIONAL PROCESSES

This research did not unfold in a vacuum, but draws on existing studies on ex-combatants' individual and collective post-militancy life trajectories, most often dealt with in literature on DDR programs. Despite conceptual improvements in DDR-programming, as outlined in 1.2, there are a number of controversial assumptions that guide international reintegration practice and limit ex-combatants' organizational processes. These include 1) the perception that ex-combatants are a deviant population group who must transform their own identity, 2) a technical implementation approach towards reintegration focusing too narrowly on economic reintegration and neglecting the socio-political dimension of reintegration, 3) the assumption that aid is of fundamental importance for successful reintegration, and 4) the assumption that ex-combatant networks must be broken to effectively ensure reintegration.

The argument that “[p]eace requires breaking the command and control structures operating over rebel fighters, thus making it more difficult for them to return to organized rebellion” (Spear 2002: 141) has taken hold in the DDR literature and figures prominently as an underlying argument of the United Nations Integrated DDR Standards (see Knight 2012). In its “Second Generation Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR): Practices in Peace Operations” report, United Nations Department for Peacekeeping Operations (UNDPKO 2010: 26) highlights that “[m]ost evidence points to the need to dismantle command structures, separate commanders and soldiers at the very beginning of the DDR process, and identify special measures to address commanders.” Discouraging ex-combatants' organizational processes and the self-identification of ex-combatants as such has become a prime objective of DDR (McMullin 2013: 22).

However, empirical research in different places has challenged these disband-and-disperse or pay-and-scatter approaches with regards to their feasibility and their effectiveness, as well as from a security perspective. Considering their feasibility, De Vries and Wiegink (2011) point out that in many instances, armed groups recruit their combatants from within the same regional area. In addition, family ties and social networks are an important feature for recruitment patterns. Such pre-militancy ties are highly unlikely to be broken by individualized DDR programs, especially if former combatants are to be reintegrated into the

same area they were collectively mobilized from. Afghanistan has been cited as a prominent case in point, demonstrating that pre-militancy ties cannot easily be severed (Zyck 2009). Secondly, regarding effectiveness, in a study based on a large sample of over 1,000 research participants in Sierra Leone, Humphreys and Weinstein (2007) did not find any positive correlation between the unmaking of factional structures and reintegration. On the contrary, there are a number of studies that even highlight the positive aspects of persisting relationships among former peer combatants, including in ex-combatant organizations. For instance, continuing relations with former combatants can also be an important form of self-help. Research in various contexts has hinted to a clash between the tendency of the international community to stress ex-combatants' need for formal guidance and support throughout their reintegration process, and realities on the ground where reintegration is often driven by ex-combatants' networks, family and friends, without any official support (see Karamé 2009).⁶⁷ From a security policy perspective, Dudouet et al. (2012b) point to the importance of (temporarily) retaining ex-combatants' structures as an interim stability measure in order to avoid a security vacuum after demobilization. This was for instance the case in Kosovo, where the population voiced strong resentment of the dissolution of the Kosovo Liberation Army, which instead was transformed into a smaller civilian security entity, the Kosovo Protection Force, and was not dismantled until a new army was set up. Findings from the case of the indigenous self-defense group MAQL in Colombia equally

⁶⁷ The question whether DDR participants are better off than non-program participants (be it because there was no official DDR program, because they were not accepted, or because they choose not to participate) still remains to be answered. Micro-level comparative studies of reintegration participants and non-participants question whether participation in reintegration programs really makes the difference it is supposed to make. Humphreys and Weinstein have criticized that "no studies have systematically compared the reintegration success of those that have and have not participated in demobilization and reintegration programmes" (2007: 532), adding that the demobilization literature mainly focuses on program design and implementation details while providing "little evidence about the factors that explain whether individuals can successfully reintegrate after conflict and the precise causal impact of externally funded programs to reintegrate combatants (ibid.: 562). De Vries and Wiegink (2011: 48) add that the abilities of former combatants to organize self-help have too often been underestimated: "Considering that a large number of ex-fighters demobilize themselves and chart a future without programmatic aid, DDR programs may not have the far-reaching impact that the massive international investment in them seems to imply."

suggest that in some cases, the communities themselves feel threatened by the idea of demobilization, as they fear their security will not be guaranteed otherwise (personal interview, *Fundación Sol y Tierra* member, March 13, 2012, Popayán). On the other hand, ex-combatants at times also regard their bonds as a security measure and might stick together for protection in unstable security situations. As highlighted by De Vries and Wiegink, ex-combatants might reason that “[i]t could also be dangerous to be on your own yet associated with a former armed group: Former enemies or colleagues taking revenge upon lone ex-soldiers or deserters are not unheard of (2011: 42).”⁶⁸

Such contradictory assertions point to the lack of understanding and in-depth analysis of the social processes involved in sticking to or departing from group identification after disengagement. The following sections revise and discuss in more detail a number of divergent views held in the literature on the advantages and disadvantages of maintaining ex-combatant ties. Section 3.1 discusses the risks of ex-combatants being politically mobilized or manipulated by their former leaders, and the risk of former combatants remobilizing into criminal activities. Section 3.2 subsequently introduces and discusses the notion of social capital before 3.3 turns to concrete examples of ex-combatants' collective contributions to peacebuilding, and discusses the specific assets that support their work, as well as the areas of work they cover. Summarizing preliminary findings, it then identifies the themes that need to be further analyzed to understand the conditions under which collective experiences of armed militancy can translate into a resource for peacebuilding, and which will be looked at in-depth throughout the case study.

3.1 EX-COMBATANT ORGANIZATIONAL PROCESSES AS A THREAT TO POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC SECURITY

There are many examples in which ex-combatants have organized themselves to lobby for their particular needs and political agendas. McMullin (2013: 55) highlights how ex-

⁶⁸ See Nussio 2011 for an analysis of the complex security concerns of former paramilitary fighters in Colombia.

combatant protests have already been a recurrent feature in intra-state wars, where they “mobilized politically to fight for extension, increase or early payments of benefits.” Gear (2002) provides several examples from the Sub-Saharan liberation struggles in which ex-combatant organizations have rallied together on the basis of their common identity to push for their rights. In Namibia, for example, war veterans from the People’s Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) marched on the Ministry of Veteran’s Affairs to proclaim their need for jobs in their famous 1998 “March on Jobs”. Whether such collective mobilization is recognized and attended to or portrayed as illegitimate and threatening depends very much on the political outcome of the conflict and the power positions that former conflict parties hold. When ex-combatants’ organizations are part of the opposition, they easily become regarded as a threat to political stability (see McMullin 2013: 30-31). In El Salvador, for instance, more than 170 organizations founded by ex-combatants emerged after the peace agreement between the government and the FMLN. While these organizations executed programs in the framework of the national reconstruction plan, the government was reluctant to support them financially out of fear of strengthening their political capacity (see Guáqueta 2005: 22).

On the other hand, some ex-combatant organizations also maintain close links to the new ruling elite, with several even being manipulatively used by former leaders-turned-politicians. In Zimbabwe, for instance, former combatants have featured prominently as the vanguard for political campaign and election agents for the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), who mobilized ex-combatants to engage in their campaign to force white farmers off the land (Gear 2002, see also Posthumus 2006: 46).

Also in an economic approach, ex-combatants’ continuing relationships have mostly been regarded from a security perspective. As early as in 1994, Collier identified both macro- and micro-insecurity-related problems caused by former militants (Collier 1994). Micro-insecurity referred to the risk presented by individual former combatants who could individually use their violent skills to make a living in the absence of other economic options. Macro-insecurity, in turn, was caused by the risk of former combatants who remained in close contact to their former units, making it easier for them to re-organize into collective armed

activities at any time.⁶⁹ Since then, research has highlighted that various factors hamper ex-combatants' economic opportunities after armed militancy and can lead to their impoverishment. Income scarcity in fragile war or post-war situations with high unemployment rates, stigmata associated with war participants, as well as educational backgrounds that are often difficult to say the least are just some of the challenges. As a result of these difficulties, ex-combatants are believed to be prone to re-engage in criminal activities.⁷⁰ Examples for ex-combatants' collective involvement in crime abound and include cases in Angola, Cambodia, Croatia, El Salvador, Mozambique, Nicaragua, and South Africa, (Rolston 2007: 263). In this context, it has been argued that demobilized militants often serve as a recruitment base for criminal activities by former superiors, if they remain in patron-client-like relations with their commanders and are exposed to manipulations. As highlighted by UNDPKO (2010: 26): “[A] key challenge in many post-conflict settings is that middle- and high-ranking officers have the status and connections to engage in illicit activities and may remobilize in organized crime structures, particularly for arms and drug trade.”

Paradoxically, Munive and Jakobsen (2012) have shown that DDR programs often rely precisely on mid-level commanders as gatekeepers to identify combatants, thereby deepening patron-client relationships. Zyck (2009), in turn, draws attention to local or community-level commanders in Afghanistan, who – isolated from the higher-level commanders receiving special reintegration packages or political positions – experienced especially harsh blows to their pride in being a leader. As a result of the DDR program's intent to break their ties with their former fighters, many regarded the return to violence as “the only way to re-gain their evaporating relevance” (ibid.: 122).⁷¹ The Afghan case

⁶⁹ Even though Collier's analysis fell short of providing a thorough comparison of ex-combatant and non-ex-combatant behaviour, and neglected to take into account overall crime activities and the wider socio-economic structures and political conditions in a given country, his analysis was widely taken up by local communities and international donors alike, including the United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group on DDR, which essentially regarded ex-combatants as a security issue (see United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group on DDR 2006: 3).

⁷⁰ See McMullin (2013) for an in-depth discussion on the argument that ex-combatants are more prone to violence.

⁷¹ One interviewee in Zyck's study expressed this by saying “[o]ne day I'm an officer, an important person, and then I'm a simple shopkeeper” (Zyck 2009: 122). When asked about their self-perceived

therefore serves as an illustration for the failures and risks of a DDR approach aimed at fragmentation, as it may even increase insecurity and instability.

On the other hand, it has also been argued that in many instances, ex-combatants stick together to make a (legal) living. Research by De Vries and Wiegink (2011) has found that maintaining relations established during militancy can be beneficial for ex-combatants' socio-economic opportunities. As a result of these findings, recent research is increasingly turning to the notion of social capital when assessing ex-combatants' post-militancy relationships with former peers.

3.2 SOCIAL CAPITAL – GOOD OR BAD?

The notion of social capital was originally introduced by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. In his writing, Bourdieu suggested the notion of various types of capital that actors brought to one specific social space, or field, to explain how elites managed to remain in power. In Bourdieu's understanding, a field is a system of social positions in terms of power relationships between different actors. More specifically, a field is a social arena of struggle over the appropriation of certain types of capital, including social,⁷² cultural, economic and accumulated symbolic capital. Economic capital is measured in income, properties and property rights. Cultural capital encompasses knowledge, cultural and academic certificates. Social capital implies the belonging to a social group which results from a permanent network of institutionalized relations. Finally, symbolic capital represents the recognition of the sum of all other capitals by the rest of society (see Vester 2010). Especially the notion of social capital has been taken up by a number of authors in the context of research on ex-combatants'

social standing, higher ranking interviewees were a third less likely than lower ranking ones to feel sufficiently respected or treated with dignity in their communities.

⁷² The notion of social capital was further developed by Putnam (2001), who sees it essentially as reciprocity and trust which develops in groups through social interaction. According to Putnam, social capital tends to be self-reinforcing, i.e. collaborative efforts in one area lead to stronger connections and trustbuilding in other areas.

post-militancy life trajectories to explore the benefits of moving on together (see e.g. Sprenkels 2014b, Sonnabend 2014, Torjesen 2013, Menzel 2010, Leff 2008, Bürge and Peters 2007, Coletta and Cullen 2000).

According to a study by De Vries and Wiking (2011), wartime connections, both vertical and horizontal, might provide ex-combatants with access to job opportunities, loans and other basic necessities. According to their research, maintaining relations with former commanders may also pay off, as commanders who “have accepted the official military or political functions offered to them during the peace process [...] may provide opportunities for patronage” (2011: 43). These findings have also been confirmed elsewhere. In the case of Lebanon, Karamé (2009: 510) highlights that ex-combatant networks were one of the two key social networks (the other being family) for finding a job. A qualitative study by Sprenkels on the FMLN's transformation process in El Salvador demonstrates how militancy continues to (positively) shape interpersonal relations even after wars end, arguing that “[t]he interpersonal relations shaped in the insurgent movement might well constitute the most enduring legacies of insurgency in its aftermath. In the case of El Salvador, it has been a crucial part of what former insurgents worked with to gain post-war ascendancy” (Sprenkels 2014b: 5). Contacts established throughout militancy were “used extensively to obtain employment, or as a social safety net” well after militancy had ended (ibid.: 4). In addition, many former FMLN combatants played an important role in setting up new social organizations addressing for instance gender issues.⁷³ Research by Rolston on Northern Ireland also claims a positive role for ex-combatant organizations. Examining the examples of Eritrean and Guatemalan ex-combatant organizations (*Mitias*⁷⁴ and *Fundación Guillermo Toriello*/Guillermo Toriello

⁷³ For instance, various women's organizations were set up by former female combatants of the different guerrilla movements (see Herrera 2010 cited in Martínez 2012).

⁷⁴ Mehreteab offers the following definition: “*Mitias* is a Tigrinya word meaning to give a helping hand for someone who is starting from fresh to make a living. It can describe a new couple, or returnees; and the help is given either by family members or the community when they start initially. After this, they are expected to be on their own. The choice of the name was significant in expressing the concept of a self-help support system. Thus, a special autonomous department was created within the Eritrean relief and rehabilitation agency to carry out the practical activities of demobilization” (Mehreteab 2002: 18).

Foundation respectively) he argues they were “lead players in a community development-inspired and politically motivated process of reconstruction. [...] What was needed was reconstruction, not reintegration, and they had the capacity, skill and political wisdom to take a lead role in that reconstruction” (Rolston 2007: 267). For the case of Guatemala, Hauge and Thoresen (2007: 5) confirm that collective rather than individual reintegration led to more social and political activism by former combatants in the post-conflict phase. In the case of Sierra Leone, different studies (Menzel 2010, Bürge and Peters 2007) have demonstrated the economic success of self-help schemes by former combatants' motorbike collectives in generating at least some basic income for their members. Bürge and Peters therefore attest social capital to motorcycle taxi (a.k.a. “bike riding”) associations in post-war Sierra Leone and call for DDR programs to support collective self-help reintegration efforts under certain conditions. For instance, they differentiate between organizations with constructive social capital, measured by the characteristics of flat hierarchies and egalitarian and reciprocal relationships, which should be promoted, and organizations that display unequal relationships and should therefore be dissolved. Nonetheless, Bürge and Peters are quite positive about bike riding being a form of promising new social capital, and as such a successful form of ex-combatant self-reintegration. In addition, they highlight the positive effects of ex-combatant and non-combatant youth collaboration in these projects. Menzel (2010), however, draws attention to the ambivalent consequences of this collaboration by introducing the term “ex-combatization”. She portrays bike riding as a double-edged sword, both at the individual and collective level. At the individual level, bike riding presents a livelihood strategy and at the same time leads to the “social dead end of ‘ex-combatization’ whereby bike riders are socially marked as ex-combatants by occupation” (ibid.: 10). From a collective perspective, in turn, promoting bike riding provides an opportunity to establish or perpetuate control (and command) through social structures “which can be used to control and mobilize bike riders for various purposes – ‘good’ or ‘bad’.” As a result, “bike-riding associations have the potential to facilitate information flow and collective action for peaceful purposes – or to be used to control allegedly ex-combatant bike riders to create fear and push power-politics” (ibid.: 2, 5).

Having outlined the ambivalent character of ex-combatant organizations' social capital, the following section goes one step further: from the mobilization of ex-combatants in general to the mobilization of ex-combatants for peace.

3.3 EX-COMBATANT ORGANIZATIONS AS A RESOURCE FOR PEACE?

Justifications on the need to involve former combatants in peacebuilding rest on different arguments. A principled standpoint argues that peacebuilding *per se* needs to be inclusive and hence open to former combatants (see Goran Bozicevic 2009:73; 74). A second standpoint is based on pragmatism, arguing that ex-combatants' involvement in peacebuilding is useful and necessary to prevent relapse into organized (political or economic) violence. Another position goes even further and regards ex-combatants as a group of people with specific capacities they can contribute to peacebuilding. This position often aims to provide a counter-narrative to DDR practice that depicts a fairly threatening picture of ex-combatants, and underlines instead the positive and powerful services ex-combatant organizations can offer. The following sections draw from this literature to provide an overview of the specific assets (3.3.1) and functions of ex-combatant organizations with regard to peacebuilding (3.3.2), before 3.3.3 summarizes this chapter with an interim conclusion.

3.3.1 ASSETS

Assessing the work of the Network of Peace and Development Promoters (*Red de Promotores de Paz y de Desarrollo*) composed by former combatants from both sides of the conflict in Nicaragua, Gharakhanian asserts that “ex-combatants are not only capable but ideal for grassroots peacebuilding” (2006: 20). While such a statement must be read with caution and certainly does not hold true for each and every single ex-combatant, there are a number of elements and skills linked with the experience of militancy that are outlined in the literature that can help ex-combatants become effective peacebuilders. In this section, we will have a look at three possible assets of former combatants – authenticity and credibility, the transfer of wartime skills and values, and activist identities with (communal) leadership capacities – which might help ex-combatants build on their militant past to contribute to peace.

The idea that ex-combatants possess a sort of moral authority to talk about violence prevention and peacebuilding because of their own first-hand experience of war is the single most mentioned added value of ex-combatants working for peace. According to McEvoy and Shirlow (2009: 48), “it is precisely because of their violent pasts that former prisoners and ex-combatants are ideally placed to provide [such] agency in moving out of conflict.” This was also confirmed by interviewees in Colombia, who asserted for instance that they had a “moral

authority because we had arms and we participated in combat; we went there, we looked and we came to the conclusion that armed struggle is not the right way” (personal interview, FUNDAPAM member, February 20, 2012, Bogotáⁱⁱⁱ). They thus regarded themselves as the country’s “best agents for peace [...] because we know the errors of war. [...] Those who have experienced war convert into agents for peace who are more convinced than many other people who didn’t experience the war and its horror as protagonists or participants” (personal interview, PAPDRB staff, May 11, 2012, Bogotá).

In addition, it has been highlighted that the specific credibility attached to ex-combatants’ authentic experiences enhances their capacity to reach out to different social groups, including their (former) group members, their (former) enemies, as well as society as a whole. Romund (2014: 178) asserts that members of veteran organizations can be valuable multipliers for constructive dialogue on war experience, as they can reach out to both the public and their peers. In the analogy of the former drug addict turned “wounded healer”, McEvoy and Shirlow (2009) assert that ex-prisoners in Northern Ireland were able to use their prison time or experience of violence as a resource to establish credibility in hard-to-reach or radicalized groups within their own communities.

Beyond their credibility as witnesses of war, ex-combatants have been said to bring other important skills and values to peacebuilding due to their militant experience. Bruchhaus and Mehreteab (2000) for instance have found that ex-combatants in Eritrea had acquired a variety of qualifications and fortified values during their militancy. These included the knowledge of different cultures, self-reliance, discipline, motivation, nursing/caretaking and conflict resolution skills. In their study on ex-combatants as peacebuilders in Mozambique, Van der Merve and Smith (2006: 15) singled out teamwork experience, leadership experience, strong public speaking, training/technical skills, as well as self-discipline and respect for a clear system of authority as potential qualities of ex-combatants. For the case of Republican ex-prisoners in Northern Ireland, in turn, Rolston (2007: 273) notes that “the ideals of self-help and mutual aid which were paramount during their years of imprisonment became central in their post-prison activities”, whereby they acquired a reputation for “commitment, dedication and reliability” in their work within their own organizations or with the community in general. Interviews conducted in Mozambique (NIZA 2006: 25) with former combatants confirm these qualities, adding specific technical capacities such as de-mining skills. In the case of South Africa, Cook (2006) highlights that ex-combatants understand the benefits of

rigorous physical training, the importance of taking responsibility for one's actions, and the benefits of working patiently and steadily towards goals.

With regard to activist identities, Van der Merve and Smith (2006:15) assert that ex-combatants "are often social activists with a strong understanding of the nature and causes of social injustice." Interviews with ex-militants from Jammu and Kashmir by Sonpar (2008) confirm these findings from a psychological perspective, outlining the emergence of activist identities and attesting to research participants an altruistic potential similar to that of peace activists. Exploring the role of former combatants in post-conflict peacebuilding in Guatemala, Hauge and Thorensen confirm that many ex-combatants had become involved in armed conflict in the first place because they wanted to change unjust societal conditions. Research by McEvoy and Shirlow (2009) on the case of politically motivated ex-prisoners and their organizations in Northern Ireland therefore criticizes the assumption of former combatants' passivity in most DDR programs and proposes instead the notion of leadership on three distinct levels (communal, military and political) to explain former prisoners' agency in conflict transformation. Equally, in El Salvador, research has shown that ex-combatants made use of their "political relations, identities, skills and revolutionary discourses developed during the war" to transform into or simply continue being local community leaders (Sprenkels 2014b: 3). All these instances emphasize the importance of continuity, not breaking with the past, for former combatant to be able to non-violently affect the changes they had originally driven for with arms. Resonating very much with these findings from literature, former combatants interviewed for this study in Colombia often regarded their militant experience as a stepping-stone for their socio-political engagement. The most important assets for ex-combatants' engagement in peacebuilding mentioned relate to authenticity, insider knowledge and values, including discipline, sincerity, solidarity, loyalty, responsibility, honesty, dedication to the community and respect for rules, as well as a certain political or ideological formation acquired in wartime (personal interview, *Fundación Líderes de Paz* member, February 06, 2012, Bogotá^{iv}). In addition, political formation acquired through militancy, an interest to work towards socio-political transformation, the general life

experience as a militant, as well as leadership and management/business administration skills⁷⁵ were found important.

While it is of course clear that not all ex-combatants possess the desire and specific skills to turn into active peacebuilders, these examples do demonstrate that armed militancy must not necessarily be an obstacle, but on the contrary can contain elements which can be used to build peace. The following section examines in more depth types of peacebuilding ex-combatant organizations have become active in.

3.3.2 PEACEBUILDING FUNCTIONS: FROM SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE TO DEALING WITH THE PAST

The most immediate function of ex-combatant organizations is to provide support for their members, including socio-economic and psychological assistance. Ex-combatant networks in Burundi and Nepal for instance have been used “to assist each other economically and also to provide psychosocial support” (Myrntinen et al. 2014: 19). In the case of Uganda, the demobilization of the LRA (Lord’s Resistance Army) spurred the creation of several hundred ex-combatant associations. According to Perrot (2012: 186), “their official aim was to help former combatants achieve economic independence and give them a voice in the post-conflict economic and social reconstruction process.” Whereas some organizations focus strongly on the self-help aspect, others are set up by governments in order to facilitate and channel support in the framework of official DDR programs. In Aceh for instance, the civilian Transitional Committee was created in the wake of the 2005 peace accord to channel governmental support to the members of the former GAM (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*, Free Aceh Movement) rebel group, supervise their orderly demobilization and maintain cohesiveness until a political party could be set up (Dudouet et al. 2012b: 17).

Next to socio-economic assistance, ex-combatant organizations can provide an important space for psychological assistance. Fischer (2006: 393) found “that as a result of their traumatization, some former combatants are motivated to participate in activities

⁷⁵ For instance, one interviewee highlighted that his work in the group had entailed managing large amounts of money (personal interview, ONE OG member, May 04, Bogotá).

enabling them to address their war experiences together with others who had a similar experience.” Duclos (2012b: 269) asserts that a central role for veteran associations is to allow for “regular friendly meetings and exchanges, which reactivate memories and provide an opportunity to seek meaning in shared experiences”. This is particularly important in circumstances where ex-combatant organizations are the only place for former militants to socialize without having to conceal important parts of their life for fear of being stigmatized or rejected.

Beyond individual assistance schemes, ex-combatant organizations have also been said to provide a platform for voicing collective grievances and demands, as well as more generally broaden ex-combatants' societal participation. In Northern Ireland, for instance, the ex-prisoner umbrella organization Ex-Prisoner's Committee (*Coiste na n-Iarchímí*) does work ranging from “counseling through job and training-related activity to lobbying and advocacy on behalf of the republican ex-prisoner constituency in relation to continuing discrimination” (Rolston 2007: 272). In this context, research has also shown that ex-combatants from different sites engage in reconciliation projects with their previous adversaries. In Nicaragua, the Network of Peace and Development Promoters (*Red de Promotores de Paz y de Desarrollo*) was initially created because ex-combatants' needs from both sides involved in armed conflict against each other from 1981-1990 were not being met by the government. While the initiative suffered from the mutual distrust between both groups at the beginning, in the course of their collaboration, ex-combatants came to understand that “[w]e were the same Nicaraguans, the same *pobres*” (peasants) and that “[t]he problems of health, of education, of unemployment [affected] one just as much as the other” (see Gharakhanian 2006: 13, 14-15). Similarly, in Mozambique, ex-combatants from both sides – the ruling FRELIMO (Mozambique Liberation Front) and the rebel RENAMO (Mozambican National Resistance) party – have established the organization PROPAZ (Associated Institute for the Promotion of Peace) which works in several provinces of the country. Van der Merve and Smith (2006: 15) therefore argue that ex-combatants' and war veterans' reconciliation projects often play a vanguard role in society by providing an “extremely powerful symbol” of reconciliation: “Those who have confronted their own personal trauma and engaged in a process of reconciliation with their erstwhile enemies have a first-hand experience of the process that the rest of society still largely needs to confront and fully understand.”

Besides engaging with former combatants, whether from their own or from an opposing side, ex-combatant organizations have also engaged in broader societal projects. In El Salvador, for instance, popular organizations founded by former middle-rank FMLN (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front) activists have become protagonists in some of the most important contemporary mobilizations in El Salvador, including against a free trade agreement with the USA or polluting mining enterprises, or generally in favor of deeper societal democratization (Martín Alvarez 2010: 36). Romund (2014) asserts that ex-combatant organizations have the potential to contribute to initiatives on dealing with the past by carrying the discussion of guilt and responsibility into the wider public. Reflecting on ex-combatant organizations from Nicaragua, Ortega (1996: 29) argues that within their respective organizations, “the demobilized encountered a way for personal and collective overcoming and also to contribute to peace”, whereby “the awareness to constitute a social subject with the right and the responsibility to propose economic plans and comprehensive policies for the own population sector, but also the community and the nation, kept growing.”

3.3.3 INTERIM SUMMARY

Chapter III has discussed possible risks and opportunities ex-combatants' post-militancy organizational processes pose. Regarding the latter, first preliminary findings relate the diversity of activities or areas of work, ranging from individual self-help schemes, to the formal channeling of reintegration help, to political advocacy, dealing with the past and reconciliation efforts.

Secondly, the examples demonstrate that ex-combatants have collectively contributed to peacebuilding both by working for better living conditions for their own members, as well as targeting their peers and reaching out to former enemies and society at large. Finally, ex-combatants have been found to possess a set of assets related to their militant experience, including moral authority and credibility when talking about their wartime experience. However, there are also several problems regarding ex-combatants' organizational processes, including the danger of persisting patronage networks, remobilization into criminal activities, or political manipulation.

A number of issues arise from these ambivalent findings, both on an individual and collective level. One important question at the individual level relates to the gap between the

claim of most reintegration programming to forget or break with one's past, and the fact that the very experience of armed militancy has been found to be one major asset for ex-combatants' authentic testimony for peace. This case study will therefore examine in how far ex-combatant organizations allow for or even support the constructive use of one's own militant identity for peaceful purposes. On a group level, the political identity and the wartime behavior of groups seem to be two important elements in explaining ex-combatants' ability to transform into agents for peace. Most of the cases examined in Chapter III concerned former members of armed groups with strong political motivation. Is the political orientation of a group an indicator for its likelihood to continue organizing its members for socio-political purposes beyond militancy? Secondly, what influence does the wartime behavior of armed groups (e.g. violent repertoire employed in interaction with civil population) have? Humphreys and Weinstein have noted that "the abusiveness of the unit in which an individual fought is strongly associated with problems in gaining acceptance" (2007: 563), and McMullin (2013: 194) further highlights that in Sierra Leone, "shame and guilt over wartime atrocities have prevented the emergence of formal veterans' associations to advocate on behalf of the political, economic, and social needs and status of ex-combatants." How does group behavior then impact ex-combatants' individual and collective capacity to gain acceptance as peacebuilders?

Finally, the cases scrutinized here most often looked at organizational processes emerging from negotiation processes with a strong institutional accompaniment geared towards reintegration. However, more analysis is needed to understand variety in terms of reintegration pathways and the impact of reintegration policies in shaping former combatant organization. The following chapters take a deeper look into these issues based on empirical findings from Colombia. Chapter IV provides an in-depth overview of the methodological proceedings for data gathering, including a reflection on challenges in the field and a detailed description of the empirical data material.

CHAPTER IV: OPERATIONALIZATION OF RESEARCH DESIGN IN THE FIELD

This thesis largely builds on the comparative analysis of ex-combatant organizations operating in Colombia. In light of their overall poor documentation and lacking academic analysis – contrary to a broad coverage of the different peace processes within the country – and the general *caveats* in understanding non-state armed actors, field research was at the heart of, and absolutely essential to covering this topic. Regarding research on NSAGs, Zahar (2009: 2005-6) has argued that:

“[I]t is important to gain as close access to these groups as possible in order to understand their internal logics. Given the manner in which they are usually framed, especially by the governments against which they fight, it is highly likely that the greater our dependence on third parties to understand non-state armed actors, the greater the risk that we will see them not for what they are but for how the third party in question, be it a facilitator, an interpreter or a research assistant, perceives them to be.”

However, while field research was long considered an unusual data-gathering method in political science, the advantages of which still needed to be clearly outlined, the discussion today is taking a reverse twist. As field research is becoming a common approach to investigating the actors and dynamics of civil war, with even undergraduate students embarking on data-gathering processes in conflict zones, it brings along a number of practical and epistemological problems that should not be underestimated (see for instance Menzel 2014, Kolterman 2013, Buckley-Zistel 2012, Sriram et al. 2009).⁷⁶ For instance, it has been questioned whether it even makes sense to have an external researcher – more often than not with a white, Westerner background – spending (third-party) funding for expensive data-

⁷⁶ Buckley-Zistel (2012) and Kolterman (2013) for instance critically discuss the conditions (researcher’s skills, feasibility of the trip), potential (improved data, personal growth), limitations (security concerns, ability of universities to provide their students adequate accompaniment and training to safely conduct field research), as well as the ethical concerns (motivation of the researcher, costs vs. benefits for both academia and the research subjects) for doing field research in the framework of peace and conflict study programs.

collecting trips, or whether field research should be left primarily to local researchers, who have a much better understanding of the context, a plethora of contacts, and can collect the data in much more cost-efficient way. In this context, personal presence in the field has been highlighted as important, as it allows the observations and insights experienced on the ground lead to decisions about necessary adjustments to the research (Paluck 2009: 54). Paluck (ibid.), however, emphasizes the centrality of working with local research collaborators, be they partner organizations or individual researchers – an approach that was taken for this thesis. From a critical perspective, Menzel (2014) interprets the increasing amount of field-research-based studies as an attempt by the research community to deliver more policy-relevant guidance aimed at improving current peacebuilding interventions. Warranting the loss of critical potential of field research, she however concludes that the added value of field research consists in the “production of irritating changes of perspective” and the uncovering of false “peacebuilding truism”, e.g. naturally assumed conflict lines between categories of perpetrators and victims. In line with this idea, this chapter provides a detailed account of the operationalization of its research design in the field.

Field research in Colombia was carried out between December 2011 and June 2012. Core data-gathering methods consisted in problem-oriented interviews with ex-combatants and participant observation. Additional insights were gained in interviews and/or informal conversations with NGO staff working in public reintegration programs on ex-combatant training and supervision, such as staff of the ACR and PAPDRB and fellow (local) researchers and academic experts. A series of semi-structured interviews with ex-combatants commissioned by the University of Oxford provided background information on ex-combatants’ general living conditions and the challenges they faced throughout their reintegration processes.

Section 4.1 elaborates on the different access strategies to research participants and outlines the criteria for their selection. Section 4.2 provides information on the data-collection methods, followed by a discussion of the limitations of the data material and data triangulation (4.3). The chapter concludes with a reflection on the challenges of fieldwork (4.4).

4.1 ACCESS TO THE FIELD

This section outlines the selection criteria for research participants (4.1.1), provides detailed information on the different access paths to interviewees (4.1.2), and discusses the limitations of data collection and possible biases (4.1.3).

4.1.1 CHOOSING A MAIN RESEARCH SITE

In the literature, ex-combatants are often described as a difficult population to interview: fear of discrimination, a desire to avoid public appearance, and anxiety due to security threats may reduce willingness to participate in academic studies (Nussio and Ugarriza 2016). Planning my field research, I anticipated it would not be easy to get in touch with ex-combatants willing to share their experience of a militant past and their transition to civilian life with me. Hence, I opted for a field research design that would allow me to spend the major part of my time in one site, namely in Colombia's capital Bogotá,⁷⁷ thereby allowing me to invest a considerable amount of time in trustbuilding. Concentrating my efforts on one single place effectively allowed me to establish continuous contact with some of the study's participants, resulting in a series of interviews and close contacts to research participants. The decision to choose Bogotá as main research site was driven by a number of reasons. First of all, Bogotá has developed into a major hotspot for ex-combatants to settle, due to its advantages in terms of economic opportunities, anonymity and safety, as well as access to reintegration services. According to a study on municipal reintegration programs (Carranza-Franco 2014: 259), 60% of individually demobilized former combatants are living in the capital city, even though only 7% out of them were originally from Bogotá.

As a result, Bogotá has also transformed into a hub for ex-combatant organizations. Consequently, the capital did not only seem to be a suitable place to interview members of different organizations, but also offered some possibilities to observe the joint efforts of these various organizations, and the networks emerging among them. Finally, the wealth of NGOs,

⁷⁷ Other sites of research included: Villavicencio (Meta department), Pasto (Nariño department) and Popayán (Cauca department).

academic experts and reintegration staff in Bogotá also provided me with extensive opportunities to double-check and discuss my research, especially with my office colleagues at the Centre for Investigation and Popular Education/Programme for Peace (*Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular/Programa por la Paz*, CINEP/PPP). Against this background, the initial set of criteria for choosing interview partners was established as follows.

4.1.2 SELECTION CRITERIA FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

With a particular interest in the contribution of former combatants' organizations to the processes of building peace, this thesis aims to analyze collective activities of former combatants in the areas identified as being at the core of peacebuilding such as: education, capacity building and theory development for peace, organizational development and alliance building for peace, campaigning and lobbying, reconciliation work including truth, justice and reparation efforts, reforms in the security sector, reintegration support for ex-combatants, and broader policy programs aimed at development, the redressing of socio-economic injustices, and the strengthening of democracy (see 2.4). Against this background, the selection criteria for research participants were formulated as follows:

- Organizational character: Involvement in a collective effort, meaning that I was not primarily interested in individual contributions to peacebuilding,⁷⁸ but in organizational formats. Organizations usually emerge when several individuals agree that they can reach their objectives better in a group and share a number of characteristics such as a common objective, the division of labor, and a formal or informal constitution (see Fuchs et al. 1994: 548). Regarding the organizations that took part in this study, they were mostly set up as non-governmental organizations or

⁷⁸ Obviously, there are also other forms of ex-combatants' engagement in peacebuilding, such as individuals joining existing NGOs or ex-combatants working as reintegration facilitators in public offices.

associations. However, there was also one business initiative and one project jointly driven forward by several ex-combatant organizations.

- Organization implicitly and explicitly displays elements of peacebuilding: while organizations would not have to explicitly call themselves a peacebuilding organization, their work would show peacebuilding elements as outlined above.
- Diversity: Apart from a self-perception as change agents, organizations did not have to fulfill further selection criteria. Instead, I was interested in getting to know the widest range of organizations with regards to their scope (local-national), membership structure (open to non-ex-combatants, only ex-combatants from one group, etc.), context of emergence (peace accord-based initiatives with public funding and self-initiatives), and focus of activities (reintegration, development assistance, lobbying, reconciliation, etc.).

Beyond these very open criteria, the subsequent selection of research participants was then guided by first analysis results. For instance, during the process of data gathering and first analysis, I noted differences between ex-combatant organizations founded in the framework of peace accords in the 1990s and ex-combatant organizations built by the initiative of individual ex-combatants. Hence, I tried to maximize this contrast by further engaging with more ex-combatant organizations established in the 1990s, in order to further analyze possible differences. This approach was partly oriented by grounded theory (see footnote 31) that suggests a cyclical and interwoven research process, in which analysis starts with the first interview and data collection permanently leads to analysis and the adaptation of initial concepts. Developing concepts in the course of research subsequently guides the selection of further interviews or observations. Contrary to more conventional research, the researcher does not provide a list of interviewees before the study, but lets first analysis determine what kind of information (and thus interview partners or observations) is still needed. The circular process of sampling ends when the research reaches “saturation”, a point “when no new categories or relevant themes are emerging” (Corbin and Strauss 2008: 148) and the researcher understands these categories in depth and can interrelate them. In practice, theoretical sampling in its ideal form is not always possible due to restrictions of accessibility to interview partners or human and economic resources. This was also true for this study. Getting in touch with research participants was not always easy. The following section therefore deals with the challenges in establishing relationships with people in the field and

generating trustful collaboration in a country characterized by distrust and security problems resulting from over 50 years of armed conflict.

4.1.3 GAINING ACCESS: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

This section will examine the challenges to gaining access to the field and the coping strategies employed. Starting with security and safety concerns from the researcher's as well as the interviewee's side, it then outlines the different entry points that were used to get in touch with research participants, outlining both their advantages and disadvantages.

SECURITY ISSUES: ENGAGING THE HARD-TO-REACH

Colombia is a country that displays not only many different conflict scenarios closely related to regional/departmental dynamics, but also a rural-urban divide. As field research took place in major cities of the country, it was not so much armed hostilities that affected my security situation as much as the general insecurity related to crime and delinquency in some research sites. Many ex-combatants live in peripheral, run-down and at times unsecure neighborhoods, where "re-recruitment is just around the corner" (personal interview, PAPDRB staff, May 11, 2012, Bogotá).

To avoid exposure to unsafe situations, I paid special attention to the choice of meeting places. Safety strategies included carefully assessing invitations to private houses, meeting in public spaces or within the ACR buildings, checking whether meeting points had easy access and exit points by public transport. In cases I did not feel comfortable with the place, I informed interviewees that I would be accompanied by a second person to the interview site. However, security concerns did not only arise from my side, but also from the perspective of my interview partners. If security problems and resulting mistrust are a general trait of Colombian society, it is even more so for ex-combatants, who often experience stigmatization or fear repression from their former group (see Nussio 2011). Trained to watch for threats throughout their involvement in armed activity, many of them still face high security risks once they have left their former groups. Not only are they at times subject to persecution by their former comrades (especially those who deserted), they are also often pressured to join illegal armed (criminal) groups, as they are considered able to handle arms and exercise violence. Those who do not resist these offers re-enter a cycle of risk-taking and violence. On the other hand, many ex-combatants are afraid of legal consequences. Altering

the rulings over legal benefits for demobilized people has alienated many ex-combatants and thrown some – at least temporarily – into a state of legal limbo (personal interview, *Corporación ANDES* member, May 18, 2016, Bogotá, see 6.2.3 for more detailed information). As a result, security considerations also influenced the interview set-up. For instance, one important term to avoid when introducing the research was the word “investigation” (*investigación*) as this was associated with prosecution. Security reasons brought additional challenges to interview appointments, which often required several attempts to take place (for an example of one ex-combatant’s perspective on security management, see personal interview, *Corporación ANDES* member, May 20, 2012, Bogotá^v). Conversations with reintegration staff also confirmed that reintegration participants were often reluctant to provide private contact details, even to program staff, and frequently faked addresses or cell phone numbers in order not to remain untraceable (personal interview, PAPDRB staff, May 11, 2012, Bogotá). From my personal experience, it was often time-consuming to initially arrange interviews, but once they actually took place (in a few occasions, I gave up on certain interviews after a series of unsuccessful attempts), the atmosphere was often quite jovial. In order to get that far, gatekeepers were of tremendous help as they facilitated my access to the field and helped me establishing first contacts.

GATEKEEPERS: CHOOSING DIFFERENT ENTRY POINTS

Throughout the seven months of field research, I used various techniques to get in touch with the widest range of interviewees possible. Each of these approaches had its own advantages and disadvantages, which should be briefly highlighted:

1) The institutional channel

Institutional facilitation through the ACR’s planning and research unit⁷⁹ established access to former combatants in various ACR installations. This channel was primarily used to establish contacts with participants in the study commissioned by the University of Oxford.

⁷⁹ At the time of research, it supervised approximately 60 research projects from different academic institutes and universities with the aim to improve its own practice and knowledge (personal interview, ACR staff, December 22, 2011, Bogotá).

This seemed quite convenient in terms of reliability, efficiency and security, as the ACR installations provide a physically secure environment for both the researcher and the research participants. In most cases, research participants had been enrolled with the ACR during several years, and the institution was a well-known space to them. While in theory, the controlled access to reintegration participants via the ACR's planning and research unit serves to protect participants, the system was easily bypassed through personal connections, as will be detailed further below. The most critical aspect of interviews arranged with the help of the ACR was their asymmetric set-up. In several occasions, I had the impression that interviewees had been nearly forced to participate in the study by presenting the interview as part of their reintegration program. In various occasions, I often had to rectify participants' assumptions that I was an ACR worker and that the interview an obligatory part of their reintegration process instead of a voluntary contribution to my research. Yet in one particular site, this was actually the case, as participants were offered the choice of participating in my research instead of taking part in one of their obligatory monthly activities, such as training activities or psychological group sessions. While this seems a fair compensation at first sight, I wondered whether such a random replacement of their planned activities was ultimately beneficial to them. In addition, contacts provided by the PAPDRB helped set up direct connections with ex-combatant initiatives that collaborated with and/or used the PAPDRB facilities.

2) Personal contacts

My local research partner facilitated first entry into Santa Rosa, a neighborhood in Bogotá with a particularly dense concentration of ex-combatants where he had already established close contacts to various ex-combatants' families throughout previous ethnographic research in the area (published in Cárdenas Sarrias 2005). Because of this personal connection, I was very well received from the start, and my team partner's acquaintances were more than willing to help me identify additional research participants.⁸⁰ With their support, I set up various interviews with former combatants, most of them at their family homes, within a

⁸⁰ See Norman (2009) for a discussion of establishing different kinds of trust, among them "relational trust" which is especially relevant in high-context cultures.

couple of days.

The advantages of relying on gatekeepers within the community soon became obvious. Not only was I introduced to potential interviewees by a well-known person, thereby lowering their initial distrust, my gatekeeper also presented their accepting the interview as a personal favor, making it difficult to turn down. However, the situation also got out of control when my gatekeeper's enthusiasm to provide me as many contacts as possible led to him eventually even asking passers-by whether they would participate in the study. On one occasion, my gatekeeper shouted to a neighbor in the middle of the street, asking whether he was demobilized or displaced. This incident also demonstrates how in this particular neighborhood, boundaries between the various segments of population became somehow fluid and – probably because of the high number of ex-combatants – being demobilized became less exceptional or stigmatizing. It was also my research team partner who put me in touch with a social worker supervising ACR's participants at the local ACR service center in another run-down neighborhood of Bogotá. It was with her help that I could participate in a series of workshops on productive projects for female ex-combatants, or ex-combatants' female family members, several of whom participated in my study right after the two-hour seminar. In that case, my gatekeeper was not as useful as the personal contact I had with the social worker, who would warmly introduce me to her group of workshop participants and encourage them to participate in the study.

3) Word of mouth (snowballing)

Word of mouth helped spread information through otherwise inaccessible channels and thus enlarged access to former combatants. I regularly asked interviewees whether they could provide me with contacts of further people who would be interested in participating in the study. In most cases, these interview partners, who themselves were engaged in ex-combatant organizations, knew about other initiatives. However, they were not always willing or able to provide contact details, partly because of personal animosities or rivalries with other groups.

Combining these different access strategies was useful, as they broadened the range of interview partners and organizational experiences I was able to meet. Had I worked only with the relatively safe institutional access, I would probably not have gotten in touch with a number of small-scale ex-combatant foundations not linked to any institutional funding or accompaniment. Had I, however, only worked with personal contacts, I would have missed

the chance to also get to learn from the experiences of the ACR staff and benefit from their overview of existing initiatives.

4.2 METHODS OF DATA GATHERING

Having explained the main challenges and strategies to gain access to the field, this section outlines why I opted for the three main research methods employed in the field: semi-structured interviews with individual ex-combatants (4.2.1), problem-centered, narrative interviews with members of ex-combatant organizations (4.2.2) and participant observation (4.2.3).

4.2.1 GETTING TO KNOW POST-MILITANCY CHALLENGES – STRUCTURED SURVEY INTERVIEWS

From December 2011 to April 2012, I worked as a research assistant for a comparative research project on the cohesion of armed groups based at the Anthropology Department of the University of Oxford and co-financed by the Berghof Foundation in Berlin. For the duration of research, I was kindly hosted by the Berghof Foundation's partner organization CINEP/PPP in Bogotá, which meant that not only could I count on an office space, but also on countless valuable discussions with my colleagues. Most importantly, however, conducting the survey provided me with valuable insights into the living environments and post-militancy challenges facing former NSAG combatants. In addition, it also served as a very useful entry point to reach out to ex-combatants, and helped me learn more about existing ex-combatants' initiatives and contact them. Finally, conducting the survey also considerably trained my interviewing skills. This is why the survey research deserves a brief explanation here. My task was to conduct structured interviews with ex-combatants from various groups, with the aim of learning more about how daily routines and social networks affected the internal cohesion of armed groups. Originally, to ensure cross-country comparative analysis, structured interviews following a clear guideline were the research method of choice. At the start of the research, an interview questionnaire was developed in collaboration with the research team at Oxford University, which was responsible for field research on different sites (Libya). An initial pilot phase conducted in December 2011 served

to test the viability and comprehensibility of the interview questionnaire, and to adapt it to the Colombian context. Based on the lessons learned from this pilot phase, and with the valuable input from my experienced colleagues at CINEP/PPP, the research questions were simplified and the questionnaire was shortened. In its final version, the first part of the interview served to compile data on interviewees' personal backgrounds, whereas the second part delved into the social networks and relationships ex-combatants maintained during their militancy, as well as their entry and exit careers (see Annex 4). Selection criteria called for interviews with both former guerrilla members (FARC-EP) and paramilitary units, and for variety in rank and functions. With regard to gender balance, the sample was to roughly represent the gender balance within the armed groups. While women make up nearly 40% of FARC-EP combatants (Ospina Restrepo 2003: 144), they are numerically much less important within paramilitary forces. Hence, the sample aimed for a proportional representation of female ex-combatants around 25%, which was achieved (see below).

The ACR's database proved helpful to comply with these selection criteria, as ACR staff would direct me to the service centers with fitting participants. In total, 59 interviews were conducted with former members of two guerrilla groups and various paramilitary groups at three different sites. As the ACR tries to spread researchers across the national territory, the planning and research unit advised me to conduct interviews outside of Bogotá. As the capital city, as well as Medellín and other larger cities had already absorbed a bulk of researchers, service center personnel and program participants alike had started to demonstrate a certain research fatigue. Hence, chances to gain access to available interview participants and be able to count on the collaboration of local staff seemed much higher in less explored sites. Having, with the help of ACR's staff, ensured these sites would fulfill my selection criteria (i.e. interviewees should be both from FARC-EP and AUC, with a mixed presentation of male and female interview participants) by scanning the ACR's database, I chose to conduct interviews in two different sites which had so far had received little attention from research programs: Villavicencio (Meta department) and Pasto (Nariño department). Thanks to the help of the ACR service center, these interviews could be conducted in a very time-efficient manner (see below). A local research team partner was hired to co-conduct interviews and to help establish additional contacts. The interviews were between 15 minutes and two hours long, with an average length of 40 minutes. Participants were informed on the content of the interview, its purpose and purely academic use. They were asked permission to audio-record the interview,

which was then stored with a numeric code so as to guarantee the anonymity of the interviewee. These interviews were gathered in three different phases:

- From January 31 to February 17, 2012, 22 interviews were conducted in Bogotá, the majority of which (15) in the very peripheral southern neighborhood of Santa Rosa, which in a unique population composition hosts approximately 80 ex-combatants with their families in a very restricted area. Due to the affordable real estate prices and the ACR's policy that financial support for an ex-combatant's income-generating project (*Proyecto Productivo para la Paz*, Productive Project for Peace, PPP) could be used to acquire property, former combatants were attracted to this area. The word spread rapidly and finally led to an unusually high density of ex-combatants in this specific area. Most of the interviews were conducted at the person's home, often with their partner and children around. Two interviews took place in a public parking lot in front of the person's workplace. Another five interviewees were reached by word of mouth and interviewed in other areas of Bogotá, four of them in public cafeterias and one at the interviewee's work place (his recently opened motorcycle garage). Finally, two interviews were arranged at the ACR's service center *Rafael Uribe* in Bogotá, with the facilitation of a local social worker.
- From February 22 to February 24, 2012, 19 interviews were conducted at the ACR's service center in Villavicencio, Meta department. These interviews were facilitated by the ACR's planning and research unit and arranged by a local psychologist supervising the reintegration process.
- Finally, from March 06 to March 09, 2012, 18 interviews were conducted with ex-combatants in the ACR's service centers in Pasto, Nariño department. As in the case of Villavicencio, these interviews were facilitated by the ACR's planning and research unit and arranged by the local head of the service center.

Even though all answers of the interview questionnaire by the AGC project had to be fully answered, interviews could be arranged in a conversational way, giving participants the opportunity to elaborate more on certain aspects. Questions explored most during the interview situation concerned the different functions and roles people held within their respective groups, their organizational structure and hierarchy, and the social relations they maintained with other former combatants. After concluding the survey interviews, the

information gathered was systematized and transcribed, while another set of interviews conducted with representatives of former combatant organizations was analyzed as described in the following section.

4.2.2 PROBLEM-CENTERED, NARRATIVE INTERVIEWS WITH EX-COMBATANT ORGANIZATION MEMBERS

Around the same time as the interviews commissioned by the University of Oxford, I conducted separate interviews with ex-combatants involved in collective peacebuilding activities. For these interviews, I opted for a more open design, employing a combination of narrative and problem-centered methods. The problem-oriented interview method was first introduced by Witzel (see Mayring 2002: 67) and aims to address several core themes in a systematic yet open-ended way, thereby approximating an open interview. Witzel conceived this methodology as a combination of a qualitative interview, case analysis, biographical method approach, group discussion and content analysis. For my research design, I adapted this by also introducing narrative elements, so as to enlarge the space for interview partners' own reflections and interpretations, and to be able to incorporate new elements into my research. Witzel (ibid.) highlights three main elements of a problem-oriented interview that are closely linked to general principles of qualitative research. First of all, the researcher is interested in understanding problematic social issues and has already identified a number of relevant aspects to tackle the research question before the interview process. This means that the interview process is pre-structured by an interview guideline that focuses the conversation on a number of core issues. However, interviewees are invited to answer the question in an open manner, with no pre-established, standardized answer categories. Such an open approach has a number of advantages. It allows interviewees to expand on their own subjective perspectives and interpretations, and provides space for them to elaborate their own explanatory narratives. Secondly, the concrete operationalization of the interview method is subject-oriented and adapted to the context. Finally, the interview method is process-oriented, with the main research questions tackled in a flexible manner and according to the data that emerge in the process. The problem-oriented approach provided substantial guidance regarding the topic of conversation: their organizations' and their own personal engagement for peacebuilding. Aside from this rough orientation, interviewees were invited to expand freely on the motivation for their engagement in peacebuilding, the history and the activities

of their organization, the personal benefits of their work as well as the challenges they encountered along the way. Building in such narrative elements allowed me to incorporate new topics that I had not considered before, such as dealing with the past or reconciliation with former enemies.

The drawback of such an open interview methodology is that it demands a certain degree of trustbuilding between the interviewee and the interviewer, since the latter is interested in getting to know the former's personal opinions and experiences in life. Gaining access to the field and establishing trust in the interview situation was therefore an important element of the field research.

With regard to the interview guideline, a first set of questions inquired on the personal background of the interviewee or his or her peacebuilding career. Questions focused on the background of the interviewee's (dis)engagement with (or from) an armed group and his or her (re)mobilization into a peacebuilding initiative, including their personal motives for engaging in peacebuilding, entry points to relevant networks, and accompanying challenges. A second set of questions then focused more specifically on the history and organizational features of the association the interviewee was part of. Questions were asked about the emergence of the initiative and its organizational format (such as loose associations, neighborhood initiatives, registered NGOs, self-help). This set of questions then focused on the different activities and target groups, as well as on the partners of the organization or initiative. A final set of questions was interested in the challenges as well as enabling factors for ex-combatant organizations to contribute to peacebuilding, and invited interviewees to critically reflect on the opportunities and challenges for ex-combatant associations in peacebuilding. Each section's questions were as follows:

- Personal background and motivation: Why did you join an armed group? Why and how did you exit this group? What are your living conditions like today? Why did you get involved in this particular initiative? How did you learn about existing initiatives? Where did you first get into touch with (ex-combatants') peacebuilding work?
- Organization: What organization are you engaged in? How many members does this organization have? What groups are these people from? Does your organization also work with non-ex-combatants? Who are the target groups of your organization? What kind of activities do you conduct? What projects are you currently running? What is

the focus of your organization's work? Do you collaborate with any other organizations? Where do you get your funding from?

- Opportunities and challenges: How would you assess your organization's success, what challenges do you face? Do they have specific capacities for peacebuilding, what resources do they bring?

At the end of the meeting, interviewees were also asked if they could recommend or provide contacts of other ex-combatant organizations. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. In one case, audio recording failed due to technical problems. Instead of a transcript, detailed minutes of the conversation were taken.

4.2.3 FORMAL AND INFORMAL PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

Participant observation is a standard method of field research, in which the researcher becomes part of a social situation embedded in their research context. The method was originally developed in the field of ethnology, but was introduced to sociology by the Chicago School (Mayring 2002: 81). It is a non-standardized instrument with the advantage that it brings researchers closer to their research subject (see Chapter I on closeness as one principle of qualitative research) and enables the researcher to observe it in its natural environment. For this study, interviews were complemented with participant observation in various sites, including the attendance of training workshops for ex-combatants (and their family members) organized by the PAPDRB and the ACR, and two preparatory meetings of ex-combatant organizations planning a forum on reintegration, to be held at the National Congress. The initial idea to accompany ex-combatants in concrete peacebuilding activities (such as seminars provided by ex-combatants or community work) was difficult to realize, as very few individuals or their respective organizations actually ran projects at the time of field research. On one occasion, however, I was able to assist a workshop for ex-combatants on citizen participation run by a former ELN member.

In May, I participated in two workshops on professional orientation for female ex-combatants or female relatives of ex-combatants in a local service center for reintegration in Bogotá. Assisting these training sessions helped me understand the dynamics at the local reintegration center and the participants' perspective on reintegration benefits and disadvantages. Furthermore, I assisted a workshop on citizen participation organized by the

PAPDRB. This workshop was organized by a former guerrilla combatant, who based much of his presentation on his own experience as a participant in war and reintegration. This workshop was particularly insightful, as it gave me a first impression on how former combatants could use their own life story to reach out to peers.

Finally, I took part in two planning sessions former-combatant organizations held in order to prepare a seminar on the challenges of reintegration in Bogotá. Attending these meetings helped me further understand the challenges of reintegration from the perspective of former-combatant organizations and better grasp the internal dynamics (ranging from cooperation to rivalries) between different organizations and the public entities surrounding them. Other, more informal observations were gathered during the numerous visits to ex-combatants' households or working places, where I was allowed to take part in their daily routines, at times sharing a coffee or even a meal with their family members. However, while the application of different research methods and a broad range of interview participants did strengthen my available data, it is also necessary to briefly reflect on the limitations of the data.

4.3 DATA LIMITATIONS AND TRIANGULATION

While the aim of the interview selection process was to gather data from a broad range of ex-combatant organizations in order to gain a varied and comprehensive perspective on the phenomenon under scrutiny, the data nevertheless presents a number of limitations. Most importantly, this research focuses primarily on interviews with ex-combatant organizations composed of either former guerrilla members or mixed groups, as these were the predominant organizations at the chosen research sites. It thereby sidelines organizational formats that emerged from the collective demobilization process of paramilitaries, which were only examined via existing documentation. Another bias of this research might be that no systematic interviews were conducted with a control group of combatants not engaged in any organizational process to determine which factors might help predict whether an individual engages in an ex-combatant organization. However, anecdotal evidence of reasons for not engaging in an organizational process could be gathered from interviews in the framework of the AGC project.

One last limitation relates to the potential implications of a center-periphery selection bias. The bulk of research was conducted in Bogotá, which is known as a reintegration hotspot and presents a number of unique features. Due to the long-held centralized approach to reintegration, the capital offers comparatively better access to reintegration services than peripheral regions. Because individuals experiencing security threats in the countryside are also attracted to the anonymity of city life and expect better job opportunities, Bogotá has received a disproportionately large amount of ex-combatants, especially individually disengaged ex-combatants. In addition, the city has taken a progressive municipal approach to reintegration that differs from national reintegration policies as it 1) has integrated a considerable amount of former combatants into its staff, including the management, and 2) has been more supportive to former combatants' collective initiatives, both of which are likely to have had a positive effect on the emergence of individually-driven former combatant organizations. However, several precautions were taken to help counter the risk of a center-periphery bias distorting research results. First of all, and as outlined above, a number of interviews were conducted in smaller cities situated in different departments such as Popayán, Villavicencio and Pasto. In addition, various interviews conducted in Bogotá explicitly referred to organizational processes that had taken place in different areas of the country. This was especially the case for organizational processes that resulted from the 1990s peace negotiations with guerilla movements and whose post-militancy formations concentrated on their previous areas of operations. Finally, center-periphery divides are not only a matter of urban-rural distinction, but also apply to cities themselves, where most ex-combatants live in run-down areas in the outskirts. This was also the case for most of my research participants, who often lived at the very edge of the city where there were poor public services, little state control and difficult security conditions.

To address these limitations and the (partial) dependence on gatekeepers and their contacts, the data gathered through interviews with ex-combatants and participant observation was triangulated with other sources.

The concept of triangulation was originally introduced under the premise of improving the validity of research results generated in social sciences. Today, triangulation is used as a strategy to gain additional insights and ensure existing ones (Flick 2008: 310-311). According to Denzin (1970), triangulation encompasses four different forms, ranging from data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation and methods triangulation. Throughout the research process for this dissertation, triangulation was applied with regards

to data and methods. With regards to methods triangulation, I combined (different types of) interviews with participant observation as outlined above. The combination of these methods helped me contrast ex-combatants' narratives with their activities, which helped me enrich or question the information obtained in interviews. In addition, meeting with different ex-combatant organizations additionally helped me understand how they relate to each other and how they actively collaborate.

Data obtained in interviews with ex-combatants and participant observation was then triangulated with information from interviews and/or conversations with staff from relevant public and private institutions (e.g. social workers and psychologists at the ACR and the PAPDRB, NGOs and academic experts) in addition to reports, flyers and other publications by ex-combatants organizations and relevant NGOs, academic institutes or public institutions linked to the reintegration processes, as well as official documents such as peace accords. Training materials both for trainers and demobilized training participants from different NGOs and institutions in charge of the reintegration process were also scrutinized. Apart from written material, audiovisual sources also provided useful information. These included a video documentary on the *Surcando Caminos* foundation produced by Al Jazeera (Contreras and Finkelstein 2011), the video documentary "I am a Peace Leader" (*Soy Líder de Paz*)⁸¹ (*Asociación de Jovenes Creadores La Pulpa* 2007) on conflict resolution training for ex-combatants, produced in the framework of the project "Supporting and Strengthening Public Institutions Responsible for the Reintegration Policy" (*Apoyo y Fortalecimiento a las Instituciones Públicas Responsables de la Política de Reintegración*) of the *Centro Mundial*, and a series of short videos with the title "Constructing Citizenship through Communication" (*Comunicar Construyendo Ciudadanía*) (*Asociación de Jovenes Creadores La Pulpa* n/a)⁸² on social problems including reintegration financed by Bogotá's municipal reintegration program

⁸¹ The project of the *Centro Mundial*, within which the video documentary was produced, was supported by the ACR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Embassy of the Netherlands.

⁸² In total, the package contains five CDs with thematic videos on 1) education and mobility, 2) women, gender, and environmental issues, 3) vulnerable populations and victims' reparation, 4) employment, and 5) reintegration. The production was supported by the City of Bogotá's reintegration program, the National Television Commission (*Comisión Nacional de Televisión*), and *Centro Mundial*.

and produced by ex-combatants, as well as a video-documentary on female ex-combatants from various guerrilla organisations produced by the International Development Research Center (IDRC). I also consulted the growing autobiographical literature by ex-combatants of different groups, with a particular attention to accounts that elaborate not only on the life within the armed group, but also on the challenges of reintegration (e.g. Peralta Gómez 2011). Finally, a personal field diary helped document research progress and served as an outlet for frequent frustrations that accompanied the field research process and triggered the following reflections.

4.4 RESEARCH AS INTERACTION: REFLECTIONS ON THE CHALLENGES IN THE FIELD

This section reflects on a number of challenges, including issues of truth and objectivity, asymmetries in the research process and hidden agendas and expectations, and the researcher's own identity as an opportunity and challenge for establishing contact and generating data. These issues surfaced time and again throughout the research process and are linked to one core academic debate: the relationships between researcher and research subject, and their role in generating data and (co)shaping research results.

4.4.1 ISSUES OF TRUTH AND OBJECTIVITY: RESEARCH AS (ASYMMETRIC) INTERACTION

It was the anthropologist Geertz who challenged the possibility of discovering “the” truth, arguing that all a researcher is able to do is to capture a presentation of the representation by the research subjects, thereby replacing the positivist quest for truth with a new interpretive paradigm of “understanding” and “meaning” (Gallahar 2009: 132, Robben 1995: 96). Research participants decide themselves how they want to present themselves, thereby influencing what a researcher can see or not in the first place. Goffmann has developed the notion of “impression management” (Robben 1995: 87), which can be used to understand the “interactional processes that develop in ethnographic encounters” in which researchers and their interlocutors alike try to protect their public image, revealing only the facets they consider convenient in the situation.

Usually, reflections on the relationship between researcher and research subjects highlight the asymmetry in interview situations and the more powerful role of the researcher, as she is ultimately the one who decides the setting, directs the meeting and, most importantly, has the ultimate decision-making power on how to present not only the research results, but also the research participants themselves (see Gallahar 2009: 133 for a discussion of the dangers of researchers misrepresenting their research subjects). Famous Colombian filmmakers Luis Ospina and Carlos José Mayolo coined the term “*porno miseria*” (roughly “misery porn”) with their 1978 short movie “*Aggarando Pueblo*” (roughly “filming the town”, the English title is “The Vampires of Poverty”). This provocative – false – documentary shot in the city of Cali expounds on the issue of the cinematographic industry revolving around documentary films portraying miserable living conditions in Latin America. In doing so, the directors criticized the asymmetry between the (often European) documenter and the (indigenous) documented. The documenters (consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly) ultimately benefit from the misery they document, even if their motivation can be considered noble. Today, this asymmetry is known well in academia and has triggered many reflections. Proposed strategies to level this asymmetry include participatory action research, collaborative research schemes with shared ownership, the involvement of resource persons in the drafting process of research outcomes, giving research informants veto power over representations they do not feel comfortable with, or declining from having researchers formulate research projects altogether and instead let the community decide what they want to be researched (Gallahar 2009: 134). Beneath these strategies lies the claim that researchers should be thinking of how they can give something back to the communities or people they are in touch with in the course of their research. As outlined and critically discussed by Gallahar (2009: 137-143), critical perspectives claim that *quid pro quo* relationships should be part of the research process. This was also addressed by some of my interview partners, as demonstrated by the following interview passage:

A: “*Personally, what do I get out of this? [...] I don’t get anything. In turn you will harvest good fruits. [...] It would be interesting if you could open up spaces within your academic environment, bring us together with other NGOs that can help us. This would help, but again, what do we get in practical terms? [...] Many people come from different universities of the world, they get a scholarship, they establish themselves here and then they enter big institutions.*”

Q: So why don’t you write yourself?

A: It is difficult to position oneself in the book market. Let's say it would be good if, for example, you could give us a contact to a European publishing house where they sell more of this [peace and conflict-related literature]. The important thing is that academic knowledge does not only serve to understand conflicts but also to resolve them. And academia sticks with observation. People don't take part, [they] manage to write the article that promotes them to their title and that's it" (personal interview, FUNDAPAM member, February 20, 2012, Bogotá).

Another challenging situation that regularly required clarifying my mission and function as a researcher were the interviews held at the ACR service center. Here, interview participants were often under the impression I was ACR staff. Hoping that I could do something for them, they provided information about their problems with the ACR, including the reintegration program design, the lack of legal security, or the lack of financial rewards for having participated in military operations (e.g. interview code PSTO38, AGC database). These examples demonstrate that researchers must be aware of the personal or collective interests of research participants in order to help them understand the commitment and expectations people bring to the interview situation. Especially those who agreed to interviews through word-of-mouth or gatekeeper contacts at times had their own motivations to participate in the study. These ranged from promoting a project or activity, telling their life story to an interested listener, complaining or voicing critical concerns regarding the way reintegration is managed in Colombia, talking to a person from a different culture, returning a favor (to a gatekeeper), or earning money.⁸³ Expectations or hope for a reward ranged from discrete inquiries as to how interview participation would benefit the interview partner, or inquiries for contacts to the (German) donor community to help finance particular projects, to open invitations to pay for the conversation.⁸⁴ One interview partner, for instance, specifically asked how his organization would benefit from the interview, and whether I had any contacts

⁸³ In one particular case, the motivation turned out to be a religious mission. While I agreed, after much insistence, to visit the interviewee's evangelical community only a few blocks down the road from our meeting point, it was a hard struggle not to be forced into a private conversation with a so-called "ceremonial master" wanting to share a personal "prophecy" with me.

⁸⁴ On one occasion, an interview partner would constantly mention his financial problems and finally invited me to write my phone number on a banknote.

in Germany that could help promote his organization: “[F]or instance, you could promote our project in your country or your university so that people know that here in Colombia, there are people who are willing and able to work towards a real [peace] process. Would that be a possibility?” (personal interview, ONE OG member, May 04, 2012, Bogotá). This demonstrates that a researcher needs to think about her strategy in dealing with monetary or service requests from research participants before engaging in a study. Opting to not provide financial remuneration to research participants is not an easy decision. Offering remuneration can be a motivating factor for people to participate in a study. It can also be regarded as a compensation for people’s time and commitment. Even though the research community asserts that research benefits everybody in the long-term by generating insights and impacting policies, it is quite doubtful whether these insights will have an immediate positive impact on the initial interviewees themselves. The argument that, in the end, the researcher might gain more through their work (in terms of remuneration, social reputation, or career development) than their key informants is thus especially obvious when economic asymmetries between researcher and research participants are striking. In addition, one must not forget that knowledge and access are both commodities which people can rightfully feel entitled to be paid for. However, I personally did not offer financial remuneration for interviewees as a general rule based on the following reflections. While paying for interviews has certain advantages, it also implies certain risks, as it might contribute to further distorting the information. Research participants may understand the situation as a service they are paid for and hence adapt their stories to what the researcher presumably wants to hear. It might also hamper the development of a personal relation based on trust and, instead, establish client-vendor relations based on monetary exchange. Finally, and most importantly to me, paying for interviews might close the door for further researchers with lesser economic means (often from local universities) who cannot afford paying people for their participation in a study. While I did not pay research participants, in cases when people had offered me particular support in the field, or when I had established a personal relationship with the interviewee, I did express my gratitude with a gift to the participants’ families, such as school material for their children. In cases when interviews were held in a public cafeteria, I also invited interviewees for a coffee or drink.

4.4.2 THE PERSONAL ASPECT IN THE RESEARCH PROCESS: GETTING INVOLVED
WHILE KEEPING A DISTANCE

Patton (2002, in Corbin and Strauss 2008: 302) asserts that “[c]reative fieldwork means using every part of oneself to experience and understand what is happening. Creative insights come from being directly involved in the setting being studied.” While this sounds exciting, it might also imply exposing oneself to (emotionally) difficult situations and demands a high degree of self-awareness and reflection about the role of one’s own identity and personality in the research process.

One element that struck me was the importance of my identity as a stranger, or as a German. In the context of her research in Egypt as a US-American, Radsch (2009: 98) highlights how nationality influences research opportunities, starting with visa issues, possibilities for funding, and chances of being accepted by potential resource person based on their own assumption about what a “typical” person from this specific country is like.⁸⁵ During my research I felt that in some cases, the idea that my research would serve an institute far away from Colombia helped interviewees feel more confident that my research would not affect their security and hence proved beneficial for establishing a trustful atmosphere. In other cases, the very fact that I was from a developed country would create expectations about the kind of economic benefits I would be able to raise for my interviewees, be it through channels in private business, academic collaboration, or my supposed connections to internationally operating development NGOs (see above). In this case, I opted for a transparent communication about my restricted possibilities for providing concrete support (e.g. dissemination of my research and hence dissemination of information about the work of the organization, putting people in touch with certain institutions abroad) and limitations (e.g. no funding opportunities).

However, coming from a different cultural background at times also proved to be challenging. One example is the different ways people communicate and arrange meetings. In

⁸⁵ See Radsch (2009: 100) and Martin-Ortega and Herman (2009: 238) for a more detailed exploration on the ways in which researchers’ identities impact access, and how researchers can handle this situation, e.g. with careful self-presentation in which the researcher emphasizes different identity aspects according to the situation.

various occasions, it took various (frustrating) attempts to arrange interviews, as the following entry in the field research diary demonstrates:

“Entry 10, Tuesday, January 24, 2012

I have a meeting at one o'clock at PAPDRB to talk to a potential research participant. I have already 1) called in December (no answer), 2) written a text message (no answer), 3) called again in January ('call me on Wednesday'), 4) called last Wednesday ('let's meet on Saturday'), 5) called again on Saturday to have the meeting postponed by the interviewee to Tuesday ('call me Tuesday at eight'), 6) called Tuesday at eight o'clock to get no answer, 7) called again at 10 o'clock to finally get an appointment at one o'clock 7) got to the appointment, nobody was there, called again to be informed that the interviewee 'will be there in 20 minutes', 8) finally met the person half an hour later but [...] the interviewee doesn't have time, but suggests that 9) I call him again 'on Friday at eight'.”

In all its irony, this is a comically accurate description of how chaotic and tiring fieldwork can sometimes become. It is also a vivid account of the value of phone conversations (over email or text messages as are common in my home country Germany) and mobile phones in Colombia. The totally normal Colombian way of getting in touch can easily imply up to five or more phone calls in a row before the person finally picks up.⁸⁶

Being a female researcher also influenced the research process in many ways. Preparing my field research for the AGC project, some of my colleagues got quite excited about my possibilities as a woman to reach out to female ex-combatants. However, in the field, it was often much easier to establish a fluent communication with my male interview partners. I had the impression that my gender identity made me appear less dangerous in the eyes of my interview participants and therefore opened some doors. While establishing personal relationships with interview partners and being invited to their homes helps build trust, and with it more fluent conversations, it also can expose the researcher to some dilemmas. First of all, it can become difficult to draw the line between a personal, confidential

⁸⁶ The story has an epilogue: Just before saying goodbye and after inviting me to give him another call, my resource person said “but the important thing is that now, we know each other”. I had established a first face-to-face contact and had passed the test. A couple of days later, I not only met him for a long interview, but also got to know some of his friends and family.

conversation and an interview you want to record and use. What people tell you personally in your capacity as a friend might reveal the most interesting facets for your work, however, obtaining them in a private setting might prevent you from using them for your professional endeavor. There is no straightforward way to deal with this dilemma. For this text, making interview passages anonymous has been one possibility to prevent doing harm to individual interviewees while still being able to use sensitive but relevant information where appropriate.

Finally, getting involved in research participants' personal lives can also expose the researcher to challenging situations on a personal level. On one occasion, an interviewee told me about the illegal activities their partner was involved in, which ranged from small-scale delinquency to illegal arms trade. On another occasion, one interviewee was constantly yelling at and finally physically punished a child. How should one behave in such a situation? Intervene and stop the person? Leave the setting? Look aside? Make the incident a topic of conversation? I opted for the last option with the consequence that I was told about the much worse treatment of that person's children in the past. Unfortunately, textbooks on field research do not frequently contain advice on how to react in such a situation where one's natural instincts to intervene collide with the professional need to keep a certain distance from one's research subject matter.

For me, one possible way to respond to or even mitigate the frustrations and challenges fieldwork brings at times was working in a team with a local research partner. Such teamwork was extremely helpful in dealing with a whole range of difficult situations, from handling safety concerns, improving interview techniques, enriching interviews with innovative questions posed by my counterpart, dealing with frustrating moments such as rejection or cancelled interviews, and last but not least, having a sparring partner when it came to processing data and the experiences linked to gathering it.⁸⁷

Having reflected on the methods and process of data gathering, including both the strengths and limitations of the applied approaches, the following section turns to the empirical data gathered in the field and provides information on the procedures used for data analysis.

⁸⁷ See Mertus (2009) for an in-depth discussion on the benefits of working with local researchers.

4.5 EMPIRICS: DATA MATERIAL AND ANALYSIS

This section serves the purpose to present the raw material of empirical data and provide an overview of how the analysis process was managed. It will begin by presenting the data gathered through the interviews and providing information on the study participants (4.5.1) as well as the organizations that took part in the study (4.5.2). Section 4.5.3 then explains how the data was analyzed.

4.5.1 DATA MATERIAL

In the context of the AGC project, I conducted a total of 59 interviews: 39 interviews with former FARC-EP, three with former ELN, and 17 with former paramilitary members. Interviewees were between 18 and 55 years old, with an average age of 32. Of the 59 interviewees, roughly one quarter were women (15 women and 44 men). The average age of taking up arms had been 20 years, with extreme cases integrating as early as the age of 11 and as late as the age of 40. The average time they had remained in their respective group was eight years, with extreme cases ranging from three months to 16 years of militancy. Two thirds of the interviewees held rank-and-file positions within their group, where they did not exercise any command over fellow group members. However, one third of the interviewees had at least a basic command function. Eight former guerrilla members were commander of a squadron (*escuadra*), the smallest guerrilla unit usually comprising 12 people, while another eight former guerrilla members had 12-50 people under their command. Only one person held a particularly high-ranking position (front commander) with, according to the interviewee, 1,000 people under their command. With regards to the paramilitary participants in the study, only two of them had command functions, one with up to 30 and another one with up to 120 people under their command. The education of interview participants was very diverse, with one interviewee having only completed first grade and two interviewees holding a university degree. Between these extremes, seven interviewees only (partially) attended elementary school (which is five years in Colombia), 24 ranged between six and ten years of school attendance, and another 25 made it until their A-grade or even finished vocational

training after school. However, originating from rural areas where they would start working at an early age, the great majority had gained a considerable amount of school education only after their demobilization and participation in the ACR's reintegration program. With regards to their personal situation, 40 out of 59 interviewees lived in a relationship, and the great majority (50 people) had children, although not always with their current partner and at times they did not live with them. Originally from over 18 different departments, only 16 of 59 people lived in or close by their place of origin.

Figure 1: Composition of interview sample

Diversity in terms of	From	To
Age	18	55
Age at recruitment	11	40
Time spent within group	3 months	16 years
Educational background	1 year of school education	University degree
Function within group	Rank-and-file	Front commander
Gender balance	15 women	44 men

Source: Own research.

All but six interviews⁸⁸ were audio recorded. A conversation summary highlighting key elements and particularities was written down shortly after each interview. Individual excel charts served to track the number of personal contacts interviewees had with people inside and outside of their group. In addition, all interviews were registered in an unattributed database containing information on personal background (age, gender, school education, armed group) as well as benchmark data on their motives to join and leave their respective group, and their current status in the reintegration program (see Annex 4).

Parallel to and after the interviews commissioned by the University of Oxford, I conducted interviews with ex-combatants involved in ex-combatant organizations and initiatives. Interview participants included two members of the NGO *Surcando Caminos* (Making their Way Foundation), three co-founders or members of the *Fundación Líderes de Paz* (Peace Leaders Foundation) and the *Corporación ANDES* (ANDES Corporation) each,

⁸⁸ Interviews were not recorded due to technical problems.

two members of the *Fundación para la Paz y el Medio Ambiente* (Foundation for Peace and Environment, FUNDAPAM), the two co-founders of a small company called ONE OG, a member of the *Red de Reporteros de Convivencia* (Reporters' Network for Peaceful Coexistence), a member of the NGO *Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris* (New Rainbow Corporation) and several interviews with collaborators of the *Fundación Sol y Tierra* (Sun and Earth Foundation). I also conducted an interview with a former EPL member on the *Fundación Progresar* and the *Fundación Cultura Democrática* (Democratic Culture Foundation, FUCUDE), as well as with one co-founder of the *Red Nacional de Mujeres Excombatientes* (National Network of Female Ex-combatants). Former members of the M-19 were also interviewed in their personal capacity (see Annex 1 for a full list of interviewees). With regard to their personal backgrounds, interviewees were former members of different armed groups, including the CRS (1), FARC-EP (8), ELN (2), EPL (2), MAQL (4), M-19 (5) and paramilitary units (2). One interviewee was a retired officer of the statutory armed forces (1). As this interview sample took into account former combatants from the peace processes of the 1990s (CRS, EPL, MAQL, M-19), it presented not only a much more diverse picture of the various armed groups and their trajectories in Colombia than the previous interview sample, but also a much lower representation of former paramilitary combatants compared to the interview sample for the AGC project. Interviewee's age ranged between 35 and 55, and the majority of them had completed a vocational education beyond high school, or had even undertaken university studies – another stark contrast to the previous interview sample. With regard to gender balance, only 5 of the 25 interviewees were women (from both paramilitary and guerrilla forces).

All interviews but the last set with members of the *Fundación Sol y Tierra* took place in Bogotá. These interviews were conducted in the Cauca department's capital Popoyán, where my research partner and I had the opportunity to conduct a number of interviews on the history of the MAQL for an edited book project on transformations from armed to non-violent resistance (see Cárdenas Sarrias and Planta 2015). As interviewees were contacted in their function as members of their respective organizations, they are referred to accordingly in this study when citing interview material.

Figure 2 below offers a brief overview of the selected ex-combatant organizations. A full description of each organization in alphabetical order, including the organizational history, membership structure, areas of activities, scope and objectives as well as funding

sources can be found in Annex 2. All information provided is based on interviews with the above-mentioned (co-)founders and members of these organizations.

4.5.2 COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW OF PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

While Chapter VI will provide an in-depth comparative analysis of the genesis, particularities and differences between ex-combatant organizations in Colombia, this section provides a short overview of the organizations that participated in this study. In general, the ex-combatant organizations studied here display a broad variety in organizational set-up, membership structure, range of activity, outreach, and organizational stability. Whereas a few organizations have managed to sustain themselves over time, others have experienced fragility and dispersal. In a comparative perspective, the scope, target groups and activities of the organizations under scrutiny were of a broad range. Most organizations examined were non-governmental organizations, with ONE OG registered as a company and the *Red de Reporteros* being a project driven forward jointly by various organizations and the support of Bogotá municipal reintegration program. Beyond activities targeting directly and exclusively the ex-combatant community (reintegration facilitation, self-help, political advocacy), interviewees mentioned activities explicitly connected to peacebuilding, such as capacity building or projects providing practical support to victims' rights and reparations, reconciliation activities (including the provision of public services and social work), memory and truth, psychosocial support, advocacy for reconciliation, peace pedagogy, the prevention of recruitment, and capacity building in conflict resolution methods. In addition, a number of activities related to a broader development agenda, including human rights, gender equality, local and regional development initiatives, food security projects, and education were also mentioned. Finally, interviewees also mentioned a range of topics related to good governance, including political capacity building for public institutions, education for democracy, public policy design and public administration. While various organizations aimed at impacting policies, only one organization, *Corporación ANDES*, explicitly aimed at actively participating in politics by building a political movement.

Funding for these various activities came from specific governmental funds related to peace agreements (in the case of organizations that signed peace agreements in the 1990s), governmental reintegration programs at the national or sub-national/municipal level, and bilateral donors and international organizations such as USAID, EU or the IOM. The target

groups of the activities did not only include fellow ex-combatants, but also youth at risk, internally displaced persons and other vulnerable community groups, as well as political decision makers and community members and leaders. A few organizations also targeted an academic audience. In one case, an interviewee reported that the organization was also providing training on how to cooperate with and build the civilian population's trust towards the mid- and high-ranking armed forces – something the organization felt very knowledgeable about because of its members' long experience as guerrilla commanders (personal interview, FUNDAPAM member, February 20, 2012, Bogotá^{vi}).

In addition, a number of interviewees also mentioned specific methodologies and principles for their work, including the powerful instrument of life stories, the need to build trust and a stable relationship with the target group before revealing one's own past as an armed militant, and be sensitive to potential fears and rejection from non-combatant target groups (personal interview, *Fundación Líderes de Paz* member, May 02, 2012, Bogotá^{vii}).

The most important differences between these organizations were related to their membership structure and their scope of action. On the one hand, several self-established ex-combatant organizations emerging independently from a collective demobilization process were built by ex-combatants from different groups. On the other hand, there are numerous peace accord-based ex-combatant organizations linked to the peace processes in the early 1990s. While the former operated in the areas its founders settled after their demobilization, the latter – at least initially – clearly focused their activities on the local area the group had been operating in. With regard to membership structure, tendencies are less clear-cut. However, peace accord-based organizations have tended to be built around in-group dynamics, at times incorporating non-combatants. Ex-combatant organizations formed by deserters were more often open to accommodate ex-combatants from different groups. Figure 2 on the following page summarizes and contrasts the different initiatives, before 4.5.3 outlines the data analysis process of the empirical material presented here.

Figure 2: Overview of organizations that took part in the study

Organization	Organizational genesis	Membership structure	Main areas of work	Site and scope
<i>Corporación ANDES</i>	Self-established	Mixed: from various armed groups (guerrilla and paramilitary)	Political advocacy	National scope, based in Bogotá
<i>Corporación Surcando Caminos</i>	Self-established	Mixed: from various armed groups (guerrilla and paramilitary)	Social work, improve living conditions for ex-combatants	Local scope, based in Ciudad Bolívar/Bogotá
<i>Fundación Cultura Democrática</i> ⁸⁹	Self-established	Single-group	Analysis	National scope, based in Bogotá
<i>Fundación Líderes de Paz</i>	Self-established	Mixed: from various armed groups (guerrilla and paramilitary)	Social work, reconciliation activities	Local scope, based in Bogotá
<i>Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris</i>	Peace accord-based (CRS)	Mixed: former members of the CRS guerrilla and non-militants	Reintegration, regional development, analysis and policy recommendations	National scope, with regional emphasis in former CRS territories, based in Bogotá
<i>Fundación Progresar</i> ⁹⁰	Peace accord-based (EPL)	Only former members of the EPL guerrilla	Reintegration, regional development	National scope, with regional emphasis in former EPL territories, based in Bogotá

⁸⁹ The *Fundación Cultural Democrática* is an exception. Set up as part from the *Fundación Progresar* by two former EPL members, it did not understand itself as an “ex-combatant organization” but from the very beginning as a think tank coincidentally established by former combatants (personal interview, staff, PAPDRB, May 11, 2012, Bogotá).

⁹⁰ The *Fundación Progresar* is no longer operating today. However, one of its regional branches in Cúcuta, Norte de Santander department, has developed into a human rights NGO, maintaining the name *Fundación Progresar* (personal interview, staff, PAPDRB, May 11, 2012, Bogotá).

Organization	Organizational genesis	Membership structure	Main areas of work	Site and scope
FUNDAPAM	Self-established	Only former members of the FARC-EP guerrilla (with one exception: one former ELN member)	Reintegration, improve living conditions for former combatants (productive projects), recruitment prevention	National scope, based in Bogotá
ONE OG	Self-established (private company)	Mixed: former guerrilla member and former military staff	Business, self-help for former combatants	Local scope, based in Bogotá (with national ambition)
<i>Red Nacional de Mujeres Excombatientes</i>	Self-established	Mixed: from various guerrilla organizations	Self-help, political training, presenting former combatants as political subjects	National scope, based in Bogotá
<i>Red de Reporteros de Convivencia</i> ⁹¹	Self-established (sponsored by Bogotá' municipal reintegration program)	Mixed: from various armed groups (guerrilla and paramilitary)	Social work, analysis, exhibiting former combatants as community agents	Local scope, based in Bogotá

Source: Own research.

⁹¹ The *Red de Reporteros*, rather than an organization, was an initiative sponsored by Bogotá's municipal reintegration program and accompanied temporarily by various ex-combatant organizations, including *Surcando Caminos* and *Líderes de Paz*.

4.5.3 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis was conducted in a cyclical way and supported by a software program. Circular data analysis refers to a process in which first analytical categories are established in parallel to (and not after) the research process and refined and set into relation once all data is gathered. For my research, this meant that initial codes were established in an open and inductive manner throughout the data gathering process. Starting with line-by-line coding of my interview transcripts, I coded every aspect within each interview that seemed relevant for the overall research question was coded into a single-word or short-phrase concept (a technique called “close encounter” by Corbin and Strauss (2008: 163). While I used my own wording for most of the codes, I also used several in-vivo codes when the exact wording used by interviewees seemed particularly explanatory and useful for further conceptualization. In a second step, and with additional information from expert interviewees and secondary sources in mind, the entire data material was revised. To facilitate the analysis process, I relied on MaxQDA software.⁹² Computer-based analysis of qualitative data has become a common tool in social sciences, although it is not uncontested (for a discussion of the potential drawbacks, see Flick 2009). Such software can be extremely useful when dealing with extensive interview material, as the computer-based application makes it easy to create, delete and re-organize codes, categories and sub-categories throughout the analysis process. In addition, programs such as MaxQDA come with a number of useful functions. They do not only automatically register how often certain codes are used, they also make it easy to retrieve interview passages if needed for citation and allow the researcher to easily create, modify and relate memos to codes, thereby facilitating the analysis process. For this dissertation, MaxQDA was primarily used to organize descriptive background data, support the coding process of the interview material and facilitate the formulation of central themes. Specifically, MaxQDA proved very helpful in organizing data on the personal background of interviewees

⁹² Similar programs are Atlas.ti and NVivo.

Chapter IV: Operationalization of research design in the field

(mobilization into and function within the armed group, disengagement patterns, peacebuilding career paths) and clustering information on the organizational set-up, membership structure and scope. The task of the following chapters is to present and guide through the findings of this analysis. While Chapter V provides a brief background of the root causes and dynamics of the conflict in Colombia, including an analysis of the emergence of different armed groups, Chapter VI then analyses in more depth the post-militancy trajectories of these groups and their organizational processes before Chapter VII highlights a number of factors that explain variation in ex-combatant organization capacity to serve as a resource for peace.

CHAPTER V: CONFLICT DYNAMICS IN COLOMBIA: FROM *LA VIOLENCIA* TO THE NATIONAL CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY (1948-1990)

“Complex” is one of the adjectives most often used to describe protracted armed conflicts. This is also true for the situation of internal armed conflict in Colombia, which has evolved through different phases over half a century, and which has been described as “violent chaos”, “civil war”, a “rebellion”, a “low-intensity war”, a “new war”, “several micro-wars”, or a “terrorist threat” according to the analyst’s perspective and political objective (see Planta 2006: 14). According to Medina Gallego (2009: 45-46),⁹³ the dynamic of internal armed conflict in Colombia is in reality a superposition of various “wars” taking place at the national and sub-national levels: the state’s war against the insurgency, paramilitarism, drug-traffickers and organized civil society, the paramilitary’s war against the insurgency, against – at least temporarily – the state, and organized sectors of the population, and the insurgency’s war against the state, the paramilitaries and the drug traffickers, and at times against other insurgency groups. It is also a war of diverse militias, armed gangs, private justice troops and assassins operating in urban areas of the country, and last but not least a war conducted by the drug dealers against the state and the insurgency.

Notwithstanding the variety of armed actors that have emerged and evolved over time, the longevity of armed conflict in Colombia has also brought about variations in conflict intensity over time and space. Next to a strong rural-urban divide in conflict dynamics, Colombian researchers (see for instance García-Durán 2010: 99) have pointed to strong variations at the subnational level as different regions experience different phases of the same conflict at the same time. Thus, scenarios ranging from latent to escalated conflict, from negotiation initiatives to post-conflict dynamics all simultaneously coexist throughout the country, making it extremely difficult to conceive a unified picture of armed conflict in

⁹³ For a detailed discussion of the nature of the Colombian conflict and the different attempts to characterize it, see Medina Gallego 2009: 30-50.

Colombia. This has resulted in distinct classifications of armed conflict in Colombia at different moments in time or space and by different data sets (see Chojnacki 2008 for a general discussion on the implications of using different typologies for armed conflict).⁹⁴ The Uppsala University's Conflict Data Program (UCDP), for instance, has categorized the situation of armed violence in Colombia as a "minor armed conflict since 1964" – the date the FARC-EP emerged – which has in some specific years, including 2002, 2004, 2005 and 2006, reached the intensity of a "major armed conflict". The Correlates of War (COW) project, in turn, refers to two specific years as starting points for the seventh and eighth "internal war" in Colombia: 1947 as the starting point for *La Violencia*, and 1989 as the starting point for armed conflict with the FARC-EP. Finally, the German Working Group on the Causes of War (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft Kriegsursachenforschung, AKUF*) refers to four different wars in Colombia, including the period of *La Violencia*, and the wars between the government and various armed groups, including the FARC-EP, the ELN and the M-19. These different classifications demonstrate not only the evolution of armed conflict in Colombia but also the variation between existing data sets and the difficulty to wholly capture situations of violence in statistics. While a measurable violence index might scientifically help to classify a situation within a country as an armed conflict in some years, but perhaps not in others, it does not necessarily offer an adequate blanket representation of what people on the ground experience from day to day throughout different parts of the country. In addition, all too often data on violence is missing, underreported or else falsified in an attempt by armed actors to cover up their actions.

In light of these caveats and in the context of this thesis, the term "internal armed conflict" will refer to the time span 1964 (the emergence of the FARC-EP) to 2016 (the end point for analysis for this thesis), independent of the intensity of recorded conflict-related violence. This approach is in order to bridge all time- and space-bound variations and emphasize the general continuities or "root causes" that characterize the dynamics of armed

⁹⁴ In particular, see Chojnacki (2006: 7) for a broader discussion on the implications of conflict definitions used by different data sets.

conflict in Colombia: an exclusionist elite-driven political system, unaddressed socio-political grievances, the operation of non-state armed groups, and the continuation not only of targeted conflict-related direct violence, but also structural and cultural violence.

The consequences of its long conflict have earned Colombia a sad reputation worldwide, with internal displacement, forced disappearance, homicide, kidnapping, sexual violence and a contamination of rural areas with anti-personnel mines having become part of the conflict-related violence. After a period of low-intensity conflict in the 1960s and 1970s,⁹⁵ violence levels rose throughout the 1980s and 1990s due to the expansion of the guerrilla,⁹⁶ the emergence of paramilitary units and the activities of the drug business.⁹⁷ As a result of the military strengthening the remaining guerrilla groups, particularly the FARC-EP, the crisis of the state and the economy, the rise of the drug business, and most importantly the growth and conversion of paramilitary units into a national platform, conflict-related violence reached a peak around the new millennium (see CNMH 2013: 32). Data for the period 1996-2002 suggests that in these six years alone, 1,089 massacres against the civilian population occurred, with a death toll of 6,569 victims.⁹⁸ These were 55% of all massacres committed

⁹⁵ According to CNMH (2013: 127), the conflict had a very low visibility throughout the 1960s and 1970s due both to the small size of the guerrilla movements and their peripheral location, and to the moderate reform policies put forward by the National Front (*Frente Nacional*) to limit opposition activities.

⁹⁶ According to CNMH (2013: 138), all three major guerrilla movements managed to considerably grow in numbers in the first half of the 1980s. Between 1981 and 1986, the EPL grew from two to 12 fronts, the ELN from three to ten and the FARC-EP from ten to 31 fronts. Growing only slowly throughout the 1970s (with 450 armed members in 1975) they grew considerably towards the end of the 1980s (with 4,700 armed members in 1988). At the height of their expansion around the turn of the millenium, they counted approximately 18,000 members (see Richani 2002: 74). Due to increasing individual demobilization and security pressure from the government, their membership declined during President Uribe Vélez' term.

⁹⁷ Before being shot dead in a police operation, Colombia's most well known drug lord Pablo Escobar engaged his drug empire in a full war against the state from 1989-1993 (CNMH 2013: 102).

⁹⁸ According to CNMH (2013: 15), the perpetration of small-scale but daily violence against the civilian population, including massacres with a comparably low death toll, was a strategy employed by armed actors to ensure their control over the population while at the same time concealing their actions at a national level.

from 1980-2012 (ibid.: 51). At the same time, kidnapping rates peaked, with the FARC-EP transforming into the single most responsible group – next to other guerrilla groups and organized crime (ibid.: 67).⁹⁹ It was only after 2002 and the beginning of the paramilitary's demobilization process that homicide rates started to decline. Displaying one of the highest homicide rates worldwide for a period (Romero 2005: 27), with 84 homicides per 100,000 people in 1991 at the height of the country's war against drugs (see *Instituto Nacional de Medicina Legal y Ciencias Forenses*, 1999: 3), the homicide rate dropped to 52 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2003 (ibid. 2013: 3) and further to 30 per 100,000 inhabitants by 2013 (ibid.). In 2016, Colombia's homicide rate eventually reached a historical low of 26 per 100,000 inhabitants (*El País* 2016b). However, these rates indicate a national average, with some regions presenting rates seven times higher than the national average (see *Instituto Nacional de Medicina Legal y Ciencias Forenses* 2013: 79).

Sadly, conflict-related deaths have in their great majority affected the unarmed civilian population, especially from the 1990s onwards. According to the CNMH (2013: 32), 81.5% of the 220,000 conflict-related deaths between 1958-2012 were civilian, including numerous politicians, social activists, local leaders and members of community initiatives, thereby deeply affecting local, regional and national democratic processes (ibid.: 285).¹⁰⁰ However, in total, the National Unit for Victims' Assistance and Integral Reparation (*Unidad para la Atención y Reparación Integral a las Víctimas*) counted close to eight million victims of the

⁹⁹ Since the 1980s, kidnapping rates increasingly rose and reached a worldwide record of 3,706 annual kidnapping incidents in 2000, according to a study by Pax Christi (2001: 27). In total, between 1970 and 2010, almost 25,000 people were kidnapped by different armed groups and organized crime, with 90% of these cases being attributed to guerrilla forces (see CNMH 2013: 65). In 2016, only 188 kidnapping cases occurred, a reduction of 92% compared to 2000 (*El Tiempo* 2016f).

¹⁰⁰ However, the CNMH report also points to enormous underreporting, which not only demonstrates the limitations of official statistics, but also the strategies armed actors employ to conceal crimes (CNMH 2013: 33). It also suggests that only one out of three violent deaths is conflict-related. Common crime and interpersonal violence, therefore, still present an underestimated threat to personal safety in Colombia (ibid.: 32).

conflict (including those affected by displacement) towards the end of 2016.¹⁰¹ An overwhelming majority of these victims were affected by displacement. According to the International Displacement Monitoring Center (2014), “more than one in ten Colombians have at some point in their lives been forced to flee their homes as a result of violence, or fear of it, related to the armed conflict.” It also deserves mentioning that, contrary to the general trend, sexual violence – or at least its reporting – has increased (*El Tiempo* 2016b). Targeting in its overwhelming majority women and girls, 97% of cases of sexual violence remain unaddressed due to limited access to justice, administrative and logistical challenges, cultural stereotypes, and a lack of qualified staff (*ibid.*). Finally, another grave human right violation consists in forced recruitment, often occurring at a young age, into the ranks of armed groups (see Maihold 2017).

However, the civilian population has not only fallen victim to the operations of NSAGs and organized crime, but also to state security forces in incidents which thereby severely damaged the latter’s reputation and credibility. Emblematic examples for the armed forces’ responsibility in human rights violations are the so-called “false positives” (*falsos positivos*). As reported by Human Rights Watch (2015), the Colombian military committed systematic executions of civilians between 2002 and 2008, declaring them as insurgents in order to increase the number of combat deaths of guerrilla forces. According to the same report, 800 soldiers, in their majority lower-ranking members of the armed forces, have been sentenced for extrajudicial killings, with about 3,000 deaths still under investigation. In addition, the Colombian state has repeatedly been ruled responsible by the Inter-American Court for Human Rights for human rights violations in the context of the armed conflict,

¹⁰¹ According to the data set managed by the victims’ unit, a victim is considered a person who has suffered from one or more of the following actions: terrorist act/combat/assault/assassination attempt or threat, crime against personal liberty and sexual integrity, forced disappearance, dispossession/abandonment and displacement from their land, murder, mine accident, kidnapping, torture and recruitment of minors into armed groups. On December 19, 2016, 7,970,190 victims were registered with the victims’ unit Unified Victim’s Registry (*Registro Único de Víctimas*, RUV), available online at: <http://rni.unidadvictimas.gov.co/RUV> (accessed February 20, 2017).

including torture, extrajudicial killings, the participation or collusion of statutory forces in massacres, as well as the failure of the state to adequately investigate human rights violations (see Cuastumal Madrid 2013: 290-297).¹⁰²

A whole academic guild, the *violentólogos* have tried to understand Colombia's history of violence, often focusing on the emergence and growth of different armed actors and on the government's efforts to negotiate with them. However, the Colombian experience with negotiation processes and peacebuilding is as vast as its history of conflict is long. In the words of Virginia Bouvier, there is an "inherent bias against actors who have eschewed violence in the pursuit of peace" within the conflict resolution field (2009: 7). This might be one reason why (inter)national scholars have paid far more attention to the actors of war in Colombia than to the agents of peace – even though the emergence and growth of a civil-society based peace movement has been closely related to the dynamics of the armed conflict. However, various organizations, such as CINEP/PPP, the National Network of Initiatives for Peace and against War (*Red Nacional de Iniciativas para la Paz*, REDEPAZ) or the UNDP, provide databases with information on the "immense wealth of peace initiatives" (García-Durán 2004: 6), including peasants, indigenous and afro-Colombian, youth, women, faith-based organizations, trade unions and academic think tanks at various levels (local, regional, national),¹⁰³ which operate in Colombia (see also Bouvier 2009 for a comprehensive overview).

Against this background, Chapter V provides a short overview of the structural roots of Colombia's conflict (5.1) and introduces the reader to the universe of armed groups that have emerged in the course of several decades of armed conflict (5.2). Having highlighted the

¹⁰² According to Cuastumal Madrid (2013: 290-297), the Colombian state was condemned in 13 occasions between 1995-2012, with the most well-known cases being the Mapiripán, Pueblo Bello, Ituango and La Rochela massacres.

¹⁰³ Local initiatives are those that are created and operated on a small scale up to the municipal level, while regional refers to initiatives that "seek to develop and articulate processes that cover various municipalities and have a regional impact, either on an economic, political or social level." National refers to instances that link centralized power with national coverage (Fernández et al. 2004: 21).

different agendas, organizational structures and identity of these groups, the chapter briefly highlights first negotiation attempts in the 1980s (5.3) and outlines the political situation from which a series of negotiation processes with guerrilla movements started in the 1990s (5.4).

5.1 ACCESS TO LAND AND POLITICAL EXCLUSION AS ROOT CAUSES FOR CONFLICT

The background of protracted armed conflict in Colombia was formed in the contested process of state formation throughout the post-colonial 19th and 20th century. Since its independence in 1810, organized armed violence, as well as attempts to put an end to it, have been an ongoing threat in Colombia's national history. The country has seen nine civil wars¹⁰⁴ and over 40 regional rebellions, as well as various ceasefire agreements, amnesty provisions and negotiation processes with armed groups (see Cárdenas Sarrias 2005: 201, Santamaría Salamanca 2004: 463). Stretching over an area of 1,141,748 km² of land (approximately 3.5 times the size of Germany, see Figure 12, Annex 5), the country is home to 48 million people, including afro-Colombians (approximately 10,6% in 2005), indigenous (approximately 3,4 in 2005), and Sinti and Romani (approximately 0,01 in 2005) minorities.¹⁰⁵ Displaying the lowest population density in Latin America (see Jenss 2016: 125), the regionally highly diverse and fragmented country has from the beginning been characterized by the lack of a unifying political project, strong regionalism, and a highly unequal and thus conflictive distribution of land property (see also González et al. 2003: 265-272 on the formation of the Colombian state and national identity). The departure of the Spanish colonialists left behind a predominantly rural country with an extremely unequal land distribution. In a segmented society of "Whites" (*blancos*), "mixed" (*mestizos*), "indigenous" (*indígenas*) and "slaves"

¹⁰⁴ These civil wars opposed the liberal and conservative political forces in the second half of the 19th century (see Medina Gallego 2009: 8).

¹⁰⁵ These numbers were taken from the last census of the population taken in 2005 and might slightly differ by today (see DANE n/a).

(*esclavos negros*), public land was first distributed by the Spanish Crown. And then, throughout the 19th century, granted to military officers, politicians, pawnbrokers or other politically influential people – partly in order to pay the country’s debts from the War of Independence and thereby aggravating the situation (Planta 2016b: 10). Despite various governmental attempts at land reform,¹⁰⁶ land issues continued to be at the heart of Colombia’s conflict, further exacerbated by forced displacements at the hands of armed actors and private businesses – often acting in collusion¹⁰⁷ – or legal insecurity due to the informality of land possession, as well as distinct visions of and approaches to how Colombia’s enormous natural resource potential should be used best (*ibid.*). From the mid-1980s onwards, large land holdings became more common, resulting ten years later in a situation in which 50% of the land property was in the hands of 1.3% of the population (see Aguilera 2013: 127). Until today, land distribution in Colombia is among the most unequal in the world, with a Gini coefficient of 0.874 according to the Geographic Institute Agustín Codazzi (*Instituto Geográfico Agustín Codazzi* 2012: 97).

Already from the mid-19th century onward, a two-party system dominated the political landscape, whereas the political and economic elites were divided into liberal and conservative parties, with the conservative party being the dominant force until the end of the 20th century, due to the importance of the coffee sector for Colombia’s economy. Even more crucial than the polarization between political elites, however, was the division between elites and subordinate sectors of society that neither had access to political decision-making spaces nor to land. These included not only marginalized population segments in the rural areas, but also, due to an increasing urbanization, the urban working class (see Jenss 2016: 123).

¹⁰⁶ Different approaches to deal with the land question included the issuing of new land titles, the establishment of peasant conservation areas (*Zonas de Reserva Campesina*) and the formulation of comprehensive agrarian reform laws in 1936, 1961 and 1994 (see Planta 2016b: 10).

¹⁰⁷ A recent sentence by the Superior Court of Medellín has confirmed a 2014 sentence against 16 businessmen and paramilitaries found guilty of forced displacement in the context of the implementation of mega-projects related to palm plantation and cattle breeding (Contagio Radio 2016).

Triggered in 1948 by the assassination of popular liberal leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán,¹⁰⁸ the period known simply as “*La Violencia*” (The Violence) lasted 1948-1958 and left 200,000 people dead and is generally acknowledged as the breeding ground for the country’s protracted conflict (Chernick 1999). This time, which is often portrayed as a violent struggle between liberal and conservative forces, was characterized by state repression of organized peasant movements and workers in a context of massive urbanization and the growth of the low urban working class.¹⁰⁹ It eventually resulted in the establishment of a liberal-conservative power-sharing alliance called *Frente Nacional* (National Front) that lasted until 1974 and once again reinforced the power of the dominating political parties by minimizing legal space for political opposition and citizens’ access to political participation – despite being a formally democratic regime.¹¹⁰ Legal obstacles to setting up opposition parties, state-of-emergency measures and the wide clearance it granted the military provoked social and union-based groupings addressing these grievances to cross the legal boundaries of protest (see Eisenstadt and Garcia 1995: 270). As a consequence of repression, the closed two-party system, unfair land distribution, and social injustice, as well as the context of the Cold War,¹¹¹ several guerrilla movements emerged in the 1960s and 1970s.¹¹² What started as a bipolar,

¹⁰⁸ Jorge Eliécer Gaitán had been a popular leader heralding the unity of the masses against the oligarchic elite. Presidential candidate of the liberal party in the 1950 elections, he had good chances to win the race (García-Durán et al. 2008: 8).

¹⁰⁹ While the country had started to become more urbanized in the 1930s, the violence in the 1950s displaced many peasants to the urban areas. As a result, between 1930 and 1970, Colombia transformed from an essentially rural to an urban country, with 70-75% of the population living in urban areas (García-Durán et al. 2008: 9).

¹¹⁰ As highlighted by Eisenstadt and Garcia (1995: 270), Colombia has been one “of the most stable civilian-ruled democracies in Latin America” with regard to its institutions.

¹¹¹ Whereas countries from the Soviet bloc provided support in the form of arms, military training and at times financial support to the guerrilla groups, the US-administration supported the government in the framework of its National Security Doctrine of counter-insurgency (see García-Peña 2005: 59).

¹¹² Already in the years of *La Violencia*, first mobile guerrilla movements emerged, but remained primarily peasant self-defense groupings (see García-Durán et al. 2008: 8).

low-intensity conflict between the government and armed political opponents, however, soon turned into a multipolar conflict scenario, as the following section highlights.

5.2 COLOMBIA'S UNIVERSE OF ARMED ACTORS: DIFFERENT GROUPS – DIFFERENT AGENDAS

The first generation of ideological guerrilla movements appeared in the mid-1960s, even though their roots can be traced back to the land conflicts of the 1920s and 1930s, as well as the insecurity during *La Violencia* (ICG 2014: 6). They were a result of the internal problems described above and inspired by revolutionary movements in other parts of the world, particularly the Cuban revolution (e.g. Chernick 1999: 165). Today's FARC-EP originated from communist peasant self-defense groups, which grew in the late 1940s under the guidance of the Communist Party. The attack of the Independent Republic of Marquetalia (*República de Marquetalia*) – a self-defense zone held by communist peasants situated in the Huila department – by statutory forces in 1964 led to survivors creating a guerrilla force called *Bloque Sur* (South Block), which renamed itself the Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia in 1966 (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, FARC¹¹³) (see Pizarro Leongómez 2011: 17, CNMH 2013: 121). Based initially on a peasant constituency – which became more heterogeneous over time – the group had a strongly rural agenda laid out in its 1964 Agrarian Program (*Programa Agrario*, updated in 1993, displayed in CNMH 2014: 342-347), a pro-Soviet bearing, and was in the beginning heavily influenced and oriented by the Colombian Communist Party (*Partido Comunista Colombiano*, PCC).¹¹⁴ Contrary to

¹¹³ It was only in its seventh conference in 1982, that the FARC added People's Army (*Ejército del Pueblo*) to their name, thereby becoming known as the FARC-EP.

¹¹⁴ However, over time, the FARC-EP preferred to establish their own political party representation, first of all through the creation of two clandestine political parties: the closed Clandestine Communist Party (*Partido Comunista Clandestino*, PC3) and the more open Bolivarian Movement (*Movimiento Bolivariano*). The latter targeted the masses and was initially directed by the PC3

many of the more urban guerrilla organizations set-up in the 1970s (see further below), the FARC-EP's peripheral rural character – which made the group seem “backward” by a rapidly urbanizing population – and hence its lower visibility in a heavily centralized country, in a way protected the armed organization in its early phase from counter-insurgency strategies of the government (see CNMH 2014: 12).

The National Liberation Army (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*, ELN), in turn, which was founded in 1964 in San Vicente de Chucurí in the Santander department, held a pro-Cuban orientation and a more urban recruitment base, with close links to radical union workers and students (ICG 2014: 5). A thriving left-wing student movement at the Industrial University of Santander and radicalized trade unionists in Colombia's oil capital Barrancabermeja¹¹⁵ provided the breeding ground for the ELN founders, who drew their inspiration from the Cuban revolution. The ELN's initial Marxist discourse soon encompassed demands for national liberation and popular democracy, as well as opposition to foreign investment. After its founding and first expansion, the ELN entered a profound crisis in the early to mid-1970s, during which it almost disappeared due to reinforced military pressure against the state's declared enemy number one – Communism – in the Cold War era (ibid.: 5, CNMH 2013: 126). After a phase of restructuring under the leadership of Catholic

(CNMH 2014: 237) and later by the set-up of a new legal party: the Patriotic Union (*Unión Patriótica*, UP). As a result of its longevity, the FARC-EP have evolved over time as an organization in terms of their political and military strategies, their military strength, and their relations to the civilian population. For a detailed discussion of the various phases the organization has gone through, see CNMH 2014.

¹¹⁵ The ELN's focus on the energy sector (oil and natural gas) was not only conditioned by its historical links to oil workers' trade unions, but also served as a distinguishing element. Contrary to the FARC-EP, the ELN resisted any involvement in the drug business for a long time, which was even prohibited to its members. It was only in the mid-2000s that the group started to partly finance its activities with drug-related activities (ICG 2014: 6). Another important element of the ELN was the role of Catholic priests within the organization. Until today, Camilo Torres, a Catholic priest and intellectual who had joined the ELN in 1965, only to die one year later in his first ambush, is regarded as a martyr and symbol of the insurgency. Later on, his Spanish colleagues Manuel Pérez, José Jiménez and Domingo Laín also became important figures within the ELN (CNMH 2013: 124).

priest Manuel Pérez, the ELN reached its highest military strength in the 1990s when it became known for its attacks on the country's sensitive energy infrastructures (mainly oil pipelines). However, due to increasing paramilitary pressure in the course of the 1990s, the ELN was militarily weakened, and even lost its traditional stronghold Barrancabermej (ibid.: 3).¹¹⁶

In 1991, after internal strategic divisions, a splinter faction of the ELN founded the Socialist Renewal Current (*Corriente de Renovación Socialista*, CRS). From the beginning, the CRS had a strong political and weak military orientation, gathering a number of important ELN leaders and a relatively small rural constituency mainly in the Caribbean Coast (*Centro de Memoria, Paz y Reconciliación* 2013).

The Popular Liberation Army (*Ejército Popular de Liberación*, EPL), finally, followed a pro-Chinese course and was founded in 1967 as the armed wing of the Colombian Communist Party – Marxist Leninist (*Partido Comunista de Colombia – Marxista Leninista*, PCC-ML¹¹⁷) (see CNMH 2013: 123, 125 and Henao 1997: 109). With a constituency of peasants, trade unions and industrial workers, it first operated only regionally in the northwest of the country, but then evolved into a national organization, forming fronts in the Atlantic coastal region, the Magdalena Medio region and in the South, mainly in the region of Putumayo as well in the major cities such as Bogotá, Bucaramanga, Medellín and Barranquilla (see Rampf and Chavarro 2014: 5).

In the 1970s and 1980s, a second generation of guerrilla movements emerged. Differentiated as new insurgency groups, they more strongly incorporated urban sectors and used armed propaganda actions to grab public attention, unlike the more traditional guerrilla movements (Chernick 1999, Henao 1997: 142.). As highlighted by Henao (1997: 116), the 1970s were a period of mass mobilization in Colombia's universities, where, inspired by the Cuban revolution and the war in Vietnam, "the image of a *guerrillero* [guerilla fighter]

¹¹⁶ According to the same report (ICG 2014: 3), the ELN is present today in the departments of Arauca, Norte de Santander, Guajira, Bolívar, Antioquia, Chocó, Cauca and Nariño.

¹¹⁷ The PCC-ML itself is a splinter faction of the Colombian Communist Party.

became a sort of messias for Colombia's youth". Public universities at the time became a breeding ground for would-be guerrilla militants, thereby diversifying the composition of the emerging guerrilla groups. For instance, one interviewee emphasized how the CRS was composed of "people from the social movement, unions, teachers, people from the city and from the countryside" (personal interview, *Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris* member, June 08, 2012, Bogotá). However, academia's disenchantment with guerrilla warfare came about in the 1990s due to an academic turn in the study of armed insurrection. As highlighted by Chernick (1999: 170) and in line with North American research on the causes for revolution (one of the more prominent voices being Charles Tilly), the closing of political spaces to voice popular grievances had long been regarded as the main reason for guerrilla movements to emerge. However, a turn in academic research, driven by the French school of social movement and particularly the writing by Alain Touraine, now reversely argued that armed insurgency hindered civil society expressions from becoming powerful in the first place. This new perspective – together with the guerrilla movements' increasing involvement in illicit activities over the course of the 1980s and 1990s – led to the deromantization of the guerrilla movement and alienated many intellectuals, academics as well as non-governmental organizations and grassroots activists from sympathizing with the insurgency, which nevertheless maintained support in rural areas and urban shantytowns affected by the conflict (ibid.). This disenchantment, however, affected the organizations still active today more strongly than the group that demobilized in the 1990s.

A good example of a new generation guerrilla group was the 19th of April Movement (*Movimiento 19 de Abril*, M-19). Grabe (2015: 31-32, see also García-Durán et al. 2008:10) for instance highlights the broad variety of militants' and supporters' backgrounds, including unionists, middle-class students, professionals, artists and urban popular sectors. The M-19, a political-military movement, was born out of a fusion between factions of the FARC-EP and the National Popular Alliance (*Alianza Nacional Popular*, ANAPO), and differentiated itself from the earlier guerrilla movements by a far less dogmatic style and a strong nationalist rhetoric (for a more detailed analysis of the M-19's particularities see ibid.).

In 1974, the Quintín Lame Armed Movement (*Movimiento Armado Quintín Lame*, MAQL) was created as an indigenous self-defense group. The MAQL was mainly active in

the Cauca department, with small incursions into Tolima, Huila, Choco and Valle. Present in 16 municipalities of the Cauca department – principally situated in the northeast of the department, where almost 70% of the population lives – the MAQL has been considered a “strongly localized” movement with an extensive support base in the territory it was operating in (Peñaranda 2012: 179). Built to protect indigenous leaders and community members from the incursion of various armed actors into indigenous territory, and in the larger framework of an emerging socio-political organizational process of the indigenous community, the MAQL was conceived as an indigenous self-defense movement rather than a guerrilla organization interested in taking over power (personal interview, *Fundación Sol y Tierra* member, March 13, 2012, Popayán). However, it did undertake joint military operations with the M-19, for instance, and was also a full member of the Simón Bolívar Guerrilla Coordinating Board (*Coordinadora Guerrillera Simón Bolívar*, CGSB) from 1987 to 1990, an umbrella organization encompassing also the FARC-EP, ELN, EPL and the PRT (see Cárdenas, Sarrias and Planta 2015).

The Workers’ Revolutionary Party (*Partido Revolucionario de Trabajadores*, PRT), in turn, emerged from ideological divisions within the Communist Party of Colombia that resulted in an armed wing in the early 1980s. Mainly supported by peasants and unionists, the PRT remained militarily weak and operated mainly in the departments situated by the Atlantic and Caribbean coast, including Atlántico, Bolívar and Sucre.¹¹⁸ In the past, these regions have been characterized by a concentration of political power in the hands of a small elite that has tried to repress – at times in collusion with paramilitary forces – peasant mobilizations in search of agrarian reform (see Rampf et al. 2014: 5).

¹¹⁸ As outlined by Rampf et al. (2014: 7-8), the PRT managed to significantly influence the National Association of Peasants (*Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos*, ANUC), but also had a constituency among various unions, the student movement and popular neighborhoods in Medellín and Bogotá, as well as in indigenous communities, particularly in the Cauca region.

Despite their different sizes, scopes and ideological orientations, as well as their inability to ultimately unify their agendas and merge into a larger cohesive force,¹¹⁹ the guerrilla movements shared one important characteristic: their explicit political agenda and ideological vision shaped their cohesive in-group character and unified leaders and their troops. The situation of clandestinity and the intense guerrilla way of living strengthened their in-group bonds and the identification of their militants with the collective, which was regarded as a “big family that resolves all doubts, provides support and imbues a signification that differentiates the individual from the rest of human beings” (Henao 1997: 114, see also Castro and Díaz 1997: 7). The guerrilla movements did not only materially take charge of their militants, but also symbolically elevated them above “ordinary citizens” by providing them with arms and uniforms, as well as a distinct social and cultural lifestyle (ibid.). In the case of the EPL, Henao (ibid.) compares the group with a sect that provided orientation, but also created a strong dependency for the individual. For the case of the M-19, interviewees in Colombia referred to their particular group spirit as a friendly feeling that promoted the identification of militants with their movement (personal interview, former M-19 members, January 19, 2012, Bogotá, see also Patiño et al. 2012). In addition, these movements maintained strong relationships with their constituencies and were often heavily involved in grassroots mobilization processes through their tight connections with the peasant or social movement sectors from which they had emerged in the first place (see for instance Grabe 2015: 31-32). A particularly telling example for close group-community relations is the MAQL, which had been initially established as a self-defence force for the organizational processes of the indigenous community that had come under threat (see Cárdenas Sarrias and Planta 2015). Concentrating their military efforts against the state, its armed forces, functionaries and infrastructure, the guerrilla groups – at least in an early phase up to the mid-

¹¹⁹ Contrary to the El Salvador example for instance, where five insurgency movements formed the FMLN and thereby considerably enhanced their strength, the Colombian guerrilla movements have struggled to find a common platform or jointly engage in negotiations with the government. The CSGB was one such an attempt.

eighties – were seldomly involved in any systematic abuse against the civilian population, even though they did also use selective violence against civilians¹²⁰ (see also CNMH 2013: 33 on the evolution of conflict-related violence).

While governments throughout the 1960s and 1970s largely regarded these armed movements as criminal and did not seriously consider political negotiations with them, this changed throughout the 1980s as a result of the armed movements' growth, the need to tackle increasing violence related to other armed actors (see below), and the realization that the guerrilla's success was linked to the social grievances they addressed (see Ugarrizaa and Craig 2012: 8). As highlighted by Aguilera (2013: 129), the 1980s were not only characterized by the increasing strength of guerrilla movements that took advantage of the country's geography and its barely penetrable plains and jungles (Chernick 1999: 165), but also by an upsurge of popular protest against the failure of the state to deliver basic services to the population, as well as workers' strikes.

Starting as a conflict between the state and leftist guerrilla groups with varying ideological approaches, constituencies, and territorial coverage, the internal armed conflict in Colombia gained complexity when the drug economy and paramilitarism increased as interrelated phenomena in the early 1980s. When conflict-related deaths rose, armed conflict in Colombia became more visible internationally (Gutiérrez Sanín 2004: 262).

While first paramilitary cells date back to the years of *La Violencia*, paramilitary groups started growing in the context of the state's counter-insurgency measures in the 1960s¹²¹ with the technical and financial support of the USA and the approval of the Colombian military (Sánchez 2001: 211, Romero Silva 1998: 178, Buitrago 2006: 64). Initially, paramilitary units were set up as private initiatives to support the state (or

¹²⁰ For instance, the kidnapping of Martha Nieves Ochoa, the daughter of one of the Medellín cartel's main leaders, in 1981 by the M-19 provoked the set-up of a first paramilitary unit by drug traffickers aiming to protect themselves (see 6.2).

¹²¹ In the years of *La Violencia*, private hitmen or "*pájaros*" (birds) were used by local elites to remain in power. In 1965, a legal basis had been set up for temporarily involving (armed) civilians in state-based counter-insurgency activities.

supplement it where it was not able to provide security) in its counter-insurgency activities, and protect population segments increasingly targeted by the guerilla from kidnapping and extortion (see also endnote xviii for a typical explanation for the need to set up of paramilitary units). Paramilitary units then grew dramatically with the set-up of private security troops by drug traffickers,¹²² with the first and most famous paramilitary protection troop being the “Death to Kidnappers” (*Muerte a Secuestradores*, MAS) group formed in 1981. As a result of this development, paramilitary units became increasingly independent from the state. With the acquisition of large amounts of land by drug dealers,¹²³ (Springer 2002: 55, Chernick 1999: 172) a natural alliance against the common enemy – the guerrilla – between landowners, drug traffickers and paramilitary units emerged (Waldmann 2003: 142). According to Arnson (2005: 2), “[p]aramilitary organizations underwent a transformation in their profile and function in the early 1980s, when large landowners, ranchers, and drug traffickers took over existing paramilitary groups and established others, creating vast illegal armies in the service of private interests.”

Three elements help understand the nature and comparatively weaker identity and in-group bonds of paramilitary units. These include their network-type organizational structure, the lack of a political programme, and the membership structure composed to a large extent of drug traffickers (at the leadership level) and their “employees” – rank-and-file combatants understanding militancy as a (well-paid) job opportunity. First of all, their genesis as independent local projects is important, as it helps explain the flexible, network-like (see FIP 2005b: 5) organizational structure that made the emergence of a strong in-group identity more

¹²² Starting in the 1960s with the sale of marihuana and the import of cocaine from Bolivia and Peru in the 1970s, Colombia’s drug cartels in Cali and Medellín experienced a real drug boom. Due to anti-drug campaigns and increased state control in Bolivia and Peru, as well as the beginning involvement of the guerrilla in drug trafficking, the cocaine production moved to Colombia. A broad network of smugglers, lacking state control, accessed the US-market through a relatively high number of Colombian immigrants, helping Colombia reach the top of the worldwide cocaine production (see Planta 2006: 15).

¹²³ As highlighted by Aguilera (2013: 127), between the 1980s and early 1990s, five to six million hectares of land changed owners.

difficult. Next, their genesis as armed actors serving private interests without a political program of their own has also affected the paramilitary's identity. As highlighted by Gutiérrez Sanín (2008: 16), paramilitary units were comparable to a "paid force, in which the economic ladder and the military hierarchy tend to overlap and delinquent groups and networks are admitted [...] with much less strict discipline, and with an economic system of selective incentives for both the leadership and the fighters." Regarding the admission of delinquent groups and networks, paramilitary groups have been notorious for incorporating narco-traffickers in their ranks. In fact, the highest paramilitary leaders have been extradicted to the US on the grounds of their involvement in the drug business (see footnote 181).¹²⁴

In addition, the idea that former combatants joining the paramilitary structures to work for a salary, comparable to a manager simply hired by a company (FIP 2005b: 5), has also been confirmed by research in the framework of the AGC project. In effect, one former paramilitary respondent reported that the work opportunity and the monthly salary of 350,000 Colombian pesos (COP) (roughly 150 US dollars in 2001, when the person joined the group¹²⁵), which was above the minimum wage of roughly 130 US dollars at the time,¹²⁶ had been one reason for him to join paramilitary forces (interview code PSTO34, AGC database). He also asserted that urban paramilitary militants were paid better, with monthly payments ranging between 750,000 to 1,000,000 COP (roughly 335-450 US dollars) or two and a half times the minimum wage. Another interviewee reported:

¹²⁴ Interestingly, next to common delinquents, former members of the armed forces are another important recruitment source for paramilitary units (Gutiérrez Sanín 2008: 6, 12).

¹²⁵ Calculated according to fxtop currency converter, available online at: <http://fxtop.com/> (accessed February 20, 2017).

¹²⁶ According to information by Banco de la República, the minimum wage in 2001 was 286,000 COP. Available online at: <http://obiee.banrep.gov.co/analytics/saw.dll?Go&Path=/shared/Consulta%20Series%20Estadisticas%20desde%20Excel/1.%20Salarios/1.1%20Salario%20minimo%20legal%20en%20Colombia/1.1.1%20Serie%20historica&Options=rdf&NQUser=salarios&NQPassword=salarios&lang=es> (accessed February 20, 2017).

“They paid me a monthly salary plus bonus, whereas the FARC don’t pay at all. With them, it is all about conviction, not about money. But the paramilitaries do pay and that is also convincing. For example, over there you earn at least one million pesos (a month). That is economic stability, many professionals don’t earn that much in this country. And now just add what you can earn on the side, so it is even more money. So we had a good life economically. We even had enough [money] to pay private health care and this was very good” (interview code PSTO45, AGC database).

As a result, Cárdenas Sarrias (2005) concludes that paramilitary units are best understood as “violence entrepreneurs” with a self-defense vision at best, but no larger political program of their own. While Colombian experts hold divergent opinions on the existence of an, at least minimal, counter-insurgency political project (see Planta 2006: 36), it is clear that a political agenda was only ever created – if at all – *a posteriori* in an attempt to legitimize their armed activities.¹²⁷ As highlighted by Cubides (2001: 144):

“[W]e are dealing with an ideology forged a posteriori, after actions have occurred, in order to justify them. [...] Originally, the violent actions committed are in a private context, but the logic of the confrontation places them on a broader stage. It then becomes indispensable for them to find a cause, make explicit their extra-individual motivations, and add a public end to their private goals.”

However, even if considering that paramilitary groups themselves operated basically as violence entrepreneurs with a mercenary structure, it must not be forgotten that they did so in

¹²⁷ See Oldenburg and Lengert (2006) for a detailed discursive analysis of the AUC’s strategy to gain political legitimacy during the negotiation process. On the one hand, this entailed communication strategies that created a separation between “good guys” and “bad guys”, the latter being solely responsible for drug-related crimes and to be expelled from the AUC. Similarly, the set-up of the so-called “Hope Villa” (*Villa Esperanza*) – a sort of official headquarters for demobilized paramilitary leaders – was meant to serve as discussion forum with civil society. Its establishment imitated the ELN’s “Peace House” (*Casa de Paz*) in the city of Medellín, which served as a forum for rapprochement between the government and the ELN during the first term of the Uribe Vélez administration (see Planta 2006: 64).

close connection with economic and political elites, thereby serving specific political and economic interests (see CNMH 2015: 65). As has been mentioned, inequally distributed access to land has been one of the driving forces of the Colombian conflict, and paramilitary units have been responsible for systematically displacing and expropriating the rural population from their lands, often to the benefit of agro-industrial elites. They did so to such a large scale even, that it has been argued that they thus contributed to a *de facto* “anti-land-reform” (see Jenss 2016: 186-187, see also Verdad Abierta 2014 on land expropriation strategies of the Castaño brothers in particular).

5.3 BETANCUR’S PEACE POLICY AND FIRST NEGOTIATION ATTEMPS

The alliance of paramilitary groups with land owners and drug traffickers became particularly relevant from the 1980s onwards, a time period characterized by 1) considerable growth of the guerrilla groups as a result of their growing financial resources gained from drug trafficking,¹²⁸ 2) increasing levels of violence, and 3) a new peace policy under President Betancur that was supported by a first wave of organized civil-society initiatives for peace¹²⁹ and threatened to bring about changes in the local power structures (Romero 2005: 61).

In the framework of this peace policy, Law 35/1982 (*Ley 35 de 1982*, see *Congreso de Colombia* 1982) was passed, which offered the possibility of legal benefits¹³⁰ and

¹²⁸ The growth of the guerrilla movements also helped them expand their territorial coverage and gain national presence, modernize their weaponry, and increase their attacks against statutory forces (see Aguilera 2013: 128). For further analysis of the correlation between the coca boom and the growth of guerrilla movements, see ICG 2005.

¹²⁹ According to García-Durán (2006), the development of a peace movement in Colombia was influenced by the political opportunities and limitations for civil society action in general, and triggered by violent incidents (e.g. the rise of kidnapping, massacres) that outraged public opinion. The first phase of mobilization for peace initiated in the late 1970s and early 1980s in the context of the struggle for human rights, social grievances and the call for negotiations with the guerrilla, which eventually started under President Betancur.

¹³⁰ Subsequent Law 49 of 1985 enabled the president to concede amnesties. These laws can be

rehabilitation programs, as well as security programs for demobilizing members – the so-called “amnestied” (*amnestiados*) – of the guerrilla.¹³¹ As a result of this peace policy, in March 1984 the government signed the Uribe Accord (*Acuerdo de la Uribe*) with the FARC-EP, followed by ceasefire agreements with the M-19, the EPL and the smaller group Self-Defense Labor Movement (*Autodefensa Obrera*, ADO). These agreements led to the return of 1,423 militants to civilian life and the definitive demobilization of the ADO. As reported by Villarraga Sarmiento (2013), the National Association of the Amnestied (*Asociación Nacional de Amnestiados*) was founded to defend the *amnestiados*' rights regarding the implementation of the benefits guaranteed to them, including access to land, credit schemes and social assistance, and provided for by the Rehabilitation and Reintegration Program (*Programa de Rehabilitación y Reintegración*), which later transformed into the National Rehabilitation Support Program (*Programa Nacional de Apoyo a la Rehabilitación*). The organization also lobbied for the better protection of their members, who were often targets of persecution, and for more public support to negotiations with the still-active insurgency movements.

However, the ceasefire negotiations failed to transform into a lasting peace agreement (*ibid.*). The takeover of the Justice Palace, situated in the very center of Bogotá, on November 06, 1985, by the M-19 and its subsequent recovery by governmental forces caused the deaths of about 100 people – including 11 members of the Supreme Court. Broadcast by national television, the events left Colombia in a state of shock and closed avenues for bringing the negotiations any further.¹³²

considered the basis upon which the processes at the beginning of the 1990s were conducted.

¹³¹ Contrary to later reintegration schemes, this did not result in a direct and long-term accompaniment of demobilized militants (see Cárdenas Sarrias 2012: 23), and therefore also did not result in the creation of a sustainable institutional setting.

¹³² The events leading to these tragic deaths have until today not yet been fully investigated; responsibilities for the escalation of the situation remain controversial (see Santamaría Salamanca 2004: 464, Patiño et al. 2012).

The negotiation process with the FARC-EP, in turn, resulted in the creation of the Patriotic Union (*Unión Patriótica*, UP) as a joint project by the political wing of the FARC-EP and other left-wing political forces. However, the party soon became subject to massive persecution.¹³³ The following years were marked by a deep political crisis and increasing levels of drug cartel-related violence under drug lord Pablo Escobar and his war against the state, which also heavily affected Colombia's major cities, especially Medellín.

5.4 A COUNTRY IN CRISIS: FROM FULL WAR AGAINST DRUGS TO THE NATIONAL CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY

In the framework of the expanding drug-related violence, urban militia groups emerged in Colombia's city, and especially in Medellín, to provide basic security to the population in the middle of the drug war (Verdad Abierta 2016), adding still more complexity to the puzzle of armed actors. As explained by Paz Jaramillo and Valencia Agudelo (2015: 265), different types of urban militias emerged in Colombia's cities throughout the last two decades of the 20th century. Basically aiming to provide security to local communities threatened by the drug business with vigilante activities, some of these militias were influenced or supported by

¹³³ Party members were assassinated by paramilitary forces, often in collusion with the state's security forces, who regarded a potential strengthening of the political left as a threat – especially after the party had surprisingly successfully participated in the 1986 presidential and legislative elections (see Romero 2005 for a more detailed analysis). Subsequently, the party lost over 500 militants by 1989, including two presidential candidates. Ten years after the party's founding in 1985, about 3,000 party members were dead, including over 20 elected parliamentary representatives, 70 city counselors and 11 mayors (see Santamaría Salamanca 2004: 469, Chernick 1999: 176), convincing the FARC-EP that politics without arms was not possible in Colombia. This was also true for other left-wing political projects such as the "*A luchar!*" (Let's fight!) movement emerging from intensified collaboration between the ELN, the PRT and the Revolutionary Integration Movement – Free Fatherland (*Movimiento de Integración Revolucionaria – Patria Libre*, MIR-*Patria Libre*). MIR-*Patria Libre* later merged with the ELN, from which its main leaders broke away again in 1994 as the CRS (see *El Tiempo* 1993). See also Restrepo and Contreras Rodríguez (2000: 37) for an overview of the merger of various smaller scale armed organizations with the ELN over time.

guerrilla militants, others created by the community itself as neighborhood patrols, and still others evolved from delinquent gangs. Some of these organizations started to become a security issue for the local population over time, as they engaged in various acts of social cleansing and extortion (ibid.). The diverse origin of these groups makes it difficult to classify or group them together under one single definition, let alone associate them clearly with one political project.

On a national level, the assassination of four presidential candidates – Luis Carlos Galán (†1989) of the Liberal Party, Jaime Pardo Leal (†1987) and Bernardo Jaramillo Ossa (†1990) of the Patriotic Union (*Unión Patriótica*),¹³⁴ and Carlos Pizarro Leongómez¹³⁵ (†1991) of the Democratic Alliance M-19 (*Alianza Democrática M-19*, AD M-19) – numerous assassinations of business representatives, popular leaders and politicians, the destruction of the National Intelligence Agency's Administrative Department of Security (*Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad*, DAS) building in Bogotá, and bomb attacks on supermarkets and shopping centers (see Serpa Uribe 2009: 27) became emblematic for the situation of a country waging a full war against drugs.

Under these circumstances, César Gaviria (1990-1994, liberal party) was elected as president in 1990 with the duty to establish a Constituent Assembly to write a new political charter for the country and solve the deep political crisis. During the presidential election of 1990, in an extra-ordinary vote locally referred to as “the seventh ballot” (*la séptima papeleta*), a large majority of Colombians had voted in favor of establishing a Constituent Assembly. While it was thus under President Gaviria's administration and in the framework of the Constituent Assembly that peace negotiations with various guerrilla movement were successfully conducted, it was also under his term that private security corporations were legalized, allowing paramilitarism to grow further. According to Chernick (1996), the country

¹³⁴ Bernardo Jaramillo Ossa had taken over the presidency of the *Unión Patriótica* after the murder of former president Jaime Pardo Leal in 1987.

¹³⁵ Recently, the Colombian justice has announced it would re-open the case and investigate the participation of the DAS in the murders for which the paramilitary had so far been held responsible (*El Espectador* 2017).

thus witnessed two contradictory but simultaneous processes in the early 1990s. On the one hand, optimism was spurred by the process of true democratization and political opening taking place, supported by the important renovations and changes introduced by the new political administration. Among others, they profoundly changed Colombia's thus-far bipolar party system, opening space for more political plurality, strengthened the judicial sector, including building a Constitutional Court, established ethnic pluralism as a founding principle of the Colombian nation, introduced protection mechanisms for the population such as the Ombudsman Office, and guaranteed a constitutional right to peace (*Constitución de Colombia* 1991, Article 22) (see Serpa Uribe 2009: 29). On the other hand, Colombians experienced increasing socio-political violence, including by increasingly independently organized paramilitary forces and the drug cartels. As a result, the negotiations did not result in a true reconciliation process but installed a parceled peace. This was also because dialogues with the FARC-EP, the ELN and a small splinter faction of the EPL grouped together in the Simón Bolívar Guerrilla Coordination Board in Caracas, Venezuela, (1991) and in Mexico (1992) had failed. This opened the door for a new policy shift: integral war against the remaining guerrilla forces unwilling to negotiate from 1992 onwards (and until new negotiation efforts under the Pastrana administration 1998-2002). It was in this ambivalent context that the first negotiated collective reintegration processes took place, which the following chapter will examine in more detail.

CHAPTER VI: ORGANIZATIONAL PROCESSES OF FORMER COMBATANTS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO RE-ENCOUNTER AND IDENTITY ACCOMMODATION

Historically, the Colombian state's answer to armed rebellion has oscillated between political incentives and military oppression (see Medina Gallego 2009: 50-54). Particularly since the first negotiation attempts with the FARC-EP guerrilla in the early 1980s, governments have regularly alternated between heavy-handed counter-insurgency strategies and political negotiations involving reintegration processes. While the very early reintegration program for liberal guerrillas in the 1950s¹³⁶ and the above-mentioned Rehabilitation and Reintegration Program in the mid-1980s do deserve mentioning, this thesis focuses on the time period 1990-2016. Since initial negotiation processes with various guerrilla movements in the early 1990s, transitions from militancy to civilian life have differed in types of groups, size of demobilizing militants and their disengagement pattern (individual vs. collective), political context, and approach taken by state-sponsored reintegration schemes. However, in each scenario, former combatants' post-militancy life trajectories have been understood as an important national challenge, as well as a personal challenge for each of the over 65,000 ex-combatants.

The following sections analyze in how far ex-combatant organizations have been helpful not only in facilitating smooth post-militancy trajectories for their members, but also in creating spaces for re-encounter among former enemies and society at large, and supporting identity accommodation processes for former militants. To do so, the following sections provide a comparative analysis of various transition processes in the time span 1990-2016 and the subsequent emergence, objectives and activities of former combatant organizations. Villaraga Sarmiento (2013) has grouped these processes into three main instances, namely:

¹³⁶ Governmental efforts to deal with armed opposition groups and civil unrest date back to the Rojas Pinilla amnesty in 1953, in which 6,540 liberal guerrillas led by commander Guadalupe Salcedo from the Llanos region as well Antioquía, Tolima, Magdalena Medio, and the coffee belt demobilized after military pressure (Bouvier 2009: 9, Herrera and González 2013: 275).

the transition processes of guerrilla movements that demobilized collectively in the 1990s in the context of the political opening provided by the National Constituent Assembly (6.1), the collective demobilization processes of paramilitary units from 2003-2006 (6.2), and individual transitions from militancy to post-militancy life based on the decision to desert between 1994 and 2016 (6.3). Each section reviews the political context for transitions to occur, the nature of the group and the negotiation outcome (in the case of collective transitions), the legal and institutional framework, and the specific approach of reintegration policies and programming, before analyzing the type of former combatant organizations that evolved from these processes, including their objectives, activities, and challenges.

6.1 EX-COMBATANT ORGANIZATIONS EMERGING FROM NEGOTIATION PROCESSES IN THE EARLY 1990S

Following the failed negotiation attempts in the 1980s, it took until 1990 for new negotiation efforts bear fruit in a fortuitous political moment, both on a national and international level (see Chernick 1999: 165). The prospects of participating in the National Constituent Assembly, the set-up of which various guerrilla organizations had been lobbying for,¹³⁷ and a reform-oriented policy under the government of President Cesar Gaviria eventually brought various insurgency groups to the table. These negotiations could expand on a number of legal innovations brought forward throughout the 1980s by the governments of Belisario Betancur and Virgilio Barco (1986-1990, conservative party) in the framework of their rapprochement policy with armed groups, such as Law 35 of 1982 (see above, see also Herrera and González 2013: 275-276).

¹³⁷ As outlined by Villarraga Sarmiento (2011), the EPL and later also other insurgency groups had been asking for a National Constituent Assembly as a guarantee for political reforms in the case of negotiations with the government. The other actor driving forward the idea of the Constituent Assembly was the student movement.

Negotiations with the M-19 had already been conducted from 1989 onwards under the new peace policy of the Barco administration and had led to the demobilization of approximately 900 M-19 members on March 8, 1990. They were followed by successful talks of the Gaviria administration with 1) the EPL, which demobilized about 2,000¹³⁸ members on March 1, 1991, 2) the MAQL, which demobilized 157 members on March 31, 1991 and 3) the PRT, which demobilized its 200 members on January 26, 1991 (see Aguilera 2013: 132). In addition, 25 members of the small-scale Ernesto Rojas Commandos (*Comandos Ernesto Rojas*, CER) joined the already existing accord with the EPL (Joya Irraba 2015: 32) and demobilized on March 20, 1992.¹³⁹

The CRS finally demobilized approximately 400 armed members on April 9, 1994,¹⁴⁰ followed by the Francisco Garnica Guerilla Coordination Front (*Frente Francisco Garnica*), a splinter group of the FARC-EP consisting of 150 people. In addition, local popular militias, grouped together under the name Popular Militias of Medellín (*Milicias Populares de Medellín, Milicias Populares del Pueblo y Para el Pueblo, Milicias Independientes del Valle de Aburrá, Milicias Metropolitanas de Medellín*), with approximately 650 members¹⁴¹ from Colombia's second largest city Medellín, demobilized in 1994 through an agreement with the national, departmental and municipal governments (see Paz Jaramillo and Valencia Agudelo 2015). The main motivation for militia groups to negotiate was not the prospect of converting

¹³⁸ In the early 1990s, the EPL was the second biggest guerrilla force after the FARC-EP. However, the demobilization process of the EPL was also marked by its parceled character that left a number of dissident groups behind (see also below).

¹³⁹ The delayed demobilization of this small EPL faction was an expression of mistrust and security concerns, as the small group remained armed as a sort of protection force for their former group members (Villaraga Sarmiento 2009: 105).

¹⁴⁰ According to Restrepo and Contreras Rodríguez (2000: 171), 865 militants of the CRS were, however, eventually admitted to take part in the reintegration program.

¹⁴¹ The number of demobilized militants resulting from this comparatively poorly documented negotiation process varies widely. While the literature mentions up to 650 demobilized militia members – out of a estimated 3,000 armed militia members operating at the time – Paz Jaramillo and Valencia Agudelo (2015: 277) claim that only 26 militia militants presented themselves on the day of formal demobilization, while the rest of the militants respected the ceasefire but kept their weapons.

into legal political actors – as was the case for guerrilla movements – but the permanent threat of other armed actors invading their territory, the interference of the drug business in their economic and military activities undermining their legitimacy, the hopelessness of their armed struggle, and the isolation affecting communities under their control (ibid.: 266). In 1998, about 170 members of another urban militia movement, the Independent Revolutionary Movement – Armed Commandos (*Movimiento Independiente Revolucionario – Comandos Armandos*, MIR-COAR) also surrendered their arms under the Samper administration (1994-1998, liberal party).

In total, these demobilization processes amounted to roughly 4,700 demobilized people (see Figure 3 on the following page). The demographic composition of militants obviously varied by group as well as recruitment period. The MAQL was probably the most homogenous group, as it was predominantly composed of male members from the indigenous community, in their large majority below the age of 20 and with a poor educational background and little political formation (*Comisión de Superación de la Violencia 1992: 107*).

The other groups, however, displayed more heterogeneous membership structures, involving mostly militants both from rural and urban contexts, peasants, workers and academics alike (see 5.2). Female combatants amounted to approximately one fourth of all militants (Londoño and Nieto 2006: 111).¹⁴² However, and especially in organizations with a long trajectory, membership structures also evolved over time. In the case of the EPL, for instance, the Commission for the Overcoming of Violence (*Comisión de Superación de la Violencia 1992: 102-103*) highlights the difference between “old generation” (1960s and 1970s) and “new generation” (from 1985 onwards) militants. While the former largely disposed over a political formation and had close ties to the peasant’s movement on the Atlantic coast, the latter were primarily young people with poor education and professional

¹⁴² Various reasons, including the lack of systematic registration of combatants according to gender, make it impossible to provide an exact figure of women’s participation in these demobilization processes. For a detailed analysis of this subject matter, see Londoño and Nieto 2006.

capacity who often joined the armed movement for reasons unrelated to any political identity (see 5.2). This divide ultimately also affected post-militancy life trajectories (see below 6.1.3).

Figure 3: Demobilization processes 1990-1994

Year	Group	Approx. number ¹⁴³
1990	<i>Movimiento 19 de Abril (M-19)</i> , national scope	900
1991	<i>Ejército Popular de Liberación (EPL)</i> , national scope	2,000
1991	<i>Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (PRT)</i> , regional scope	200
1991	<i>Movimiento Armado Quintín Lame (MAQL)</i> , regional scope	157
1991	<i>Comandos Ernesto Rojas (EPL remainder)</i>	25
1994	<i>Corriente de Renovación Socialista (CRS)</i> , regional scope	433
1994	<i>Milicias Urbanas de Medellín (Milicias Populares del Pueblo y para el Pueblo, Milicias Independientes del Valle de Aburrá y Milicias Metropolitanas de Medellín)</i> , local scope in the city of Medellín	650
1994	<i>Frente Francisco Garnica (EPL dissidents)</i>	150
1998	<i>Movimiento Independiente Revolucionario – Comandos Armados (MIR-COAR)</i> , local scope in the city of Medellín	171
Total		4,686

Sources: CNMH (2015: 35) and Cárdenas Sarrias (2012:11).

The negotiation processes with various guerrilla groups are often grouped together in the literature not only because they took place during a similar time period, but also, and more importantly, because of the similarities they share in their political agendas and the contents of the agreements signed with the government. Generally, because of their unique character, this analysis does not take into account agreements signed with militia groups. Before their negotiation processes, these small-scale, urban organizations were regarded as predominantly delinquent groups to be differentiated from the clearly politically motivated guerrilla

¹⁴³ As numbers for some groups slightly vary according to sources, the numbers provided here should be regarded as an approximation (see Aguilera 2013: 132).

movements. In fact, it has even been argued that this type of negotiation with a non-political actor provided Uribe Vélez's later government with a precedent to engage in negotiations with the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*, AUC (see Paz Jaramilla and Valencia Ageludo 2015: 269, see also Bejarano 2009: 78-79). However, this interpretation might be somewhat short-sighted, as some of the militia groups were not only ideologically trained and militarily supported by the FARC-EP and the ELN, but their agreements with the government also foresaw social investment plans and community centers for areas of the city the militias had been operating in, thereby copying the agreements signed with guerrilla groups (see *Verdad Abierta* 2016, Villarraga Sarmiento 2009: 400).

Negotiations with the guerrilla groups followed a similar blueprint¹⁴⁴ that basically consisted of four major points: 1) granting demobilized guerrilla members political benefits and participation rights in democratic elections, 2) tackling human rights issues within the movements' zones of influence, 3) setting up socio-economic reinsertion programs based on specific legal regimes (amnesty for political crimes according to Law 77/1989 and Decree 213/1991¹⁴⁵) or facilitating processes of re-encounter, and finally 4) implementing regional development programs, managed by the National Fund for Peace, in former guerrilla operation areas (Bejarano 2009: 79-80).

In addition, these collective demobilization processes were also characterized by an organizational accompaniment beyond politics. In the aftermath of the peace agreements, a

¹⁴⁴ This blueprint left the discussion of substantial political agenda items or any broader and nationally relevant reform policies to be discussed by the Constituent Assembly and the post-negotiation political debate. It has been argued that this solution, and an agreement that substantial political themes were to be discussed only after negotiations, severely hampered dialogue between the government and the *Coordinadora Guerrillera Simón Bolívar* in 1991 and 1992, as its members were insisting on a substantial negotiation agenda with the government (Bejarano 2009: 85) and turned down the previous negotiations as not being substantive enough, being limited only to demobilization, the resolution of legal issues and the granting of benefits to combatants.

¹⁴⁵ Law 77 of 1989 and subsequent regulations established limits to the amnesty provision, e.g. for homicides committed outside of combat.

number of ex-combatant organizations were created. The *Compañía Nacional para la Paz* (National Company for Peace, COMPAZ) emerged in 1994, a few years following the transition process of the M-19. Contrary to the following organizations, it was not yet mentioned in the peace agreement signed with the M-19 but only set-up later. The peace accord with the EPL resulted in the creation of the *Fundación Progresar* (Moving Forward Foundation), and the peace accord with the PRT in the creation of the *Corporación para la Paz y el Desarrollo Comunitario* (Peace and Community Development Corporation, CORPADEC). The *Fundación Sol y Tierra* (Sun and Earth Foundation) was set up after the peace accord with the MAQL. From the 1994 peace accord with the CRS emerged the *Corporación Arco Iris* (Rainbow Foundation, which was renamed into New Rainbow Foundation – *Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris* – after a political division within the group¹⁴⁶) and the organization National Union of Organizations for Housing for Peace (*Unión Nacional de Organizaciones de Vivienda para la Paz*, UNAVIDA). As highlighted by a former EPL leader, these organizations were closely linked to the political projects of former insurgents, and it was often the political leadership that decided who would direct these organizations (personal interview, PAPDRB staff, May 11, 2012, Bogotá).

Financially supported by the national government, and despite little institutional experience, these organizations were in charge of 1) co-shaping reintegration policies, 2) channeling and distributing governmental funds to former combatants, 3) promoting peace and overall democratization processes in the zones of former guerrilla presence, and 4) following up on the implementation of the peace agreements. Next to the reintegration structures established by the state, these foundations played an important role in supporting their members' post-militancy trajectories and served as a bridge between the former combatant population and the state (Pinto Borrego 2002: 19). It is worth mentioning that, in addition to these collective trajectories, a considerable number of demobilized guerrilla

¹⁴⁶ In 1996, the CRS split into two factions. The minority faction was led by former CRS leader Adolfo Bula Ramírez. The remaining majority of the CRS created a new non-governmental development organization, the *Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris* (Restrepo and Contreras Rodríguez 2000: 179).

members of the 1990s have pursued a political career, individually engaging in socio-political activities,¹⁴⁷ (re-)engaging in academic careers, joining private and public peace initiatives as staff members and/or (co)founding NGOs working in the area of conflict resolution, human rights, democracy promotion, and development. Instances include the Peace Observatory (*Observatorio para la Paz*¹⁴⁸) led by former M-19 member Vera Grabe, or the Democratic Culture Foundation (*Fundación Cultura Democrática*, FUCUDE) led by former EPL members Nelson Plazas and Álvaro Villarraga Sarmiento (see Villarraga Sarmiento 2009: 115 and 2011 for detailed information on the trajectories of individual EPL members).

The following sections outline in more detail how a weak institutional framework (6.1.1) and the political nature – and hence content of the peace agreement – of the guerrilla movements that demobilized in the 1990s (6.1.2) have positively influenced the role ex-combatant organizations have been able to play in the post-militancy period, before turning to the challenges these organizations have been facing (6.1.3).

6.1.1 A WEAK INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK AS A CHANCE FOR ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT?

As a result of the relatively quick negotiation processes, first demobilization processes took place with little previous preparation (Heno 1997: 129) and in an institutional void

¹⁴⁷ Another interesting initiative in this regard is the “Collective for Thought and Action ‘Women, Peace and Security’” (*Colectivo de Pensamiento y Acción Mujeres, Paz y Seguridad*). The initiative emerged from an international exchange project between the Philippines and Colombia, promoted by the British NGO Conciliation Resources. In the course of the project, a group of ten women from each country representing different social sectors and conflict sides – including former combatants, national security agents, representatives of the media, business, academic and social sectors etc. – visited each other to exchange thoughts on the conflict situation and different approaches to working for peace. The collective (*colectivo*) that emerged from this project is composed today of more than 100 women actively involved in working for peace, and was awarded Pax Christi’s international peace prize in 2015 (for more information see <http://pactoetico.org/>, accessed February 20, 2017).

¹⁴⁸ More information available at the observatory’s website: <https://www.obserpaz.org/> (accessed February 20, 2017).

characterized by inexperience, resulting in challenges as well as opportunities.¹⁴⁹ According to Henao (ibid: 128), the lack of an immediate disbursement of support forced some former combatants to migrate to the city in order to generate income, and thereby promoted dispersal that made transition more difficult.

In 1990, the government set up the National Normalization Council (*Consejo Nacional de Normalización*, Decree 314/1990) to serve as an advisory and coordination agency for the various state entities in charge of implementing the different agenda items of the peace agreement and facilitating the transition process of former combatants to civilian life (Restrepo and Contreras Rodríguez 2000: 160).¹⁵⁰ The council was also responsible for supervising the handing over of weapons, the distribution of resources in the regions of former guerrilla operations, and the evaluation of reinsertion policies. It counted 17, later 19, regional divisions, which played an important role in planning and implementing local development plans agreed upon in the different peace accords and based on the National Rehabilitation Plan (*Plan Nacional de Rehabilitación*, PNR), a presidential program dating back to the Betancur administration's negotiations with the guerrilla movements and the reintegration of the *amnistiados* in the early 1980s (ACR 2014: 5, see 5.3).¹⁵¹

However, the National Normalization Council proved unable to comply with the manifold tasks agreed upon in the peace accords, and the government soon created a new coordination mechanism, the National Office for Reinsertion (*Oficina Nacional de Reinserción*). In 1991, reintegration was then placed within the Presidential Administrative

¹⁴⁹ See Figure 10 in Annex 3 for an overview of legal and institutional innovations.

¹⁵⁰ Next to setting up completely new institutions and coordination mechanisms, the government also enacted a number of new legislations to facilitate the implementation of the peace agreements, including laws relating to the amnesty regime, the collaboration of local governments in the regional implementation of the agreements, or the administrative regulations for the disbursements of funds dedicated to regional development projects. See Restrepo and Contreras Rodríguez (2000: 161) for more information on the legal changes required to implement the peace agreements.

¹⁵¹ Under the following Barco administration, the National Rehabilitation Plan was reformulated as a tool to combat poverty and was extended to all marginalized regions of the country (Bejarano 2009: 70).

Department (*Departamento Administrativo de la Presidencia*) under the name Presidential Program for Reinsertion (*Programa Presidencial para la Reinserción*), from where it was transferred back to the PNR (see Villarraga Sarmiento 2013). Then it was further passed on to the Solidarity Network (*Red de Solidaridad*) in 1994, and in 1999 to the General Reinsertion Department (*Dirección General para la Reinserción*, DRG) within the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Cárdenas Sarrias 2012: 17). This institutional instability and lack of coordination among different entities in charge contributed to processes of dispersion among former militants. However, on a positive note, the reinsertion program was part of a larger governmental peacebuilding policy, which went beyond the implementation of the peace agreements and also helped develop citizen's initiatives at municipal and departmental levels (*Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris* 2005: 5).

However, all peace agreements contained provisions to ensure reintegration policies, and were jointly designed and implemented by the government and former combatant representatives, whereby ex-combatants were considered active decisionmakers rather than beneficiaries or participants, as they were in later demobilization processes. This was, for instance, ensured with the participation of former combatant representatives both at the national and regional level of the National Normalization Council. For example, the peace accord with the EPL and the MAQL stipulated that the design and implementation of reintegration plans should “take maximum advantage of the existing capability” of former militants (in Villarraga Sarmiento 2009: 172 and 202 respectively).¹⁵² In that sense, the relative weakness of a completely new institutional landscape, characterized by improvisation and learning by doing (Sanguino 2005: 86) also constituted a chance for the active leadership of former combatants. In fact, through the Pact to Consolidate the Peace Processes (*Pacto por la Consolidación de los Procesos de Paz*), which was signed in 1993 (and in 1996 by the CRS) and extended governmental support under the Uribe Vélez administration in 2002

¹⁵² The information relating to the content of peace agreements with the CRS, EPL, MAQL, PRT, and the Militias of Medellín is taken directly from the original peace accords with the respective groups, made available in Villarraga Sarmiento 2009.

(“*punto final*”¹⁵³) a National Consultation Committee (*Comité Nacional de Consultación y Concertación*) was created in which representatives of the government and ex-combatant organizations jointly formulated the strategic implementation of the overall reintegration process. According to ODDR (2012c: 4), ex-combatant representatives did not only position themselves as valid interlocutors or mediators (personal interview, PAPDRB staff, May 11, 2012, Bogotá) within the national reinsertion program, at times, they also became part of the official staff structures of the reinsertion programs themselves (ibid.). In addition, and as a result of the inexperience of public institutions in offering reintegration support and the need for qualified staff, Restrepo and Contreras Rodríguez (2000: 162) report that governmental entities increased the salary for functionaries working in the area of reintegration, as they were expected to attend to a high-risk population. Consequently, this pushed former combatant leadership to independently set up NGOs specializing precisely in this work. From a more critical perspective and in the case of the EPL, Henao (1997:129) has emphasized the poor accompaniment of, or even indifference (Castro and Díaz 1997: 58) towards armed groups’ transition processes by civil society initiatives – that contrasts to the high public interest throughout the negotiation phase – highlighting that former combatants had no other support than the advice provided by the very ex-combatant organizations themselves. Another problem related to the poor implementation and use of coordination instruments provided for in the various peace agreements. As highlighted by the *Comisión de Superación de la Violencia* (1992: 259), the *Oficina Nacional de Reinserción* fell short of implementing regional forums promoting the peace process and the reinsertion of former militants. Similarly, Villarraga Sarmiento (2009: 114) stresses that ex-combatant organizations had to press hard to ensure peace accord provisions were implemented and not lost in the bureaucratic machinery of the different entities in charge of reintegration policies. Summing up, he highlights the arrangement’s individualistic and economic character, its lack of proper

¹⁵³ With its *punto final* or final point policy, the Uribe Vélez administration aimed to free up funds for the paramilitary demobilization process by putting an end to funding for former combatant organizations (Cárdenas Sarrias and Planta 2015: 166).

preparation, the slowness and precariousness of the accompanying institutional commitments, as well as the lack of involving the business sector and the inefficiency of (inter)national monitoring mechanisms in a context of ongoing war as driving factors behind this deficit (ibid.).

However, next to the weak institutional framework, it was also the very nature of the guerrilla groups and the content of the peace agreements themselves, that entailed clear provisions for participation in politics and socio-political benefits for communities under former guerrilla influence, that facilitated an active role for former combatant organizations.

6.1.2 EX-COMBATANT ORGANIZATIONS AS REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND DEMOCRACY PROMOTERS

As outlined earlier, negotiations with the guerrilla groups consisted of four major points (Bejarano 2009: 79-80), namely: 1) granting political benefits and participation in democratic elections, 2) tackling human rights issues, 3) setting up socio-economic reinsertion programs or facilitating processes of re-encounter, and 4) implementing regional development programs.

First of all, with regard to former guerrilla movements' integration into legal politics, an important feature of the negotiation processes was the large support by civil society, which transformed into an electoral success for former insurgency groups that managed to transform into or merge with existing political parties. For instance, the M-19, with the support of the EPL and the PRT, merged with other political actors into the AD M-19 coalition, which started participating in parliamentary elections only a few days after the M-19's demobilization, and whose presidential candidate Antonio Navarro Wolff (replacing the assassinated M-19 leader Carlos Pizarro Leongómez) finished third in the presidential race of 1990 with 12% of the votes (Planta and Görzig 2012: 158). The EPL, in turn, created the political movement Hope, Peace and Liberty (*Esperanza, Paz y Libertad*). Former MAQL militants, finally, were founding members of the indigenous political party Social Indigenous Alliance (*Alianza Social Indígena*, ASI) created in July 1991 (Tatay 2009: 56). Former insurgency movements nominated one third of the 70 members of the Constituent Assembly. Of the 19 elected members of the Constituent Assembly nominated by the M-19, six were

former combatants. The two EPL representatives who negotiated with the government were participants with full rights, whereas the MAQL and the PRT had one negotiation representative each, who, aside from the electoral route, only participated on a voice-without-vote basis (Aguilera 2013: 148, Jaramillo 2009: 40, Londoño and Nieto 2006: 64, Chernick 1999: 180).¹⁵⁴

Secondly, with regards to human rights and democracy promotion, the accords foresaw a range of measures and instruments to tackle the situation of gross violence in the country, or more specifically in the regions of former guerrilla operations, and to bolster human rights. The creation of specific human rights mechanisms, for instance, included organizing discussion events, producing reports and baseline studies, setting up working groups and human rights commissions to study the factors for violence in the regions and provide policy recommendations, as well as opening regional human rights offices (Aguilera 2013: 150). The peace accord with the EPL stipulated the creation of a Commission for the Overcoming of Violence (*Comisión de Superación de la Violencia*). Composed of five members,¹⁵⁵ the commission was financed by the Colombian government and tasked to produce regional baseline studies and a report containing recommendations for policymakers on how to improve the human rights situation and decrease violence levels on the basis of regional consultation processes (in Villaraga Sarmiento 2009: 174-175 and *Comisión de Superación de la Violencia* 1992). The peace accord with the PRT, in turn, stipulated among other human rights-related provisions the opening of an office of the Presidential Advisory

¹⁵⁴ Under the heading “political favoritism” (*favorabilidad política*), the peace accords also foresaw special seats for demobilized guerrilla organizations, at the latest in the 1992 elections for the Colombian Parliament and Senate through the so-called Special Electoral Peace Districts (*Circunscripción Especial de Paz*), see for instance original accord with the M-19 available online at: <https://www.las2orillas.co/acuerdo-de-paz-entre-el-gobierno-nacional-el-m-19/> (accessed February 20, 2017). For the CRS, however, since it had demobilized later in 1994, the peace accord foresaw the participation of two representatives in the parliament for the legislative period 1994-1998 (Villaraga Sarmiento 2009: 390).

¹⁵⁵ The MAQL later negotiated in its peace accord that it could nominate two people, who would be linked to the commission, to investigate and protect the human rights of indigenous communities (in Villaraga Sarmiento 2009: 200).

Body for the Defense and Promotion of Human Rights (*Consejería Presidencial para la Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos*) at the Atlantic coast (in Villaraga Sarmiento 2009: 185-186). The peace accord with the CRS called for the organization of a national human rights forum to generate recommendations for public policies in human rights issues (in *ibid.*: 387). However, what was largely missing within the human rights agenda was an explicit reference to victims' reparations. Only the peace accord with the PRT directly stipulated victims' support through the Victims' Families Support Foundation (*Fundación para el Apoyo a los Familiares de las Víctimas de la Violencia*) (in *ibid.*: 186). In the context of amnesties and comparatively few cases of civilian abuse committed by the demobilizing guerrilla groups (see also 5.2), reparations for victims were sidelined and remained limited to symbolic events.¹⁵⁶

On the other hand, the agreements contained various measures with regard to the broader promotion of democracy. The peace accord with the EPL called for the creation of so-called Democracy Houses (*Casas de Democracia*) that were to be built in various cities to further democratic development in the country. The government's financial support of 12 million COP (approximately 18,700 US dollars¹⁵⁷) was to be administered by the ex-combatant organization *Fundación Progresar*, which emerged from the peace accord (in Villaraga Sarmiento 2009: 170). The peace accord with the CRS called for the creation of a Fund for Citizen Participation (*Fondo de Participación Ciudadana*) to enhance citizen participation in political decision-making processes (in *ibid.*: 387). It also established a Cultural Officers for Peace Program (*Programa de Gestores Culturales de Paz*), which was to be coordinated by the government and the ex-combatant organization *Corporación Arco Iris*

¹⁵⁶ Measuring the exact share of human rights violations of organizations that demobilized in the early 1990s is difficult, as studies on the violent events by single actors usually lump paramilitary units and guerrilla movements together, with single analysis only provided for organizations still active, namely the ELN and FARC-EP (see for instance CNMH 2013).

¹⁵⁷ This rate and all following rates in this chapter are calculated on the basis of the exchange rate in January 1991, see fxtop currency converter, available online at: <http://fxtop.com/> (accessed February 20, 2017).

(in *ibid.*: 389). In addition, the agreement foresaw the strengthening of the Institute for the Development of Democracy Luis Carlos Galán (*Instituto para el Desarrollo de la Democracia Luis Carlos Galán*), in which former CRS militants were to participate actively (in *ibid.*: 387).

Finally, various peace agreements also provided funding for initiatives aimed at publicly promoting the peace accord. The peace accord with the EPL included funding for the publication of press articles, the production of TV advertisements for the peace accord formulated by the EPL, as well as a book project (Villaraga Sarmiento and Plazas 1994) on the history of the EPL (Villaraga Sarmiento 2009: 170). Furthermore, the *Fundación Progresar* was provided with 15 million COP (approximately 23,400 US dollars) to implement peace promotion programs (in *ibid.*: 170).

As a result, and because of the former combatants' intellectual capacity and their strong identification with the ideals and values of their former group, the peace processes of the 1990s have not only been widely analyzed by observers, but have also generated an important academic field for former members of the insurgency themselves, thereby further promoting a joint narrative of these groups' past.¹⁵⁸

With regard to the reintegration packages offered at that time, the benefits for demobilizing guerrilla groups included financial support ranging between 120 and 150 million COP (approximately 190-230 US dollars) for a period of six months, access to health services and basic education, as well as amnesty conditions for political crimes and security provisions (see Henao 1997: 107). Long-term support consisted mainly of three options former combatants could choose from: credit schemes for setting up an income-generating business project (*proyecto productivo*), the facilitation of university studies through a grant scheme, or the facilitation of a job placement in the private or public sector (see for instance

¹⁵⁸ The Documentation and Cultural Center for Peace (*Centro de Documentación y Cultura para la Paz*), for instance, documents and archives information on the social and political struggle of the M-19. See website of the center available online at: www.pensamientoculturaypaz.org (accessed February 20, 2017). See also Grabe 2015 for an overview of texts produced on the M-19. See Restrepo and Contreras Rodríguez (2000) or Valencia et al. (2005) on the history of the CRS, and Villaraga Sarmiento and Plazas (1994) on the history of the EPL.

peace accord PRT, Chapter X, item C in Villaraga Sarmiento 2009: 187). However, the benefits varied according to each group's negotiations with the government and evolved over time due to the learning curve in four years of subsequent negotiation experiences. Londoño and Nieto (2006: 124) highlight, for instance, that the negotiation process with the CRS was the first to be accompanied by a women's agenda, as female combatants of the CRS – with the support of their comrades from other already demobilized groups – understood they had gender-specific needs.¹⁵⁹

In hindsight, governmental reinsertion programs have been criticized for their individualistic and micro-economic approach to reintegration based on the idea that former combatants could easily be transformed into entrepreneurs (see Villaraga Sarmiento 2009: 114).¹⁶⁰ Such an approach did not only underestimate the problems arising from ex-combatants' scarce business experience and slim financial resources, but also the structural impediments of a country that lacked the ability to quickly absorb the spike in available work force (see Patiño et al. 2012: 49).

Nevertheless, policies designed back then by the *Programa de Reinserción* produced an important legacy in terms of lessons learned, policies, instruments and strategies. According to Sanguino (2005: 86), four strategies developed in the 1990s are particularly worth mentioning. On the one hand, the socialization of peace agreements meant bringing the benefits of the accord to the communities. The regionalization of reintegration referred to the

¹⁵⁹ As outlined by Londoño and Nieto (2006: 62-63), there was no mention of or specific reference to gender issues or the specific reintegration needs of female ex-combatants throughout the peace negotiations of the 1990s. What's more, of six peace accords signed with insurgent movements from 1990-1994, only one peace accord had a female signatory. Reasons why women's issues were sidelined at that time are manifold, and range from the lack of a proper women's agenda within the political agenda of the insurgency movements, the lack of clear selection criteria (e.g. taking into account gender representativeness) for negotiators, the lack of a gender consciousness by the female combatants themselves, a lack of self-confidence about one's own capacities, as well as the lack of support or even hostile reactions by male comrades towards specifically female visions.

¹⁶⁰ Projects set up with seed money from the reintegration program encompassed a wide range of business in the agrarian, industrial as well as service sector, e.g. the transportation business, convenience stores, and even pubs. For an overview, see Prieto Forero (n/a: 9).

process of also involving local and departmental governments in the implementation of reintegration programs. A stronger institutionalization was aimed at creating linkages with new national and regional actors, such as NGOs or the private sector. Finally, the internationalization of reintegration meant networking and transferring knowledge to other countries with similar experiences.

Besides their bureaucratic task of administering reintegration support, ex-combatant organizations also played the more symbolic role of providing orientation for former militants. Henao (1997: 127), for instance, highlights how the *Fundación Progresar* became former EPL combatants' sole reference point, where they sought out moral support in situations of great uncertainty and abandonment.

Finally, regional development plans were also part of the agreements. The M-19 agreement called for a National Fund for Peace (*Fondo Nacional para la Paz*), in charge of administering regional investments according to a planning process involving local communities. Through this fund, the EPL and the CRS each negotiated the disbursement of two billion COP (approximately 3,122,000 US dollars), the PRT 300 million COP (approximately 468,300 US dollars), and the MAQL 600 million COP (approximately 936,700 US dollars)¹⁶¹ for regional development projects (in Villaraga Sarmiento 2009: 175, 188, 204, 386). In some instances, the former combatant organizations were directly involved in the implementation of community-gearred projects. For instance, the *Corporación Arco Iris* was provided 50 million COP (78,100 US dollars) to implement a housing program in the zone they had formerly controlled. In the case of the MAQL, the *Fundación Sol y Tierra* was provided with a one-off funding worth seven million COP (11,000 US dollars) to support activities that would promote the peace process and facilitate the reintegration of former

¹⁶¹ While the government had initially rejected the idea to invest funding in the development of the 14 municipalities the MAQL had been operating in, pressure from civil society organized in a dialogue commission called People from Cauca for Peace (*Caucanos por la Paz*) and acting as observers helped to provide more weight to these demands. As a result, the government ended up investing more than 3,000 million COP (4,683,000 US dollars) in regional development projects which went well beyond the 600 million COP stipulated in the peace agreement (Tatay 2009: 53).

MAQL militants. In addition, a one-off funding of two and a half million COP (3,900 US dollars) was provided to support seven spokespersons of the MAQL in their task of promoting the peace process within the Cauca region (in *ibid.*: 200). Similarly, CORPADEC did not limit its work to facilitating post-militancy trajectories, but also understood its mission in a larger sense of contributing to social development and democratization (see Rampf et al. 2014). In accordance with that mission, the organization implemented community leader capacity building programs, conflict resolution and human rights training, as well as economic and housing projects. In addition, CORPADEC evolved into a particularly important space for former female combatants to set up a number of specific projects for women organizations targeting both urban and rural participants (*ibid.*).

To summarize, the ex-combatant organizations did not only focus on the ex-combatants *per se*, but also participated in the implementation of the regional development projects to the benefit of local communities as agreed upon in the peace accords, thereby facilitating former combatants' re-encounter with society (*Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris* 2005). This policy, that not only addressed former combatants, but also the surrounding community, positively affected the political leadership of former combatants and their organizations. It helped not only to maintain links to their former constituency, but also broadened the social base and political power of former insurgents, allowing their organizations to play an important role within their region (Restrepo and Contreras Rodríguez 2000: 166). As quoted in Rampf et al. (2014: 14), former PRT members asserted that “[w]e grew with CORPADEC. [...] When we conducted the negotiations with the government, we had some influence over society, but later, with CORPADEC, we managed to increase this influence. We reached more sectors of society [...] that had not been part of the PRT but accepted our leadership.”

Regarding the militia groups, their organizational post-militancy processes had mixed results. The peace agreement with the MIR-COAR in 1998 brought about the creation of the Peace and Social Development Corporation (*Corporación para la Paz y el Desarrollo Social*, CORPADES). Similar to the organizations emerging from guerrilla movements, CORPADES started with a broad mandate to accompany ex-militants and set up community-g geared programs. Today, under the leadership of a former MIR-COAR militant, it has transformed

into a regionally well-known human rights NGO that regularly receives threats due to its investigations on security-related themes, such as on connections between local police and paramilitary units (*Colectivo de Abogados* 2015). The experience of the militia groups that jointly demobilized in 1994, however, took a different turn. As agreed upon with the government, they were allowed to set up a private security organization, partly also out of fear that the otherwise resulting security vacuum in their zones would quickly be filled by other armed actors (Paz Jaramillo and Valencia Agudelo 2015: 274). The peace agreement stipulated that, following their demobilization, a security cooperative (*Cooperativa de Seguridad y Servicio a la Comunidad*, COOSERCOM) would be created, providing jobs for about 360 militants (in Villarraga Sarmiento 2009: 401). However, analysts have classified this experiment as a failure, as it not only led to the death of over 180 demobilized people – among them the chief commanders and negotiators with the government – but also to the abuse of the local population. The organization was finally closed down in 1996 (*Verdad Abierta* 2016). With a death toll of over 20% of former militants, the experience of the urban militias in Medellín is the one that most significantly highlights the security problems affecting former combatant organizations. However, this has also been a common, and probably the most challenging, issue for organizations emerging from the peace negotiations with the guerrilla groups in a context of ongoing, and at times even escalating, armed confrontation.

6.1.3 CHALLENGES: SECURITY CONDITIONS, DIVISIONS BETWEEN LEADER AND FOLLOWERS, GENDER GAP

The assassination of former M-19 commander Carlos Pizarro Leongómez on April 26, 1990, is probably the most frequently mentioned and emblematic case of targeted violence against former combatants-turned-politicians. However, it is by far not the only case. According to Patiño et al. (2012: 48), 160 former M-19 militants – almost 20% of its overall members – were murdered between 1989 and 2005. Ten years after their establishment, the *Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris* (2005: 6) reported that 79 demobilized CRS members had been killed, and another ten were forced into exile, two of which were former negotiators, while the offices of the *Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris* themselves were a constant target of aggression and theft.

The experience of the EPL, in turn, was unique in the sense that its negotiation process was characterized by factionalism, with a considerable part of the group remaining active (see *Comisión de Superación de la Violencia* 1992: 99 for an overview of dissident groups). While these dissident groups feared their former comrades might provide state security forces with military information and thereby endanger their military operations, those who demobilized were also exposed to security risks (see Sanguino 2005: 78, 81 and Villaraga Sarmiento 2009: 111). Not only did they face security threats by paramilitary groups, they were at times also attacked by former group members or other guerrilla groups – in the case of former EPL members, mainly by the FARC-EP (see Aguilera 2013: 149 and Valencia 2007: 18).¹⁶² Demobilized PRT militants have pointed to the murder of 61 former militants, including CORPADEC staff (see Rampf et al. 2014). In total, between 1990-1999, approximately 700 demobilized people were assassinated (see Cárdenas Sarrias 2006: 53-70). These experiences gave first insights into the need for providing safety for former combatants (Salgado 2013). In addition, as highlighted by the *Comisión de Superación de la Violencia* (1992: 103, 109), demobilization in many cases also weakened the security situation of local communities, and especially the social constituency of demobilized guerrilla groups and grassroots activists deemed close to them, as they remained without any protection against other armed groups, paramilitary and remaining guerrilla forces alike.

Next to security issues, the most important challenge common to the organizations emerging from these negotiation processes was the division between leadership and its rank-and-file segments, in some instances resulting in a sense of abandonment that demonstrated the difficult transition from collective to individual life. Focus group discussions with former PRT members conducted by Rampf et al. (2014) revealed that many former militants expected a stronger continuation of their common objectives beyond demobilization. They

¹⁶² As highlighted by Valencia (2007: 18), one of the EPL dissident groups engaged in an alliance with the FARC-EP and started to attack members of the Hope, Peace and Liberty party, leading to the assassination of dozens of former EPL militants. As a result, the demobilization of the EPL has been particularly traumatic.

expressed disappointment and frustration because of their impression that former leaders had managed to take advantage of the demobilization process to improve their personal – socio-economic and political – situation. In the case of the EPL, former militants felt their collective project had been orphaned (see Henao 1997: 132), especially after the EPL's own political party Hope, Peace and Liberty had merged with the broader AD M-19 coalition. As a result, the *Comisión de Superación de la Violencia* (1992: 258) highlighted the need for post-militancy (political and social) organizations to provide better information and guidance to former rank-and-file militants. Similarly, interviews conducted during field research in Popayán also provided nuanced perspectives on the overall positive assessment of the MAQL reintegration process, hinting at a difference between leaders who had engaged in politics or were even part of the Constituent Assembly, and ordinary rank-and-file militants, who were initially received with a certain mistrust by the community, as “in any case, they had been *guerrilleros* [guerilla fighters] and had acquired bad habits and had to regain the respect of the community” (personal interview, *Fundación Sol y Tierra* member, March 13, 2012, Popayán). Another interviewee confirmed the double standard society applied to former combatants, by which ex-combatants who had managed to build a political career were regarded with esteem, whereas “simply” demobilized persons were regarded with deep mistrust:

“Society doesn't appreciate you if you are a simple demobilized person. But if you are Antonio Navarro [former commander and leader of the M-19 and presidential candidate in 1990] then you are regarded with esteem. Why? Because you represent political power. Not because you are an ex-guerrilla fighter. The population is pragmatic in that sense. If you are a reincorporated person that holds some power, then there is no problem [with your past] but if you don't have any power, then you are a son of a bitch, a guerrillero, a murderer. This mentality in Colombia is a real catastrophe” (personal interview, PAPDRB staff, May 11, 2012, Bogotá).

Former M-19 combatants also hinted at the fact that many former militants are today facing lacking job opportunities because of the gaps in their resumes (personal interview, former M-19 members, January 19, 2012, Bogotá). Highlighting the difficulties of individual (rank-and-file) ex-combatants, including their integration into the labour market, the security situation, their loss of group identity and their dispersion into anonymity, there has been a debate on

labelling ex-combatants as “victims of peace” (see Grabe 2015: 535). However, as highlighted by Grabe, for many former combatants, the collective disengagement also meant a possibility to rebuild personal and family lives.

In addition to the divide between leaders and followers, female ex-combatants have also highlighted a gender gap in post-militancy life. One interviewee, for instance, criticized that many former combatant organizations that evolved from the peace accords of the 1990s did not rely on any substantial leadership from former female combatants (with the PRT apparently being an exception, see above) (personal interview, *Red Nacional de Mujeres Excombatientes* member, January 17, 2012, Bogotá). In addition, research has also hinted to the particular difficulties former female combatants faced after the transition. Sánchez-Blake (2011: 6, see also Londoño and Nieto 2006) for instance highlights that especially women’s peace initiatives did not recognize female ex-combatants’ contributions to peacebuilding because of their belligerent past. While universities or reintegration programs might invite former female combatants to talk about their militant experience, women’s organizations “deny them the right to make their contribution” to peacebuilding. As a result, the National Network of Women Ex-combatants (*Red Nacional de Mujeres Excombatientes*) emerged as an initiative by former female guerrilla militants to share individual and collective experiences of militancy and transition, make them public, and promote the active participation of female ex-combatants in politics. This effort involved not only organizing regional self-reflection workshops and connecting women ex-combatants internationally, but also a book project revealing the life stories of selective network participants, as well as lobby efforts to position the topic of female combatants more prominently, such as the national working group “Women and Armed Conflict in Colombia” (*Mesa de Trabajo Mujer y Conflicto Armado en Colombia*) (ibid.). Interestingly, in the early stage of this network, the discussion among participants on the network’s name already reflected the need to continue relating to their ex-combatant identity. Participants were not sure whether or not to use the denomination “ex-combatants”. Alternative suggestions included for instance “Female Signatories of the Peace Accords” (*Mujeres Firmantes de los Acuerdos de Paz*) or “Women for Life and Peace” (*Mujeres Gestoras de Vida y Paz*). However, the ex-combatant

terminology was eventually chosen, because it seemed to highlight and reveal the common past of the network's members (*ibid.*, see also IDRC documentary 2012).

As these examples underline, individual and collective post-militancy trajectories are not necessarily congruent. Despite strong identity bonds within the guerrilla movements (see 5.2) – which were all of relatively small scale compared to other insurgency movements across the globe – the existence of post-militancy organizations could not prevent processes of individualization and dispersion. As highlighted by Castro and Díaz (1997: 37), the strong unification and homogenization of the individual within the guerrilla movements led to the – at least partial – neglect of individual differences in terms of gender, class or educational background. However, the transition process and the dissolution of the collective made these differences visible again.¹⁶³

In a situation where each and every former militant had to embark on a personal search for a new identity, former combatant organizations provided at least a temporary orientation and support platform for former combatants, as well as a backing for their individual post-militancy trajectories. In fact, organizations that resulted from the collective demobilization processes of the 1990s actually maintained a strong profile with regard to group belonging. While they have incorporated non-ex-combatants, for example as advisers or technical staff, they have not engaged in collaboration with their former paramilitary opponents (as have other organizations, see below 6.3). The persisting trench between former guerrilla and former paramilitary members was also highlighted by a representative of the National Women Ex-Combatants Network, who pointed out the strong resistance within the collective to open space for former female paramilitaries. Probably, this was also due to the political orientation of the collective, that understood itself as a feminist network for “political women who want to influence public policies” and whose aim was to “make women of the

¹⁶³ See Londoño and Nieto (2006: 123-131) for a detailed analysis of the impact of social stratification, including the urban-rural divide, and the role of individual positions within the armed group for ex-combatants' post-militancy life trajectories.

insurgencias visible in political action and leadership” (personal interview, *Red Nacional de Mujeres Excombatientes* member, January 17, 2012, Bogotá).

To conclude, former combatant organizations emerging from the peace processes of the 1990s have been characterized for their ability to maintain, build upon and at times even strengthen the social support basis of the former armed movement because of their closeness to local communities, their relatively low level of abuse towards civilian society, and the lobbying for and participation in the implementation of community-gearred regional development and democracy promotion projects based on their political vision. Their strong in-group identity has in some instances even promoted the continuation of social bonds and solidarity beyond militancy against all odds. As highlighted by one former EPL member:

“I demobilized with the EPL and I did maintain my group spirit because I demobilized together with all other EPL militants. For us, it was very complicated to solve the emotional issues, [...] we were like a family. That’s why I am still friends with this guy who is a parraco [paramilitary] today. [...] This kind of situation exists because of the old ties that were built up throughout years [of militancy]” (personal interview, PAPDRB staff, May 11, 2012, Bogotá).

This persistence of identifying with one’s former group has in some instances also been facilitated by the legacy of academic reflections and autobiographic memoirs written by individual former combatants or commissioned by former combatant organizations, as highlighted above (see footnote 157). However, while these organizations have managed to provide their former militants with orientation, if even temporarily (Guáqueta 2005: 23), they have not been able to prevent the processes of dispersion, individualization and divides between leaders – who often entered a political career – and rank-and-file followers. In addition, the continuation of the armed group’s political legacy has also led to security threats against former militants. While they have offered spaces for re-encounter on a collective level, they have not necessarily enabled their members to adjust individually to post-militancy life. However, despite these challenges, degrees of recidivism among former combatants demobilized in the 1990s have been relatively low (see CNMH 2015: 57, CNRR 2011: 24, and

personal interview, PAPDRB staff, May 11, 2012, Bogotá), even though some re-joined still operating guerrilla, paramilitary forces, or common crime.¹⁶⁴

At the time of research, most of the ex-combatant organizations were still operating, however, often with a different focus. The most solid organization at the time of research was the *Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris* (with the CRS's housing project UNAVIDA having been shut down). They had managed to transform into a nationally acknowledged think tank (personal interview, *Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris* member, June 8, 2012, Bogotá) that integrated both former guerrilla militants and professional staff without any insurgency background.¹⁶⁵ The *Fundación Sol y Tierra* was struggling for survival. Both COMPAZ and the *Fundación Progresar* were no longer operating (personal interview, PAPDRB staff, May 11, 2012, Bogotá). Interestingly, COMPAZ has been the less visible and less well documented organization of those presented here. However, this might be related to the strong focus on the political party development of the M-19 after its demobilization and its quick electoral success that probably sidelined to a certain extent the socio-economic aspects of the transition. Regarding the *Fundación Progresar*, it was shut down because of financial difficulties after the *punto final* policy of the Uribe Vélez administration, even though its members had managed to receive some international project funding. However, it was also mentioned that the organization took a somewhat unexpected shift away from its original political orientation when its last director switched political sides and became a human rights adviser within the Uribe Vélez administration (personal interview, PAPDRB staff, May 11, 2012, Bogotá), highlighting again the role of post-militancy leadership in maintaining (or not) cohesion. However, the director of one the local branches of *Fundación Progresar* Cúcuta, himself a former EPL member, had turned the branch into an independent human rights NGO (ibid.).

¹⁶⁴ Factions of the M-19 (*Jaime Bateman Cayón*) and the EPL that did not take part in the negotiation process mostly descended into common crime or were forcefully disbanded by the statutory forces or the FARC-EP (CNMH 2015: 57). One EPL splinter group, however, survived and continues to operate in the Catatumbo region under the name *Frente Libardo Mora Toro* (CNMH 2015: 57, 63).

¹⁶⁵ See also its website at: www.arcoiris.com.co (accessed February 20, 2017).

Having outlined the emergence of former combatant organizations in the framework of the peace accords with various guerrilla movements in the early and mid-1990s, their particularities and the specific challenges they have been facing, the next section turns to an analysis of the demobilization of the paramilitary units under the Uribe Vélez administration and the ensuing organizational processes.

6.2 THE DE- AND REMOBILIZATION OF PARAMILITARY MILITANTS (2003-2006)

This section turns to the remobilization processes following the demobilization of paramilitary units from 2003-2006, the single largest collective demobilization process in Colombia. Section 6.2.1 outlines how a policy shift under the Uribe Vélez administration finally led to a negotiation process with the paramilitaries. Section 6.2.2 then turns to the particularities of the ensuing DDR process, including the lack of political substance, the lack of victims' reparation within a new transitional justice system and the establishment of a new institutional framework. Section 6.2.3 then critically discusses paramilitaries' regrouping in criminal networks and the set-up of income-generating projects often led by former paramilitary leaders as two main patterns of remobilization.

6.2.1 A POLICY SHIFT UNDER THE URIBE VÉLEZ ADMINISTRATION: NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE PARAMILITARY

Despite the optimism and enthusiasm sparked by the political opening of the Constituent Assembly, the overall impact of the 1990s peace processes remained short-lived and limited due to the difficult implementation of the ambitious political changes brought forward by the new constitution, the lack of a coherent and sustainable governmental peace policy, the resurgence of political violence, and the acts of abuse by legal and illegal armed forces alike, including former combatants, towards the civilian population (see Villaraga Sarmiento 2013: 113). While President Gaviria had managed to sign peace deals with various guerrilla movements, paramilitary groups started to become more organized and connected nationally. The foundation of the Peasant Self-Defenders of Córdoba and Urabá (*Autodefensas*

Campesinas de Córdoba y de Urabá, ACCU) by the Castaño brothers¹⁶⁶ in 1994 was followed in 1997 by the creation of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*, AUC) (for an in-depth analysis see Arnson 2005, Garzón 2005, Cubides 1999). What before had been numerous independent local projects now evolved into a national platform powerful enough to disturb the government's renewed efforts for dialogue with the guerrilla forces. Following massive civil society rallies for peace,¹⁶⁷ presidential candidate Pastrana won the 1998 elections on the grounds of his specific peace agenda, and quickly assumed peace talks with the FARC-EP and the ELN. Only shortly after his election, he negotiated the creation of 42,000km² large demilitarized zone in the El Caguán region, situated in the north of the Caquetá Department with the FARC-EP. However, the FARC-EP strategically used the demilitarized area as a “safe haven’ from where they could plan and execute attacks, recruit and train new members, and even hold kidnapped victims” (Planta and Görzig 2012: 159). On the other hand, repeated acts of sabotage by paramilitary groups delayed the process and eventually led to the exhaustion of trust and the breaking down of contact between the negotiation parties (see Kurtenbach 2004: 39, González

¹⁶⁶ Emblematic figures for both paramilitarism and the drug business, the brothers Fidel, Vicente and Carlos Castaño Gil from the Antioquia region founded the ACCU in association with other enemies or victims of the guerrilla after their father had been kidnapped and killed by the FARC-EP. The ACCU later became one of the founding units of the AUC. For more information on the rise of Carlos Castaño to a public celebrity, complete with a private PR advisor and an autobiographic book (see Aranguren Molina 2002) that became a bestseller in Colombia, see Oldenburg and Lengert (2006: 29-31).

¹⁶⁷ The late 1990s were a period of “immense growth” and diversification for the peace movement in Colombia (García-Durán: 2006: 20). In 1997, the Citizens’ Mandate for Peace (*Mandato Ciudadano por la Paz*), mobilized more than ten million Colombians to sign a non-binding petition for peace. In 1999, the famous “No More” (*No Más*) mobilization against kidnapping mobilized eight million people to march in 180 municipalities across the country. However, the breakdown of the peace talks plunged the peace movement into a deep crisis and left it without “an agenda or any further mobilization potential” (Grabe 2014: 4). On a positive note, this crisis led to a reorientation of the peace movement, whose primary interest shifted away from promoting (and supporting) political negotiations with armed actors to including peacebuilding activities beyond the negotiation table.

et al. 2003: 79).¹⁶⁸ At the same time, between 1998-2002, paramilitary units increased their own numbers from 4,500 to 11,000 (ICG 2003:11), expanded from the coastal region and the country's center to the departments of Arauca, Santander, Caldas, Valle, Cauca, Nariño, and established themselves in the country's major cities Cali, Medellín und Bogotá (Valencia 2002: 223, see Figure 14 in Annex 5).

After the trauma of the failed Caguán negotiations, the pendulum swung to the other extreme when hard-liner Uribe Vélez, whose father had been killed by FARC-EP, was elected president by 52% of the votes, “riding a wave of general dissatisfaction with the country's increasingly violent conflict” that moved from the periphery into Colombia's major cities, where high levels of personal insecurity deeply affected the urban middle and upper classes (see Restrepo and Spagat 2005: 131). Taking a new direction,¹⁶⁹ the Uribe Vélez administration started to concentrate its negotiation efforts on the former paramilitary spoilers, while at the same time increasing its military operations against the guerrilla.¹⁷⁰ The government's motivation was twofold. On the one hand, it needed to limit the paramilitaries' growing independence and increasing use of violence,¹⁷¹ which was turning paramilitarism into a threat for the political stability and the state's monopoly of force (see Jenss 2016: 181, Angarita Cañas et al. 2015: 274). Up to then, and with the sponsorship of traditional and

¹⁶⁸ This included, for instance, the abduction of Senator Piedad Córdoba from the liberal party and seven other deputies, massacres against civilians, and military attacks on guerrilla positions as well as protest movements against a demilitarized zone for the ELN (Planta 2006: 30-31).

¹⁶⁹ Initial contacts with paramilitary leaders during the previous Pastrana administration had been abandoned.

¹⁷⁰ Officially, the new security policy called “*Plan Patriota*” (Patriotic Plan), itself part of the Democratic Security Policy (*Política de Seguridad Democrática*), was based on a heavy increase of military operations and aimed to restore control over the territory and improve the overall security situation by fighting against all armed groups (see Garzón 2005: 100, *Semana* 2005).

¹⁷¹ In 2001 alone, 1,186 political killings and 1,680 massacre victims were attributed to paramilitary units, according to human rights organizations (see Planta 2006: 31). Out of 1,982 massacres documented by the CNMH (2013: 36) between 1980 and 2012, paramilitary groups were responsible for 1,166, or almost 60%.

emerging politicians,¹⁷² paramilitaries had managed to control public policies in the areas they were operating in, gain access to public spending, build alliances with representatives of relevant state institutions, and gain influence over the legislative procedure (see CNMH 2013: 252).¹⁷³

On the other hand, the Uribe Vélez administration responded to the interests of its electoral base, regional elites within the agrarian and business sector, by taking up negotiations with the AUC (Romero 2007: 467). Not only had President Uribe Vélez himself promoted private security associations (*Asociaciones Comunitarias de Vigilancia Rural*, CONVIVIR), thereby providing paramilitary units with a legal basis, but under his administration as governor in Antioquia (1995-1997) (see Valencia 2007: 21-22), a considerable part of his electoral supporters, the *Uribistas* had also been accused of systematic alliances between politicians, paramilitary units and drug dealers (*parapolítica*) (see CNMH 2013: 249). At the height of this *parapolítica* scandal in 2006, one third of Colombia's congressmen and -women were investigated because of their connections to the AUC.¹⁷⁴ According to a report by the Supreme Administrative Court (*Procuraduría General de la Nación*), 519 disciplinary processes against public functionaries were registered between 2006 and 2016 relating to connections with paramilitarism, including homicide, threats, electoral fraud and illegal financing of electoral campaigns (*Semana* 2016a). In addition, the special Justice and Peace Law prosecutors have asked to investigate over 10,000 civilians – many of them local businessmen – for their undue links to paramilitary forces (CNMH 2013:

¹⁷² Already in 2001, the so-called secret “Ralito Pact” (*Pacto de Ralito*) had been signed between paramilitary leaders and more than 50 politicians with the objective to set up a new political project.

¹⁷³ See also information on *parapolítica* below, see Jenss (2015: 266-274) and Valencia (2007: 34-42) for a detailed analysis of how politicians with close ties to paramilitary groups influenced the making of the Justice and Peace Law.

¹⁷⁴ Out of 102 senators and 97 parliamentarians under investigation, 42 were finally condemned. Seven out of ten presidents of the Senate between 2002 and 2012 have been or are being prosecuted for presumed connections with paramilitary forces (CNMH 2013: 252).

250). Finally, close relatives of Álvaro Uribe Vélez – and in 2015 even he himself (*Semana* 2015) – have been accused of *parapolítica* activities.¹⁷⁵

In a context of increasing international pressure on the government to combat them, internal divisions related to their links with the drug business, and strong personal incentives to negotiate, the paramilitary leaders seized the opportunity to consolidate and legalize their political and economic power at a low legal cost (*ibid.*, see also Planta 2006: 46-55). The categorization of the AUC as a terrorist organization by the US (September 10, 2001), Canada and the EU not only considerably limited the AUC's political space, but also pressured the government to apply tougher measures to these groups (*ibid.*: 46). Extradition to the US threatened 24 high-ranking paramilitary leaders, including Carlos Castaño himself (*El Tiempo* 2006).

Against this background, official dialogue with the AUC leaders started in July 2003 under the facilitation of the Catholic Church in the town of Santa Fe de Ralito. In the Santa Fe de Rialto Agreement (*Acuerdo de Santa Fe de Ralito*), the AUC committed itself to demobilize its troops until the end of 2005 in a gradual process. Back then, an estimated 15,000-20,000 militants were expected to demobilize, however, in the end the process involved 31,671 people and provided 18,051 arms in a total of 38 events (*Presidencia de la República* 2006: 8, see Figure 4 on the following page).

¹⁷⁵ Uribe Vélez's brother Santiago Uribe Vélez is being investigated for having participated in the creation and promotion of the paramilitary group "*Los 12 Apóstoles*" (The Twelve Apostles) while his cousin Mario Uribe, former Senator and President of the Congress (2000-2001), was condemned to seven and a half years of prison in 2011 for connections with the AUC (*El Espectador* 2016 and *Semana* 2011).

Figure 4: Demobilization of paramilitary units 2003-2006

Group	Year	Number
<i>Bloque Cacique Nutibara</i>	2003	868
<i>Autodefensas de Campesinas de Ortega</i>		167
<i>Bloque Bananero</i>		451
<i>Sur del Magdalena e Isla de San Fernando</i>		48
<i>Audodefensas Cundinamarca</i>	2004	148
<i>Bloque Catatumbo</i>		1,434
<i>Bloque Calima</i>		564
<i>Bloque Córdoba</i>	2005	925
<i>Bloque Suroeste Antioqueño</i>		126
<i>Frente Mojana</i>		109
<i>Frente Héroes de Tolová</i>		464
<i>Bloque Montes de María</i>		594
<i>Bloque Libertadores del Sur</i>		689
<i>Bloque Héroes de Granada</i>		2,033
<i>Autodefensas de Meta y Vichada</i>		209
<i>Bloque Pacífico</i>		358
<i>Bloque Centauros</i>		1,134
<i>Bloque Noroccidente Antioqueño</i>		222
<i>Bloque Vichada</i>		325
<i>Bloque Tolima</i>		207
<i>Bajo Cauca, Magdalena Medio y Noreste de Antioquia</i>		1,922
<i>Frente Mártires de Guática</i>		552
<i>Bloque Vencedores de Arauca</i>		548
<i>Bloque Mineros</i>		2,786
<i>Autdefensas Campesinas de Puerto Boyacá</i>		742
<i>Bloque Central Bolívar – Santa Rosa del Sur</i>		2,519
<i>Bloque Resistencia Tairona</i>		1,166
<i>Autodefensas Campesinas del Magdalena Medio</i>	990	
<i>Héroes del Caguán, Andaquies y Florencia</i>	552	
<i>Frente Sur del Putumayo</i>	2006	504
<i>Frente Julio Peinado Becerra de las AUC</i>		251
<i>Bloque Norte: Chimila y la Mesa-Valledupar</i>		4,759
<i>Frente Héroes del Llano y Héroes del Guaviare</i>		1,765
<i>Frente Costanero</i>		309
<i>Frente Pavarando y Dabeiba</i>		484
<i>Frente Norte Medio Salgui</i>		743
Total	2003-2006	31,671

Source: Cárdenas Sarrias (2012: 12).

6.2.2 PARTICULARITIES OF THE PARAMILITARY “LEGALIZATION” PROCESS

The demobilization process of almost 32,000 paramilitaries has been heavily criticized for its lack of political substance, its character as a mere – and even partial – demobilization or even “legalization” process, its controversial transitional justice framework, and its flaws in setting up a new institutional reintegration scheme.

The lack of a political identity of paramilitary units, as discussed in 5.2, led to a negotiation process itself void of political substance. This was visible in at least three instances. First of all, it was reflected in the legal changes the Uribe Vélez administration had to make in order to assume negotiations in the first place. In 1997, Law 418 (*Congreso de Colombia* 1977) had been set up to facilitate dialogue with armed groups of political nature with the aim to ensure “peaceful coexistence and reconciliation” (*Congreso de Colombia* 1997, see also Herrera and González 2013: 277).¹⁷⁶ Modifying Law 418/1994, the government introduced Law 782/2002 (*Congreso de Colombia* 2002), which removed the political character of a group as a precondition for entering negotiations (see Cárdenas Sarrias 2012: 72). This allowed the government to engage in negotiations without having to recognize the paramilitary units as political actors – which would have been fiercely argued against by large parts of the political opposition and social movements, as well as the Colombian justice institutions (see Angarita Cañas et al. 2015: 274, CNMH 2013: 242, and Hoyos 2010).

Secondly, it was visible in the questionable procedures of enlisting for demobilization. While the government claimed the massive demobilization of almost 32,000 people – more than double the original estimation – to be a success, the significant discrepancy between estimates and final demobilization numbers has been attributed to fraudulent admissions to the reintegration program. On the one hand, mere collaborators or even people completely alien to paramilitary structures were recruited into the reintegration program on short notice for economic purposes. On the other hand, the so-called “selling of franchises” (*venta de*

¹⁷⁶ This law had for instance enabled the Pastrana administration to start peace negotiations with the FARC-EP and the ELN in the late 1990s (see 6.2.1).

franquicias)¹⁷⁷ helped drug traffickers join the demobilization process and even make it to the negotiation table under the guise of being paramilitary leaders, demonstrating the penetration of paramilitary units by drug traffickers and the mercenary character of the relationship between leaders and followers (CNMH 2015: 66, 71, see also CNRR 2011: 37). Finally, and contrary to the peace accords signed with the guerrilla organizations, the agreement with the paramilitary did not contain any political demands or other substantial agenda items. As a result, there is a considerable debate over the terminology to describe the negotiation and demobilization process of the paramilitary forces. For instance, instead of referring to it as a peace process or peace agreement, some analysts consider it a demobilization agreement, consisting in a simple exchange of weapons for legal benefits agreed upon between actors with similar interests (see CNRR 2011: 24). Still others criticize the process as a mere legalization of illegal actors and their illegally acquired assets (e.g. Jents 2016, Arangita Cañas et al. 2015) under extremely favorable legal conditions.

Even though new international norms and the rise of victims' rights on the international agenda made it impossible to apply the amnesty policy of the 1990s to the paramilitary units, the transitional justice mechanism,¹⁷⁸ the so-called "Justice and Peace Law" (Law 975 /2005, *Ley de Justicia y Paz*, LJP, *Congreso de Colombia* 2005) conceded generous "alternative penalties". Ratified after considerable debate¹⁷⁹ in June 2005 (see Jents

¹⁷⁷ In the sense of awarding licences, this process meant that an entire armed unit could be rented out to the drug business. This in turn meant that drug lords essentially were able to buy their way into controlling paramilitary groups, making themselves by definition paramilitaries as well.

¹⁷⁸ Since the 1990s, the concept of transitional justice is associated with the challenge of finding a balance between justice on the one hand, and peace on the other. According to the International Centre for Transitional Justice, it "refers to the set of judicial and non-judicial measures that have been implemented by different countries in order to redress the legacies of massive human rights abuses. These measures include criminal prosecutions, truth commissions, reparations programs, and various kinds of institutional reforms." See ICTJ website at: www.ictj.org/about/transitional-justice (accessed February 20, 2017).

¹⁷⁹ Intervention by the Colombian Constitutional Court and international pressure prevented an initial draft law (*Ley de Alternatividad Penal*, Alternative Penalties Law), close to providing blanket amnesties, to be become ratified.

2015: 266-274 and Romero 2007: 35 for a detailed analysis), the law was meant to regulate alternative penalties – prison sentences of eight years maximum¹⁸⁰ – for former paramilitaries responsible for crimes against humanity, as well as reparation measures for their victims. The LJP has received enormous criticism and has failed to fulfill many of its expectations (see Görzig and Planta 2009 and *Verdad Abierta* 2016). Analysts have highlighted the non-public and often false content of the declarations (so-called “free versions” – *versión libre*) by paramilitary members, the lack of investigation into confessed crimes and the lack of specialized attention for victims (Cárdenas Sarrias 2012: 20). The conditions of impunity and lack of personnel and financial capacities in the Colombian Justice sector resulted in a situation where a large majority of demobilized individuals were *de facto* granted amnesty, while victims’ rights remained widely unaddressed (CNMH 2013: 246).¹⁸¹ The non-compliance of paramilitary leaders with the truth-telling process and their continuing involvement in illegal and violent activities, followed by their subsequent incarceration or extradition to the US,¹⁸² further aggravated the loss of faith in the demobilization process and limited possibilities for interlocution and representativeness between former combatants and

¹⁸⁰ In 2014, first paramilitary leaders condemned under the Justice and Peace Law were released from jail (*Semana* 2014).

¹⁸¹ While almost 40,000 crimes were confessed in paramilitary truth-telling procedures, leading to the discovery of 4,000 graves containing nearly 5,000 dead bodies, the first sentence under the new legal framework wasn’t until 2011 (CNMH 2013: 246 and *Verdad Abierta* 2015b). Out of 4,400 demobilized people registered with the LJP, only 14 were sentenced by the end of 2012 (CNMH 2013: 246, see also *Verdad Abierta* 2015b and 2015c). Only 20% of the victims have in turn been included in court rulings – a precondition to receiving compensation through the reparation fund, which additionally lacks resources (see CNRR 2011: 60-61). Especially with regard to land restitution, the LJP has therefore been considered a failure (*ibid.*).

¹⁸² Contrary to what had been agreed upon with the Uribe Vélez government, the 14 highest paramilitary commanders were extradited in May 2008 to the US on the grounds that they had not abided by their commitment to the Justice and Peace Law (see below) (*El Espectador* 2008). Ultimately, the extradition highlighted another turn in the Uribe Vélez administration’s treatment of paramilitary units, that had gone from regarding paramilitarism as a welcome anti-insurgency support, to tensions and confrontation with them, to support for the demobilization or “legalization” process, to the provision of an extremely favorable legal framework for their transition, only to finally declare them as criminals and extradite them to the US (see Angarita Cañas et al. 2015: 274).

the state or society (CNMH 2015: 39 and 2011: 116). In addition, there were also negative consequences for those participating in the procedure. According to a report by the National Commission for Reparation and Reconciliation (CNRR 2011: 165), 800 demobilized people who took part in the truth-telling procedure were assassinated, with an additional 1,000 receiving threats, often by their former superiors, between 2007 and 2009 alone.¹⁸³

In this scenario, analysts have also criticized the government for having failed to pay enough attention to the reintegration phase of demobilized paramilitary militants (see for instance Romero 2007: 469). The Uribe Veléz administration dissolved the *Dirección General para la Reinserción* and set up the Program for Reincorporation into Civilian Life (*Programa de Reincorporación a la Vida Civil*, PRVC). Initially established to attend to individual deserters, it then also became responsible for coordinating reintegration activities with the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace (*Oficina del Alto Comisionado para la Paz*, OAC)¹⁸⁴ in charge of supervising the demobilization of paramilitary units (see Herrera and González 2013: 278, Decree 128/2003, *Presidencia de la República* 2003).¹⁸⁵ However, until 2006, the government largely delegated the responsibility of dealing with demobilized paramilitary militants to the sub-national level, with Bogotá (where mostly individual deserters ended) and Medellín (where many former paramilitary members gathered) turning into municipal “hotspots”, thereby spurring the setting up of their own municipal complementary reintegration programs (see 6.2.3). However, as outlined by Romero (2007:

¹⁸³ According to the same report (*ibid.*, see 161-181 for a more detailed analysis of violent threats for the demobilized population), figures by the National Police on homicides against demobilized people allow the conclusion that participation in truth-telling efforts is the major cause for attacks against former combatants.

¹⁸⁴ First established in 1983 (Decree 240/1983) by the Betancur administration, the High Peace Councilor’s Office has, under changing names, been in charge of advising and accompanying the government in its negotiation efforts with armed groups.

¹⁸⁵ This was, however, with differentiated benefits, as the monthly payments for individually disengaged guerrillas – designated as “humanitarian aid” – was almost double the amount given to collectively demobilized paramilitary members (see IRG n/a).

469.), municipal and departmental entities largely lacked the technical, institutional and financial capacities to implement meaningful reintegration programs.

It was only in 2006, due to the massive (and unexpected) increase of former combatants both from the paramilitary demobilization process and the increase of individual deserters, that the High Council for Social and Economic Reintegration of Armed Persons and Groups (*Alta Consejería para la Reintegración Social y Económica de Personas y Grupos Alzados en Armas*) was created (Decree 3043/2006, *Presidencia de la República* 2006, see also FIP 2014: 23). In 2011, it was renamed the Colombian Reintegration Agency for Armed Persons and Groups (*Agencia Colombiana para la Reintegración de Personas y Grupos Alzados en Armas*) (Decree 4138/2011, *Presidencia de la República* 2011), or simply the Colombian Reintegration Agency (ACR).

In 2008, the government finally formulated a proper public reintegration policy – *la Política de Reintegración Social y Económica* (DNP 2008). The set-up of the ACR, together with this new policy, brought about a number of important innovations and changes (see ACR 2014: 7 and CNMH 2015: 170-171), relevant both for collectively and individually disengaged combatants, which therefore deserve to be highlighted in more detail before concluding this section.

6.2.3 SETTING UP THE ACR: EX-COMBATANTS BECOME “PARTICIPANTS”

The new reintegration policy and the creation of a new institutional framework through the ACR brought about positive developments, but also challenges. On a positive note, analysts have noted:

- 1) a more holistic approach to reintegration manifest in the terminological shift from reincorporation or reinsertion (short-term) to reintegration (CNRR 2011: 70) based on

– at least on paper – a community-gear approach.¹⁸⁶ Reintegration was now understood as the “sum of all processes associated with the reinsertion, reincorporation and social and economic stabilization of minors and adults undergoing voluntarily an individual or collective demobilization, with a special emphasis on the acceptance of these persons by the receiving community and the active participation of society in their inclusion in civilian, legal life” (see Decree 3032/2016, *Presidencia de la República* 2006, Article 2),

- 2) the decentralization of the ACR, which set up regional centers in order to avoid the mass migration of former combatants to urban centers. At the time of research in 2012, the ACR operated 29 regional centers, and had expanded to 34 centers by 2016 (ACR 2016b),
- 3) the professionalization of assistance to former combatants, which had previously been criticized for lacking coordination among the different public entities involved in attending to the demobilized population (see Denissen 2010: 334). The ACR developed a standardized reintegration roadmap, specialized its assistance, and started to provide differentiated services according to the former combatants’ profiles. The agency also designed support material for professionals (“*reintegradores*”, see CNMH 2015: 38) working closely with former combatants (personal interview, *Centro Mundial* staff, May 28, 2012, Bogotá),¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ In order to enhance local reconciliation processes, community leadership and peaceful coexistence, the reintegration policy created in 2008 spelled out four different strategies, including human rights and alternative dispute resolution mechanism trainings, the strengthening of citizen participation, the organization of symbolic events, and projects enhancing the socio-economic development of communities receiving former combatants (DNP 2008: 26, 52). However, its scope and incidents have been very limited (CNMH 2015: 212).

¹⁸⁷ As of today, the reintegration roadmap consists of eight dimensions, including a personal and family dimension, education, productivity/income generation, housing, health, citizenship, and security (ACR 2014: 9). Programing was differentiated according to former combatants’ health situation (e.g. special programs for the disabled), their function within the group (e.g. special programs for mid-level commanders), their age (e.g. specific intervention for both elderly people as well as young – minor – people) and according to their gender (personal interview, ACR staff,

- 4) the unification of services provided to individually disengaged and collectively demobilized militants, resulting also in the unification of amounts of “humanitarian aid” – now termed “economic reintegration support” – paid to former militants (see IRG n/a).
- 5) Ultimately, reintegration was elevated to state policy, with its new home in the Special Administrative Unit (*Unidad Administrativa Especial*) within the Administrative Department of the Presidency of the Republic (*Departamento Administrativo de la Presidencia de la República*). This move meant a considerable step towards more financial and administrative independence, and was aimed to ensure that reintegration efforts would continue regardless of governmental changes (Ospina Valencia 2015, ACR 2014: 9).

However, despite these institutional advances, the ACR’s reintegration scheme has been regarded as flawed, as it rests on a principally “depoliticized and individualized” approach to post-militancy trajectories. The ACR introduced the notion of “participant” (instead of reinserted or reincorporated person) and later “person in process of reintegration” (*persona en proceso de reintegración*, PPR), supposedly to create a sense of belonging for the ex-combatant and to counter the stigmata attached to the terms *reincorporado* and *reinsertado*, that remitted people to their “criminal” or “terrorist” past according to ACR staff (Cárdenas Sarrias 2012: 78). However, the understanding of ACR participants of a pre-designed process also highlights 1) the technical and administrative approach of a bureaucratic entity towards former militants perceived as beneficiaries of public services, and again, 2) the need to promote former combatants’ break with their past. Regarding the first point, the idea of the state handing out benefits to former combatants has, however, been disputed, with former combatants claiming that a whole range of reintegration services, such as access to health or education, were basic citizen rights the ACR was cloaking as benefits^{viii}.

December 22, 2012, Bogotá).

Regarding the second point, interpreting militancy as failed identity-building, reintegration services have been offered on the assumption that the existing state and societal system are a stable and normalizing environment within which the “a-normal demobilized person” needed to be incorporated – as a failed individual, not as a political subject. This implicitly required people “to undergo a strong personal change and adapt his or her values” (CNMH 2015: 39, see also IRG n/a). This approach has also been transmitted and internalized by former militants undergoing the ACR’s (psychosocial) workshops focused on promoting ex-combatants’ “break with their past” (CNMH 2015: 77-78). As highlighted by one interviewee:

“Many demobilized people have incorporated the government’s discourse that former combatants are perverted terrorists. So people leave their organization thinking they are terrorists. [...] But I wasn’t a terrorist, I was a socio-political [activist], I was a revolutionary rebel. [...] I had convictions and my reasons to be there.” (personal interview, *Fundación Líderes de Paz* member, February 02, 2012, Bogotá^{ix}).

Thereby, former militants’ post-life trajectories have been reduced to an apolitical and functional integration into the liberal, economic and cultural system in place, without any means of participation, interpellation or validation of the experience and knowledge ex-combatants might have (CNMH 2015: 66). Consequently, former militants have also not been considered as valid interlocutors in the design, implementation and evaluation of reintegration programs, which have instead remained the exclusive task of the implementing agency. As pointed out by one interviewee (personal interview, *Corporación ANDES* member, May 08, 2012, Bogotá), the ACR’s approach was focused on the psychosocial aspects of reintegration, making the supporting psychologists, not the demobilized individuals, the main protagonists of reintegration. Interviewees explained the possibility of such an individualized approach with the absence of any collective negotiation process. In fact, they highlighted that individual desertion was based on individual agreements with the government, outside of any larger transition framework. The difficulties resulting from this lack of collective representation have also been critically highlighted by former guerrilla combatants of the 1990s. As one former female guerrilla militant put it: “How would one person alone feel, facing this state?”

One person alone, who leaves and is faced with the judging look of society, the guilt, the criminalization, and with being seen as a scoundrel” (IDRC documentary 2012, 00:26:00).

As a result, interviewees have argued that many former combatants have become highly dependent upon the reintegration program, as it starts to influence and change former combatants’ views on the country (personal interview, *Corporación ANDES* member, May 08, 2012, Bogotá^x) and foster a form of assistentialism (ibid., personal interview, *Red de Reporteros* member, May 10, 2012, Bogotá). Eventually, national public reintegration policies were deemed a complete failure (personal interview, *Corporación ANDES* member, May 08, 2012, Bogotá), contrary to Bogotá’s municipal reintegration policy that followed a different approach and stimulated the creation of small-scale initiatives by providing training and office or meetings space (see CNMH 2015: 94). Both a former and the current director of the PAPDRB (personal interview, PAPDRB former director, January 23, 2012, Bogotá and personal interview, PAPDRB director, December 22, 2012, Bogotá) highlighted that the national reintegration policy was mainly driven by a security and counter-insurgency doctrine, whereas the municipal reintegration policy was driven by a peace and reconciliation agenda, and was thus more inclined to strengthen organizational processes of former combatants and their capacity to liaise with local and national authorities and lobby for their needs. In line with this, the PAPDRB also supported the ownership and protagonism of former combatants within the municipal reintegration program by strategically employing former combatants from different groups as so-called “peace officers” (*gestores de paz*) responsible for accompanying former combatants’ reintegration processes and strengthening the articulation of the program in its target population (ODDR 2012c, Monsalve 2007). While the program initially organized the support provided by the *gestores de paz* according to group belonging – former guerrilla members attending to demobilized guerrilla militants vice versa – it later abandoned this separation and introduced a territorial approach (ODDR 2012c).

To summarize, the weak political identity of paramilitary units, their mercenary structure and their grave human rights violations, that remained largely unaddressed, led to an extreme lack of legitimacy of both the demobilization process as well as the paramilitary leaders, thereby hampering the emergence of legitimate post-militancy organizational processes. The delay and subsequent bureaucratic and individualized approach of the

reintegration program, in turn, further hampered post-militancy organizational processes of former rank-and-file paramilitary combatants. Processes of remobilization remained largely driven by 1) new forms of mercenary-type engagement in armed activities, or 2) income-generating organizational formats set up in the framework of the reintegration program, as will be outlined in the following.

6.2.4 BACRIM AND INCOME-GENERATING PROJECTS PERPETUATING COERCION AND MILITANT STRUCTURES

This section discusses the remobilization of former paramilitary militants in two main forms: the continuation of joint criminal activities, and the establishment of income-generating organizations, so-called “Productive Projects for Peace” (*Proyectos Productivos para la Paz*, PPP).

On the one hand, and according to the ACR’s former director Alejandro Eder, about 20% of former paramilitary members are subject to recidivism (see CNMH 2015: 213). Already in 2005, the MAPP-OEA highlighted in its first reports that paramilitary blocs were continuing their drug-related activities, extortion and other crimes, and that new paramilitary groups were emerging in the midst of ongoing demobilization, replacing recently disarmed groups (see Cárdenas Sarrias 2012: 21). As one interviewee of the AGC project put it quite bluntly:

“The thing is that we demobilized in 2005 but we continued working until about 2007. One keeps on doing business, like kidnapping, drugs. There were two modalities: either you do it alone or you do it with your group. But you do it secretly, because the government can cut your (demobilization) benefits. The demobilization was more about convenience than about really wanting to change. As I said, we demobilized in 2005 but I kept on working until 2007 when they killed my superior and his wife and this was the moment when I talked to my partner and we decided to stop doing this work because it had turned out to be very dangerous. And of course, from 2005 on, I received support from the reintegration program” (interview code PSTO45, AGC database).

As of today, many former paramilitary members have re-engaged or simply continued their activities in the BACRIM format under similar framework conditions and salary levels. Another interviewee (interview code BOG6, *ibid.*), for instance, reported that they had been offered a salary of 800,000 COP a month (roughly 400 US dollars or 1,5 times the minimum wage in 2012¹⁸⁸), including five holidays every three months, for joining one BACRIM outlet. As highlighted by CNRR (2011: 119), at least 17% of BACRIM members are former paramilitary militants. According to a Human Rights Watch report (2010), most of these groups are led by former mid-level commanders of the AUC, who either failed to demobilize or underwent fraudulent demobilization, allowing them to continue their illegal activities while at the same time receiving public reintegration benefits. A more detailed analysis by CNRR (2011: 129) distinguishes between paramilitary dissident groups (that did not participate in the demobilization process), re-armed groups (that participated in the demobilization process but then re-armed or joined existing criminal groups), emergent groups (that were not very visible before, but became more influential after the demobilization process) and hybrid groups (a combination of re-armed and emerging groups). These groups often operate in former paramilitary territories and display the same modes of operations, including social control, threats, assassinations, civilian displacement, and social cleansing. What distinguishes them from former paramilitary structures, however, is their lack of a counter-insurgency discourse or national character (see CNRR 2011: 24-25, 122-123). However, the two most significant BACRIMs according to the ODDR (2012a: 2) – the *Los Rastrojos* and *Los Urabeños* – have managed to create sufficient alliances, or integrate other smaller groups in order to enable them to operate in all departments of the country but Vaupés by 2014 (CNMH 2015: 41). Between 2012-2014, over 320,000 persons registered with the Unified Victim's Registry as victims of violence perpetrated by BACRIMs, most often due to displacement (see Bohórquez Contreras 2016). Especially on the Caribbean coast – a territory supposedly pacified after the demobilization process of the paramilitary, BACRIMs have

¹⁸⁸ According to fxtop currency converter on January 2012 available online at: <http://fxtop.com/> (accessed February 20, 2017).

been accused of threatening social leaders of victims' and human rights organizations and land restitution activists (*ibid.*, see also CNMH 2015: 41), a scenario that is hardly helpful in generating processes of re-encounter between former militants and other social groups.

However, this dynamic was also visible in the creation of legal ex-combatant organizations linked to security projects and income-generating projects. With regard to the first case, Romero (2007: 469) has outlined how the privatization of security has particularly affected regions with a formerly strong presence of paramilitary groups, such as the Urabá region, the northwestern parts of the country, the Antioquia department as well as the Atlantic coast. Here, former paramilitary leaders or their close allies have set up private security companies (at times outside the law) that continue to coerce local communities, thereby continuing the paramilitary's identity as "violence entrepreneurs".

On the other hand, and according to a nationwide survey of the National University's DDR Observatory, a large number of the 263 former combatant organizations identified between 2002 and 2009 were created after the demobilization of paramilitary units. However, their set-up and overall purpose were quite different from the ex-combatant organizations of the 1990s. Created by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, productive projects for peace (PPP) consisted of income-generating activities, mostly in the agricultural sector, with a purely economic purpose.¹⁸⁹ With an average participant rate of 50 people, some of the projects gathered just a few former militants, while others consisted of up to 500 demobilized individuals¹⁹⁰ (personal interview, ACR staff, December 22, 2011, Bogotá). Ex-combatants

¹⁸⁹ While these projects lacked a clear social or communal approach, they nevertheless incorporated local community members. This was, however, unintentional and due to the lacking workforce. Community participation nevertheless remained relatively low, as many projects struggled financially and did not follow the logic of a peasant culture in which people live and work on their own land instead of commuting to their work place (personal interview, ACR staff, December 22, 2011, Bogotá).

¹⁹⁰ In many cases, the officially registered number of ex-combatants was much higher than the actual number of participants, as many people were unhappy with the project and simply left and settled down in a different area. In other cases, former combatants lacked the necessary agricultural knowledge.

interested in participating in the project had to join the initiative as an employee by investing their seed money granted by the ACR, which made them owners of a project that was managed by a private operator. However, ACR staff reported the drawbacks of such a set-up, in which former paramilitary commanders often forced their former subordinates to join the project, thereby preventing participants from developing a sense of ownership or commitment. In the end, this led to a situation where “people didn’t grasp the meaning of an ‘association’ beyond a mere partnership of convenience, a way to earn a living”, resulting in the high fluctuation and dispersal of participants (personal interview, ACR staff, December 22, 2012, Bogotá). In addition, the projects were often marked by poor management and corrupt practices (personal interview, ACR staff, December 22, 2012, Bogotá). Most crucially, the projects incited conflicts of interest with the local population. Problems arising from situations in which projects were not only directed by former paramilitary leaders, but also executed on their (wrongly or rightly acquired) lands, were also highlighted in an interview with ACR staff, taking the experience of the Agrarian Lumber and Cattle Association of the Sinú (*Asociación Maderera Agrícola y Ganadera del Sinú*, ASOMAGS) as an example (ibid.). In that specific case, which was also widely taken up by Colombian media (e.g. Saralde Duque 2013 and *Verdad Abierta* 2015), an estimated 500 participants of a long-term forestry project had all belonged to the same paramilitary unit, while the project itself was set up on the lands of their commander. However, according to the regulations of the Justice and Peace Law, this land should have been returned to the original owners it had been forcibly taken from, thereby causing a dilemma in which the implementation of a long-term reintegration project had to be weighed against the victim reparations.¹⁹¹ The case of ASOMAGS resonated throughout Colombia as a powerful warning that poorly designed income-generation projects had the potential to promote the legalization and legitimization of expropriation and make the restitution of lands and the reparation of victims even more

¹⁹¹ The Victims’ Law specifically stipulates that members of armed groups are not considered victims and therefore cannot benefit from the law, with the exception of minors (see Herrera and González 2013: 77).

complex. As a result, the ACR itself concluded that the PPPs were a failure (2014: 8) in that they reproduced or upheld former armed groups' command chains.

Last not but least, it is worth mentioning that paramilitary control over territories was not only ensured with violence and threats, but in some instances also by investing in social projects, health care and educational infrastructure, as well as promoting organizational processes. Thus, paramilitary leaders also sporadically set up legal social projects and foundations, with the most important one being the Foundation for Peace Córdoba (*Fundación por la Paz de Córdoba*, FUNPAZCOR) (see Verdad Abierta 2014). Fidel Castaño himself, right-wing drug lord, paramilitary and co-founder of the AUC, in turn had set up FUNPAZCOR which operated in Córdoba along the Atlantic coast and continued its activities beyond the demobilization process. However, FUNPAZCOR has been regarded by analysts as a mere “fake foundation”, an instrument long used by the Castaño brothers to legalise some of their illegally acquired lands and masking their properties by “donating” it to the foundation. As was highlighted by one of the special Justice and Peace Prosecutors:

“With the objective to legalize the expropriation of lands and hamper their retracing, the Castaño brothers set up a series of organizations and foundations. First, they donated land to these foundations, which was then divided into smaller lots and given to a group of people, in the majority of cases pre-selected by the Castaño brothers themselves. These people were then asked to sell their lands back to the foundation” (see Verdad Abierta 2014).

As a result, these organizations have been completely discredited. As one interviewee pointed out, the problem with these organizations was that “these weren't initiatives driven by [rank-and-file] former militants, but by the commanders of the demobilized paramilitaries, in order to continue to exercise control over [...] territory and people” (personal interview, *Corporación ANDES* member, May 08, 2012, Bogotá).

To summarize, organizational processes of former paramilitary militants have been characterized by the lack of a political agenda, the use of pre-existing command chains for criminal purposes, and the poor implementation of community-centered reintegration, at times peaking in clashes with local communities and thereby further hampering the creation of spaces for re-encounter. In the worst cases, collective remobilization processes have resulted

in the creation of new illegal armed groups or re-recruitment into existing ones. Against this background, the paramilitary demobilization process lacked legitimacy and international support (see CNRR 2011: 52).¹⁹² However, at an individual level, former paramilitary members have integrated local ex-combatant initiatives set up jointly with their guerrilla peers, as will be explored in the next section.

Having discussed the set-up of former combatant organizations following the collective demobilization of paramilitary units, the next section turns to an analysis of ex-combatant organizations emerging from individual disengagement processes.

6.3 ORGANIZATIONAL PROCESSES AFTER INDIVIDUAL DISENGAGEMENT (1994-2016)

This section is primarily concerned with the specific challenges individual desertion poses for ex-combatant organizational processes. However, it should be clarified from the beginning that most of the organizations looked at here have a mixed membership structure. While they have most often been initiated by guerrilla deserters, they also incorporate paramilitary militants who either disengaged individually or were part of the collective demobilization process in the years 2003-2006.

Individual desertion constitutes a numerically important element in Colombia's reintegration puzzle, with more than 26,000 former militants having chosen personal disengagement since 2002 (see Figure 9, Annex 3).¹⁹³ As a result of the large time span of 26

¹⁹² The MAPP-OEA eventually started to monitor and assist the AUC's demobilization process in early 2004 after a request from then President Uribe Vélez. The mission provided support to the demobilization and verification process and also observed the negotiations with the AUC (see Arnson 2005: 7 and *Presidencia de la República* 2006: 7).

¹⁹³ However, a large number of registered demobilized people do not join the reintegration program, be it out of fear, because they do not want to rely on economic support, or because they re-engaged in delinquency. While the ACR admitted in 2001 that more than 42% of the people demobilized had gotten "lost in transition" (CNMH 2015), this number had decreased to 15% or roughly 9,000 people

years covered here, individual deserters' profiles vary and cover former militants of different groups, even though the great majority has been individually demobilizing from the ranks of the FARC-EP.¹⁹⁴

Opening the legal possibility for state-sponsored support in the case of individual disengagement had the twofold aim to 1) include guerrilla militants into the reintegration schemes created after the peace agreements in the early 1990s, and 2) stimulate desertion, thereby weakening remaining guerrilla movements. In 1994, the government introduced Presidential Decree 1385/1994 (*Presidencia de la República* 1994) to enable guerrilla members who “voluntarily abandon the subversive organizations” to join existing reintegration schemes (CNMH 2015: 88).¹⁹⁵ While Decree 1385/1994 only covered guerrilla deserters, Decree 128/2003 (*Presidencia de la República* 2003) later also enabled paramilitary militants to join the reintegration program on an individual basis until the closure of their collective demobilization and with the exception of minors.¹⁹⁶ At first a low-scale phenomenon, increasing rates of individual disengagement shifted desertion into the focus of

in 2016 (see ACR 2016b, CNMH 2015: 78, 216). In addition, a study by FIP (2005b) on the role of mid-ranking FARC-EP commanders comes to the conclusion that processes of unregistered disengagement are not uncommon, especially if militants are given the possibility to put aside some of the organization's funds to build a new life without requiring economic support.

¹⁹⁴ According to information provided by the ACR (n/a), out of 22,990 individually demobilized people in the time period from 2002-2012, 15,852 (almost 70%) were from the ranks of the FARC-EP, with another 3,195 coming from the ranks of the ELN, and 478 from other guerrilla groups. The remaining people had demobilized from paramilitary units before 2006 or, in a few occasions, were minors who had joined paramilitary units and were admitted to the reintegration program even beyond 2006. In 2008, the government introduced a new decree (1059/2008, see *Presidencia de la República* 2008) that allowed jailed guerrilla members to apply to the Justice and Peace framework and join the ACR's reintegration roadmap.

¹⁹⁵ The few individual deserters that made use of this mechanism at the time were, however, often regarded with mistrust by militants who had negotiated collective demobilization, as they were regarded as traitors to their organization, and in some instances also suspected to have collaborated with the armed forces (CNMH 2015: 89).

¹⁹⁶ BACRIM militants are not regarded as actors of the conflict and hence can only be “reintegrated” through ordinary justice procedures.

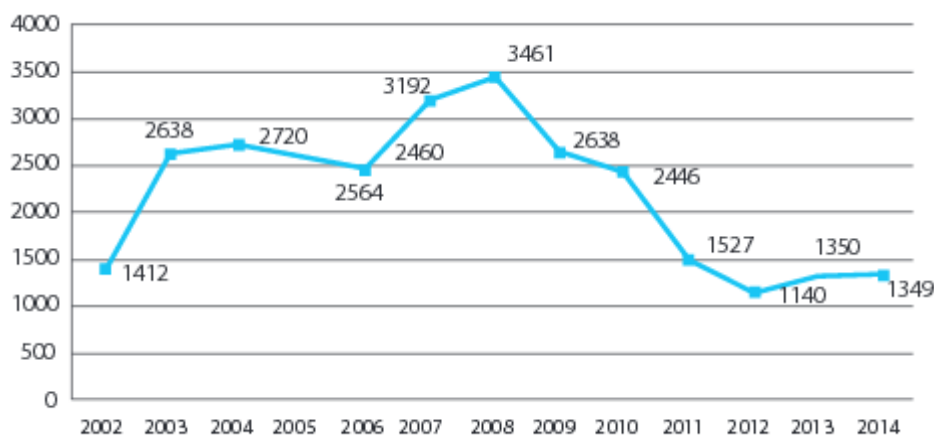
the Uribe Veléz administration.¹⁹⁷ Following a basically economic analysis of disengagement, the government increased economic benefits for ready-to-desert non-state combatants, including offering extra bonuses¹⁹⁸ for those ready to provide relevant military information on their former group. This policy shift was very visible in the mediatized campaign of the National Defense Ministry, that conceptualized special radio and TV spots promising individual and family benefits through the reintegration program, along with “freedom” and “new life opportunities” (Hoyos 2010). As a result of the government’s prioritization of desertion as one key element of its counter-insurgency and anti-terrorism strategy, individual desertion became a collective phenomenon (see Figure 5 on the following page).

Section 6.3.1 discusses a number of challenges related to individual disengagement before 6.3.2 highlights the impact of individualized reintegration schemes on former combatants’ organizational processes. Section 6.3.3 closes by discussing in how far ex-combatant organizations emerging outside of formal negotiation processes have been contributing to creating spaces of re-encounter with the former enemy and forging an ex-combatant identity beyond group affiliation.

¹⁹⁷ In 2002, a study commissioned by the government reported that individual demobilization had gone from 150 cases in 1998 to 1,200 cases in 2001 (Pinto Borrego et al. 2002: 1). The study highlighted mistreatment as the most prominent (37%) among various factors for disengagement, including lack of economic remuneration (19%), the deprivation of liberty (17%) and false promises (16%) (ibid.: 6). In general, when it comes to individual disengagement, research by Rosenau et al. (2014: 280) has identified five main incentives: the desire for a change of life, pressure from military operations, absence from family, demoralization about the armed struggle/war fatigue, and mistreatment. Particularly the last point was also highlighted several times during my interview phase in Colombia and in connection with the often harsh system of sanctions within the various groups. Fearing a serious sanction (that could go as far as a death penalty) was an important trigger for leaving the armed group (see Gutiérrez Sanín 2008: 13 for a more detailed analysis of penalties). However, most relevant for the analysis of the government were the poor economic living conditions in the illegal armed groups and the security risks associated with guerrilla life.

¹⁹⁸ See Cárdenas Sarrias (2012: 84-86) for an overview of bonuses paid out for different activities and information ranging from 10,000 COP (e.g. for locating animals) to up to 1, billion COP (for locating money hide-outs) or approximately 5 to 770,000 US dollars as of 2012 according to fxtop currency converter available online at: <http://fxtop.com> (accessed February 20, 2017).

Figure 5: Individual disengagement 2002-2014



Source: CNMH 2015: 120.

6.3.1 “LITTLE DUCKS IN THEIR NEW PLACE” – CHALLENGES OF INDIVIDUAL DISENGAGEMENT

A number of challenges individual deserters face have been outlined both in the literature and throughout interviews, including most prominently security risks related to the militarization of disengagement (see Villarraga Sarmiento 2013, Cárdenas Sarrias 2012, Hoyos 2011, and Pinto Borrego et al. 2002: 4), deserters’ image as traitors, mistrust among former combatants, the unwillingness to engage in yet another collective endeavor, as well as the individualized approach by the reintegration program that did not provide incentives for collective organizational processes (see 6.2).

Firstly, in the framework of the Defense and Democratic Security Policy (*Política de Defensa y Seguridad Democrática*), Decrees 128/2003 and 2767/2004 (*Presidencia de la República* 2003 and 2004) stipulated that the provision of relevant military information was not only remunerated, but also an obligatory step in the certification process of individual deserters by the National Defense Ministry’s Operative Committee for the Abandonment of Arms (*Comité Operativo para la Dejación de Armas, CODA*) (see CNMH 2015: 32). Reintegration, instead of being part of a larger peacebuilding project, was thereby limited to narrower security perspective. The practice of using former combatants as paid informants, including in military operations, increased the mistrust of still operating groups against their

deserters and thus posed considerable security risks for former militants (see ODDR 2012).¹⁹⁹ One interviewee compared individually demobilized ex-combatants with “little ducks in their new place, afraid of people asking them things about the past” and ending up not talking to anybody because they “had turned into [military] targets of their former groups. Those who had been their family before, were now their enemies” (personal interview, *Centro Mundial* staff, May 28, 2012, Bogotá^{xi}). Throughout the interviews conducted in the framework of the ACG project, former militants themselves critically discussed this policy. While some freely admitted their participation in intelligence or military operations against their former group (e.g. interview code PSTO49, AGC database), others rejected outright the use of former combatants as informants, either because of the security risks this posed for former militants and at times also their families (e.g. interview code PSTO45, AGC database) or because of their ongoing loyalty to their former armed group (e.g. personal interview, *Corporación ANDES*, May 08, 2012, Bogotá).²⁰⁰ Resulting safety concerns did not only enforce ex-combatants’ hiding strategies, but also forced former combatants to leave the area they were originally from or had been active in during their militancy and search the anonymity of a big city, where most of them did not possess a social network (personal interview, *Fundación Surcando Caminos* member, February 27, 2012, Bogotá^{xii})

Secondly, this situation was also aggravated by suspicions amongst former combatants themselves. On the one hand, there were in some instances doubts about the true character of former militants. Research has pointed to the incorporation of false deserters (*colados*) – often family members or acquaintances of guerrilla militants who had some basic knowledge about guerrilla life and operations, and for whom the economic benefits from the government

¹⁹⁹ While recidivism among individual deserter militants is rather low, as their disengagement is mostly based on a voluntary and autonomous decision and a strong motivation to return to civilian life, re-recruitment most commonly leads to engagement in paramilitary or neo-paramilitary groups, as the very condition of being a deserter makes it difficult to be accepted back into old groups (CNMH 2015: 101).

²⁰⁰ In addition, there was also mentioning that the bonuses promised for participating in military operations were not duly paid (interview codes BOG5 and PSTO38 AGC database).

outplayed the risks associated with being registered as a former combatant – into the reintegration program (see CNMH 2015: 32, Cárdenas Sarrias 2012: 14, personal interview, *Fundación Líderes de Paz* member, February 02, 2012, Bogotá, and interview code BOG38, AGC database). On the other hand, cases of active guerrilla members (so-called “*infiltrados*”) infiltrating the reintegration programs on the lookout for the deserters they deem as traitors have also been reported (CNMH 2015: 119, also interview code BOG5, AGC database). As a result, individually disengaged former militants have difficulties in finding a trusted network – a fact that reinforces their isolation.

In this context, interviewees referred to the ambivalent process of “individualization”. Research in the field of psychology (Castro 2001: 38) underlines how the time within an armed group is focused on the collective and its needs, whereas civilian life is more focused on the individual aspects of life. It has been argued that managing the transition from collective to individual life is especially challenging, at times even traumatic, for former combatants who disengage on their own accord without taking part in any collective demobilization process, as they go through this transition phase “without the support of a group that offers them an identity, a membership, some behavioral orientation, means and ends” (Cárdenas Sarrias 2005: 255). On the other hand, interviewees highlighted how disengaging from their group resulted in a new sense of freedom, along with a reluctance to engage in yet another collective endeavor: “Many people spent a lot of time in their group and felt that they had to comply, comply, and comply with their group. [...] So now these people don’t want to commit to anything anymore, [...] they just want to be free” (personal interview, *Corporación ANDES* member, May 18, 2012, Bogotá^{xiii}).

As a result of individual post-militancy trajectories taking place in a political void, due to the absence of a political negotiation process and the depoliticized approach of the reintegration program, former combatant’ security concerns and their resulting hiding strategies, mistrust amongst former militants, dispersal after militancy due to the change of location, reluctance to return to hierarchical command structures, as well as the lack of

incentives for organizational formats, the emergence of any solid large-scale ex-combatant organization from individual disengagement processes has so far been severely hindered.²⁰¹ However, a number of small-scale ex-combatant organizations have been created on the initiative of former combatants in the city of Bogotá, often with the direct or indirect support of public or private entities as the following section highlights.

6.3.2 EX-COMBATANT ORGANIZATIONS AS OPPORTUNITIES FOR SELF-HELP AND REPRESENTATION

Anecdotal evidence suggests that former combatants' organizational processes have been partly responding to changes in the reintegration policies, thus creating confusion and fears and thereby spurring the need for self-help and collective representation. According to one interviewee, organizational processes of former combatants in Bogotá originated in 2003 from the need to lobby for the improvement of the most immediate concerns of demobilized people, such as the payment of the monthly allowances (*bono*), and their need to directly contact the government in order to influence the program's design (personal interview, *Corporación ANDES* member, May 08, 2012, Bogotá). This was particularly important at the time, as the new institutional set-up of reintegration assistance and shifts in reintegration policies under the newly elected Uribe Vélez administration largely brought about confusion, especially regarding the payment schemes (*ibid.*). In 2003, a number of small-scale former combatant organizations representing former guerrilla and paramilitary militants alike therefore organized a peaceful protest march, mobilizing about 400-500 people in Bogotá's city center to remind the government of their unmet needs. In addition, these organizations also made use of other instruments, such as petitions and legal procedures through the *acción de tutela* – a special mechanism introduced by the 1991 constitution to provide citizens with

²⁰¹ While the allusion to national processes in the name of some organizations hints to larger-scale movements, this is mostly not the case. As one interviewee revealed, "at the beginning, the 'national' association consisted of five people" (personal interview, *Corporación ANDES* member, May 08, 2012, Bogotá).

efficient and easy access to legally ensuring their fundamental rights are respected by public authorities (for more information see Bustamante Peña 2011) – to claim their rights with the reintegration program. They also created a roundtable (*mesa de trabajo*) that gave birth to the creation of the Foundation for the Assistance and the Defense of Demobilized People (*Fundación para la Atención y Defensa de los Desmovilizados*, FUNDADEM), which was relatively successful in channeling ex-combatants' claims, and also managed to achieve some degree of interlocution with authorities responsible for reintegration. However, with lacking widespread support, the initiatives never managed to spread to the national level and were disassembled after about one year (see CNMH 2015 93, personal interview, *Fundación Líderes de Paz* member, February 02, 2012, Bogotá, see also IRG n/a on the fragility and the lack of political incidence of these initial mobilizations).

At the time of research, again, public reintegration policies had just been subject to change. In order to address the flaws of the LJP and to increase control over the demobilized population, Law 1424/2010 (*Congreso de Colombia* 2010) had established new obligations for former combatants responsible for “minor crimes” (e.g. membership in an armed group or the illegal bearing of arms) in order for them to benefit from transitional justice mechanisms, including: 1) their full compliance with their reintegration roadmap, a measure that also aimed at improving governmental control over the whereabouts of the demobilized population, 2) their participation in a non-judicial truth-telling process organized by the National Center for Historical Memory (*Acuerdos de Contribución a la Verdad*, see CNMH 2015: 43 and ACR 2010), and 3) completing social community service for 80 hours as part of their reintegration plan. At the time of research, this law had just been put into practice and had stirred a lot of confusion and fears among former combatants, who complained about the lack of a clear legal framework (personal interview, *Corporación ANDES* member, May 08, 2012, Bogotá).

As a result, various smaller-scale ex-combatant organizations were re-assembling a network to jointly lobby and directly address political decision-makers in support of ex-combatants' interests and needs. One such attempt was the creation of a municipal roundtable (*mesa distrital*) in Bogotá. According to one interviewee, this space was managed by ex-combatant organizations themselves and “not by the program, nor the ACR, nor public functionaries who only want to take advantage of us” (*ibid.*). The objective of the *mesa*

distrital was to enhance the political agency of former combatants regarding the design of reintegration policies (*Corporación ANDES* n/a: 2) and thereby tackle the situation of “complete lack of participation” and “total socio-political marginalization” of the ex-combatant population in the national reintegration program (*ibid.*). The roundtable therefore aimed to create space for debate and reflection. In addition, ex-combatant organizations participating in the *mesa distrital* worked to elaborate recommendations to improve the municipal and national reintegration program, as well as the coordination among the different entities involved in facilitating former militants’ post-militancy life trajectories.²⁰² At the time of research, roundtable participants were particularly hopeful that their efforts would be fruitful because Gustavo Petro, a former M-19 militant who had founded the Progressive Movement Party (*Movimiento Progresistas*), had just been elected Mayor of the City of Bogotá. It was hoped that his personal history as a former militant would have positive effects in terms of improving reintegration policies. However, his turbulent mandate²⁰³ did not particularly address ex-combatants’ issues.

The emergence of organizational formats outside collective transition processes has often been triggered by ex-combatants encountering one another at one of the sites of the official reintegration process. This could, for instance, be the *albergues*, housing facilities provided by the Ministry of Internal Affairs which serve as a first stop for ex-combatants on their path to reintegration (after which they have to settle at their own place, often in peripheral cheap neighborhoods), and where they usually stay for about three months, living together with fellow ex-combatants (personal interview, *Corporación ANDES* member, May

²⁰² One long-term objective was to consolidate the network and create national and regional roundtables. For now, the roundtable was preparing a public event within the Senate to discuss current reintegration challenges and to liaise directly with political decision-makers in order to make them aware of the failures of the reintegration program and the necessity of having ex-combatants participate directly in the design and implementation of reintegration policies (*Corporación ANDES* n/a: 2).

²⁰³ After a controversial reform of the municipal garbage collection system, Gustavo Petro was deposed of office by the public prosecutor, but then re-installed with a restraining order by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (*La Silla Vacía* 2016).

08, 2012, Bogotá, and personal interview, *Fundación Surcando Caminos* member, February 27, 2012, Bogotá).²⁰⁴ While these housing schemes originally operated on a group-based logic (i.e. separating former guerrilla and paramilitary members), they later grouped ex-combatants from different groups together, thereby opening the possibility for encounter between former militants from different sides of the conflict. For many, living in these sites meant (re)building relations and friendships with fellow former combatants, who often become their sole or most important support network for a new life in the city (Hoyos 2010: 16). Other sites of encounter are the psychosocial workshops or the educational courses ex-combatants take as part of their reintegration scheme.

However, in other instances, ex-combatant organizations have also emerged from various capacity-building workshops offered by national and municipal reintegration programs. Interviewees mentioned for instance training courses taken with the ACR's Reference and Opportunity Center (*Centro de Referencias y de Oportunidades*, CRO), as well as NGOs (e.g. the *Centro Mundial* or the *Fundación para la Reconciliación*) offering conflict resolution training or other activities promoting reconciliation processes. In fact, interviewees argued that a number of NGOs started to discover the ex-combatant population as an interesting target group for third party-funded projects (see personal interview, *Centro Mundial* staff, May 28, 2012, Bogotá^{xiv}). Following this logic, a number of trained ex-combatants seized the opportunity to set up their own foundations and attract funding from (inter)national donors to conduct local projects enhancing processes of re-encounter, or become trained staff members of peacebuilding NGOs. Organizations emerging from such training opportunities, e.g. *Líderes de Paz*, have from the start emphasized their focus on reconciliation and conflict transformation. However, according to a representative from the organization *Centro Mundial*, the pressure of human rights organizations and civil society activities to pay greater attention to victim's rights has not only led to the creation of new

²⁰⁴ There were about 70 *albergues* in Bogotá. However, after a car bomb attack in 2005, 60% of them closed down and the residents were transferred to individual housing schemes. There were about 50 persons plus their families in each housing complex (CNRR 2015: 97).

laws, such as the Victims' Law, but also to a shift in public spending under the Santos administration, thereby reducing the available funding for initiatives focusing on ex-combatants' reintegration (personal interview, *Centro Mundial* staff, May 28, 2012, Bogotá, see also personal interview, *Corporación ANDES* member, May 18, 2012, Bogotá). In addition, particularly in Bogotá, the municipal reintegration program has also facilitated the set-up of smaller-scale ex-combatant initiatives by providing meeting or work spaces, as highlighted in 6.2.3.

As a result of their genesis, many of these small-scale organizations have been characterized by mixed-membership structures involving ex-combatants from different groups, often bringing together former guerrilla and former paramilitary militants (mostly from collective demobilization processes), and in some instances even non-combatants as technical advisers – at times a hazardous by-product of individual acquaintances, at times a result of an internal reflection process:

“Until 2011, ANDES was short for Asociación Nacional de Desmovilizados (National Association of the Demobilized), now it is a Corporación (Corporation). The name ‘association’ indicates that it gathers a specific population segment. And in the beginning, we were only former guerrilla members, so it was a very closed space. This changed when I met with [former paramilitary acquaintance] and we saw the need to make some progress. So we re-thought the idea, as we wanted to engage in politics and now, since we are a corporation, we are also open to the non-ex-combatant population” (personal interview, *Corporación ANDES* member, May 08, 2012, Bogotá).

In addition, they are most often led by “new leaders”, i.e. ex-combatants that did not necessarily have a leadership position during their militancy (the organization FUNDAPAM being an exception). As highlighted by CNMH (2015: 97), compared to the collective negotiation processes of the 1990s, individual deserters mostly displayed a lower educational background and less political and academic formation, as they most often held rank-and-file positions in guerrilla groups, whereas collective negotiation processes have included all levels in the command chain, up to the political and military leadership (ibid.). While there have been increasing efforts to target e.g. the FARC-EP mid-level commanders, in order to more strongly debilitate the FARC-EP as an organization, mid-level commanders have been found

to prefer choosing “silent desertion”, as they do not necessarily depend on the reintegration program’s financial support (see footnote 192).

Section 6.3.3 now discusses how the mixed-membership structure has led to the forging of new identities in the post-militancy period.

6.3.3 REVEALING MILITANT EXPERIENCES AND FORGING A COMMON IDENTITY

This section takes a look at two aspects that were positively highlighted by former combatants engaged in organizations emerging beyond collective demobilization processes and often based on mixed membership. Firstly, interviewees hinted to the contribution of their organizations to make former combatants visible in a context of high stigmatization, thereby making a first step towards re-encounter with society. Secondly, interviewees highlighted the facilitation of re-encounter with the former “enemy” and the forging of a common ex-combatant identity based on an understanding of being of the same “vulnerable population group”, a process that will be discussed critically below.

Regarding reflection processes on their stances towards their former opponents, various interviewees of organizations with mixed membership mentioned the value of their organization in bringing together – and furthering the reconciliation process between – former military enemies. In that sense, ex-combatant organizations were conceptualized both as space for reconciliation among militant peers, as well as an example of reconciliation for society: “There was a moment in my life when the paramilitaries were my antagonistic enemy which I had to kill under any circumstances. Today, we are doing projects together and we’ve made friends. This demonstrates that there are opportunities for transformation, for reconciliation and forgiveness” (personal interview, *Fundación Líderes de Paz* member, February 06, 2012, Bogotá). A number of interviewees shared their story of how their perceptions of their former enemy changed over time. Starting with feelings of fear and hatred (ibid., personal interview, *Red de Reporteros* member, May 10, 2012, Bogotá), dialogue projects and common activities helped interviewees move on to understand their shared history of engagement in war, their current common needs and living conditions, and sometimes even their shared values (see for

instance personal interview, *Fundación Surcando Caminos* member, February 27, 2012, Bogotá^{xv}) despite different political ideals.

This process of rapprochement also facilitated the reconceptualization of one's own ex-combatant identity, whereby the previously predominant group identity was gradually complemented – if for some not replaced – by a broader ex-combatant identity: “We were stripped of our group belonging and we took a step ahead. And we realized that we are all human beings and that we suffer from the same things and that we are one and the same population” (personal interview, *Corporación ANDES* member, May 18, 2012, Bogotá).

More specifically, other interviewees confirmed that the construction of this common ex-combatant identity unfolded by first understanding oneself as part of a wider vulnerable group and as a “victim at one point or another” of the conflict (personal interview, *Fundación Surcando Caminos* member, February 27, 2012, Bogotá, and personal interview, *Corporación ANDES* member, May 18, 2012, Bogotá^{xvi}).

Indeed, research suggests that at least the rank-and-file segments of armed groups are recruited from similar population sectors. So far, academic research has not produced coherent knowledge on whether the differences between ex-combatants are essential (people join paramilitary or guerrilla units because of distinct personal characteristics/motives) or circumstantial (people join either one or the other group because of external factors). Extensive research by Arjona and Kalyvas (2009: 1) comes to the conclusion that in Colombia, both guerrilla and paramilitary ex-combatants usually come from poor backgrounds and areas of low state presence, whereby guerrilla fighters more often have a rural – instead of an urban – background and a lower educational profile, probably because they are often recruited at an earlier age. In addition, research by Gutierrez Sanín (ibid.) comparing paramilitary and FARC-EP recruits argues that both groups attract “opportunists”²⁰⁵ and “activists” alike. In fact, a considerable number of FARC-EP members

²⁰⁵ In a situation where especially many rural families are struggling for their daily survival, the word “opportunistic” however must be read with care. As was highlighted by interviews conducted in the AGC project, many former combatants made the decision of joining an armed group against a

stated that they had joined the group expecting a salary (which was often due to miscommunication). This was also confirmed in the framework of the AGC project, where several former FARC-EP militants asserted that they had joined the group because of “false promises” or out of “economic motivation” (e.g. interview codes BOG11, VVO23a, VVO26, PSTO37, PSTO38, PSTO45, PSTO49, AGC database). However, FARC-EP respondents considerably more often indicated political motivation to join the armed group than their paramilitary counterparts. Out of 39 FARC-EP respondents, six referred to an ideological or political motivation for joining the group (interview codes BOG2, BOG3, BOG12, BOG18, VVO30, PSTO46a, *ibid.*), while only one of 17 paramilitary former militants (interview code BOG17, *ibid.*) referred to a political motivation. In line with this, Arjona and Kalyvas (2009) found that paramilitary recruits were more often driven by materialistic concerns than guerrilla fighters.

Nonetheless, they also conclude that one extremely important factor for recruitment into one or the other type of armed group is the geographical presence of a specific armed group in the home territory of a would-be-recruit (*ibid.*) This was also confirmed by one of my interviewees (personal interview, *Corporación ANDES* member, May 18, 2012, Bogotá^{xvii}), who described the poor prospects for life options in her youth ranging from becoming “a hooker, a *guerrillera* [female guerilla combatant], or a *narco’s* [drug lord] girlfriend” and continued to explain: “When I joined [the paramilitary], I did so because in the region where I lived the guerrilla was growing and they committed terrible crimes.” For this particular woman, a fundamental problem of the reintegration program in Colombia lies in the generalization and the lack of understanding of individual war careers, that often start from a position of extreme vulnerability: “Many combatants are themselves victims of the war who join one or the other group. One group killed my mother or my father and that’s why I joined the other group. [...] But first of all, they were victims” (*ibid.*). However, from a more critical

background of economic despair, not for personal enrichment.

perspective, this process of forging a common ex-combatant identity also brings along challenges.

While it is a fact that many former militants joined their groups from a context of vulnerability, this is not true for all former combatants. While forging a common ex-combatant identity based on ex-combatants' own victimhood might bring former militants closer together across conflict lines and thereby foster reconciliation among them, it might even enlarge the divide to the non-combatant victim population, which has extremely suffered from the activities and atrocities of these militants' former groups. In that sense, there needs to be a careful balancing between acknowledging the conditions that led people to take up arms in the first place and have made them go through traumatic experiences, and taking individual responsibility for one's own participation in war. In fact, some former combatants were even firm in outright rejecting their responsibility. Strategies consisted, for instance, in highlighting the socio-political conditions that forced people to join armed groups and the responsibility of the Colombian state in generating the conflict^{xviii}, in defending the good intentions of their respective group^{xix}, or – on a personal level – in emphasizing one's own merely political function within a group^{xx}, thereby evading responsibility for the group's atrocities. However, other interviewees held a more nuanced perspective and instead invoked a holistic vision of shared responsibility, including also the “white-collar” sectors of society (personal interview, *Corporación ANDES member*, May 18, 2012, Bogotá^{xxi}) that benefited from or even spurred the violence by others.

From yet another perspective, the “vulnerable population” discourse is also challenging as it can also be regarded as instrumental for national reintegration policies. Lumping together ex-combatants from different groups is also a useful strategy to further neutralize former combatants, and especially those with an insurgency background, as political subjects. In that sense, it is not surprising that also the director of the ACR asserted in an interview (see Ospina Valencia 2015), that both perpetrators and victims of the Colombian conflict belonged to “the most disadvantaged classes in Colombia. [...] Our demobilized people are a representation of the Colombian who lives in an isolated zone [of the country], vulnerable, without much opportunities and in the shelter of illegality.” In addition, one could argue that forging a common ex-combatant identity is even instrumental for the very ex-

combatants themselves in their search for representation beyond group affiliation. As highlighted by a staff member at the PAPDRB, himself a former EPL member:

“[b]ut the problem is that they don’t have a group affiliation anymore. So what they find as the common denominator are their common needs: education, health, housing, a productive project, and these kinds of things to ensure survival. They also share information about security measures, how to protect oneself, because they have to be careful” (personal interview, PAPDRB staff, May 11, 2012, Bogotá).

However, such a conflation of former group affiliation has been outright rejected elsewhere. The Female Combatants’ Network, for instance, has consciously chosen to only incorporate former female militants from different insurgency movements, as one of its aims consists in strengthening female combatants’ visibility, political participation and impact on the design of public policies. With such a political objective, it seemed appropriate to the network’s founders to focus their efforts on the work with politically affiliated network participants (personal interview, *Red Nacional de Mujeres Excombatientes* member, January 17, 2012, Bogotá). However, again, the difference is also linked to the fact that the network emerged after the collective demobilization processes in the 1990s, when group affiliation and political identity were carried on beyond the surrender of weapons.

Lastly, the construction of a joint ex-combatant identity was also reinforced by the common experience of rejection by, and at times neglect from the state and society at large. (personal interview, *Corporación ANDES* member, May 18, 2012, Bogotá). In fact, the main challenge for the ACR remains to reduce the stigmatization from parts of Colombia society towards the demobilized population.²⁰⁶ However, hiding former combatants from stigmatization might lead to even stronger marginalization, as it hinders genuine encounters

²⁰⁶ Other main challenges consist in enhancing the legal stability for demobilized people and the reintegration process, deepening the regionalization of the reintegration policy, and making innovations to the activities that the reintegration process is composed of (ACR 2015).

with community members. As outlined by Sonnabend (2014), every-day social discourses on ex-combatants are mainly mediated by third parties such as the media, and not by personal experience. As outlined by CNMH (2015: 208), positive developments in the field of DDR have not entered mainstream media coverage or managed to garner public interest. Prejudices arising from these discourses lead to further avoidance of contact, reinforcing the isolation and stigmatization of ex-combatants. As a result, one important task ex-combatant organizations have taken on consists in providing a safe space for making the experience of their members visible. The *Red de Reporteros* for instance has been promoted by Bogotá municipal reintegration program as an ex-combatant initiative composed of members from different groups, including former guerrilla members and ex-paramilitaries, who produced audio-visual material in order to make the experiences of former combatants as well as ordinary citizens in vulnerable communities visible^{xxii}. Members of the *Fundación Líderes de Paz* reported on their small-scale community projects, where they shared their militant experiences in safe spaces and after necessary periods of trustbuilding. These types of activities are particularly important for former combatants who demobilized individually and struggle with their journey of individualization.

To conclude, individual disengagement affects former combatants in a number of ways, including in their opportunities for collective political participation and representation (see Villaraga Sarmiento 2013: 126). As a result of security concerns, the dispersal after militancy due to change of location, the fear of individual people to be put back into hierarchical command structures, as well as the lack of incentives for organizational formats, ex-combatant organizations have remained small-scale, fragile and with limited outreach. However, on a local level, they have shown some ability to provide a platform for ex-combatants to lobby for their needs, express militant experiences, and forge collaboration between former enemies. However, on a flipside, ex-combatant organizations discussed here have also often been driven by project- and income-generation logics, and have potentially fueled a discourse that lumps together ex-combatants in the group of vulnerable individuals, thereby running the risk of stripping them of their political identity.

Discussing different pathways for former combatants' organizational processes after militancy, 6.1 and 6.2 respectively have revised the negotiation and demobilization processes

of the guerrilla groups that made the transition to civilian life in the early 1990s, and the paramilitary units that demobilized from 2003-2006. Section 6.3 has dealt with the particularities of former combatant organizations that emerged as initiatives of individually disengaged militants. On the basis of this analysis, Chapter VII singles out four factors that help explaining variation in ex-combatant organizations' ability to transform into a resource for peace.

CHAPTER VII: EX-COMBATANT ORGANIZATIONS' CAPACITIES TO SERVE AS A RESOURCE FOR PEACE: EXPLAINING VARIATION

Chapter VI has analyzed three different transition instances, two of them in the framework of collective demobilization processes, and one outside of such a collective process based on individual disengagement, as well as the types of ex-combatant organizations that have emerged from each. Based on a comparative analysis of these instances, a number of factors on the micro- (individual profiles of former combatants), meso- (factors on the group and organizational level) and macro- (factors referring to the overall political and security context) level that influence ex-combatant organizational processes have been identified (see Figure 6 at the end of 7.4). This chapter discusses four factors on the group/organizational level that emerged from the interview material with former combatants themselves and which explain variation in ex-combatant organizations' abilities to serve as a resource for peace.

These factors are of course not exhaustive and do not take fully into account the various macro-political conditions that are also important for ex-combatants' organizational processes. These include, for instance, the overall political context and public perception vis-à-vis armed groups and their transition process, the security situation former combatants disengage into, their legal security ensured for instance by transitional justice mechanisms, and the existence of a framework for victims' reparations which is conducive to reconciliation. As highlighted in Chapter VI, ex-combatant organizations emerging from the 1990s negotiation processes did so in the context of a political opening, as well as broad support for negotiations and society's readiness to accept these actors into the democratic game. All of these factors helped facilitate the active role that former combatant organizations could play. On the other side, the flawed demobilization process of the paramilitary units and the failure of the Justice and Peace Law to adequately address victims' needs and rights hampered the possibilities for re-encounter. In addition, in all three instances, demobilization or disengagement took place in the context of ongoing war, which severely endangered former combatants' safety and that of their organizations.

On the other side, this research has also hinted at the role of individual factors that enable former militants to engage actively in collective post-militancy trajectories, including

ex-combatants' functions within a group and the potential gap between leaders and followers, gender differences as well as personal profiles, and in particular the educational background of former militants. In addition, the experience a person takes away from armed militancy – positive or negative – will also determine his or her readiness to participate in post-militancy organizational processes. While these are valuable factors, Chapter VII takes a specific interest in the meso-level of transition and therefore centers on group-level factors. Section 7.1 discusses the relevance of group identity and in-group ties to the nature of its post-militancy organizational processes. Section 7.2 subsequently analyzes how the “capital of relations” that former combatant organizations can build on influences their ability to create spaces of re-encounter and outreach. Section 7.3 then turns to the ability of former combatants and their respective organizations to make use of their “insider knowledge”. Finally, 7.4 analyzes the opportunities for organizational development, partly linked to the design of reintegration policies.

As explored in Chapter VI, disengagement modalities have affected ex-combatant organizational processes in a number of ways. Therefore, the impact of the type of disengagement will be discussed within each of these sections.

7.1 IDENTITY AS THE FOUNDATION FOR POST-MILITANCY ORGANIZATIONAL PROCESSES

Having defined armed groups primarily as identity groups, it follows that a group's identity constitutes an important building block from which post-militancy organizational processes grow and that determines what ex-combatant organizations will stand for. The previous analysis has outlined significant differences between the identities of armed groups in Colombia. This section takes a particular interest in two dimensions: the strength of in-group ties as an indicator for solid organizational processes beyond militancy, and the political nature of the group's identity as an indicator for types of activities that might be implemented by ex-combatant organizations after militancy.

As outlined earlier, the guerrilla organizations that demobilized in the early 1990s were characterized by strong in-group identities and a political agenda. The content of the

peace agreements of the early 1990s, and the electoral success of political candidates of the former insurgency highlight the political origin, agenda and existing constituency of these armed movements. However, aside from creating or joining political parties, the insurgency movements also set up organizations tasked with facilitating post-militancy trajectories and working towards the socio-economic development of the regions under former guerrilla control. In that sense, the groups' political vision permitted the creation of projects that were linked to the promotion of peace policies, human rights, local development and citizen participation, allowing the different ex-combatant organizations to make an important social and political contribution in the regions in which they had formerly operated in (see Villaraga Sarmiento 2013: 24), and thereby facilitating former combatants' re-encounter with society. Most importantly, these organizations were developed throughout the implementation of regional development plans that directly resulted from governmental negotiations with the guerrilla groups. This helped former combatants become promoters of regional development.

Paramilitary units, on the other hand, have had a markedly different experience. Under the AUC's umbrella of a national platform, paramilitary units operated fairly independently from one another and have been based on a mercenary relationship between commanders and followers, whereby recruits were paid a salary in for their participation in armed activities. Together with the brutal practices paramilitary units have employed towards the local population and a lack of an ideological horizon promoting internal cohesion, this organizational set-up produced a far weaker in-group identity compared to the guerrilla movements. Research based on the biographies of former guerilla and paramilitary units by Cárdenas Sarrias (2005: 252-254, see 2.2) has for instance highlighted that former FARC-EP research respondents were more inclined to continue appreciating their former organization and its revolutionary ideal, and to display a certain self-esteem due to their former status as a member of the most powerful guerrilla organization in Colombia. The paramilitary ex-combatants that participated in the study, in turn, were much more reluctant to identify with their former group, questioning the often brutal practices they were subjected to during their initiation phase, and which they then applied to the civilian population (see 2.2). As a result of a lack of a political vision, and with a strong focus on the legal and economic benefits of reintegration, paramilitary members' post-militancy remobilization has been characterized by

a lack of socio-political organizational processes, as well as by the persistence of illegal structures and the creation of fragile income-generating projects without a socio-political or developmental agenda. According to Hoyos (2010), the design fault of these collective income-generating projects was that they built upon the example of former combatant organizations formed in the 1990s, however, without accounting for the political recognition, legitimacy and acceptance from the local population these had. According to *Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris* (2005: 3), it is thus precisely the political nature of the peace accords, ultimately linked to the political identity of the group, and the ensuing demobilizations of the 1990s that differentiate the negotiation and reintegration processes of the early 1990s from the paramilitary demobilization processes.

Finally, organizations emerging from individual initiatives, outside the framework of an official negotiation process, were characterized by yet another dynamic. As outlined previously, individual disengagement severely affects former combatants' opportunities for collective post-militancy trajectories. Instead of being part of a collectively negotiated agreement – which might entail community benefits – their disengagement does not take place in the context of any broader reform or developmental agenda that could facilitate their re-encounter with society (personal interview, *Corporación ANDES* member, May 08, 2012, Bogotá). As a result, their opportunities for re-encounter are driven by the public reintegration program's efforts to reduce ex-combatant stigmatization, and their own individual efforts.²⁰⁷

However, ex-combatants themselves have criticized that many of the organizational processes taking place outside a collective demobilization process lacked a clear political vision. Bringing together former combatants from different groups, these organizations were rather initiated by the daily struggle for survival, or the “*rebusque*” (Colombian expression for

²⁰⁷ In some cases, ex-combatants might bring money to the community, as their presence might pique the interest of international donors in getting active in the neighborhood (this was at least the case for Santa Rosa, where an ELN couple established *Juntas Comunes*, an organized security service run by ex-combatants, and a social foundation) (personal interview, *Universidad Nacional* researcher, December 14, 2012, Bogotá).

the everyday struggle to generate income whether through legal or illegal means, see Cárdenas Sarrias 2012: 132 for a definition and discussion of the concept). In fact, various interviewees revealed how their engagement in an ex-combatant foundation came about as a random by-product of the capacity building courses offered as part of the reintegration scheme. For instance, one person recalled that “maybe because I got this training in conflict resolution, I did end up here. Because before, I thought about opening an internet café and then I also took some baking classes and thought that maybe a bakery would be a good business” (personal interview, *Fundación Líderes de Paz* member, February 06, 2012, Bogotá). In that sense, it has been criticized that engagement in an ex-combatant organization has become a business. Interviewees criticized that this development did not only negatively affect the sustainability of the organization, but also led to situations of abuse and exploitation (personal interview, *Corporación ANDES* member, May 08, 2012, Bogotá^{xxiii}). Several interviewees hinted to situations where former combatants set up foundations in the name of their peers in order to receive project financing. However, without the necessary competency or even clear vision or mission, many of these organizations later dissolved, leading the ex-combatant population to lose trust in their self-proclaimed leaders or representatives (personal interview, *Corporación ANDES* member, May 18, 2012, Bogotá^{xxiv}). This discredit to the work of such foundations was expressed in an interview with former combatants who were trying to set up a business and become social entrepreneurs rather than setting up a foundation:

“There are foundations everywhere, real foundations, foundations that exist only on paper, foundations by name, foundations that are somewhere in between, foundations for whatever purpose. And we don’t want to be a foundation. There might be foundations that are good but in many cases people just want to make profit out of this and things are not clear” (personal interview, ONE OG member, May 04, 2012, Bogotá).

However, it is not only the identity of the group that seems to determine the capacity of ex-combatant organizations to serve as a resource for peace, but also the relationships that the group and especially the leaders have maintained with the civilian population and society more broadly during its operations.

7.2 THE CAPITAL OF RELATIONS

Linked to the identity of a group, this section discusses the relevance of an organization's social capital, a theme already discussed in Chapter III. While much of the DDR literature discusses the advantages and disadvantages of social capital referring in a restricted sense to former combatants' peer networks, this thesis takes a broader approach. Based on discussions with former combatants, it introduces the notion of an organization's "capital of relations" to refer to different types of relationships post-militancy organizations can rely on and that shape their capacity to reach out to different audiences (personal interview, PAPDRB staff, May 11, 2012, Bogotá). In sum, three main types of relational capital have been singled out in the interview material: 1) the relationships armed groups maintain with their constituencies, and hence the degree of legitimacy and acceptance former combatant organizations can build upon, 2) the degree of connectivity to other relevant organizations, social movements, political parties and academic spaces built up during (and before) militancy, and more specifically 3) the existence of legitimate leaders who help foster organizational processes in the post-militancy phase with their contacts and credibility.

Regarding armed groups' relations to local communities, studies have shown that armed groups in Colombia differ in the repertoire of violence that they apply. According to data from the CNMH (2013: 35), paramilitary groups have mainly relied on selective killings, massacres, forced disappearances and displacement, torture and threats, sexual violence and economic blockades. The guerrilla, in turn, has been known for resorting to kidnapping, selective killings, attacks against civilian goods, looting, terrorist attacks, threats, forced recruitment, as well as selective forced displacement. Their actions have also affected the civilian population, making them collateral damage of attacks against urban centers and the use of anti-personnel mines.²⁰⁸ As a result, CNMH (ibid.) concludes that "[t]he paramilitaries

²⁰⁸ According to the same source, statutory forces have been mainly responsible for arbitrary detention, torture, selective killings and forced disappearances, as well as for producing collateral damage due to bombardments and the disproportionate use of violence against the civilian

kill more often than the guerrilla, while the *guerrilleros* kidnap more and cause more destruction than the paramilitaries.” However, as these data lumps together all guerrilla groups, it is worthwhile mentioning that a large amount of guerrilla violence has been committed by still active insurgency movements, most prominently the FARC-EP. The guerrilla movements that demobilized in the 1990s – and thus before the absolute height of the conflict between the years 1996-2002 – had been known for committing very few infractions on the local population, instead focusing their armed activities on the state's security forces (see 5.2).

These differences have consequences for enabling re-encounter. One reason why former guerrilla organizations of the 1990s were better received by the community was their restricted use of violence against civilian society, which they regarded as their support base. Taking the case of the MAQL as the most prominent example, one important reason to explain the relatively smooth return of MAQL combatants to civilian life was the group's relations with their community during the war, which were based on the particular understanding of the MAQL as a self-defense and protection force for the community, and its clear belonging to the indigenous population and related legitimacy. This was partly also enforced by the recruitment system of the MAQL that was very much based on a rotating system. As most of the MAQL militants only remained within the movement for a short period (approximately eight months), many families had one member who circulated through the ranks of the movement (see *Comisión de Superación de la Violencia* 1992: 107, see Cárdenas Sarrias and Planta 2015: 162-163). One interviewee from the MAQL asserted that because of the close ties the movement had to its constituency, it was easier for former combatants to be accepted by their communities: “[T]he Quintín members were [...] from the communities. When they demobilized, they were known. We provided permanent support and protection for our indigenous people. They couldn't reject us and even less so as [the

population.

Fundación Sol y Tierra] came with [project] ideas” (personal interview, *Fundación Sol y Tierra* member, March 12, 2012, Popayán^{xxv}).

Contrary to these tight group-community relations, paramilitary units operated on a completely different basis, mostly as contracted or mercenary units without community support. Regarding the ex-combatant organizations founded by disengaged individuals, they operate mostly outside the area their members were active in during their militancy. This means that they can hardly build on any relational capital with local communities from the pre-disengagement phase, but instead need to establish completely new relations with the communities into which they are inserted. As a result, these organizations must invest particular effort in relationship and trust building through community processes (personal interview, *Fundación Líderes de Paz* member, May 02, 2012, Bogotá).

Beyond the relational capital former combatant organizations establish with their constituencies and local communities, one interviewee referred more generally to the importance of the capital of relations that former combatant organizations can expand on in the political and academic spheres in order to become sustainable and ensure they are more widely heard (personal interview, *Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris* member, June 08, 2012, Bogotá). Analyzing the interview material, it becomes clear that different ex-combatant organizations possess varying degrees of relational capital in terms of their connectivity to local or national political and academic elites.

For instance, especially the small-scale combatant organizations that developed out of individual disengagement processes lack the capacity to reach out to politically relevant spaces, as they possess neither party political representation nor connections to former militants-turned-politicians. In comparison, organizations that demobilized in the 1990s can look back on a long common trajectory in political mobilization and communal leadership, which helps former combatants consolidate organizational processes in their post-militancy trajectories (see Restrepo and Contreras Rodríguez 2000: 172). In this context, it is also important to consider the continuity of relationships and networks that date back to the time before engagement in an armed group. For instance, analyzing the pre-militancy backgrounds of former combatants can help us understand which political networks, parties or social movements they will most likely be able to reach out to. According to one interviewee,

former militants of the CRS had been active drivers of the creation of the peace movement in Colombia, and could therefore easily reach out to other peacebuilding NGOs and local communities (personal interview, *Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris* member, June 08, 2012, Bogotá), especially since the *Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris* has continued to play an active role in national peace initiatives, such as the Permanent Peace Assembly (*Asamblea Permanente por la Paz*) or the Mandate for Peace (*Mandato por la Paz*) and its involvement in earlier negotiation attempts with the ELN and the FARC-EP (*Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris* 2005: 7). Such connections were regarded a necessary condition for ex-combatant organizations to gain an audience and reach out to society (personal interview, *Corporación ANDES* member, May 18, 2012, Bogotá^{xxvi}). One former member of the CRS hinted to the fact that their organization had managed to become attractive to academia and experts because of its combination of intellectual capacities and the first-hand experience that its members brought to the peace and conflict “market”.

In this context, one interviewee also highlighted the important roles of leadership and the capital of relations in an organization. The collective negotiation processes of the 1990s, for instance, involved all segments of a former group, from rank-and-file to the highest leadership levels. As a result, these organizations could draw from their emblematic leaders' skills and contacts. For instance, the success of the *Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris* was partly explained by the political connections and reputation of the foundation's charismatic leader (personal interview, *Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris* member, June 08, 2012, Bogotá^{xxvii}).

In the case of individual desertion, the situation is dramatically different, because it is characterized by a lack of leadership and representation. The organizations emerging from individual disengagement processes, therefore, have been singled out for their poor connections to the political world, as well as their lack of academic formation (personal interview, PAPDRB staff, May 11, 2012, Bogotá).

As was highlighted in the case of the paramilitary units, for their part, they gained their political connections primarily by coercive means, threats and corruption (see discussion of the *parapolítica* in 6.2.2), and not on a large constituency of grassroots mobilization. The infiltration of their leadership by drug traffickers before and during the negotiation period, as well as their leaders' non-compliance with the demobilization process (which led to the

extradition or incarceration of a considerable number of them) have left paramilitary rank-and-file soldiers without legitimate leaders. This once again highlights the importance of broader efforts that ensure the legitimacy of transitional processes, so that ex-combatant organizations may become viable instruments for re-encounter. Especially in scenarios in which armed groups are responsible for gross human rights violations and are not supported by a social constituency, transitional justice mechanisms that properly address victims' needs and rights need to be put into place.²⁰⁹

Finally, focusing on the issue of leadership makes a contribution to understanding the way how issues of power in terms of access to different resources and center-periphery divides – not necessarily in geographic but also social and political terms – play out in individuals' capacities for identity accommodation.

Comparing pre- and post-militancy trajectories of former combatant organizations members, it seems as if those who had more privileged positions in society because of their education or access to social networks and status are more likely to be found in leadership positions after militancy. While it is argued that individuals can hold various identities, it seems that individuals have neither the same range of options to pick from, nor the same capacities available in terms of social or other capital to maneuver a new, civilian, life.

7.3 MEMBERSHIP STRUCTURE AND FORMER MILITANTS' PREPAREDNESS TO USE THEIR INSIDER KNOWLEDGE

Next to the identity of a group and its capital of relations, another recurrent theme throughout interviews was ex-combatants' insider knowledge. While international DDR approaches

²⁰⁹ In this line, the peace process with the FARC-EP has strongly focused on victims' needs and rights, with the final accord containing over 60 pages detailing transitional justice mechanisms, truth-telling efforts, and instruments to repair victims and guarantee non-repetition (see 8.2).

usually assume that ex-combatants possess a specific set of skills related to the use of violence and military strategies (see 2.2), ex-combatants interviewed for this study referred to insider knowledge in a quite different way, namely as their particular understanding of “the problems and the needs in war” (personal interview, *Fundación Surcando Caminos* member, February 27, 2012, Bogotá), which allowed them to apply a unique lens on how they viewed conflict and its transformation. One person stated: “We have a very particular experience which not everybody has. Not even books can give you that [experience]. And this is a contribution, a value that I have, for me it is an asset” (personal interview, *Corporación ANDES* member, May 18, 2012, Bogotá). The ability of former combatants to make use of this insider knowledge was considered important within a wide variety of spaces, be it in policy or academic discourse, in specialized NGOs and peacebuilding work, at the community level or as a reintegration facilitator. As one representative of the *Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris* explained:

“We do have a certain perspective on the conflict here. For instance, [Fundación] Ideas para la Paz [Foundation Ideas for Peace – another foundation not related to ex-combatants] is very similar to us, but they have a more institutional stamp, they don’t have any historical closeness to the guerrilla, but we do. We come from there, we have this birthmark. Fine, we do not believe in this anymore, but we still have certain modes of analysis, of looking at the conflict, which is very much reflected in our ideas on reforms. While others might think about [the solution of] the conflict in terms of reintegration, we think about addressing the root causes of conflict” (personal interview, *Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris* member, June 08, 2012, Bogotá).

A representative of the female ex-combatant network, in turn, highlighted that female ex-combatants bring their own distinct approaches and discourse to peacebuilding as former protagonists of war, compared to traditional feminists, as they do not “reject war as a masculine space, [...] and they also do not necessarily reject war *per se*. They also do not perceive women solely as ‘victims’ of the guerrilla” (personal interview, *Red Nacional de Mujeres Excombatientes* member, January 17, 2012, Bogotá). As a result, they are able to challenge and complement existing discourses about women only being victims of war. Representatives of the *Fundación Sol y Tierra* for their part highlighted how the capacity for

political analysis that former MAQL members acquired during their militancy had helped them become respected community leaders (personal interview, *Fundación Sol y Tierra member*, March 11, 2012, Popayán):

“[t]he demobilized Quintínos have the capacity to be in all of these community processes because they’ve gone through political training, because they are following the news and because they are able to analyze the political and the national reality. So the population consults them. In that sense, it is more a continuity than a break” (personal interview, *Fundación Sol y Tierra member*, March 11, 2012, Popayán).

The insider perspective was also found to be a particular asset when working with former combatants. Former militants have first-hand experience in what it means to join, belong to, and disengage from an armed group, and can therefore often relate to the experiences of other ex-combatants. Interviewees asserted, for instance, that they would rather trust and “feel identified” with a fellow combatant-turned-reintegration-officer who “speaks the same language and will understand my problems”, and is more committed to their task because of their own disengagement experience (personal interview, *Corporación ANDES member*, May 18, 2012, Bogotá^{xxviii}). This was utilized by Bogotá’s municipal reintegration program, which strategically employed former combatants as reintegration officers (see 6.2.3).

These examples highlight how the experience of militancy can continue to make important contributions in post-militancy life, and how former combatants can become storytellers of their own history – instead of letting others tell their story for them. It is the authenticity with which former combatants talk about their experience in and knowledge acquired through war that can help them acquire a new position in society, e.g. as political experts, community leaders or reintegration facilitators. They can do so without having to deny their former identity as an armed militant, but can instead building on this, even if their knowledge is only “incorporated” and not “institutionalized” capital – to use Bourdieu’s terms – meaning that it is not certified or officially valued by an educational institution. Actively using their militant past brings about new action options for ex-combatants beyond the stigmatized image of the violent perpetrator or the to-be-reintegrated DDR participant.

For some, the active utilization of their militant experience can even evolve into their (sole) source of income, thereby leading to the professionalization of the ex-combatant identity. One interviewee, for instance, found a job as a dialogue facilitator, hired to share and discuss her life story with college students (personal interview, *Fundación Líderes de Paz* member, May 24, 2012, Bogotá). However, this of course also has its limitations. To begin with, not all former combatants associate their militancy with positive experiences. On the contrary, forced recruitment, abuse, hardships and/or disillusionment can make ex-combatant wish to forever turn away from their former group. Also, according to their function within the group and personal background, ex-combatants might not have the chance to develop any specific insider knowledge, let alone the necessary analytical or social skills to build on this. In addition, interviewees also emphasized that the niche for professional work in the area of conflict analysis and peacebuilding is relatively small, and it is extraordinarily difficult to make a living out of these types of activities (personal interview, *Fundación para la Reconciliación* staff, May 30, 2012, Bogotá^{xxix}). Finally, the way society stigmatized former combatants, along with their lack of certified training, also limited their ability to capitalize on their past. As a result, many former combatants strategically handle their militant identity, sometimes actively using it, other times hiding it, depending on the social situation. As one interviewee explained:

“The Minuto de Dios [University], for instance, would contract me in my capacity as a [former] guerrillero to talk about peace as part of their ‘Peace School’. In another occasion, I wanted to be hired as a specialist in the public administration to talk about public administration issues in Colombia. In that case, well why would I show them my ex-combatant ID?” (personal interview, PAPDRB staff, May 11, 2012, Bogotá).

However, what is interesting in the context of post-militancy organizational processes is that not all organizations manage to capitalise on their members' insider knowledge or expertise. As outlined by a former EPL militant:

“This whole topic about demobilization politics and the peace and conflict themes: How do you demonstrate that you are an expert on these topics? Through your academic and capacities and writings! You must have articles,

books, documents [...] and you must become well-known by the media, too. These are capacities that you build as a demobilized person, so that other people start consulting you on these topics. What is important is the academic and political authority you are able to accumulate. But how will these individually demobilized people ever get invited to participate in a seminar organized by the Javeriana [expensive private University in Bogotá with a good reputation]?” (personal interview, PAPDRB staff, May 11, 2012, Bogotá).

These interview passages demonstrate that insider knowledge is a capital which ex-combatant organizations use in different ways, to different degrees, and in different spaces (academia, politics, community reconciliation processes). As a result of their different membership structures, not all former combatant organizations have the capacity to combine their members' "experience with intellectual passion and abilities", thereby becoming an "interesting mix for academia" (personal interview, *Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris* member, June 08, 2012, Bogotá). To the extent that ex-combatant organizations incorporate former (political or ideological) leaders of the armed movement to varying degrees, the type of insider knowledge they possess and their ability to build upon it varies. As highlighted by one interviewee, the *Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris*, for instance, was composed both of former militants with a university career, or at least extensive political experience, as well as professionals who had not been part of the armed group (personal interview, *Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris* member, June 08, 2012, Bogotá). Similarly, another interviewee pointed to the higher degree of academic education and administrative capacities in the organizations that emerged from the peace agreements in the early 1990s (personal interview, PAPDRB staff, May 11, 2012, Bogotá and personal interview, *Corporación ANDES* member, May 08, Bogotá).

However, it is not only in academic spaces that ex-combatant organizations can make an important contribution based on their specific approaches to conflict and conflict transformation. Various examples have also demonstrated the effective use of one's life story to engage in processes of local re-encounter and reconciliation, or work in the area of recruitment prevention (personal interview, FUNDAPAM member, February 20, 2012). Nevertheless, the professionalization of ex-combatant identities has at times also resulted in

abuse and exploitation by different sides. Interviews reported challenges regarding the abuse of the ex-combatant-turned-peacebuilder story – by ex-combatant themselves, by the business sector, as well as by the very peacebuilding community. More than one interview partner talked implicitly or explicitly about the fact that being an ex-combatant had become something of a business model in a number of different ways.²¹⁰ One common complaint was the fact that other NGOs or foundations were profiting (personal interview, *Corporación ANDES* member, May 18, 2011, Bogotá) from ex-combatants' experiences and their unique selling points, and “were selling projects behind the ex-combatants' backs” (personal interview, *Fundación Líderes de Paz* member, May 04, 2012, Bogotá), using the market niche of the ex-combatants-turned-peace-worker to their own benefit. As highlighted by one interviewee (ibid.), “[b]eing composed of demobilized people who talked about reparation, reconciliation and peaceful coexistence gave our organization its particularity.”

In the same line, interviewees also accused the reintegration programs offered by the ACR of using ex-combatants' life stories as a lobbying tool for the institution's success,²¹¹ which was particularly criticized against a background in which the ACR had not provided much support to ex-combatants' collective, self-driven initiatives. Hence, this last section will

²¹⁰ More generally, they also accused the government as well as the private sector more broadly of treating ex-combatants' reintegration as a business. For instance, one interviewee asserted with regard to the social work ex-combatants must carry out as part of their reintegration roadmap that “[m]any companies just take advantage of demobilized people who must do their social service. They make them work without paying them. I think social service should be more focused on the community, society should benefit from social work and not only a private company in charge of cleaning the city's drains and so on” (personal interview, *Fundación Líderes de Paz* member, May 04, 2012, Bogotá).

²¹¹ One interviewee, for instance, referred to the “tailor of the FARC”. This was a well known and mediatized case of a former FARC-EP-collaborator who managed to set up his own tailoring business in a periphery neighborhood of Bogotá after his desertion. The interviewee argued that the ACR had financially supported the person's work for the sake of promoting a successful transformation story: “The tailor of the FARC, [...] he is sold as a model. And they put a lot of money into this. How would he ever have been able to set up such a show by himself, including with TV coverage?” (personal interview, PAPDRB staff, May 18, 2012, Bogotá).

look into the opportunities for organizational development ex-combatant organizations have been able to build on.

7.4 OPPORTUNITIES FOR ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Lastly, another difference in the set-up of ex-combatant organizations discussed throughout interviews was the opportunities for organizational development that former combatants have been able to tap into.

In a context of weak institutional experience, combatants who took part in the peace processes of the 1990s were regarded as political subjects and decision-makers, while the ex-combatant organizations set up following the peace accords in the 1990s were in charge of delivering support to former combatants, thereby fulfilling an important administrative role and gaining administrative experience. In addition, they were at least temporarily (until the *punto final*) provided with economic seed capital through the reintegration resources they managed. However, the ex-combatant organizations that were set up as self-initiatives have been forced to generate their own financial resources from the start, resulting most often in unstable economic and staff/member situations. The lack of funding could easily be considered a challenge to continued organizational growth or the implementation of projects and activities. Yet the flipside to this is that economic resources also come with many negative effects on organizational development, which interviewees highlighted, including internal power struggles, corruption, and mismanagement – especially if combined with poor management capacities and the lack of a long-term vision (personal interviews, *Fundación Líderes de Paz* member, May 04, 2012, Bogotá^{xxx} and PAPDRB staff, May 11, 2012, Bogotá^{xxxi}).

However, and as stated by one interviewee, there are also a number of other challenges related to organizational development that go beyond mere funding needs and include issues of credibility, establishing trust and a track record with donors, and building administrative skills and management capacities. These difficulties were highlighted by one interviewee, who asserted that “[p]eople tend to create foundations because they believe that this will maintain them [economically]. But it turns out that this is not true. It is not that easy

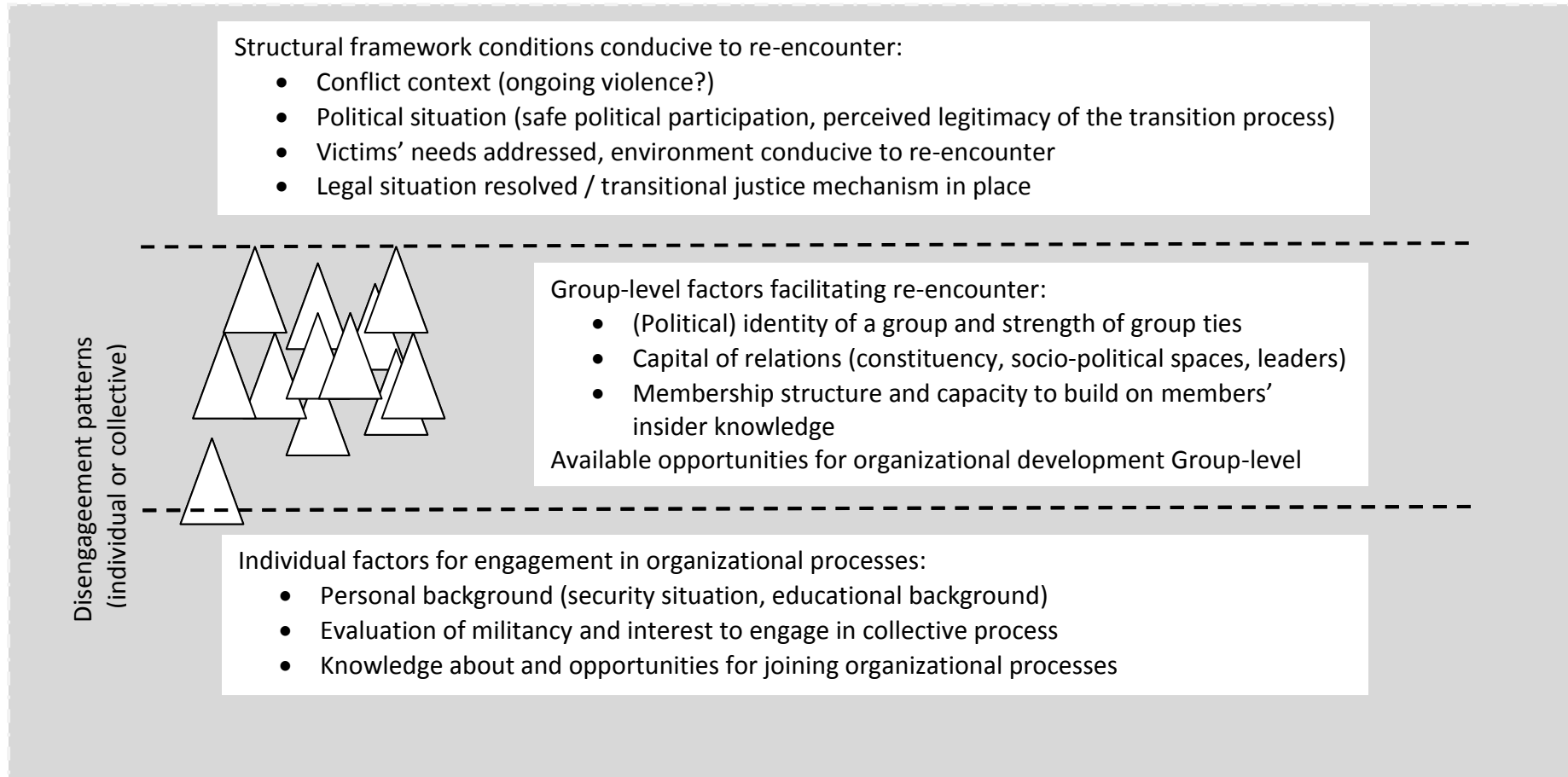
to create an organization with all the competition in the market; earning the credibility and trust of the donor is not easy” (personal interview, *Fundación Líderes de Paz* member, May 04, 2012, Bogotá^{xxxii}). In that sense, organizations which emerged from the peace processes of the 1990s and received governmental funding have had more opportunities to improve their management capacities, establish a funding track record, and at times even create staff positions that do not depend on project funding (personal interview, *Fundación Sol y Tierra* member, March 11, 2012, Popayán), thereby providing a certain stability to the organization as well as the opportunity to develop activities beyond the scope of administering governmental reintegration support. This was also highlighted by an evaluation report of the CRS (2005: 9) that concluded that the development of projects executed by the *Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris* and UNAVIDA helped to strengthen former combatants' organizational processes. As a result, one interviewee has summarized the differences between organizational processes following individual and collective disengagement processes as follows:

“If you look at the case of voluntary individual demobilizations, these [organizations] don't get any support. So there is a huge difference between the collective and the individual processes in economic terms, in the degree of visibility, in terms of participation, etc. In the 1990s, agreements were made [between the government and the armed organizations]. In comparison, we didn't sign any [collective] agreements with the government, we only agreed as individuals [to demobilize]. So this is why the organizations of the individual demobilized former combatants face so many difficulties” (personal interview, *Corporación ANDES* member, May 08, 2012, Bogotá).

Summing up, Chapter VII has suggested four central elements for explaining the variety in the capacity of ex-combatant organizations to serve as a resource for peace in Colombia, next to the mode of disengagement, including the strength of their in-group (political) identity and ties, their capital of relations, their capacity to make use of ex-combatants' insider knowledge, and their opportunities for organizational development. The chapter has highlighted differences regarding between the three main reintegration instances in Colombia. While organizations emerging from the peace accords in the 1990s have managed to make important peacebuilding contributions in their former regions of operation despite a number of

challenges, organizational formats resulting from paramilitary demobilization processes have failed to create spaces for re-encounter. Small-scale organizations emerging from individual disengagement processes have produced mixed results. While they have managed to forge rapprochement between former enemies and contribute to re-encounter at a local level, they have also been characterized by strong organizational insustainability and are often driven by income-generating interests.

Figure 6: Analytical framework



Source: Own research.

CONCLUSION: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND OUTLOOK

Situated in the field of peace and conflict research and based on an explorative approach, this thesis brought together three fields of research linked to broader academic debate that each contribute important elements to understanding former combatants' post-militancy organizational processes: research on the transition processes of NSAGs, policy-driven research on DDR programs and research on identity transformation processes. The starting point for examinations was a general interest in the ways NSAGs and their members continue to shape socio-political transformation processes beyond the political or security arena that have dominated researchers' interest so far. Because of the centrality of DDR approaches in shaping war-to-peace transitions, this thesis critically revised a number of flaws in DDR literature and practice, including a predominant focus on the security and economic dimensions, the neglect for socio-political aspects of reintegration and the underlying assumption of former combatants as a risk group who "must break with their past". As such approaches were to be found at odds with former combatants' self-description as "activists", "agents of peace" and "drivers of change", the thesis further drew from research that discusses the transformation of "war-related identities" for transitions to become sustainable.

Bringing these three strands of research together, this thesis has taken an interest in former combatants' organizational processes and their contribution to building peace in Colombia. The aim of the study was not to test any pre-existing theory or hypothesis, but to explore and generate new analytical lenses to understand which organizational settings nurture the ex-combatant organizations' capacities to serve as a resource for peace. More specifically, the main objective was to understand which factors shape ex-combatant organizations' contributions to opening space for re-encounter and relationship building and help accommodate militant identities in the context of civilian life.

The qualitative research design largely built on a historical analysis of ex-combatant organizational processes, and on field research with semi-structured surveys as well as problem-centered interviews and participant observation conducted over a period of six months. Field research mainly centered on the development of and challenges facing about a dozen ex-combatant organizations and their members in post-militancy life. As a way of

conclusion, this chapter recapitulates the main research findings according to the stated objectives of this study (8.1):

- 1) Improving our understanding of the processes of de- and remobilizing former militants in ex-combatant organizations,
- 2) Improving our understanding of identity accommodation processes in transitions from armed militancy to civilian life,
- 3) Revising conceptualizations of ex-combatant organizations as a security threat and re-thinking (international) reintegration assistance targeting former combatants and their post-militancy organizations.

It then identifies possible avenues for further research and policy implications (8.2) and subsequently discusses the implications of the research findings regarding the risks and opportunities of future former FARC-EP combatants' organizational processes (8.3).

8.1 RECAPITULATING RESEARCH FINDINGS

Based on an empirical and qualitative approach, this thesis compared three main transition instances in the time period 1990-2016 and the ex-combatant organizations emerging from them: 1) the transition processes of various guerrilla movements following negotiations in the early 1990s, 2) the collective demobilization process of paramilitary units from 2003-2006, and 3) the post-militancy trajectories of combatants who individually disengaged from their group (1994-2016).

For each instance, this thesis reviewed the overall political context for transition to occur, the nature of the group that underwent transition, the outcomes of negotiations (in the case of collective transitions), the overall legal and institutional framework demobilization or disengagement took place in, and the approaches public policies and programming took to reintegration in each case. In addition, it also discussed in detail the impact of disengagement patterns (individual vs. collective) on former combatants' organizational processes. Based on this analysis, it found significant variation in the types of ex-combatant organizations

emerging from these three instances, as well as in their capacities to facilitate re-encounter and identity accommodation processes.

As highlighted in 6.1, the transition processes in the early 1990s took place in a general political context of democratic opening and the acceptance of former guerrilla members into legal democracy. They were heavily driven by the political identity of the insurgency movements and their strong relations with the local constituency, broader social movements, and legitimate leaders with ties to relevant political spaces. The set-up of ex-combatant foundations to channel reintegration funds or develop projects that were linked to socio-economic development, human rights and democracy promotion in previous conflict zones was an integral part of the collectively negotiated peace accords, and thereby supported the re-encounter of the demobilized militants with local communities. Former insurgents' (at least initially) successful participation in politics, in combination with low levels of recidivism, increased the already considerable legitimacy of the transition process. In addition, at the time ex-combatants and their organizations were regarded as political subjects and active decision-makers in designing and implementing the reintegration processes. Governmental funding helped these organizations establish a certain track record so they could acquire further funding and projects to continue their operations beyond the initial reintegration scope. However, the organizational processes were also deeply disturbed by the context of ongoing war and the growing divide between leaders and followers. As has been outlined, post-militancy trajectories of individual former militants were deeply shaped by personal factors, including former combatants' personal and educational backgrounds, thereby also showing the limits of post-militancy organizational processes in facilitating difficult transition processes.

The collective demobilization process of the paramilitary units analyzed in 6.2, in turn, was largely shaped by their mercenary identity, resulting in relatively low in-group cohesion, coercive relationships with the civilian population, and the absence of a substantial political agenda. In addition, and as a result of the heavy infiltration of paramilitary structures by common criminals and drug traffickers, the transition process lacked legitimacy as well as leaders that could have promoted socio-political organizational processes in the post-militancy period. As a result, their post-militancy organizational processes have been characterized by comparatively high degrees of recidivism, the persistence of illegal structures and/or their transformation into new BACRIMs and the creation of fragile

economic projects geared predominantly towards income-generation with no socio-political or developmental agenda and at times even at odds with victims' needs and rights, thereby hindering rather than promoting re-encounter with society.

Finally, organizational processes taking place outside of formal negotiations, and mostly driven by individually disengaged former combatants, in their large majority guerrilla deserters, have been characterized by their fragility and limited local scope (6.3). Set up outside of their former region of operation (e.g. in urban areas) and without substantial leadership or capital of relations, these organizations could no longer rely on their members' former group identity but had to develop a new purpose, vision and identity for their post-militancy organization aside from (armed) group affiliation. As a result of their mixed-membership structure, these organizations have forged a common identification of former combatants from different sides of the conflict as one vulnerable population group. Whereas these organizations have enabled a few individual former combatants to find a professional niche by strategically using both their personal skills and the various capacity-building courses offered to them, they have in their majority remained fragile organizations. Some of them have additionally been characterized by instability and the need to generate income by whatever means ("*rebusque*", see 7.1) set out by former combatants' self-proclaimed leaders, thereby further damaging the already delicate trust relations among former combatants.

Therefore, it can be argued that the organizations emerging from the peace accords in the 1990s have managed to make important peacebuilding contributions in their former regions of operation, despite a number of challenges. Organizational formats resulting from paramilitary demobilization processes, however, have completely failed to create spaces for re-encounter. Small-scale organizations emerging from individual disengagement processes have produced mixed results, with a few success stories interspersed among highly tense, insecure organizational set-ups. On the basis of the comparative analysis of these three instances of post-militancy organizational processes, this thesis suggests four main factors in addition to the disengagement pattern on the group/organizational level to explain variation in ex-combatant organizations' capacities to transform into a resource for peace in Colombia. These are 1) a strong (political) identity and in-group ties within the former armed group, 2) the organization's capital of relations, 3) its capacity to make use of ex-combatants' insider knowledge, as well as 4) opportunities for organizational development.

Regarding the first point, 7.1 has shown that ex-combatant organizations' abilities to

serve as a resource for peace are strongly linked to the type of armed group they emerge from. More specifically, the more legitimacy an armed movement derived from its political agenda, and the higher its militants identified with their group – even beyond demobilization – and the better the chances for organizational processes to grow strong became. The type of the political agenda in turn (e.g. linked to democracy promotion, human rights policies etc.) predicts what type of activities former combatant organizations will engage in after militancy. Linked to this, this thesis also discussed the capital of relations ex-combatant organizations possess. As highlighted in 7.2, this capital of relations was understood to have three dimensions: the relationships of the former armed group to its constituency and local communities, the relationships the armed group maintained to other socially relevant spaces (e.g. social movements, political parties etc.), and the connections of individual leaders that could facilitate ex-combatant organizations' post-militancy positioning in the academic, political or communal sphere. Next, 7.3 suggested that ex-combatant organizations' ability to make use of their members' insider knowledge also influenced their ability to become a resource for peace. However, it also finds that as a result of variation in their membership structure, ex-combatant organizations do so to different degrees. Finally, 7.4 argued that ex-combatant organizations' ability to serve as a resource for peace depended on the types of support or the opportunities for professional development they could access. It finds that in Colombia, these opportunities have to a large extent been dependent on disengagement patterns and the reintegration policies in place.

In addition, next to these factors on the group and organizational level, ex-combatant organizations' opportunities to transform into a resource for peace are conditioned by structural factors (e.g. the overall political context and legitimacy of the transition process linked to the transitional justice framework and existing regulations for victims' reparations, and the security situation former combatants' organizational processes are subject to) as well as the individual attributes of their members (e.g. former combatants' educational background, how they experienced militancy and hence their interest to maintain close contact with their former peers, or the disposition of individual leaders to move organizational processes forward).

Regarding ex-combatant organizations' capacities to facilitate post-militancy identity accommodation processes, this thesis has critically discussed the international DDR-programming assumption that former combatants need to break with their past relationships and

militant identity in order to successfully reintegrate. Research has demonstrated that war-related identities are indeed a challenge to reconciliation if they reinforce a group's own common identity while reproducing boundaries to others, thereby disturbing processes of rapprochement and reconciliation (Buckley-Zistely). Research in the former Yugoslavia by Simić (2015) has for instance outlined the emergence of “professional victims” identities that hamper cross-ethnic contact. Transferring these findings to the case of former combatant organizations, Chapter III has hinted to the risk of ex-combatant organizations transforming into mere lobbying tools for former combatants to press for their needs, thereby deepening the gap to the rest of society. In addition, continuous identification with one's wartime group has been mainly interpreted as a security risk because of the danger of easy remobilization or re-recruitment into illegal and violent activities. For instance, a study by *Fundación Ideas para la Paz* (FIP 2014: 11) found that persisting militant networks among former fighters in Colombia have been regarded as one important factor for recidivism into delinquent activities, therefore classifying these networks as “negative” social capital – contrary to other “positive” support networks such as family (see FIP 2014: 11).

However, findings from this thesis suggest that a more differentiated approach is needed to take into account the heterogeneous character of armed groups and their organizational post-militancy processes. Throughout field research, a number of ways ex-combatant organizations helped their members make use of their militant experience – and thereby utilize their ex-combatant identity in the present rather than simply forgetting it – could be identified, including 1) the revealing of militant experiences in a collective, and thus safe(r), space, 2) the professionalization of ex-combatant identities, and 3) the complementation and reconfiguration of group-related to a broader ex-combatant identity.

First of all, in a context of high stigmatization and single-sided media coverage of post-militancy trajectories, both of which focus mainly on the problems former combatants pose in terms of security, ex-combatant organizations can make an important contribution to revealing the experiences of former combatants – especially if former militants belong to rather marginalized ex-combatant segments, such as female combatants or rank-and-file members of armed groups that rarely have a voice in post-militancy political, media or academic spaces otherwise. For these segments, as well as for individually disengaged combatants, exhibiting their former militant past on their own can be perceived as threatening. Therefore, ex-combatant organizations can provide a safe(r) space for exposing one's

experience alongside other peers. As highlighted in 6.1, the guerrilla organizations that demobilized in the 1990s seized the opportunity to enshrine memory efforts into their peace agreements, thereby not only steering processes of self-reflection and producing a common narrative of their groups' history, but also providing the interested public with a documentation of their struggle from their own perspective. This opportunity, however, was not readily available for former combatants disengaging individually, despite their similar need to make society aware of the why and how of their militancy (personal interview, *Corporación ANDES* member, May 18, 2012, Bogotá).

However, field research has demonstrated that organizations evolving outside former negotiation processes have also contributed to furthering the understanding for people's trajectories in armed groups. By publicly discussing their members' militant past, by producing written or audio-visual material on the circumstances that led people to join armed groups, or how they managed the transition process and how they experience life after militancy, these organizations have produced first elements for re-encounter in a situation where most former combatants prefer to hide away.

With the exhibiting and strengthening of knowledge about militant trajectories being a first step for re-encounter, ex-combatant organizations have in some instances also enabled ex-combatants to actively and strategically use their militant past. Contrary to the notion of professional victims as discussed above, the notion of professional ex-combatants here has a more positive connotation, as it highlights how former militants have managed to build on their past to become respected academic experts on peace and conflict issues, reintegration facilitators, or local agents for community reconciliation. However, these opportunities have been strongly influenced by former militants' individual backgrounds, including their pre-militancy trajectories and their education.

Finally, field research has also highlighted processes of complementing (or replacing) one's group identity with a broader ex-combatant identity. As outlined in 6.3.3, this process was most often observed in the case of organizations displaying mixed membership structures (e.g. emerging outside of a formal negotiation process). While the demobilization processes of the guerrilla organizations in the 1990s have produced former militant organizations with a strong group-related identity, which mainly opened up to like-minded non-combatants (e.g. as technical advisers) or guerrilla peers (e.g. the female ex-combatant network), organizations emerging outside a group-related demobilization process are often characterized by the

integration of former combatants from across conflict lines. Here, former combatants have forged a common identity as a vulnerable population. While interviewees pointed to continuous political discussions between the representatives of different armed groups within their organizations as one decisive factor for these processes, they also emphasized the development of a common identity based on common needs in the post-militancy phase, including economic, legal and physical security, the lack of representation vis-à-vis public institutions responsible for the reintegration program, and the rejection they experienced from society. While this dynamic, resulting from the organizations' mixed membership structures, has enabled spaces of encounter and collaboration among former (paramilitary and guerrilla) members, the formation of such a "neutral" and undifferentiated ex-combatant identity apart from group-affiliation and a cohesive political identity has also been promoted through the reintegration program. No longer differentiating between ex-combatants from different groups, it has been criticized that a program leads to (and aims at) the depoliticization of former combatants (personal interview, *Corporación ANDES* member, May 08, 2012, Bogotá). As a result, the forging of such new ex-combatant identities was viewed with ambivalence: on the one hand, it has enabled rapprochement between former enemies and hence contributed to local relationship building, on the other hand, it also bears the risk of contributing to a sort of depoliticization of former militant organizations.

Finally, and maybe most interestingly, there are the "non-results" of this thesis that remain silent on one central question: When does a person cease to be an ex-combatant and becomes a civilian again? Rather than regarding the statuses of being a former militant or a citizen as mutually exclusive, or as a sequence former militants pass through, this research concludes that these are complementary and simultaneous identities, the prevalence of which depends both on the social situations former combatants are in and their personal access to alternative identity markers.

As highlighted by one interviewee "Look, you will never 'get rid' of your participation in armed conflict [...] even if you deny that you are a demobilized person. Therefore, I prefer to admit this myself, and assume my past with responsibility, instead of having others pointing their fingers at me" (personal interview, *Corporación ANDES* member, May 18, 2012, Bogotá). While this might not sound like a surprising finding at first, it nevertheless challenges international DDR approaches in its refusal to regard retaining a former militant identity as a problem *per se*, thereby descandalizing former militants' past. Instead of

emphasizing individuals' obligation to break with their past identity, the focus should lie on descandalizing and accommodating this identity while at the same time broadening access to other identities. While this thesis follows a constructivist approach and argues that identities are changeable according to situation, it also highlights the limits of individuals' capacities to accommodate their militant identity in civilian life.

Observing identity accommodation processes in this sense makes a contribution to understanding the way issues of power in terms of access to different resources and center-periphery divides – not necessarily in geographical but also social and political terms – play out in the transitions examined here. While interviews with former combatants left no doubt that armed group participation had deeply affected their personal life, the empirical findings presented here also hint to elements of continuity that are often sidelined in studies portraying conflict as fundamentally restructuring – be it in the positive sense as a catalyst for social renewal or in the negative sense as destructive to social ties and values. Comparing pre- and post-militancy trajectories of former combatant organizations members, it seems as if those who joined their armed group from the periphery of society both in geographical and in social terms have “re-integrated” back into the margins. While they may not live in their peripheral, rural home areas, they do live in the urban periphery. In the contrast, those who had more privileged positions in society, because of their education or access to social networks and status, are also more likely to be found in leadership positions after militancy. While it is argued that individuals can hold various identities, it seems that individuals have neither the same range of options to pick from nor the same capacities in terms of social and other capitals to maneuver through a new, civilian phase of life. While it has been argued that ex-combatant organizational processes are to be avoided, as they inextricably hinge people to their militant past, this thesis argues for a more differentiated approach. It shows that under specific conditions, ex-combatant organizations can make a valuable contribution to sustainable peace transformation processes by offering members a first practice and learning field for citizen – not just civilian – engagement that actively builds on their previous experience instead of forcing them to forget their past.

8.2 AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Complementing existing research on war-to-peace transition processes by focusing on non-state armed groups and their members' individual and collective post-militancy life trajectories, this thesis ties into core debates on the scientific self-image, the subject matter and the methodological and theoretical approaches used in peace and conflict research (for a detailed discussion of these three aspects see Bonnacker 2011).

First of all, taking a specific interest in former combatant organizations' potential contribution to peacebuilding, this study responds to the normative call of peace and conflict research to not only further our understanding of conflict but also to mitigate its effects by promoting our knowledge on the conditions that nurture sustainable peace (see Schlotter and Wisotzki 2011: 19). Thus, this thesis shifts the perspective from focusing on the causes of armed conflict and the emergence of armed groups to taking an interest in the social processes that help overcome scenarios of armed conflict. Closely connected to this, and in line with an understanding of peace and conflict research as a theory- and practice-oriented field of inquiry (see Engels 2014: 136, Bonnacker 2011: 60-63) this thesis further aims to provide relevant insights for future practice not in the form of blueprint solutions but by critically reflecting on current DDR practices and pointing to alternative strategies of dealing with post-militancy organizational processes.

Regarding the subject matter, the thesis departs from and enlarges the dominant political science focus on the state and statebuilding processes after war by focusing on the role of non-state armed actors and their role in peacebuilding. Building on the notions of transition, identity accommodation and re-encounter, it draws upon the field of social psychology to add a new lense to political science views on the social processes of building peace. While the field of political science has predominantly used the notion of transition to refer to processes of regime change, including in the Latin American context, here, the focus is deliberately placed on individual and group transitional experiences to help grasp the role of identity accommodation for integrating individuals into civil, and civilian, engagement. Yet while this thesis has pointed out the possibility of identity accommodation based on a constructivist worldview, it has also hinted to the variation of individual and collective capacities for identity accommodation. Thus, the notion of social capital – or “relational capital” as it was termed in the field – as one such asset explaining variation has been

explored here. Future research could more systematically draw from Bourdieu's theory of social practice to examine the interdependences between individual and collective dispositions and socio-political structures that help or hinder their scopes of action (see for instance Sprenkels 2014b). Finally, conceptualizing peacebuilding or "re-encounter" as relationship (re)building also helps turn attention away from political reform processes and institutional engineering at the political elite level towards organizational processes in the sphere of civil society. Such an approach ties into the debate on the need for vertical and horizontal peacebuilding in the aftermath of armed conflict, as well as broader discussions on the role of civil society actors in stabilizing countries after internal armed conflict (see Chapter 2.4).

From a methodological perspective, this thesis connects to the micro-political turn in peace and conflict studies characterized by a shift from quantitative to qualitative studies (Koloma Beck 2012: 29-30, see also Schneider 2015), and a stronger focus on studying the decisions and trajectories of "ordinary" people in and outside of armed organizations rather than those of (political) decision-makers and high-ranking leaders – who often are also more accessible to a "Western" researcher. Such a procedure also resonates with postcolonial approaches. Thus far under-explored in peace and conflict research, (see Chojnacki and Namberger 2014: 176-182 Engels 2014: 131-132) postcolonial perspectives can provide a helpful theoretical tool to revise "Western" constructions and representations of "the other" – armed groups and their members in this case – being examined. More broadly, postcolonial lenses might help critically engage with the normative and binary categories used in Western political thought such as state/non-state, modern/traditional or barbarism/civilization to understand armed violence around the world (*ibid.*). Regarding peacebuilding processes, this could also foster reflections on the dichotomous notions of conflict vs. post-conflict, shifting focus instead more strongly on continuities and how conflict dynamics continue shaping the post-conflict social arena. More differentiated understanding would allow a more adequate dealing with variation in conflict dynamics at the subnational level (see Chapter V).

Against this broader background, a number of concrete avenues for further inquiry arise from this study. In general, as this paper applied a strict focus solely on Colombia, future comparative cross-regional research is invited to test, complement or reject its findings and their validity in other contexts, thereby improving, refining, and broadening the analytical framework outlined here. More specifically, it seems worthwhile to pick up five additional

issues in order to deepen and broaden our understanding of post-militancy organizational processes.

First of all, the findings from Colombia have shown that there are considerable differences between ex-combatant organizations set up as a result of collective or individual disengagement processes. With the bulk of research focusing on former combatant reintegration within official DDR programs and their success or failure, more comparative research is needed to explore organizational processes that take place outside of institutional reintegration schemes and how these contribute to (or hamper) not only individual post-militancy trajectories (e.g. see Karamé 2009), but also local peacebuilding processes.

Secondly, and linked to this, more research is needed on the organizational processes of marginalized sectors within armed groups. Comparative research (see Lundström and Marhaban 2016, see Dudouet et al. 2012a) has for instance demonstrated the poor prospects of former female combatants in starting a political career upon disengagement – contrary to their male peers. Moreover, examples from Colombia have shown that former female guerrilla combatants were even marginalized during the set-up of social organizations following the peace accords. In how far can organizational processes beyond party politics become a support for women combatants' post-militancy life trajectories, or does the post-militancy gender gap instead require separate entities and gender-specific organizational formats specifically voicing former women combatants' concerns and needs?

A third avenue for future research relates to the design of reintegration policies and the topic of inclusivity. Findings from Colombia suggest that the design of reintegration policies plays an important role in promoting (or hampering) former combatants' organizational processes. In the reintegration processes of the 1990s in particular, former combatants took a strong role in shaping and even leading reintegration policies. On the other hand, reintegration programming for collectively demobilized paramilitary units and individual deserters alike took place without any major representation of former combatants in the design process, thereby sidelining the very actors the process had been initiated for. In addition, the design and implementation of all reintegration policies received little attention from, let alone participation by, civil society, unlike the previous negotiation processes that had been closely followed by a national audience (Restrepo and Contreras Rodríguez 2000: 163). Comparative research across world regions should therefore explore the benefits (and potential drawbacks) of including former combatants as well as the wider public in shaping reintegration policies

beyond the negotiation phase, and whether such designs are helpful in fostering re-encounter.

Next, while the thesis makes no claim for general applicability as outlined above, the broad variety of conflict dynamics, group characteristics, transition types, and ex-combatant organizational set-ups included in the analysis suggests that findings might be relevant for a broad spectrum of transition types. In this context, it would be interesting to explore whether findings can be transferred to the post-militancy trajectories of armed actors in other scenarios of organized armed violence. After the shift of focus from inter-state to intra-state armed conflict, researchers are now increasingly turning their attention to so-called “non-conflict scenarios” and “non-conventional” armed actors (see Planta and Dudouet 2015, Schultze-Kraft and Hinkle 2014, Hazen 2010), such as for instance gangs or organized crime groups.

A last avenue suggested here relates to the exploration of victim identities and discourses at the local and national level, and how they interact with each other. As was shown in 6.3.3, former combatants have been forging a common identity as a vulnerable population in processes of encounter with their former enemies. In addition, some of these organizations have also engaged in citizen networks aimed at voicing community needs at the local level. In that context, they have also been collaborating with organizations representing conflict victims. In how far are such local processes of rapprochement and re-encounter helped or hindered by ex-combatant and victims’ organizations operating at the national level? Also, the other way around, in how far do national processes of reconciliation support or contradict local realities where ex-combatants are considered to be receiving benefits not available for common citizens and victims?

In terms of policy recommendations, underlining the thus-far underestimated potential of former militants’ organizations’ capacities to serve as a resource for peace provides an incentive for (inter)national DDR planners and implementers to revise their assumptive approach of breaking with the past and instead develop strategies that aim to prepare and support ex-combatant organizations in becoming a resource for peace, or – as it was termed by one interviewee – supporting ex-combatants in discovering their “leadership” and “employability for peace” (personal interview, *Fundación para la Reconciliación* staff, June 01, 2012, Bogotá).

Once more, such strategies would have to do justice to the heterogeneous nature of non-state armed groups and start with a careful analysis of the demobilizing armed group, its political (if any) objectives and trajectory, and its membership structure. In addition, such an

analysis would also have to take a careful look at the types of relations the group has managed to establish with its constituency and broader socio-political spaces. Based on this assessment of a group's future strong and non-coercive relationships, and its organizational projection within legal boundaries, reintegration policies could proactively make use of former combatants' insider knowledge and provide technical and financial support and accompaniment to former combatants' organizational processes accordingly. However, participation in such collective trajectories must always remain voluntary. Ultimately, the transition from militancy to post-militancy is a personal challenge for every former combatant, and implies individually adjusting to a new life. However, in the best case, this accommodation process, or the phase "betwixt and between", can be supported by organizational processes that help build bridges to local communities and society at large. In that sense, and based on findings from Colombia, DDR programs could potentially benefit from stronger civil society participation in their design and implementation.

Finally, looking ahead to future peacebuilding challenges in Colombia, former combatants' post-militancy life trajectories will remain one of the core challenges for the country in the years to come. Improving ex-combatants' self-help opportunities and strengthening organizational set-ups that can empower former combatants and communities rebuild new relationships is one task in the post-agreement phase. As the FARC-EP commander Timoleón Jiménez, known as "Timochenko", has highlighted, former FARC-EP militants will not cease to be combatants, but will become "combatants without arms, combatants for peace, peace with social justice" (ONIC 2016).

8.3 LOOKING AHEAD: FARC-EP'S POST-MILITANCY LIFE TRAJECTORIES AND ORGANIZATIONAL PROCESSES

Regarding the prospects of former FARC-EP post-militancy trajectories, a number of challenges are to be expected based on the experiences analyzed here. These include most prominently security risks in the post-agreement phase, including former combatants receiving threat or re-engaging in illegal and violent activities, and encountering difficulties due to their stigmatization in society. On the other hand, however, the group's post-militancy organizational processes are also likely to be characterized by innovations. The FARC-EP have already announced that they understand their political and socio-economic post-

militancy trajectories as a collective endeavor. Rejecting the ACR's reintegration scheme as a counter-insurgency tool, they have initiated the implementation of an alternative, self-managed and collective post-militancy reintegration process that places the self-understanding of the FARC-EP as a community center stage (see Álvaro 2016).²¹² Against this background, this thesis concludes with a discussion of the challenges and opportunities that FARC-EP post-militancy organizational processes face.

8.3.1 SECURITY CHALLENGES: REMOBILIZATION AND SAFETY RISKS FOR EX-COMBATANTS AND COMMUNITIES

To start with, challenging security scenarios range from factions that openly break away and reject participation in the demobilization process,²¹³ to more subtle processes of splinter groups clandestinely continuing illegal activities – mostly related to drug-trafficking – under the guise of demobilizing, to individuals re-mobilizing into BACRIM ranks – which in some cases have already established alliances with the FARC-EP (see CNMH 2014: 292-297 for a detailed analysis) – or other guerrilla groups, such as the ELN or a small EPL faction, which

²¹² Regarding previous cases of fraudulent militants being admitted into the transition process, this seems less likely to occur with the FARC-EP due to its hierarchical structure. In addition, the government and the FARC-EP have agreed on a complex process of combatant accreditation in which the FARC-EP provides the government with a full list of their combatants, including their prisoners, which is then revised and commented by the government. A dispute resolution mechanism will be set up to clarify disagreements over the list. The government will accept the list in a formal administrative act no later than 180 days after the signature of the peace accord (see *Acuerdo Final* 2016b: 73). In the meantime, combatants have been concentrated into 23 so-called “Transitory Rural Settlement Normalization Zones” (*Zonas Veredales Transitorias de Normalización, ZVTN*) situated within 23 *veredas*. A *vereda* is the smallest administrative territorial unit in Colombia. In total, there are 33,000 *veredas* in the country. Only 23 of them, located within 12 different departments (Cesar, Norte de Santander, Antioquia, Tolima, Cauca, Nariño, Putumayo, Caquetá, Arauca, Meta, Vichada, Guaviare) are hosting ZVTNs. In addition, eight special camps or Transitory Normalization Points (*Puntos Transitorios de Normalización, PTN*) have been created in the departments of Guajira, Antioquia, Chocó, Córdoba, Cauca, Caquetá and Guainía (*Ministerio de Defensa Nacional* 2016, see Figure 13 in Annex 5).

²¹³ In September 2016, the first front of the FARC-EP publicly confirmed that roughly half of its militants were not ready to abide by the peace agreement and would break away from the FARC-EP (*El País* 2016). In December, the FARC-EP leadership publicly announced the expulsion of several of the first front's commanders (CERAC 2016). Next to the first front, CERAC also identified the fronts 7 and 16 as high dissident risk fronts (*ibid.*).

are still operating. While former FARC-EP militants are largely believed to remain in their areas of operation, some analysts have highlighted the security challenges related to former ex-combatants' migration to urban areas, as well as the activities of demobilized FARC-EP urban militants. In Medellín for instance, local gangs already announced their readiness to fight – and kill – potential FARC-EP militants daring to settle and take over control of gang strongholds (*Mi Región* 2016). However, there are also high security risks for former combatants entering politics or even for social activists (perceived as) close to the FARC-EP, as previous transition processes and the experience of the *Unión Patriótica* have demonstrated. In this context, there is also the additional risk that, once the FARC-EP dissolves, other armed groups (BACRIM, organized crime, ELN and EPL dissidents) might take advantage of the ensuing security vacuum, thereby exposing local communities to new threats.

A number of security provisions have been taken to ensure the safety of post-militancy life trajectories. The Final Accord (*Acuerdo Final* 2016b: 39) introduces a special protection system (*Sistema Integral de Seguridad*) and an extensive catalogue of security guarantee measures for sectors of society particularly under threat, such as human rights defenders, members of social movements and political opposition groups, and including those who might be part of the new political party emerging from the peace accord (*Acuerdo Final* 2016b: 77-97). In addition, the government is taking responsibility for disbanding criminal organizations, and specifically those that emerged from the paramilitary demobilization processes, under the supervision of a National Commission of Security Guarantees (*Comisión Nacional de Garantías de Seguridad*) (see *Acuerdo Final* 2016b: 80) On the other hand, the state's security institutions announced that fighting against drug trafficking and possible FARC-EP breakaways will be their priorities for 2017 (*Ministerio de Defensa Nacional* 2017). Regarding security sector reforms of the statutory forces, in turn, the debate about the need – or not – to downsize the strength of Colombia's armed forces and the impact of any potential peace agreement with the FARC-EP on the national security institutions will probably only concretize within the next presidential turn. The peace agreement at least does

not mention any major security sector reforms,²¹⁴ which might be due to the continuing threat posed by remaining armed groups (such as the ELN, an EPL dissident group, and various BACRIM) and the FARC-EP's unwillingness to incorporate statutory forces. Finally, transitional justice mechanisms have also been introduced for members of the statutory forces whose crimes committed in the context of armed conflict will be submitted to the Special Peace Jurisdictions (*Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz*) (Acuerdo Final 2016b: 149).²¹⁵

8.3.2 STIGMATA TOWARDS “NARCO-TERRORISTS”, OR WHO ARE THEY?

While four years of negotiations with an explicit and substantial political agenda have at least partly restored the FARC-EP as political actor, stigmatization and rejection by large parts of the population are likely prospects, a fact that was more than visible in the negative outcome of the October 2016 plebiscite. The trauma of the failed Caguán negotiations (1998-2002) left Colombia's society deeply disillusioned and frustrated with the FARC-EP and their peace process, which had found wide popular support back then (see Planta and Görzig 2012: 159). Subsequently, under the Uribe Vélez administration, the FARC-EP was discursively framed as a group of narco-terrorists and the state's absolute enemy (see Angarita Cañas et al. 2015: 263). In effect, data presented by the National Centre for Historic Memory (*Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica*, CNMH 2013: 102) indicates that the FARC-EP has been responsible for 55 of 95 terrorist attacks related to the armed conflict in between 1988 and 2012, and 238 of 1,982 massacres, with a total of 11,751 victims, committed between 1980 and 2012 (ibid.: 47). Furthermore, the FARC-EP also transformed into the single illegal armed forces most responsible for kidnapping – a war-strategy that deeply affected the entire country.²¹⁶ Finally,

²¹⁴ The army itself has proposed a “Technical Transformation Plan 2030”, which foresees the restructuring of the statutory forces into a modern “multi-mission-army”, and includes the deployment of Colombian armed forces to missions abroad. However, this plan is not the product of a broad societal discussion, but was developed internally by the army (see Madsen 2016).

²¹⁵ According to information from the National Defense Ministry, more than 20,000 members of the armed forces are currently under investigation for such crimes; many of them could fall under a special judicial procedure within the transitional justice framework (see *El Tiempo* 2016a).

²¹⁶ While kidnapping initially targeted mostly members of the security forces caught in fighting, or politicians – with the most prominent hostage being presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt – the

the group has been heavily involved in the drug business, illegal gold mining and extortion, not even shying away from engaging in collaboration with paramilitary groups or organized crime (ICG 2016a: 13, see CNMH 2014: 12 and 290-301 for a more detailed analysis of the FARC-EP financial resources). As a result of the image of a decadent guerrilla that has lost its moral compass and is engaged in gross human rights violations, the FARC-EP steadily lost legitimacy within the population.²¹⁷

Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to only regard the FARC-EP as a criminal gang without a political profile. Its political agenda has not only been demonstrated in the substantive negotiation process, but has also been confirmed by research on the political education provided to FARC-EP militants. According to a FIP survey involving disengaged FARC-EP members, half the FARC-EP combatants attended ideological training sessions at least once a week during their militancy (see Nussio and Howe 2012). In addition, research by Ugarizza and Craig (2012: 9) highlight the significant resources the FARC-EP spent on ideologically training community members as well as their own militants, which is also a condition for FARC-EP members to advance in the organization's hierarchy. Throughout interviews for the AGC project, more than half the former FARC-EP members referred to the regular political training they had taken part in.²¹⁸ These were mostly provided in the form of one to two hours of daily or weekly talks at a set time of day, most commonly in the evening

FARC-EP used this strategy widely and randomly between 1996-2002, at the height of the conflict. Especially in urban areas, this brought the conflict closer to the Colombian middle class. In addition, the FARC-EP themselves exposed the cruelty of their hostages' living conditions in order to increase pressure on the state. Autobiographical books have been written by former FARC-EP hostages (e.g. Pérez, Luis Eladio and Darío Armizmendi 2008). A special radio program called "The Voices of the Hostages" (*Las Voces del Secuestro*) was set up by journalist Herbin Hoyos Medina, through which families could send messages to their kidnapped relatives.

²¹⁷ This was also expressed during a massive national and international protest march against the FARC-EP on February 04, 2008. Rallied through social media under the slogan "no more FARC", the event brought over two million people around the world to the streets (CNMH 2013: 68, *El Tiempo* 2008). It was followed a month later by another large-scale mobilization commemorating the victims of state and paramilitary violence. For a comparative analysis of these mobilizations and their representation in the media, see Jaramillo Correa and Molina Ríos 2010.

²¹⁸ Information taken from interview codes BOG1, BOG2, BOG4, BOG6, BOG10, BOG 11, BOG16, BOG19, BOG22, VVO 23, VVO 23a, VVO 24, VVO24a, VVO 25a, VVO26, VVO 27, VVO27a, VVO28, VVO28a, VVO29, VVO30, VVO31, VVO31a, PSTO37, PSTO45, AGC database.

and when the security situation allowed for it. According to interviewees, the training entailed discussions, readings, the presentation of audio-visual documents, the revision of the FARC-EP's code of conduct, and the analysis of news. In sum, these findings can be interpreted as a strong indicator that the FARC-EP maintains a political dimension, and that a considerable number of former FARC-EP militants – even below the leadership level – possess a political formation that will help them remain active participants in local socio-political processes. As highlighted by ICG (2016a: 13): “While deeply involved in illegal economies, political aspirations and engagement at the local level remain fundamental to the group’s identity”. Next to its political identity, the FARC-EP has also been said to be characterized by strong in-group ties and cohesion as a result of its ideological orientation and hierarchical structure (see CNMH 2014: 298, see also Nussio and Howe 2012). It can also be attributed to the long duration of individuals’ militancy. As many FARC-EP militants joined the group at an early age, they spent a considerable share of their lifetime with the group.²¹⁹ For instance, of 39 individually disengaged former FARC-EP militants interviewed in the framework of the AGC project, 26 had stayed with the group for a minimum of five years, half of them even ten and more years.²²⁰ In comparison, only 4 of 17 interviewed paramilitary militants had spent five or more years in paramilitary ranks (interview codes BOG21, PSTO41, PSTO44, PSTO46, AGC database), and only one person spent more than ten years (interview code PSTO44, *ibid.*). The identity-giving pull of a political vision can thus serve as a building block for the FARC-EP’s future post-militancy organizational processes.

However, analysts have also highlighted that the group’s cohesion will largely depend of mid-level leadership. Because of their knowledge of the territory and the population, their unique position between the troops and the decision-makers, and their role in generating

²¹⁹ Of the 39 former FARC-EP militants interviewed for the AGC project, 21 were below the age of 18 upon enlistment, with 12 of them even below the age of 15 (interview codes BOG1, BOG2, BOG4, BOG5, BOG7, BOG8, BOG9, BOG10, BOG18, BOG19, VVO23, VVO23a, VVO25a, VVO27, VVO27a, VVO28, VVO28a, VVO29, VVO29a, PSTO35, PSTO36, AGC database). This small sample confirms findings from elsewhere suggesting that about 50% of former FARC-EP combatants were recruited as minors (see Maihold 2017).

²²⁰ Between five and nine years: BOG1, BOG3, BOG4, BOG7, BOG17, VVO23a, VVO25, VVO27, VVO29a, VVO31a, PSTO35, PSTO38, PSTO49. Ten years and more: BOG2, BOG5, BOG12, BOG13, BOG15, BOG18, BOG19, BOG22, VVO24, VVO28a, VVO29, PSTO45, PSTO46a, AGC database)

income for the organization, mid-level commanders have long been considered vital for the survival of the FARC-EP as an armed group. Now, they are also believed to be essential elements for the success of any peace process, not only because they can help prevent defection or non-compliance with the negotiated agreements, but also due to their spoiling potential. Nussio and Howe (2012: 62) found that mid-level commanders “are the sub-group most likely to experience loss in terms of status and economy as the result of a demobilization process, and therefore should be recognized for their role as potential spoilers.” So far, however, no special measures have been taken to specifically address the FARC-EP’s mid-level commanders (see FIP 2005b), even though a new paragraph, added after the re-negotiation of the peace agreement, holds former guerrilla commanders and the leaders of the new political party accountable for actively contributing to the success of former combatants’ transition to civilian life (*Acuerdo Final* 2016b: 77).

8.3.3 THE FARC-EP’S CAPITAL OF RELATIONS

Turning away from the FARC-EP’s internal bonds and assessing their capital of relations beyond their members, it has been argued (CNHM 2014: 13) that the key of the FARC-EP’s relative success can be found in its complex relationships with the civilian population in the areas of its influence: a highly ambivalent mixture of representing peasants’ political demands, providing *de facto* governmental services for local communities, including security and conflict management (see also interview code BOG15, AGC database), on the one hand, and coercive and massively abusive treatment of local populations on the other hand. Despite this ambivalent relationship, the FARC-EP has managed to build a large support network in the areas they have been operating in (ICG 2016a: 13). In fact, in the vast majority of the 190 municipalities the FARC-EP is active in, the group has been present for over two decades (ICG 2016a: 13). Therefore, analysts have been warning that “[I]ntentionally destroying this social anchor might lead to fragmentation and further increase their vulnerability to remobilization or engagement in illegal activities” (ibid.). In addition, the FARC-EP also maintains connections with social movements that share the FARC-EP’s political vision, such

as the *Marcha Patriótica* (Patriotic March²²¹) that emerged in 2012 – the year peace negotiations with the FARC-EP officially started – and has since then been subject to threats and assassinations of its members, or the revitalized political party *Unión Patriótica* and the Communist Party (Álvaro 2016). However, while the FARC-EP has managed to remain influential at a local level and among specific sectors close to their political program, this will not necessarily translate into a larger political success at the regional or national level, where many left-wing sectors and political parties are highly critical towards the FARC-EP. In addition, the implementation of national peace agreements at the local and regional level have proved challenging in the past. The strong regional diversity of the country, both in terms of state presence and conflict dynamics, has made the political participation of former combatant at the regional level more difficult (Rampf et al 2012: 5) and might limit the electoral opportunities of party politics, as discussed below.

8.3.4 POST-MILITANCY ORGANIZATIONAL PROCESSES: INNOVATIONS AND CHALLENGES

Against the background outlined above, the peace accord has already laid the groundwork for former militants' political and socio-economic organizational processes. First of all, the political transition of the FARC-EP will be facilitated by the creation of a political party or movement. To this end, chapter 3.2.1.1 of the Final Accord (2016b: 69-72) outlines support in the necessary legal registration process, special funding and technical capacity building measures, access to mass media, security guarantees for party members and leaders, as well as guarantees for representation in Colombia's Congress (five seats guaranteed both in the Senate and Parliament) for the duration of two constitutional periods as of July 2018. These measures are all the more important, as the FARC-EP already looks back on one failed transition process in the 1980s. Subsequently, in late 2016, the FARC-EP announced the set-

²²¹ The *Marcha Patriótica* is best understood as a platform or movement of movements, in which members are indirectly affiliated through their – in many cases peasant or ethnic – organizations. According to numbers provided by the *Marcha Patriótica*, 124 members have been assassinated since its emergence, as a result of its perceived closeness to the FARC-EP (Sánchez 2016b). See also www.marchapatriotica.org/ (accessed February 20, 2017).

up of a political party called “Voices of Peace and Reconciliation” (*Voces de Paz y Reconciliación*), which so far is headed by civilians close to the FARC-EP’s political agenda.²²²

Chapter 3.2.2.2 of the Final Accord (2016b: 72) outlines the creation of a Center for Thought and Political Formation (*Centro de Pensamiento y Formación Política*). Conceived as a not-for-profit organization with initial funding from the government (until 2022), the objective of the center will be to promote studies and investigations in the field of social sciences and to design and promote programs for political formation. This will potentially help the FARC-EP uphold their internal cohesion involving core political themes, while at the same time engaging in collaboration with externals.

Next to the set-up of a political party and think tank, chapter 3.2.2.1 of the peace accord also foresees an organization in charge of facilitating the socio-economic aspects of its members’ post-militancy trajectories. In the form of third-sector “shared social economies” (*Economías Sociales del Común*, ECOMUN) (*Acuerdo Final* 2016b: 72) across the national territory, the FARC-EP plans to associate its former members in collective micro-businesses, thereby upholding the idea of a collective transition. Projects will be financed by the government with funding administered directly by ECOMUN (*ibid.*). It is particularly interesting that the peace agreement does not once mention the involvement of the ACR in supporting former combatants’ post-militancy trajectories (see also Álvaro 2016). As highlighted earlier, the FARC-EP is highly suspicious of the ACR’s work and has thus preferred to design a completely independent process. This does not, however, exclude individual former FARC-EP combatants from joining the ACR’s reintegration scheme if they wish to (see Resolution 0075/2016, *Agencia Colombiana para la Reintegración* 2016c). Instead, the agreement (*Acuerdo Final* 2016b: 72) proposes the creation of a National Council

²²² According to the press, the most well-known lead figures of this newly established party are student leader Jairo Rivera, professors Francisco Tolosa and Jairo Estrada (*Universidad Nacional*), former UP leader Imelda Daza, and Pablo Julio Cruz from the Communist Youth Movement (Albiñana 2016). With the strategy of putting non-FARC-EP members in the lead positions of this new political entity, the FARC-EP intends to maintain a low profile, protecting and preparing the way for its lead figures until the movement can fully and regularly participate in the presidential elections of 2018 (*ibid.*).

for Reincorporation (*Consejo Nacional de Reincorporación*, CNR) which will be composed of two governmental and two FARC-EP representatives and complemented by regional councils to define activities, establish a chronogram, and monitor the reincorporation process which also contains specific regulations for minors.²²³

It remains to be seen to what extent demobilized FARC-EP militants will prefer their leaders' collective trajectory or switch to the ACR's reintegration process, which will be a voluntary option once the transition period comes to an end. While it has been outlined that the group does have strong in-group ties, there might also be militants who prefer to no longer be associated with the FARC-EP. Forced recruitment,²²⁴ hardship, abuse or general disillusionment have been common reasons for desertion. However, in a group that fiercely sanctions deserters, there still might be a considerable amount of people who have remained with the group due to coercion or fear.

To summarize, the agreement stimulates both political as well as socio-economic organizational processes, and establishes security measures for protecting former combatants' safety. Despite much higher institutional experience today, the FARC-EP has pushed for an innovative self-driven collective reintegration model, whereby former militants themselves are in the lead of shaping the reintegration process through the ECOMUN and the National Council for Reincorporation.

However, a number of challenges remain. First of all, the self-driven reintegration process has to-date been poorly described in detail. As mentioned, it yet remains to be seen whether rank-and-file militants will stick to this prescribed model. In addition, it is only speculative at the time whether the ECOMUN's projects will function. Experiences with collective income-generating projects in the past have demonstrated the difficulty to provide

²²³ Chapter 3.2.2.5 of the Final Accord (2016b: 74) stipulates that minors will be treated under the Victim's Law. This will also entail a special prioritization of their access to health, education and family reunification, as long as this is in the interest of the minor.

²²⁴ While according to the group's own code of conduct, admission into the ranks of the FARC-EP is on a voluntary basis, forced recruitment is not unheard of. In addition, it can be argued that FARC-EP's recruits often join the group at such a young age that it is highly questionable whether their "voluntary" enlistment is truly based on a conscious decision (see also Maihold 2017). Again, out of 39 former FARC-EP members interviewed for the AGC project, four reported that they had been forced to join the group (interview codes BOG7, BOG15, BOG16, PSTO 35 AGC database).

sustainable economic opportunities for former combatants. In addition, while the provisions regarding different organizational processes on the political and socio-economic level seem promising in maintaining cohesion among former militants, the interesting question is whether they will also be able to open spaces for re-encounter with social sectors that do not share the same opinions, and whether they will facilitate identity accommodation processes or reinforce closed group identities. Against the background of stigmatization outlined above and its relatively poor capital of relations beyond political alliances, the FARC-EP's post-militancy organizational processes will not only have the task of facilitating former combatants' transitions to civilian life by providing former militants with a social reference system and an identity beyond militancy, as well as supporting their socio-economic life trajectories, but also of reaching out to society and building bridges, including towards the peace movement, sectors of society that do not share their opinions, and FARC-EP deserters – still regarded as traitors to the organization – and former militants of other insurgency groups. Specifically regarding the latter, it will be interesting to see whether female former combatants in the FARC-EP, which is estimated to consist of 40% women militants (Ospina Restrepo 2003: 144), will play a lead role in promoting re-encounter with other former insurgency movements, e.g. by joining existing initiatives such as the National Network of Women Ex-Combatants, and thereby facilitating rapprochement to organizations that demobilized in the early 1990s. Finally, and as a lesson learned from previous transition instances, processes of rapprochement and re-encounter must also consequently address the victims of the conflict, and in this context particularly the victims of the FARC-EP.

8.3.5 STRUCTURAL REFORM AND VICTIMS' RIGHTS: LESSONS LEARNED FROM EARLIER PROCESSES

Contrary to the peace agreements in the 1990s, the FARC-EP's peace accord sets victims' rights and reparations center stage, with point five of the agreements, entitled "Victims", covering more than 60 pages alone. This was heavily based on the lessons learned from the Justice and Peace Law and the realization that the peace accord's legitimacy will partly depend on its ability to satisfy victims' needs and rights. Hence, the agreement puts in place an Integral Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition System (*Sistema Integral de Verdad, Justicia, Reparación y No Repetición*) with three main components: a truth commission, non-judicial mechanisms to promote investigations and sanction grave human

rights violations and infractions to international humanitarian law under the Special Peace Jurisdiction, as well as ordinary judicial mechanisms to investigate and sanction crimes committed by paramilitaries' successor organizations. Regarding transitional justice mechanisms, the agreement indeed stipulates that "the largest possible" (*Acuerdo Final* 2016b: 148) amnesty will be provided for political crimes committed in the context of armed conflict. However, there are also crimes exempt from amnesty, including crimes against humanity, systematic international humanitarian law infractions, kidnapping, torture, extrajudicial executions, forced disappearances, sexual violence, the recruitment of minors, and forced displacement. Those responsible for these crimes will be investigated by special Peace Tribunals and subject to penalties ranging from five to eight years in prison. In order to benefit from these special transitional justice regulations, former militants must, however, collaborate with truth-telling efforts to ensure victims' reparations and guarantees of non-repetition. In addition, under the heading "Integral Rural Reform", the peace accord (*Acuerdo Final* 2016b: 13) foresees a "massive formalization" of land registrations, involving seven million hectares of land within the next 12 years, to address the structural problems that hamper the proper implementation of Law 1448/2011.²²⁵

Finally, the FARC-EP has also committed itself to implement "acts of reparation", including for instance participation in the reconstruction of destroyed infrastructure in regions most affected by the conflict, demining activities, or programs aimed to substitute illegal crop plantations (*Acuerdo Final* 2016b: 179). The organizations emerging from the peace process with the FARC-EP could potentially take on a leadership role in planning and implementing such activities, thereby promoting spaces of re-encounter for their members with local communities. Currently, it remains to be seen whether these efforts will suffice to create an environment conducive to re-encounter and, eventually, reconciliation.

²²⁵ As only one out of three displaced peasants possess a formal title to their (former) lands, legally reclaiming lost property will remain difficult (see *Planta* 2016b: 11).

Throughout field research in the framework of this study, many examples were brought up of the power of local re-encounter through well-facilitated dialogue between ex-combatants and community members. This demonstrates not only the capacity of ex-combatants to use their own story for reconciliation processes, but also the capacity of the community to deal with such stories and to recognize the structural social problems that are often at the heart of militant careers. However, there are many factors that make such re-encounters difficult or even impossible, including the necessity of many ex-combatants to hide their militant past and the degree the civilian population was affected by violence and trauma in a context where victims' needs and concerns have remained largely unaddressed. Regarding the latter point, it still remains to be seen whether the peace agreement will keep its promises in terms of political reforms and victims' reparation. Despite the ultimately positive reception of a peace agreement having been signed, observers do not cease to repeat the many challenges remaining in Colombia's path to peace. Whether the Santos government will be able to put an end to Colombia's history of violence is only partly dependent upon his success at the negotiation table. Analysts have been continuously highlighting that many structural problems beyond silencing arms remain to be resolved. Besides the specific questions addressing the post-militancy life trajectories of former FARC-EP (and eventually ELN)²²⁶ combatants, the government must also tackle the desperate socio-economic situation of large parts of the population, ex-combatants and non-ex-combatants alike,²²⁷ rampant social violence, as well as organized violence against socio-political activists,²²⁸ and the persistence or emergence of

²²⁶ After three years of exploratory talks, the government and the ELN announced that an official negotiation process would start in October 2016 in Quito, Ecuador (*Semana* 2016d). However, the negotiations came to a rocky start and their official opening was postponed multiple times until February 2017. Negotiations are expected to remain difficult. This is partly because the ELN has a less centralized organizational structure than the FARC-EP, and therefore slower decision-making processes (see ICG 2014: 5, see also *Comisión de Superación de la Violencia* 1992: 109-113 for a historical explanation of the genesis of the ELN), and partly because the ELN's preferred negotiation format foresees broad civil-society participation, making negotiations potentially lengthier (see *Semana* n/a).

²²⁷ In a 2016 interview, the director of the ACR highlighted the need to improve the socio-economic situation of all population segments, highlighting that while 69% of former combatants were working in the informal sector, this was also true for 51% of all Colombians (Castrillon 2016).

²²⁸ Towards the end of 2016, reports of political violence against social and political activists were

(new) illegal armed structures that control the population. In addition, the government must also continue its efforts in uncovering the responsibilities of the diverse conflict actors in Colombia, including the statutory forces.

As highlighted by Theidon (2007: 74), “multiple transitions” at the level of former combatants, the government and society at large are needed in order to support post-militancy trajectories. Otherwise, there is a risk that the whole transition process remains a “‘façade’ [...] that does not reach beyond the flat shiny surface of the television screen” (ibid.: 90) and leads to contradictory post-militancy trajectories. The dangers lying ahead might best be summed up by the following interview passage with a former guerrilla militant, turned member of an ex-combatant peacebuilding NGO, turned would-be BACRIM recruit (personal interview, anonymous):

A: “Three years ago, I had a friend who was active with the paramilitaries. Well, now they are BACRIM. And he visited me and I was going through a crisis, ten months without work. Well, my partner took care of the kids but it is not the same, I don’t like being dependent, this always creates problems. So my friend said ‘I’ll give you four million pesos, let’s go’. He pushed me to come with him, telling me that I would mainly work outside [in the city], and I was about to accept.

Q: So you are saying that you were ready to work as an urban paramilitary?

A: Yes, I had already told my partner ‘if there is no job in the next two months, I’ll leave’.

Q: What made you change your mind?

A: My friends... they told me not to join the AUC, they told me to wait, that something would come up. [...] The thing is that you do have the experience and you know that it is rough. But money is power and everybody wants to have it. If

rising. A press communication by international civil society organizations (*Espacio de Cooperación para la Paz* 2016) endorsing the peace agreement highlighted their concern about more than 80 violent actions perpetrated against social leaders, including assassinations, threats, attacks, robberies and harassment between September and November 2016.

they would come right now [again in a situation of economic despair] and tell me 'look we'll pay you that much', I would do it.

Q: But wouldn't that be a moral problem for you, with all the [conflict resolution] training and experience you have gathered?

A: *Of course, it is a contradiction in life, but that's how things are."*

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ANNEX

ANNEX 1: INTERVIEWS AND PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

Figure 8: List of interviews

Organization and function	Date of interview(s)	Place
Researcher, <i>Universidad Nacional</i>	December 14, 2012	Bogotá
Project coordinator, <i>Planeta Paz</i> , former member of the M-19	December 16, 2012	Bogotá
PAPDRB director, ex-member of the EPL	December 22, 2012	Bogotá
ACR staff member for economic and social reintegration (three people) and staff member from the planning and research department	December 22, 2012	Bogotá
<i>Red Nacional de Mujeres Excombatientes</i> co-founder, former member of the M-19	January 17, 2012	Bogotá
M-19 former members (three people)	January 19, 2012	Bogotá
Former PAPDRB director	January 23, 2012	Bogotá
ACR local service center staff	January 26, 2012	Bogotá
<i>Fundación Líderes de Paz</i> member	February 02 and May 24, 2012	Bogotá
<i>Fundación Líderes de Paz</i> member and co-founder	May 02, 2012	Bogotá
<i>Fundación Líderes de Paz</i> member and co-founder	February 06 and May 04, 2012	Bogotá
ACR local service center staff	February 10, 2012	Bogotá
<i>Fundación para la Paz y el Medio Ambiente</i> members and co-founders (two people)	February 20, 2012	Bogotá

<i>Fundación Surcando Caminos</i> founder and member (two people)	February 27, 2012	Bogotá
<i>Fundación Sol y Tierra</i> director, former member of the MAQL	March 11, 2012	Popayán
<i>Fundación Sol y Tierra</i> member, former member of the MAQL	March 12, 2012	Popayán
<i>Fundación Sol y Tierra</i> members, former director and former member of the MAQL (two people)	March 13, 2012	Popayán
ONE OG founding members (two people)	May 04, 2012	Bogotá
<i>Corporación ANDES</i> founding member	May 08, 2012	Bogotá
<i>Red de Reporteros de Convivencia</i> member	May 10, 2012	Bogotá
PAPDRB staff, former member of the EPL	May 11, 2012	Bogotá
<i>Corporación ANDES</i> member	May 18, 2012	Bogotá
<i>Corporación ANDES</i> member	May 20, 2012	Bogotá
<i>Centro Mundial</i> staff	May 28, 2012	Bogotá
<i>Fundación para la Reconciliación</i> project coordinator	May 30, 2012	Bogotá
<i>Fundación para la Reconciliación</i> project coordinator	June 01, 2012	Bogotá
<i>Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris</i> member	June 08, 2012	Bogotá

Source: Author's notes.

Figure 9: Overview of participant observation

Participants	Date and place	Activity
Facilitator (former ELN member), two PAPDRB staff, approximately 30 participants	February 07, 2012, PAPDRB office, Bogotá	Workshop PAPDRB: "Citizen Spaces"
Workshop facilitator and 12 participants	February 10, 2012, ACR service center Rafael Uribe, Bogotá	Workshop ACR: "My Productive Project" for demobilized women or female family members of a demobilized person
Workshop facilitator and 12 participants	February 17, 2012, ACR service center Rafael Uribe, Bogotá	Workshop ACR: "My Productive Project" for demobilized women or female family members of a demobilized person
PAPDRB staff, several representatives from <i>Corporación ANDES</i> , one representative each from New Life for Demobilized People (<i>Nueva Vida para los Desmovilizados</i> , NUVIPADES), DDR Observatory of the <i>Universidad Nacional</i> , FUNDAPAM, and three representatives of demobilized people from the city of Barrancabermeja.	May 04, 2012, PAPDRB office, Bogotá	Municipal Roundtable Meeting (<i>Mesa Distrital</i>)
PACPR staff, several representatives from <i>Corporación ANDES</i> , one representative each from NUVIPADES, DDR Observatory of the <i>Universidad Nacional</i> , FUNDAPAM.	May 09, 2012, PAPDRB office, Bogotá	Municipal Roundtable Meeting (<i>Mesa Distrital</i>)

Source: Author's notes.

ANNEX 2: DESCRIPTION OF ORGANIZATIONS THAT TOOK PART IN THIS STUDY

Corporación ANDES (ANDES Corporation)

According to one of the founders of the *Corporación ANDES*, the organization was created by a group of former ELN members who knew each other from their militancy, as they belonged to the same war front, and who re-met in one of the Ministry of Internal Affairs housing schemes for demobilized people (*albergues*). The organization was headed by their former commander. However, all but one of the founding members left Bogotá, and that remaining person had to single-handedly manage the organization, which consisted of 130 members. At the beginning, the organization did not expand beyond the capital for two reasons: First of all, it seemed more important to strengthen and consolidate the existing members first. Second, security issues prevented members from inviting additional (not as well known and hence less trusted) people to join the organization.

At the beginning, the organization was called the National Association of the Demobilized (*Asociación Nacional de Desmovilizados*), and its main objective was to defend and claim the rights of demobilized ex-combatants, such as their monthly stipend from the ACR. They also managed to receive funding from the EU to implement a community-based reintegration project in Santa Rosa, an outskirt of Bogotá with a particularly high percentage of demobilized persons. The project offered cultural activities such as dance, theater and music interventions. However, financial mismanagement got the organization into trouble and they decided not to engage in further projects. Instead, they opted for renovating the organization's profile, including its membership structure and name. While the organization consisted only of ELN members at the beginning, it is now open to also include former paramilitary fighters. This was mainly a result of personal interactions and friendships between members of the corporation and acquaintances. The organization is today led by a steering committee (*junta directiva*) consisting of four people and has about 1,000 members nation-wide, 700 of which in Bogotá alone, according to their steering committee.

Finally, the organization has decided to also invite non-demobilized people to join them. This is linked to their broadened ambition to transform into a political movement. These transformations are also reflected in a change of the organization's name, which reads *Corporación ANDES (ANDES Corporation)* since 2011.

Corporación Surcando Caminos (Making your way Corporation)

According to its founder, the *Corporación Surcando Caminos* emerged from an organizational process of ex-combatants aiming to protect their families and improve their lives as well as the lives of fellow community members. The 25 to 30 members got to know each other while attending the ACR's educational program and had originally belonged to different groups, including the AUC, ELN and FARC-EP. They established links to other organizations in the neighbourhood such as the Displaced People's Association in Ciudad Bolívar (*Asociación de Desplazados de Ciudad Bolívar*), and the *Asociación Redfanuvi*, an NGO by and for afro-Colombians, and joined a meeting platform for various civil society organizations in Ciudad Bolívar (*Espacio cívico de Ciudad Bolívar*), thereby trying to promote ex-combatants' participation in local socio-political spaces and community processes. Examples for the corporation's activities include a three-day pedagogical excursion for ex-combatants and their families to the outskirts of Bogotá. The excursion was financed by the EU and was meant to incentivize former combatants to take active roles within the organization. Other activities consisted in small-scale food distributions. Many other ideas for potential activities were mentioned, such as organizing football matches, health brigades, and a pilot project for security within Ciudad Bolívar. However, without any economical or institutional or even organizational support, these activities remain ideas and dreams for the moment.

Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris (New Rainbow Corporation)

The *Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris* is a product of the negotiations between the government and the CRS in 1994. According to one of its members, the organization went through various phases. At first, from 1995 to 2000, the organization was dedicated to facilitating the post-militancy trajectories of demobilized CRS members, with regional offices in Antioquia and Sucre. However, as time passed, members decided to expand the organization's areas of activities. Incorporating non-demobilized experts and creating alliances with academia, the organization successfully managed to receive funding from international development cooperation after governmental support for reintegration ended in 2002 (the so-called *punto final* – final point). As of today, the organization's main activities are centred in Bogotá, but there are also small teams working in Cartagena and Sincelejo. These are, however, project-bound teams that only work temporarily within the organizational framework. Most, or at least half of the team members are non-demobilized people that did not belong to the CRS. The organization also

maintains a conflict observatory, which is well known for its reports, its applied research and its policy recommendations. It also runs practical projects, providing guidance and organizational capacity building for victims' organizations or technical assistance for local development projects. The focus of these practical projects, however, is always linked to armed conflict, where the organization feels it has its expertise (personal interview, *Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris* member, June 8, 2012, Bogotá^{xxxiii}). According to Pinto Borrego et al. (2002: 20), the *Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris* is “the most solid” organization to emerge from a peace process with the insurgent movements in the 1990s. At the time of field research (2012), the organization was again undertaking a shift in its profile, setting up a new website with a stronger focus on political analysis and journalism.

Fundación Cultura Democrática (Democratic Culture Foundation)

Although co-founded by former EPL members and non-combatants, this organization was never thought of as an organization of demobilized people, but as a platform to work on topics related to human rights, conflict resolution and reintegration. It was created simultaneously as the *Fundación Progresar* (see below), for which it also implemented a book project on the history of the EPL (Villaraga Sarmiento and Plazas 1994). The small-scale foundation still exists to-date (December 2016), and has been very successful in producing academic studies. Most importantly, it has been publishing a several volume-strong compilation of analysis and original documents on the history of peace processes in Colombia, which is being funded by international organizations such as the EU, the IOM, and USAID.

Fundación Progresar (Moving forward Foundation)

The *Fundación Progresar* emerged from peace negotiations between the government and the EPL. It served as an intermediary between the government and ex-combatants of the EPL with regards to the facilitation of post-militancy trajectories. While its main office was in Bogotá, several smaller offices opened in cities such as Cali, Barranquilla, Urabá, Medellín, and Bucaramanga, in order to facilitate the reintegration of about 2,000 former EPL members. At first, the foundation received economic support by the government, but they additionally managed to raise funds from international NGOs and the international development cooperation sector. However, over time, the foundation ran out of money. When internal divisions over the organization's political profile were added its financial problems, the foundation was closed

down. However, one of its former local branches in Cúcuta had become an independent human rights NGO under the same name.

Fundación Sol y Tierra (Sun and Earth Foundation)

The *Fundación Sol y Tierra* took up work accompanying the post-militancy trajectories of demobilized former MAQL combatants after the signature of a peace accord between the government and the MAQL in 1991. However, from its beginning on, an important part of the foundation consisted in providing development assistance to the indigenous community in the Cauca region, where the MAQL had been active. Aside from governmental funding, the foundation received support from the EU, which was used for instance for a large educational project and a productive agriculture project. When governmental funds ceased in 2002, the foundation had to seek further financial support from international development cooperation. Fortunately, with the money collected from all demobilized MAQL members, they had managed to buy a house in the city of Popayán that still serves as the foundation's office. However, difficulties to raise funds for further project work have brought the foundation close to shutting down. At the time of field research in 2012, the foundation could only survive by renting the first floor of the house to a pharmacy, and had only two people left to run it. Nonetheless, interviewees asserted that despite its financial difficulties, the foundation represented an important meeting place for former MAQL members.

Fundación para la Atención y Defensa de los Desmovilizados, FUNDADEM (Foundation for the Assistance and the Defense of Demobilized People) / Fundación Líderes de Paz (Peace Leaders Foundation)

As recalled by one of the co-founders of *Fundación Líderes de Paz*, the organization has its beginnings in 2004 when several ex-combatants living in the Ministry of Internal Affairs' housing scheme organized a working group (*mesa de trabajo*) or negotiation team to claim the economic benefits that had been promised but not yet paid to them. Out of this organizational process, FUNDADEM was created, which however only ran for a year. After the collapse of FUNDADEM, several ex-combatants made use of the training opportunities provided by the Reference and Opportunity Center and got involved with the work of the Foundation for Reconciliation (*Fundación por la Reconciliación*), receiving training in conflict resolution. In 2007, 17 people decided to legalize their efforts under the name *Fundación Líderes de Paz*. The foundation was composed of ex-combatants from different groups including AUC, M-19, ELN

and FARC-EP and also involved non-ex-combatants. As one founding member recalled, their first project was financed jointly by the Mayor's Office of Bogotá and the IOM and aimed to capacitate former combatants and community members under the heading "Critical-constructive competencies for exercising your rights in Bosa, Soacha and Ciudad Bolívar" (*Competencias críticas y propositivos para el ejercicio de los derechos en Bosa, Soacha y Ciudad Bolívar*). The foundation managed to raise funds for different projects including social work with children, youth, and victims in several neighbourhoods of Bogotá following this first project. They also received some support from the PAPDRB, such as an office space. However, the members of the foundation had to earn their living with other jobs. At the time of research, the *Fundación Líderes de Paz* had reached a difficult turning point. With only three members active in the organization – one heading off to a new job appointment at the Colombian Coast and the remaining two struggling with personal difficulties – the survival of the organization appeared uncertain.

Fundación para la Paz y el Medio Ambiente, FUNDAPAM (Foundation for Peace and the Environment)

According to the founder of FUNDAPAM, the organization has been working since 2007 to prevent new recruitment in 16 departments, 210 municipalities and 20 districts (*corregimientos*). With school workshops, the organization covers four topics: Education for democracy, non-violent conflict resolution, gender equality and rules of civil behavior (*normas de civilidad*). They receive funding from the National Defense Ministry and the American Embassy. In addition, the organization was about to set up a solidarity farm for about 20 families run by demobilized and displaced people. Its members are mostly former middle-rank FARC-EP militants, with only one former ELN member.

ONE OG

ONE OG differs substantially from the other organizations because it is thought of as private business and not as a non-profit organization. However, its owners claim that they will contribute to peacebuilding with their unique business idea. A former FARC-EP member and a pensioned military officer, they met during the demobilization process, became friends and finally decided to start their own company in October 2011. By the time we met, they had recently opened their first paint-ball site and were exploring two additional business ideas. They

explained that their objective was to give an example how former conflict actors can work together for reconciliation and peace.

Red Nacional de Mujeres Excombatientes (National Network of Female Ex-combatants)*²³⁰ – *Colectivo de Mujeres Excombatientes (Female Ex-combatants Collective)

According to a co-founder of the *Red Nacional de Mujeres Excombatientes*, the network is an initiative for and by women, driven forward by a smaller circle called the *Colectivo de Mujeres Excombatientes*, which emerged in 1999 out of the desire of former female combatants (initially from the M-19) to reflect upon and make their individual and collective experience of militancy visible. The network aims to make former *guerrilleras* (female guerrillas) more visible to the public and to activate their participation in politics. A first national encounter was organized in 2000 with support from the World Bank's funding scheme for women's organizations. 130 women from 20 different cities and six different guerrilla organizations (M-19, MAQL, EPL, PRT, MIR-COAR, CRS) participated in a three-day seminar to discuss the challenges of their return to civilian life and their current situation. This was followed by an international exchange in 2002, involving female ex-combatants from El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua and regional encounters in Colombia in Zipaquirá, Neiva, Cali, Ibagué, Bucaramanga and Cartagena, which were attended by 320 women in total. Throughout these regional encounters, the idea of a book project evolved. At the time of field research (2012), an edited volume containing 12 life stories was planned. Overall, the network was facing many challenges to keep its members connected and raise funds for further activities. However, there were also plans to reactivate the network.

Red de Reporteros de Convivencia (Reporters' Network for Peaceful Coexistence)

The *Red de Reporteros de Convivencia* is an initiative promoted by Bogotá's municipal reintegration program that aims to make local experiences of peaceful coexistence visible and enhance the exchange between local journalists and community members. One of its main objectives is for its associated reporters to produce and distribute free-of-charge print and audio-

²³⁰ The information from the interview was enriched by information provided by a paper presentation by Sánchez-Blake 2011.

visual material about experiences, news and events related to DDR processes and other themes related to peaceful coexistence within local neighborhoods (see also *Buque de Papel* 2009). According to one of its members, the *Red de Reporteros de Convivencia* was founded after a number of workshops provided by Bogotá's municipal reintegration program and started as a loose collective of ex-combatants from different groups, including former guerrilla members and ex-paramilitary. However, at the time of field research in 2012, only one person, a former guerrilla member, from the original network was still active in the network, which had now lost its ex-combatant character and had been joined by new participants without a demobilization background.

ANNEX 3: REINTEGRATION PROCESSES IN COLOMBIA 1990-2016

Figure 10: Chronology of reintegration processes: Groups and numbers

Government and Year	Group	Approx. numbers
Virgilio Barco (1990)	<i>Movimiento 19 de Abril (M-19)</i>	900
César Gaviria (1991)	<i>Ejército Popular de Liberación (EPL)</i>	2,000
César Gaviria (1991)	<i>Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (PRT)</i>	200
César Gaviria (1991)	<i>Movimiento Armado Quintín Lame (MAQL)</i>	157
César Gaviria (1991)	<i>Comandos Ernesto Rojas (CER)</i>	25
César Gaviria (1994)	<i>Corriente de Renovación Socialista (CRS)</i>	433
César Gaviria (1994)	<i>Milicias Urbanas de Medellín (Milicias Populares del Pueblo y para el Pueblo, Milicias Independientes del Valle de Aburrá y Milicias Metropolitanas de Medellín)</i>	650
César Gaviria (1994)	<i>Frente Francisco Garnica</i>	150
César Gaviria (1991)	<i>Autodefensas Campesinas del Magdalena Medio</i>	200
Ernesto Samper (1996)	<i>Frente Bernardo Franco (EPL splinter group)</i>	200
Ernesto Samper (1998)	<i>Movimiento Independiente Revolucionario (MIR-COAR)</i>	171
Andrés Pastrana (1998-2002)	Individual disengagement	2,600
Álvaro Uribe Vélez (2003-2006)	Collective demobilization of paramilitary units	31,671
Álvaro Uribe Vélez (2005-2008)	Collective demobilization of FARC-EP factions: <i>Frente Milicias Urbanas Norma Patricia Galeano de las FARC-EP, Compañía Cacica Gaitana de las FARC-EP,²³¹ Milicias Urbanas de Florida de la Columna Gabriel Galvis de las FARC-EP, and ELN dissident groups: Ejército Revolucionario Guevarista (ERG) and Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP)</i>	200
Álvaro Uribe Vélez (2002-2010), Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2016)	Individual disengagement, principally of FARC-EP militants	26,490
Total		66,047

Sources: ACR (2016a), FIP (2014), ODDR (2012b), Cárdenas Sarrias (2012), CNRR (2011), Pinto Borrego et al. (2002).

²³¹ The alleged *Compañía Cacica Gaitana de las FARC-EP* was later exposed as a fraud, to which the by then High Commissioner for Peace Luis Carlos Restrepo had to respond legally (see *El Espectador* 2015).

Figure 11: Evolution of the institutional and legal framework for reintegration

Timeline	Relevant legal and institutional innovations referred to in the text
1982	Law 35/1982 introduces the possibility of legal benefits and participation in socio-economic rehabilitation and security programs for disengaging members of the guerrilla forces.
1983	Decree 240/1983 sets up a presidential advisory commission with the Office of the High Councilor for Peace (<i>Oficina del Alto Comisionado para la Paz</i>). Under changing names, this entity has until today remained in charge of advising and accompanying governmental dialogue and negotiation efforts with armed groups.
1985	Law 49/1985 enables the president to grant amnesty.
1989	Law 77/1989 further specifies the president's possibilities to grant amnesty for political crimes and crimes committed in connection to a political crime, both for individuals and collectives.
1990	Decree 314/1990 sets up the National Normalization Council (<i>Consejo Nacional de Normalización</i>).
1991	Decree 213/1991 further regulates the amnesty provisions for political crimes and crimes committed in connection to a political crime, both for individuals and collectives. The National Office for Reinsertion (<i>Oficina Nacional para la Reinserción</i>) is set up to attend the demobilized population. The new Constitution of 1991 introduces the "right to peace" in Article 22 (<i>Constitución Política 1991</i>).
1991	Decree 2884/1991 sets up the Presidential Program for Reinsertion Department (<i>Dirección del Programa Presidencial para la Reinserción</i>)
1993	The Pact to Consolidate the Agreements (<i>Pacto por la Consolidación de los Acuerdos</i>) is signed with the M-19, PRT, EPL, MAQL and the <i>Commandos Ernesto Rojas</i> . It sets up the National Consultation Committee (<i>Comité Nacional de Consulta y Concertación</i>) as a liaison mechanisms for joint planning between the government and former combatant representatives. The CRS signs a similar agreement in 1996.
1994	Decree 1385/1994 enables guerrilla members who "voluntarily abandon subversive organizations" to join existing reintegration schemes, thereby establishing a framework for individual disengagement.

	The governmental reintegration policy is placed within the Social Solidarity Network under the name “Special Office for Reinsertion” (<i>Red de Solidaridad Social, Secretaría Especial para la Reinserción</i>). The Operational Committee for the Handing in of Weapons (<i>Comité Operativo para la Dejaración de Armas, CODA</i>) is created to certify individual deserters. ²³²
1997	Law 418/1997 allows the government to conduct dialogues and sign peace accords with “political actors of the conflict”, opening the door to peace negotiations with the FARC-EP and the ELN under the Pastrana administration. It also stipulates that the Colombian Institute for Family Wellbeing (<i>Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar, ICBF</i>) is responsible for attending to under-aged victims of the conflict, including disengaged children and youth.
1999	Decree 2546/1999 places reintegration within the General Reinsertion Department (<i>Dirección General para la Reinserción</i>) within the Ministry of Internal Affairs.
2001	Resolution 0722/2001 sets up the National Defense Ministry’s Humanitarian Assistance Group towards the Demobilized (<i>Grupo de Atención Humanitaria al Desmovilizado, GAHD</i>) in charge of the immediate humanitarian support to demobilized people and their families, covering for instance accommodation, food, clothing, transport, security and health services. A Special Assistance Program for Disengaged Children and Youth (<i>Programa de Atención a Niños, Niñas y Jóvenes Desvinculados del Conflicto Armado</i>) is set up and managed by the ICBF through Resolution 0666/2001.
2002	Law 782/2002: The Uribe Vélez administration extends Law 418/1997 to the paramilitary groups by removing the political character of a group as a precondition for entering negotiations. <i>Punto final:</i> Financial support to ex-combatant organizations emerging after the peace agreements in the 1990s is cut in order to redirect resources to the paramilitary demobilization process.
2003	Decree 128/2003 modifies Law 418/1994 and sets a new basis for individual disengagement under the Uribe Vélez administration through the set-up of the Program for the Reincorporation to the Civil Life (<i>Programa para la Reincorporación a la Vida Civil, PRVC</i>) and its Reference and Opportunity Center under the Ministry of Internal Affairs and in cooperation with the National Defense Ministry. The

²³² The CODA is responsible for verifying an applicant’s data with regard to his or her affiliation with an armed group and evaluating his/her will to reintegrate into civil life. The CODA certifies the applicant’s right to receive legal and socio-economic demobilization benefits. It is composed by one delegate each from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the National Defense Ministry, the Reintegration Program, the Attorney General, the Colombian Institute for Family Wellbeing, and the Ombudsman.

program was principally created to attend to individual deserters, but has widened its scope to include paramilitary former combatants who demobilized collectively under the supervision of the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace (*Oficina del Alto Comisionado para la Paz*).

2004	Decree 2767/2004 introduces the obligation to collaborate with the statutory forces for former combatants upon disengagement.
2005	Law 975/2005, the Justice and Peace Law (<i>Ley de Justicia y Paz</i> , LJP) is enacted.
2006	Decree 3043/2006 sets up the High Council for Social and Economic Reintegration of Armed Persons and Groups (<i>Alta Consejería para la Reintegración Social y Económica de Personas y Grupos Alzados en Armas</i> , ACR) to attend an ever-increasing ex-combatant population resulting both from collective and individual disengagement processes.
2008	Decree 1059/2008 offers jailed guerrilla members the opportunity to individually disengage under the LJP framework. CONPES 3554/2008 formulates the Social and Economic Reintegration Policy (<i>Política de Reintegración Social y Económica</i> , PRSE) that unifies the reintegration roadmap of individual and collectively disengaged militants.
2010	Law 1424/2010 introduces a new legal regime for former combatants who are not part of the LJP procedure (e.g. obligatory social service, participation in a truth-telling procedure).
2011	Law 1448/2011 or Victim's Law is passed. Decree 4138/2011 renames the <i>Alta Consejería para la Reintegración Social y Económica de Personas y Grupos Alzados en Armas</i> in. Colombian Reintegration Agency for Armed Persons and Groups (<i>Agencia Colombiana para la Reintegración de Personas y Grupos Alzados en Armas</i> , ACR).
2012	Legislative Act 01/2012 or Legal Framework for Peace is passed.

Sources: ACR 2014, Cárdenas Sarrias 2012, Pinto Borrego et al. 2002, ACR website, available online at: www.reintegracion.gov.co/en/agency/Pages/historical.aspx (accessed February 20, 2017)

ANNEX 4: EXTRACT DATABASE ARMED GROUP COHESION PROJECT

Figure 12: Extract database Armed Group Cohesion project

No.	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
Code	BOGNo20	BOGNo21	BOGNo22	VVO23	VVO23a	VVO24	VVO24a	VVO25
Date and place	February 02, 2012, Santa Rosa, Bogotá	February 17, 2012, ACR service center Rafael Uribe, Bogotá	February 17, 2012, ACR service center Rafael Uribe, Bogotá	February 22, 2012, ACR service center Villavicencio	February 22, 2012, ACR service center Villavicencio	February 22, 2012, ACR service center Villavicencio	February 22, 2012, ACR service center Villavicencio	February 22, 2012, ACR service center Villavicencio
Contact through	Word of Mouth	ACR	ACR	ACR	ACR	ACR	ACR	ACR
Age	31	39	31	22	26	33	30	45
Gender	m	f	f	m	F	m	m	m
School education	11 th grade	7 th grade	5 th grade	1 st grade	10 th grade	11 th grade	6 th grade	5 th grade
Family status	Married, lives with wife and two children aged 1 and 5	Free union, lives with partner and six children	Boyfriend, 1 daughter aged 14 who lives with her mother	Free union	Free union, son aged 5	Free union, two children aged 2 and 11	Single, no children	Free union, 1 daughter aged 15
Place of origin	Toca, Boyacá	Bogotá, grew up in Antioquia	Medellín, Antioquia	Santa Barbara, Narino	Puerto Rico, Meta	Villavicencio	Mitu	Boyacá
Lives in	Bogotá since 2004	Bogotá (before: Puerto Rico, Meta)	Bogotá since 2010	Villavicencio (recently), plans to go to Cali	Villavicencio since 2006	Casanare	Villavicencio since two months	n/a
Group	<i>Autodefensas Campesinos del Sur del</i>	<i>Autodefensas, Bloque Central Bolívar</i>	<i>FARC-EP, Frente 34</i>	<i>FARC-EP, Frente 29</i>	<i>FARC-EP, Frente 27</i>	<i>FARC-EP, Frente 39</i>	<i>FARC-EP, Frente 1</i>	<i>FARC-EP, Frente 7</i>

Casanare

Area of operation	Casanare, Arauca, Boyaca	Sur de Bolívar	Antioquia	Nariño	Meta, Vichada, Huila	Meta, Vichada, Guaviare	Guaviare, Vaupés, Caqueta, Meta	
Age when joined	20	26	19	17	11	18	19	40
Reasons for joining	Forced recruitment	Lack of economic opportunities	Fell in love with a FARC-EP guerrillero	Joined combat troop after having worked two years as a "miliciano"	False promises	Family problems, false promises	They convinced him to join	Served then in camp as a "miliciano" for two years
Time span in years	4	7	10	1	5,5	10	11	6
Function	Rank-and-file	Logistical functions (arms trade), part of the security ring of an important commander	Security guard (due to physical issues she couldn't participate in heavy physical tasks such as combat)	Rank-and-file	Squadron commander	Squadron commander	Squadron commander	Rank-and-file
People under command	0	0	0	0	12	12	12	0
Reasons for disengagement	Military pressure through permanent combat	Collective demobilization of <i>Bloque Central Bolívar</i>	She wanted to see her family (left a daughter at her mother's place when she joined the FARC-EP)	They did not treat him well, his girlfriend wanted to leave	She got hurt	Military pressure, he was abandoned by his troop, his wife had deserted 3 days before	He wanted to see his family	He got bored
Type of	Captured	Collective	Individual	Individual	Individual	Individual	Individual	Individual

demobilization

Date of demobilization	approx. 2004/2005	2005	aprox. 2010	approx. 2010	between 2003-2006	approx. 2008/2009	2011	approx. 2011
Current occupation	He works in a transport company. He still participates in the ACR courses and has received several vocational trainings.	She is not working, just re-integrated in the ACR activities.	Not working at the moment, participates in ACR activities.	He is waiting to be transferred to Cali, participates in ACR activities.	Not working at the moment, but planning to start working with an oil company; participates in ACR activities.	Not working yet as he just demobilized (December 2011); participates in ACR activities.	Just got a job through the ACR; participates in ACR activities.	Just demobilized; participates in ACR activities.

Source: Own research.

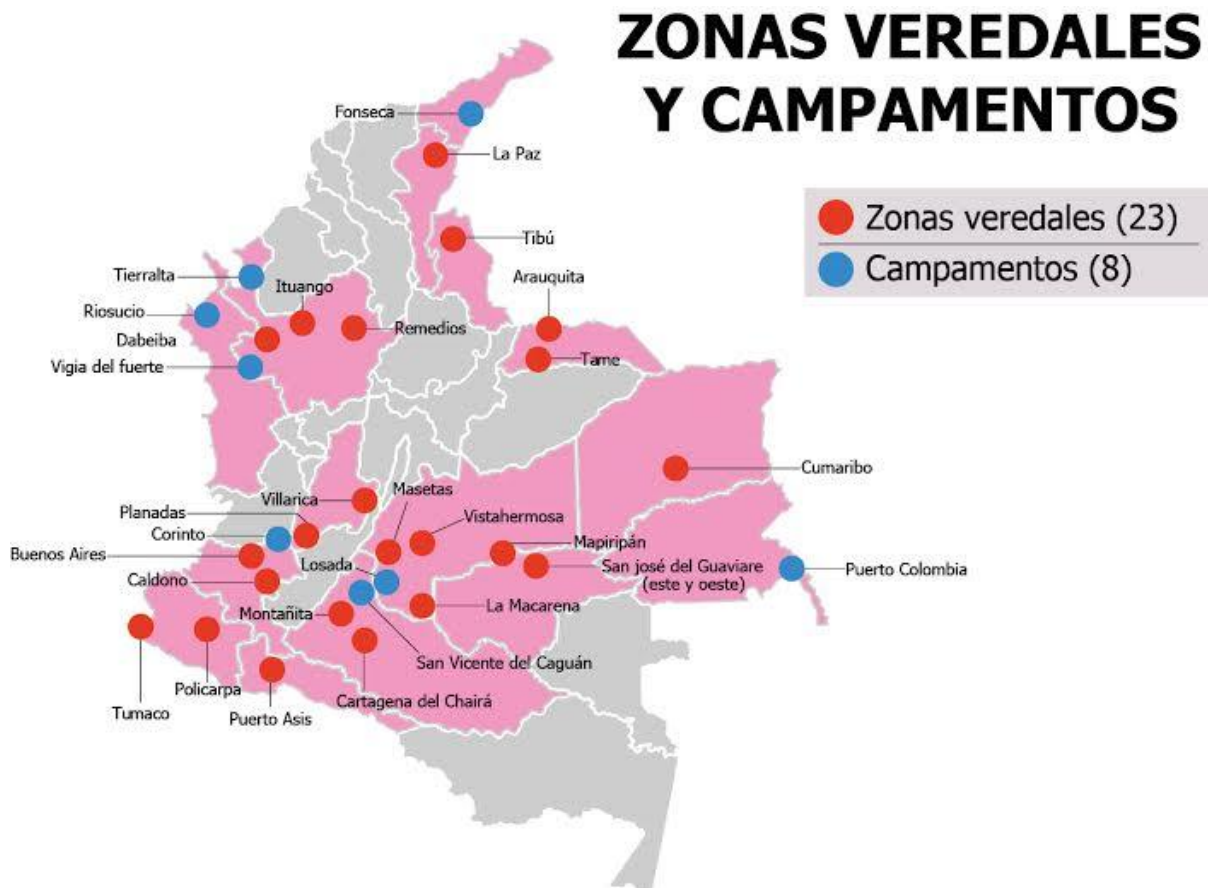
ANNEX 5: MAPS

Figure 13: Map of Colombia



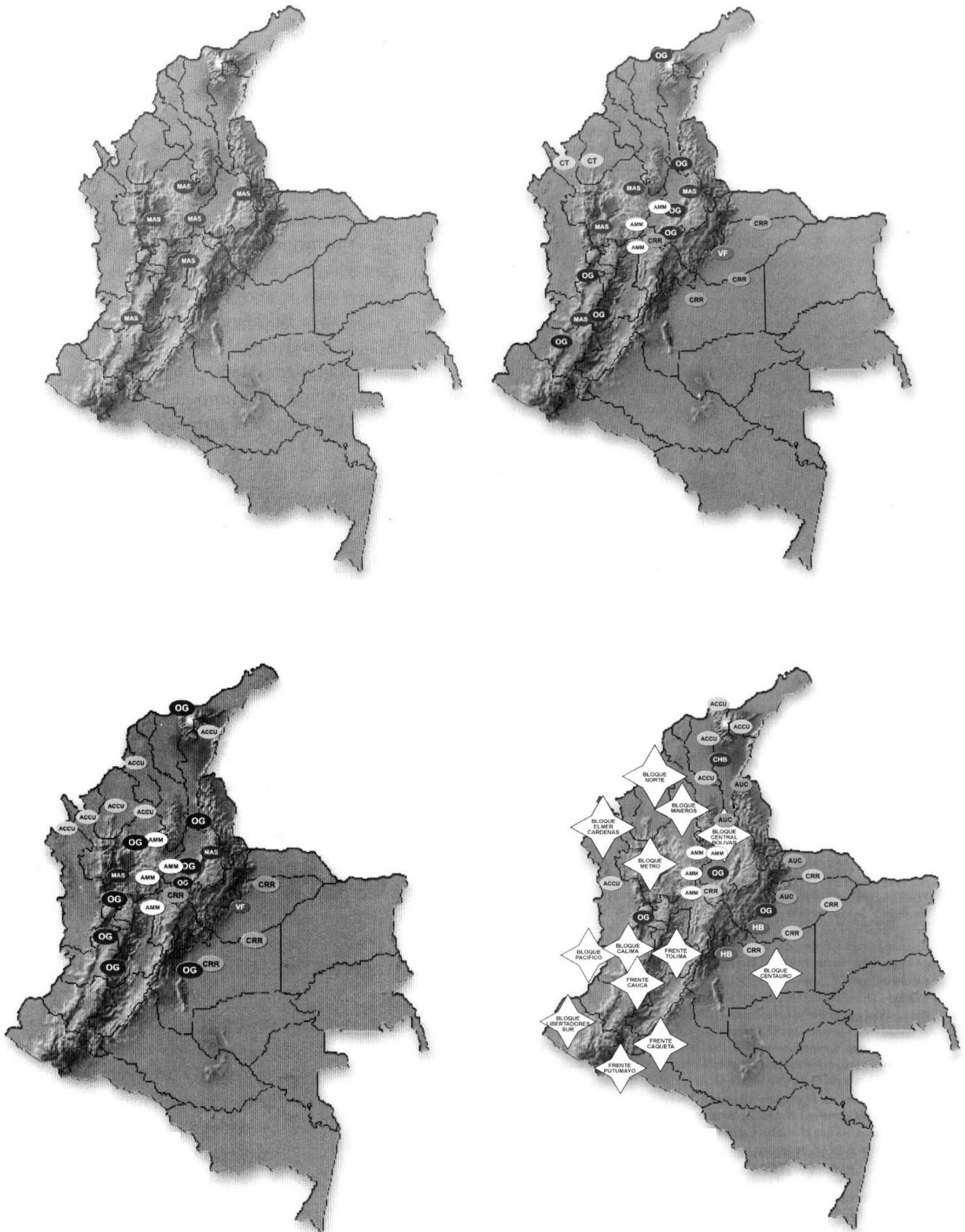
Source: ICG 2005: 5.

Figure 14: Transitory Rural Settlement Normalization Zones and camps



Source: El Pilón 2016.

Figure 15: Paramilitary expansion 1982-1992-1996-2002



Source: Indepaz 2003: 6.

ANNEX 6: ABSTRACTS IN ENGLISH AND GERMAN

Critically engaging with international disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) policies and practice that regard former non-state armed combatants and their organizations as security risks and a challenge for peace, this thesis takes an interest in former combatants' organizational processes and their contribution to building peace in Colombia. The aim of the study is to explore and generate new analytical lenses to understand which organizational settings nurture the capacity of ex-combatant organizations to strike a balance between offering their members stability and identification, while at the same time opening space for new interactions and relationships, and thus the development of new identities in the context of civilian life. With this objective, this thesis follows an empirical and qualitative research design based on field research including semi-structured survey interviews as well as problem-centered interviews and participant observation.

The thesis compares three main, partly overlapping, transition instances and the subsequent emergence of former combatant organizations in the time period 1990-2016: 1) the negotiation and ensuing transition processes of various guerrilla movements in the early 1990s, 2) the collective demobilization process of paramilitary units from 2003-2006, and 3) the reintegration of individually deserted combatants (1994-2016).

For each case, the thesis reviews the political context in which transitions occurred, the nature of the group transitioning, the negotiation outcome (in the case of collective transitions), the legal and institutional framework, and the particular approach public programs took to reintegration, as well as the effect it had on the emergence and shaping of former combatant organizations. Building on these insights, this thesis suggests that, in addition to disengagement patterns (individual or collective), there are four main factors to explain variation in ex-combatant's ability to serve as a resource for peace in Colombia, including the political identity of a group and its members, the group's capital of relations, its ability to make use of militants' insider knowledge, and the opportunities available for organizational development, partly shaped by reintegration programming.

Internationale Entwaffnungs, Demobilisierungs- und Reintegrationsansätze betrachten die Organisationsprozesse ehemaliger Mitglieder nichtstaatlicher bewaffneter Gruppen meist als Sicherheitsrisiko und als Gefahr für den Frieden. Diese Forschungsarbeit setzt sich deshalb kritisch mit Organisationsprozessen ehemaliger Militanten auseinander und erkundet deren Beitrag zum Frieden in Kolumbien. Das Ziel ist es, neue analytische Perspektiven zu generieren, um zu verstehen, welche Bedingungen die Kapazität dieser Organisationen stärken, ihren Mitgliedern auf der einen Seite Stabilität und eine Identifikation zu bieten, und auf der anderen Seite den Aufbau neuer Beziehungen und Identitäten im legalen Kontext zu ermöglichen. Mit einem empirischen und qualitativen Forschungsdesign stützt sich die Arbeit auf Feldforschung, einschließlich semi-strukturierter Befragungen, problemzentrierter Interviews und teilnehmender Beobachtung.

Die Arbeit vergleicht drei zum Teil überlappende Wiedereingliederungsvorgänge und die darauffolgende Entstehung von Ex-Kombattantenorganisationen im Zeitraum 1990-2016: 1) die Verhandlungs- und Transitionsprozesse verschiedener Guerrillaorganisationen in den frühen 1990er Jahren, 2) den kollektiven Demobilisierungsprozess paramilitärischer Einheiten von 2003-2006, und 3) die Wiedereingliederung desertierter Militanten (1994-2016).

Für jeden Vorgang wird der politische Kontext, die Charakteristiken der jeweiligen bewaffneten Gruppe, das Verhandlungsergebnis (im Falle der kollektiven Transitionen) und der legale und institutionelle Rahmen, einschließlich des Reintegrationsansatzes staatlicher Programme, und der Effekt, den diese auf die Entstehung und Form von Organisationsprozessen hatten, untersucht.

Auf dieser Analyse aufbauend, schlägt die Arbeit neben den Exitmodalitäten (individuell oder kollektiv) vier Faktoren vor, die die Varianz in den Möglichkeiten ehemaliger Kombattantenorganisationen, als Resource für den Friedensaufbau zu dienen, erklären: die politische Identität der bewaffneten Gruppe und ihr Gruppenzusammenhalt, ihr Beziehungskapital, die Fähigkeit, das Insiderwissen ehemaliger Militanten zu nutzen und, zum Teil durch Reintegrationspolitiken geförderte, Möglichkeiten für organisationelle Entwicklung.

ANNEX 7: ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Katrin Planta has been a project manager in the Berghof Foundation in Berlin (www.berghof-foundation.org) since 2009. She joined Berghof first as a project officer and research assistant in the Berghof Foundation's "Resistance and Liberation Movements in Transition" project, then as a project manager and researcher in the Agents of Change for Inclusive Conflict Transformation and the Dialogue, Mediation & Peace Support Structures programme. Most recently, she was in charge of a project on the coexistence of traditional and non-traditional conflict resolution mechanisms funded by the German Foundation for Peace Research (DSF). In 2012/13, Katrin also served as an interim coordinator of the Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation. Her main themes of interest include mediation and negotiation processes with non-state armed groups, armed violence in 'non-conflict' scenarios, and the role of different actors in building peace. Before joining the Berghof Foundation, Katrin worked as Junior Consultant for the German Civil Peace Service (*Ziviler Friedensdienst*, ZFD) in Bolivia. Katrin graduated in Social Science from Westfälische Wilhelms Universität Münster, Germany, and the Institut d'Études Politiques de Lille, France, and holds an MA in Conflict Resolution from the University of Bradford, UK.

 ANNEX 8: INTERVIEW QUOTES

ⁱ “[Militancy] has taught us or has given us many values that you don’t see here in society: solidarity, respect, the meaning of life, of freedom, the capacity to value the most minimal thing you have. [...] For instance, there are many people who do not respect their own word. I was educated in the group in a way that my word is worth more than any signature” (personal interview, Corporación ANDES member, May 18, 2012, Bogotá).

ⁱⁱ “For me, war has taught me many things, how to organize myself, how to work. At the Cúcuta battalion, a coronal called me and said ‘Brother, now you have to forget everything’. But I told him ‘Coronal, I am sorry but I can’t forget’. There are important things in war: loyalty, commitment, being responsible for people. This is something war teaches you. Some values are difficult to live up to here in the city. Here, you can’t sleep with the doors open” (personal interview, Red de Reporteros member, May 10, 2012, Bogotá).

ⁱⁱⁱ “We have more moral authority because we had arms and we participated in combat. But what did we get out of this? Our friends died in war, we were separated from our family, we delayed our own academic and cultural progress, and we created hate zones within the population. We did all this. So it’s about warning these youngsters so that they don’t repeat our history. [...] Sometimes there are some youngsters who still believe in armed struggle but they are thinking about it from here, from a cafeteria, with their backpack full of paper and notes, so they think that this is revolution, talking about the revolution in a cafeteria. At least we went there, we had the values and we experienced all the consequences. We went there, we looked, and we came to the conclusion that armed struggle is not the right way” (personal interview, FUNDAPAM member, February 20, 2012, Bogotá).

^{iv} “Well, I believe that there are things from the organization worth looking into and not everything is that negative. You learn to be responsible, to be honest and to have a social vocation for the community. Especially for the work that I was doing, you had to have a very strict discipline, so that has helped me a lot to also be responsible here; and this together with honesty has helped me maintain myself in my current job, where they have given me important tasks. I brought these values with me into civilian life and I believe that I could live up to them here” (personal interview, Fundación Líderes de Paz member, February 06, 2012, Bogotá).

^v “Today I can sit here with you having a coffee. However, I will not sit with my back to the door; we pay attention to everything around us. We don’t give interviews to just anybody. [...] This is also because we manage security issues: you do not arrive at the agreed time. That’s something you need to know as a researcher here in Colombia. So for instance, we agree to meet at 10 but I won’t come at 10. I can come either before [10] to make sure you are there or you are not accompanied by somebody, or after [10] to check first whether you

already came to the place. We still manage these security issues” (personal interview, Corporación ANDES member, May 20, 2012, Bogotá).

^{vi} *“We tell them, for instance, how their troops should treat the civilian population in order to not create resentment. Because it is the very behavior of the soldiers that makes people join the armed groups”* (personal interview, FUNDAPAM member, February 20, 2012, Bogotá).

^{vii} *“In many parts, the doors were closed to us because we said ‘we are demobilized’. At that time, many people didn’t even know about the number of ex-combatants living in Bogotá. They ignored the fact that their neighbours could be demobilized people. But many people were afraid of this, and so we saw the need to build trust first. We needed to work with the community first and then we told them who we are and that worked pretty well. Because first they get to know you as a person and they think ‘that’s great, we can learn together’. When we told them who we were they almost couldn’t believe it”* (personal interview, Fundación Líderes de Paz member, May 02, 2012, Bogotá).

^{viii} *“Take the health service: It is not true that the reintegration program offers a special benefit, but it is your right to have access to health services. The same with education: you are entitled to get free access to education. But people think that it is a special benefit they are getting from the reintegration program because you are a demobilized person. The reintegration program tends to put it like this but it is a lie. There is a lot of misinformation, so I [in the person’s function as a reintegration officer] have to explain the whole institutional set-up, and explain to people the role of functionaries. They have to provide certain services. Thus, it is not about ‘personal favours’ but about rights”* (personal interview, Corporación ANDES member, May 18, 2012, Bogotá).

^{ix} *“Many demobilised people have incorporated the government’s discourse that former combatants are perverted terrorists. So people leave their organization thinking they are terrorists, that they are bad people, and this creates problems. On the contrary, our attitudes, or at least personally my attitude, is to claim my past within the armed organization. I wasn’t a terrorist, I was a socio-political [activist], I was a revolutionary rebel. [...] Within in political military organization, an armed illegal organization, that’s true, but I had convictions and my reasons to be there. That is why now, I am calm personally and emotionally, I can talk about this past, there is no reason to hide it”* (personal interview, Fundación Líderes de Paz member, February 02, 2012, Bogotá).

^x *“The program is not designed to promote peace in Colombia. It has an individualized approach: ‘You fight for yourself’. I tell them: ‘You have to get out of the environment of the program, Colombia is not the program’. They do everything the program tells them to do, the program is the ‘holy truth’”* (personal interview, Corporación ANDES member, May 08, 2012, Bogotá).

^{xi} *“The question was: how to ensure that demobilized people can be political subjects and participate, while at the same time they had already left the housing scheme and were basically hiding away [from society] like little ducks in their new place, afraid of people*

asking them things about the past. They also had difficulties in getting an apartment, a job, socializing with people from the neighborhood. So basically they didn't talk to anybody. They had turned into [military] targets of their former groups, those who had been their family before were now their enemies" (personal interview, Centro Mundial staff, May 28, 2012, Bogotá).

^{xii} *"Aside from being demobilized people, we are deserters of these organizations. Being deserters, we are military targets of the organizations we belonged to. This is a huge problem, because we don't have anywhere to go. We simply had to move to big urban centers, such as Bogotá, Cali, or Medellín to live there, because there was no other solution. Because we cannot go back to where we are from, to our peasant origins, we cannot go back because we are military targets, if they find us they will kill us, let's say it this way. We are declared military targets, their enemies, and there is no protection from the government"* (personal interview, Fundación Surcando Caminos member, February 27, 2012, Bogotá).

^{xiii} *"When I was there, I had to ask for permission to talk, to rest, I didn't have freedom, I was just a robot, that's not fair. Even to have a boyfriend [I had to ask for permission]. And if they gave you permission, everything was very regulated. [...] Sexual relations with permission! There was no right to freedom, [...] many people spent a lot of time in their group and felt that they had to comply, comply, and comply with their group. [...] So now these people don't want to commit to anything anymore, [...] they just want to be free"* (personal interview, Corporación ANDES member, May 18, 2012, Bogotá).

^{xiv} *"We identified a number of young leaders in the process of reintegration who were very powerful as role models, their example was saying: 'Look, I completed my reintegration process, I am doing something productive in life, and I have given up arms definitively'. So we kept on working with these individuals that stood out for their capacity to speak, to gather, these were people others would listen too. So we gave them more responsibility, they would help to train others, to develop a climate of trust and honesty. One has to make these leaders visible and stimulate processes with them so that other ex-combatants can follow their examples. And they are a good example that reintegration is possible"* (personal interview, Centro Mundial staff, May 28, 2012, Bogotá).

^{xv} *"When I came here, we started an organizational process with former AUC and FARC-EP combatants. We got in touch with each other, we started a dialogue and we conducted a number of workshops, conversations and so on. First, we started to talk about our different group identities: 'Ok so you were AUC, I was a FARC-EP member, we were enemies but now we are here and we live in the same conditions', and we started to look at each other and decided to leave this problem behind and rather focus on the future. The problem is that in war, the only losers are us and our families, because war never affects the sons of presidents or mayors but only the sons of peasants, of the poor and humble people. So basically, we all came from a peasant family background and because of some external conditions we took up arms on one side or the other"* (personal interview, Fundación Surcando Caminos member, February 27, 2012, Bogotá).

^{xvi} “Here in Colombia, they always point at us as the perpetrators, but I was a victim of the conflict, too. I was kidnapped without knowing where I was going to go and then I could not escape. Well then something funny happened because I got to occupy a leadership position, the group put me on the highest political position. But that was not because I said: ‘Yes, I want to be a combatant’, but because I was a victim, too” (personal interview, Corporación ANDES member, May 20, 2012, Bogotá).

^{xvii} “When I joined [the armed group], I did so because in the region where I lived the guerrilla was growing and they had committed terrible crimes. And what were my options? I could either become a prostitute, enter the guerrilla, become the girlfriend of a drug dealer, or I could join the paramilitaries. The choice was between a hooker, a guerrillera, or a narco’s girlfriend. [...] Plus, I’ve always has this curiosity for weapons. But then my dad told me that I couldn’t [join the army], that women have to take care of the household, raise kids and nothing more. I said ‘I can do something, too’. But the army wouldn’t take me because I was too young, I didn’t have money, and I didn’t have an education. So I said ‘I’ll go this way’, and I left home” (personal interview, Corporación ANDES member, May 18, 2012, Bogotá).

^{xviii} “The sole responsible for this situation is the Colombian state and the various governments. I wasn’t guilty; the state forced me to make this decision” (personal interview, Fundación Surcando Caminos member, February 27, 2012, Bogotá).

^{xix} “The paramilitary groups were created because the guerrilla was abusing and mistreating the population. But both the guerrilla and the paramilitary argue that they wanted to do ‘something good’ for the people. What separates us [paramilitaries and guerrilla] is how we do things. The guerrilla blows oil pipelines to harm the government. But I think they are only doing harm to the population, because the locals have to pay for the reparation with their taxes. I wanted the guerrilla to get out of my region because they were like cancer, they abused people and they kept investors away, kidnapping them on the basis of the argument that they were ‘exploiting people’. In reality, they just wanted to get rich themselves by doing that. And in the end, keeping the investors away meant that the people didn’t have any place to work, anything to eat, [...] it meant misery” (personal interview, Corporación ANDES member, May 18, 2012, Bogotá).

^{xx} “Your and other countries only have the image of the chainsaw, the killings, the massacres, the people who are not allowed to talk, and if they do they will be killed, in mind when thinking about the creation of the self-defense units. So that’s why we decided to create this political part to ‘soften’ the organization that was too much focused on the armed activities. [...] But God gave me this special grace so that I was only sent to functions where I didn’t have to do harm. My function was to do good, so that was a great opportunity for me. So that was my function, a political function. The political area was superior to other functions of the group, and it was our task to serve as a corrective: ‘Look, don’t take out your gun and threaten people. This is not how we are going to get the support of the locals’. We were the

area that gave orientation, that accompanied people” (personal interview, *Corporación ANDES* member, May 20, 2012, Bogotá).

^{xxi} “There is responsibility from ‘both sides’. When we talk about the armed conflict, we usually talk about the guerrilla, the paramilitary, and the military. But where are private companies? Where are the big banana companies who ultimately financed paramilitarism? What truth are we talking about? What justice? What reparation? Many regional politicians supported paramilitary groups and participated actively in their set-up. Those with white collars sometimes have more blood on their hands than those who carried arms. We all need to accept responsibility for the violence committed in this war by all actors of the conflict. I could only use a weapon because someone else paid for the bullets. This is not understood properly. But without having a safe space where we can discuss these issues, we won’t have a true culture of peace or reconciliation, and even less so forgiveness or truth” (personal interview, *Corporación ANDES* member, May 18, 2012, Bogotá).

^{xxii} “The Reporters’ Network started with this enthusiasm to do programs with the ex-combatant population, programs that weren’t in the media and that tried to reveal the situation of the ex-combatants through videos, interviews. Our idea was to work within the communities and show the vulnerability of the people living there” (personal interview, *Red de Reporteros* member, May 10, 2012, Bogotá).

^{xxiii} “Because many organizations that are here in Bogotá don’t have a political vision, they only want to implement projects but they don’t want to become political protagonists or actors in the country. Without this political fundament, however, they are not sustainable” (personal interview, *Corporación ANDES* member, May 08, 2012, Bogotá).

^{xxiv} “Well, one day I went to a meeting where they took a photocopy of my ID card and I realized that they wanted to use our names to get some projects with *Acción Social* [*Social Action* is a department from Colombia’s Presidency which works towards abolishing poverty and inequality within the country] so I thought ‘if the demobilized people themselves try to do something like this, what kind of trust can people develop?’ We have to gain the trust of the demobilized population. [...] Something that kills an organizational process is individualism and grievance, well not grievance but greed, [...] greed to make profit, to earn money. [...] There are many organizations that start well and you think ‘they are getting somewhere’ but the president or the vice-president engage in some business, they get a project in the name of the organization, or foundation, or corporation, or whatever, and then they take the money and here it all ends. And then the whole organization gets into trouble and dissolves. This is what I call using and abusing people. What is the result? They don’t trust you anymore” (personal interview, *Corporación ANDES* member, May 18, 2012, Bogotá).

^{xxv} “The role of the MAQL was of political formation so it wasn’t restricted at all to a military strategy. This is why we are recognized today because we always were clear that our mission was to defend and not to attack. For instance, if some indigenous community member committed a crime or made a mistake, we never judged them ourselves but called the

indigenous authorities. The Quintín members were indigenous; they were from the communities. When they demobilized, they were known. We did provide permanent support and protection for our indigenous people. They couldn't reject us, and less so as we came with ideas. The case of FARC for instance is different. If they wanted to demobilize and go back to the communities with a program, people wouldn't accept them because they kill. So that makes a difference" (personal interview, *Fundación Sol y Tierra* member, March 12, 2012, Popayán).

^{xxvi} *"A lot of people have tried to organise themselves but they didn't know how to do it and they didn't have the strength to reach out to politically relevant spaces. In turn, we have managed to get to the Senate. When people realize that we ex-combatants do have a value, that we are supported by [politically] powerful people, that's when they start listening"* (personal interview, *Corporación ANDES* member, May 18, 2012, Bogotá).

^{xxvii} *"Of course, the figure of León [León Valencia is an important founding member of the organization and a well-known author] has helped us a lot. It was important to count with a person who has this vocation for political debate and who knows how to work with the media. He is a person of public interest and therefore part of the establishment. He is the founding father of the organization but he is absorbed by many other things: writing, politics. It's also because of him that we had the opportunity to raise funds"* (personal interview, *Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris* member, June 08, 2012, Bogotá).

^{xxviii} *"There is more trust and we feel identified. Look, if you start working in the program and I – as a demobilized person – see you, an ordinary citizen; there is little trust between us. It has been one of the advantages of this program that almost all its personnel – both here in the office and locally – is composed of ex-combatants. So if I approach you as my supervisor, we will understand each other because we speak the same language, [...] you will understand my problems. So that's also a strategic move"* (personal interview, *Corporación ANDES* member, May 18, 2012, Bogotá).

^{xxix} *"There are not so many [former combatants working in this field] because the job market is not easy, not even for other sectors of the Colombian population and for them it is even more difficult. Of course, you can regard yourself as a peaceful coexistence leader but you also have to make a living. So if being a peaceful coexistence role model allows me to make a living, that's great, but if not they have to find another job"* (personal interview, *Fundación para la Reconciliación* staff, May 20, 2012, Bogotá).

^{xxx} *"So the problem starts if these organizations manage to channel some funding, this is when they start to fight among each other. Instead of strengthening the organization, money creates internal divisions and even finishes off the organization. In our case however, our first project did strengthen us a lot. Because we were clear from the beginning. We knew about our obligations, we managed to make some savings that helped us survive once the project was over. We were able to keep on paying our controller, paying the taxes and we have always*

been transparent with our financial management” (personal interview, Fundación Líderes de Paz member, May 04, 2012, Bogotá).

^{xxxii} *“We had a number of problems because of the different regional and personal interests. And we also had problems because of the management of the foundation’s resources. These problems were mainly related to the internal power relations and struggles between the different groups within our organizations to gain access to these resources or benefits that were provided by the government. And those among us that were clever and had powerful positions managed to direct the resources more to certain regions or persons than others. Well, it must be said that all demobilized received at least the basic benefits. However, what happened was that the organization managed to attract new funding. The whole process was traumatic for the foundation because many people called us ‘traitors’ and we had many problems because the government gave us a certain amount of money for about 30 projects run by our demobilized people. We were supposed to channel this money but in practice, the foundation was already almost bankrupt. So they decided that Fundación Cultura Democrática should instead channel this money. That decision then led to a huge scandal and we were accused of stealing the reintegration benefits” (personal interview, PAPDRB staff, May 11, 2012, Bogotá).*

^{xxxiii} *“People tend to create foundations because they believe that this will maintain them [economically]. But it turns out that this is not true. And there are also many organizations with social objectives but as I said, they are born with the idea to generate projects and [money]. [...] So people end up frustrated and with a lot of legal problems because they leave the organization and forget that, as a legal entity, they need to fulfil a number of requirements, like a monthly tax paper, members’ assemblies, and a lot of other things. So they leave this administrative responsibility aside and end up with a lot of fines and even legal issues, which puts them in trouble. It was a very complicated process and the legal and administrative responsibility that one must assume is huge. It is not that easy to create an organization with all the competition in the market; earning the credibility and trust of the donor is not easy. And for instance, we didn’t have the experience at that time for us to be contracted by a state or municipal institution. That was very complicated and I still think it is complicated today that they give you a project if you don’t have a contractual track record or at least a year of running your foundation” (personal interview, Fundación Líderes de Paz member, May 04, 2012, Bogotá).*

^{xxxiii} *“Today our corporation has a conflict observatory which is very well-known. We publish reports, conduct applied research to further the public debate, and we also produce policy recommendations. We do have a victims’ program and another program that focuses on local development, including topics such as participation, productive chains and so on. But our main focus is always development in the middle of conflict; this is where our expertise lies” (personal interview, Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris member, June 08, 2012, Bogotá).*