

Women and Reintegration; Everyday lives of FARC Women in Post-Accord Colombia

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Cover photograph: taken by the author; *“houses reintegration camp in Icononzo”*

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Abstract

This research offers a new insight on female ex-combatants experiencing postwar transitions as it examines the demobilized FARC women in Colombia. It shows the complex reality of their everyday lives as it is being influenced by larger structures such as the Colombian peace agreement, their reintegration process, and the reintegration camp as their living place. Simultaneously these processes are being internalized into the lifeworld's of the FARC women. This study perceives the Colombian postwar context as a certain playing field, where the FARC women try to re-built their lives in different ways. A playing field, where old and new ideas come together, resulting in constraints and new possibilities when shaping their lives. The rebuilding of their lives implies making choices, weighing carefully all the options available, and overcome struggles, while navigating themselves through a highly insecure and uncertain environment. This thesis thus captures how these women experience and shape their everyday lives in the postwar context of Colombia. Thereby telling stories of hope and new possibilities enshrined with stories of disillusionment and high insecurity, all told from the perspective of the FARC women themselves.

Key words:

FARC, FARC women, Colombia, postwar, everyday lives, peace agreement, reincorporation process, camp

Resumen

La presente investigación pretende brindar nuevas percepciones y un mayor entendimiento sobre el tema de las mujeres excombatientes que afrontan y experimentan procesos de transición posconflicto, ello mediante el estudio específico del caso colombiano de las mujeres desmovilizadas del grupo guerrillero conocido como las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia - FARC. A lo largo de este documento se expone en gran medida la realidad compleja de la cotidianidad de sus vidas, la cual se encuentra influenciada por estructuras mayores tales como el proceso de paz colombiano, su proceso de reintegración, así como las zonas de reincorporación en las que habitan. Simultáneamente, estos procesos se encuentran siendo interiorizados por el entorno habitual de vida de estas mujeres. Este estudio percibe el contexto posconflicto colombiano como un verdadero campo de juego en el cual las mujeres excombatientes intentan reconstruir sus vidas en diferentes esferas, formas y sentidos; siendo este un campo de juego en el cual ideas antiguas y nuevas concurren, resultando ello en limitaciones y nuevas posibilidades en torno a las cuales las mujeres foco de este estudio deben darle forma a sus vidas. Este proceso de reconstrucción de sus vidas implica la toma de decisiones, la ponderación minuciosa de las posibilidades a su disposición y el superar numerosas dificultades, todo lo cual deben desarrollar mientras se conducen en un ambiente cargado de inseguridad y falta de certeza. En consecuencia, este trabajo observa y captura el cómo estas mujeres experimentan y moldean el día a día de sus vidas en el contexto del posconflicto colombiano, para lo cual se comparten historias de esperanza y nuevas posibilidades, las cuales se contrastan con relatos de desilusión y bastante inseguridad, todas contadas desde la perspectiva misma de estas mujeres excombatientes, quienes anteriormente pertenecieron a las FARC.

Palabras clave:

FARC, mujeres de las FARC, Colombia, posconflicto, vida cotidiana, acuerdo de paz, el proceso de reincorporación, el campamento

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1 Introduction

“I live for the FARC, I am very dedicated to the FARC. I do not want to go back to the time of being in the guerilla, peace is better. But my life is totally different. My everyday life is totally different right now in comparison with my life in the guerilla. I have lived for 40 years in the jungle, of course the change is hard”

- Sonía, female FARC member
[January, 16]

The above quote in many ways captures the essence of the complex pathway FARC women are facing in this moment, when standing at the beginning of their reintegration into the Colombian society. This symbolizes a transition in their lives. A transition where female ex-combatants of the FARC must reposition themselves in Colombian society, without their weapons, uniforms and without violence. A transition that means having the possibility to choose another pathway than they originally chose, namely; being a female guerilla fighter in the FARC.

In 2016 a peace agreement between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) was signed. This peace agreement put a formal end to a 50 year old conflict. The FARC is Colombia's oldest and largest guerrilla group, established in 1964. After the signing of this peace agreement the FARC handed in their weapons in twenty-six UN led demobilisation zones. These zones are now turned into reintegration zones and are built as camps to house the FARC ex-combatants for at least two years. My research started exactly two months, after the disarmament phase had been fulfilled, in one of these so-called reintegration zones. There I started to capture how these women experience and (re)-shape their everyday lives within the post-war context of Colombia.

Globally the participation of women and girls in guerilla warfare is increasingly being recognized as a fundamental aspect of armed conflict. This leading to an increasingly complex understanding of their roles, contributions, and wartime and post-war realities. Scholars have sought to understand why women join armed groups, what role they played within these armed groups followed by the participation of women and girls in reintegration and peacebuilding processes (Moser and Clark, 2001; Denov and Ricard-Guay, 2013; Shekshawat, 2015; McKay and Mazurana, 2004).

Where are female combatants positioned in post-conflict transition, when violence subsides and peace and reintegration processes start? This question about the position of female combatants in the peace and reintegration processes has not yet received enough attention. When analyzing the global peace and reintegration processes in post-conflict societies the conclusion reached, is that women are at the margins of these processes, or are entirely missing (Shekshawat, 2015). Resulting in the non-recognition of their role in conflict nor are they considered to be equal stakeholders in the peace-making and reintegration processes (Shekshawat et al., 2015).

In Colombia women and girls have supplied a significant percentage of fighters in the FARC; 40% of all FARC fighters were female. Females occupied critical operational, tactical and social roles in the FARC. In 1985, FARC-EP statutes formally recognized women as guerillas on an equal level with men (Derks et al., 2011).

The FARC claims that they have created a racially and gender equal organization, where women are treated as equal partners. Gender equality extends to combat, an activity at which everyone agrees the women excel. On the other hand the literature on the role of women in the FARC describe how this gender equality is constantly contested by certain rules that undermine the agency of women (Herrera and Porch, 2008; Hernandez and Romero, 2003). Scholars that studied the role of women in the FARC, all show that the FARC's military system understood the potential advantage of female presence in their ranks, and structured their organization to squeeze the maximum benefit from female recruitment (Derks et al., 2011).

Nevertheless the experience of many FARC women is that they feel pride in the fact that, without the dedication, organizational skills and courage of the women, the FARC could not function on the level that it has achieved, nor survive as an organization. Service in the FARC gives them a sense of belonging and accomplishment (Derks et al., 2011). For many women the FARC acts as a lifeline. Their role, their identity and their position in the FARC during the armed conflict plays a substantial role in their everyday lives after the signing of the peace process and during the peace talks.

During the peace talks, a strong and powerful Colombian women's movement demanded their participation in the peace negotiations. This led to, by many seen, as the most inclusive peace agreement in history. The peace agreement contains a progressive gender agenda towards gender equality (ONUMujeres, 2016). This gender discourse also got enshrined with the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) phase (El Acuerdo final, 2016).

Acknowledging that 40 percent of FARC fighters are female, consequently makes up for a significant percentage of women starting their reintegration process back into Colombian society. Nonetheless in general little is known on women in reintegration processes as in most cases women are at the margins of these processes, or are entirely missing (Shekhawat, 2015). This makes the female FARC ex-combatants an interesting case concerning the experiences of women on postwar transitions. Additionally the label of postwar reintegration, as a scientific concept, presents many limitations. With few exceptions, DDR literature only offers evaluations of different programs and prescriptions of how to do better. Therefor showing a rather simplistic idea of what exactly entails a reintegration process for these ex-combatants. It pays little attention to the insurgent group itself, its internal relations and organizational culture and does not see the reintegration process as a socio-political process in itself (Sprenkels, 2014).

This thesis thus offers new insights on the position and experiences of female ex-combatants in post-war transitions. Therefor not only contributing to the academic literature written on women and reintegration processes, but also making an attempt to give these highly marginalized group of women a rightful place, by telling their story. I will do this by shedding light on how the female FARC ex-combatants experience and (re)-shape their everyday lives in the postaccord context of Colombia. This implies using Ralph Sprenkels theory on post-insurgency in order to capture the complex reality of reintegration. This theory captures all the difficult social and political processes that emerge from this new peace context; including the reintegration process of these female FARC ex-combatants. Additionally, it implies using the actor-oriented approach of Normal Long in order to acknowledge that all FARC women have agency.

It allows to see the FARC women as active participants who process information and strategies in their dealing with various local actors as well with outside institutions and processes. Combining these theories allows me to look at the reintegration process through the everyday lives of these women and perceive it as an everyday reality instead of a policy.

In order to analyze some processes that occur in the (re)-shaping of their everyday lives, I will make use of the concept of strategic life choices of Neila kabeer. These are choices which are critical for people to live the lives they want, for example; choice of livelihood, where to live, whether to marry, who to marry, whether to have children, how many children to have, freedom of movement and choice of friends. This concept helps to analyze the room these women have and make when it comes to the (re)-creation of their livelihoods.

As will become clear while reading, this research will describe a certain playing field, where active recipients (the FARC women) try to (re)-shape their livelihoods in different ways and reposition themselves in the Post-War context of Colombia. This implies making choices, weighing carefully all the options available and overcome struggles. This research shows the highly complex reality of the every-day lives of these FARC women, partly shaped by larger structures such as the Colombian peace agreement, their reintegration process and their living place. It shows that a reintegration process is more than just a policy, it is the everyday reality of these women. It shows stories of hope and new possibilities enshrined with stories of disillusionment and high insecurity, all told from the perspective of FARC women, living in the postaccord context of Colombia.

Set-up of this thesis

The above mentioned theories and their use within this research will be presented in the first chapter. This will be followed by the methodology and an extensive background chapter in order to understand the context these women are living in. Hereafter three empirical chapters will follow. The first will be on how the Colombian peace agreement is being internalized into the everyday lives of these FARC women. The second will explain how the Reincorporation process is being experienced and internalized by the FARC women. The third will do the same but then for the camp as their living place. All three chapters will explain what meaning these women give to the three wider structures, what elements they use in order to create room for maneuver and how these wider structures influences their ability to make strategic life choices, when looking at what enhancements and constraints these women face when re-shaping their livelihoods. Ultimately a conclusion and discussion will be given to wrap up the analysis provided in these chapters.

2 Studying the everyday lives of FARC women within postaccord Colombia

The essential aim of this research is to shed a light on the everyday lives of FARC women in the Post-Accord context of Colombia. I will analyze the everyday lives of these women, how they engage in the creation of their new livelihoods and make use of larger processes in order to shape their everyday lives. Crucial for this research is also the time frame; as these women are currently in the process of changing from a life as a guerrilla fighter to a civilian life and are thus in the process of creating and (re-) shaping their livelihoods.

In this theoretical framework I will elaborate on the theories that I will use for this research and will help to answer the research question. Before going into depth on the theories used, I will briefly give an overview of what we already know on the participation of women in combat and reintegration processes. For this research I will make use of two bigger theories, namely; the Post-Insurgency theory of Ralph Sprenkels and the actor-oriented approach of Norman Long. I will connect the theories together and will explain how both theories can be used to analyse the everyday lives of these women. I make use of several elements of the empowerment theory of Neila Kabeer, however, I do not embrace this theory entirely as this thesis is not a study on empowerment. Within this theory I will make use of the concept; the ability to make strategic life choices, this concept helps to analyze the notion of agency introduced by Norman Long. Shortly said I will thus not measure the level of empowerment and if these women find themselves empowered, but I do look if these women are able to make strategic life choices. At the end of chapter I will introduce the research question this study tries to answer.

2.1 Female ex-combatants and reintegration

Before going into depth concerning the theories used in this research, I will shortly give an overview of what is already written on the participation of women in combat and reintegration programs. Knowing what is already discovered on the role women play in combat and the reintegration phase helps to understand what additional information this research provides concerning these themes.

Globally the participation of women and girls in guerilla warfare is increasingly being recognized as a fundamental aspect of armed conflict. This leads to an increasingly complex understanding of their roles, contributions, and wartime and post-war realities. Scholars have sought to understand why women join armed groups, what role they played within these armed groups followed by the participation or non-participation of women and girls in reintegration and peacebuilding processes. Much of the literature contains a special gender focus by trying to understand the gendered effects of war and gendered agency in war, thus how women navigate in conflict and seek opportunities (Moser and Clark, 2001; Denov and Ricard-Guay, 2013; McKay and Mazurana, 2004; Shekhawat et al., 2015).

Looking at the literature written on why women and girls may join armed forces, the main conclusion is that the motivations for joining non-state armed groups and participating in violence vary among individual women, just as they do among individual men (Darden, Henshaw and Szekely, 2019).

Furthermore these motivations vary across groups and conflicts in this regard. Kampwirth's (2002) study on Latin America guerilla forces states that participation of women was mainly caused by family structures, social changes in agricultural exports, migration to cities and religious beliefs. This combined with personal motivations such as revolt against authoritarian familial structures and the attraction of military life. The research in Northern Uganda and Sierra Leone of Mazurana and McKay (2004) presents a range of reasons for joining armed groups such as; to seek revenge, to express political opinions, to uphold a religious identity and to seek protection from violence. Still in Africa, the predominant pattern has been for girls to be abducted or coerced into forces, either being taken from their homes and communities, or being forcibly recruited in a school setting. In Colombia Herrera and Porch (2008) argue that the FARC exploits the shortcoming of Colombian rural society as the forces shaping women's motivations to join, such as; inequality, paramilitary violence, ethnic and racial difficulties in indigenous and afro communities, limited access to education and jobs, as well as poverty and patriarchal structures.

Still the assumption that "combatant" by default means "male combatant" is present in a great deal of research on armed conflict (Darden, Henshaw and Szekely, 2019). Therefore research that is written on the role of women in combat followed by the role of women and girls in reintegration processes mostly expresses the invisibility of these women and girls and therefore non-participation in the reintegration processes and programs. The literature shows that women are made invisible by a gender-discriminatory framework which saw women and girls only as 'sex slaves', 'wives' and 'camp followers'. Therefore they are not viewed as appropriate recipients of DDR benefits (McKay and Mazurana, 2004). The international community rarely recognizes the reality of women's involvement. In the countries where United Nations has put in place such programs, the exclusion of women is already naturalized by national structures (Mann, 2015). This goes hand in hand with the main view on women as (sexual) victims of the conflict instead of victimizers (McKay, 2004; Denov and Ricard-Guay, 2013). The literature thus mainly describes that with the end of the conflict, the transition for these women and girls from combatant to civilian often occur in silence and isolation. These women and girls undergo a so-called 'spontaneous reintegration' in the sense that they assimilate directly into their communities, return to new communities, or drift to camps for the internally displaced in search for alternative forms of support (McKay, 2004; Denov and Ricard-Guay, 2013).

The above mentioned ideas on women and reintegration are mainly based on experiences in Africa. This literature mainly talks about women and girls who were forced to join the armed forces which goes hand in hand with widespread sexual violence against women and girls in these groups. Some studies were done on the guerilla movements in Guatemala, Peru and Colombia. These studies show that most women who joined the guerilla movements did this deliberately. Although these studies were done in various contexts they all highlighted that in order to ensure participation of women in reintegration processes, we need to recognize their role in the armed conflict and their roles as combatants in armed groups.

Much of the literature written focusses on gender and changing gender roles connecting this to processes of empowerment. Trying to measure a level of empowerment or changing empowerment levels with female ex-combatants as they experience relative autonomy in armed groups and learn new skills. Other literature argues that both conflict and post-conflict situations are gender-discriminatory (Shekhawat, 2015).

The book on *female combatants in conflict and Peace; challenging gender in violent conflicts* (2015), written by Seema Shekhawat, exemplifies with different cases how:

“...Women become indispensable to armed groups, being capable of sustaining and nourishing a violent movement by simultaneously playing the socially ascribed role of women and the newly assigned role of men. They fight like men, at the same time they continue to be caretakers, nurturers and facilitators. Concurrently, female combatants experience both accidental empowerment as victimization during conflict. Once violence recedes, female combatants are relieved of the burden of playing roles of men and women. They are relegated to the private domain within the four walls of domesticity to play one role – that of women. In the post-conflict situation, these women become pariah for all: the community, the group they fought for and the group they fought against...” (Seema Shekhawat, 2015, pg 1).

Within this book she and other scholars argue that changed gender roles during conflict do not necessarily revolutionize the socially ascribed norms. This becomes more evident in the post-conflict, peace and reintegration processes, when female combatants are relegated to their traditionally socially ascribed norms and are not seen as equal partners in peace and reintegration processes (Shekhawat et al., 2015). They also argue that for a woman, becoming a combatant is a greater risk than for her male counterpart. While for the latter it is only a phase of life, for the former it is an eternal phase, as it affects the rest of her life. These women are confronted with many specific problems, such as being stigmatized as violent and sexual, both being unacceptable traits of a “normal” women and thus result in rejection when these women reintegrate back into society (Shekhawat et al., 2015).

Reading the above text of the book *female combatants in conflict and Peace; challenging gender in violent conflicts* (2015), raises awareness on the vulnerable and marginalized position these women find themselves within the post-war transition period. This highlights the importance of giving these women a voice and a rightful place within the discourse and literature on conflict and post-war transitions. This study contributes to this literature written on women and reintegration, by looking at how the female ex-combatants experience and reposition themselves within the post-war context of Colombia. These women in Colombia make an interesting case as it is already acknowledged that forty percent of the FARC fighters are women and are thus participating in the DDR process. Furthermore the progressive gender discourse present within the peace agreement is an interesting aspect of their reintegration process. Instead of measuring empowerment or explicitly looking at changing gender roles this research focusses on the everyday experiences and realities of these women. This could result in them mentioning processes of empowerment and/or changing gender roles, but this is not the main starting point of this thesis. Furthermore by looking at everyday lives I look with a different lens towards reintegration. This allows me to show the complex reality of reintegration perceiving reintegration merely as an everyday reality instead of a policy.

2.2 Post-Insurgency theory

In most of academic literature, the socio-economic life trajectories of former combatants, or as Sprenkels calls them; insurgents, are dealt with under the label of ‘postwar reintegration’. Postwar reintegration’ is one of the most important concepts of peacebuilding theory, a rapidly expanding academic discipline. However, as a scientific concept, postwar reintegration presents many limitations (Sprenkels, 2014).

When policy makers or academics use the term reintegration in the context of peacebuilding after an armed conflict, the concept is always used into the triad; Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, best known as DDR. DDR refers to; 'the transition of being a member of an armed group to being a civilian' (Klem, Douma, Frerks, Gompelman, & van de Laar, 2008). Or as stated by the UN: *"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 time-frame, primarily taking place in communities at the local level"* (DDRR, UN). In international policy, DDR has come to be considered as crucial groundwork for sustainable peace. With the reintegration phase seen as the most complex and problematic phase of DDR, but at the same time the most important one. As the UN says that; "if reintegration fails, the achievements of disarmament and demobilization are undermined as well." (United Nations, 2006).

With few exceptions, DDR literature only offers evaluations of different programs and prescriptions of how to do better. Most of the DDR literature writes about reintegration viewing it as a challenge to transform an ex-combatant from a 'threat' to an 'asset' to society (McMullin, 2013). Taking an individual by the hand and leading him or her from combat to citizenship, reintegration stands as a metaphor for the country's imagined postwar transition to democracy as facilitated by the international community (Sprenkels, 2014). DDR literature shows rather a simplistic idea of what exactly entails a reintegration process for these ex-combatants. It shows almost no understanding towards the nature of the armed conflict. Furthermore it pays little attention to the armed group itself, its internal relations and organizational culture and fails to see the reintegration process as a socio-political process in itself (Sprenkels, 2014). As if the notion of peace suddenly annuls the armed group sense of collectiveness, their political aspirations and their historically obtained skills and knowledge.

Rather than contributing analytical depth to the understanding of the accommodations and adjustments that take place among insurgents in the post-war period, reintegration theories assumes that former insurgents substitute previous relationships for a set of new ones, such as that of citizens responsive to the State (Sprenkels, 2014). Such a perspective does little justice to the social, political and economic adaptations that actually take place on the ground.

For this research I agree with Sprenkels, who writes about all these shortcomings within the DDR literature, that the term 'postwar reintegration' is not the right term to describe all the processes that play a role in the postwar transition period. As Sprenkels points out in his research on FMLN insurgents in El Salvador; "...In my opinion, the pertinent question is not whether or to what extent former FMLN insurgents 'reintegrated' into society after the Peace Accords; but rather what different types of adjustments and accommodations have taken place on a collective as well as on an individual level, and what kind of positions, roles and arrangements these have rendered..." (Sprenkels, 2014, p. 35).

This starting point of Sprenkels and him wanting to change the way we use and study the term 'postwar reintegration' connects to this study on FARC women in their postwar reintegration phase. This starting point allows me to also analyze these women from a different perspective, allowing me to overcome all the shortcomings within the DDR literature. Furthermore perceiving the reintegration phase of these women as an everyday reality and not as a policy.

He introduces the concept of post-insurgency as a way to call attention to the multiple transformations and accommodations, collective as well as individual, that took place among former insurgents during the postwar transition period. By introducing this concept he wants to consider the phenomenon of what happens to insurgents (ex-combatants) after the war ends as a relational process embedded in a particular historical and political context. This concept helps to understand some of the continuities, the readjustments and the ruptures that occur in the relationships and the creation of their livelihoods as the armed groups formally dissolve (Sprenkels, 2014). This concept of post-insurgency can be seen as a contribution to the explicit theorization of the many social processes taking place in the aftermath of the insurgency.

Much more than simple demobilization; the circumstances of peace propel multiple adjustments and adaptations in participant relations, as former insurgents sought to position themselves personally and collectively in an emerging postwar context (Sprenkels, 2014). He defines the concept of post-insurgency as a historically constructed space of relationships between multiple social agents who were previously connected through participation in the insurgency. He argues that we should think of this space as a particular social field, where different sub-groups and individuals might hold different cards and might seek to position themselves or to benefit from the emerging circumstances in different ways.

For this research I agree with him that most of the postwar reintegration theories are too simplistic and mostly only offers evaluations of different programs and prescriptions of how to do better. Reintegration theories also simplify the reintegration period by creating categories, such as economic, social and political reintegration. The problem is that in most studies these three dimensions are studied in isolation and are studied in a top-down manner. Asking questions like; what influence has a certain reintegration policy on the ex-combatants and till what degree are the ex-combatants reintegrated in society, which is than measured with a certain set of variables. This is exactly what I do not want to measure in this study as I see the need to study the economic, social and the political reintegration as a whole, just as these women experience it as something that is interrelated in their daily lives.

In this research the theory on post-insurgency can serve to explain the Post-Accord context in which the FARC women are trying to re-shape their everyday lives. Additionally it can serve to answer particular kind of questions on Post-Accord processes. Allowing me to use the process of reintegration just is one of the many social and political processes emerging within this context. Herein I will consider the Post-Accord context in Colombia as a social field where former insurgents seek to position themselves personally and collectively in an emerging postwar context and where different sub-groups and individuals hold different cards (resources) and might seek to position themselves or to benefit from the emerging circumstances in different ways, that facilitate or hinder social, political and economic progress in the post war context.

Different than Sprenkels I will focus on agency and everyday lives instead of political agency and participation in politics. It is not that I will not focus on political participation, but this can be just one of the many livelihood strategies that the FARC women choose in their everyday lives. Sprenkels study also focusses on a much larger time-frame than my study as he looks specifically at two decades after the end of the war.

When this study was conducted it was almost one year after the signing of the peace agreement and just several months after the disarmament phase was ended. Where Sprenkels thus works with a retrospective analysis, tracing back historical insurgent networks, I mainly focus on what is happening at this moment in the everyday lives of the FARC women. This study is more focused on the future and how these FARC women are shaping their everyday lives, with their prospective livelihoods in the back of their head. Interesting here is that some conclusions Sprenkels draws after analyzing the evolvement of insurgent networks after many years can already be witnessed within the lives of the FARC women. An example here is the experience of growing in-group differentiation (personal communication, Carmen, 16-01). An important aspect of Sprenkels study is his focus on the networks and relationships of the post-insurgents in order to see what these networks have meant in the construction of their new lives. Connecting it to this study I also see that these historically obtained networks and relationships are still very important in the lives of these FARC women. I would argue that these networks function as the foundation for the re-construction of their livelihood in this new and uncertain context. However, Sprenkels main focus is on networks and relationships, I will predominantly focus on agency and livelihood strategies of the FARC women and how they are shaping these livelihood strategies in the emergency of the post-accord context. In order to do so I will make use of the actor-oriented approach of Norman Long and thus will combine this approach with the post-insurgent theory of Sprenkels.

2.3 Actor-oriented approach

The actor-oriented approach offers an actor perspective on development intervention and social change and can be seen as a bottom-up theory. The actor-oriented approach was developed by Norman Long as an answer to more structuralist approaches in development theories. In his theory Long (2001) describes social actors “...not as passive recipients of interventions, but as active participants who process information and strategies in their dealing with various local actors as well with outside institutions and personnel” (N. Long, 2001, p. 13) Through this perspective Long gives agency to social actors. Agency ‘*refers to the knowledgeability, capability and social embeddedness associated with acts of doing (and reflecting) that impact upon or shape one’s own and other actions and interpretations*’ (Hebinck, den Ouden, & Verschoor, 2001). Through this theory the researcher can try to understand differential responses to changing circumstances shown by different social categories and groups as well to relate these local processes to macro structures or interventions by the state. It allows a researcher to explore how interventions by state and non-state entities are mediated and transformed by local structures and processes (N. Long, 1984).

Long states that all actors exercise some power or agency. Although actors are often limited in their choices by a lack of critical resources, they should not be seen as passive recipients or victims of planned change, who simply follow existing rules (Hebinck et al., 2001). All actors try to create room for manoeuvre, even those in highly subordinate positions, so that they might benefit from certain interventions. This allows me to recognise that all FARC women do have agency and that they try to create room for manoeuvre in the different interventions that partly shape their lifeworld’s. The actor-oriented approach and the notion of agency thus helps me to study how actors shape the post-insurgent processes that Sprenkels talks about.

Important to mention here is that the actor approach also leaves room for the notion that different members of the group develop their own conceptions and meaning and values about certain projects or interventions. This is important in this study, as the FARC women are not a homogenous group, but every woman develops her own livelihood and development path. An example here is how different women of the FARC developed their own meaning and conception on what the development of the cooperatives means in their daily lives and how they will make use of the cooperatives in the shaping of their life's.

Another key strength of Long's approach and therefore very useful in this research, is the way it seeks to connect an understanding of social actors in their everyday 'life worlds' with wider structures and processes. This relates very well with my research as I also try to connect the everyday 'life worlds' of the FARC women with wider structures and processes namely; the Colombian peace agreement. The reincorporation process and the camp.

To explain these wider structures and processes, I will use the way Norman Long looks at interventions. Long looks at intervention with an actor-oriented approach; by which external interventions enter the lifeworld's of the individual and groups affected and thus become part of the resources and constraints of the social strategies they develop. In this way the so-called external factors are internalized and often come to signify quite different things to different interest groups or to different individual actors, whether implementers, clients or bystanders (N. Long, 2001, p. 25). Following this line of thinking Long and van der Ploeg (1994) describe an intervention: "...as an ongoing transformational process that is constantly reshaped by its own internal organizational and political dynamic, including the responses and strategies of local and regional groups, who may struggle to define and defend their own social spaces, cultural boundaries and positions within the wider power field..." (A. Long & van der Ploeg, 1994, p. 79). In this research I will build on, on the concept of intervention described by Long and van der Ploeg by distinguish three different interventions processes experienced and internalized by the FARC women, namely; the Colombian Peace Agreement as an intervention, the Reincorporation process as an intervention and the Camp as an intervention. These three processes, or interventions, enter the lifeworld's of the FARC women and become part of the resources and constraints of the livelihood strategies they develop. This also connects with the research gap as there are almost no theories that describe the reintegration process as an ongoing intervention, an ongoing process of action and reaction, but most importantly an ongoing part of the flow of life of these FARC women.

These three interventions are interconnected and are part of a broader framework, namely the Post-Accord context in Colombia. This relates to what Long says: "...as interventions are always part of a chain or flow of events located within the broader framework of the activities of the state and or international bodies, and the actions of different interest groups operative in civil society..." (N. Long, 2001, p. 45). Important is also the interconnections between these interventions as if it was not for the Colombian Peace agreement there will be no reincorporation process, and with no reincorporation process there will be no camp. But it is also the other way around, if these two interventions; the camp and the reincorporation process were not in place, there was no peace. This connects to Long vision on interventions; "...Interventions are linked to previous interventions, have consequences for future ones and more often than not are a focus for inter-institutional struggles or represent arenas where battles over perceived goals, administrative competencies, resource allocation and institutional boundaries are fought out..." (N. Long, 2001, p. 45).

Other concepts mentioned by Long that I want to explain here and that will align my research are; arenas, the collective actor and livelihood.

Arenas of struggle

The concept of arenas can be connected to the concept of interventions; "...as interventions more often than not are a focus for inter-institutional struggles or represent arenas where battles over perceived goals, administrative competencies, resource allocation and institutional boundaries are fought out..." (N. Long, 2001, p. 59). Arenas are social and spatial locations in which contests over issues, resources, values and representations take place. The three processes or policies that partly shape the lifeworld of these women, can all three be seen as arenas of struggle where the FARC women seek opportunities and try to navigate themselves. All three processes and policies function as an arena of struggles where the Colombian government and the FARC are constantly contesting their position towards each other. Furthermore these FARC women are constantly struggling between old and new value and the collective and the individual.

Livelihood and identity shaping

Long describes livelihoods as: "...Livelihoods best expresses the ideas of individuals and groups striving to make a living, attempting to meet their various consumption and economic necessities, coping with uncertainties, responding to new opportunities, and choosing between different value positions. It is also a matter of ownership and circulation of information (involving issues of self-esteem) and group identity..." (N. Long, 2001, p. 54). Important here is the type of choices they identify and take, and the switches they make between livelihood options. Also problematic livelihood situations leads to a consideration of the ways in which actors develop social strategies to cope with these situations. Livelihood is an important concept as the everyday lives of the FARC women are about partly creating new livelihood strategies just because of the simple fact that they have to change from a combatant into a civilian. This implies redefining their role and identity within this new context. As this research is conducted in the crucial time of (re)-shaping their livelihoods, it is a vital concept in explaining how these women (re)-shape their everyday lives.

The identity-constructing processes are a crucial part of constructing a livelihood. This is relevant since livelihoods entail the building of relationships with others whose lifeworld's and statuses may differ (N. Long, 2001). The (re)-shaping of identity is an ongoing struggle for FARC women as part of their identity was being a female combatant of the FARC, an organization with a certain ideology, values and ideas, which formed their identity. Now they have to re-shape the image the outside world has of them, but also their own identity in the FARC in this new postwar context. The choices they make in the shaping of their identity influence the creation of their livelihood as well as the creation of room for maneuvering in this new context. When talking about identity shaping in this research I will stay with the concept of livelihoods and thus see identity as a crucial part of these women livelihoods. Certain choices in the shaping of their identity have consequences for their livelihood strategies. Furthermore the labeling of FARC women by the outside world as female ex-combatants, creates mainly constraints in their ability to create space for maneuver.

Before moving on to the next concept I want to clarify the use of the concepts; everyday lives, livelihoods and lifeworld. All three concepts will be used frequently in this study. Everyday lives is the concept that is mentioned in the research question and describes the day to day experiences of these women. The creation of livelihoods, such as an income or identity is a part of these everyday lives, so by actively creating a livelihood these women give meaning to their everyday lives. Or in other words their everyday lives are filled with actions and reactions in order to create a livelihood. Lifeworld is a concept that I use, when I want to mention something larger than the everyday life. For example it can be said that the camp where these women are living is their lifeworld or the collective of the FARC is their lifeworld.

Marginalized group

The notion of agency according to Long implies that every individual actor has the capacity to process social experience and to devise ways of coping with life, even under the most extreme forms of coercion. His interpretation of agency has a rather optimistic flavor as Long says that every actor has some room for manoeuvre, even the ones in highly suppressed positions. A frequently used criticism on the actor oriented approach is that it sometimes prevents from seeing the serious limitations of the room for manoeuvre of many people, the misery of distressed living condition and the hopelessness for the future that is present in many places (Hebinck et al., 2001). As Hebinck et al. point out here; the reader could get the impression that the studies using the actor oriented approach, are dealing with people who are doing rather well in solving problems and monitoring their own actions. But in most of these cases these researches study poor people with limited possibilities to improve their situations (Hebinck et al., 2001). I wanted to mention this criticisms, as it relates to the situation of the FARC women I studied. These women are in fact a highly marginalized and stigmatized group, with limited possibilities to improve their livelihoods, following the above mentioned arguments of Shekhawat (2015) concerning the vulnerable position of a female ex-combatant in a postwar societies. They are also not always in the position to make decisions about the direction of their lives or to obtain the resources needed to improve their livelihoods. Simply because the Colombian state and also the FARC leadership controls the resources needed and makes these decisions for them.

2.4 Ability to make strategic life choices; empowerment theory

This study is done in a period of change as these women are in the process of changing from a guerrilla fighter to a civilian. During a period of change, processes of empowerment could occur, as there can be a redistribution of resources and in this case new livelihood possibilities. Most of the women I spoke, indeed mentioned the hard times of live, but that in the end they perceived their new lives as better, with more possible opportunities (personal communication, Marlene, 27-11).

In order to analyze some processes that occur in the (re)-shaping of their everyday lives, I will make use of the empowerment theory of Neila Kabeer. However, I do not embrace this theory entirely as this thesis is not a study on empowerment or measuring empowerment levels. It could be that these women experience processes of empowerment within their everyday lives, but it is not the starting point of this thesis. Therefore within this theory I will mainly make use of the concept; the ability to make strategic life choices.

Kabeers explanation for empowerment fits well in the specific period these women's lives are in. She describes empowerment as the ability to make choices; to be disempowered therefore implies to be denied choice. Her understanding of empowerment is that it is inescapably bound up with the condition of disempowerment and refers to the processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make choice acquire such an ability (Kabeer, 1999).

The notion of choice is important in this study as choice necessarily implies alternatives, the ability to have chosen otherwise. The women in this study are at the verge of starting their new lives, this also entails making choices to shape this new life. Some choices have greater significance than others in terms of consequences for people's lives. Therefore Kabeer mentions the concept of strategic life choices, these are choices which are critical for people to live the lives they want, for example; choice of livelihood, where to live, whether to marry, who to marry, whether to have children, how many children to have, freedom of movement and choice of friends. She thus refers empowerment to the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices (Kabeer, 1999). As many women talked about how they see their future livelihoods, choices they make right now are of influence on these future livelihoods and the thinking and weighing of these choices are thus part of their everyday lives. By using this theory I don't necessarily imply that these women are empowered or that they are part of empowerment processes. On the contrary, as in many cases these women experience processes of disempowerment rather than empowerment. Still I will use the concept of strategic life choices to answer the question how certain processes such as the Colombian peace agreement, the reincorporation process and the camp influence their ability to make strategic life choices in order to shape their (desired) livelihoods. This concept also helps to make the concept of agency used by Norman Long more tangible, recognizing agency as the ability to make strategic life choices. When concluding this research I will not sum up all the choices that these women made or are able to make. However this concept will be used in order to evaluate what these women experience as constraints and what they experience as enhancements and how this gives them room for maneuver and new possibilities in the form of more or less ability to make strategic life choices.

The role of a gender discourse

This research does agree on the notion that most women experience conflict, peace and reintegration processes differently than men. This research contributes to this starting point by analyzing how the FARC women in Colombia experience the post-war transition phase in Colombia. By taking the above mentioned starting point, I acknowledge that most of the processes I analyze are engendered processes. However I choose not to use a gender theory, as my focus is not on analyzing the changing gender roles or the re-definition of gender roles and men-women relationships in a postwar context. My focus is on how these women perceive and shape their everyday lives in a postwar context. Gender issues can be part of these everyday lives and thus can be mentioned in this analysis, as being a woman is part of their identity and gender issues are part of their everyday lives. Gender can thus be perceived as a sub-area within the everyday lives of these women.

By using the theories and concepts mentioned in this theoretical framework I will try to answer the research question; *"How do FARC women experience and shape their everyday lives in the post-accord context of Colombia"*. All three theories built on each other and therefore are the framework of this research.

The Post-Insurgency theory of Ralph Sprenkels will be used to explain the bigger picture. This includes the current context in Colombia, which I describe as the Post-Accord context, and the background chapter on the organizational structure of the FARC as an insurgent group including the role of women in the FARC during the armed conflict. The concept of post insurgency is defined as a historically constructed space with relationships between multiple social agents who were previously connected through participation in the insurgency. Where the Post-Accord context in Colombia can be seen as a social field, where these female ex-combatants try to (re)-position themselves and different sub-groups and individuals hold different cards and might seek to position themselves or to benefit from the emerging circumstances in different ways (Sprenkels, 2014). Additionally the concept of post-insurgency acknowledges that the history of these female ex-combatants play an important role in the (re)-shaping of their everyday lives. Thus acknowledges the importance of a background chapter.

For the other three chapters, which describe three interrelated interventions and how these interventions are perceived and used by the FARC women in their everyday lives, I will make use of the actor oriented approach of Norman Long. As this theory allows me to recognise that all FARC women have agency and that they try to create room for manoeuvre within the different interventions that partly shape their lifeworld's. Lastly I will use the notion of empowerment as the ability to make strategic life choices from Neila Kabeer to analyse strategic life choices in order to shape their (desired) livelihoods.

2.5 Research question and sub questions

The aim of this research is to shed a light on the everyday lives of the FARC women, rebuilding their livelihoods in the post-accord context in Colombia. By doing this contributing to a new perspective concerning women and reintegration processes. Partly by describing the reintegration process as an ongoing intervention, an ongoing process of action and reaction, but most importantly an ongoing part of the flow of life of these FARC women.

With the concepts of post-insurgency, actor oriented and strategic life choices, the research question that is to be answered throughout this thesis is as follows;

“How do FARC women experience and shape their everyday lives in the post-accord context of Colombia”

I will try to answer these research question with the help of the following sub-questions:

- *How do FARC women give meaning, to the Colombian peace agreement, the reincorporation process, and the camp, in their everyday lives?*
- *How do they make use of these emerging processes as they try to create room for manoeuvre in their everyday lives?*
- *How do these interventions influence their ability to make strategic life choices, looking at what these women perceive as constraints and possibilities, shaping their livelihoods.*

3 Methodology

For this research I studied the everyday lives of the FARC women in the post-accord context in Colombia. These women are starting their reintegration processes with other FARC members in so-called '*Zonas Veredales*'. The methodology I chose is mainly based on ethnographic research as it aims to understand sociocultural problems in communities and institutions. Furthermore ethnographic research builds upon face-to-face interaction with people in the research community. Performing ethnographic research gave me the means to understand and give meaning to the lived experiences of these FARC women. This was necessary as my research is telling their story and how they experience and give meaning to their new living circumstances.

In this methodological chapter I will explain the process of this research, by explaining about my research field, research participants, the different research methods used followed by my data analysis. Subsequently I contribute a part to the role of emotions in doing research and a part on ethics. I will conclude this chapter with a personal reflection concerning my identity and the main limitations of this research.

Access

My fieldwork began on the 4th of October 2017 and ended on the 23rd of January 2018. The first month I stayed in Bogotá and I used this month to take Spanish classes and start with explorative fieldwork. With this I tried to understand the Colombian context after the signing of the peace agreement and already gain my first information about the reintegration process of the FARC. In this first month I visited the camp in Icononzo in order to establish the first contact with my research participants. Julian Urquijo Cortes (PHD student Wageningen University) acted as one of my key informants and through him I gained access into the "Zona Veredal". He introduced me to some key figures in the camp and through his sister Laura Cortes, I got access to a sleeping place in the camp.

In this first month I also attended several seminars and events about the peace process organized by the government, the UN and universities. Next to that I visited the head office of the Agency on Reincorporation and Naturalization (ARN). Here they told me that it was not allowed to visit the camps as was stated in the Colombian peace agreement. They only allowed researchers into the camps after the approval of their research proposal by the ARN. This could take up to six months. Luckily I had arranged my stay through the FARC leadership and not the Colombian government. This was my first encounter with the highly unorganized and chaotic start of the reincorporation programs.

On the 17th of November I moved to the camp in Icononzo. Initially I planned to stay in the village, Icononzo, and travel back and forth to the camp. This turned out to be a small miscommunication as they reserved a bed for me in the camp itself. In the camp I stayed together with Laura Cortes in one of the houses in the camp. On the one hand I can argue that my stay in the camp made my research more profound and realistic as I experienced first-hand the same living conditions as my research participants. On the other hand it was a tricky and difficult situation, because I was associated with them. Moreover sleeping in the camp also meant that I was not able to leave my research field, after a whole day in the camp.

Methods

During my research I made use of a triangulation of qualitative research methods; participatory observation (PO); semi-structured in-depth interviews, and, informal interviews. The interviews I conducted were semi-structured as this gave me the opportunity to ask about key issues and simultaneously leave space for the interviewee to add new issues.

I stayed in the camp until the 13th of January. In total I had 12 formal interviews with FARC woman and two formal interviews with FARC men, who lived in the camp. Furthermore I conducted an interview with two people working for the United Nations Verifications Mission, who monitored the process. I conducted one interviews with an ARN official in the camp. Outside of the camp I conducted two formal interviews with FARC woman living in Bogotá and one formal interview with the male leader of the cooperative in Bogotá. Furthermore I conducted a second interview with and ARN official in Bogotá.

Next to these formal interviews I had numerous informal conversations with many FARC men and women living in the camp. These informal conversations form a large part of the information I needed in order to write this research. As this research aims to shed a light on the daily practices of these women, having informal conversations on their daily activities gave me important insights on how they gave meaning to their lives in these new circumstances. The use of participant observation gave me as a researcher the opportunity to be part of the situations while simultaneously observing what was happening. In the camp certain places provided me with the ideal circumstances to perform participant observation. As will be described in the following chapters, the restaurant, the shop/bar and the area where one cooperative was situated all were places where I could gain highly useful information through participant observation and informal conversations.

My research participants were mainly FARC women living in the camp. For my formal interviews I was able to interview many female FARC members who obtained a leadership position in the camp. These women were eager to talk with me about their role in the FARC and the ideological cause of the FARC. Other women refused to have formal interviews with me as some expressed that they did not wanted to share their stories, yet others expressed that they were already interviewed by the UN and did not wanted to have another interview. This was a limitation for my research but also gave me multiple insights on the role and behaviour of the FARC women. It gave me insights on how female FARC women gain leadership positions, but also on the behaviour of the normal FARC women. Most of these women were not used to talk with people from outside the FARC let alone to people from other countries. Thus when reading this research one need to keep in mind that most of the formal information comes from FARC women in leadership positions. This of course results in a certain bias when talking about ambitions and desired livelihoods. As it could be that the ambitions and thus livelihoods of women in leadership positions differ from the women who did not had this position. Most formal interviews I had were enshrined with an ideological message of the revolution. I could imagine that they saw these interviews as a possibility to highlight their side of how they perceived the Colombian conflict and show the lack of the Colombian government towards the implementation of the peace agreement. This also resonates with the polarized political situation in Colombia.

The women I spoke were eager to tell me about their future ambitions. I can imagine if my research was about the atrocities of the FARC in the conflict, they would have been less eager. This I encountered when trying to talk about sexual violence or forced abortions. Women denied it immediately and did not want to talk about it with me.

Security issue

Before my interviews I always asked for consent regarding the recording of their voices and the mentioning of their names in my research. Only one time two women expressed that I could not mention their names in my research. Nevertheless I still choose to use synonyms in order to protect my research participants, especially because of the sometimes insecure environment they are living in. Herein I choose to make an exception for two female FARC leaders I spoke, namely Valentina and Laura. Both women are highly respectable leaders in the camp and mainly spoke about their ideas and wishes for the future of the camp, the FARC and its ideological cause. Thereby not mentioning their personal situation or other stories which could compromise their position.

Data analysis

All the information I gathered was recorded in field notes. I audio recorded some formal interviews but only when the interviewee gave permission. The informal conversations and participant observations were written down, partly on my computer and partly in a notebook. All the information is coded according to the themes established in this research.

At the start of this research my main focus was on the establishment of the cooperatives. I wanted to take the role of women in the cooperatives as a micro case within the larger subject of women and their reintegration process. Nevertheless, while I was there, it became evident that the cooperatives were still in the establishment phase and in the process of legalization. Thus I decided in the field to broaden my research and focus upon their everyday lives and how they shape their lives in these new circumstances.

In the first two weeks I choose to not conduct any interview as I first wanted to gain more information and insights on the organizational structure and culture of the camp. During these two weeks of informal conversations and participant observation, I noticed several striking matters such as; the renewed contact with family members, the pregnancies, the different meanings these women gave to the cooperatives, the reincorporation process as a collective matter and the use of the word gender. Subsequently I decided to design my interview questions according to these observations. Thus during my interviews I focused upon several topics which were; their role in the camp, their view and role on the cooperatives, the role of family in their lives, the role of gender and their futures including the main obstacles they are experiencing now. This resulted in many varying conversations as some women gave more meaning to the cooperatives and other to having a child. Every conversation became adapted to what that woman saw as important in her life.

During my research, when overlooking the data I collected, it could feel as I would not have any specific outcomes. This because I gathered very varying information on the lives of these women and there was not one clear line running through their stories. Nevertheless when the coding process started I could distinguish several overlapping themes.

Furthermore I believe that the varying information I gained sheds light on how these women all experience their process in a different way. Describing this and the many contradictories in this process, is exactly what I wanted to accomplish with this research. This contributes to a different view on reintegration.

When looking at the overlapping themes I decided to divide this research along three larger themes that kept coming back in the gathered data. These three themes are the Colombian peace agreement, the reincorporation process and the camp. The chapters in this research are built alongside these themes.

Ethics

While conducting this research some ethical issues arose. What to do with the gathered information and how to deliver the gained insights were questions that were always present in my head during my research. The FARC and their role in the Colombian conflict was a very sensitive topic in Colombian society. Most of the times I could not mention to Colombian people that I was conducting research on the FARC, let alone live with them. I was always very careful with that. One ethical issue that arose was on how far I wanted to relate to them in order to gain their trust. This was a constant struggle during my research. I lived with them, so many FARC members and people outside the camp immediately assumed that I supported their cause as well. On the one hand this resulted in being able to build up a trust relationship. I constantly needed to reaffirm my identity as an independent researcher in order to not become their spokesperson and let my thesis become a way for them to express their ideological ideas. This also relates to the way how I was planning on writing my thesis and use the information given to me. I was very aware of the fact that I was not there to judge anyone or describe something as not right. Still this was hard at times when being placed in such a polarized society.

Another ethical issue was that I was only extracting information and could not give anything in return. I dealt with this by giving information about myself in order to establish a two-way relationship. Furthermore I paid a small amount of money for living there and made sure that I always ate my meals in the restaurant. I would have wanted to give something else such as English lessons, but the short duration of my stay did not allow for that.

Role of emotions in doing research

Here I want to shortly highlight the role emotions can play when conducting ones research. In order to do this I will make use of the ideas of Tessa Diphooorn on the emotionality of participation (Diphooorn, 2006). She argues that: *“ emotional experiences are not obstructive and detached experiences from the more objective analytical data, but when reflected upon, they are illuminating and interconnected to other data that we regard as knowledge. Emotions are thus not merely research tools, but they frame data, are a part of other data, and function as data on their own..”*

She is concerned with the emotionality of participation. This refers to the observable behavioral reactive of an emotion experienced by the researcher while participating in the field (Diphooorn, 2006). She states that this is particularly important when researching emotionally charged topics, such as violence, where our emotions are more salient and weigh heavier in our analysis. While in this research I am not researching topics like violence or sexual

violence against women. I still experienced my stay in the camp as an emotional experience. Especially because the heaviness of living in the camp is also part of my data as this also influences the daily lives of these women. Furthermore certain feelings I felt during my research, such as fear, sadness but also hope, helped me a lot to understand my informants experiences. This also resonates to the constant struggle of sympathizing with my research informants versus being neutral or even at times being disgust by the atrocities the FARC committed during the conflict. This disgust I mainly felt outside of the camp, when I was talking with others about the atrocities the FARC committed during the conflict.

Moreover the emotionality of participation also shapes the relationships with my research participants. Sometimes I was seen as a bystander and observer, other times I was seen as part of the group. An example here was the many times that I went to the shop/bar in the camp. Every time I was there they invited me behind the counter, as they were aware of the many men being drunk. The fact that I choose to live with them, evoked within some of them the feeling that I was part of them and needed their protection. This also connects to the next part of this chapter where I reflect on myself as a researcher and the research in itself.

Reflections

Doing research was an unique experience for me, which felt like a rollercoaster ride. Going up and going down during the ride. At times it all went according to plan other times it did not, which resulted in finding new solutions and adapting your expectations. When reflecting on this research some aspects were relatively easy. Such as gaining access to the research field. Through Julian and with consent of the FARC leadership it turned out to be easy to enter the camp and talk to the FARC members, who just handed in their weapons.

In the camp I experienced several obstacles, which I had to overcome. Firstly I found it harder than I thought, to live in the camp and not having the opportunity to step out of my research field. As I also slept there, I was not able to leave the field and the stories behind me. When starting this research I was not so much aware of the sensitivity around the topic of reintegration. Moreover I was not aware of the fact that my research participants just came out of a violent conflict and certainly had traumatic experiences. Of course I knew this in the back of my head, but what it really meant for my research or how I would deal with these women, was something that I did not really had thought through before entering this research field. In order to cope with this I decided to sleep for three days in a row in the camp and then travel to Bogotá and stay there for two nights or stay in the village for one night. This helped me to feel more comfortable while doing the research.

Secondly I experienced that especially FARC women were very distanced. They were very hesitant in having conversations with people outside of the FARC, in contrary to the FARC men. It thus took me some time to gain trust, before I could ask them to have an interview. With some women I never was able to establish a connection, how hard I tried. When talking to other entities from outside the FARC such as the UN, the ARN and the personnel from the health clinic, they all told me that they had the same experience with the women in the camp. For them it was also easier to lay contact with the FARC men than with the FARC women. Most of them related this distanced attitude to the fact that these women were not used to let people in from outside the FARC.

Moreover the FARC was and still is a very closed organization, with its own customs and beliefs, it thus takes time to adjust to people and organizations from outside.

Thirdly there was the language barrier. Especially in the first month I had to overcome this language barrier as nobody in the camp spoke English. The fact that my Spanish was not fluent also resulted in me taking more time to do this research. At the start I needed more time to obtain a better and profound understanding of the organizational structure and culture of the camp. I recorded most of my interviews, to be able to listen them again and see if I had missed something during the interview. I am aware of the fact that if my Spanish was better at the start I probably would have had a faster connection with the FARC and more profound answers in my interviews. On the other hand I think that living with them in the camp made up for the fact that I was not always able to understand them.

Looking back at my fieldwork I would definitely do things differently than I did back then. I would have tried harder to obtain a useful role in the camp, such as giving English classes or help in the restaurant. I think that it would have been easier to connect with the women if I was doing something useful for them. I also would have narrowed down the topic of the research as now it was merely on their everyday lives, but I did not have a special focus. On the other hand I was one of the first foreign researchers living with them, thus there was almost no information about their living circumstances which I could have used to start my research.

The researchers Identity

In the field, it is always important to remain self-reflexive. Being aware of oneself and how the identity and image of the researcher influences the field work. I believe that the perception research participants have on the researcher certainly influences the research and the fieldwork.

During this research I was always aware of my identity, as I was always the outsider, being the only foreigner living in the camp. Of course there were other foreigners (journalists and UN personnel) visiting the camp, but they were not living with them in the camp. Being a foreigner had several downsides but also opened up opportunities. Mainly because as a foreigner I was relatively neutral when it came to the armed conflict, not being influenced by actions in the past or during wartime. This made it easier to go and live with the FARC, comparing to someone from Colombia, who could have a strong bias against the FARC. I say relatively neutral as I still had a personal bias as a researcher. This bias has allowed me to sympathize or reject certain ideas or statements determining what I found important to write down in this research. Although I always tried to maintain a neutral perspective and not to pick a side between the Colombian government and the FARC, I did recognize that I find that the Colombian government lacks when it comes to attention paid to civilians living in rural settings. Furthermore I sometimes sympathized with the FARC when it came to their living conditions and hopes and dreams for their future livelihoods. Living with the FARC made me recognize that these are just normal people, trying to build up their lives, despite all the violence they experience and caused. It was however when I traveled outside of the camp, that I found myself at moments being disgust by what the FARC had done during the conflict. Outside the camp I got contact with victims of the conflict, telling me their stories of how their men and children were killed.

These stories also influenced my personal view towards the FARC, although I never connected these stories to the people living in the camp, as it was hard for me to imagine that these people were capable of committing such atrocities.

Another matter concerning my own identity was my gender. Being a woman and doing research on women gave me a better connection with my research participants. On the other hand I was also aware that being a foreigner and female made me an interesting party for the FARC men. It was always a struggle between showing my interest in them, because I needed information on their lives versus give them the idea that I was interested in them in other ways.

By living and staying with the FARC in the camp I automatically was associated with them. Although I always emphasized that I was there for my research and that I was just a neutral spectator, I still lived with them. When I made some friends in the surrounding village, they told me that everybody in the village thought that I was part of the FARC. Then I became aware of the fact, that every time I came down from the camp, I was wearing rain boots (the official footwear of the FARC) and most of the times on the back of a motorcycle, with one of the FARC members. It was not a weird thought to think that I was part of the FARC, although they could see that I was foreign. This also resonates to the situation inside the camp, as I was living with them many FARC members automatically assumed that I was supporting their cause. So I had to be aware to stress the fact that I was an objective and neutral researcher from the Netherlands, who had come to do research on the reintegration process.

4 Towards Peace; an overview of the Colombian armed conflict and the peace agreement

This chapter functions as an outline of the major developments leading up to the Colombian post-accord context. Starting with answering question such as; how did the FARC emerge? What was the role of women in the FARC during the armed conflict? How did the peace agreement emerge and what are the consequences of peace in Colombia? What are some important processes happening in the post-accord context in Colombia? How do these processes influence the everyday lives of these women? Before looking at the current situation of the female FARC ex-combatants it is important to have historicized understanding of their lives. Following Ralph Sprenkels as he argues; “...a historicized understanding of a revolutionary movement and its internal relations constitutes an important part of the puzzle of post-insurgency or in this case post-accord...” (Sprenkels, 2014, pg 75).

This chapter will firstly elaborate on the history and the foundations of the FARC-EP. Secondly on the role of women in in the FARC-EP and the organizational structure of the FARC-EP. Thirdly it will describe the road towards peace, with special attention to the Colombian Women’s movement and the gender discourse. And at last this chapter will explain the Post-Accord context and what social and political processes have emerged within this context.

4.1 A brief history of the Colombian conflict and FARC foundations

The Colombian conflict is the longest running internal conflict in the Western Hemisphere and has resulted in over 220,000 deaths, 25.000 disappeared persons, 5 to 6 million internally displaced by violence, and countless other human rights violations by armed groups on all sides. There are many different narratives on this war, but most emphasize; a civil war that started as a war of Marxist revolutionaries against an exclusive political system and developed into a struggle over resources; military, paramilitary, guerilla, domestic elites and multinational actors fought for control of this resource-rich country (Theidon, 2009).

The national center for Historic Memory in Colombia marks the start of the conflict as 1958. However, the 10-year period before it, known as “*La Violencia*”, also left over 200,000 Colombians dead and is inevitable linked to the events of the following decades (Lee, 2012). The conflict that helped produce “*La Violencia*” has its roots in agrarian class division between the landowners and the workers. Violence and breakdown of social order happened in most of the countryside, which gave rise to insurgent self-defense organizations. Peasant self-defense groups (*Autodefensas Campesinas*) grew in this time and became a serious threat to the Colombian government. One of these groups called themselves the “Marquetalia Self-Defense Movement”. In 1966, the group renamed itself the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC) and appointed Tirofijo as its commander (Cunningham et al., 2013). The FARC developed itself as a rural-based Marxist guerilla movement. Inspired by the Cuban Revolution, the FARC made military struggle a crucial part of its approach. It believed that a revolution could happen, and that the revolutionary effort had to be initiated from the countryside (Rochlin, 2003).

Besides the FARC various guerilla groups were founded during the National Front; among these the ELN (Ejército Nacional de Liberación, the EPL (Ejército Popular de Liberación) and the M-19 (Movimiento 19 de abril). The second largest still operating guerilla movement is the ELN (Theidon, 2009). At present, the ELN has an estimated 3,500-4000 combatants and are still active in the rural areas of Colombia.

As a reaction to the public disorder, the Colombian government promoted paramilitary organizations; ultra-right civil defense organizations who were permitted to bear arms for private use (Theidon, 2009). Paramilitary organizations have evolved since the 1960s as a fundamental component of the Colombian counter-insurgency strategy and aimed at fighting against leftist guerilla movements. This was the beginning of a complicated relationship between the Colombian state, the US government (who gave financial and military aid), and the semi-legal armed groups known as the paramilitaries (Theidon, 2009). Additionally, paramilitary groups were hired by regional elites in order for protecting their interests and suppressing social protests (Theidon, 2009).

The 1970s and 1980s were decades in which the drug trade grew in Colombia, first with marijuana and then with cocaine. This was the era of the Medellín and Cali cartels, personified by Pablo Escobar. They claimed 2.5 million acres of land in Colombia between 1983 and 1985, more than one-twelfth of Colombia's productive farmland. For this land grab paramilitaries were used to take, most of the times by force, the wanted lands and thus displaced thousands of peasants. The fusion of paramilitary organizations and drug trafficking gave rise to a new phenomenon known as "*paramilitarismo*"; "The transformation of paramilitary groups into economic, social, and political force, that has infiltrated Colombian society" (Theidon, 2009, p. 8). The most known paramilitary group are the United Self Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC). At its height the group comprised over 30,000 members. It is known for being responsible for many atrocities and human rights violation against the civilian population (Saab & Taylor, 2009).

In the mid-1970's, the FARC also became involved in drug trafficking, which intensified in the 1980s (Cunningham et al., 2013; Lee, 2012; Provost, 2018; Saab & Taylor, 2009). By 1979 the FARC was dominant in only a few areas, such as Putumayo, Caquetá and the southern and central regions, but its influence became bigger as those areas became involved in the production of cocaine. In 1982 the FARC made the decision to tax narco-traffickers to receive the revenues it needed to expand (Gentry & Spencer, 2010). Partly through this the FARC grew immensely in the 1980s until 2000. The FARC grew approximately from 3,600 in 1986 to about 17,000 to 20,000 fighters in 2000 (Gentry & Spencer, 2010). Later on the FARC expanded its narcotics activities from its focus on taxation of narcotics traffickers to more direct involvement in coca growing, narco-manufacturing and commercialization. Although it has never been proven that the FARC actively dealt in cocaine, it ensured its financial viability through involvement in coca growing and drug trafficking (Gentry & Spencer, 2010). In addition, to assure financial viability the FARC has been very active in extortion and kidnapping (Saab & Taylor, 2009). Thousands of Colombians were kidnapped every year, and the kidnappings were a major source of revenue for the FARC. Not all the targets were wealthy; some of them were chosen for their strategic value as bargaining chips in negotiations with the government. The most well-known kidnapping was that of former presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt.

Therefore most people argue that the FARC abandoned its commitment to the best interest of the people and the revolution, and turned instead to profiteering (Lee, 2012; Saab & Taylor, 2009; Theidon, 2016). These events, such as being involved in the coca-trade, kidnappings and extortion, are up to today influencing the main stories on the FARC in Colombian media. This thus partly results in the hostile attitude of many Colombian citizens towards the FARC, which is still present in today's Colombian society.

In 1985 the FARC formed a new political party called the Union Patriótica (UP). This was the FARC's first significant effort to engage in politics (Rochlin, 2003). Despite encouraging results in the elections of 1985, the UP ended because of political violence. It has been argued that right-wing paramilitary groups were responsible for the assassination of up to 2,000-4,000 UP supporters and leaders from 1986 through the early 1990's and that it was tolerated by the army. A phenomenon that has been called the Dirty War (*la Guerra Sucia*). These events solidified the FARC's argument for the necessity of the armed struggle (Rochlin, 2003).

In the 1990s the FARC negotiated for official control of a territory in the southern part of the country. The Pastrana administration gave a Switzerland sized section of the country in the department Meta, to the FARC. In an effort to create a demilitarized zone that would contribute to solidifying peace talks. However according to Rochlin 2003 this only strengthened the FARC's belief that altering or overthrowing the government was possible. It maintained the support of most of the people in this major coca-cultivating region because it supported the peasants' economic and political interests (Lee, 2012). By 1998 the FARC's power had grown tremendously, and it was using the demilitarized zone for guerilla training and narco-trafficking (Rochlin, 2003). As a consequence, from the early 1998 to the end of 1999, the FARC has extended its operations and the size and scope of these operations; military confrontations took place in major cities and the outskirts of Bogotá. In 2002 president Pastrana's gestures had failed to convince the FARC leaders to negotiate seriously and in 2002 the demilitarized zone ended (Gentry & Spencer, 2010).

Then president Álvaro Uribe Vélez, inaugurated in August 2002, went further, formulating a fierce counterinsurgency strategy designed to defeat the FARC. Uribe was determined to defeat it. Largely because the FARC had killed his own father in an attempted kidnapping in 1983. In 2004 Uribe put into effect a plan called "*el plan Patriota*", a military campaign with help of the United States in order to defeat the FARC. Although Uribe could not defeat the FARC, it severely weakened several combat formations and forced the FARC to retreat back into guerilla warfare. By 2008 the FARC was down to about 9000 fighters, with many killed, captured or deserted as a consequence of the severe counterinsurgency of Álvaro Uribe (Gentry & Spencer, 2010; Rochlin, 2003). Then in 2012 under the supervision of the new president Juan Manuel Santos, peace talks between the FARC and the Colombian government started. These peace talks ended in 2016, when a peace agreement was signed and formally ended a 50-year old conflict.

Organizational culture of the FARC

The FARC is and was characterized by being predominantly rural. In addition it was mainly a militarized organization; a hierarchical organization with a well-defined chain of command and rank structure (Gentry & Spencer, 2010). In this research I will not explain the whole command and rank structure of the FARC, as this is too complicated and unnecessary. Instead I will explain a rough image of the organizational culture and its ideology.

This, in order to get an idea about, how the FARC positioned itself as an organization in a military way but also as a farmer-based movement. Connecting to the post-insurgency theory of Ralph Sprenkels as he states that it is important to look at the organizational culture and internal relations of an insurgency group (Sprenkels, 2014). Some of the aspects of the organizational culture continue in the post-insurgency context and thus influence their livelihoods. Aspects such as, the hierarchical internal structure and the leftist revolutionary ideology are still influencing the everyday lives of the FARC women studied in this research.

The FARC has a hierarchical internal structure. It was composed of; the Secretariat of the Central High Command, The High Command, seven blocks which are organized by geographical regions, various urban structures and over seventy "*frentes*" (fronts). Each bloc contains at least five *frentes*. The two largest operational blocs were the Eastern and the Southern Blocs, as they operated in the rural lands of Colombia, which can be seen as the FARC's heartland. The Secretariat was composed of seven male members and led the military organization. The High-Command existed out of twenty-five commanders from the seven blocks and were for example responsible for choosing the members of the Secretariat (Gentry & Spencer, 2010). The FARC's almost seventy Fronts were subdivisions of the seven blocks and were divided throughout the national territories. The Fronts could be seen as the combat part of the FARC (Gentry & Spencer, 2010).

The FARC also has members who were not necessarily participating in combat. They are called *milicianos* (militias), young women and men between the age of fifteen and thirty-five who have been trained by the FARC, and who live in small towns and cities. These members provide technical support, information and intelligence. Militias consist out of *milicias urbanas* (urban militias), which are similar to the militias but operate in big cities, such as Bogotá, Medellín and Cali. Other members are called *milicias populares* (militia members). These are older men and women who were not formally trained by the FARC, but who provided logistical support and are in solidarity with the guerrilla group. Most of these militias were part of the Bolivarian Movement created by the FARC secretariat member Alfonso Cano in 2000, also to attract more higher educated members who supported the FARC on an ideological level (Ferro, Medina, & Ramón, 2002; Waalen Borch, 2007). This because the FARC mainly exists out of low-educated peasants from the rural areas in Colombia, which resulted in that most combatants lacked political skills and ideological knowledge (Waalen Borch, 2007). This was during the time when the FARC changed their ideological focus from a Marxist ideology towards "*Bolivarianism*". *Bolivarianism* is a set of national doctrines inspired by South American independence hero Simón Bolívar (Ugarriza & Craig, 2013). *Bolivarianism* is a mix of Pan-American, socialist and national-patriotic ideals, fixed against injustices of imperialism, inequality and corruption. Interesting here is that is not formally known if these militias are participating in the DDR process as most of them did not had a weapon to hand in or did not want to participate. This also resonates with the militias secret nature operating semi-autonomously from the FARC its military structure (El Espectador, 2016)

Many authors have argued that, although the FARC has established itself as the strongest leftist group in Latin America, it had failed to develop a refined political approach and was more focused on the military part (Rochlin, 2003; Tolle, 2003). Other authors do not agree with this position and see the FARC's ideological framework as relevant (Ampuero & Brittain, 2005; Ugarriza & Craig, 2013). This because the political wing was responsible for the educational aspect of the organization.

During the first two months, new rebels not only undergo military training but also study the FARC's agrarian program and political platform. This ideological education is required before members are allowed to participate in combat operations. Members of the FARC spend an hour each day of discussing national politics, Marxism, Leninism, socialism or Bolivarianism. The FARC also had a radio channel called *La Voz de la Resistencia*, which broadcasts revolutionary music and political propaganda. As they had their own famous musicians and revolutionary music, which was and is popular among peasants in Colombia (Ugarriza & Craig, 2013). The FARC uses a communist lifestyle, which means that they share everything and that the combatants have little possessions. Even if they receive a gift from family, this first has to pass through the commanders and they decide to give the gift back or to share it among the combatants. The FARC does not pay its combatants as all the money earned is for the organization and their fight for the Colombian people (Saab & Taylor, 2009). This "sharing norm" is still important and present in the current everyday lives of the FARC women studied in this research.

Next to ideological education of its members the FARC also facilitated workshops and courses in skill-training other than combat. An example is that FARC combatants could follow courses in medicine and health, but also on nature conservation and rule of law. Many women I spoke followed courses in medicine and health in order to become a nurse.

"You will learn everything you need to learn about patients, medicines and I even did an internship in one of the FARC hospitals. I also followed a course about ecology which made me very conscious about the nature and how to preserve it"

- Nancy
[December, 07]

FARC demands life militancy; dissentation is considered high treason and is one of the worst offenses punishable by death. Despite this fact, recruitment is said to be "voluntary". Voluntary between brackets as many FARC members join the FARC at the age of 13-15 years and are thus perceived as child soldiers (Gutiérrez Sanín, 2008). In addition there is a political or military sanction for every type of offence. Apart from executions, there are other types of punishment such as being chained to trees for weeks, digging garbage pits, trenches, or latrines, carrying piles of wood, and so on.

The above mentioned information gives an image on how hierarchical and disciplined the FARC was as an organization and how their ideology played an everyday role in their lives. Many aspects of the organizational and ideological culture continues to play a large role in the current everyday lives of the FARC women and men. On the other hand some aspects are slowly changing, such as the militaristic focus. Because the FARC is no longer a military organization. I will elaborate more on this in the following chapters.

Role of "guerrillas" in the FARC

In Colombia women and girls have supplied a significant percentage of fighters in the FARC, currently 40% of all FARC fighters are female. Their role, their identity and their position in the FARC during the armed conflict plays a substantial role in their everyday lives after the signing of the peace agreement. Therefore I will try to explain briefly their lived experiences in the FARC through the interviews I conducted and literature that is written about the FARC women as "guerrillas".

The interviews I conducted are mainly on their lives at this moment and their futures, not so much their past. The information I do have about their past, focusses mainly on their occupation and profession, but also on a feeling of belonging to something bigger and fighting for a cause. The information I will use from the literature, that is written on the role of women within the FARC, is based on stories of women who fled and thus deserted the FARC before the peace agreement was signed. It is thus of importance to keep in mind that these women have chosen to leave the FARC and that the women, interviewed for this research, have chosen to stay with the FARC. This consequently results in contradicting information and truths, but also shows us how these women have different perspectives on their lives in the FARC during the armed conflict.

In 1985, FARC-EP statues formally recognized women as guerillas on an equal level with men. Main reason according to many authors, was that in 1980, the FARC gained access to many new resources and wanted to expand. The group could not have achieved this expansion as an all-male force and thus had to think about other options, such as female recruitment (Herrera & Porch, 2008). The FARC's military system understood the potential advantage of female presence in their ranks, and structured their organization to squeeze the maximum benefit from female recruitment (Derks et al., 2011). The presence of female fighters had several benefits for the FARC. First, it is supporting the FARC's stated ideology; "The FARC feels that the entire community needs to be represented in its ranks, including women". Second, female recruitment increases the quantity and quality of the FARC's recruitment pool. Third, the underestimated courage and efficiency, not to mention ferocity, of female fighters served as weapon for the military system. Fourth, females help to soften the image of the guerilla group. Females are often used in photo moments and to interact with the civilian population. Fifth, female presence in the ranks attracts and retain male guerillas because they provide a supply of sexual partners and are thus essential for the moral and the stability of the organization. Lastly the presence of women and children in the ranks helps to demoralize the Colombian military by forcing them to fire on people normally seen as non-combatants (Herrera & Porch, 2008)

Women living in the regions, where the FARC operated, were affected by so-called push factors, influencing their decision to join the FARC. Colombia is known as a highly patriarchal society, with a culture of *machismo* and a high rate of sexual and domestic violence against women and girls (Santamaría & Hernández, 2018) Most women in Colombia experience extreme class and gender inequality. Additionally the armed conflict itself also creates conditions for women joining the FARC. Motivations for women joining the FARC vary a lot. Most of the women mention reasons such as having no educational opportunities, security issues as running away for sexual and domestic violence, displacement and the simple reason of seeing it as a logical step when living their whole lives under FARC governance (Hernández & Romero, 2003). Women who enter the FARC, are overwhelmingly coming from the rural areas, most are illiterate and indigenous or Afro-Colombian, and young. Between 13 and 15 is the most common age of entry. For many young women the FARC was seen as a sanctuary as in the countryside there are no schools, and there is lots of sexual and domestic abuse. The women I spoke almost all joined when they were 14 years old (personal communication, Andrea, Nancy and Sonía, 2017). Most of them with the reason that the FARC could give them something they could not get form the Colombian state; security and education.

Some also told me that they joined as a reaction to the assassination or violent displacement of their family members. Nancy, one of the FARC women in the camp told me her story:

“I lived in the middle of the battlefield between the FARC and the paramilitary. During that fight the paramilitary killed two of my older children and my husband as they thought we were collaborating with the FARC (this was not the case she just lived in FARC territory). Desperate to survive, I asked for shelter with the FARC for me and my daughter (a baby of five months) as they were the only ones near to protect us against the paramilitary. Later on I joined the FARC, partly for protection and partly because I did not really had another choice”

- Nancy
[December, 07]

When entering the FARC, it is meant to be a shock, aimed at breaking the physical, psychological and emotional bonds with one's former life. A new guerilla takes a “*nom de guerre*”, and during a two month basic training course must become familiar with the rituals, values, and regulations of the organization (Herrera and Porch, 2008). Moreover most of the women spoke about a sort of life-dependency on the organization and its norms and values (Santamaría & Hernández, 2018). This dependency did not only entail their daily activities but also their whole identity. This special identity of being a FARC female combatant is called “*Fariana*”; which defines what it is to be female but simultaneously being a member of the FARC. The women interviewed for this research also mention that their identity depends on being a member of the FARC but also being female. This identity shaping will be explained later on in this research. On the website “*Mujer Fariana*”, the FARC women launched in 2013, they stated briefly what it means to be a “*Fariana*”;

“Ser guerrilleras significa tomar la decisión de luchar, de asumir la responsabilidad por nuestros actos, de liberarnos de un destino preestablecido, de esos roles definidos por una sociedad injusta y excluyente. Nuestro ingreso a filas representa de por sí un acto de rebeldía y liberación; es hacer parte de un colectivo donde ser hombre o mujer está rebasado por la condición de combatientes revolucionarios por un mundo justo” (MujerFariana, 2013)

“To be a female guerilla means to make the decision to fight, to take responsibility for our actions, to liberate ourselves from a pre-established destiny, of those roles defined by an unfair and exclusive society. Our entry into the ranks represents in itself an act of rebellion and Liberation; it is to be part of a collective where being male or female is exceeded by the condition of revolutionary combat for a fair world” (MujerFariana, 2013)

Far from seeing themselves as victims of conflict, former guerillas especially look back on their service as an extremely positive experience for two reasons (Herrera and Porch, 2008). First, although discipline in the FARC is strict, and punishment may be brutal, the organization allows females to have relative autonomy and a control over their lives. This includes sexual freedom, which is unimaginable in a patriarchal rural societies from which the vast majority is recruited. For many women the FARC offers a way out from physical, verbal and sexual abuse, empowers them through arms, assigns defined roles and tasks that allows them a measure of control over their lives (Herrera and Porch, 2008). Secondly, they feel pride in the fact that, without the dedication, organizational skills and courage of the women, the FARC could not function on the level that it has achieved, nor survive as an organization. Service in the FARC gives them a sense of belonging and accomplishment, an opportunity to play an important role in what can be seen as a “successful enterprise” (Herrera and Porch, 2008). Women occupied critical operational, tactical and social roles in the FARC.

They mention that they could follow courses on communication, intelligence and medicine. But also obtained decision-making skills and leadership skills in combat and by carrying out government tasks in the areas they were present. This also comes to the fore when speaking with the female FARC ex-combatants in the camp. Most of them express a feeling of pride being part of the FARC.

The FARC claims that they have created a racially and gender equal organization, where women are treated as equal partners. Gender equality extends to combat, as is expected from the women to have the same combat skills as men. In theory, any guerilla is able to advance in the FARC hierarchy based on his or her abilities, dedication and intelligence. There are cases of women as commanders, but few go much higher and the 12- men Secretariat is all male. Most females are content with the positions that the FARC traditionally assigns to women, such as nurses, radio operators, explosive experts, specialists in logistics and finance, intelligence, propaganda and public order (Derks et al., 2001). The women I spoke also mentioned these positions, most of them were radio operators and nurses. This does not annul the fact that they were all very proud when talking about their positions. Many felt that they contributed to a bigger purpose, namely the fight for a more equal Colombian society.

Controversial issues in the FARC

Within the FARC there are many rules concerning having a relationship and starting a family. In the FARC it was not allowed to become pregnant (Hernandez and Romero, 2003). FARC policy is that they be required to abort in the first four months, still late-term abortions were common. The revelation of a late-term pregnancy is taken by the FARC as evidence of a desertion plan. The punishment is to give the women seven or eight months pregnant, massive doses of mifepristone or RU-486 to induce an abortion. Deserted women have complained, that despite the claim to gender equality, the FARC fails to accommodate their ambitions as females, but instead punishes them. Many deserted female ex-combatants described that they were traumatized by an abortion or the giving up of a child (Herrera and Porch, 2008; Hernandez and Romero, 2003). These claims about abortion and sexual violence are also described in the Colombian media. The FARC (men and women) themselves say that the media is telling lies and that they would never abort a baby if a woman does not want it. The women that I spoke in the camp and in Bogotá never told me anything about sexual violence or forced abortions. They did on the other hand stressed the importance of gender equality and how this always has been part of the FARC ideology. In addition they told me that there was birth control and that if they became pregnant they faced the option of having the baby and leave it with their relatives or abort (personal communication, Valentina, 24-11-2017). One woman told me:

“I already had two children before I joined the FARC and they stayed with my mother and in the FARC I accidentally got pregnant and decided to have it and leave it with my mother”

- Amanda
[December, 07]

But there were others who claimed that forced abortion did happen. One employee of the ARN, who works with deserted female FARC ex-combatants told me:

“The women I work with do mention sexual violence and forced abortion as the main reasons for fleeing the FARC, their hatred and fear for the FARC is immense”

- ARN official on the national level
[December, 13]

The literature on the role of women in the FARC all describe a certain playing field, which on the one hand emphasizes the gender equality within the organization and on the other hand describes how this gender equality is constantly contested by certain rules that can undermine the agency of women. Women and men ex-combatants who were interviewed for this research all agreed that, in theory, men and women in the FARC are equals. How this equality plays out in reality is perceived different by various women and will be explained later on in this study.

4.2 Towards Peace; the peace negotiations and the role of Colombian women

President Juan Manuel Santos and FARC leader Rodrigo Londoño (aka “*Timochenko*”) announced that the Colombian government and the FARC would begin peace talks in October 2012, which was the first attempt in more than a decade, ten years after the failure of the Pastrana-FARC peace talks. The willingness of both sides to negotiate was visible by the fact that the FARC had decided to continue with the talks, even though its chief-in-command, Alfonso Cano, had been killed on 4 November 2011, when the preliminary talks were already taking place (Gomez-Suarez & Newman, 2013). Many stated that the Colombian government had bombed the FARC towards the negotiation table. This partly because of the profound military offensive of president Alvaro Uribe, with Juan Manuel Santos as its minister of defense at that time. During which the FARC diminished from approximately 18.000 fighters to 8.000 fighters and was obliged to pull back into the jungle.

The road towards the peace agreement needs to be explained in this research, as it shows the struggle for peace in Colombian society. A struggle which still is very much present after the peace agreement was signed and is thus momentarily influencing the everyday lives of the FARC women in the camp. Moreover a result of these peace negotiations, is a strong and powerful women’s movement standing up, claiming their participation in these peace negotiations. This women’s movement and the gender equality discourse have an important influence on the everyday lives of FARC women right now. As they consider themselves part of this Colombian women’s movement which until today still fights for an equal society for women and girls in Colombia. Furthermore the gender discourse developed in the peace agreement has a direct effect on the DDR process followed after the signing of the peace agreement. The following quote shows the perspective of the FARC women concerning the achievement of the progressive gender agenda in the peace agreement.

“It is not an achievement of the FARC women nor the government, it is an achievement of the women’s movements in Colombia, which we are all part of”.

- Valentina
[November, 24]

When the peace talks began in Cuba, men occupied all seats. Each side was permitted up to ten negotiators and a team of up to 30 total members. All the negotiators were men. The exception was Tanja Nijmeijer (the Dutch guerilla), who joined her nine male colleagues at the negotiation table. For many this was a bit of a shock given all the progress in national and international normative frameworks demanding women's inclusion in peacemaking and all of the work Colombian women prepared for the peace talks (Bouvier, 2016). Throughout the peace process women have taken advantage of every opportunity and mechanism available to participate in civil society conferences, working groups and research initiatives regarding the Havana peace talks. Organizations as UNO mujeres, Ruta Pacifica de las Mujeres and the Centro de Pensamiento y seguimiento al Dialogo de Paz put a lot of pressure on the inclusiveness of women in the peace talks. The change came following a landmark National Summit of Women and Peace in October, 2013, Initiated by nine Colombian women organizations. These organizations represented different ethnic, regional, cultural and political backgrounds. At the summit, some 450 representatives of Colombian women's organizations from 30 out of 32 departments met in Bogotá (Bouvier, 2016). They put forth three key demands; the parties need to stay at the table until an agreement is reached; that women will be included at the peace table and at every stage of the process; and women's needs, interests, and experiences of conflict need to be considered during the talks. After this summit the government appointed two women; Nigeria Rentería and María Paulina Riveros as negotiators. FARC also secured greater participation of women. Commander Victoria Sandino joined the negotiating team and by the end of 2015, the FARC delegation in Havana was made up of more than 40% women, closely reflecting the gender composition of the FARC as a whole. Additionally in October 2013, FARC women launched their own webpage; www.mujerfariana.org. Which contains a variety of multimedia presentations, narratives and interviews by and about the perspectives and lives of FARC women. This webpage shows how they position themselves as being female and FARC. This webpage thus helps in shaping their identity towards the outside world. The timing for the launch of the website is also important as it is around the time of the National Summit of Women and Peace in 2013 and thus around the time gender-equality and women empowerment became an important topic nationally and internationally (MujerFariana.org, 2013).

After the National Summit, for each of the five agenda items at the peace table, teams of advisors have been formed in which women dominate. Women sat on major working commissions, sub commissions and working group. These roles were influential posts and have provided opportunities for women to engage in the peace process (Bouvier, 2016). Furthermore the establishment of the Sub-commission on Gender as part of the formal peace negotiations has turned out to be an effective instrument for gender inclusion in the peace process. "Co-chaired by María Paulina Riveros for the government, and Victoria Sandino Palmera for the FARC-EP, the sub commission is mandated *"to review and guarantee, with the support of national and international experts"* any peace agreements that are reached, and to ensure that they *"have an adequate gender focus"* . The Colombian government noted that the commission *"seeks to guarantee inclusion, social equality, and bring us closer to an accord that represents the interests of men and women"*(Bouvier, 2016). The FARC delegation expressed the hope that the commission *"would produce real change for women and members of the lesbian, bisexual, gay and transgender (LBGT) communities"* and *"grant full rights to women and to the LBGTI sectors that have been discriminated against for so long"* (Bouvier, 2016).

Signing the peace agreement

On the 24th of November 2016, a peace deal has been agreed upon. The final version of this peace Accord was signed in Havana, Cuba by the government of Colombia and the FARC-EP. In order to get the support from the people, President Santos subjected the agreement to a referendum. This referendum voted against by less than half of one per cent, with a 37% turnout (Semana, 2018) . The no-campaign was led by ex-president and congressman Álvaro Uribe. Uribe's general support is stable and high in the country and Uribe backers are in general also more inclined to vote than other groups. The referendum was ideal for mobilizing his committed base, as it loathes the FARC, rejects its participation in politics and fears Colombia turning into "Chavista" Venezuela. The religious no-vote primarily concerned about the gender ideology smuggled into the agreement. Interesting here is that the areas of higher poverty tended to vote for the accord. Areas with higher victimization levels in the armed conflict thus tended to vote "yes". A revised accord, with several changes was revealed less than two months later and ratified by Congress (International Crisis Group, 2017).

Internationally the peace accord is seen as progressive, innovative, and ambitious. The accord contains some interesting aspects. For the first time in history a Peace Accord includes a notion of gender and the LGBTI rights. It contains progressive ideas about land restitution and the specific focus on Transitional justice is not seen before. Transitional justice concerns the aftermath of conflict and large-scale human rights abuses. It addresses past wrongs and therefor moves towards a peaceful civil society and a sustainable peace. Throughout the entire accord, six issues are identified; agricultural development, political participation, ending of the conflict, illegal drugs, victims of the conflict, and implementation of the accord (Acuerdo final para la paz, 2016).

All these events, before the formal signing of the peace agreement, mark clearly the polarization in Colombian society. The context in which peace is to be implemented is far from hospitable. Political support for the peace agreement is weak, full implementation is thus far from guaranteed. In the next part of this chapter I will go more in depth on this polarization of the Colombian society in the so-called post-accord context.

4.3 The Post-Accord context in Colombia

With the Post-Accord context I mean the context in Colombia after the signing of the peace agreement. The Colombian government and the International community would refer to this period as the post-conflict period, but the people would prefer to use the word "*posacuerdo*" (post-Accord) as they say that the peace agreement does not mean that there is no conflict between armed groups anymore. The violence and feeling of insecurity do not stop, it is only a shift in power dynamics of new and old armed groups (El Tiempo, 2016).

Nevertheless it is not true that life after the peace agreement did not get better, there are also many examples of improvements. A women who works at the civil society organization CINEP told me: *"...Victims are actually for the first time in many years manifesting themselves and writing down their stories, they feel strengthened by the peace agreement"* (personal communication, CINEP, 19-07). Other people have stressed that the discourse of peace brings hope to the people; a certain feeling that something can be changed and that life can become better. On the other hand many are already expressing the feeling of disappointment and distrust in the peace agreement as the Colombian government already fails to deliver.

“The government has everything right on paper, but now they need to consequently do it in reality and act upon there laws and plans. “Le falta mucho, no cumpli y no quiere”

- Valentina
[November 24]

Following Ralph Sprenkels stating that: *“the circumstances of peace propel multiple adjustments and adaptations in participant relations, as former insurgents sought to position themselves personally and collectively in an emerging postwar context”* (Sprenkels, 2014). The post accord context in Colombia can be considered as a social field, were these FARC women are repositioning themselves. For these women this context is the reality in which they live in and where they need to build their livelihoods. Many social processes that come forth from the signing of the peace agreement thus influence their everyday lives. Therefor it is important to explain what processes are enfolding in this context. Furthermore the recognition of the post-accord context as a social field can be a contribution to the explicit theorization of the many social processes taking place in the aftermath of the insurgency. Emphasizing that Post-Accord does not only consist out of the reintegration process that these female FARC ex-combatants are experiencing right now. The reintegration process is just one facet of the Post-Accord context influenced by many other social and political processes.

In this part I will go more in depth on different important social processes that took place in the aftermath of the insurgency and after the signing of the peace agreement. Firstly I will explain some essential parts of the peace agreement, which directly or indirectly are influencing the lives of the FARC women. Secondly I will describe the challenges around the implementation of the peace agreement mainly as a consequence of different social, economic and political processes that emerge out of these new circumstances.

Brief explanation of the DDR Process

Part of the peace agreement is the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) phase, which is described in the third point of the agreement “Fin del conflicto” (the end of the conflict. The FARC and the Colombian government agreed on a scheme of 180 days in which the FARC must be fully disarmed and demobilized. This was done in 20 transition zones; *“Zonas Veredales Transitorias de Normalización”* (ZVTN’s) or six transitional points; *“Puntos Transitorios de Normalización”* (PTN), spread out over fifteen departments in Colombia (El Acuerdo Final para la paz, 2016). They handed in their weapons in collaboration with the United Nations. On August 15th 2017 the United Nations concluded the process of extracting all the armament and ammunition in the 26 camps of the FARC-EP (UN). About 8,112 weapons were handed in (UNNews, 2017) . From August 2017 the official reintegration phase started. It is not entirely clear how much FARC members started their reintegration phase in the zones, but most of the literature indicated that about 8,200 members were present in the zones. The general philosophy of the process of socioeconomic reintegration as described in the peace agreement: *“... is aimed at strengthening the social fabric across the country, coexistence and reconciliation among its inhabitants and developing and deploying socially productive activities an local democracy ”* (El Acuerdo final para la paz, 2016). As the United Nations and the Colombian government calls the process reintegration, the FARC refers to the process as reincorporation. As they claim that they are already integrated in Colombian society. So according to the FARC they only have to reintegrate in an economical matter, which they call reincorporation (Personal communication, male FARC member, 11-02-1018).

The entity from the government that is responsible for this process is called the “Agencia de reincorporación y Normalización” (ARN). An agency that has an abundance of experience with the process of reintegration, as they handled the reintegration process of many ex-fighters including the paramilitary in 2006. They had to change their name from reintegration to reincorporation after the peace agreement was signed.

The FARC established the organization ECOMUN for the purpose of the economic reintegration of the FARC. This organization is mainly responsible for the economic reincorporation as they manage the establishment of the cooperatives. The cooperatives can be seen as collective enterprises for the FARC members in order to start their economic reincorporation. Additionally in order to start the reincorporation process the FARC members will receive amnesty, which facilitates the transition to a legal status. Part of this legal status is the provision of a cédula (Colombian identity-card), giving them a new identity and the possibility of a new start.

They will also receive a basic income from the government for a period of 24 months and social security payments. This allowance is 90% of the minimum wage, which is about 700.000 pesos (193,056 euro). Moreover everyone who resides in the zones was offered a 24-hour course in solidarity economics by the Ministry of Labor. Additionally every registered FARC member receives one-off seed capital of approximately 2.700 dollar to initiate any individual or collective productive project. So in total they have a monthly income and the one-time reintegration payment to invest into the cooperatives and productive projects. Further financial support can be expected from the international community, mainly from the UN body UNDP and the European Union. The United Nations verification mission, who is monitoring the reincorporation process, also reached out to the representatives of the private sector in order to come forward and explore collaboration with productive reintegration projects (UN Verification mission, 2017).

The peace agreement states that these so-called reincorporation zones are temporary. The houses and services are built for two years. The idea is that the people will gradually leave as they find opportunities, family and a life outside the camp. However, most of the camps seem to be developing into communities, where people want to stay and set up the cooperative businesses. This of course has its foundations in the fact that the FARC wants to reintegrate as a collective and not in an individual way. This is new within the Colombian reintegration history, as reintegration programs mainly focus on the individual and not the collective. Therefore the ARN needed to develop a whole new reintegration strategy together with the FARC. Furthermore much is still unclear about the responsibilities of the ARN and the FARC. More on how this process of reincorporation plays out, will be explained in one of the other empirical chapters.

Creating a new political party

“ La firma e implementación del Acuerdo tiene como uno de sus principales objetivos generar las condiciones para el tránsito de las FARC de una organización armada a un nuevo partido o movimiento político, posterior a la dejación de las armas. (El Acuerdo final de Paz, 2016, pg. 19)”

“The signing and implementation of the Agreement has as one of its principal objectives to generate the conditions for the transition of the FARC from an armed organization to a new political party or political movement, after the disarmament. (El Acuerdo final de Paz, 2016, pg. 19)”

An important part of the peace agreement is the transformation of the FARC from a guerilla group into a political party. In order to generate this, the agreement guarantees the FARC will have a minimum representation of five Senators and five Representatives in Congress for two electoral periods. In the case that the party fails to obtain five seats in any of the chambers of Congress, those missing seats will be assigned anyway. If they gain five or more seats, no additional ones will be assigned (El Acuerdo Final de Paz, 2016)

In September 2017, after the disarmament phase, the FARC announced its new name and logo. The group still has the acronym FARC, which now stands for the *“Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común”* (Alternative Revolutionary Force for the Common People). The FARC choose a red rose as its symbol. Opinions are divided about its name as some say that having the same acronym as before still reminds the Colombian people of the armed conflict. They thus suggest that they had to change their acronym, as it fits better to their transition into non-violent organization. The FARC itself, says that keeping the same acronym is necessary as it is part of their identity and their shared history.

“En ese sentido, el líder de las Farc, Iván Márquez, explicó que la decisión de mantener las siglas está relacionada con no “romper los vínculos” de su pasado” (El Tiempo, septiembre 2017).

“In this sense, the Farc leader, Iván Márquez, explained that the decision to maintain the acronym is related to not breaking the bonds of their past” (El Tiempo, septiembre 2017).

The new party has a broad character, claiming to be “a new party for a new Colombia” (Ivan Márquez, 2017). It will be a movement committed to guarantee social justice, peace, sovereignty and agrarian reform, for the defense of the popular interests. The FARC wants to use their political party to implement their ideas based on their Marxist ideology (El tiempo, 2017). Instead of reforming the country through an armed revolution, they now focus upon reforming the country through a “legal” way of competing in elections and creating and promoting bills in order to implement their ideas.

Transitional Justice

Central in the peace agreement between the FARC and the Colombian government are the victims of the armed conflict. Therefor the agreement contains several promises regarding the victims of the conflict. The agreement states the necessity of the greatest possible realization of victims’ rights and accountability for what happened, ensure legal certainty for those involved, help achieve coexistence, reconciliation and non-repetition, and assist with the transition from armed conflict to peace, the so-called Transitional Justice process (El Acuerdo final de Paz, 2016)

Transitional justice, also referred to as ‘dealing with the past’, is a term used for the process of addressing massive human rights violations. According to the UN secretary General: *“...Transitional Justice comprises the full range of processes and mechanisms associated with as society’s attempts to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale past abuses, in order to ensure accountability, serve justice and achieve reconciliation. These may include both judicial and non-judicial mechanisms, with differing levels of international involvement (or none at all) and individual prosecutions, reparations, truth-seeking, institutional reform, vetting and dismissals, or a combination thereof...”* (Report Secretary General, 2004, pg4.)

In the agreement a comprehensive system for truth, justice, reparation and non-repetition is designed. It is the first time a system of this nature has been agreed upon directly out of a peace negotiation process (El Acuerdo final de paz, 2016).

The members of the FARC are mainly dealing with the institution called the Special Jurisdiction for Peace. This judicial body will undertake criminal justice proceedings and comply with the states duty to investigate prosecute and punish crimes committed in the context of and due to the armed conflict (El Acuerdo Final de Paz, 2016). The FARC as well as state agents such as the Colombian armed forces, will participate in the comprehensive system. For the FARC it is of great importance that their crimes are equally judged as the crimes committed by the state. The Peace tribunal works in a way that the ones who acknowledge responsibility of their crimes before the Judicial Panel will face a restriction of liberties and rights of 5-8 years. Which means that they will be involved in concrete actions of reparations for the damages caused, mainly community work (El Acuerdo de paz, 2016). Those who do not acknowledge responsibility and are convicted, will face prison for 15 to 20 years. Right now the Special Jurisdiction for Peace is starting with their first cases. Both on FARC leaders as well military leaders are already questioned before the Judicial Panel.

The part on transitional justice in the peace agreement is seen as one of the most progressive parts of the peace agreement by the international community. Hence the FARC women did not mention it all while I was staying in the camp. This could say something about them not being aware of what the peace agreement entails or how transitional justice is going to play a role in their future lives.

Emerging role of the International Community

Important to mention in this context is the role of the International community during the peace talks and now, in the early stage of the implementation of the peace agreement. With the international community I mean; the United Nations, the European Union, International NGO’s. Additionally I experienced firsthand the role of the Embassies in the implementation of the peace agreement, during my internship at the Dutch Embassy in Colombia. During the peace talks and the finalization of the peace agreement, the international community mainly acted as a facilitated entity. When the first version of the peace agreement was being rejected by the Colombian people, the international community pressured both the Colombian government and the FARC to come up with a second agreement. A very visible act is the offering of the Nobel Peace prize to former president Juan Manuel Santos, in order to as many say: “boost hopes for peace”. (The guardian, 2016)

For many civil society organizations the international communities help and pressure is key in the implementation of the peace agreement. The International community does not only openly support the implementation they also help the implementation of the peace agreement in a financial and technical way. The funding they provide is sometimes the only funding available when it comes to the implementation of the peace agreement on a regional level and in the conflict affected territories. The peace agreement does not only need to be implemented on a national level, but more important on a regional level and especially in the most-affected territories. This need to be done in such a way that the people themselves feel ownership over the implementation instead of seeing the peace agreement just as a piece of paper came up with by the national elite. As there is not much funding of the government for the implementations in the regions, the funding of the international community is very valuable when it comes to the so-called “grassroots peace” (personal communication, CINEP, 19-07)

The reintegration process of the FARC is being monitored by the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia. This mission monitors the implementation of the process of political, economic and social reincorporation of the FARC-EP and collective security guarantees (United Nations resolution 2366, 10 July, 2017). On the ground this means that in every reintegration zone two or three UN field staff are present in order to monitor the implementation.

Understanding the role of the international community in the implementation of the peace agreement can be seen as a new emerging process in the postwar context of Colombia. The role they have on the ground also results in them entering the lifeworld of the FARC women. Some women make use of the presence of the international community, yet others are very suspicious and distant towards these organizations.

4.4 Emerging processes in the Post-Accord Context.

Fieldwork for this study was conducted from November 2017 to January 2018. This was just before the Congressional elections in March 2018 and the Presidential elections in June 2018. These elections were the first elections of the FARC participating as a political party. During my research the hostile political environment already existed in the run-up to the elections. The polarization of Colombian politics and Colombian society was as much present before the elections as after the elections. These elections give a good image on how the polarization is played out in Colombian society. The outcome of these elections are important for the implementation of the peace agreement in the future and therefore I will briefly mention it at the end of this chapter. Still the main focus will be on the post-accord context during the time of the conducted research.

In order to explain certain processes I want to begin with the referendum, in which the peace agreement was rejected with a difference of a half percent. The second deal was approved on November 29 by Congress. This has led the opposition to argue that the government is undemocratically “imposing” the peace deal as they say that a special congressional vote is not a valid “popular referendum” (International Crisis Group, 2017). This no-vote can be seen as an indication for how deeply polarized Colombia is as a country on a political level but even more on a societal level. The context in which peace is to be implemented and these women are starting their reintegration process is thus far from hospitable.

Political division

The no-vote campaign was led by congressman and ex-president Álvaro Uribe. The same man that in 2002, the successful military campaign started, against the FARC. Uribe is part of the Far-right political party “Centro Democrático”. He is very popular under the richer part of Colombia in the cities, but also under peasants in the richer rural areas. As he is still being seen as the man who made Colombia safer by diminishing the influence of the FARC. From the moment the agreement was signed he and his party threatened to “tear up” the agreement or at least amend it in such a way that it will not have any legitimacy anymore. Ivan Duque, at that time the presidential candidate for “Centro Democrático” and the protégée of Uribe, claims that when he comes to power he will “modify” the peace agreement (El Tiempo, 3018).

On the other side there is the Colombian left and the center who are in favor of the agreement. They are backed by most of the civil society organizations and the International community. As a consequence, just as in 2014 elections, peace with the FARC was at the heart of the national elections in 2018 (International Crisis Group, 2017). With Uribe and other leading right-wing opposition figures, including the newly elected president Ivan Duque, being against the peace agreement and the Colombian left and center in favor. As many feared the 2018 elections were more a vote in favor or against the peace agreement than about a certain candidate. The government at that moment, led by Santos, did everything they could to preserve the foundations of the peace agreement. They incorporated it in the Constitutional law for at least the next three governments.

Because one feared that if the opposition of the peace agreement would take over, part of the peace agreement, mainly the implementation of the most contested areas could end. By underfunding the implementation of the peace agreement or undercutting its political importance, the new government can quickly make the accord irrelevant.

One of these most contested topics in the peace agreement is the institution for Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP). Ivan Duque (the new president), Uribe and their allies have proposed certain changes and modifications they want to make regarding the JEP. Several FARC leaders started serve in Congress, without going through the whole process of special jurisdiction. They argue that members of the FARC cannot take place in congress without having face jurisdiction for their crimes (Periódico debate, 2018). As these cases can take years, this would mean that most of the FARC leaders who are in congress, will have to step down. This directly challenges the notion of the FARC changing from a guerilla group to a political party. As a consequence of this rhetoric, one of the FARC leaders Ivan Marquez stepped down from his position as he finds his position as congressman too insecure (El Espectador, 2018). Furthermore Duque, Uribe and his allies argue that members of the armed forces should not be placed on an equal footing with the FARC guerillas in the JEP, but instead be trailed by a special tribunal connected to the Supreme Court and by military judges. (El Espectador, 2017) (Personal Meeting, CCJ, 13-07). This hostile political climate fosters one concern above all within the FARC; that the government will not fulfil its part of the accord. While the FARC is in favor of peace, the possibility of returning to the battlefield resurfaced after these events.

These series of events show the highly polarized and hostile political environment in which the FARC women are shaping their everyday lives.

It shows the distrust of the FARC towards the Colombian government. Moreover it highlights the highly insecure context in which these FARC women are trying to build their livelihoods. If the FARC leadership is not safe and decides to step out of congress or worse step out of the peace agreement, violence can return.

Polarized society

The Political polarization in Colombia goes hand in hand with a polarized society in Colombia. Popular support for the agreement and its implementation is fragile and uncertain, putting the implementation of the agreement at risk. Most of the opposition against the FARC comes from a decades long hearing of all the atrocities the FARC committed against the Colombian people. Furthermore Colombia counts almost 2 million internally displaced people and victims of the conflict. Most of them are not directly victimized by the FARC, but they do associate the FARC with the 50 year old-conflict and therefor see them as partial responsible. They claim that the FARC has way too many benefits in the agreement such as; such as the minimum income they receive for two years (El Espectador, 2017).

The FARC has a history of bad publicity in the Colombian media. This bad publicity focuses mainly on the role of the FARC in drug trafficking, kidnappings and other human rights atrocities. They are also portrayed as an organization committing sexual violence towards women, which includes horror stories about forced abortions of 8-month pregnant women. If these allegations are true or false is not the question, because fact is that many Colombians, see the FARC as terrorists instead of a group that fights for the rights of the Colombian people. The hatred for the FARC goes deep and has many reasons, this partly resulted in a large part of Colombian society being against the peace agreement.

Security Issue

This hostile context in Colombia fosters above all one concern and that is; security. This security concern enfolds itself in many ways. Since the FARC withdrew from their rural areas to gather in the 26 camps at the start of 2017, rival armed actors have taken their place and battle for the former FARC territories (International Crisis Group, 2017)). These armed groups are seizing the opportunity to get control over the coca plantations and illegal drug trade in the former FARC territories. They threat everyone who tries to defend their land or the rights of their communities. Already about 51 local leaders were killed in the first half year of 2017, up to 26 during the same period in 2016 (UN Report Verification Mission in Colombia, 2017).

At least nine FARC dissident groups continue to carry out violent attacks, refusing to hand over their weapons. They are about 800 to 1000 members (UN Report Verification Mission in Colombia, 2017). Motivations for these dissidents are difficult to establish. Though it is known that most of the members of the First Front are deeply involved in the cocaine trade, but also say they do not agree on the peace agreement. The dissidents attack police and military to protect the coca trade and the communities that are dependent of this coca trade, therefor they operate as they did before the peace agreement. Despite their origins, many dissident groups are more abusive than their FARC predecessors as they compete among themselves, sometimes brutalizing local communities to maintain control and thus undermine the peace process both nationally and especially locally (International Crisis Group, 2017). This ongoing insecurity deprives mostly rural communities of any peace benefits. These peace benefits are important concerning the legitimacy of the peace agreement.

The FARC dissidents also undermine the reintegration process of the other FARC members, as they maintain the image of the FARC as an armed group involved in illegal practices.

This security issue influences directly their mobility, their economic reincorporation and the shaping of their identity. According to the UN, 51 former FARC-EP members have been killed and 5 others, were victims of forced disappearance, since August 2017. The killers that were identified were both part of the “Clan de Golfo” illegal armed group (UN Report Verification Mission in Colombia, 2017). This indicates the severe security challenges to former combatants. It needs to be mentioned that all these killings were committed outside the camps, thus shows the direct restriction of movement that former FARC combatants have. This insecurity and sometimes hostile environment also channels the fear for revealing their identity as being ex-combatant and FARC, to people in their surroundings. They are never sure if someone has ties to other armed groups or enemies. Furthermore the hatred against the FARC of some groups of Colombian civilians also results in fear to reveal their identity. In the next chapters I will describe, more in-depth, how this security issue in the postaccord context influences their daily lives and how these FARC women cope with the everyday feeling of insecurity.

The Presidential elections

As I already mentioned, this research was conducted before the presidential elections. Still I would like to mention the outcome of the elections, as they are a good example of the polarized society in Colombia and can give an indication of the future concerning the reincorporation process.

Current president Ivan Duque won a presidential run-off with 54 percent to 42 per cent from the left-wing candidate Gustavo Petro. The result of his victory also foster further uncertainty about the FARC peace agreement (El Espectador, 18 June, 2018).

“No acabaré con los acuerdos, pero sí haré modificaciones”: Duque, (El Tiempo, 3 June 2018). This sentence shows that Duque wants to modify the peace agreement and is not afraid to act upon it. Just after his elections the new president Ivan Duque and his party “*Centro Democrático*” proposed several reforms regarding the Special Peace Jurisdiction. These reforms could change the fundamental idea of having a Special Peace Jurisdiction, which could eventually endanger the implementation of the peace agreement (El Tiempo, 14 June 2018).

It is still unsure what is going to happen to the agreement as most of the peace agreement is enshrined in the Colombian constitution which makes it very difficult to modify (Comunicado No. 51, Corte Constitucional, 2017). Furthermore one must not forget the strong performance of the other presidential candidate Gustavo Petro, who portrayed himself as a strong supporter of the peace deal, which suggests that public backing for the agreement has strengthened. Also the support of the International community for the peace agreement puts pressure on Duque to implement the deal. Duque could thus be constrained by both Colombia’s domestic politics and its international relations (meeting, CCJ, 13-07).

The FARC, who participated only in the congressional elections, performed poorly. It just received 0.5% of the total number of votes. Still as agreed upon in the peace agreement, they received five seats in Congress.

According to the Colombian media the FARC was never expected to win lots of seats as many critics felt it was too soon for the former guerilla fighters to be running for Congress (El espectador, 2018; El Tiempo, 2018). Furthermore it underlines that many Colombians felt that the ex-combatants should have been held accountable for their crimes rather than given political influence. Still many FARC members and leaders express, that they perceive their ability to vote as an important step in their path towards a civilian life (El Tiempo, 2018).

Conclusion

Ralph Sprenkels argues in his theory on post-insurgency, where he argues that a historicized understanding of a revolutionary movement and its internal relations constitutes an important part of the puzzle of post-insurgency or in this case postaccord (Sprenkels, 2014, pg 75). Following this statement, firstly this chapter explains the most important background aspects of the FARC-EP during the armed conflict such as their organizational structure and the role women played in the guerilla group. Secondly it focusses on the Post-Accord context and the social/political processes that emerged from this context.

Concluding that the past operations of the FARC during the armed conflict, their image and ideology still partly shape their reincorporation process now. It also shapes the image the Colombian society has about the FARC. The peace agreement allows for new circumstances to happen such as; the DDR process, the transition of the FARC towards a political party and a greater involvement of the international community. But it also directly and indirectly allows for a feeling of insecurity through; a highly polarized society and politics, the battle on former FARC territories, assassinations of ex-FARC members, family members of FARC and social leaders.

In all these new circumstances the FARC women, I lived with, are trying to create a new life as civilians and are repositioning themselves in this context. This (re)- shaping of their livelihoods and lives are influenced by all these new processes.

In the next three chapters I will explain and describe the everyday lives of these women in this context; structured by three major processes which influence the lives of these women. These three processes are; the Colombian peace agreement, the reincorporation process and the camp (reintegration zone). All three interventions are translated into their everyday lives and give them resources or constraints in the shaping of their everyday lives.

5 The Colombian Peace Agreement, FARC women and their everyday lives

Introduction

“That society sees us for what we are and not for what the media says we are. The media only portrays us as women of commanders, who are only there to please the commanders, instead of women who are equally equipped to fight and can also become a commander! I want to change the way they see us, namely; as equal political players and partners”

- Valentina, female leader in the camp. She answered this when I asked her what possibilities peace could give women from the FARC.
[November, 21]

“Now I do not always have to think about bombs, attacks or gunfire. Life in the guerilla was hard (*Vida muy duro*). Here you do not have to think about that.”

- Sonía, female leader cooperative in Bogotá. She answered this when I asked her, what the most significant change is in her life after the signing of the peace agreement.
[January, 16]

“It is clear that we (the FARC) lived up to our promises, but the government did not. For us giving up our arms made us vulnerable. A *guerrillera* without arms is no *guerrillera*.”

- Natalia, female leader in the camp. She answered this when I asked her if she thought the peace agreement had lived up to its promises.
[November 19]

The above quotes summarize the content of this chapter and show some practical and symbolic interpretations of the FARC women towards the Colombian peace agreement. This chapter elaborates on how the FARC women interpret the peace agreement and how they give meaning to it in their everyday lives. The wider structure and processes of the Colombian peace agreement can be considered as an external policy, actively experienced and internalized by the FARC women. The peace agreement thus becomes part of the resources and constraints of the social strategies they develop in their everyday lives.

This chapter and the following two chapters will all describe a certain playing field, where active actors (the FARC women) try to (re)-shape their lives in different ways and reposition themselves in the Post-Accord context of Colombia. This implies making choices, weighing carefully all the options available and overcome struggles. The act of making choices always goes together with a certain tension of contradicting objectives and outcomes of these choices. In this chapter and the following two chapters I will try to shed a light on these daily struggles of building a life, while telling the stories of these women, living in the reincorporation zone Antonio Nariño in Icononzo. All these three chapters are based on the stories of the women living in the reincorporation zone in Icononzo and on the mostly contrasting stories of FARC women living in the city of Bogotá.

This chapter and the other two chapters all connect the post-insurgency theory and the actor-oriented approach. Perceiving the Colombian peace agreement as one of the many social and political processes that emerge out of a post war context or in this case, the post-agreement context. Then looking at this process with an actor-oriented approach allowing me to shed a light on how this process is being translated and actively used by the FARC women repositioning themselves in this emerging context.

Of the three interrelated interventions discussed in this study - the Colombian peace agreement, the reincorporation process, and the camp - I would argue that the peace agreement is the intervention that stands the furthest away from the lifeworld's of these women. This because initially the peace agreement is an abstract policy designed by the Colombian government and FARC leadership. On the other hand it contains some direct and practical consequences for the lives of these women. Events such as the DDR process and the end of combat are two very obvious consequences of the peace agreement that led to rigorous changes in their lives. This chapter thus not necessarily focuses on giving an answer to the question if the Colombian peace agreement enhances or diminishes their ability to make strategic life choices. Still, in order to gain a better understanding of the everyday lives of these women, it is important to know how these women interpret the peace agreement and make use of certain elements in their lives. This chapter will show that these women make use of the peace agreement in a practical way but also in a symbolic way. Interpretations and actions such as; using its gender discourse as a strategic tool, seeing the peace agreement as a symbol for the transition in their lives, and use and interpret it as a contract between them and the Colombian government; giving them some power to hold the government accountable.

Important to mention is that I refer to women of the FARC, but that different members of the group develop their own meaning, conceptions and values towards the peace agreement. Additionally some FARC women are better in using resources to make room for maneuver than others and what some women see as constraints can be enabling elements for other women and the other way around. This connects to one of my main findings in this chapter, namely that FARC women in leadership positions use and interpret the peace agreement differently than FARC women who are not in a leadership position.

This chapter starts by summing up the interpretations of the FARC women towards the Colombian peace agreement, making a difference between women in leadership positions and women who do not hold these positions. Followed by showing how some elements are used practically and strategically in their everyday lives.

5.1 Interpretations of the Colombian peace agreement

Throughout the entire agreement, six pillars are identified. The second pillar on political participation and the third pillar on the ending of the conflict, both directly influenced the everyday lives of these FARC women. Namely through the handing in of their weapons and the movement into the demobilization zones. Next to these direct consequences of the peace agreement the FARC women have translated the peace agreement differently into their everyday lives.

Interpretations of the peace agreement mentioned by these women are; the gender discourse, with gender as new word entering their lifeworld's, the peace agreement as a symbol for the transition in their lives, connecting to the action of handing in their weapons, and the peace agreement as a contract between them and the Colombian government.

The Peace agreement and its gender discourse

The Colombian peace agreement contains a very progressive gender agenda, described in the background chapter of this research. The discussion on gender equality became more popular during the peace negotiations. Which resulted in the establishment of a gender sub-commission, and a place at the peace table for women. This gender discourse is not only used in the peace agreement on paper but is also translated by the FARC women into their everyday lives. Resulting in some practical outcomes such as a gender commission in the camp and using the gender discourse as a strategic tool to define their identity, but also to continue their ideological fight against (gender) inequality in Colombian society.

"The peace agreement gives us the opportunity to change something in a political way, especially the lives of the people in the marginalized areas (*el campo*). We are in a fight against the inequality in this country, that is the main fight. Between social classes. It is a large challenge but we need to follow this new path, because without equality there is no peace."

- Valentina, leader in the camp
[November, 21]

The above quote shows how some women, especially female leaders, give meaning to the peace agreement as a new opportunity to continue with their fight against inequality. This resonates with the ideas of the FARC leadership on continuing their ideological fight for the Colombian people, as a political party instead of an armed group.

Part of this fight against inequality is the fight against gender equality. The gender discourse that comes forth from these peace negotiations was picked up by the FARC and especially the FARC women in leadership positions. Hence these women see the peace agreement and its progressive gender agenda as a possibility to fight for women's rights and gender equality. The following quote illustrates how the FARC women are turning the gender discourse of the peace agreement into a tool of empowerment for women in Colombia.

"I feel that what we are doing in the FARC on equality for women is what is needed in society. As our society treats women as less than men, it is thus necessary that they are going to see women as equal partners. The peace agreement is thus also an opportunity for women to have their voices being heard. More women as leaders are needed."

- Andrea, female leader in the camp
[November, 30]

The word gender, frequently used in the peace agreement, is a new word for most women. Before the peace agreement all women had never heard of the word gender or in Spanish "*genero*". Now the word is frequently used by the female FARC leaders in the camp and all women are aware of what it means, although these meaning differ per women. This shows two matters, first the influence of the international community and its discourse on the peace agreement and secondly the thorough way the FARC, and especially the female leaders, have taken over this discourse in their lives. The following quotes illustrate very clear how gender was a new word, both for women in leadership positions and women who do not hold these

positions. Furthermore the quotes show how they connected this “new” word to their own ideology and norms and values that were already present in the FARC as a guerilla group.

“the word gender is a fashionable word. Through the peace agreement the existing violence against women was an important topic. Before the peace agreement it also was happening, but almost no one was paying attention to this phenomena. Now the equality between women and men is seen as something important and this changed in an institutional theme”

- Valentina, Female leader in the camp

[November 21]

“No, before the peace agreement I had never heard of it. But before the agreement we did work that way; everybody is equal, women and men are equal here. The difference now is the we use the term gender. All the work we do is equal, men and women cook together, they wash their clothes together and they clean everything.”

- Andrea, female leader of the camp

[November, 30]

“Yes I heard of it, mostly during the peace agreements Now it is seen as something very important and lots of people are talking about it. Before the peace talks I never heard of it. For me it means that men and women have equal rights. I find it a very frustrating word as I do not really know what it really means and nobody explained it. It is just a word that became important during the peace talks but for me there is already equality between men and women in the FARC.”

- Sonía, female leader cooperative Bogotá

[January 16]

“No, we never heard of it. It is a new word for us.” After this answer I explained the meaning of it and the girls were nodding very enthusiastic and said; “well we do agree with this idea”

- Lar Hermanas, sisters of a FARC member living in the camp. They are not FARC but came to live with their brother after the peace agreement was signed.

[December 9]

The last quote is said by two women who are not part of the FARC. They do live in the camp and are sisters of a male FARC member living in the camp. After the peace agreement was signed, they decided to live with their brother in the reincorporation zone. As the quote shows, these girls had never heard of the word gender, while most of the FARC women do know what gender entails. It could thus be argued that the using of the word gender in their everyday lives is directly caused by the Colombian peace agreement. Moreover many women relate proudly to the fact that the FARC already treated women and men as equals, at least on paper. Claiming that the word “*genero*” could be a new word for them, the meaning of the word, namely; men and women need to be treated equally, is according to most women, not new. One interpretation of the peace agreement is thus its gender discourse, which is actively being translated and internalized into the everyday lifeworld’s of these women. Resulting in the use of the gender discourse as a strategic tool to position themselves within Colombian society. How they do this, is being explained further on in this chapter.

The peace agreement symbolizing the current change in their lives

Most of the women refer to the peace agreement as: before the peace agreement and after the peace agreement. For these women the peace agreement thus symbolizes the current change in their lives; namely handing in their weapons and moving into the camp, leaving their old lives in the jungle behind.

What these women mean with “change” and what these women have experienced as the most significant change in their lives since the signing of the peace agreement, differs per woman.

Different stories were told when talking about the change in their lives. Some told me that the most significant change in their lives was living without the fear of being bombed by the Colombian government and living without fear of losing their comrades in combat. Yet others talked about a diminishing sense of belonging or collectiveness since the signing of the peace agreement. They all mentioned that they missed some things from the time before the peace agreement, but that life overall was definitely better now and brought them new opportunities. Most of them mentioned all the new possibilities they have in the areas of work, education, politics and family. Some were more realistic than others and realized that finding these possibilities and act upon it will take time and is not going to be easy.

Summing up all the different meanings these women give to the way the Colombian peace agreement have changed their lives, shows how the Colombian peace agreement can be perceived as the starting point of a new chapter in their lives. Having said that, most women do not directly connect it to peace or a peaceful life as they are aware of the many insecurities and new threats surrounding them. Insecurities and threats such as a hostile Colombian society, the rise of other armed groups, the drug trade, the land issues and, most importantly, the double stigmatization of being FARC and female. The following quotes illustrate the different perceptions women (and men) had when talking about the impact the peace agreement had on their lives.

“My life right now is way better than it was before the peace agreement. Right now we have way more possibilities. You can study, work and have new insights and knowledge”

- Male FARC member, part of the leadership of the camp
[January 11]

“There are many new different possibilities in my life, but I need to find them and search actively to make my life better”

- Andrea, female FARC member
[November 30]

“The moral was better in the guerrilla, you know where you signed up for and the sacrifices you had to make. Now the people do not want to sacrifice everything for the FARC anymore.”

- Daniela, member cooperative in Bogotá
[January 16]

“life is more quieter than during the conflict, you can do what you want at any moment and you do not have to listen to anyone or be afraid to get killed. But I am still doubtful if life will be better, we are still in a transition period ”

- Nancy, Female FARC member in the camp
[December 7]

A direct result of the signing of the peace agreement was the DDR phase, which entails the handing in of their weapons. Most women remembered the handing in of their weapon and linked it to the peace agreement. The act of handing in their weapons, which some carried around for almost 40 years, was for many very symbolic. An action that symbolizes the start of their new lives, namely a life without their weapons, uniforms, and violence.

Some mentioned they felt very vulnerable after they handed in their weapon. Others felt that they were not *guerrillas* anymore, as a weapon is part of their identity as female FARC member.

Others linked it to peace, as they saw it as the first act of starting their life as a civilian, without weapons and violence. The following quotes show some of these interpretations linked to the act of disarmament.

“For us giving up arms makes us vulnerable. A *guerrillera* without arms is no *guerrillera*.”

- Natalia, female leader in the camp.
[November 19]

“Ciclo de violentes (a circle of violence). Una cultura muy violenta (a very violent culture), we are now breaking the cycle of violence and solve issues in a political way without weapons. There need to be changes in lives and education of the new generations without violence.”

- Valentina, female leader in the camp
[November 21]

The peace agreement as a contract between the Colombian government and the FARC

The peace agreement is an agreement between the FARC and the Colombian government. Thus another meaning given to the peace agreement is the peace agreement as a contract between them and the Colombian government. Consequently this results in using the peace agreement to hold the government accountable for their actions, or, in this case, lacking of actions. Using the peace agreement as a contract gives them a certain amount of power and also serves as a way to criticize the Colombian government. On the other hand it also makes them dependent on the Colombian government. Without them there is no peace agreement, but also no funding for productive projects and other crucial parts of the reincorporation phase.

By most women the peace agreement is used as a way to criticize the Colombian government and hold them accountable for not keeping their end of the bargain. They feel that they have fulfilled their part by coming to the demobilization zones and by handing in their weapons. Now the government has to do their part, by funding their productive projects and help legalizing their cooperatives.

An example that illustrate these frustrations against the government is how the Colombian government treated FARC members who just left prison after the signing of the peace agreement. All FARC combatants who were in prison because of the reason they were FARC and thus part of an illegal armed group, were freed after the signing of the peace agreement. I lived next to a men, who just came out of prison. Sometimes I helped him painting his house and he told me that he did not yet had received the salary that was promised to him, like many others who just left prison. Therefor he was dependent on the support of the FARC, and felt that he could not start his new life (informal conversation, November 21). He blamed the government for his situation as they were the ones that needed to grant him amnesty and the monthly salary.

There was a lot of anger towards the government for not accomplishing their part of the peace agreement. Many FARC men and women feel left alone by the Colombian government resulting in a very distrusting attitude towards the Colombian government. Partly this anger was evoked by the realization how dependent they were of the Colombian government for money and skill training. It can thus be argued that most of this anger and frustrations were based on feeling of disillusionment and not going forward.

The following quotes illustrate almost every conversation I had with the women, but also men in the camp, about the Colombian government:

“It is a new process full of opportunities if you know how to use them. The government wants new lives for us but they are not giving anything so you have to do it yourself”

- Marlene, female members of the camp
[December 12]

“El gobierno no cumplí (the government does not accomplish)”

- Male FARC member, old FARC commander and leader of the camp
[November 18]

“La Falta mucho; agua, la salud, mucho (They lack a lot; water, healthcare, just a lot)”

- Male FARC member, part of the leadership of the camp
[November 20]

Most of the words being used in relation towards the government were “cumplir” (accomplishment) and “falta” (lack of), as is illustrated by the quotes used. The Colombian government were thus, in their eyes, not taking their responsibility when it comes to the implementation of the peace agreement on the ground. Still most of the FARC women could not really tell what exactly the government did not accomplish; what exactly are the responsibilities of the government and in what time frame they had to accomplish it. This also illustrates the vagueness of the peace agreement and how it should play out on the ground. Furthermore it resonated with what is said by many that the peace agreement is good on paper, but lacks when it comes to implementation on the ground. This becomes painfully clear when analyzing the lives of these women and the insecure environment in which this peace agreement is being implemented.

On the other side the government officials told me that there was still not one clear plan for the reincorporation phase. Partly because the FARC want to arrange their reincorporation process themselves and partly because they were still in the designing phase of the reincorporation policies, which needs to be executed by the ARN. These quotes illustrate the confusion and vagueness around the implementation of the peace agreement.

“First we had a plan, the disarmament of the FARC was a clear set-up plan. Now there is no plan, not from the FARC as from the government. I find it way harder to do my job than before”

- UN field-worker, monitoring the process in Icononzo.

“it is hard for us to get in contact with the FARC and the people in the camps are super closed. Furthermore I have heard from my colleagues that everything is very disorderly. Most of the things that should have been started are not yet started and the process is very slow. Also the FARC is not open when it comes to letting in help from the ARN. There is also not a good plan set up between the government and the FARC how we are going to accompany the FARC in this process”

- ARN official on national level
[December 13]

5.2 The Colombian peace agreement experienced by the FARC women

In this part I explain how the above mentioned interpretation of the peace agreement play out in their everyday lives. Showing how some elements of the Colombian peace agreement are used practically and strategically when constructing their lives. This part of the chapter focuses on two of these used elements namely; the gender discourse and the peace agreement as a contract. Most women are actively working with the gender discourse present in the peace agreement. This gender discourse is used as a strategic tool in the (re)-creation of their identity and their repositioning in Colombian society. Additionally seeing the peace agreement as a contract between them and the government gives them a small amount of leverage when creating their livelihoods. On the other hand it also makes them dependent on the government, partly constraining them when building their livelihoods. Looking at the peace agreement with an actor oriented approach, I want to argue that both these elements are part of constraints and possibilities, when creating room for maneuver in their everyday lives.

The gender discourse as a strategic tool

According to the FARC women the Colombian peace agreement opens up the possibility to show the Colombian people their real identity instead of how the Colombian media portrayed them. The gender discourse that is used in the peace agreement is perceived as a resource in when shaping their “new” identity. The peace agreement is thus seen as a possibility to actively shape their “social” identity. Meaning; to shape how they are labeled by the outside world. By doing this they also actively shape their personal identity.

The gender discourse of the peace agreement is used to shape their identity as a female FARC member. Thereby telling the outside world that they are part of the Colombian women’s movement who accomplished the involvement of women at the peace table. But also on the other hand distinguish themselves from the “ordinary” Colombian woman as they are also part of the guerilla movement FARC, which comes with certain knowledges and skills. Furthermore, although gender is a new word for them, they claim that what gender means, equality between men and women, already is present in the FARC as an organization. This results in the feeling that as FARC women they need to educate the Colombian women about their rights and need to lead the fight against gender inequality. Therefor positioning themselves towards the Colombian society and especially towards the Colombian women. A position that goes against the image of the Colombian media; namely seeing FARC women as victims who did not had a choice and victims of sexual violence and oppression of the male FARC members.

My main informant about the meaning and use of gender for FARC women was Valentina. A female leader in the camp, with a strong communist ideology and view on how to move forward with the FARC as a political party. She is the head of the gender commission in the camp, the education commission and leader of one of the cooperatives. Everybody respected her and almost worshiped her. In meetings, when she talked, everybody listened to her. I interviewed her twice and both times we were interrupted every five minutes by men and women who needed her help or advice. She was kind and professional, always mentioning the continued ideological fight of the FARC against inequality. She would not open up about her personal life, while she did spoke a lot about problems of others. When she spoke about the FARC, she always spoke in we –form and never in the I –form.

She and other female FARC leaders are using the peace agreement and its gender discourse to position themselves as a group of women (women of the FARC) who can play a major role in the fight against gender inequality in Colombian society. Thus the signing of the peace agreement and them re-entering Colombian society opens up the possibility to participate in this fight against (gender) inequality.

“The FARC is an organization that always has relied on women. Therefore many women joined the FARC by choice as they were seen as fundamental for the organization. The FARC played and plays an important role in the fight for equal rights for women and men. Many women were present when they firm the revolutionary papers of the FARC in 1964. Women were already active in movements on land issues and movements in defending the rights of the farmer.”

- Valentina, female FARC leader
[November, 24]

In the above piece of text she points out how women in the FARC always have been present in movements for equal rights and fights for equal rights. This fight still continues and through the peace agreement the FARC women have the possibility to speak up and together with the Colombian women fight against inequality. In the next piece of text she answers my question; Do you see the peace agreement as an opportunity to change the role of women in the Colombian society and how exactly?

“The peace agreement gives us (the women of the FARC) the opportunity to change something in a political way but also the lives of the people in the territories. We are morally obliged to change the lives of the people who are living “*en el campo*” (the rural territories). So that the new generation there does not have to create new guerillas. This is an important task for us, women of the FARC, as still 40 percent of us is female, so we need to be political active as we were a revolutionary rebel group first, we need to continue our fight.”

- Valentina
[November, 24]

Her answer given above highlights the importance of FARC women being role models and being morally obliged to carry on the fight against inequality between men and women for two reasons. Firstly because they were part of a rebel group with a particular ideology and secondly because they are women in a rebel group, which gives them a sort of double obligation to show how equality is being executed.

“Many people think that the FARC is very machismo, were men have the power and women were only used by them. But I want people to acknowledge that FARC women got the chance to fight were they stand for. For us as FARC women it is important to look at history and write a new story where also the women who fought in this country are being acknowledged.

You know, history is also patriarchal and forgets about important women in Colombia, but this happens all over the world. In the statutes of the FARC you will never find the word gender, but you will find that women are equal to men and have the same rights. I do acknowledge that for women it is more difficult to survive the guerilla than as a man. Although the bodies of women who are farmers are way more tougher then bodies of women who are from the city (FARC women were mostly farmers from the rural areas). The practice of the FARC women or as we call our self "Fariana" is what gender needs to be and what equality means. How we fill in our roles and work is how it should be. We need to be role models and give direction to other women."

- Valentina
[November, 24]

Following the piece of text written above, she describes why FARC women need to become role-models, but also that society should acknowledge them as strong and capable women. She talks about writing and telling a new historical story on the fight of women's movements for equal rights. Here she explains how the peace agreement can be used to give Colombian women a voice and be used as a chance for women to write their own story.

Interesting side note here is that the way FARC women see gender equality comes down to; women need to be able to have the same capabilities, skills and attitudes as men and not the other way around. About this given meaning on gender equality I will explain more in the next chapter. Where I will show how it can undermine their identity as a woman and the realization that women sometimes need different resources than men.

The use of the peace agreement as a contract

As I already discussed another meaning given to the peace agreement is a contract between the FARC and the Colombian government. Consequently this results in using the peace agreement to hold the government accountable for their actions, or in this case their lacking of actions. Most of the women agree that the government did not fulfill their part of the peace agreement. Still it is unclear if the government really lacked responsibility as there is a certain vagueness around the implementation of the peace agreement. Although this does not really matter as for them it is a way to criticize the Colombian government and hold a small leverage towards them.

This situation, where the Colombian government is mainly blamed by the FARC for not fulfilling their promises, results in the FARC to pick up their arms again. This is a phrase that I heard many times. Interesting here is that I mostly heard it from male FARC members. Some women also mentioned it, but most women talked about it as a possibility for other FARC ex-combatants. The following quote shows this phenomena.

"I am a little bit scared about how the peace agreements will evolve in the future, as nothing is sure, and if the government is not going to do more I think that most of the members are getting up arms again."

-Andrea, female FARC member in the camp.
[November, 30]

Like Andrea, most women are aware of the possibility that taking up arms could be an option if the implementation of the peace agreement fails. Holding the government accountable and by mentioning only the lacking of the Colombian government, gives them a certain room for maneuver to always step out of the peace agreement and go back. This is of course not what the Colombian government wants and most importantly what the international community does not want.

Most of the female leaders residing in the camp understand that the pressure of the international community, concerning a smooth implementation of the peace agreement, is very high. All eyes are on the Colombian government and the FARC leadership. By claiming that the Colombian government does not fulfill its promises they putted most of the responsibility of the fragile starting phase on the Colombian government. This line of thinking is most seen within the FARC leadership and thus mainly being used by the female leaders of the camp. When you talk about it with the other women, who do not portray themselves as leaders, they know that there is the option of stepping out of the peace agreement, but they will only do it as a collective. This will also give them the most leverage as it is way more dangerous when 150 to 300 ex-combatants pick up arms than just one or two.

At the same time stepping out of the peace agreement can be a choice, but it does mean that many alternative choices are not available anymore. Most of the women have already chosen to start a family and become pregnant. When you have the responsibility for a baby, the choice to take up arms again is not that easy anymore. I believe that this partly explains why many women do not consider this option as a real option, but more as part of a collective threat towards the government.

The option of stepping out of the peace agreement is also shaped by the context they live in; the postaccord context. This context contains an emerging security issue as other armed groups taking over former FARC territories, mainly to control the coca trade in that area. This rising security issue also influences their decision concerning staying in the peace agreement or to step out of the peace agreement. With this rising security issue many women are aware that they do not carry a weapon anymore, expressing that they feel vulnerable without their weapon.

“We have some problems around security. We have a lot of enemies. Most of the times we do not reveal our identity. But I am always afraid that something could happen. Like a bomb in the office or getting killed on the streets. Many people are getting killed in Bogotá these days. I never walk alone on the streets at night. Once, the door of the office was opened and nobody was there. I was really scared that someone had broken in or placed a bomb in our office. It is something I think of everyday; my own security.”

- Sonía, female leader of a cooperative in Bogotá
[January, 16]

This piece of text illustrates the constant feeling of insecurity many women in the camp and in Bogotá described to me. This constant feeling of insecurity sometimes constraints certain choices, when it comes to, for example, movement. This goes so far that some women expressed to me that they decided to wait with making choices about children or partners after this insecure “transition period”. (personal communication, Daniela, Sonía, Andrea, Nancy and Valentina). Many women, like Sonía, think about this every day. It does influence their everyday lives at this moment and by the women described as mentally very exhausting. This context of insecurity is partly influenced by the peace agreement and the DDR process. For the women becoming part of a life they have never experienced and living in a society where they were not part of for almost 40 years, this makes them very vulnerable and insecure. An interesting side note here is that the women also described that their lives are better now, because they do not have to fear the bombing of the Colombian government.

Still this is experienced as a different fear, which belongs to the period before the peace agreement. Now after the signing of the peace agreement they experience a new feeling of insecurity which is still evolving in the postaccord context.

Before ending this chapter I want to mention one more matter about the fifth point of the peace agreement: Transitional Justice. Transitional Justice is an important part of the peace agreement as it could bring justice for the victims of the armed conflict and thus is of utmost importance when it comes to creating livable society, where *“victimas”* and *“victimarios”* can live together. When I conducted my research and asked the FARC women many question about the different aspects in their lives, not one time they mentioned the possibility to be trailed by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace. I was not fully aware of what Transitional Justice entailed, while I was doing my research, so I also never asked about it. On the other hand no woman ever mentioned it, when I asked questions about their future or the peace agreement. It was only after my research, when I was doing my internship at the Embassy, that I became aware of this possibility, which could drastically influence the lives of these women. As many people at the Embassy asked me, what the FARC members in the camp thought about their possible trials. Unfortunately I cannot make any assumptions about why they choose not to speak about it. I do know that at that time, the mandate of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace still needed to be determined, so many aspects about the process were still unsure. Furthermore it was clear that many victims and also FARC members needed to be informed about the procedures and the existence of this system. It could also be that these women were aware of the fact that the crimes and illegal activities of the FARC, were a topic that they could not bring up. This especially to people from outside, like me, who wrote about them. The transitional Justice process directly addresses their crimes and illegal activities, which then influences their identity and image towards the outside world.

Conclusion

In this chapter I tried to describe the meaning that these women are giving to the Colombian Peace Agreement in their everyday lives. Here I found that these women make use of the peace agreement in a practical way but also in a symbolic way. Interpretations and actions such as: using its gender discourse as a strategic tool, seeing the peace agreement as a symbol for the transition in their lives, and use and interpret it as a contract between them and the Colombian government; giving them some power to hold the government accountable.

Concerning the use of the gender discourse, I found that mostly women in leadership position make actively us of the gender discourse. They saw themselves as being responsible for continuing their fight against inequality through politics, instead of weapons. This resonates with the ideology of the FARC and the ideas of the FARC leadership about the role of the FARC in this postaccord context in Colombia. Here I found that the gender discourse of the peace agreement is internalized by these FARC women as a way to continue this fights against inequality and then especially gender inequality. In everyday lives of these women this plays out as a new possibility to reposition themselves towards the Colombian people, and especially the Colombian women. Partly by using the gender discourse to reshape their identity as female and FARC.

Women who did not have a leadership role, were aware of the gender discourse and the word gender, but they were not actively using it as a strategic tool in their everyday lives.

On the other hand they gave meaning to the peace agreement in a more symbolic way; perceiving it as a major turning point in their lives. Referring to their life before and after the peace agreement. Including the act of handing in their weapons as the starting point of a new life as a civilian.

Another meaning given to the peace agreement was seeing the peace agreement as a contract between them and the Colombian government. Thus using the peace agreement in order to be able to hold the government accountable for the implementation of the peace agreement. This simultaneously enhanced and constrained them. They have the power to decide to step out of the peace agreement, but on the other hand they depend on the government fulfilling their part of the deal.

6 The Reincorporation process, FARC women and their everyday lives

“Yes, being together is way more easy, as it feels like you have a family and you always feel supported, you will have a foundation for your live”

- Andrea, female member/leader of the camp. She answered this when I asked her about the phenomena of a collective reintegration process.
[November 30]

“The biggest challenge now is the legalization of the cooperatives in order for us to start making an income. As many women want to have a family and be able to feed their children.”

- Laura, female leader in the camp and head of the agricultural cooperative. She answered this when I asked her about the biggest challenge for women in the reincorporation process.
[November 29]

“It is a big change in our lives. It is an opportunity to finally start a family, for me it is an opportunity to finally see my family”

- Nancy, female member living in the camp. She answered this when I asked her about what the reincorporation process meant for her.
[December 12]

The above quotes illustrate some of the perspectives the women have on their reincorporation process, which followed after the signing of the Colombian Peace Agreement. The reincorporation process was just starting when I conducted this research. Most of the women I interviewed were living in the “*Zonas Veredales de Normalización*” (ZVTN) or as they call it themselves; the camps (*el campemento*). Some of the women I spoke were living in Bogotá and started their reincorporation process there. In this chapter I will elaborate more on how these women interpret and view the reincorporation process, how it enters their lifeworld's and is being translated by them into their everyday lives. I use the word reincorporation instead of the word reintegration as the FARC themselves do not want to use the word reintegration because they already feel integrated in Colombian society. More about the difference between reintegration and reincorporation will be explained further on in this chapter.

Just as the Colombian peace agreement, the reincorporation process can be seen as an external intervention, influenced by other processes that emerge from the postaccord context in Colombia. In this study I will describe the reincorporation as being part of the everyday reality of these women. This allows me to view the process from the perspective of these women. Thus this chapter tries to shed light on how these women interpret and make use of the different resources and constraints emerging from this process in order to create their new lives.

When seeing reintegration in a rather simplistic way, one could argue that the creation of their livelihoods is the reincorporation process in itself. This because the creation of their new livelihood implies the transition from a guerilla fighter to a Colombian citizen. Nevertheless, following Ralph Sprenkels theory on post-insurgency, this is not how I will use it in this study.

On the contrary, I will turn it around: the reincorporation process as part of the construction of their livelihoods in a larger social field, namely the post accord context in Colombia. To clarify: these women are (re)-shaping their livelihoods in the Colombian post-accord context and the reincorporation process is one of the many processes that emerge in this context. Thus the reincorporation process has an influence on their everyday lives and is simultaneously being formed by the actions of these women. Following the actor-oriented approach of Long allows me to connect the everyday lives of social actors to wider structures and processes.

Again, just as in the chapter above, I will refer to FARC women, but different members of the group develop their own meaning, conceptions and values towards reincorporation. I distinguish three major themes in the lives of these women, where they make use of different elements of the reincorporation process in order to create room for maneuver. These three themes are: collectivity, family and the establishment of the cooperatives. In this chapter I will, per subject, go in depth on the different perspectives, possibilities, options, struggles and tensions when shaping their (desired) livelihoods. At the end of this chapter I will briefly elaborate on how they use the reincorporation process to shape their identity as part of their livelihoods. Furthermore I will conclude with how their reincorporation process influences their ability to make strategic life choices.

6.1 Reincorporation and collectivity

Interpretation of reincorporation as a collective matter

Integrating in society as a collective or community instead of an individual reintegration process is one of the main pillars of the reincorporation process of the FARC. All FARC members refer to their reincorporation as a collective process instead of an individualistic process. By doing this they stay close to their ideology and the unity and solidarity they had as guerilla group. Another element is that reintegrating as a collective allows the FARC to organize their own reincorporation process, which they refer to as 'collective economic and social reincorporation'.

When I spoke about the reincorporation process with the FARC women and other FARC members, the words collectivity and community, were frequently mentioned. They immediately link the reincorporation process to a collective process, something that they have to create together, but also execute together. This resonates with the reincorporation policies designed by the FARC leadership. The following quote belongs to Victoria Sandino, a female FARC leader on national level.

"it's this collective reintegration that I believe holds the most promise for female ex-combatants. "We don't want women to retreat into a domestic world. That's not what they did as guerrillas. Instead, I visualize a collective economy where women will be an active part of political, social, and community life."

- Victoria Sandino, high female FARC leader, congresswomen, head of the gender sub-commission in Havana.
(IRIN News, Tolima, 7 September 2017)

Victoria Sandino was part of the negotiation committee in Havana and head of the gender commission in Havana. She was instrumental in including a gender perspective in the peace agreement. Now she represents the FARC party in the Colombian senate and works hard on themes around the implementation of the peace agreement and gender. She, together with Tania Nijmeijer, are the most visible and important female leaders in the FARC leadership. She partly designs FARC policy around reincorporation and gender. For many women she is a role model and spokesperson towards the outside world.

In the above quote she stresses the importance of reincorporating as a collective, especially for women. She also stresses the importance of women becoming more visible by creating more female leaders who actively participate in the creation of their new livelihoods. She implies that if these women leave the FARC or are reintegrating as an individual, they have the chance to end up going back to their old roles of working in the household. This quote thus shows the common narrative of the FARC leadership and policy concerning their ideas around reintegration and women. This narrative is what most FARC women in the camp and outside the camp also emphasize when talking about their reincorporation process and thus became part of their everyday realities on their reincorporation process. The following quote illustrates how the ideas of Victoria Sandino and the FARC leadership resonates in the ideas of these women on their reincorporation process.

“I want to stay positive and just see this as a transition phase in order to have a better future in eight to ten years. I do see my future only working out if we all work together as a community and not as individuals”

- Natalia, female leader in the camp
[November 16]

Reincorporation versus reintegration

An interesting phenomena is that the reincorporation process as intervention is thus mainly based on policies made up by the FARC leadership. From the government the FARC receives help of the organization ARN (*Agencia para la Reincorporación y la Normalización*). Together, the FARC and the Colombian government, formed the National Reincorporation Council (CNR). The CNR is building and designing the long-term Reincorporation Program, which implementation started on January 1, 2018. Interesting is thus that, while I was doing my research, the reincorporation process had not officially started yet, according to the CNR. This also reflects upon the collaboration between the Colombian government and the FARC regarding this reincorporation process. According to the FARC the reincorporation process officially started after the handing in of their weapons. While the government claims that they were still in the starting phase, or how they like to call it; “the early reincorporation”.

Most of the information about the Reincorporation program I wrote above, is coming from the website of the ARN. This website did exist when I was conducting my research, but all the information about the reincorporation program was not yet available. Now it is possible to read information about their old reintegration program, fully executed by themselves as official reintegration organization, and the new reincorporation program executed in collaboration with the FARC. With the old reintegration program I mean the ongoing reintegration processes of FARC ex-combatants who deserted before the signing of the peace agreement, and ex-combatants from other armed groups. This is still called reintegration and based on their individual reintegration programs.

The process of collective reincorporation is thus new for the ARN. They are already working with reintegration programs since 2006, when the first demobilization of paramilitary combatants took place. An ARN official told me about some difficulties they face with the FARC concerning this new process of reincorporation.

“We notice that the FARC is very closed to let people in from outside. It is hard for us to work with the FARC as the FARC wants to reintegrate themselves and as a group and it is harder for us to find out what they need, especially as they are not opening up”

- ARN official, working on a national level
[January, 13]

“We offer education (courses and skill training) and help with the start of the productive projects. We also have to offer psychological help, but the FARC refuses to have this. Their idea of reintegration is that they only have to reintegrate economically and that they were always part of Colombian society. Therefore they deny that their own people are traumatized. I also think that they don’t want all the stories to get out, because a psychologist works for the ARN and thus the government. The trust against the government and thus the ARN is very low.”

- ARN official working on a national level
[January, 13]

He told me the information about the psychological help after I told him that I was surprised that there was no psychological help available in the camp where I stayed. Interesting is that in the peace agreement it is written that psychological help must be part of the reincorporation process.

Simultaneously most FARC women and men talked about the distrust they have towards the ARN. They told me that the ARN was initially started by Uribe (former Colombian president), in order to start the reintegration process of the paramilitary. Now the organization changed its name but not the people who work there. According to them, half of the people working for the ARN are still so-called infiltrants, who secretly work for Uribe and thus the paramilitary (informal conversation, 08-12). Meaning that the people who work for the ARN thus collaborate with the enemy. This results in them not trusting anyone from the ARN and thus results in little collaboration efforts from the FARC side.

Both quotes show the fragile relationship between the FARC and the government when it comes to their own reincorporation process. The notion of reintegrating as a collective and staying together in a camp is new for the ARN, who always designed reintegration programs for individual ex-combatants. This brings certain struggles and tensions between the FARC and the ARN.

Collectivity and individuality

The phenomena of reincorporating as a collective brings certain tensions, when it comes to individual choices and needs. For most of the women it means that they constantly are choosing between the collective (the FARC) and themselves. Sometimes their choices coincide with the collective, but sometimes they go against the vision of the FARC leadership.

The FARC leadership and the FARC as a political organization made up a reincorporation strategy which entails economic and social reincorporation as a collective. This comes with certain responsibilities and ideas about how to do this.

The idea of the reincorporation process is to give shape to it as a collective and therefor make choices about their livelihoods that resonate with the wishes and needs of the collective. Still when speaking about their personal ambitions, they speak about what they themselves want and not what they want for the collective. The following quotes are examples of their personal aspirations;

“Right now I want to go on with the political project that the FARC is starting. But when that is established I want to study; Social communication or business administration as I feel responsible to help in the communication strategy between the FARC and the Colombian people.”

- Daniela, Female FARC member in Bogotá
[January, 01]

“Take some classes or courses at the university on human rights and women rights and educate other women in the Cauca.”

- Nancy, female FARC member in the camp
[December, 07]

As the above quotes illustrate, these women are not planning on leaving the FARC and start a whole new life by themselves. But they do want to study or do something else than what is offered to them now. This struggle between individualism and collectivity will be discussed further on in the chapter when I will talk about family and the establishment of the cooperatives. These two subjects can function as examples of the constant struggle of choosing for the collective or choosing for themselves.

Individuality also relates to the acknowledgement of being female. Connecting being female to the acknowledgement that this sometimes implies having different needs and possibilities than men. For many FARC women this goes against their view on equality, which is that a FARC female combatant is capable of doing anything a male FARC combatant can. This also shapes their notion of collectivity, a female FARC member is equal to their male counterpart and thus need the same things. The following quotes demonstrate this view.

“But this has nothing to do with being a women or a men as it has to be successful for the FARC as a community only than it is also successful for the women”

- Valentina, female leader in the camp
[November, 24]

“Yes, but we (the FARC) also have other ideas of what a women can do. We know that we can do the same work as a man, we know our rights and we know how to fight for our rights”

- Andrea, female member of the camp
[November, 30]

“Never we question the role of a woman, if a men can do something a woman can do it too, equality is always the most important.”

- Laura, female leader in the camp
[November, 29]

“There is unity and solidarity and there is absolutely no difference between men and women”

- Sonía, female leader cooperative in Bogotá
[January, 16]

The contradiction here is that they do not want see themselves as women, but as part of the collective; the FARC. Placing the FARC and the collective above the notion of being female and thus them as individuals. This could have implications concerning the wish to become pregnant and start a family, as many women expressed that motherhood is important to them. Also because being able to become a mother is a form of expressing their femininity. I will explain more on the wish to become a mother further on in this chapter. Furthermore by denying their femininity they do not take into account their special needs towards health care, reproductive health or the double discrimination of FARC women in the Colombian society.

“It is important to think of what women need and also their physical capacity. Furthermore women most of the time have undergone sexual violence and thus need different physical help than men. Stereotyping is another challenge which many female ex-combatants are facing. Women are way more careful and thoughtful than man but it is harder for them to find a job. They also need to be educated in certain sexual reproductive health lessons. Communication on healthcare is different with women and especially different for younger girls”

- ARN official on a national level. He answered this when I asked him about the extra challenges women face when starting the reintegration programs they have now.
[January, 13]

The quote above shows one of the many perceptions concerning the needs for women in reintegration processes. Still this is the perception of a government official, following a policy designed for reintegration, it is thus not said that the FARC women also look at it in this way. Furthermore it could be argued that reintegrating as a collective, partly diminishes certain challenges for these women. As the women will be supported and lifted up by the prosperity of the group. I will go more in depth on this phenomena when discussing the role of family in their lives.

Collectivity and security

“Outside the camp most of the conditions are very dangerous, therefor it is hard to start a life on your own. Being on your own can be very dangerous, especially when you are female and they know you are FARC.”

- Nancy, female FARC member in the camp
[December, 07]

As the quote above illustrates there is a strong relationship between security and collectiveness. Most of the women I spoke, described that being part of the FARC community gives them a certain notion of security, which is important when building their new livelihoods.

In the chapter on the postaccord context I already explained the upcoming security issue. FARC members are being killed and threatened and have many enemies. Reincorporating as a collective is thus also a practical way to be more secure.

Contradicting here is that actively showing that they are part of the FARC also enhances their insecurity. This phenomena I experienced firsthand, because by living and staying with the FARC in the camp I automatically was associated with them. When I made some friends in the surrounding village, they told me that everybody in the village thought that I was part of the FARC. The moment I became aware of that, I felt less secure than before. Because if the people from the village could think that I was part of the FARC, other groups could also assume that. This feeling of insecurity I experienced, was also experienced by most FARC women, but then worse as they could not step out of the situation. The interesting part here is that by being part of the collective diminishes their insecurity because they are part of a supportive community but it simultaneously also enhances their insecurity.

6.2 Reincorporation and family

Interpretation of Reincorporation and family

“It is a big change in our lives. It is an opportunity to finally start a family, for me it is an opportunity to finally see my family”

- Nancy, female member living in the camp. She answered this when I asked her about what the reincorporation process meant for her.
[December, 07]

This quote, also used at the start of this chapter, captures how most of the FARC women experience this process. For them reincorporation is a way to be with their family again. Not only visit their family, but also start a new family. As I already explained in the beginning of this research; women were not allowed to have children in the guerilla. Some still became pregnant and had the option fleeing the FARC or staying and leave their child behind, most of times with their relatives. This means that there are many women in the camp who could not raise their own child. Now, after the conflict, some saw their children for the first time since the moment they gave their child away. Other women wanted to have children, but decided that the cause they were fighting for was more important than creating a family. The phenomena of starting a family goes hand in hand with relationships with men. Relationships between female and male combatants were forbidden during the conflict. Most of the time when a couple wanted to be together, they were separated by the commanders and one of them was transferred to a different “*Frente*”. Now having a relationship with a male ex-combatant is a possibility. This also reflects the living situations in the camp, where many FARC women live together with a FARC men.

Next to creating a new family, visiting their family is also a new possibility. During my time in the camp I experienced many different situations such as; family visiting men and women in the camp, FARC members visiting their family for the first time since many years, and children being reunited with their FARC parents or parent.

Another meaning given to family is; the FARC as family. This notion of seeing the FARC as family and support system was common during their time in the guerilla and therefor still continues after the signing of the peace agreement. During the time in the guerilla they were almost never allowed to visit their family as they needed to perceive the FARC as their new family and support system. When entering the FARC every member had to follow a sort of initiation, after following this initiation they would receive a new name, a so-called “*nom de guerre*”, which marked the starting point of a life-long commitment towards the FARC. This phenomena can be connected to Ralph Sprenkels theory on post-insurgency, where he shows the importance of old networks and relationship in the lives of ex-combatants after the ending of the conflict. How these old relationships and networks still give shape to their current livelihoods and also emerge with new networks and relationships, or in this case their known network of the FARC emerges with new relationships such as with their family.

Reincorporation and the choice to have a baby

“Right now I am pregnant, so first I need to take care of the baby and want to start a family. Furthermore I want to work as a dentist and keep working for the political party of the FARC. For me the most important thing now is to have a family. I am first waiting to have our baby and then we will see”

- Natalia, female FARC leader in the camp
[November, 16]

The above quote shows the deliberate choice of one female FARC member to become pregnant and start a family, before focusing on her professional ambitions. She lives in a house in the camp with her man Juan who works in one of the cooperatives. This focus on starting a family, was an aspiration of many women in the camp. In my field notes I wrote down that around half of the women in the camp, were pregnant or just had a baby. In the two months that I was there, around fifteen babies were born. This was not only the case in my camp, in almost all 26 camps around Colombia, women were having babies, they called these babies the babies of the peace (*bebés de la paz*). There was one couple who I met a few times in one of the cooperatives. They both worked in the cooperative of manufacturing and brought there recently born baby to work. I did not really interviewed them, but had many informal conversations with them. They were definitely very happy with their little boy and the fact that they could live together now and be a real family.

“I do not want to have a baby now. We are in a transition period and that is not smart to get baby right now. You do not know what the future holds; everything is very insecure, so this is not the time to have babies.”

- Sonía, female leader of a cooperative in Bogotá
[January, 16]

This quote shows that there were also women who chose not to have a baby. They saw this phase of the reincorporation process as a transition phase. Which was not a stable environment to raise a child. Interesting here is that most of these women who had this view, were living in Bogotá. In the camps almost half of all women were pregnant, but in the city: of the 25 women working in the cooperatives, only two were pregnant. One more reason for these women not to have a baby right now is the health care system. There is almost no healthcare available for the FARC.

They are still in the process to be added to the general health care system of Colombian society. For many women the poor availability of healthcare made it dangerous to be pregnant. When I was living in the camp, they lost one woman, who died at giving birth. This just happened before I arrived, so I did not know her. The poor availability of healthcare for most pregnant women was a daily concern for many women and men living in the camp and Bogotá.

Reincorporation and visiting their families

“When the conflict stopped I got to know that my mother was dead. This was very hard for me as I thought that my mother could come and visit me in Havana.”

- Sonía, female FARC leader in Bogotá
[January, 13]

“On the 31st of December I am going to visit my family, but my economic situation does not allow me to visit my family more often. Besides that my family cannot really support me with money as they themselves are also poor.”

- Nancy, female member in the camp
[December, 07]

I arrived at the camp around November and stayed there during December. This was an interesting period as for the first time everybody had the chance to celebrate Christmas and new year's eve with their (former) families. The following story illustrate these events. When I was traveling to Bogotá I sat in the bus next to two other FARC men from the camp. Both visiting their families. One already had visit his mom and was now going to visit her for three months. The other was going for the first time and had not seen his family since 30 years. He was very excited, but also a bit stressed. The only thing that made him sad was the fact that his grandparents wouldn't be there anymore, as they died while he was in the FARC [Informal conversation, 17-12-2017]

Another event, I experienced in the camp was two weeks before Christmas. It was on a Friday and every Friday the bar/store opened up early, as many men started to drink beer and play *Tejo* (a typical Colombian game). I also passed by the store and decided to drink a beer with Johnner (one of the camp leaders). While I was sitting there, some men already became pretty drunk. One of them approached me and we had a conversation about Christmas and that he was going to visit his family somewhere close to the Amazon. While he was telling me this he suddenly started to cry. I knew that he was very drunk and the other men and two women started to laugh. I asked him if he was crying because he was happy to see his family again. He answered me that he was happy, but also very nervous to see his family for the first time since 22 years. He was nervous because, his family does not know everything he had done and experienced during his time in the guerilla. He was afraid that they would not accept him anymore. Then he suddenly showed me one of his shot wounds (in his leg) and said: “*Look at this, this is something they do not know about me, I fought in a war, I used a weapon and was shot*” (informal conversation, December 15).

Although this story was not told by a FARC woman, I knew by the many informal conversation I had with these women and men, that visiting their families was a highly emotional event.

Simply because of the fact that some of them had not spoken with their families for many years and these families were not aware of what their family member had experienced in the FARC.

Another very emotional event was the event of FARC women being reunited with their children which they had to leave behind with their relatives. One girl from the camp, Amanda, had three children during her time in the guerilla, all raised by her mother.

“The biggest change for me is that I can finally be a mother for my children. My family has always helped me with caring for my children. Everything I do from now on is for my children, I want to give my children a future without the stigma I am carrying.”

- Amanda, female member in the camp
[December, 06]

I asked her why her children did not live with her in the camp as there were other children as well, she answered;

“this place is not a place to have children and to let children grow up and now I have all the room to work as hard as I can to make some money for them.”

- Amanda
[December, 06]

These quotes illustrate two phenomena. Firstly how the life of some women changes from living for the higher cause of the FARC to living for their children. Secondly how some women relate the reincorporation process to finally being able to be a mother. This again influences how they shape their identity as a woman and thus a mother. It also influences the notion of collectivity as acknowledging that being a mother is the most important from now on, is acknowledging that the FARC as a family is not anymore. I will go more in depth on this phenomena during the part on identity shaping in this chapter.

FARC members did not only visit their families, their families also visited them. One of the women I visited regularly in her home, lived with her mother, who was almost 90 years old. Natalia, a FARC woman who gave birth to a baby girl while I was there, was helped by her mother and younger sister. This is normal in Colombia, where mothers help their children with their born children by living with them for a while.

Furthermore I interviewed two girls, who lived in the camp with their brother, a male FARC member. They told me that their mother finally stopped crying after the signing of the peace agreement and the moment she got to know that her son was still alive.

“Our mother was very sad, every birthday of my brother she could not stop crying, same for every Christmas and other festivities. As she never heard anything from him, we did not know if he was still alive or already dead. This kind of was the reality in which they lived as a family.”

- Las hermanas
[December, 9]

This quote gives a small insight in how families at home might have felt, when they knew that their loved ones were fighting and could be killed any moment. Also for them, the fact they could see their loved ones, was an emotional event.

The reconnection with their family also opens up the possibility to be supported by their family in a financial way. For some of the FARC members this became an option after the signing of the peace agreement. Although I mainly heard about this option with male FARC members. Some of them told me that with a small amount of money from their family they could buy a small farm and start their own individual projects outside the cooperatives. This connects to the next part of this chapter on the establishment of the cooperatives. The financial support of family goes against the notion of collectivity, because one saw this as a personal financial gift which was not shared with the rest of the group. This already started to result in in-group differences as these members of the FARC will be earning different salaries than other members of the group. Financial support from family enhances the possibility on owning some property or the possibility to study. Although most of the FARC members do not have that much financial support from their family, as most of their families live in the rural areas and are fighting to survive themselves or are displaced by the conflict. I also spoke to some women who did not want to be dependent on their families, illustrated by the following quote;

“My family lives in Manizales. I do see them sometimes, but I do not want them permanently in my life. I want to show them that I can make a living by myself, like I always did. I do not really need them. It could be an option in the end if I life here does not work out for me”

- Andrea
[November 30]

6.3 Establishing the cooperatives

“Most important and most challenging now are the productive projects. They have to start now as we still have one year income from the government , so after that year we have to make some money. The cooperatives are now in their legalization process, but in Colombia these processes take a very long time.”

- Male FARC member, part of the camp leadership
[January, 11]

“In general, the biggest challenge are the establishment of the cooperatives. We need to get started as we do not have any other income. It is important for the women in order to start a family and be able to feed their children. It is also important for our region and the communities who surround us. Part of the plan is to expand the cooperatives, in order for Colombian farmers and people to join this process and work together in the cooperatives.”

- Laura, female president of the cooperatives on agriculture.
[November, 29]

Both quotes illustrate the situation in the camp around the establishment of the cooperatives. By most female and male FARC leaders the establishment of the cooperatives is seen as one of the most important processes of the reincorporation phase. This has two reasons; firstly it is their way to generate income for every FARC member. Secondly, because the establishment of the cooperatives is part of their communist ideology and part of their cause to change the current Colombian political and economic system. Through the establishment of the cooperatives they want to lay the foundations for a new economic system that goes against the capitalist and individualistic Colombian economy and society. This quote illustrates their ideas on how to use the cooperatives for the higher purpose of a more equal society;

“Establish a new economic, social, political and cultural community. Which goes against the society as it is right now; a consumer and individualistic society. We need to find another way of living together, the cooperatives can be seen as the beginning of this societal change”

- Valentina, female leader in the camp and president of the cooperative of manufacturing [November, 24]

Before starting this chapter I want to shortly elaborate on the situation around the establishment of the cooperatives in the post-accord context of Colombia. The economic reincorporation exists out of two projects, namely; the productive projects and the cooperatives. These productive projects can be part of the cooperatives but also individual. The national cooperative of the FARC ECOMUN, is established in order to help the establishment of all the other cooperatives in the 26 camps and cities, such as Bogotá and Medellín. Their head office is in Bogotá and every camp has one member of ECOMUN present in the camp. In the camp in Icononzo, this is Johneer, who is simultaneously camp leader and responsible for the establishment of the cooperatives. The Peace agreement states that every registered FARC member receives a monthly income and a one-time reintegration payment of 7 million pesos (2,700 euros) to invest into the cooperatives and productive projects. Many, living in the camp in Icononzo, did not yet received this one-time reintegration payment and some did not even received their monthly allowance.

The Report of the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia on the reincorporation process stated that so far; 18 cooperatives were established with the support of the Ministry. Of which nine are currently operating in six territorial areas (the camps). Meanwhile in many territorial areas, productive projects have been undertaken independently by former combatants. This report was written on December 27, 2017, exactly when I was conducting my research. The next report written was on the second of April, 2018. This report stated more than 100 productive initiatives are currently at various stages of implementation in the territorial areas. Then the report continues by stating “... *Unfortunately, the formal mechanism established by the Peace Agreement to formulate and finance productive projects has been ineffective..*” (Un Verification report pg. 17). With this they mean that the Peace Agreement provides; that an amount of 8 million pesos (about 2.700 dollar) is granted to each FARC member starting a productive project within a cooperative or independently. As at February only one such project has been approved. In other words the Colombian government is not financing the projects how they promised in the Peace Agreement. On the cooperatives the report states that some progress has been made. A total of 51 cooperatives were created, with 3,070 members. But only a few cooperatives have met all the legal and operational requirements. The last sentence means that most of the cooperatives are still not legal to operate and thus cannot generate an income for the FARC members.

The above text illustrates the process around the establishment of the cooperatives. While I was doing my research they were in the middle of legalizing the three cooperatives of the camp in Icononzo. Only when these cooperatives are legalized they can provide the FARC members with an income. But this process is a very lengthy process, which fuels the disillusionment, distrust towards the government but above all the decision to step out of the peace agreement as they feel they are not able to move forward.

Another factor working against the establishment of the cooperatives and productive projects is the lack of initiatives by the FARC members themselves.

“The cooperatives are now in their legalization process and we know that this can take a while, next to this there is also a lack of initiative from the FARC members, as many are not used to take initiatives, when it comes to their own lives. Also at this moment many comrades have left the camp in order to visit their family or search for a job with other farmers until the cooperatives are working.”

- Male FARC member, part of the camp leadership
[January, 11]

This quote above demonstrates that many FARC members do not prioritize the cooperatives as their main priority. That said, all FARC members, female and male, have their own interpretation and meanings concerning the cooperatives. Most of these struggles connect to the larger struggle of collectivity and individuality. The cooperatives are part of the collective reincorporation. Nevertheless most of their personal aspirations such as studying, having a family or other personal aspirations actively undermine the establishment of the cooperatives. When FARC members decide that they want to study or follow courses, they have to move to a bigger city. The cooperatives are mainly being established around and in the camp, moving out of the camp, thus means that they cannot work in the cooperatives. With undermining I mean that there is lesser commitment towards the cooperatives. One of the reasons fueling this is the insecure context where they live in and the uncertainty around the establishment of these cooperatives. This insecure context of not knowing how their lives and the cooperatives will develop in the future makes them hesitant investing all their money in the cooperatives.

Different perspectives of FARC women on the cooperatives

Before mentioning the different perspectives FARC women give to the cooperatives, I would like to mention a part that I read in the book of Norman Long on the actor oriented approach. This piece of text illustrates perfectly the situation of the FARC women. He speaks about a study of Villareal, who describes in her study a project designed to promote women's agro-industrial activity;

“While the project itself was originally designed to promote women's agro-industrial activity, different members of the group developed their own conceptions of the meaning and value of the project to them. Although as a group they adhered to the idea of group solidarity and shared benefits, individual members differed in their self- definition as beekeepers (which was the project about). Some readily took on the label of the entrepreneurial peasant woman and wished to maximize their economic returns, others saw their participation as entailing no more than a supplement to household income and were therefore less committed to industrializing the product for outside markets. Yet others saw it primarily as a recreational activity that gave them a break from the chores and tedium of household domesticity. Most were inclined to switch between these different representations as and when they saw fit.”

- Norman Long (2006)

The above quote perfectly describes how women in the FARC give meaning to the cooperatives.

All of them agree on the importance of the cooperatives as it is part of their collective reincorporation, but on an individual level these women have different meaning and realities towards the cooperatives and their role within these cooperatives. The women who have a leadership position within the camp are very committed towards the establishment of the cooperatives. They connect the establishment of these cooperatives to the higher cause and leftist ideology of the FARC. Other women are very passionate about it, for different reasons, such as; It gives them the chance to learn new skills or the chance to use the skills they learned during their time in the FARC. Furthermore it gives them a feeling of solidarity and accomplishing something together, like they had during their guerilla time. Others just see it as a way to generate income, in order to feed their children or start a study. Yet others do not want to be part of it or have a boyfriend who is starting his own productive project. Some work in the cooperatives for days, others just for five hours a week. The women I spoke, who are living in Bogotá, experience their cooperative more as a community or a place to come together. While the women in the camp experience it more as a recreational activity or working space. The reason, explaining this difference, is that the women in the camp are already living together in the camp as a community. While the women in Bogotá are all living in different places spread through the city and thus perceive the office of their cooperative as a place to come together. The following quotes show some of the different experiences and thoughts women have on the cooperatives;

Some women valued the cooperatives as an actual working place where they could learn new skills or use their already obtained skills during their time in the FARC.

“I choose to join the cooperative of services as partly this cooperative is about health and education. I want to work in the health sector, because that is what I already did during my time in the guerilla. The cooperatives are the best way to start the reincorporation process. It is always better to reintegrate as a group than as an individual”

- Natalia, female leader in the camp and pregnant. She was a dentist, during the guerilla. She wants to use the skills she learned in her work in the cooperatives.
[November, 16]

“There are so many things to learn, I am always busy. I work in the archives; we try to document everything such as old movies and photos of our time during the guerrilla. I am helping to store and digitalize everything, this is an important for our memory and heritage. Right now as a secretary I am also working hard on filling in the right papers for legalizing the cooperative. I am also taking some courses on how to work in a cooperative; what rights and what obligations do I have towards these cooperatives.”

- Daniela, Female FARC leader of the cooperative in Bogotá. She really likes working in this cooperative; especially the new skills she gained and the new responsibilities she has with her new role as secretary.
[January, 16]

“When we came to Bogotá there was nothing. We build everything from scratch and are still building and learning. When I came here I expressed that I wanted to learn more about the camera and editing. So they gave me homework to study and manage these skills and I became an editor. I edit everything, from pieces of news to small movies or documentaries. Next to that I help others who are willing and wanting to learn the skill of editing. There is a lot of work and every day, it is busy but I also have a lot of fun in working here.”

- Sonía, female FARC leader of the cooperative in Bogotá. Like Daniela she like working in this cooperative, she gets a lot of freedom to do what she wants and develop her skills.
[January, 16]

Other Women mainly saw the cooperative as a way to generate income in order to make a living, safe up for their future plans or support their children.

“I am part of the management of the cooperative in agriculture. Everything I do is because I want to be able to take care of my children and give them an education.”

- Amanda, female FARC member. Everything she does, she does it to have an income and spent this on the lives of her children.
[December, 6]

Yet other women saw the cooperatives as a way to promote female leadership positions and greater participation of women.

“It is of great importance that women take actively part in this process as 40% of the FARC is female. For the FARC equality is always one of its most important values. It is important to have women in all the cooperatives and in all the levels, so the management, on the ground etc.”

- Laura, Female leader in the camp and president of the cooperative on agriculture. She works very hard on the establishment of the cooperative in agriculture.
[December, 19]

“I am super proud working on the land, it is what I am; a strong “campesino” woman. We FARC women are strong and we can carry as much as the FARC men. In our projects we work with 16 men and four women. Men and women do the same job, when making lunch we have shifts, so men and women both cook and make lunch”

- Valeria. One of the female FARC members working in the cooperative on agriculture. Most of the conversations I had with her were informal. She was very proud of her work on the land, as she had been the daughter of a farmer.
[December, 17]

These last two quotes show the insecurities that the process of the establishment of the cooperatives bring with them for these women.

“Right now I receive an income from the government, but when this stops I need to have something else. I thinks it is good that most women are putting their money in the cooperatives. Still I do not want to do this, I want to see how things evolve before I make any decisions about my money.”

- Andrea, member living in the camp. She does not want to join any cooperative right now.
[November, 30]

“It is hard to get the productive projects off the ground. Now it is mostly meeting after meeting and nothing really happens; we are waiting for the government and all the papers. We cannot set it up until the cooperatives are made legal with the chamber of commerce. I find it very frustrating to do nothing, during the guerilla we were always busy. I really underestimated the work it cost to set up a productive project.”

- Maria, Female leader in the camp. She is setting up a fishery, but they do not make any progress. This shows the frustration many FARC members have, there is not that much to do and everything takes time.

[January, 10]

All these quotes and pieces of text demonstrate the different interpretation FARC women give to the cooperatives. These interpretations influence the role they want to have in the establishment of these cooperatives. Moreover it influences their decisions on the role the cooperatives are having or are going to have in the shaping of their lives and livelihoods.

6.4 Shaping their everyday lives

Shaping their identity

The three most important meanings women give to the reincorporation process are; collectivity, family and the establishment of the cooperatives. These three interpretations also influence the shaping of their identity. This process of shaping their identity is full of contradictions where woman have to choose and prioritize between multiple options.

Part of creating a new livelihood is creating a new or partly new identity. As shown in the previous chapter, these women, are trying to position themselves in the Post-Accord context in Colombia. This context and the processes that occur are giving them certain possibilities and constrains when shaping their identities. Possibilities to portray themselves as skilled and knowledgeable FARC women and not only as victims of the FARC men. Constrains as they encounter severe stereotyping and discrimination, which also results in issues around their security.

Seeing reincorporation as a collective matter, makes them part of a collective, namely the FARC. They are proud to be FARC, but choosing for the collective simultaneously could undermine individual identity choices. The main struggle these women face is how to position themselves as FARC, but also as a woman. Being part of the collective FARC is more important than being a woman or a men. This view also connects to the view they have on gender equality. Gender equality to them means; FARC women are able and need to be able to accomplish everything a male FARC member is able to accomplish. In a way this view could influence and/or undermine the recognition that women do need different resources and have different needs than men. An example, of a different need is the difference in health care provision towards men and women, especially for women who are pregnant. Now FARC women finally have the liberty to decide if they want to become a mother and have children. This includes to have relationships with their male counterparts. All these new options confronts them with the need to give a new definition on being male or being female.

“We need to change our ideas about having relationships. We never had normal relationships between men and women. The FARC and your “*frente*” are your family and you cannot have a partner. This also romps the idea of being a men and being a women during the guerilla. Now, we can have relationships and children, this changes our mindset; our body is ours again, we can decide if we want to have a future with our partner and have children.”

- Valentina, female leader of the camp and head of the gender commission.
[November, 24]

This quotes shows the change that is happening concerning the perceptions on being male and being female. Here I do not want to state that being part of a collective and choosing to be a mother do not collide together. Here I want to explain that these women are in the middle of re-defining their role and identity towards the outside world, but more importantly within the FARC itself. One could argue that when it comes to their identity of being a woman, they are in a transition period, where old views and new views come together, and sometimes contradict each other.

Another role for women that shapes their identity is the opportunity for FARC women to obtain a leadership role within the cooperatives. In the camp two of the three cooperatives are being managed by women. Moreover many women are present in the management of the cooperatives as secretaries. This leadership role gives these women a certain identity and pride, showing that FARC women are capable of leading a cooperative.

Conclusion; Their ability to make strategic life choices

Following the theory of Kabeer, the ability to make strategic life choices is the ability to make choices which are critical for people to live the lives they want. Analyzing the reincorporation process being translated into the everyday lives of these women, I found that these women create room for maneuver concerning three important issues in their lives, namely; their family, themselves as individuals in the greater collective of the FARC and their income. They have the choice to start a family and become pregnant and they can choose to visit their family again. They can choose to work in the cooperatives or set up their own productive projects. They can fulfill a leadership role within the cooperatives or the political party. Furthermore the collective they are part of provides them a certain feeling of security, which gives them a secure space to make decisions regarding their livelihood. Regarding their family, the cooperatives, and the FARC as a collective, these women have a certain range of choices they can choose from. That said, outside these three objectives they do not have that many options. The only way to gain some income is when they join a cooperative or get financial support from their family. This leaves the cooperatives as almost the only option to gain income. Most women are very hesitant deciding on their future and thus where to put their money, because of the insecure context and the uncertainty around the establishment of the cooperatives. These uncertainties thus also influences their ability to make strategic life choices concerning their choice of livelihood.

Another aspect that influences their ability to make strategic life choices and could be seen as a constrain is the FARC idea on collective reincorporation. The FARC themselves are the main responsibility for their own reincorporation process, they are also the ones who shape the policies when it comes to the reincorporation of the FARC women. On a policy level almost every official entity has an gender commission.

On the ground still much is not accounted for when it comes to a different reincorporation approach for FARC women. I do not want to say that the reincorporation policies of the FARC such as the cooperatives and collectivity are not working for these women. On the contrary, the women expressed that these policies also give them a secure space to create their livelihoods. Still the acknowledgement, on the ground, that women on some aspects have different needs than men, is not present.

This said, still many women are proud to be FARC and woman. They want to actively shape their identity towards the outside world as a FARC woman and want to be heard and seen. They are fulfilling leadership positions within the cooperatives and starting families. All this is influencing how they experience and shape their new lives and position themselves within the Post-Accord context.

7 The camp, FARC women, and their everyday lives

“It is six am in the morning, the dogs are barking and the first morning light shines through the cracks of the house on my face. It had been a cold night, luckily I was prepared for that, as I had slept with a sleeping bag, two blankets, long pants and a sweater. Just like everyone else I started my day around six or seven in the morning. This was normal as almost everybody went to bed around seven or eight in the evening. When the camp was pitch dark and there was nothing more to do than sitting in your house, watching TV, read a book or listen to the radio. I got up on the cold and concrete floor, put on my boots and walked to the toilets and the shower compartment. First I checked the water, as most of the days there was no water to shower or flush the toilet. This was again one of those days with no water, so I got a bucket and filled it with rain water, which they catch, through an ingenious system, in a big ton. I walked back to my little house and greeted two neighbors. Our house, the house of me and Laura, was situated at the top of the camp.

The houses in the camp were made of four very thin walls of plasterboard, a roof and a concrete floor. You could hear everything through the walls. During the night it was very cold and during the day it could become very warm as the roofs were made of tin plates. There was one lightbulb in every home, although electricity was not always working. While I was walking through my *“barrio”* (neighborhood), I looked around and was amazed by what everyone made around his or her own small house. Some made little gardens with wooden fences, others painted their houses in funny colors. It all made it a bit more pleasant to live in the camp.

After putting on some different clothes I walked to the restaurant to have my breakfast. I greeted the woman and two girls working in the kitchen and asked if I could have a breakfast with some coffee. When I sat in the restaurant, I looked around me. The people, working for the ARN, just started their days. The FARC men who served me my breakfast, sat down next to me and we talked a bit about differences between Colombia and the Netherlands. He was very surprised that we did not have a guerilla movement in the Netherlands and wanted to know what we in the Netherlands thought about the FARC. This was a frequently asked question as one of the more famous Female FARC members Alexandra Nariño or as we know her, Tania Nijmeijer, is Dutch.

Then Jason stepped into the restaurant, he was the head of the camp management and arranged everything around the construction of the camp and its facilities. He brought his dog, who was running around and barking to everyone. This was very common in the camp as many FARC members took the stray dogs in order to domesticate them and have them as a pet. A pet is also part of making a life, with a house to live in, a partner and children. All the time I saw stray dogs, who were forced to wear a belt and a collar, it was very amusing to observe this process. Jason told me that in two hours, three people from an English NGO would arrive in order to talk about financing one of the productive projects in the camp. For this meeting everything in the restaurant had to look at its best for their arrival.

After finishing my breakfast I decided to have a walk through the camp. This walk was kind of intense, as the camp was built upon a mountain with very steep sandy roads. During my walk I got invited into the *“ranchero”* (kitchen) of another neighborhood and sat there with mostly FARC men and drink some coffee. After that I walked back via the small healthcare clinic. There I always stopped and talked to the young doctor, the nurse and one woman from *“defensores del pueblo”*. During my walk I was always a bit amazed about what everyone was doing, this because everyone was always busy with the same tasks. Most of the FARC members were busy washing clothes, washing themselves, hanging up clothes, preparing for lunch, painting their houses, and many men were carrying pieces of wood, bags full of sand or other construction material.

After having lunch in the restaurant, I decided to take a shower, as the water was finally running after two days without water. When I walked back to the restaurant from my shower I was invited inside by Fernando. Fernando was a former commander and I saw him as the diplomat of the camp. He was always busy making trips outside the camp, to the surrounding communities, the local politicians or even Bogotá. When he was in the camp he always had some organization with him and this time it was a delegation of the French communist party who were having lunch in the restaurant. He screamed; “..hey “Holanda” (my nickname), come here I want you to meet some people..”.

Around four I walked to the “*tienda*” which in Colombia is a small grocery store and bar in one. Here many FARC men were already busy playing “tejo” and drinking beer since twelve in the afternoon. The store was run by Djuraani, a transgender and Elias a 30 year old FARC man. They knew each other from their time in prison. I drank a beer with them and we had a little chat, mostly about their lives in the camp. When it was six, I walked back with my torch, as there were no lights in the camp. I arrived at my home and was ready to go to bed.”

- A day in the FARC camp Antonio Nariño, told from my own perspective.

I choose to start this chapter, with a somewhat detailed description of a day in the camp, told from my own perspective. It could have been any day, as most of the days in the camp were similar like these.. By telling this story I want to give the reader an insight on how living in the camp could look like. What activities the FARC members did day to day, who visited the camp, which organizations were present in the camp, what the houses look like, in short show the space where the women are creating their livelihoods.

The camp as a part of the everyday life of these women, is one of the three interventions I choose to write about. Both the Colombian peace agreement and the reincorporation process are actively being interpreted and used by the FARC women. But these interventions are not made by the FARC women, policy wise. The peace agreement is written by the FARC leadership and the Colombian government. The reincorporation policy is mainly designed by the FARC leadership and the government organization ARN. The camp as an intervention is different than the other two. Besides from the peace agreement stating that the FARC was going to demobilize in 26 zones, it does not state anything about how these zones should be developed, how the organizational culture should be or what activities should be taken place. The camp is more directly part of the construction of their new lives. Part of this new livelihood is the camp as their living place. This living place brings certain possibilities and constraints when constructing their lives. In contrary to the reincorporation process and the peace agreement, the camp as their living place is a space where they have more control over.

This chapter is on how the camp as an intervention, emerged in the postaccord context, is perceived and internalized by the FARC women into their everyday lives. I will do this by first talk about the camp as a physical living place. I am going to do this in a more descriptive way in order to give the reader an idea of what the camp entails and thus what their everyday reality looks like. The information used partly comes from my own observations and living experiences. After that I will elaborate more on the organizational structure and culture in the camp. Here old and new ideological values come together when shaping this culture.

Moreover I will talk about how the camp as their living place, gives possibilities and constraints when building their livelihoods. This includes the psychological attachment to the camp and therefor the FARC, and the experiences of these women about the camp as their living place.

Followed by a short elaboration on the city of Bogotá as a living place and how this differs from the camp as a living place. It is important to describe this, as the city as a living place shows how a life can be outside the boundaries of the camp. In the end I will conclude on how the camp as a living place and Bogotá as a living place influences their ability to make strategic life choices, by describing what these women perceive as constraints and possibilities towards the re-construction of their lives.

7.1 The camp as their living place

This part contains a detailed description of the camp as a physical place. With physical I mean what does the camp exist of, such as where is it located, what buildings are in place and how it is constructed. What fundamentals are in place or are not in place, facilitating the start of the new livelihoods and lives of these women. It is important to describe this for two reasons. First because the camp is their everyday reality. Knowing how their daily environment looks like, gives a better image of their everyday lives. Secondly because there is not much information on how these camps are being experienced by the FARC, man and women. International and national journalists visit the camp, but mostly just for one day, not being able to capture the FARC's everyday realities and struggles.

The location of the camp

The camp where I stayed was one of the 26 Zonas Veredales de Normalización (ZVTN), where the FARC had to hand in their weapons and start their reintegration process. The camp was called *"El campamento Antonio Nariño; zona para la paz (the peace zone)"*. Now these zones are called; Territorial Training and Reincorporation Spaces (ETCR) in order to: *"...train the members of the FARC-EP for their reincorporation into civil life and prepare the productive projects, in collaboration with the surrounding communities with a community reincorporation approach"* (Website ARN).

This camp was built close to a small town called Icononzo in the department of Tolima. From Bogotá it was about four to five hours with the bus. Although the camp originally lays in Icononzo, it still takes you around 45 minutes to reach the camp from Icononzo, depending on the weather and transport. The road to the camp is a small land road slowly ascending to the top of the mountain. When traveling from Icononzo to the camp, the road passes several small farms, crosses through rivers and goes through a jungle kind of landscape. On days with clear skies, you would have a stunning view. Transport to and from the camp included a bus going every morning at 7 a.m. from the camp to the village and at 12 and 5 p.m. from the village to the camp. Furthermore some FARC members had a motorcycle, but mostly they lifted with a local farmer to go in and out the camp. Another option was getting a ride back to the village with the visitors who visited the camp daily. The best way to travel to the village was to walk along the road and then finally a local farmer, the police, or someone else would pick you up and bring you to the village.

For many FARC members it was merely a constrain that the time to travel to the village approximately took one hour and a half, including the time to travel and the arrangement of the transport.

Arranging their transport took time and thus going in and out the camp always had to be carefully planned. On the other hand everything in Colombia takes time when it comes to transport, so they were probably used to it, as I became used to the slow transport system after a couple of months as well.

Despite of the hard-to-reach place, many FARC members expressed to me that the remote place also gives them a sense of home. As they were used to live in remote places during their time in the guerilla, where they spent most of their time living in the jungle. One of the women said; “...at least we are surrounded by a stunning view and nature..” (Nancy, December, 07). Another reason why it felt more at home was that some FARC members referred to their time before the guerilla, when they lived as “campesinos” (farmers) in the same kind of environments.

Additionally, the location of the camp also gave them a sense of safety. The camp was located on the top of a mountain, with only one road that gave access into the camp. This road was also being surveyed by the Colombian army. Every time when I drove up that road, it was normal to pass several men of the Colombian army. They always put their thumb in the air as a sign of good will. An interesting side note here is that the Colombian army always had been the main enemy of the FARC during the conflict. Now after the signing of the peace agreement, they are the ones with the task to protect the FARC against other armed groups.

Another consequence which has to do with the location of the camp are the many visitors going in and out of the camp. This camp is the closest to Bogotá and thus the easiest accessible for organizations, universities and journalists residing in Bogotá. Imagining that most Colombians had not seen a member of the FARC for almost fifty year, as they were hiding in the jungle, many were thus curious on visiting these camps. Still most a large part of the Colombians did not wanted to know anything about the FARC as they still saw them as terrorists. Nevertheless many international journalists, but also national media came to this camp to cover the story on the handing in of their weapons, and the start of the reincorporation process. While I was there, in two months, I saw many different organizations each with their own objectives. Christian organizations visited in order to try to convert the communist FARC, whose ideology was against any religion. International organizations such as the red cross, the UN, visited the camp to monitor, but also to choose projects which they were planning on financing. Journalist came to cover the story of the FARC. Some came for a week others for one day. Representatives and students from universities came to do research or offer assistance with certain issues, such as the water or the electricity problems. The relatively close location to Bogotá and thus the many visitors gives them certain opportunities, but also disillusion, as much is promised to them and few of these promises are actually being realized. More on these possibilities and constrains will be explained in the next part of this chapter.

The living conditions; housing and basic services

The camp is built for approximately 300 FARC members. At the moment of my research, around 150 of them were living there. The peace agreement states that the “*Zonas Veredales*”, are temporary and seen as zones for transition. This reflects the houses that are built, which are built to house the FARC members for just two years. Same for the basic services, such as water, electricity and internet.

These basic services are poorly constructed in a non-durable way. The government sees these zones as camps where the FARC can start their reincorporation process but after two years these camps have to dissolve.

This view of the Colombian government contradicts the view of the FARC; who are planning to develop the camp into a permanent home. The establishment of the cooperatives and the productive projects in and around the camp give economic value to the camp as a living place. Especially now, in the beginning of their reincorporation phase, their income mainly depends on the cooperatives and the productive projects. Thus indirect their income also depends on recognizing and developing the camp as a more permanent living place. For the FARC women (and also men) the recognition of the camp as a more permanent living place, differs per woman. This difference in value and perception towards the camp as a living place strongly relates to other factors, such as the value these women give to their family and to the cooperatives. I will further explain this in the next section of this chapter.

In order to get an image of the camp as the living place for the FARC members, I am going to describe the setting of the camp; the planning of the camp; with its roads, houses and public buildings, the construction of basic services and activities that can take place in the camp. I will do this with the help of photos I took during my stay in the camp. I choose to do this as the reader will be able to capture a better image of the day to day activities and routines that occur in the camp and are thus a great part of the everyday lives of these women. Furthermore some FARC men and women expressed to me that they were very glad that I had decided to stay for a longer period instead of some days. They mentioned that this contributed to a better view of their living conditions.



Fig. 1. 'The Camp'



Fig. 2. 'The sign on the road towards the camp'



Fig. 3. The entrance of the camp an UN car'



Fig. 4. 'Houses of the FARC'



Fig. 5. 'Houses with ideological paintings'



Fig. 6 'The clinic with ambulance'

Fig. 7. 'My room in the camp'

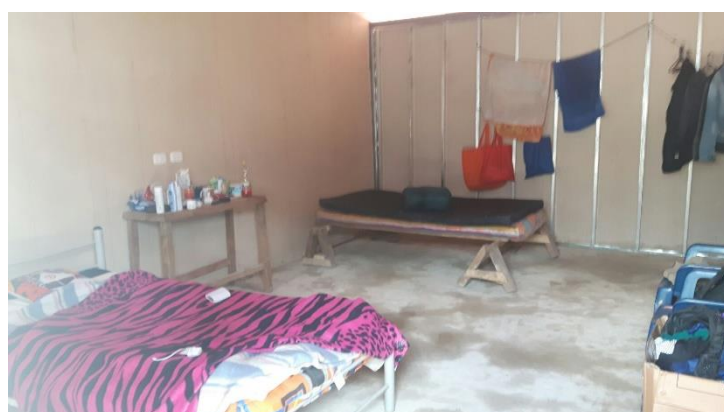




Fig. 8. 'FARC women playing football'



Fig. 9. 'In the restaurant with the French communist party'



Fig. 10. 'In the restaurant during lunch time'



Fig. 11. 'Playing pool in 'la tienda''

Figure one shows the camp, the photo is taken on the top of the mountain. The photo captures the way this camp is constructed on a steep mountain hill. Walking through the camp took time, because of the steep and sandy roads. Especially when it rained, the roads became very slippery. *Figure two* shows the sign you will pass when driving towards the camp. The sign shows the name of the camp and indicates it as a peace zone; “*Territoria de la paz*”.

Figure three shows the entrance of the camp, this is the only road that leads into the camp. Just at the entrance there is a small reception and a small museum on the history of the FARC. In this museum one will find attributes of the FARC which they used in combat, such as their uniform and camping attributes. There are some books, including the statutes of the FARC as a guerilla group. Just outside the museum, on its wall, there is a painting, which includes all the names of their fallen comrades. On that wall the FARC members can write the names of their friends, who died during the conflict. An older FARC woman from the camp, showed me the museum. When she showed me the wall with the names she pointed out the name of her best friend who died during combat. She expressed that everyone on that wall died for a good cause. According to her they all joined the guerilla with the risk of getting killed. [PO, 09-12]

Figure four and five show the houses of the FARC members. All the FARC members had the right to one house. When you wanted to live with your partner, you could get two houses next to each other. I was invited into the house of Lana, she lived with her boyfriend and together they owned two houses. There was a part where they could cook. Next to the cooking part was their bedroom. all the walls inside were painted bright pink. The walls outside were painted blue. On the walls they had several artefacts which reminded of their time in the guerilla; parts of their uniforms and their backpacks. She proudly showed me her cat and the TV they just bought together. [PO, 10,01]

Most of the houses looked like the description I wrote above; there was one bed, a place to cook, a little bit of furniture, and a TV. Interesting was the difference in how much stuff people had in their houses. Some houses had couches and a TV, others just had one bed and a small cupboard. For many it was also the first time since many years, to own furniture or even a house they could decorate the way they wanted it. More on how FARC women experience this new circumstances will be explained in the next part of this chapter.

Figure seven shows my room, which I shared with another girl who was not part of the FARC. She worked for the UNDP and helped the FARC with the establishment of their productive projects. The wooden bed on the picture dates from their time in the guerilla. Our female neighbor told me this in a very proud way. The few stuff we had was all given to us from different FARC members. Our neighbors gave us the cupboard, the bed and the mattresses. Here I experienced the notion of collectivity first hand.

Figure six shows the small health clinic present in the camp, including an ambulance. Every camp needed to have a small clinic with an ambulance, this was stated in the peace agreement. I was told that this was quite a challenge as most camps were established in the zones where the FARC already lived. These are originally zones without any healthcare. Establishing a clinic and infrastructure for the ambulance was almost an impossible task in most camps.

Figure eight, nine, ten and eleven all show different activities happening in the camp. *Figure eight* shows a football game during a party they organized for their family and the surrounding community. During this day several female football teams played against each other.

Figure nine and ten show the restaurant where all the visitors and different organizations were hosted. The photo shows the visit of the French communist party. *Figure eleven* shows the pool tables in the “*tienda*”, which means so much as shop and bar. Here most of the male FARC members came together, some every day, to play pool, “*Tejo*” and drink beers. As a shop, it belonged to the services cooperative. In the shop it was possible to buy basic things, such as toilet paper and cooking oil. But also crisps, chocolate and Coca-Cola were available. Samuel (manager of the shop) told me that most of the goods were financed by the Colombian government. Now they hope to maintain the shop with the revenues gained from local farmers visiting the shop and FARC members who buy goods in the shop.

Other basic services present in the camp, where five “*rancheros*” (kitchens), where they could cook. Every *ranchero* was run by a group of FARC members who lived in the same neighborhood. One *ranchero* was present per two or three neighborhoods, which were about 25 houses. Furthermore there was one small house which had a satellite and thus a Wi-Fi connection. Here most of the FARC members came when they had homework for school or courses they were following. While I was living there, a storm broke the satellite. The whole time that I lived there no one really seemed to be able to repair the Wi-Fi. According to a male FARC leader it was something that the Colombian government had to repair.

Every “*barrio*” (neighborhood) possesses a bathing compartment. This was a small building with three showers and three toilets. Additionally it also had three washing places, for the FARC members to wash their clothes and their dishes. Most of the times they had to share the bathing space with approximately eight to ten other households. Many times there were problems with the water supply. It was not always working as it was poorly constructed. Julian, the camp manager on camp construction, together with the mayor of the province, was developing a new water supply system. Still it could take months before this plan was ready to be executed.

Next to a poorly constructed water infrastructure, there was also no system for waste processing. But with the help of the National University they made a compost pile, in order to process all their natural waste. Together with the ARN they started a small program on reusing their plastic bottles to make plant holders out of it. Nevertheless most of the waste produced by the camp was being collected just outside the camp on a big pile. They told me that the municipality promised them to pick it up. This had never happened since the camp was there. No one could really tell me why this was not happening. Some said that the municipality did it on purpose as they did not want the camp to be there.

When reading these descriptions it shows the day to day activities of FARC men and women. It shows what services are already in place and what services are still lacking in order to start their new lives. These experiences were not that different for FARC men and women. The photos show that the camp is still under construction. Nevertheless, all the women I visited and spoke, all showed that they are trying to make their houses their own, by painting it, decorating it and designing small gardens around it. Their house is thus a small space which they can make their own.

Furthermore when I moved into my room, I experienced the notion of collectivity and how it can function as a support system constructing a livelihood. This connects to what the women told me about the feeling of support when living in this collective.

7.2 The organizational structure and culture within the camp

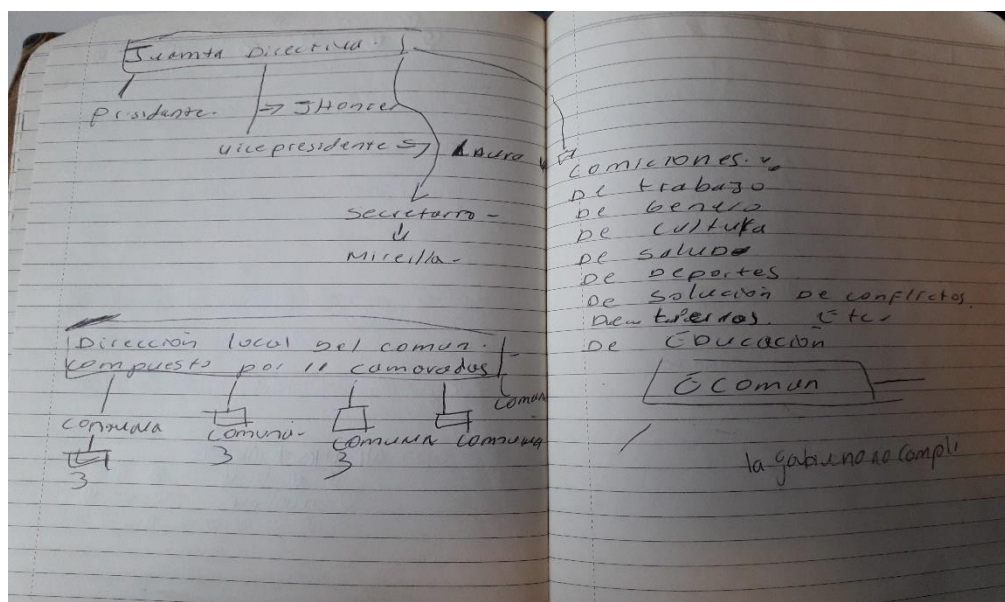


Fig. 12. 'The organizational structure of the camp, drawn by Fernando, one of the camp leaders and former commander'

Figure twelve shows an illustration of the organizational structure in the camp. This was drawn by Fernando, one of the camp leaders and former FARC commander. In this part I will briefly explain the organizational structure and culture of the camp which includes its management, different commissions, the cooperatives and their culture of collectiveness.

Looking at the organizational structure of the camp also sheds a light on the organizational culture of the FARC during their time as a guerilla group. So to understand how the FARC organizes itself after the signing of the peace agreement, it is of importance to understand their organizational and ideological culture during their time as a guerilla group. Much of the organizational culture and structure of the camp can be traced back to their time in the guerilla. This also connects to Ralph Sprenkels his theory on Post-Insurgency. It is necessary to pay attention to insurgent groups' internal relations and organizational structures, as Sprenkels points out; the notion of peace does not suddenly annuls the insurgent's sense of collectiveness, their internal relations and the multiple ties between people that were shaped within the framework of the FARC as a military organization (Sprenkels, 2016). Recognizing that the FARC's organizational structure and culture is partly based on their organizational structure and culture during their time as a guerilla group, offers guidance for understanding some of the continuities, the readjustments and the ruptures that occur in this current environment.

The main readjustment that the FARC had to make is the switch in leaders. The FARC as a political organization had to make a switch from military focused leaders towards more political focused leaders. Leaders who fit the new direction of the FARC. Hence from a mainly hierarchical organization towards a more horizontal organization. They needed leaders who could solve issues with dialogue and not with violence or weapons. They needed leaders who were chosen because of their trustworthiness and charisma, not because of their good tactics in battle. Important to know here is that the FARC leadership stayed on as a leadership. They were all nominated for Colombian congress and are still having important positions when it comes to the implementation of the peace agreement, despite the different opinions in Colombian society. Many Colombians still relate these leaders to the many atrocities the FARC had committed during the conflict. They still see them as leaders of a terrorist group, not of a legitimate political party. On national level, the only new leader is Victoria Sandino. Her position as a female leader was mainly established because of her role during the peace talks as head of the gender sub-commission. The switch in leaders thus mainly took place on a lower level, namely; leaders of commissions in the camp, leaders of the cooperatives and leaders of the political party in the different municipalities where the camps resides.

The FARC choose these new leaders in a democratic way. Everyone who had the ambition to become a leader or wanted to be part of the management of a cooperative or commission could design a plan. This plan then had to be presented in front of an “*asamblea*” (assembly). The assembly was everyone in the camp. Then everyone voted for the one who they thought had the best plan. The following quotes illustrate this democratic way;

“Because of the peace agreement we have to make a switch (un cambio) in leaders. During the war we needed leaders who were military focused, but now we need leaders who are more political. Moreover these leaders cannot give orders to people anymore, just an advice. After the signing of the peace agreement, some persons wanted to stay on as leaders and some not. Now we have new leaders, also in the camp, including myself and Maria. We were chosen in a democratic way, we had to present our plan in front of the “*Asamblea*” (assembly) and the one who has the majority of the votes wins. An important aspect is that the people can choose their own leaders. This is open for everyone, women, man etc.”

- Male FARC member, part of the camp leadership
[January, 11]

“I was chosen by the people to be in the directive of this cooperative. You are free to present your proposal and then they will choose you. It is like a small democracy.”

- Daniela, member of the cooperative in Bogotá
[January, 16]

The management of the camp (*Junta Directiva*) exists out of eight persons, three of them are female. Together they executed different tasks, such as; the construction of the camp, the management of the many commissions in the camp, managing all paperwork needed for the amnesty of the FARC members and the establishment of the cooperatives, and actively building on a relation with the surrounding community.

Part of the management were the different commissions. Each one established to handle a different issue, namely; the commission on work (*trabajo*), on gender (*genero*), on culture (*cultura*), on health (*salud*), on sports (*deportes*), on conflict solution (*solución de conflictos*), on territory and reincorporation (*territorial y el proceso de reincorporación*) and on education (*educación*). Valentina is head of the commission of gender and education.

Laura is head of the commission on territory and reincorporation. Valentina works together with the ARN on themes like gender and education and Laura with the CNR (the national entity for reincorporation). Most of the other commissions were not yet started.

Independently from the *"Junta Directiva"* is the *"Direccion local del comun"* (The local community directive). This is constituted of eleven FARC leaders and each of them leads one *"comuna"* (commune). Each commune consists out of several FARC members, this differs between the 15 and 30 members. These communes can be seen as small departments within the camp, where they discuss important themes about the camp and the reincorporation process. Next to that they can be seen as small cells of the political party the FARC.

The cooperatives established in the camp

There are three cooperatives being established in the camp. They are part of the national cooperative ECOMUN. These three cooperatives are the cooperative in manufacturing, services, and agriculture. In the previous chapter I mainly explained about the process in general as part of the reincorporation process, while in this chapter I focus more on how the establishment of these cooperatives play out on the ground.

"These are our *"proyectos productivos"* (productive projects). Three cooperatives; *"agropequario"* (agriculture), *"manufatura"* (manufacturing) and the *"servicios"* (services). I am the head of the cooperatives on manufacturing. We make clothes, jewelry and we print images on t-shirts. The cooperative exist out of 32 persons, 8 men and 24 women. It is very important to have men and women in the cooperative, but also people from different ethnicities, ; such as Afro-Colombian, indigenous and mestizas"

- Valentina, female leader in the camp and head of the manufacturing cooperative
[November, 21]

Valentina is the president of the cooperative on manufacturing. This one is located in a larger building in the camp. The cooperative has around six sewing machines and one large press machine, which prints pictures and logo's on t-shirts. All the machinery was bought with the money they received from the government and invested in this cooperative. Several middays I had spent with the people working in this cooperative. There was one couple who told me that they had to learn everything from scratch, when they started to work in this cooperative. Now they are still learning and are enjoying it. Another guy showed me, proud, all the clothes that were printed with the FARC logo of the red rose. It could be argued that this is not the best business move as most of the Colombians, did not want to walk around with the logo of the FARC on their clothes [PO, November 16,17].

When I asked them, to whom they were selling most of their clothes, the answer was that they were only selling to the FARC as the cooperatives were not legal yet. [PO, November, 17]

"I am the president of the cooperative *"agropequario"*. This cooperative exists out of various projects; cattle, fish, avocado, sachu inchi, and flowers. We are owning a small Finca and some land where we can start some of our projects. Still this is by far not enough for what we want to accomplish in the future. So now we are waiting for the government, who is buying land and other *"fincas"* (farms) for us, in order to expand. Without this land it is impossible to establish our agricultural projects."

- Laura, female leader in the camp and head of the cooperative on agriculture
[November, 29]

Laura is the head of the cooperative on agriculture. They were in the process of establishing their first agricultural projects on the small piece of land they got from the government.

The location of this plot of land is very close to the camp. They are still in the process of starting up the agricultural projects, but in order to do that they need more land. Furthermore this cooperative is not yet legalized and therefore not yet profitable. This results in FARC men working with other farmers in order to have the security of a small income, outside of the cooperatives.

Then there are also the Individual productive projects. FARC men and women who choose to establish their own project outside of the cooperatives. These men and women are still living in the camp, in the future this could change as they are not investing in the cooperatives.

“Yes there are also members who are developing their own projects, which are not part of the cooperatives. Most of the time they are starting these projects with their families. It is still the question how we are going to manage this. The money which has to finance our lives here has to come from the cooperative and thus in the future we will have to find a way to see how this will work with the individual projects.”

- Laura, female leader in the camp and head of the cooperative on agriculture
[November,29]

The third cooperative is the cooperative on services. For now this includes the restaurant and the shop in the camp. In the future they also want to develop a daycare. Furthermore this cooperative wants to focus more on tourism, and then mainly eco-tourism. They want to develop some hotels and offer an authentic stay at a FARC camp with the FARC (informal conversation, December, 13).

The restaurant is the place where visitors and organizations are being received and can have breakfast and lunch. The shop/bar was used by mostly male FARC members to come together and drink some beers. Furthermore many farmers who lived in the surroundings were also going there to have some beers and play “tejo”. On a Friday evening, it could be crowded with visitors and FARC members with their families.

Organizational culture

To come back to the theory of Ralph Sprenkels, an important continuity, which originates from its time during the guerilla, is their sense of collectiveness and the way they divide tasks. Everyone, men and woman, are doing the same household tasks, such as; cooking, washing and cleaning. They organize everything in shifts such as; making breakfast, lunch and dinner, cleaning the kitchens and cleaning their bathing compartments. This is the same when it comes to the construction of the camp. Men and woman together are slowly building up the camp. It is not only the men who are carrying heavy construction materials. Many times I also saw women in the camp carrying heavy construction material.

When it comes to leisure activities I noticed a clear divide between the FARC men and women. Men were always present in the public spaces such as the restaurant and the shop/bar. They were walking around the camp and were most of the times outside. Women, on the other hand, were mostly inside their houses. Also in the restaurant, the women were mostly cooking in the kitchen. While the man, who worked there, was serving the food and talking to its customers. I do not know the precise reason for this division, but it was a very striking difference.

External organizations in the camp

The external organizations present in the camp were the ARN, the SENA, the healthcare personnel, the UN verification mission, the police and the Colombian army. The ARN was presenting the Colombian government and were with five to six persons present in the camp. They slept in small farms close to the camp and worked there every day. They had their office in the restaurant. Every one of them was linked to the commissions set up in the camp. They were not responsible for the productive projects or the cooperatives. They were there to monitor the process and arrange for education and healthcare in every camp. One of them had set up a project with some FARC members to recycle waste and they were present at all the formal meetings with the UN in the camp. They had arranged for a teacher, who came to the camp every day and taught from 6 am to 8 am to the FARC members who did not had their high school certificates.

Another entity who arranged educational courses was the SENA. They provided small courses, mostly on technical issues around agriculture and eco-tourism. Most of the FARC members were following one of these courses in order to learn different extra skills.

The UN mission existed out of three people; a girl from Mexico, a girl from France and a man from Sweden. They also visited the camp regularly, talked to the members and were monitoring the whole process. The police sometimes came into the camp, but mostly patrolled around the camp, together with the Colombian army.

The surrounding community

The camp was located in Icononzo, Tolima. The community who lived in Icononzo, were the closest neighbors of the camp. Therefore it was necessary to establish a good relationship, in order for them to work together with the community. This is also something that was desired by the FARC women. For them connecting with the surrounding community also connected to their wish of changing the view of the Colombian people towards the FARC. Furthermore establishing a good relationship with this community also diminished their feeling of insecurity. Part of this collaboration with the surrounding community was the collaboration with women groups present in the area. FARC women in leadership positions expressed the importance of a good connection with the surrounding community as a chance to incorporate them in the cooperatives in the future.

“The biggest challenge for me is the acceptance of people around the zona. I still lives in fear. I also fears that this is a thing that will take my whole life as it needs new generation to forget what happened.”

- Andrea
[December 12]

“In the end everything needs to connect together, we need to establish a good relationship with the farmers, as they can join our productive projects and cooperatives”

- Laura
[November, 29]

Establishing a good relationship with the surrounding community is an important step in the reincorporation process for the FARC. Many depends on the location of the camp and the social-political history of this location. Some camps were established in areas where the FARC already had presence before the peace agreement. But other camps were established in areas where the hatred against the FARC was very high. This was especially in the area around Medellin, which is called Antioquia. Establishing a good relationship with the people in this area was and still is very hard for the FARC in these areas.

For what I experienced and what the people in Icononzo told me, the communication between the FARC and the village was pretty good. In the weekends almost every FARC member traveled to the village in order to do groceries or travel further to other parts in Colombia to visit their family. Furthermore the FARC members also went to the village to go out in the several bars that were present in the village.

One example of this collaboration between the FARC camp and the community is an informal community organization called the “Veeduría”. Which means so much as monitoring entity. Here some informal local leaders of the surrounding communities came together to discuss the implementation of the peace agreement in their communities. There were about 40 to 50 people, men and woman. Everyone informed each other about the events that happened in their villages, this includes displacement, violence against farmers, sexual violence against women and threats against local leaders and human rights defenders. Interesting was that these meetings were without the ARN or any formal government entities. They said that this was something for the people by the people. The government was not invited as they always disappointed the people, because they never live up to their promises. This was initially started by the FARC, Fernando was the leading party and chair of all these meetings.

When analyzing these stories it could be argued that establishing a good relationship with the surrounding community is a very important part of their reincorporation process. Not only for women in leadership positions but also for women who did not have such a position. Almost all women (and men) expressed the desire to change the view of the Colombian people towards the FARC, likewise starting with changing the view of their surrounding community.

7.3 The camp experienced and shaped by the FARC women

In the previous sub-section I described the circumstances and the living conditions of the FARC women living in the camp. In this sub-section I will explain how the women experience and shape their everyday lives in the camp and what they perceive as constraints and possibilities within the camp.

The location of the camp

“Luckily, we do not receive any threats from other armed groups and our relationship with the surrounded community is better than we could have hoped for. But I know that we are privileged. We feel ourselves very safe in this “*espacio*” (space). As I know that there are other zones, which are not that safe as ours. Let’s hope it will stay like this. Because when we are starting to receive threats, people will want to leave this camp.”

- Male FARC member, part of the camp leadership
[January, 11]

The above quote illustrates the importance of the location of the camp concerning their security. As I already mentioned; a camp that is located in an area with low support for the peace agreement and the FARC, makes it harder for the FARC to establish a good collaboration with their surrounding communities, which is necessary for their reincorporation process. Furthermore some areas are home to other armed groups, who are still threatening to assassinate FARC members. These are not only threats as since 2017, 51 FARC members had been killed by other armed groups who can be linked to the cocaine trade.

The location of this camp is partly the reason why these FARC members do not receive any threats. The collaboration with the community in Icononzo is experienced as relatively good. For many women this well-established collaboration connects to their feeling of security. Furthermore the fact that this camp is relatively close to Bogotá, results in many visitors visiting the camp. This also ensures some protection as this camp is in a certain way more visible for the international community and organizations than other camps. Next to that, this camp is located in an area where the government is present, this makes it a relatively easy task to protect the camp.

Some women expressed to me that, the closeness to Bogotá, also makes it more easy for them to visit their family. Because of their location in the middle of the country they have a better connection with busses in order to go to their families.

The camp provides basic living conditions and services

With living conditions I mean housing, places to cook, and places to bath. With services I mean healthcare and education.

Most women expressed that the healthcare provided to them is not sufficient and does not cover their needs. Although there is healthcare, the quality of this service is not very high. On one hand for the pregnant women the presence of healthcare is an important asset, because now they have the possibility to have regularly check-ups. On the other hand the clinic is very small and not sufficient to handle more complicated medical cases.

Moreover the women expressed that the healthcare is very expensive. Also when they are very sick or have something more complicated, they are obliged to go to a normal hospital. This costs them a lot of money and time. Next to that some women (and men) are not even in the medical system yet, they are still waiting for their amnesty papers, their monthly income of the government and their “*cédula*” (Colombian ID). The following quote illustrates the dissatisfaction about the healthcare.

“The healthcare was definitely better during the time in the guerilla. Life is very expensive for me. My mother lives with me and with the money I receive from the government I am not able to pay the medicines I need. When I will pay them, I do not have enough money for the rest of the month. This also affects my ability to work, because of my sickness I cannot work that much in the cooperative as I would have wanted.”

- Nancy, female member living in the camp
[December, 12]

This quote states that the healthcare they had during the guerilla was better than the healthcare they have been offered now. Women expressed to me that going to a doctor or receiving the right medicines was easier and cheaper during their time in the guerilla than it is now. During their time as a guerilla group, the FARC provided their own healthcare. Not only for their own members but also for the communities who lived in their territories. Partly because the government was not present in these areas so there were almost no hospitals or clinics for the people living in these territories. Talking about this current issue; the lack of healthcare, one must not forget that a large part of Colombian society also does not have access to healthcare facilities. This includes the poorest people in the cities, who also cannot afford healthcare although it is present in the cities. Thus with the FARC re-entering Colombian society they are also entering the difficult accessible healthcare system of the Colombian society.

Another service provided by the Colombian government is education. One of the educational services present in the camp was the possibility to get a high school diploma. Many FARC members (women and men) joined the FARC when they were 14 or 15. Most of them never had the chance to attend a high school. They learned to read and write in the FARC but they never received an official diploma. In order to have a better chance on the job market, an official diploma is necessary in Colombian society. While I was there, the first class graduated. This were about 35 FARC members (men and women). They held a big graduation party. They were all dressed up in black graduation cloaks and special graduation heads. The FARC members could invite their families and after the official ceremony, there was music, food and drinks. For many FARC members this was a historical happening, as they never received a real diploma or had the chance to celebrate this with their families. Most family members were crying during the ceremony. [PO, January 5]

The other educational service present in the camp were the many courses offered by the SENA; Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje (National learning service). This educational entity offered many technical courses, which were especially needed for working in the cooperatives. These courses were mostly 24 or 48 hour courses. Some were given in the camp and some were given outside the camp. Some women I spoke, traveled every Saturday to another town in order to follow a course.

“Both agreed that the women in this camp have more opportunities. We are very enthusiastic about all the small courses that are available for the women here in the camp. In our village we would not have the chance to do this.”

- Las Hermanas, Two sisters who live with their brother, both are not part of the FARC.
[December, 9]

It can thus be argued that the educational services in the camp are better than in some places outside the camp. Still when it comes to higher education such as the university or an equivalent, women had to move to Bogotá or another major city. This is also not provided by the Colombian government.

“There are not that many women with professional skills in this camp. But most of them who do have these skills they left to Bogotá, to study or to work. Four or five women who lived in the camp, left for Bogotá, one of them is studying law. They feel more at home in Bogotá and there are much more possibilities than here. Here there is almost no internet and not that much activities. In Bogotá the quality of life is better.”

- Male FARC member, part of the camp leadership
[January, 11]

When it comes to these services and the possibilities on education it is important to keep in mind that this research was conducted at the start of their reincorporation process. Much was not clear yet about what possibilities they have concerning their education. Another important aspect to keep in mind is that these women compare what they have now with what they had during their time in the guerilla. They would not know if their chances and possibilities would be different outside the camp. Thus I am just describing what these women experience in these particular circumstances of living in the camp as an opportunity or as a constrain in their everyday lives.

When looking at the living conditions in the camp, the quality of the housing are by many perceived as a constrain. The houses they are living in are built to house one FARC member for approximately two years. This is of course the result of the government only paying and delivering construction material for this period of time. Because the government, as is stated in the peace agreement, still wants the camps to dissolve after two years. For the FARC, especially in combination with the establishment of the cooperatives, the camp is perceived as a more permanent living place. Still the question arises if they are going to find a solution to the poor housing facilities after two years.

“It is all the time very cold and the houses we are living in are not functioning as real houses. Lots of things are not there such as water, warm blankets, beds and other things to make my life better and more comfortable”

- Nancy, female member living in the camp.
[December, 07]

“I do not think that this place is a place to have children and let children grow up.”

- Amanda, female member living in the camp.
[December, 06]

The last quote shows the concern of a FARC woman, who is mother of three children. This idea of building a safe home to have children and let your children grow up is very important for many FARC women. Because most of them are pregnant or wishing to have children one day. Not all FARC women I spoke to had the same opinion about the camp not being a place to have children. But most of them felt that they did not really had a choice as this was the only place where they have a house. Although the houses were poorly build, these women did perceive these houses as their own. Resulting in them having the liberty to decorate it as they wanted. It could thus be argued that within the camp their own house is a small place fully controlled by themselves.

The camp and women participation

The establishment of the three cooperatives, the different commissions and the necessity to have a switch in leadership, all allow for women to have an active role in the camp. Women can have leadership positions in the management of the camp, the cooperatives or participate in themes around the construction of their livelihoods, when joining of the many commissions present in the camp.

Many women I spoke were working in an active manner in the cooperatives or in one of the commissions. Furthermore the women who had a leadership position, such as Valentina and Laura, who were both head of one of the cooperatives, were actively promoting the inclusion of women at all levels in the camp.

“At all levels there are women. On a national level we have women and some who are being nominated for the next elections. Also in the camp in every committee there are women participating. Without the participation of women there is no production, women are needed to help in the political party but also to work in the cooperatives. It is necessary to keep promoting the participation of women. If we do so everyday more and more women will be willing to participate. In our cooperatives women have the freedom to come up with their own projects if they want that. Furthermore in the future it is important that the project on childcare is being established. So that our women can come to work, knowing that their child is in a safe place.”

- Laura, female leader in the camp and head of the agricultural cooperative
[November, 29]

Working in the cooperatives, if it is in a leadership position or in a normal position, also gave women a certain pride. This sense of pride had different reasons. Some were proud because they fulfilled a crucial role in cooperatives and that they could make a difference. Others just felt proud because they could work for their own income and were not dependent on someone else. Yet others expressed that they were proud because they could do the same work as a man.

“I just worked for three days straight in a row, because we are in the process of formalizing and legalizing the cooperatives with the Colombian chamber of commerce. I am very excited to play a role in this, as this means that, soon many people will be able to work in the cooperatives”

- Amanda, female FARC member in the camp
[December, 06]

Next to the promotion of female leadership in the camp and the cooperatives by other female leaders, the gender commission in the camp also has the task to make women aware of the right to participate. The gender commission has to make sure that every project made up has to be equally accessible for women and men. While I was there the gender commission just started. Four women and one man form the ARN led this commission. One of these four women is a transgender woman. They already organized two workshops on women's rights and on the machismo society in Colombia. The head of the commission on gender is Valentina. She told me about the importance of the commission and how it came into place.

“I started to work with the theme gender after the peace talks in Havana. The peace talks showed us the importance of incorporating gender in our everyday work and lives. I went to “*Un encuentro nacional de general de las FARC en Cauca*” (a national meeting of the FARC in the department of Cauca). Here I attended a training on gender and women's rights which lasted one month. Two or three members from every camp were present. Here we got educated on what women had accomplished around the world and how to translate the notion of gender into our everyday lives. We had lessons on how gender was used in the history of the FARC. As the word gender is new, but the meaning of gender; men and women are equals was always present in the FARC. Next to that we got lessons in law; international law on women's rights and Colombian law on women's rights and laws against sexual violence. We learned which types of violence there are, what are the causes, solutions and what organizations are political influential in this theme, such as safe houses for women victims.

Everybody at that congress needed to bring all the information home in order to educate the male and female members in the camp.”

- Valentina, female leader of the camp and head of the gender commission in the camp.
[November, 21]

This quote can illustrate how seriously the FARC had taken up the task to fight for women’s rights and against sexual violence. This is not only present in their own organization, but they also want to collaborate with women’s organization in the surrounding communities. During my stay, the first event, organized by the gender commission and the ARN took place. The FARC women met with many different women’s organizations from Icononzo and other surrounding communities in the camp. They talked about what gender meant for them and what their role was in this machismo society and how to stand up for themselves in their communities [Informal conversation, ARN employee, November 20] . Unfortunately while this event happened I was not in the camp, but one man from the ARN, who helped facilitated the event, told me the themes they spoke about. The following quote shows an example of how some women in the camp took the idea on gender and gender equality very seriously.

“The other striking thing in her house was that on her wall she put up some posters. One of them said: “*El machismo es un cancer*” (Machismo is cancer). The other one showed some ground rules on rights for women and rules on what it meant to be gender inclusive. The last one she got during a workshop on gender inclusivity”

- Personal Observation when I was invited into the house of Marlene to do an interview.
[December, 07]

The camp as a secure community

The camp could be seen as a physical result of the FARC’s wish to reincorporate as a collective. In order to accomplish this, the camp, is one way to continue this sense of collectiveness. This sense of collaboration and loyalty is something most FARC women know of their time spent in the guerilla. It is an important part of their communist ideology.

Many women see the camp as a safe place, not only because they live together with other FARC members, but mostly because they perceive the world outside the camp as an unsafe place. This is partly grounded in the insecure Colombian context and the stigmatization against FARC women.

“Outside the camp most of the conditions are very dangerous, therefor it is hard to start a life on your own. That can be very dangerous especially when you are a women and they know you are FARC”

- Nancy
[December, 07]

“Now still many people see us as monsters who started a war against the Colombian people.”

- Maria
[January, 10]

On one night I went out in the village of Icononzo. I was together with two friends from Wageningen and a group of approximately eight FARC members, four women and four men. While we were there in the village one woman told me that it was their second time since they lived in the camp, that she had left the camp.

You could feel that she was very nervous. As we walked through the village to another bar, they walked very slow and hesitant and all the time looked around them. It was clear that they did not feel comfortable being outside the camp. The camp thus gives these women a certain sense of protection, but the question here remains if this is not a constrain when creating their livelihoods, as they are not in connection with the outside world. The outside world is eventually the world where they have to live in again, together with the Colombian society.

The psychological side of living in this camp

In this part I will briefly pay attention to the fact that the life in the camp, also has a psychological side. First one should keep in mind that most women living in the camp, spent the majority of their lives in the FARC. Which meant for some that they lived for almost 40 years in the jungle or other remote areas. They lived with the constant fear of being killed or the fear that their loved ones, other FARC members, were being killed. They experienced traumatic events such as the dead of their companions and had to live in difficult circumstances.

Although their life was hard, the sudden transition from this life towards a new life in a camp is also hard. Everything is new and the differences with their old lives are enormous. Small things as doing groceries or maintain their household are new to. One woman told me that she was amazed by the different pieces of soap you could buy, while during the FARC there was just one piece of soap [informal conversation, January, 13].

Secondly, staying in the camp also means staying psychologically attached to the FARC and its ideology. Most of the houses were painted with communist paintings. There were still many rituals and ways of living originated from their time as a guerilla. This resulted in the FARC still being a closed community from the outside world, with the camp as a physical separation between the FARC and the Colombian society. When living in the camp these women are obliged to live by the rules and norms made by the FARC.

I experienced this during my interviews. Most formal interviews I had were merely a way for the FARC women to emphasize the ideology of the FARC and how they have the solution for the inequality issues in Colombia. Furthermore nobody spoke about events that highlighted the wrongdoings in the FARC. When I tried to speak about it they were immediately denied. Nobody spoke about sexual violence against women in the FARC, although there is enough evidence that it happened. I asked about it two times and both of the times they said that they never had experienced it or heard of it. This felt like it was not allowed for these women to address the wrongdoings within their own group; the FARC.

This research maybe portrays that it was easy to talk to these women, but this was quite the opposite. Most of the women in the camp were not very eager to talk to me and acted very shy when I approached them. The women that did agreed upon an interview, were mostly women who were used to speak up as they obtained a leadership position. This was very different from the FARC men, who were very eager to tell their story. This of course could have various reasons, which I name in my methodology. Still it was surprising how female FARC members avoided most of the contact with entities from outside the FARC.

The whole ambience in the camp had a certain heaviness. This is mainly based on my own feelings, but also on some informal conversation I had with FARC men and women in the camp.

It was obvious that many women and men living there had experienced very difficult and traumatic events. Although they would not talk about it, you could see it in their eyes. Some even explicitly expressed to me that they did not want to talk about certain events that had happened in their lives. It was not only the psychological burden they carried, it was also the lack of activities and development in the camp. People were very disillusioned when it came to their hopes in their reincorporation process. This sense of hopelessness was, at times, present in the camp and thus in the everyday lives of these women.

The future of the camp

One of the main questions that arose to me, conducting this research, was how this camp would evolve in the future. Would it function as a permanent living place or would it slowly dissolve. Will the FARC in the future be able to make an income from the cooperatives or are many FARC members obliged to seek employment somewhere else. Will there be money for new housing projects after two years. Will the government, in the long run, allow these camps to become permanent living places. Will these permanent living places and their collectivity foster their relationship with the surrounding communities or will it end in the FARC living on the top of a mountain separated from the “real” Colombian society. It is still too early to answer all these questions, but some processes connected to these questions could already be observed.

The movement in and out of the camp holds a clear connection with the meaning FARC members give to the camp as a living place. While I was there, many FARC members were traveling in and out the camps. This quote sums up the reason for members leaving the camp temporarily.

“The main reason is that the people want to visit their families and want to get to know other cities and places in Colombia. People also leave the camp to work with other farmers in other “fincas” as they need to earn some money. Because nothing is happening around the implementation of the productive projects. But I am convinced that when these zones are getting more productive people will start coming back in order to work”

- Male FARC member, part of the camp leadership
[January,11]

Here the aspects of family and visiting ones family does not always goes well together with the way of living in the camp. Some even left the camp for three or four months, while these are also crucial times to build up the camps and establish the cooperatives.

This also closely connects to the meaning people give to the cooperatives, if they would prioritize these cooperatives above their personal needs and wishes. These can be starting an individual productive project or start a study in one of the bigger cities.

“The ambition to study could be a problem in the future because there are no study possibilities here in Icononzo, so than people have to leave and live in Bogotá.”

- Male FARC member, part of the camp leadership
[January, 11]

Some processes described above go against the notion of collective reintegration and thus also partly undermine the process of developing the camp as a permanent living place. The relationship, different FARC members, have with their families and how they act upon this is decided on an individual level and not on a communal level. Therefore it could contradict with what is decided upon on a communal level. Same when it comes to individual projects and the ambition to study. This said, I do want to emphasize that most camp leaders I spoke to, women and men, were not per se discouraging the start of an individual project or the desire to study. These processes just highlight the complexity of the whole reincorporation process and the different meanings people can give to it.

7.4 Bogotá as a living place

The whole chapter talks about the camp as a living place and how it influences the everyday lives of these Women. Next to the camp a small part of my research was conducted in Bogotá. In Bogotá I came in contact with the president of a recently established cooperative, which had its office in Bogotá. This cooperative is a news network that aims to offer an alternative to, how they call it, a media landscape crowded with biased, traditional news items. The news network is called: *“Nueva Colombia Noticias; informando para la paz”* (News about the new Colombia; inform about peace).

At that time 25 FARC members were working in this cooperative, 20 of them female and five men. Furthermore they also relied on journalists stationed at some of the 26 camps in Colombia. Their aim is to give a voice to whom have been living in silence, but are still experiencing the state's neglect. Here they aim for the poorest sections living in Bogotá, mainly the displaced population of Bogotá. They do this by actively going on the streets and interview people about the peace process. Reporting on the streets these ex-combatants are coming face-to-face with the Colombian people who or not always ready to accept them. Still it can be argued that this is in many ways the core of what their reintegration process entails, being confronted with the Colombian society and their ideas on the peace agreement and the FARC and learn how to deal with that.

Furthermore they assemble old footage and photos of their time in the guerilla. They want to create an archive in order to preserve their history. With this footage they also create small documentaries with the aim of showing the world and the Colombian people the life of a guerilla fighter. Worthy to mention, is that just two months ago in November 2018, they released a small documentary on the lives of FARC women.

In the office of this cooperative I had the chance to interview the president of this cooperative and two women who worked in the cooperative. Sonía who is the vice-president of the cooperative and Daniela, who is the secretary of the cooperative. Both told me about their lives; living as a female ex-combatant in a city like Bogotá. In this part I would like to shortly elaborate on how these women experienced their everyday lives in the city and what differences there are between living in Bogotá and living in the camp.

Both women had never stayed in one of the *Zonas Veredales*. They came straight to Bogotá as they both were in Havana during the peace talks. They handed in their weapons at one of the points close to Bogotá. In total there were twenty-two *Zonas Veredales* and four smaller points where the FARC could hand in their weapons.

They had various reasons to choose to come to Bogotá instead of one of the *Zonas Veredales*. One of them followed her commander, who traveled to Bogotá after the peace talks. Both have family who are living in Bogotá. They do not live with them, but they visit them very often. Both also agreed that they thought that there would be more possibilities for themselves in Bogotá than there would be in the camps.

The camp versus Bogotá as a living place

The women live in houses with other women three or four other women. These houses are partly paid by the government for the coming two years. Furthermore a major part of the people working in the cooperative are living in a hotel close to the two offices of their cooperative. This hotel is also paid by the government for the coming two years.

When talking about their lives in Bogotá they both tell me the same struggles of living in a larger city;

“I find it hard to live here, because the cost of living is very high and we do not earn that much. Now we only have the salary of the government and hopefully in the future we will have our own salary from the cooperative”

- Sonía
[January, 16]

“For me the one of the hardest things about living in the city, is the traffic. Every day I have to take a cab or a bus and it is never quite. This is a big change with my life in the jungle”

- Daniela
[January, 16]

The living costs in Bogotá are higher than in the camp. They do not earn that much money, so it is hard to manage their living expenses. Both also had to get used to the loud city, with its traffic and crowded places. During their time in the guerilla they lived in the rural areas, which makes the transition to the city extra intense.

Another constrain that these women encounter in Bogotá is that they do not have any healthcare. The women in the camp have the small clinic that is present in the camp, but in the city they have to rely on the normal healthcare system.

“Another hard life aspect is that we do not have any healthcare. Therefore it is not a good idea to have a child right now, as there is no hospital or healthcare facility where we can go too, this is better in the camps. There are two women who are pregnant in the cooperative and we are all very worried. Our boss is very worried and tries to give them everything they need”

- Sonía
[January, 16]

The rate of women who are pregnant in the cooperative is very low compared to the pregnancy rate of women in the camp. Partly this is because of the lack of availability of healthcare, but both women also expressed that it is not the right time to have child.

They also told me that most of the women who worked with them in Bogotá thought about it that way.

"I do not want to have a baby. I am aware that many women are pregnant in the camps and this worries me a lot. Because now we are in a transition period and therefore it is not smart to have a baby. You do not know what the future holds and everything is very insecure, so this is not the time to have babies."

- Sonia
[January, 16]

Another difference is how they create their lives around the notion of collectivity. Where the camp is already a space in itself where the FARC can live as a collective, Bogotá is not. In Bogotá the two offices of the cooperative are seen as the place to come together as a collective. So both women value the cooperative differently in comparison with the women in the camp, who mainly see the cooperatives as a way to generate their income. Here I see two consequences which influence the everyday lives of these women.

On the one hand they are very passionate about their work in the cooperative and both feel very responsible for the development of this cooperative. On the other hand they do miss the feeling of solidarity and living together as a community. Apparently this is less when living in the city. Carmen even expressed to me that she already feels in-group differences when it comes to clothes and material things.

"I miss the solidarity and unity we had during the guerilla. Everybody was looking after each other and we lived as one big community. The moral was better in the guerrilla, you know where you signed up for and the sacrifices you would make. Now the people do not want to sacrifice everything for the FARC anymore. Furthermore in the guerilla everybody was equal, nobody had money. Right now some people are earning more money than others and this can become even more in the future. Same with how the people are dressing, the younger ones are already showing each other the new clothes they bought."

- Sonia
[January, 16]

Through their work and the lives they lived in Bogotá, both women had day-to-day contact with the Colombian people in their surrounding environment. This had two sides, on the one hand they felt the intense discrimination, but on the other had they also had the experience of making new friends outside the FARC.

"Yes, there is a lot of discrimination. Yesterday evening I was in a meeting with all the reporters from the street and they told me that many find it hard to do their work, because people in the city say the most awful thing about the FARC. But this also means that we know how to anticipate when it happens and what thoughts people have about the FARC, which helps us again in coming up with projects to show the people who we really are."

- Sonia
[January, 16]

"I do like to make new friends in my new community. I already have some new friends in my neighborhood and people are getting used to me living there. Still I am always very careful to tell people that I am FARC. I first want to get to know people before I tell them that I am part of the FARC."

- Daniela
[January, 16]

The quotes above partly show the different security issues that these women and most FARC members face when living in the city. When living in the city, they do not have the same protection from the Colombian army and the Colombian police as they have in the camps. The insecurity these FARC members face are influencing their daily practices. They have to be extremely careful when it comes to revealing their identity. As the threats and the assassinations against the FARC members are proven to be very real. All the 51 assassinations on FARC members took place outside the transition zones, thus the threats have to be taken very serious by these women living in the city. When observing the buildings in which the FARC members have their offices in Bogotá, minor adaptations are found in order to protect themselves. These buildings are all completely un-marked and un-recognizable and secured with an extra gate and most of them have security. This is a complete contrast with the inside of the buildings. When entering these buildings there are carton boards of former FARC leaders and the symbol of the FARC is everywhere in the building.

“There are some problems with the security. We have a lot of enemies. Most people do not know that we are FARC. But I am always afraid that something could be happen. Sometimes I am afraid that someone places a bomb in our office or that I get killed on the streets. Many people are getting killed here in Bogotá. I never walk alone on the streets at night and the people in my neighborhood do not always know that we are ex-combatants from the FARC. On time the door of the office was open and nobody was there. I became really scared that and thought that someone had broken into our office or placed a bomb in our office. Every day the feeling of insecurity crosses my mind”

- Daniela
[January 16]

To conclude I want to highlight some positive processes that I noticed when being with these women. What I noticed was that these women were in general more open minded than the women living in the camp. They had certain ambitions such as studying international communications and followed English classes on the Saturdays as a preparation for their study. They were very open about their lives and were also interested in my life and what I was doing here. You could feel that they were more comfortable around people from outside the FARC than the women living in the camp. They were very passionate about their work in the cooperative. They both expressed to me that the work in the cooperatives gave them a certain fulfillment, which also resulted in them being grateful for their new lives. Although they sometimes missed the feeling of solidarity.

I do not want to state that the life in the city is easier or better than the life in the camp. As living in the city also brings certain constraints such as; a lack of healthcare and insecurity. Still it also has a lot of positive sides. These women are doing all sorts of activities, are very energetic and are actively preparing themselves for their future.

7.5 The camp and the ability to make strategic life choices

Previously mentioned, the concept; strategic life choices and the ability to make these choices is used in this study to shed a light on the everyday constraints, but also on the new possibilities these women experience living in the postaccord context in Colombia.

I will and cannot conclude if these women feel empowered in their ability to make strategic life choices in comparison with their time in the guerilla. I can only show, from the perspective of these women, how a certain reincorporation plan pays out on the ground and how these women are slowly finding their way within this new live. The camp as an important part of their everyday lives plays thus an important role in their everyday struggles and actions constructing their new lives.

In this chapter the camp can be perceived as a process emerging from the reincorporation process. The main pillar of the reincorporation process is collectivity. The camp is thus the physical outcome of this idea on reintegrating as a collective. On the other hand the camp is actively being formed by the people who live in it. Without these people, FARC men and women, the camp would not be the living place. Following Long, the camp as an outside intervention and/or process is thus internalized by these women. But simultaneously the camp would not exist as it is today, without the FARC men and women giving meaning to it and develop it. This is different than the peace agreement and the reincorporation policies, which are largely developed outside influence sphere of the FARC men and women who live in the camp.

When analyzing this chapter I found that the camp in itself is a living place in a physical way. Meaning that there are certain living conditions for these women to build on their livelihoods. Still the housing and services such as healthcare are not sufficient, especially not when it comes to having children and starting a family. Many women expressed their concern about the camp as a place to have children. There is poor housing and the future of the camp is uncertain. On the other hand. Despite of the poor quality of the houses, the women do experience that it is theirs. They are free to design it in the way they want it. Not the Colombian government nor the FARC leadership controls the inside and outside of their house.

When looking at the camp as a living place, I found that the camp connects to a certain feeling of security. The literal boundaries of the camp protects them from the outside world. This also comes to the for when comparing it to Bogotá as a living place. Here the feeling of insecurity goes together with living in the city outside the protection of the camp. On the other hand many women expressed their desire to change the view of the Colombian people towards them. A good collaboration and connection with their surrounding community is necessary and seen as the first step in accomplishing this. Where the boundaries of the camp can give them a secure feeling it also puts a literal boundary between them and the Colombian people. Comparing this to the FARC women living in Bogotá; these women are actively engaging with the Colombian people and thus feeling more at ease within the Colombian society.

Another important aspects of living in the camp is the psychological side of living in the camp. Or better said the psychological attachment to the FARC and its ideology. For some women this results in them feeling stimulated to take up leadership roles within the camp, the cooperatives or the political party. These women want to play an active role in the transition of the FARC from a guerilla towards a political party. For others it could mean a constrain in choosing what life they really want. Thus for most women living in the camp thus made it hard to look beyond the FARC, as they were being surrounded and reminded of the FARC's ideology and culture every day.

Additionally, what becomes evident in this chapter is that much about their livelihood is still very insecure and uncertain. The future of the camp is insecure, the establishment of the cooperatives is insecure, their chances on education and healthcare are insecure. All this insecurity results in a constant struggle between certain choices these women have to make in their lives. To choose for their family or to choose for the FARC or try to manage both. Help constructing the camp as a permanent living place or just see it as something temporarily. Start an individual project or work in the cooperatives. Take on a leadership role or live a more withdrawn life. Leave the protection of the camp or stay in the camp. All these are struggles which have to be overcome in the everyday lives of these women. Furthermore this constant uncertainty also influences their ability to make strategic life choices. Most women do not feel ready to make these choices as much about their future, such as their living place, is still unknown.

8 Conclusions

This thesis has attempted to answer the main research question: *“How do FARC women experience and shape their everyday lives in the postaccord context of Colombia”*. By doing so this analysis shows the many uncertainties these women face in a highly marginalized position, but on the other hand it also shows stories of hope and new possibilities when starting their new pathways in the postwar context of Colombia.

This question was divided in several stages or as I call them; interventions. These interventions are the Colombian peace Agreement, the reincorporation process and the camp. These three interrelated interventions all directly changed and influenced the everyday lives of these women. All these three interventions are larger processes coming forth from the postaccord context in Colombia. Understanding this context is thus the starting point of this research. I used the theory of Ralph Sprenkels on post-insurgency in order to explain the emerging processes coming from the postaccord context in Colombia.

As Ralph Sprenkels points out in his theory: *“the circumstances of peace propel multiple adjustments and adaptations in participant relations, as former insurgents sought to position themselves personally and collectively in an emerging postwar context”* (Sprenkels, 2014). The post accord context in Colombia can be considered as a social field, where different sub-groups and individuals hold different cards and might seek to position themselves or benefit from the emerging circumstances that come forth from this context. Many different social, economic and political processes emerge out of these new circumstances of “peace”. This postaccord context is the context in which the female ex-members of the FARC are repositioning themselves by creating space for maneuver to (re)-shape their everyday lives. For these women this context is the reality in which they live and where they need to build their lives. As explained, this context allowed for new circumstances to happen such as; the DDR process, the transition of the FARC towards a political party and a greater involvement of the international community. But it also directly and indirectly allows for a feeling of insecurity through; a highly polarized society and politics, the battle on former FARC territories and assassinations of ex-FARC members, family members of FARC, social leaders and human rights defenders. In all these new circumstances the FARC women, I lived with, are trying to create a new life as Colombian civilians.

The three interventions, mentioned earlier can be perceived as frameworks in which the everyday lives of these women in the postaccord context play out. All three interventions are structures and/or processes which directly and indirectly shape the boundaries around these women’s everyday lives. The Colombian peace agreement and the reincorporation process both do this as policies. The camp does this more in a physical way, as their actual living place. When analyzing the everyday lives of these women I use the actor-oriented approach of Norman Long, stating that these women are not passive recipients of wider structures and processes, but can be seen as active actors who process information and strategies and internalize these wider structures and processes in their everyday lives (Long, 2001). Thus, these three processes, or interventions, enter the lifeworld’s of the FARC women and become part of the resources and constraints of the livelihood strategies they develop. When analysing this process I firstly tried to answer the question; *“How do FARC women give meaning, to the Colombian peace agreement, the reincorporation process and the camp, in their everyday lives”*.

Secondly I tried to answer the *“How do they make use of these emerging processes as they try to create room for manoeuvre in their everyday lives”*. And thirdly, to conclude, I tried to find an answer on the question; *“How do these interventions influence their ability to make strategic life choices, looking at what these women perceive as constraints and possibilities, shaping their livelihoods.”* looking at how these women are constrained and enhanced by these processes as they try to create their lives in this new postaccord context.

The use of this concept; “strategic life choices” is used to find out what room these women have or make in order to make choices about their (desired) livelihoods. Thus at the end what possibilities do they experience when deciding upon these choices. The concept is not used to sum up the choices women already made concerning their desired livelihoods, however it is used to make the notion of agency a bit more tangible. This analysis clearly shows that these women are still in the process of making choices, weighing carefully all the options available and overcome struggles.

Analyzing the chapter on the Colombian peace agreement I found that these women make use of the peace agreement in a practical way but also in a symbolic way. Interpretations and actions such as; using its gender discourse as a strategic tool, seeing the peace agreement as a symbol for the transition in their lives, and use and interpret it as a contract between them and the Colombian government. Furthermore it sheds a light on the current rising security issue after the signing of the peace agreement. Concerning the use of the gender discourse I found that mostly women in leadership positions make actively use of the gender discourse. The gender discourse of the peace agreement is internalized by these FARC women as a way to continue their ideological fight against inequality and then especially gender inequality. In the everyday lives of these women this plays out as a new possibility to reposition themselves towards the Colombian people, and especially the Colombian women. Partly by using the gender discourse to reshape their identity as female and FARC. Women who did not have a leadership role, were aware of the gender discourse and the word gender, but they were not actively using it as a strategic tool in their everyday lives. On the other hand they gave meaning to the peace agreement in a more symbolic way; perceiving it as a major turning point in their lives. Referring to their life before and after the peace agreement. Including the act of handing in their weapons as the starting point of a new life as a civilian.

Another meaning given to the peace agreement was seeing the peace agreement as a contract between them and the Colombian government. Thus using the peace agreement in order to be able to hold the government accountable for the implementation of the peace agreement. This simultaneously enhanced and constrained them. They have the power to decide to step out of the peace agreement, but on the other hand they depend on the government fulfilling their part of the deal. This struggle with the Colombian government is a daily struggle. On the one hand they can pressure the government, but on the other hand putting all the responsibility on the shoulders of the government also results in passive attitudes and a feeling of disillusion. Which then has an impact on their daily lives and active attitude towards building up their livelihoods.

Analyzing the second chapter on the reincorporation process, the FARC women distinguish three ways to give meaning to this process, namely: reincorporate as a collective, reincorporation as the opportunity to visit their family or establish a new family, and the establishment of the cooperatives. What meaning and value they give to these three objectives vary per woman.

I found that the FARC women refer to their reincorporation process as a collective matter. This gives them a certain sense of security and gives continuity to their ideological values of solidarity and unity. Still the phenomenon of reincorporating as a collective brings certain tensions, when it comes to individual choices and needs. For most of the women it means that they constantly are choosing between the collective (the FARC) and themselves. Sometimes their choices coincide with the collective, but sometimes they go against the vision of the FARC leadership. Women are thus seeking to position themselves towards the FARC as a collective, but simultaneously focusing on their own wishes.

Secondly I found that they see the reincorporation process as a way to be with their family again and/or start a new family. Most women in the camp were pregnant and deliberately choose to have a baby. A choice some were not able to make for almost 40 years. Moreover this process opened up the possibility for these women to visit their families. They experienced this as a highly emotional event as most women did not see their families for many years. This resulted in two phenomena; firstly the life of some women changed from living for the higher cause of the FARC to living for their children and being a mother. Secondly old relationships and networks emerge with new networks and relationships, or in this case their known network of the FARC as a family emerges with new relationships such as with their “real” family.

Thirdly, most FARC female and male leaders see the establishment of the cooperatives as one of the most important processes of their reincorporation. This has two reasons; firstly it is their way to generate income for every FARC member. Secondly, because the establishment of the cooperatives is part of their communist ideology and part of their process towards a more equal society. All FARC members, female and male, have their own interpretation and meanings concerning the cooperatives. These interpretations influence the role they want to have in the establishment of these cooperatives. Moreover it influences their decisions on the role the cooperatives are having or going to have in the shaping of their lives. Most of these decisions connect to the larger struggle of collectivity and individuality. The cooperatives are part of the collective reincorporation. Nevertheless most of the personal aspirations of these women; such as studying, having a family or other personal aspirations could actively undermine the establishment of the cooperatives. With undermining I mean that there is lesser commitment towards the cooperatives. One of the reasons fueling this is the insecure context where they live in and the uncertainty around the establishment of these cooperatives. This insecure context of not knowing how their lives and the cooperatives will develop in the future makes them hesitant investing all their money in the cooperatives.

Additionally I found that these women are in the middle of re-defining their role and identity towards the outside world, but more importantly within the FARC itself. The main struggle these women face is how to position themselves as FARC, but also as a woman. Being part of the collective FARC is more important than being a woman or a man. This view also connects to the view they have on gender equality.

One could argue that when it comes to their identity of being a woman, they are in a transition period, where old views and new views come together, and sometimes contradict each other.

Concerning their ability to make strategic life choices I found that within these three themes of collectivity, family and the establishment of cooperatives they created a certain space for maneuver when creating their lives. They can choose to have a baby, they can choose to visit their family again.

They can choose to work in the cooperatives or set up their own productive projects. They can fulfill a leadership role within the cooperatives or the political party. The collective they are part of provides them with a certain feeling of security, which gives them a secure space to make decisions regarding their livelihoods. Regarding family, the cooperatives and the FARC, the women have a certain range of choices they can choose from. That said, outside these objectives they do not have that many options. Some women talk about having an education, wanting to go to university, but in reality this is almost not possible. Furthermore women who want to live with their families or live outside the collective, the camp or the cooperative, are faced with insecurity and harsh discrimination from Colombian society. The cooperatives are almost the only option for them to gain income, which makes them economically dependent on the FARC. Most women are very hesitant deciding on their future and thus where to put their money, because of the insecure context and the uncertainty around the establishment of the cooperatives. These uncertainties thus also influences their ability to make strategic life choices concerning their choice of livelihood

Analyzing the last chapter on the camp as an intervention in the everyday lives of these women, the camp can be perceived as the physical outcome of this idea on reintegrating as a collective. On the other hand the camp is actively being formed by the people who live in it. Without these people, FARC men and women, the camp would not be a living place.

When analyzing this chapter I found that the camp in itself is a living place in a physical way. Meaning that there are certain living conditions for these women to build on their livelihoods. Still the housing and services such as healthcare are not sufficient, especially not when it comes to having children and starting a family. Despite of the poor quality of the houses, the women do experience that it is theirs. They are free to design it in the way they want it. Not the Colombian government nor the FARC leadership controls the inside and outside of their house.

When looking at the camp as a living place, I found that the camp connects to a certain feeling of security. On the other hand many women expressed their desire to change the view of the Colombian people towards them. A good collaboration and connection with their surrounding community is necessary and seen as the first step in accomplishing this. Where the boundaries of the camp can give them a secure feeling it also puts a literal boundary between them and the Colombian people. Comparing this to the FARC women living in Bogotá; these women are actively engaging with the Colombian people and thus feeling more at ease within the Colombian society.

Another important aspects of living in the camp is the psychological side of living in the camp. Or better said the psychological attachment to the FARC and its ideology. For most women this makes it hard to look beyond the FARC as they were being surrounded and reminded of the FARC's ideology and culture every day. It could constrain them in choosing the life they really want.

Additionally, what becomes evident in this chapter is that much about their livelihood is still very insecure and uncertain. The future of the camp is insecure, the establishment of the cooperatives is insecure, their chances on education and healthcare are insecure. All this insecurity results in a constant struggle between certain choices these women have to make in their lives. This constant uncertainty also influences their ability to make strategic life choices. Most women do not feel ready to make these choices as much about their future, such as their living place, is still unknown.

To answer the question; *“How do FARC women experience and shape their everyday lives in the post-accord context of Colombia”* is very complex. This question tries to shed a light on the complex situation these women find themselves in, namely; the starting point of their new lives as Colombian civilians. Therefor this question tries to understand how these women cope within this new environment, what choices they make in relation to the pathways they want to choose in their lives and what constraints and possibilities they find at the start of these pathways. When analyzing this I found that the environment in which these women try to navigate themselves is a highly insecure environment. These women thus give shape to their lives in the midst of this uncertainty. This experienced uncertainty is part of the everyday lives of these women and also resonates to their ability to make strategic life choices. I found that many women do not find themselves able to make strategic life choices yet, mainly because of this insecure environment.

Here I want to make a difference between creating space for maneuver and the ability to make strategic life choices. This because I found that on a day to day basis women do create small spaces for maneuver, such as; designing and creating their own houses, visiting their families, deciding on their role within the cooperatives, visiting the surrounding community, using the gender discourse as a strategic tool and using the peace agreement to criticize the government. The ability to make strategic life choices put an emphasis on choices which are critical for these FARC women to live the lives they want, putting a focus on the future and their desired livelihoods. Analyzing these choices I found that many women do not find themselves able to make strategic life choices yet., with the exception of the decision to become pregnant and start a family.

This analysis shows the struggle between experiencing a certain level of security within the FARC as a community and simultaneously the need to reintegrate back into Colombian society, which brings opportunities and constrains outside the FARC's sphere of influence. Or as I earlier mentioned the constant tension between the collective and the individual. Here old networks and relations based on the ideological ideas of the FARC are being given new meanings within the post-accord context. These women are still in the process of finding their positions within this playing field, where old and new ideas come together and can be used to shape their livelihoods.

This tension between the collective and the individual also relates to their reintegration process being heavily influenced by the FARC and their ideology and policies. These women find themselves in the constant struggle of on the one hand following the ideas of the FARC such as; working and investing in the cooperatives, actively developing the camp as a permanent living place and reintegrate as a collective. With on the other hand the experience of a certain feeling of uncertainty about these plans and projects. This results in them being hesitant towards investing in the cooperatives or the camp as a living place, as for now nothing is certain about the duration of these projects. Yet others spoke about their plans beyond the

camp and the cooperatives, such as studying, traveling back to their home territories and/or families or start an individual productive project. When analyzing their ability to make strategic life choices, the only significant choice most women already made was the choice to become pregnant and start a family. This freedom of choice regarding having children was new to them, as they were not allowed to have children or had to give them away when they were born.

The women I spoke for this research are not a homogenous group. Every FARC woman brings different experiences and gives a different meaning and values to certain aspects in their everyday lives. As described some women I spoke held leadership positions within the camp and the political party. Their actions and choices mostly resonate the ideas and policies of the FARC leadership. These women have a clear idea about their futures in comparison to most women who did not had a leadership position. The women who were not active as leaders were more hesitant when it came to making choices about their future livelihoods. This also partly relates to hierarchical and disciplinary structure of the FARC in which they lived for many years. Another remarkable finding was the difference in attitude and values between women who were living in the camp and women who were living in the city of Bogotá. These women tended to have a better idea about what they want to achieve and accomplish in their lives and how their reintegration in Colombian society should happen.

All the above mentioned outcomes of this analysis show the complex reality of these women when trying to reposition themselves within the postaccord context of Colombia. Navigating themselves through this highly insecure and uncertain environment. This connects to the larger objective of this research of understanding the reintegration phase as a complex reality and a social-political process in itself instead of a simplistic policy. This complex reality, existing out of larger structures and processes such as; the Colombian peace agreement, the reincorporation process and the camp as their living place, partly shape the everyday lives of these women. This analysis shows how these women as active actors give meaning to these so-called interventions and are finding room for maneuver concerning their livelihoods and identities. It shows the many uncertainties these women face in a highly marginalized position, but on the other hand it also shows stories of hope and new possibilities when starting their new pathways.

9 Discussion

This thesis serves multiple purposes: Firstly it seeks to draw attention to the role of female ex-combatants in the context of postwar transitions that have long been ignored. Secondly it offers a new view towards reintegration processes, perceiving the reintegration process as an everyday reality instead of a policy being executed by policymakers. Lastly it seeks to give the female FARC ex-combatants a voice, a way to tell their story, hopes, and dreams, therefore supporting to their inclusion in postwar and peacebuilding processes in the Colombian context.

In the introduction I mentioned the question: Where are female combatants positioned in post-conflict transition, when violence subsides and peace and reintegration processes start? This question about the position of female combatants in the peace and reintegration processes has not yet received enough attention in most literature concerning postwar realities. When analyzing the global peace and reintegration processes in post-conflict societies the conclusion reached, is that women are at the margins of these processes, or are entirely missing (Shekshawat, 2015). Concerning the case of Colombia Avoine and Tillman (2015) wrote in the book; *Female combatants in conflict and peace: Challenging gender in violence and Post-Conflict*: “...There is still much work to be done collecting and analyzing the testimonies of (de)mobilized women. This is particularly the case in the Colombian context, where the peace processes promise to bring about the demobilization of many women along with men, especially when one considers the FARC’s reintegration...” (Avoine and Tillman, 2015, pg. 216). They wrote this shortly before the peace agreement between the FARC and the Colombian government was signed. This is exactly what this research tried to do, collecting the testimonies of the demobilized FARC women in order to explore their role within the postwar transition of Colombia and more importantly how they themselves perceived their role and position within this context. Thereby contributing to a better idea on the experiences of female ex-combatants in postwar transitions. In this case the participation of the FARC women in the Colombian armed conflict is recognized, thereby recognizing the need to include these women in the DDR phase. Nevertheless what this thesis shows is that the recognition of female presence in these processes does not necessarily gives them more agency or ensures inclusion. This is also recognized by other scholars such as Shekshawat, Avoine and Tillman, who argue that; even when the participation in armed conflict is recognized it is often construed in ways that implicitly or dismisses women’s agency.

Ideas on empowerment and changing gender roles are often connected to female ex-combatants and their reintegration process. Many scholars argue that the post-conflict moment is inseparable from a quest for broader social transformation that re-construct identities and relations of power. Although this research did not explicitly answers questions on empowerment or changing gender roles, it did find some issues and processes that relate to these larger questions on post-conflict and changing gender roles. Gender, gender equality and especially the question on gender identity definitely played a role in the everyday lives of these women. In the first place because of the gender discourse used in the Colombian peace agreement and the DDR process. Secondly, because according to them, they are part of a gender equal organization, where women are offered the same opportunities as men.

Interestingly however equality thus means “equal to men” resulting in women “becoming men”. These ideas also fit the ideological ideas on collectivity, where the collective of the FARC exceeds the individual needs of women (and men). Now after the ending of the conflict and thus the FARC as an armed guerilla group, these women find themselves in a position where they have to redefine their gender roles and identity towards Colombian society, themselves, but especially towards their own group; the FARC.

Furthermore this research analyzes the ability to make strategic life choices. This concept comes from the empowerment theory of Neila Kabeer. She sees empowerment as the ability to make choices, therefor disempowerment as being denied the ability to make choices. This research does not measure changing levels of empowerment in the time frame of before the peace agreement and after the peace agreement nor compares the levels of empowerment between FARC men and women. Nevertheless using this concept inevitable is connected to the question if there are any elements of empowerment and liberation in the everyday lives of these women? This question relates to the larger discourse that conflict, in some ways at least, provides an occasion for women to accomplish agency. The general discourse argues that; the traditional social structure and gendered hierarchies can be challenged with the opening of, even though in a limited manner and for a limited time, the public space for women. Still most case studies done on this topic suggest that it most often remains a lost opportunity. Shekharawat (2015) argues in her book on female ex-combatants that female ex-combatants experience both accidental empowerment as well as victimization within an armed group. Furthermore she argues that the experiences of women can reach an extreme of being liberated and empowered as well as another extreme of being highly exploited. Within this research the question of empowerment remains largely unexplored as further research is needed to examine this question. Nevertheless this research does show that the question of empowerment and the experience of empowerment differs per woman. Additionally the conclusion that many women in this moment do not find themselves capable of making strategic life choices, also illustrates that the inclusion of women in reintegration processes does not necessarily result in empowerment for these women. Hence their ability to make strategic life choices does not only connect with their inclusion and participation in reintegration processes. Much more is needed than only their participation in a reintegration process, such as a supportive and stable environment, an income, and many other needs.

I started this research by explaining the post-accord context of Colombia. I did this to show how the everyday lives of these women are embedded and enshrined with certain social, political and historical processes. This resulted in perceiving the reintegration process as an everyday reality instead of a policy being executed by policymakers. By showing this I wanted to create a whole new way of looking at reintegration processes as Ralph Sprenkels does in his research on post-insurgency in El Salvador. Contesting the mainstream and simplistic view on reintegration. Thereby perceiving the reintegration process as an everyday reality instead of a policy being executed by policymakers. An outcome of this approach is that reintegration is not a solely standing policy or process, but is embedded within a larger context, namely the postwar context. Furthermore by looking at reintegration through the everyday lives of the FARC women, it showed that everyone experiences and interprets her reintegration process in a different way. Thereby contributing to a more holistic picture on post war transitions.

Lastly this research seeks to give the female FARC ex-combatants a voice, a way to tell their story, hopes, and dreams, therefor supporting their inclusion in postwar and peacebuilding processes in the Colombian context. In general women have been considerable marginalized in postwar and peace building processes, however, especially those who played an active role in the armed conflict. These women experience severe stigmatization as being a female ex-combatants means for society that they have transgressed traditional gender norms by being “violent” and “sexual”, especially in the highly patriarchal society of Colombia. It is thus of importance to give these women a voice and include them in peacebuilding processes. I agree with the view of Shekhawat that: “.. *The experiences of these women are exceptional; calling for due attention from scholars and policymakers, thereby arguing for a rightful place for female combatants in academic discourse and in policies.* (Seema Shekhawat, 2015, pg. 17).”. Telling their story challenges the mainstream thinking in Colombian society on female ex-combatants. This thinking creates certain stereotypes which encourages the discrimination against FARC women in Colombian society. Their story thus contributes to yet another perspective on the FARC and the role women play in this guerilla group. A perspective which can be highly valuable in the current hostile and polarized Colombian society.

Many people asked me why I choose to do research on such a controversial topic as female ex-combatants, especially In Colombia, where many disgust the FARC because of their role in the armed conflict. I do understand this perception, but during my stay in the camp, I also experienced how these women are just humans trying to re-build a live, after a very traumatic and violent chapter in their lives. Personally, I think that being able to obtain more information about these kind of groups helps to a better understanding of their circumstances and therefore a more peaceful environment. As they said themselves;

“war is a dehumanizing process, we were dehumanized by many, perceived as monsters. But we want the Colombian people to see us as humans, who are also worthy to exist”

- Maria, female FARC member living in the camp
[January, 10]

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Annex A

Map of the 20 “Zonas Veredales” and 6 “Puntos”.

