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Understanding *Motherhoods* during FARC-EP Female Ex-Combatants' Reincorporation Processes
The Case of La Guajira

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List of Acronyms

ARN	Agencia para la Reincorporación y Normalización [Agency for Reincorporation and Normalization]
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
ETCR	Espacio Territorial de Capacitación y Reincorporación [Territorial Training and Reincorporation Space]
FARC-EP	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo [Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army]
JEP	Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz [Special Jurisdiction for Peace]
PTN	Puntos Transitorios de Normalización [Transitional Local Points for Normalisation]
SENA	Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje [National Training Service]
UN	United Nations
ZVTN	Zonas Veredales Transitorias de Normalización [Transitional Local Zones for Normalization]

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Abstract

Over the years, motherhood and its complexities have been theorised from many outlooks. This research stands with feminist scholars, writers, and activists that have been working on understanding the complexity of motherhood as an institution with all that it entails. This research paper nourishes the debate by approaching motherhood from the perspectives and experiences of FARC-EP female ex-combatants living in the ETCR *Amaury Rodríguez*, La Guajira, during their reincorporation process in the framework of peacebuilding in Colombia. Through the use of a feminist ethnographic approach, this research relies on their stories as main source of knowledge. Based on these stories, I argue that although some women do not necessarily understand motherhood differently from its universal conception, their experiences defy its institution by different practices like making it a choice rather than a goal, and by politicising their experiences, and turning them into experiences of resistance.

Relevance to Development Studies

A crucial aspect of conflict transformation and peacebuilding is inviting every concerned party into the conversation, as they are crucial in the peacebuilding and reconciliation processes. FARC-EP female ex-combatants' voices on their experiences as women, combatants, and especially as mothers have not been included in previous research on conflict transformation and on motherhood. In this sense, this research transmits the empirical voices of some women experiencing motherhood and reincorporation as they are, as means of emancipating themselves from representations to which they do not agree. It is important to study personal narratives and personal statements that have been used by marginalised groups of women to express their standpoints on motherhood in order to shift feminist theorisation on motherhood to a more 'complete' mosaic.

Keywords
Motherhood, womanhood, experiences, institution, FARC-EP, female ex-combatants, women, reincorporation, Colombia

Chapter 1 Introduction

The Colombian armed conflict between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army (FARC- EP in Spanish) lasted about five decades until 2016 when a peace treaty was signed. Throughout the conflict, the FARC-EP was known for its considerable female participation, which made about 40% of the organisation's entire militancy (Castrillón 2015: 78, Gutiérrez and Carranza 2017: 770, Ramírez 2001: 98).

Female participation drove the organisation to enforce regulatory measures around intimacy among combatants (Gutiérrez and Carranza 2017: 775). These included controlling women's and young girls' sexual and reproductive health by forcing the use of contraception and obligating abortions in case of pregnancy (Castrillón 2015: 78, Gaitán 2018: 56-57, Gutiérrez and Carranza 2017: 775, Moreno 2017, Stanski 2006: 147-148). Under very particular circumstances, women were able to carry their pregnancies to term (Gaitán 2018: 56-57). In these cases, due to the war and sanitary conditions, they were sent away to deliver their babies in nearby towns, leave them with surrogate families, and then re-join the ranks (Gaitán 2018: 43-46). Throughout the conflict, women's participation in the conflict and the control over their sexual and reproductive health became one of the most debatable topics among scholars and the media—women were often times stigmatised and victimised (Gaitán 2018: 34).

When peace negotiations started in 2012, while for some women it meant a possibility of becoming mothers, for others it meant starting the process of reuniting with their sons and daughters they may have had to leave behind during the conflict. As increasing fertility rates within the organisation re-emerged, many started to call it a "baby boom" (Gaitán 2018: 39, Moreno 2017). After the signature of the treaty, 10,000 ex-combatants moved to 24 Territorial Training and Reincorporation Spaces (ETCR in Spanish) that were created to facilitate their transition into civilian life over a span of 24 months as part of their reincorporation process (ARN n.d.). The latter, as stated in the final peace accord, entails a reincorporation in economic, social and political dimensions (Gobierno de Colombia and FARC-EP 2016: 8).

In the ETCRs, the "baby boom" and the family reunifications continued to happen (Moreno 2017). According to official government numbers, as of July 2019, 2,449 ex-combatants' children were born since the peace negotiations, of which 600 currently live in the ETCRs (Barragán 2019). In these spaces, ex-combatants—especially women—are still constantly the centre of attention of the media and researchers (author's fieldwork). Given their trajectories and the various debates I had previously read about, I as a young researcher became interested in the emergence of the "baby boom," as well as the families' reunifications. I got interested in learning what did it mean for them in terms of their experiences of motherhood and reincorporation, and a possible link between these two.

The dominant conception of motherhood has been deployed through multiple representations, theories, norms and beliefs across different cultures (Lagarde 2016: 376). In Colombia, motherhood and fatherhood have been central in the social organisation and reproduction of gender (Puyana and Mosquera 2005: 7). It is perceived as a woman's main realisation, and it has been shaped by the belief that womanhood *is* motherhood (Pachón 2007: 147-148), and thus that women ought to validate themselves through motherhood (Yañez 2017: 66). Sometimes, experiences of motherhood relate, contest, or are compared to this perceived dominant way.

After my stay in the ETCR *Amaury Rodríguez,* in La Guajira, I was able to hear the women's experiences that compose this research. Women's stories on their experiences have often times been suppressed or manipulated, thus I seek to present them as they were

presented to me. I approach these experiences as interpretations that emerge from what they want to explain rather than the origin of their explanations (Scott 1991: 797). They led me to engage with feminist theorisations of motherhood and to create a dialogue between my understanding of motherhood and my interpretation of empirical findings of experiences of motherhood. I understand motherhood as both a diverse range of experiences, which entail women's potential relationship with their ability to reproduce and with their children, and a patriarchal institution that has imposed a dominant conception of how women should mother (Rich 1976: xv).

I argue that motherhood as an institution has had the ability to mutate and reconfigure itself, and thus, there are no experiences of motherhood running outside of it. However, it affects experiences differently, and not all of them are completely determined by it. This research studies various tensions between these experiences and the institution of motherhood through the embodied experiences of motherhood of some female ex-combatants. I argue that while some women do not necessarily contest some ideals of the universal discourse and practices around (non)motherhood, they defy its institution by making it a choice; others turn their experiences of motherhood into resistance and political experiences. Rather than attacking the notion motherhood, I intend to tackle it under its patriarchal conceptualisation and definition, as well as acknowledge the plurality and diversity of its experiences.

This paper is divided into six chapters. The current chapter contextualises the research and gives insights on the objectives, the research questions, methodology and reflexivity. The second chapter explains the theoretical and conceptual considerations of this paper, which include intersectionality as a crucial lens, a critical review of the theorisation of motherhood, and the concept of reincorporation in its temporary dimension. In the third chapter, I problematise the idea that there is one way of representing ex-combatants, along with their practices of motherhood, womanhood, and reincorporation. In order to create a more complete and 'non-objective' version of female ex-combatants' experiences of motherhood during their reincorporation, I superimpose previous studies and the different experiences and realities of women I encountered. In the fourth chapter, I discuss experiences of motherhood that are based on the idea of realisation, but also on choice. I further discuss how womanhood cannot be seen as overlapping and interchangeable with motherhood. In the fifth chapter, I touch upon stories that I encountered that resist the institution of motherhood in various way such as redefining their motherhoods as experiences of resistance and political struggle. Finally, chapter six contains the concluding remarks of this research paper.

1.1 Research Questions

How is motherhood experienced by FARC-EP female ex-combatants undergoing reincorporation in the ETCR *Amaury Rodríguez,* La Guajira?

Sub questions

How has womanhood in war and motherhood in peacebuilding been represented? Does this reflect or contradict the experiences of women ex-combatants?

How do experiences of women ex-combatants challenge universal conceptualisations of motherhood and womanhood?

In what ways are their experiences of motherhood and womanhood political acts and acts of resistance?

1.2 Contextualizing the research

In Colombia, war and peace-attempts have coexisted since 1948 (Díaz 2018: 15). Although this coexistence goes beyond the fight between the FARC-EP and the Colombian state (Díaz 2018: 15), given the existence of various groups with various agendas, this research's context is situated on the conflict—and latest peace agreement—between the FARC-EP and the government. Nonetheless, it acknowledges that violence is still ongoing across the country's territory, and that peace is a complex process (Díaz 2018: 15).

1.2.1 A Five Decades Long Conflict and its Female Participation

The conflict lasted more than half a century and terribly affected the civilian population (Dasli et al. 2018: 16). At its roots, there is lack of state presence, military oppression in rural areas, land inequality, privatisation of national resources, and political exclusion (Dasli et al. 2018: 16). It started as power struggles between the liberal and conservative parties, which accentuated the post-colonial pattern of power-sharing among elites during the 20th century (Dasli et al. 2018: 16).

During a period known as "La Violencia" (1948-1958), violent confrontations between these two parties had a devastating toll on civilians (Dasli et al. 2018: 16, Díaz 2018: 17-18). In order to alleviate the country's violent situation, from 1958 to 1974, these two factions agreed to a political coalition called the National Front, which manifested itself as the alternation of four presidential terms of four years each (Díaz 2018: 18-19, Nasi 2018: 42). While this political coalition marginalised different ideological affiliations and oppressed other political actors, it gave birth to various insurgent groups (Díaz 2018: 18). A number of peasants agreed to take part in revolutionary action as a means of representing their previously suppressed political interests. Thus, in 1964, the FARC-EP emerged as the first rebel organisation dedicated to rural uprising, and a highly ideological organisation that acted as mediator and almost as a state entity in rural areas where the Colombian government was not present at all (Nasi 2018: 36, Paterson 2013: 5).

Castrillón (2015: 83) and Gutiérrez and Carranza (2017: 772) mention that the first tales about this rebel organisation make tribute to 48 brave and revolutionary men, who alongside their families, started a peasant resistance movement. However, women and children are not mentioned in these stories, given they were not considered decision-makers or military participants (Gutiérrez and Carranza 2017: 772). Throughout the years, however, the conflict dynamics drove the organisation to transform itself. After several military setbacks during the 1960s, and as it sought to increase its capacity and territorial reach, it shifted from this "familial model" into a "mobile guerrilla force model" (Gutiérrez and Carranza 2017: 773). This also implied shifting into an essentially all-male organisation, and even if there was female support, women were in charge of doing laundry and handling food logistics, but not combat duties (Gutiérrez and Carranza 2017: 773).

The gradual transformation of female participation was a result of a series of decisions taken during the 6th (1978) and 7th (1982) Conferences[1] (Gutiérrez and Carranza 2017: 773). During the 7th Conference, the FARC-EP established itself as no-longer a "peasant-defence organisation" but a "people's army," which necessarily involved incorporating women in direct military roles (Gutiérrez and Carranza 2017: 770, Marón 2003). In parallel, the social conditions of the country pushed women to hold arms and go to war (Castrillón 2015: 84). Women in Colombia, especially in rural areas, were and still are affected by several intersecting inequalities—independent and/or related to war—such as mistreatments and abuses

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[1] Political gatherings where the highest decision-making occurred regarding the organisation (Gutierrez and Carranza 2017: 773).

under a patriarchal authority, lack of education, and domestic and sexual violence (Bouvier 2016: 15, Castrillón 2015: 85, Gutiérrez and Carranza 2017: 771). Thus, becoming a combatant meant not only having the opportunity of obtaining military and political skills, but also obtaining to some extent autonomy, self-esteem, and significant solidarity links (Gutiérrez and Carranza 2017: 772, Rodríguez 2008: 8-9). This does not mean that some women were forcibly recruited, or joined because of their role as social leaders, political persecution, or family ties with the organisation (Castrillón 2015: 85).[2]

Once in the ranks, many combatants had a sense of gender equality as men and women shared the same tasks and same training (author's fieldwork). Nonetheless, Rodríguez (2008: 9) has exposed that some women recognised there were sexist traits within the organisation, and that it established a fixed gender structure that resulted in asymmetric power relations. For instance, although there were no limitations for women to ascend in the ranks, there were no women in the highest military positions (Castrillón 2015: 83). Indeed, Stanski (2006: 143) states that advanced training for leadership positions was traditionally directed to men.

Castrillón (2015: 83) adds that women's specific needs were undermined and put under class struggle for they were considered by the organisation as a distraction in their revolutionary agenda. As Castrillón (2015: 84, 85) and Gutiérrez and Carranza (2017: 773) argue, under the emancipation and equality discourse, the FARC-EP included women in their ranks in order to fulfil the needs of the conflict and to legitimise it (Castrillón 2015: 80). The latter raises the question if the organisation was actually reproducing dominant and patriarchal patterns that have always been in Colombia (Castrillón 2015: 79).

1.2.2 The Making of Peace: Reincorporation of FARC-EP ex-combatants

Although the peace negotiations started in late 2012, the signing of a peace accord came in 4 years later, on September 26th, 2016 (Nasi 2018: 39). However, when former President Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2014 and 2014-2018) held a plebiscite, it resulted in the majority of Colombians voting "no" (Nasi 2018: 39). This was caused due to many Colombians following former President Uribe (2002-2006 and 2006-2010) and other political sectors who strongly opposed the negotiations, and thus, distrusting the FARC-EP and Santos' government (Nasi 2018: 39). Together with the opposition, the government and the FARC-EP had to renegotiate the peace accords that resulted in the signature of another accord on November 24th—this time to be ratified by Congress (Nasi 2018: 40).

In previous Colombian peace processes, women were never considered negotiating actors. Yet throughout the years, they have found ways to exercise pressure and to get closer to the negotiation table (Bouvier 2016: 17). During the peace negotiations in La Habana, the negotiators were pushed by women's organisations and female combatants to establish a gender sub-commission, responsible for revising the peace agreement using a gender lens and assuring effective measures to guarantee women's rights (Céspedes-Báez 2018: 111, Dasli et al. 2018: 8, Gaitán 2018: 18). This created a space for female participation and the implementation of a gender perspective in the agreement, as well as a space in which there was a considerable emphasis on addressing gender-related issues, together with class, race and ethnicity (Dasli et al. 2018: 9).

The final accord touches upon six points: an agrarian reform, political participation, definitive ceasefire and conflict termination, illicit crops and drug trafficking, victims and transitional justice, and implementation and verification of the accords (Gobierno de Colombia and FARC-EP 2016: 7-9). The third point includes the economic, social and political

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[2] Included in author's work upon completion of the course "Gender and Sexuality as 'Lenses' to Engage with Development Policy and Practice," ISS, June 2019.

reincorporation of the members of FARC-EP into civilian life (Gobierno de Colombia and FARC-EP 2016: 8). In order to make this possible, the FARC-EP and the government agreed on specific rules of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process (Nasi 2018: 45). These rules included temporarily concentrating the combatants in 20 Transitional Local Zones for Normalisation (ZVTN in Spanish) and 7 Transitional Local Points for Normalisation (PTN in Spanish), in addition to the FARC-EP gradually handing in all their weapons to the United Nations (UN) (Gobierno de Colombia and FARC-EP 2016: 57-58-62). By August 2017, these concentration zones turned into 24 ETCRs, which, sought to stabilize actions in health, education and productivity for ex-combatants over a span of 24 months (ARN n.d.).

1.3 My way to the ETCR *Amaury Rodríguez*

1.3.1 Shifting Places

My journey started in Valledupar (see Map 1), a close city to two ETCRs I viewed as possibilities for my research. While being there, my gatekeeper provided me the contacts of two female ex-combatants in two different, but not-too-far, ETCRs: one in La Guajira and the other one in Cesar (See Map 1).

Map 1. Map of Colombia and the ETCRs
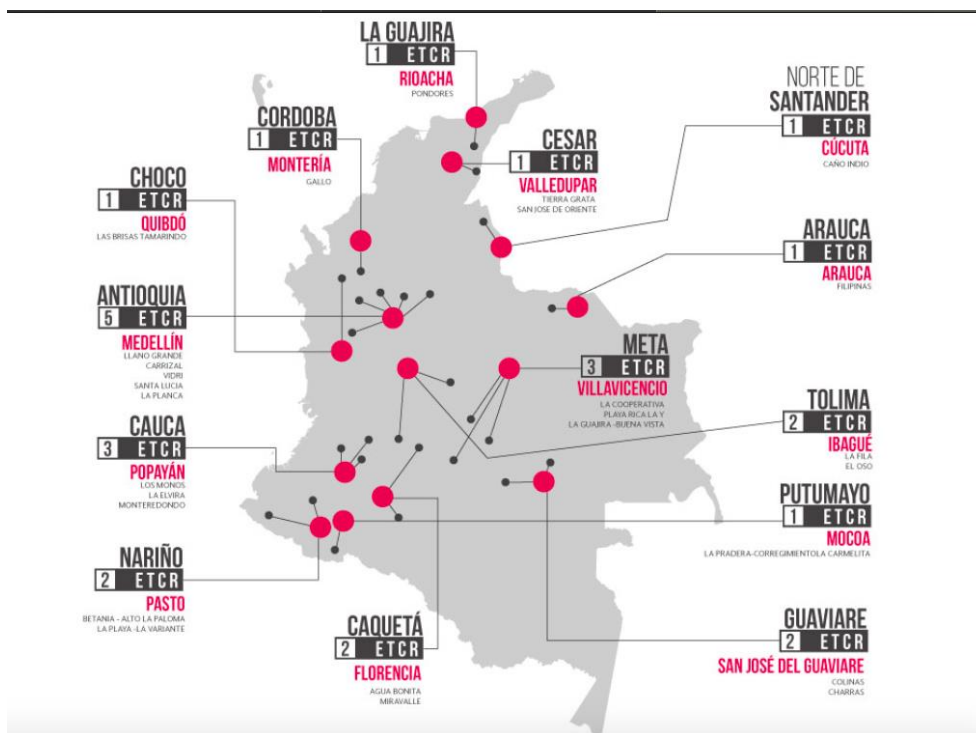
Source: ARN (n.d.)

I called the two of female ex-combatants and they both said that since many researchers had previously visited them to talk to ex-combatants, especially to women, they were tired of giving interviews. I assured them that I was going to share my work with the participants, and that I intended to build more of a collective work. This aspect of finding my way to the ETCR significantly impacted this research because early on it made me wonder about the instrumentalization of these women's stories and the over attention they were getting.

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After many calls, multiple change of plans, and a few days, I arrived to the ETCR in La Guajira. When I got there, Sara—the ex-combatant I had contacted some days before—greeted me in her house with a hug and a cup of coffee. While she mentioned I could stay in an open module for visitors, she offered me a bed in her place for a more suitable price. She said that I would have more privacy and that maybe I would feel more comfortable there. The only thing is that I would share the bedroom with her little 6-year-old boy—which was not a problem for me. I accepted immediately, not yet knowing that staying in her place would have helped me later for building rapport with other ex-combatants and understanding better their daily lives. She became a strong bridge for me to cross into people's trust. I also believe it was a good way of giving something back to her in return for her hospitality.

Even though I was staying in her house and she was always very helpful, she made it very clear I was left to be independent because her days were always quite busy. Nonetheless, on that day, she accompanied me to the cafeteria, to speak to one of the leaders called 'Bertulfo Álvarez', and to Carlos—the president of the Community Action Council. 'Bertulfo' asked me about my research, and with a cold sight, asked me to eventually provide feedback on the information that resulted from my research as it could also be helpful for the ETCR. We shook hands and we never crossed paths again during my stay.

On the contrary, Carlos invited me for a cup of coffee at his house. He asked me about my research, and since it involved motherhood, he associated it with gender and mentioned he was part of the gender committee of the ETCR. He then showed me pictures of his children, who were all born during the war and currently all live in different places. He said to me that his oldest son had joined "*the enemy*"—meaning the Colombian military—but that they had talked and reconciled (author's fieldwork).

Throughout my visit, he was always around and very friendly. Every time he saw me and introduced me to other people he said, "*This is a Colombian student that comes from the Netherlands. She is studying gender.*" In the beginning, I think it portrayed me wrongly because people knew me as the "student doing gender." Women were very tired of researchers, especially the ones "doing gender." They did not talk to me until they noticed I was not going to ask questions all of a sudden and about their lives. On the contrary, I knew I wanted to create connections with people.

1.3.2 Becoming a '*Compañera*'

Given my short stay, I was not able to do an ethnography. Rather, I employed a feminist ethnographic approach that allowed me to incorporate essential elements of an ethnography. That is, I participated in people's daily routines in order to see what happened, to listen to what was said, and to ask questions through informal conversations or semi-structured interviews[3] (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 3). The latter included open-ended and exploratory strategies in structured and unstructured settings that allowed me to examine ex-combatants' social practices and discourses as a form of "interpretative knowledge production"—all while attempting to alleviate power imbalances (Cerwonka 2007: 2-14, White 2008: 282-284). Since I had never engaged with ethnographic research before, many parts of my process were experimental.

Every morning for a week, I woke up at 5:30 am to the sounds of birds, chickens and children laughing and playing; I took a shower in the bathrooms outside like everyone else; I went to have breakfast at the outdoors cafeteria, and then do some exploring. I did not want to be just another student doing research and looking for interviews, so I knew I had to be creative. Initially, I remained an observer and someone who wanted to learn from them. Some days, I had the opportunity to become part of their routines, which ended up

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[3] All of the informal conversations and the interviews were conducted in Spanish.

being critical in understanding some dynamics of their lives. The most exciting thing about this, however, was that it was often times not planned. The information somehow came to me without me even looking for it, in random but fulfilling conversations. For instance, one day as I was returning from having breakfast in the common area, I heard *"Blondie! Come with me to sell cakes!"*. The person who called me was an ex-combatant's sister, who happened to be the mother of a 7-month-old baby, and now a participant of this research.

Other days, however, I had to manage to make it happen. I had remembered Sara mentioning a National Training Service (SENA in Spanish) course some people were taking in the mornings. Thus, on my second morning there, I headed to the outdoor classroom to learn about sewage and water systems. Since the teacher was almost an hour late, it gave me the opportunity to talk to some ex-combatants, who were very welcoming and curious about me. While we were waiting for the professor to come, Carlos pointed at a pregnant ex-combatant and said *"Look, just what you need."* I felt afraid because I did not want her to feel intimated, yet after working in the same study group, she approached me to leave the class early together because her 9-month pregnancy made it difficult for her to stand the heat. Thus, we went to the air-conditioned clothing manufacturing workshop, but not without stopping first at her house to have a cup of coffee. At the end, we ended up spending almost the entire day together.

Some other days, if I noticed someone needed help, I made myself useful. This allowed me to position myself beyond the standpoint of an "extractivist" researcher (Ferdinand et al. 2007: 519). I was able to help in various ways such as participating in a collective cleaning session of the ETCR, taking care of a baby while her mother was busy at work, or helping out in the day-care. Sharing time with them helped me realise a few things quickly. For instance, they call each other *'compañero/a'* (colleague), and some of them even referred to me as *compañera*. Sara, for example, introduce me like this to her little son the first time we met.

1.3.3 The Women

This research departs from a feminist standpoint epistemology, which drives me to understand realities through women's eyes and experiences, as well as to apply this derived knowledge to social change (Brooks 2007: 55). I place women's experiences of motherhood as the centre of this research and as the main source of knowledge (Brooks 2007: 56). Among many things, this research seeks to present a dialogue that takes into account the relation between dominant representations of motherhood, and the different expressions of women's autonomy. It seeks to give voice to women's lives that have been suppressed or manipulated (Brooks 2007: 54, Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 13). My standpoint is that they can understand their stories for themselves, so "the world can claim virtually no history at all" (Harding 1987:8), as it has done so far. Most importantly, I aim at avoiding disclosing information that could reinforce negative stereotypes about women ex-combatants (Jaggar 2008: 458).

Rather than using statistical representative sampling, I employed purposive sampling, which consists of "purposefully selecting cases of theoretical and conceptual significance" (Huijsmans 2010: 83). Since this research is based on a very small sample of FARC-EP female ex-combatants, I will not generalise experiences of motherhood of female ex-combatants and I will not take them as representative of the wider population of ex-combatants across the country.

I was able to conduct 6 interviews with female ex-combatants from rural fronts of the guerrilla, aged between 24 to 42, who were about to experience motherhood, were experiencing it, or had experienced it during the conflict (See Appendix 1). They all happened in very different circumstances. Sara and I got to build a relationship because I was staying in

her house; Ana was introduced to me by her sister; Olga asked me if I could watch her baby for a while; and the other three women Camila, Natalia and Flor were asked to participate in a more spontaneous way. When I interviewed Flor, her partner Jorge was present, and I invited him to participate. When he was invited in, he became the main participant of the interview, for Flor was very shy and he was very talkative. On the other hand, the informal conversations that are included in this research come from different encounters. Adriana, the ex-combatant I met during the SENA class was willing to give me an interview but the very next day we met she went into labour and I did not see her again during my stay. However, the brief story she shared with me during our conversations is included in this research. With Andrea I got to have breakfast and a desert at her house once. Although all their voices are included in the paper, this research expands on Andrea's, Sara's, and Ana's insights. These encounters were very deep in that they helped me understand many aspects of motherhood as an institution, with its experiences and "counter-experiences."

One of the things I realised while doing this research is that I as a researcher, while acknowledging that every individual has a different life trajectory, often times expected to have a study community with many similarities. Although these women's stories comprise similar aspects, they all have different trajectories that make their experiences of reincorporation and motherhood very different. I understand these women's lives are multi-faceted and deepened in changing and diverse struggles. War affects people in different ways depending on gender, age, class, ethnicity, race, and regional provenance (Bouvier 2016: 6). The participants of this research were from various regions of the northern part of Colombia, which explains their role in the 'Bloque Caribe' of the FARC-EP (See Map 2) and joined the organisation under different circumstances. While Appendix 1 shows the specific of each of them, Appendix 3 touches upon their trajectories into the organisation.

Map 2. FARC-EP's Distribution During the Conflict
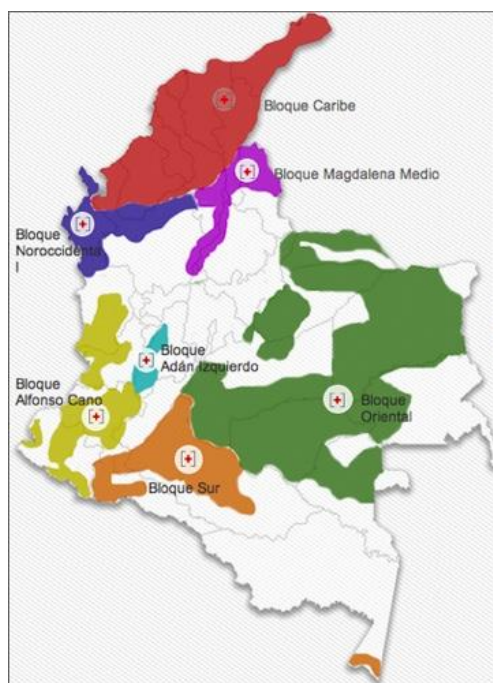
Source: Semana 2012

They all gave consent for their participation in this research, and most of them asked me for confidentiality and anonymity. In order to avoid harming the participants of the research, I will address them in this paper not by their real names or war aliases, but

pseudonyms. In return for their participation, I agreed to use this information solely for the objective of this research, and to share my reflections with them upon completion.

My participant observation and general experience in the ETCR was recorded as regular entries in a research diary. The latter was an important element of this research, as it helped me fill in the gaps of my interviews and observations (White 2008: 298). It was also a tool for reflecting on issues of positionality along my fieldwork experience. For the sake of building rapport, the interviews were only tape-recorded if permission was given by the participant. During the interviews, I did not take notes because I could tell this made people uncomfortable. Rather, I treated the interview as a conversation with questions. As soon as we finished, I went home and took notes of everything I could recall.

1.3.4 Positionality

As a feminist researcher employing an ethnographic approach, it becomes crucial to think of reflexivity as a methodological practice (White 2008: 286). In that sense, part of applying feminist principles in all stages of this research is to acknowledge the epistemological implications of my positionality that influence the way in which I collected the data and the way in which I am producing knowledge (Crossa 2012: 112, Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 15, Huijsmans 2010: 58, Jaggar 2008: 458). I consider myself a 'white' Colombian young woman, who belongs to the upper-middle class, and has not experienced motherhood nor militancy—or even direct contact with the conflict.

On the one hand, not having experienced motherhood directed me to many assumptions without wanting to do so. In a sense and to some extent, it marked how participants related to me. When I was in the field, since I was researching "motherhood" a lot of people asked me if I had already given birth ('*Ya parió?'*), yet when some asked me about my age, they said there should not be any rush. Since being a mother was not what drove me to do this research, I wonder if it has developed out of my desire to one day become a mother, or to contest all those expectations that surround me just because I am a woman. In the end, the main reference I have is my mother and my *nana* Isabel. My mother has never imposed any expectations around me becoming a mother one day, but I know she perceives motherhood as one of her biggest realisations in life after having lost her mother at a very young age; Isabel has been taking care of me since I was one-year old, when she moved into the house with her 14 year-old daughter as a single mother. She is originally from Santander but migrated to the capital due to the conflict, and in search of opportunities. She has been my second mother and has shown me you do not have to be related by blood to take care of someone with such love.

On the other hand, since I have never experienced the conflict first-hand, what I knew derived from stories based on polarising discourses that romanticised war. This research is part of my desire to understand the conflict through the protagonists themselves, whose realities have mostly remained silent. It is about understanding stories from people who were strongly marked by many years of fighting, compared to just a few as civilians. In the ETCR, as ex-combatants often times feel stigmatised, this was appreciated. Nonetheless, even if I had this on my mind, I realised I had many hidden assumptions about them.

Before going there, I thought that my physical appearance would be a problem, because I have felt it has made me a 'foreigner' and a privileged 'other'. Indeed, people thought I was a foreigner at first—they called me '*gringa'*, British and blondie—but when they found out I was Colombian it seemed that some barriers were taken down. No one related my appearance to a socio-racial hierarchy or class, but to the richness and diversity of the Colombian population. Instead of assuming I belonged to an upper-class, many ex-combatants treated me as a student that had come a long way from the Netherlands.

Although this research seeks to portray and evoke the voices of women as they are—without claiming them—I am aware that I as a researcher have the verbal privilege of writing down their stories, and thus, it is my vision that is presented in this research (Rich 1976: xviii). In order to alleviate power imbalances during our encounters, the participants controlled the narratives, and although I guided the conversations, they chose their own paths to follow. This research is the result of partial visions and interpretations; it does not seek to speak for all women, but to bring insights on a number of female ex-combatants' different experiences and trajectories. As Rich states,

> …at this point any broad study of female culture can be at best partial, and what any writer hopes—and knows—is that others like her, with different training, background, and tools are putting together other parts of this immense half-buried mosaic in the shape of a woman's face. (Rich 1976: xix).

Chapter 2 Theoretical and Conceptual Considerations

In this chapter, I apply an intersectional lens to study the experiences of womanhood and motherhood of female ex-combatants. Then, I critically review the theorisation of motherhood in order to contest its patriarchal conceptualisation and situate myself in the debate. In further chapters, this will be contextualised in stories of participants of this research. Finally, I expose why I choose to use reincorporation as a concept in its temporary dimension and as the time frame of this paper.

2.1 Applying intersectionality

Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) coined the term intersectionality in order to understand the complex oppressions of black women in the United States, and to challenge womanhood as a unique category (Mendoza 2016: 105). When it was adopted by anticolonial feminists outside of the United States, intersectionality as an analytical tool highlighted different problems emerging from the "complexity of the intersections of gender, race, class, and sexuality in the colonial condition" (Mendoza 2016: 106-107). This allowed scholars to study different power dynamics in different colonial contexts (Mendoza 2016: 110). When applied to this research, one can find that female participation in insurgent groups in Colombia does not correspond to a single story; all female ex-combatants carry different backgrounds and trajectories (Rodríguez 2008: 1). They are peasants, indigenous, black, mestizas, women living and revolting in rural and urban areas, married and/or single, mothers or not mothers; with different education levels, different levels of participation, and from different social sectors (Rodríguez 2008: 1). Thus, although this research addresses female ex-combatants' sharing experiences of war, motherhood, and reincorporation, it understands that women's trajectories are marked by different realities. Every woman experiences different forms of oppression that cannot be addressed separately; it is important to address the interconnectedness of their multiple identities and understand the extent to which they strengthen or weaken each other[4] (Winker and Degele 2001: 51).

While applying an intersectional lens and based on the work of Patricia Hill Collins and Evelyn Nakano Glenn (1994), I see the importance of not analysing motherhood independently from its context. In the following sections, I argue that motherhood as an embodied experience framed by interconnected structures of race, class, gender, culture, religion, and age. It is important to study personal narratives and personal statements that have been used by marginalised groups of women to express their standpoints on motherhood.

2.2 Motherhood and Womanhood

2.2.1 The dominant conception of motherhood

The dominant conception of motherhood itself is problematic as it has often been tied to the Western understanding of womanhood (Glenn 1994: 3). It has been constructed based on conceptions of biology, medicine and psychology, which have resulted in an essentialist lens that considers women to have innate mothering qualities (Posso 2010: 61). It rests full responsibility solely on the biological mother, "for whom it constitutes the primary if not

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[4] Author's previous work upon completion of the course "Contemporary Perspectives on Social Justice," ISS, 2018.

sole mission during the child's formative years" (Glenn 1994: 3). This conception was built upon the mistake of understanding motherhood and womanhood as overlapping and sometimes interchangeable (Ramírez 2001: 90).

The reproduction of motherhood and fatherhood have been central in the social organization and reproduction of gender (Puyana and Mosquera 2005: 7). The meaning of motherhood and fatherhood derive from the cultural expectations and symbolisms around gender relations, and around established norms regarding femininity and masculinity (Puyana and Mosquera 2005: 7). Gender refers to "socially constructed relationships and practices organized around perceived differences between the sexes" (Glenn 1994: 3, Scott 1986: 1067). Likewise, it refers to an analytical tool to evaluate how gender relations of power have played a role at the institutional level—as in the economy, family, and the state itself—as well as at the personal level in terms of social interaction and personal identity (Glenn 1994: 3, Scott 1986: 1067). States and different organisations have employed several tools to dominate women as a form of power construction and consolidation (Castrillón 2015: 79). This is reproduced and maintained by unevenly distributing property and resources, information, responsibility and rights between women and men (Castrillón 2015: 79).

Through multiple representations, theories, norms, and beliefs around this conception of motherhood, it has been either reproduced, modified or contested in different cultures that develop their own dominant understanding and dominant policies around it (Lagarde 2016: 376). In the case of Colombia, the media, public policy and governmental institutions have defined motherhood—from their moral and ethical perspectives—as well as how children should be raised (Gaitán 2018: 69). In that sense, the family is sacralised and ideally pictured as an institution, in which happiness is seen as central and conflict is non-existent (Pachón 2007: 145). Motherhood is perceived as a woman's main realisation, as it has been constructed around the notion that womanhood *is* motherhood (Pachón 2007: 147-148). It has placed reproduction as women's principal responsibility and bearing children as women's main realisation (Pachón 2007: 147-148, Ramírez 2011: 13). The women that compose this research compare, relate to, and sometimes contest this dominant framework of motherhood.

2.2.2 Where does this research stand?

The understanding of motherhood started to be questioned when Simone de Beauvoir first published *The Second Sex* (1949). Not only did de Beauvoir consider the exaltation of motherhood as a way of oppressing women, but she also triggered a whole series of feminist studies around it (Posso 2010: 63, Ramírez 2011: 3, Sánchez 2016: 256). In the words of Forcey (1994: 159), "feminists called for the right not to mother, documented the darker side of the mothering experience, and advocated a more equitable sharing of the responsibilities for child rearing in the struggle for job equity."

Some studies traced back the origin of the dominant conception of motherhood to the resulting response to the "first feminism" that emerged during the French Revolution, which sought to expose the ancient hierarchy between sexes as an unfair privilege (Posso 2010: 61). Since this feminism exposed men's domination as political, the response was to naturalise it by claiming that women *had* to be mothers and wives (Posso 2010: 61, Ramírez 2011: 5). These studies state that these patriarchal claims became the building ground for relegating women to the private sphere and men to the public one (Posso 2010: 61). Since the latter included all activities with political and economic value, it became a determinant factor in women's subordination (Posso 2010: 61).

In effect, many feminist scholars study its origin through the study of its relationship with the private sphere. Rich (1976: 31) starts her analysis as early as the 14th century to expose women working alongside men, which continued into the early stages of the

Industrial Revolution. She explains that motherhood was understood as a short period of a person's childhood and women were not seen as the primary caretakers, for they left their children with the oldest ones or paid someone to take care of them when possible (Posso 2010: 61, Rich 1976: 30). She notes that during the 19th century this changed given significant changes in the Western understanding of the home, work and women (Rich 1976: 30). According to Rich (1976: 32), as a result of the Industrial Revolution, the notion of 'home' started to be perceived as a space in which women should be dedicated to their children and to itself. Women started to be seen as passive and perceived as fully responsible for the welfare of men and their children (Rich 1976: 32). Their employment started to be perceived as a threat to male workers, as it "…was clearly subversive to the 'home' and to patriarchal marriage" (Rich 1976: 31-32).

Yet based on Hill Collins' (1994) work, I problematise this genealogy, for it has emerged in "specific intellectual and political contexts" (Hill Collins 1994: 62). On the analysis of the origin of the concept of motherhood, Hill Collins (1994: 46) notes it is derived from a heteronormative family household, in which there is a working father "who earns enough to allow his spouse and dependent children to withdraw from the paid labour force." It neglects women's experiences in alternative family structures, under different economic and political circumstances (Hill Collins 1994: 46). In the case of African American women, "work and family have rarely functioned as dichotomous spheres for women of colour," and their experiences show the two spheres to be interwoven (Hill Collins 1994: 46). This is also the case of peasant women in Colombia, as well as many women who stand at the margins (Lagarde 2016: 187-188). Regarding female ex-combatants, especially in Olga's (chapter 4) and Sara's (chapter 5) stories, "maternal separation becomes a much more salient issue than maternal isolation with one's children within an allegedly private nuclear family" (Hill Collins 1994: 54). It becomes crucial then to understand experiences of motherhood as determined by economic and social circumstances, access to private and public care, urban or rural setting, social class, age groups, conjugality, etc. (Lagarde 2016: 377). In addition to understanding feminist studies around motherhood, even this one, as partial understandings that cannot be applicable to all women.

Rather than attacking the notion of motherhood, this research seeks to tackle it under its patriarchal conceptualisation. Not only it addresses it as a social construct, rather than a biological given (Forcey 1994: 357, Glenn 1994: 3), but it also seeks to not universalise experiences of motherhood and study experiences of resistance. Based on Scott (1991: 797), I understand experiences as interpretations that need interpretations themselves, which makes them "neither self-evident nor straightforward." As a way of discussing an event that happened and a way of claiming knowledge that is incontestable, experiences emerge from what we want to explain rather than being the origin of our explanation (Scott 1991: 797). It is from women's embodied experiences, with all their differences and contradictions, that women have created discourses and understandings about social practices that question the ones that have been forced upon us by patriarchy (Sánchez 2016: 256).

Motherhood as an institution

I use Adrienne Rich's (1976: xv) theorisation of motherhood in order to examine the complexity of the link between women's experiences and the ways in which they have been institutionalised. Yet, I do so while acknowledging the context in which she produced knowledge and keeping an intersectional lens.

In *Of Woman Born,* Rich (1976: xv) claims that motherhood as an experience is women's potential relationship to their power of reproduction and their children, while motherhood as an institution "…aims at ensuring that the potential—and all women—shall remain under male control." To make the distinction—yet to acknowledge the connection—between experience and institution allows us to politicise its problems and find their common roots in

power struggles, while avoiding neglecting women's specific differences and inequalities (Yañez 2017: 69).

While Rich's (1986: 280) study of the institution of motherhood is done in relation to the 'home' as a private space in which women are perceived as fully responsible for their children, and thus a place in which women have experienced violence, African American feminists such as Hill Collins (1994) and Angela Davis (2005 in Yañez 2017: 70) have critically addressed this. They see the idea of exclusive, intensive, heterosexual, and individualised motherhood as a historical construction—only possible for upper class, white and cisgender women (Yañez 2017: 69-70). Following these critiques on the 'private' vs. 'public' sphere, this research does not resonate with motherhood and its relation to the 'home' as it will be shown that ex-combatants' relation to the home is different. Nevertheless, it does relate with it as a historical institution that has been key to the reproduction of society and culture, as well as to the socialisation of women (Lagarde 2016: 562).

This research understands the institution of motherhood as a patriarchal institution that presents itself under different configurations in various social and political systems (Rich 1976: xv). Patriarchal as in it has been reproduced based on male interests, rather than on women's experiences, needs and pleasures (Rich 1976: 24, Yañez 2017: 69). Not only it has affected women and children, but as exposed in chapter 5, it has also exonerated men from fatherhood (Forcey 1994: 359, Rich 1976: xv). It has affected women in a sense that it has sought to put pressure on women by making them validate themselves through motherhood and by judging those who by any reason or circumstance are not mothers (Lagarde 2016: 574, Yañez 2017: 66-69). The female body and the maternal body, which even if associated with each other, have been turned into opposite bodies (Rich 1976: xv). While the first one is "impure, corrupt, the site of discharges, bleedings, dangerous to masculinity, a source of moral and physical contamination…" (Rich 1976: 15), the maternal body is "sacred, pure, asexual, nourishing…" and a woman's only destiny and main justification in life (Rich 1976: 15). Although these two perceptions have been imposed onto us, we have also internalised them and therefore judged each other and ourselves (Rich 1976: 15-16).

Yañez (2017: 74) states that although feminisms have promoted women's choice and reproductive rights, they have not succeeded in incorporating experiences of voluntarily non-motherhood into theory and praxis as a legitimate project. In the case of Latin America, the possibility of non-motherhood has been even more restrictive. The value of motherhood has been the starting point for several social struggles and for the civil rights of women. During the 20th century, motherhood was thought of as the reason why women needed access to civil and social rights, since they would transform society by bringing their maternal values to the public sphere (Yañez 2017: 74). Many scholars agree that the existence of a voluntary and full motherhood will depend on the ability of feminisms to enable non-motherhood as an election and not as a tragic or incomplete destiny. This will be touched upon further in chapter 4, with Andrea, a woman who freely chooses non-motherhood.

Experiences of motherhood

Although the institution's ability to mutate and reconfigure itself implies that there are no experiences of motherhood running outside of it, there are some experiences that are not completely determined by it (Yañez 2017: 69). Indeed, the institution affects every woman but not every woman is affected in the same way. Since a 'right' and 'normal' lens has been set in order to perceive and criticise different experiences of motherhood within its institution, to acknowledge their singularities and differences as a feminist practice has been one of the most legitimate ways of positioning oneself against and outside of patriarchy (Sánchez 2016: 256, Yañez 2017: 69).

Embodied experiences of motherhood are not identical to the universal conception that has reproduced them. They acquire particularities from specific social and cultural

contexts in which women live and are intersected by different power relations, and determinants of time and of space (Lagarde 2016: 376-377, Yañez 2017: 69). This research intends to avoid essentialising motherhood and thus universalising these women's mothering experiences; that is, wanting every woman to fit under its imposed definition, and to avoid turning experiences of motherhood into constructed patterns (Forcey 1994: 372, Yañez 2017: 62).

By understanding motherhood as a sociocultural phenomenon and a very context-based one, it should be then referred to as *motherhoods* (Lagarde 2016). In the context of this research, although belonging to a militia and being mothers is at the convergence of the women I interviewed, they all hold different life stories and contexts. They also hold motherhood as "one part of the female process," rather than "an identity for all time" (Rich 1976: 18). This aspect will be further exposed through ex-combatants' experiences of motherhood in chapters 4 and 5.

Motherhood as a collective responsibility

Motherhood cannot be exercised by only one woman; it is always a collective institution (Lagarde 2016: 579). In many cultures, women have helped each other at birth and have nurtured each other's children "as sisters, aunts, nurses, teachers, foster-mothers, [and] step-mothers" (Rich 1976: xiv).

Throughout her research with African American communities, Hill Collins (2007 in Yañez 2017: 71) coined the term *othermothers* in order to represent the great diversity of experiences of motherhood that go beyond biological daughters and/or sons. Sometimes, the latter are short-term arrangements, and other times they turn into informal adoptions. *Othermothers* have been present in marginalised groups in Westernised societies. In Latin America, while privileged women have been able to delegate child-upbringing to working women from popular sectors, the children of these women have been raised through their familial and communal ties (Yañez 2017: 71).

Collective upbringing is a way of resisting the institution of motherhood, for the sole responsibility that is put on *the* mother is faded. By making visible the experiences of collective upbringing of marginalised sectors, feminisms have questioned this individualisation and isolation of maternal responsibility (Yañez 2017: 74). In the context of Colombian conflict, collective upbringing was present throughout (as many combatants left their babies with extended family or close people), and it is also present today during their reincorporation through alternative familial ties (chapter 5).

2.3 Reincorporation vs. Reintegration

I have been using and will use reincorporation as a concept in its spatial and temporary dimensions, rather than its theoretical dimension. Spatial since this process entailed a concentration of ex-combatants, and temporary since it is meant to be transitory. I also address it as a multi-meaning term, for it signifies different realities for each combatant. It encompasses the sum of many individual and personal processes into a collective one.

Although reintegration is the most-used English translation of the word *'reincorporación',* and it is the word used for addressing one of the three stages of UN peacekeeping DDR programmes (Von Dyck 2016: 8), I choose not to use it. As stated on the final peace accord, I use the word 'reincorporation' because of my experience during fieldwork and out of respect for the participants of this research.

Under the UN's DDR framework, reintegration is perceived as an offering for an alternative way of living to combatants who have recently undergone disarmament (Von Dyck 2016: 9). According to the UN, reintegration is a "a long-term process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income" (in Von

Dyck 2016: 9). However, although it is known as a long-term process, the economic and programmatic assistance is only provided for a few years (Von Dyck 2016: 9). In the particular case of Colombia, the Agency for Reincorporation and Normalization (ARN) defines reintegration as a process of six and half years, in which the Colombian state is to facilitate demobilization from organized armed groups and, social and economic reintegration to all people who wish to do so (ARN n.d.).

On the peace accord, the Government and the FARC-EP used the word 'reincorporation', which is expected to be,

> …a comprehensive, sustainable process of an exceptional and transitory nature which takes into account the interests of the community of the FARC-EP, its members and their families, aimed at strengthening the social fabric across the country's territories as well as coexistence and reconciliation among the inhabitants […]. (Gobierno de Colombia and FARC-EP 2016: 69).

This process comprises education, vocational training and psychosocial support, as well as support in productive projects (Gobierno de Colombia and FARC-EP 2016: 69, ARN n.d.).

During the first interviews and my first encounters with ex-combatants, I used the word '*reintegración*' (reintegration), yet often times they showed discontent and corrected me. I asked one of the interviewees why and she said,

> We use the word 'reincorporation' because we have been reincorporating through certain processes that we agreed on the Peace Accords in Cuba. The thing with the word 'reintegration' is that it was used in a reintegration process with paramilitaries a long time ago during Uribe's government. Although these two words may mean the same, one of them was used in a paramilitary process and the other one is used in our process (Sara 2019, personal interview).

I also recall having another informal conversation with a male ex-combatant in which we talked about the meaning of reincorporation. He said, "*reincorporation means people also learning from us. You see women taking showers outdoors in their underwear, and you never see anyone harassing them…*" (author's fieldwork). It made me reflect on the meaning of the word itself, as it entails two parts 'becoming' one, rather than one turning into the other (assimilation). Through these encounters, I realised I do not want to be yet another scholar that uses a term that does not reflect the ideals of the people that I claim to represent, while it actually makes a difference to them.

Chapter 3 Women's experiences in war and reincorporation

"It is a constant struggle to be accepted for what we were and what we are"–(Ana 2019, personal interview).

This chapter problematises the dominant representation of women in the Colombian conflict, and the representation of mothers during peacebuilding as it strongly sparked the initial interest in this research. My intention has never been to study the conflict and peacebuilding from one standpoint without making visible its multiple realities. On the contrary, in this and in the following chapters, I expose women's embodied experiences as fundamental for the assemblage of the multiplicity of war and reincorporation experiences.

3.1 *Farianas'* representations: sexual and reproductive control

Tales around the FARC-EP have been reproduced by the media and have led people to hold many assumptions about combatants—especially women (Gaitán 2018: 34). During the 1980s, when women started to massively join the organisation and occupy military positions, the image of the female guerrilla fighter not only captivated a lot of young women interested in the organisation's political struggle, but also the media (Gaitán 2018: 23-24).

Women's experiences in armed conflict entails a profound rupture with traditional gender roles (Bouvier 2016: 23, Londoño 2005: 70, Rodríguez 2008: 9), and thus, female combatants have been depicted as cruel and bloody by the media and the state (Castrillón 2015: 87). Women in armed conflicts are represented as *more* violent than men or as 'unnatural' for having 'masculine traits' (Castrillón 2015: 87, Londoño 2005: 68-69). Some scholars have researched this comparison between men's and women's representation of violence and have concluded that women are not more or less violent than men (Barth 2002 in Castrillón 2015: 87). Rather, women's violence gets more attention and is amplified because it is considered to go against traditional gender roles (Castrillón 2015: 87). There is the perception of women as pacifists, mothers and wives; opposed to aggressive and violent men willing to go to war (Mackenzie 2009: 243-247). Although there are female militants around the world that have proved this conception wrong, it has remained dominant and has resulted in pejorative outcomes such as the impediment for methodical research on women as active militants (Castrillón 2015: 82).

In the case of Colombia, state entities, the media and various local and international human rights organisations focused mainly on the control of women's and girls' sexual and reproductive control within the FARC-EP. They documented abortions, sterilisations, and sexual abuses (Castrillón 2015: 78, Gaitán 2018: 23-24) that resulted in the reproduction of the dominant representation of female combatants as victims. Yet, as Rich (1976: 273) and Kumar et al. (2009: 628) note, women react to pregnancies and abortions differently based on cultural but also personal contexts and circumstances. Consequently, one as a researcher cannot assume agency or victimisation in a woman's life, but rather note when each is highlighted in her experience (Zarkov 2006: 227).

On the one hand, although this control represented a lack of autonomy over their reproduction, some women did not feel autonomous before the FARC-EP. Combatants like Clara Zetkin (quoted in Valderrama 2018: 71) believe it meant the possibility of choosing: "In the guerrilla they teach us that we have a choice whether we want kids or not […] On the contrary, here the imposed social role on a woman is that she has to be tender and has to have children…" Beyond an imposition, many perceived contraception and abortions as

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necessary in times of war (Gaitán 2018: 44, Valderrama 2018: 74). Moreover, even though the FARC-EP did not recognise women as autonomous actors capable of making decisions over their bodies, Colombian society does not either. Like in many Latin American countries, to 'own' one's body remains a privilege rather than a right; it is a stratified choice depending on one's socio-cultural context, race, class, etc. In terms of abortion, it was entirely illegal until 2006, "when the Constitutional Court ruled it as legal under three circumstances: foetus malformations, risk of death, or pregnancy as a result of sexual violence" (Ministerio de Salud n.d., Ramírez 2011: 13). During fieldwork, while many women discussed with me the impossibility of having children while being in the fronts because of the living conditions, Ana was the only participant to mention abortion explicitly and without hesitation. She said that sometimes in many places it was not possible to get the pill or injections because "*they blocked the roads to La Sierra[5]. Indigenous communities there do not have access to contraceptives,*" and therefore abortions became necessary (2019, personal interview). She then stated that if the Army found an indigenous person with pills or injections, they would be beaten. As shown above, and following Ana's statement, it seems there is always an entity that decides the outcome of women's reproductive health.

On the other hand, there have been some ex-combatants that have expressed they were repeatedly forced to have abortions, and that it became one of the reasons for them to abandon the insurgency (Gutiérrez and Carranza 2017: 775). This topic, as a woman speaking, is a very difficult one to approach. Despite the fact that I do not agree with the victimisation of female combatants, I do understand forced abortions as sexual abuses and violence towards women, and I acknowledge that many women currently suffer from both physical and psychological after-effects (Valenzuela 2019, Women's Link Worldwide 2019). Women's Link Worldwide (2019) filed a report with the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP in Spanish), that includes 35 stories of violations of women's and girls' reproductive and sexual rights in the FARC-EP during the conflict. This becomes complex as the women I talked to, through their perspectives, did not portray abortions during the conflict as abuses or violence (author's fieldwork). It made me reflect on the extent to which some women have internalised the organisation's agenda and naturalised the imposition of control over their sexual and reproductive rights.

3.2 From romanticising to grasping reality

Due to the sexual and reproductive health control of combatants, motherhood during their reincorporation has been highly mediatised and mythicised. The media portrays the women who, for years of conflict were forced to use contraception and have abortions were now becoming mothers (see Figure 1). It also speaks of the reunifications of mothers and children that were left with surrogate families during the conflict and focuses on the difficulty of regaining custody of the children (see for example Quintero 2019).

It superimposes a bloody and violent past, with a softer side that comes with parenthood, and the shift from shotgun sounds to baby cries (Semana 2017). As shown in Figure 2, this is portrayed as a breakthrough for ex-combatants and as a symbol of all the things they were not able to do during the conflict but is possible during peace times (Quintero 2019, Semana 2017). More importantly, they portrayed peace as achieved and violence to be over.

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[5] Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, in the region of Magdalena, is the highest coastal mountain in the world. It is home to Kogi, Arhuaco, Kankuamo and Wiwa ethnic groups.

Figure 1 "Baby Boom"

The end of FARC's 50-year pregnancy ban leads to a baby boom

Source: Wright (2017), *The World.*

Figure 2. Children of Peace

Source: Semana (2017) – *"The baby harvest in the FARC ranks demonstrates that war has been
left behind and that today ex-combatants are betting on a different future."*

This drove me to, unconsciously, romanticise the "baby boom" and the "children of peace," as well as to gain interest in these family reunifications and the implications these had on women's experiences of motherhood. However, my experience in the field led me to redefine and transform a lot of interests and questions that initially motivated this research (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 3). Following what Ana said to me in the opening quote of this chapter, we must come to understand the real struggle of these women and their real stories; for what they were, and for what they are. This is the way in which I as a feminist researcher can contribute to these women's emancipation and contest their misrepresentations (Brooks 2007: 56).

Before fieldwork, I had had the privilege of sensing conflict and ex-combatants as a distant reality. Yet, as I engaged with them, this distance was broken down and I quickly understood they were both victims and victimisers from different types of violence (See Appendix 3). I also understood that one cannot talk about *one* reality and experience. Ex-combatants, and all the women I talked to, "hail from a diverse range of class, cultural and racial backgrounds," who live different realities and experience oppression differently (Brooks 2007: 78). They are human beings capable of feeling, who have had sensitive life trajectories (author's fieldwork). War happened to every Colombian, especially to those who for many reasons were directly involved in the conflict. Their voices are just as important as any other during Colombia's conflict transformation. The majority of people expressed to me their wish of being seen as persons, and the wish of making visible the reasons that drove them to become part of the insurgency in the first place. Flor's partner Jorge said, "*I am a person with a good heart […] We could honestly all help each other and be in peace […] it is good to forgive*" (2019, personal interview).

Soon, I realised I had fallen under the 'otherness' perception of combatants, especially when it came to experiences of motherhood. I was expecting to encounter women with experiences of motherhood that related to the stories I had seen on the media. Yet reality quickly came to me during my second day in the ETCR, when I met Adriana—a 26-year-old ex-combatant from Santander who was almost 9-months pregnant. As we were walking, she told me her pregnancy was not planned—there was not a specific meaning of peace behind it. I then wondered if it was because of no access to contraception, but she soon told me she was on the pill, but it did not work. She did not want to have the baby, but as her partner did, she kept it (author's fieldwork). Her experience contested the story that pregnancies were happening exponentially given the lack of the organisation's control (Figure 1) and reminded me to keep an open mind for the rest of my stay.

As I read my fieldwork journal today, I realise I was expecting to study a phenomenon that I had actually constructed in my mind. Part of this phenomenon was my understanding of motherhood necessarily connected to women's reincorporation. Contrary to my expectations, during the interviews I found that, although many of the participants referred to the current period of time as an opportunity for childbirth and child upbringing (still under difficult conditions), they did not entirely relate their reincorporation to their experiences of motherhood. While Natalia, a mother of two, slightly mentioned her children, she mostly emphasised the uncertainty during reincorporation (2019, personal interview). When I asked her if there was any difference between her two experiences, I was actually wondering what it entailed to be a mother during the war and now during reincorporation. Her response had nothing to do with outer circumstances, but rather in terms of how experienced she became with her second baby. She said, "*With the second one I felt more relaxed. I already had the experience from my first kid*" (2019, personal interview). When I tried to ask further questions about her first pregnancy, I learnt it was during that time that her and her partner were both captured and separated for 9 years. When she recalled these events, she got very emotional and we decided to change the course of the interview (2019, personal interview, author's fieldwork). When I asked Sara, Ana, Olga, Flor and Camila about what it meant for them to reincorporate, none of them related it to their experiences of motherhood. Rather they related it to "*another reality*", starting from zero, rebirth, and the possibility of political participation (2019, personal interviews).

I was further interested in understanding if by becoming mothers it became easier for them to feel accepted. My chain of thought linked acceptance with the pacific connotation of motherhood. To this, Ana replied,

> [Many people] have manifested we have gotten pregnant to cover our mistakes. We have never used pregnancy as a cover for our mistakes or what we were. And our children are not our shields. This was simply the moment in which it happened. (Ana 2019, personal interview)

Acceptance was evoked as intangible to me when they told me that it was not easy to be a parent and an ex-combatant given the stigma that has been passed down to their children. Jorge told me that children were being called "*little guerrilla fighters*," and that he was afraid it could continue to be a tangible reality when their little daughter would grow up (2019, personal interview). Unfortunately, according to the report of the Ombudsman, this phenomenon is happening nation-wide for children going to nearby schools in many ETCRs (Defensoría del Pueblo 2017: 102). Thus, the name of "children of peace" is not the only label utilised to describe these children—it is only used circumstantially. Every interviewee mentioned that they do not believe this as an accurate label for their children. Sara expressed, "*For me, this is a frustrated peace. A shoved and half-way peace. Children are not hers*" (2019, personal interview).

This quote opens up the possibility of discussing how their experiences as mothers are most of the times inextricable from their socio-political concerns, mostly uncertainty, around the peace process and their reincorporation. In the following section, I review their general perspective on their experiences in a post-accord Colombia where there is no tangible transition from conflict to peace, to then examine some of their decisions and reasons to mother during reincorporation.

3.3 Being a mother in times of 'peace': why now?

Peace as a promise of newness in Colombia has been attempted many times, but it has not been possible yet. Despite the peace treaty and the peacebuilding process, various armed groups continue to exert violence, which Díaz (2018: 28) calls the "peace paradox," asserting that drug trafficking, and underlying social inequalities and injustices that were at the roots of the conflict need to be addressed first.

As I encountered in the ETCR, when one examines the daily lives of ex-combatants the reality of peace proves to be much more complex. Many ex-combatants expressed the existence of violence in Colombia; "*Paramilitarism is still hurting, every day social leaders and ex-combatants get threaten... We are threatened.*" said Natalia (2019, personal interview, author's fieldwork). They also expressed their concerns towards the lack of commitment from President Iván Duque's government with their reincorporation and the implementation of the treaty in general (author's fieldwork). They see the ETCR as a place that was never fully appropriate for them and their families, as well as a place that was supposed to only last 24 months. Most of them said that Duque had visited the ETCR and had claimed to give them spaces to build their houses, yet at the time I visited, they were still waiting (Ana 2019 and Sara 2019, personal interviews).

This violence and the current conditions raise the question of why mothering now. As ex-combatants have lived through the conflict and the post-accord period in uncertainty and under harsh conditions, it becomes clear that motherhood is not seen as a strategy in their reincorporation process to either be accepted or to "blend" in better—even if public opinion believes so (Ana 2019, personal interview). As stated before, I had been romanticising their experiences of motherhood, and thus, I was surprised when their reasons and their perceptions on their current living situation did not reflect the representations shown in the previous sections. As introduced by Adriana, one of the truths I encountered, is that despite the organisational control on their reproductive and sexual health, many of them had babies or are having them based on the surprise factor and lack of planning, or because they saw stability in staying in one place. As Sara explained,

> We are free now to have children. Given war conditions, we as ex-combatants had that aspect of motherhood and fatherhood frustrated. We had it frustrated because we had to follow rules, and it was to the organization we owed everything. In there, we did not have the conditions to assume the roles of mothers and fathers. Since we are no longer in war conditions, many have said that they want to see their children flourish. It is true what they say, years do not wait, and each one of us wants to see our children bloom. Not dying without leaving behind a little seed. (Sara 2019, personal interview).

After understanding their reincorporation did not meant motherhood per se, I see crucial then to understand what their experiences of motherhood entail for them as ex-combatants. In the following chapters, I will build an interpretative mosaic of their experiences of motherhood based on my empirical findings.

Chapter 4 (Non) Motherhood is a choice

In this chapter, I review the idea that many female ex-combatants partially escaped patriarchal oppression when joining the FARC, and that during the conflict, their participation contested the traditional understanding of womanhood. During the post-accord, female ex-combatants returned to a society that is still patriarchal, and thus many are driven back to traditional gender roles. However, this is not the case for most of the participants of this research. I argue their experiences of motherhood are perceived as realisations but contest the institution in a sense that they do not perceive these experiences as a destination or an obligation. Later, this gives me ground to tell the story of Andrea, an ex-combatant who exemplifies womanhood should not be equated to motherhood.

4.1 Womanhood(s) and Motherhood(s): from conflict to reincorporation

Women in Colombia, especially living in rural areas, are subject to intersecting inequalities non-caused or caused by war. Many suffer from oppression by a patriarchal authority, which results in abuses and mistreatments (Castrillón 2015: 85, Gutiérrez and Carranza 2017: 771). Thus, for many female combatants joining the FARC, beyond grasping a sense of gender equality, it meant an opportunity to obtain to some extent autonomy, military and political skills, pride, and self-esteem (Gutiérrez and Carranza 2017: 772, Londoño 2005: 70, Rodríguez 2008: 8-9). Their experiences of womanhood turned into political acts. In her own words, Sara stated,

> When we joined the ranks, we did it under the traditional woman role—invisible. The woman who cooks, the woman of children, of housework, the one unable to carry a heavy bulk on her shoulder…well, that woman portrayed by society. Inside the ranks, we had rules that put us in the same conditions as men; we had duties and rights. These duties were the ones who let us demonstrate that we can go to combat, that we are political, that us too were military and that we were also capable […]. (Sara 2019, personal interview).

This fissure impacted also the fact that many ex-combatants rejected the compatibility of their combat duties with being mothers (Ramírez 2001: 106). According to Londoño (2005: 69), participation in an armed conflict turns the 'feminine' body, with all its social connotations, into an instrument of war. This alternation of the 'feminine body' led women to redefine their relationships not only with their traditional gender identities, but with their bodies in general (Castrillón 2015: 88, Londoño 2005: 70)[6]. This was also enhanced by the FARC-EP regulations on the female body, which as already mentioned, sought to impede this feminine body from becoming a maternal one. However, as touched upon in the previous chapter, all participants of this research added that their decisions of not having children mostly relied not only on the harsh conditions of *"the mountains"*, but also to their commitment to the social cause (author's fieldwork). Without wanting to fall under the patriarchal juxtaposition of feminine/maternal bodies (Rich 1976: 15), their bodies became acts of resistance themselves, as they were not perceived as necessarily made to become maternal, but as instruments of war. All participants, although some of them were mothers during the conflict, considered childbearing during the war as too risky and unconceivable due to all the movement and physical conditions (2019 personal interviews).

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[6] Included in author's work upon completion of the course, "Gender and Sexuality as 'Lenses' to Engage with Development Policy and Practice," ISS, June 2019.

After the peace treaty was signed, women came back to a society that has not changed much. Many encountered the presence of traditional roles in Colombian society, which highly influenced them (Valderrama 2018: 73). This was evoked by Ana during our conversation when she referred to the traditional gender division of roles and said, *"there are many compañeras who have decided to return to the role of housewife. It is a reality […] They are no longer interested in anything"* (2019, informal conversation). Nonetheless, she continued and said that there were many women, especially the ones that had recently given birth, that are working in different projects (e.g. plant nurseries, mobile kitchens, tourism, etc.) (2019, personal interview). This importance of women and men working alongside in a variety of projects during reincorporation was also expressed by Sara, as she stated that *"…we cannot let men claim all of the projects we are carrying out. We must be empowered women regarding our efforts and projects. We need representation, leadership, and commitment. We have to be visible"* (2019, personal interview).

Most of the women I talked to see their experiences of motherhood as their realisations, and as a central aspect of their femininity, yet they have built projects beyond motherhood during reincorporation. On the one hand—regarding motherhood as a realisation—Olga said to me that for her being a mother is a beautiful experience, that it is *"every woman's dream"* (Olga 2019, personal interview). Flor mentioned it is fulfilling, and another reason to keep going; for Jorge their daughter is the result of their love and forming a family feels like going into *"another level"* (2019, personal interview). In the case of Natalia, she emotionally stated that she feels happy and proud of her two children (2019, personal interview). Finally, for Camila motherhood means having now a responsibility with a human being, and thus she sees ahead as an opportunity to work and keep going (2019, personal interview). On the other hand, they saw their experiences as something different than a destination. For instance, Flor had not thought about it before—not only because of the circumstances of war but because she simply had not considered it (2019, personal interview). When I asked Camila if she always wanted to be a mother, she replied that she never thought about it before. She replied that the only thing she wanted to do "before" was play (2019, personal interview). Indeed, since she joined at age 10, her "before" means her childhood years (See Appendix 3).

Camila further said that currently it was not easy to get contraception because they had to pay for it and compared her present situation to how during the conflict it was almost always provided (2019, personal interview). The use of and access to contraception is an important determinant in this women's perception of motherhood as a choice. During their years as combatants, contraception was imposed, and therefore, the subject was touched upon. This is different in other rural areas of Colombia, in which contraception is not even talked about because pregnancies are not supposed to be impeded. As mentioned in chapter 3, even Ana stated that it was inconceivable for the Army to catch indigenous peoples with contraceptives—they would know it was not for them. Today, while only Olga mentioned it was provided by the government, the other mothers told me they had to pay it for themselves but would still choose to use it. The important aspect becomes that they consider contraception as an option, and thus, the surprise factor aside—motherhood and/or non-motherhood as a choice.

Furthermore, participants talked about a future and a reincorporation in which they could study and form themselves. None of them referred to their partners as providers or non-helpers. They perceived their necessities and situations as equal. Except for Flor, who said to me that her role in the ETCR was to be a mother, all of the women I talked to were currently participating in the reincorporation's productive projects mentioned above. Nonetheless, Flor's situation was portrayed as temporary and as a choice, for when I asked Flor and Jorge about their future, they said, *"We want both to work, and that our daughter becomes a professional"* (2019, personal interview). Indeed, all of them seek to eventually work outside

the home and to achieve other goals beyond motherhood, in order to provide their children with more opportunities and to fulfil their professional desires.

In the case of Olga, she does not see her caretaker role as an imposition. While her partner works as a security guard for the political party, for her staying at home is a choice. Olga only sees herself working and studying as long as she does not have to spend too much time apart from her baby. I remembered the SENA courses, so I mentioned them to her, and she told me she was interested in the course on early childhood care but taking it would mean leaving her baby and she did not want to. She said, *"The time that one should spend with them is spent with someone else, so they lose affection [towards parents] … Although one never stops being a mother…it is not the same"* (2019, personal interview). Following Hill Collins' (1994: 46)) study, these women are part of alternative family structures, in which there is no separation of the 'private' and the 'public', they are rather connected. In Olga's experience of motherhood, maternal separation is the issue rather than the maternal isolation (Hill Collins 1994: 54).

Nonetheless, this position of choice can be problematised. I see this position as possible during this stage of reincorporation as ex-combatants are still living in the ETCRs and are still receiving a basic income and are provided with utilities and food (author's fieldwork). However, during my stay, ex-combatants were told that provisions were going to end soon, given they were supposed to last for 24 months (Gobierno de Colombia and FARC-EP 2016: 77). It remains an open question then how this aspect would change when their reincorporation transcends to the next step of relocating ex-combatants to their own homes (author's fieldwork). Mostly because Colombia remains a very unequal country, in which exclusive, intensive and individualised motherhood remains possible for rather upper-class women.

4.2 Womanhood is not motherhood

To touch upon motherhood as a choice in the previous section, drives me to now touch upon non-motherhood as a choice. In order to do so, I have to recall one of my encounters in the ETCR, when I met Andrea while I was having my first breakfast in the outdoor cafeteria.

I had already sat down, when a tall woman with curly hair came to me and asked if I was the girl studying gender. I replied to her that I was indeed a student, but that more precisely I was studying motherhood during reincorporation. She then ordered her breakfast and asked if she could sit with me (author's fieldwork). She was a charming woman from Antioquia studying Systems Engineering in one of the SENA locations of La Guajira. Since I had mentioned my research, she told me that she did not want to have children because she saw it as something that would hold her back in her studies and in her reincorporation process, which she sees as an opportunity. Actually, this was one of the reasons why she and her partner ended their 8-year-long relationship during reincorporation. She further explained to me, *"There is more than having children in the life of a woman. If we [ex-combatants] are the promise of a new society, this means not having tons of children like the previous and outside society"* (2019, informal conversation).

I see Andrea as a woman that drove me to re-think many of my assumptions; our encounter made me re-shape my research and my methodological choices. Initially, it made sense to me to only seek women who were mothers or wanted to become mothers. Yet I realised that the fight for freely and autonomously choosing non-motherhood has been at the core of women's emancipation (Rich 1976: 80). Her story became crucial in this research, since as Rich (1976: 286) emphasises, as a means of destroying the institution of motherhood (which does not mean abolishing motherhood), is achieving the possibility of freely choosing whether to mother or not. I see Andrea as a woman who chooses not to become a mother,

and to signify her own realisations through education and professionalism. I see a woman who does not perceive motherhood as means to validate herself.

Chapter 5 The result of a hard and long political struggle

This chapter focuses on the various tensions between the institution of motherhood and Sara's and Ana's experiences, which present various fissures between prevailing ideals around motherhood and actual experiences. It also exposes to what extent their motherhoods and the rest of the participants' mean a continuation of their political struggle during a historical and political period such as the post-accord.

5.1 Blurring motherhood as a women's only responsibility

5.1.1 Maternal separation

Although there are no experiences running outside of the institution, there are some that are not completely determined by it and that in turn are experiences of resistance (Yañez 2017: 69). For many ex-combatants, motherhood has never been an impediment for their relationship with their political and military motivations. Many female combatants that decided or happened to be mothers during the conflict had to leave their children, for sometimes long periods of time, with their families or friends. Regarding this, Gaitán (2018: 56-57), Ramírez (2001: 108-109) and different testimonies (Valenzuela 2019) expose differing reasons of why this could happen like security reasons, women remaining silent or being commanders' partners, or even reasons that still are unknown. During fieldwork I realised it is a sensitive and blurry topic to approach, and thus when participants mentioned their pregnancies during conflict, I felt unable to further ask them for reasons or circumstances.

This is Sara's case, a 42-year-old ex-combatant, and a mother of two during the conflict. Sara was not able to take care of her first child and was not able to be there for some of the early years of her second one. For her, like in Olga's experience, the problem has never been maternal isolation, but rather the maternal separation (Hill Collins 1994: 54) that came with the constant movement and harsh conditions of the conflict.

Since the beginning, I perceived Sara as a woman with a strong presence and a very caring personality. On the second day of my stay, as the sky was pouring and we were inside the house, she agreed to give me an interview. When we started talking, she told me she first became a mother when she was 24 years old while being a combatant. She told me she has been in contact with her son, and that "*He understands about violence. He has experienced it himself. He knows I did not abandon him, I was rather protecting him*" (2019, personal interview). She emphasised she was protecting him from the harsh conditions of the mountains. I asked her if when she went into labour, she was scared of getting captured—as I had read this in some testimonies before. Yet to my surprise, she stated that back then she was in a friendly region, in which people knew the FARC-EP and therefore participated in her son's collective upbringing: "*They protected us and they were precisely the ones that helped me raise my son,*" (2019, personal interview).

Women like Sara have been historically judged in Colombia, even by combatants within the organisation. I actually encountered this myself while having a conversation with a male ex-combatant, who expressed his disagreement towards it (author's fieldwork). This is interesting as ex-combatants understand the context of war, and Sara referred to being judged actually by people that do not understand it and that base their judgement on their class. In effect, she problematised who is allowed to be mobile or not when having a child,

as class stratification largely determines the specific experience of all women's motherhoods (Lagarde 2016: 557). In her opinion, she preferred finding a surrogate family than leaving her child to the foster care system,

> I don't want to give my child to the foster care system. When people question us, they never understand our position […] But a person who has lived war will understand. Women and men pertaining to an upper class will never understand. Women who claim to be "super moms" hire someone to take care of their children. They never feed them or wash their diapers…So what are they talking about? They are not the ones raising their children. They give their children to a maid, as they call the women who's labour force they exploit, to whom children grow up loving instead. (Sara 2019, personal interview).

Her statement drove me to connect it to Lagarde's (2016: 194) analysis on different oppressions, and the importance of analysing not only motherhoods, but also their contexts. Even if all women are subject to oppression, there are differences between each one of us given our historical situations. The oppression of the bourgeois woman—responsible for the organisation and administration of domestic work—is different from the oppression of working-class women who are also "responsible, organisers, administrators and executors of the domestic reproduction of the workforce and the domestic world" (Lagarde 2016: 194). Both women are mothers, yet while one has a team of employees and opportunities of carrying out her maternal and conjugal functions, the other has not sufficient means so she does everything herself (Lagarde 2016: 194). In the case of Sara, she recurs to collective motherhood.

Particularly enough, this judgement has been only directed to women. There has not been any attention paid towards men being absent fathers during the conflict. Even though many men I talked to had children during the conflict and had to do the same as female ex-combatants, they never felt the need to explain themselves. Even during my conversation with Sara and other female ex-combatants, I noticed this is internalised by women. They do not question why men are not stigmatised for not being present fathers. It reassured me that the absent father may be a social given, but an absent mother is a stigmatised one. As Lagarde (2016: 559) states, "paternity […] occurs only within other institutions that bind them and ensure them that in truth that child is theirs. If other institutions relax, paternity relaxes."

Women also do not question why sexual and reproductive control was only directed to them during the conflict years. This may be explained by the fact that the institution of motherhood has been successful at exonerating men from fatherhood (Rich 1976: xiv-xv), and that the reproductive male body has mostly been silenced and not controlled (Gaitán 2018: 11-12, Harcourt 2009: 39, 62-64). Following the work of Harcourt (2009: 64), Glenn (1994: 3), and Pachón (2007: 147-148), this is related to how part of the dominant understanding of motherhood is to place reproduction as only women's responsibility; and to how the fertile body is linked to gender identity and the cultural representation of femininity. Being a woman is equated to becoming a mother and equated to being fully responsible for reproduction.

5.1.2 A collective responsibility

Collective child upbringing did not happen only with Sara's first son. While we continued talking, her 6-year-old son was running and playing around by himself. He often times passed by and demanded her attention, which gave us ground to talk about her experience of motherhood with him. She explained to me he was hyperactive because he was born prematurely due to her stressful time in jail. The chronology of her little boy's life is still not very clear to me, but what I could grasp is that she was freed from jail after the baby was born. She then

returned to the mountains and was able to take care of him for a while (2019, personal interview, author's fieldwork).

When in the mountains, she met 'Grandma', an older ex-combatant that eventually took care of the little boy for 2 years in Venezuela while the conflict settled, and the peace negotiations started. Since 'Grandma' currently lives with the family, during my first day in the ETCR I thought she was called this way because she was Sara's biological mother. However, after having some conversations with her I understood she had become an *othermother* after having helped Sara take care of the little boy when she was not able to. Today, after some sort of informal adoption of 'Grandma', she lives within their household. She told me she also had to leave her 2-year-old daughter once with someone, and therefore, when she took Sara's little boy, she empathised a lot with Sara. It reminded her of her own experience with her daughter ('Grandma' 2019, informal conversation).

Sara's current partner is not biologically related the little boy either. Nevertheless, he is treated as and acts like his father. Every morning he left even before the sun came up to work in the crops of the ETCR, to then come back to take the little boy to school. When he came back, he was most of the times around, doing laundry or sometimes doing maintenance work in the house. Sara was out of the house most of the times, her role in the ETCR was very active. However, she made sure to be the one to wake the little boy up, shower, and give him breakfast, as well as to be there for dinner. She said that because she was a mother during the war and was once separated from her first child, she does not want to be away from her little boy today. She sees this period as a chance to give back the time she once lost due to the conditions of war. On the days it was not possible for her to be there, 'Grandma' would help her out. I could see they were a team and it was perceived as normal. Sara's household exemplifies an experience of motherhood in an alternative family structure, for they lived in a differing economic and political circumstance (Hill Collins 1994: 46).

5.2 Different from our mothers

In Sara's perspective, female guerrilla fighters see motherhood differently from their own mothers who were directly affected by the institution of motherhood. She noted,

> Maybe our mothers had us in different conditions. They became mothers in order to fulfil a requirement that society imposed on them, which is procreation. In my opinion, I do not think us women have to…well it is a necessity to procreate so humanity does not cease to exist. But the conditions for us to bring children to this world are different. Previously, women could not use contraception. They got full of children, while going through all kinds of necessities: poverty, malnourishment, etc. They could not say no. We have a child when we decide to, if we consider it appropriate. (Sara 2019, personal interview)

Beyond understanding motherhood also as a choice, she understands her experience of motherhood as a political act; it is another reason to fight, to keep going, and to grow. She emphasised that this fight, although not an armed one anymore, is a well-alive political struggle (2019, personal interview).

She is not the only ex-combatant I met that sees her experience of motherhood as part of a well-alive political struggle. Ana, a 41-year old ex-combatant from La Guajira, expressed similar feelings to me on the day I met her. It was a sunny day, and she and her little boy were visiting from *La Granja,* a nearby farm that belongs to the ETCR and the place in which she lives with her partner. They met during the conflict and have been together for six years now (2019, personal interview).

Ana expressed that being a mother was an accomplishment and a fight—not only for ex-combatants but for every woman. She added,

[…] Our role as women and as mothers is to keep fighting being housewives and slaves of this patriarchal society. That our children do not become obstacles for us to participate in different activities. My son is the result of a hard and long political struggle. Thanks to the [peace] process, and to life, I am here standing with him in this experience. (Ana 2019, personal interview).

Ana relates to the private/public dichotomy although it does not necessarily define every women's situation (Hill Collins 1994: 46). Her perception derives from her family context in which, although under harsh economic conditions, there was the heteronormative family in which there is a working father and a mother dedicated to the house (Hill Collins 1994: 46). She said that her mother was an indigenous woman from the Wiwa tribe and that her father was from Valledupar. She continued, *"…in my house he was the one who talked and oriented more because my mom was purely indigenous and he barely spoke or took decisions"* (2019, personal interview). This, beyond denoting the socio-racial hierarchy that exists in Colombia, exposes how oppression is lived by women in various ways and it is strongly linked with their context of race and class, beyond many other aspects.

Like many ex-combatants, Ana does not perceive motherhood as a destination. She did not dream of becoming a mother before joining the organisation, she dreamt of studying and helping her family. At age 23, right before being displaced by paramilitaries, she was about to start studying (See Appendix 3). The desire of becoming a mother came during the war as the silent presence of death was deafening. During the war, she developed a necessity *"for leaving her little seed in the world"* (2019, personal interview). She has not put her dream of studying to rest, and it is now more enhanced by her experience of motherhood. She sees studying as an opportunity for her to become a women's leader, and for her son to *"flourish"* in the future (2019, personal interview). Today, motherhood is not an obstacle to her, and different from her mother, in her household activities are shared between her and her partner. Today, she is an active participant of the gender committee in the ETCR, as well as the many productive projects.

5.3 Building Legacy: *Continuando la Lucha*

Although all of the stories on experiences of motherhood are different, now that the rifles are melted, the uniforms are burnt, and the insurgency became a political party, all of the participants conceive it necessary to tell their children about their participation in a revolutionary struggle (author's fieldwork). Like for Sara and Ana, for the rest of the participants, motherhood has never been an impediment for their relationship with their political and military motivations. This is one of the most political demonstrations around their experiences of motherhood, and a strong contestation to its institution.

In the case of Natalia and Sara, who were both mothers during and after the conflict, they acknowledge their children understand their struggle. While Natalia stated, *"Now that my girl is 10, I let her know that it was because I wanted to join the ranks. It was voluntary"* (2019, personal interview); Sara expressed to me that her older son understood the conflict, and that she was going to tell her second son about her experience as a combatant in a political struggle to which she has dedicated her life whenever he could understand it. She added he may even remember it, since they spent some time together in the mountains (2010, personal interview). I perceived this in small daily routines in the house. For instance, every night, Sara came into the bedroom to cuddle with her son for a while, tuck him into bed, and then put a net over his bed. She did this every night because she believes it brings him comfort, as she used to do it in the mountains to protect him from bugs (author's fieldwork, Sara 2019 informal conversation). In little details like this one, I noticed her legacy as a combatant was to stay untouched.

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Camila and Ana see telling their children about their struggle as a necessity (2019, personal interviews). Ana expressed,

> I will tell my son that people in Colombia have always dealt with class struggle. [In Colombia] the poor have always been oppressed, and their voices cannot be raised. People cannot march because they are immediately silenced. The whole world should know what is happening in our country. Because of this and given the fact I was left in the middle of the conflict, I had to follow the path of arms, not being the best one. But at that time, it was the only way I could be sure to live a little longer. (Ana 2019, personal interview)

In her statement, not only can one sense the extent to which the political message is expected to be transmitted to her child, but also a need to explain to him why she had to participate in an armed conflict.

For Olga, it is very important to be transparent with her daughter. She wants her to learn the many (family) values she learnt during the conflict years (2019, personal interview). When I asked her what values she was referring to, she said "*appreciating the things we are given, and respecting and caring for other people without necessarily being related*" (2019, personal interview). As for Olga, for most ex-combatants, the insurgency was an ideal of family. That is, a group of people without particular parental relationships, that was able to establish strong solidarity links, provide protection, and work towards a common cause (Gaitán 2018: 35). Lastly, for Flor more than a family, the FARC-EP means a place in which she was able to learn many skills she would otherwise never know (2019, personal interview). She finds pride in the computer skills she was able to acquire. For this, she wants to transmit to her daughter how the FARC-EP for her meant more opportunities (2019, personal interview).

Analysing this finding under an intersectional lens becomes very interesting given the possibility of their children being stigmatised in polarised-Colombian society (see chapter 3). I compare this to the analysis of Hill Collins (1994: 57) on how, different from racial ethnic women, there is privilege to white mothers who necessarily do not have to teach their children coping skills to fight racial oppression. Children that are born in marginalised groups have to learn how to survive in "systems that oppress them" (Hill Collins 1994: 57). Although these women understand about the stigma that their trajectories entail, by all means they do not desire to hide them from their children. The coping strategies for fighting the stigma remain an open question, which fall outside of the scope of this research, but nevertheless requires further investigation.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

Throughout this research, I sought to create a dialogue between my understanding of the complex theorisation of motherhood, and my interpretation of the empirical findings of the experiences of motherhood of women that were strongly marked by the conflict and are now following the path of reincorporation. I argue that they experience motherhood (and non-motherhood) by resisting in different ways the institution of motherhood as theorised by scholars like Rich (1976) and Lagarde (2016). That is, as a patriarchal institution that has imposed a dominant way in which women should mother, that actually comprises diverse and plural experiences.

Female ex-combatants have long been hyper-represented and misrepresented. While their experiences of womanhood during the conflict have been instrumentalised to create stigma and victimisation, their experiences of motherhood during reincorporation have been used to create a false spectrum of peace. After fieldwork, I argue that they see their years as combatants with pride, and do not romanticise their experiences of motherhood since their stories reflect a complex and uncertain peace. While some women were able to have babies despite the organisation's control on their reproductive and sexual health, others were not able to. Although this control played an important role in the decision to become mothers of those who previously could not, it was not the only one. Many of them have become mothers based on the surprise factor and lack of planning. Something all of the participants of this research share, whether mothers during the conflict or not, is that even if they are in one place (which is still temporary) and do not live under the harsh conditions of war, they still have a feeling of uncertainty and instability during reincorporation. Thus, it becomes clear that motherhood is not seen as a strategy in their reincorporation process to either be accepted or to "blend" in better.

After understanding the temporality of their motherhoods and its relationship with reincorporation, I examine their experiences as mothers. I do so while keeping in mind that there are no experiences of motherhood that stand outside the institution, yet that there are many experiences that resist it in various ways. Through the stories of Olga, Flor, Natalia, Camila, I argue that some women's experiences do not necessarily contest some ideals of the universal discourse and practices around motherhood, as they are perceived as realisations. Instead, they defy the institution by understanding their motherhoods as possibilities rather than destinations. I argue that these choices and their productive participations in the ETCR are not only partially built upon their trajectories and their knowledge on contraception, but also on their social and economic circumstances. For some women like Olga, the public turns into maternal separation and the private becomes an opportunity to care and love their children. Furthermore, for other women like Andrea, womanhood entails not looking for validation through motherhood. This gives me ground to build my perception of choice and to state that to choose whether to mother or not should be possible under complete freedom and autonomy.

By interpreting the experiences of Sara and Ana (but also the other ex-combatants) I examine other tensions between experiences and institution. The story of Sara allows me to problematise aspects of the institution such as women being considered the only caretakers of children, and the only ones responsible for reproduction. Sara touched upon the judgment her trajectory has received over the years by discussing how it is based on women's social class and lack of context. She then calls for understanding when it comes to the reasons why she had to leave her children with someone else and recur to collective mothering. For her and for Ana, being a mother differs from their own mothers' experiences and entails another reason to fight, to keep going and to grow. Although for Sara it means more a reason

to continue a political struggle, for Ana it means more like a commitment to fight patriarchal oppression through participating outside the house. In her experience, there is a perceived private/public dichotomy even if it does not define every women's situation. This explains why she emphasised on the importance of her motherhood as an experience of accomplishment, in which she is able to share household activities with her partner. On the other hand, there is a tension I find to be in every experience I heard. The ex-combatants that participated in this research share experiences of motherhood as continuations of their struggle. Their experiences of motherhood can be understood as political experiences of resistance, as they desire to share their past as combatants with their children. This is one of the most political demonstrations around their experiences of motherhood, and a strong contestation to its institution. It is in terms that they do not want to follow the ideal of a peaceful and passive mother, but one that is a multifaceted woman.

I conclude that the institution of motherhood is a powerful and patriarchal institution that has been able to reconfigure itself and has determined every women's experience. However, to answer the main question that led this research, I present stories that beyond exposing their experiences as more than "deviant" stories or romantic promises of peace, challenge the institution of motherhood in different ways. I argue that their experiences of motherhood are diverse, ambiguous and sometimes contradictory, but above all, they are experiences of resistance.

Appendices

Appendix 1. List of Participants

Name	Age	Origin	Age (at the time they joined the FARC-EP)	Number of Childen	Ages of Children	Date of interview/ Informal Conversation
"Grandma"	63	Antioquia	18	1	-	July 31st, 2019
Sara	42	Antioquia	14	2	18 years 6 years	July 31st, 2019
Ana	41	Guajira	23	1	7 months	August 1st, 2019
Natalia	37	Bolívar	16	2	10 years 10 months	August 3rd, 2019
Andrea	35	Antioquia	15	0	-	July 31st, 2019, August 1st, 2019
Olga	32	Cesar	13	1	6 months	August 3rd, 2019
Adriana	26	Santander	-	1	9 months (pregnant)	July 31st, 2019
Camila	25	Magdalena	10	1	5 months (pregnant)	August 3rd, 2019
Flor	24	Magdalena	14	1	10 months	August 3rd, 2019
Jorge	26	Cesar	20	1	10 months	August 3rd, 2019
Carlos	-	Antioquia	-	3	34 years 7 years -	July 30th, 2019

Appendix 2. Interview Questions

What is your name, age and place of birth?

When did you join the FARC?

How long ago did you become a mother?

Have you tried before?

Have you had contact with your son/daughter?[7]

How was it to see him/her again?

Why didn't you try before?

Do you think something changed to be a mother now? Why?

What does it mean to be a mother for you? Why?

What in your family influences the way in which you mother today?

What life experiences affect your experience as a mother? Why?

What is women's role in the ETCR? Is it different from before? How?

What things were you able to do before and not now? What things are you able to do now that you could not do before?

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[7] The questions in italics are sensitive questions. They were asked only if it was applicable and if the respondent felt in her capacity to answer.

What would you like to do in the near future?

What did you dream of doing when you were little?

What does reincorporation mean to you? And acceptance?

In terms of your reincorporation, where do you position yourself? Why there? How would you call this moment?

How has your process been?

In your opinion, what does it mean to be an ex-combatant?

At what moment did you feel like an ex-combatant?

Do you feel you have a purpose?

What would you tell your child(ren) about your years as combatant?

What does family mean to you?

What do you think about the name of "children of peace"? Why?

Do you think that by being a mother it becomes easier for you to reincorporate? Why?

Where would you like to be in 5 or 10 years?

Are you motivated by the past, present, and the future? Why?

How do you perceive the future for your children? Is it how you perceived the future when you were little?

Can you tell me an experience of what love means to you?

Do you have a partner?

What role does the organisation play in your relationship?

What does privacy mean to you?

What does home mean to you? Do you consider having a home now?

How is it to live in this ETCR?

How do you see Colombia as a country to raise your child(ren)? Different from how you perceived before being a combatant?

What do you like about Colombia?

How do you perceive the Colombian culture outside the FARC? What do you like or do not like about that culture?

How do you perceive the culture within the FARC?

Is there something you would like to explain to people about your experience?

Are there sometimes in which you feel you cannot say what you think? Could you give me an example?

Have you felt fear?

Have you felt remorse?

Is there anything you would've like to avoid or experience differently?

Is there anything you would like your child(ren) to experience differently?

Appendix 3. Reasons for joining the FARC-EP

Almost half of the organisation joined or was recruited at a very young age (Bouvier 2016: 14). This is reflected in the participants' trajectories, for each joined between the ages of 10 to 23. Since their reasons for joining the FARC-EP differed, there were many contrasting perspectives and insights from their past and their current state as members of an organisation, and as ex-combatants experiencing reincorporation.

During the interviews I conducted and the informal conversations I had, I could grasp the social conditions of the country that pushed women to hold weapons and go to war. Although the reasons why Olga, Natalia, and Adriana were not disclosed to me, the rest of the participants shared with me their trajectories.

Something tangible among ex-combatants' realities is that there were territories in Colombia that have never had State presence. Rather, they were under guerrilla's political and social control. Some of the people I talked to told me they were born in 'revolutionary cribs', as their parents were part of the guerrilla and the territories in which they live in saw guerrilla boots walking up and down constantly. Flor mentioned that she lived in a region in which the guerrilla was very present as well, but it drove her to be constantly targeted by the Colombian army. She recalled many times looking for her because they thought she was part of the guerrilla, to the point she almost taken away from her family. She then decided to join the FARC-EP as her only option to survive.

Other combatants were from regions that have been highly affected by different types of violence. Sara told me she was from a region in which many people were assassinated, especially leftist leaders, and that her family was always persecuted (Sara 2019, personal interview). Ana lived in a region in which right-wing paramilitaries were highly present and highly aggressive towards the civilian population. She mentioned that paramilitaries believed all of her town was helping the guerrilla, and that their goal at some point became "end" everyone. After her family was displaced and her father was killed, she was driven to join the FARC.

The story of why Camila joined the FARC-EP is slightly different, but quite representative of rural women's situations in Colombia. She told me that given the bad conditions in which she was raised, she decided to join the insurgency. She is one of the many women in Colombia who have suffered from mistreatments, poverty, and several intersecting inequalities (Castrillón 2015: 85, Gutiérrez and Carranza 2017: 771). Finally, Andrea told me she joined the FARC-EP on a run when she was a teenager. She actually was from the city of Medellín, but she was on a trip with her father in a rural area with guerrilla nearby. She told me she often times regretted joining the organisation given it was very hard. She then continued to tell me that whenever she thought about leaving, she realised it was simply not possible.

Appendix 4. Pictures

"Empezar a pensar es empezar a luchar"

Source: The author, fieldwork 2019.

Ana's Baby

Source: The author, fieldwork 2019.

Memory's Museum

Source: The author, fieldwork 2019.

"Peace Library"

Source: The author, fieldwork 2019.

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