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Disarming, Demobilising and Reintegrating Whom? Accounting for Diversity Among Ex-Combatants in Colombian DDR

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Abstract²

This paper contributes to understanding how the Colombian Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) process accounts for a highly diverse ex-combatant population, whose composition will become even more diverse following the prospective peace agreement with the FARC. Analysing Colombian DDR discourse and practices through a gender and diversity-sensitive securitisation lens, I enquire how policymakers, academics, and practitioners understand diversity among ex-combatants, and how this understanding translates into reintegration practices. The analysis unpacks general de-securitisation of all ex-combatants, however with different discursive logics along the lines of diversity. Revealing a nuanced strategy of male de-securitisation in Colombian DDR discourse, the findings contrast with previous studies on gender and DDR. At the same time, this work demonstrates the added value of a more holistic approach to diversity for understanding patterns of inclusion and exclusion in Colombian DDR. In a more policy-oriented discussion, it further points to inter and intra-institutional dynamics that undermine an effective implementation of existing programmatic approaches to gender and diversity in DDR.

Keywords: DDR; reintegration; armed groups; Colombia; securitization; gender; diversity; discourse analysis.

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Introduction

A country with one of the oldest ongoing civil wars, Colombia is amongst those with the richest experience in disarming, demobilising and reintegrating former rebels and paramilitaries.³ Currently, almost 30,000 ex-combatants are undergoing a reintegration process and a similar estimated number of combatants, collaborators and urban militia from the guerrilla movement *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC) could demobilise and join reintegration programs soon (ACR, 2014b; Mathieu, 2014). In light of an increasingly diverse ex-combatant population, the prospective growth of Colombian DDR following a peace agreement with the FARC, and Colombia's growing advisory role to other states' reintegration programs, this paper urges for a deeper understanding of how the Colombian model addresses diversity among ex-combatants. To this end, I introduce a novel diversity-sensitive securitisation perspective to analyse Colombian DDR discourse and related practices.

In Colombia and elsewhere, DDR has become an integral component of larger 'post-conflict' reconstruction and peacebuilding initiatives that aim to restore long-term stability and social cohesion through ex-combatants' social and economic (re)integration (Muggah, 2010). Scholarly criticism has focused mostly on lack of evidence about programme (in)effectiveness ([Muggah, 2009](#); [Muggah and Krause, 2009](#)); the often context-insensitive top-down character of DDR programmes (Colletta and Muggah, 2009); or their narrow focus on 'conflict violence' failing to address other forms of violence along a more comprehensive continuum of violence (Moser, 2001; [Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2004](#); [Muggah and Krause, 2009](#); Krause,

³ In the following, I refer to all former members of non-state armed groups as 'ex-combatants'.

2012), including the fusion of former paramilitary structures and organised crime in Colombia (Restrepo and Aponte, 2009; Massé, 2011).

Except for gender scholars (MacKenzie, 2009a), few have paid attention to the *characteristics of the target group* of DDR programmes and to the DDR discourses and practices at work that enable or limit ex-combatants' return to civilian life. I argue that such a perspective is innovative and relevant to grasp mismatches between programme design and complex social realities as well as to understand patterns of exclusion that risk to perpetuate the root causes of Colombia's half-century old civil war. This gains momentum considering the high diversity among the current ex-combatant population and an even more diverse composition of the FARC: high proportions of female members and minors, as well as over-proportionally represented ethnic minorities in their ranks, combined with its rural character and geographical scope.

To learn how DDR discourse and practices account for diversity among ex-combatants in Colombia, I ask the following questions:

- How is diversity among ex-combatants perceived, if at all, and projected in the DDR discourse of key personnel involved in DDR design, implementation and evaluation?
- How is 'the combatant' discursively constructed and which logics and practices relate thereto?
 - Who is represented through the notion of 'the combatant', and 'the ex-combatant' respectively?
 - What are the governing logics of the respective discourses and programmes?

- What practical implications are identifiable, e.g. in patterns of exclusion and inclusion?
- What role do institutional dynamics play therein?

Thereby, I neither purport to propose a policy model for FARC DDR nor to evaluate impact or success of past and current processes. Through innovative research from a different theoretical angle to the DDR literature, I aim to contribute to more in-depth understanding of Colombian DDR experiences to date and to incite more diversity-sensitive programming in the future.

The paper is structured as follows: Firstly, building on an extensive literature review and using a feminist approach to the securitisation theory, I locate the Colombian case within global DDR trends and develop a diversity concept, as appropriate for the Colombian context. Secondly, I conduct a critical discourse analysis of empirical data collected in Colombia (interviews with policy makers, practitioners and ex-combatants working in the public space, internal documents of key agencies, visual and audio material) and identify securitising logics linked to diversity among ex-combatants. I further reflect about institutional dynamics that interfere with diversity-sensitivity at different levels. The last section discusses major findings and relates them to putative FARC demobilisation.

Approaching Colombian DDR and Diversity

DDR trends: Split between security and development?

The United Nations (UN) describes DDR as an integral mechanism towards “both the initial stabilisation of war-torn societies as well as their long-term development” (United Nations Peacekeeping, 2014).⁴ Reflecting the merger of security and development in the late 1990s (Duffield, 2001), concept strategies have shifted from “minimalist (security-first) interventions” to “maximalist (development-oriented) activities” (Muggah and Krause, 2009: 139), adding social and economic reintegration to the agenda (Muggah, 2005; Muggah and Krause, 2009) and placing DDR within the human security discussion about states’ responsibility towards the security of their citizens in the name of human development (Schnabel, 2008).

From this perspective, human security would entail an absence of both direct and structural violence in Johan Galtung’s sense (1969). Exclusion from access to or participation in DDR, e.g. on the basis of the specific constellation of diversity categories within an individual person or social group, such as gender, age, ethnicity, geographic location or membership in a non-state armed group (NSAG), is a form of human insecurity in this logic, which opposes the objectives of the larger framework of mechanisms to prevent a relapse into insecurity and conflict (Muggah, 2010).

Scholarly criticism on DDR practices, however, reveals how funders and programme designers, a majority of whom are men (Bastick, 2008), adhere to

⁴ „*Disarmament* is the collection, documentation, control and disposal of small arms, ammunition, explosives and light and heavy weapons from combatants and often from the civilian population. *Demobilization* is the formal and controlled discharge of active combatants from armed forces and groups, including a phase of “reinsertion” which provides short-term assistance to ex-combatants. *Reintegration* is the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income. It is a political, social and economic process with an open time-frame, primarily taking place in communities at the local level.“ (United Nations Peacekeeping, 2014; emphases added).

traditional security conceptions, which lead them to overemphasise disarmament and quantifiable weapons collection – the so-called “disarmament bias” (Muggah, 2006: 198) – and to notoriously underfund reintegration programmes (Muggah, 2006).⁵ A similar mindset will presumably guide policymakers’, DDR programme designers’ and implementers’ perceptions of who (ex-)combatants, the threat-to-be-redressed through DDR programmes, are and how to best address them accordingly; hence the choice of a security perspective for analysing their discourse(s).

Feminist approach to securitisation

A feminist approach to the Copenhagen School’s *securitisation theory* provides a useful theoretical lens in two ways: first, the securitisation theory captures the discursive construction of an important security risk – here: the combatant or ex-combatant respectively – and the adoption of extraordinary measures to address this risk – here: the focus of DDR programmes on the constructed threat (Hansen, 2000; Williams, 2003). Second, by rendering women in politics and conflict visible and contesting discourses that (re)produce gendered social hierarchies, feminist security scholars underline the key role of actors neglected in conventional security discourse due to male domination of the domain (Tickner, 1992; Salla, 2001; Skjelsbæk, 2001; Blanchard, 2003; Sjoberg, 2009; Sjoberg, 2010; Cheldelin and Eliatamby, 2011).

In line with critical security studies’ questions about “how [...] threats and interests are constructed, how the actors involved are constituted, and how these processes may change” (Krause and Williams, 1997: 51), the Copenhagen School’s *securitisation theory* examines how “securitising speech acts” (Williams, 2003: 513)

⁵ These critics themselves, in turn, tend to neglect how differential experiences of conflict and DDR shape reintegration opportunities and limitations.

construct an existential threat to a “referent object”, a collective or political community, thereby creating an “emergency condition” and thus allowing for extraordinary measures (Fierke, 2007: 101). From a Foucauldian perspective, Jaremeay McMullin convincingly argues how discursive frames, used to securitise ex-combatants in DDR, exert “politics, power and violence” themselves, thereby shaping concrete practices (McMullin, 2012: 413).⁶ Other discursive frames *de-securitise* explicitly or implicitly: Lene Hansen (2000) considers both the silencing of women’s voices – “security as silence” (Hansen, 2000: 294) – and the rejection of gender as a salient identity, whose security can be threatened – “subsuming security” (Hansen, 2000: 297) – as *de-securitising practices*. As Hansen puts it, “if security is a speech act, then it is simultaneously deeply implicated in the production of silence” (Hansen, 2000: 306).

I argue that, as much as for the referent object, this holds true for the construction of the threat itself. In her inspiring study about female ex-combatants in Sierra Leone, Megan MacKenzie (2009b) uses a similar approach to analyse female exclusion from the DDR programme as a consequence of their de-securitisation. Assuming that only those perceived as a threat will be securitised and arguing that gender is an important, but not necessarily at all times the most salient “identity marker” (Myrntinen et al., 2014: 5), it is by expanding Hansen’s approach from gender to diversity that the securitisation theory can provide a useful heuristic tool for analysing the discursive construction of ‘the (ex-)combatant’ in the Colombian DDR process (Miller, 2001; Skjelsbæk and Smith, 2001: 11).

⁶ „Assumptions about ex-combatants as inherently threatening securitise DDR interventions specifically and peacebuilding generally: they rationalise and justify reintegration assistance only as long as ex-combatants constitute a security threat“ (McMullin, 2012: 413).

The Colombian (D)D(R) experience

What began in Colombia in the aftermath of a civil war called *La Violencia* as a peasant insurgency against a highly exclusive and elitist bipartisan political system soon converted into today's on-going armed conflict that cost the lives of over 220,000 Colombians between 1958 and 2012 (CNMH, 2013a: 20) and internally displaced close to five million persons in the past three decades alone, about ten per cent of the Colombian population.⁷ The myriad actors involved in Colombia's armed conflict (left-wing guerrilla groups, among them the remaining FARC and the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN), the recently demobilised right-wing paramilitaries *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC) and state armed forces), their mingling with organised (drug) crime since the 1980s and a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual population, marked by a stark urban-rural divide and a large-estate owner elite controlling the political sphere, have rendered the armed conflict highly complex and opaque.

The Colombian history of NSAG demobilisations is as old as the contemporary armed conflict itself.⁸ Before the end of *La Violencia*, General Rojas Pinilla (1953-1957) offered amnesties to liberal and communist self-defence groups if they demobilised and returned to civilian life. Given the partial rejection of this offer and channeling of self-defence groups into full-fledged guerrilla movements, this was the first of a range of (partial) collective and individual demobilisations in the historical record of the contemporary armed conflict (Koth, 2005).

⁷ Conservative estimates speak of 4.79 (MAPP-OEA, 2014: 2) to 4.87 (HRW, 2013) internally displaced persons (IDPs).

⁸ For a comprehensive historical overview, see Villarraga (2013a).

The Colombian DDR model distinguishes between collective and individual demobilisation, following different governing logics: First, demobilisations of collective guerrilla groups as part of peace agreements during the 20th century, including amnesties and political participation arrangements (Chernick, 1996). The prospective FARC demobilisation falls under this logic. Second, collective demobilisation can be part of a transitional justice framework, as was the case for the paramilitary AUC between 2003 and 2006 (Guáqueta, 2009). Third, individual demobilisation since 1994 aims to incentivise desertion from NSAGs and thereby functions as a counterinsurgency strategy (Villarraga, 2013a).

Contrary to international trends in DDR, *disarmament* and weapons collection have never played a key role in Colombia. Colombia's most recent DDR process included unarmed support structures of the demobilising AUC, producing a comparatively low number of collected weapons and illustrating the symbolic character of disarmament in Colombia.⁹ *Demobilisation*, including basic reinsertion measures for demobilised persons, constituted the core of Colombian collective processes during the 20th century.

In line with the aforementioned global merger of security and development in the 1990s, Colombian programmes experienced a shift from state-security-oriented (D)&D to more development-oriented (D)DR in the early 21st century, with basic reinsertion programmes expanding to fully-fledged *reintegration*: the 2002 *Programa de Reintegración a la Vida Civil* (PRVC) under the Ministry of Interior and Justice was replaced in 2006 by the *Alta Consejería para la Reintegración* under the Presidency of the Republic, which turned into the contemporary full-fledged and autonomous

⁹ The average of 0.59 collected weapons per demobilising combatant is low compared to disarmament statistics in other countries between 1997 and 2007 (Nussio, 2011a: 89; Muggah, 2009: 8-11).

Ministry, the *Agencia Colombiana para la Reintegración* (ACR) in 2011 (Villarraga, 2013a). While the ACR is in charge of adult reintegration, the *Instituto Colombiano para el Bienestar Familiar* (ICBF) has run a specific reintegration programme for minors since 1997, with an elaborate system including childcare centres, host-families and supervised residences (ICBF, 2010). In Bogotá, a smaller-scale reintegration programme, *Proyecto 840*, complements ACR offers by working with ex-combatants in their receiving communities.

Conceptualising diversity in the Colombian context

Despite the longstanding DDR history, attention to *diversity* among ex-combatants was normatively introduced only recently: the national policy guideline 'CONPES 3554' (2008) pays attention to particular reintegration needs, according to different diversity categories: focusing on *age* (the institutional separation of reintegration of minors and adults), the document also relates to *gender*, with a basic understanding of 'gender equity' and 'masculinity'; *ethnicity*, emphasising ex-combatants' right to ethnicity-sensitive reintegration in cooperation with their ethnic community; and *disability*, underlining the right to equal access to reintegration programmes.¹⁰ Except for a recent publication on gender, age, and ethnicity in reintegration by the *Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica* (CNMH, 2013b), however, attention to diversity remains a marginal side-topic both in the policy guideline and subsequent evaluation studies.¹¹

¹⁰ Disabled ex-combatants, though included in CONPES 3554, are neither addressed in the literature nor by the interviewees (CNMH, 2013b; CNRR, 2010).

¹¹ Only three out of 71 pages are dedicated to the diversity categories (Conpes 2008: 57-60). Similarly, the National Commission for Reparation and Reintegration reports on diversity its last chapters only (CNRR, 2010).

On the basis of an extensive review of global and Colombia-specific literature, I complement gender, age and ethnicity – three diversity categories that are ‘internal to a person’ – with two more ‘external’ diversity categories: first, the type of NSAG a person demobilises from, and second, regional differences in terms of conflict dynamics and culture.¹² Rather than sharing other scholars’ preference for a larger catalogue of influencing factors,¹³ I argue that a limited amount of five diversity categories favours analytical clarity. Broad enough to capture and group other factors within and between their oscillating boundaries, the categories are non-exhaustive and facilitate accommodation of emerging themes. They are closely interconnected, partly overlapping and mutually nurturing constructs. For example, socialisation within a specific NSAG type is closely linked to regional conflict dynamics, gendered relations within the NSAG, or the age at recruitment. Arguing that diversity-sensitive DDR requires an in-depth understanding of the complex interplay of diversity categories, I reject any presupposed hierarchy amongst them.

Although any differential analysis arguably risks introducing or perpetuating discrimination along its lines,¹⁴ the present diversity-sensitive approach provides a useful analytical tool to unveil such discrimination, as a first step towards mitigating it. The working hypotheses (Table 1), grouped along the five diversity categories, guide further empirical data collection and analysis. I refrain from further explanations at this point and juxtapose theoretical and empirical findings in the analysis below.

¹² For a more detailed literature review building up the present diversity concept, see Mia Schöb (Schöb, 2014).

¹³ For instance, Alba Nubia Rodríguez Pizarro (2008) works with a more comprehensive catalogue of factors influencing FARC women’s experiences of war.

¹⁴ Compare to Simone de Beauvoir’s (2008) analysis of how addressing inequalities and advocating equality can (unintendedly) contribute to ‘othering’ and further discrimination.

Tab. 1: Working hypotheses drawn from the literature review

No.	Working hypotheses
1	The discursive construction of a) the 'combatant' or b) the 'ex-combatant' as a security threat influences the way DDR programs are designed and shapes patterns of inclusion or exclusion.
2	These patterns reflect the hegemonic gendered notions in society, reproduced in DDR.
2a	Men are perceived as a security threat and thus securitised in DDR.
2b	Women are perceived as belonging to the private sphere and as such de-securitised in DDR.
2c	Similarly, children and ethnic minority groups are marginalised in or excluded from DDR.
3	The type of NSAG, and ex-combatants' socialisation therein, influences reintegration capacities, depending on the degree to which NSAG socialisation and roles differ from post-demobilisation societal expectations
4	(De-)securitisation follows patterns of social inclusion and exclusion in larger society.

Empirical Analysis: Securitising Along The Lines Of Diversity?

Methodology

An abductive research process, marked by a constant dialogue between “top-down theory and bottom-up empirical data” (Wodak, 2004: 200), informs this paper. This interplay between “previous theoretical knowledge and new empirical observations” (Kelle, 2007: 154) permits inferring the most plausible explanation for newly observed empirical phenomena. Accordingly, the working hypotheses are but a preliminary result of and basis for further abduction throughout the research process. For the empirical analysis, I triangulate 55 semi-structured interviews with 74 key informants,¹⁵ notes taken in two public events on reintegration, official and intra-institutional documents, audio-visual data and participant observation field-notes, collected in Colombian reintegration institutions in March 2013.¹⁶

¹⁵ Appendix B lists all interviews, including their ascribed ID, which I use in the following for in-text referencing.

¹⁶ Inspiring methodological literature include, e.g. Rubin and Rubin (2012) on interview techniques and Kawulich (2005) on participant observation.

Theoretical sampling guided the research process, pursuing chain referrals until reaching a saturation point where referrals became circular ([Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981](#)). Lasting between one and three hours, the interviews facilitated my understanding of interviewees' perspectives and exploration of emerging themes beyond the working hypotheses. Aiming to unpack how power relations and inequalities produce the research object, I conducted a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of all empirical data ([Fairclough, 2010](#)), interpreting absence of data or bias between data sources as meaningful data per se ([Roth and Mehta, 2002](#)).

Most analysis in this article stems from within institutions: while interview partners of the first round are mainly DDR experts working in international organisations and think tanks, most interview partners of the second round, in Colombia, are institutionally embedded in either public institutions involved in DDR, international organisations in advisory roles, or non-governmental organisations and think tanks engaged in reintegration (compare Appendices A, B). Approximately one quarter of them are ex-combatants themselves who have undergone, or are in an advanced stage of, a reintegration programme.

The analysis thus partly reflects lived reintegration experiences, yet framed through interviewees' institutional embedding. Another piece of original research is needed to complement the findings of the present analysis with bottom-up insights into current reintegration processes: through the lens of those current participants in reintegration programmes, who are neither involved in programme delivery nor in shaping DDR discourses and practices at the institutional level. Considering current restructuring of reintegration programmes and the novelty of key concepts identified

below, such additional research is necessary and important to thoroughly understand the effects of DDR discourse and practice on their diverse target population.

Regarding diversity among my interview partners, I do not purport to draw a single narrative from the interviewees' myriad discourses. Generalisations about experiences *as women, as children, as indigenous persons, as guerrilla or paramilitary members* assume commonalities among the members of these identity groups, but shall at no point suggest uniformity of experiences or undermine the value of each individual and unique experience. The over-proportional length of the gender section is representative of the prominent role gender occupied in interviewees' answers to my diversity-related questions. Within this gender focus, the 'new masculinities' stand out as the most dominant theme.

Adult reintegration approaches in practice: ACR and Proyecto 840

Two different and complementary approaches to adult reintegration exist to date: individual-focused within the ACR and community-oriented in *Proyecto 840*. According to several interviewees previously or currently employed by the ACR, the reintegration strategy is based on 'personalised attention' to each 'participant-in-reintegration' ('PPR'), assisting them in designing their individual 'reintegration route' in line with their concrete 'life project', their personal capacities and contextual possibilities (Interview BC35P).¹⁷ Reception of reintegration benefits is contingent on the completion of sub-steps within the reintegration route (e.g. workshop participation, which requires physical presence at a given time and location).

¹⁷ Ex-combatants undergoing the reintegration process were referred to by ACR interview partners as 'PPR', an abbreviation for 'participant/person in process of reintegration'.

The ACR reintegration model has been undergoing a transition from a three-tier system of social, economic and community reintegration units, with separate projects and responsibilities and several professionals working with the same demobilised person (Interviews BC5G; BC11P; BC24P) to a 'new dimensions approach' (Interview BC35P), designed in the ACR headquarters in Bogotá and allegedly introduced in the 38 regional offices since 2013 (Interviews BC6G; BC7G; BC35P). While implemented in some regional offices (Interview BC39E), others report transition difficulties and incomplete implementation as of late March 2014 (Interview BC40E). In the new model, each 'PPR' is accompanied by a single reintegration professional, the latter assisting between 30 (Interview BC1Ev) and 55 (Interview BC35P) 'PPRs' in designing their personalised reintegration route along eight dimensions: personal, educational, productive, citizenship, family, health, living environment and security. Within the personal dimension, 'internal' diversity categories, such as gender, age, ethnicity and socialisation within a specific NSAG-type, could potentially be localised.

A smaller reintegration programme, *Proyecto 840*, is in place in the capital. Its working team is composed largely but not exclusively of male and female ex-combatants from different NSAGs. The district programme works complementarily to but independently from the ACR, also addressing ex-combatants who are not (any more) under the auspices of the national reintegration agency and placing the collective into the centre of attention (Interview BC23P). Focusing on families and communities, *Proyecto 840* plans to fill the gaps left unaddressed by the ACR's emphasis on personalised reintegration routes (Interview BC29P). The district program rejects the ACR denomination 'participant' as a denial of identity and aims to transform ex-combatants' formerly violent expression of dissent into positive, non-violent activism

and 'active citizenship' at the local level, rather than 'erasing' ex-combatants' past (Interview BC23P).

Findings: (de-)securitising practices, diversity foci and institutional challenges

A number of unexpected findings complement and contrast with existing literature: First, ex-combatants as a monolithic category are generally de-securitised in the interviewees' discourse around reintegration, rather than securitised as (male) ex-combatants. Second, whether intentionally or not, the discursive strategy instrumentalises different diversity categories to achieve this de-securitisation through different channels: either through *silence and invisibility*, combined with varying degrees of perceived victimhood and deprivation of agency, as for women, minors and ethnic minority groups, or through *demilitarising masculinities* by approximating the notion of 'new masculinities' to feminine characteristics, traditionally identified as peaceful and non-threatening.

Furthermore, interviewees acknowledge discrimination against ex-combatants according to their former group affiliation, but reject the assumption that the type of NSAG and respective socialisation should be accounted for in DDR. To illustrate these points, Table 2 below juxtaposes the working hypotheses with empirical findings. Third, intra and inter institutional dynamics affect design and implementation issues. In the following, I further elaborate on each of the three points, focusing on those aspects that provide new insights or contest key theoretical assumptions.

1) Terminology: (de-)securitising the (ex-)combatant

The critical discourse analysis reveals securitising and de-securitising elements regarding interviewees' perceptions of (ex-)combatants. Women, minors and ethnic minorities are rather de-securitised through silence than linguistically addressed. On the contrary, men – generically referred to as 'combatants' or 'ex-combatants' because "the majority of ex-combatants are men" (Interview BC32P) – are partly securitised by referrals to high recidivism rates, yet de-securitised through the discourse about 'new masculinities', led by a wide range of interviewees from national and international organisations.

For Disarmament and Demobilisation, the analysis finds a securitising strategy towards guerrilla combatants, the remaining official NSAGs addressed by DDR in Colombia, manifest in de-humanising public discourse that labels them as "rats", an abbreviation for *redes de apoyo al terrorismo* (terrorist support networks), or as "narco-terrorists" (Interview BC16P), and justifies individual Disarmament and Demobilisation as a security measure conducted under the Ministry of Defence (Interview BC26P). None of the interviewees explicitly referred to these as men-only terms. Nonetheless, missing attention in this discourse to marginalised groups, such as women, minors and ethnic minorities, indicates that it is unlikely for most interviewees to associate them with the above-described securitising terms.

For Reintegration, the findings are less black-and-white and worth further scrutiny. Interviewees related to the ACR portray the condition of 'ex-combatant' or 'demobilised' as a social ill, to be remedied through reintegration. One interviewee used a medical metaphor to illustrate the shift from reinsertion to full-fledged reintegration as the strategic change from giving an aspirin to all demobilised to proscribing an

individual cure, specific medication for long-term recovery (Interview BC5G). Before entering the ACR, ex-combatants are labelled 'demobilised', whereas afterwards, they become 'PPR', 'the participant' or 'the client' (Interviews BC6G; BC7P; BC11P; BC35G; BC36G).

While one interviewee argued that, from a security perspective, once deprived of their weapons and demobilised, ex-combatants are not a threat anymore (Interview GS7P), references to ex-combatants' personal security risks de-securitise through a more subtle argument: their vulnerability to aggression from an unspecified other. PPRs have "an inherent condition: they are demobilised people and as such at risk" (Interview BC35G), an ACR employee underlines. Publicly relating ex-combatants' personal stories about persecution by the NSAG they deserted from and sanctions towards their families, in the form of kidnappings and assassinations (Interview BC1Ev), further enhances the notion of ex-combatants' vulnerability. Declaring the majority of foot soldiers in NSAGs victims rather than perpetrators (Interview BC24P) supports this de-securitising discourse, though it also casts doubt on the securitisation of 'the combatant' prior to Disarmament and Demobilisation.

These de-securitising strategies add to a much-criticised failure of DDR to address other forms of violence ([Muggah and Krause, 2009](#)) by diverting attention from ex-combatants' agency as well as from a re-location of violence from the public into the private sphere during reintegration, only mentioned by one *Proyecto 840* interviewee (Interview BC23P).

Nonetheless, the interviews reveal objecting voices and discourses: Opposing the focus on ex-combatants' vulnerability and hence their discursive de-securitisation, other interviewees argue that ex-combatants are security risks if not well reintegrat-

ed, as the “gun-for-hire gangsters” in West Africa show (Interview GS6S). Understanding the Colombian reintegration process as a *système de proximité* to keep close track of the “demobilised ex-terrorists” (Interview GS5P) implies seeing reintegration as a security measure rather than a healing process. While insisting that female demobilisation is to be neglected as insignificantly small in comparison to female victimisation, a Colombian researcher portrayed (male) ex-combatants as a specifically problematic population, “people who have spent the largest part of their lives killing” (Interview BC32P).

One important element that undermines the de-securitising discourse is recidivism, the re-mobilisation of ex-combatants into NSAGs or organised crime. While interviewees pursuing the de-securitising strategy either avoid the problematic or state an unrealistic four per cent rate (Interview BC6G) to underline the unlikelihood of recidivism, some ex-combatants themselves make their potential return to armed violence explicit, should this be considered the best alternative in a given moment (Interview BC29P), and contend they frequently receive offers to join different armed groups (Interviews BC29P; BC37G). Persisting fear of and mistrust against ex-combatants (Interview BC22P)¹⁸ further indicate a limited effect of the de-securitising strategy on contemporary Colombian society.

2) Accounting for diversity in Colombian DDR?

Tab. 2: Juxtaposing working hypotheses and empirical findings

No.	Working hypotheses	In accordance with empirical analysis? Why?
Emerging theme	Colombian DDR discourse follows a de-securitising logic: building on the socially prevalent marginalisation of women, children and ethnic minorities through a strategy of silence, while ‘feminising’ and thus de-securitising the masculine through the concept of ‘new masculini-	

¹⁸ This is confirmed by earlier studies on reintegration in Colombia (Theidon, 2009; Nussio, 2011b; Nussio and Oppenheim, 2013).

	ties', the 'ex-combatant' loses his/her threatening features in reintegration as a 'participant', ideally turning into a 'neutral citizen'.	
1	The discursive construction of a) the 'combatant' or b) the 'ex-combatant' as a security threat influences the way DDR programs are designed and thereby patterns of inclusion or exclusion.	a) Indeed, for the securitisation of the 'combatant' and visual identification with a male person of mestizo features (dominant ethnicity in Colombia) before and during Disarmament and Demobilisation. This determines whose practical possibilities in Reintegration are accounted for and leads to the marginalisation of other groups, such as women, children and ethnic minorities. b) No. The discursive construction of the 'ex-combatant' de-securitises this population as a whole. Nonetheless, the focus on men directs DDR efforts in favour of this sub-group.
2	These patterns reflect the hegemonic gendered notions in society, reproduced in DDR.	Only partly: while the focus on men in this approach is criticised as a reproduction of patriarchal subordination of the female, the demilitarisation of the masculine and its 'feminisation' in 'new masculinities' contrast with hegemonic gendered notions of <i>machismo</i> and <i>marianismo</i> .
2a	Men are perceived as a security threat and thus securitised in DDR.	Only partly. Men are more dominant, especially in visual depictions of the 'combatant', and as such securitised before DDR and during Disarmament and Demobilisation, but not in Reintegration.
2b	Women are perceived as belonging to the private sphere and as such de-securitised in DDR.	Indeed. Female ex-combatants are marginalised through silence in DDR discourse and confronted with traditional gender roles in reintegration.
2c	Similarly, children and ethnic minority groups are marginalised in or excluded from DDR.	Indeed. Children are de-securitised as agency-less victims. Ethnic minorities receive little discursive attention and are regarded rather as victims, or simply as unimportant.
3	The type of NSAG, and ex-combatants' socialisation therein, influences reintegration capacities, depending on the degree to which NSAG socialisation and roles differ from post-demobilisation societal expectations	No. The type of NSAG matters, but differently than expected: de-humanising, anti-guerrilla public discourse socialises state officials, provoking (perceived) 'negative discrimination' against former guerrilla combatants, in favour of former paramilitary members.
4	(De-)securitisation follows patterns of social inclusion and exclusion in larger society.	Indeed. Despite overall de-securitisation, the visual focus on men reproduces social gendered patterns of exclusion. Other traditionally marginalised groups (children and ethnic minorities) are similarly silenced and marginalised in discourse, while disabled persons are not even considered.

▪ *Type of NSAG*¹⁹

A substantive body of literature on Colombian NSAGs²⁰ suggests two major ways in which the type of armed group can be expected to shape the DDR experience: first, access to a specific demobilisation mode (i.e. individual or collective) is contingent on NSAG membership (Villarraga, 2013a). Second, different NSAGs, through their internal structure and regulation, socialise their members differently, i.e. construct different identities that influence the capacity to reintegrate in different ways (Gutiérrez Sanín, 2007).

Interviewees confirm that post-demobilisation violence, geographic movement and interests are closely linked to the type of NSAG (Interviews BC16P; BC14G; BC17P), as are the proportions of women demobilising from different armed groups: in 2013, 25.6 per cent of individually demobilised guerrilla members were women (Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, 2014), against only six per cent of demobilised AUC members (ODDR, 2011: 9, 12). Nonetheless, a number of interviewees emphasise that accounting for former NSAG membership would introduce unnecessary “negative discrimination”, as opposed to the “positive discrimination” of a differential approach that is sensitive to each person’s human characteristics (Interviews BC1P; BC2P; BC33P).

¹⁹ I define NSAGs as “organized non-state armed groups that have taken up arms to challenge the state or another armed group over control – or the state’s or another armed group’s attempt to hold a monopoly of control – of political, economic, natural, territorial and/or human resources” (Mazurana, 2013: 147) recurring to armed violence dependent on “opportunities, risks and alternatives” (Muggah and Krause, 2009: 141).

²⁰ E.g. Gutiérrez Sanín (2004, 2007); Theidon (2007); Herrera and Porch (2008); Arjona and Kalyvas (2012); Dietrich Ortega (2012); Gutiérrez Sanín and González Peña (2012); Villarraga (2013a).

Notwithstanding the inclusion of former group affiliation in publicly available ACR statistics since April 2014 (ACR, 2014c), this argument is reflected in the ACR strategy to address all ex-combatants equally as ‘participants’. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this focus, paired with the physical closeness among former members of different NSAGs in reintegration, helps re-humanising the former ‘other’ and unfolds potential for reconciliation (Interview BC31G; also BC1Ev; BC21P).

Remarkably, none of the interviewees considered NSAG socialisation an important differential category for ex-combatants’ reintegration. Yet they underlined that state official’s (e.g. ACR employees’) socialisation through de-humanising public discourse against guerrilla members provokes an (unconscious) reproduction of negative imageries and stereotypes in ACR or ICBF reintegration design and implementation, thereby risking to conduct “negative differentiation” among ex-combatants in favour of former paramilitaries (Interview BC4P). Rather than internal effects rooted in ex-combatants’ socialisation within a particular NSAG, the type of NSAG thus influences external opportunities and limitations that ex-combatants face in reintegration.

- *“A country of regions”*

Scholars have analysed how regional conflict dynamics, including shifting control over local conflict herds by different armed groups, influence patterns of recruitment, re-recruitment and victimisation (Arjona and Kalyvas, 2012). Additionally, through regional variations in demography, ethnic minorities are over-proportionally affected by these dynamics, as Luisa Hernández (2013) shows for Afro-Colombians on the Pacific Coast. The ACR acknowledges both aspects and addresses the latter through its operational structure: 38 regional offices scattered over the national territory and

run by local staff are responsible for implementing the national reintegration model in a context and culture-sensitive way (Interview BC7P).

Since NSAG fronts tend to be composed of locals (Interview GS10S), reintegration staff is likely to share ex-combatants' culture and ethnicity (Interview BC11P), if ex-combatants are enrolled in a reintegration programme in their region of origin. However, the latter is rarely the case: security concerns and the location of reintegration service centres in urban hubs uproots (rural) ex-combatants from their homelands – a process colloquially referred to as *defenestración*, losing ground beneath one's feet (Interview GS10S). Considering the strong rural component of the FARC, their prospective demobilisation could possibly tackle this problem through a region-based rural DDR model (Interview BC8P).

- *Addressing gender?*

Addressing gender in DDR has become imperative since 2000, when the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 set female involvement in armed conflict and peace processes on the international agenda. Gender relations are understood as structural social power relations, founded on the patriarchal principles of male domination and female subordination (Fierke, 2007; Cohn, 2013) yet highly dynamic and constantly transformed in and after conflict (Farr, 2005; Specht, 2013).

Patriarchy, *inter alia* expressed through institutional structures (Cohn, 2013; Jacobson, 2013), has been considered an underlying cause for armed conflict and violence and its persistence a key obstacle to sustainable conflict resolution (Enloe, 2005). Decades of armed conflict, overall social militarisation, and arguably the emergence of a “culture of violence” (Sweig, 2001: 122; [Waldmann, 2007: 63](#)), contribute to perpetuating patriarchy in Colombian society, marked by *machismo*, milita-

rised masculinities and a “cult of virility”, and *marianismo*, the ideal of female sanctity (Mazurana, 2013: 165).

Feminist scholars have extensively examined how empowering effects of female mobilisation into NSAGs are reversed after demobilisation: female participation in DDR, and particularly their reintegration, are likely to be obstructed by male-focused and inadequate DDR programmes on the one hand (MacKenzie, 2009a; 2009b; Dyck, 2011; Schöb, 2014) and social stigma for the transgression of gender norms, combined with the expectation to silently slip back into their socially ascribed roles in the private sphere on the other (Londoño and Nieto, 2006).²¹

Unlike feminists, masculinity scholars have paid “little attention [...] to masculinities in conflict-ending contexts” (Cahn, 2011). Individually and collectively constructed, masculinities can be expressed in manifold ways. Hegemonic masculinities, however, set the standard of ‘manliness’, as opposed to deviant, or subordinate, forms of masculinity (Carrigan et al., 2004). They are based on a repudiation of the feminine and consequent othering of women, minorities and subordinated masculinities (Kimmel, 2004). During armed conflict, hegemonic masculinities become more militarised, conditioning access to manhood on military attitudes and violence (Cahn and Aoláin, 2010).

Pointing to the problematic persistence of ex-combatants’ identification with militarised masculinity, “that fusion of certain practices and images of maleness with the use of weapons, the exercise of violence, and the performance of an aggressive and frequently misogynist masculinity” (Theidon, 2009: 5), Kimberly Theidon (2007, 2009) recommends “re-constructing masculinities” in Colombia in order to break the

²¹ Interviewed female ex-combatants support these findings (Interviews BC17P; BC22P).

cycle of violence and enable reintegration. The remainder of this section analyses how reintegration institutions understand and integrate these different elements of gender into their discourse and practice and reflects on the dominant theme that emerged from the data: the 'new masculinities'.

The ACR's endeavour to incorporate gender is reflected in visual and linguistic confrontations with gendered stereotypes and a partial rendition to these through a focus on men and masculinities. While visually acknowledging the existence of female NSAG members, as illustrated in the first picture in Figure 1, the *male* combatant bears the weapon and enters the individual demobilisation process, receives his demobilisation certificate and undergoes his personalised reintegration route within the ACR, re-joining his wife and children and enjoying support in becoming a responsible citizen.²²

Fig. 1: Excerpts from ACR video and picture explanations of the ACR reintegration route (ACR 2013)



Why not visually depict her, the armed or unarmed female combatant in her reintegration route? Because the majority of combatants and victims of conflict-related

²² Interestingly, the combatant is visually depicted as *mestizo*, a male member of the dominant ethnic group in Colombia.

lethal violence are men (Interview GS2P), the majority of DDR designers are men (Interview GS5P) and as such men are the “natural partners” (Interview GS6S) in DDR and other security-related initiatives? Or because Colombian society is highly *machista* and it is unlikely that men in power positions, benefitting from gender inequalities, would make gender an authentic objective on their agenda, irrespective of *pro forma* declarations to satisfy international claims (Interview BC1P)? Or simply because women are not perceived as a direct threat (Interview GS7P)?

The visual focus on male combatants reflects and reinforces a much-discussed silence around female ex-combatants that results in their quasi-invisibility in DDR, their disempowerment and deprivation of agency in comparison to lived experiences as combatants, further producing practical obstacles to their participation in reintegration programmes.²³ In order to receive financial reintegration benefits, for instance, reintegration participants must complete a certain number of assigned reintegration activities, which poses a problem to female ex-combatants as *women*, traditional caretakers in Colombian society, when no childcare facilities are offered (Interviews BC17P; BC22P; BC33P; BC34P).

At the policy level, the ACR's internal gender strategy introduces a “differential gender focus” (ACR, 2009: 9). Its “gender and new masculinities perspectives” (ACR, 2009: 4-5) are based on an understanding of female empowerment and simultaneous victimisation in NSAGs and militarised hegemonic masculinity as a foundation of patriarchal culture and female subordination. According to the gender strategy, gender-related activities shall provide space for reflection and reversal of female and male ex-combatants' militarised gender identities. The strategy document thoroughly

²³ Given that excellent scholarship (Londoño and Nieto, 2006; Herrera and Porch, 2008) exists on this problematic in Colombia, I refrain from discussing my empirical findings here.

expands on the state of the art of gender scholarship and envisions incorporating gender into reintegration activities.

Nonetheless, reported implementing workshops have been more limited in scope: they focus on the prevention of intra-familial violence and sexually transmitted diseases, on the exercise of citizenship, and on women-only workshops for female empowerment, including professional training in traditionally female professions (tailoring, handicraft, beauty) (ACR, 2009) – activities that long-demobilised women perceive as disempowering rather than as empowering (Interviews BC17P; BC22P).²⁴ While none of the concrete activities listed in the gender strategy address the concept of ‘new masculinities,’ the term is recurrent in the strategy document as well as in my interviewees’ discourse and thus deserves more in-depth perusal.

- *The ‘new masculinities’: Masculinising the feminine for war, feminising the masculine for peace?*

Reportedly introduced by the ACR following Theidon’s (2007, 2009) recommendation to offer non-violent masculinities to male ex-combatants (Interview BC2P), the ‘new masculinities’ are meant to “promote acknowledgment of the existence of different forms of constructing and expressing masculinities” (ACR, 2009: 9) and reverse militarised masculinities present in NSAGs, which repudiate “emotions like sadness, pain, or crying [...] because they symbolise ‘weakness’ and are associated to femininity” (ACR, 2009: 5).

Activities around gender-based violence, gender equality, sexual and reproductive health, domestic violence and ‘new masculinities’ shall create the space for men to reflect about their identity, emotions, and family relations, “taking into account

²⁴ Other scholars discuss the problematic of these trainings perpetuating traditional gender roles and mismatching both female ex-combatants’ skills and local labour markets (MacKenzie, 2009a).

traditional (gender) roles and rendering these more flexible” (ACR, 2009: 9). While the strategy envisions that revising militarised masculinities and allowing for formerly emasculating elements, such as characteristics related to the feminine, become part of the ‘new masculinities’, the empirical data collected for this study gives no concrete evidence of how this is implemented to date.

Outside the ACR, the ‘new masculinities’ have established as a catchall term, though with different connotations. A DDR researcher explains ‘new masculinities’ with “Gilles Deleuze’s concept of *déterritorialisation*.” Transferring a concept from one foundation (or basis) to another changes its meaning. That is to say, the meaning of a water glass shifts from a drinking instrument to a piece of art when moved from a kitchen to an exhibition. Applied to masculinities, the war context in Colombia provides the foundation for the concept of masculinity as violent and militarised. The ‘new masculinities’ approach aims to move this concept onto ‘peace’ as a new foundation, rendering its expression non-violent (Interview BC16P). Interviewees, some of them former combatants themselves, refer to “changing the chip” (Interviews BC16P; BC30P; BC33P), i.e. demilitarising ex-combatants’ minds and re-humanising the former ‘other’. As one former ex-combatant now working in an NGO in Bogotá puts it, “men need to re-think themselves” in order to get “out of the logic of war” (Interview BC33P).

Other interviewees acknowledge that demilitarising minds embraces both masculinities and femininities: women’s gender identities are similarly militarised, or ‘masculinised’ for war, through aspirations to prove equal to men in NSAGs (Interviews BC17P; BC23P) but also through gender-specific sanctions depriving female combatants of their femininity markers, such as shaving women’s heads in the highly

patriarchal AUC (Interview BC30P). Therefore, a re-definition of family roles, for instance, implies alleviating conflict-induced “absent paternity and aggressive maternity” (Interview BC11P; also BC33P; BC36G), e.g. through workshops on parenting and domestic labour division.

Similar to ACR activities, interviewees working at the Bogotá-centred *Proyecto 840* use the notion of ‘new masculinities’ to describe activities in their envisioned ‘gender route’, comprising workshops on intra-familial violence, anger control, or parenting (Interview BC30P). Several NGOs working closely with both victims and perpetrators of armed violence further adopt these aspects when promoting spaces of reconciliation and forgiveness, underlining how masculinities are ‘feminised’ through verbal and physical expression emotion, such as crying or hugging (Interview BC38P).

In sum, DDR discourses and – to a lesser extent – practices confront gender-specific obstacles to reintegration in myriad ways. From a securitisation perspective, both women and men are de-securitised through the gender discourse, by silencing and invisibilising women’s involvement and through an approximation of the ‘new masculinities’ to the feminine, traditionally perceived as non-threatening, inherently peaceful, and belonging to the private sphere. While feminists criticize that the focus on ‘new masculinities’ further marginalises and invisibilises women (Interviews GS13P; BC17P; BC34P), a number of questions arise as to what it entails for male ex-combatants if “the masculine is feminised” (Interview BC38P) for peace through the ‘new masculinities’.

On the one hand, scholars have underlined the benefits of social and mental demilitarisation as well as the need for alternative, non-violent masculinities for male

ex-combatants. The 'gender and new masculinities' approach has the potential to facilitate this among the ex-combatant population and to mitigate gendered identity crises upon demobilisation (Farr, 2005). For instance, by replacing the economic and symbolic power and prestige related to weapons and combat, the non-violent 'new masculinities' can contribute to reducing male ex-combatants' feelings of disempowerment and emasculation after losing their weapons, combatant prestige as well as their role as protector in demobilisation (Bastick, 2008; UN IAWG on DDR, draft). This is also of particular importance to prevent recidivism by breaking the vicious circle of men's feeling of powerlessness combined with a belief in their entitlement to power and recurrence to violence to assert manhood (Kimmel, 2004; 2005).

On the other hand, considering that hegemonic masculinities – highly militarised in the Colombian case – are grounded in notions of anti-femininity and the subordination of alternative forms of masculinity, the framing the 'new masculinities' as feminising could undermine ex-combatants' acceptance of such an otherwise progressive concept. Equally critical is the image of the 'new men' towards their civilian peers and civilian women who prefer the "big men" (Theidon, 2009: 18) in the local economies of war, i.e. those with access to power through weapons and violence.

Consequently, for the 'new masculinities' to gain traction, they need to be accompanied by a larger process of social demilitarisation that reduces social acceptance for militarised gender identities and transforms hegemonic masculinities (Gómez Alcaraz and García Suárez, 2006; Esguerra Rezk, 2013; Villarraga, 2013b) – a long-term challenge in light of prevalent armed violence, a patriarchal political elite and a highly militarised state apparatus (Interviews BC16P; BC33P; BC34P).

▪ *Minors: Differential approach according to age or perceived agency?*

In line with international law, the Colombian legal framework considers persons under the age of 18 as children and primarily as victims of the armed conflict, including of recruitment into NSAGs.²⁵ A key theme emerging from the interviews relates to the dichotomy between the notions of childhood and adulthood. Referring to under-age ex-combatants as ‘dissociated’ (*desvinculados*) from an armed group, rather than as ‘demobilised’ (*desmovilizados*) (ODDR, 2009), connotes an assumed lack of agency and voluntariness in joining and remaining with the NSAG.

Two contrasting positions respond thereto: interviewees who had been recruited as minors themselves adopt this position in their discourse, arguing that external factors, such as prevalent domestic violence in rural areas, force minors into armed groups. They suggest that circumstances don’t permit any voluntary decision (Interview BC1Ev).²⁶ Other interviewees claim that joining a NSAG can be a deliberate decision (Interview BC18G), incentivised through access to “social adulthood” (Hart, 2012: 76-77). Furthermore, this often goes in line with lived experiences in rural Colombia, where both male and female minors assume adult roles as caretakers, providers, protectors and procreators much below the 18-year-threshold (Interview GS10S).

Interestingly, and contrasting with the de-securitising and victims discourses around child recruits, one interviewee mentioned extremely high re-mobilisation rates among minors, as the civilian environment they return to lacks attractive alternatives (Interview GS3P). Where NSAG membership provides an opportunity in terms of ac-

²⁵ See, e.g. the 2007 *Paris Commitments to Protect Children Unlawfully Recruited or Used by Armed Forces or Armed Groups* and *Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups*, cited in Muggah (2010: 7).

²⁶ In line with this argumentation, Colombian institutions argue for a ‘child-as victim approach’ and consequent separation of minors from adults in reintegration (Villarraga, 2013c).

cessing adulthood, the ICBF reintegration scheme, which addresses minors as agency-less victims, may cause even stronger identity crises in minors than in adult ex-combatants under the ACR.

The institutional separation of child (ICBF) and adult (ACR) reintegration is not only regarded as mismatching the social reality in rural Colombia, but also as a cause for deep identity crises in the transition from one reintegration model to another. When a 'disassociated' minor turns 18 years old, he or she is transferred from the ICBF to the ACR and confronted with a troubling double condition: on the one hand, as a former ICBF participant considered a victim (with a right to reparation), the person enjoys continuing right to reparation, whereas the new condition as adult ex-combatant in the ACR program converts him or her into a perpetrator with a legal duty to repair her or his victims (Interviews BC4P; BC14G; BC31G). Depending on the time gap between demobilisation and transferral to the ACR, the underage ex-combatant confronts two identity shocks in a row: the first when losing agency and 'adulthood' through dissociation from the armed group; the second when regaining them as a victim-turned-perpetrator upon reaching legal age. The aforementioned gender discrimination among ex-combatants as well as the loss of the ICBF's minimal ethnicity-sensitivity transitioning to the ACR (Interviews BC5G; BC31G) could further aggravate these identity crises.

- *Ethnicity: modelling a 'neutral citizen'?*

According to the 2005 population census, 3.4 per cent of the Colombian population are indigenous, belonging to 102 different indigenous peoples (Ruiz García, 2013: 424), and 11.52 per cent are afro-descendent (Hernández, 2013: 330). Pro-

tected as ethnic groups under international law²⁷ and the Colombian Constitution of 1991 (Art. 7), they enjoy special autonomy status under Colombian law. Living in rural, highly conflict-affected areas, indigenous and afro-Colombian communities are disproportionately affected by conflict (Serrano Murcia, 2013).

Afro-Colombian and indigenous minors have increasingly and over-proportionally been recruited into NSAGs (Interview BC9G): reportedly, up to 25 per cent of recruited minors belong to indigenous groups (Interview GS3P) – a significantly higher proportion than the 18 per cent of registered ‘disassociated’ indigenous minors in 2013 (ICBF, 2013: 37-38). This data supports the trend identified in the literature: indigenous communities avoiding official registration and reintegrating ‘recovered’ minors silently (Villarraga, 2013c). While little is known about afro-Colombian ex-combatants’ reintegration, indigenous communities generally conduct demobilisation and reintegration initiatives autonomously from state programmes, according to their own cosmologies (Villarraga, 2013d).

A neglect of the ethnicity dimension is manifest in reported ACR data disaggregation, broadly categorising ethnic minorities as ‘indigenous’ and ‘afro-Colombian’ (Interview BC14G), and the incompatibility between indigenous communities’ focus on the collective and the ACR’s individual-focused reintegration approach (Interview BC18G).²⁸ Exceptionally, the ICBF’s pilot project *modelo familia gestor* seeks to align the agencies’ accompaniment of *nasa*²⁹ minors’ reintegration with the community focus of the tribe, by accepting the entire indigenous community as

²⁷ E.g. the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965), Convention 169 of the International Labour Organisation on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (1989) and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007), cited in Serrano Murcia (2013: 40).

²⁸ Since no access to ICBF and ACR databases was granted, I rely on secondary information provided by interviewees working in advisory positions to the national agencies’ data management.

²⁹ The *nasa* are an indigenous tribe in the Cauca region.

equivalent of the “biological family” to which the child ex-combatant returns (Interview BC31G). Other ICBF projects, however, underline the singularity of the former example: the *Granja Ingruma*, for instance, is considered insensitive to ethnic particularities, as it subsumes demobilised minors from diverse afro-Colombian and indigenous backgrounds under a single “rural education” program with spiritual accompaniment (Interview BC4P).

Overall, the discourse around ethnicity led by reintegration staff reveals a contradictory position: despite acknowledged importance of ethnic and cultural sensitivity, the larger aim and *de facto* approach of Colombian reintegration seems to ‘create’ an ‘ethnically neutral’ citizen rather than to make an effort for ethnicity-sensitive alternatives – a neutrality claim embracing but not reduced to ethnicity, as the silence around former NSAG affiliation and socialisation within specific NSAGs demonstrates.

3) Behind the curtains: institutional (mis)communication and other challenges

Intra and inter-institutional communication and overlapping responsibilities of reintegration agencies stand out from the interviews as key challenges inhibiting full-fledged cooperation on and knowledge dissemination of approaches to diversity. Against the policy prescriptions to account for gender, age, ethnicity and disability (Conpes, 2008), the interviews reflect a common belief among persons involved in the Colombian DDR process that there is neither ‘differential treatment’ of ex-combatants nor a strategy for differential treatment in current reintegration practice (Interviews BC2P; BC4P; BC8P; BC13P; BC25P; BC28P; BC33P; BC40E).

Notably, gender is the diversity category that receives most attention by DDR practitioners in adult reintegration and as such lends itself to illustrate the workings of intra and inter-institutional (mis)communication. Of my interviewees *outside the ACR*, none was familiar with the existing gender strategy (ACR, 2009),³⁰ or with alleged “pilot projects” on specific reintegration routes for youth and elderly (age), ethnicity and disability (Interviews BC6G; BC7P). Some underline a merely “functional use of gender” (Interview BC2P) for counterinsurgency purposes in Colombia, e.g. in advertisements inciting individual demobilisation (Interview BC25P), or to satisfy international demands to mainstream gender in reintegration (Interview BC6G). *Intra-institutional knowledge dissemination and training* seem to pose further challenges, as many interview partners’ unfamiliarity with the aforementioned gender strategy suggests.³¹ Furthermore, the high fluctuation and regional dispersion of reintegration personnel (Interview BC1P) would require more widespread trainings to guarantee transmission of such policies to regional staff and translation into specific activities on the ground.³²

Regional reintegration staff encounter manifold challenges in programme implementation, among them insufficient funding and institutional capacities, professional skills and know-how in regional offices (Interviews BC40E; BC34P), but also incompatibilities between national concepts and local understandings thereof. The meaning of the gender concept is far from homogeneous and undergoes a constant transformation and (re-)interpretation, contingent on the interpreters’ contextual and cultural situation: from the initial strategy document via ACR headquarter personnel

³⁰ As of March 2016, the gender strategy has been further developed and published on the ACR website (ACR, no date).

³¹ Furthermore, gender is absent in the 2013 management and implementation report (ACR, 2014a).

³² Between 2009 and 2013, one capacity-building workshop disseminated the gender strategy to reintegration staff (ACR, 2009: 7).

and regional coordinators (as mediators) to regional reintegration staff (Interviews BC5G; BC11P).³³ Meanings of gender (and other concepts) in theory and local practices can thus differ considerably, which complicates top-down progress evaluation but potentially enables context-sensitive reintegration approaches.

Overlapping responsibilities and gaps in cross-institutional coordination further complicate diversity-sensitive reintegration programming. Despite the much-acknowledged traumatic transition from ICBF to ACR (from ‘dissociated’ minors considered victims to ‘demobilised’ adults considered perpetrators with a duty to repair their victims), ACR and ICBF do not pursue a unified approach towards minors-turning-adults (Interviews BC4P; BC5G; BC14G; BC31G). Considering that an estimated 31 per cent of adult ex-combatants undergoing reintegration were recruited as minors (ICBF 2013: 35) and further that three quarters of ‘disassociated’ minors face an imminent transition to the ACR when entering the ICBF at the age of 15 to 17 (Observatorio del Bienestar de la Niñez, 2013: 11), a unified strategy overcoming diverging discursive and legal approaches to ex-combatants would be crucial to mitigate identity crises during this transition. Overall, less mutual scepticism and more transparency about policies and practices could enhance cooperation, coordination and complementarity between different agencies and programmes involved in the reintegration process.

Why diversity, if everybody speaks gender?

In manifold ways, the analysis shows the added value of a more holistic approach to diversity. Focusing on gender exclusively (and gender-based exclusion,

³³ Rosalind Shaw (2007) illustrates this point with the theoretical concept of *friction*: local context moulds an international concept’s meanings so as to fit its culture and needs.

e.g. through silencing women's voices) may distort attention from more salient identity markers at a given time, such as NSAG membership (and consequent discrimination in reintegration or different post-demobilisation interests) or ethnicity (and indigenous reintegration models outside the national programmes). In the Colombian case, where minors in reintegration are deliberately treated in a "gender-neutral" way (Interview BC31G), subsuming age under a gender analysis, rather than explicitly addressing this diversity category, risks excluding or marginalising this group of ex-combatants from the analysis. Notwithstanding similar analytical results about de-securitisation through silence, focusing on 'women and other marginalised groups' from the outset would presuppose such findings and inhibit a more nuanced analysis of different underlying strategies.

Including further diversity categories that conceptually characterize ex-combatants, as well as demonstrating their links, partial overlaps, interdependency and divergences, permits a more comprehensive understanding of different lived experiences and related opportunities and limitations encountered in Colombian DDR. Naturally, analysing perceptions of diversity, and discursive and visual constructions related thereto, is but a first step in a more holistic approach towards Colombian DDR. An additional piece of research must complement the present findings by analysing how ex-combatants outside public roles currently experience these discursive strategies and derived practices, particularly with regard to implementation of the new ACR reintegration approach. Asking diversity-related questions to those shaping DDR discourse and programmes top-down, this research has identified themes of interest for further, bottom-up oriented research projects, while ideally having a trans-

formative effect on interviewees' reflection about their own presumptions, approaches and (un)intended impacts.

Conclusion

Aiming to contribute to better understanding current limitations and challenges of DDR in Colombia, this research critically analysed empirical data collected within institutions involved in shaping Colombian DDR discourses and practices through a novel diversity-sensitive securitisation lens. By pointing to themes emerging from the data, the findings contrast with and complement existing knowledge in myriad ways. On the one hand, they support feminist scholarship arguing that women are silenced and marginalised through security discourse, hence de-securitised and consequently neglected in practice ([Hansen, 2000](#); [MacKenzie, 2009b](#)). Additionally, however, the findings suggest that demobilised minors and members of ethnic minority groups are similarly de-securitised as marginal to security concerns.

Unlike previous scholarly work, the present analysis uncovers a nuanced strategy of gradual discursive de-securitisation of male ex-combatants in reintegration through an approximation of the 'new masculinities' to the feminine. Therein, men occupy the main part of discursive and consequent programmatic attention. While social patterns of inclusion and exclusion are generally reproduced in DDR, overall de-securitisation challenges gender norms by offering an alternative (the 'new masculinities') to hegemonic militarised masculinities.

From a securitisation perspective, this portrays a successful DDR process, detaching the ex-combatant population from security concerns like recidivism or emerging forms of armed violence that are deeply entrenched with former NSAGs,

the armed conflict and conflict economies. Nonetheless, the present diversity-sensitive analysis reveals deep deficits in how ex-combatants are dealt with: marginalisation of ex-combatant groups traditionally excluded in society, 'negative discrimination' of former *guerrilleros* and *guerrilleras* as opposed to former paramilitary members, demilitarised masculinities against a persistently militarised society, uprooting through an urban focus for a mostly rural phenomenon. Notwithstanding international recognition as the "best reintegration process in the world" (Interview BC12P) and progressive approaches like the 'new dimensions approach' or the 'new masculinities', a mismatch between DDR concepts and the complex social realities on the ground have undermined truly diversity-sensitive programming and led to distorted policy practice which fail to find sustainable ways for linking demobilisation to peacebuilding and creating opportunities for ex-combatants to build new livelihoods.

Weaknesses of the current approach have become more visible and rethinking them more urgent in light of the putative FARC demobilisation, should a peace agreement finally be achieved. Women, minors and ethnic minorities will constitute a larger part of the prospective ex-combatant population. Accounting for their visibility and creating equitable reintegration opportunities will be as important as overcoming intra and inter-institutional barriers. Regional reintegration schemes, adapted to the demographics of each respective ex-combatant population, could prevent the problematic uprooting of a largely rural population.

Clarifying the objectives and content of the rather abstract concept of 'new masculinities', developing a more critical stance towards dominant stereotypes, and generating institutional capacities to implement existing strategies in a diversity-sensitive way could further alleviate these weaknesses for current ex-combatants,

while paving the way for future processes. As a feminist interviewee argues, this needs to be accompanied by demilitarisation of DDR discourse and practice, a form of “changing the chip” from a security to a development basis, and more holistic approaches to reintegration within broader social dimensions.

Even from a security perspective: whatever the modalities of the DDR processes to come, accounting for diversity among Colombia’s increasingly diverse ex-combatant population will be crucial to mitigate post-demobilisation security risks and to avoid perpetuating forms of structural violence that are among the root causes of the country’s half-century old armed conflict.

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APPENDIX

A. Institutions consulted during the empirical data collection process

Public sector, composed of state agencies involved in the design of DDR policy and programs on the national level	The adult reintegration agency ACR, the child reintegration unit of the ICBF, the <i>Alto Comisionado para la Paz</i> working on the peace negotiations with the FARC, and on the Bogotá district-level, e.g. the Bogotá reintegration <i>Proyecto 840</i> or the <i>Secretaría Distrital para la Mujer</i> promoting a feminist approach to public policies in Bogotá. Another institution providing three interviewees was the CNMH, collecting testimonies from victims and perpetrators for composing a coherent historical memory of the recent conflict.
National think tanks and academia	The Conflict Analysis Resource Centre (CERAC), the <i>Fundación Ideas para la Paz</i> (FIP), the <i>Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular/Programa por la Paz</i> (CINEP/PPP), the <i>Fundación para la Reconciliación</i> , the <i>Observatorio para la Paz</i> , the feminist victims' NGO <i>Corporación Humanas</i> , as well as professors from several Colombian universities and directors of attached centres, such as the <i>Observatorio DDR</i> of the National University in Bogotá.
International agencies assisting the nationally owned Colombian DDR and TJ processes	The Verification Mission of the Organisation of American States (MAPP-OEA), the adult and child reintegration units of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), several UN agencies (UNDSS, UNDP, UN Women) and the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ), as well as the NGO Save the Children.
International institutions covered in the first round of interviews	The Small Arms Survey, Geneva Call, DCAF, Transition International, International Alert, UN Women and UNDP.

B. List of Interviewees

Interview codes give information about the *location of the researcher* at the time of the interview (GS for Geneva, Switzerland; BC for Bogotá, Colombia), the *interview number* in the respective location and the dominant *interview mode* (P for personal/face-to-face; G for group; S for Skype; E for e-Mail; Ev for interviews conducted in the framework of larger/public events).

First round of interviews

GS1P	Expert on gender and armed violence in a Geneva-based think-tank
GS2P	Expert on DDR and armed violence in a Geneva-based think-tank
GS3P	Expert on NSAGs, gender and armed conflict in Colombia in a Geneva-based NGO
GS4P	Expert on small arms and illegal armed groups, independent consultant
GS5P	Expert on gender and DDR in an international governmental organisation
GS6S	Expert on gender and SSR/DDR in a Geneva-based think-tank
GS7P	Expert on SSR/DDR in a Geneva-based think-tank
GS8S	Expert on gender and age in DDR in a Dutch NGO
GS9P	Expert on gender and SSR/DDR in a Geneva-based think-tank

GS10S	Former FARC member, currently working as university professor in Spain
GS11P	Expert on gender and conflict, university professor in Switzerland
GS12S	Expert on gender and DDR in Colombia working in a British think-tank
GS13S	Expert on feminism, gender and DDR, independent consultant
GS14S	Expert on gender and armed violence in a Geneva-based think-tank
Second round of interviews	
BC1P	Researcher on armed conflict and DDR, university professor in Bogotá
BC2P	Researcher in a Colombian think-tank
BC3P	Researcher in a Colombian think-tank
BC4P	Researcher in an international NGO working on child reintegration
BC5G	Two government officials formerly involved in reintegration programmes at the state level
BC6G	Two ACR employees in the central office
BC7P	ACR employee in the central office
BC8P	Expert on gender and DDR in an international governmental organisation
BC9G	Two experts on child recruitment working in a German governmental organisation
BC10P	State official formerly involved in AUC negotiations, disarmament and demobilisation
BC11P	Former ACR employee in the central office
BC12P	ACR employee in the central office
BC13P	Expert on DDR in an international governmental organisation
BC14G	Three advisors on adult reintegration in Colombia, employees of an international governmental organisation
BC15P	Researcher in a Colombian feminist NGO
BC16P	Researcher and employee in an international governmental organisation
BC17P	Former EPL member working in a state institution
BC18G	Two experts on DDR working in an international governmental organisation
BC19P	Expert on NSAGs, gender and armed conflict in Colombia working in an NGO
BC20P	Expert on DDR history working in a Colombian think-tank
BC21P	Advisor on DDR, university professor in Bogotá
BC22P	Former M-19 member working in a state institution
BC23P	Former FARC member working in a state institution
BC24P	Former ACR employee and regional coordinator
BC25P	Researcher on conflict and violence, university professor in Bogotá
BC26P	Former EPL member working in a state institution
BC27P	Researcher in a state institution
BC28P	Expert on child reintegration working in a German governmental organisation

BC29P	Former FARC member working in a state institution
BC30P	Former AUC member working in a state institution
BC31G	Two advisors on child reintegration in Colombia, employees of an international governmental organisation
BC32P	Researcher on conflict and violence in a Colombian think-tank
BC33P	Former M-19 member working in a Colombian NGO
BC34P	Former M-19 member working in a state institution
BC35P	Head of a regional ACR office
BC36G	Five ACR employees in a regional office
BC37G	Two ex-combatants, former ELN member and former FARC member, currently undergoing the Reintegration process
BC38P	Employee in an international NGO
BC39E	ACR employee in a regional office
BC40E	ACR employee in a regional office
BC41S	ICBF employee
BC1Ev	Interviews conducted in the framework of a guest lecture at a university in Bogotá by two ex-combatants, one former FARC member and one former AUC member, who have undergone the Reintegration process and are now ACR employees
BC2Ev	Event on political participation with five former guerrilla members demobilised in the 1990s (M-19, EPL, ERT, CRS)