The Collective Initiatives of FARC-EP Ex-Combatants in Reincorporation: Challenges to Contribute to Peacebuilding in Colombia

Las iniciativas colectivas de los excombatientes de las FARC-EP en la reincorporación: Retos para Contribuir a la Construcción de Paz en Colombia

ANDREA CAROLINA JARAMILLO CONTRERAS
University of Marburg

Sobre los autores ▸ About the authors
Andrea Carolina Jaramillo Contreras holds a PhD in Sociology with a focus in Peace and Conflict Studies from the University of Marburg in Germany. Her dissertation focused on the collective reintegration of former FARC-EP members in Colombia. With over ten years of experience working with governments and international organizations, she has contributed to projects related to social development, peacebuilding, poverty reduction, and reparation and reconciliation. Andrea's research interests centre on qualitative and ethnographic approaches to understanding the daily lives of vulnerable populations, applying the "Do No Harm" (DNH) principle in social interventions, and advancing peacebuilding efforts. acjaramillo81@gmail.com

Abstract
In 2016, the Colombian government signed a peace agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP) and aims to reintegrate more than 13,000 ex-combatants into society, through an approach referred as collective reincorporation. This approach focuses on the development of collective actions that foster the social, economic and political reintegration of ex-combatants, and the use of their ideological and emotional legacies as a tool for social transformation. Based on a multi-sited ethnography in three areas of Colombia, this study shows that collective reincorporation contributes to new knowledge on how to implement reintegration processes, moving beyond the dominant individualistic paradigm defined in the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) standards. The results identify ex-combatants as active subjects in peacebuilding, and as agents of change who promote development and the consolidation of peace from bottom-up perspectives in the areas where they settle.
Keywords: Collectivism, Ex-Combatants, Peace Agreement, Peacebuilding, Reintegration

Resumen
En 2016, el gobierno colombiano firmó un acuerdo de paz con las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP), y ha buscado reintegrar a la sociedad a más de 13.000 excombatientes, a través de un enfoque denominado reincorporación colectiva. Este enfoque se centra en el desarrollo de acciones colectivas que fomentan la reinserción social, económica y política de los excombatientes, y el uso de sus legados ideológicos y emocionales como herramienta de transformación social. A partir de una etnografía multisituada en tres zonas de Colombia, este estudio muestra que la reincorporación colectiva contribuye a un nuevo conocimiento sobre cómo implementar los procesos de reintegración, superando el paradigma individualista dominante definido en las normas de Desarme, Desmovilización y Reintegración (DDR). Los resultados identifican a los

excombatientes como sujetos activos en la construcción de la paz, y como agentes de cambio que promueven el desarrollo y la consolidación de la paz desde perspectivas ascendentes en las zonas donde se asientan.

Palabras clave: Colectivismo, Excombatientes, Acuerdo de Paz, Construcción de Paz, Reintegración

> *There are some societies in the world that have learned to put others to work almost to the point of enslaving them so that they themselves can spend their lives in luxury hotels [...] This is not the kind of society we are hoping to achieve. Here, we have our hopes set on a type of society in which we can all participate in the planning, the implementation and the distribution of tasks. This is a concept of society in which we label ourselves as revolutionaries [...] we want to continue fighting for this even among all these difficulties.*
> (Christian, member of AETCR Agua Bonita, October 2019).

1. Introduction

In 2016, one of the longest-running conflicts in the world came to an end with the Final Agreement between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP, Spanish acronym) which by then was the oldest and largest guerrilla group in the Western Hemisphere. As part of this peace accord, the Colombian government agreed that more than 13,000 FARC-EP ex-combatants would take part in a process of "collective reincorporation". The distinguishing characteristics of this process are the gathering of groups of former FARC-EP members in certain areas of the country, their visibility in society as a group, the development of collective projects for income generation; a robust community approach, the involvement in politics and innovative economic and social modalities to reincorporate ex-combatants into society (DNP, 2018).

The intention of FARC-EP ex-combatants to remain together responded to their interest in maintaining the social characteristics of the group, their ideological principles and the way in which they had operated during the conflict (Zambrano Quintero, 2019):. Furthermore, as part of the process of bringing the conflict to an end, one aim of the agreement was that ex-combatants should apply their principles of collective action when defining their political party, which now is called *Los Comunes* (previously the Common Alternative Revolutionary Force, which had retained the Spanish acronym, FARC).

The guerrillas wanted to make it clear that they were not disappearing as a political organisation but were just dismantling their military structure. Their legacy would provide the basis to keep fighting for their ideals, but now without weapons. As Zambrano Quintero (2019, p.46) argues, "they stop using weapons". They sustained that they did not defeat in their fighting, but they just wanted to contribute to peacebuilding in Colombia (CEDE, 2020).This placed them on an equal footing with the government during peace negotiations as they were able to play an active role in the creation, design and implementation of their own processes of reintegration (McFee & Rettberg, 2019). Contrary to individualistic approaches to reintegration that aim to detach the command-and-control structures of armed groups from their former comrades (De Vries & Wiegink, 2011)collective reincorporation regards the structure and leadership inherited from the period of armed conflict as a resource that promotes sustainability, collective identity and group cohesiveness (DNP, 2018).

To date, almost 3,000 ex-combatants have been resettled across 23 former Territorial Spaces for Training and Reincorporation (Spanish acronym, AETCRs) and the so-called New Areas of Reincorporation (Spanish acronym, NARs), where they are engaged in implementing their reincorporation activities under collective principles. Meanwhile, an additional 8,000 ex-combatants are part of a process of individual reintegration (ARN, 2020). Jean Arnault, by then the United Nations mission chief, argues that ex-combatants who opted to follow an individual reintegration path do so because of their interest in re-uniting with their families, in getting involved in politics, in simply reintegrating themselves on their own, or because they have lost trust in the guarantees offered to the AETC(RT, 2017). Other reasons include involvement with FARC-EP dissidents, criminal groups or the National Liberation Army (Spanish acronym, ELN) (Ávila, 2020).

The current process of reincorporation in Colombia therefore has two main approaches: *individual reincorporation*, which provides economic and social guarantees, mostly on an individual basis for those ex-combatants who have detached themselves from the collective of FARC-EP ex-members. The collective *reincorporation* includes ex-combatants who are located in the AETCRs and NARs and are developing collective projects to sustain their reintegration with Colombian society. This article will focus exclusively on the collective reincorporation approach, as it wants to show the different strategies used by FARC-EP ex-members to remain visible in society while playing an active role in peacebuilding. Furthermore, the aim of this article focus on the challenges ex-combatants have faced in implementing collective initiatives in their social, economic and political reincorporation and their contribution in the Colombian peacebuilding. The intention of this article is neither to overlook the negative effects that loyalty, militia structure and ideological legacies may have on the reintegration of ex-combatants, nor the influence of antisocial capital on recidivism in the persistence of conflict (Cheng, 2018; Nussio & Oppenheim, 2014). It describes rather how collective practices of reincorporation exerted by FARC-EP ex-combatants have influenced another way of understanding reintegration by considering their visibility, their role in peacebuilding and their collective history as a guide to reintegrate into society.

This article argues that the adoption of collective reincorporation marks a significant shift from the traditional Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) approach. Rather than viewing reintegration as a start over in the life of ex-combatants, it sees this phase as a continuation of their history as militants. It moves beyond the notion of ex-combatants as passive "recipients" of aid, positioning them instead as active agents in peacebuilding, drawing on their legacy from the period of conflict.

"Legacy" here refers to the various emotional and ideological experiences and perspectives that ex-combatants acquired during conflict times, or as Alape calls it, the "accumulated experience" that influences the way ex-combatants behave or relate to each other and to their reintegration process (CEDE, 2020). For ,Nussio, (2012, p.378) emotional legacy is "the emotional dimension of today's perception of the past involvement in war" and it delivers more stability and opportunities for the ex-combatants in their transition to reincorporation. Some studies have demonstrated the importance of the use of the ex-combatants' legacy as part of reintegration processes (Nussio, 2012; Podder, 2017) and the value of the ex-combatants' existing experience of exercising agency and leadership, which allow them to be active agents in peacebuilding (Friðriksdóttir, 2018). Friðriksdóttir (2018) mentions that ideology is not only related to enrolment in armed groups but is also used as a peaceful strategy to achieve positive change, and as a tool to transform surroundings by transforming the root causes that sustained the conflict. Therefore, the collective actions in reincorporation would provide former FARC-EP members with more sources for exerting their agency in everyday local practices, while strengthening their sense of identity as individuals. Daly has found that the loyalty of past shared or

similar experiences among ex-combatants has a positive effect, as long as their leaders have a willingness to contribute to peace negotiations (Daly, 2016).

The FARC-EP's origins, ways of operation and lengthy experience of combat distinguished this organisation as a cohesive group with strong social bonds (Pécaut, 2008). The identity as ex-combatants provide a kind of comfort and security, as is clear in the emotional legacy ex-fighters maintain towards their peers (Nussio, 2012). Themnér, (2011) found that strong social relations between ex-fighters and their former commanders converted them into a special social group labelled the "ex-combatants' community", or as they denominate themselves *"la familia fariana"* (The *fariana* family). The sense of belonging to this group reinforces ex-combatants' social identity as well as their self-esteem when comparing themselves with other groups of society (Mac Ginty, 2014).

The ex-combatants' feelings of attachment to their ex-comrades become stronger when they share a collective memory related to the fears, joys, challenges and harms caused by the conflict (Acosta-Navas & Reyes, 2018). Some scholars argue that social ties created among ex-combatants during the period of conflict become a way of gaining acceptance and access to more opportunities, thus boosting their prospects for reintegration and security (De Vries & Wiegink, 2011; Kilroy & Basini, 2018).The same happens with the social, economic and political dimension, which is easier to develop when ex-combatants do not break away from the existing command structure (Buxton, 2008).

Mac Ginty, (2010)points out that militants' experience can substitute for the conventional social ties represented by family, employment, and community. The same happens in the political dimension, as this is easier to develop when ex-combatants, as they reintegrate, share information with each other about their lives (Segura & Stein, 2019). Bowd & Özerdem (2013)mention that including ex-combatants' ideologies in taking decisions helps individuals to escape from the margins of poverty and may pre-empt any return to criminal activities. Likewise, it contributes to ex-combatants' role as citizens and their active participation in peacebuilding.

This article is an adaptation of a chapter from the author's PhD thesis, completed in 2022 at the University of Marburg in Germany. Specifically, it examines how collective reincorporation advances the traditional Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR), as it does not conceive reintegration as a start over in the life of ex-combatants but as a continuation of their history as militants, as an asset for transforming their present. This article argues. In this article, emphasis is place on the insights and challenges of collective economic, social, and political initiatives of FARC-EP ex-combatants as novel alternative reintegration strategies for peace processes worldwide. In the remainder of the article, firstly a description of the methodology will be provided, then an analysis of the different meanings around the concept of collective reincorporation exerted by ex-combatants and the benefits and challenges for ex-combatants to implement collective actions in their social, economic and political reincorporation will be discussed.

2. Methodology

This qualitative study uses a multi-site ethnography method as the basis on understanding the interrelation between social discourses and the diverse settings under the analysis (Marcus, 1995). By examining the spatial decentralization of ex-combatants, the study understands these sites not merely as physical locations but as dynamic spaces that reflect a variety of social discourses across different social worlds (Falzon, 2012). Framed by a trans local level perspective, the fieldwork of this study, did not represent a single place in Colombia, rather multiple settings with similar characteristics (Hannerz, 2003).

In this paper, emphasis is placed on the grassroots level, with the intention of demonstrating the positive effects that collective reincorporation has produced in the everyday economic, social and political dynamics in the areas where ex-combatants have settled and the use of their collective initiatives as a positive tool in peacebuilding.

The fieldwork was carried out between October and December in 2018 and in 2019 in two AETCRs, respectively Agua Bonita and Llano Grande, and one NAR, San José de León. In these three territories of Colombia, FARC-EP ex-combatants are implementing collective actions as a way of reintegrating into society by taking advantage of the economic benefits provided by the national government and international organisations (See Map 1).
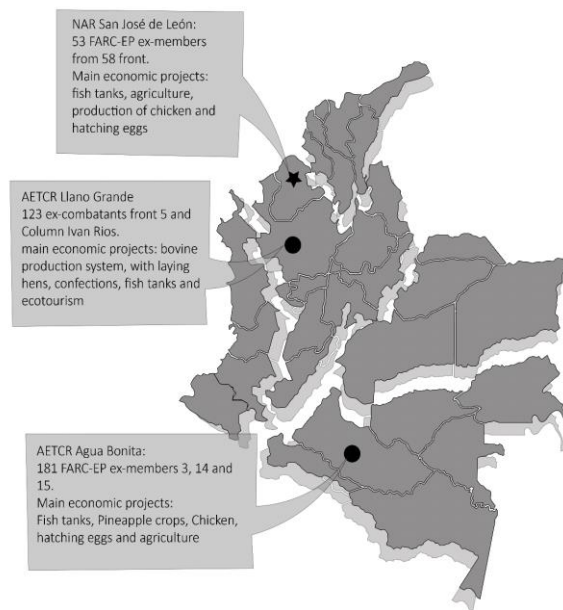
MAP 1 CASE STUDIES: AETCR AND NAR. OWN ELABORATION

A total of 58 in-dept semi-structured interviews were conducted with ex-combatants (19 women and 39 men; six were part of the militiamen, two commanders in the national structure of the FARC-EP, and the rest were part of the troops of the guerrilla military structure). Additionally, 12 interviews were conducted with surrounding communities who live near to these camps. This information was complemented with participatory observations and field diaries (106 transcriptions), small talks and secondary information done during the 7 months of the fieldwork carried out during the year 2019 and 2020.

All the information mentioned above was added and organised in the software MAXQDA. Subsequently, patterns of association were identified with the main category, and then a relation of categories and sub-categories were grouping, what is called axial categorisation Following (Strauss & Corbin technique, 2002). By identifying patterns of association based on the construction of inductive categories, a total of 11 categories and 55 subcategories were grouped together in order to do an analysis of the patterns of discourses and practices around the collective reincorporation of the places selected in this study.

The researcher recognized that "informed consent" —though not involving a formal signature or similar documentation— entailed building horizontal trust between herself and the participants. This process involved a verbal agreement on the research procedure, the confidentiality of the

information, and its exclusive use for research purposes. In the body of this document, the alias of each participant was supplemented with the AETCR to which they were part of and the date of the interview.

3. Results and Discussion
3.1. Ideas behind the collective initiatives in reincorporation

The first interview carried out with an ex-combatant began with the question, "What does the concept of reincorporation mean to you?" He immediately answered, "It is doing everything on the basis of our past experiences" (Christian member of the AETCR Agua Bonita, October 2019). But, when this answered was discussed, different facets of his assumption were demonstrated, such as the desire to be together with other ex-combatants, to remain loyal to their insurgency and to create initiatives of self-sustainability, political actions and social development in their surroundings.

José, one of the leaders of ex-combatants in Agua Bonita, explains the term "collective" as the basis for the FARC-EP insurgency:

> *The way we live in the ETCRs is not new to us. When we bore arms, or were living in clandestinity, we had the objective of applying our political ideology to our reality, with our experience and our internal rules [...] For us, the collective element is not new, it is part of our essence as individuals. When we went into combat, when we had to work, everything was based on a position in which the collective element was guaranteed.* (José, member of the AETCR Agua Bonita, October 2018).

Pastor Alape argues that while the previous reintegration program founded its approach on a counter-insurgency strategy by encouraging the guerrilla fighters to desert their units, the new process of reincorporation entails a macro perspective that puts an emphasis on long-term development and the maintenance of ideological perspectives. Alape states: "A process of reincorporation has to benefit the social, economic and political needs and interests of the FARC collective and the communities around territories destined for reincorporation" (Semana, 2017).

The collective reincorporation challenge traditional approaches of individual reintegration, in which the state was the head of interventions and defined how ex-combatants reintegrated and how they should act as civilians. While individual reintegration was the *adaptation* of ex-combatants to a fragmented and unjust society, collective reincorporation revises the pre-established standards that aim to configure passive civilians and renders ex-combatants as active agents in the transformation of society.

For Alape, the peace agreement with the FARC-EP is not a process of demobilisation of ex-combatants; rather it is a process of mobilisation towards peace (Alape, 2020). For the ex-combatants the understanding of these terms makes a distinction between the motivations and aims of those who signed the peace agreement and the so-called deserters or *desmobilizados*. Marcela, a representative of the collective in Llano Grande, argues that the FARC-EP ex-combatants are not part of any "*reintegración*" (reintegration) process, as for her that term relates to former armed groups that laid their weapons in the past, or individuals who had deserted from the FARC-EP and did not feel motivated to keep its ideology alive:

> *We are not part of reintegration; the ones who were part of that abandoned their struggle and deserted so as to be part of civilian society. We are part of a reincorporation to civilian life in which we work on a collective basis in line with*

> *our ideology (…) now, we are no longer fighting with weapons, we are fighting with our words.* (Marcela, member of the AETCR Llano Grande, November 2018).

In this vein, reincorporation does not denote the abandonment of the ideological perspective of ex-combatants, but rather the maintenance of it in the transition to peacetime (Rueda, 2020). It goes beyond the idea of "restarting a new life" (United Nations, 2006) either by "breaking with the past" (Rodríguez López et al., 2015) or by changing ex-combatants' "mentality from war to civilian life" (Denissen, 2010).It implies using past experiences from the period of conflict as a valuable resource in achieving a sustainable peace.

The collective legacy of FARC-EP ex-members is evident in a feeling of nostalgia from their insurgent time and the interest shown in maintaining social ties with their ex-comrades. Yulis, an ex-combatant who leads various collective projects in Agua Bonita illustrates this when she says:

> *People label us as guerrillas simply because we carried weapons, but we were much more than that. Who can take away from me the knowledge, the thoughts, and the lessons I gained in the guerrillas, especially about working collectively? We learnt to value others and to live in harmony with what we have. The most beautiful thing is life and being with others from a position of humility. What I learnt in the war will stay in my head for the rest of my life.* (Yulis, member of AETCR Agua Bonita, October 2018).

For FARC-EP ex-members, collectivity implies a comradeship represented in the everyday practices they exert to maintain their values as former guerrillas and their learnings process during conflict times. It entails a process of political action in which their social and ideological legacy plays a relevant role in the transformation of their surroundings. These roles benefit the economic and social stability among ex-combatants and build a sense of security, emotional attachment and comradeship developed during conflict times.

Being together for a long time allows the FARC-EP ex-members to accumulate under collective basis experiences, fears, symbols and memories, which in turn define their social identity, represented in a form of local power in the territories where they are settling down (Segura & Stein, 2019). The value of these relationships means that not only former hierarchical dynamics keep the ex-combatants together, also their social and family relationships, their shared identity, and their experiences of hardship and marginalization (Munive & Stepputat, 2015)

As such, the collectivity in reincorporation acknowledges ex-combatants' social relationships and their symbolic representation of being together. It involves a sense of belonging to the other, the achievement of a collective security and the recognition of a collective memory. This social attachment enables the maintenance of the ex-comrades' social networks and the interaction with their families and friends, who subsequently become integrated into a community involving families, surrounding communities and ex-combatants.

Ultimately, the meanings around collective reincorporation enable ex-combatants to see themselves as visible actors with a history to share, playing an active role in Colombia's transition to post-conflict. In the following, I discuss how the collective actions among FARC-EP ex-members have favoured their social, economic and political reintegration, and thus benefiting the local communities in the areas where they have settled, as well as the difficulties to remain as a collective.

3.2. Social collective reincorporation

Contrary to traditional DDR discourses that describe combatants as disengaged from communities while they were part of armed groups FARC-EP ex-combatants see themselves as former community members who are now playing a role as collective unit. Based on this collectivity, they work together in the frame of peacebuilding identifying themselves as "we" (O'Brien, 2023). By maintaining their collective principles, they are building their social networks with surrounding communities while they play a role as peacebuilders.

Everyday interactions between ex-combatants and their surrounding communities help to facilitate a natural process of integration and acceptance, contributing to the minimisation of prejudices and stereotypes developed during conflict (Kaplan & Nussio, 2015). Jesus, an Agua Bonita village resident in charge of providing milk to this AETCR, mentions how his perception of ex-combatants changed after a period of living close to them:

> *I imagined them [ex-combatants] to be difficult people, for example, that they were maybe very rough and keeping themselves apart. But they are not like that. They are the same as anyone else. They are people who know how to express their feelings [...] they have strong ideologies. When you look at how they live, you can see their attitude to work and their interest in supporting one another in a collective way. They have a very nice community. I have always said that it is better to see them working, producing and cultivating than [to see them] with weapons in their hands.*
> (Jesus, Agua Bonita village resident, October 2019).

The everyday encounters between surrounding communities and ex-combatants transform social identities into harmonious relationships (McFee et al., 2019). These relationships become easier when they are sharing experiences from the war and have similar socio-economic needs (Prieto, 2012). For example, most of the ex-combatants and members of the surrounding communities grew up in rural areas, regard themselves as farmers who suffered during the conflict in different ways, experienced state abandonment and the absence of minimal social and economic conditions.

According to Nussio et al., (2015) greater social proximity between victims and perpetrators can facilitate mutual trust and appreciation of each other's perspective, as well as a greater willingness to engage in reconciliation activities. This relationship-building generates a sense of belonging to the local area and is therefore a factor that minimises potential for conflict. In the AETCR Llano Grande, the ex-combatants, members of the military and existing village residents have come into being dubbed by outsiders "the Llano Grande family" (*La familia de Llano Grande*). Yerson, a villager now working as a plumber for the Llano Grande AETCR, explains:

> *Outsiders call us the Llano Grande family. This is how they recognise us, without excluding anyone. The football matches strengthen the bonds between us because we are all united no matter where we came from. The "enemy" is the other team. Those people who hated each other at first [police, military and ex-combatants] are now all on the same side and end up playing together to beat the other team. (Yerson, member of Llano Grande community, November 2018, emphasis added)*

This sense of belonging permeates the life of communities, as they become the main social network for ex-combatants in their transition to society. This local-local (between ex-combatants and communities) relationship delivers everyday experiences of reparation and reconciliation, represented

by economic, political and emotional practices in the territories concerned, while at the same time helping to build trust between different actors while strengthening their social coexistence (Prieto, 2012)The development of mutual local-local activities beyond the requirements of the peace agreement becomes the most significant factor in long-term reciprocal cooperation between local actors (McFee et al., 2019).These everyday encounters contribute to the transformation of the ex-combatants' own perceptions of themselves and the building of relationships with local communities, marked by processes of tolerance and respect.

However, that has not been easy when ex-combatants are reincorporating in the middle of different political and security problems. No-compliance with points agreed in Havana, the internal conflicts between some ex-commanders of FARC-EP, and the recidivism of some ex-combatants have been some of the obstacles to achieving a proper collective reincorporation. According to Francisco de Roux, the director of the Truth Commission in Colombia, the large number of ex-combatants and social leaders killed across Colombian territories has placed a heavy burden on the peace process, jeopardizing the possibility of achieving peace in the country. Security concerns may lead many ex-combatants to return to war, while also pushing farmers to take the path of war, where they feel unsafe (Verdad Abierta, 2021). Since the signing of the Final Peace Agreement, no fewer than 1600 social leaders and 420 former members of FARC-EP have been killed (IDEPAZ, 2024) . Most of these assassinations have been committed by FARC-EP dissident groups, criminal groups and neo-paramilitaries.

Not surprisingly, the killing of ex-combatants has generated distrust in the peace agreement and more barriers to reintegrate into society. This has affected not only ex-combatants' visibility in the territories but also has altered the transition to a post-conflict. What is clear is that the more visible and active the different actors who played a role in the conflict are, the better the causes that led to the conflict will be understood. Oettler & Rettberg, (2019) argue that leaving aside the so-called perpetrators of the conflict results in a partial understanding of the background that led to the continuation of the conflict. Therefore, the aim of social reincorporation is not only to reintegrate ex-combatants into society, but also to minimise the reappearance of new conflicts.

3.3. Economic collective reincorporation

One of the most challenging parts of collective reincorporation is the economic self-sustainability of ex-combatants as mostly it has depended on the temporal resources or opportunities provided by the government and international agencies. Mostly, traditional DDR perspectives offer short-term employment, the creation of individual micro-enterprises, or the acquisition of skills to employ ex-combatants in a capitalist system without compromising the rules of the market (Thorsell, 2013).

Collective economic reincorporation attempt to develop cooperative initiatives that go beyond the paternalist perspective of DDR (Zambrano Quintero, 2019). The collective economic strategy in reincorporation is based on a community economy, which aims to contribute to the development of mainly rural areas.This process entails an inclusive development of projects in the territories where ex-combatants are settled and the creation of economic initiatives that overcome traditional ways of production (Guasca et al., 2021).

Rocio, one of the national leaders of the political party *Los Comunes*, clearly explains that their idea of breaking with the rules of the market was one of their political postures when they were part of the guerrilla, and that their struggle continues in that direction:

> *Everything has a meaning and a reason for being. But if you go to the individual*
> *[level], everything ends up the same as before: you have a society where everything*

is in line, where capitalism tells us what the right thing is to do. We, in our life project, do not share this perspective. (Rocio, member of the national party, December 2019).

For the ex-combatants, the importance of creating their own ways of subsistence is related to the improvement of the socio-economic conditions in the communities in which they find themselves. For Jorge, it is not about receiving money and surviving at the expense of others, but about contributing to the development of the country: "We have to generate employment. If there is no employment there is no human development" (Jorge, member of the AETCR Agua Bonita, October 2019).

Therefore, collective economic reincorporation does not seek just to establish an individual way of surviving, but to influence the myriads of factors that may undermine economic conditions in a society. In an interview conducted by Valencia & Chaverra with Elmer Arrieta, a FARC-EP ex-member, Arrieta shows how collective economic reintegration places the emphasis on the development of the most disadvantaged:

> *We adopted cooperativism in our return to civil life as it provides the capacity to develop new relationships within the framework of the capitalist economy – without leaving that framework but always trying to overcome its selfish and individualistic elements. You should understand that the guerrilla way of life was a highly developed socialist way of life, and we could not switch overnight to economic structures that replicated exploitation and appropriation by individuals. (Interview with Elmer Arrieta, in Valencia Agudelo & Chaverra, 2019)*

This statement shows how the collective actions in economic reincorporation respond to the ideas about self-sustainability and collective organisation that FARC-EP had in mind during the peace agreement, in which a cooperative model was the base of their interests (Presidencia de Colombia, 2016). According to the National Council for Reincorporation (*Consejo Nacional de Reincorproación* -CNR), 128 projects have been allocated to collectives, of which 124 are being carried out by 93 cooperatives, benefiting 3,972 ex-combatants (ONU, 2023).

These Collective initiatives are part of the Social Economies of the Common-ECOMÚN *(Economias Sociales del Común),* which served as a platform to integrate various collective economic projects based on an ideological and programmatic purpose as political party (Valencia Agudelo & Chaverra, 2019).To date, ECOMÚN brings together 120cooperatives and associations with 7,000 members. Each cooperative has its own resources, infrastructure and capital. Most of these cooperatives are located in rural areas and they mainly focus on agricultural production (ONU, 2023)Besides identifying ECOMÚN as a productive alternative in reincorporation, FARC-EP ex-combatants want to contribute to the reduction of inequality, poverty and negative environmental effects.

Thus far, the ex-combatants who have shown the greatest organisational capacity in terms of economic initiatives are those who have purchased land and focused their efforts on self-sustaining projects. This is particularly evident at the Agua Bonita AETCR and the NAR in San José de León, where most of the activities are based on sustainability. Pineapple production, clothing and boot design and manufacture, fish farming, poultry rearing and ecological tourism are examples of sources of income for ex-combatants who are succeeding in finding local markets and gaining both local and national visibility. In these projects, FARC-EP ex-combatants develop capabilities to promote social cohesion with surrounding communities by collectively creating productive alternatives.

According to ECOMÚN, the creation of these cooperatives responds to the interest of FARC-EP ex-members to integrate the surrounding communities as part of their projects. For example, Jorge, an ex-combatant in charge of a project producing sugarcane, argues for the importance of building collective dynamics between the *fariano* collective and surrounding communities:

> *We are working on a sugarcane project, and we want to create a collective along with five nearby villages, so that in future they too will be able to benefit from this initiative. To do this, we are going to set up an administrative board to manage the resources obtained from this initiative, so as to benefit all of us in a parallel way. And that also is something we also call a "collective".* (Jorge, member of AETCR Agua Bonita, October 2019).

However, creating self-sustainability projects between ex-combatants and natives of the communities have not been easy. According to the KROC Institute, these cooperatives lack of economic resources and administrative control, and do not have a strategic plan. Additionally, the centralism of FARC-EP ex-members has affected the good performance of the cooperatives in terms of internal decision-making, which have led to the disarticulation of the associations and cooperatives in the territories (KROC, 2017).

Martínez & Lefebvre explain the most significant aspects that interfere the ex-combatants' economic collective initiatives:

> *The development gaps in the Colombian countryside that inhibit efficiency in production and commercialisation; the gaps and uncertainty about the rules of game for collective and individual economic reincorporation; and the persistence of illegal economies configured as escape routes for some ex-combatants who are suspicious of what it means to bet on new forms of legal income.* (Martínez & Lefebvre, 2019).

One of the alternatives that FARC-EP ex-members have found to maintain the essence of "cooperativism" and the economic sustainability of the collective is to participate in different projects promoted by the government or international organisations. In the development of these projects, they are using their labour and their collective principles as a central aspect of their production. In addition, in the process of economic reincorporation, families, host communities and FARC-EP ex-members are creating an economic network that has strengthened local capacities in the territories by integrating family and collective economic projects. By doing so, they are merging individual and collective initiatives in reincorporation that allow them to maintain their initial interests of being self-sustainable.

Undoubtedly, one of the biggest challenges of the collective initiatives created by the collectivity of ex- FARC-EP is to survive in the long term without the resources provided by the government and/or international organisations, and to achieve a cooperative model that helps to overcome social inequalities and contribute therefore to a long-lasting peace.

4. Political collective reincorporation

One of the fundamental pillars of the Colombian peace agreement with the FARC-EP was the political participation of this guerrilla group through the creation of a political party (Söderberg Kovacs &

Hatz, 2016).This encompassed not only the establishment of a new political figure, but also the participation of ex-combatants in the local and national political arena as any other citizen.

The visibility of ex-combatants as an organised collective with shared principles benefits the recognition of ex-combatants as political actors and veterans of the conflict (Wiegink, 2019). By promoting their political party not just with candidates, but also with their local collective initiatives, ex-combatants empower themselves as political actor. This process allows them to perform their own meanings of citizens by acting freely under their ideological principles and their understanding of what peace implies.

The presence of FARC-EP ex-members in different territories of Colombia have allowed their participation in tandem with the local leaders of their communities. They are now joining forces to minimise the social injustices of their regions while demanding for their rights. For instance, in the latest regional elections ex-combatants together with victims of the conflict organise meetings with the political candidates for the municipality to demand benefits for their village. In other cases, the ex-combatants establish alliances with other parties to support each other in campaigning. These cases show how the ex-combatants' participation in local political environments contributes to their acquisition of bureaucratic knowledge and the construction of their political identity. This assumption aligns with Wiegink's studies in Mozambique, which argue that the local participation of ex-combatants in political activities contributes to their collective organisation and activism, as well as to their process of 'self-making' as war veterans. (Wiegink, 2019, p.154).

Beyond the creation of a political party, the collectivity of *farianos* aims to contribute to grassroots participatory democracy by playing a collective role in the local spheres. At a national level, since the peace process was signed, FARC-EP ex-members are actively participating in the Truth Commission, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP), The Unit for Presumed Disappeared Persons (UBPD), the Territorial Council for Reincorporation (CTR), and the National Council for Reincorporation (CNR). This leads them to play a role as advocates of the peace agreement or as candidates for local posts in some of these bodies (Nussio & Quishpe, 2019).However, the participation of ex-combatants in the public sphere has posed different challenges for them. Given their history of causing significant harm to the country, ex-combatants face the difficult task of convincing communities that their ideology can bring about improvements in socio-economic conditions. However, internal divisions within the party have exacerbated the mistrust felt by the Colombian people.

In sum, the political actions of FARC-EP ex-members should be supported not just by the legal documentation stated in the peace accord or the creation of a political party. Rather it should extend to political initiatives that can be performed in the everyday life of the territories. Hence, beyond following the government's parameters of what an active citizen should be, the *farianos* face the challenge of immersing themselves in the myriads of formal and informal political discourses that have arisen in the aftermath of the conflict.

5. Conclusions

This article analyses the role of collective initiatives in the current reincorporation process of FARC-EP ex-combatants. By examining the social, economic and political dimensions in the local dynamics of reincorporation, this study identifies the benefits that this approach delivers in the territories in which ex-combatants are settled, mainly in which refers to the transition to post-conflict. By acting collectively, the ex-combatants develop alternatives that create and re-create ways of living by bringing into play their ideological and emotional legacy from the period of armed conflict, which

help them to identify themselves as *farianos* and a social group that wants to expand their ideological perspectives.

In this context, collective reincorporation provides opportunities to understand the reintegration of FARC-EP ex-combatants beyond seeing them as the passive actors in peacebuilding or the mere receivers of social interventions. Now, FARC-EP ex-members, together with their surrounding communities, carry out social, economic and political activities in benefit of local development. These actions are contributing to the transition to post-conflict while at the same time reinforce the role of communities in peacebuilding, and their agency in acquiring a voice at a national level.

By addressing the economic dimension of reincorporation, this article mentioned the importance of *farianos*' cooperative approach as a long-term economic perspective on peacebuilding, offering an alternative to disregarding market principles. In this framework, the economic initiatives contribute to social development and the self-sustainability of ex-combatants. This article discussed the importance of local-local encounters in natural settings as a tool to restore trust and social coexistence from bottom-up perspectives. Finally, an analysis of political reincorporation from below was proposed as a way for ex-combatants to consolidate their knowledge within the political bureaucracy. As they create their own political identity, the communities around them recognise them as political actors who play a role in society.

On the other hand, this article emphasis on the different challenges that ex-combatants face when acting collectively. The lack of commitment of the state to support collective initiatives, the lack of security guarantees and social injustices in the territories where the ex-combatants are located, the dismantling of the FARC political group and the ongoing conflict in Colombia are some of the reasons that have affected the success of collective reincorporation. However, this article did not make a thorough analysis of these aspects, due to the lack of access to other ETCRs and the analysis of other categories that to a different extent have affected the adequate reincorporation of ex-combatants (such as the emergence of other armed groups, corruption and social inequalities).

In short, collective reincorporation opens the possibility of extending the understanding of ex-combatants' reintegration beyond seeing them as merely adapting to wider society or by taking a passive role in peacebuilding. By acting collectively, FARC-EP ex-members are not only contributing to their own reincorporation process but are also becoming active actors in transforming the root causes of the conflict, such as those related to social inequality and poverty.

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