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War as a 'window of opportunity'?

- the recruitment and mobilisation of women in FARC-EP

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1. Introduction: Gender and civil war

'I like the FARC because I saw these women in uniform, with rifles looking very beautiful. I decided that (when I was old enough) I would have my equipment and a rifle.' Female ex-combatant from Chocó, Colombia ¹

The prevailing notion of women in war is that of victims. Without in any way diminishing the suffering of women in violent conflicts, it is important to acknowledge that women can be perpetrators as well, and often take an active role in contemporary conflicts. Even though female participation continues to be rather low in traditional state armies, the share of women as active combatants has been quite high in armed groups participating in internal violent conflicts. This has been the case in such diverse geographical, political and cultural contexts as those of Sri Lanka², Nicaragua³ and Sierra Leone⁴, just to mention a few. In Latin America, there is a pattern of women comprising around a third of the fighting forces of several guerrillas⁵. This is remarkable considering that women's participation in traditional armies continue to be low. Why, then, do so many women participate in armed rebellion?

This paper will investigate the impact of gender on women's mobilisation into the Colombian insurgent group FARC-EP: *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo*⁶. The group, which justifies its insurgency on the basis of a Marxist-Leninist ideology, has together with other leftist guerrilla movements, paramilitaries and the Colombian army been involved in a violent internal conflict that traces back over forty years. Despite having been militarily reduced in the recent years, FARC-EP still poses a challenge to the Colombian state. The broad recruitment of women into FARC started in the 1980s, and has been increasing during the last twenty years, and women are estimated to comprise approximately a third of the 9.000 combatants⁷.

¹ Quote taken from Herrera & Porch 2008, p.616

² Bouta, Frerks & Bannon 2005, p.11

³ Fuest 2008

⁴ MacKenzie 2010, p.155

⁵ Viterna 2006, p.6-7

⁶ Translation: The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army

⁷ El Mercurio 27/12/2010

In analyzing women's participation in FARC, I will use the concept of gender. It could be questioned why this is a relevant concept - don't women join insurgent groups for the same reasons as men do, no matter if those reasons are ideological or because of structural poverty? The answer is that gender is an interesting concept when analyzing warfare and violence, because it is so closely linked to these matters. Gender is not just about differences between men and women, but also about the social roles that are ascribed to men and women by society, roles that are omnipresent and ultimately manifested in laws and regulations. The fact that war has been a traditional male domain through history and in virtually all cultures, implies that gender norms and rules could play an important role in armed conflicts.⁸

For example, studies from African civil wars suggest that many female combatants experienced an expansion of gender norms during conflict^{9 10 11} and in Eritrea, interviewed female ex-combatants described the conflict years as a better time than the post-conflict years, since during the war they were treated as equals.¹² Another empirical study from South Asia claims that war opened up both intended and unintended spaces for empowering women.¹³ These studies suggest that civil war function as a "window of opportunity" for at least some women.

If gender identities are affected in this way by conflict, they could also be exploited by the insurgent groups in their recruitment of new members, and there is definitely a value in a better understanding of them and considering them when designing demobilization policies and programs for ex-combatants to reintegrate into civilian life.

⁸ Goldstein 2001

⁹ Barth 2002

¹⁰ Coulter, Persson & Utas 2008

¹¹ Fuest 2008

¹² Barth 2002

¹³ Manchanda in Meintjes, Pillay & Turshen (eds), 2002

1.1 Research question

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to a better understanding of why there is such a high share of women among the combatants in insurgent groups, with the specific question being:

What is the impact of gender on the mobilisation and recruitment of women into FARC-EP?

It is rather a theory-generating than a theory-testing study, since the field of research is currently under development. The hypothesis is that something is lacking in existing theories on recruitment to armed groups and that they are not sufficient to explain the high participation of female combatants in insurgent groups. By applying a gender perspective on the mechanisms behind the mobilisation of Colombian women into the guerrilla group, it might be possible to find complementing factors that can help to explain the dynamics behind women's mobilisation to insurgent groups. The most important delimitation of the paper is that focus is on the motives and mechanisms behind the mobilisation process to armed groups, which leaves out the process of DDR¹⁴ and other issues related to the post-conflict society.

The question is divided into three sub-questions which are discussed and analysed in this paper:

-In which way is gender equality and the roles of men and women addressed in the ideology of FARC? Which attributes are ascribed to women?

- How is gender equality and the relationship between men and women regulated in the internal organisation of FARC: Do women and men have the same rights? Do women and men share the same tasks and responsibilities? Do they have the same opportunities to achieve a high position within the group?

-Can specific "gender motives" be traced as a reason for individual women's mobilisation into FARC?

¹⁴ Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration

1.2 Definition of concepts

The terms and concepts used are defined as following:

Gender – The central concept of this paper is that of gender. It refers to the socially constructed roles ascribed to women and men, as opposed to biological and physical characteristics. Thus, gender is about the social roles of men, women, boys and girls and the relationships between and among them.¹⁵ The term gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women, men, boys and girls.

Mobilisation – the concept of mobilisation generally refers to the process by which individuals become active and organised as a collective, in order to achieve societal change. In this paper, the term will be used to describe individual and collective voluntarily involvement in armed groups that use violent means in their pursuit of societal change. When the term recruitment is used, it refers to the same process as mobilisation but from the perspective of the armed group.

Insurgent group – An armed group operating within a state, employing violence in their struggle against the government or against counterinsurgency. An insurgent group has some kind of political agenda, as opposed to criminal networks which can also openly fight the authority of a state, but do not count as insurgent groups.

Insurgent mobilisation – the act of individual and/or collective involvement in an insurgent group

Combatant – the definition of combatant in this paper is a person who is incorporated in an armed group full-time, carries a gun and participates in battle, as opposed to supporters or co-operators. The term will be used for under-aged as well as adult combatants.

Guerrilla – Spanish term referring to an insurgent group with a leftist political ideology.

Guerrillero/a – a combatant in the guerrilla.

¹⁵ Mazurana, Raven-Roberts & Parpart (eds) 2005, p.13

1.3 Outline

Chapter 2 gives an account of the existing theories on insurgency mobilisation and the recruitment of women. Chapter 3 motivates the choice of Colombia and FARC as case of study, describes the material and the qualitative method used in the study and discusses problematic aspects. In chapter 4, various components of the ideology of and mobilisation to FARC are analysed: a) The organisation's official view on gender equality b) The internal gender structures within the organisation c) The motives and background of female ex-combatants from the organisation. In chapter 5 the results are discussed and concluded.

2. Theories on insurgent mobilisation

In this section, I will first give an account of general theories on insurgent mobilisation, starting with the “greed vs. grievance” dichotomy and moving on to the more recent research which indicates that the causal motives and mechanisms behind mobilisation are multiple and complex. Then I will review the research on women’s mobilisation in armed groups in Latin America in three previous studies.

2.1 The “greed vs grievance” dichotomy

What is the motive for insurgent groups to fight, and what are the motives for individuals to join these groups? Many insurgent groups justify the use of violence by claiming that the ideological agenda they fight for is for the greater good. There is little doubt that the ideology sometimes merely serves as a pretext for the incentive of obtaining benefits, like the control over lucrative resources. A study by Collier and Hoeffler compares two motivations for rebel violence in civil wars: Greed and grievance. They analyse 73 outbreaks of civil wars during the period 1960-1999, where “greed” represents the ability to finance insurgent warfare, and “grievance” represents ethnic or religious division, or other forms of inequality or political repression. In the case of Colombia, the “greed” variable would be represented in control of the lucrative drug trade, while “grievance” is found in inequality and the guerrillas’ demands for social justice. Into “grievance” counts also the desire of revenge. The study concluded that civil wars will be the result of rebel movements only if the expected benefits are greater than the cost of rebellion.¹⁶

Applying a similar rational choice-analysis on the individual’s motives for mobilising into an insurgent group is to assume that the decision to join is preceded by a cost-benefit calculation, in order to maximise the benefit of the individual. From this point of view, the individual would join because of the expected economical outcome of joining, such as having opportunity for looting, gaining a salary or expecting other rewards. The material benefits is what makes it worth the risk it entails to be involved in an armed group.

However, only using the two causal factors economic gain and division between different societal actors to explain civil war mobilisation, is not sufficient. The “greed vs grievance” dichotomy is overly simplistic, and is only looking at the macro level of civil war, missing the

¹⁶ Collier & Hoeffler 2004, p. 26

dynamics at local levels. The greed factor is not a plausible motive in many guerrillas, since no salary is offered and plundering not permitted. A study of demobilised ex-combatants in Colombia showed that many of them are unaware of, or uninterested in, the ideology that at a macro level is the reason for their armed struggle. Rather, they quote the desire to have an adventure when asked on their motives for joining.¹⁷

2.2 The endogeneity of civil wars

Even if the conflict may very well be ideologically motivated, or driven by so called greed motives at a macro level, at a local level the conflict dynamics can have very different motives. Through micro studies of the dynamics of the Greek civil war, Kalyvas showed that the mechanisms for violence in civil war are very different on the local level from that of the macro level (national level). He claims that civil war is an endogenous process, where the war itself creates and affects local power dynamics which in turn affects the war dynamics. For example, civilians can use political actors to settle private conflicts and may even turn the political actors into their own private “contract killers”¹⁸. He points to the problem of micro-macro disjunction in the study of civil wars and argues that the common preferences between central and local actors are wrongly assumed, and that in fact the general dynamics of internal conflict is characterized by allegiances between local and supralocal actors. The supralocal offer military resources and the local actors can supply them with essential local resources such as food, shelter and information. Thus, “myriads of local conflicts are linked to the overarching conflict of civil war”.¹⁹

Kalyvas also points to the fact that political conviction is often a consequence of joining the guerrilla, and not the other way around as could be expected. Referring to a multitude of observations from wars, both civil wars and partisans fighting occupation, he argues that ordinary people at the countryside, where most mobilisation to rebel or partisan movements take place, are drawn into conflicts for survival reasons or because of local loyalties or animosities, and it is not a consequence of an ideological “choice”.²⁰

¹⁷ Herrera 2008

¹⁸ Kalyvas 2006, chapter 10

¹⁹ Kalyvas 2006, chapter 11

²⁰ Kalyvas 2006, p.45

In a large-scale survey conducted with demobilised ex-combatants from three Colombian armed groups: FARC-EP, the leftist guerrilla ELN and the paramilitaries, Arjona & Kalyvas asked for the personal background and mobilisation motives of the ex-combatants. They found that the local dynamics of the conflict was one of the most influential factors in the recruitment to the armed groups. The recruitment was endogenous to the local presence of armed groups, in the sense that those growing up in an area dominated by one of the groups (and especially where representatives of this group were looked up to and respected) were more likely to eventually join that group as combatants. They did not find evidence supporting the greed hypothesis, since there was not a strong correlation between being unemployed or poor and joining an armed group. Neither for the grievance hypothesis, since ideology or revenge motives showed not to be the main cause for mobilisation.²¹ They also pointed to the fact that the majority of the recruited to armed groups are young: 50 percent of the interviewed ex-combatants from FARC were between 8 and 17 years old at the time of enlistment into, and about 30 per cent were aged between 18 and 25²² Of the total number of individually demobilized combatants interviewed, which is the group of the FARC ex-combatants together with those from ELN and the paramilitaries, 8 per cent are female²³. The study does not present the findings divided in the different sex of the combatants so any potential differences between the female and male ex-combatants in either background or motives is unknown. However, 4 per cent of the ex-combatants from FARC state domestic violence as factor that was part of their motives for joining the guerrilla, and given that girls and women are more frequent victims of domestic violence it can be speculated that these respondents are female, even if this is not confirmed.²⁴ If so, it means half the women interviewed stated that the desire to escape domestic violence was a motive for them to join an insurgent group.

2.3 Previous research on women's participation in Latin American insurgencies

In one of the first studies of women's mobilisation in Latin American guerrillas, Reif compared patterns of women's participation in five Latin American guerrillas (Nicaragua, El

²¹ Arjona & Kalyvas 2008, p.27

²² Ibid., p.7

²³ Ibid., p.5

²⁴ Ibid., p.19

Salvador, Guatemala, Cuba, Colombia and Uruguay). The study was made before FARC started a broader recruitment of women into the guerrilla in the 1980s, so Colombia is classified as a country with low participation of women in this study. She claims that there were two causal factors behind contemporary guerrilla movements' recruitment of women. First, it was a pragmatic strategy employed by the guerrillas in order to receive the increased popular support that was needed in the warfare of modern guerrillas, and secondly it was a development influenced by the increasing feminist awareness in the world, which sensitised guerrilla leaders to women's rights issues and made them incorporate gender in their socialist ideology.²⁵ Reif also found that the organisational structure of the guerrilla is very important for the attractiveness of the movement on women. Besides adding gender equality to their demands for societal justice, the guerrillas began to promote routine policies of egalitarian relations between men and women within the movement, with shared tasks, and in some cases, shared leadership, in order to recruit women. Some even offered special welfare programs with childcare and health care that facilitated women's commitment to the family rather than threatened it²⁶. Using this strategy of attending to women's needs, the guerrillas in Nicaragua and El Salvador recruited large number of working-class and rural women²⁷.

In another comparative study of female participation in six Latin American guerrilla groups and two Latin American terrorist groups, Gonzalez-Perez claims that women choose to become active in the groups because they anticipate a potential for change in their hierarchal status²⁸. She argues that whether the insurgent group has a mainly domestic or an international agenda is the factor that determines the level of participation of women within it. Domestic groups recruit women to active roles as combatants, while groups with an international agenda (opposed to global capitalism and US imperialism) only allow women in supportive roles, like cooking, providing shelter or sometimes sex to the male members.²⁹

The comparison, however, does have weaknesses since it does not mention the size of the guerrilla movements as an important factor. It is also questionable how relevant it is to compare broad popular movements, such as FMLN in El Salvador and the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, to the Cuban revolutionaries in the 1950s and Islamic Jihad cells in South America (the only two "international groups" in the study)? In the Cuban case the time aspect is

²⁵ Reif 1986, p.164

²⁶ Reif 1986, p.162

²⁷ Ibid., p.163

²⁸ Gonzalez-Perez 2006, p.313

²⁹ Gonzalez-Perez 2006, p.315

probably important, since it was before the feminist wave of the 1970s, and in the case of the Islamic group its religious agenda distinguishes it from other Latin American guerrillas. Gonzalez-Perez also classifies the political goals of FARC as domestic, which is not unproblematic since FARC emphasizes its opposition to imperialism and global capitalism.

The focus on structural change or on the role of the guerrilla at a macro level, however, does not explain why in fact most women do *not* mobilise. This is the entry point for an in-depth study of the mobilisation of women in the Guatemalan guerrilla group FMLN in the 1980s, with interviews conducted with both women who did join the guerrilla and those who did not, trying to detect common patterns. Viterna divides the patterns of mobilisation of women into guerrilla activism as following three different paths: 1) Women pulled into the guerrilla as a consequence of engagement in political organisations or having family members already involved, and in both cases the network seemed to be the determinant factor.³⁰ 2) Women pushed into the guerrilla by state repression or other crisis – they mobilised as a means of survival since they lacked other means, or because of external expectations of who “should” become active in the guerrilla, and there was more pressure on young childless women than on women who were mothers.³¹ And the last category: 3) Women persuaded by recruiters in refugee camps into joining the guerrilla. These were often very young and came from broken homes, and when asked about their motivation for joining, the two common reasons they all shared was the desire of adventure, and seeking revenge for the death of relatives³².

Viterna also points to the critical role of refugee camps since they were used by guerrilla recruiters as organisational sites of mobilisation³³, which supports Kalyvas theory on the endogenous dynamics of civil war. Mobilising for survival reasons does not exactly fall under the greed theory, since in this case the women did not join to gain, but for crude survival. The revenge motive supports the grievance theory. However, the desire to have fun as a motive for mobilisation does contradict the fundament of the greed hypothesis, that the decision to join is based on a cost-benefit calculation.

³⁰ Viterna 2006, p.21

³¹ Viterna 2006, p. 27

³² Ibid., p.31

³³ Ibid., p.37

Of these theories and previous research, what I consider most relevant and interesting for my case is Kalyvas and Arjona's finding of domestic violence as a potential motive behind the mobilization of women to insurgent groups, and Reif's study of the guerrilla's strategic approach to attract women in the recruitment process. This is interesting since FARC started to recruit women in the 1980s, after having already existed for decades, and the strategy has been successful considering that women now comprise a third of the combatants. Therefore it is interesting to look at my case from the two aspects that were identified by Reif as the most influential in determining the level of women's participation in guerrillas; the incorporation of gender equality demands in the ideology, and policies of egalitarian gender relations within the internal organisational structure of the guerrilla

Also, Viterna adds the influence of social networks to the existing theories of "greed and grievance" grievance and the importance of controlling the territory. I will look at all these motives, since the hypothesis is not that gender factors are enough to explain women's participation, but rather suggest that it could be a complementary factor that has been overlooked.

3. Method

This section will motivate the choice of FARC for the case study, discuss reliability problems with the material used and explain the choice of design for the study: a qualitative, textual analysis where gender factors are looked for in the material.

3.1 Selection of case

The choice of Colombia and, more specifically, the armed group Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) for the case study, is based on the country presenting favourable circumstances for gender factors to be important. The idea is that if gender does have an impact on the process of women's mobilisation into armed groups, this is most likely to be visible in the case of Colombia. The argument for this is that the level of inequality based on gender is quite high in the country. According to the UN Gender Inequality Index³⁴, Colombia was only the 90th most equal country out of the 137 countries measured and scored 0.658, where 0 indicates equality between men and women and 1 indicates inequality. The way the index is measured, this means that Colombian women are far from having the same opportunities as men in the labour market or when it comes to empowerment and reproductive health. Also, domestic violence is widespread³⁵ and the women's participation in the political system is very low; the share of women among mayors in Colombia 2003-2009 was 3 percent³⁶. The fact that FARC has an, at least in theory a policy of gender equality should make it a most-likely case for women to join the guerrilla for opportunities they cannot have in regular society.

3.2 Design of the study

The relevance of micro studies

In the theoretical section of this paper, it was demonstrated that the micro-level of civil wars has been understudied, and that this is a problem since the multiple dynamics of civil war at a local level can differ greatly from the macro-level dynamics of the conflict. Failing to consider the micro-level dynamics will lead to wrong assumptions on the causal effects. This

³⁴ UN Gender Inequality Index (GII) 2008

³⁵ OECD 2011

³⁶ The World's Women 2010

is the entry point for the choice of a qualitative analysis method for investigating the motives and background of women that were active combatants in FARC.

A bottom-up approach and micro-level analysis is also the method advocated by feminist scholars in IR, who are the ones that frequently take gender identities, relations and hierarchies into account when analysing the concepts of security and insecurity.³⁷

Using a qualitative method

This paper carries out a qualitative textual analysis of the ideological statements and internal regulations of FARC, together with the personal stories of FARC ex-combatants from FARC. My approach is that there is no big division between quantitative and qualitative analysis, but they rather serve as complementary of one another. Which kind of method is suitable depends on the purpose of the study, and even though it is not possible to draw a clear line between theory-generating studies from those testing theories empirically³⁸, the main focus of this paper is to generate theory. Since qualitative methods follow an inductive principle (trying to find new hypothesis) rather than deductive (testing a hypothesis)³⁹, a qualitative method was deemed suitable. In other words, it is an alternative method that seemed suitable in order to find alternative aspects.

The method used to analyse the documents has been called "the constant comparative method", and consists of an process where the researcher continuously compares any found patterns with new data, and also comparing with previous research as well as theoretical perspectives.

³⁷ See for example Tickner 2001 and Ackerly, Stern & True (eds) 2006

³⁸ Esaiasson, Gilliam, Oscarsson & Wängnerud 2007, p. 126

³⁹ Hjerm & Lindgren 2010, p.21

What are “gender factors”?

The intention of this paper is to answer the question *what is the impact of gender on the mobilisation and recruitment of women into FARC-EP?* In order to assess the impact of gender, it is of course crucial to first define *which* gender factors should be looked for. The following questions are based on the definition of gender used in the paper, and on the existing theories on insurgency mobilisation in general, and theories on women’s mobilisation in particular. In order to assess the role of gender in the recruitment of women to FARC, I will first look at the two aspects that were identified by Reif as the most influential in determining the level of women’s participation in guerrillas; the incorporation of gender equality demands in the ideology, and policies of egalitarian gender relations within the internal organisational structure of the guerrilla. The following questions will be asked to the material:

-In which way is gender equality and the roles of men and women addressed in the ideology of FARC? Which attributes are ascribed to women?

- How is gender equality, and the relationship between men and women regulated in the internal organisation of FARC: Do women and men have the same rights? Do women and men share the same tasks and responsibilities? Do they have the same opportunities to achieve a high position within the group?

Second, in order to assess the impact of gender on women’s decisions to mobilise into FARC, I will look for the motives behind mobilisation that were suggested in the literature and see if any additional “gendered motives” can be traced. So with a starting point in the theories and previous research, the motives for joining FARC that are expected to be found could be: greed (expecting a salary or other benefits from joining), grievance (joining for ideological reasons or seeking revenge for a relative or friend who was killed), endogenous factors (growing up in FARC-controlled territory and looking up to local leaders), social networks (having friends/relatives who already joined), survival (joining as a means to survive) or joining because of expected fun/adventure. Any gendered indicators/factors will be developed from processing the material using the constant comparative method. In this context, “gendered motives” mean motives and behaviours that are linked to the social roles of men and women, constraints related to gender or the relationship between men and women.

One such “gendered” motive that could be expected based on previous research, is to join in order to escape domestic violence. Since domestic violence mostly affects women, and according to many is a structural problem in patriarchal cultures, this would be a clear motive which is related to gender. Another gendered factor could be if the conditions for a FARC-combatant offer a possibility to transgress gender norms and have opportunities which are otherwise not accessible for women. Such as being in power, have sexual freedom or other that is not permitted for women in the culture. I will also leave it open to finding other gendered motives which are not expected, as long as they relate to the definition of gender as socially constructed norms for women, men and the relationship between them.

The difficulty here is to determine how broad or narrow the interpretation of gender should be. Should it be considered a factor present in the motives only when this is explicitly stated by the ex-combatant? Or should it be a more generous definition where I can interpret a gender-related influence, even if it is not stated. I will therefore use two different ways to determine what a “gendered” motive is, and then compare the outcome of these two definitions.

1. Strict interpretation of gender: Only assumed when the ex-combatant explicitly identifies something as related to their gender identity, gender roles or norms.

This way a situation is avoided when everything a woman says is interpreted to be related to her being a woman, and if some “gendered” motive is found using this narrow interpretation, it will be a strong indicator that gender is in fact a relevant factor. The problem is of course that it can be too narrow, and there is a risk that gendered motives are missed or classified as something else.

2. Broadly interpreted concept of gender: I will identify gendered motives when I interpret something as related to gender identity, gender roles or norms, even if this is not stated explicitly by the ex-combatant.

The potential problem here is that the concept is too generous and thereby less valid, on the other hand there is less risk to miss important signs because of a too narrow interpretation.

3.3 The material

The following material is being used in this paper to analyse the gender aspects of the mobilisation of women in FARC:

1) To analyse the role of gender in FARC's ideology, five official announcements released by the group are used. These have all been released on the occasion of the International Women's Day, March 8th, during the period 2005-2010. The motivation for using them is that they represent the ideological position that FARC has chosen to communicate publicly in recent years, regarding women and gender equality. Three of the announcements are signed by the group's International Commission, which is at the highest level of command in FARC's internal hierarchy⁴⁰. The other two are signed by the central command of one of the *bloques*, which represents the second-highest level in the hierarchy and the last one is signed by "the women" of a *compañía*, which is a smaller unit of just 48 combatants⁴¹. However, here it has been assumed that irrespective of who has formally signed the announcement, the organisation is so hierarchal and controlled that all the documents can be said to represent the highest level within FARC.

To get an idea of the general importance of gender issues in FARC, a control group of fifty other official documents released between 2005-2010 have been scanned for the key words "woman/women", "sisters", "gender equality".

2) To analyse gender aspects of FARC's organisational structure, I have looked at the internal regulations of the group. These are the same within the whole organisation and state the regulated behaviour, rights and penalties for infringement of the rules. I have combined this with observations made by scholars, and five testimonies of both male and female ex-combatants to verify how the regulations are implemented in practice and how women are treated within the organisation. The testimonies, three of women and two of men, have all been published in Colombia. Four of them are interviews and one is a biography, and the ex-combatants were all active in FARC. The fact that the material is diverse in regard to the age of the persons when they joined the guerrilla, the duration of their time in the guerrilla, the

⁴⁰ Comisión Internacional

rank of their positions and their reasons for demobilising is considered an advantage, since it makes it less probable to miss important clues because of a too standardised material.

3) The basis for the part of the analysis that examines the impact of gender in women's individual decisions to join FARC, consists of the three published in-depth testimonies by female ex-combatants mentioned above. Two of these are in the form of interviews and one is a biography. The use of personal narratives in a qualitative analysis permits for nuances, mechanisms, and dynamics that otherwise would be missed to be visible. Since the point of this part is not as much to test a theory as to look for new angles for generating theory, this is an important advantage. On the other hand, this is also the part of the material that poses the most problematic aspects, which have to be mentioned. The ex-combatants have many reasons not to tell the whole truth or to change the story, which means the material could easily be biased and not giving an accurate account of the events. However, the individuals have a stronger incentive for this when stating their motives for demobilisation than for their mobilisation, which is the focus here. Despite the potential bias problem, the central position of the informants as ex-combatants in FARC renders their testimonies a high value.

4. The impact of gender on women's mobilisation and recruitment to FARC

The analysis will be conducted in three parts. The first part will examine how gender is addressed in FARC's ideology; the second part will look at the internal policies on gender equality of the organisation. The third and last part will analyse the background and motives of three women that were active in FARC, trying to trace the impact of gender on the process.

4.1 FARC's message on gender equality

In which way is gender equality and the roles of men and women addressed in the ideology of FARC? Which attributes are ascribed to women?

The five official announcements by FARC that has been analysed have all been released on the occasion of International Women's Day, March 8. Thus, the very purpose of them is based on gender. It is mentioned twice, in 2005 and 2010, that women comprise a third of the combatants in FARC.

I have classified the gender-related statements in the announcements, and they are presented in order of their frequency, with the number of the announcements they were mentioned in parenthesis. For those statements that only appear once, the year in which they appeared is also stated.

Since these 8th of March documents are of course highly likely to contain statements on gender equality, I have also scanned fifty other statements released by FARC between 2005-2010 to get an idea of the general importance of gender issues. These official documents have been scanned for the key words "woman/women", "sisters", "gender equality", however with no results found. When the word equality was found, in all cases it referred to equality between classes or ethnicities, not to gender equality.

Table 1. Gendered statements made by FARC 2005-2010:

- Gender equality within FARC, equal tasks and responsibilities (5)
- Political demands for free universal health care and education (4)
- Gender struggle is subordinated class struggle (4)
- References to motherhood (3)

- Women in FARC are assigned tasks according to their capabilities (3)
- Women are the most vulnerable to the ills of the capitalist system (2)
- Female combatants in FARC have active roles (carry guns) (2)
- Demands for sexual and reproductive rights for women (1), 2010
- Condemning prostitution caused by poverty (1), 2010
- Claims FARC offers a better gender role than that of capitalism (1), 2010
- Accusing feminists of immorality (1), 2006a
- Attributing specific features to women (1), 2006a
- Women are the most victimised by the Colombian conflict (1), 2010
- Women can become commanders in FARC (1), 2007

Of these categories, the most recurring is the one that refers to the gender equality in FARC's internal organisation, and the equal share of tasks and responsibilities. The importance of the organisational structure of the guerrilla for recruiting women was one of the findings in the study made by Reif, where promoting policies of egalitarian gender relations within the organisational structure of the guerrilla was a strategy to facilitate the recruitment of women. However, it is also mentioned several times that women are assigned tasks in according to their capabilities, suggesting slightly different roles according to gender. This could of course manifest a wish to promote their movement to women by showing consideration and having excessive physical demands on the female combatants. In one of the reviewed statements, that was signed by Raúl Reyes (FARC's second highest commander until he was killed by the Colombian national army in 2008), it is said regarding women's opportunities for advancement within the group that *the women also occupy high-ranked positions according to their capabilities, and whoever discriminates them will be punished according to the internal regulations that control the FARC-EP.*⁴²

The stressing of demands for universal health care and education in announcements made for the International Women's Day might also correspond to Reif's claim: what is seen as women's interests are added to the political demands in order to mobilise women, although these claims in themselves do not necessarily have to be linked to gender. In the announcements, these demands are frequently being linked to references to motherhood:

⁴² FARC-EP 2007, my translation from Spanish

*Children die in Colombia each year of hunger and that the women are becoming active because they see their children suffering [...] a third of Colombian children under five years suffer from anemia. The women have to leave their children in deficient care at schools due to the lack of public funding.*⁴³

Despite the promotion of the gender equality within FARC, all but one of the announcements emphasises that the societal struggle for women's rights is subordinated to the struggle for social justice between the classes, which is not surprising since the overarching ideology of FARC is that of revolutionary socialism. Combined with the fact that no gender related statements are found in any of the other official documents, this indicates that gender equality is not a priority for FARC. As said by Reif, it could be because of international pressure that FARC wants to appear sensitive to gender equality and gender issues.

Some of the most interesting statements only appear in only one announcement each. These are: the demands for sexual and reproductive rights for women and criticism against the prohibition of abortions in Colombia which results in teenage pregnancies and illegal abortions⁴⁴, condemning child prostitution caused by extreme poverty and claiming that joining FARC is a better alternative for teenagers⁴⁵, claiming that FARC offer women a better gender role than that of capitalism since it turns women into superficial consumers⁴⁶ and ascribing specific feminine attributes to women:

*May each woman take a place in battle and contribute with her wisdom, tenderness, devotion and joy [...] to build a better future*⁴⁷

There is also a criticism of liberal feminism claiming that it is immoral:

*Feminists believe that by adopting debauchery and by treating men as if they were the enemy or the cause of their misfortune, and by adopting radically independent behaviours, they will achieve the so longed-for freedom.*⁴⁸

⁴³ FARC-EP 2010, my translation from Spanish

⁴⁴ FARC-EP 2010, my translation from Spanish

⁴⁵ Ibid., my translation from Spanish

⁴⁶ Ibid., my translation from Spanish

⁴⁷ FARC-EP 2006a, my translation from Spanish

⁴⁸ Ibid., my translation from Spanish

From a western liberal feminist perspective this might seem a bit contradictory, but I interpret the statements as the FARC exhibits a gender-awareness since it presents its own interpretation of gender equality and reflection on gender roles.

To conclude, it is clear that FARC has incorporated gender into its ideology. For the purpose of this paper, some of the theoretical claims made by FARC regarding their own organisation are interesting, since they can be compared to the reality of FARC's organisation as observed by ex-combatants and experts. These claims are: That there is gender equality within the organisation, the claim that women have equal opportunities as men to advance in the internal hierarchy and the support for women's sexual and reproductive rights. The latter two will be further investigated in the next part.

4.2 Gender in FARC's internal structure

The first factor considered as a determinant for the level of women participating in a guerrilla, according to Reif, was the incorporation of gender equality in the ideological agenda of the group, which was discussed in the previous part. This part will analyse the second causal factor behind a guerrilla's successful recruitment of women: The implementation of policies of egalitarian gender relations within the internal organisational structure of the guerrilla. Based on two of the claims made in the ideological announcements, this part will examine how well these claims correspond to the actual reality in the organisational structure of the group. The claims are:

- i) Women and men have equal opportunities to advance in the internal hierarchy of FARC
- ii) FARC is supportive of women's sexual and reproductive rights

The possibilities for women and men to advance in the internal hierarchy of FARC

A female *ex-comandante* in FARC states that there is sexism in the group, but that it is caused by the general sexism in the Colombian society, and that the egalitarian policy of FARC gives the female combatants the necessary instruments to oppose discrimination based on gender.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Lara 2000, p.114, my translation from Spanish

Theoretically, every combatant in FARC can become a *comandante* (officer). Among the prerequisites stated in the general statutes of the organisation⁵⁰ there are some that are open to interpretations (as opposed to prerequisites such as being literate, or having been active in FARC for at least two years). Some of the more subjective prerequisites are to have leadership skills; to be “calm, courageous, thoughtful, respectful of others and modest”; to “have a high revolutionary moral” and to “having showed a deep respect for the interests of civilians, to behave properly with them and gain their trust”.⁵¹ According to Gutierrez Sanín, the share of women at the central operational level of FARC is only 10 per cent, a significant smaller proportion than the total share of women, around a third of all combatants.⁵² None of the testimonies mentions that it should be more difficult for women to become a *comandante*, or any explanation for why women are under-represented on higher level of commands. However, Jimena mentions general discrimination against women, which contradicts the gender equality stated by FARC:

*there was a lot of physical abuse of the new recruits, and a lot of discrimination against women, they were mostly used for spending the night or for cleaning up the camp*⁵³

Women’s sexual and reproductive rights within FARC

The physical integrity of women is protected in FARC’s internal regulations, which states that rape is one of the intra-organisational crimes at the same level as killing fellow combatants, desertion and treason, which are all judged in guerrilla war council which is where the severe penalties are given.⁵⁴ That sexual violations are punished heavily within FARC, at least against fellow combatants, is supported by the testimonies⁵⁵.

Relationships between men and women are allowed in the FARC combat units, and women have a greater sexual freedom than in the rest of Colombian society. However, every aspect of

⁵⁰ Medina Arbeláez 2008, p.138

⁵¹ Ibid., my translation from Spanish

⁵² Gutierrez Sanín 2008, p.10

⁵³ Jiménez Meneses 2008, p.259, my translation from Spanish

⁵⁴ Medina Arbeláez 2008, p.135

⁵⁵ Cárdenas Sarrias 2005, p.188

daily life within the guerrilla is heavily regulated and both men and women are controlled by their commanders and need a permit in order to have relationships. One of the testimonies, the FARC ex-combatant Esteban relates that the relationships are very regulated by the organisation, and that there are specific days of the week when it is allowed to spend the night with your partner, and the combatants have to ask for permission of the *comandante* beforehand.⁵⁶ There are other observations of how the combatants are punished by having to carry wood and similar extra tasks, if they have sexual relations without permissions.⁵⁷ Esteban also states that when a couple seem to develop a too strong bond, they are often separated to different units as to avoid a desertion of the couple.⁵⁸ A similar testimony is found in the interview with Jimena, a female ex-combatant in FARC:

*There is a lot of demotivation in the FARC guerrilla, since they interfere with any kind of affectionate relationship, with the family or with another person. That is why many of the desertions that occur are in a couple, because they are being separated from each other, they don't allow you to feel love or other feelings, just to have sex and that's it. And in the case of us having children it gets really difficult because they either force you to have an abortion or they take the child away from you.*⁵⁹

A pattern where FARC forces women to have abortions, or give their children away to relatives since the role of a combatant in FARC cannot be combined with motherhood, is supported by evidence in a report from Human Rights Watch⁶⁰

Women have limited right to abortion in the rest of Colombian society. Abortion was completely illegal until 2006, when a new law that allowed abortion in case of rape or if the mother's life is in danger, but in practice most women in the countryside are lacking access to this right since there is a lack of abortion clinics, it is very expensive and medical staff often refuse to perform abortions even when it is legally allowed.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.189, my translation from Spanish

⁵⁷ Medina Arbeláez 2008, p.131

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Jiménez Meneses 2008, p.300, my translation from Spanish

⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch 2003, p.45

Considering this, it is remarkable that FARC is completely opposed to the traditional role for women in the Colombian society when it comes to both sexual freedom and the right to abortion. On the other hand, the organisation maintains a strong control over women's bodies, just in another way, by forcing them to use contraceptives, have abortions, give away their children and control all relationships. In FARC it is not possible to combine the role of mother with that of a guerrilla soldier, and many women desert in order to keep the child in case of pregnancy, or flee together with a male soldier to be able to have a family together. This was the case of one of the testimonies, Jimena, who left FARC to be able to see her children and have a regular family life. This situation is very different from the strategy described by Reif, where in order to attract female combatants the guerrillas in Nicaragua and El Salvador tried to make the life of the guerrilla soldier more compatible to that of mothers, by organising childcare and health care for children. Clearly, FARC has chosen the opposite strategy.

4.3 “Gendered” patterns of mobilisation

In order to assess the impact of gender on women's decisions to mobilise into FARC, I will look for the motives behind mobilisation that were suggested in the literature (greed, grievance, endogenous factors, social networks, survival, fun/adventure) in the testimonies, and see if any additional “gendered motives” can be traced. In this context, “gendered motives” mean motives and behaviours that are linked to gender roles, constraints related to gender or the relationship between men and women. It is only the background of the women and their motives for joining FARC that are considered in this part, not their time as combatants in the group.

The three women are from different backgrounds – two from rural areas and one from urban area. They come from different socioeconomic backgrounds, have various level of finished education and joined FARC at different ages.

Regarding economic benefit as a motive, none of the three women thought that they would receive a salary or expected economic benefits from joining FARC. However, the women are from very different backgrounds and escaping poverty might of course have had an influence. Like in the case of Zenaida, who grew up in a farm with six siblings, where all slept in three

beds in a two-room house. Liliana also tells that she needed to find a means to support herself at the time of joining the guerrilla, which of course is very relevant and likely to have influenced her decision.

Regarding survival and escaping threats as a motive for joining, which can not be categorised as a “greed” motive but is still relevant, Zenaida was told from FARC commanders that someone from the family should join the guerrilla, so she decided to do it since otherwise one of her younger siblings would be pressured to do so. This is not really to escape an outside threat but rather a direct pressure from FARC, almost and an example of forced recruitment.

When it comes to the grievance factor, meaning ideological motives or desire for revenge, none of the women tells of seeking personal revenge as a motive, which was common in previous studies of women joining guerrillas in Viterna’s study of Guatemala. Ideology seems to have played a more important role, and two of the three, Jimena and Liliana, tells of the political commitment as important for the decision to join FARC.

The endogeneity theory suggested that growing up in guerrilla-dominated territory is the most influential factor for the decision to join insurgent groups. Jimena’s case is an illustration of this. She grew up in guerrilla controlled territory and was appointed local leader of the guerrilla’s student organisation at the age of eleven, was interested in politics and appealed by the solidarity and equality of FARC ideology. After seventh grade (at the age of approximately 13) she went to a FARC camp supposedly for a two month political military course after which she would return to her family, but instead spent eleven years as a guerrilla soldier.

Zenaida, who was also from a rural area, was familiar with guerrilla combatants since the age of five, and says she was not afraid of them. She tells of how the guerrilla was a legitimate force in the area she grew up and how they imposed social norms in the local society, which affected the private domestic life of the people in the area:

The bad thing with my father was that he got drunk and would hit my mother. He would sweep the floor with her. Until the guerrilla came [FARC]. They wouldn’t allow the husbands to hit their women. They beat up a neighbor with a belt buckle,

*for having hit his woman. They told him: 'Just the way it hurts for you, she hurts too'.
My dad understood this and would never return to harm my mother*⁶¹

This is interesting because it shows how the guerrilla implements its own behavioral standards in the controlled area. But it is also a clearly gendered incident and also in that sense is likely to have had an impact on the young girl witnessing this. She does not explicitly state that this had anything to do with her joining FARC later on, but with my more generous definition, this would have an impact on that decision.

Liliana also relates of the father being in charge at home “because of machismo” and experienced mild domestic abuse by her mother when growing up, but does not in any way link this to her joining FARC. Here it is more dubious to interpret gender motives for her decision to join the guerrilla, and not even with the generous definition of gender motives would I do that.

Another question is if stating that a female role model was a motive for joining the guerrilla should be interpreted as a “gendered” motive. Liliana says she was inspired to join the guerrilla when reading a book about a female guerrilla soldier. It seems likely that this kind of identification with other women would have an impact on the decision to join.

All three women display the motivations for their mobilisation as being multiple and the various factors are hard to distinguish from each other, as illustrated in the case of Liliana (my classification of the found motives are put in parenthesis):

Liliana joined a communist group because she liked the ambience of fraternity and had a circle of friends there (*social network*). But she also liked the idea to create a different, more equal society (*grievance*). She was also inspired by a book about a Bulgarian female guerrilla soldier (*wanting fun/adventure, gender identification*). She was encouraged by her family not to get married at a young age, but rather to travel and experience. Needed to find a means of supporting herself (*survival*). At age 19 she heard of FARC first time, and had a positive personal contact with a trade unionist from guerrilla controlled area. She had a positive idealistic image of the guerrilla and did not consider the military aspect at all before joining

⁶¹ Rueda Calderon 2009, p.23, my translation from Spanish

(contradicts the “greed” hypothesis) and wanted to teach. This is how she describes her decision to join the guerrilla:

*[they] asked me: ‘Why don’t you join FARC and help to write documents and work in our educational program?’. I had been giving classes in the schools of the region. I had already been five years in the Juco [la Juventud Comunista, a Colombian communist organisation]. I wanted to experience new things. I wanted to have more adventures. I had run out of prospects. Where I was there was a lot of internal discussions and they said we weren’t making much progress. So for me the prospective of the guerrilla seemed interesting, and I said: ‘I’m going’.*⁶²

These quotes illustrate how difficult it is to distinguish motives and separate them from each other. Together in the three narratives, motive indicators of all categories were found and often intertwined. None of the three women tells of joining the guerrilla explicitly in order to escape domestic violence or to transgress gender norms and have a gender role that wouldn’t be accessible to them otherwise, so using the more narrow interpretation of gender, these motives would not be influential. However, using the broader interpretation, there are signs and patterns showing that FARC’s attitudes to domestic violence might have had an impact, as well as the importance of role models.

5. Conclusions: Is the gender factor relevant?

The question for this paper was *what is the impact of gender on the mobilisation and recruitment of women into FARC-EP?* I looked at the way gender equality and the roles of men and women addressed in the ideology of FARC, how gender equality and the relationship between men and women is regulated in the internal organisation of FARC and tried to trace “gendered” motives behind women’s decisions to join FARC.

Regarding the importance of gender issues in FARC’s ideology, it seemed to be a peripheral issue in the group’s ideology and clearly subordinated to the issue of class struggle and

⁶² Lara 2000, p.93, my translation from Spanish

revolutionary socialism. I interpret the statements about gender equality on the special occasion of International Women's day March as a way to appeal to international allies and supporters, rather than to the female base for recruitment which is mostly women in the Colombian countryside.

When it comes to the internal organization, I looked at the two aspects that were identified by Reif as the most influential in determining the level of women's participation in guerrillas; the incorporation of gender equality demands in the ideology, and policies of egalitarian gender relations within the internal organisational structure of the guerrilla. The conclusion was that FARC has definitely incorporated gender in their ideology, and that they somewhat have adopted an egalitarian framework within their organisation. The women in FARC have formally equal rights to those of men and are protected from sexual violence, they have partial sexual and reproductive rights, but it also in this area that they show the most deficiency when it comes to the rights of women, with forced abortions and other violations.

Regarding the theory of Gonzalez-Perez, I have not looked at women's mobilisation on a macro level but only a micro level, which makes it hard to relate my empirical study to the theory. However, her hypothesis was that women's choice to engage in guerrilla struggle is caused by their desire to change hierarchal gender structure. To me, it seems more likely that Latin American guerrilla movements needed a broader recruitment base for pragmatic reasons in order to be successful in warfare, and thus included women out of necessity, which led to a change in the hierarchy and ideology of the group.

In order to assess the impact of gender in women's decisions to mobilise into FARC, I looked for the motives behind mobilisation that were suggested in the literature (greed, grievance, endogenous factors, social networks, survival, fun/adventure) and tried to find any additional "gendered motives" if they were to be traced. In this context, "gendered motives" meant motives and behaviours that are linked to gender roles, constraints related to gender or the relationship between men and women.

I have chosen to use two different definitions of the gender concept, and the conclusion is different depending on whether a narrow or a broad definition of "gender motives" is used. If it is necessary that the women themselves state that motives were related to gender, the result is that no such gendered patterns were found to be influential in the individual's mobilisation.

Using the broader definition, however, there seems to be such patterns of gender-related factors could be rather influential, and be complementary to the established theories on mobilization. Especially in the matter of domestic violence, a clearly gendered topic where it seems that it could help to explain the mechanism why young people in areas controlled by FARC become interested in joining the guerrilla. It seems that gender is relevant as a complementary concept to the theories on insurgent mobilization, even if the other factors explained by Kalyvas are probably more important (poverty, growing up in a guerrilla-controlled area) it is still important to understand the influence/impact of gender factors, and to consider them when designing policies for demobilization and reintegration programs. By doing this, the DDR process can be improved and more successful.

Another insight of this small, qualitative study is that mobilisation does not seem to be the consequence of a rational, well calculated decision, but rather the cause of various intertwined events and circumstances. I found that there are multiple factors behind the recruitment of the individual, and it is hard to tell which one is the main cause for mobilisation, rather they vary. The reasons for joining the guerrilla are as diverse as to experience an adventure; as a means of financial support; familiarity with the guerrilla since a young age and through social ties; being pressured to join; and joining for ideological reasons – these are all motivations that were represented in the limited material of this case study which shows the complexity when studying motives for mobilisation.

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