



**LOCAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF DISARMAMENT-
DEMOBILIZATION-REINTEGRATION (DDR):
FORMER COMBATANTS' PERSPECTIVES ON DDR IN
COLOMBIA**

**SİLAHSIZLANMA-TERHİS-YENİDEN ENTEGRASYON
(STYE) SÜREÇLERİNİN YERELDE SORGULANMASI:
KOLOMBİYA'DA ESKİ FARC ÜYELERİNİN STYE'YE
BAKIŞI**

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ABSTRACT

DDR processes, the design of which follows technical knowledge produced by international organizations and programs, have become a standard way for addressing the process of armed groups' transition from armed to civilian life. However, the components of DDR, namely disarmament-demobilization-reintegration, may themselves be contested at the local level. This study investigates this contestation through the case of the Colombian peace process, with a focus on ex-combatants' perspectives. Based on extensive fieldwork in Colombia, this study investigates how and why former combatants contest DDR components. Former FARC members rejected disarmament and demobilization terms since they indicate an idea of defeat. They also rejected "reintegration" since, in Colombia, reintegration indicates a different process focusing on individual reintegration. Thirdly, many FARC members refute the term "ex-combatant",

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arguing that the group continues its struggle in the political arena. The study contributes to recent research focusing on domestic understandings of international norms and practices in peace processes.

Keywords: DDR, Ex-Combatant, Colombia, FARC, Peace Process.

ÖZ

Uluslararası kuruluşlar ve programlarca üretilen teknik bilgiye göre tasarlanan STyE süreçleri, eski savaşçıların silahlı mücadeleden sivil hayata geçişini ele almanın standart bir yolu haline gelmiştir. Bununla birlikte, STyE'nin bileşenleri olan silahsızlanma-terhis-yeniden entegrasyon öğelerine yönelik yerel düzeyde eleştiriler ortaya çıkabilmektedir. Bu çalışma, belirtilen bu eleştirileri, eski savaşçıların bakış açılarına odaklanarak, Kolombiya barış süreci örneği üzerinden incelemektedir. Kolombiya'da icra edilen kapsamlı bir saha çalışmasına dayanan bu çalışma, eski savaşçıların DDR bileşenlerine nasıl ve neden karşı çıktığını araştırmaktadır. Eski FARC üyeleri, silahsızlanma ve terhis kavramlarına, bu kavramlar bir yenilgi fikrine işaret ettiği için karşı gelmektedirler. Ayrıca Kolombiya'da "yeniden entegrasyon" kavramı bireysel teslim olmaya dayanan farklı bir süreci tanımladığından, bu kavram da eski FARC üyelerince reddedilmektedir. Son olarak, birçok eski FARC üyesi, grubun halen siyasi arenada mücadelesini sürdürdüğünü savunarak "eski savaşçı" terimini reddetmektedir. Bu çalışma, son dönemde gelişmekte olan ve barış süreçlerinde uluslararası normlar ve uygulamalara yönelik yerel yaklaşımlara odaklanan literatüre katkıda bulunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: STyE, Eski Savaşçılar, Kolombiya, FARC, Barış Süreci.

INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1990s, DDR programs have become a staple of peacebuilding processes by multilateral organizations like the United Nations and the World Bank. Today, nationally-led peace processes also encompass DDR processes that

aim at the disarmament and demobilization of armed groups and their social, legal, and economic reintegration into the society. While their scope and design have expanded considerably in the last three decades and across different contexts, DDR programs remain a core step for both multilateral and nationally-led peacebuilding. At the same time, although DDR has been increasingly standardized in international policy documents produced especially by the UN since the early 2000s, the actual practices and meaning of each component are shaped based on contextual needs and interests. A review of peace agreements and related documents signed since the 1990s reveals that a variety of terms are used in reference to the process of disarming, demobilizing and reintegrating armed groups (Muggah and Rieger, 2012). Terms such as arms control, weapons management, weapons collection and destruction (in reference to disarmament), cantonment, warehousing (in reference to demobilization), and reinsertion, rehabilitation (in reference to reintegration) reveal this diversity.

Focusing on the recent peace negotiations between the Colombian government and the FARC armed group during 2012-2016, this paper investigates ex-combatants' perspectives on DDR and the reasons for their contestation of the standardized DDR framing used in international policy environments. The Final Agreement signed in November 2016 reflects the framings adopted by the parties. The agreement uses "laying down arms" in reference to the disarmament and demobilization process. The word "disarmament" does not appear within the document while the word "demobilized" appears only two times under the heading in relation to the victims of the conflict, with reference to "demobilized individuals" and "women, youngsters, and girls demobilized from the conflict" (Alto Comisionado para la Paz, 2012: 220). The agreement also uses "reincorporation" instead of "reintegration" of armed group members who lay down their arms. Reinsertion or reintegration does not appear in the document. This paper seeks to explain this divergence with a focus on the local level and is organized as follows: The following part traces the development of DDR in international policymaking. The next part provides a brief background of DDR in Colombia. The third part discusses ex-combatants' perspectives on DDR. The final part concludes.

1. THE EVOLUTION OF DISARMAMENT-DEMOBILIZATION-REINTEGRATION (DDR) AND ITS DEVELOPMENT AS A NORM

DDR is the process of "demilitarizing official and unofficial groups by controlling and reducing the possession and use of arms, disbanding non-state armed groups, reducing the size of state security services and assisting former combatants to reintegrate into civilian life" (Ball and van de Goor, 2006: 2). As a comprehensive process, DDR aims to contribute both to immediate security needs and also longer-term stability by engaging with the social, economic, and political

integration of ex-combatants (Dilek, 2019). DDR processes are not limited to establishing post-conflict security and stability. Rather, DDR is linked in a more comprehensive manner to peacebuilding efforts and is inextricably linked to security sector reform and transitional justice.

DDR processes consist of three main components (United Nations Peacekeeping, 2021). The first component, disarmament, refers to the “collection, documentation, control, and disposal of light and heavy weapons from combatants and even from the civilian population and the development of responsible arms management programs” (United Nations, 2005). The second component, demobilization, refers to “the formal and controlled discharge of active combatants from armed forces”, involving stages such as the processing of individual combatants in temporary centers and the massing of troops and the provision of support packages for the demobilized (United Nations, 2005). The third component, reintegration, is the process by which demobilized combatants acquire civilian status. Reintegration is frequently preceded by reinsertion, which refers to the “assistance offered to ex-combatants (including government forces, opposition rebel groups and irregular armed groups) during demobilization but prior to the longer-term process of reintegration” (United Nations, 2005). Reinsertion addresses immediate needs of ex-combatants through safety allowances, food, clothes, shelter, medical services, short-term education, and training. Reintegration is essentially a social and economic process primarily taking place at the community level and having an open timeframe with no pre-defined endpoint (United Nations, 2005). The UN has increasingly adopted a broader understanding of reintegration under the “sustaining peace” approach (UN Peacebuilding, 2021). Accordingly, support for the reintegration of former combatants can be provided not only in contexts where conflict has ceased but also in contexts where active conflict is continuing (UN Peacebuilding, 2021). This understanding shows that reintegration is increasingly regarded as a core practice and idea for supporting peace.

Since the early 1990s, the scope of DDR has expanded in terms of what is expected to be achieved through DDR programs and processes (Muggah and O’Donnell, 2015). The scope of DDR programs that the UN implemented during peacekeeping operations in the 1990s mainly involved the cantonment and commissioning of former military units. This first generation of DDR was primarily focused on security and military aspects and needs; what might be called as “minimalist” focus (Özerdem, 2013). The scope of DDR programs was widened after the late 1990s, with increasing emphasis on societal reconciliation and a more comprehensive approach to demobilization and reintegration of armed groups. The “second generation” DDR, which is regarded as “maximalist”, emphasizes community-based incentives for addressing needs at the societal level related to security and development (Munive and Jakobsen, 2012). States going

through negotiated peace processes may adapt the maximalist DDR processes to the domestic needs and expectations. More recently, since the 2010s, the scope of DDR programs has expanded further. DDR processes now may take place before the end of conflict and the signing of a peace agreement and are increasingly linked to transitional justice, security sector reform, and national development plans.

In the UN system, the DDR framework is considered as a standard, promoted by the UN as an indispensable part of peacebuilding processes. In the early 2000s, the Integrated DDR (IDDR) standards were proposed with the purpose of bringing together “knowledge, lessons and good practice on a wide range of issues from concepts, policies and strategies to program planning, design, management, monitoring and evaluation” outlining each phase of the DDR and providing guidance on topics such as information, sensitization, food security, and women and gender (United Nations, 2014: 13). The IDDRs set the first standards regarding DDR, laying down a list of five underlying principles: people-centered; flexible, transparent and accountable; nationally owned; integrated; and well-planned (United Nations, 2014). IDDR was followed by the Stockholm Initiative on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (SIDDR) report published in 2006 (Stockholm Initiative, 2006). The SIDDR report provided details for good practices in DDR design and implementation and underlined that DDR could be used as a political instrument to support peacebuilding.

The following preconditions are seen as essential for DDR programs: signing a ceasefire and/or peace deal that provides a roadmap for DDR; trust in the peace process; willingness by the parties to engage in DDR; and security guarantees (UN Peacebuilding, 2021). Considering that these preconditions might not be met in every context, the UN has recently adopted a more flexible approach focusing on the DDR *process* rather than exclusively on DDR programs. This approach is part of the revised IDDR approach established in 2019 by the UN inter-agency working group. Accordingly, a DDR process may consist of any combination of a DDR program, DDR-related tools (such as the management of weapons, community violence reduction, and initiatives to prevent individuals from joining armed groups), and reintegration support, depending on the context (UNDDR, 2020).

The development of international standards of DDR reveals the normative expansion of DDR as an indispensable part of peacebuilding. It is now widely accepted that international norms, understood widely as standards of appropriate behavior, diffuse geographically and shape state and sub-state behavior (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). Recently, the literature on international norms became increasingly interested in domestic responses to such norms. For example, a well-known perspective, localization, explains how local actors might try to fit international standards to domestic normative standards (Acharya, 2004). Other

perspectives discuss how local actors may contest international norms (Wiener, 2004). The contestation of such norms might be related to their application (applicatory contestation- contesting how a norm or standard would be applied), or their validity (validity contestation- contesting the meaning of a norm, whether it is valid or not) (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann, 2020). Contestation research sheds light on the political processes behind the adoption and/or rejection of international norms. Contributing to this research strand, this study provides empirical, local-level observations about responses to international norms and practices in a peacebuilding context, from the perspective of non-state actors.

With regards to peace processes, domestic responses to international norms vary depending on the characteristics of such processes. In peacebuilding processes where international actors (mainly the United Nations) engage in top-down design (generally after peacekeeping operations), critical perspectives have debated how such peace processes lead to top-down imposition of liberal norms like liberal market democracy, good governance, and security sector reform (SSR) (Paris, 2002). In this strand of research, an important discussion revolves around local agencies and how local actors react to top-down decisions about the process of a peace process (Mac Ginty, 2008). On the other hand, in negotiated peace processes such as the one in Colombia, the diffusion of international norms and practices is not top-down. While local actors are expected to comply with certain normative standards (such as the protection of human rights, the fulfilment of the right to justice, and the right to reintegration), such norms and practices are not imposed by third parties. However, while not imposed, these standards are amenable to local contestation. In this study, we aim to reveal such ideational and conceptual contestation that FARC ex-combatants expressed towards the use of the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration labels in the Colombian context.

In negotiated transitions, domestic political processes become more important as local actors generally seek to fit international norms into their own agendas. Negotiating parties may have different understandings of the disarmament and reintegration process, depending on their local positions regarding the conflict and their expectations from the peace process. The local political, historical, and cultural setting of conflicts require that we shift focus from the mechanics of such processes to local dynamics and perceptions of local actors and groups (Berdal and Ucko, 2013). The position of the negotiating parties is expected to be shaped by domestic interests and the domestic political context. As Muggah and Rieger (2012) also note, in many settings, “disarmament” and “demobilization” may be considered loaded and pejorative terms, connoting “surrender”, and as a result the expressions may be deliberately excluded from peace accords or other official documents, even if a DDR process is in place. This situation was also acknowledged in Afghanistan, where the International Security

Assistance Force (ISAF) engaged in reintegration was instructed to never use the terms “surrender” and “laying down arms” in any conversation, considering that this would be perceived as harming the dignity of reintegrating insurgents (International Security Assistance Force, 2011). Disarmament and demobilization are intensely political issues closely linked to security dilemmas for the parties. Armed groups would be unwilling to lay down their arms in the absence of credible security guarantees that the peace agreement terms will be enforced (Muggah and Rieger, 2012: 9). For instance, this was the case in Myanmar after the ceasefire agreement signed in 2015 where armed groups refused both the terms and implementation of disarmament and demobilization in the absence of guarantees for federalism and power-sharing (Kyed and Gravers, 2015). Furthermore, armed groups would be unwilling to leave arms in the absence of associated transitional justice adjustments supporting special sentences and amnesties for demobilizing armed group members.

2. DDR IN COLOMBIA

The Colombian government has gone through various peace negotiation processes with different armed groups since the 1980s.¹ In terms of DDR, one of the most comprehensive processes took place under President Uribe’s term (2002-2006). Between 2003-2006, the Uribe government hosted a program for the demobilization of the AUC, the umbrella organization for paramilitary groups in Colombia. Law 975 of 2005 –the Justice and Peace Law– was promulgated with the purpose of handling the demobilization and transitional justice process. After demobilization, in line with this law this law, AUC members faced reduced prison sentences (Jaramillo, Giha and Torres, 2009). Combatants were not punished for illegal armed group membership and went through a reintegration program. The Presidential High Council for Reintegration was in charge of the reintegration program. With the Justice and Peace Law, DDR was linked to transitional justice, moving beyond the narrow focus on military and security frameworks (Theidon, 2007).

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed in 2016 between the Santos government and the FARC-EP included provisions on the disarmament and demobilization of the FARC and the long-term reintegration of demobilizing combatants. The peace agreement established a tri-partite monitoring and verification mechanism involving the Colombian government, the FARC, and the

¹ Colombia had gone through several rounds of peace processes since the 1980s, including under Belisario Betancur (1982-1986) (with the FARC, the process known as “La Uribe”), Virgilio Barco Vargas (1986-1990) (resulted in the demobilization of M-19), César Gaviria (1990-1994) (with the FARC, ELN, EPL, the process known as the Tlaxcala and Caracas dialogues), under Andrés Pastrana (1998-2002) (in El Caguán). The demobilization of the paramilitary group AUC during the Álvaro Uribe (2002-2010) government during 2002-2005 also is considered as an important experience in terms of demobilization and amnesties.

United Nations. In July 2017, The UN Verification Mission in Colombia (UNVMC) was established to verify the implementation of 3.2 and 3.4 sections the peace agreement by the Government and the FARC-EP (UN Department of Peacebuilding and Political Affairs, 2021). The UN mission completed its activities related to the laying down of arms in September 2017. A total of 8,994 arms, 1,765,862 ammunition rounds, and 38,255 kg of explosives and other related materials were collected during the process (UNSC, 2017). The FARC's disarmament process was completed in June 2017 (BBC News, 2017).

In terms of the institutional aspects, as an extension of the DDR process that started in the early 2000s, the reintegration policy in Colombia was strengthened with the creation of the Colombian Agency for Reintegration (ACR) in 2011 as a Special Administrative Unit (Colombian Reintegration Agency, 2021a). The ACR was transformed into the Agency of Reincorporation and Normalization (ARN) in 2017 with the purpose of leading FARC-EP members' reincorporation process. The change of the agency's name from "reintegration" to "reincorporation" reflects that parties' preference for differentiating FARC's reintegration process from previous processes. This was followed by the creation of the Technical Unit for Reincorporation and Normalization in 2018. The government established 26 demobilization camps in rural areas, called Zonas Veredales Transitorias de Normalización (ZVTN, Transitory Rural Settlement Normalization Zones). Twenty-four of these centers were converted to Espacios Territoriales de Capacitación y Reincorporación (ETCRs, Territorial Training and Reincorporation Spaces) where former FARC members could continue their reintegration processes.

The ARN defines reintegration as "an offer of six and a half years by the Colombian State, through the management of the ARN, to people who have been demobilized from Organized Armed Groups who Operate Outside the Law, who have not committed crimes against humanity, and who want to reintegrate to social and economic life" (Colombian Reintegration Agency, 2021c). Accordingly, "reintegration seeks to develop citizen skills and competencies among demobilized persons and their environments" (Colombian Reintegration Agency, 2021c). On the ARN website, it is noted that the process of reintegration is for the persons demobilized after January 2003, who were part of guerillas of the FARC, the ELN, the EPL, and the AUC. According to the ARN, within the reintegration process in Colombia, approximately 25,000 people have been disarmed and transited into civilian life. As part of the broader reintegration process, the "special reintegration process" refers to the process of reintegration of demobilized individuals who served 5 to 8 years in prison after their disarmament, through the Justice and Peace Legal Framework (Agency for Reincorporation and Normalization, 2021b).

While reintegration covers the demobilized guerillas and paramilitaries, *reincorporation* is a process and mechanism established through the Final Peace Agreement between the Colombian government and the armed group FARC-EP. Accordingly, reincorporation, as explained in point 3 of the agreement in relation to the End of the Conflict topic, establishes that the reincorporation of the FARC shall be defined by the National Council for Reincorporation, established in 2016 and composed by two members of the National Government and two members of FARC-EP. The reincorporation process is divided into two stages (Agency for Reincorporation and Normalization, 2021a): the early reincorporation stage has a duration of 24 months and is a mandatory phase that all individuals in the process of reincorporation go through. The long-term reincorporation stage begins after the end of the first stage and encompasses components such as education, healthcare, economic sustainability, and housing. As part of the reincorporation process, Territorial Spaces for Training and Reincorporation (ETCRs) were established for a two-year term in 2017. Training and reincorporation activities were carried out in these spaces with the purpose of facilitating the initial phases of adaptation of FARC members into civilian life. After completing the two-year work, the ETCRs were transformed to Former Territorial Spaces for Training and Reincorporation (AECTRs) (Colombian Reintegration Agency, 2021b).

The FARC has rejected the idea of DDR based on three arguments (Carranza-Franco, 2019): First, the demobilization process initiated during the Uribe period aimed to instrumentalize DDR as a counterinsurgency strategy to attack guerillas to favor his paramilitary allies. Accordingly, the FARC rejected the idea of DDR by creating parallels to the counterinsurgency policies of previous periods. Second, giving up weapons meant that they decided to continue their struggle through political means (thus, not giving up struggle completely but transforming into a new form). Third, the FARC underlined that they would go through a collective reincorporation process, different from collective demobilization. According to a recent piece by Segura and Stein (2019), the FARC sees the individual reintegration model as interventionist and thinks that this process will create dependency to state for the former FARC members. FARC supports a collective reintegration process that will enable ex-combatants to transition to civilian life in a collective manner. The gap between the individual reintegration process foreseen during the peace negotiations and the practical challenges associated with collective reincorporation became increasingly visible in the post-2016 implementation phase (International Crisis Group, 2021). In this study, we focus on how the gap in perceptions were expressed at the local level. More specifically, based on extensive field research in different areas with concentrated ex-FARC members, we investigate how and why these terms were contested at the local level.

3. METHODOLOGY: BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF FIELD RESEARCH

The findings of this study are mainly based on fieldwork conducted in Colombia in 2020 and 2021. The fieldwork, which was financially supported by Universidad del Rosario, was part of a project focusing on the security of former FARC members and the evaluation of the DDR process. During field research, we visited several municipalities in six of Colombia's 32 departments in addition to Bogotá, the capital city. These departments are Valle del Cauca (Cali), Cauca (Buenos Aires, Santander de Quilichao, Popayán), Caquetá (Florencia, San Vicente del Caguán, ETCR Miravalle, ETCR La Montanita, Cartagena del Chairá), Nariño (Tumaco) and Casanare (Yopal, Villanueva). All the field trips were conducted in 2021. Before determining these places, we made a statistical analysis and evaluated the general dynamics of violence in Colombia (Charles, Baysal and Forero, 2020). With the help of this study, we determined the departments and municipalities where the level of violence against former FARC members is very high. Logistics and security restrictions also influenced the selection of the field research areas. A non-governmental organization, Corporación Territorio, Paz y Seguridad, mostly consisting of ex-FARC members, also assisted us in the process of finding people for interviews and focus groups.

In these places we conducted interviews and focus groups with ex-FARC combatants with the purpose of understanding their perceptions of the ongoing DDR process in Colombia. To be able to include all ex-FARC combatants in different processes, we interviewed ex-FARC combatants living in ETCRs (Espacios Territoriales de Capacitación y Reincorporación - official reintegration centers for ex-FARC combatants), NARs (Nuevas Áreas de Reincorporación – new unofficial reintegration places), city centers and rural communities (ex-combatants living independently). We also included both male and female former FARC members in our sample group. We conducted interviews with a total of 47 former FARC members.

During the interviews and focus groups, the reactions of the ex-FARC combatants towards “international” academic concepts like “ex-combatant”, “demobilization”, “disarmament”, and “reintegration” led us to focus on the dilemma between international academic concepts and local concepts. Interviewees expressed such reactions mostly upon receipt of the “informed consent form” prepared for the field research. After seeing these concepts, the ex-combatants who were demobilized within the framework of 2016 peace deal rejected these terms and even some of them started to argue with us. This led us to focus more on this issue and investigate the inconsistencies between local and international terms and the tensions that emerged because of these inconsistencies.

4. FORMER COMBATANTS' VIEWS ON DDR

As expressed above, during fieldwork, we witnessed that ex-FARC members do not accept the international academic and policy terms of “disarmament”, “demobilization”, “reintegration”, and “ex-combatant”. One of these terms, reintegration, was rejected because of the local political context of Colombia in which this term has a very specific meaning, while the others were rejected because they implied a meaning of defeat. We believe that particularly the ones that imply defeat may be observed in different peace processes in different parts of the world and with the emergence of other studies, this dilemma between international/academic terms and local understandings may lead to a change in the approach and terminology in academia and international organizations like the UN. This part of the study presents and evaluates the findings of our fieldwork.

Disarmament and Demobilization: Connoting Defeat

One of the issues related to the dilemma between international and local terms is related to disarmament and demobilization. Disarmament and demobilization are two main components of DDR processes, which are used in the jargons of international organizations like the UN and academia. We also used these terms in our participant information forms during our fieldwork in Colombia. The former FARC members demobilized within the framework of 2016 peace deal, *reincorporados*, harshly rejected these terms. Some of the former FARC members stated that these are the arguments of the Duque government, which has been reluctant to implement the peace process since it got power in Colombia in 2018.² According to former FARC members, these terms imply a defeat of the FARC by the state. They argue that they were not defeated when they sat at the negotiation table. Instead, they decided to pursue their cause in the political arena and sat at the negotiation table with the state, by their own will, as two equal negotiating parties. They negotiated with the state the terms of the peace deal. Neither side was defeated; both sides and the Colombian society won as a result of the peace process between the Santos Government and FARC. For example, a high-ranking former FARC member who is now a member of an NAR in Caqueta and another former FARC member living in the Miravalle ETCR rejected these terms after seeing our informed consent form by stating “we are not defeated”. The one ETCR Miravalle even started to argue with us by stating that these are the arguments of the Duque government. It should be stated here that harsh reactions mostly came from high- or middle-rank FARC commanders but some of the low-ranking former FARC members also expressed their concerns about these terms.

² The governments that signed and had implemented the peace deal until 2022 are different. Moreover, the government which had been implementing the peace deal since 2018 was leading the opposition to the peace process during negotiation process between 2012 and 2016.

Actually, the words themselves connote defeat for one party and our inferences from Colombia may be observed in different parts of the world too. The roots of these words are “disarm” and “demobilize”.³ They have a meaning in which one party is demobilizing and disarming the other party. In peace processes without a military victory of one side and in which both parties sat at the negotiation table on equal terms to end a conflict, using these terms may be problematic and in Colombia we faced this in our fieldwork. In Colombia, the problem with the meanings of the terms disarmament and demobilization has also been recognized in the peace process. In order to eliminate the implication of defeat, the parties adopted the term “laying down arms” (*dejar las armas*) during the negotiation process. This shows that the rejection of these terms is a general stance of the FARC including its leadership and that this issue was a sensitive topic from the very beginning of the peace process. As expressed above, the term disarmament was not used in the final peace agreement and the term demobilization was used only two times in reference to the victims of the conflict rather than FARC members. It may be considered that this sensitivity is only about wording since the FARC has been demobilized and disarmed during the implementation of the peace agreement. However, we believe that this is important since it is about their ideas and feelings. Moreover, wording gives different meanings to similar practices. Using the term “laying down the arms” instead of “disarmament”, reflects the idea that the FARC is not defeated, and this addresses the feelings of the FARC members who spent years in FARC ranks.

Complexities around “Reintegration”

Another issue related to the dilemma between international academic terms and their local understandings is related to the term reintegration. As expressed above, reintegration and reincorporation refer to different processes in Colombia in legal terms. The rights and benefits of the demobilized combatants are different. In Colombia the term reintegration indicates the reintegration process of individually demobilized combatants. This process includes all combatants from different armed groups like the FARC, the ELN and paramilitary groups. Moreover, in reintegration, the process is conducted without a peace agreement. Therefore, it is directed towards armed group members who individually desert their organizations and surrender. Because of this, reintegration is also considered as a counterinsurgency measure. In Colombia, the individually demobilized armed group members who disarmed within the framework of reintegration program are called as *reintegrados*. On the other hand, reincorporation is the process for the collectively demobilized FARC members after the 2016 peace

³ Although we made all of the interviews in Spanish and our consent forms and participant information forms were also Spanish, the words disarmament, demobilization and reintegration are very similar to English (disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration = desarme, desmovilización y reintegración).

agreement. Therefore, the FARC members demobilized within the framework of the 2016 peace agreement are called as *reincorporados*. In addition to reintegration and reincorporation processes, there is also another process in Colombia. This process is for the demobilized paramilitary group members (AUC) during the Uribe Era. The paramilitary group members demobilized within this program are called as *reinsertados*.

In addition to the different legal rights and regulations, the political implications of the differences between these three terms are crucial in the Colombian context. The term reintegration is used both in the UN and academic jargons as an international term. However, using this term in Colombia to refer to all the above-mentioned processes creates problems. This issue was one of the problems we faced during our fieldwork regarding the dilemma between international/academic terms and local understandings. We used the term reintegration in our participant information forms. Most of the ex-FARC combatants who demobilized within the framework of 2016 peace deal rejected these terms and some of them started to argue with us. This was because the term reintegration refers to the program that targets individual demobilization of all armed group members outside the framework of the 2016 peace agreement. Individually demobilized FARC members (*reintegrados*) are regarded as if they were surrendered to state, however, the ones that are demobilized within the framework of the 2016 peace deal (*reincorporados*) see themselves as not surrendered but as having negotiated with the state as two equal sides and reached a middle point in which both sides made sacrifices. With the peace agreement, FARC accepted to lay down its arms, but the agreement also included decisions like rural reform and political participation. Considering that FARC was founded in 1964 to protect the rights of poor peasants, the agreement addressed some of the demands of the group, too. Therefore, this process is not regarded as surrender or defeat. Moreover, ex-FARC members demobilized within the framework of the 2016 peace deal regard individual reintegration process as a counterinsurgency measure by the state since it aimed at weakening the organization while the armed conflict was going on. Since *reintegrados* had surrendered to the state, they are even regarded as traitors to the cause of the organization. Because of these issues, the ex-FARC members refuse to call the final process as “reintegration”. They also reject the term *reintegrado* and use *reincorporado* to identify themselves.

Another issue regarding the reintegration process in Colombia is related to the difference between *reincorporados* and *reinsertados*. Between 2003 and 2006, ex-president Uribe initiated a demobilization process for paramilitaries (AUC). This process included the reintegration of ex-paramilitaries in accordance with the Law 975 of 2005. These ex-paramilitary group members are named as *reinsertados*. In our fieldwork in Colombia, we worked with a non-governmental organization

mostly consisted of ex-FARC combatants demobilized within the framework of the 2016 peace deal between the FARC and the Santos government. Before going to the field, we were warned to be very careful about not using the term *reinsertado* for the ex-FARC combatants. In Colombia paramilitary groups are right-wing non-state armed groups and the FARC (and the ELN) is a leftist non-state armed group. Therefore, these two groups have opposing ideologies and there has been a conflict among them. Therefore, calling *reincorporados* as *reinsertado* would create stronger reactions. However, as expressed above, reinsertion has a special meaning in international usage indicating the initial steps of a reintegration process. But in the local context its meaning is different, and this difference is prone to tensions.

Refuting the “Ex-combatant” Term

A final issue regarding the dilemma between international terms and local terms is related to the concept of ex-combatant. During our fieldwork, the ex-FARC members who demobilized within the framework of the 2016 peace deal rejected the term ex-combatant and preferred the term *reincorporado*. Even some of them argued that they are still combatants, but they are fighting for their cause in the political arena without weapons. For example, the ex-FARC members that we interviewed in NARs in Cauca expressed that “they are still fighting for their socialist cause” and they still define themselves as “combatants who are fighting without weapons”. The NARs we visited in Cauca (a fish farm and a coffee farm) are commune-like places and the former FARC members living in these places expressed that the FARC, as a political party, is still fighting for the ideals of the organization and they themselves are still fighting for their cause with their commune-like activities. In essence, many of the former FARC members who laid down arms within the framework of the 2016 peace deal still have strong affiliation to the organization, which is now a political party in Colombia. These people still see themselves as FARC members and regard the FARC as their family.⁴ The FARC political party changed its name to COMUNES during our fieldwork in Colombia and some of the *reincorporados* expressed their frustration about this change even without being asked their opinion on the issue. This is mainly because they still feel affiliated to the organization, and they still see themselves working/fighting for its aims. In addition, the *reincorporados* expressed that they preferred to use the term *reincorporados* for themselves since this term specially

⁴ It should be stated here that it is not all of the former FARC members Support FARC party and the socialist cause of the organization. Some of them are apathetic to this cause and there are different factors (like finding a job, having children, experiences in the FARC before the peace deal) that lead to different paths. However, since this is a topic of another paper these are not examined in detail here.

refers to the ex-FARC members that laid down arms within the framework of the 2016 peace agreement.

To sum up, the international terms disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, and ex-combatant do not sufficiently cover the complex conflict and peace dynamics in Colombia. Using these terms creates problems and tensions. During field research we worked hard to explain to *reincorporados* that these terms are academic, international concepts and we do not have any political intentions in using them. But this shows that these international academic terms may be problematic in local contexts and that the international academic jargon must be more context-sensitive.

It should also be stated here that not all of the former FARC members strictly rejected these terms. The level of reactions was also different. Most of the harsh rejections came from high- and mid-level commanders of FARC who were demobilized within the framework of the 2016 peace deal. Moreover, the stricter reactions came mostly from the former FARC members who live in NARs and ETCRs as part of a community consisting of former FARC members. As we stated above, we conducted interviews with 47 former FARC members. Approximately, 3/4 of them were *reincorporados* while the others were *reintegrados*. These *reintegrados*, who demobilized individually, were not sensitive about these concepts. Approximately, half of the *reincorporados* we interviewed rejected these terms. However, among the *reincorporados*, there were also different reactions. As a general inference of our fieldwork, there are different levels of political motivations and affiliations to the FARC's cause among the *reincorporados*, too. This affiliation level ranges from apathetic ones (the ones who are not politically motivated anymore) to political supporters and activists. Some of the former FARC members now have different primary identities like being a mother, a father, or a farmer. These people do not give importance not only to these concepts but also to other developments and debates on the peace process. The level of political motivation and affiliation to the FARC cause led to different levels of reactions ranging from no reaction or mimics that implied discomfort for these terms to frustration and disputes. However, despite this variation of reactions we believe that the findings of this study bare important lessons for Peace Research and its terminology.

5. CONCLUSION

The Colombian peace process bares many lessons for Peace Studies and future peace processes in the world both in terms of negotiation and implementation processes. The very well-documented and detailed final truth commission report, which was published recently, can also be considered as one of these themes (Truth Commission Final Report, 2022). This study investigates

the discrepancies with regards to the DDR process between the way its components are defined in international policy documents and the way they are perceived and adopted at the local level. DDR is now accepted as a standard in peacebuilding processes and it widely encompasses the processes of the disarmament and demobilization of armed groups and their long-term reintegration into the society. DDR is accepted as a fundamental component of the peacebuilding process. In international policy documents, DDR is defined as a process that involves the collection of arms, cantonment, and social, economic and political reintegration of demobilized groups into the society. In recent years, the scope of DDR expanded from a primary focus on arms control and disarmament to a more comprehensive focus on development, broader security reform, and transitional justice and an expanding focus on reintegration processes. This study focuses on FARC ex-combatants' approach towards DDR components, namely disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration, by investigating the way these terms were adopted and contested and the reasons for such contestation. Through extensive fieldwork in Colombia, this study argues that FARC ex-combatants contested each component due to the political connotations and the context of the peace negotiations.

Ex-combatants contested disarmament and demobilization on the grounds that they implied defeat for the FARC. Reflecting this contestation, instead of disarmament, the negotiating parties agreed on the term "laying down arms". This is also reflected in the General Peace Agreement signed in November 2016 in which disarmament does not appear as a term while demobilization is only used in reference to women and youngsters. Reintegration is the most contested term. The FARC rejected the use of the reintegration term on three main grounds. First of all, reintegration is a term used in relation to the demobilization and reintegration of members of the AUC paramilitary group that was initiated by the Uribe government during 2002-2004. Secondly, the FARC adopted instead the term "reincorporation" as a term that underlined the fact that the FARC was not defeated and did not surrender. Instead, from this perspective, the FARC transitioned from armed to political struggle as a result of a negotiation process between two parties, the FARC itself and the Colombian government. Thirdly and relatedly, ex-combatants reject reintegration as a term referring to the individual reintegration of FARC members that demobilized individually before the signing of the final peace agreement. Those who demobilized individually, called as "reintegrados" were regarded as having surrendered to the state. Additionally, ex-FARC members reject individual reintegration, seeing it as a counterinsurgency strategy adopted by the Colombian government during the implementation phase. Adopting the term "reincorporation", the FARC rejected individual reincorporation and supported instead collective reincorporation that would allow it to transition to civilian life as a group. This outcome is also important

considering the aforementioned new reintegration approach of the UN that includes processes in the absence of a peace agreement (UN Peacebuilding, 2021). Reintegration efforts that are implemented without a peace deal can be counterproductive as this example shows that these efforts are seen as part of a general counterinsurgency policy. Finally, former FARC members rejected the “ex-combatant” term on the grounds that the group was not defeated but it continues its struggle in the political arena through political means. From this perspective, the ex-combatant term is rejected as it connotes an end to the group’s struggle.

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