



**BREAKING WITH THE PAST:
The social navigation practices used by ex-paramilitaries
during their transition to a civilian lifestyle in Medellín,
Colombia**



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| Breaking with the past

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Since I was a high school student I have felt the urge to understand conflicts and to engage with people that endure the reality I read about in study books. I wanted to understand what it is like to be in their shoes and to unravel why people act the way they do when confronted with violent situations. The MA Conflict Studies and Human Rights has given me the valuable opportunity and freedom to go into the field and to familiarise myself with the experiences of people that were so different from my own. Conducting independent research on the social navigation practices of former paramilitaries in Colombia has taught me a lot on academic as well as personal level and there are many people I want to thank for supporting me during this process.

First of all, my gratitude goes out to the participants in this research. I am utterly grateful for the ex-paramilitaries' openness and sincerity when talking about their lives. Beforehand, I read stories about the cruelties the paramilitaries had committed and the so-called "war face" they had adopted. However, during my research I solely encountered ex-paramilitaries who were extremely helpful and kind. As a result, I often found myself caught in a paradox during the interviews. On the one hand, I experienced disgust for the crimes they had committed and the grief they had caused. On the other hand, I admired their perseverance to create a new life and sympathised with their suffering. It struck me that these ex-paramilitaries, even though they are often portrayed as perpetrators and killing machines, are victims as well – victims of direct as well as structural violence. This experience reinforced my sense that engaging with the people you study provides you with insights and impressions that are different from the image you get when reading books. Relatedly, I would like to thank the experts for sharing their insights with me. Their expertise formed a valuable addition to the academic literature I consulted before I went into the field.

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this research is to understand why certain paramilitaries decided to demobilise and how they transitioned to a civilian lifestyle in Medellín, Colombia, from 2003 onwards while a substantial amount of their comrades continued in reconfigured paramilitary groups. In this research, the ex-paramilitaries were comprehended as social navigators who strategically and tactfully move in their dynamic social environment. Through fieldwork including interviews with twelve local experts and nine ex-paramilitaries, this study demonstrates that the former paramilitaries I interviewed decided to demobilise because they adhered to the order of their commanders and imagined a life in legality to result in an enhancement of their and their family members' living conditions. The ex-paramilitaries' subsequent new life was characterised by a flow of legal as well as illegal opportunities. Strengthened by their personal motivation and belief in God, the interviewees tactfully employed three strategies to resist the criminal offers. These strategies entailed a complete focus on their family, the avoidance of people who could have a negative impact on their achievements and moving to a different area where they were not known as paramilitaries. With the abovementioned strategies the interviewees managed to counter the influences that could pull them back into their old lives and to create their own stable and motivating environment. In this environment they could take advantage of the opportunities the local reintegration programme offered and find their way on the labour market. The interviewees talked about their reintegration in terms of redemption in which they were 'freed' from their confining lives as paramilitaries and were suddenly able to 'move' in the direction they preferred.

Key words: DDR, Reintegration, Ex-paramilitaries, Colombia, Social Navigation Practices, Transition to Civilian Lifestyle, Desistance.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACR	Agencia Colombiana para la Reintegración (Colombian Agency for Reintegration)
AUC	Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia)
BACRIM	Bandas criminales (Criminal gangs)
BCB	Bloque Central Bolívar (Central Bolívar Bloc)
BCN	Bloque Cacique Nutibara (Cacique Nutibara Bloc)
BM	Bloque Metro (Metro Bloc)
CEPAR	Centro para la Paz y Reconciliación (Centre for Peace and Reconciliation)
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
ELN	Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army)
EPL	Ejército Popular de Liberación (Popular Liberation Army)
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia)
IDDRS	Integrated Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Standards
M-19	Movimiento 19 de Abril (19 th of April Movement)
PyR	Programa para la Paz y Reconciliación (Programme for Peace and Reconciliation)
UN	United Nations

INTRODUCTION

“It’s like coming to terms with a person passing away. You come to terms with the death when you bury someone. Otherwise you will keep watching the person and feel as if he is still alive and in the present. The same happened with our demobilisation. We demobilised and came to terms with being demobilised. Life is changing and you start looking at what you will become. Are we going to return to our old life or are we going to take advantage of the opportunities they are giving us? When you arrive at this point you have to take a decision. If I stay here, as much as I want to change, I will not change, because that is reality. Consequently, you have to take the decision to stay where you were or close your eyes and leave. That’s what I did. I closed my eyes and proceeded at the hand of God. It’s like when you are thrown into a river and you don’t know how to swim or suddenly have to learn how to swim.”¹

In 2003, Esteban and his comrades were confronted with the sudden initiation of their paramilitary bloc’s demobilisation in Medellín (Rozema, 2008, p.428). They entered a highly uncertain period in which they had to decide about the direction of their future lives. As described by Esteban - whose story will be used as a thread running through this thesis - the paramilitaries were standing at the crossroads between continuing in an armed group and starting a new life. Although exact numbers are not available, it is generally known that a substantial amount of paramilitaries did not participate in the collective Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programme of the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC)² and immediately continued in other armed groups while theirs was dismantled. Additionally, there were paramilitaries who started the DDR programme but later decided to return to an armed group (Hristov, 2010, pp.21-22). Consequently, for some paramilitaries the DDR process marked a turning point³ in their life course whereas others disregarded the process and continued in war.

This research focuses on the group of paramilitaries who completed the DDR programme and transitioned to a civilian lifestyle⁴. This group is specifically relevant to investigate in Medellín for several reasons. First of all, the collective demobilisation process of the paramilitaries started in this city as a pilot and therefore differed from the rest of Colombia (Rozema, 2008, p.440)⁵. The programme had to be a success in order to proceed with the DDR process in the rest of the country. Therefore, more benefits were made available for the first demobilised paramilitaries.⁶ Moreover, it was led by the municipality’s own organisation called *Paz y Reconciliación* (PyR) whereas the DDR process in other areas fell under the coordination of a national programme. Over time the national organisation *Agencia Colombiana para la Reintegración* (ACR) and the PyR adapted their programmes to the lessons learned and started working more closely together.⁷

¹ Interview with Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017.

² As will be elaborated upon in chapter 2, the majority of these paramilitary groups were established in the 1980s by mostly wealthy sectors of society to counter the upsurge of the guerrillas. Their aim was to neutralise and eliminate individuals or movements that were an obstacle to the private property and business interests of those with economic and political power. During their operations they received (sometimes unofficially) military and logistical assistance from the government (Hristov, 2010, p.15).

³ A turning point often involves a particular event, experience or awareness that brings about a long-term change in the direction of a person’s life (Elder Jr., Johnson & Crosnoe, 2003, p.8; Teruya & Hser, 2010, p.2).

⁴ Individuals’ way of living who are not active members of the military, the police or a belligerent group in an armed conflict (www.thefreedictionary.com; www.dictionary.cambridge.org).

⁵ Interview with Catalina Morales, expert 12, 11/04/2017.

⁶ Interview with Catalina Morales, expert 12, 11/04/2017.

⁷ Interview with Catalina Morales, expert 12, 11/04/2017.

In addition, while most paramilitaries were active in the countryside, Medellín formed an exception as it used to be a paramilitary stronghold.⁸ Interestingly, the demobilisation process was initiated at the peak of the paramilitary domination in Medellín (Cívico, 2016, p.195). Their activities provided the *urbanos* - paramilitaries active in Medellín - with considerable power, privileges, money and the perfect embodiment of masculinity (Theidon, 2007, p.76, p.86). These aspects were hard to compensate for during the DDR process (Theidon, 2009, p.30). Yet, approximately 3.000 paramilitaries participated in the DDR programme and many paramilitaries managed to successfully transition to a civilian lifestyle (Cívico, 2016, p.95, p.182; Theidon, 2007, p.78; Rozema, 2008, pp.450-451)⁹. This is remarkable since a considerable amount of paramilitaries reconfigured their former groups – which are now referred to as *bandas criminales* (BACRIM). In several of Medellín’s neighbourhoods, they were able to maintain their parallel state and control of the business sector (Rozema, 2008, p.450; Theidon, 2007, p.85; Hristov, 2010, pp.21-22). Since only the paramilitary node of the wider criminal structure was demobilised, there were ample opportunities for former paramilitaries to sustain their activities in other criminal enterprises that remained active (Rozema, 2008, pp.450-451).

Ex-paramilitaries’ continuation in criminal, armed groups was further facilitated by various factors that characterised the post-demobilisation period. To start with, the collective demobilisation process was designed in such a way that the paramilitary blocs demobilised in their entirety. This meant that most of the ex-paramilitaries still lived in the same neighbourhoods as they did whilst active fighters, continued to meet up with their comrades and could thus rather easily continue their business as usual (Cívico, 2016, p.184; Rozema, 2008, p.450). Kaplan and Nussio add that living in the midst of criminal groups is one of the most important factors related to ex-combatant recidivism in Colombia (2016, p.23)¹⁰. Furthermore, there is a high level of distrust of the government, which lowered the paramilitaries’ expectations that the process would be a success.¹¹ Finally, the ex-paramilitaries are rather stigmatised in the Colombian society, which makes it harder to enter the labour market and sustain themselves in a legal way.¹² Consequently, the question arises why some ex-paramilitaries decided to truly demobilise and how they could create a civilian lifestyle in the long term, while the paramilitary structures subsisted and continued to enable most of the ex-paramilitaries’ former, profitable activities (Hristov, 2010, p.21; Theidon, 2009, pp.16-17, Rozema, 2008, p.449).

In order to investigate this complex reality a framework is needed that allows an analysis of the intersection between agency, structure and change. The formation of ex-paramilitaries’ new lives and corresponding choices in the wake of their demobilisation have to be researched in relation to the dynamic context in Medellín and the structural obstacles that hindered their room for movement. Consequently, ‘social navigation practices’ is used as a lens to understand how paramilitaries transitioned to a civilian lifestyle. Social navigation practices are defined as the act or process of strategically and tactfully moving through one’s changing social environment (Vigh, 2009, p.425). As Vigh explains: “We act, adjust and attune our strategies and tactics in relation to the way we experience and imagine and anticipate the movement and influence of social forces” (2009, p.420). Social navigation is

⁸ Interview with Catalina Morales, expert 12, 11/04/2017.

⁹ Interview with Jorge Gaviria, expert 7, 27/03/2017.

¹⁰ Recidivism among ex-combatants in Colombia is 158 per cent more likely if the BACRIM is present in their municipality (Kaplan & Nussio, 2016, p.19).

¹¹ Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017; David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017.

¹² Interviews with former employee of the ACR, expert 2, 06/03/2017; Daniel Castaño, expert 3, 14/03/2017.

particularly relevant to study this phenomenon because it “is used when referring to how people act in difficult or uncertain circumstances and in describing how they disentangle themselves from confining structures, plot their escape and move towards better positions” (Vigh, 2009, p.419). When the demobilisation process started, the paramilitaries had to redirect their lives and a multitude of potential life trajectories¹³ opened up. But what made them choose the life path they eventually actualised? And how did they manage to advance a civilian lifestyle in the challenging and constantly changing environment of Medellín? Hence, the research question of this thesis is:

Which social navigation practices have ex-paramilitaries used in their transition to a civilian lifestyle in Medellín, Colombia, since 2003?

The aim of this research is to shed light on the manner in which ex-paramilitaries were able to leave their old lives behind while they were confronted with circumstances that could push them back into their former activities. The objective is to find out how they socially navigated their environment, including opportunities, challenges and social network, in order to turn their transition to a civilian lifestyle into a success.

This research is socially relevant since demobilisation and reintegration is a complex process and DDR programmes do not always manage to achieve their objectives (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2007, p.563). Gaining more insight into the way people socially navigate their lives after a demobilisation process and make the transition to a civilian lifestyle is therefore a relevant contribution. Moreover, this research is relevant with regard to the DDR process of the guerrilla group *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC). The FARC recently started its DDR process. However, experts have noticed that some members of the FARC are currently establishing their own BACRIM - already termed FARCRIM by McDermott - in a similar fashion as paramilitaries of the AUC did (McDermott, 2017). Additionally, alliances between the BACRIM and the FARC have been reported, which provide FARC fighters contacts and opportunities to integrate into existing BACRIM networks (Nussio & Howe, 2012, p.63). This research provides a modest contribution to understanding which practices are important for Colombian combatants' transition to and maintenance of a civilian lifestyle. Additionally, light will be shed on the factors that according to the interviewed experts and ex-paramilitaries encouraged the continuation and remobilisation of ex-combatants in armed groups.

This research is also scientifically relevant since studies on the effectiveness of DDR programmes are often focussed on statistics and the short-term outcomes (Klem & Douma, 2008, p.10). According to Sprenkels, “in-depth research on DDR and its consequences is still scarce” (2014, p.3). Consequently, this research is innovative in the sense that it investigates the long-term reintegration process by using personal stories. Furthermore, social navigation is a relatively new concept and Denov and Buccitelli called for more research using this analytic framework: “Future research would do well to examine the applicability of social navigation to multiple contexts” (2013, p.16). So far no research has used this lens to study the demobilisation and reintegration process of armed groups in Colombia. Therefore, this research provides a relevant contribution in the sense that it further explores the suitability of social navigation as an analytical framework for civilian reintegration in the Colombian context. Moreover, as will be elaborated upon in section 1.1.5, there is no consensus on the incentives diverse social networks provide after demobilisation. Therefore, it is relevant to see

¹³ A life trajectory is a pathway or line of development over the life span, such as work life or criminal behaviour (Sampson & Laub, 1993, p.8).

which roles social networks played in ex-paramilitaries' attempt to remain on the civilian path after their demobilisation process. Finally, several authors have argued that maintaining a non-delinquent path requires active decision-making on a daily basis (Terry & Abrams, 2017, p.731; Maruna, 1999, pp.8-9; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009, pp.1108-1109). However, few studies have investigated how and why these decisions are made (Terry & Abrams, 2017, p.730). Therefore, Terry and Abrams argue that more research is needed to understand the specific strategies of former delinquents to transition to a life in legality - including how they came to decisions regarding the avoidance of criminal activities (2017, p.731). Accordingly, this study investigated the day-to-day decisions and social navigation practices of ex-paramilitaries that prevented a relapse into their old lifestyle.

In order to answer the research question and enhance our understanding of the studied phenomenon, this research is divided in five chapters. The first chapter discusses the position of this research in the larger body of DDR literature. Additionally, the content of the analytic framework 'social navigation practices' and its relevance for this research topic will be further explained. Finally, the methodology will be addressed before we turn to the empirical chapters. The second chapter will provide a more detailed description of the origins and characteristics of the Colombian paramilitaries and the context of the DDR process in Medellín. The information provided is based on both academic literature and the author's interviews with Colombian experts and ex-paramilitaries.

The abovementioned chapters form the foundation for the next three chapters that aim to unravel the research question. The transition to a civilian lifestyle started with the announcement of the collective disarmament and demobilisation process. This sudden change provided the paramilitaries with several possibilities regarding their future lives. The third chapter addresses the interviewees' first reaction to this change and how they navigated the options that arose in the wake of the demobilisation process. In order to understand their first choice – whether to demobilise or not – this chapter addresses the following sub-question:

1. Which life trajectories opened up to the paramilitaries when they were confronted with the order to demobilise and why did they opt for demobilisation?

After the ex-paramilitaries had decided on their desired life paths in the first year following their demobilisation process, the question remains how they could advance this life trajectory in the long-term. Therefore, the fourth chapter focuses on the formation of their new life; the question how they were able to effectively transition to a civilian lifestyle; and which strategies the interviewees used to prevent a relapse into their old life. The following sub-question will be answered:

2. How have ex-paramilitaries strategically and tactfully moved through their social environment in order to advance their civilian lifestyle in the long term?

The final chapter reflects on the ex-paramilitaries' social navigation practices and perceptions on their post-demobilisation achievements. The sub-question that will be answered is:

3. How do the ex-paramilitaries think about their new life, which mentality changes have taken place and how do they talk about their own agency in the constantly changing social environment they find themselves in?

Finally, the conclusion provides a summary of the findings, suggests future research and discusses policy implications.

1. ANALYTIC FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

This research on ex-paramilitaries' transition to a civilian lifestyle in Medellín is part of the larger body of literature on DDR programmes and processes. Therefore, the first section describes the academic debate surrounding research on DDR effectiveness and the controversies related to security, political, economic and social aspects of reintegration. The second section discusses the principles defining social navigation and the relevance of this analytic lens in relation to the researched phenomenon. Finally, the last section elaborates on the methodology of this research.

1.1 DDR programmes: controversies and effectiveness

Ex-combatants have been conceived as “time bombs slowly ticking away” (Mashike, 2004, p.101) and the legacy of armed ex-fighters has often been one of the factors accountable for renewed hostilities in post-conflict settings (Klem & Douma, 2008, p.7; De Vries & Wiegink, 2011, p.38). Consequently, the implementation of DDR programmes has gained importance within larger peacebuilding efforts since the late 1980s (Rozema, 2009, p.427; Klem & Douma, 2008, p.8). A wide range of actors became involved in DDR programmes and in order to address the critiques regarding the lack of strategy, coherence and consensus the United Nations (UN) launched the framework Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS) in 2006. These guidelines stated the UN approach to DDR and emerged as the dominant framework in this field (Klem & Douma, 2008, p.9, p.5). In general, DDR programmes are aimed at reducing violence, dismantling armed organisations and realising the transition of armed group members to civilians (Rozema, 2009, pp.426-426; Klem & Douma, 2008, p.7). However, the effectiveness has been hard to establish and studies have come to different conclusions regarding DDR successfulness.

1.1.1 Definitions, critiques and effectiveness

The content of the three elements composing DDR programmes are elaborated on in the IDDRS and defined as follows:

“Disarmament is the collection, documentation, control and disposal of small arms, ammunition, explosives and light and heavy weapons of combatants and often also of the civilian population. Disarmament also includes the development of responsible arms management programmes” (UN, 2006, p.6).

“Demobilisation is the formal and controlled discharge of active combatants from armed forces or other armed groups. The first stage of demobilisation may extend from the processing of individual combatants in temporary centres to the massing of troops in camps designated for this purpose (cantonment sites, encampments, assembly areas or barracks). The second stage of demobilisation encompasses the support package provided to the demobilised, which is called reinsertion” (UN, 2006, p.6). “Reinsertion is the assistance offered to ex-combatants during demobilisation but prior to the longer-term process of reintegration. Reinsertion is a form of transitional assistance to help cover the basic needs of ex-combatants and their families and can include transitional safety allowances, food, clothes, shelter, medical services, short-term education, training, employment and tools” (UN, 2006, p.19).

“Reintegration is the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income. Reintegration is essentially a social and economic process with an open time-frame, primarily taking place in communities at the local level. It is part of

the general development of a country and a national responsibility, and often necessitates long-term external assistance” (UN, 2006, p.19).

Although IDDRS is the broadly accepted standard, some considered the acronym DDR too limited and have added more R's. Consequently, separate R's for Reinsertion, Rehabilitation¹⁴ and Repatriation or Resettlement¹⁵ have been included in some definitions (Klem & Douma, 2008, p.8). Besides criticism on the components of the acronym, there is a considerable amount of critique regarding the definition of reintegration. To start with, there is an agreement in the literature that the term 'reintegration' is a misnomer (Söderstrom, 2013, p.19; De Vries & Wiegink, 2011, p.44). The prefix 're' implies that reintegration is aimed at returning to the pre-war state of affairs. However, both society and combatants have significantly changed over time and it is an illusion to think that everything can return to the status quo ante (Söderstrom, 2013, p.19; De Vries & Wiegink, 2011, p.44). Furthermore, it does not seem desirable to return to the old days given the fact that the societal conditions fed the outbreak conflict itself (Söderstrom, 2013, p.19). Therefore, Söderstrom argues that policymakers and academics are actually referring to 'integrating' ex-combatants (2013, p.19). However, Klem and Douma argue that, in fact, combatants might never have been disintegrated when they for instance stayed in their communities while fulfilling a military function (2008, p.8). Accordingly, using the term 'integrating' instead of 'reintegrating' ex-combatants might not be an adequate alternative. Another perspective is offered by Sprenkels, who argues that the 'theoryless field' of DDR has a limited understanding of insurgencies and the accompanying groups. The concept reintegration "oversimplifies the actual individual and the collective agendas at stake" (2014, p.6). Therefore, Sprenkels advocates for using the term reconversion¹⁶ instead of reintegration (2014, p.6). Although the term reconversion might be more adequate and theoretically-based, the term reintegration will be used throughout this thesis since it has been the praxis to use this terminology.

There is not only disagreement concerning the term reintegration itself, the definition and objectives are also contested. The definitions of reintegration have varied to such an extent that they have been organised along a continuum from more security oriented minimalist definitions to more development oriented maximalist ones (Söderstrom, 2013, p.2; De Vries & Wiegink, 2011, p.40). Furthermore, most definitions have not sufficiently differentiated between social, political and economic reintegration and thereby blurred the objectives of specific reintegration programmes (Söderstrom, 2013, p.3). Over the past years a multitude of definitions have been used, which thereupon influenced the design, implementation, expectations, coordination practices, financing, monitoring and, eventually, the understanding of what drives and explains the success of DDR programmes (Söderstrom, 2013, p.2). Consequently, disagreement on the definitions and corresponding objectives has resulted in ambiguity about what DDR and specifically reintegration is supposed to accomplish (Klem & Douma, 2008, p.9; De Vries & Wiegink, 2011, p.40). Therefore, divergence regarding the meaning of reintegration poses an obstacle to investigating reintegration (Kaplan & Nussio, 2015, p.2) and is partly accountable for the confusion and mixed results regarding DDR effectiveness (Söderstrom, 2013, p.3).

¹⁴ Rehabilitation is more encompassing than reintegration since it involves the wider societal struggle of ex-combatants and community members to reconstruct a normal life with housing, income, basic facilities, etcetera (Klem & Douma, 2008, p.8).

¹⁵ An R for Repatriation or Resettlement is sometimes included when ex-combatants need to return to their home area or country (Klem & Douma, 2008, p.8).

¹⁶ While international organisations aspire to dissolve armed groups and *reintegrate* combatants, the leaderships of these insurgent groups are more concerned with *reconverting* their political, social-economic and military capital in order to adjust to the peaceful situation and gain political leverage in the new context (Sprenkels, 2014, p.6).

Another factor thwarting the determination of DDR effectiveness is the fact that especially reintegration is hard to measure. Reintegration, in contrast to disarmament and demobilisation, is by nature a qualitative process that “does not lend itself to ‘counting’” (De Vries & Wiegink, 2011, p.40). Reintegration is often seen as ‘the weakest link’ in the DDR chain and very few appropriate metrics have been developed to analyse its long-term effects (De Vries & Wiegink, 2011, p.40). Keen further explains that it is hard to establish the long-term impact since it is a complex task to separate the socio-economic effects of reintegration programmes from other contextual factors that might influence the post-conflict situation (2009, in Sprenkels, 2014, p.2). Furthermore, evaluations of DDR programmes are completed shortly after the programme has finished, which is too early to provide solid conclusions about combatants’ reintegration process or potential remobilisation on the long-term (Sprenkels, 2014, p.3).

Taking these aspects together, it is not surprising that studies come to different conclusions regarding the effectiveness of DDR programmes. For example, whereas Humphreys and Weinstein found “little evidence at the micro level that internationally funded programmes facilitate demobilisation and reintegration” (2007, p.531), specific DDR programmes in Mali, Mozambique and Cambodia have been suggested as success cases (Klem & Douma, 2008, p.10). In general, assessments of DDR successfulness have been rather inconclusive. Consequently, Muggah strongly claims that DDR programmes should not be seen as a magic bullet until the objectives are formulated more clearly and DDR success is adequately demonstrated (2005, p.249). In sum, disagreement and inconclusiveness are characterising the academic debate of DDR effectiveness. The next sections will elaborate on specific aspects of DDR programmes and the corresponding factors that have been shown to facilitate or hinder successful ex-combatant reintegration.

1.1.2 Security aspect

Several authors maintain that security is related to DDR success (Klem & Douma, 2008, p.11; Rozema, 2008, p.428; Nilsson, 2005, p.40). The security dilemma faced by combatants while they are disarming has been distinguished as an obstacle to reaching peace (Themnér, 2011, in Kaplan & Nussio, 2015, p.2; Walter, 1999, p.134). The combatants are often required to demilitarise under conditions of anarchy and civil war. Subsequently, their security dilemma is characterised by a tense situation in which the combatants feel increasingly vulnerable as they start handing over their weapons (Walter, 1999, p.134). Klem and Douma add that a traditional gun culture, the masculine value attached to the possession of guns and legitimate security concerns influence combatants’ willingness to disarm (2008, p.11).

Besides the immediate security dilemma, safety after the completion of a demobilisation process is crucial as well (Nilsson, 2005, p.40). For example, Berdal (1996, pp.17-18) and Call and Stanley (2003, pp.216-218) argue that ex-combatants might re-arm to protect themselves when they are harassed or threatened. The state is often the main actor providing for security. However, state institutions in fragile countries are generally too weak to enforce safety or are itself a threat to human security. In short, it is essential to enhance security and stability when trying to stimulate combatant’s transition to a civilian lifestyle. Nonetheless, the fortification of institutions concerned with enforcing security is outside of the scope of DDR programmes and often takes longer than the DDR programme lasts (Klem & Douma, 2008, p.11). Since security is identified as an aspect related to DDR successfulness, it is relevant to investigate how former paramilitaries experienced their security in the wake of their demobilisation and what role security concerns played in their reintegration process.

1.1.3 The political aspect

The willingness of warring parties to adhere to the programme is an essentiality when it comes to DDR success (Mateeva, 2012, p.29; Rolston, 2007, p.274; Klem & Douma, 2008, p.12). There is a general consensus that the ownership of the DDR programme lies at the national actors in order to enhance the legitimacy of the process (Nilsson, 2005, p.49; Klem & Douma, 2008, p.12). Consequently, no matter how well a reintegration programme is designed and how many international actors provide support, state capacity and the political will of the warring parties is crucial when advancing a DDR process and bringing about reforms to address the root causes of the conflict (Klem & Douma, 2008, p.12; Kingma & Grebrowold, 1998, p.12). In addition, effective legal arrangements are paramount during this process. However, these often hinge on a complex balancing act between, on the one hand, the need to grant amnesties in order to halt cycles of violence and enable a reasonable livelihood for ex-combatants and, on the other hand, the quest for justice and the necessity to avoid a remuneration of violence (Nilsson, 2004, p.42; Spear, 2006a, p.185). Overall, warring parties' willingness to adhere to the programme, state capacity and well-balanced legal arrangements are factors related to the effectiveness of DDR programmes. Therefore, this research explores to what extent the ex-paramilitaries were ready to demobilise, willing to adhere to the DDR programme and, accordingly, how these attitudes influenced their reintegration process. Furthermore, the ability of the state to fulfil their promises and the ex-paramilitaries' reactions to the legal arrangements are addressed in order to evaluate the reintegration process of ex-paramilitaries in Medellín.

1.1.4 The economic aspect

According to Klem and Douma, the availability of economic opportunities is vital to DDR success (2008, p.428). Multiple authors found that ex-combatants may resort to crime and violence when legal opportunities to provide for themselves and their families are limited (Rozema, 2008, p.428; Spear, 2006b, p.68; Knight & Özerdem, 2004, p.513; Kingma, 1997, p.9; Mashike, 2004, p.100). However, in many post-conflict societies socio-economic deprivation and high unemployment rates are a reality (Sprenkels, 2014, p.4; Klem & Douma, 2008, p.12; Kingma, 1997, p.6). Consequently, it has been argued that in these contexts ex-combatants are simply reintegrated into poverty. This may defy ex-combatants' expectations of progressing in life and decrease the opportunity cost to join a criminal enterprise (Banholzer, 2014, p.18). Although the endurance of structural economic problems frustrates DDR, it should not be assumed that combatants reintegrate easily in well-performing economies. For example, Rolston found in Northern Ireland that, even though the labour market could have absorbed them, former combatants with criminal records experienced difficulties with obtaining jobs due to their past conviction (2007, p.271). Consequently, although relative economic stability may favour reintegration, there are other factors such as the social rejection of ex-combatants that can play a role as well.

DDR programmes have been critiqued for the limited socio-economic return on their large investments (Collier, 2006, in Sprenkels, 2014, p.4). However, it is important to point out that there is a danger in expecting too much of DDR programmes. These programmes are not meant to address a country's entire economic situation and, in this context, can only try to enhance the economic position of individual ex-combatants (Banholzer, 2014, p.18). Since the economic position is deemed crucial in remaining on the civilian path after demobilisation, it is relevant to research how demobilised paramilitaries perceived the availability of economic opportunities and navigated the labour market in order to attain a new career.

1.1.5 *The social aspect*

In reintegration literature, several social networks and environments have been discussed. To start with, there is a controversy regarding the question whether persistent contact between ex-combatants is good or bad. It is often assumed that wartime networks need to be dismantled in order to prevent remobilisation and secure DDR success (De Vries & Wiegink, 2011, pp.40-41). However, academic scholars disagree on the question whether wartime networks foster or hamper DDR processes. Although the majority of the authors advocate a complete dismantlement of the ex-combatant network due to the risk of remobilisation¹⁷; others argue that persisting relationships between fellow ex-combatants do not necessarily increase the risk of recidivism (Kaplan & Nussio, 2016, p.20; De Vries & Wiegink, 2011, p.47) and that maintaining ex-combatant networks is important to prevent ‘social disorientation’ that can lead to remobilisation (Zyck, 2009, p.111). Additionally, Wiegink argues that maintaining ex-combatant networks can be worthwhile because it may provide them with social protection, economic opportunities and a sense of belonging (2015, p.11).

Several authors have identified gaps in the literature and recommended further research on the role of ex-combatant networks. For instance, Rozema argues that more attention needs to be paid to the role ex-combatant networks and criminal organisations play when analysing the risk of ex-combatant remobilisation and use of violence (2008, p.423). Wiegink also underlines that continuing participation of ex-combatants in networks based on their former armed group is largely ignored in post-war analyses (2015, p.2). She concludes that it is relevant to investigate the perspectives of ex-combatants who did not remobilise on the persistence of wartime networks and ex-combatant (non-)remobilisation (2015, p.11). Hence, taking these gaps and contrasts in the literature into account, it is relevant to further explore the incentives this network provided to demobilised paramilitaries who did not continue in armed groups.

In addition, the role of the community¹⁸ in ex-combatant reintegration has been widely discussed. Firstly, it has been assumed that former fighters want to return to their homes. However, in some cases ex-combatants are not welcome in their former communities or have created ‘home’ at another place (De Vries & Wiegink, 2011, p.46). Wherever ex-combatants choose to reside, acceptance by one’s community has been identified as a factor restraining recidivism (Kaplan & Nussio, 2016, p.7, p.8; Rozema, 2008, p.428). However, the fact that community members are sometimes fearful and distrustful of the ex-combatants restrains their possibility of gaining acceptance (Espinal & Agudelo, 2008, p.31; Wood, 2008, p.555; Kaplan & Nussio, 2015, p.3). De Vries and Wiegink add that the expectations of ex-combatants’ community members influence the degree to which they accept ex-combatants in their midst (2011, p.48).

Moreover, constructive ex-combatant behaviour, such as participating in the community, prevents the recurrence of conflict as well (Kaplan & Nussio, 2015, p.16). When ex-combatants are embedded in their community a safe and supportive environment can be created. This could mitigate the immediate security dilemma ex-combatants face (Kaplan & Nussio, 2015, p.3). Adversely, in communities with less social participation ex-combatants are more likely to organise among themselves (Kaplan & Nussio, 2015, p.3). This could,

¹⁷ See for example: Rozema, 2008, p.449; Bøås and Bjørkhaug, 2010, p.2; UN, 2014, p.161; Utas, 2012, p.19; Guáqueta & Arias, 2011 in Nussio & Howe, 2012, p.60; Themnér, 2011 in Kaplan & Nussio, 2016, p.5.

¹⁸ Communities are in this research understood as neighbourhoods ex-paramilitaries live or lived in. The recipient community is often wrongfully approached as a homogeneous entity. However, they should be studied as a diverse group of people who have different perceptions regarding the returning ex-combatants (De Vries & Wiegink, 2011, p. 48).

depending on the role of the ex-combatant network, either encourage or hamper remobilisation (Nilsson, 2005, p.50). Communities and ex-combatants thus mutually influence each other's behaviour. Therefore, it is interesting to explore how relationships between ex-paramilitaries and their neighbours developed after the demobilisation process and what role changing or remaining in their neighbourhoods played in the ex-paramilitaries' reintegration process.

Finally, family is a key network related to reintegration. As Theidon (2009) shows, family is an important reason to demobilise (p.21) and a key incentive to avoid remobilisation (p.31). The latter is confirmed by Kaplan and Nussio (2016, p.18) who argue that those with familial restraints are less likely to become recidivists while ex-combatants with weak family ties might be more vulnerable for recidivism (Kaplan & Nussio, 2016, p.24). Rozema takes this even further and states that reintegration will only happen if ex-combatants' families are willing to embrace them (2008, p.428). Terry and Abrams (2017) explain the importance of strong family ties in the transition to a civilian lifestyle by arguing that if family members are unwilling or unable to support them in the way they need, former delinquents are more likely to keep relying on their criminally associated networks. Subsequently, they find it harder to break with their criminal past (Terry & Abrams, 2017, pp.743-744).

Unfortunately, the abovementioned authors do not specify what 'family' exactly entails. Therefore, this research will look at the broadest interpretation of family. It investigates the role of the nuclear family ex-paramilitaries grew up in, their own family formation including their partner(s) and child(ren) and broader family ties such as uncles, cousins, in-laws and grandparents. In Colombia, family plays an influential role in people's lives and as such affects combatants' involvement in armed groups (Theidon, 2009, pp.30-31). Consequently, it is relevant to investigate how strong ex-paramilitaries' family ties are, what expectations the family had regarding ex-paramilitaries' post-demobilisation life and which role this played in ex-paramilitaries' decisions.

This section demonstrated that the effectiveness of DDR programmes is hard to establish; that DDR success is influenced by the economic, political and security situation in a country; and that diverse social networks can play multiple roles in ex-combatant's lives. Interestingly, in Colombia some paramilitaries managed to successfully reintegrate into society while others maintained their former lives in an armed group. This shows that the effectiveness of a programme can differ per person. The ways in which people are situated in their environment and how they use their social network depends on the individual. This points to people's ability to shape their own life and to navigate opportunities, obstacles and interpersonal contacts. Hence, ex-paramilitaries are social navigators who strategically and tactfully move through their dynamic environment in order to arrive at their desired destination.

1.2 'Motion in motion': understanding social navigation

Vigh introduced the concept 'social navigation' and defined it as the way in which agents seek to draw and actualise their life trajectories by navigating networks and events in order to increase their social possibilities and life chances in a shifting and volatile social environment (Vigh, 2006, p.11, p.13). As such, social navigation enables an analysis of the interplay between agency, social forces and change (Vigh, 2009, p.433). First of all, the definition

points our attention to people's agency¹⁹. Social navigation provides a lens to observe people's engagement in the world and the way in which they move towards positions seen as better than their current one. Here, social navigation differs from Jackson's rather similar concept 'maneuvering' in the sense that Jackson's concept only focuses on the short term. In comparison, Vigh's idea encompasses the navigation of social forces both in the immediate circumstances and the imagined future (Jackson, 1998, p.26; Vigh, 2009, p.425). Chapter 2 until 4 will demonstrate that social navigation is more relevant for this research since the interviewees not only navigated their immediate circumstances, they also moved in relation to their future goals and imagined, prospective positions.

Although social navigation underscores people's capacity to direct their lives, the concept opposes Murdoch's (1970) overemphasis on agency. Murdoch sees people as completely free and highly self-contained, conscious beings (Murdoch, 1970, p.35) whereas in social navigation individuals are never entirely free to move as they wish. Rather, "we move in relation to the push and pulls, influences and imperatives, of social forces" (Vigh, 2009, p.432). De Certeau's distinction between tactics and strategies²⁰ is a relevant starting point for understanding people's room for navigation (Korf, Engeler & Hagmann, 2010, p.387). The distinction between tactics and strategies emphasises different actualisations of agency (Vigh, 2009, p.432), which have been termed tactical and strategic agency by Honwana (2006). The first is a narrow and opportunistic agency "exercised to cope with concrete, immediate conditions of their lives in order to maximise the circumstances created by their environment" (Honwana, 2006, p.71). On the contrary, strategic agency requires a certain position of power that facilitates a degree of control over oneself and the choices made. The time frame is longer and a "mastery of the larger picture" is required (Honwana, 2006, pp.71-72). Events and actions can be planned and are not merely "determined by random factors they could neither predict or control" (Honwana, 2006, pp.71-72). Several authors who used tactical and strategic agency echoed De Certeau's argument that "tactics are the art of the weak" (De Certeau, Jameson & Lovitt, 1980, p.6). As a result, it has been mainly the tactical agency of victims or people with a weak position in war-torn societies that has been studied so far (Honwana, 2000; Bøås, 2013; Utas, 2005).

However, Vigh criticised this distinction between the powerful and the weak by arguing that "seeing strategy as acts of the powerful and tactics as acts of the weak disregards the fact that a terrain is an intrinsically multi-layered phenomenon containing a multitude of negotiations of power" (Vigh, 2006, p.135). Based on his research in Bissau, Vigh proposes the concept social navigation in which all people constantly redraw their trajectories, strategies and tactics against the backdrop of shifting and sometimes life-threatening constellations of social order (Korf, Engeler & Hagmann, 2010, p.389). Combining social navigation and De Certeau's distinction, "strategy is the process of demarcating and constituting space and tactics the process of navigating it" (Vigh, 2009, p.424). Therefore, this research uses the concept 'social navigation practices' in which actors both strategically

¹⁹ People's capacity to act, to initiate change and to engage in reflexive self-direction (Demmers, 2017, p.16, p.18). It entails a consciousness that it is possible to alter one's life conditions, which denies the immutability of some undesirable situation (Gamson, 1995, p.90).

²⁰ According to De Certeau, strategy is "the calculus (or the manipulation) of relations of force which becomes possible whenever a subject of will and power (a business enterprise, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated. Strategy postulates a space susceptible of being circumscribed as a propre and of being the base from where relations can be administered with an exteriority of targets or threats" (De Certeau, Jameson & Lovitt, 1980, p.5). Tactics are "the calculated action which is determined by the absence of a proper space. [...] Tactics has no place except in that of the other. Also it must play with the terrain imposed on it, organised by the law of a strange force" (De Certeau, Jameson & Lovitt, 1980, p.6).

as well as tactically move through their social environment. This perspective has been taken over by other authors in the field, such as Denov and Buccitelli who discussed the social navigation strategies of marginalised former child soldiers that were deliberately and tactfully used in Sierra Leone (2013, p.4). In sum, people have the agency to strategically plot their lives and to tactfully employ their long-term strategies through day-to-day micro-level decisions.

Nevertheless, people's room for navigation is constrained by so-called social forces. Unfortunately, Vigh's work lacks an explanation of what is exactly meant by social forces. However, from the definition mentioned in the beginning it can be assumed that networks and events²¹ are the social forces that have to be navigated. To delve deeper into the exact meaning of social forces it is relevant to look at works of other authors who have discussed the role of networks more extensively. Networks can broadly be defined as a set of flexible, adaptive and interconnected nodes that can be people, institutions or other things (Castells, 2000, p.695). To further operationalise networks this research focuses on a specific type of network, namely social networks. When combining the work of various authors a social network can be defined as consisting of people (network nodes) linked by a set of relationships, which differ in nature²², vary in strength²³ and evolve over time²⁴. In this research it is investigated how the ex-paramilitaries embedded themselves in their social environment and how the people they are connected with - through e.g. kinship, shared experiences, location or involvement in the same institution - influenced their social navigation practices.

Vigh argues that networks and events have to be navigated (Vigh, 2006, p.13), which literally means 'have to be sailed' (Vigh, 2009, p.420). Navigation refers to the act of moving in an environment that is fluid and volatile. This directs our attention to the third component of the concept: change. The social forces move simultaneously as people move in it (Vigh, 2009, p.420). With his socio-cultural fields²⁵, Bourdieu also focussed on the relationship between agency and social forces. However, Vigh argues that his concept puts more emphasis on the possibility of rapid change in the social environment compared to Bourdieu's conceptualisation of the social field (Vigh, 2009, pp.426-427). Another concept that became popular when defining the ground upon which lives are formed is 'landscapes' (Vigh, 2009, p.427). Although thinking in terms of landscapes is beneficial in the sense that it sheds a light on the topographies and multiple layers of social formations, Vigh states that it is ill-equipped to analyse the change and movement that define the social world (Vigh, 2009, pp.427-428).

²¹ Events are generally seen as occurrences of certain importance that happen or take place during a particular interval of time (www.oxforddictionaries.com; www.dictionary.com).

²² The relationships a social network encompasses can be of a different nature, which depends on the formality and function(s) of a particular relationship (Nelson, 1989, p.380).

²³ Social ties can be weak or strong depending on reciprocity, trust, friendship and the frequency of contact (Nelson, 1989, p.380; Granovetter, 1973, p.1361; Golembiewski & McConkie, 1975, p.131).

²⁴ An aspect of social networks is that they are by nature unstable, changing and constantly adaptable (Utas, 2012, p.13; Wood, 2008, p.539; Wiegink, 2015, p.5; Duffield, 2002, p.155).

²⁵ According to Bourdieu, an individual's position in the social space is determined by the positions he holds different social fields, i.e. in the allocation of powers that are active within each of these fields. These powers are economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital. The social field is thus a multi-dimensional space of positions in which agents are distributed according to the overall volume and composition of the capital they possess (Bourdieu, 1985, p.197). A social field is a partially autonomous field of forces while it also constitutes a field of struggle for the positions within it, which can either transform or preserve the social field (Bourdieu, 1983, p.312). Fields are thus characterised by a dialectical relationship between structure and agency (Mahar, Harker & Wilkes, 1990, p.8). Thereby, Bourdieu illustrates a rather dynamic picture of practice via the quest for capital (Vigh, 2009, p.435). Nevertheless, according to Vigh, Bourdieu visualises the ground upon which agents move as relatively stable in comparison to his concept social navigation (Vigh, 2009, p.435).

As Ingold argues, landscapes are in motion, but “on a scale immeasurably slower and more majestic than that on which our own activities are conducted” (Ingold, 2000, p.201). Consequently, Vigh, Bourdieu and Ingold seem to differ on their assumptions related to the speed and acceleration of change (Vigh, 2009, pp.426-427). With regard to this research setting, social navigation is deemed more relevant than Bourdieu and Ingold’s concepts since Medellín has recently experienced a rapid change. In only twenty years time the city has transformed from one of the world’s most dangerous cities into most innovative city in 2013 (BBC, 2013).

In sum, social navigation concerns the manner in which agents navigate networks and events as they strategically and tactfully move within fluctuating social structures. Agents simultaneously plot trajectories, strategise and move toward a distant goal while taking their current position, imagined future and possibilities for movement into account (Vigh, 2006, p.13). By using social navigation practices as an analytic lens, it is possible to analyse how ex-paramilitaries acted in uncertain, dynamic circumstances and how they strategically and tactfully transitioned to a civilian lifestyle.

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 Research design and data collection techniques

This research conceptualised ex-paramilitaries as social navigators and is interested in their movement through the dynamic environment they find themselves in. Hence, it is advantageous to adopt an interpretivist epistemological stance that allows studying the phenomenon from within in order to understand the meaning of people’s action (Demmers, 2017, p.17). Reintegration is by nature a qualitative process that does not lend itself to ‘counting’ (De Vries & Wiegink, 2011, p.40) and turning points in one’s life course can best be understood by focussing on the stories of individuals (Maruna, 2010, p.5). Therefore, this study has a qualitative research design with a focus on the fieldwork that was conducted in Medellín. During the three-month fieldwork period from March until May 2017 I first held interviews with experts after which in-depth interviews with nine ex-paramilitaries followed.

1.3.2 Research strategy

The research process consisted of four interrelated steps. The first step was a preparatory phase in which the research was planned. Besides the more practical arrangements, contacts with experts and organisations that could put me in touch with ex-paramilitaries were established. The second step was aimed at contextualising the research puzzle. After I had arrived in Colombia, I started interviewing local experts in both Medellín and Bogotá. Commonly referred to as ‘purposive sampling’ (Boeije, 2010, p.35), twelve experts had been selected on the basis of their expertise and availability (see Appendix I for profiles of the experts). The interviews were semi-structured and lasted between fifty minutes and two hours (see Appendix II for the questions that were used as a guideline during the interviews). The experts’ insights supplemented the previously conducted literature review and enhanced my understanding of the phenomenon I was researching. This step was crucial in the method since Baird argues that a thorough understanding of the local context is essential when interpreting and understanding the interviewees’ responses. This is especially relevant when sensitive matters are researched because the participants’ responses are more likely to be partial or misleading (2009, p.74).

During the previous two phases I had been working on gaining access to ex-paramilitaries through the national reintegration organisation ACR, the local reintegration organisation PyR and the reconciliation organisation *Aulas de Paz* that was founded by ex-paramilitaries. Before I went to Colombia I had established contact with the ACR in order to receive permission for interviewing ex-paramilitaries and to arrange the interviews via them. However, only when I arrived in Colombia they notified me of the requirement to forward my research proposal in Spanish. After a three-week evaluation process, the ACR approved my request and subsequently the PyR could start organising the interviews with ex-paramilitaries in mid-April. At the same time, Gustavo Duncan – an academic I had interviewed – introduced me to the employees of *Aulas de Paz*. They were able to arrange interviews with two ex-paramilitaries while the other seven interviews were organised via the PyR and their education institute *Centro para la Paz y Reconciliación* (CEPAR). The interviews were semi-structured and lasted from one to two and a half hours (see Appendix III for the questions that were used as a guideline during the interviews). I asked the first interviewee²⁶ for feedback on my questions and how he felt during the interview. He did not experience any problems, which provided a good starting point for the other in-depth interviews.

Although I did not have much influence on the ex-paramilitaries the organisations selected, the employees took several selection criteria into account that were important for my research. The most important criterion was that the interviewees participated in the reintegration programme in Medellín and either already lived in or moved to this city after they had demobilised. Another criterion was that the ex-paramilitaries demobilised between 2003 and 2006, preferably in the collective demobilisation programme. Although one interviewee demobilised individually, all selection criteria were met (see Appendix I for an overview of the ex-paramilitaries that were interviewed). Out of safety and privacy reasons, the interviews took place in a private room at the organisation that had arranged the interview. All the ex-paramilitaries were assured of their anonymity and the confidential use of the information provided. Additionally, everyone agreed to the recording of the interview. After the interviews with the ex-paramilitaries were conducted I had a final meeting with the expert Antonio García Fernández²⁷, who I had talked to before, in order to verify my information and discuss my findings.

The fourth phase entailed the analytic process. All the interviews were transcribed immediately after they had been conducted. I transcribed the interviews with the experts myself whereas the in-depth interviews with the ex-paramilitaries were transcribed by trustworthy third persons that were introduced to me via the CEPAR and my Spanish school. After the data collection phase ended in mid-May, I summarised the interviews I had held with the ex-paramilitaries in order to create a quick overview of the information that was provided. These interview summaries were used to create topic summaries, in which the responses of the interviewees were organised per topic. This enabled the discovery of overarching themes in the interviews. Subsequently, these themes were used when coding the data with the programme NVivo. During this analytic process various patterns were distinguished in the data that will be elaborated upon in chapter 3 to 5.

1.3.3 Limitations and considerations

First of all, it is important to underline that the sample is not representative. The aim of this research is to focus solely on ‘success cases’ of reintegration, in other words, paramilitaries

²⁶ Interview with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 05/04/2017.

²⁷ Interview with Antonio García Fernández, expert 5, 11/05/2017.

who decided to demobilise and completed the DDR programme. Additionally, the amount of interviews is not sufficient to be representative. Therefore, the stories addressed in this thesis do not form a representation of the Colombian paramilitaries in general or, more specifically, the situation in Medellín. Instead this study focussed on understanding the interviewees' behaviour and formation of a post-demobilisation life. Rather than a mere presentation of facts, this study documented how a specific number of ex-paramilitaries talked about their social navigation practices during retrospective interviews.

Secondly, it is relevant to point out that the sampling location had an influence on the information that was provided by the ex-paramilitaries. The majority of the ex-paramilitaries I interviewed via the PyR were very positive about the organisation's work. This could be related to the fact that the PyR put me in touch with them. Especially since the three people who were most negative about PyR's programme were the ones I contacted through *Aulas de Paz* and CEPAR. It is probable that the PyR is conscious about the image they want to portray to foreigners and only introduced me to the ex-paramilitaries who are positive about their work. However, because I also spoke with experts and ex-paramilitaries that were not contacted through the PyR I believe that I still gained an accurate overview of the organisation's strengths and weaknesses. Interestingly, the viewpoints of the two people I interviewed through *Aulas de Paz* were quite similar as well. This indicates that the sampling location probably has an influence on the answers people give during an interview. Therefore, this thesis could have been different if the participants were contacted through other ways.

Finally, it is noteworthy that the in-depth interviews with ex-paramilitaries were conducted in Spanish while the interviews with experts were held in both Spanish and English. Although I had a sufficient level of Spanish to conduct this research, I am not fluent in this language yet. When I decided to do this research in Colombia at the end of September, I started taking intensive Spanish classes to be able to interview ex-paramilitaries without a translator. On the one hand, conducting the interviews by myself was an advantage in the sense that the ex-paramilitaries were even more willing to help me out considering my efforts to learn their language. It served as a useful icebreaker to talk about the struggles I had while learning Spanish. After I had shown a more vulnerable and personal side of myself, the interviewees felt more comfortable to open up about their own lives. Moreover, the fact that there was no third person present during the interviews renders it less likely that responses were biased. The ex-paramilitaries talked very openly about their lives, which might have been stimulated by the fact that I am not Colombian and do not carry the same stigma against them as many Colombians do. On the other hand, my intermediate Spanish level was a disadvantage since, especially in the beginning, I had difficulties understanding the ex-paramilitaries' use of slang. This inhibited my ability to ask some necessary follow-up questions. To overcome this problem I held second interviews with the first ex-paramilitaries I interviewed to obtain the information I was missing. I also hired people to transcribe these interviews in order to ensure there were no mistakes in the transcriptions. Although the quotes used throughout this thesis are translated from Spanish to English, the translations aim to convey the Spanish meaning as accurately as possible. It touched me that some interviewees thanked me for listening to their story. Contrary to Baird's experience (2009, p.74), I did not feel that people were withholding information or deceiving me. It was clear that they did not see me as a threat and therefore were very kind and honest during the interviews.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: DIALOGUE BETWEEN LITERATURE AND LOCAL EXPERTS

This chapter firstly provides a brief history of Colombia's armed groups and the origins of the paramilitaries. Subsequently, the peace process between the government and the AUC, including its aftermath, will be discussed. In the second section, the conflict dynamics specific to Medellín will be elaborated upon. The aim of this chapter is to enable a positioning of the ex-paramilitaries' stories in the wider historical context of the conflict and its armed groups. Furthermore, its objective is to provide a description of the environment ex-paramilitaries had to socially navigate when the demobilisation process started.

2.1 Origins of the Colombian paramilitaries, the DDR process and its aftermath

Paramilitaries have been a permanent feature of the Colombian society since its independence in the nineteenth century (Civico, 2015, p.1). In the recent history of Colombia, three generations of paramilitary groups can be discerned (Civico, 2015, p.35). The first generation started in the period called *La Violencia* (1948-1958), during which the country was dominated by sectarian violence between elites of conservative and liberal parties who were pursuing economic and political control. Both conservatives and liberals deployed paramilitaries to assassinate opponents and protect their strongholds (Civico, 2015, pp.35-36). The political agreement *Frente Nacional* made an end to the civil war in 1959 and decided that conservative and liberal parties would take turns in governing the country (Civico, 2015, p.37). However, the exclusion of other actors in the political arena fuelled resistance. Consequently, in the 1960s, the guerrilla groups *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC) and *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN) emerged in the countryside and a new civil war between leftist, guerrilla groups and the Colombian State spread over the country (Civico, 2015, pp.37-38).

As part of the government's counterinsurgency strategy, the first generation paramilitary groups were still deployed in the fight against the guerrilla groups (Theidon, 2009, p.9; Hristov, 2010, pp.18-19). However, in the 1980s, the conflict dynamics started to change. Empowered by law 48²⁸, local elites started to adopt a leading role and formed their own self-defence groups to fight the guerrillas that threatened their private property and business interests (Civico, 2015, p.38). Gustavo Duncan²⁹ - a Colombian academic specialised in paramilitarism - emphasised that it were not only rich Colombians who created these second generation paramilitary groups. In fact, many came from a poor background and seized the opportunity to become warlords and gain power, economic resources and social status. In his words: "You didn't need a social revolution to solve your discontent. You could have been a criminal and created your own state."³⁰ During their golden age in the 1980s, paramilitary groups were found throughout the country, attained military and financial power (mainly due to their involvement in and the growth of the drug trafficking business) and committed gross human rights abuses (Hristov, 2010, p.19). Their legitimacy to use excessive violence was reinforced by the discourse that framed paramilitaries as protectors fighting

²⁸ This law was adopted in 1968 and remained in effect until 1989. It authorised the creation of civil patrols and their supply with weapons that were normally restricted to the exclusive use of the state (Hristov, 2010, p.19).

²⁹ Interview with Gustavo Duncan, expert 4, 23/03/2017.

³⁰ Interview with Gustavo Duncan, expert 4, 23/03/2017.

against the guerrilla groups that were threatening the state and people's security.³¹ The fact that the state did not effectively claim its presence in the periphery of the country made it even easier for the paramilitary groups to expand their power and parallel states^{32, 33}.

As several experts pointed out, it was not an ideological war between leftist and far-right groups.³⁴ In fact, the counterinsurgency discourse concealed the paramilitaries' real goal: controlling the drug routes³⁵ and ruling society³⁶. As Civico confirms: "Counterinsurgency language became the blanket that covered and rationalised the alliance between the army and the paramilitaries and between Colombia's political and economic elites and the drug kingpins" (2015, p.93). This dynamic and intertwinement between drug traffickers, the State and paramilitary groups is clearly observable in the period leading up to drug lord Pablo Escobar's death. In 1993, Escobar was killed by the loose, ad hoc coalition called *Los Pepes*, which consisted of the Colombian police, business leaders, drug lords of the Cali and North Valley cartels and emerging paramilitary leaders such as the Castaño brothers and Diego Murillo Bejano alias Don Berna (Civico, 2015, p.165). After Escobar's death, power relations between the drug traffickers and paramilitary leaders had to be reconfigured. The Castaño brothers were rapidly gaining territory with their paramilitary group and in an attempt to organise the multitude of self-defence groups Carlos Castaño established the umbrella organisation *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC) in 1997 (Civico, 2015, p.89). The ex-paramilitaries I interviewed entered these second generation paramilitary groups in their early or late adolescence and had to integrated with their group into the larger network of the AUC. Whereas some interviewees mainly operated in the rural areas with the paramilitary group *Bloque Central Bolívar* (BCB), others were active in Medellín's groups *Bloque Cacique Nutibara* (BCN), *Bloque Metro* (BM) and *Heroés de Granada*.

Only a year after its creation the narcotisation of the AUC began when Carlos Castaño believed he could obtain more control on the government's negotiations with the FARC if he would be in charge of the narco-trafficking, drug routes and laboratories (Civico, 2015, p.87). This move revealed the paramilitaries' larger political project of ruling the country.³⁷ With terror, massacres, selective killings, disappearances and torture, the AUC was able to spread its domination throughout the country (Civico, 2015, p.40). According to a former police commander I interviewed, the paramilitaries controlled sixty per cent of the country in 1997.³⁸ Human Rights Watch even depicted the paramilitaries as the sixth division of the Colombian army (2001, p.1). In short, paramilitaries formed the centre of a complex intertwinement between the political elite, business leaders, drug lords, military combatants, the legal and the illegal (Civico, 2015, p.40).

³¹ Interviews with former employee of the ACR, expert 2, 06/03/2017; Daniel Castaño, expert 3, 14/03/2017; Gustavo Duncan, expert 4, 23/03/2017; former police colonel, expert 9, 04/04/2017.

³² Robert Paxton described a parallel state as state-like institutions or organisations that operate parallel to the legal state (2004, p.49). It forms an institutional arrangement in which "organised interests with criminal capacities or expertise in the use of violence are able to use their organic links with the formal state to protect and expand their activities" (Briscoe, 2008, p.12).

³³ Interviews with Gustavo Duncan, expert 4, 23/03/2017; Nico Tita, expert 6, 26/03/2017.

³⁴ Interviews with Gustavo Duncan, expert 4, 23/03/2017; former police colonel, expert 9, 04/04/2017; Liduine Zumpolle, expert 11, 11/04/2017.

³⁵ Interview with former police colonel, expert 9, 04/04/2017.

³⁶ Interview with Gustavo Duncan, expert 4, 23/03/2017.

³⁷ Interview with Gustavo Duncan, expert 4, 23/03/2017.

³⁸ Interview with former police colonel, expert 9, 04/04/2017.

Pushed by several internal and external developments³⁹, the Colombian government and AUC started a peace process in 2002. It was a rather secret process in which then-president Álvaro Uribe negotiated a deal with his ‘friends’⁴⁰. Daniel Castaño - a Colombian academic specialised in paramilitarism – revealed that many drug kingpins presented themselves as paramilitary leaders in order to receive DDR benefits and continue in legality.⁴¹ In 2003 the first paramilitary groups started their DDR process and by the end of 2006 Uribe declared that the collective demobilisation programme of the AUC had been completed (Hristov, 2009, p.12). As agreed upon in the Justice and Peace Law of 2005, the majority of the paramilitaries received an amnesty.⁴² As a former employee of the reintegration organisation ACR explained, the people who committed political crimes got an amnesty while only a small percentage of the paramilitaries - around 3.500 people who were convicted for committing crimes against humanity - had to serve eight years in prison. However, in 2010 the amnesty law was adapted, which made participation in the reintegration programme compulsory for everyone in order to prevent imprisonment.⁴³ Besides changing the rules for the rank-and-file combatants, Uribe also ‘betrayed’ his friends by extraditing some paramilitary commanders to the United States in 2007.⁴⁴ According to government and press reports, these paramilitary leaders continued their criminal activities from places of detention.⁴⁵ However, Antonio García Fernández⁴⁶ – who works as a lawyer for ex-paramilitaries and has regular contact with the extradited commanders – highlighted that it is generally known that Uribe extradited them because they were disclosing too much sensitive information about his involvement in the paramilitary and drug business.⁴⁷

Although the government has been rather positive about their achievements to eradicate paramilitary groups, most academics, experts and ex-paramilitaries I interviewed are critical of the peace process and underline the continuation of paramilitaries’ involvement in

³⁹ International organisations advocated for a different attitude of the government towards the paramilitaries due to their human rights abuses. Moreover, then-president Uribe had promised to restore the rule of law and the monopoly on violence. He also wanted to use the opportunity to counter suspicions about his connections with the Medellín cartel and paramilitaries (Grajales, 2010, pp.4-5). Additionally, tensions within the AUC leadership and between regional paramilitary groups added to the idea that the national organisation did not have a secure future. Some AUC leaders hoped to prevent their extradition to the United States by participating in the peace process (Rozema, 2008, p.430). However, the experts I interviewed underlined the state’s realisation that the paramilitaries gained too much power and Uribe’s ambition to improve the government’s status as most important reasons to start the negotiations (Interviews with Gustavo Duncan, expert 4, 23/03/2017; Antonio García Fernández, expert 5, 11/05/2017; Liduine Zumpolle, expert 11, 11/04/2017).

⁴⁰ Uribe has been portrayed as the ‘father of the paramilitaries’ due to his involvement in the foundation of the paramilitary group *Convivir* (Interviews with Daniel Castaño, expert 3, 14/03/2017; Liduine Zumpolle, expert 11, 11/04/2017). There was a clear financial link between the paramilitaries, drug traffickers and the political class (Interview with Gustavo Duncan, expert 4, 23/03/2017). The fact that they were ‘friends’ made it easier for Uribe to negotiate a peace agreement with them, which enabled Uribe to lift his status as ‘peace president’ in a relatively short amount of time (Interviews with Antonio García Fernández, expert 5, 11/05/2017; Liduine Zumpolle, expert 11, 11/04/2017).

⁴¹ Interview with Daniel Castaño, expert 3, 14/03/2017.

⁴² Interview with former employee of the ACR, expert 2, 06/03/2017.

⁴³ In 2010 the Colombian constitutional court declared that the political crimes of the paramilitaries were actually committed with the aim to commit crimes against humanity. Consequently, their right to an amnesty was withdrawn and the demobilised paramilitaries could only maintain their freedom if they would adhere to the reintegration programme offered by the ACR or PyR, testify about their deeds in a truth commission, provide reparation to the victims and sign a guarantee of non-repetition (Interviews with former employee of the ACR, expert 2, 06/03/2017; Antonio García Fernández, expert 5, 24/04/2017; Paulo Serna, expert 10, 06/04/2017).

⁴⁴ Interview with Antonio García Fernández, expert 5, 24/04/2017.

⁴⁵ Interview with Jesús Medina, expert 1, 06/03/2017.

⁴⁶ Interview with Antonio García Fernández, expert 5, 24/04/2017.

⁴⁷ Nevertheless, it is possible that former leaders and mid-level commanders continued to operate from prison since that is still a common practice in Colombian prisons nowadays (Interviews with the community leader of the neighbourhood *13 de Noviembre* in Medellín, expert 8, 28/03/2017; former police colonel, expert 9, 04/04/2017; Liduine Zumpolle, expert 11, 11/04/2017).

their former, illegal activities (Hristov, 2010, pp.20-21; Theidon, 2007, p.78; Civico, 2015, pp.200-201; Rozema, 2008, p.451)⁴⁸. The reorganised and recomposed paramilitary groups that include ex-paramilitaries, new recruits, criminal gangs and drug traffickers are now referred to as *bandas criminales* (BACRIM) (Hristov, 2010, pp.21-22). These groups have been conceived as third generation paramilitaries in Colombia (Civico, 2015, p.36). Nevertheless, the degree to which paramilitarism has continued is contested. The opinions range from “no paramilitary truly demobilised”⁴⁹ to “only three per cent of former paramilitaries continued in the BACRIM”⁵⁰. Similarly, whereas some academics, experts and ex-paramilitaries argued that the structure of these third generation paramilitary groups remained the same (Hristov, 2010, pp.20-21)⁵¹, others argued that there are substantial differences⁵². Finally, there is a disagreement concerning the activities of the third generation. Some stated that they are involved in the exact same thing and only changed the name of their factions (Hristov, 2010, p.17)⁵³ whereas others highlighted that they changed their activities and mode of operation (Rozema, 2008, p.450; Theidon, 2007, p.85)⁵⁴. In the following section, a brief overview of Medellín’s conflict dynamics will be provided after which the involvement of former paramilitaries in the city’s underworld will be described.

2.2 Conflict dynamics in Medellín and ‘administering calm’

Since the 1980s, life in Medellín has been characterised by waves of violence caused by various actors, such as drug-cartels, militias, paramilitary blocs and, more recently, combos and bandas. After a period of relative peace, Pablo Escobar consolidated his Medellín cartel in the 1980s. He employed a private army of *sicarios*, or mercenaries, who assassinated people that were obstructing his operations (Rozema, 2008, p.432). The Medellín cartel was able to proliferate in the context of an economic crisis and thousands of displaced people entering the city due to an intensification of the war with the guerrillas. Drug trafficking and *plata fácil* (easy money) provided many people with an incentive to join Escobar’s cartel – among others some participants in this research⁵⁵. This allowed the rapid growth of Escobar’s imperium that ruled Medellín’s society until his death (Rozema, 2008, p.432; Bernal Franco & Navas Caputo, 2013, p.6).

⁴⁸ Interviews with Jesús Medina, expert 1, 06/03/2017; former employee of the ACR, expert 2, 06/03/2017; Daniel Castaño, expert 3, 14/03/2017; Gustavo Duncan, expert 4, 23/03/2017; Antonio García Fernández, expert 5, 24/04/2017; Nico Tita, expert 6, 26/03/2017; community leader of the neighbourhood *13 de Noviembre* in Medellín, expert 8, 28/03/2017; former police colonel, expert 9, 04/04/2017; Paulo Serna, expert 10, 06/04/2017; Liduine Zumpolle, expert 11, 11/04/2017; David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017; Jairo, ex-paramilitary 9, 11/05/2017.

⁴⁹ Interview with a community leader of the neighbourhood *13 de Noviembre* in Medellín, expert 8, 28/03/2017. This was affirmed during an informal conversation with a taxi driver on the 4th of April 2017, which shows that more people share this sentiment.

⁵⁰ Interview with Jorge Gaviria, expert 7, 27/03/2017.

⁵¹ Interviews with Nico Tita, expert 6, 26/03/2017; a community leader of the neighbourhood *13 de Noviembre* in Medellín, expert 8, 28/03/2017; former police colonel, expert 9, 04/04/2017; Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017.

⁵² Interviews with Daniel Castaño, expert 3, 14-03-2017; Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017.

⁵³ Interviews with a community leader of the neighbourhood *13 de Noviembre* in Medellín, expert 8, 28/03/2017; former police colonel, expert 9, 04/04/2017; Liduine Zumpolle, expert 11, 11/04/2017; David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017.

⁵⁴ Interview with Gustavo Duncan, expert 4, 23/03/2017.

⁵⁵ Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017; Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017; Jairo, ex-paramilitary 9, 11/05/2017.

However, after Escobar was killed, violence did not diminish as many *sicarios* continued and created their own gangs. As a result, left-wing militias⁵⁶ formed self-defence groups to protect civilians from the gangs (Rozema, 2008, p.432; Espinal & Agudelo, 2008, p.27). The fast advancement of the militias and their de facto state in local neighbourhoods provoked the entrance of the paramilitaries at the end of the 1990s. According to their reasoning, the upsurge of guerrilla activities had to be countered with a tough response and Medellín, as a strategic drug trafficking corridor, was seen as a valuable asset by the AUC (Rozema, 2008, p.437). The paramilitaries co-opted some gangs and *oficinas*⁵⁷ after which an urban warfare between the paramilitaries and militias followed. Over time, the paramilitaries expelled the guerrillas from the city and established their parallel states in Medellín's neighbourhoods (Rozema, 2008, p.437). However, the urban warfare endured as rivalry between the paramilitary factions *Bloque Metro* (BM) of Carlos García Fernández alias Doble Cero and *Bloque Cacique Nutibara* (BCN) of Don Berna came to a height.

At the beginning of the century, BCN defeated its rival and incorporated a large share of BM's combatants (Rozema, 2008, p.439; Bernal Franco & Navas Caputo, 2013, p.8). The co-optation of an armed group after its defeat was a common practice in Medellín. As such, the ex-paramilitaries I interviewed had often been part of several paramilitary and sometimes even guerrilla groups as they were forced to switch when their group had lost its power.⁵⁸ Just after Don Berna managed to dominate the paramilitaries and drug business in Medellín, the peace process between the AUC and the government began (Cívico, 2016, p.195). Nonetheless, Don Berna's BCN became the first Colombian paramilitary group to demobilise in 2003 (Rozema, 2008, p.442; Gaviria Veléz, 2011, p.184). The municipality of Medellín created the organisation PyR⁵⁹ that led the local DDR process. The reintegration process focussed on various aspects such as education, psychosocial help, juridical support, reconciliation, reparation, improving the relationship with neighbours through social work, generating income and preventing recidivism.⁶⁰ Every ex-combatant's reintegration route was tailored to his or her specific needs and the benefits one received were linked to the person's fulfilment of diverse reintegration requirements. Due to the individual focus of the reintegration route, the duration of each personal programme was different and depended on the person's progression. The PyR is still actively supporting reintegration processes of former paramilitaries and members of guerrilla groups.⁶¹ In chapter 4 ex-paramilitaries' experience regarding the reintegration programme and whether their perspectives resemble the organisation's presentation of itself will be discussed.

In the post-demobilisation period, the homicide rate dropped spectacularly and the security situation of the city improved (Bernal Franco & Navas Caputo, 2013, p.8). However, armed actors are still present and rule daily life in the neighbourhoods. The city is divided between *combos* and *bandas* (also commonly referred to as BACRIM). The latter are larger entities that comprise of a certain amount of combos, which are smaller units exerting control

⁵⁶ Militant groups related to guerrilla movements such as FARC, ELN, M-19 and EPL that entered the city at the end of 1980s and beginning 1990s (Rozema, 2008, p.432).

⁵⁷ Influential criminal organisations that replaced Escobar's role in delivering arms and contracts to other illegal groups in Medellín (Rozema, 2008, p.437).

⁵⁸ Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017; David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Jairo, ex-paramilitary 9, 11/05/2017.

⁵⁹ In 2010 the national reintegration organisation, ACR, was founded as well. They currently work closely together in Medellín (Interviews with former employee of the ACR, expert 2, 06/03/2017; Catalina Morales, expert 12, 11/04/2017).

⁶⁰ Interviews with Jorge Gaviria, expert 7, 27/03/2017; Catalina Morales, expert 12, 11/04/2017.

⁶¹ Interviews with former employee of the ACR, expert 2, 06/03/2017; Jorge Gaviria, expert 7, 27/03/2017; Paulo Serna, expert 10, 06/04/2017; Catalina Morales, expert 12, 11/04/2017.

over the neighbourhoods (Bernal Franco & Navas Caputo, 2013, p.20)⁶². These combos and bandas consist of dissidents, recidivists and new members from the neighbourhood. Whereas recidivists are paramilitaries who first demobilised and then returned to war, dissidents never demobilised and went straight to another armed group.⁶³ As Duncan explained, “the combos are the police of the criminals. They live from extortion, selling drugs and creating monopolies”⁶⁴. Castaño added that the combos decide who is allowed to sell which goods and which transportation companies can drive through their area. If people want to start a business it is compulsory to receive permission of the combo and pay an illegal tax. In other words, “they dominate legal economies in an illegal way”⁶⁵. Duncan and Zumpolle talked about a criminalisation of the armed groups in the sense that nowadays they solely consist of criminals who discarded the former counterinsurgency discourse.⁶⁶

The new strategy of the paramilitaries who did not demobilise and continued in the bandas and combos was to administer calm while maintaining their parallel state (Rozema, 2008, p.450; Theidon, 2007, p.85)⁶⁷. In line with their former state-like activities, paramilitaries still bring order, oversee conflict resolution and control the market (Cívico, 2016, p.183; Theidon, 2007, p.85). However, they had to maintain a low profile in order to prevent attracting attention to their lucrative but illegal practices (Theidon, 2007, p.85)⁶⁸. The relationship between the neighbours and former paramilitaries is important to understand this dynamic. The fact that the community still turns to the combos, including former paramilitaries, for their state-like services contributes to the continuation of paramilitaries’ former activities and the maintenance of their parallel state (Theidon, 2007, p.85; Rozema, 2008, p.447). The police colonel I interviewed added that many people see the police as an untrustworthy institution that lacks the reputation and power to make people abide by the law.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, the police gained more presence in Medellín’s neighbourhoods⁷⁰ and they managed to create deals with the combos in order to exert some sort of influence on the security situation⁷¹. As Castaño and Duncan explained, the police are not present in the periphery of the city because they negotiated a ‘governance pact’ with the combos and bandas about their permitted activities. The police only enter such neighbourhoods when the situation suddenly destabilises or the armed actors do not adhere to the pact. Therefore, the combos and bandas strive to administer calm in order to continue their lucrative businesses. This resulted in a much safer Medellín where violence rates have diminished significantly (Colombia Reports, 2016; El Colombiano, 2016).

As Duncan explained, the domination of combos and bandas is inherited from Pablo Escobar who taught local gangs that they could embody the state in their own communities.⁷² Paradoxically, the government is partly responsible for this dynamic as well due to the initial legalisation of paramilitary groups at the end of the 1960s and their cooperation with

⁶² Interview with Gustavo Duncan, expert 4, 23/03/2017.

⁶³ Interview with Daniel Castaño, expert 3, 14/03/2017.

⁶⁴ Interview with Gustavo Duncan, expert 4, 23/03/2017.

⁶⁵ Interview with Daniel Castaño, expert 3, 14/03/2017.

⁶⁶ Interviews with Gustavo Duncan, expert 4, 23/03/2017; Liduine Zumpolle, expert 11, 11/04/2017.

⁶⁷ This is confirmed in my interview with the community leader of the neighbourhood *13 de Noviembre* in Medellín, expert 8, 28/03/2017.

⁶⁸ This is confirmed in my interview with the community leader of the neighbourhood *13 de Noviembre* in Medellín, expert 8, 28/03/2017.

⁶⁹ Interview with former police colonel, expert 9, 04/04/2017.

⁷⁰ Interview with Gustavo Duncan, expert 4, 23/03/2017.

⁷¹ Interview with Daniel Castaño, expert 3, 14/03/2017.

⁷² Interview with Gustavo Duncan, expert 4, 23/03/2017.

paramilitaries even after the groups were declared illegal.⁷³ Hence, the government itself has played an important role in the “militarisation of security”⁷⁴. Overall, Medellín has witnessed overlapping episodes of violence that were dominated by various actors, which all contributed to the current composition of armed groups in the city. In the post-demobilisation period, these armed groups still tried to convince former combatants to join their *combo* or *banda* by offering more money than their employers or the government.⁷⁵ As will be elaborated upon in chapter 4, this added a complicating factor to the ex-paramilitaries’ reintegration process.

3. THE DECISION TO DEMOBILISE: A CHOICE CHARACTERISED BY UNCERTAINTY, DISTRUST AND HOPE

This chapter will describe the moment the paramilitaries were confronted with their commander’s order to demobilise, their response to this sudden change and why they decided to start a new life. It will provide an overview of the life trajectories that opened up to the paramilitaries in the wake of their demobilisation process and address how the ex-paramilitaries came to their decision to demobilise.

3.1 Initial reluctance to the demobilisation process

All ex-paramilitaries I interviewed emphasised that they were not enjoying life while they were in the armed group. In fact, the majority literally mentioned that it was no life they were having. Their daily life was characterised by stress, fear, hiding, running, alcohol, drugs, women, violence and waiting for orders.⁷⁶ Although one person mentioned there were sometimes good moments⁷⁷, the others were solely negative about their experiences as a paramilitary. In the two fragments below Santiago describes his life in the paramilitary groups he was part of and his feeling of being trapped in this kind of lifestyle.

“In reality one does not live, only day-to-day life. One does not sleep well, one does not eat well. There are no expectations for what is going to happen the other day, no. It is waiting to receive orders what to do and if you are not waiting, you are tucked into a house to wait, to receive instructions.”⁷⁸

“Receiving orders that maybe by your own will you do not want to do because, as I said, I was formed in values, but then how do I retract? So it's a situation that makes you wonder how far things will go. But I never thought about retiring out of fear. If I withdraw from the groups what will become of me? I don't know how to do anything else in life. And perhaps one himself had formed that barrier of not seeing beyond where he was.”⁷⁹

⁷³ The most notable example of a joined operation in Medellín was ‘Operación Orion’. In 2002, armed forces and paramilitaries cooperated in order to expel left-wing militias from the neighbourhood *Comuna 13* (Rozema, 2008, p.438; Bernal Franco & Navas Caputo, 2013, p.7)

⁷⁴ Interview with former police colonel, expert 9, 04/04/2017.

⁷⁵ Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017; David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Andrés, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017; Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017; Luis, ex-paramilitary 8, 10/05/2017; Jairo, ex-paramilitary 9, 11/05/2017.

⁷⁶ Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 05/04/2017; Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Andrés, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017; Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Luis, ex-paramilitary 8, 10/05/2017.

⁷⁷ Interview with Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017.

⁷⁸ Interview with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 05/04/2017.

⁷⁹ Interview with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017.

It is understandable that Santiago mentions fear and incapability of doing something else as important reasons to stay in the armed group. Only one of the interviewees had left his paramilitary bloc before the collective demobilisation process started. In 2003 he saw an advertisement on the television that promoted individual demobilisation. The advertisement proclaimed that the government was waiting for *desmovilizados* and could provide them with an education and other services that were part of a reintegration programme. Nevertheless, former comrades persecuted him and his family after he fled from his paramilitary group. Ricardo, a former paramilitary commander of BCB, endorsed that it was impossible to leave the group once you were in it.⁸⁰ These accounts explain Santiago's fear to leave. Additionally, without access to education and financial support it would have been extremely difficult for ex-paramilitaries to sustain themselves and to create better living conditions than they were having in the armed group.

Paradoxically, although they did not like their lives as paramilitaries, the majority of the interviewees maintained that they had preferred to continue in their paramilitary group when the demobilisation process started.⁸¹ They were presented with the opportunity to leave their unsatisfying life and yet they were reluctant to make this step. This can be explained by their uncertainty about the future and distrust in the government.⁸² Esteban explained that it was an extremely uncertain period in which they were uninformed about the consequent steps in the process and had no idea what was going to happen to them.⁸³ This uncertainty was further reinforced by their distrust in the government. As Diego, who belonged to BCB in the countryside, stated: "We did not believe in the government and we wanted to continue."⁸⁴ Ricardo explained this overall trend in the group by highlighting that their bloc consisted of many former guerrilla members who had participated in a demobilisation process before. Since the government had not complied with the peace agreement the former guerrilla members decided to return to an armed group out of discontent. Hearing their stories discredited the government and made the paramilitaries highly reluctant to demobilise.⁸⁵ Additionally, Santiago emphasised his belief that the government would use the opportunity to imprison all of them.⁸⁶ While some were concerned about the government's intentions, others mentioned that they feared for their safety due to former enemies.⁸⁷ Interestingly, despite their initial concerns, all participants eventually demobilised. Before it will be addressed how they socially navigated this change and came to their decision to demobilise, the various life trajectories that opened up to the paramilitaries when they were confronted with the demobilisation process will be outlined.

3.2 The opening up of new possibilities

The rather abrupt end of the paramilitary blocs left its combatants with a several new life trajectories they could capitalise. To start with, the paramilitaries had to decide whether they would participate in the DDR programme or not. The so-called 'dissidents' did not

⁸⁰ Interview with Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017.

⁸¹ Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 05/04/2017; Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Luis, ex-paramilitary 8, 10/05/2017; Jairo, ex-paramilitary 9, 11/05/2017.

⁸² This finding is confirmed during my interview with Antonio García Fernández, expert 5, 11/05/2017.

⁸³ Interview with Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017.

⁸⁴ Interview with Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017.

⁸⁵ Interview with Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017.

⁸⁶ Interview with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017.

⁸⁷ Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017; Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Andrés, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017; Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017.

demobilise and continued in other armed groups after theirs were dismantled.⁸⁸ Of my participants, only Santiago started off as a dissident in the first years after the demobilisation was initiated. Due to his distrust in the state he switched from BCN to the other paramilitary bloc *Heroés de Granada* when the former started to disarm. This type of dissidence was rather common when BCN began its DDR process since it was the first paramilitary group to lay down its arms in Medellín (Cívico, 2015, p.181). Among the people who decided to demobilise and join the reintegration programme of the PyR, different life trajectories can be identified as well.

Regarding the ones who received an amnesty, Theidon distinguishes between paramilitaries who demobilised with *consciencia* and those who just went through the demobilisation programme until another violent option presented itself (2007, p.78). The first category entails the path of desistance⁸⁹ and includes people who truly demobilised, complied with the reintegration programme and started studying or working. The participants of this research all fall into this category - even Santiago who later collectively demobilised with *Heroés de Granada*. The second category comprises of people who started the demobilisation process and found out that it did not serve them. These people are known as ‘recidivists’.⁹⁰ Finally, there is another category discernable, which consists of paramilitaries who ‘demobilised’ during the day and rearmed at night (Cívico, 2015, p.182). These people play a dangerous double game as was pointed out by Esteban: “There are people who want to be good and bad, there are people who want to be in a combo and want be working. That [the combo] is where they are killed.”⁹¹

However, there were also ex-paramilitaries who did not receive an amnesty and whose course of life seemed rather determined after the demobilisation process. Three of my interviewees were notified that the amnesty arrangement did not apply to them after they had demobilised. They felt betrayed and their imagined future suddenly looked radically different. Interestingly, the interviews showed that despite their room for movement was restricted, they were still able to navigate their time in captivity. Although many prisoners were convinced of their return to an armed group after their release⁹², the ex-paramilitaries I interviewed decided to study, developed new skills and even started their own organisation while they were imprisoned. Instead of waiting, taking drugs and planning new criminal activities, they used their time in prison to prepare themselves for a return to society. Thus, even in prison, the path someone followed depended on personal motivations.⁹³

Importantly, the life trajectories mentioned above are susceptible to change, sometimes overlapping and not mutually exclusive. It is also worth mentioning that many ex-paramilitaries’ life trajectories were abruptly ended as they were killed due to personal vendettas or continued involvement in armed groups.⁹⁴ The next section will elaborate on the reasons why the interviewees chose the path of desistance even though they doubted the government’s intentions to fulfil their promises and were facing a profound uncertainty regarding the future.

⁸⁸ Interview with Daniel Castaño, expert 3, 14/03/2017.

⁸⁹ Desistance is a term that stems from the criminological desistance theory, which aims to explain the processes by which offenders stop their delinquent behaviour (Harper, 2013).

⁹⁰ Interview with Daniel Castaño, expert 3, 14/03/2017.

⁹¹ Interview with Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017.

⁹² Interviews with Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017.

⁹³ Interviews with Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017; Jairo, ex-paramilitary 9, 11/05/2017.

⁹⁴ Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017; Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017; Luis, ex-paramilitary 8, 10/05/2017; Jairo, ex-paramilitary 9, 11/05/2017; Jorge Gaviria, expert 7, 27/03/2017.

3.3 Socially navigating change and deciding on one's course of life

As Theidon states, the paramilitaries have settled down because their commanders ordered them to do so (2007, p.85). The fact that demobilisation was an order came to the fore in multiple interviews as well.⁹⁵ The paramilitary leadership had signed a peace deal with the political elite and consequently all the lower ranks were ordered by their bloc's commander to demobilise.⁹⁶ However, it was also mentioned that some people ignored this order and did not adhere to the DDR programme.⁹⁷ As Jairo exemplified: "They said we were going to demobilise, but a lot of people said: 'Ah I'm not going for that, I'm going the other way.'" ⁹⁸ Therefore, the question was raised why the interviewees accepted the order to demobilise and how they assessed along which path they were most likely to realise their hopes and dreams for the future.

Although Jairo argued that many paramilitaries ignored their commander's order, several interviewees mentioned that they demobilised because they were ordered to do so.⁹⁹ Of my interviewees, only Santiago initially refused the order to demobilise. However, he changed his mind when he saw that other paramilitaries benefitted from the reintegration programme.

"I always thought that the government was going to betray us, summon us, capture and imprison us at some point. After that [some comrades demobilised], I started to see that no, I actually started to believe more in the process. [...] I saw that they did not return to where we were. They started to share more time with their families, talked differently, dressed differently. [...] I took the decision after having seen that it is beneficial for me."¹⁰⁰

This fragment demonstrates that Santiago first observed comrades' achievements in the process to ensure that demobilising would be more advantageous regarding his future position than staying in an armed group. Under these circumstances, he decided to follow the order to demobilise when his bloc *Heroés de Granada* started its DDR process.

The other interviewees were less certain whether demobilising would be a smart move. Nevertheless, the idea of being able to spend more time with their families and their tiredness of war made them inclined to demobilise.¹⁰¹ In Ricardo's words: "The war tires. We said: 'Well it's already fair, no more, we don't want to run anymore, we want to be with the family.'" ¹⁰² His reference to fairness is related to his remark that he entered the war out of revenge. When he was four years old members of the FARC shot his parents in front of him. Later, when he was studying at the university and people offered him to take revenge on his parents' killers he joined them immediately. However, he clearly remembered the moment he decided it was enough and the time to demobilise had come.

⁹⁵ Interviews with Daniel Castaño, expert 3, 14/03/2017; Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 05/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Luis, ex-paramilitary 8, 10/05/2017; Jairo, ex-paramilitary 9, 11/05/2017.

⁹⁶ Interview with Daniel Castaño, expert 3, 14/03/2017.

⁹⁷ Interview with Daniel Castaño, expert 3, 14/03/2017.

⁹⁸ Interview with Jairo, ex-paramilitary 9, 11/05/2017.

⁹⁹ Interviews with Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Luis, ex-paramilitary 8, 10/05/2017; Jairo, ex-paramilitary 9, 11/05/2017.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017

¹⁰¹ Interviews with David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Andrés, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017.

¹⁰² Interview with Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017.

“In my case, what made me say I don’t go any further in the war was in 2004. They brought a tied up *guerrillero*, captured by my men, and I gave the order to kill him. In the bag he had a wallet, his wallet. When I opened the wallet he was with his wife and two children. [...] I realised I was doing the same thing they did to me because we were with two children as well [when they shot my parents]. Therefore, I said: ‘I’m not going any further.’ That was in 2004, in November 2004, and I said: ‘No more, no more, no more, I demobilise.’”¹⁰³

Gustavo Duncan confirms this finding, by highlighting that at a certain point paramilitaries who entered out of revenge realise they have killed enough people to avenge their beloved ones and, consequently, decide to demobilise.¹⁰⁴ Thus, being tired of war, the desire to spend more time with their family and fulfilled revenge were identified as reasons that made the interviewees abide by the order to demobilise.

There were also more practical reasons that influenced ex-paramilitaries’ choice to demobilise. For example, the offering of juridical benefits¹⁰⁵ and opportunities to create a new, supposedly better life.¹⁰⁶ Most interviewees saw the demobilisation process and subsequent reintegration programme as a possibility to improve their living conditions and realise their personal goals.

“What I wanted while I was there [armed group] was to study. I wanted to get a good job, because that was my vision. I leave here and get a good job. I do not want to be out there earning the minimum, that’s why I want to study, leave and train for that.”¹⁰⁷

They liked the idea of peace, demobilising and taking advantage of the reintegration programme in order to advance their and their family members’ lives. Consequently, laying down their arms was seen as a more beneficial option than continuing in an armed group.¹⁰⁸

Interestingly, only one interviewee mentioned that his disagreement with the ideology of his paramilitary bloc was the principal reason for his demobilisation. Whereas all interviewees collectively demobilised, David decided to demobilise individually mainly because he did not agree with the group’s mode of operation and initial resistance to the demobilisation process. It was a great risk and, as a result of his choice, former comrades persecuted him and his family.¹⁰⁹ His individual demobilisation and the attachment of such importance to the paramilitary’s ideology could be explained by his forcible recruitment. In contrast to the other interviewees, David was the only one who had not joined the paramilitary group out of free will.

This chapter showed that despite the interviewees’ dissatisfaction with their lives in the paramilitary group, they were reluctant to demobilise when they were ordered to do so. This could be explained by their uncertain future perspective and distrust of the government. In the wake of the demobilisation process there were different life trajectories that opened up to them. Nevertheless, the participants in this research all chose to leave their old lives behind. The main reasons for this decision were the order to demobilise, their hope it would enable them to spend more time with their family and the possibility to develop the kind of lifestyle they were wishing for. According to Terry and Abrams, making the decision to

¹⁰³ Interview with Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Gustavo Duncan, expert 4, 23/03/2017.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Andrès, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017.

¹⁰⁶ Interviews with Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Andrès, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017; Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017; Luis, ex-paramilitary 8, 10/05/2017.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Andrès, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017.

¹⁰⁸ Interviews with David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Andrès, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017; Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017; Luis, ex-paramilitary 8, 10/05/2017.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017.

desist from a criminal lifestyle is a necessary step for behavioural change (2017, p.5). Nonetheless, the road to a civilian lifestyle is long and Daniel Castaño rightly points out that the factors explaining someone's decision to demobilise are different from the factors that clarify why ex-paramilitaries stayed on the civilian path.¹¹⁰ Whereas this chapter showed how the interviewees came to the decision to start a new life, the next chapter focuses on how they seized opportunities and navigated their way out of potentially harmful situations in order to successfully transition to a civilian lifestyle.

4. THE FORMATION OF A NEW LIFE

This chapter addresses how the ex-paramilitaries gave form to their new lives. It illustrates how the interviewees socially navigated the opportunities and obstacles in order to arrive at the positions where they are now. Furthermore, it will elaborate on the factors that were identified as influential in ex-combatants' decision to return to an armed group and the strategies my interviewees tactically employed to prevent a relapse into their old lifestyle.

4.1 'Salir adelante': seizing opportunities and circumventing difficulties

4.1.1 *Education and the role of the PyR*

All the ex-paramilitaries I interviewed entered an education programme after they had demobilised. By now, half of the interviewees¹¹¹ completed their studies while the other half¹¹² is still finishing their degree besides their work. The majority of the ex-paramilitaries I interviewed had only received primary education before they entered an armed group.¹¹³ Three others¹¹⁴ had attended high school while only one person¹¹⁵ had been able to study at a university. Therefore, when the PyR offered them to study this was seen by the majority as an opportunity to extend their schooling and to enlarge their job prospects.¹¹⁶ According to Jairo: "One begins to take advantage of the opportunities that perhaps were isolated, for example, because of x or y reason, because of security reasons or because one is in an environment."¹¹⁷ Additionally, the people who went to prison after their demobilisation used their time in detention to study and to learn new skills that facilitated their return to society.¹¹⁸ Diego, who went to prison for eight years, clearly described the importance of studying in order to move forward in life.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Daniel Castaño, expert 3, 14/03/2017.

¹¹¹ Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 05/04/2017; Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Luis, ex-paramilitary 8, 10/05/2017; Jairo, ex-paramilitary 9, 11/05/2017.

¹¹² Interviews with David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Andrés, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017.

¹¹³ Interviews with Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Andrés, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017; Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Jairo, ex-paramilitary 9, 11/05/2017.

¹¹⁴ Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 05/04/2017; David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Luis, ex-paramilitary 8, 10/05/2017.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017.

¹¹⁶ Interviews with David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Andrés, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017; Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017; Luis, ex-paramilitary 8, 10/05/2017; Jairo, ex-paramilitary 9, 11/05/2017.

¹¹⁷ Interview with Jairo, ex-paramilitary 9, 11/05/2017.

¹¹⁸ Interviews with Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017.

“For me the study is a tool that I encountered, which is the only tool I have to bring my family forward. Because if I stay where I am I would always have to be there. So it’s the only way I can obtain a better future for my family.”¹¹⁹

However, not all interviewees were equally motivated to study. As mentioned before, the PyR provided the ex-paramilitaries with a wide range of opportunities, such as education, psychosocial help and finding a job. If ex-paramilitaries adhered to different requirements of the reintegration programme – for example, to study - they would receive money during the first years after their demobilisation.¹²⁰ Especially Esteban mentioned that he only studied for the money. In his words: “The study has not been like mine [my thing]. [...] But logically if you did not study anything, you were not paid.”¹²¹ Fortunately for Esteban, they adapted the rules of the programme after a while. This change permitted a monthly payment to the ex-paramilitaries who were working instead studying as well.¹²²

Similar to Esteban, Santiago thought studying was not for him and he wanted to focus on working instead. However, the employees of the PyR took studying very seriously and encouraged him to choose a programme. Eventually, he agreed to enter the hardest course there was in order to prove them it would not be a success. Contrary to Santiago’s predictions, he enjoyed his engineering degree and even finished a post-graduate study at the university. The other comrades in his programme noticed his talent and were asking for his help. Consequently, he started as an unofficial teacher giving classes at his apartment, after which the CEPAR hired him as their math professor.¹²³ As the following quote shows, his thoughts on education changed completely over the years.

“I believe there is no better way to predict the future than by creating it. I believe that from the moment I started studying I started to create that future. [...] Education opens ways for one. [Ways] to leave the wall of the neighbourhood, the wall of the house, of his friends, of all that. [...] I believe that opportunities have to be sought by oneself. I’m convinced that the only way to open up opportunities is through education. There is no other way.”¹²⁴

Santiago emphasised people’s agency in creating their own life and described how education opens up new roads. These new trajectories will be discussed in the next section. It addresses how the ex-paramilitaries found a new way to sustain themselves and their families by socially navigating their environment.

4.1.2 Navigating the labour market and the smart use of their identity

In order to understand ex-paramilitaries’ position on the labour market it is relevant to first provide an insight in Medellín’s economic situation and to what extent employment opportunities were available to ex-paramilitaries. Medellín is Colombia’s second largest economy and the economic position of the city has significantly improved since 2005. As the graphics in appendix IV demonstrate, the unemployment rate has declined from fifteen to ten per cent. Furthermore, poverty diminished and the city’s gross domestic product (GDP) has increased (Colombia Reports, 2017). According to Lowenthal and Mejía (2010), Medellín has been catapulted into the modern era due to the cooperation between growing businesses, a proactive civil society and visionary political leaders.

¹¹⁹ Interview with Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017.

¹²⁰ Interviews with Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Catalina Morales, expert 12, 11/04/2017.

¹²¹ Interview with Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017.

¹²² Interview with Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017.

¹²³ Interview with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017.

¹²⁴ Interview with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017.

Although Medellín's economic situation has improved, most interviewees were sceptical about the opportunities available to them.¹²⁵ Some experts also pointed out that ex-combatants are still highly stigmatised and that the Colombian population was not ready to receive them at the time of their demobilisation.¹²⁶ In 2010 the ex-paramilitaries' position on the labour market even worsened due to a change in the amnesty law (see section 2.1). After this amendment all ex-paramilitaries received a criminal record, which employers could easily track down in an online database.¹²⁷ Below Andrés described how this disclosure of their identity as *desmovilizados* (demobilised people) interfered with their job opportunities.

“I say very few opportunities because you know that companies are a little bit afraid of that [ex-combatants]. The governors, the mayor and all those people tell them to give opportunities to these people. But most employers refrain from working with any of these people.”¹²⁸

In line with Rolston's research (2007) mentioned in section 1.1.3, even if the economy might have been capable of absorbing the ex-paramilitaries other factors such as social rejection and stigma have played a role in their economic reintegration as well.

Despite the difficulties ex-combatants still face on the labour market, my interviewees also noticed that over the years the opportunities slowly enhanced. The society became more open and because they had personally changed, the opportunities available to them changed as well.¹²⁹ David and Ricardo argue that the role of organisations such as the PyR and *Aulas de Paz* have been important in this change. These organisations educate the business sector on the importance of hiring ex-combatants and reiterate the contribution they can make to peace if they open up positions for demobilised people.¹³⁰ This may have added to the fact that in the end all interviewees found a job to sustain themselves and their families. They obtained their employment through the PyR, their own social network or a combination of the two. By moving smartly through their environment, taking advantage of the benefits provided by the PyR and using their own contacts, they could seize opportunities that enabled them to move forward. According to Santiago, “maybe I'm working here because I have handled well.”¹³¹ This indicates that their personal behaviour played an important role in achieving their work positions. There were also some ex-paramilitaries who chose to work independently in order to prevent problems with companies and to avoid rejection due to their past.¹³² Below Diego described how his ex-paramilitary friends, who experienced difficulties in the formal economy, managed to earn an income on the informal market in order to stay out of criminal enterprises.

“They are always trying to find a way that avoids going back to crime, they are always looking for ways to do things right. [...] They don't always work, but they sometimes work for example in construction. They go and help a construction chief without being paid social security or anything. They only have helpers to help them there and they pay them per day, because they

¹²⁵ Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017; David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Andrés, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017; Luis, ex-paramilitary 8, 10/05/2017.

¹²⁶ Interviews with former employee of the ACR, expert 1, 06/03/2017; Antonio García Fernández, expert 5, 11/05/2017.

¹²⁷ Interviews with former employee of the ACR, expert 1, 06/03/2017; Paulo Serna, expert 10, 06/04/2017.

¹²⁸ Interview with Andrés, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017.

¹²⁹ Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017; David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Andrés, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017; Jairo, ex-paramilitary 9, 11/05/2017.

¹³⁰ Interviews with David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017.

¹³¹ Interview with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017.

¹³² Interview with Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017; Jairo, ex-paramilitary 9, 11/05/2017.

cannot enter a company. Almost the majority puts businesses there on the street, hotdogs, hamburgers, things like that. They are independent of a company. They do it like that because nobody gives them work.”¹³³

Thus, ex-paramilitaries have used different routes to enter the job market and generate a sufficient income.

Despite their current employment, many interviewees are still uncertain about their future positions. The interviews revealed that ex-paramilitaries have agency in the sense that they can create their own entrances at the job market, enhance a useful social network and limit discrimination by hiding their identity. Nonetheless, there are also external forces that influence their ability to find and maintain their jobs. For example, Diego does not have his criminal record yet due to slow bureaucratic processes. He can therefore benefit from the same job opportunities as every other citizen in Medellín. However, he is aware that sooner or later his criminal record will appear in the database, which could have profound consequences for his future opportunities.

“I know that by the time I get convicted, I’m going to be very limited. [...] At this time I think that I have the normal possibility as anyone else to get ahead, right now. But I don’t know about tomorrow. Tomorrow they might start to cut me off, it will be more complicated and I will start to see what I can do to get ahead.”¹³⁴

Other interviewees were worried about their future positions as well. Santiago mentioned that he might get fired since, officially, ex-combatants are not allowed to work for state institutions such as the CEPAR.¹³⁵ Additionally, Felipe is currently setting up his own vendors business. However, he is awaiting the combo’s reaction as they have to approve his business in the neighbourhood.¹³⁶

Additionally, for some ex-paramilitaries the PyR presented a source of uncertainty. Although most interviewees were very positive about PyR’s work and the opportunities they provided¹³⁷, others - mainly the two interviewees who did not receive an amnesty - were critical about their involvement in ex-paramilitaries’ lives.¹³⁸ They argued that the PyR is counteracting their reintegration process since they have to come to PyR’s office at working hours to confirm that they are not participating in an armed group. Furthermore, they have to go to court hearings for full weeks to, once again, tell the truth. Since not all employers check the online database, most ex-paramilitaries try to hide their former participation in an armed group. Consequently, they have to tell lies and put themselves in a difficult position to get days off for the court hearings. This makes it harder for them to maintain their jobs and create a new life.¹³⁹ Diego even claimed that the government is deliberately working against them to eventually catch them as recidivists and imprison them.¹⁴⁰ Interestingly, only one person had a fatalistic attitude regarding his possibilities on the labour market.¹⁴¹ The others all came

¹³³ Interview with Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017.

¹³⁴ Interview with Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017.

¹³⁵ Interview with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017.

¹³⁶ Interview with Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017.

¹³⁷ Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017; David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Andrés, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017; Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Jairo, ex-paramilitary 9, 11/05/2017.

¹³⁸ Interviews with Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017; Luis, ex-paramilitary 8, 10/05/2017.

¹³⁹ Interviews with Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017.

¹⁴¹ Interview with Luis, ex-paramilitary 8, 10/05/2017.

across as highly motivated and driven to achieve an even better position on the job market despite the obstacles they faced.

Although the sample of this research is not representative for the ex-paramilitaries in Medellín and Colombia in general, these personal accounts demonstrated that ex-paramilitaries have agency regarding their conduct and success on the job market while confronted with outside factors that could hinder their employment opportunities. By elaborating on Esteban's story it will be shown how this process of socially navigating opportunities and obstacles exactly works. Esteban had entered an armed group when he was thirteen years old and, as a consequence, did not have any prior working experience when he demobilised. Nevertheless, he was able to create his own company in electronic waste. When I asked him why he chose this type of business he convincingly explained that it is "the business of the future."¹⁴² Especially since few companies are specialised in this topic while the importance of this sector is rapidly growing. Therefore, he perceived electronic scrap as a profitable business with good long-term prospects. He gained trust of some people who could bring him to auctions where the electronic waste was sold. There learned more about the topic and created his own business by linking up to bigger companies.

"I made alliances with other companies that gave me the tools to work because you need environmental licenses in order to manipulate that type of [electronic] scrap. Then I went to get acquainted with people and to show them that I'm responsible and have the capacities."¹⁴³

In order to gain trust of the companies and to establish alliances he had to be open about his former involvement in an armed group. He knew they would find out about his past since companies in this sector usually check new names in the database.

"When I arrive at a company the first thing I do is: 'I'm demobilised since so many years and bla, bla.' I tell them everything. [Then I ask them to] give me the opportunity to show them that I do have the skills to do whatever they need, to provide the service. You get to know the people and one company catapults you to the other. [...] And so I have been working, that way I became known at the national level."¹⁴⁴

Interestingly, whereas the majority of the ex-paramilitaries were hiding their identity or trying to put as little emphasis on it as possible in order to prevent discrimination and stigmatisation¹⁴⁵, Esteban benefitted from being direct and open about his past. Although some employers and colleagues of other interviewees were aware of their former involvement in an armed group, most ex-paramilitaries only revealed this part about themselves to the people closest to them. They prefer to maintain a low profile and deliberately chose with whom they share this information.¹⁴⁶ Ricardo clarifies that only his close social network – in this case his working environment - knows who he was while he maintains a different profile for others.

"No one knows who I was [...] in order to take care of yourself in your environment. [...] I will make my family, my children vulnerable as soon as they are going to point them out, no,

¹⁴² Interview with Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017.

¹⁴³ Interview with Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017.

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017.

¹⁴⁵ Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017; David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Andrés, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017; Luis, ex-paramilitary 8, 10/05/2017.

¹⁴⁶ Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017; David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Andrés, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017; Luis, ex-paramilitary 8, 10/05/2017.

I'm a normal citizen. [...] My social circle is this [at his organisation] and everyone knows who we were or who I was."¹⁴⁷

Additionally, Esteban's story demonstrates that not only the people are deliberately chosen, what will exactly be disclosed about this past is carefully thought through as well. In his words: "What happens is that there are things of the past that can be hidden and others that cannot. And this [the mere fact of participation in an armed group] is one of those things that cannot be hidden."¹⁴⁸ This aspect is exemplified in Ricardo's story when he talks about their organisation's work aimed at convincing companies to hire more ex-combatants.

"There is a company, a group of companies, called Altipal. They invited us to Bogotá to give a conference. They were very impressed that we went there with the victims and told our life stories, which were not very different. I tell my life story as a victim, in which the guerrilla killed my mom and dad. The other person says the paramilitaries or guerrilla also killed his mom and dad. It's the same, but I decided to join a group. [...] Altipal manages hundred companies, they are the distributors of Colgate, Palmolive, several other companies, and they have opened the doors for many demobilised people to work there."¹⁴⁹

Clearly, Ricardo opened up about his past in a paramilitary group. However, by framing himself as a war victim making the wrong choices after this cruelty was done to him, he shifts the emphasis from insensitive killing machine to human being. This approach, in which it is carefully chosen what to say and what to leave out, resulted in a lot of extra jobs for ex-combatants.

In sum, this section showed that ex-paramilitaries navigate their environment in the sense that they detect and act upon opportunities that seem beneficial on the long run. Although the majority of the interviewees maintained that the PyR had an important role in providing these opportunities, some perceived them as hindering their reintegration process. Furthermore, it was demonstrated that the ex-paramilitaries were not completely dependent of the PyR, but used their own creativity and social network to enter and thrive on the job market. Finally, it is interesting that the interviewees used opposing strategies regarding identity disclosure and attempted to prevent discrimination and stigmatisation in different ways.

4.2 Socially navigating the bad by focussing on the good

While the ex-paramilitaries were giving shape to their new lives and seizing opportunities to *salir adelante* (move forward) as explained in 4.1, they were simultaneously facing a constant flow of opportunities to return to their old life. These so-called criminal opportunities had to be dealt with or avoided in order to move forward and advance their envisioned life path. However, this was not always easy and especially in the first years after their demobilisation some important decisions had to be made in order to remain in legality. This section first elaborates on the availability of criminal opportunities and why some people returned to an armed group. Secondly, ex-paramilitaries' social navigation practices aimed at remaining in legality will be addressed.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017.

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017.

4.2.1 Criminal opportunities and recidivism

The interviews with local experts and ex-paramilitaries indicated that opportunities to join criminal enterprises are still widely available in Medellín, other parts of Colombia and beyond.¹⁵⁰ In David's words: "There are always offers in Colombia to work with the BACRIM or in Venezuela."¹⁵¹ Except for one interviewee¹⁵², they were all directly offered to return to an armed group.

"Armed groups are well-aware of people who know how to handle weapons, logistics, and all those kind of things. The experience is not improvised and it is not at all strange that at some point they make me an offer for anything."¹⁵³

As a result of this dynamic, Esteban argues that it is a fallacy to talk about a peace process.

"For a successful peace process they have to catch everyone. Nothing is gained by demobilising these and not catching those. That happened with us. We demobilised, but the other groups continued as they are. Then, the ones who demobilised with us and didn't like it returned to the others and continued committing crimes."¹⁵⁴

The fact that whenever one group dismantles another rises, only one part of the criminal structure in Colombia demobilised with the DDR of the AUC and other armed groups remained intact, provided the demobilised paramilitaries with ample opportunities to resume their former activities (Rozema, 2008, pp.449-450; Espinal & Agudelo, 2008, pp.15-16)¹⁵⁵. Whereas the experts from reintegration agencies were rather optimistic about the number of people who continued in an armed group¹⁵⁶, almost all ex-paramilitaries disclosed that many of their former comrades returned to other criminal groups¹⁵⁷. Again, Diego forms an exception since he stated that only a small minority of the ex-paramilitaries continued with their former activities.¹⁵⁸ Although exact and trustworthy numbers concerning ex-paramilitary recidivism are not available, it is relevant to mention Ricardo's research. While he was in prison he started a project in which he documented every crime their group had committed. He wanted to support the victims and provide them with valid information about the details of a particular crime. In order to find out what exactly had happened he called many former comrades to ask them what they remembered from a particular crime. In our interview he told

¹⁵⁰ Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017; David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Andrés, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017; Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017; Luis, ex-paramilitary 8, 10/05/2017; Jairo, ex-paramilitary 9, 11/05/2017; former employee of the ACR, expert 2, 06/03/2017; Daniel Castaño, expert 3, 14/03/2017; Gustavo Duncan, expert 4, 23/03/2017; Antonio García Fernández, expert 5, 24/03/2017; Nico Tita, expert 6, 26/03/2017; community leader of the neighbourhood *13 de Noviembre* in Medellín, expert 8, 28/03/2017; former police colonel, expert 9, 04/04/2017; Paulo Serna, expert 10, 06/04/2017; Liduine Zumpolle, expert 11, 11/04/2017.

¹⁵¹ Interview with David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017.

¹⁵² This could be explained by the fact that Diego was only released from prison eight months ago. He claimed that everyone in his social environment knows that he has changed his life (Interview with Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017).

¹⁵³ Interview with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017.

¹⁵⁵ Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017.

¹⁵⁶ Interviews with former employee of the ACR, expert 2, 06/03/2017; Jorge Gaviria, expert 7, 27/03/2017. Liduine Zumpolle (expert 11, 11/04/2017) already warned me for government statistics since the state and reintegration programmes benefit from showing positive results.

¹⁵⁷ Interviews with David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017; Jairo, ex-paramilitary 9, 11/05/2017.

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017.

me that during this process of calling former comrades he realised that many of them had returned to the BACRIM.¹⁵⁹

This raises the question why these people returned to an armed group while others stayed in legality. Several ex-paramilitaries I interviewed emphasised that it is hard to build a new life when there are no economic opportunities. They mock the government for not having done more to provide them with opportunities to *salir adelante* in a dignified way.¹⁶⁰ However, my interviewees were confronted with the same economic deprivation and yet remained in legality after their demobilisation. Themnér made a similar observation since he found that even if the background factors related to remobilisation – economic deprivation, availability of weapons and lack of personal security - are present, this does not necessarily lead to remobilisation (2013, p.326). He argues that the opportunities provided by violent entrepreneurs to resort to violence were only seized if these entrepreneurs of violence shared military affiliations with the ex-combatants, had access to intermediaries and provided the former fighters with selective incentives (Themnér, 2013, pp.326-327).

According to Themnér, the first trigger in the causal chain that explains how people could be remobilised is military affiliations. Ex-combatant violence is most likely to take place if former fighters and entrepreneurs of violence – in this case leaders of the BACRIM - share a history of military cooperation. This former cooperation provides them with crucial information about the trustworthiness and reliability of the other party (Themnér, 2013, pp.308-309). Several authors claimed that former commanders somehow evaded their prison term and continued in the BACRIM (Civico, 2015, p.41; Nussio & Howe, 2012, pp.62-63; PAX, 2011, p.5). Additionally, as David revealed: “Then they did a demobilisation and never liked the programme. They didn’t want to move forward or study and continued in the same neighbourhoods with the same people and the same commanders. Thus, they continued in the same.”¹⁶¹ Hence, it is likely that military affiliations between ex-paramilitaries and commanders of the BACRIM were present, which enhanced their trust in the criminal enterprise.

Secondly, the violent entrepreneurs had access to intermediaries that could recruit the ex-paramilitaries for them. Intermediaries are often mid-level commanders standing in between violent entrepreneurs and potential recruits (Themnér, 2013, pp.309-310). Many of the ex-paramilitaries I interviewed mentioned that people they knew from their former paramilitary life contacted them about criminal opportunities. Ricardo provided a clear example of the way in which intermediaries approached them.

“I left [prison] on the 2nd of June in 2015, I left Tuesday at 2 p.m., or about this time. On Friday the 5th of June I met someone at the Olaya airport and he said ‘What’s up, how nice you’ve left, let’s drink something, I invite you.’ I [said] ‘No, I’m traveling, I’m going to see my children’ - my children did not live here, they lived in Bogotá. [...] ‘No stay, I’ll give you the tickets.’ I [said] ‘No, I’m traveling, I’m traveling.’ [He said] ‘Let’s at least drink a coffee.’ We went and had a coffee. He told me: ‘I’m going to help you, I know that you can get ahead, *bacano*, the only help I have is Cúcuta, catch Cúcuta.’ ‘How do you catch Cúcuta?’ [I asked]. ‘Get into Cúcuta, take fifty men, take Cúcuta and I will pay you fifty million per month’ - that is 25 thousand dollars a month - and I said ‘I thought you were my friend, so long, I’m going to take the flight, bye.’”¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017.

¹⁶⁰ Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017; David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017; Luis, ex-paramilitary 8, 10/05/2017.

¹⁶¹ Interview with David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017.

¹⁶² Interview with Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017.

Thus, the interviews showed that violent entrepreneurs had access to intermediaries that knew who used to be part of an armed group and could be eager to return to such an enterprise.

The last important trigger is selective incentives, that is, benefits only provided to those participating in the armed group (Themnér, 2013, p.311). The selective incentive in the Colombian case is *plata fácil*, or easy money. Over the years the so-called *cultura fascilista* took control of people's minds and, as a result, many Colombians lost their moral compass.¹⁶³ The former police colonel explained that the "short route", in which luxurious goods can be obtained quickly in an illegal way, has dominated in Colombia since Pablo Escobar's era.¹⁶⁴ The ex-paramilitaries confirm that their comrades returned to an armed group because of the money.¹⁶⁵ In Esteban's words: "Many people returned to the same thing for the same reason; for the pleasure of *plata fácil*."¹⁶⁶ Ricardo elaborates on this:

"They call us a lot for those illegal groups and the job offers are good. For example, a friend was called eight days ago and they paid him five million [pesos] a month, we are talking about 2.000 dollars. The government is giving you almost 200 dollars. Therefore, they say: 'No, I'm leaving.'"¹⁶⁷

Thus, the combination of these three factors – military affiliations, intermediaries and selective incentives – has been present in the Colombian society after the paramilitaries demobilised. However, the participants of this research did not remobilise even though they were likely to have military affiliations with the violent entrepreneurs and were approached by intermediaries who offered them *plata fácil*. Hence, there is one other essential factor related to recidivism in Colombia. This field research revealed that family has been a key determinant for the interviewed ex-paramilitaries to maintain their civilian lifestyle and to reject criminal opportunities. As Luis explained:

"If they tell me 'Let's do that' [I say] 'No in my house three people are waiting for me.' Another person would say 'Nobody is waiting for me, let's go.' 'Are you alone?' [they would ask and he says] 'Let's do it *hijueputa*, if they kill me, they kill me.'"¹⁶⁸

This function of the family network is confirmed by the studies of Theidon (2009, p.31), Kaplan and Nussio (2016, p.24), Terry and Abrams (2017, pp.743-744) and Rozema (2008, p.428). The next section expands on the role significant family members played in ex-paramilitaries' maintenance of a civilian lifestyle. It will be shown how the interviewees strategically moved through their environment in order to prevent relapsing into their old behaviour.

4.2.2 Ex-paramilitaries' strategies to remain in legality

During the interviews three strategies that were tactfully employed by the interviewees came to the fore. These strategies show how ex-paramilitaries dealt with the constant flow of criminal opportunities that could pull them back into their old lives. They managed to counter the bad influences by creating a stable and motivating environment, which stimulated their transition to a civilian lifestyle.

¹⁶³ Interview with Liduine Zumpolle, expert 11, 11/04/2017.

¹⁶⁴ Interview with former police colonel, expert 9, 04/04/2017.

¹⁶⁵ Interviews with Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Jairo, ex-paramilitary 9, 11/05/2017.

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017.

¹⁶⁷ Interview with Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017.

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Luis, ex-paramilitary 8, 10/05/2017.

The first strategy entails the creation of closer ties with their family. During their period in an armed group it was too unsafe to have regular contact with their family members.¹⁶⁹

“If you were with your family it was one hour and then you already had to go or hide. I would only see them again every three or four months. That is a very big difference from what we have now.”¹⁷⁰

Despite the reduced contact, their family never lost importance and was mentioned as a paramount reason to demobilise (see chapter 3). During the reintegration process the influence of their family further enlarged and significant family members functioned as main motivators to *salir adelante*. Currently, except for Santiago¹⁷¹, all interviewees have a wife or girlfriend. The majority also has children of which some were born during their life in war while others came after their demobilisation.¹⁷² Additionally, the majority affirmed that their mother has played a crucial role in their post-demobilisation life.¹⁷³ Other family members, such as fathers, siblings, grandparents, in-laws, uncles and aunts, were brought up less in the interviews. In order to understand the role family members played in the interviewees’ transition to a civilian lifestyle, it will be addressed how this relationship changed after the demobilisation process and how family and fatherhood influenced their decisions and direction of life.

During our interview Diego extensively described why and how his relationship with his family changed after he demobilised.

“When I give [court] hearings - when you’re in jail and you start to talk about everything you did in the conflict - there are often victims inside, one, in my case. You see the pain of the relatives. You put yourself in their place and think: What if it would happen to me? It’s very painful because if you already feel the pain of the victims, what will your own pain be like? Then you begin to appreciate the family a little more than before. Because before you were with your children and family but it was not a love as attached as when you sit down to talk about what you did. [...] It’s very difficult because you start to see that you did a lot of damage. No matter how, you will never repair, you will never return a life, you will never return the joy to that family. Then you begin to appreciate your own family more because of the pain you see in others. [...] I thought very differently. When you enter you are so ignorant that you almost don’t care about your life, nor will you care about other people’s lives or the family. As a result of all this, you begin to value your life and the life of your family and the people surrounding you more. I love them and I know that in case something happens to me it may hurt them too. It changed a lot.”¹⁷⁴

Although not all ex-paramilitaries were confronted with their victims, for everyone the relationship with their family improved due to the increased contact, the realisation how much pain they caused their families and the ex-paramilitaries’ change of lifestyle partly made possible by their family’s support and motivation.

¹⁶⁹ Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017; Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Andrés, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017; Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017.

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017.

¹⁷¹ Interview with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017.

¹⁷² Interviews with David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Andrés, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017; Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017; Luis, ex-paramilitary 8, 10/05/2017. Only Santiago and Jairo do not have children. Nevertheless, Jairo’s wife has children who he helps to raise as well (Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017; Jairo, ex-paramilitary 9, 11/05/2017).

¹⁷³ Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017; Andrés, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017; Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Luis, ex-paramilitary 8, 10/05/2017; Jairo, ex-paramilitary 9, 11/05/2017.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017.

The ex-paramilitaries' family members suffered a lot due to persecution and the uncertainty that comes with having a family member in an armed group.¹⁷⁵ Nevertheless, the ex-paramilitaries expressed that their family members, especially the mothers, were always there for them.¹⁷⁶ When the demobilisation was announced and the paramilitaries returned to their families, their loved ones were delighted to welcome them and were hoping for a life in peace. Consequently, all ex-paramilitaries mentioned that improving their and their family's living standard and well-being was a key motivation to *salir adelante* and remain in legality. According to Diego: "For my family I really changed. For my family I'm trying to *salir adelante*."¹⁷⁷ Due to the limited job opportunities and generous proposals of armed groups, some interviewees mentioned that it was hard in the first years to reject the offers to return to an armed group. Nevertheless, they maintained that by thinking about their family they found the strength to walk away from the bad influences.¹⁷⁸

Ever since the interviewees demobilised their families have motivated, supported and advised them. As David said: "The family has always helped and influenced. With study and with work they have always influenced and given you an urge to *salir adelante*. To fight."¹⁷⁹ Their families believe in them and their capacities to move forward, which helped the interviewees to keep on finding their way in legality and addressing the difficulties they had encountered.¹⁸⁰ Additionally, the interviews revealed that fatherhood was an essential motivator to *salir adelante*. They wanted to be a good role model for their children, be present when they grow up and work hard in order to provide them with a decent education.¹⁸¹ Consequently, their children guide the direction of the ex-paramilitaries' lives in the sense that "they are always present in any kind of decision [...] because they are the reason to live."¹⁸²

Everyone expressed that their close family members have been the most important people in their lives, who have greatly influenced their decisions and activities. Again, it is relevant to dive deeper into how family exactly influences the interviewees' life course and decisions by looking at Esteban's story.

Me: "You said that at the beginning of your demobilisation your daughter was born?"

Esteban: "Yes, that was something that came very close together. To where I go, before I didn't have that responsibility to have an obligation, do you understand? When you're in that life you only worry about drinking and consuming drugs. [...] After you demobilise you change. I changed my life a lot and outside of that [armed group] came my first daughter, so that made me think in a very different way. [...] That's why I started looking for work in something else."¹⁸³

¹⁷⁵ Interviews with with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017; David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Andrès, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017; Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017.

¹⁷⁶ Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017; Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017.

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017.

¹⁷⁸ Interviews with David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017.

¹⁷⁹ Interview with David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017.

¹⁸⁰ Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017; David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Andrès, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017; Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017; Luis, ex-paramilitary 8, 10/05/2017; Jairo, ex-paramilitary 9, 11/05/2017.

¹⁸¹ Interviews with David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Andrès, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017; Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017; Luis, ex-paramilitary 8, 10/05/2017.

¹⁸² Interview with David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017.

¹⁸³ Interview with Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017.

This fragment demonstrates that his family, especially the birth of his daughter, made Esteban more responsible and changed his mentality. Later in the interview he guiltily smiled when he admitted that he impregnated an older woman when he was fifteen years old. Consequently, his first daughter was born when he was part of a paramilitary group. However, this event did not influence his life like the birth of his second daughter. This is in line with the timing principle of the life course theory¹⁸⁴, which holds that the same events or experiences can affect people in different ways depending on when they occur (Elder et al., 2003, p.12). Hence, this example shows that fatherhood had a decisive role in Esteban's transition to a civilian lifestyle, but only because the birth of his daughter occurred at the same time as his demobilisation.

When Esteban started living together with his current wife right after he demobilised, his first daughter moved in with them and a third daughter was born. Although only the second daughter had an influence on his initial mentality change, all three daughters equally influence his current life.

“As I say today, they are the axis for one to be willing to get ahead. Many people are satisfied with the basics, that is, with having his sleep, and yeah [those things]. But as a result of the family I want to *salir adelante* to give them tools. In order to give them a good study they have to enter a university and here that is very expensive.”¹⁸⁵

As discussed in the former section, Esteban was able to set up his own company in electronic waste to move forward and to obtain a more economically stable future for his family.

However, during this time he was also confronted with an event that almost pushed him back into his old life. After his brother-in-law shot Esteban's own brother - who continued in another armed group after the paramilitaries had demobilised - his family pressured him to retaliate. However, that would mean a return to his former life.

“I was pressured a lot. I even have family that doesn't speak to me after that. Or, the excuse of many of my relatives was that if I were killed my brother would not have left it that way. But I am no longer in that, I already wanted to make a different life and then you have to leave it. [...] It was very hard because I was drinking a lot and I was coming back again as if I were giving in to vices, I was very, what I was telling you now, but thanks to my God, I made the decision not to go back to that. I said of this water I won't drink because I have daughters and a family, and you don't know whether today or tomorrow they will kill a daughter. [...] To get into a problem like that meant to lose my wife, to lose my daughters and to go back in to put my family in danger, that is, to relive a number of things that I had already left behind. [...] I continued my life, with a lot of pain and everything, to bury a brother and to see the suffering of my father and my mother, especially of my father because he was his favourite. Then my dad was also crazy: 'They killed your brother and you did nothing.' Later my sisters managed to raise his awareness 'but look dad.' That helped us a lot to get closer as a family. Now I go up and try to help them as much as I can, I go up two or three times a week.”¹⁸⁶

This passage shows that even though Esteban had a good motive and was pressured to take revenge, he chose to stay with his family and continue on the “right path.”¹⁸⁷ In the end, this

¹⁸⁴ The life course theory entails that “people construct their own life course through the choices and actions they take within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstance” (Elder Jr. et al., 2003, p.11). Although people have agency and do not passively act upon social influences and structural constraints, their life course is embedded in and shaped by the historical context and places they have experienced (Elder Jr. et al., 2003, p.12). The theory further holds that “lives are lived interdependently and that socio-historical influences are expressed through this network of shared relationships” (Elder Jr. et al., 2003, p.13).

¹⁸⁵ Interview with Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017.

¹⁸⁶ Interview with Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017.

¹⁸⁷ Interview with Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017.

tightened the relationship between him and his close family members while he lost contact with other relatives that did not understand his choice. All the interviewees mentioned that their families were the principal reason they did not return to an armed group. Their family means everything to them and any other social network can never replace their importance. Remarkably, they portray family as “the pillar”¹⁸⁸ everything is “moving around.”¹⁸⁹ This indicates that they navigated the social world in a way that allows their family to be the focus of their lives. Accordingly, during this process of forming a new lifestyle they constantly took into account which life projects, environments and social contacts would benefit their family’s future and well-being.

Besides creating closer ties with their families, they also made conscious decisions about other people in their lives. They deliberately tried to stay away as far as possible from people who could have a negative influence on their achievements. For example, Andrés avoids phone calls from people who offer him criminal opportunities by changing his number as soon as someone got a hold of it.¹⁹⁰ Felipe used the juridical excuse that he is only conditionally out of jail to ensure that the armed groups will accept his rejection and do not return to him with other offers.¹⁹¹ Besides people, they also avoid places where there is a chance of meeting new people who can have a bad influence. This is further explained by Santiago.

“I already know how to move in the city, where you should and shouldn’t go. [...] I stay away from those corners, the stories, where normally this kind of information arrives. So I stay on the margins of it.”¹⁹²

Esteban has the same strategy as Santiago in the sense that he stays away from certain places where “problems start”¹⁹³. He avoids social events in his new neighbourhood since “unfortunately, the first ones who seek friendships are the bandits.”¹⁹⁴ Consequently, they all developed their own strategies how to avoid being approached by people who want to convince them to return to an armed group.

Relatedly, all interviewees mentioned that they lost contact with most of their paramilitary comrades. The process of moving on and letting the others go was in general a slow process that was sometimes experienced as difficult.¹⁹⁵ The process was even slower for the interviewees who went to prison since they stayed together with other ex-paramilitaries for a longer time.¹⁹⁶ Nevertheless, for everyone the phase had come in which they detached themselves from most of their former comrades and followed their own path. Diego described how the contact with his comrades slowly faded away after he was released from prison.

“Before we saw each other every day, we talked every day. [...] Now we see each other every time we have a court hearing or if someone needs another favour. I go out and we meet for a moment, five or ten minutes, and that’s it. But yes, after you leave you distance yourself a little from the friends you had before in jail. When we were in the group we were very constant, all

¹⁸⁸ Interview with Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017.

¹⁸⁹ Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017; Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017.

¹⁹⁰ Interview with Andrés, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017.

¹⁹¹ Interview with Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017.

¹⁹² Interview with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017.

¹⁹³ Interview with Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017.

¹⁹⁴ Interview with Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017.

¹⁹⁵ Interviews with David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017.

¹⁹⁶ Interviews with Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017.

the time. Here everyone laid their hands on their own course, everyone is working on another side and we only meet when we have to come together for the programme.”¹⁹⁷

Interestingly, whereas all the ex-paramilitaries emphasised that they are having their “own life” now and mainly care about their own family’s future. Ricardo is the only one who still feels responsible for other ex-paramilitaries.¹⁹⁸ This could be explained by the composition of the sample as well as the fact that Ricardo was a paramilitary commander in which he used to have a lot of responsibility for his *muchachos*. This feeling of responsibility may be reinforced by the fact that other ex-paramilitaries still approach him when they need help. Therefore, he still has some sort of leadership role. However, this time it is focussed on helping former comrades to remain in legality.

Although the interviewees emphasised that they lost contact with their comrades and have their own life, they also maintained some sort of friendship with a select group of people from their former life. Albeit some ex-paramilitaries were closer with their former comrades than others, they all deliberately chose whom they allowed in their new lives.

“I have many friends who stayed after having lived through the whole process of jail and the armed group, true friends, friends who told me: ‘I congratulate you, here we are, we can give you work, let’s do this.’ There are also others who looked for me and told me: ‘Ricardo look, let’s go again.’ Then, that is not a friend, now I have real friends that I met in the war and who came, visited and supported me and gave me a voice of encouragement. Today they are my friends. [...] I learned to select. What stayed with me from jail is that I regretted, that it served me and that I knew who the good and the bad were in my life. The bad ones I discarded, the good ones I strengthened and that’s my environment.”¹⁹⁹

Everyone who maintained close contact with other ex-paramilitaries emphasised that their friends were *saliendo adelante* as well. They mutually motivated each other and talked about the hardships they sometimes faced in their new lives.²⁰⁰ Interestingly, in school and prison ex-paramilitaries were often studying together with ex-guerrilleros as well. They fulfilled the same function as other ex-paramilitaries in the sense that they encouraged each other to work hard and study fast. Nevertheless, the contact with ex-guerrilleros faded away after they had graduated while some ex-paramilitary friends remained in the interviewees’ lives.²⁰¹ Felipe described how his ex-paramilitary friends helped and motivated him after they demobilised.

“I was very *facilista* at first, but they were very constant for the study, very good friends, very responsible. I always clung to those things. I was very irresponsible, to say something, and they taught me responsibility. To see them with their family and children showed me ‘see I can also be that.’ They impregnated me with good energies, positive things.”²⁰²

Thus, the interviews demonstrated that the ex-paramilitaries’ contact with former combatants did not hinder their reintegration, which resembles the work of Kaplan and Nussio (2016), De Vries and Wiegink (2011), Wiegink (2015) and Zyck (2009). Contrary to those authors who argued that the maintenance of ex-combatant networks leads to remobilisation (see 1.1.4), in this case, former comrades provided the interviewees with both

¹⁹⁷ Interview with Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017.

¹⁹⁸ Interview with Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017.

¹⁹⁹ Interview with Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017.

²⁰⁰ Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017; Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Andrés, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017; Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017; Luis, ex-paramilitary 8, 10/05/2017.

²⁰¹ Interviews with Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Andrés, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017; Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017.

²⁰² Interview with Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017.

positive and negative role models that helped them to *salir adelante*. On the one hand, several ex-paramilitaries maintained that it was very inspirational for them to meet and maintain contact with people who successfully transitioned to a civilian lifestyle.²⁰³ On the other hand, they saw and heard stories about ex-paramilitaries who were returning to war and were immediately shot or caught.²⁰⁴ These negative role models showed them that criminality was not the right path to take and would not be beneficial on the long run.

Finally, some interviewees also made new friends at their work and studies.²⁰⁵ In David's words: "They are the ones who have helped me. They are the teachers of my life."²⁰⁶ Although some ex-paramilitaries did not consider friends to be relevant or did not have time for friends²⁰⁷, other people mentioned that their social environment was important to them.²⁰⁸ Nevertheless, Luis formulated the general tendency that was observable in the interviews: "Friends are there while family is always going to be there, family is the first thing one has. Friends are there, but they can never reach the importance that a family can achieve."²⁰⁹ In sum, they navigated their social network in order to shake off bad influences and avoided creating new contacts that could have a negative effect on their civilian lifestyle. This strategy resembles a strategy Terry and Abrams discovered in ex-offenders' behaviour after their release from prison. Likewise, the ex-offenders constantly navigated their peer-associations while being aware that certain people could help or hurt their efforts to stay on the law-abiding path (Terry & Abrams, 2017, p.743).

The last strategy most interviewees deemed crucial when advancing their new lifestyle was moving to a different neighbourhood. The collective demobilisation process took place in the same neighbourhoods as where they were active as paramilitaries and Rozema argued that many stayed in the same area after they had demobilised (2008, p.450). However, the interviewees stated that the majority of the ex-paramilitaries moved to a different area after the demobilisation process. They assessed which place was best to live and where they could enhance their chances to build a new life.²¹⁰ This is confirmed by Catalina Morales, who worked for the ACR. She claimed that ninety per cent of the ex-paramilitaries had moved to a different area after their demobilisation.²¹¹ The contradiction between this research and Rozema's findings could be explained by the fact that Rozema's research was conducted earlier after the demobilisation process than this one. Perhaps many ex-paramilitaries had not yet decided to leave at that time.

As the interviews revealed, several ex-paramilitaries moved to a different neighbourhood because they perceived it as an essential step in breaking away from or

²⁰³ Interviews with David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017.

²⁰⁴ Interviews with Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Jairo, ex-paramilitary 9, 11/05/2017.

²⁰⁵ Interviews with David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Andrés, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017; Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017.

²⁰⁶ Interview with David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017.

²⁰⁷ Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017; Jairo, ex-paramilitary 9, 11/05/2017.

²⁰⁸ Interviews with David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Andrés, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017; Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017; Luis, ex-paramilitary 8, 10/05/2017.

²⁰⁹ Interview with Luis, ex-paramilitary 8, 10/05/2017.

²¹⁰ Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017; David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Andrés, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017; Jairo, ex-paramilitary 9, 11/05/2017.

²¹¹ Interview with Catalina Morales, expert 12, 11/04/2017.

“knifing off”²¹² their former life.²¹³ According to David, it is almost impossible to move on if people stay in the same neighbourhood.²¹⁴ This realisation is described by Santiago: “When I was thinking that I really wanted to demobilise the heart, the first thing I did was selling the weapons I had and moving from the area where I was.”²¹⁵ We resume with Esteban’s story to further elaborate on the importance of moving to a different area.

“Initially everything was very similar, the difference was that logically we were no longer receiving orders from anyone, nor were we armed or anything. Initially everyone continued with a life very, not the same, but very similar because as I was saying the people in the neighbourhood were still afraid of you, ‘this is so-and-so’. And with them there was a normal relationship, drink, drink every time, to get paid up and down on a motorcycle, life continued as usual. What changed was that there were no bullets from corner to corner, you no longer kept a weapon in your house or buried somewhere. You were not staying up late or spending the night somewhere, but socially life was almost the same. At what moment my life started to change? When I left there. [...] It is difficult because they are people you have been with for many years and they are the only people that you have known, well, it is the environment, the social life I have had all my life. Then starting is super hard, that’s why you leave from where you are, because if you don’t leave, you are still the same in the same ointment.”²¹⁶

Thus, Esteban and the other interviewees considered it necessary to move to a different area in order to truly change their lifestyle.

They chose their neighbourhood based on where their family was, where it was safe and where they could maintain a low profile.²¹⁷ After they chose their new place, they had to adapt to the new circumstances. For example, Andrés moved a lot within his neighbourhood and he considered it rather complicated to constantly adapt to new areas and to change friendships.²¹⁸ Additionally, Ricardo had never lived in Medellín before, so he described it as a new phase in his life in which he had to accustom to the new living environment. “It is a phase in which I am still living, the rejection of my society, the fear, face a city that after all those years I didn’t know, I didn’t know how to move.”²¹⁹ Similarly, after Diego was released from prison he moved in with his family where he had to look “for the form to fit in.”²²⁰ These quotes indicate that they had to adapt their social navigation practices; their way of acting and moving in relation to their changed social environment.

Remarkably, two interviewees managed to transition to a civilian lifestyle whilst living in the same area as before.²²¹ Security considerations partly explain why they were able to do this. For several ex-paramilitaries I interviewed it was not even an option to stay in the same place or neighbourhood due to the presence of enemies.²²² Although some authors point out that a threat to ex-combatants’ personal security may lead to remobilisation (Berdal, 1996, pp.17-18; Call & Stanley, 2003, pp.216-218; Nilsson, 2005, p.40), the interviewees in this

²¹² This term is used in criminological theories and refers to the opportunities that help delinquents to break away from a wide range of contaminated past situations. Changing their neighbourhood is mentioned as a strategy of delinquents to knife off the past (Maruna & Roy, 2007, p.105, p.107).

²¹³ Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017; David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Jairo, ex-paramilitary 9, 11/05/2017.

²¹⁴ Interview with David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017.

²¹⁵ Interview with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017.

²¹⁶ Interview with Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017.

²¹⁷ Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017; David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Andrés, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017; Jairo, ex-paramilitary 9, 11/05/2017.

²¹⁸ Interview with Andrés, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017.

²¹⁹ Interview with Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017.

²²⁰ Interview with Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017.

²²¹ Interviews with Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017; Luis, ex-paramilitary 8, 10/05/2017.

²²² Interviews David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Andrés, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017.

research rather moved to a different area and kept a low profile than going back to an armed group. However, not all interviewees who moved were forced to do so out of security reasons. For example, Esteban is still welcomed as a hero in his former neighbourhood.²²³ The interviewees who stayed in their neighbourhoods mentioned that they were living a calm life and were not facing any threats to their security.²²⁴

Felipe stayed in his neighbourhood and explained that it was sometimes hard to transform his presence and lifestyle in the same area. Nevertheless, his relationship with the neighbours slowly changed as they saw how the reintegration process was transforming him. He noticed that they no longer respected him because of his power position but because of his solidarity and social work in the neighbourhood.²²⁵

“I learned that respect is not imposed, you win it, deserve it. Then, two things that looked the same, but what a difference! The people greet you with a firm handshake, embrace you, invite you to the cinema, invite you to lunch, invite you to good things. Thus, it has been good thanks to God.”²²⁶

Other interviewees also mentioned that their relationship with the neighbours changed for the better.²²⁷ For some interviewees the neighbours are more important than for others, but no one maintained that they are very important in their life. Although the majority said they do not have a very close relationship with their neighbours²²⁸, they also mentioned that they have never felt so involved in their living environment before²²⁹. Due to their participation in social work and other activities in the neighbourhood they became part of society.²³⁰ This might have reinforced their feeling of not wanting to hurt society anymore, which was mentioned by some as a reason to avoid returning to their old lives.²³¹ This is in line with Kaplan and Nussio’s finding that ex-combatant participation in the community prevents the recurrence of conflict (Kaplan & Nussio, 2015, p.16).

Altogether, the ex-paramilitaries’ stories showed that it is a common strategy to move to a different neighbourhood in order to knife off their former lives. However, it is possible to *salir adelante* in their old areas as long as they can safely live there, end their involvement in former power structures and reconfigure their relationships with the neighbours.

Life course theory has identified several turning points such as fatherhood, marriage and employment that can help people to shift their criminal trajectories to civilian ones (Terry & Abrams, 2017, p.730). These new life roles can serve as ‘hooks’ that provide former delinquents with opportunities and contexts to change their lifestyle (Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph, 2002, p.992). Nevertheless, it has been argued that, above all, a person’s choice to fully commit to a job, their family or civilian life in general is essential when redirecting one’s course of life (Maruna, 1999, p.4). This willingness to change is reinforced by aging in

²²³ Interview with Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017.

²²⁴ Interviews with Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017; Luis, ex-paramilitary 8, 10/05/2017.

²²⁵ Interviews with Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017.

²²⁶ Interview with Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017.

²²⁷ Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017; David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Andrés, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017.

²²⁸ Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017; Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Andrés, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017; Jairo, ex-paramilitary 9, 11/05/2017.

²²⁹ Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017; David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Andrés, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017; Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017.

²³⁰ Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017; David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017.

²³¹ Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017; Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017; Jairo, ex-paramilitary 9, 11/05/2017.

the sense that people are likely to become more focused and less willing to live a criminal lifestyle when they become older (Terry & Abrams, 2017, p.729; Moffitt, 1993, p.690). In the three strategies discussed above it is observable that personal motivation and active demeanour were crucial in the interviewees effort to successfully transition to a civilian lifestyle. The importance of personal conviction was emphasised by Andrès.

“I think that you have to handle it yourself because you go out there and there are many things along the way like ‘look we’re going for this’. There are many people, friends you had in that past, who say ‘let’s go and do this’. Then you have to make your own decisions. I’m not going to be doing this. I’m going to dedicate myself to the right life. I do not want to be bothering around. You think about your future and the future of your family.”²³²

The interviewees personal motivation and active behaviour was reinforced by their social network, the PyR and, very important, God. All ex-paramilitaries are very religious and some mentioned God as an important influence to keep them on the civilian path. They used specific parts of religion as guidance in their new lives. Some mentioned they were not followers of Catholicism in the strict sense but created their own religion or being they believed in. They took specific elements of Christianity they found helpful in their lives, which gave them strength and helped them to deal with the past. To give some examples, whereas Santiago finds reading the bible very calming²³³, Luis talks to God everyday and considers him to be a good friend²³⁴. Furthermore, Jairo mentioned fear for God’s punishment as an important reason to only engage in good things.²³⁵ This is reflected in Esteban’s promise to God.

“I one day promised God that if he helped me to get out of the life I was in, I would not kill anyone again. I feel a deep respect for God, the things of God, respect and even fear I don’t know. I think that on the day I break this promise I made to God, that day bye [something bad will happen].”²³⁶

These examples show that the interviewees had different relationships with God and different attitudes towards religion. They tailored the given religion to their own needs and preferences, which eventually helped them to move forward.

A final factor that played a role in ex-paramilitaries’ decision to stay in legality is that over time returning to an armed group was not seen as profitable anymore. After they have completed the programme, finished a study and found a job, returning to an armed group was seen as going backwards. It was perceived as an illogical move in which they would throw everything away they had gained over the years.²³⁷

“That’s going back, so no. Yes, there are ‘tempting’ offers, but no, tempting in quotation marks, they are not so good. I don’t want to be outside of the law, only move in legality. [...] What was, was and after everything that I have advanced to go back? That is going backwards, for me, no. No, we liberated ourselves from many things.”²³⁸

²³² Interview with Andrès, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017.

²³³ Interview with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017.

²³⁴ Interview with Luis, ex-paramilitary 8, 10/05/2017.

²³⁵ Interview with Jairo, ex-paramilitary 9, 11/05/2017.

²³⁶ Interview with Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017.

²³⁷ Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017; Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017; Jairo, ex-paramilitary 9, 11/05/2017.

²³⁸ Interview with Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017.

It shows that despite the availability of criminal opportunities, the interviewees were able to advance their civilian lifestyle and gain better living conditions. Felipe's remark of "liberating" himself from the paramilitary group was a recurring theme in the interviews. The next chapter will elaborate on this notion of 'reintegration as redemption'.

5. REINTEGRATION AS REDEMPTION

This section provides a reflection on the transition of ex-paramilitaries to a civilian lifestyle. How do the interviewees they think about their new life, which mentality changes have taken place and how do they talk about their own agency in the constantly changing social environment they find themselves in?

The interviews demonstrated that the ex-paramilitaries considered the demobilisation as a rupture between their old and new life. In David's words: "For me the [reintegration] programme is a new opportunity of life."²³⁹ They referred to their period in an armed group as "another life", from which they deliberately tried to distance themselves after their demobilisation.²⁴⁰ Shadd Maruna discovered that people who successfully left their criminal past behind had to disassociate themselves from their delinquent, in this case paramilitary, identities and actively adopt new ones (2001, in Terry & Abrams, 2017, p.730). In the interviewees' new lives they no longer saw themselves as paramilitaries, but as normal citizens, fathers and husbands. Although their identity as *desmovilizado* did not particularly serve their efforts to advance a civilian lifestyle, everyone highlighted that they were able to improve the quality of their second life in comparison to their former one. According to Felipe: "I feel happy, I feel like living another life, life has given me a second wind I say."²⁴¹ Although everyone emphasised how much better their life is – "this is the best moment of my life" to quote Santiago²⁴² – Andrès has been more nuanced regarding the extent to which his life has improved. He maintained that his life changed a little but due to economic difficulties his position remained almost the same. Nevertheless, he feels better since his fear and "problems" are gone.²⁴³

The interviews showed that the ex-paramilitaries talked about their demobilisation and subsequent new life in terms of redemption. They were freed from their confining, stressful circumstances and were able to achieve *tranquilidad*, that is, inner peace or calmness.

"The change has been almost 200% better than how we lived before, which was very stressful. I believe more strongly in not continuing with committing crimes. Not because I don't have the opportunity, but because I don't want to do it. It is better to live like this, be *tranquilo*, sleep *tranquilo*."²⁴⁴

²³⁹ Interview with David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017.

²⁴⁰ Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017; David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Andrès, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017; Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017; Luis, ex-paramilitary 8, 10/05/2017; Jairo, ex-paramilitary 9, 11/05/2017.

²⁴¹ Interview with Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017.

²⁴² Interview with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017.

²⁴³ Interview with Andrès, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017.

²⁴⁴ Interview with Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017.

Beside themselves, they also freed their families from the stress and fear that comes with having a family member in an armed group. Since family has been highly important to them, freeing their relatives from their suffering was almost as important as freeing themselves.

“Thanks to God I freed myself from so many things and here I am, thanks to God, with my mother. First I was staying in the streets and my mother was suffering, waiting for me. If she heard a gunshot she thought it was me they had killed. Thus, now she lives with a *tranquilidad* much better.”²⁴⁵

Hence, the demobilisation freed their and their families’ minds from worries, fear and a profound stress that occupied their thoughts during the interviewees’ time in a paramilitary group.

In addition to their mental freedom, they also described a more physical freedom. The ex-paramilitaries’ freedom of movement was highly restricted while they were in an armed group. The city was divided by so-called *fronteras invisibles*, or invisible borders, which marked the territories of different armed groups. These borders were not to be crossed and the paramilitaries had to be alert concerning the whereabouts of their enemies.²⁴⁶ However, after their demobilisation they were “able to move” and pass through different areas without being afraid.²⁴⁷ This liberation is exemplified by Andrés.

“You feel freer, like I can be here, I can drink a soda there, I can leave, I can walk by someone without feeling afraid on that side. [...] I think that’s very good [...] If you are involved in there you are hiding so they won’t see you, I cannot go here, that is the life you have there. How do I explain? Very hurried, you are always on the defence, being pendant, it’s very different.”²⁴⁸

This freedom of movement was highly valued and some stated that they would never want “to lock” themselves again in an armed group.²⁴⁹

They were not only enabled to move in the literal sense of the word, their possibilities to move as social navigators was enhanced as well. In the armed group they had to follow orders and they were guided by their commanders.²⁵⁰ The reintegration process encompassed a decollectivisation of lifestyles and, subsequently, allowed the ex-paramilitaries to increasingly shape to their own life course. Santiago clarified how he was able to form his own life after he demobilised.

I make my own decisions. In that sense I do everything on my own. That way we are adults, but before, when you are in armed groups, you are almost like a child under the control of another person.²⁵¹ [...] I think that after so many years of following models, of wanting what others had, because that was what I was doing, I wanted the things of others, I think now I follow my own model. I built my own model. [...] You believe in what you have and what you have been able to learn in order to develop in life.²⁵²

Santiago explained how he became his own role model after he demobilised. Nonetheless, the interviews revealed that the ex-paramilitaries had to learn how to follow themselves, how to

²⁴⁵ Interview with Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017.

²⁴⁶ Interview with former employee of the ACR, expert 2, 06/03/2017.

²⁴⁷ Interviews with Andrés, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Luis, ex-paramilitary 8, 10/05/2017; Jairo, ex-paramilitary 9, 11/05/2017.

²⁴⁸ Interview with Andrés, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017.

²⁴⁹ Interviews with David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Luis, ex-paramilitary 8, 10/05/2017.

²⁵⁰ Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017 & 05/04/2017; Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017.

²⁵¹ Interview with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017.

²⁵² Interview with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 05/04/2017.

be responsible and how to shift their focus to the long-term.²⁵³ Resembling the other interviewees, Santiago described that in the armed group their perspective was not focussed on the future. “When you’re in the armed groups you become a person who only lives day-by-day and has no future. You’re ending yourself in your thoughts, you are curtailing the idea of a future.”²⁵⁴ Consequently, with help from mainly the reintegration programme and their family, the interviewees could change their mentality and visualise their life on the long run.

Again, we turn to Esteban’s story to illustrate this process. He described that in the first year he had to focus on returning to a normal lifestyle and change his mentality.

“In the first year I was mainly studying. You are like returning to normal life, because you were in another world. You lived with other things in the head, did not have the responsibility to get up to work. I had no obligation, because during that time I didn’t live with my wife.”²⁵⁵

As elaborated on before, Esteban started to change his way of thinking after his daughter was born and he moved in with his wife. He also received psychosocial support from the PyR, which made him “more focussed” and “looking at the future.”²⁵⁶ As a result of these developments he started looking for business opportunities and left his neighbourhood. In his words, it is crucial to “break away and throw sand on the past.”²⁵⁷ Subsequently, he started to plan his future.

“I project myself, to say something, in two years in which I have the company well constituted, I will have the economic means to help my parents, my brothers, because they still live up in La Sierra. I’m already moving forward with my immediate family, with the ones I live with, my wife and children. But I’m planning a future in which I can say ‘I’m going to get my mom and dad out of there, I’m going to buy another small house where they can live more calmly.’ Improving their lifestyle.”²⁵⁸

The ex-paramilitaries’ stories disclosed that they moved from a day-to-day perspective to a more long-term view on life. They became more serious and learned how to responsibly navigate through society in order to move ahead with their family.²⁵⁹ Consistent with Vigh’s idea, they did not only look at the immediate but also at the imagined: their desired future positions and how to get there. They freed themselves from people who dictated them what to do and managed to give shape to the life they preferred. As Santiago illustrated: “The things I wanted, I dreamt about when I was little: ‘I want to be this.’ Now you can get into that path again.”²⁶⁰ The mentality changes and increasing responsibility for one’s life can be seen in light of Honwana’s distinction between tactical and strategic agency as explained in the first chapter.

If Honwana’s work (2006) is compared with the interviews it can be argued that the interviewees shifted from predominantly tactical to predominantly strategic agency. From Honwana’s perspective, it seems that the interviewees started to develop their strategic agency after their demobilisation. When they were ‘liberated’ from the armed group their

²⁵³ Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017; David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Andrés, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017; Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Luis, ex-paramilitary 8, 10/05/2017; Jairo, ex-paramilitary 9, 11/05/2017.

²⁵⁴ Interview with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017.

²⁵⁵ Interview with Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017.

²⁵⁶ Interview with Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017.

²⁵⁷ Interview with Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017.

²⁵⁸ Interview with Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017.

²⁵⁹ Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017; David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Andrés, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017; Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Luis, ex-paramilitary 8, 10/05/2017; Jairo, ex-paramilitary 9, 11/05/2017.

²⁶⁰ Interview with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017

room for movement enlarged and they were further empowered to make their own decisions. This is not to say that they were weak tactical agents while they were active in the armed group, which is often argued in relation to tactical agency (Honwana, 2000; Bøås, 2013; Utas, 2005). Instead, their power position as paramilitaries was relatively big compared to those of normal citizens. Despite the orders and rules they had to live by, they also had some sort of freedom. For example, Antonio García Fernández and Ricardo exemplified that the rank-and-file combatants committed a lot of crimes the commanders were unaware of.²⁶¹ Although the pre-demobilisation period was not extensively studied in this research, the available information suggests that the paramilitaries were not just pawns of their commanders and deprived of personal ideas. In line with the idea of both tactical agency and social navigation, their actions rather seemed to be a product of navigating the immediate circumstances aimed at maximising their short-term benefits.

The interviewees' stories revealed that they further developed their strategic agency and started working on long-term projects after the demobilisation process. They enhanced their labour market position by studying and focussed on improving their family's future position and well-being. Although the Colombian post-demobilisation period has to a certain extent been dominated by uncontrollable factors, an untrustworthy and corrupt government and stigma that influences their opportunities, the interviewees managed to incorporate these obstacles into their long-term strategy and chose routes that have the potential for a better future.²⁶² Their new developed strategies were tactfully employed on a day-to-day basis by constantly making deliberate micro-level decisions that facilitated their transition to a civilian lifestyle. In essence the interviewees managed to escape from confining structures, obtained more space to move and were to a certain extent able to navigate their lives to the desired direction. In Jairo's words: "If time would give me the opportunity to go back, I would never enter those groups or anything because I believe that life is beautiful and full of opportunities. Wherever we are there are always opportunities, it's just about fighting and warring life."²⁶³

DISCUSSION

This research aimed to understand why a certain subset of ex-paramilitaries decided to demobilise and how they transitioned to a civilian lifestyle in Medellín. The ex-paramilitaries were comprehended as being social navigators whose actions and strategies are based on their vision of and the push and pulls instigated by their dynamic social environment (Vigh, 2009, p.420, p.432). Building on interviews with twelve local experts and nine ex-paramilitaries, this thesis answered the research question: *Which social navigation practices have ex-paramilitaries used in their transition to a civilian lifestyle in Medellín, Colombia, since 2003?* The transition to a civilian lifestyle was divided in two phases. The first phase entailed the navigation of life trajectories that opened up in the wake of the demobilisation process and the subsequent choice to demobilise. The second phase was concerned with the long-term

²⁶¹ Interviews with Antonio García Fernández, expert 5, 24/03/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017.

²⁶² Interviews with Santiago, ex-paramilitary 1, 27/03/2017; David, ex-paramilitary 2, 19/04/2017; Diego, ex-paramilitary 3, 21/04/2017; Andrés, ex-paramilitary 4, 23/04/2017; Felipe, ex-paramilitary 5, 26/04/2017; Esteban, ex-paramilitary 6, 03/05/2017; Ricardo, ex-paramilitary 7, 04/05/2017; Luis, ex-paramilitary 8, 10/05/2017; Jairo, ex-paramilitary 9, 11/05/2017; former employee of the ACR, expert 2, 06/03/2017; Antonio García Fernández, expert 5, 24/03/2017 & 11/05/2017.

²⁶³ Interview with Jairo, ex-paramilitary 9, 11/05/2017.

transition process: the social navigation strategies and accompanying daily decisions that ensured the interviewees' maintenance on the civilian path.

The decision to demobilise was a choice characterised by uncertainty, distrust, obedience and hope. Although the ex-paramilitaries lived an unsatisfying life in the paramilitary group, they were reluctant to demobilise due to their uncertain future perspective and distrust of the government. Several possible life trajectories opened up to them when they were confronted with their demobilisation. Under these circumstances, there were paramilitaries who chose the path of dissidence, recidivism, the double game or desistance. In the end, all participants in this research chose to follow their commanders' order to demobilise. They socially navigated their options in the sense that they were both pushed by their superiors to demobilise and personally imagined that demobilisation could lead them to their desired future position. They imagined that a life in legality would provide them with opportunities to enhance their living conditions and the ability to spend more time with their families. Hence, they decided to adhere to the order and to leave their old lives behind.

Their subsequent new life was characterised by a flow of legal as well as illegal opportunities. The majority of the interviewees were offered good money to return to a criminal enterprise and it was widely known that many former comrades continued in reconfigured paramilitary groups. Strengthened by their personal motivation and belief in God, the interviewees tactically employed three strategies to resist the criminal offers. The first and most important strategy was to shift their focus completely to their family. Due to the ex-paramilitaries' more important role in their family life, they became more attached to their family members and gained more responsibility in taking care of them. This responsibility guided their post-demobilisation life and was paramount in their decision to remain in legality. The second strategy focussed on avoiding people - and the places where they usually gather - who could have a negative influence on their achievements. They discarded the ones who were trying to push them back into armed groups and only maintained contact with people who were also moving forward. The last strategy was to move to a different neighbourhood in order to break away from their old habits and to redirect their lives. However, two interviewees managed to develop their new lifestyle in the neighbourhood where they were active as paramilitaries. This shows that although the last strategy was common among the interviewees, it was not a prerequisite if the interviewees could safely live in their neighbourhood, ended their involvement in former power structures and reconfigured their relationships with the neighbours.

With the abovementioned strategies the interviewees managed to counter bad influences by creating their own stable and motivating environment. In this space they could take advantage of the opportunities offered by the PyR and find their way on the labour market. By circumventing obstacles and using their identity as a *desmovilizado* wisely, they were able to *salir adelante* with their families. Additionally, the interviewees mentioned that at a certain point they had gained so much from their life in legality that criminal offers would never seduce them to go back to an armed group. The interviewees represented their reintegration as redemption in which they were 'freed' from their confining lives as a paramilitary and were suddenly able to 'move' in the direction they preferred. They changed their mentality and transformed their agency from mainly tactical to strategic. This meant that they were able to further develop their long-term view and increasingly planned their lives ahead. Due to the demobilisation process they were able to "disentangle themselves from confining structures, plot their escape and move towards better positions" (Vigh, 2009, p.419). Obviously they were not completely free to act as they wished since they had to fulfil the requirements of the PyR and were hindered by laws and social rules. Nevertheless, their

room for movement improved and the interviewees were able to exert more influence on the direction of their lives.

This research showed that the concept ‘social navigation practices’ is a suitable lens to understand the complex reintegration process of ex-paramilitaries in Medellín. The concept aided to understand the interviewees’ post-demobilisation behaviour by shedding light on the strategic movement and tactical day-to-day decisions that facilitated their transition to a civilian lifestyle. Corresponding to Terry and Abrams’s research (2017, p.746), this study illustrated how deliberate in thought this process of desistance is. To further enhance our understanding of this phenomenon, future research could provide a unique contribution by tracking ex-combatant behaviour while it is unfolding. Due to the retrospective nature of this research, it was only possible to document ex-paramilitaries’ representation of their social navigation practices. However, following ex-combatants from the start of their transition to a civilian lifestyle could provide a greater insight into the development of social navigation practices over time.

Furthermore, although the sample was too small to make strong claims, this research indicated that social networks such as family, friends and former comrades could have both a positive and a negative influence on the creation of a new life. However, the influence these networks exert on people depends on the individual’s utilisation of and dependence on that specific network. The interviews exemplified that the ex-paramilitaries created their own social environment in which they personally decided on the role specific social networks played. If certain people were not acting in tune with the interviewees’ personal goals and plans they distanced themselves from these negative influences. In this way, the long-term outcomes of a DDR programme are highly dependent on the ex-combatant’s motivation to change. According to most interviewees, the PyR initially played an important role in helping them to find work, enter education institutions and to create their long-term perspective. Hence, a reintegration programme that is specifically tailored to the individual’s needs coupled with the ex-combatants’ motivation and everyday decisions that facilitate their desistance seems to form the basis for successful long-term reintegration.

It would be recommendable that the Colombian state, the United Nations mission in Colombia and the organisation in charge of the future reintegration of the FARC take the difficulties that occurred during the DDR process of the AUC into account. Since FARC dissident groups are continuing their business as usual (McDermott, 2017) and several individuals have aligned themselves with the BACRIM (Nussio & Howe, 2012, p.63; Clavel, 2017), it is relevant to focus on the success factors related to ex-combatant desistance. Although this study did not concentrate on the DDR process of FARC fighters, it contributes to understanding the ‘recycling’ of combatants in armed groups while others managed to transform their combatant lifestyle into a civilian one. Below, several factors will be addressed that were revealed as being influential in the decision to demobilise and to remain in legality.

To start with, the government should work on its credibility and trustworthiness since that was one of the reasons why many ex-paramilitaries were reluctant to demobilise in the first place. This distrust of the government reinforced the uncertainty ex-paramilitaries were experiencing at the beginning of the disarmament and demobilisation phase. As Esteban explained in the opening quote of this thesis, he and his comrades had to close their eyes and jump into the deep. It was a rather frightening jump as they did not know “how to swim” and had nothing to hold on to except for God. In order to address this uncertainty it is advisable to provide the ex-combatants with accurate information about the coming procedure. Additionally, it could be advantageous to involve positive role models in earlier stages of the

DDR process. By involving other ex-combatants who successfully transitioned to a civilian lifestyle the benefits of demobilising are made more visible. This could help to convince combatants to lay down their arms and to start a new life. Simultaneously, family should be the focus of the DDR programme because it came to the fore as a decisive factor related to ex-paramilitaries' choice to demobilise and to remain in legality. It would be relevant for future research to specifically investigate ex-paramilitaries who did not have a family to return to and how they acted in the post-demobilisation period. It would be useful to know how ex-paramilitaries without a family were motivated to *salir adelante*.

Furthermore, the availability of legal opportunities to create a living is essential in facilitating combatants' return to a civilian life. Hence, socio-economic job support programmes should be fortified. It would be relevant to research what the main arguments are why companies refrain from hiring ex-combatants in order to tailor job programmes to these issues. For now it seems that stigmatisation and fear for ex-combatants are the main reasons demobilised people are turned down on the labour market. Therefore, more efforts should be directed at reducing the stigma that hinders ex-combatants' entry into the job market. This could be achieved by improving reconciliation programmes and by creating more possibilities for contact between ex-combatants and 'normal citizens'. Antonio García Fernández²⁶⁴ stressed that effective reconciliation programmes are currently lacking in Colombia while, as Staub argues, reconciliation is required to halt a continuing cycle of violence (2001, p.171). It would be beneficial to evaluate why current reconciliation efforts are insufficient in order to tailor reconciliation programmes to these specific needs and obstacles.

Moreover, the fact that there are still many armed, criminal groups active in Colombia provides a complicating factor that renders it impossible to end the recycling of combatants. Unless all groups will be dismantled at the same time, it is unlikely that Colombia will reach a peaceful era in the coming years. It would be interesting to compare the demobilisation and reintegration process of the FARC with that of the AUC to identify the extent to which history is repeating itself with the DDR process of the FARC. Another aspect worth researching is the fact that former paramilitaries and guerrilla members are increasingly working together in the BACRIM and other drug enterprises.²⁶⁵ Referring to Liduine Zumpolle's words, it would be interesting to investigate this "reconciliation"²⁶⁶ through drug trafficking and the accompanying transformation of the once ideological war between far-right and leftist groups.

The interviews revealed that once ex-paramilitaries have started their new lives and found their way in legality, they become highly reluctant to give up what they have achieved and to return to an armed group. Therefore, I agree with Themnér (2013, p.327) who argues against popular perceptions that former fighters are not ticking time bombs and, in fact, are highly risk-averse. Hence, he advocates for a desecuritisation of the ex-combatant problem, in which academics and policy-makers should refrain from perceiving ex-combatants as inherently dangerous. The interviews showed that the moment of disarmament and the first years after their demobilisation were paramount for the interviewees to establish a new lifestyle. In this period, guidance provided by the reintegration programme as well as their close social network appeared to be crucial. However, once they have embedded themselves in legality, it is unlikely that they will relapse into their old lives and "lock" themselves in the criminal world again.

²⁶⁴ Interview with Antonio García Fernández, expert 5, 11/05/2017.

²⁶⁵ Interview with Liduine Zumpolle, expert 11, 11/04/2017.

²⁶⁶ Interview with Liduine Zumpolle, expert 11, 11/04/2017.

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APPENDIX I

Table 1: Additional information about the experts who were interviewed.

NAME PARTICPANT	INFORMATION	DATE AND LOCATION
1. Jesús Medina	He worked as a journalist for the newspaper <i>El Tiempo</i> where he held several positions, among others that of political editor and head of press for the parliament. He had regular contact with the Colombian political class.	06/03/2017, Bogotá.
2. Former employee ACR	She is originally from Medellín where she studied political science and researched the relationship between demobilised groups and receiving communities. Afterwards, she worked eight years for the ACR.	06/03/2017, Bogotá.
3. Daniel Castaño	Academic at the political science department of the <i>Universidad de Medellín</i> . He is specialised in paramilitarism and focussed on the relations between the communities and paramilitaries.	14/03/2017, Medellín.
4. Gustavo Duncan	Academic working at the political science department of the university EAFIT. He is specialised in paramilitarism and wrote among others the book ' <i>Los señores de la guerra: de paramilitares, mafiosos y autodefensas en Colombia</i> '.	23/03/2017, Medellín.
5. Antonio García Fernández	As a lawyer he represented ex-paramilitaries after the collective demobilisation process. He maintains close contact with the extradited paramilitaries in the U.S. and has, as the brother of 'Doble Cero', a lot of inside information regarding the paramilitaries.	24/03/2017, Medellín. 11/05/2017, Medellín.
6. Nico Tita	He is a psychologist who works with victims of the armed conflict on reconciliation and emotional reparation. Due to his work he has an extensive knowledge about the conflict in Medellín.	26/03/2017, Medellín.
7. Jorge Gaviria	Director of the PyR, which led the collective reintegration programme of the paramilitaries in Medellín.	27/03/2017, Medellín.
8. Community leader of the neighbourhood <i>13 de</i>	President of a community organisation. They work on	28/03/2017, Medellín.

<i>Noviembre</i> in Medellín	community development and creating a participatory democracy. He lived his entire life in this neighbourhood and has thus witnessed the conflict transformation in Medellín.	
9. Former police colonel	He started at the police in 1994 and retired in 2016. He is currently finishing the master ' <i>Conflicto y Paz</i> ' at the <i>Universidad de Medellín</i> .	04/04/2017, Medellín.
10. Paulo Serna	Regional coordinator of the ACR reintegration programme in Antioquia.	06/04/2017, Medellín.
11. Liduine Zumpolle	She moved from the Netherlands to Colombia and has been working in this country for over forty years. As director of the organisation <i>Manos por la Paz</i> , she is dedicated to improve the human rights situation of demobilised FARC-fighters in prison. Furthermore, she writes reports about the conflict dynamics and DDR processes in Colombia as a freelancer.	11/04/2017, Bogotá.
12. Catalina Morales	She worked for the ACR between 2005 and 2011. Afterwards, she was employed at the Ministry of Mining and the organisation ' <i>Consolidación Territorial</i> '.	11/04/2017, Bogotá.

Table 2: Additional information about the ex-paramilitaries who were interviewed.

NAME PARTICIPANT ²⁶⁷	ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	DATE	ORGANISATION THAT ARRANGED CONTACT
1. Santiago	He was born in Medellín and joined local gangs in his youth. Later he became part of BM, BCN and Heroés de Granada. He collectively demobilised in 2005.	27/03/2017 05/04/2017	PyR, interview took place at CEPAR.
2. David	He grew up in a town in Medellín's province Antioquia. He was first forcibly recruited by the ELN after which the paramilitaries forcibly recruited him as well. When the paramilitaries found out he was working for both groups he was	19/04/2017 26/04/2017	PyR.

²⁶⁷ The participants were allocated a different name to ensure their anonymity.

	obliged to leave the ELN and to fully cooperate with the paramilitaries. He became part of BM in Medellín and decided to individually demobilise in 2003.		
3. Diego	He was born in a village in the department Nariño, South of Colombia. He joined BCB and was active in the rural areas of the country. Due to his position close to the commander, the amnesty arrangement did not apply to him and he was imprisoned for eight years after he collectively demobilised in 2005.	21/04/2017	Aulas de Paz.
4. Andrés	He grew up in several towns in Antioquia. He joined BCB and was active in both Medellín and the rural areas. He collectively demobilised in 2005.	23/04/2017	CEPAR.
5. Felipe	He was born in Medellín and started in Pablo Escobar's gangs. Later, he continued in BCN and collectively demobilised in 2003.	26/04/2017	PyR.
6. Esteban	He was displaced from a village in Antioquia to Medellín. He entered the militias of the ELN when he was 13 years old. Afterwards, he became active in BM and eventually demobilised with BCN in 2003.	03/05/2017	PyR.
7. Ricardo	He grew up in the coffee zone and was recruited for BCB when he was studying at the university. He became part of the leadership and headed a bloc of 1.200 paramilitaries. In 2005 he demobilised and went to prison for eight years.	04/05/2017	Aulas de Paz.
8. Luis	He was born in Medellín and joined	10/05/2017	CEPAR.

	BCN when he was twenty years old. He collectively demobilised in 2003.		
9. Jairo	He grew up in Medellín and started his criminal career in the gangs when he was ten years old. He demobilised in 2006 with <i>Heroés de Granada</i> . Afterwards he spent 1,5 year in prison due to an unfulfilled conviction for a crime he had committed before the demobilisation process started.	11/05/2017	PyR.

APPENDIX II

List with interview questions for the experts:

1. What did you think about the peace process with the AUC?
Qué piensa del proceso de paz entre el gobierno y las AUC?
2. What do you think about the demobilisation of the AUC?
Qué piensa de la desmovilización de las AUC?
3. Which opportunities were available for the paramilitaries after they demobilised?
Qué oportunidades estaban disponibles para los paramilitares después de su desmovilización?
4. Did these opportunities change after a while?
Cambiaron estas oportunidades con el tiempo?
5. In what kind of activities did ex-paramilitaries engage after their demobilisation?
En qué tipo de actividades participaron los ex paramilitares después de su desmovilización?
6. How many paramilitaries really stopped with their criminal activities?
Cuántos paramilitares sinceramente pararon sus actividades criminales?
7. Why do you think some stopped with their criminal activities even though there are still many opportunities to join an armed group?
Por qué cree que algunos se detuvieron con sus actividades criminales aunque todavía hay muchas oportunidades de unirse a un grupo armado?
8. What do you think is the role of their social environment in these decisions?
Cuál cree que debe ser el papel del entorno social más cercano al ex-paramilitares sobre qué hacer después de su desmovilización?
9. Do you know if there are subgroups of ex-paramilitaries?
Sabe si hay subgrupos de ex paramilitares?
10. Do you know what the current political influence of ex-paramilitaries is?
Sabe cuál es la influencia política actual de los ex paramilitares?
11. Do you know what the current influence of ex-paramilitaries is in business?
Sabe cuál es la influencia actual de los ex paramilitares en los negocios?
12. What is the current relationship between the state security apparatus (army and police) and ex-paramilitaries?
Cuál es la relación actual entre el aparato de seguridad del Estado, como el ejército y la policía, y los ex paramilitares (en Medellín)?

13. How did most people see the ex-paramilitaries? (Were they accepted in the society?)
Cómo reaccionó la mayoría de la gente ante los ex paramilitares?
14. Do you know which organisations are important for ex-paramilitaries?
Sabe qué organizaciones son importantes para los ex paramilitares?

APPENDIX III

List with interview questions for the ex-paramilitaries:

Introduction

1. Can you tell me something about yourself?
¿Podría contarme algo sobre su vida?
2. What is your current job?
¿Cuál es su trabajo actual?
3. Until what age did you go to school?
¿Hasta qué edad fue a la escuela?
4. What did you study?
¿Qué estudió?
5. How old are you?
¿Cuántos años tiene?
6. Where do you live?
¿Dónde vive?
7. Have you always lived there?
¿Usted Siempre ha vivido allá?

Demobilisation, social navigation practices & reversion

8. In which year did you demobilise?
¿En cuál año se desmovilizó?
9. How did you experience the demobilisation process?
¿Cómo experimentó el proceso de desmovilización?
10. What did you do after you demobilised?
¿Qué hizo después de su desmovilización?
11. What did your job position exactly entail?
¿Cuál era su puesto de trabajo exactamente después de su desmovilización?
12. Which skills were important for your job?
¿Qué habilidades eran importantes para su trabajo?
13. Are you still doing this job or did your position/job change after a while?
¿Todavía continua haciendo el mismo trabajo o cambió su puesto de trabajo después de un periodo de tiempo?
14. Did you feel there were many opportunities available for you when you demobilised?
Can you explain?
¿Pensó que había muchas oportunidades disponibles para usted cuando se estaba desmovilizando? ¿Podría explicar?
15. In which ways did the opportunities for ex-paramilitaries change over time?
¿De qué manera las oportunidades para los ex paramilitares cambiaron con el tiempo?

Perspective of the future, hopes & dreams

16. How did you think about the future at the time you were demobilising?
¿De qué manera pensó sobre el futuro cuando se estaba desmovilizando?
17. Did your perspective of the future change over time?
¿Ha cambiado su perspectiva del futuro con el tiempo?

18. What would be your ideal life?
¿Cuál sería su vida ideal?
19. What were your hopes for the future when you were demobilising?
¿Cuáles eran sus esperanzas y expectativas para el futuro cuando se estaba desmovilizando?
20. To what extent do you feel you got closer to your ideal life after you demobilised?
¿En qué medida cree que usted se ha acercando a su vida ideal después de la desmovilización?

Introduction social networks

21. Who were the most important people in your life when you were starting the demobilisation process?
¿Quiénes fueron las personas más importantes en su vida cuando comenzó el proceso de desmovilización?
22. Who are the most important people in your life now?
¿Quiénes son las personas más importantes en su vida ahora?
23. [If it changed] When and why did this change?
[Si ha cambiado] ¿Cuándo y por qué esto cambió?

Family

24. How important is your family in your life?
¿Qué tan importante es su familia en su vida?
25. Did this change over time? In which ways?
¿Cambió esto con el tiempo? ¿De qué manera?
26. Who are your most important family members?
¿Quiénes son los miembros más importantes de su familia para usted?
27. How was your family situation when you grew up?
¿Cómo fue su situación familiar cuando creció?
28. How did your family react to your demobilisation?
¿Cómo reaccionó su familia ante su desmovilización?
29. Do you feel your family has an influence on the decisions you make? In which ways?
¿Cree que su familia influye en las decisiones que toma actualmente? ¿De qué manera?
30. What did your family expect you to do after you demobilised?
¿Qué esperaba su familia después de su desmovilización?
31. To what extent were your actions in line with their expectations?
¿Hasta qué punto estaban sus acciones en consecuencia con sus expectativas?
32. To what extent did your family encourage your job as [...]?
¿En qué medida su familia fomentó su trabajo como [...]?
33. Did your family help you to stay on the right path after you demobilised? [If yes] In which ways?
¿Su familia lo ayudó a mantenerse en el camino correcto después de su desmovilización? [En caso afirmativo] ¿De qué manera?
34. Did people in your family encourage you to become active in a group again? [If yes] In which ways?
¿Algunos miembros de su familia le han animado a volverse activo en algún grupo? [En caso afirmativo] ¿De qué manera?

Neighbourhood

35. How important are your neighbours in your life?
¿Qué tan importante son sus vecinos en su vida?
36. Did this change over time? In which ways?
¿Ha cambiado esto con el tiempo? De qué manera?
37. Do you live in the same neighbourhood as when you were active in the group?
¿Vive en el mismo barrio que cuando estaba activo en el grupo?
38. [In case the participant moved] Why did you move?
[En caso de la persona se haya mudado] ¿Por qué se mudó?
39. Do you like your neighbourhood?
¿Le gusta su barrio?
40. How was it to live in your neighbourhood after you demobilised?
¿Cómo fue vivir en su barrio después de su desmovilización?
41. How was the relationship with your neighbours after you demobilised compared to when you were in the group?
¿Cómo fue la relación con sus vecinos después de su desmovilización en comparación de cuando estaba en el grupo?
42. Did you feel part of/ involved in your neighbourhood after your demobilisation? How did this change over time?
¿Se sintió parte de/involucrado en su barrio después de su desmovilización? ¿Cómo esto cambió con el tiempo?
43. Do you think your neighbours had an influence on the decisions you made after your demobilisation?
¿Cree que sus vecinos influyeron en sus decisiones después de su desmovilización?
¿De qué manera?
44. To what extent did your neighbours encourage your job as [...]?
¿En qué medida sus vecinos fomentaron su trabajo como [...]?
45. Do you help each other in the neighbourhood when necessary?
¿Se ayudan los vecinos los unos a los otros cuando es necesario?
46. Did your neighbours help you to stay on the right path after you demobilised? [If yes] In which ways?
¿Sus vecinos lo ayudaron a mantenerse en el camino correcto después de su desmovilización? [En caso afirmativo] ¿De qué manera?
47. Did they encourage you to become active in a group again? [If yes] In which ways?
¿Algunos vecinos le animaron a volverse activo en un grupo armado? [En caso afirmativo] ¿De qué manera?
48. Have you participated in community projects?
¿Ha participado usted en proyectos comunitarios?
49. [If yes] What role did this community project play in your life?
[En caso afirmativo] ¿Qué papel jugó este proyecto comunitario en su vida?
50. Did you go to the church?
¿Ha ido a la iglesia regularmente?
51. [If yes] Which role did the church play in your life after you demobilised?
[En caso afirmativo] ¿Qué papel jugó la iglesia en su vida después de su desmovilización?

Ex-paramilitaries

52. Did you stay in touch with people from the group?
¿Se mantuvo en contacto con personas del grupo?
53. Were you close with people from the group?
¿Estuvo cerca de miembros del grupo?
54. How important are other ex-paramilitaries in your life?
¿Qué tan importante son otros ex paramilitares en su vida?
55. To what extent did your relationship with people from the group change over time?
¿En qué medida su relación con otros ex-paramilitares ha cambiado con el tiempo?
56. Did your comrades help you to stay on the right path after you demobilised? [If yes] In which ways?
¿Otros ex paramilitares le ayudaron a mantenerse en el camino correcto después de su desmovilización? [En caso afirmativo] ¿De qué manera?
57. Do you think your comrades had an influence on the decisions you made after your demobilisation?
¿Cree que otros ex paramilitares influyeron en sus decisiones después su desmovilización? ¿De qué manera?
58. To what extent did your comrades encourage your job as [...]?
¿En qué medida otros ex paramilitares fomentaron su trabajo como [...]?
59. Did you ever talk about going back to an armed group?
¿Hablaron alguna una vez sobre volver a entrar a un grupo armado?
60. Did they encourage you to become active in a group again? [If yes] In which ways?
¿Algunos ex paramilitares le animaron a volverse activo en un grupo? [En caso afirmativo] ¿De qué manera?
61. Did you have contact with ex-combatants from other groups as well?
¿También tuvo contacto con excombatientes de otros grupos?
62. [If yes] How is this contact and how important are those other ex-combatants in your life?
[En caso afirmativo] ¿Cómo es este contacto y qué tan importante son los otros excombatientes en su vida?
63. Do you think they had an influence on the decisions you made after your demobilisation? [If yes] In which ways?
¿Cree que ellos influyeron en sus decisiones después su desmovilización? [En caso afirmativo] ¿De qué manera?
64. To what extent did these other ex-combatants encourage your job as [...]?
¿En qué medida otros excombatientes fomentaron/han fomentado su trabajo como [...]?
65. Did they help you to stay on the right path after you demobilised? [If yes] In which ways?
¿Otros excombatientes lo ayudaron a mantenerse en el camino correcto después de su desmovilización? [En caso afirmativo] ¿De qué manera?
66. Did they encourage you to become active in a group again? [If yes] In which ways?
¿Algunos excombatientes le animaron a volverse activo en un grupo? [En caso afirmativo] ¿De qué manera?

Government reintegration programmes

67. How important have reintegration programmes been in your life after you demobilised?

- ¿Qué tan importante han sido los programas de reintegración en su vida después de su desmovilización?
68. What do you think about the government reintegration programme?
¿Qué piensa sobre los programas gubernamentales de reintegración?
69. Did you participate in an education programme after you demobilised?
¿Participó en algún programa de educación después de su desmovilización?
70. [If yes.] What did you think about this programme? [If no.] Why not?
[En caso afirmativo] ¿Qué piensa sobre los programas? [Si no] ¿Por qué no?
71. Did you get money from the government after you demobilised?
¿Recibió dinero del gobierno después de su desmovilización?
72. Did the reintegration programme help you to find work after you demobilised?
¿Los programas de reintegración le ayudaron a encontrar un trabajo después de su desmovilización?
73. To what extent did the reintegration programme encourage your job as [...]?
¿En qué medida los programas de reintegración fomentaron su trabajo como [...]?
74. Do you think the reintegration programmes had an influence on the decisions you made after your demobilisation? [If yes] In which ways?
¿Cree que los programas de reintegración influyeron en sus decisiones después de su desmovilización? [En caso afirmativo] ¿De qué manera?
75. How was the contact with the people who work for the reintegration programme?
¿Cómo fue su contacto con los empleados de los programas de reintegración?
76. Did you meet other ex-combatants through the reintegration programmes?
¿Conoció a otros excombatientes a través de programas de reintegración?
77. How was your contact with them? Did you become friends?
¿Cómo fue su contacto con ellos? ¿Se hicieron amigos?
78. Did the people you met at the reintegration programme help you to stay on the right path after you demobilised? [If yes] In which ways?
¿Las personas que conoció lo ayudaron a mantenerse en el camino correcto después de su desmovilización? [En caso afirmativo] ¿De qué manera?
79. Did they encourage you to become active in a group again? [If yes] In which ways?
¿De las personas que conoció le animaron a volverse activo en un grupo? [En caso afirmativo] ¿De qué manera?
80. How do you think the reintegration programme can be improved?
¿Cómo cree que se puede mejorar el programa de reintegración?

Paramilitary time

81. What was the most important reason for you to demobilise?
¿Cuál fue la razón más importante para que usted se desmovilizara?
82. Were you ready to demobilise in [year] or would you have preferred to stay in the group?
¿Estaba listo para desmovilizarse en [año] o hubiera preferido quedarse en el grupo?
83. What was your position in the group?
¿Cuál era su posición en el grupo?
84. Why did you join the group?
¿Por qué se unió al grupo?
85. What did your family and friends think about your decision to join the group?
¿Qué pensaron su familia y amigos de su decisión de unirse al grupo?

86. What did your family and friends think about your demobilisation?
¿Qué pensaron su familia y amigos de su decisión de desmovilizarse?

People still involved in groups

87. Do you know people who are still involved in groups?
¿Conoce a personas que todavía estén involucradas en grupos?
88. From which time in your life do you know these people?
¿Desde qué momento de su vida conoce a estas personas?
89. How was your contact with them after you demobilised?
¿Cómo fue su contacto con ellos después de su desmovilización?
90. How important are they in your life?
¿Qué tan importante son ellos en su vida?
91. To what extent did your relationship with these people change over time?
¿En qué medida su relación con ellos ha cambiado con el tiempo?
92. Do you think they had an influence on the decisions you made after your demobilisation? [If yes] In which ways?
¿Cree que ellos influyeron en sus decisiones después su desmovilización? [En caso afirmativo] ¿De qué manera?
93. To what extent did they encourage your job as [...]?
¿En qué medida ellos fomentaron su trabajo como [...]?
94. Did they help you to stay on the right path after you demobilised? [If yes] In which ways?
¿Ellos le ayudaron a mantenerse en el camino correcto después de su desmovilización? [En caso afirmativo] ¿De qué manera?
95. Did they encourage you to become active in a group again? [If yes] In which ways?
¿Ellos le animaron a volverse activo en un grupo? [En caso afirmativo] ¿De qué manera?

Violent opportunities

96. Were there opportunities in your neighbourhood or Medellín that enabled returning to a group?
¿Existieron oportunidades en su barrio o en Medellín que le permitieron regresar a un grupo?
97. [If yes] Did you find it difficult to resist these opportunities?
[En caso afirmativo] ¿Le ha resultado difícil resistir estas oportunidades?
98. Did people try to convince you to join a group after you demobilised?
¿Algunas personas trataron de convencerlo de que se uniera a un grupo después de su desmovilización?
99. [If yes] Who were these people (family, comrades, etc)? Where did you first meet them?
[En caso afirmativo] ¿De dónde los conoce?
100. How did you react to this?
¿Cómo reaccionó a esto?
101. Why didn't you join the group?
¿Por qué no se unió al grupo?
102. Did you sometimes feel that people in your environment had different opinions about

what would be best for you after your demobilisation?

¿Alguna vez sintió que la gente de su entorno social tenía diferentes opiniones acerca de lo que sería mejor para usted después de su desmovilización?

103. [If yes] How did you deal with this difference in opinion and how did it affect your behaviour?

[En caso afirmativo] ¿Cómo hizo frente a esta diferencia de opinión y cómo afectó a su comportamiento?

104. Have you once considered joining a group after your demobilisation?

¿Alguna vez consideró unirse a un grupo después de su desmovilización?

105. [If yes] Why did you decide not to join in the end?[If no] How come you did not feel attracted to such groups anymore?

[En caso afirmativo] ¿Por qué decidió no unirse al final? [Si no] ¿Por qué ya no se siente atraído por estos grupos?

106. What was the hardest part about demobilising and who was most important in supporting you during this hardship?

¿Cuál fue la parte más difícil en el proceso de desmovilización y quién(es) fue(ron) lo/los más importante(s) para ayudarle durante esta situación?

APPENDIX IV

GDP growth

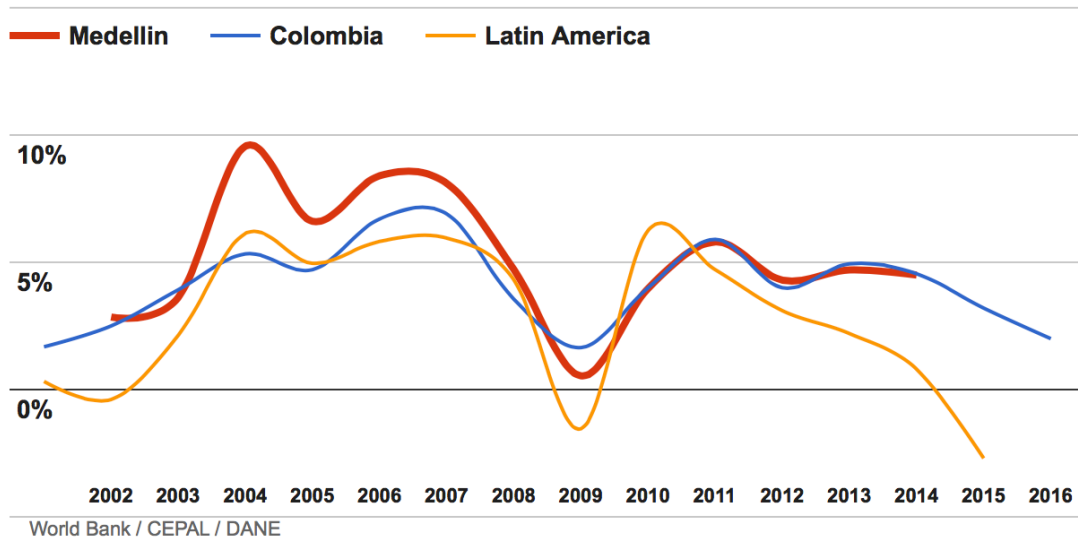


Figure 1: Retrieved from Colombia Reports, 2017, <https://colombiareports.com/medellin-economy-statistics/>.

Unemployment rate

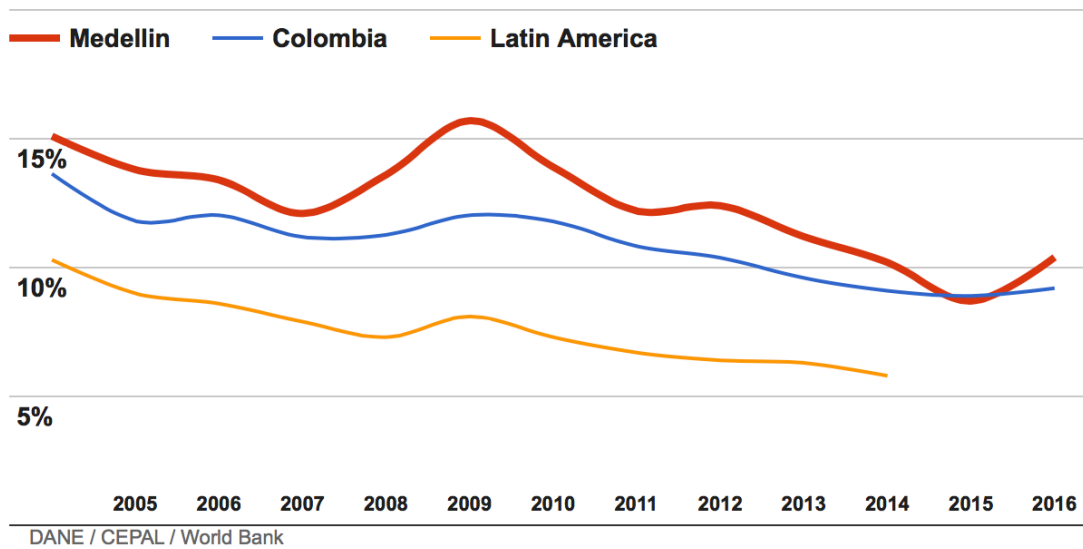


Figure 2: Retrieved from Colombia Reports, 2017, <https://colombiareports.com/medellin-economy-statistics/>.

Poverty rate

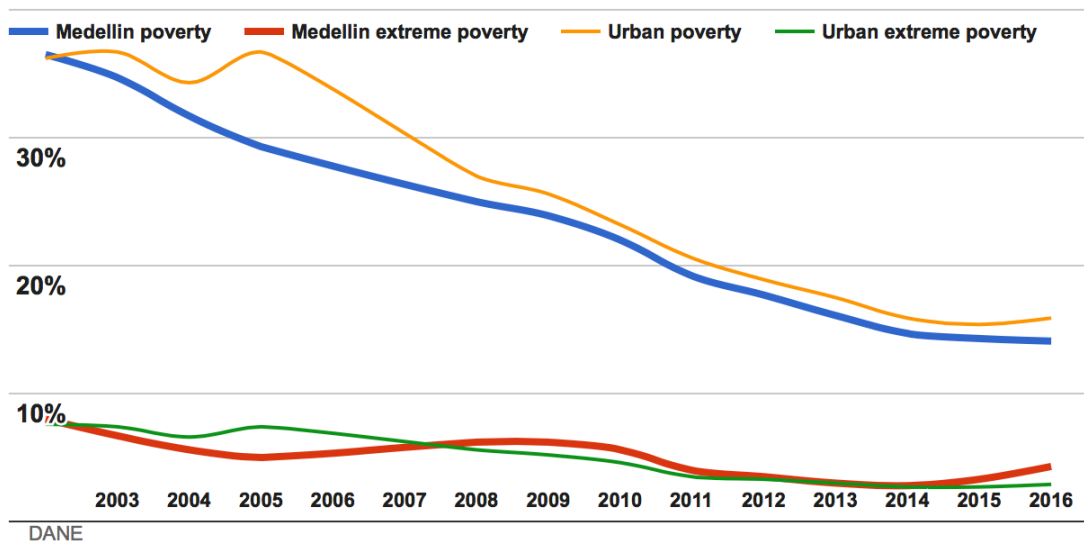


Figure 3: Retrieved from Colombia Reports, 2017, <https://colombiareports.com/medellin-economy-statistics/>.