Militarised Masculinities In Colombia
And Approaches To Building Alternative
Masculinities For A Feminist Peace

Supported By Original Empirical Data
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Patriarchy, War and Militarisation:
the construction of hegemonic militarised masculinities

Structural, Institutional and Cultural Productions of Militarised Masculinities in the Context of Colombia’s Histories of Conflict and Violence

Colombia’s Histories of Conflict and Violence & Underlying Structural Drivers of Militarised Masculinities

Institutional Practices:
"making men" through military training & the conundrum of different gender regimes in different armed groups

Cultural Productions:
the soldier-hero & the glorification of violent machismo in popular culture

Demilitarising Masculinities for Peace & Engaging Men and Boys

Attitudinal Changes and a Focus on the Individual to Cultural and Systemic Transformations

Overlapping But Different Approaches:
engaging men and boys and/or transforming masculinities

Gender-Transformative Peacebuilding:
demilitarising and diversifying masculinities

Overview of Actors Working on Deconstructing Hegemonic (Militarised, Violent) Masculinities in Colombia

Findings and Directions for Future Work

Bibliography
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Masculinities are always multiple, fluid and learned. Consequently, hegemonic militarised masculinities linked to a war culture and patriarchal power hierarchies can be demilitarised, reconstructed, or replaced by more positive, non-violent masculinities.

GBV and gender inequality negatively affect people of all genders. While men, in particular young men, are the main perpetrators of violence against women and children, they are also the victims of gender-based violence (GBV) themselves: young men are by far the largest victim group of lethal armed violence, and the primary target group of recruitment into the state armed forces, illegal armed groups and gangs. But militarised masculinities also cause psychological suffering and a lack of freedom to express emotions – the effect of hegemonic militarised masculinities is diverse and turns against men and boys themselves.

Demilitarising and diversifying masculinities contributes to more gender equality and reduces GBV for the benefit of all. Since people of all genders reproduce hegemonic militarised masculinities, demilitarising masculinities for peace must involve people of all genders consequently.

Colombia’s complex histories of armed conflict and violence have arguably produced a “culture of violence”, which is discursively linked to the national identity and promotes militarised, violent masculinities as the hegemonic model of masculinity. This model upholds the mental, political and economic schemes of war and patriarchy in Colombia.

Executive Summary
Patriarchy, militarisation and war are mutually constitutive, while neoliberalism focuses on individual attitudes, and distracts from the multiple forms of structural and cultural violence that perpetuate GBV and gender inequality.
Most work on masculinities at the global level and in Colombia has focused on men’s attitudes on a small scale (individual, family, community).

This is important, but needs to occur in parallel with larger societal and structural transformations (demilitarisations).

This also requires a demilitarisation of the cultural frames that mark socialisation into Colombian society from early childhood onwards: military parades and the profiling of the soldier-hero in public campaigns and popular culture, violence-glorifying TV shows, films and music.

Larger-scale transformations should also include gender-transformative policy, legal and judicial frameworks to address the structural drivers of conflict that increase pressures on men to adopt militarised models of manhood and to engage in violence. Inter alia, this requires an end to the arms trade, including the illicit sale of arms by the military and police, the war on drugs, and mass incarceration in prisons that serve as incubators of violence; and it would require addressing the corruption, poverty and inequalities that facilitate recruitment into gangs and armed groups.

Importantly, such changes need to be accompanied by adequate funding, accountability mechanisms and independent monitoring of their de facto implementation.

Civil society, academia and artists across Colombia are already at work on a smaller scale, some more sustainably than others, in providing the building blocks for these gender-transformative, demilitarising processes at the individual and cultural levels, and there are policies in place that provide the necessary supportive political discourse. Ex-combatants themselves act as local-level peacebuilders, and show the benefits of demilitarising gender identities from the ground up.

Without larger-scale and long-term changes in the structural conditions that underpin Colombia’s patriarchal and highly militarised war economy and politics, however, these efforts risk remaining isolated. It is essential to continue advocating for structural reforms, and state institutions should build on the knowledge and practices of Colombia’s vibrant civil society to do so in a context-sensitive, inclusive and intersectional manner.
The current political and health crises, as well as the peace processes that continue at different levels against all odds, provide an enabling environment for bringing about social change – a historical momentum that should not be missed to promote a feminist peace.
INTRODUCTION
Militarised hegemonic masculinities pose a core problem for achieving feminist peace in Colombia, as they constitute violent gender identities that are based on highly unequal power relations and reinforced through gender-based violence (GBV).
PATRIARCHY, WAR AND MILITARISATION:
the construction of hegemonic militarised masculinities
Scholars widely agree that masculinities, like other gender identities, are socially constructed (Essayag, 2018, p.27). They take shape through gendered practices, reiterative and interactive social performances that constitute and sustain power relations, and form bodies and minds (Butler, 1990, 1993, 2010; Bourdieu, 1977, 1992, 2001; Foucault, 1971, 1995, 2007). They are always relational, situational, and gain meaning within their historical, contextual, institutional and cultural contexts (Duncanson, 2020). The concept of militarised masculinities captures the “fusion of certain practices and images of maleness with the use of weapons, the exercise of violence, and the performance of an aggressive and frequently misogynist masculinity” (Theidon, 2009, p.5). As anthropologist Kimberly Theidon claims, constructing militarised masculinities as hegemonic is as essential to the maintenance of militarism and war in Colombia as are guns and bullets (Theidon, 2009, p.5).

1. Ontologically and epistemologically building on the work of Judith Butler, Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, this text subsequently refers to ‘practices’ or speaks of ‘embodied and performed’.
Before analysing structural drivers and the institutional and cultural productions of militarised masculinities in Colombia, and exploring efforts to demilitarise these, this section reviews the main debates that provide the conceptual and theoretical background for speaking about militarised masculinities in relation to violence, war and peacebuilding. Feminist and masculinity scholars, many of whom are self-identified feminists or take a pro-feminist stance (Beasley, 2020 p.28), have long debated the relationship between masculinities, war and militarism. Usefully synthesising and simplifying these complex debates, Claire Duncanson distinguishes three thematic and chronologically consecutive debates: first, the relationship between masculinities, militarism and war; second, the multiplicity of masculinities and their hierarchies structuring social orders; and third, the question of whether masculinities can change and whether and how this contributes to peace (Duncanson, 2020).

All of them are relevant for understanding militarised masculinities in the framework of peacebuilding in Colombia. First, scholars enquiring about the causal relationships between masculinities, militarism and war examine, for instance, how militarised masculinities are enabled by and perpetuate the underlying and mutually constitutive structural conditions of patriarchy, war and militarisation (Duncanson, 2020, p.467–69; Cockburn, 2010; Davies and True, 2015; Enloe, 1983, 1993, 2007; Goldstein, 2001; Oviedo Mercado, 2008; Whitworth, 2004, 2008). Whether militarisation is produced by structural conditions, or instead an inherent part of an a priori militarised martial politics, remains an open debate (Howell, 2018; MacKenzie et al., 2019). Strongly simplified, feminists have argued that “masculinity shapes war and war shapes masculinity” (Duncanson, 2020, p.468; Cockburn, 2010, p.249) and that militarised, violent masculinities are an empirical necessity for wars to persist and for military institutions to function (Whitworth, 2004). Focusing on state militaries and other state security institutions in particular, these scholars show how (predominantly male) recruits are socialised into militarised masculinities: men are made through military training, and manhood becomes equated to being a soldier.

In parallel to such institutional practices are cultural productions of essentialising gender-binary clichés, such as the soldier as the protector of women, children and the nation (Duncanson, 2020). Problematically, scholars on war, militarism and masculinities acknowledge that “ideas about masculinity forged through military training and culture also influence civilian men” (Duncanson, 2020, p.469) reinforce patriarchy and hence obstruct peacebuilding.

As the section shows, all these elements resurface in contemporary Colombia – hence addressing militarised masculinities is an urgent matter on the way to reducing GBV, enhancing gender equality and building a feminist peace.
A second strand of literature emphasises that masculinities are always plural, their relationships complex and hierarchical, and linked to the ways in which masculinity intersects with other factors (eg rank) and identity markers, such as class, ethnicity/race and nation (Kirby and Henry, 2010; Myrتنین، ختاط، and ناویوسک، 2017).

The versions of militarised masculinities vary from state military and security forces to non-state armed groups, like Colombia’s multiple guerrilla and paramilitary groups, to private military and security companies, gangs, organised crime, and civilians ways of interacting that are rooted in an overall valorisation of military culture and violent expressions of machismo (Duncanson, 2020, p.469–70).

Yet these different versions all contribute to making militarised masculinities hegemonic and thus to perpetuating war and militarism in Colombia.

What does hegemony mean here? Originally developed by Raewyn Connell in the 1980s, the concept of hegemonic masculinities understands those masculinities as hegemonic (in the Gramscian sense) (Gramsci, 1971), which are at the top of a hierarchy of multiple, co-existing forms of masculinity in a given society scale point in time.

They are constructed as exemplary, the normative ideal type to aspire to, which, however, is unattainable for most men in real life (Connel and Messerchmidt, 2005; Segato, 2018). In particular in conflict–affected areas with high levels of armed violence, and underlying structural violence that forecloses access to economic livelihood opportunities, this produces thwarted masculinities, “masculinities of men who are bound by expectations of living up to dominant notions of masculinity in the face of realities which make it practically impossible to achieve these, leading to frustration and at times various forms of violence, against both others and oneself”. (Myrتنین، ختاط، and ناویوسک، 2017, p.108; Kimmel, 2004, 2005).
Hegemonic masculinities are based on a denigration of difference (the feminine) and a discursive and performative othering of women and people with non-hegemonic masculinities (including non-binary sexual and gender identities, ethnic or religious minority groups) (Whitworth, 2004, p.242-43; Kimmel, 2004; Schöb, 2014, p.140); they subordinate, feminise and invisibilise alternative, non-hegemonic forms of masculinity (Theidon, 2009, p.6).

Like in the perpetuation of patriarchy writ large, people of all genders are implicated in the reproduction of militarised masculinities as hegemonic. Importantly, however, hegemonic masculinities are not necessarily linked to armed violence or militarisation, and they are situational, geographically and historically situated; they are fluid, constantly struggled over and renegotiated; in brief: they can be changed and delinked from militarism and violence (Carrigan, Connell, and Lee, 2004, p.156 and 160; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Schöb, 2014).

A third debate accordingly pivots around how gender roles and identities change in war and thereafter. Armed conflict and “chronic violence” (Pearce, 2008) transform gender relations and the corresponding notions of femininities and masculinities.

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2. I speak of “people of all genders” as an inclusive term that includes the gender binary (men, women, boys and girls), as well as people with fluid gender and sexual identities, such as LGBTQ+ persons.
Hegemonic masculinities tend to become more militarised, conditioning access to manhood even more on military attitudes and violence, but also to the capacity of providing protection.

(Cahn and Aolain, 2010; Schöb, 2014, p.140; UN IAWG, 2012).
Violence – including theatric paramilitary violence aimed at sowing terror, or sexual violence committed by all armed actors and civilians in Colombia (Amparo Sánchez et al 2011; CNMH 2017; UARIV 2021) – becomes normalised (Segato, 2018, 2019; Taussig, 2005; Uribe, 2004; Waldmann, 2007) and patriarchal gender relations reinforced (Enloe, 1983).

Paradoxically, however, war also produces the contrary effect: gender norms, roles and relations can be flexibilised as a result of women’s engagement as combatants – an example of which is given by the FARC, which claims internal gender equality in line with its insurgent feminism (Schmidt, 2020; Schöb, 2021 Combatants for Peace) – or their relative increased access to economic empowerment as breadwinners following forced internal displacement from rural to urban areas (Cohn, 2013; Raven-Roberts, 2013).

Such shifts in livelihood opportunities can produce emasculating, disempowering effects on internally displaced men, which exacerbate the problematic of internally displaced people often getting stuck in a vicious cycle of dependence as victims (Tovar Guerra and Pavajeau Delgado, 2010; Niederberger and Schöb, 2012).

The flexibilisation of gender roles as an effect of violence can be seen as conducive to gender-transformative peacebuilding, for instance when ex-combatant women claim their space as differently gendered citizens, or ex-combatant men adopt more care-orientated, non-violent masculinity models (Schöb, 2021 Combatants for Peace; Dietrich, 2017; Londoño and Nieto, 2006; Nieto-Valdivieso, 2015).
The understanding is thus that militarised masculinities can be transformed, reconstructed or demilitarised for peace, from the masculinities embodied and performed by ex-combatants (Theidon, 2007, 2009; Cahn, 2011; Myrttinen, 2003) and veterans (Whitworth, 2008) to those reproduced in communities (Myrttinen, Naujoks, and El-Bushra 2014) and larger society (Farr, 2005).

A separate debate asks whether masculinities – and the category of “men” as a social and class construct, which is based on its subordinated other, the category of “women” – should be deconstructed or even abolished completely, in an effort to abolish patriarchy and patriarchal relations (Hearn, 2014; Wittig, 1992). The section below on *demilitarising masculinities* discusses this scholarship in relation to engaging men and boys for peace. Suffice here to note that changes need to occur at all levels, from institutional and cultural practices and relations, to the underlying structural conditions that enable, perpetuate and feed on militarised masculinities (Connell, 2002, p.36; Duncanson, 2015, 2020 p.473).
STRUCTURAL, INSTITUTIONAL AND CULTURAL PRODUCTIONS OF MILITARISED MASCULINITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF COLOMBIA’S HISTORIES OF CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE
Building on the theoretical debates on militarised masculinities in the previous section,

this section examines some of the key structural, institutional and cultural productions of militarised masculinities in Colombia.

It argues that the many faces of gendered, raced, sexed, classed and economic structural violence visible in Colombia today, are closely linked to the country’s histories of armed violence and conflict. Institutional practices and cultural productions manipulate these histories to link militarised masculinities to an (imagined) national identity, and legitimise Colombia’s ongoing politics and economy of war.
4.1 COLOMBIA’S HISTORIES OF CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE & UNDERLYING STRUCTURAL DRIVERS OF MILITARISED MASCULINITIES
Before the FARC peace agreement was signed in 2016, headlines like “Colombia’s 52-Year War Is Ending” (Rios Escobar and Casey, 2016) were common, and so is research that narrates Colombia’s conflict history as originating in the aftermaths of the La Violencia civil war in the 1950s (Sánchez, Díaz, and Formisano, 2003).

This is highly problematic for several reasons: first, it ignores that peace is built in times of ongoing war in Colombia (Bouvier, 2009): peace agreements with a single guerrilla or paramilitary group, like the last with the FARC in 2016, can address only a small portion of Colombia’s complex “war system” (Richani, 1997, p.38).

This has thus far always created an incomplete scenario of peace – even in the negative understanding of peace (as absence of direct conflict-related violence) (Galtung, 1969, 1996) that underlies statements like the New York Times headline above. Colombia remains in a “pre-post conflict” (Theidon, 2007, p.66) situation that is marked by ongoing violence – a situation Alex Fattal has termed “hot peace” (Fattal, 2018, p.14).
Second, Colombia’s histories of war, internal conflict and multiple forms of violence date back much longer, like in other Latin American countries, the foundations for today’s multiple direct, structural and cultural violence (Galtung, 1969, 1996, 1990) – deeply patriarchal, racist and classist – were laid during the era of colonisation, reinforced through the diverse systems of slavery, social stratification, and post-independence regimes that constructed the new socio-political and religious order based on exclusion and gendered, raced and classed hierarchies (Schöb, 2021 Combatants for Peace, p.20-25; Gorrón, 2018; Rivera Gómez, 2011; Bonil-Gómez, 2018; Sánchez, 1985).

Hegemonic masculinities linked to violence and militarisation – Colombia’s “masculinidades bélicas” (Muñoz-Onofre, 2011) – are rooted in these historical experiences, hence deeply engrained in the political, economic, institutional, social and cultural structures of the country (Muñoz-Onofre, 2011; Rivera Gómez, 2011). Third, such statements obscure the long-standing cultural productions of national identities linked to militarised masculinities, eg through films and propaganda, but also through androcentric historiography and corresponding teaching in schools, universities and popular education (discussed below for the construction of the soldier-hero) (Rivera Gómez, 2011).

Fourth, such statements ignore the structural drivers of conflict that increase pressures on men to adopt militarised models of manhood and to engage in violence; inter alia, Colombia’s socio-economic inequality, high levels of unemployment, and lack of access to education, health services and infrastructure. With a Gini coefficient of over 50 (51.3 in 2019), Colombia is among the countries with the most unequal income distribution in the world.

At the same time, the livelihoods of the rural and urban poor only partially figure in official unemployment rates – 15.6% in May 2021, according to the National Statistics Department DANE – as they depend on a largely informal economy and labour market (Schöb 2021 Combatants for Peace, p.168–69).

Consequently, poverty is criminalised (Dagino, 2007), social mobility is largely foreclosed to the already marginalised, which affects young men and their access to social adulthood in particular: socio-economic exclusion has an emasculating effect on men and boys, and works as a powerful driver into armed violence, crime and socio-cultural practices that recur to weapons and violence for reasserting their masculinity (Baird, 2015).
Young men are particularly at risk of falling into vicious cycles, as overcrowded prisons with appalling conditions and rampant corruption become incubators of violence and recruitment into organised crime. (Dudley and Bargent, 2017).
Ending Colombia’s wars would thus require more than a peace agreement with one or more armed groups: it demands addressing the underlying corruption, poverty and inequalities that facilitate recruitment into gangs and armed groups.

Fifth, beyond the socio-economic factors, peace would require tackling Colombia’s deeply engrained systemic structural violence linked to the country’s weak or selective governance (Ciró Rodríguez, 2013; Schöb, 2021 Combatants for Peace), corruption⁵ and high levels of impunity (Betancur-Restrepo and Grasten, 2019; Lozano and Morris, 2010); to the entwinement of its state armed forces with non-state armed groups like the paramilitary groups and transnational organised crime, which surfaces in the illicit sale of arms by the military and police (Anselma, 2019, 2020); and to the larger political economy of war that is based, inter alia, on the arms trade and illicit arms flows fuelling war and organised crime, and narcotics functioning as conflict resources⁶.

Finally, the transnational dimensions of Colombia’s underlying structural drivers of conflict also include US economic and military assistance, discussed below.

Colombia’s contemporary conflict history must be read against this larger background of structural violence and the complex entwinement of its political and economic elites, armed groups and international allies – the foundation on which the hegemony of militarised masculinities builds.

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⁶ [missing]
During the 1970s and 1980s, growing international demand for marijuana, and later cocaine, made narcotics an important conflict resource (Angrist and Kugler, 2005; Sánchez and Palau, 2006; Le Billon, 2012). Guerrilla groups grew in number, scale and scope of actions, Colombia’s famous drug cartels formed, and right-wing paramilitary groups were created for the drug barons’ and large estate owners’ (often the same people) “self-defence” against the guerrillas and each other. These paramilitary groups, which later organised under the umbrella organisation Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC), had a close relationship with the political and economic elites of the country (Gutiérrez Sanín, 2012; Romero, 2003; Romero and Valencia, 2007; Cívico, 2012). They have collaborated with the state armed forces in counterinsurgency operations beyond the battlefield: they have become known and feared for perpetrating theatrical spectacles of violence against civilians, sowing terror and fear through social cleansing (massacres and selective killings), and reinforcing the heteronormative social order through highly sexualised techniques of violence against women and sexual minorities (CNMH, 2013, 2017; Schöb, 2018). Today, with the notable exceptions of the ELN and fractions of the EPL, the guerrillas and paramilitary groups have demobilised through different peace processes (Schöb, 2021 Combatants for Peace; Nussio, 2012; Villarraga, 2013). Yet demobilisation processes have remained incomplete, and splinter groups – as well as remobilised former fighters – have merged with organised crime across the country since, making Colombia’s “war system” (Richani, 1997, p.38) even more complex and its ongoing violence more diffuse to civilians (Idler, 2019).
The transnational influence on militarisation in Colombia is closely linked to counterinsurgency politics, the political economy of war, and the US role as primary consumer market of Colombia’s narcotics. The US “war on drugs” in the Americas dates back to the second half of the 20th century. When narcotics became Colombia’s primary conflict resources, and export to the US rose dramatically, the US extended its “war on drugs” to Colombia, supporting counterinsurgency and influencing Colombia’s economy and politics of war (McCallion, 2005, p.320). Agreed with the US government by the Pastrana government in 1999, military aid to Colombia reached a larger scale with Plan Colombia, a combined military and humanitarian aid package on which the US spent approximately $9.6 billion and the Colombian government US$1.3 billion between 2000 and 2015 (DSJG and DSEPP, 2016). From 2000 to 2008 alone, the US provided $4.9 billion in military assistance (GAO, 2008). In exchange, Plan Colombia requested the Colombian armed forces to stock up their number significantly, to increase the military budget, and to improve the public image of the army. During the 2000s, Plan Colombia supported the counterinsurgency operations of Álvaro Uribe Vélez’ Democratic Security Policy. Plan Colombia is of geopolitical and strategic importance to the US. It must be understood as part of the larger US interventions in Latin America that are driven by economic and political interests. For example, through economic assistance and military support to its major trading partners in the region (Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama and Venezuela), in the early 2000s through the Andean Regional Initiative (ARI), the US secures its economic benefits – oil and other extractive industries, as well as commerce, including an important market for weapons and private military contractors (PMCs) – and indirectly steers the politics and military operations in its two parallel and strongly intertwined global wars: on terror and on drugs (McCallion, 2005, p.320-26). With its “narcoterrorism”, as the US labelled the Colombian guerrilla groups’ use of narcotics as a conflict resource, the Colombian context combines both, and Plan Colombia has been propagated as the single most successful example of a US intervention in its global wars on terror and against drugs (Tate, 2015, p.322). It partially funded several of the cultural productions discussed below, had a direct institutional impact on the scale of the Colombian armed forces (for instance, the number of professional soldiers rose from 23,000 in 1998 to 88,000 in 2014, and military equipment and infrastructure were heavily stocked up and modernised) (DSJG and DSEPP, 2016), and its direct military training support is likely to have shaped the specific constructions of soldier-masculinities in military training (Tate, 2015).
The physical and mental militarisation in Colombia goes beyond military barracks, guerrilla or paramilitary camps, and battlefields.
Before sketching these, a brief note is due on the above-mentioned normalisation of violence as an important structural condition to enable the reproduction of militarised masculinities and GBV. The historical prevalence of a large spectrum of cultural, structural and personal violence in Johan Galtung’s sense (Galtung, 1969; Confortini, 2006), has led to a normalisation of violence in Colombian society more broadly, which some scholars speak of as a “culture of violence” (Sweig, 2001, p.122; Waldmann, 2007, p.63; Schöb, 2021 Combatants for Peace, p.16). That is, the physical and mental militarisation in Colombia goes beyond military barracks, guerrilla or paramilitary camps, and battlefields. It creates an acceptance of the omnipresence of violence and its grotesque forms, produces apathy towards their appearance, and trickles down and in (eg from public to domestic violence), as those who survive violence are also more likely to become perpetrators themselves (Uribe, 2004; Segato, 2018, 2019). This “culture of violence” is highly gendered, building on militarised hegemonic masculinities linked to men’s and boys’ abilities to fulfil their heteronormative roles as providers and protectors in spaces of chronic violence, where social cohesion is low and access to power is mitigated through the possession of a weapon (Arjona, 2008, 2016; Idler, 199; Schöb, 2018; Taussig, 2005, 2011; UN IAWG on DDR, 2012).

Only a minority join guerrilla or paramilitary groups, though, and the state armed forces are often either undesirable or inaccessible to them, eg due to access barriers like a high school degree. (Schöb, 2021 Combatants for Peace) Whether in Bogotá, Medellín, Managua or Ciudad Juárez: male youth in particular are prone to arm themselves, join gangs and engage in risky behaviour, as they fight for their place in the gendered social hierarchy and seek to provide for and protect their families (Baird, 2012, 2018; Rodgers, 2006; Bergman, 2011; José Antonio Gutierrez and Gibbons, 2020). Women and girls – as mothers, sisters, girlfriends or wives –are complicit in this reproduction of violent masculinities.

7. This is a recurring theme in Schöb’s interviews with former paramilitary and guerrilla fighters: denied access to the state armed forces, the young men and women joined non-state armed groups.
This becomes visible, for example, when Colombian women prefer the “big men” as partners in the local economies of war, as those with access to power through weapons and violence are considered more able to provide and protect, but also more prestigious in gendered social hierarchies (Theidon, 2009, p.18; Schöb, 2014, p.22). Rather than deliberate attitudes of individual women and girls, however, such complicity is rooted in, and simultaneously contributes to reproducing, the societal and cultural constructions of heteronormative relationships. The structural and direct violence (including a lack of access to education, economic opportunities and prestige through non-violent means) and the culture of violence marked by militarised masculinities (and enforced through peer pressure and social exclusion), as well as a resulting feeling of disempowerment and frustration, leave many young men with “few [perceived] options but the gun” (Bevan and Florquin, 2006).

The multiple forms of physical, psychological, economic or political violence that have become normalised in Colombia, unfold along a gendered, age-related, raced and classed “continuum of violence” (Mosser, 2001; Cockburn, 2001, 2010; Cohn, 2013; Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2004; Schöb, 2021 Combatants for Peace, p.154). GBV is a cross-cutting violence on this continuum. GBV includes, but is not limited to, different forms of sexual violence, which have been perpetrated in Colombia by all armed conflict actors and civilians alike (Bastick, Grimm and Kunz, 2007, p.73; CNMH, 2013, 2017; Ruta Pacifica, 2013; Schöb, 2018). The few available surveys show high rates of sexual violence across Colombia, in particular in conflict-affected areas (Amparo Sánchez et al., 2011, p.13; Krug et al., 2002, p.151). Such gender-based and sexual violence forms part of the codified language of war itself. It is particularly powerful because of the gendered meaning it conveys, and the power hierarchies it can thereby install and reinforce. Across the globe and at different historical moments, sexual violence has been used by men to communicate between themselves, making rape an effective weapon of war (Bazza and Stern, 2009; Butler, Gluch, and Mitchell, 2007; Cohen, Green, and Wood, 2013; Cohen, Nordås, and Wood, 2014; Meger, 2016; Kirby, 2013; Wood, 2006, 2009, 2018; Cohen and Nordas, 2015). This communication can be direct, with men emasculating and subordinating other men through sexual violence (Drumond, 2017; Lewis 2009; Sivakumaran 2007).
But more often, it is indirect, using women’s bodies as the battleground: perpetrating sexual violence on one’s enemies’ wives, daughters or mothers is an effective way to disempower and symbolicallyemasculate, hence subordinate, the enemies (Baaz and Stern, 2009; Wood, 2006; CNMH, 2017). When perpetrated by armed men against civilians, the messages are even clearer. Combined with other conflict-related violence, sexual violence has been used in Colombia as a mechanism of social cleansing (including specific attacks against LGBTIQ+ persons and ethnic minorities), control and domination, eg to impose heteronormativity and enforce patriarchal military orders (violence directed against women and people with non-hegemonic and non-binary gender identities primarily) and to demonstrate power over civilians and suspected collaborators of rival groups (in particular women are targeted) (Schöb, 2018). Such practices have a long-standing tradition in Colombia’s war histories, with La Violencia showing outstanding “semantics of terror” (Uribe, 2004). The converging effects of Colombia’s sexual violence, perpetrated by armed groups, range from cross-generational physical and psychological injuries to broken community ties, where the law of silence and mistrust reign, to the displacement of individuals, families or entire communities (Schöb, 2018; Pinzón, 2009; Ruta Pacífica, 2013; CNMH, 2017).

Although all armed groups – state armed forces, paramilitaries, guerrilla groups – have perpetrated such violence in Colombia’s contemporary conflict history, the role of the state armed forces has been downplayed in official records and historical memory building in Colombia – a problematic that gave rise to ACOOC’s project Violencias Invisibles. The links between GBV and hegemonic masculinities is complex. Strongly simplified, hegemonic masculinities grant an implicit permission and put pressure on men to perpetrate violence against women, against men embodying and performing non-hegemonic gender identities, and against and among themselves (in the form of in-group practices, repression of emotions, or suicide) (Essayag, 2018, p.28). That is, while ensuring the hegemony of militarised masculinities, everybody suffers from the GBV that comes with them (Segato, 2019, p.31) – hence the benefit of demilitarising masculinities for all. The above outlined structural conditions enable and accelerate the institutional and cultural practices of militarised masculinities. The next section looks at institutional practices, narrated by veterans, related to in-group socialisation.
4.2 INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES: “MAKING MEN” THROUGH MILITARY TRAINING & THE CONUNDRUM OF DIFFERENT GENDER REGIMES IN DIFFERENT ARMED GROUPS
Military training makes men (ie soldiers) by disciplining the soldier-body (Muñoz-Onofre, 2011; Foucault, 1995; Whitworth, 2008; Duncanson, 2020). Through “sweat, blisters and humiliations” (Enloe, 1993, p.55) the freshly recruited soldier-body is transformed into a combatant-body, which can be released to the battlefield after as little as 14 weeks (González Quintero, Forero Ángel, and Ramírez González, 2019, p.1491).

Recruits are taught that they embody the heroes of the nation, but at the same time, the rank-and-file soldiers in Colombia are conscious of their lives being “disposable” (matable) as cannon fodder, and that, once the soldier-body is injured, it loses all worth for the military institution (González Quintero, Forero Ángel, and Ramírez González, 2019). Humiliations and insults are highly gendered; they rely on sexist references that form soldiers’ masculinities as an anti-thesis to the feminine and feminised (showing bodily weakness, being a sissy, having to be consoled, crying) (González Quintero, Forero Ángel, and Ramírez González, 2019). Alongside shaping the body, military training works on recruits’ minds to transform them into brave, disciplined and obedient soldiers – and into killing machines, whose worth as soldiers and men is based on the dehumanisation and denigration of the enemy Other. In the Colombian armed forces, this enemy used to be the guerrilla: from the discursive use of dehumanising abbreviations – the guerrilla is referred to as RATs (redes de apoyo al terrorismo) (Schöb, 2006, p.133), for example – to violence-inciting chants that soldiers sing in chorus during the drills, such as “Guerrilleros mataremos y su sangre beberemos.”9 (Schöb, 2021 Combatants for Peace, p.366–67).

9. Or “We will kill the guerrillas and drink their blood.”
All state and non-state armed groups in Colombia have created militarised mindsets and contributed to the hegemony of militarised masculinities, even though their structures and concrete practices differ. The AUC use similar references of male heroes to construct exemplary masculinities (Neira Cruz and Castillo Olarte, 2021).

Their more horizontal organisational structures reportedly employed less rigid military training, whereas the more vertically organised FARC pursued strict discipline, physical training and mental indoctrination strategies (Gutiérrez Sanín, 2008, p.16). Part of the ideological education of recruits was forming soldiers with “insurgent masculinities”, with the main leaders of the guerrilla movement as the male heroes to imitate. Much like in other military-like structures, this masculinity entails a homophobic and heteronormative dimension (González Quintero, Forero Ángel, and Ramírez González, 2019) and practices of sexual violence in their warfare (though less in the FARC than the AUC)(CNMH, 2017).

Notwithstanding its gender equality claims, and the comparatively higher proportion of female recruits in the FARC, the guerrilla group thus also built the warrior-ideal on male models and militarised masculinities.

What did this mean for the approximately one third of female FARC members, the farianas? Research with ex-combatants of all genders has shown the different facets of the FARC’s proclaimed gender equality (Dietrich, 2017; Estrada-Fuentes, 2016; Herrera and Porch, 2008; Londoño and Nieto, 2006; Nieto-Valdivieso, 2015; Schmidt, 2020; Schöb, 2021 Combatants for Peace; Thylin, 2019).

While the organisation was more egalitarian and less patriarchal than other armed groups in Colombia, this equality is narrated mostly as an equality of tasks, a less gendered labour division, yet measured against the masculine standard (carrying as heavy as men, shooting as well as men, doing the same chores) and with a “glass ceiling” towards the highest ranks (Schmidt, 2020; Schöb, 2021 Combatants for Peace).

But, as Schöb’s research illustrates, this does not mean that the farianas simply become men or masculinised: instead, while underlining their equal worth to male peers, female ex-farianas draw a unique strength from this seemingly equalising experience of military socialisation, which fits the stereotypes of neither masculinities nor femininities — it is different, disturbing the norms, and stretches the boundaries of the patriarchal order around it (Schöb, 2021 Combatants for Peace, p.274).

This inevitably raises the question as to whether the conflict-related flexibilisation of gender roles could also provide a chance to overcome gender as a defining category for peacebuilding.
4.3 CULTURAL PRODUCTIONS: THE SOLDIER-HERO & THE GLORIFICATION OF VIOLENT MACHISMO IN POPULAR CULTURE
Cultural practices that produce and reproduce militarised masculinities are manifold: they range from cultural-institutional practices driven by such institutions as the military or schools, to the wider productions of popular culture.

Consequently, only a glimpse can be given here. In terms of cultural-institutional productions through the Colombian government and its military institutions, the discursive and visual construction of the soldier-hero links militarised masculinities directly to state and nation-building. In 2019, for the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Bogotá, the military, alongside the Colombian government, constructed and propagated the image of the soldier-hero as a trans-historical subject linked to the foundation of the Colombian Republic, ie directly connected to the identity of the nation. The propaganda works through posters, videos, television and public events. This propaganda silences the state violence perpetrated through the armed forces against civilians (eg the falsos positivos, civilian youth unlawfully killed by Colombian soldiers and presented as guerrilleros) and invisibilises its structural foundations in the political economy of the war and its transnational influence (Schöb, 2021 Combatants for Peace, p.16; Rojas Bolaños and Benavides Silva, 2017). It also invisibilises and reproduces the gendered, raced, classed and sexed structural violence against non-hegemonic bodies, women, Afro communities, sexual minorities, campesinos (peasant farmers) and indigenous people, and their historical exclusion from state and nation-building processes (Barrero Cubides, 2020, p.101).

110. “As false positives are known the systematic, ordered and rewarded killing of between 5,000 and 10,000 civilians during the presidency of Álvaro Uribe Vélez alone (2002-2010), falsely presented as enemy combat deaths of insurgents/rebels/terrorists, in which state and paramilitary actors (including some previously demobilised AUC recidivists) collaborated.” Schöb, 16;
The mystification, distortion and evocation of a war event in Colombia’s founding history is thus used to perpetuate the hegemony of militarised masculinities, and to justify the status quo of a violent military supported by the government (Barrero Cubides, 2020, p.101).

Beyond the historical battlefield warrior, the soldier-hero is also given a humanitarian face, and militarised heroism is linked to love, care and the family. Effective media campaigning in the framework of the militarised counterinsurgency strategy under Plan Colombia allowed for the war against guerrilla “terrorism” to be covered behind an image of the life-saving humanitarian soldier who reunites Colombian families by bringing the lost sons and daughters back (Fattal, 2018, 2019; Schöb, 2021 Combatants for Peace, p.32). Similarly, the highly successful media campaign Los heroes en Colombia sí existen!, televised at peak hours, constructs the image of the humane, loving soldier-hero who is admired by civilians – in particular children – and who gives his life (the soldier is embodied by a male person normally in these campaigns) for his fellow Colombians, the TV spectators whom he directly speaks to. (Berrio Meneses, 2018, p. 408–9; Murcia Briceño, 2012)².

The co-option of the traditionally feminised notion of care in the cultural-institutional construction of the “humanised soldier-hero” (Gordillo Aldana, 2014, p.30) is problematic, as its deconstruction demands both delinking masculinities from military symbols, and simultaneously demilitarising care. In seeking to produce a sense of belonging and identification in the spectator, McCann Erickson, the company hired to develop the media campaigns and TV series for the Uribe government, also addresses male children and youth most directly – similarly to police and military recruitment posters (Schöb, 2021 Combatants for Peace, p.404) – and thus serves the double purpose of increasing approval rates of the state armed forces (Gordillo Aldana, 2014), while reinforcing the influx of recruits.

Notably, these soldier-heroes are the same rank-and-file soldiers who self-perceive as the disposable of the military institution, the cannon fodder, and whose only use to the military after an injury is that they can be portrayed as martyr-heroes for the nation (González Quintero, Forero Ángel, and Ramírez González, 2019).

In Seguridad mediatica, Gordillo Aldana explains how the patriotic discourse of these and similar campaigns linked the image of the soldier-hero to important values for the national identity – security, peace, nationalism, religion, territoriality, traditions, inclusion – while perversely legitimating the killings of (discursively dehumanised) FARC members as an act of patriotic heroism (Gordillo Aldana, 2014, p.61).

These cultural-institutional constructions do not go uncontested. Colombian civil society has mobilised against the militarism and its biased and excluding historical memory-building, for instance in protests that claim the falsos positivos as the real heroes (Berrio Meneses, 2018). But they are also widely welcomed and integrated into popular cultural practices, for instance in relation to commemorations of Independence on 20 July, when civilians attend military parades with their (male) children dressed as soldiers.

10. Meaning “heroes do exist in Colombia!”
12. For an overview of other highly mediatized campaigns led by the Colombian government under President Álvaro Uribe Vélez (2002-2010), see Gordillo Aldana 2014, p.27.
The importance of such militarised symbols linked to the national identity becomes evident when they are openly challenged: in the context of the national strike in 2021, the national flags swung by protesters on Independence Day had reversed colours and sides. (Pacheco, 2021).
Importantly, however, the contestations nonetheless take place within militarised patriarchal and nationalistic logics: within the protests and protesting chants, there a national identity is always evoked and reinforced, and the masculinidades en primera línea both accuse the violence perpetuated by members of the public forces (police, military, ESMAD) and simultaneously perform different, but nonetheless militaristic and violent masculinities, whose practice entails, among others, violence against women during the protests and in domestic spaces (further discussed below). They thus reveal how, even in spaces of resistance, gender-based violence is normalised and hegemonic militarised masculinities are reproduced.

In brief, institutional-cultural productions within the military are multiple and construct complex, multi-layered militarised masculinities.

An analysis of the cultural productions by non-state armed groups (guerrilla groups, paramilitary groups, pandillas or organised crime, which often overlap) would further complicate this image.

What all contribute to, is the promotion of a military culture that assumes a state of war or chronic violence as a seemingly natural status quo, glorifies weapons and prioritises militarised masculinities that dominate and pretend to protect (invisibilising the fact that weapons and violent masculinities victimise all and constitute a key cause for the perceived need of protection in the first place). This likewise reflects in school curricula and popular culture (Rivera Gómez, 2011; Viveros Vigoya, 2001) marked by violent machismo – cultural productions that go beyond the scope of this paper, but form part of the larger cultural practices that perpetuate militarised masculinities in Colombia and Latin America more broadly.

14. For a proposal to reverse this trend, see Velásquez et al. 2017.
DEMILITARISING MASCULINITIES FOR PEACE & ENGAGING MEN AND BOYS
Not only feminist and queer scholarship, but also masculinity researchers underline the diversity of experiences, wherein few people actually fit the heteronormative, raced and classed expectations of hegemonic (militarised) masculinities (Flood, 2015; Kimmel, 2004), and acknowledge that hegemonic masculinities are harmful to most people in society (Bergman, 2011; Ortiz, 2013; Theidon, 2009).

This opens up the simplistic, heteronormative, often racist, classist and otherwise essentialising binaries of man/woman, perpetrator/victim, bad/good, violent/peaceful, and allows engaging people of all genders in the common struggle against “patriarchal violence” (Barker, 2016) and in favour of a feminist peace, which crucially includes demilitarising and diversifying masculinities.

Different strands of feminism and masculinity-orientated work for peace share basic premises, “all describing hierarchies of dominance, relationally defined gender, and multiple, and interactive axes of social oppression” (Gardiner, 2005, p.47).
ATTITUDINAL CHANGES AND A FOCUS ON THE INDIVIDUAL TO CULTURAL AND SYSTEMIC TRANSFORMATIONS
In the contested field of research on masculinity work and engaging men and boys, three themes emerge regularly that are of particular relevance to the Colombian context.

First, intersectionality, cultural and context-specificity and inclusiveness must be taken seriously, if gender work is to avoid reproducing the very problem it aims to address (Flood, 2015; Myrttinen, 2003; Myrttinen, Naujoks, and El-Bushra, 2014; Myrttinen, Khattab, and Naujoks, 2017).

Second, most acknowledge that ideas about masculinity and corresponding patterns of behaviour must be changed at the individual and group levels. “There is a growing body of evidence that well-designed interventions can increase men’s and boys’ gender-equitable attitudes and behaviours, including with regard to sexual and reproductive health, parenting and care work, and intimate partner violence and sexual violence.” (Flood and Greig, 2020). Yet they underline that working with individuals can be a neoliberal short-cut that blinds out the larger systemic problems, rendering masculinity interventions (and gender work as a whole) important and potentially effective for a small minority, but depriving them of their potential to provoke larger societal, political and economic transformations (Durie-Smith, 2017; Flood and Greig, 2020; Greig, 2009; Peacock and Barker, 2014). Individual-focused interventions to produce attitudinal change need to go along with systemic approaches to tackle the structural, cultural and institutional conditions, which shape gender norms, identities and relations at a deeper level.

Third, among the recurring themes, resignifying masculinities through a focus on ethics and an economy of care resonates with Colombian approaches: this translates into practices promoting more equitable parenting roles, and men’s increased involvement in household chores, valuing care work and domestic labour, and is believed to empower men and women alike (Flood and Greig, 2020; Greig, 2009; Theidon, 2007; Schöb, 2021 Peace Starts in the Home; Essayag, 2018, p.33-34).

Finally, given that masculinities are learned from early childhood on, and that boys and male youth reproduce them, eg through GBV and gang involvement, from a young age onwards, masculinity interventions are accordingly recommended to take place at a young age (Peacock and Barker, 2014).
5.2

OVERLAPPING BUT DIFFERENT APPROACHES: ENGAGING MEN AND BOYS AND/OR TRANSFORMING MASCU LINITIES
The arguable benefits and limitations of engaging men and boys in GBV reduction and gender equality promotion are widely discussed and often contested in academic debates (COFEM, 2018; Flood, 2015; Flood and Greig, 2020; Jewkes, Flood and Lang, 2015; Greig, 2009; Peacock and Barker, 2014; Peacock and Levack, 2004; Peretz, 2020; Vess et al., 2013; V. D. Berg et al., 2013; Theidon, 2007, 2009.)

Take, for instance, the widespread argument in favour of engaging men and boys, also used by the UN (Essayag, 2016, 2018), which claims that men will also gain from challenging patriarchy as a whole, and from demilitarising masculinities that underpin their superior position in the power hierarchy of the politics and economy of war in particular. Researchers juggle with the dilemma of how to justify this argument in the face of the historical pervasiveness and stickiness of patriarchy: if men didn’t benefit in general from GBV and gender inequality, then why should it still persist? (Flood, 2015)

Others warn about the risks of depoliticising work on GBV, diverting funding, capacities and attention from women’s work, delegitimising women’s movements that exclude men, invalidating the experience of women, or of reproducing the very problem they aim to address, gender inequality, if male allies, partners and activists take a prominent role in GBV prevention and are not accountable to women’s movements (COFEM, 2018; Flood, 2015).

These important and justified considerations warrant two brief notes of caution: first, they reflect the fears of competition and doubts about men’s involvement of some, but not of all strands of feminism. In Colombia, relationships between men’s collectives and feminist organisations vary from close collaboration to mutual scepticism, depending on such fears for competition, co-option and undermining of women’s authority in the anti-patriarchal struggle.15

15. Interview with Javier Ómar Ruiz, CHM, July 2021.
Second, engaging men and boys in predominantly women-led movements as allies, partners or agents of change is not the same as working to transform masculinities – whether among groups of men, in gender-mixed constellations, or at the larger cultural level of imageries.

To the state workers and civil society activists whose work is briefly outlined in the examples below, it is not only about engaging men and boys in a struggle for gender equality that has traditionally been led by feminist movements, predominantly composed of women. Rather, it is about a parallel, complementary but potentially separate work on masculinities – “the practices, norms and relations associated with manhood” (Flood, 2015, p.8) – a work that contributes through different means to the larger objective of a feminist peace, but is led primarily by men of different age and ethnicity for other men (involving people of all genders as allies).

Although the two approaches of engaging men and boys and working on masculinities often overlap in practice, and the boundaries are fluid, it is important to conceptually distinguish them: one is about the actors, the other is about the concept, and all eventually converge in the larger objective of an anti-patriarchal search to demilitarise gender relations for peace.
5.3 GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE PEACEBUILDING: DEMILITARISING AND DIVERSIFYING MASCULINITIES
Some of the core ideas driving academic debates and underlying activist masculinity work in Latin America are, first, men’s co-responsibility (corresponsabilidad) in tackling gender inequality and GBV, making men’s engagement both an ethical and political imperative as well as an empirical necessity, considering that they are the main perpetrators of GBV against people of all genders, including themselves (Boscán, 2008, in Essayag, 2018 p.15-16). Second, others emphasise a need for resignifying masculinities, demilitarising them and delinking them from the rigid idea of an excess of power/superiority (Montesinos, 2002; Theidon, 2007, 2009). Third, and connected to the former, are claims for a diversification of masculinities that corresponds to the intersectional experiences in culturally and ethnically diverse contexts like the Colombian, but also allows for more fluid understandings of what it means to be a man and to be good at being a man (Rivera, 2003; Rivera Gómez, 2011; Theidon, 2009). The first point is primarily about engaging men and boys, the second and third primarily about masculinity work. All three resonate with the empirical examples encountered in Colombia, two of which are briefly introduced below.
**Example: Demilitarising ex-combatants’ bodies and minds for peace**

Researchers and practitioners have emphasised the urgency of providing gender-sensitive assistance to ex-combatants after disarmament and demobilisation, in particular to help male ex-combatants cope with a transition that is often experienced as “from hero to zero” (UN IAWG, 2012; Essayag, 2018). Some state institutions are working with male and female ex-combatants of non-state armed groups, to demilitarise mindsets and develop access to alternative, less patriarchal gender norms and roles. The Agencia Colombiana para la Reincorporación y Normalización (ARN) is of interest, because it provides an example of a policy-backed state programme that works on masculinities for gender equality, and because it does so with a population whose gender norms and roles are deeply militarised.

Since 2003, the ARN accompanies ex-combatants of non-state armed groups, in particular former members of guerrilla and paramilitary groups who have laid down their weapons and “opted for peace”, in their transition to civilian life. It leads two parallel programmes at present, the reintegration programme – the one for collectively demobilised former AUC and individually demobilised/captured/deserted guerrilla members – and the reincorporation of FARC adherents to the 2016 peace process. The Conpes document outlining reintegration introduces gender, age, ethnicity and disability as cross-cutting issues (Conpes 2008).

Since 2009, a sophisticated and constantly revised and updated gender strategy, guides and also complicates the operational work of street-level reintegration workers across Colombia’s diverse regions. It includes work with men on “new masculinities”, basically understood as co-constructing identities and attitudes identified with non-hegemonic masculinities, eg anger control, emotion release or care work (Schöb, 2015). Beyond changing attitudes, the reintegration programme aims to generate “cultural transformations for gender equality”, the promotion of a non-sexist culture. “In its rationale, the gender strategy is a feminist document that lays bare and aims to address historically-grown structural inequalities in Colombian society: gender equality is understood as a human right not yet granted to Colombian women, including to female ex-combatants [and to ex-combatants of all genders with non-hegemonic gender or sexual identities], because prevalent patriarchy, heteronormativity and machista society hamper their equal possibilities to exercise their rights and citizenship, which in turn undermines sustainable peace.”(Schöb, 2021 Combatants for peace, p.277). To create the conditions for peace, the larger aspired cultural transformation builds on male ex-combatants’ adoption of non-hegemonic, non-violent masculinities, as well as on the empowerment of women and LGBTI persons (ACR, 2016, in Schöb, 2015).

**Attitudinal change and cultural transformations are to be combined in a holistic manner.**

The reintegration practices that ex-combatants and their assigned reintegration workers negotiate every day across the country are gender-transformative, and contribute to building peace from the individual, the mini-state of the family, and ex-combatants’ communities up.

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5.3

Adapted to the regional contexts and ex-combatants’ intersecting experiences as gendered, raced, classed beings, these practices turn into action the feminist claim to choice (Schöb, 2021 Gender-Transformative Peacebuilding): by flexibilising gender roles and norms with ex-combatant women and men alike, they open up choices for non-hegemonic, non-heteronormative family and income-generation models (Schöb, 2021 Combatants for Peace).

Many male ex-combatants translate their alternative access to “being good at being a man” (Theidon, 2009, p.16) from their families to local politics and community work: they engage in local-level peacebuilding as leaders of violence reduction or youth recruitment prevention initiatives that teach empathy, ethics of care, and non-violent conflict resolution through sports or arts (Schöb, 2021 Combatants for Peace).

Others have founded their own organisations, for instance Reintegrar ConCiencia, which works in peace education more broadly, but also has a specific psychological focus on assisting male perpetrators (Martinez, 2017).

Smaller city-based reintegration programmes, like the former Bogotá-based Proyecto 840, and religious organisations such as the Fundación para la Reconciliación use similar approaches in their holistic work with conflict survivors and perpetrators, to demilitarise masculinities and rehumanise them for peace (Schöb, 2006, p.35).

The observed reintegration practices are certainly of crucial importance to helping ex-combatants “change the chip from warrior to citizen” (Schöb, 2021 Combatants for Peace, p.347), to overcome the disempowering feeling of losing their weapons, and to disarm and resignify their notions of masculinities. Engaging men alongside women in the broader gender work has also reportedly reduced the levels of domestic violence, which generally rise in households following demobilisation. This highly gendered violence was interpreted by one reintegration worker as the combined result of frustrations about (predominantly male) ex-combatants’ own disempowerment and their (mostly female) partners’ relative empowerment in civilian life (Schöb, 2021 Combatants for Peace, p. 300-301).

Ex-combatants’ demilitarised values as citizens, and their engagement in gender-transformative peacebuilding, could be read as manifestations of the aspired “cultural transformation of gender equality”, at least among the ex-combatant population and in their immediate environment.

Although ex-combatants are a particular sub-population of Colombians, the question that inevitably arises here is of larger societal importance: how impactful for peace can a supposed “cultural transformation for gender equality” be, if it remains limited to disempowered ex-combatants and their immediate circles, considering that they remain an isolated, socially stigmatised and threatened sub-population, and can hardly be assumed to become role models for the national identity-construction process? (Schöb, 2006, 2021 Combatants for Peace)

17. See also for other ‘post-conflict’ contexts Cahn and Aolain 2010, p.106–8; Specht 2013 p.76, 81.
Example: Colectivo Hombres y Masculinidades & Colectivo Sin Fronteras [see next page]

A noticeable civil society initiative is the Bogotá-based Colectivo Hombres y Masculinidades (CHM), which has pursued holistic approaches to transforming masculinities since 1994. Working with people of all genders and diverse communities in terms of ethnicity, age and gender identity, allows the CHM and its partners to simultaneously "review masculinities and reinforce women’s rights in parallel – something that distinguishes us from initiatives that work with men or women exclusively".

Director Javier Ómar Ruiz describes their work as anti-patriarchal, anti-capitalist and anti-colonialist: from a personal, interpersonal but also public/systemic perspective, they challenge “the alliance between patriarchy and capitalism, the structural relationship that creates multi-layered oppressions” and they do so through “Southern epistemologies, Latin American ways of thinking and acting linked to indigenous cosmologies and the idea of el buen vivir, rooted in indigenous and campesino cultures.”

The CHM integrates bodily and mental work through a variety of methodologies. Its members work with journalists and academia, supporting a range of theses; they have advised ex-combatants’ reintegration/reincorporation at the conceptual and operational levels; have been involved in the development of gender and “post-conflict” curricula; or collaborate with the telephone helpline for men in emotional distress, Línea Calma, which was installed in Bogotá in 2020 and overwhelmed by demand.

18. https://colectivohombresymasculinidades.com For an interview with director Javier Omar Ruiz, see, e.g. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bVmteG-CcU0&t=302s&ab_channel=ClaudiaPalaciosOficial.
20. Interview with Javier Omar Ruiz, CHM, Bogotá, November 2017. See also Essayag 2018, p.30
21. See, eg: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UpBGztZUMZc&ab_channel=MOMENTO24; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zCGYfyuHh70&ab_channel=CulturaEnBta
They are publicly visible, from *marchas de hombres en falda* or *fútbol con falda*, that demand the legitimacy of non-hegemonic expressions of masculinity in public, to participation in the activities of feminist organisations as male allies to women’s empowerment and gender equality, to public interviews and conferences.

Yet, their main methodology is popular education, inter alia through targeted workshops on masculinities (eg for high school and university students, trade unionists, international organisations’ staff) or long-term engagement with youth collectives, such as the *Colectivo Jóvenes Sin Fronteras* [see below]. Members of this youth collective discuss what it means to be a young man in a vulnerable neighbourhood in Bogotá; to embody and perform non-hegemonic, non-violent, non-militarised masculinities; or to gradually transform their patriarchal socialisation. The CHM and the *Colectivo Sin Fronteras* also have a communitarian garden (*huerta comunitaria*), whose maintenance opens opportunities to reflect on the links between masculinities and care work – with a broad understanding of care for life and alternative development models that are based on peace, and ethics of care and construction, instead of the hegemonic model based on war, exploitation and destruction.\(^{23}\)

Lastly, in its contribution to reviewing masculinities for peace, the CHM takes a broad approach to conflict and militarised masculinities. Beyond their contribution to ex-combatant reintegration and popular education writ large, the members currently take part in the national strike, accompanying male and female youth to resignify masculinities at the frontline: being *hombre en primera línea* (a warrior/hero stereotype) has become the militarised model of masculinity for this generation.

While they fiercely contest the structural and direct state violence, and would certainly reject the soldier-hero image, these youth construct a different kind of heroism, a counter-image, which is likewise based on militarised masculinities and war analogies. This illustrates that different masculinity ideals can be contradictory to each other, but all reinforce the hegemony of militarised masculinity.

According to the CHM, GBV constitutes a grave problem, not only as state violence against the demonstrators, but also within the lines and in the domestic sphere. Through a series of workshops with young demonstrators in Cali and other cities, the CHM aims to transform the *masculinidades en primera línea* from combat to care-orientated masculinities.\(^{24}\)

This is only one example of how normalised patriarchal and militarised violence in Colombia continues to manifest in masculinities in everyday life, showing the need for sustainable and continuous demilitarisation efforts, but also the urgency of deeper changes in the structural conditions that enable this violence.

\(^{23}\) Their conversation series can be followed via YouTube, Sur Masculino. See, eg: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_K9MnQwWw&t=543s

\(^{24}\) Interview with Javier Ómar Ruiz, CHM, July 2021.

\(^{25}\) Idem.
OVERVIEW OF ACTORS WORKING ON DECONSTRUCTING HEGEMONIC (MILITARISED, VIOLENT) MASCULINITIES IN COLOMBIA
Beyond the work of Colombia’s oldest masculinities organisation, the Bogotá-based Colectivo Hombres y Masculinidades, there is a range of initiatives that work with men and boys, as well as with gender-mixed groups, to transform masculinities at different levels in Colombia.

Unlike the CHM, which pursues holistic approaches with all kinds of communities (seeking variation in its target groups regarding ethnicity, age and gender identity), the majority of groups/collectives/initiatives working on masculinities in Colombia reportedly focus on therapeutic approaches directed at male aggressors. The most recent thematic foci of the identified initiatives are GBV and violence against women; ex-combatants and post-conflict masculinities; legal prosecution of GBV; mental health; spirituality; popular education; relationship to feminist movements; and deepening of methodological approaches. Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic has brought to the agenda the challenges of confinement, not only in terms of rising domestic violence, but also in terms of resignifying masculinities in the face of unavailable public spaces.

To date, no systematic and updated record exists of civil society masculinity initiatives and their manifold collaborations, overlaps and specificities. Some initiatives are more short-lived than others, and membership in collectives and collaborations is fluid, with working groups often forming ad hoc for a specific event.

In an attempt to provide an updated mapping of civil society groups/collectives/initiatives, the overview below recurs to different information sources: the agenda of Hombres en Disidencia, a yearly programme of monthly thematic men’s circles organised by the CHM (Ruiz Arroyave and Gómez Camargo, 2021, p.33-35), and an additional unpublished mapping of organisations operational in 2021 kindly shared by the CHM, amended by references obtained through key informant interviews, as well as a list of relevant interlocutors mapped by UN Women (Essayag, 2018, p.99–100).

The list below is non-exhaustive, and suggests entry points for a comprehensive and more in-depth mapping.

At the national level, there are the Red Colombiana de Masculinidades por la Equidad de Género, an umbrella organisation of different regional and local organisations, initiatives and collectives across the country; the Mesa Nacional de Masculinidades Corresponsables y No Violentas; and the Red Colombiana de Masculinidades No Hegemónicas. At the Latin American level, they are connected to the Red MenEngage.

At the regional or local level, the following groups/collectives/initiatives are active or have been part of masculinities activities in the past five years:

- Antioquia: El Amanador Colectivo Masculino (Medellín); Grupo Nuevas Identidades Masculinas Suroeste Antioquia (Municipio de Venecia); Grupo de trabajo, corporación combos (Medellín);* círculos de hombres, Casa de la Memoria (Medellín).*
- Caldas: Machos Afectivos (Manizales).
- Cauca: Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca (CRIC).*
- Costa caribeña: Grupo Masculinidades Caribe (with six local sub-groups).*
- Magdalena: Iniciativa de Masculinidades (Santa Marta).
- Meta: Reintegrar ConCiencia (Villavicencio).
- Nariño: Colectivo Hombres en Marcha (Pasto).
- Santander: Grupo Diversidad Humana (Barrancabermeja).
- Valle del Cauca: Círculo de Hombres (Cali), which collaborates with the ARN on 'new masculinity' approaches in ex-combatant reintegration/reincorporation; Taller Abierto (Cali); Corporación Viviendo (Cali).*
- Further initiatives have been mentioned without specification in Bucaramanga, Neiva, Arauca, Apartadó and Cartagena.33

29. Sincere gratitude to Javier Ómar Ruiz for kindly sharing his personal notes.
30. Conducted by Dr. Mia Schöb in Colombia between November 2017 and July 2021, part of these interviews were conducted for separate research projects on sexual violence and ex-combatant reintegration, see, e.g. Schöb 2018, 2021 Combatant for Peace.
32. Those marked with an asterisk (*) could not be confirmed to remain active in 2021.
33. Interviews with Javier Ómar Ruiz, CHM, Bogotá, December 2017 and July 2021; with Gender Specialist (anonymous), Defensoría del Pueblo, Florencia, Caquetá, November 2017; with Researcher at the INER, Medellín, March 2018.
A high concentration of groups/collectives/initiatives is in the capital Bogotá, notably:

- Colectivo Hombres y Masculinidades.
- Colectivo Juvenil Sin Fronteras.
- Grupo Hombres Casitas Bíblicas.
- Grupos/iniciativas de Jóvenes con experiencia de vida Transmasculina.
- Acción Colectiva de Objetoras y Objetores de Conciencia, ACOOC.
- Corporación Agoras.
- Escuela Otras Masculinidades.
- Escuela De-Formación de Masculinidades, Mayra Barahona.
- Hombres que Despiertan.
- Red de Armonización Mambrú.
- Somohs.
- Colectiva la Tulpa Antimilitarista.
- Rash Bogotá.
- Masculinidades insurgentes.
- Movimiento Sur Masculino.
- Poliamor Bogotá.
- Manes a la Obra.
- Masculinidades Sentipensantes.
- Fundación Social Colombiana Cedavida.*
- Liga Internacional de Mujeres por la Paz y la Libertad (LIMPAL).
- Línea Calma (phone line providing psychological support to men in emotional distress, since 2020).

In terms of support to such civil society initiative, public institutions like the Consejería Presidencial para la Equidad de la Mujer (CPEM) as well as the Secretarias de la Mujer of each respective Mayor’s Office can be expected to be involved in or to support (at least superficially) the work on masculinities. The Agencia Colombiana para la Reincorporación y Normalización (ARN) collaborates with local masculinity groups/collectives/initiatives to address non-violent masculinities with ex-combatants. International support for Colombia’s masculinities work is provided, among others, by the Colombia branches of UN Women, Oxfam, Mercy Corps and USAID.

Complementarily to the above, it would be worth studying the role of communities and organisations that do not frame their work as masculinities work, but importantly embody and perform demilitarised masculinities in Colombia, such as the Peace Communities (eg. Idler, Garrido, and Mouly, 2016; Burnyeat, 2018).
FINDINGS AND DIRECTIONS
FOR FUTURE WORK
Colombia's complex histories of armed conflict and violence have arguably produced a "culture of violence", which is discursively linked to the national identity and promotes militarised, violent masculinities as the hegemonic model of masculinity. Militarised, violent or belligerent masculinities are reproduced in military training across armed groups, promoted as heroic in state propaganda and public culture. Hegemonic masculinities are closely intertwined with GBV, and rely on the reproduction of gender inequality, which negatively affects people of all genders. A feminist peace (a positive peace) (Confortini, 2006, p.334) that seeks social justice based on equitable relationships and marked by the absence of all forms of violence, thus relies on demilitarising and diversifying masculinities.

Civil society, academia and artists across Colombia are constructing the building blocks for these gender-transformative, demilitarising processes at the individual and cultural levels, and there are policies in place that provide the necessary supportive political discourse in some cases (ex-combatant reintegration/reincorporation).

Like most work on masculinities at the global level, many of them focus on men's attitudes on a small scale (individual, family, community). As Greig and Flood underline, focusing on a seemingly homogeneous category of "men" and "masculinities" as a men's problem has undermined larger social and structural changes; truly gender-transformative work should link up with larger social-transformative work on violence reduction and development, but also push for policy and legal changes, and for the funding necessary to implement these (Flood and Greig, 2020).

Without larger-scale and long-term changes in the structural conditions that underpin Colombia's patriarchal and highly militarised war economy and politics, Colombia's remarkable civil society and punctual state interventions to demilitarise masculinities risk remaining isolated.

It is essential to continue advocating for structural reforms that address the structural drivers of war in Colombia, including corruption, socio-economic inequalities and exclusion, and the arms trade. Furthermore, state institutions should build on the knowledge and practices of Colombia's vibrant civil society to do so in a context-sensitive, inclusive and intersectional manner.

Beyond the examples discussed above, ACOOC's advocacy for the recognition of conscientious objection by the Colombian government, stands out as an example of civil society work to promote legal changes and transform institutional practices; LIMPAL's advocacy against military spending and pressure towards Colombia's ratification of and adherence to the Arms Trade Treaty illustrates how civil society can effectively campaign for compliance with international norms and systemic demilitarisation.

The current political and health crises, as well as the peace processes that continue at different levels against all odds, provide an enabling environment for bringing about social change – a historical momentum that should not be missed to promote a feminist peace.

———Perspectiva de Género. Bogotá, Colombia: Agencia Colombiana para la Reintegración


——— Superación de la violencia basada en el género para el pleno disfrute de los derechos de las mujeres en Colombia. Experiencias promisorias de promoción de masculinidades no violentas y de la corresponsabilidad entre hombres y mujeres en los cuidados. Documento final de análisis. ONU Mujeres and USAID, 2016.

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Supported By Original Empirical Data