

Margarita Orozco

Final Report for the IRIS Graduate Student Summer Fieldwork Award (2018)

After nearly 50 years of conflict, in September of 2016 the Colombian government signed a historic peace agreement with the country's largest guerrilla group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). While incidents of violence have dropped dramatically across Colombia, some episodes of aggression against the former rebels indicate the challenges of achieving and sustaining peace remains. Colombia's peace is fragile, and the country is at risk for future violence due to its more than 50-year history of violent conflict and unresolved internal tensions between reintegration of FARC combatants and justice for victims.

The aim of my field trip to Colombia was to explore the feasibility of a dissertation project focused on the deliberative practices among former guerrilla members, victims of the conflict and common citizens. However, visiting the Territorial Spaces for Training and Reincorporation ETCR (in Spanish *Espacios Territoriales de Capacitación y Reincorporación*) to interview people, and apply some questionnaires as was planned, was very challenging, and in some cases impossible, due to the escalation of violence in conflict zones. Collecting the information was very difficult because the proliferation of illegal groups makes it problematic and unsafe to access civilians in some areas, and the ex-combatants and rural population did not talk much by cause of fear and frustration. They believe that they have been ignored by the government in this process and that they do not have any protection from the State.

Despite the situation, I interviewed 50 ex-combatant members, and while the complete analysis of the material is still in process, there are some general concerns from this population that I will summarize on the following points:

1. The main concern of the ex-combatants is their own security. Since the signing of the peace agreement, 115 social leaders have been killed. Many of these assassinations have happened despite the fact that many institutions indicated to the authorities several times that these people were in high risk, especially those involved in processes of land restitution, substitution of illicit agricultures, and recruitment of minors. According to some of the ex-combatants, the homicides are associated with illegal groups that are trying to control the territory and seize the land after the FARC left, especially in zones located on strategic routes for drug trafficking. Additionally, there are still areas where there is not a presence of security authorities from the State. As a result, 83 former members of the FARC and 17 ex-combatant's family members have been killed, and another five have been victims of enforced disappearances.
2. The implementation of the program of substitution of illicit agricultures has presented many problems. First, many of the community participants have been threatened or assassinated by drug traffickers, which increases the fear among the population about participating in the program. Second, many families who are involved in the process are worried because of the lack of resources for the program and the delays in investments to improve infrastructure and address rural poverty. "It's difficult to change our way of living if we cannot find any other way to economically support our families. And with the intimidation to our lives, things are becoming more difficult".
3. The problem of the land restitution is not solved yet. Ex-combatants do not know how the government will guarantee access to the land, especially in those cases in which former guerrilla members need the land to produce their projects.

4. There are many ex-combatants that are not in Territorial Spaces for Training and Reincorporation. Many of them have left to go to the main cities or are living with their families in different places of the country. These people are still looking for a project of life, and their future is very uncertain.
5. Around 1400 ex-guerrilla members are going back to the criminal life. They have left for other groups that the press has called dissidence and that the Peace Reconciliation Foundation calls Postfarc. The numbers are within the world averages of recidivism, but there will be a factor that will determine the number of commanders who will relapse, and this will determine whether the peace process goes forward, or if the former chief guerrilla, Santrich, is captured and extradited.