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Disembodying Combat: Female Combatants' Political Reintegration in Nepal and Colombia

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ABSTRACT

Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programs have systematically failed to reintegrate women into civilian society adequately: both academic knowledge and policy orientations have been misleading about female ex-combatants' political post-war engagement. This working paper aims to critically analyze the reintegration of the female combatants by comparing the *Maoists* (Nepal) and *Farianas* (Colombia) processes in their respective context of the post-peace agreement. The focus is on the political issues underlying the particular place of women in insurgent combat and what it means to "re-embody" civilian society with a temporal glance at the 15-year transition in Nepal and the 5-year peace process in Colombia. The working paper is divided into five sections: (1) a contextualization of the cases; (2) a mapping of the transitional context; (3) a critique of the dichotomous perspectives that have shaped the figure of the female combatant; (4) an analysis of the lessons learned from Nepal and Colombia's post-peace agreement transition and, finally; (5) a set of policy orientations and academic venues for an intersectional and embodied perspective on DDR.

KEYWORDS:
Nepal; Colombia; Female Ex-Combatants; Reintegration; Embodiment; Intersectionality.

Introduction: A Feminist Take on DDR[1]

Overall, Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programs worldwide have failed to adequately understand and consider the diverse experiences of women and girls in war. Consequently, they have systematically been unable to effectively reintegrate them socially, politically, and economically in their communities. Dominant analyses in mainstream Security Studies have not recognized "women's political agency and engagement in postwar structures" (Koens & Gunawardana 2020, 4). In that sense, both academic knowledge and policy orientations do not offer a complete picture of the political reintegration of female ex-combatants in post-agreement settings.

Undeniable progress has been made since the adoption, in 2000, of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325). This resolution allowed for the recognition of women's participation in armed conflict as active combatants, political militants, or antimilitarist activists, which, in turn, has become an essential matter for the building of sustainable peace. Yet, twenty years after the adoption of the UNSCR 1325, "women are still systematically excluded from peace talks" (Goetz 2020, xxii), and most of the time, they have not effectively been integrated into local and national politics. One of the main reasons for this is that women are still framed as victims of armed conflicts, and their role as political agents is not fully recognized.

In fact, despite the "window of opportunity" (Steenbergen 2020, 1) presented by DDR programs and the "optimistic feminist analysis of the tremendous potential of a post-war moment to transform gender power hierarchies," evidence from the field shows that the return to "normalcy" does not improve women's political rights and participation (Goswami 2015, 9). In mainstream International Relations (IR), women's embodied[2] and emotional political experiences and the backlash in post-conflict settings are not analyzed in this return to "normalcy." Feminist Security Studies (FSS) (Sjoberg 2009) have challenged those postulates coming from mainstream analyses of security in transitional settings (Dietrich 2017; Bueno-Hansen 2016; Tabak 2011). They have argued for the study of the continuum of violence (Al-Ali & Pratt 2016) faced by women and the constant militarization of their lives in the aftermath of war to complicate analyses that have mostly been centered on economic reintegration and victimhood narratives.

FSS (see Parashar 2014; Sjoberg 2009, 2016; Wibben 2016, among others) have actively critiqued the central focus on nation-States in IR at the expense of people experiencing war and have made several postulates essential to this working paper. First, the concept of security must be rethought from other epistemological and practical standpoints than those proposed by mainstream IR to capture the complexities of war and peace. Second, contemporary wars must be analyzed through the multiple and intersecting systems of oppression constitutive of IR. Third, emotions, affects and embodiment, even if understudied, are central categories to analyzing wars. Fourth, violence perpetrated by women must be analyzed on a victim-perpetrator continuum. Both agency and structure should be considered to avoid the fragmentation of their political identities and experiences during wartime and transitions.

[1] I am grateful to Bénédicte Santoire for her careful revision of this working paper, and to María Martín de Almagro Iniesta, for her comments on the early version of this text, and whose work in Feminist Security Studies is an inspiration for me.

[2] I define embodiment as a discursive, material, and affective process central to political actions (Butler 2010). It thus refers not only to the material body, but also to the process of subject construction and being subjected to forms of power (*assujettissement*).

From this starting point, how can we analyze women's political militancy in post-peace agreement settings? How does women's active participation in combat, war knowledge, and political transgression influence the transitional period following a peace agreement? My questionings[3] stem from the observation that there is very little research on the post-insurgency transition period and, notably, on reintegration (Weber 2020). As such, post-war reintegration "remains a critically understudied topic" (Ehasz 2020, 8), especially from an intersectional perspective with regards to the (in)securities experienced by ex-combatants. The figure of female combatants[4] is a recent object of study, with a growing engagement since the last 15 years. Despite this, there is still limited literature that compares the cases of Nepal with other DDR processes (see Steenbergen 2020), and, to my knowledge, none addresses transitional settings for female ex-combatants between Nepal and Colombia. This working paper wishes to begin a reflection to address those blind spots.

In this working paper, and drawing upon Feminist Security Studies, I emphasize on the analysis of oppressive structures (borrowing from post-colonial studies) and on affects and embodiment (borrowing from poststructuralist contributions). My objective is to critically analyze the reintegration of the female combatants by comparing the *Maoists* (Nepal) and *Farianas*[5] (Colombia) processes in the context of the post-peace agreement. I focus on the political issues underlying the particular place of women in insurgent combat and how post-peace agreement periods tend to block women's militancy and, therefore, long-term security objectives of DDR processes. Particularly, I want to question what it means to "re-embody" civilian society with a temporal glance, given that Nepal has undergone a 15-year transition while Colombia is engaging its fifth-year process since the Havana Peace Agreement. Although reintegration programs are context-specific (Estrada-Fuentes 2018), reflecting on the case of Nepal in comparison to Colombia proves to give highly relevant insights to improve International DDR Standards (IDDRS). Ultimately, my goal is to contribute to those ongoing reflections on the urgent necessity to think about policy orientations to improve women's reintegration into civilian society.

The paper first contextualizes the Colombian and Nepalese cases. Part two details the respective DDR processes, and part three proposes a critique of the dichotomous perspectives that have shaped the figure of the female combatant. Part four draws lessons from both transitional contexts in terms of women's political reintegration and, finally, part five opens up to consider intersectionality and embodiment as key theoretical and practical tools to inform policy orientations in DDR.

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[3] The questions raised in this working paper are not individual reflections: it is the fruit of countless exchanges with female ex-combatants, friends, colleagues, feminists that have nurtured the ideas presented here. To paraphrase Ahmed (2004), I am grateful to them and to the circularity of emotions that sustains those collective reflections.

[4] I wish to insist on the diversity of this category "female combatant" (Goswami 2015); for the purpose of this working paper and because the reflection is based on two guerrilla groups, I will use indistinctly "female ex-combatants", "female ex-guerrillas" and "women ex-combatant". In the case of Colombia, I will also refer to "*Farianas*" and in the case of Nepal, to "Maoist female combatants".

[5] *Farianas* is the term used by the female ex-guerrilleras from the Farc-ep to identify themselves. It has been subject to debates and, more recently, this identity has been confronted to internal discussions within the political party that has officially decided to change its name to "*Partido Comunes*" [the Commons]. See: https://partidofarc.com.co/farc/. However, as fariana was the way many militants refer to themselves and because of the foundation of *Mujer Fariana* webpage in 2013, I will stick to this name for this working paper.

1. Nepal and Colombia: Comparing the Cases

Both Colombia and Nepal have undergone complex internal armed conflicts rooted in entrenched inequalities that persist until now. First, the Communist Party of Nepal–Maoist (CPN-M), created in 1995, presented a 40-point ultimatum in January 1996 that clearly included the end of patriarchal oppression among other demands. After the government ignored their demands, the Maoists officially launched a People's War in February 1996 against the monarchy, feudal power, and oppressive structures. The CPN-M was composed of three principal branches, the political one based on the local adaptation of Marxist, Leninist, and Maoist ideological stances (Prachanda Path), the armed guerrilla, and the cultural revolution that included popular campaigns to mobilize masses (Lecomte-Tilouine 2006).

As Dahal argues, besides the geographical vantage point to build a guerrilla movement, the Maoists have consolidated strong grassroots bases in the countryside of Nepal, most notably due to the "frustration among marginalized people owing to the national elite monopoly on governing system and resource allocation" (2015, 187). One prominent feature of the Nepal People's War was the involvement of women in its rank: it is estimated that one-third of the Maoist combatants were female (Gogoi 2017). As of 2002, several women were part of the Central Committee, and they were also present in different districts and cells (Pettigrew & Shneiderman 2004, 25). Women have been appointed commanders and vice-commanders, and "there were separate women's sections in brigades, women platoons, and women squads" (Manchanda 2010, 6). In the 10-year long war, more than 13 000 people have died, mostly at the hand of State security forces (approximately two-third), with significant economic losses related to war (Sthapit & Doneys 2017, 36). A Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) was finally signed in 2006.

Second, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - People's Army (Farc-ep) has been one of the most important insurgent forces[6] opposing the Colombian government for almost 60 years. The Farc-ep began as a self-defense peasant group against State oppression, fighting the unequal distribution of land. It was officially founded in 1964 in Marquetalia, Department of Tolima, by 46 men and two women (Méndez 2012). In 1982, it officially became a People's Army. While mainly composed by men initially, women were part of the struggle since Marquetalia, occupying different roles. Progressively, and in parallel with the militarization and transformation into an army, the Farc-ep began to include women in combat roles in the 1980s. Therefore, simultaneously, women were integrated and fought for their place and equal functions with men in the insurgency (Gutiérrez Sanín & Carranza Franco 2017; Trisko Darden *et al.* 2020).

War in Colombia has had terrible and long-lasting effects: it is estimated that more than 220 000 people have lost their lives, more than 7 million people have been forcibly displaced, and multiple modalities of violence including torture, sexual violence, child forced recruitment, and landmines, have been widely used by all armed actors, including the State (CNMH 2013). While many groups are still in arm – such as the National Liberation Army (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional* - ELN), the neo-

[6] Multiple actors are involved in the Colombian armed conflict, most notably the paramilitaries, other guerrilla groups such as the ELN, the State (with the National Army and the different public forces) but also multinational compagnies, drug traffickers and businessmen.

paramilitary groups, or the criminal organizations) – the Farc-ep and the Colombian government has successfully concluded an agreement in 2016 in La Havana after almost five years of negotiations.

Almost 15 years after Nepal People's War, results are mitigated regarding the possibility of emancipatory politics coming from women's participation in armed struggle, and many parallels can be drawn with the situation experienced by the *Farianas* in Colombia. Despite female involvement in insurgencies, little attention has been paid concerning how they politically experience the aftermath of war when they are expected to "return to normal life" (K.C. 2019b, 453). In fact, after 15-year of transition, Nepal has not proven to reintegrate all female ex-combatants into civilian society effectively.

I argue that comparing the cases of the CPN-M and the Farc-ep can contribute to reflect upon policy orientations in DDR programs. Both were Marxist-Leninist/Maoist-oriented guerrillas and were consolidated armies with around 20 000 combatants at their peaks (Méndez 2012; K.C. 2019b). The two insurgencies have undergone a negotiated peace agreement: the CPN-M signed a Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2006, and the Farc-ep concluded a Peace Agreement in 2016. While women have not been actively included in the peace process in Nepal and the reintegration program was male-centered (K.C. 2019b), the Colombian case was acclaimed as the first worldwide negotiation to include a technical subcommittee on gender (Barrera Téllez 2017). Recent obstacles to the implementation of the peace agreement in Colombia (Kroc Institute 2019), as well as the political assassination of more than a thousand social leaders and ex-combatants since 2016 (Indepaz 2021), confirm the relevance of comparing female political participation with cases like Nepal, implemented almost 15 years ago with mitigated results in terms of security and peace (Goswami 2015). The two insurgencies show similar characteristics that are relevant for comparison: rural discontent and entrenched economic inequalities were at the heart of insurgencies in Nepal and Colombia. In both cases, women were involved in armed and political activism. Although it is difficult to "measure precisely the number of female combatants in any given armed group" (Trisko Darden *et al.* 2019, 2), it is estimated that constituting between 20% and 40% percent of the two guerrillas (Bouvier 2016; Goswami 2015). Women's roles were diverse and challenged the patriarchal and capitalist order. In both countries, the implementation of reintegration shows mitigated results and particular complexities for female ex-combatants. Also, contrary to other DDR, the United Nations (UN) has played only a supporting and monitoring role without peacekeeping operations. Finally, female ex-combatants' political participation and their contribution to historical memory are currently endangered in Nepal and Colombia (Sabogal & Richter 2019; Upreti & Shivakoti 2018).

2. DDR: Transitional Contexts

DDR programs have two main goals: "removing" weapons from the hands of combatants and extracting them from military structures in order to facilitate their return to civilian society. The logic behind these programs is twofold: to promote security and stability following armed conflict and pave the way for development and rehabilitation (Dietrich 2017). They are composed of *short-term* objectives, namely *disarmament* and *demobilization* (including short-term reinsertion), and *long-term* objectives related to the *reintegration* of ex-combatants into civilian life (Méndez 2012). Globally, the parameters of DDR are set by the UN through IDDRS, though all states have been performing those programs differently. The UN characterizes disarmament as "the collection, documentation, control,

and disposal of small arms, ammunition, explosives, and light and heavy weapons of combatants"; demobilization as "the formal and controlled discharge of active combatants from armed forces or other armed groups"; and reintegration is the "process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income" (UN 2014, 25). Reintegration is seen as the final stage for ex-combatant to re-embody civilian values and norms. It is difficult to estimate the time frame of reintegration, and it is the more complex part of DDR: it implies the redefining and rebuilding of identities and should be understood as a long-term and non-linear process (Estrada-Fuentes 2018).

DDR is supposed to facilitate the transition from a military to a civilian scenario. However, the lines between the two are often fundamentally blurred due to the constant militarization of societies – which is especially true for the cases of Nepal and Colombia. The process of DDR is seen as a window of opportunity to change oppressive structures, particularly those that have fueled the emergence of conflicts. However, it is globally understood in terms of the nexus between security and development, which has had many gendered consequences. Indeed, a discursive and political apparatus is articulated around the notion of "peacebuilding," which has imposed a global gender nomenclature widely criticized, especially by feminist decolonial theorists (Boutron 2018; Rodríguez Moreno 2014; Pettigrew & Shneiderman 2004). One reason is that it has not responded to the plights of women, thus neglecting their agency and long-standing history of resistance. One of the major problems is that it has been assumed that once DDR programs are put in place, "security and normality are likely to resume and ex-combatants are expected to perform normalcy" (K.C. 2019b, 455). The following subsections address a brief context in Nepal and Colombia.

2.1. Nepal: Almost 15 Years of Transition

The CPN-M signed the CPA with the Government of Nepal on November 21, 2006 (Upreti & Shivakoti 2018) – exactly ten years before Colombia's Peace Agreement. This accord is fundamental as it directed the DDR process, understood in terms of "rehabilitation," transforming the Maoist combatants into "citizens" (K.C. 2019b, 453). In the first place, Nepalese soldiers were retrenched in their barracks, and Maoist fighters were relocated in 28 cantonments (Manchanda 2010). Following Hauge (2020, 218), the term DDR was "deliberately excluded from the Nepalese peace agreement; instead, the official term for referring to the combatants was '*Byahastapan ra Samayojan*' or 'Management and Integration'". UN Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) verified 19 692 combatants (Manchanda 2010), although it ended to be 17 502 in the end in 2012. Among these, 3 356 were women. Also, the United Nations Interagency Rehabilitation Program (UNIRP) was responsible for the reintegration of child soldiers (under the age of 18) and late recruits (recruited after November 22, 2006, for those who have missed the verification round). According to Steenbergen, the "UNIRP ran from 2010–2012 and achieved the highest female participation rate of any UN-led DDR program to date, at 38 percent" (2020, 4).

As K.C. argues, "Nepal faced multiple inter-related transitions: from war to peace, from autocracy to democracy, and from a centralised state to a decentralised state" (2019a, 6). The reintegration process has been controversial, and the initial six-month established to complete the DDR process took more than five years (K.C. 2019a). In November 2012, the reintegration plan in three possibilities: the integration into the Nepalese national army, a voluntary withdrawal with monetary compensation, or a rehabilitation kit that includes educational support and training. This obviously induced the

majority of women ex-combatants to accept the money given their precarious financial situation or the barriers to their integration into the formal army (K.C. 2019b). Moreover, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons were established almost eight years later in 2014 (Manchanda 2020, 72). In that sense, transitional justice has been one of the major failures of the CPA.

Following Upreti & Shivakoti, the "situation of the vast majority of female ex-combatants is very frustrating" (2018, 80). First, the management of the cantonments has been widely criticized. Those have become liminal spaces during almost six years, where uncertainty and anguish were prominent emotions: the frustration stems from the many years of struggle and the contradiction of feeling spatially "locked", waiting for their future (Dahal 2015; K.C. 2019b). Despite the clear evidence of female participation in the Maoist struggle, the CPA did not address clearly women's issues and was male-centered with no clear methodology (K.C. 2019b). For example, of the 3 356 women, only 104 chose the path of inclusion in the army, mostly partly because the criteria were not designed for women and never considered the special needs of mothers (Dahal 2015). In sum, the CPA did not follow the UNSCR1325 guidelines, which recommended prioritizing the needs of women and girls ex-combatants but also integrating them into all the phases of DDR (design, implementation, distribution of resources, etc.) (Goswami 2015, 7).

2.2. Colombia: 5 Years from La Havana

In 2011, the Farc-ep and the government of Colombia began to negotiate in Havana, Cuba. Negotiations were made official in 2012 and, on November 24, 2016, both parties signed a peace agreement ending more than 60 years of internal armed conflict between the State and this insurgent group (Boutron 2018). The UN Verification Mission in Colombia was in charge of monitoring the disarmament process and accompanying the reincorporation of ex-combatants. Disarmament was completed on June 27, 2017, and ex-combatants have been assigned to temporary reincorporation zones (ETCR) to facilitate the transition and ensure training for ex-combatants.

This peace agreement, both acclaimed and decried, is the basic document that provides the tools for peacebuilding and governs the reincorporation of combatants into civilian life. On the one hand, it has been acclaimed globally for its inclusion of gendered and ethnic components but, on the other hand, it has been rejected through a referendum by the Colombian population on October 2, 2016, before its adoption by the Congress. One of the major points of friction, coupled with agrarian reform and transitional justice, is the reincorporation[7] of 13,000 former Farc-ep combatants, among which 7,000 are combatants transiting from the military context to civilian life (Dietrich 2017; Barrios Sabogal & Richter 2019). However, for Farc-ep members, demobilization is not an option: they agreed to disarm only if their political mobilization was to be renewed in nonviolent terms. This means that their disarmament and return to civilian society were bound by the possibility of continuing their political activity, this time, through formal and non-armed politics.

[7] Reincorporation is the term adopted by the Farc-ep to refer to their political reintegration. It has been decided as such because they "reincorporate" the State and because they want to differentiate their process from the previous ones – such as the paramilitary DDR process in 2003-2005.

La Havana Agreement represents a historical deal regarding a gender-sensitive approach, providing a strategic space for former female Farc-ep members in their political conversion (Boutron 2018; Trisko Darden *et al.* 2020). The final document set up the stage for an implementation that would consider "gender-sensitive measures, including gender-specific psychosocial support and strategies to prevent violence against ex-combatants" (Weber 2020, 16). Women's and feminist organizations have actively participated in the negotiations, and this allowed female ex-guerrillas to engage in fruitful discussions on the specific war affectations experienced by women (Vargas Parra & Díaz Pérez 2018). The constant contact with feminist activists, female ex-combatants from other countries, and their own war experience allowed female ex-Farc-ep to propose their own form of feminism, the *insurgent feminism*[8].

However, as of February 2021, uncertainty reign in Colombia about the implementation of the peace agreement: the Kroc Institute (2019) has published reports with mitigated results, and the political landscapes are marked by the many sets back with the arrival of the conservative government of Iván Duque in 2018. In the same vein, activists and Farc's politicians have warned that the structural reforms expected to be adopted with the implementation have been diverted (Anctil Avoine 2019). The implementation of the peace agreement on the ground has been slow and difficult. As of February 2021, the reincorporation zones, originally thought to be temporary, have gradually become "permanent" or have been transformed in small villages while many combatants moved to other settlements or major cities to find employment. It is estimated that most of the ex-combatants now live outside the reincorporation zones (Barrios Sabogal & Richter 2019).

Land reforms and structural changes are far from being addressed, and *Farianas* still face the stigma attached to their participation in war (Weber 2020). They also face many challenges for their political participation (Ehasz 2020) despite having built their own strategy for their inclusion in the political party. In the *Comprehensive Strategy for Farc Women's Reincorporation*[9] (Farc, 2020), the *Farianas* have stated their proposal for the economic, political, and social reintegration (reincorporation) to civilian society. In this document, they propose different axes of work for their political participation within the political party but also for their community engagement. For example, they adopt a specific set of measures to prevent gender-based violence, and they suggest the adoption of "insurgent masculinities", to engage a discussion with their *camaradas* and deconstruct hegemonic masculinities. Directly correlated to this perception of masculinities, they propose to recover some of the war practices regarding the sexual division of work (for example, equal distribution of tasks for cooking and cleaning) and adopt an economy centered around solidarity and care. However, despite being engaged in rethinking gender roles and political participation, they are faced with many challenges related to economic survival, the division of gender roles in Colombian society, and the perpetuation of military hierarchies in the political party.

[8] *Farianas* have proposed the "*feminismo insurgente*" based on their own experience of war. Issued from the discussion in La Havana, it consists of an emancipatory project that wishes to contribute to the building of sustainable peace in Colombia from an antipatriarchal and anticapitalist stance (See: Simanca Herrera 2018 and her recent tweet about insurgent feminism: https://twitter.com/SandinoVictoria/status/1361675246928072706).

[9] In Spanish: *Estrategia integral para la reincorporación de las mujeres de las Farc.*

3. The Figure of the Female Combatant: Beyond Binaries

DDR has been globally framed on the figure of the male combatant (Anctil Avoine & Tillman 2015) and the dichotomy between the "civil" and the "military, foreclosing the possibility for ex-combatants of occupying a different political position in the reconfiguration of their subjectivities. Engaging analytically and practically with the figure of the female combatant is a challenging but necessary task for feminism, imposing a reflection about its own relation to violence (Dorlin 2017). Following Harel-Shalev & Daphna-Tekoah (2020), it means confronting our binary conceptualizations and definitions of "victim" and "agent of violence" and, in that sense, the cases of Colombia and Nepal bring to light the question of emancipatory politics and its conflicting relation with militarization (Manchanda 2004, 237). This section explores three sets of binaries: emancipation/victimization, armed/nonviolent struggles, and gender/class politics. I argue that overcoming those binaries is essential to unravel the challenges faced by female ex-combatants for their post-peace agreement militancy.

Empowerment/victimization

Both in Colombia and Nepal, gender inequalities were central to women's engagement in revolutionary struggles. Steenbergen (2020) argues that female combatants have felt empowerment through revolutionary struggles in Nepal and Liberia. The CPN-M clearly stated that "patriarchal exploitation and discrimination against women should be stopped" (K.C. & Van Der Haar 2019, 436) in the initial ultimatum sent to the government of Nepal. Gender empowerment has also been an essential point for recruitment and a clear motive for long-term engagement for female cadres, despite many paradoxes (Manchanda 2010). Many studies have testified that women engaging in the Farc-ep have done so for many political, socio-economic, and cultural reasons, among which the widespread *machismo* has played an important role (Trisko Darden et al. 2020). In both insurgencies, women who joined were, for a vast majority, from economically marginalized populations. Most of them have faced class-based and gender-based injustices, as well as State oppression. If forced recruitment happened in both cases (Pettigrew & Shneiderman 2004; Higgs 2020), women and girls' ex-combatants should not be reduced to their position as "victims" of armed groups. The dichotomized vision of women as victims of armed groups or as empowered combatants does not hold: their experiences of recruitment, engagement, and political/violent activism are diverse (Barrios Sabogal 2020) and might involve both the feeling of empowerment and processes of victimization. In fact, the complex question of agency in war should be analyzed by accounting for the political context where a decision to join is taken. This political context is marked by the continuum of violence, which refers to the daily and constant violence women face in pre-war, war, and post-war settings (Al-Ali & Pratt 2016). Therefore, the deconstruction of this binary should be integral to the reintegration phase to understand the diversity of female ex-combatants' experiences.

On the one hand, if female combatants in Nepal and Colombia have attained commandment positions, the majority of leadership or high-ranking positions often continue to be occupied by males (Pettigrew & Shneiderman 2004; Ehasz 2020). While Maoist women's leadership took a higher significance in 2002 with the adoption of a Women's Department in the Central Committee[10] (Manchanda 2004), women in the Farc-ep have fought for their place as combatants inside the armed group. However,

[10] See the role of Comrade Parvati as a Central Committee Member and the Head of Women's Department of the CPN-M (Goswami 2015).

they have not been included in all organizational levels and never occupied the Central Secretariat (Castrillón Pullido 2015).

The process of militarization to engage in armed struggles also has different consequences on the bodies of women and men. Dietrich (2017), who has studied leftist insurgencies in Latin America, has shown that involvement in those insurgencies comes with a 'functional equality', where masculinities and femininities are mobilized to function for war. This, in turn, establishes a series of emotional, embodied, and affective devices that are created to bound the armed collective together and establish specific internal gender regimes. Those gender regimes – which was the case both in the CPN-M and the Farc-ep – challenge some of the characteristics of traditional sexual division of labor in the larger society. It therefore seems that gender roles are better distributed and that, to a certain extent, women and men become "units of combat", holding the collective together. For example, the Farc-ep and the CPN-M have constructed alternative political and judicial systems, where several norms were agreed regarding gender relations or punishment in case of rape and gender regulations. On their side, the Farc-ep strongly regulated reproduction for women, one of the most controversial points of their ideology and one of the main reasons why *Farianas* have been publicly victimized, against their political will. As such, those gender regimes need to be closely analyzed to rethink the reintegration process adequately.

On the other hand, by taking up arms, women have performed a series of transgressions in their respective societies. In both insurgencies, men and women have taken up roles normally attributed to the other gender in their civilian communities. For example, the Maoists have adopted a political platform for gender equality – even though many paradoxes persisted – where many women felt they were having their voices finally recognized and could identify with other comrades (Goswami 2015). In their areas of influence, the Maoists established "women's exploitation-free villages" to ensure the "equal share of parental property" (Gogoi 2017, 52). In Colombia, many women of the Farc-ep have found their voices through *Mujeres farianas* political actions, notably by using their skills learned in war and making visible their particular experience fighting against social injustice. They have since published many documents and reports, transforming their reflections on the intersection of class and gender oppression over time.

Class/gender

Class has been an important feature of Marxist-Leninist and Maoist insurgencies, and the ideological apparatus of both insurgencies has worked to subsume gender to class struggle. However, as Dietrich argues, "despite the fact that gendered differences are considered as side contradictions, when compared to class struggle, gender continues to operate as a structuring category in insurgent contexts" (2017, 255). There is, therefore, a necessity to deconstruct the binary between class and gender and adopt an intersectional stance to analyze insurgent women's war involvement and political reintegration.

The intersecting of these two categories is visible in the mobilization of the female identity to justify the increasing involvement of women in the war efforts. In the case of Nepal, the figure of the female combatant is mobilized to show that the war is noble and affects "all" people: the war effort is shown to be universal because, in the face of oppression, "even women" are joining in (Dahal 2015). In the

case of Colombia, the growing involvement of women in the Farc-ep is also attributed to a desire to reach the masses and the growing military necessities to ensure the transformation from a defensive armed group to an offensive army (Gutiérrez Sanín & Carranza Franco 2017).

The predominance of class consciousness has obviously permeated politics, embodied discipline, and ideological stances in left-wing insurgencies. Gendered aspects were mostly subsumed to class-oriented discourses, and the priority was given to equality in combat (Dietrich 2017). At the same time, women have been actively taking this vantage point and have fought for their political spaces within the guerrillas. As Sthapit & Doneys argue, despite the difficult war context, Maoist female cadres "felt a sense of achievement in fighting alongside men and for taking a radical step on behalf of all Nepali women" (2017, 40).

Deconstructing the gender-class binary in the analysis of female ex-combatants' wartime experience provokes a more profound question about the necessity of understanding emancipatory politics in transitional settings from an intersectional perspective. Class (and caste in Nepal) is a major and intersecting category in their fight for political inclusion in post-peace agreement settings. Going beyond this binary allows for the understanding of female ex-combatants' post-war activism. For example, in the case of Colombia, the *Farianas* propose an open politics of 'insurgent feminism', joining their visions on class struggle, antipatriarchy, and openly accepting their armed past. As such, in terms of post-peace agreement militancy, how will *Farianas* cope with the class-based, hierarchical and militaristic views on politics inherited from a Marxists-Leninist with feminist principles (Ehasz 2020)?

Armed/nonviolent struggle

One of the persisting binaries in the analysis of female ex-combatant experiences of war and post-conflict politics is the division of their "combats" along with the binaries of armed/unarmed (or nonviolent) and military/civil engagement. *Farianas* and Maoist combatants were never fully extracted from "civilian society" even though the military discipline obviously impacted the configuration of their lifeworlds (Higgs 2020). Additionally, and of relevance to counter the stigmatization of former female combatants, the insurgent experience should not only be defined through *armed* violence.

Participating in armed insurgencies should not be reduced to narrow views on combat. For women, taking up arms might mean the transgression of expected roles in their societies, as was the case with Nepal and Colombia. The Maoists permitted inter-caste marriages, women's political participation in different hierarchies of the party, and many other transgressions regarding menstruations, women's bodies, or women's roles. In the Farc-ep, women have also found a political voice in the military structure through popular pedagogy and have embodied numerous careers in the armed insurgencies that would not have been possible for them in their villages. As Nieto-Valdivieso (2017) argues, insurgent wars are not only about violent combat, bombing, and death; it is also about joy and happiness, political engagement, and collective processes of learning. But what happens with the notion of combat after the peace agreement? In engaging in armed violence, women are perceived as having "failed" to socially accepted gender norms. As such, female combatants receive a markedly different treatment than their male counterparts: they transgressed not only the boundaries of violence, but they also failed to the gendered expectation of generating and carrying life. Their combat

is understood from gendered assumptions, and they are expected to disembody this experience of struggle.

Deconstructing the binary of armed/unarmed combat is imperative if we want to comprehend female combatants' multiple and diverse political experiences. This means a necessary redefinition of the notion of combat, which has been expelled from the majority of DDR programs. Debunking this binary means to address the continuity of militancy: most DDR programs have failed to understand this continuum as they are based on the erasure of the insurgent identities through the re-embodiment of "civilian" values and norms without accounting for the political possibilities that participation in armed struggles might have brought in ex-combatants' lives. DDR programs have failed to generate other conceptualization of political combat: the dichotomized assumptions regarding armed/unarmed combat do not account for the continuum of female ex-combatants' multiple experiences of political resistance.

4. (In)Securities and Political Participation: Lessons learned

The challenging of gendered roles in leftist armed struggles is no guarantee for the reintegration process. Several feminist authors have argued the possible setbacks experienced by insurgent women in post-conflicts (Shekhawat 2015; Tabak 2011). Dietrich (2017) has warned about the reassignment of women to traditional gender roles in the vast majority of post-peace agreement settings, where the politicization of women is invisibilized in their return to civilian society. Similarly, Sthapit & Doneys argue that "female ex-combatants in Nepal returned to *status quo ante bellum* (or the pre-war status)" (2017, 43), posing many obstacles to their social reintegration. Additionally, as women are expected to "regret" their participation in armed insurgencies, the positive aspects and emotions associated with their time in the armed groups are devaluated (Nieto-Valdivieso 2017), further complicating their post-peace agreement militancy.

Challenging the binaries mentioned in the previous section, this section analyzes both reintegration processes from critical lenses and propose to explore several lessons along three specific axes: (1) re-embodiment of civilian life; (2) marginalization and the re-orientation of the public-private divide and; (3) (de)politicization.

4.1. Challenges in Re-embodying the Civilian Life

> *"Sons will be welcomed back with open arms, but for daughters, there can be no return. When they become guerrillas, the women set themselves free from patriarchal bonds. How can they go back?"*
>
> Hsila Yami (Comrade Parvati) (in Manchanda 2010, 14)

Reintegration is a rupture. Returning to civilian life means disembodying combat: laying down weapons is a strong emotional event. Insurgency wars involve continuous and multidimensional embodied discipline, which is a creative force of subjectivity. Thus, abandoning weapons and transiting from an insurgent life to a civilian one is a central political issue. The transition is too often understood as an individual process, evacuating the collective potential for women ex-combatants to remain

politically active in a nonviolent setting – primarily because of our binary understanding of the notion of combat. Since they are expected to put their past behind, female participation in armed struggles and the transformation of their militancy – understood as a continuum of formal and informal political practices in the context of reintegration – is understudied.

Re-embodying civilian life has been underestimated in DDR programs. The narrow view on embodied security consequently reduced the complexity of transiting from a militaristic and discipline everyday life to the "autonomous" and "individual" character of civilian life. Both in Nepal and Colombia, reintegration zones were initially thought to smoothen the transition. However, the sensation of endless "waiting" in the transitional spaces has caused despair and sentiment of abandonment among many ex-combatants. In Nepal, the cantonments were highly criticized for the slowness of the process, and many ex-combatants have felt discouraged and betrayed politically (Dahal 2015). In Colombia, ex-combatants also critiqued the State's disengagement with the peace agreement and felt that they were not prepared to confront the civilian life, characterized by the breaking up of emotional and collective bonds (Ascanio Noreña et al. 2019; Trisko Darden *et al.* 2020).

De-embodying armed combat means re-adapting to a different way of life than the one experienced in the armed insurgencies. For *Farianas*, it has meant unlearning of the collective arrangements of affect and the learning of expectations that civilian society imposes upon the definition of femininities. For example, the return to civilian society poses the question of sexual and reproductive health differently: the changing of gender regimes means that they will need to think about planning themselves, but also, some of them would think of becoming a mother (Ascanio Noreña *et al.* 2019; Davalos *et al.* 2019). For the Maoists female cadres, confrontations with their family in post-peace agreement came from their lived experience as combatants: their conception of sexual health, menstruation, and gender relations has changed and entered in contradiction with the view of their close relatives (Dahal 2015). The changes in the gender regimes in the transition to civilian society hence pose the question of the privatization of affect and needs. Many of the women in both insurgencies would recall the political experience of being a female combatant as an affective and collective one. For example, in returning to civilian life, they would prefer to engage in relationships with other ex-combatants that might be less likely to reproduce traditional masculine roles.

Reintegration also involves several processes of confronting trauma and the psychological effects of war. Those were not addressed in the case of Nepal and, 5-year after the peace agreement in Colombia, the same conclusion can be made for *Farianas* (Ascanio Noreña *et al.*, 2019). Physical changes are also strong and multiple, especially because military training has left its marks by disciplining the body. War in itself also leaves multiple forms of embodied stories such as scars, trace of bullet affectation, physical and psychological wounds caused by sexual violence, among many other forms of bodily vulnerabilities (K.C. 2019b). Therefore, reintegrating civil society means "landing" into a civil society with all this "insurgent" background in a civil society unprepared for social reconciliation.

In Nepal and Colombia – and despite the apparent effort to make the reincorporation process in Colombia a collective one[11] – reintegration is still understood as a one-way process of returning to

[11] CONPES 3931 is the public policy adopted following the peace agreement, stipulating the collective and territorial character of Farc-ep reincorporation.

civilian society: the disarmed combatant is assumed to be the one to reintegrate society, while society as a passive role of receiver. It is, overall, a process of normalization into the existing social structures with generally no or few modifications to the *status quo* or alteration of the social order (Dahal 2015; K.C. 2019b; Dietrich 2017).

4.2. Isolation and Re-Orientation of the Private-Public Divide

Women's participation in Maoist and Marxist-Leninist guerrillas has allowed for questioning certain oppressive structures (sexism, classism, racism). In contrast, their return to a "normal" civil life has instead led to their social marginalization and setbacks in their political participation (Shekhawat 2015). As K.C. (2019b) points out, the failure to include a gender approach in the Nepalese peace agreement resulted in the political and social exclusion of many Maoist female cadres in the transitional period. In Colombia, despite the gender approach of La Havana agreement, there is still danger for women to be reassigned to traditional gender roles, even if *Farianas* have clearly stated that they will not trade their guns for cooking pots (Boutron & Gómez 2017).

Female ex-combatants often bear the burden of the care economy: they might not find their place in the political party, they might be rejected by their families, or face socio-economic inequalities (Dahal 2015). The post-peace agreement is marked by a return to the "private" and the sphere of intimacy – compared to the collective organization of a guerrilla insurgency. K.C. & Van Der Haar argue that female Maoists experience a step backward in reintegrating civilian society: "in their private lives, they lost the sense of empowerment they had enjoyed during the insurgency as achievements of gender equality dissipated" (2019, 444).

Changes in identities occur. Whereas the collective was the main identity axis, the post-conflict is marked by a return to the individual and a readjustment towards more "traditional" roles, including questions related to maternity, love, and sexual life. It also means the destructuring of the 'family ties of war' (Dahal 2015), in the case of Maoists, and of the '*familia fariana*' in the case of the Farc-ep (Ascanio Noreña *et al.* 2019). Isolation (and self-isolation) might follow: the loss of emotional ties and the sense of security originally given by the political engagement with the insurgency are fragmented and broken by the imperative of everyday life.

Maoists and *Farianas* female ex-combatants have also found themselves stigmatized by their entourage, family, and society in general. Upreti & Shivakoti show that Maoist female ex-combatant experience "exclusion, hate, marginalization and disempowerment" while some of them also face discrimination for their inter-caste marriage (2018, 83). Similar conclusions were made about female ex-combatants in Colombia: they and their families might face death threats. Most of them decide not to return to their community of origin or near their family because they fear reprisals against them (Anctil Avoine 2017), while familiar reunification continues to be a blind spot of DDR programs (Ascanio Noreña *et al.* 2019).

4.3. (De)politicization

Women face "substantial barriers to participation in formal politics" globally (Koens & Gunawardana

2020, 2-3), and female ex-combatants are no exception. In Nepal, women made significant gains in the aftermath of the People's War with Constitutional guarantees, including 33% of parliamentary seats reserved for women in the Constitution of 2015. Since 2008, the Maoist Party is a major social and political force in Nepal (K.C. & Van Der Haar 2019). The Maoist revolution "broadened women's horizons" (Yadav 2016, 98), and the post-conflict provided "opportunities for Nepali women to organize and act collectively for women's empowerment" (Upreti & Shrestha 2017, 29). In Colombia, female ex-Farc-ep are now allowed to engage in formal politics, with two prominent figures, Victoria Sandino and Sandra Ramírez, as active Senate members. *Farianas y Diversidad*[12] is also actively involved in gathering the memories of the *Farianas* and promoting women and LGBTIQ+ rights in Colombia, engaging with different perspectives on Latin American popular feminism. Both Maoists and *Farianas* are engaged in community actions, especially against gender-based violence.

Nevertheless, structural patriarchal, racial and classist foundations have hardly changed in both post-peace agreement settings. Yet, female ex-combatants are in a particular political position to challenge the *status quo*, given that most of them have experienced different – and most of the time transgressive – political roles in insurgent groups. The question of their militancy after insurgency is, therefore, a central one, and some lessons can be mapped regarding the process in Nepal. Moreover, early conclusions can be made from the 5-years of peace agreement with the Farc-ep about the possible setbacks in their political engagement, and further, about their (de)politicization.

Political reintegration did not receive central attention in DDR programs. As such, many obstacles remain for the political participation – formal or informal – of female ex-combatants. The following points show the persistent political barriers they face:

1) Their transgression of gender norms renders their political participation highly complex, and they are often seen stereotypically by their communities such as "victims", "violent women," "promiscuous," "criminals," etc. This also led to familiar and affective barriers to their political participation.
2) Their political engagement is often devaluated because their knowledge of war is not recognized as politically relevant: female ex-combatants have been "through incredible difficulties and formative experiences during the war, which taught them new warrior skills, a sense of empowerment" (Dahal 2015, 192); however, those skills are most of the time ignored in the reintegration process while their roles as mothers and wives are celebrated (K.C. 2019b). Their political know-how resulting from their participation in war is not renewed in political, associative, and community life after the peace agreement.
3) Once the imperatives of the war are over, women's engagement in the political party (in our case of interest, the Maoist Party and the Farc Party[13]) becomes difficult. Early testimonies of ex-Farc-ep female combatants show that the conciliation of women's agenda (against patriarchal oppression) with the party's political agenda is not easy (Ehasz 2020). Similar lessons can be drawn from the participation of women in the Maoist party: "some of the most prominent women

[12] Their work can be consulted via their Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/MujeresFarianas
[13] At the time of writing, the political party of the Farc – Common Alternative Revolutionary Force as named in 2017 just changed to "*Los Comunes*" – The Commons. This decision stems from the constant stigmatization experienced by ex-combatants because the former name was publicly and politically associated with the extinct armed guerrilla.

Maoists broke away to continue resistance politics" otherwise (Manchanda 2020, 64). This often led to resentment against the party as a certain form of betrayal (Weber 2020).

4) Participation in formal politics continues to be a challenge for female ex-combatants due to the historical barriers that generally affect women globally in their inclusion in the political sphere and our understanding of the private-public divide. Many female ex-combatants struggle to ensure livelihood and are affected by the lack of consideration to the economy of care in DDR programs (Upreti & Shivakoti 2019; Farc 2020). Besides, the insistence on formal and electoral politics undermines the multiple possibilities of engaging in other political spheres (Marhaban & Affiat 2018).

5. Implications for Policy Development and Action: Embodiment and Intersectionality in DDR

> *"I would like to make an appeal to everyone not to tolerate oppression but instead to rebel against such practices."*
>
> Onsari, Maoist female ex-combatant (Berghof Foundation 2020)

The case of Nepal has shown that the reintegration of female ex-combatants poses several additional challenges, particularly because the process has been oriented towards the figure of the male combatant (K.C. 2019b). If the peace process in La Havana offers new venues for the political reintegration of women, many obstacles persist. In this section, from the reflections carried out in this working paper, I argue for a better design of reintegration programs through an intersectional feminist lens.

First, I propose the use of intersectionality, initially thought from Black Feminist Theorists (Hill Collins & Bilge 2016), as a methodological, theoretical, and practical tool for feminist analysis of overlapping systems of oppression. Post-colonial scholars in IR have extended this framework to the analysis of contemporary wars, showing the necessity of thinking about the discipline with a critique of its racial and gendered epistemological assumptions and analyzing armed conflicts from a multiple inequality perspective. Intersectionality is a highly relevant tool that can further help the rethinking of the reintegration programs, in this case, for leftist guerrillas. Second, it is essential to pay attention to embodiment – in its discursive and material multiple manifestations – has been given increasing attention in IR, mostly by poststructuralists feminists who advocate for the inclusion of corporeal and emotional experiences in conflict and transitional settings (Martín de Almagro 2018).

1) An intersectional and embodied focus of DDR would ensure that policies consider the **diversity of identities of female ex-combatants**. This means recognizing that female ex-combatants are intersected with overlapping identities: women, mother, rural, ex-combatant, political agent, indigenous, in a situation of disability, among others (Goswami 2015). DDR programs cannot ensure the full participation of female ex-combatant if it does not recognize their diversity. As Manchanda states, "the diversity in women's responses points to the range of women's lived understanding of the plural and contested meanings of militarization, insecurity, fundamental freedoms and, above all, peace" (2020, 62). This allows for the breaking of binaries that currently contribute to the victimization or stigmatization of female ex-combatants by recognizing their

diverse forms of resistance while also proposing policies that challenge oppressive systems.

2) Following this recognition of diversity, intersectional lenses enable us to question the **power dynamics** at stake in armed conflicts and transitional settings *among female combatants*. Not all women were equally ranked in the militarized hierarchies of the Farc-ep and the CPN-M. Evidently, some of them have gained political and social capital that impacts their transition to civilian society. Questions related to the marital status of some female cadres in the Maoists (Pettigrew & Shneiderman 2004) or their political and military position in the People's war influenced their political positions in the aftermath of war compared to lower positioned female combatants who might still be struggling for their basic needs (K.C. & Van Der Haar 2019). Some conclusions can be drawn from the *Farianas*, where some of them were granted privileges because of particular knowledge (medicine, nursery, cartography) or because of their relationships with high-ranking commanders. Those differences have been reaffirmed in the reincorporation process, and women's experience in rural areas continue to be difficult five years after Havana Peace Deal (Kroc Institute 2019).

3) Policy-oriented intersectional analysis can also **reveal the perpetuation of local power structures**, specifically class, racial and gender-based hierarchies: for example, in Nepal, post-peace agreement political obstacles undercover "the resilience of local patriarchates and the presence of male-dominated kinship networks and all-male informal power structures" (Manchanda 2020, 69). Intersectional DDR programs should address structural inequalities of the so-called "normalcy" where women are reintegrating.

4) Intersectionality allows for the questioning of **structural and global power relationships** that sustains the "global assumptions that tend to homogenize and essentialize the category of women" (Manchanda 2020, 63). Especially, female ex-combatants' knowledge should not be expelled in favor of "international gender experts" that conform to gender mainstreaming politics (Yadav 2017). This, in turn, allows for a critique of global power structures in peacebuilding, denouncing the persistence of colonial relations and "othering." As Goswami (2015) argues about Maoist women, several programs are "about them, but not with them," which contributes to their political marginalization and goes against their political agency. In sum, intersectionality gives us a framework to critique the depoliticization of women's struggles at the local level by the international peacebuilding programs and transitional justice frameworks (Manchanda 2020). As such, intersectional policy analysis is central to **de-universalize reintegration programs**. It allows the questioning of the normalizing effects of such programs and a rethinking of the notions such as "combat," "civil society," "insurgency," and "the political."

5) DDR programs must **re-engage with insurgent identities** (Dietrich 2017) to capture the complexity of the transition from armed insurgencies to civilian society for women. War knowledge of female ex-combatant might contain the seeds for challenging the social-political order and foster political resistance and nonviolent action. How was love experienced in insurgencies? What about grief? Pain? The relationship to the wounded body? To menstruation? How are these emotions can be narrated and, therefore, become political forces? Those experiences have a transformative potential for their political mobilization in return to civilian life, especially for

those who continue their political formal or informal engagement (Nieto-Valdivieso 2017), allowing women to engage as community leaders or agents of local change (Goswami 2015).

6) Embodied and affective approach to DDR would center the reintegration on **everyday politics**: it opens up the realm of what is considered as political, emphasizing the links between productive and reproductive spheres in order to guarantee the time and energy for female ex-combatants to actively participate in political activities (formal or informal) (Steenbergen 2020). This provokes a shift in focus for DDR from security-oriented reintegration (security sector reform; inclusion in the military, etc.) to broader political issues that have been left outside the political realm in transitional settings (such as trauma healing, feminist endogenous economic management, fight against gender-based violence).

7) An intersectional and embodied vision of DDR would comprehend reintegration as a **"decades-long performative process"** (Estrada-Fuentes 2018, 292). Understanding the affective implications of war for female combatants (ex.: trauma, psychological affectation, the joy of militancy, affective relationships) should be central to their reintegration, not only for them but for the whole society who should also be fully involved in this process of war recovery. Reintegration is also about those affective bonds and how they can contribute to challenging the *status quo* of gender relationships. An embodied view of reintegration reorients policy attention to several day-to-day issues that have been historically left out of DDR programs, such as finding a job, taking care of one's health, building emotional ties in a "nuclear family," etc.

In DDR, the last R is central: it is a long-term endeavor, and it is essential to building long-lasting and sustainable peace. Yet, very few comparative studies exist to tackle the current problems faced by female ex-combatants in post-peace agreement settings. Almost 15 years after the signing of the CPA in Nepal, Colombia faces the same challenges in reintegrating women: even though La Havana agreement has made significant progress in implementing a gendered approach to peacebuilding, this working paper has shown the many setbacks in their political participation. Furthermore, it is a feminist task to propose further research venues, policy orientations, and militant options against the silencing of female ex-combatants' voices.

In conclusion, many avenues for research follow from the discussion in this working paper. There is a necessity of conducting comparative analyses between different case studies where women have been engaged in armed insurgencies, comparing the armed groups' gender regimes and their impacts on reintegration programs and women post-peace agreement political participation. Studies are also needed regarding transition periods and political participation of female ex-combatants: how can DDR programs be rethought, from feminist international lenses, to capture the multiplicity of experiences of female ex-combatants? What is the role of feminist / women's groups and collective in their process of reintegration? As Manchanda further asks: "what does the 'empowerment' of women through participation in authoritarian and violently destructive struggles mean for the nature of freedom?" (2004, 238). Moreover, what political and epistemological questions does the female combatant/guerrilla figure pose to feminism and mainstream political science?

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