Food for Justice
Power, Politics
and Food Inequalities
in a Bioeconomy

Food Initiatives by FARC Ex-Combatants

Promoting Peacebuilding and Strengthening Urban-Rural Linkages in Colombia

Felipe Hernández Crespo

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Abstract

This working paper explores how food initiatives led by FARC ex-combatants contribute to peacebuilding and strengthen urban-rural linkages in Colombia. The study investigates the motivations behind ex-combatants' involvement in food initiatives, examines the connection between economic reincorporation and peacebuilding, and analyses how food acts as a bridge, materialising peace between urban and rural communities. Using a multi-method approach, this paper provides an overview of FARC's political trajectory, highlighting its shift from armed insurgency to peacebuilding actor. It further maps the landscape of ex-combatant food initiatives, analysing their scale, organisational structures, roles within the food system, and the intersectional categories that shape them. Findings indicate that ex-combatants often view food-related projects as integral to economic reincorporation, motivated by a blend of campesino heritage, former guerrilla identity, and established regional production knowledge and practices. This combination emphasises the importance of urban-rural linkages in shaping collective reincorporation processes. These food initiatives, grounded in principles of territorial peace, align with broader peacebuilding efforts, aiming to strengthen urban-rural connectivity. Ultimately, this research underscores the critical role of food systems in building lasting peace and highlights the voices and agency of ex-combatants in shaping their futures.

Short biography

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Introduction

The signing of the "Final Agreement to end the Armed Conflict and Build a Stable and Lasting Peace" [Office of the High Commissioner for Peace, 2017], between the Santos' government [2010-2018] and the guerrilla FARC Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia [Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia][1], put an end to more than 50 years of a warlike confrontation. A number of 13,623 FARC ex-combatants[2] [3,143 women] were accredited by the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace including rural guerrilla fighters, urban undercover militia, and ex-combatants in prison [Misión ONU, 2022].

As ex-combatants transition into civilian life, they encounter multifaceted challenges deeply rooted in Colombia's enduring armed conflict and an institutional order that perpetuates long standing socioeconomic inequalities. [García & Álvarez, 2020; García Romero, 2019; Pereira, et al., 2018]. These disparities, characterised by the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities, significantly impede efforts toward sustainable peace and reintegration [FIP, 2019]. The structural inequalities that pervade Colombian society, such as unequal access to land [Indepaz, 2020], limited economic opportunities [Lopera, 2021], and social exclusion [Cortés et al., 2021]—are further magnified in the post-conflict context, perpetuating cycles of poverty and marginalisation for ex-combatants [Bolaño & Mejía, 2020].

Moreover, these challenges intersect with broader axes of inequalities, including gender [Lopera, 2022; ONU Mujeres, 2022], and racial/ethnicity [Lopera Molano, 2020]. The reincorporation process reveals how these intersecting dimensions of inequality not only shape individual experiences but also exacerbate existing vulnerabilities. Women ex-combatants, for instance, often face compounded discrimination due to their gender and ex-combatant status [Lopera, 2022], while Afro-Colombian and Indigenous ex-combatants contend with racialized forms of marginalisation that further limit their access to land and economic opportunities [Lopera Molano, 2020].

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1   Translations from Spanish to English appear in square brackets. If not indicated otherwise all the quotes from literature and interviews translated to English are my own translation.

2   According to the interviews conducted for this research, FARC members do not feel represented by terms that denote an absence of political agency. There are several names that they use to identify themselves [Rebels, Revolutionaries, Peace Signatories, Subjects of Reincorporation, Farianxs, Comunes, Ex-guerrilleros, Unarmed Guerrilla Fighters] but each term only represents particular subjectivities within the collective. For that reason, I will use the international concept of ex-combatant in a broad sense, but also highlighting the notion of a post-disarmament political agency.

The COVID-19 pandemic worsened existing inequalities among ex-combatants, particularly concerning food security (Lopera, 2020; World Food Programme, 2023). The pandemic's impact on supply chains, rising prices, and the overall resilience of food systems highlighted the urgent need for equitable recovery strategies (Delgado et al., 2021). In post-conflict contexts, food systems involve intricate networks that encompass production, processing, distribution, consumption, and waste management, all of which are vulnerable to the disruptions caused by conflict (Delgado, 2019). Conflict severely affects agriculture, infrastructure, and governance, destabilising market systems and transportation networks. These disruptions reduce food availability, inflate prices, and limit product diversity. Additionally, conflict-related violence decreases purchasing power and alters consumption patterns, compounding the food security challenges (Delgado et al., 2021).

Efforts to recover and promote food systems in post-conflict scenarios have been widely studied by international organisations, governments, and cooperation agencies (Delgado et al., 2021). While the relationship between violent conflict and food insecurity, and the role of food security in peacebuilding varies across different contexts, common efforts in these scenarios include rebuilding local agricultural economies, moving beyond subsistence farming, reintegrating into produce markets, and adopting resilience measures such as climate change adaptation (Delgado et al., 2021). In post-genocide Rwanda, rebuilding food systems played a crucial role in the country's recovery, with government-led land reforms establishing a new land tenure system, while community-driven initiatives focused on forming agrarian cooperatives to revitalize local agricultural economies (Pottier, 2006).

However, there is a gap in the literature when it comes to understanding food system transformation from the subjectivities of ex-combatants who are seeking to reincorporate into a society that they once tried to change through armed means. This research will primarily investigate the role of food initiatives to promote peacebuilding efforts and strengthen rural-urban linkages, bringing forward the voices of FARC ex-combatants in their reincorporation processes. The main research question that drives this research is: How have food initiatives by FARC ex-combatants contributed to peacebuilding and strengthened urban-rural linkages? Complementary questions will be addressed in the following sections and are: Where does ex-combatants' interest for food-related initiatives come from? What is the relation between food initiatives, reincorporation processes, and peacebuilding? How peace is materialised through food and helped in bridging urban and rural settings?

This paper is rooted in my master's thesis research, conducted under the guidance of Dr. Marco Teixeira and Prof. Dr. Renata Motta. The topic of this research emerged during Professor Motta's seminar on "Researching Food Movements: a multi-methods approach," with the participation of members of the research group "Food for Justice: Power, Politics and Food Inequalities in a Bioeconomy". During this seminar I was able to address the main axes of inequality, articulate global entangled inequalities (Jelin, Motta, & Costa. 2017), and explore the strategies and practices employed by different types of food movements (Motta, 2021a) to denounce and overcome these food inequalities.
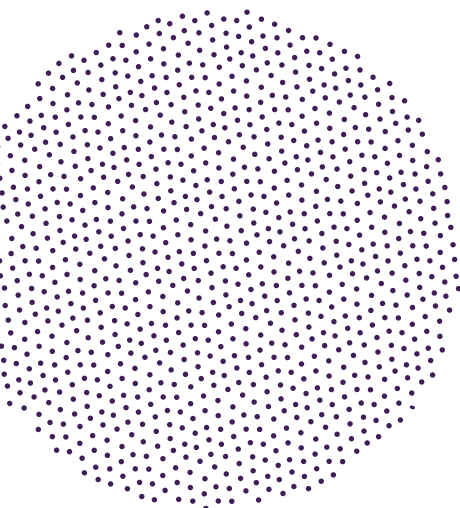
Food for Justice focuses on social mobilisation targeting injustices within food systems and explores social and political innovations aimed at addressing inequalities (Motta, 2021a). My research aligns closely with Food for Justice, as it acknowledges the agency of social movements and marginalised communities striving to collectively fight against intersectional food inequalities (Motta, 2021b) and in the case of Colombia also achieve a sustainable peace in the territories.

In the first section (1), I introduce the multimethod approach employed for this research. Section two (2) focuses on the political subjectivity of FARC ex-combatants, providing an overview of FARC's history. This is followed by section three (3), which examines the transition from campesino armed insurgency to a peacebuilding landscape after the peace agreement. Here, key dimensions are explored, including the relationship between liberal peace and food security (3.1), the link between territorial peace and food sovereignty (3.2), and the economic aspects of reincorporation (3.3).

Moving forward, section four (4) presents the results of mapping food initiatives in a peacebuilding context. This section delves into the landscape of ex-combatants' food initiatives (4.1) and explores FARC political subjectivities related to food and the creation of urban-rural linkages (4.2). Section (4.3) highlights the role of food initiatives as tools for reincorporation, particularly in their ability to bridge urban and rural settings between ex-combatants and the wider Colombian population. Additionally, section (4.4) provides insights from coffee production and processing as a case study to illustrate the cultural meanings of the economy and the materialisation of peace . Finally, section five (5) offers the paper's concluding discussions, drawing together the key findings and reflections.

1 | Multimethod Approach

In this section, I will outline the multimethod approach employed to investigate the landscape of FARC food-related peace initiatives. This approach encompasses various methodologies, each contributing unique insights to the overarching mapping exercise. Initially, I will describe the mapping, which serves as the cornerstone, aimed at delineating the scope and significance of these initiatives in shaping Colombia's peacebuilding landscape. Subsequently, I conducted fieldwork in three cities, engaging in informal discussions with relevant stakeholders, and conducted semi-structured interviews with FARC ex-combatants and experts.

The **mapping** aimed at delineating ex-combatants' food-related peace initiatives[3]. This method helped to identify food initiatives as ways to foster peacebuilding context. Within this research framework, a food-related peace initiative encompasses organised efforts aimed at leveraging food systems to promote peace, particularly by addressing economic opportunities within rural and urban settings. Adhering to this definition, the study focuses on key categories, including scale of action, associative forms, food systems and the sub-category types of food production, and intersectional categories.

Table 1:
Analytical Categories for Mapping

Category	Example
Scales of action	multiscalarity: national, regional, local [Goodman & Goodman, 2009]
Associative form	cooperative, association, federation
Food system	production, distribution networks, preparation, consumption and disposal of food [Goody, 1982] Sub-category. Types of food production: coffee, beer, honey, etc
Intersectional categories	gender, racial/ethnicity, rural difference [Motta, 2021a; Motta & Teixeira, 2021]

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3   The mapping exercise did not aim to provide a comprehensive compilation of all associative forms led by ex-combatants. Instead, it focused primarily on leveraging online resources and information gathered from events and interviews. Obtaining information on local initiatives in rural areas, particularly those specialising in fish farming and livestock production, proved to be challenging.

In guiding the mapping process, I have drawn upon methodological approaches similar to those delineated by Carvalho et al. (2022a, 2022b). In delineating the scales of action, I have drawn upon the research of Goodman & Goodman (2009) to provide a framework for understanding the diverse levels at which these initiatives operate. The conceptualization of the term food system, originally articulated by Goody (1982), serves as a framework, encapsulating the multifaceted processes inherent in the production, distribution, preparation, consumption, and disposal of food. Furthermore, I draw upon the notion of intersectional food inequalities (Motta, 2021a) and rural differences (Motta & Teixeira, 2021), enabling an examination of the intersecting axes of inequality within food-related peace initiatives. Finally, for the category of associative form and the sub-category types of food production, emerged organically during the mapping process itself.

For the mapping exercise, comprehensive data was gathered regarding various food-related initiatives covering the period of January 2021 to December 2023. This process entailed comprehensive searches across social media platforms, official websites, and newspapers, inspired by the work done by Carvalho et al. (2022a; 2022b). Some criteria were established to differentiate and identify what qualifies as a food-related peace initiative, thus defining the scope of the research.

Table 2:
Mapping Scope

Scope	Definition
Time Scope	Initiatives and associative forms that originated after the signing of the 2016 peace agreement.
Geographic Scope	The focus lies within the national borders of Colombia.
Actor Scope	I expanded the scope beyond initiatives solely composed of ex-combatants, including constellations involving at least one member with such a background. Individual enterprises were not considered in the mapping.
Sector Scope	My examination was restricted to those ex-combatant' initiatives directly related to any aspect of the food system.

The **fieldwork** spanned from October 2021 to January 2022, encompassing engagement with ex-combatant networks in the cities of Bogotá, Medellín and Cali. This endeavour employed various field data collection techniques, including initial exploratory discussions with potential interviewees and stakeholders within the respective territories. It further encompassed informal interviews and conversations with ex-combatants and individuals who held contrasting viewpoints compared to those interviewed as part of my research, thereby enriching the spectrum of perspectives. I registered my observations in a fieldwork diary. Additionally, I had the opportunity of immersing myself in the firsthand experience of peace initiatives. This participant observation provided me with tangible insights into the material dimensions of these food-related products. Participant observation served as a vital qualitative research method, facilitating direct engagement with participants in their environments (Flick, 2018).

It's noteworthy that certain ex-combatants exhibited hesitancy to converse, potentially stemming from security reasons during that period, suggesting their preference for maintaining a discreet profile. A pattern emerged, wherein the visibility of select ex-combatants corresponded with a heightened sense of security and acceptance within society. In contrast, those overseeing organisational processes, operating with less visibility, appeared to face increased vulnerability and risks.

I also conducted **semi-structured interviews**. This method was designed to establish comparability among interviewees while maintaining flexibility throughout the process (Mayring, 2000). In crafting the interview guide for this research, an equilibrium was sought between providing structure and allowing openness, and the most important, affording interviewees the latitude to share their perspectives in a manner that honoured their unique subjectivity. This guide incorporated thematic clusters that would later serve as categories during the data analysis phase (Mayring, 2000). To meticulously manage the interview data, all recordings were gathered, meticulously reviewed, organised into relevant thematic groupings, and subsequently coded with the software for qualitative data analysis MAXQDA.

The selection of interviewees was guided by a concern for diversity in the perspectives represented. Two interviewees identified themselves as women and two as men, with two being part of the urban militia and two being rural guerrilla combatants. It should be noted that during wartime, interviewees may have asked to use their guerrilla first names instead of their legal names for security reasons, so it remains at the discretion of each individual. Additionally, insights on the current political landscape in relation to food-related peace initiatives were provided by four experts from academia and government agencies. In sum, a total of eight interviews were conducted.

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2 | FARC ex-combatants as Political Subjects

This section provides a succinct historical examination of the FARC, tracing their origins within the campesino struggles.

The FARC political subject has evolved over time, starting as a rural self-defence tactical group, then transitioning to a large-scale military guerrilla with undercover militiamen in the cities, before ultimately becoming a peace signatory and subject of the reincorporation process. Before the foundation of the guerrilla group in 1964, the FARC were deployed as a product and heirs of the agrarian struggles of the 1920s, 1930s, as well as victims of the bipartisan violence of the 1940s and 1950s (CNMH, 2014). The period known as *La Violencia* [The Violence] had its genesis on April 9, 1948, with the assassination of left-wing politician and charismatic leader Jorge Eliecer Gaitán, and continued until the establishment of the National Front in 1958, resulting in an estimated 200,000 deaths (CNMH, 2014).

Distinguished Colombian academics, such as Pizarro (1991), Sanchez (1977), and Guzmán et al. (1962), consider *La Violencia* as the beginning of the current Colombian internal armed conflict. According to FARC narratives, they see themselves as victims of *La Violencia*, proclaiming themselves to be targets of the national bloodshed of that time, as well as victims of the state and hence justify their actions as "obligatory or defensive violence" (Aguilera 2014, p. 20). In their original phase, FARC recognized themselves as a defensive force, which gave concrete projection to the political-military notion of self-defence tactics (CNMH, 2014, p. 11). To analyse the different phases of the FARC's insurgency, I will use the four phases proposed by Aguilera (2014) in order to examine changes in aims, means, and the public opinion over time.

The initial phase (1964-1978) saw the FARC being primarily influenced by the direction of the Colombian communist party, lacking clarity and endurance in terms of strategy, and building its discourse around the idea of agrarian struggle (Aguilera 2014). The FARC guerrilla group was established with an agrarian program as a foundational element of its political agenda. According to Medina Gallego (2009), the Marquetalia Agrarian Program (1964) became the rallying point for the revolutionary group that had deep roots in the *campesino* territories, emerging in the context of an ongoing struggle over land that dated back to the early 20th century.

The second phase (1978-1991) is defined by the political crisis at the end of the 1970s and 1980s, which resulted in an enhanced official security rhetoric, as well as the growth of paramilitary groups, new guerrilla groups, and drug trafficking (Aguilera 2014). After unsuccessful peace negotiations with the conservative Betancur

administration (1982-1986), the FARC political wing ventured into representative democracy with the creation of a political party called *Unión Patriotica* [Patriotic Union]. Tragically, the *Unión Patriotica* members were subject of a political genocide by the state and its paramilitary forces (Medina Gallego, 2009). Approximately 3500 of its members were exterminated, which annihilated the party almost completely in the 1990s.

The third phase (1991-2008) is defined by the FARC's *Campaña para la Nueva Colombia* [Campaign for the New Colombia] whose major goal was to conquer Bogotá and seize national authority. According to Aguilera (2014), they completely engaged in war, launching a vast military offensive, and capturing additional territories. FARC transformed into an army with a large-scale military offensive strategy and changed into a more strategic actor, expanding into new territories, and installing alternative economic systems in the rural areas (CNMH, 2014).

In its period of military expansionism, FARC moved closer to the illicit drug circuits, the regular exchange with criminal gangs, and the use of corruption mechanisms characteristic of traditional clientelism. Doing this, FARC obtained funds from local administrations and got involved in practices that undermined the moral discourse that the insurgency had historically wielded against the economic and political elites (CNMH, 2014). By the end of the fourth phase (2008-2013) FARC was pushed back to their rear areas and initial steps were taken towards the 2016 peace agreement.

The relationship between FARC and Colombian society is described as highly ambivalent, changing across time and region, as well as depending on the military and social actions applied by the organisation (CNMH, 2014). Uribe's right-wing government (2002-2010) responded to the guerrilla warfare expansion, first with full army force, supported by the enormous military and economic assistance of the US-led effort *Plan Colombia* [Colombian Plan]; and second, with a strong counter-insurgent propaganda that deepened the role of the internal enemy (INER, 2015), and shaped public opinion and mainstream society attitudes against FARC members.

Franco (2009) argued that political propaganda during the insurgency created distorted portrayals of war that dehumanised and demonised the insurgents. Traditional media also played a role in shaping public opinion and constructing a collective perception of the insurgents, in order to gain support and legitimise the counterinsurgency efforts. These narratives, fueled by counterinsurgent animosity, aimed to resist change and maintain a social order that favoured the ruling classes (Franco, 2009). The stigmatisation of FARC was persistent in various spheres of society (Pares, 2022), and negatively affects the new role of ex-combatants as peace signatories and subjects of the reincorporation processes.

3 | From a Campesino Armed Insurrection to a Peacebuilding Scenario

This section analyses strategies for resolving violent conflicts in a peacebuilding process. First, it focuses on the "Liberal Peace" paradigm and its relation with food security (3.1). Subsequently, the focus shifts to an analysis of the concepts of *paz territorial* and food sovereignty, elucidating their contributions to the formation of sustainable peace (3.2). Finally, the examination extends to the dimensions of economic reincorporation, offering insights into the intricate relationship between the economic reincorporation of ex-combatants and the broader context of peacebuilding (3.3).

3.1. Liberal Peace, Food Regimes and Food Security

The inclusion of strategies for resolving violent conflicts in a peacebuilding process is contingent on the interpretation of violence (Walteros, 2011). The divide stems from the distinction between direct violence and structural violence (Galtung, 1969) disrupts the shared understanding of peacebuilding. Walteros (2011) identifies two perspectives: one that focuses on addressing only the root causes of direct violence (referred to as the institutional approach), and another that advocates for transforming the state to address structural inequalities and establish sustainable peace (known as the social justice approach). Hereafter, a comparison of these perspectives will be made, and their relevance to food system transformation in post-conflict settings will be explored.

The institutional approach (Walteros, 2011), coming from international organisations, considers peacebuilding as an "action to identify and support structures which tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict" (UN, 2010, p. 45). This definition influenced how the Agency for Reincorporation and Normalisation (ARN), during the Duque government (2018-2022) implemented the reincorporation processes for ex-combatants. The ARN interpreted reincorporation primarily as a socio-economic stabilisation process based on Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) and peacebuilding international guidelines (ARN, 2022). A perspective that is often seen in the literature on peace and conflict studies as a liberal peace approach (David, 1999; Chandler, 2010; Richmond, 2011).

The DDR framework is a field-applied set of strategies and policies, as well as a dis-

course, which has been implemented in armed conflict settings worldwide. Initially, DDR measures were implemented in conjunction with other initiatives aimed at helping war-torn nations recover, through strategies like humanitarian assistance and compensation schemes [World Bank, 2002]. A change in the DDR paradigm occurred in the early 2000s, transforming it from a purely humanitarian problem to one that also involves development and security [Richmond, 2011], now situating the subject of the ex-combatant within a security narrative.

The World Bank [2002], a strategic participant in DDR, asserts that the overall goal is centred on restoring security and promoting peace, both of which are necessary preconditions for sustained economic growth and the reduction of poverty. The aim really supports a goal, namely strengthening the stability of national economies to include them into the global market economy [Richmond, 2011].

One significant aspect of the discourse on security relates to the protection and safety of food. Food security "exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" [World Food Summit, 1996, n.d.]. In the securitization narrative of liberal peace, the concept of food security constitutes a crucial element of human security, with a particular emphasis on ensuring that individuals have access to adequate nutrition in regions affected by conflict or in post-conflict situations.

This securitization narrative often involves the involvement of external actors, such as international organisations, states, or non-governmental organisations. These external actors may play a role in shaping food security policies, programs, and interventions, guided by their own priorities, interests, and perspectives, which may not always align with local needs or context-specific solutions [Shepherd, 2012].

Richmond [2011] in his critique of liberal peace argues that state policies for post-conflict are usually framed as security policies rather than policies that take into account structural changes in societies. And adds that, "the politics of the liberal peace are perceived to represent the maintenance of existing normative and political hierarchies at the local, national, and global levels" [Richmond, 2011, p. 7]. According to this, liberal peace does not guarantee that structural conditions, that gave rise to the conflict in the first place, will be addressed by authorities. Furthermore, actions to achieve peace after securitization, are aimed essentially at restoring state capacity for market institutions to function properly [Hazen, 2007].

Food security and food regimes are interconnected concepts in the discourse of food systems and global food governance [McMichael, 2005]. Food regimes, as conceptual frameworks, provide an understanding of the dominant patterns and dynamics in the production, distribution, and consumption of food at a global scale, including the roles of states, international institutions, and transnational corporations [Holt-Giménez & Shattuck, 2011; McMichael, 2005]. These regimes shape the rules, policies, and practices that govern the global food system.

For instance, the current corporate food regime, characterised by the dominance of transnational corporations, neoliberal deregulation of markets, and globalised food supply chains [McMichael, 2005], may influence food security by affecting

access to markets, influencing the availability and affordability of certain types of food, and shaping trade policies that can impact food production and distribution in different territories (Sage, 2013).
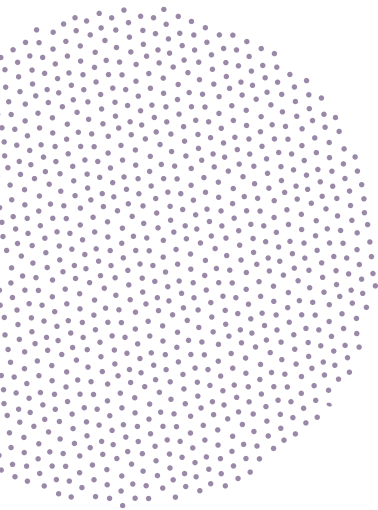
3.2. Paz Territorial and Food Sovereignty

In contrast to the liberal peace approach, several political projects have advocated for alternative strategies that prioritise social justice (Walteros, 2011). The approach, known as *Paz Territorial* [Territorial Peace] (Jaramillo, 2013; Cairo et al., 2018), is built on participatory processes, and the cumulative struggles of historical processes in the territories. This alternative approach incorporates the political agendas of civil society and grassroots movements, including *campesinos*, indigenous, and afro-descendant communities, who have historically supported non-military solutions to the social conflict in Colombia and advocated for democratic processes in the territories (Baquero Melo, 2022).

It is argued that *Paz Territorial* is a concept that emerged from the dynamics of communities in the territory, and the way they understand peace (Cairo et al., 2018). For Peña (2019) peace is a political process that consists of (re)appropriating a geographical space in order to carry out an economic-cultural project for a dignified, ecologically sustainable life and the protection of community life in the face of violence and war. The search for peace implies territorial dynamics in the sense that transforming the spatiality of war and violence means that the territory, the materially and symbolically appropriated living space, once again fulfils the collective functions that it has lost due to the armed conflict (Peña, 2019).

Since the signing of the 2016 peace agreement, the concept of *Paz Territorial* has sparked public debate, as well as a recognition of the diverse peace efforts developed in the territories. The *Paz Territorial* framework emphasises the need for differentiated approaches that account for the spatial and temporal heterogeneity of the war, its effects, and its impacts (González et al., 2015). From this perspective, there is no singular definition of peacebuilding. Instead, it encompasses multiple conceptions that vary depending on the perspectives of different actors, the particularities of the territories, and the various moments of interactions (Jaramillo, 2013). According to Nova (2017), in order to promote public and territorial debate of the economic model, peacebuilding must overcome the interrelated epistemic and developmental violence.

As a part of initiatives aimed at countering the violence of the hegemonic economic model, "food sovereignty emerges as a viable option for an alternative global moral economy" (McMichael 2005, pp. 286), in the sense that promotes "the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems" (Nyéléni, 2007, n.d.). Food sovereignty is a concept and a movement, distinct from the securitization narrative inherent in food security, that emphasises the rights of people, communities, and countries to control their own food systems, including food production, distribution, and consumption, based on their cultural, social, and ecological contexts (Patel, 2009).

Food sovereignty and *Paz Territorial* share common principles in their approaches. Both emphasise the participation of local communities in decision-making processes related to food systems and governance structures. Food sovereignty aligns with the concept of *Paz Territorial* by jointly underscoring the empowerment of local communities. In the *Paz Territorial* discourse, the empowerment of local communities is regarded as a pivotal element in establishing enduring peace. This approach facilitates the incorporation of diverse perspectives, nurtures a sense of belonging, and reinforces social cohesion. Furthermore, food sovereignty advances the cause of local and sustainable food production, focuses on the welfare of small-scale *campesinos* and food producers, and advocates for the right to wholesome and culturally appropriate food for all (Patel, 2009).

In the 2016 peace agreement, as part of chapter 1 on Comprehensive Rural Reform, the subchapter "System for the progressive guarantee of the right to food" foresees:

"in fulfilment of the obligation to progressively realise the human right to healthy, nutritional and culturally appropriate food, with the aim of eradicating hunger and enhancing the availability of, access to and consumption of sufficient nutritional food, the National Government will set in motion a special system for the progressive realisation of the right to food for the rural population" (Office of the High Commissioner for Peace, 2017. p. 32).

In that sense, the discourse on *Paz Territorial* involves addressing issues related to political power, and territorial control, and acknowledges the significance of addressing underlying causes of conflicts, such as unequal access to food and resources (Peña, 2019). Similarly, both food sovereignty and *Paz Territorial* can be seen as a combined framework to promote sustainable and ecological food production practices, as well as peacebuilding measures to prevent future conflicts over resources.

3.3. Dimensions of Economic Reincorporation

The post-conflict in Burundi provides a valuable example for understanding the DDR framework in its most individualised form. Mechanisms of economic reintegration were regularly based on monthly monetary allowances and other economic incentives, which in certain situations are insufficient to ensure its effectiveness. The "cash and in-kind transfers program" had beneficial spillovers in the communities where ex-combatants returned. ex-combatants spent a considerable portion of their allowance on food, clothes and other items, generating a brief economic boom in the communities. However, for families of ex-combatants as well as for communities where ex-combatants returned, the long-term development of consumption indicators is negative, indicating that the immediate effect and any long-term spillovers of the program were lost (D'Aoust et al., 2018).

In the terminology outlined by the United Nations (2006; 2010) guidelines on Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR), the term "Reintegration" typically denotes the process of an ex-combatant reintegrating into civilian life on

an individual basis. However, the approach to DDR differed between Burundi and Colombia, particularly in the 2016 Colombian peace agreement, which adopted a more collective approach. While government representatives aimed to introduce an individualised approach through the concept of "economic reintegration" during the peace agreement negotiations (Office of the High Commissioner for Peace, 2017), FARC negotiators chose to distance themselves from the individualistic connotations inherent in traditional reintegration processes. Instead, they opted for the term "Reincorporation" to underscore the collective significance within this specific DDR process (Misión ONU, 2022).

This shift in terminology had a significant impact on the perception and implementation of economic measures stemming from the peace agreement. It facilitated the development of social solidarity economies (SSEs) (Sorzano & Botero, 2022) and associative structures, departing from individualistic approaches and showing limited interest in formal labour market inclusion (FIP, 2019). In that sense, the FARC, in alignment with its Marxist-Leninist political ideology, championed cooperativism as a strategic avenue for achieving their collective economic reincorporation[4]. Their aim was to counteract atomization within the process by fostering collective associativity within the economy.

"With the aim of stimulating different associative forms of work for and between small and medium-sized producers, based on solidarity and cooperation, which promote economic independence and organisational ability, especially in rural women, and which strengthen the ability of small producers in terms of access to goods and services, marketing their goods, and, in general, improving their living, working, and production conditions, the National Government will set up and implement the National Plan to Foment the Rural Solidarity and Cooperative Economy" (Office of the High Commissioner for Peace, 2017, p. 28).

In the aftermath of the agreement, FARC established a national structure named Ecomun *Economías sociales del común* [Social economies of the commons], to promote cooperativism and SSE alternatives. Ecomun worked first as a national cooperative, and recently transformed into a federation, that aims to bring together production and distribution initiatives from ex-combatants under one umbrella. Its goal is to coordinate efforts among cooperatives at local and regional levels, strengthen interconnections between them, and support the construction of a Paz Territorial with social justice. As of 2022, there were 177 cooperatives of ex-combatants across the country, with 45 of them being represented by women (ONU, 2022).

Although the associative formations chosen by FARC negotiators and established in the peace agreement (2016) for the economic reincorporation of ex-combatants were cooperatives, those are not the only form of associativity for ex-combatants. The Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, which provides technical support to develop the evaluation and monitoring model of the peace agreement, notes a common trend in the territories, where ex-combatants have developed

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4   This approach draws parallels to Lenin's proposition in the 1920s to alleviate tensions with the Russian peasantry. Lenin's proposal involved a revaluation of the path to socialism, favouring a socialist market economy over a centralised one. This shift entailed the promotion of agrarian cooperatives (Atkins, 2007).

their own productive projects and collectives in a self-organised manner. Kroc positively assesses these initiatives, that "do not wait until the central government resolves their necessities" and instead reunite economic and human capital on a local level (Kroc 2019, p. 85).

Figure 1 - Café Trópicos, Mesa Nacional del Café. URL: https://www.reincorporacion.gov.co/es/sala-de-prensa/noticias/Paginas/2022/Cafe-cultivado-por-excombatientes-llega-con-punto-de-venta-a-la-Universidad-de-Antioquia.aspx
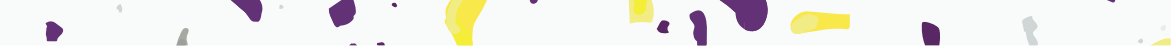
4 | Food Initiatives in a Peacebuilding Context

In this section, I will analyse the landscape of food initiatives as they relate to the reincorporation processes of ex-combatants. First, I present the findings of the mapping exercise, along with the key variables used for analysis (4.1). I then examine why food initiatives have become a central economic activity for ex-combatants, focusing on their connections to both urban and rural roots (4.2). Next, I discuss how these initiatives are integrating ex-combatants into Colombian society, as well as the challenges and obstacles they face in contributing effectively to peacebuilding efforts (4.3). Finally, I explore the symbolic significance of coffee within these initiatives, highlighting its role in materialising peace and its transformative potential (4.4).

4.1. Ex-combatants Food Initiatives Landscape

The mapping of these initiatives covers two key aspects of the **food system**, as outlined by Goody (1982). The first aspect, food production, includes obtaining and processing food, while the second, food distribution, addresses how food is shared or exchanged within a society. Based on this mapping, among the 68 initiatives identified, 41 focus exclusively on food production and local sales, 9 prioritise regional distribution, and 16 combine both production and distribution efforts. Additionally, there are 2 national initiatives that promote these food initiatives at a broader level, although they are not directly involved in their production or distribution activities.

Different **types of food production** are discernible within the landscape of ex-combatant initiatives, encompassing a diverse array of products. Notably, coffee production and processing represent the most prevalent category, with 38 initiatives, exemplified by ventures like award-winning *Café Trópicos, Frutos de la Esperanza*. Additionally, there are 5 initiatives that focused on beer production, such as *La Roja* in Bogotá, highlighting the burgeoning craft beer sector. Other categories include honey production, with 5 initiatives such as *Miel La Montaña* in Anorí. Furthermore, there are initiatives dedicated to dairy products, eggs, fish farming, meat, fruits and vegetables, oil and nuts, each contributing to the diverse food landscape in Colombia and the relation to the region productive expertise where the ex-combatants were located during their reincorporation process, as will be explained in section 4.2.

Distribution initiatives specifically aim to bridge rural areas with major urban centres such as Bogotá, Medellín, and Cali, exemplified by projects like *Amor a Tiempo*, *Mercado de Mujeres*, and *De Mano en Mano*, respectively. These efforts highlight the importance of rurality and its distinct contributions, an aspect that will be explored further in the following paragraphs.

Within the **intersectional categories** identified in the mapping of initiatives, I found three main intersectional axes influencing the experiences of ex-combatants during their reincorporation process: rural difference, gender, and race/ethnicity.

A significant portion of the initiatives (39 out of 68) are based in rural areas, emphasising the importance of understanding the **rural difference** within the reincorporation process (see section 4.3). In contrast, fewer initiatives (13 out of 68) operate in urban settings, targeting both major cities and smaller urban centres. The remaining initiatives (16 out of 68) span both urban and rural areas, aiming to strengthen connections between these regions through the development of new markets. This rural-urban interconnection highlights the varied contexts in which reincorporation occurs and underscores the unique challenges and opportunities each setting presents.

In addition, **gender** emerges as a key axis in both urban and rural contexts. (20 out of 68) initiatives stand out for their focus on gender and rurality, particularly those led by ex-combatant women. Notable examples include Asomanuelitas in Cauca, the Asociación de Mujeres Huilenses por la Paz in Huila, and Mercado de Mujeres in Medellín. These initiatives emphasise the role of gender in shaping the experiences of ex-combatants, especially in rural areas affected by armed conflict, where women often encounter additional barriers to social and economic participation (Zuluaga-Sánchez & Arango-Vargas, 2013).

In this mapping, the third intersectional axis focuses on **race/ethnicity**, (8 out of 68) emphasising these intersections. According to a 2017 characterization of the FARC community conducted by the National University of Colombia, 18% of ex-combatants identified as indigenous, while 12% identified as Afro-descendant. Among indigenous ex-combatants, 76% were male and 24% were female, while among Afro-descendants, 86% were male and 14% were female.

Initiatives such as *Café el Tercer Acuerdo* in Planadas, Tolima and the *Cooperativa Multiactiva Indígena para la Paz* in Riosucio, Caldas illustrate the importance of race and ethnicity sensitive approaches to reincorporation. The case of *Café el Tercer Acuerdo* reflects joint efforts between ex-combatants, indigenous groups, and local rural communities, highlighting the complex intersections of race and ethnicity with the socio-political realities of post-agreement Colombia (Lopera Molano, 2020).

The conceptualization of **scales** within the framework of Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) by Goodman and Goodman (2009) emphasises that food systems function across multiple interconnected levels, from the local to the global. AFNs are networks of food production, distribution, and consumption that seek to challenge conventional, industrialised food systems, often prioritising sustainability, reflexive

localism, and social justice [Goodman & Goodman, 2009].

In line with the concept of **multiscalarity** [Goodman & Goodman, 2009], where food systems operate across various levels, 3 initiatives exemplify AFNs at the national scale, involving ex-combatants across multiple regions. These include the *Federación Nacional de Economías Sociales del Común* [Ecomun][5], which encompasses most of the ex-combatant cooperatives nationwide [Ecomun, 2018], the *Federación Mesa Nacional del Café* [Femncafé][6], and *Desde la Raíz*, an initiative created by the ARN. At the regional scale, 2 notable initiatives include *Federación de Organizaciones Sociales y Solidarias Suroccidente* [Fedecomun] in the southwest region, and *Federación de Economía Solidaria Efraín Guzmán* in the northwest region of Colombia.

However, the majority of initiatives [63 out of 68] operate on a **local scale**, serving specific communities. This distribution reflects Goodman and Goodman [2009] argument that scales are relational and interconnected rather than hierarchical, with local initiatives often shaped by broader regional and national forces while maintaining their focus on local needs and conditions.

The mapping identified three distinct **associative forms**: Associations, which are groups of individuals who come together within a single organisation to pursue a shared purpose, united by common interests; Cooperatives, which are enterprises owned and managed by their members, who may be individual workers or a network of similar organisations collaborating for mutual benefit; and Federations, which are groups of collectives or organisations that unite, typically due to shared interests or goals, to strengthen their collective influence and capacity.

The preference for the cooperative model as the main associative form[7] [46 out of 68] can be traced back to the provisions outlined in the peace agreement as previously mentioned in section 3.3. Embracing cooperativism as an associative framework has not only enabled ex-combatants, but also urban and rural communities affected by the armed conflict, to come together and benefit from collective initiatives that promote SSEs [García Müller & Álvarez, 2020].

A key distinction within the associative forms of ex-combatant initiatives is the choice between forming cooperatives or associations. While the Colombian legal framework does not clearly differentiate these forms in terms of embodying the principles of SSEs,[8] interviews revealed notable practical differences. One of these

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5   The inception of Ecomun, initially envisioned as a national cooperative, eventually evolved into a federation, with the purpose of incorporating other cooperatives for management, training, technical support, and organisational guidance. The strategic objective of Ecomun involved the formation of grassroots cooperatives, the grouping of these cooperatives by region, and by lines of productive or economic activity [Ecomun. 2018].

6   Femncafe emerged from the initiative of multiple cooperatives and associations of ex-combatants working on coffee production and processing, facilitated by the support of the ARN. In their own words: "We are more than an organisation; we are a community united by a passion for coffee and a commitment to social justice, peace, and resilience" [Femncafe. n.d.].

7   Several individual enterprises pursue diverse food-related ventures, including restaurants, neighbourhood stores, and other types of individual projects facilitated by the ARN's individual reintegration framework. It's important to note that these enterprises were not included in the mapping exercise.

8   Cooperatives are regulated by the Superintendence of the Solidarity Economy and must comply with Law 79 of 1988, which establishes the principles of cooperativism, such as democratic management and equal member participation. Associations are regulated by the Colombian Civil Code and regulations governing non-profit entities. They are registered with the chambers of commerce and local authorities according to their type and activity. Decisions are made democratically, but the bylaws can provide for different participation mechanisms depending on the internal structure of the association [Arango Jaramillo, 2023].

is the dissatisfaction some initiatives felt with how Ecomun was coordinating efforts for economic reincorporation, largely due to internal political divisions within the FARC political party (Pulido, J., personal communication, November 13, 2021).

Additionally, a significant factor contributing to the formation of associations (17 out of 68), as further discussed in section 4.2, is the difference between urban militia and rural guerrilla backgrounds. Since cooperatives fell under the coordination of Ecomun, some ex-combatants, particularly urban militia members, chose not to sign the agreement for personal or political reasons. These individuals, seeking to remain anonymous, opted to form associations instead, an organisational structure that operated outside the scope of the FARC political party and government agencies overseeing the implementation of the peace agreement.

4.2. FARC Political Subjectivities Around Food and Urban-Rural Linkages

Not all ex-combatants possess the necessary agricultural knowledge or skills, particularly since many joined the guerrilla at a young age. Nonetheless, agriculture remains the predominant vocation for most ex-combatants (Ortega, 2021), and this choice carries profound political significance. Their focus on agrarian cooperativism and the *Paz Territorial* framework, which includes the principles of food sovereignty (Ecomun, 2018), reflects a deliberate effort to shape their economic reincorporation around political ideals rather than merely economic profit. Thus, the emergence of food initiatives by ex-combatants should be understood not just as a means of livelihood, but as a political stance, an expression of their evolving political subjectivities rooted in the specific contexts of their territories.

In this section, I will discuss the motivation behind FARC ex-combatants' engagement in food initiatives, with a pattern showing that people with rural backgrounds tended to choose food initiatives for their economic reincorporation and how it relates to linkages between urban and rural settings. **Three primary factors** can be attributed to it.

First, their *campesino* heritage. In a survey that investigates ex-combatants' roots concerning their rural or urban origin, 66% hailed from rural areas, 19% from urban areas, and 15% had origins in both urban and rural settings. Among those surveyed who expressed interest in developing collective projects, 60% aimed to engage in agricultural activities, while 37% intended to establish *campesino* markets (UNAL, 2017).

Many ex-combatants have skills related to food production that have been passed down through generations and have historically been entangled with the Colombian *campesinado* (CNMH, 2014). Following the peace agreement, numerous ex-combatants showcased a wide range of skills in food production, stemming not only from newly acquired knowledge, but also from the amalgamation of diverse identities, primarily derived from campesino communities, which were shaped during their time of armed conflict against the state (CNMH, 2014). These skills were
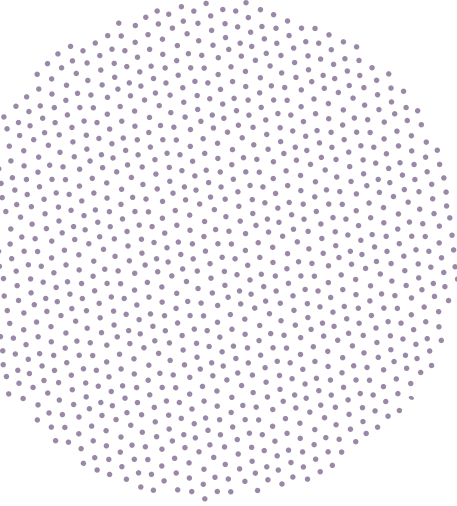
harnessed by different groups of ex-combatants, who organised themselves to establish food-related initiatives in both rural and urban areas.

The urban and rural settings play a crucial role in shaping the decision-making process of ex-combatants when they choose to engage in food-related initiatives. These settings influence not only the types of projects they pursue but also the strategies they employ to sustain them. For ex-combatants with rural backgrounds, their connection to the land and traditional *campesino* practices often guides them toward agricultural production. Many possess generational knowledge tied to farming, livestock, and sustainable use of local ecosystems, which, combined with their lived experiences, makes agriculture a natural choice for collective projects.

Their *campesino* heritage fuels a strong commitment to defending rural territories and supporting their communities through reincorporation initiatives. However, their approach is shaped by the relationships forged during the conflict. FARC's presence across the country led to varied dynamics with local communities. In regions with a history of guerrilla resistance, FARC established social order and formed alliances with *campesino* communities, often strengthened by kinship ties. Conversely, in areas marked by military expansion and conquest, FARC was frequently viewed as occupiers, leading to minimal or even non-existent connections with local communities [CNMH, 2014].

Those with urban or mixed urban-rural origins often adopt different approaches. While they may still engage in food production, they are more likely to focus on creating connections between rural producers and urban markets. These ex-combatants tend to prioritise value-added processes such as food distribution, market organisation, or the commercialization of products that serve the needs of urban populations. Their familiarity with urban settings equips them with skills in logistics, sales, and distribution networks that are critical for establishing *campesino* markets or cooperative ventures that bridge urban and rural economies.

Moreover, the urban-rural settings influence the resources and support systems available to ex-combatants. In rural areas, ex-combatants may have access to land and communal networks, but they often face challenges such as limited market access, and inadequate infrastructure. Urban-based initiatives, on the other hand, benefit from proximity to consumers and access to commercial infrastructure, but may struggle to find space for food production.

Second, the distinction between militia and guerrilla status, along with the urban-rural dynamics linked to these roles, plays a key role in shaping ex-combatants' reincorporation choices. According to the same survey that examined ex-combatants' rural or urban origins [UNAL, 2017], approximately 55% were classified as rural guerrilla fighters [67% male, 33% female], 29% as urban militia members [88% male, 12% female], while a combination of both 16% were incarcerated [93% male, 7% female].

The rural guerrillas and urban militia had distinctly different experiences and training. Guerrilla fighters, more closely associated with rural settings, received

extensive military training and lived in environments that were often remote and agrarian. In contrast, urban militia members, who were less intensively trained, led lifestyles more akin to urban residents and were more familiar with city environments [CNMH, 2014].

This distinction significantly impacts their reincorporation decisions. Rural guerrillas, with their deep ties to rural areas and agriculture [FARC, 1964], are more likely to pursue reincorporation initiatives that leverage their agricultural skills and knowledge in rural settings. Conversely, urban militia members may be drawn to urban or urban-rural areas, where their familiarity with city life and less intensive military training can be better utilised in non-agricultural projects or urban markets.

Third, Ex-combatants' choices in economic activities are often rooted in the productive traditions of their regions. For example, regions with a long history of agriculture or specific types of farming may see a higher concentration of food-related initiatives. In rural areas with established agricultural practices, ex-combatants are likely to continue these practices, leveraging their prior knowledge and skills. Ecomun [2018] highlights that 60% of economic activities by ex-combatant cooperatives are concentrated in agriculture, reflecting the strong influence of regional productive traditions.

Cooperatives typically align their activities with the dominant economic practices of their regions, leveraging local knowledge and established markets. For instance, in regions known for coffee cultivation, many ex-combatant cooperatives focus on growing and processing coffee. This emphasis is rooted in the historical significance of coffee as a national project during the 20th century [Palacios, 1980] and the traditional coffee industry in areas like the *Eje Cafetero*, where altitude and environmental conditions are ideal for coffee production. This case will be further developed in section 4.4.

In addition to the economic activities based in agriculture, there are non-food related peace initiatives in various regions of Colombia. For example, in the Antioquia region, there is a strong tradition of textile work which has now translated into local textile-focused peace initiatives such as *Textiles la Montaña* [Zanger, 2021], with presence of national federations such as the *Red Nacional de Confecciones por la Paz RENA-C* [López etal., 2022]. In other areas farther from supply chains and food markets, ecotourism has emerged as an option for peace initiatives and economic reincorporation with the peace initiative Caguan Expeditions [Tellez, 2022].

Building on these three factors, there is a tendency for ex-combatants to choose food initiatives as part of their economic reincorporation. The rural-urban division emerges as a factor that intersects and surpasses other influences in shaping their decisions. While *campesino* heritage, militia or guerrilla status, and regional productive traditions significantly impact their choices, it is the urban-rural linkages that provides the overarching framework for their economic strategies. Ex-combatants' strong ties to either rural life or urban experiences shape how they approach food-related projects, with rural settings often driving production-based initiatives and urban areas focusing on markets and distribution.

Thus, the urban-rural context not only determines the type of food-related initiative pursued but also influences the broader strategy and long-term objectives of these efforts.

4.3. Food Initiatives as a reincorporation tool. Bridging urban-rural settings between ex-combatants and the Colombian population

Ex-combatants initially aimed to sell their peace products to fellow ex-combatants. However, the diverse circumstances of reincorporation and their limited economic means made ex-combatants an unreliable customer base for artisanal goods. Instead, these products found traction among individuals committed to the peace process, particularly those from **middle-to-high income backgrounds**, who embraced the idea of intertwining political engagement with economic support for peace initiatives (Nijmeier, T., personal communication, November 5, 2021). This strategy not only sought to provide material sustenance for ex-combatants but also aimed to foster dialogue and raise awareness about peacebuilding among consumers.

Key demographic supporting these initiatives are **urban youth**, particularly from middle-to-high income groups, who are motivated to contribute to peacebuilding efforts (Tellez, L., personal communication, November 2, 2021). Despite initial hesitations stemming from societal stigmatisation (Pares, 2022), ex-combatants found this young, financially stable audience to be receptive. This generation, which came of age after the violent eras of Pablo Escobar and the FARC conflict, demonstrated a strong commitment to peace during the social mobilizations of 2021 (Temblores, 2021). Their support highlights a shift in focus toward post-conflict generations who are eager to contribute to social change, though often outside traditional political channels (Arango, A., personal communication, November 20, 2021).

However, focusing on middle-to-high income consumers **excludes low-income, informal sector and unemployed populations**, sparking controversy among ex-combatants. These lower-income communities, like the ex-combatants themselves, often cannot afford the healthier, artisanal goods produced by peace initiatives. This raises the question of how to extend access to these products to lower-income urban areas while expanding the customer base. As Nijmeier T. (Personal communication, November 5, 2021) suggests, one solution could be to use sales to wealthier individuals to subsidise costs for lower-income consumers. Achieving social justice through local food systems requires addressing the wealth and power imbalances that exist across regions (Allen, 2010). Initiatives like *Amor a Tiempo* (de Vengoechea, 2023) advocate for empowering rural communities within the value chain to address these disparities (Pulido, J., personal communication, November 13, 2021).

Ex-combatants have embraced a *Paz Territorial* approach, seeking to avoid the

historical mistake of concentrating all peace efforts in major cities. However, a critique to the *Paz Territorial* approach, highlights the need to broaden its scope beyond rural areas to include **metropolitan and peri-urban spaces** as part of a continuum of urban-rural dynamics instead of fragmented boxes [Baum, 2019]. While *Paz Territorial* efforts are mainly aimed at rural regions devastated by armed conflict and state neglect, data from the fieldwork shed light on how peri-urban communities—comprising displaced conflict victims, marginalised groups, and, more recently, ex-combatants undergoing reincorporation—are actively engaged in grassroots peacebuilding. However, the risk of displacement due to new violences threatens not only their physical territory but also their ability to self-organise and sustain peace from within [Baum, 2019].

Food initiatives are important ways to connect ex-combatants, mostly from rural areas, to the Colombian population, mostly in urban areas. As a marketing strategy for food-related initiatives, the peace narrative engages part of the population, mainly middle-to-high income and urban youth, it leaves another big part out [Londoño, J., personal communication, December 15, 2021]. The research showed that the biggest challenge for food initiatives is to connect to low-income, unemployed and informal sector populations, mainly in metropolitan and peri-urban spaces. In the following subsection, I delve into the example of a coffee food initiative, showing how they address this challenge of going beyond current peace narratives to sell their products and to connect to a major part of society.

4.4. Coffee and the Materialisation of Peace

The diverse coffee cultivation regions in Colombia, known for their decades of technical expertise [Machado, 1977; Palacios, 1980], are now being harnessed by ex-combatants to lead coffee-related initiatives. Field research data indicates that coffee projects involving ex-combatants, such as *Café Tropicos, Café Maru*, and *Café El Tercer Acuerdo*, have successfully integrated into reputable coffee distribution networks in major urban markets. In some cases, the decision to pursue coffee cultivation was inspired by the success of neighbouring communities' coffee production and processing initiatives, which have set a precedent and created a supportive environment for new ventures [Pulido, J., personal communication, November 13, 2021].

The majority of the initiatives identified in the mapping focus on coffee production and local sales [see Figure 1], driven by **three key factors**. **First**, coffee's deep cultural significance and its role in Colombia's nation-building history [Palacios, 1980]. Traditionally, coffee has symbolised resilience and perseverance, representing the efforts of individuals who have overcome adversity [Machado, 1977]. Coffee is more than just a commodity in Colombia—it's a narrative woven into the country's social fabric. Most of the personal conversations and interviews that informed the fieldwork for this research were conducted over a cup of coffee, highlighting its centrality in everyday life.

Second, Colombia's global reputation for high-quality coffee, bolstered by favour-

able geography, a reputation well-established in international markets [Machado, 1977], makes it an attractive industry for ex-combatants to engage in as part of their economic reincorporation. **Third**, partnerships between ex-combatants, the private sector, and national agencies in charge of implementing the peace agreement have facilitated this transition. Organisations like the Colombian National Federation of Coffee have provided crucial technical and economic support, fostering commercial agreements that help ex-combatants reincorporate in society while contributing to peacebuilding efforts [Ojeda & Monroy, 2023].

For many ex-combatants, coffee serves not only as a consumer product but also as a link for discussing the country's history, the personal narratives of all parties involved in the armed conflict, as a tool for reconciliation, and means for improving the material conditions of peace. This perspective underscores the multifaceted significance of coffee in post-agreement Colombia, extending beyond its economic value to encompass social, cultural, and emotional dimensions. These interactions have fostered stronger connections with consumers, who can now engage in conversations while enjoying a cup of coffee, fostering a sense of community and shared experiences rather than mere transactional exchanges [Tellez, L., personal communication, November 2, 2021]. This has facilitated a process of building relationships, enabling conversations with people who were separated for many years due to war.

When ex-combatants produce and sell coffee, it becomes not just a commodity, but a medium for storytelling and reconciliation. These stories represent the broader effort to rebuild a country torn by decades of conflict and serve as an essential platform for peacebuilding [Fajardo, D., personal communication, February 4, 2022]. By sharing these narratives, ex-combatants use coffee as a reincorporation tool to bridge divides between urban and rural, foster understanding, and promote national reconciliation.

Figure 2 - Café Maru. URL: https://x.com/ARNColombia/status/1262534535268511744/photo/1

Final Discussions

In this section, I will recap the research questions, summarise my findings, and connect the discussions on reincorporation, food initiatives, and rural-urban linkages. I will also evaluate these findings in relation to the peacebuilding approaches mentioned in section 3. The primary research question guiding this research was: How have food initiatives by FARC ex-combatants contributed to peacebuilding and strengthened urban-rural linkages? To address this, I explored secondary questions through various sections of this paper, which have collectively informed the analysis. These questions were: **1.** Where does ex-combatants' interest for food-related initiatives come from? **2.** What is the relation between food initiatives, reincorporation processes, and peacebuilding? And, **3.** How peace is materialised through food and helped in bridging urban and rural settings?

To address question 1, the findings reveal a tendency for ex-combatants to gravitate toward food initiatives as a key aspect of their economic reincorporation, with rural-urban dynamics playing a decisive role in shaping these choices. While factors such as campesino heritage, former militia or guerrilla status, and regional productive traditions all exert significant influence, it is the intersection of these elements with rural-urban linkages that ultimately defines their economic strategies. Ex-combatants' deep connections to either rural life or urban environments inform the nature of the food-related projects they pursue—rural areas predominantly drive production-oriented initiatives, while urban centres focus on markets and distribution. This rural-urban interplay not only determines the type of food initiative but also shapes the overall strategy and long-term goals of these efforts, highlighting the importance of bridging these contexts in reincorporation processes.

Food sovereignty and *Paz Territorial* share a foundational principle: the active involvement of local communities in food systems and governance. Both approaches emphasise the empowerment of local populations through sustainable food production and access to culturally appropriate and nutritious food, essential for building lasting peace. Within this framework, the food initiatives led by ex-combatants exemplify *Paz Territorial* values by centering on community-driven efforts. These initiatives provide ex-combatants with a pathway to reincorporation that honoured their urban and rural origins. By supporting rural autonomy and local governance, they not only strengthen the role of rural communities but also enhance their connections with urban areas, contributing to broader peacebuilding efforts.

To address question 2, food initiatives play a crucial role in bridging the gap between ex-combatants, largely based in rural areas, and the broader Colombian population, particularly in urban regions. These initiatives often rely on peace narratives as a marketing strategy to engage specific demographics, notably middle-to-high-income groups and urban youth. However, this strategy tends to overlook a significant portion of the population, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, the unemployed, and workers in the informal

sector—especially in metropolitan and peri-urban areas. The research revealed that one of the main challenges for food initiatives is extending their reach to these marginalised populations.

The development of peace initiatives occurs in a diverse range of contexts. Ex-combatants have adopted a *Paz Territorial* approach, consciously avoiding the historical tendency to centralise efforts in major urban centres. Their initiatives focus on promoting social inclusion, economic independence, and sustainable development as part of the peacebuilding and reconciliation process. They want to demonstrate that an alternative to the hegemonic food regime exists. To achieve this goal, they look to transform their struggle from one involving arms to one involving the dissemination of their ideas and the promotion of their initiatives within the existing capitalist system.

Additionally, there have been shifts in relationships, with individuals from middle and high-income urban areas, who were previously disconnected from ex-combatants due to wartime conditions, now becoming supporters and consumers of their products. The initiatives often struggle to reach low-income neighbourhoods due to the higher costs of their products. This highlights the need for increased awareness among consumers about the political and social value of these products, though this understanding may be limited to those with higher incomes. Despite efforts to implement a model of Social and Solidarity Economies [SSEs], these evolving rural-urban dynamics and class interactions underscore the complexities of the post-conflict environment and influence ex-combatants' perspectives on reincorporation and peacebuilding.

To address question 3, Beyond its economic impact, food initiatives serve as vital platforms for social reconciliation, providing ex-combatants with opportunities to engage meaningfully with wider society. These efforts contribute to peacebuilding by fostering trust and mutual benefit between rural ex-combatants and urban consumers, particularly through culturally significant products like coffee. For many ex-combatants, coffee transcends its role as a mere commodity; it becomes a medium for storytelling, allowing them to share personal experiences of the conflict and extend peace beyond conventional narratives that may not reach all demographics.

The prominence of coffee initiatives in these efforts can be traced to three key factors. First, coffee holds deep cultural significance in Colombia, playing a central role in the country's nation-building and symbolising resilience and perseverance [Palacios, 1980; Machado, 1977]. Second, Colombia's international reputation for producing high-quality coffee, bolstered by favourable geography and market positioning, makes the coffee sector an attractive pathway for ex-combatants seeking sustainable economic opportunities. Third, strategic collaborations between ex-combatants, the private sector, and national agencies have provided essential technical and economic support, fostering partnerships that not only aid in reincorporation but also actively contribute to broader peacebuilding efforts [Ojeda & Monroy, 2023].

Coffee has become a prominent example of peace materialisation, with numerous initiatives centred on its production and distribution achieving notable success in the peacebuilding context. These initiatives have sought to extend beyond con-

ventional peace narratives, aiming to engage a wider segment of society and expand their market reach. As a traditional staple in Colombian households, coffee allows ex-combatants to interact with a broader audience and foster meaningful dialogue. By integrating personal stories into their coffee production, they leverage the industry not only for economic reintegration but also as a bridge between urban and rural communities.

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