

Special Thematic Section on "Multiple Perspectives in Conflict Settings: From Diversity to Pluralism"

Concealing Former Identity to Be Accepted After the Demobilization Process in Colombia: A Real Reintegration in a Post Conflict Scenario?

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Abstract

Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) processes underlie the issue of the adaptation of former combatants into civilian life, as well as their acceptance by the civilian population. In an ongoing conflict scenario like Colombia's, some factors such as civilian hostility and discrimination can lead former combatants to opt for defensive strategies such as concealing their former identity or taking up arms again. Until 2016, 58'000 combatants tried to rebuild their lives in civil society under a process where concealing their former combatant identity was necessary for reintegration. This paper contributes with original data on concealing identities in DDR processes, from a field study conducted in 2014 in Colombia with former members of guerrillas' group (FARC and ELN) and paramilitaries' group (AUC) in four different regions in the country (N = 201). We study the factors that determine concealing the former combatant identity and its effects on reintegration. The voluntary demobilization and the pride of having belonged to an armed group decrease the frequency of concealing the former identity. Otherwise, a hostile civilian community's reception increases the level of concealing. Contrary to literature on intragroup relations and on social reintegration and reconciliation, our results reveal that concealing one's past seems to indirectly permit a better integration, with a higher identification with civilian life. Results are discussed with reference to social identity theory, reintegration, and reconciliation literature, regarding the limits of reintegration processes in an ongoing conflict scenario.

Keywords: concealed social identity, stigmatized identity, former combatants, reintegration process, armed conflict, Colombia, reconciliation

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Concealing or Assuming One's Identity in Reintegration Process

"I have lived through discrimination at work; I lost my job when they realized I was a demobilized person... companies turned us down. So, now I do not say it any more." (Participant 80, male, October 31, 2014)

"One day my husband told his family [that I had been a paramilitary], and it was the worst mistake ever, the worst thing. Because my mother-in-law wanted to take my children away because she said that I was

a murderer, that I did not deserve her son or to be here. (...) Today I conceal it, not because I'm afraid, but I like to hear first what they think. (...) They may recognize us as aggressive and dangerous.” (Participant 28, female, October 24, 2014)

After more than 60 years of internal armed conflict and two important peace agreements, first with paramilitary groups and then with the most important guerrilla army, Colombia is in the middle of a difficult reintegration process. From 2003, the government launched a DDR plan aimed primarily at paramilitary fighters and guerrilla deserters. Throughout changes and learning over more than a decade, the Colombian Reintegration Agency (ACR) managed to host 58'000 demobilized people (ACR, 2017) who embarked on the difficult path of rebuilding their lives within the civilian community. In the middle of an ongoing armed conflict, and facing hostility and discrimination from civil society, the process of reintegration was marked by secrecy and insecurity. When they return to civilian life, demobilized combatants bear a dark past and a reputation of violent fighters, or even criminals, who can no longer be trusted. When armed groups are still active, as in Colombia, host communities, often themselves composed of victims, can resist to the re-integration of demobilized combatants in the civil society. In this first DDR process, many former combatants were forced to conceal their past and deny their condition as demobilized people in order to be accepted by the community. From the recent agreements in 2016 with the country's largest guerrilla, the FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia - Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), a new model of DDR - based in the community and the recognition of the political past of ex-combatants - was chosen as a route to a new scenario of coexistence. In the collective euphoria of this important historical event, we forget these thousands of *ghost reintegrated combatants* of the former process whose experience allows us to question the limits inherent to a DDR process in a context of ongoing conflict.

This paper discusses the results of a retrospective field study carried out in 2014 in Colombia with former paramilitaries and guerrillas who were part of the ACR's reintegration program. The present study is part of a broader research on reintegration with a perspective of group change and nostalgia for the former social identity (Cuénoud González, 2018; Cuénoud González & Clémence, 2017). We focus here on descriptive aspects of the reasons why former combatants conceal their former identity and evaluate the influence of the armed group exit and the civilian community reception on concealing their former identity, and the consequences that it has on their reintegration. We have learned from the literature on reintegration and reconciliation (i.e. Flournoy & Pan, 2002; Humphreys & Weinstein, 2007; Staub, 2006) and from the literature with identity perspective (i.e. Branscombe, Fernández, Gómez, & Cronin 2011; Newheiser & Barreto, 2014), that concealing a former stigmatized identity is negative for the integration into a new group. But these research traditions have not studied the effect of concealing a former combatant identity on their reintegration into civilian life in an ongoing conflict scenario. Many empirical studies in post-conflict scenarios define social reintegration in terms of acceptance of ex-combatants by their families and their neighbours (Gomes Porto, Parsons, & Alden, 2007; Humphreys & Weinstein, 2007; Kilroy, 2014; Nadler & Shnabel, 2015). Although there is no academic consensus on the definition of social reintegration of the ex-combatant (Kaplan & Nussio, 2018), the persistence of the term *acceptance* in almost all definitions (it is understood that it is acceptance of the ex-combatant - as ex-combatant - by the community) makes it possible to understand that the concealment of the former identity is not a mechanism of integration compatible with the spirit of the process itself.

This Colombian experience shows us the limits faced by a process of social reintegration of ex-combatants when it has to take place in an ongoing conflict setting and not in a post-conflict one.

The Colombian Conflict: Many Actors and Multiple Causes

The beginning of the process of DDR in Colombia is anchored in the continuity of an armed conflict of more than half a century, one of the oldest internal conflicts in the world and the lengthiest in Latin America (Garibay, 2010). It goes back to the middle of the last century, and despite the latest progress on the road to peace, the conflict is far from over. It takes root between 1948 and 1962, when Colombia saw the period of *The Violence (la Violencia)*, an undeclared civil war between members of the Liberal and the Conservative Party. It is from the depths of this historical division that the various armed groups that are still in conflict have arisen. In 1964, what remained of the liberal strongholds operating in the mountains gave birth to the first communist guerrillas, including the FARC and the ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional - National Liberation Army) (Hudson, 2010). Beginning in the 1980s, the movement of paramilitary groups rose against the guerrillas. The Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC – Self-defense united of Colombia) emerged in the 1990s from a coalition of various right-wing armed groups throughout the country. From this period until the beginning of the DDR process on which our research focuses, the three main players in the conflict are left-wing guerrillas, right-wing armed groups and the army itself, one of the largest in Latin America. Since 2003 the government initiates dialogues with paramilitary groups to create negotiations for a demobilization process (Pizarro & Valencia, 2009), offering them a number of economic and social benefits in return for laying down their weapons and promise of reintegration. The official figures of demobilized combatants until 2017 (before the beginning of the new demobilization of the FARC) amount to more than 58'000, including 21'000 guerrillas and 36'000 paramilitaries (ACR, 2017). In 2012, the government initiated dialogues with the FARC with whom a peace agreement was signed in 2016.

DDR 2003-2016: Reintegration in an Ongoing Conflict Setting

Before the agreements of 2016, the demobilization process included two modalities. It could be collective (in the case of dissolution of a group or an armed front, as it has been for the paramilitaries groups as a condition of negotiation) or individual (in the case of deserter members of guerrilla groups, which were not taking part yet in the negotiations of 2003). Although demobilization was collective, integration in this process, unlike the new process with the FARC, is individual. We have to specify that many members of the FARC already demobilized under the prior process, and that so, had the same conditions of reintegration than the paramilitaries. DDR processes not only concern the demobilization, but also have to include a reintegration program. In Colombia, for the DDR process first directed to paramilitaries, demobilized combatants must have been part of the Colombian Agency of Reintegration (ACR) program under several conditions: Lay down their weapons, but also the confession of crimes and the cooperation in the construction of historical memory (ACR, 2015). In exchange, they received benefits such as economic assistance, technical or professional training, medical and psychological care. The liberal vision of this program proposed a route of reintegration (*la ruta*) that granted too much importance to the economic self-sufficiency as the criteria for a definition of a successful reintegration. The reintegration at that time was totally seen as an individual process. Despite the advantages of the program, recidivism, or the return to illegality is a major problem for the DDR process. Some combatants demobilize but armed groups are still active and the war continues. The authorities recognize that 24% of demobilized combatants re-offend and, most disturbingly, it seems that over 60% have a *recidivist* tendency, either because they have already thought or wish to retake weapons (FIP, 2014).

Although recidivism is a symptom used to measure the success of a DDR process (Kingma & Muggah, 2009; Nilsson, 2008; Nussio, 2009), the real threats reign in insecurity and discrimination. The work of the ACR was carried out under a strict security protocol that sought to guarantee the physical integrity of the ex-combatants in

an atmosphere of continuity of war. Discrimination, on the other hand, meant that the demobilized opted to conceal their condition in order to be able to integrate into the host communities. The theory implicit in many reintegration processes suggests that the social participation of the demobilized and the acceptance of the community increase the perception of security and reduce recidivism (Kaplan & Nussio, 2018). Obviously, acceptance and participation are both activities linked to identities disclosure between members of the community and ex-combatants. Consequently, there is a contradiction: In principle, concealing the identity of ex-combatant is not part of the integration mechanisms of the ACR. Various components of the Colombian reintegration process are related to the disclosure and not to the anonymity of the ex-combatant identity in front of the community (for example during public contributions to the construction of the collective memory, in which ex-combatants and victims meet face to face). However, the need to guarantee the physical safety of ex-combatants in an ongoing conflict scenario requires a strict protocol in which anonymity of demobilized people becomes the rule, and consequently a usual mechanism for the former combatants themselves to cope with discrimination.

Avoiding Discrimination by Concealing an Identity: A Psychosocial Approach

Following a psychosocial approach, we address the process of concealing the past from a social identity perspective. Demobilization, seen as a dynamic of group change, supposes the abandonment of one social identity for the benefit of another. Demobilized combatants let behind the social category of combatants to assume a membership in a new social category represented by the civilian community. The hostility of the other members of the civilian community may lead the former combatants to use defensive strategies, such as isolating themselves (see Nussio, 2012; Paluck, 2010; Theidon, 2007), concealing their former identity or taking up arms again (see Kingma, 2002; Walter, 1997, 2002). In the case of this study, we readily understand that most demobilized combatants, after years of war as perpetrators of violence (or reputation for committing crimes), are inclined to conceal a prior identity that is rejected by the civilian community. However, this strategy could vary depending on the conditions of the demobilization and the quality of reception of the civilian population.

Social psychological research focused since a long time on the strategies that individuals or groups adopt to cope with discrimination and stigmatized identities (e.g. Crocker & Major, 1989; Major, 2006; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), including particularly strategies of individual mobility or social change. As an individual mobility strategy, it has been considered to actually leave the stigmatized group (e.g. Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1997; Prislín & Christensen, 2005). The strategy of leaving could be the case of former combatants who left voluntarily the armed group, not only for security reasons, but because they were no longer identified with it, and hoped to forget this past. After the demobilization, the former identity should be then more often concealed when the demobilization resulted from a choice than from a constraint. Otherwise, pride of having belonged to an armed group and having participated in the conflict, even if it is not valued by the rest of the population, can influence the assertion of the former identity. Former combatants who are still proud of having been part of an armed group should then conceal their former identity less after the demobilization.

According to the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986) and of the small group socialization model (Moreland & Levine, 1982), the inclusion within a group depends not only on the identification of the new members to the group but also on their feeling of being included by other members. This process implies a positive reception of the new members. The discrimination against new members indeed leads to a decline in their level of identification to the new group of belonging (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999). Empirical studies in social psychology show that rejection of a new member in a group may be due to ingroup favoritism by considering them as a threat to the positive social identity of the group (Marques, Abrams, Paez, & Hogg, 2001) or the consequence of

negative representations of the category of this new members (cf. Marques & Paez, 1994). The anticipation of intolerance in response to the revelation of an identity will determine the behavior of the target population of discrimination against the other discriminating group. At a general level, to conceal a stigmatized identity in intragroup relations allows to be or feel accepted by the majority (Branscombe et al., 2011; Newheiser & Barreto, 2014). This strategy of coping aims at limiting painful discrimination and thus promoting a better integration in a new group. In the same line of reasoning, other studies have shown that stigmatized members in a group can use this strategy to actively adopt or pretend to adopt a new identity by concealing a deviant or threatened identity (Croteau, 1996; Barreto, Ellemers, & Banal, 2006; Goffman, 1963; Griffin, 1992; Katz, 1981; Prokos & Padavic, 2002).

As former combatants perceive themselves as rejected by civilian population in the Colombian reintegration process (FIP, 2016; Kaplan & Nussio, 2018; Kingma & Muggah, 2009; Theidon, 2007), this enhances the tendency of concealing their former identity as armed combatants (see FIP, 2014; “Los desmovilizados ocultan”, 2013; Theidon, 2009). We therefore predict that demobilized combatants will conceal their identity more when they feel a worse reception by the civilian community.

Benefits and Consequences of Concealment — The principal and apparently unique advantage of concealing is a protection against prejudice and discrimination expecting to be better evaluated and accepted by others (Branscombe et al., 2011; Clair, Beatty, & MacLean, 2005; Croteau, 1996; Newheiser & Barreto, 2014). Even if the direct benefit is a reduced discrimination, literature has showed that concealing an identity can have negative consequences in the long term for the self (Branscombe et al., 2011; Laird, Bridges, & Marsee, 2013; Newheiser & Barreto, 2014; Schnur, 2004; Vrij, Nunkoosing, Paterson, Oosterwegel, & Soukara, 2002), for social interactions (Čehajić & Brown, 2010; Newheiser & Barreto 2014; Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009, 2015), and can also have a negative impact on feeling of belonging (Newheiser & Barreto, 2014) and on well-being (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999; Branscombe et al., 2011; Chaudoir & Quinn, 2010; Major & Gramzow, 1999; Quinn & Earnshaw, 2013).

This strategy implies managing a double identity, which can be particularly difficult or even dangerous in a post conflict context (McFee, 2016), and psychologically stressful in particular because people are afraid to be discovered, and so dedicate a lot of energy to control their behaviour, lies and interactions (Barreto et al., 2006; Smart & Wegner, 1999).

Finally, experimental studies revealed that even if concealing a social stigmatized identity is expected to secure acceptance and belonging (Newheiser, Barreto, Ellemers, Derks, & Scheepers, 2015), it can actually have the ironic effect of decreasing feelings of belonging and even create an actual social rejection (Newheiser & Barreto, 2014). Moreover, concealing an identity can increase the stress experienced by the stigmatized persons and create a high psychological distress (Major, 2006).

From this literature we can deduce that revealing the stigmatized identity (vs concealing) should be positive for the self. Furthermore, visibility has been shown to be important for marginalized minorities, as demonstrated by studies in other contexts that support the positive aspects of transparency of identities for the empowerment or recognition of those minorities (Haddad & Smith, 2002; Naber, 2000; Sözer, 2014). Regarding the large negative consequences compared to a few benefits documented by research, we then predict that concealing the former identity should have a negative impact on the evaluation of the integration of demobilized combatants and should increase their desire to return to an armed group.

The Concealment of Former Identity by Demobilized Combatants: A Field Study

In summary, the previous theoretical developments lead us to consider the following hypotheses regarding the antecedents and the consequences of the concealment of the former identity:

Discrimination against the stigmatized identity theoretically leads to conceal it, then: The perception of a friendly reception from the civilian population (feeling of being accepted) should be negatively associated with the frequency of concealing one's former identity (H1).

However, the voluntary nature of leaving the armed group should positively influence the frequency of concealing the former combatant identity (H2).

The remaining attachment to the former identity should modify the behaviour towards the latter: The pride of having belonged to an armed group and having participated in the conflict should have a negative link with the frequency of concealing the former identity (H3).

As concealing the stigmatized identity has negative effects for the self and decreases the feeling of belonging: The frequency of concealing the former identity should reduce the level of satisfaction of their role in civilian society, which in turn should be positively associated with identification in civilian life (H4).

And, the frequency to conceal the former identity should decrease the identification with the civilian group and enhance the desire to return to the former armed group. In that vein, the level of identification with civilian life should be negatively associated with the desire to return to an armed group (H5).

Based on another study (Cuénoud González, 2018), we also expected positive relations between the evaluation of the reception, and the voluntary nature of leaving the armed group with the level of satisfaction in the civilian group, a positive influence of the former on the identification with civilian community and a negative one of the latter on the desire to return to the armed group. Finally, the pride in having belonged to an armed group should favour the desire to re-join this group.

Method

Our fieldwork study, which explores the psychosocial factors that hinder former combatants' re-identification with the civilian community, includes quantitative and qualitative data from 201 former combatants (including 57 women) from guerrillas (FARC and ELN) and paramilitary groups taking part in the Colombian DDR process since 2003. For the present paper, we used the data from the survey by questionnaire and some extracts of the interviews for illustration. The study was done with the logistic help of the Colombian Reintegration Agency (ACR). However, this help implied following some obligations, in particular regarding an interdiction to address questions about reprehensible acts committed by the former combatants.

Procedure and Participants

Between October and November 2014, we conducted a field study in four regions that were severely affected by the armed conflict in Colombia, commonly chosen with the ACR for the distribution of former combatants. Two regions counted mainly with the presence of armed groups from guerrillas and the other two regions counted mostly with the presence of paramilitaries. This gave us a sample of demobilized combatants from various armed

groups, as representative as possible of this difficultly accessible population. We visited the ACR reintegration centers where we interviewed, individually or in small groups, 57 former combatants in Cali, 46 in Popayan, 38 in Pasto, and 60 in Pereira. Between the ages of 18 and 66 ($M = 31.34$, $SD = 8.50$), those women and men spent between 6 months and 26 years in their armed group before demobilizing. The participants were 146 Guerrillas' deserters, from FARC or ELN and 55 were former members of paramilitary groups (AUC). Our retrospective questionnaire explored three periods in the former combatant's life, the life before joining the group, the life within the armed group, and the life after the demobilization. At each phase, we measured the level of identification with the group, the reasons for joining and leaving the group, then the impressions about the community reception, the feeling of discrimination and the reactions to it. We also asked about the way they think now about their former identity, and the actual desire to return to the former group. As the context permitted us, we could do interviews of circumstances with most of the participants ($N = 178$, 60 alone and 118 in small groups from two to five people), from half an hour to two hours. Those semi-structured interviews followed the thematic logic of the questionnaire and deepened certain topics. For this present study they allowed us to better understand the reason why the former identity is concealed.

As the main topic of our broader research was about the identity change and the nostalgia of the former identity to predict the obstacles to reintegration and risks of recidivism (Cuénoud González, 2018), the questionnaire and interviews address those concepts. We also addressed demobilized combatants with the issue of the reencounter with the civilian community, the reactions of people and how common is for them the act of hiding their past as combatants and why they do it. The extracts of the interviews presented in this paper emerge from a thematic coding carried out on all the interviews. The coding was conducted by the first author in two steps. In the first step, all extracts that mention the topic of concealing the former combatant identity were identified. Among the 178 interviews, 156 interviewees mentioned spontaneously the topic. In the next step, these extracts were coded for two a priori categories: the reasons and the consequences of concealing the identity. Then the reasons were separated between the protection of social discrimination reasons and the personal security reasons, and the consequences were separated between the positives and the negatives. The coding categories were defined with the goal of enriching the quantitative findings on the hypothesized antecedents and outcomes of identity concealment.

Measures

The frequency of concealing one's former identity was measured by an original item "How often do you conceal your condition of demobilized combatant in front of other people?" on a 5-points scale (1, "never", 2, "very rarely", 3, "from time to time", 4, "often", 5, "always"). Additional questions were asked to precise *from whom the former identity is hidden*: "to nobody", "to the family", "to schoolmates", "to colleagues of work", and "to the neighbours". Multiple responses were possible. These categories were then coded 0 for no and 1 for yes.

The perceived quality of the reception by the civilian population has two components, one focusing on the cordiality of the members of the new group and another focusing on the feeling of rejection and discrimination of the new member. It was measured using six original items on a 5-point scale (1, not at all; 5, totally): "After the demobilization, were people generally cordial with you?", "Has the community you belong to welcomed you in a positive way?", "Do you think the demobilized are welcome?", "Have you ever felt rejected by the civilian population?" (Reverse), "Do you notice a difference in the treatment you receive from people when they know you are a former combatant?"

(Reverse) and "Did you feel discriminated against for your former combatant status?" (Reverse) (Cronbach $\alpha = .761$).

The voluntariness in demobilization was measured using two items on a 5-point scale (1, not at all; 5, totally): "How much did you agree to leave the armed group?" and "how voluntary were you to leave the group?". The distribution of these two variables being largely asymmetric, we decided to dichotomize them to the median (five for both variables). Thus, these two variables were combined into a single one by coding 0.5 for the respondents who answered five on the scale to both items and -0.5 for the others.

The pride of having belonged to an armed group was measured by an original item "Nowadays, how proud are you to have been part of an armed group?", on a 5-point scale (1, not at all; 5, absolutely).

The satisfaction of the role played in civilian life was measured with an original item on a 5-points scale (1, not at all; 5, totally) "How satisfied are you with your role in the civilian community?".

Identification with civilian life understood as a measure of feeling of belonging and integration, included a series of seven 5-points scales (1, not at all; 5, totally) inspired by the measure of Leach et al. (2008) as "How well do you feel in the civilian community?", "How satisfied are you with belonging to the civilian community?", "How proud are you to belong to the civilian community?", "How much do you feel identified with the civilian community?", "To what extent do you have strong emotional ties with members of the civilian community?", "How much do you feel integrated into the activities of the civilian community?" and "How committed are you to the civilian community?" (Cronbach $\alpha = .874$).

The desire to return to the armed group was measured on a 5-points scale (1, not at all; 5, totally) item, "How much do you want to return to your former group or to another armed group?".

In order to take into account the retrospective approach of the questionnaire, we use a path analysis to test the predicted relations between variables. Such a structural equation analysis permits to build and test a model by placing the concealment of the former identity between its antecedents (pride to belong to the armed group, voluntariness of leaving and evaluation of the reception) and its consequences (satisfaction with the role, identification to the civilian community, desire to re-join the former group). Figure 1 shows the theoretical picture to schematize the hypotheses. Extracts of interviews will be used to complete the results issued from the path analysis. We selected extracts that best represented the issues revealed by the quantitative results and serve here as illustrations.

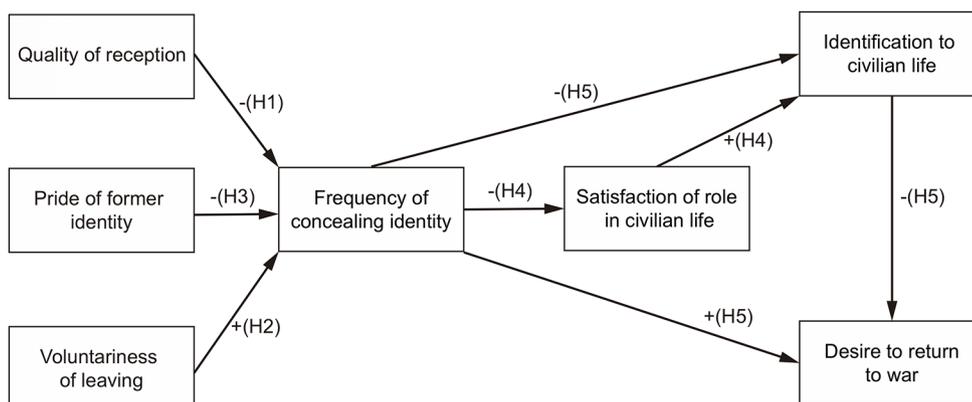


Figure 1. Theoretical model.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

A first glance on the central tendencies of the answers reveals intriguing results (Table 1).

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations Pearson's Correlations Between the Main Variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Pride of having belonged to an armed group	1.74	1.20	-					
2. Degree of voluntariness in demobilization	0.21	0.46	-.424***	-				
3. Quality of the reception of the civilian population	3.26	0.90	-.034	.104	-			
4. Frequency of hiding one's former identity	4.27	1.17	-.143*	.151*	-.170*	-		
5. Satisfaction of the role played in civilian life	4.08	1.13	-.097	.237**	.254***	.147*	-	
6. Identification with civilian life	4.23	0.89	-.075	.189**	.325***	-.010	.663***	-
7. Desire to return to the armed group	2.04	1.44	.386***	-.306***	-.224**	.024	-.224**	-.359***

Note. For all the variables $N = 201$.

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

On one hand, the average frequency of former combatants hiding their former identity is very high. Thus, 63.2% of participants declared that they consistently conceal their identity, sometimes even to their own family (16%), while only six percent declared that they assume it entirely and avoid concealing it from anyone. The importance of concealment of the former identity is confirmed by the interviews. In front of the possibility of a rejection, lying, concealing and inventing another reality in order to be accepted appears as the solution and becomes a habit, like demobilized participants told us:

"I do not tell anyone [that I am a demobilized person]. Where I study they don't know, only my family knows and the people of the ACR [ACR – Colombian Reintegration Agency]... (...) To lie became a habit. Then, if they ask me about my past I say "well I was with my family working on the farm..." (Participant 58, October 28, 2014)

"Well, I think they're going to reject me, so I do not say that. To my friends of many years I tell them, but otherwise I don't, no, never." (Participant 68, October 29, 2014)

"At the beginning one is afraid [they might find out]. (...) Now not anymore because I say: "no, are you kidding me? How can you think I was there...?" (...) Personally, I don't [suffer of discrimination], but the group does, the society rejects it. (...) We know that we will be rejected. But I don't say it; I'm going to die with this secret." (Participant 126, November 7, 2014)

On the other hand, the mean level of identification with the civilian community and of satisfaction with their role in it appear also very high, while the desire to return to the armed group or the pride in having belonged to this group are low in average. Finally, most of the participants indicated that they left the former armed group voluntarily and perceived their reception by the population as relatively friendly in the average. To avoid redundancy, we will consider the correlations with the path analysis, when they differ from the path coefficients.

A Path Analysis of the Antecedents and Consequences of Concealing the Former Identity

Preliminary analyses show that the frequency of concealing one’s former identity doesn’t depend on gender, age, regions of study and neither on political orientation of the armed group ($F_s < 2.0$; $p > .16$). The latter means that, contrary to what we could expect due to the magnitude of the differences between the guerrillas’ groups and the paramilitaries’ group, there is no difference in the integration strategy such as the choice to conceal the former identity. It also means that for this process there is no differences between former combatants who demobilized collectively and those who demobilized individually; the form of demobilization, whether collective or individual, doesn’t present a difference in the act of concealing. The guerrillas and the paramilitaries also don’t differ in their evaluation of the reception of the civilian population ($F < 0.17$; $p > .05$).

Figure 2 shows the predicted model evaluating the associations between the antecedents and the consequences of hiding the former combatant identity. The fit of this first model appeared poor, $\chi^2(6) = 94.157$; $p < .001$; CFI = .625; RMSEA = .271, 90% CI [.302, .617]. However, three predicted paths were non-significant. On the side of antecedents, the predicted negative effect of the pride to belong to the former armed group on concealing the former identity (H3) disappeared when the voluntariness of leaving the armed group and the quality of the reception was entered in the model. The correlation between both variables ($r = -.143$; $p = .043$) was indeed in the predicted direction, showing that the more former combatants were still proud of their former membership, the less they would conceal their former identity in the civilian community. On the side of the consequences, hiding the former identity did not significantly influence the identification to civilian group and only influence tendentially the desire to return to the armed group (H5). The first two non-significant paths were removed from the analysis and the trend path was maintained. However, one path was added between the satisfaction of the role in civilian life and the identification with civil community. This path allows to take into account an indirect effect of concealing the identity on the identification with civilian life. The revised model presents a good fit to the data, $\chi^2(7) = 6.281$; $p = .507$; CFI = 1.000; RMSEA = .000, 90% CI [.000, .046].

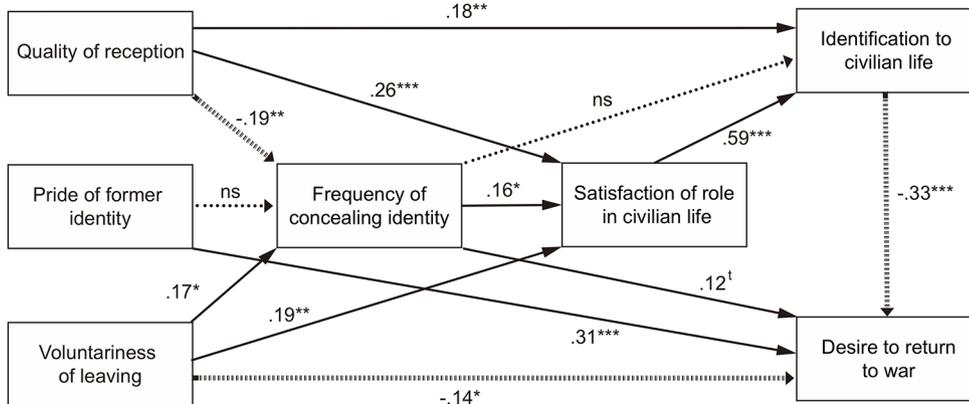


Figure 2. Predicted and final model of the paths associated concealment of former identity with its antecedents and its consequences.

On one side, the final model confirms the predicted influence of the evaluation of the reception, H1, $B = -.188$; $SE = .069$; $p = .007$; $d = .392$, and the voluntariness of leaving the armed group, H2, $B = .374$; $SE = .151$; $p = .013$; $d = .357$, on the frequency to conceal the former identity of combatants. On the other side, contrary to our hypothesis (H4), the frequency of concealing the combatant identity is positively associated with the satisfaction

with the role in society, $B = .164$; $SE = .068$; $p = .016$; $d = .347$, which in turn increases the identification with civilian life, $B = .588$; $SE = .055$; $p = .000$; $d = 1.539$.

As expected, the satisfaction of the role in civilian life is also positively enhanced by the quality of the reception, $B = .262$; $SE = .067$; $p < .001$; $d = .563$, and by the voluntariness of demobilization, $B = .405$; $SE = .147$; $p = .006$; $d = .397$. The pride of having belonged to an armed group favours, $B = .304$; $SE = .070$; $p < .001$; $d = .625$, while the voluntariness of leaving it decreases, $B = -.307$; $SE = .155$; $p = .048$; $d = .285$, the desire to return to this former group. The evaluation of the reception from civilian population enhances the identification with the civilian community, $B = .176$; $SE = .055$; $p = .001$; $d = .461$, which in turn diminishes the desire to return, $B = -.328$; $SE = .064$; $p < .001$; $d = .738$. As in the initial model, the frequency of concealing the former combatant identity has a marginal positive effect on the desire to return to this group, $B = .123$; $SE = .064$; $p = .053$; $d = .277$.

About the Dark Face of Concealing the Former Identity

The results from the path analysis show that concealing one's identity seems to be beneficial for former combatants to feel well in civilian life. In this sense, concealing has, contrary to our expectations, positive consequences in the reintegration. The only negative effect is a small increase of the desire to return to an armed group when the concealment is more frequent.

However, as said above, we cannot address some aspects of the dark antecedents and current relations of the former combatants. Despite the fact that they feel compelled to, most of the qualitative interviews seem to nuance the positive consequences of concealment. First, they emphasized the fear of being rejected by the community by underlined the experience of discrimination as illustrated by two citations: *"They stigmatized us (...) At first it is hard to know what to say, because people always ask: "Well, where are you from, where did you work..." It is better to go unnoticed in order to avoid inconvenience. I work with a man who has like a phobia of the demobilized persons, but he does not know that I am one."* (Participant 90, October 31, 2014); *"We have that stigma, that people will reject us, that we are "bad". But we want to change that image, but we know that people will still think that we cannot [change]. (...) It happened to me with a teacher; he said we were killers."* (Participant 123, November 6, 2014). Second, some of them expressed also the protection given by a new identity toward their former comrades: *"Here I have to be very careful, I change my name for security reasons. (...) It's a psychosis that the comrades come to kill you. I didn't sleep. (...) Because after having left the group, which would be my punishment ... for a traitor of the cause? ... And because I bring a lot of information."* (Participant 80, October 31, 2014). Finally, concealment of the former identity appears to be a part of the new life of the demobilized to be inserted in the civilian community of course, but also, and sometimes more in order to avoid the marginalization: *"Here people are very closed, one wants to forget the past but people do not. To say that you are demobilized is like saying that you are sick. Being demobilized does not allow you to open account, or ask for loan to do a business, they tell us that we are "population at risk."* (Participant 94, November 4, 2014). But these a priori positive aspects have a cost, and concealing one's former identity can be an obstacle to feel free: *"One lives with double identity. I wish I could say who I am without being afraid of the reaction of the people, of rejection. (...). Here one lives discriminated. Then one thinks of returning. (...) Discrimination is the hardest, here one cannot speak freely."* (Participant 194, November 18, 2014).

In this respect, beyond the results of the path analysis, some interviews emphasized the context of openness of the civilian community when they have decided to quit the armed group and to reveal their former identity. This is in particular the case of former combatants who have become peace-promoters (six participants). Their task is

to be an intermediary between the civilian population and the demobilized combatants, explaining to the entire civilian population and to the direct victims of the conflict what they are, what they have done, why they have done it, and why they want to change. This is also the case of the minority of demobilized combatants who participate actively in processes of collective memory reconstruction: *"Everywhere we [the demobilized people] tried to keep a low profile, to not say that we are part of the program. (...) Now [with my work as a promoter] it's different. (...) [The demobilized identity] is important, it fills me. (...) Create this identity [of former combatant] is important, so not to forget [the past]. But in the contrary, to do something of it; to turn in positive that bad experience. (...) I am really proud to represent the agency and if I can go on with my work as a promoter, well Thanks God, because it is my job and it is what I am going to do."* (Participant 123, November 6, 2014). Here, assuming one's former identity is experienced as a relief, and help them to be proud of what they become. They feel judged by the rest of the civilians as still being part of the former group while they are no longer part of it. Also, telling the truth allows them to come out of the stigma of this categorization: *"For me [to be able to say that I am a demobilized person] it's a flag. The flag of what I can offer, my job offer, which is motivating people in the process of reintegration, to study, to learn, not to stay there, no longer feel bad about being rejected. And showing people that they have to accept us, not aggressively but with good actions, actions that show that the change is real, that I want to change, that I did, that I deserve an opportunity. (...) I want to be able to say: "I am not a paramilitary [member], I was a paramilitary [member]. Whatever I was, stayed in the past; now, we are working for the same cause. (...) Today I do not express it as freely as I would like."* (Participant 28, Promoter, October 24, 2014)

Conclusion: Discussing Concealing Identity in an Ongoing Conflict Setting

The principal and intriguing result of our study is on one hand that concealing the former identity by the demobilized combatants is very frequent, and on the other hand that it has a small but positive effect in their integration in a new community. Thus, concealing a stigmatized former identity permits a lower discrimination and prevents rejection in the new group. Contrary to what we expected based on the literature on social identity and intragroup relations theories (i.e. Branscombe et al., 2011; Čehajić & Brown, 2010; Newheiser & Barreto, 2014; Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009, 2015) and as well as reintegration and reconciliation literature (i.e. Gomes Porto et al., 2007; McFee, 2016; Shnabel & Nadler, 2008; Shnabel, Nadler, Ullrich, Dovidio, & Carmi, 2009), concealing the former identity seems positive for the reintegration favouring a better identification with the civil community, in the short term at least, allowing the former combatants to feel better with the role they can have in the civilian life, and so indirectly decreasing the desire to take up arms again.

Our survey shows that the perceived discrimination in civilian life forces former combatants to conceal their former identity. The interviews, as the results of the path analyses, showed clearly that the concealment of the former identity depends on the reception by the population. Many of the excombatants related experiences that confirm this perception of hostility and the subsequent risk of revealing their former identity. In this respect, this study shows that concealing a former stigmatized identity in a DDR process can have individual short-term benefits. That is the reason why this strategy is so frequently employed by former combatants, because it not only fosters personal safety but it also helps to avoid discrimination.

In a longer-term perspective, however, such prevalent identity concealment may have a negative impact on the former combatants and the prospects for peace. Systematic identity concealment can contribute to the maintenance of negative representations about the former combatants even after a peace process, thus perpetuating their discrimination. In turn, the continued exposure to discrimination can contribute to the perpetuation or even escalation of hostilities. Indeed, our findings show that the perception of discrimination is related to the increased desire to return to war. Therefore, the identity concealment induces a trade-off between short-term benefits for the former combatants themselves and long-term risks for the society at large.

In a broader perspective, the reintegration of the former combatants can be understood as part of a process of reconciliation after an internal conflict (Bar-Tal, 2000; Berdal, 1996; Gomes Porto et al., 2007; McFee, 2016; Shnabel & Nadler, 2008; Shnabel et al., 2009). In line with Bar-Tal (Bar-Tal & Bennink, 2004, p. 15), we conceive reconciliation as a "mutual recognition and acceptance" between members of different groups previously in conflict and the possibility of living together. Recognition is a stage that supposes presentation of the other as he/she is, without concealment or simulations, and acceptance of the other, with all the burden of their past (Shnabel & Nadler, 2008; Shnabel et al., 2009). In the spirit of DDR processes is implicit the idea of that any reintegration process seeks to strengthen peace efforts and that every single former combatant becomes "an active participant in the peace process" (United Nations Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Resource Center, UNDDR, 2019). However, the vision of the DDR as a process that contributes to a transition from war to reconciliation only applies to post-conflict scenarios, in which the parties confronted after an internal war seek a new common space of coexistence (cf. Bloomfield, 2006). The fundamental problem of reintegration in Colombia is that it is not a post-conflict scenario but an ongoing-conflict one. In this ongoing conflict, the *ghost former combatants'* integration, based on the concealment of the former identity, leaves no space for transparency and for mutual recognition and acceptance. Yet, a transparent disclosure of the past is generally assumed to be an important element of the intergroup reconciliation, which has led to the widespread establishment of the collective and public truth telling mechanisms in conflict-affected societies (Flournoy & Pan, 2002; Staub, 2006). Overall, as long as the three quarters of the demobilized combatants have to conceal their former identity and their past in order to be accepted, we cannot talk about a real reintegration and it is unlikely that a reconciliation process can begin.

At the time of writing this paper, since the new agreements signed in 2016, we observe a reinforcement of the negative representations of the demobilized (i.e. "Agreden al candidato", 2018). Three years after the beginning of FARC demobilization, the integration of its members is stagnating. If reintegration goes wrong or the peace process itself is challenged, then it can contribute to an even greater rejection of the demobilized combatants. Those new agreements, which are an extension of the DDR program of which our participants are part of, present the difference that the members of the recently demobilized fronts of the FARC are reintegrating together, collectively, maintaining a common identity within the superordinate group of the civilian society. This new model of reintegration is based on the recognition of their political rights and, of course, on the visibility of their former membership in front of the host communities. A priori, it seems that this process of reintegration would not allow the identity concealment. But the problem is that this model faces the same conditions of ongoing conflict that forced the anonymity and concealment of the demobilized in the former process that was studied here. The DDR process, in this type of scenario, has limits that are marked by insecurity and discrimination in the war environment. Thus, the practice of concealing combatant identity may persist. Indeed, today in Colombia, the assassination of social leaders and demobilized members of the FARC in rural areas (Álvarez Vanegas, 2016; "El espinoso camino", 2016) is the main threat to the stability of the agreements signed in 2016. Hence, the effort to change the reintegration model without a transition to a new post-conflict society, may be insufficient. As long as it occurs in a setting

of an ongoing conflict, the model of reintegration is likely to foster a concealment of the former combatant identity. For the recognition and revelation of the parties, a transition of the whole society is needed and not only combatants, in order to recover the real spirit of DDR processes.

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Competing Interests

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