

Meanings of War

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Alexander L Fattal. *Guerilla Marketing: Counterinsurgency and Capitalism in Colombia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018)

To assist with the various acronyms/agencies that appear in the assigned chapter that follows, we have provided two excerpts from an earlier chapter:

“The offices of this elite Colombian consumer marketing firm [Lowe/SSP3] have the playful feel of a Palo Alto tech company and the curated cool of a Lower Manhattan ad agency. The foosball, the gourmet coffee, the young, hip employees – it all contrasted with the spartan cubicles of the Colombian Ministry of Defense, Lowe/SSP3’s most high-profile client. Lowe/SSP3 has built a reputation for creativity thanks to its work for the ministry of defense’s Program for Humanitarian Attention to the Demobilized (PAHD). The PAHD disarms and demobilized guerilla fighters, wringing them for intelligence before passing them off to the civilian side of the bureaucracy, the Colombian Agency for Reintegration, or ACR, charged with socio-economic reintegration.” (p. 79)

“Lowe/SSP3 is a hybrid: part local Colombian outfit, part global conglomerate. SSP3 is an acronym for the last name of the Colombian partners, while Lowe references Lowe and Partners, a global network of marketing agencies from the Colombian office draws resources and to which it contributes a percentage of its earnings.” (p. 80)

Alexander L. Fattal,

Guerrilla Marketing:

*Counterinsurgency and Capitalism
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Preface

Before Being a Guerrilla, You Are My Child.

Paid for by the Colombian Ministry of Defense and expertly crafted by the consumer marketing firm Lowe/SSP3, this campaign used personal photographs, the kind that mothers store in shoeboxes and tape into family albums. One picture features a puffy-cheeked toddler primly dressed in white. A second picture, of a boy posing in pants two years too big, is washed out in a sepia tone. In a third photo, grainy and poorly focused, a mother holds an excitable infant in her arms. From the mother's gaze, it seems like she is collaborating to produce a memory with the photographer (the baby's father?). In the ventriloquism so central to their trade, the marketers behind the campaign created a disembodied voice—that of a guerrilla fighter's mother who calls to her daughter or son to abandon the insurgency and return home for the Christmas holidays.

Every Christmas season between 2010 and 2014, the Ministry of Defense and Lowe/SSP3 would work together to release a new emotionally charged multimedia onslaught.¹ Here, in the 2013 campaign, "You Are My Child," soldiers stand in formation and hold the posters bearing childhood photographs for the camera, pinching their fingers on command (figure P.1). There will be much by way of contextualization in the following pages, but now I want to rip this image from its context, for it condenses the themes of this book: the convergence of consumer marketing and counterinsurgency; intimacy as a target of both spheres of expertise; how the shifting grounds of kinship, gender, social relations, and cultural production condition the way antiguerrilla warfare is waged; and the belief in branding's ability to reconcile the irreconcilable, such as the idea of a humanitarian counterinsurgency.



FIGURE P.1. Still photograph from “You Are My Child” campaign of Christmas 2013. Photo courtesy of Colombian Ministry of Defense.

The message of “You Are My Child” is misleadingly simple. It only skims the surface. But the point of this book is to go deep beneath the surface, to untangle a web of images, affects, and ideologies that this carefully composed photograph with its militarized formation of other photographs can only wink at. What follows is not a systematic study of how these campaigns were received by audiences. I am interested in affects more than effects, though clearly the two are intertwined. Consider, for example, the affective response to “You Are My Child” of Lara Logan, a reporter for *60 Minutes*. She arrived to Bogotá one week after Colombia signed a historic peace accord with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). The American television newsmagazine had come to feature the work of Lowe/SSP3 in Colombia, not its stewardship of brands like Mazda and Red Bull, but its ten-year effort to lure fighters out of the FARC and ELN, two Marxist insurgencies that date back to the mid-1960s.² *60 Minutes*’ report, “Advertising to Sell Peace Not Products,” is fawning. Miguel Sokoloff, the most prominent partner of Lowe/SSP3, gave Logan a multimedia presentation of the company’s work on the Ministry of Defense account. When he presented the videos from “You Are My Child,” he gave the tag line “Before being a guerrilla, you are my child,” and added, “So come home, I will always be waiting for you at Christmastime.”

Her eyes wet with emotion, Logan said, “We call that going for the jugular Jose, because . . . wow.”

The segment’s producer, Alan Goldberg, was also impressed. CBS posted an interview with him on its webpage as a supplement to its coverage; he concluded by saying, “Who knows what will happen after our report airs. Maybe Sokoloff’s phone will be ringing off the hook from other governments looking for a way to solve their wars.”³

The slick advertising spots derive their force from surprise—surprise at their unlikely creativity, humanism, and intelligence. Those associations—surprise, creativity, humanism, intelligence—had been antithetical to the image of the Colombian military. Lowe/SSP3’s task was not only to lure people out of the guerrilla but also to reorient the public’s affective disposition toward the armed forces.

Logan and Goldberg’s enchantment with Sokoloff’s story was no accident. For years Sokoloff had promoted his firm’s work to international audiences in particular. In 2014 he gave a TED talk in Rio de Janeiro titled “How Christmas Lights Helped Guerrillas Put Down Their Guns.” His story was so compelling that it induced CBS’s flagship news program to forget the most basic principle of journalism: do not rely on only one source. *60 Minutes*’ reporting did not include the voices of any former guerrillas and relied exclusively on materials and representations provided by the marketers. Even one of my favorite shows, the quirky and inquisitive radio magazine *This American Life*, fell into the same trap, creating a segment that did not deviate from the marketers’ perspective.

The idea that marketing had the power to debilitate one of the world’s largest and most formidable insurgencies and precipitate peace seduced distinguished US media programs and Colombia’s mass media, as well as policy elites in Washington and Bogotá. Behind the unexpected creativity of campaigns such as “You Are My Child” lies an ideological axis ready to embrace the idea that the world’s most intractable problems can be branded away. Lowe/SSP3 is both the vanguard and the poster child for this idea.

In this book I examine what is at stake in the confluence of marketing and counterinsurgency in Colombia. Through ethnographic analysis I raise questions beyond the scope of *60 Minutes*’ coverage. Questions like *What does it mean to weaponize advertising, the crux of late capitalism, in a bid to vanquish armed Marxism from the Americas? How has branding emerged as a central battleground in wars of the twenty-first*

century? To what extent do people who desert leave war behind, and to what extent are they remobilized in another? What might it mean to cast the marketization of counterinsurgency as a model to be replicated internationally? The answers that I have found in my research, however fragmentary, paint a much more complex picture than the triumphalist narrative that Lowe/SSP3 and the Colombian Ministry of Defense skillfully pitched to news outlets and their audiences.

Another glaring absence from the *60 Minutes* segment is discussion of the plebiscite on an initial peace agreement between the Colombian government and the FARC in 2016. In that referendum held on October 2, 2016, the No vote carried the day, winning with a margin of 0.4 percent. The narrow victory of the No campaign sent the government and the FARC back to the negotiating table. On November 30, 2016, the Colombian Congress approved a slightly modified version of the accord. The 310-page agreement outlined a formidable list of transitional and transcendental reforms. A few of the pillars of the peace accord are redistributing land; forging a more inclusive democracy; creating a transitional justice framework to balance the demands of truth, justice, and punishment; and designing a framework for demobilizing and reintegrating the FARC's fighters. While the announcement of negotiations in 2012 created widespread excitement in Colombia, by the time the two parties emerged with the document four years later that excitement was long gone. Right-wing politicians systematically attacked the agreement throughout the negotiating period, in the campaign leading up to the plebiscite, and in the implementation of the final accord—effectively fulfilling their promise to shred the accord.⁴

Why the plebiscite failed is a question deserving of a book of its own. For the purposes of this one, however, it is important to note that Lowe/SSP3 played a role in that too. Unlike its work with for the Ministry of Defense however, the firm's efforts here had intense competition. Lowe/SSP3 was essentially outmarketed. Whereas the Yes campaign relied primarily on television and radio advertisements to spread its universal message of peace, the No campaign sowed division with different messages that micro-targeted demographic subgroups via social media. Led by former president Álvaro Uribe, the No campaign used disinformation and conservative wedge issues to fracture the Yes campaign's invocation of peace as a magical transformation on the horizon. Uribe and his followers mobilized against issues as diverse and divisive as the prospect of former FARC fighters receiving welfare and the incremental progress

on expanding rights to people of all sexual orientations. The campaign played upon deep-seated fears of communist subversion from within the political system and reinvigorated a long-standing alliance between the interests of the religious right, conservative political factions, and the Colombian military, sectors of society threatened by the changes written into the accord.

As the post-peace accord political system in Colombia absorbs the intensity of the war, the battles over Colombia's future will be fought with the changing arsenal of consumer marketing. The story that unfolds in these pages is of a particular moment in the mutating assemblage of war and marketing, the period between 2003 and 2016, when sixteen thousand guerrilla fighters deserted from the FARC and joined the government's individual demobilization program. Note that the number of FARC fighters who disarmed and demobilized individually is nearly double the number of those who disarmed and began their demobilization and reintegration process in 2017 after the peace agreement. The demobilizations of 2003–16 have been largely eclipsed by the political and historical significance of the 2016 accord, yet it was during the first years of the third millennium when marketing emerged as a central strategy of antiguerrilla warfare in Colombia, and it was also when the postconflict state was born.



FIGURE INT.4. Drawing by Lucas Ospina.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Good Life Deferred and Risks of Remobilization

Felipe ducks into a closet lit with heat lamps glowing red. He pulls out a plastic fender for a motorcycle's front wheel, its paint now dried. A friend who has a relationship with a Kawasaki distributor sends Felipe business for his motorcycle repair shop. From the perspective of the Colombian Agency for Reintegration, or ACR, the civilian reintegration program that receives the demobilized from the PAHD, Felipe is a success story. In its language, he is a *micro-empresario*, a micro-entrepreneur, who is carving out a name for himself, growing his customer base, and investing in equipment to expand his small shop.

The sound of a growing crowd outside prompts Felipe to pause his work with the fenders and peer out his third-floor window. Below, a young man is throttling a motorcycle while popping a wheelie, riding with one wheel above his head for the length of the block in a display of motorcycle machismo. Biker jackets, helmets, and reflective vests are packed in kiosks and adorn mannequins that pose outside the storefronts below. The three-block radius of this working-class neighborhood of Raconto is a beehive of buzzing motorcycles, a space of commerce regulated by paramilitary strongmen. Felipe pays \$15 a day in extortion charges, \$3 to five different groups that each promise "protection." Those groups send men with fanny packs or pleather satchels to collect the informal tax. Felipe's contributions add one more layer to the collectors' fist-sized wads of small bills. The paramilitary-controlled neighborhoods where Felipe lives and works served as a buffer against the FARC, which had sentenced him to death. The paramilitaries run

drugs, extort local businesses, and kill young people who dare compete for their customers by selling drugs from street corners (*ollas*). The murders these narcoparamilitaries perpetrate are discussed in a euphemistic discourse of cleanliness as pernicious as it is pervasive in Colombia.¹ Most former guerrillas have settled in such informal urban settlements, and many, like Felipe, strike up relationships of accommodation with local paramilitaries. Whereas the guerrillas often recruited children and adolescents by asking them to carry messages or deliver food supplies, paramilitaries begin to *remobilize* former guerrillas by asking for favors, such as lending a motorcycle or storing some weapons.

The ACR, the civilian component of Colombia's individual demobilization program, strives to keep former combatants from remobilizing with a different group. One pillar of its plan is to transform guerrillas into businesspeople. The ACR gave Felipe \$2,200 worth of brand-name equipment to help him get his motorcycle repair business off the ground. To receive a second \$2,200 of seed capital, he must stay active in the program. That means checking in with his caseworker once a month, avoiding run-ins with the law, and persevering through ACR's business start-up checklist. "Graduation" from the program, an eight-year process, is only a year away. Felipe spoke to me with enthusiasm about a rumor that President Juan Manuel Santos might preside over his graduation ceremony. As we talked, he daydreamed aloud, imagining his eight-year-old son seeing the president hand him the certificate that would consummate his transition to civilian life.

Seemingly Felipe is playing by the rules of the game. He is motivated by the demobilization program's promise of the good life as an entrepreneur and consumer. He has embraced his civilian identity and appears to be a docile, law-abiding subject of the state. Yet things are not so simple. In one of our many conversations, Felipe said, "I have many enemies," and pulled a handle in the lower level of his workbench to prove it. A handgun lay in the otherwise empty drawer. The more time I spent with Felipe, the more I learned of the varied enemies he has accumulated while fighting on different sides of Colombia's war.

As a peasant from an indigenous community in the east, Felipe lived in extreme poverty. He joined the FARC for the authority it projected in his home province of Guaviare, and for the meals it provided. Between the ages of fifteen and twenty-nine, he rose in the organization's hierarchy, but he left the FARC in 2006 in an acrimonious dispute with his commander. After deserting (but not yet joining the government's de-

mobilization program) he feared that he would be hunted down for having abandoned the guerrilla movement; so he went to work for a paramilitary group in a part of Colombia's western Andes.² An altercation about money between the paramilitaries and their military collaborators in an illegal gold-mining racket prompted him to flee to the city of Raconto. When a friend who had demobilized from the guerrilla and was living in Raconto's urban periphery warned Felipe that he was about to be captured (which may have been a self-serving warning to earn a monetary reward from the military), Felipe demobilized too.

As I got to know Felipe better, I learned how his story was even more complex. While maintaining his motorcycle repair business, he was also plotting with a group of former rebels and corrupt military officers to locate a stash of cash that he and two others had buried for the FARC years before. One of his former comrades who helped hide the money had recently demobilized. He told Felipe that the stacks of bills had never been unearthed. Pocketing a cut of the approximately \$150,000 (likely guerrilla taxes on cocaine production and trafficking) tantalized Felipe.³ I visited him while this mission loomed as a possibility. We met at a dive bar, a neighbor's living room decorated with pin-up posters, a jukebox, and plastic tables. Drunk on a mixture of whiskey and beer, Felipe fantasized about buying his own house and raising his son to join the professional class.

Felipe's trajectory prompts a chain of questions. What kind of citizen-subject is he? To what extent has he really disarmed, demobilized, and reintegrated into Colombian society? What does Felipe's chameleonlike ability to navigate between an ever-changing assemblage of armed actors say about Colombia's individual demobilization program?

Campaigns to promote desertion from guerrilla ranks, like the Christmas campaigns described in chapter 2, stoke desires to reunite with family and join the middle class. These sophisticated marketing operations interpellate subjects by promising a comfortable life of family connection and consumer citizenship. However, given the state of the social contract in Colombia, eviscerated by a radical form of neoliberalism, the constructed image of the good life—a nuclear family that has the comforts of housing, utilities, education, quality health care, and occasional indulgences—is easily imagined but nearly impossible to maintain. Principal among the obstacles former guerrillas face as they build their civilian lives is a lack of formal education. Another weight that drags on their prospects of keeping a job or making friends in their neighborhoods is

the entrenched stigma of having been a guerrilla. It is a stigma cast and recast through decades of government propaganda and the daily and nightly indoctrination of corporate news broadcasts that represent the FARC as evil incarnate.

For former FARC fighters, the good life is continuously deferred in an often incremental process of disappointment that leaves them adrift in contexts of extreme poverty and rampant criminality. Thwarted aspiration connects former rebels with their working-class neighbors who themselves must figure out how to live an ethical life "at the cusp of soaring aspiration and drowning disappointment."⁴ This is how Jocelyn Lim Chua discusses the double-edged nature of the good life in Kerala, India. Amid fraying fantasies of economic success, "adjustment seems like an accomplishment," as Lauren Berlant writes in *Cruel Optimism*.⁵ Indeed, a certain cruelty festers in the optimism peddled by the Colombian government's mass publicity campaigns targeting the demobilized. Those campaigns to remake rebel fighters into consumer citizens, dialogically engage a more generalized advertising onslaught in which companies bombard marginal communities where the demobilized settle with advertisements that sow desires for middle-class lifestyles. This is not merely a matter of advertising; it's also a question of urban design and financialization. Between 2003 and 2014 the number of malls more than tripled in Colombia. As anthropologist Arlene Dávila notes, developers build most of these shopping malls in proximity to the poor to help companies seek out "coming-of-age" consumers in poor, densely populated areas of cities.⁶ These malls are expressions of efforts to produce middle class-ness. I write "middle class-ness" to highlight the fact that in Latin America, as others have noted, "middle class" is often a catch-all category that includes the racially and ethnically diverse "lower middle classes" or "emerging classes."⁷ Malls provide a safe space for young people to stroll, a sharp contrast with gang-ridden neighborhoods where invisible borders dictate who can move where. The rate of proliferation of shopping malls in the urban periphery is rivaled by the growth in credit card opportunities for the poor, which quintupled in the first fifteen years of the millennium.⁸ The economic struggles of former FARC rebels resonate with those of internally displaced people and economic migrants who also settle in Colombia's urban peripheries and stitch together a life in the yawning gap between the promised and the possible.

The houses in Felipe's hillside neighborhood may be precariously

built with brick and corrugated iron, but they have sweeping views of the Raconto cityscape below. At night the downtown glows in the distance. The lights of the tall buildings signal commerce and possibility. In Felipe's neighborhood, however, the road to the good life is routed through relationships with paramilitary mafias. Informality and illegality closely conjoin in the neighborhoods where ex-combatants settle. The ACR knows that such an environment, often labeled "high risk" by urban planners, poses threats to former combatants' commitment to lead a lawful life and undermines its mission statement: "To promote the return of the demobilized population to legality in a sustainable manner, contributing to Peace, Security and Citizen Coexistence." The bureaucracy's principal objective, "the return of the demobilized population to legality," is then qualified by the catchphrases of sustainability and citizen security—code for what cannot be printed in the agency's glossy pamphlets: *to curtail rearmament and remobilization*.

Quantitative studies about rearmament in Colombia are unreliable because researchers primarily use government statistics and include only criminal activity known to the state. Much slips beneath the state's radar. Government statistics claim that 28 percent of demobilized combatants (paramilitary and guerrilla) break their commitments to legality, while another study by Ideas for Peace, a Bogotá think tank, found a recidivism rate of 24 percent.⁹ Both of these figures are likely low, not only because they rely heavily on official data but also because they exclude the thousands of ex-combatants who once officially certified never present themselves to the ACR and enter its rolls; choosing to hide (*perderse*) rather than deal with the hassle and surveillance of reintegration.

The academic literature on disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration processes, which is disproportionately composed of political science scholarship, is focused on the difficulty of economic integration and its relationship to rearmament. Scholars often construct complex matrices of factors—personal, social, and environmental—that push and pull on ex-combatants.¹⁰ One of the most common findings in this literature is that the impossibility of finding stable work leads many ex-combatants to take up arms once again. Although this is a logical conclusion, designing a policy to address it has proved nearly impossible. Well-educated bureaucrats in the ACR have read the academic literature, surveyed previous reintegration processes in Colombia and in other parts of the world, and concluded that the best approach to economic integration is to transform the demobilized into small business owners.

Business owners are rooted, while alienated employees or people who hustle in the informal economy are prone to remobilize. Owners won't cut, run, and rearm—so the thinking goes.

The government's conception of the demobilized as entrepreneurs is yet another expression of its deep ideological commitment to market fixes, a fixation that parallels the PAHD's reliance on consumer marketers for its propaganda and psychological warfare campaigns. The ACR has placed great emphasis on fomenting small business initiatives (*proyectos productivos*)—nail salons, internet cafés, car mechanic shops—that often end in bankruptcy and acrimony. These projects succumb to a series of structural challenges, not least of which is former guerrillas' preference for work in the countryside. Many do dream of ownership, but of a parcel of land rather than an entrepreneurial venture in the city. Fear of their former comrades, however, has kept them in cities, where a mismatch of skills accumulated in the war and those needed in the city, along with the discrimination that comes with their stigmatized status, grind against their prospects.

The ACR, through the years, has become increasingly aware that former combatants are ill prepared to run businesses.¹¹ In addition to its efforts to turn guerrillas into entrepreneurs, it also pleads with companies to hire a quota of former combatants. But as one former director of the ACR lamented in an academic conference, the government's appeals almost always fall on deaf ears. Despite the ACR's energetic efforts to convince the private sector to hire former combatants, only a few tokenistic partnerships between the ACR and the private sector provide jobs to the demobilized. The most prominent of these initiatives is that of Coca-Cola Femsa, a Mexico-based Coca-Cola bottling franchise, one of the largest in the world.

The motivations for the corporation's support of the ACR are suspect. In Colombia the company has had to cope with bad press emerging from accusations that it is complicit in paramilitary violence against a labor union. It is a long story, but in brief, SINALTRAINAL, the Spanish acronym for the National Union of Food and Beverage Workers, is the trade union that bore the brunt of the paramilitary aggression allegedly linked to the soft-drink giant.¹² The union counts nine deaths among its members between 1990 and 2012. Via allied unions in the United States, SINALTRAINAL filed a suit in a federal district court in Miami. A judge threw out that suit, arguing that the court did not have jurisdiction. Anthropologist Lesley Gill has compellingly argued that such as-

sassinations of unionists in Colombia eviscerated the labor movement and exemplify a fraternal relationship between the “the evil twins” of neoliberalism and political violence in Colombia.¹³

Although the lawsuit against Coca-Cola failed, the brand battle continues. Activists have sought to tarnish the company's image by creating websites like Killercoke.org.¹⁴ Viewed through the optics of the ongoing public relations war between the company and student activists, Coca-Cola Femsa appears to be attempting to peace-wash its image and curry favor with the Colombian government by acting as one of the few companies to hire former combatants. In a 2015 survey of 1,328 businesses, Bogotá's chamber of commerce found that zero percent employed demobilized guerrilla or paramilitary combatants.¹⁵

In what follows I offer a glimpse into some of the pitfalls of economic reintegration and begin to illuminate how remobilization works. As shown in chapter 3, the government has transformed demobilized combatants into military informants, which is already a remobilization of sorts.¹⁶ While pomp and publicity accompany demobilizations, the remobilization of combatants with other armed groups takes place quietly—often in furtive acts of last resort, at moments when ex-combatants find themselves broke and broken by the economics of urban life.

Luisa

Of the homes of former FARC members that I have visited, Luisa's feels the most spacious. No doors separate the two bedrooms, small kitchen, and nook with a desktop computer, and their absence gives the place an airy feel. Her second-story apartment felt even more spacious when I returned in early 2012. She had recently pawned most of her appliances. The pawning spree began with the motorcycle of her boyfriend, Simón. He had bought it for \$2,200. They sold it for \$1,100. When things hit rock bottom, Luisa and Simon hauled their refrigerator to the pawnshop. They were in a financial jam, and her three kids felt the effects. They regularly skipped meals and ate a proper lunch only a few days a week.

Luisa could escape her financial straits quickly, if she wished. The solution was as simple as it was dangerous: accept one of two offers extended by the financial manager of a man called Machete, the local narco-paramilitary boss who ran the hills of Raconto during the late 2000s. The first: launder \$55,500, and keep \$5,500 for herself once the sum was

legalized. The second "opportunity" was to join the ranks of Machete's group and earn a comfortable salary, a job that would involve assassination, or "cleansing" (*limpieza*). How did Luisa find herself in this conundrum? Let's backtrack.

Luisa grew up in an indigenous community in the country's far east. From the age of seventeen to twenty-seven she dedicated her life to the FARC, where she was a rank-and-file member of a front that operated in the southwestern Andes. A guerrilla mole in the attorney general's office passed along information that a warrant for her arrest had been issued. A series of close calls intensified her feeling that either the state or its paramilitary allies would kill or capture her soon. So in 2005 she reluctantly turned herself in, coordinating her demobilization with Edwin, her boyfriend at the time, a *miliciano*. Within three months the inter-agency committee that certifies the demobilized, the CODA, approved both of them and gave them laminated ID cards.

In civilian life she still considers herself a revolutionary though she has disavowed the armed struggle. Politically she identifies with the FARC's political project and has internalized its antigovernment propaganda. She has channeled her passion for what the FARC calls "organizing the masses" into becoming a local activist who tries to bring together former guerrillas and displaced peasants, populations united by the precarity of urban poverty and violence. With other leaders from the demobilized community, she created an organization called Weaving Society (Tejiendo Sociedad). Five of the groups' members were killed between 2005 and 2015, likely by shadowy right-wing forces. The circumstances of those deaths, like so many other of the "cleansings" that happen in her neighborhood, are hardly ever investigated, much less adjudicated.

In the High Presidential Advisory for Social and Economic Reintegration, the predecessor to the ACR, both Luisa and Edwin dutifully fulfilled the requirements to access the seed capital (the centerpiece of which is a business-planning exercise). They each wrote a plan for an internet café and pooled the capital they were given, more than \$8,000 in all. Getting their business going meant working with the vendors approved by the reintegration agency, merchants who not only sold the necessary supplies but also served as brokers for entire small businesses, selling them new or used. Luisa and Edwin bought their business for \$9,450 (putting in more than \$1,000 of their own money) from an approved vendor whom Luisa would later refer to as "a rat of a guy." (She came to consider the network of vendors used by the reintegration agency "a mafia.")

The couple went to see the business. Reflecting on that visit, she said, "Back then we didn't know anything about computers," a point she made in a tone that split the difference between self-criticism and disdain for the institutional arrangement that put her in that situation. They purchased desktops with Pentium 4 processors, outdated by then. "We barely had gotten them and they started to break down," she said. It was not only the computers that began to break down but also the phone cabins where people make phone calls and are charged by the minute. Until the price of a cell minute fell from ten cents to five, minutes were their shop's most profitable items. A software program controlled the codes to the phone cabins, but between glitches in the program and interruptions in internet service, the calls would drop. When the broker sold her the business, he had showed her registries of sale for similar businesses that made \$110–\$167 per day. Things did not work out that way for Luisa and Edwin.

Hardware and software were not the only problems. "The employees were the worst," Luisa remembered bitterly.

They didn't clean the machines; they didn't attend [to the customers]. They spent all of their time on Facebook. I would go every two weeks and found bags of trash piled up; they didn't take them out. Over there the roads aren't paved, so lots of dust comes in; you have to clean a thousand times a day, but you could tell they never touched a rag. . . . I changed the people like a thousand times, but I couldn't manage.

As the business faltered, Luisa fell into a debt cycle through the "drip-drop" system (*gota a gota*) in which loan sharks recover their loans in daily sums that amount to usurious interest rates. She took a \$1,670 loan at 20 percent interest and paid it down daily.

It's a common story among former guerrillas uninitiated in the world of finance. In the insurgency, each front has a provisioner (*ecónomo*) who apportions supplies to each member of the unit. The vast majority of guerrillas have little experience with managing resources in any way beyond buying an occasional treat with petty cash distributed by the *ecónomo* on an ad hoc basis. Although the FARC was awash in money from the drug trade, mining, and extortion, only commanders and members in the finance commissions made financial decisions and handled large sums of money.

Luisa and Edwin decided to sell his portion of the business, down-

sizing from eleven computers to six. They used the money from the sale to paint the shop and service the computers. But the cycle of fixing and breaking continued, further draining their limited resources. Luisa said, "Technicians take advantage of you—they know you don't know about system maintenance." It was a lesson in savage capitalism, a "save yourself if you can" world, in her words. She invoked an aphorism all too relevant to her experience: "The con artist lives off the fool" (*el vivo vive del bobo*).¹⁷ Con artists abounded. They sold her SIM cards containing a fraction of the minutes that she had paid for. When she went looking for the hucksters, they had disappeared.

Nonetheless the internet café was covering its costs, if not making a profit. In the meanwhile, the "drip-drop" had turned into a waterfall, plunging Luisa deeper into debt. She consistently paid multiple cell phone bills on time. Her decent credit history enabled the predatory lending practices of the local bank, whose transaction manager (*tramitador*) was a con artist of the corporate stripe. He approved a series of credit cards and loans that added up to \$25,560 of debt. Luisa called those loans "the stupidest decision of my life." (The transaction manager collected \$2,560 from Luisa for pushing the loans through.)

With her newfound credit she upgraded the equipment in the internet café and bought appliances for her home: a refrigerator, washing machine, and home computer. But if the appliances indexed her ascension to the middle class, they were unstable signs that vacillated in time. Time, after all, was the currency of Luisa's business: a fifteen-minute internet session, a three-minute phone call. Yet the economics of time were stacked against her. The interest she owed compounded daily, propelling her debts much faster than any meager profit she could eke out.

After a four-year battle to keep the internet café running, Luisa conceded defeat. The same vendor who sold them the business for \$9,450 bought it back for \$2,780. Luisa surmised, "This was all premeditated. He knew the state of those computers, he knew it wouldn't work. He had his technicians arrange everything so they only half-worked."

When I visited Luisa three years after her business had folded, it was still causing headaches, literally. The vendor who bought back the business from Luisa still owed her money. She had traveled by motorcycle-taxi up the hill to speak with him with the hope of getting paid. The driver was cut off on a turn along an unpaved road, and the motorcycle tipped over. Luisa's right eye was badly bruised by the impact of

her poorly fitting helmet. The trip yielded a nasty black eye and some scratches, but none of the money she was owed.

Although Luisa lacked business acumen, she had embraced the entrepreneurial spirit. Like many former guerrillas she looked for opportunities wherever she could find them—a constant hedge against the improbabilities that any singular source of income will last. Halfway through her experience with the internet café, Luisa took a position as community liaison with a program to support ex-combatants in Raconto's city government. That position would enable her to learn of other initiatives to support the demobilized, one of which was a collective business venture: a supermarket. Luisa jumped at the opportunity to join the collective. The project gave \$38,900 in start-up funds to a group of eleven ex-combatants from different groups: the FARC, ELN, and AUC. Five of the demobilized combatants, Luisa included, administered the half of the store dedicated to selling packaged goods, while the other six managed the produce section. Since Luisa had a job in the municipal government, she didn't involve herself in the day-to-day operations of the supermarket and did not expect any dividends either. "As a partner, the only benefit I got was the opportunity to do my food shopping on credit. At the end of the month, I paid [for what I had taken] and took more food out. We all had that privilege, and it helped us a lot."

The supermarket that doubled as a food bank for its partners began to crumble amid mismanagement and theft. One night, Luisa recalled, "one of the *compañeros*, we don't know who, came in. The building had a security system, alarms, cameras. When the person who woke up at dawn to open the store arrived the next day, he saw that \$2,780 had been stolen from the safe." The door had not been forced. The alarm did not go off. The only thing that had been broken was the safe, which had a hole smashed into its side. "In the beginning we worked well together," Luisa said, "but then the biggest con artists who managed the business began to take out [money] to pay debts, furnish their houses, send their families on trips."

Only when one of the partners robbed the store did the former combatants identify a longer trend of embezzlement. As with Luisa's internet café, the solution in a moment of crisis was to take out a loan and downsize. Luisa's two business ventures foundered at the same time. Those experiences as well as her work advising other former combatants led her to the conclusion that "we, the demobilized, don't know how to man-

age a business. It's been totally proven by the majority of the demobilized. I think 1 percent are good at business."

For many years, it was the modest salary from her job with Raconto city government that kept Luisa and her family afloat (a basic stability that most former guerrillas lack). By 2010 she and Edwin had split up. She began a relationship with Simón, who comes from a family that the FARC had forcibly displaced when he was a child. (Such relationships between the demobilized and the displaced are not uncommon nor illogical, given that the two populations are crammed into the same barrios that ring major cities like Raconto.) Simón contributed to the household by taking odd jobs, low-paid short-term contract work like "the Russian" (*el ruso*). *El ruso* is vernacular for construction work, and it involves waking up at 4 a.m., being exposed to occupational hazards, and coming home at 7 p.m. exhausted. Between Luisa's salary and Simón's sporadic earnings they could pay rent and keep paying down their debts. But they hardly had enough money to buy food for the family, let alone school uniforms for the kids. In the middle of one of our conversations, Luisa recalled how her youngest son would look up at her on occasion and say, "Mom, I am hungry." As she repeated her son's words, her tone and body language combined to express a mix of heartbreak and failure.¹⁸

Three years earlier Luisa had been equally destitute. That was when a man had walked into the local government office where she worked, the same man who a year later would make Luisa lucrative offers to work with the paramilitaries. The municipal government that employed Luisa to support the ex-combatant community was under no legal obligation to provide services to the demobilized, but it offered them skills training and job placement services. It was late and Luisa was the only social worker there, so the secretary ushered the fellow to her cubicle. The man, a former paramilitary, had demobilized from the AUC in the mid-2000s. He asked if they could speak in a more private setting. "Of course," she said. They stepped into an office and closed the door.

"Don't worry, I am also demobilized," she told him. "I am a social worker, but also demobilized. I'll understand whatever you tell me."

"You see, what happened is that I am demobilized [from the AUC] but I reactivated with Machete," he said.

Machete was the narcoparamilitary boss who controlled the drug trade in Raconto's northern hills in the late 2000s. This man, as he explained, was Machete's financial officer. Luisa immediately recognized

the danger and delicateness of the case. Luisa recalled her first impression of the man. "When I met him he had been in the street for two days. He had gotten wet and then dry, he had to sleep on the street, he hadn't eaten, he smelled like shit." She gave him some money to pay for a city bus fare, a night in a hotel, and some food.

The man showed her a series of photos he carried to prove his story: photos of Machete, his kids, his mother-in-law, his bodyguards, even images from the funeral of one of Machete's children, including the body in a casket. He said to Luisa, "I have all of this information and I want to turn it in. I have DVDs here and more information."

Luisa told him, "Look, I am going to tell you, as someone who is demobilized from the FARC—you, as someone who is demobilized from the AUC, you know they have people who are infiltrated everywhere, from the government to where you least expect it. I wouldn't hand in any information, because where are you going to hide? . . . If I were you, I would wash my hands of that information. I don't know why you are carrying around those photos, those videos. They will only bring you more problems. If you want to be in good standing as a demobilized person, dedicate yourself to a job, work for your family, and leave that other stuff alone."

Then he showed Luisa his bank statement. She was taken aback. The account, in his name, held more than \$55,500. She didn't understand why he couldn't access the money. The man explained: "What is going on is that the manager of the bank works with us. With one call they can cancel everything." The guy had gone from riches to rags in record time.¹⁹

The next week he came back to the office transformed into a stylish member of the upper middle class with "a nice outfit, pimped-out watch, a laptop, and cell phones." When Luisa asked what had happened, he responded, "I went back. I am not going to give away that information on Machete. I reported to Machete again, and they activated the account. In fact, I need to go and cash some checks. I am good now; I am paying for a studio apartment in Risaraldo [an upscale part of Raconto]." He thanked Luisa profusely for her solidarity in his time of need.

A few months later the demobilization program fired Luisa in a round of layoffs. Machete's financial henchman called and said, "Luisa, hey, your friends told me that you lost your job, that you're in a tough spot because you're unemployed and have the kids, because your partner isn't working, and your businesses aren't going well. I want to help."

I told him, "No, it's fine. I am OK."

He said, "No, I want to help, because you were one of the people who helped me with clothes and money to buy a room. Not just anybody does that."

I said, "You aren't the first. I always help with what I can."

He said, "No, let me cash these checks and I'll give you some money."

I said, "I am not asking for money. I really can't take money from you."

He said, "In any case, I am going to find a way to help you."

Months later he called and said, "Hey, where are you?"

"In the culture house in Quintales [a popular area of Raconto], in an event with a group of women."

"Perfect, I am heading over. I need to talk to you," he said.

The man arrived in a pickup truck with a chauffeur and took Luisa out to coffee at a nearby bakery. He wasted little time before getting down to business. "I am coming with two proposals that can help you. The first is that we need people to launder some money, and there's a possibility you can help. If you want, I'll recommend you. . . . You know what, that's why I brought the truck. If you want, call Simón and we can go to Cali. If you want, we can get \$55,500 today."

He said, "If you want to launder that money for me, I'll leave it with you for a year. You'll be responsible to me, and I'll be responsible to Machete. If you fail me, I fail Machete. He'll charge me, and I'll charge you."

Recounting the conversation, Luisa underlined the threat. "That's what he said!" The risks notwithstanding, Luisa confessed that "the whole situation started to tickle my sense of temptation, and I thought—maybe. But then I said no, we're talking about paras."

She declined the offer, in part on principle, in part out of ignorance. "I don't even know how to launder money. I don't know anything about how to make money look legal."

After Luisa declined the first proposal, the man launched into his next offer—that she work for him in downtown Raconto. "He would give me some men [*unidades*] and I would be responsible for doing some things," Luisa recalled. Among the "things" he mentioned were "cleansings," *limpiezas*, or, in less euphemistic terms, murder. "They would pay me monthly, like any other *paraco*." The second proposal did not appeal to Luisa at all. "That would be getting involved with paramilitaries and narcotrafficking, the worst thing anyone can do." She continued,

"I come from the FARC, and I am not open to changing my ideology and switching groups." Luisa mentioned the exchange to friends who had also demobilized from the FARC. Some responded to the money-laundering scheme by saying, "Oof, let's do it."

Within a year the police killed Machete as he fled a raid in Colombia's Amazonian region. Her friends commented, "You see, you could have kept the money."

"There's always someone who collects the debts," she said.

One of her friends shot back, "No, you're being a fool; some of your colleagues in the program went for the \$55,500."

She never learned the identities of her colleagues who became paramilitary money launderers. "I'll tell you the miracle but not the saint" is the religiously loaded flourish Luisa's colleague used to compartmentalize the sensitive information. Although "the saint" who took the narco-paramilitaries up on their offer remains unknown, knowledge about who has declined circulates through the paramilitaries' expansive networks.

When I returned to Luisa's home in 2015, she had managed to get her refrigerator back from the pawn shop. Both she and Simón were working with the municipal government (she was no longer with the demobilization program), but her activities as a community organizer had attracted the attention of a group calling itself Cooperating for Good Living. They slipped a pamphlet written in the style of a press release under her door. Its header was simply a white skull and crossbones over a black box. The first line read: "In defense of the Colombian State." The pamphlet claimed that Raconto had been invaded by sleazy people (*de mala muerte*), "guerrillas masked as defenders of human rights, the land, the peasants, the victims, the poor." It sentenced Luisa and others to death "wherever they are," but especially in the spaces that they use to organize. It urged the listed individuals "to abandon their [organizing] practices, the neighborhood, the city, or face the consequences with their families." The threat was signed with the exact phrasing of a government memo: "Let it be communicated and fulfilled" ("*Comuníquese y cúmplase*"). Either Luisa's role as a community organizer or her refusal of the paramilitaries' lucrative offer would have been sufficient to get her name on a death list. The combination could be fatal.

This was not the first time that she had been marked for death since abandoning the FARC. When we were walking in her neighborhood to pick up groceries for lunch, she pointed out the route that she had taken to avoid someone she suspected had been sent to kill her. She recalled

how she suddenly cut across a busy avenue to evade her stalker. When it was clear that she had gotten away, Luisa looked back at the man. When their eyes met, the man crossed himself as if he were mourning at a Catholic funeral. The gesture made her heart sink.

The skull and crossbones pamphlet triggered a paranoia that had lingered after the incident. Luisa evaluated her risks and lowered her profile in the barrio. Weaving Society (Tejiendo Sociedad), the organization she was struggling to launch with other former combatants, began to unravel as other leaders left the neighborhood. When I last visited their home in 2015, Luisa and Simón were weighing the pros and cons of moving elsewhere in the city.

Cooperating for Good Living's *comunicué* is not only a threat but an articulation of the good life in which narcoparamilitaries repress into submission community-based projects that suggest collective organizing. Its response is utterly disproportionate to any real threat to paramilitary hegemony.²⁰ The community-level activism of former combatants has no budget or any significant projects under way. Luisa's organization and others I have followed are "done by one's fingernails"—a Colombian expression that means scraping together the bare minimum necessary. Enterprising former combatants will often take the initiative to bring people together for small projects with the hope of winning funding from a municipal government office or NGO interested in development or reconciliation.²¹ I have witnessed the fitful efforts to launch three different organizations led by former guerrillas. Each has struggled to incorporate as a nonprofit, attract sponsors, and move the organization beyond a series of initial meetings. As members of a population of interest to the expansive international and national NGO sector, charismatic former guerrillas can get an audience in NGO offices. Navigating the paperwork at the chamber of commerce and creating a legal organization, however, is a first, and often insurmountable, hurdle. While former guerrillas like Luisa try to organize, narcoparamilitaries who control the urban periphery violently repress even the most ineffectual of community solidarity initiatives. The vision of the good life that narcoparamilitaries enforce is one in which atomized individuals and nuclear families strive to improve their own lot by laboring under their menacing dominion.

When we overlay the perspectives of narcoparamilitaries and the state toward former guerrillas, their ideological alignment against leftist politics comes into relief. While narcoparamilitaries respond to the specter of leftist politics with violent repression, the state tries to detach former

rebels from the political sensibility they forged while in the insurgency. The ACR's dedication to social and economic reintegration brackets out political reintegration, preferring that the demobilized see themselves as apolitical subjects. The ACR worries that political activities might spur ex-combatants to return to the FARC or to a different guerrilla organization. Yet the ACR's model of reintegration, focused on entrepreneurial projects, is far from apolitical. Microcredit schemes throughout Latin America serve as potent tools for integrating marginal populations into existing political economic structures and blunt the possibility that they might embrace revolutionary movements.²² Peruvian economist Hernando de Soto has argued forcefully for the formalization of the global poor's assets so that capital languishing unrecognized by banks, such as properties without deeds, can be used as collateral for loans. The subtext to this model of development, outlined in his best seller *The Mystery of Capital*, is a political project to buttress liberal capitalism by integrating the abjectly poor—those most prone to rebel—into the economic system partly responsible for their marginality. De Soto makes explicit the politics of his program in an opinion piece he published in the *Wall Street Journal* in October 2014 titled "The Capitalist Cure for Terrorism." There he argues that the fight against the Islamic State should learn from the fight against the Peruvian Maoist group the Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso). He claims that the Peruvian military defeated the Shining Path because of the legal and economic reforms that allowed its peasant base to prosper and ultimately turn on the Shining Path. He points to Peru's relatively fast-paced growth in the 1990s and 2000s, failing to mention the economic polarization, grinding rural poverty in the postconflict moment, and the calamitous environmental consequences of Peru's resource extraction-oriented economy.²³

Whereas de Soto advocates for integrating the poor into an ownership society, he refuses to look at the ways in which they get locked into an *ownership* society. As Luisa's case makes clear, reintegration through entrepreneurialism can easily end in cycles of credit and indebtedness. For most this becomes a downward spiral for which paramilitarism is the only quick solution. Refusal to resolve one's economic problems through remobilization means breaking the unwritten social contract by which paramilitaries solidify their hegemonic position through a combination of gifts and threats.

I don't want to give the impression that *all* small businesses started by former guerrillas end in failure, but over the nine years that I spent

researching this book I did not hear of a single success story. When I returned to Colombia to do follow-up fieldwork in 2016, I got in touch with a former ACR official. She had spent more than a decade in the organization and oversaw more caseworkers (*reintegradores*) than any other manager. I asked if she could refer me to a successful small business run by a former rebel. She sent me the contact information for Ciro.

"What's his business," I wrote in a WhatsApp message.

"He makes briefcases, bags," she replied. "Sewing," she added in the next bubble.

"Is he the tailor?" I asked.

"Yes"

I should have figured that when I asked for an exemplary business, I would be referred to the tailor.

Ciro

As it turns out, Ciro was not the person whom the ACR had labeled "the tailor of the FARC" in 2012. That was Álvaro Pérez. Supposedly Álvaro specialized in sewing uniforms for the FARC. As a demobilized combatant he created Colfepaz, a sewing business that received the enthusiastic backing of the upper echelons of the reintegration agency.²⁴ Colfepaz seized upon the government's scheme to create a brand—Chance—at the Bogotá Fashion Circle, the nation's premier fashion event. The public relations initiative to launch the Chance brand brought together the ACR, the Ministry of Defense, and Lowe/SSP3 (from chapter 2). Ciro was one of Álvaro's close associates in Colfepaz. Leading fashion designer Sandra Cabrales helped Álvaro, Ciro, and other former combatants (from both the guerrilla and the paramilitaries) design a seasonal fashion line. When Marcela, who features in chapter 2, invited me to the launch, I went unprepared for the spectacle that would take place beneath the giant tent pitched in the middle of Bogotá's Ninety-Third Street Park, a green space surrounded by some of the city's most expensive properties and restaurants.

Beneath the canopy, models dressed in meticulously tattered T-shirts and jeans strutted to the music of the Colombian hip-hop group Choc-quibtown (see figure 4.1). At the end of the runway they would strike a pose for the photographers and, with a flip of the hip, turn and strut



FIGURE 4.1. Models stride down the runway wearing the Chance fashion line designed by ex-combatants with the help of fashion designer Sandra Cabrales. Photo by author, 2012.

back. The ex-combatant tailors held hands with Cabrales as they walked the catwalk and took a bow to polite applause.

Then came remarks by Juan Carlos Pinzón, Colombia's minister of defense: "During the time I've been minister of defense, and the years before when I was vice minister, I've visited what is known as the naked Colombia. The most isolated places." After listing a series of remote municipalities, he said: "The state, entrepreneurs, civil society, all want the demobilized to dream and to aspire to a better future. Chance by Colombia, Chance *para* Colombia, offers a real opportunity for those who have left the guerrilla to make visible the possibility of a better future, and God willing with a stable income, so that everyone who is there [in the guerrilla] decides to demobilize." He concluded, "Thanks to the Fashion Circle there's hope for the country's future."

After the minister's remarks came an inspirational video extolling the fashionista peace initiative. Up-tempo music accompanied images of former combatants concentrating at sewing machines, a behind-the-scenes look at the production process (figure 4.2). The voiceover proclaimed: "We are going to show that behind every item of clothing, each

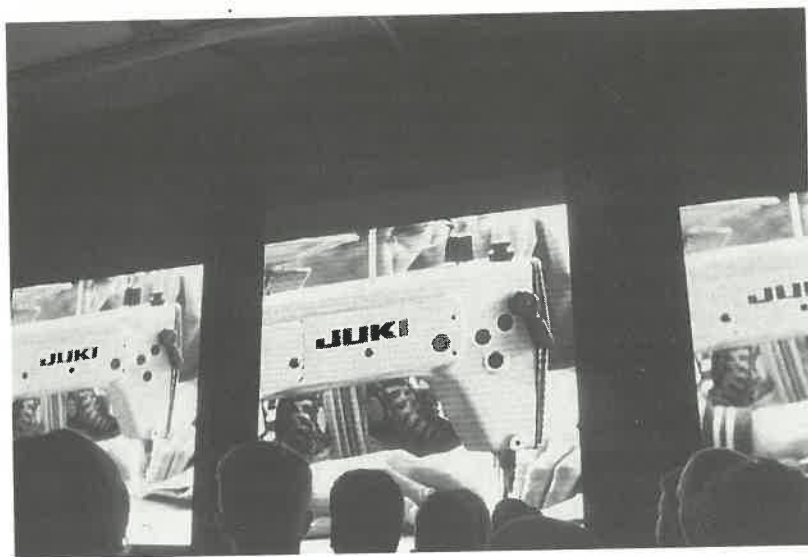


FIGURE 4.2. Image of an ex-combatant sewing in the promotional video for Chance. Photo by author, 2012.

color, each texture, there's much more than fabric and machines, threads and stitches. There's a life story. The brand looks to transform trends into something much more than fashion, transforming it into a motor for social change that generates opportunities for thousands of Colombians. They can show the world that it's always possible to start over, that there's always a chance."

There's always a chance. But for whom? To do what? The word itself has a gambler's edge. Presumably the "chance" (never translated into Spanish) is an opportunity for the demobilized, but that requires some parsing.

To start, let's look at the sartorial clues. The clothes themselves, ripped and pockmarked to suggest bullet holes, bespeak worn combat fatigues and the tatters of urban poverty. The mostly denim garments also evoke the punk culture of the Global North and invite prospective wearers to posture as rebels of the nonthreatening variety.²⁵ The models, meticulously accessorized, carry shiny red backpacks and red tote bags that resignify the color associated with the Communist Party in an indisputably consumerist register. The demobilized tailors watching on the sidelines dress in business suits and embody rehabilitated subjects,

transformed from class-conscious guerrilla fighters or ruthless paramilitaries into successful entrepreneurs ready for the upscale bustle of north Bogotá's workweek. The fiction of their agency in the Chance project and its ostentatious launch is transparent to all. But the Fashion Circle is not about a reality: it's a phantasmagoric world where the demobilized are cast as characters in a morality play in which consumer culture is good and militancy bad. The figure of the rehabilitated demobilized fighter exists only to be consumed by the spectacle itself. The real protagonists of this show are the fashion models. That is who the audience has come to see, the archetypal sirens of consumption. I concur with anthropologist Michael Taussig when he writes that focusing on "the co-existence of glamour and terror in the world" misses the point of "their synergism."²⁶

Two blocks beyond the giant white tent in Ninety-Third Street Park stands a five-story brick building that contains the offices of *SoHo*, the Colombian equivalent of *Playboy*. In November 2015, three years after the Chance fashion show, *SoHo* featured a demobilized female FARC rebel, Ana Pacheco, posing erotically with a female police detective, Isabel Londoño (figure 4.3). The gloss of the cover contained the wild sexuality of these dangerous women, immobilized by the photographer's camera. These technologies of capture and display put the uncomfortable matter of this femme fatal pair in its place, the familiar category of objects of male desire. The intentionally provocative cover helps to illuminate the relationship between models and demobilized combatants in the Chance fashion show.

The first point that must be made about this image is a chronological one: it appeared at the end of 2015, when peace negotiations between the Colombian government and the FARC were in an advanced stage. The liberal facet of corporate media had begun to anticipate the collective demobilization and reintegration of the FARC's military structures, while not giving up on the mass media's long-standing project to discredit the FARC by relentlessly drawing attention to its child-recruitment practices and mistreatment of women (valid points often exaggerated for effect). *SoHo*'s editors, in the spirit of peace through dialogue between political opposites, asked right-wing journalist Salud Hernández-Mora to interview Ana Pacheco, the former FARC guerrilla, and left-wing journalist Alfredo Molano to interview former DAS detective Isabel Londoño.

The combination of erotica and stories from the war's protagonists in



FIGURE 4.3. This November 2015 cover of *SoHo* magazine features a former FARC guerrilla and a former police detective that prosecuted the FARC. In a cheeky reference to its own debasement of the war into airbrushed erotica, the editors title the cover “Peace according to *SoHo*.”

SoHo is an iteration of the same recipe behind the Chance fashion show. The amalgam of sex appeal and war drama serves as a two-pronged hook to lure audiences and potential consumers. As in the Chance pageantry, combatants proved a potent weapon for marketing the idea of peace through consumption. That messaging intensified as negotiations between the FARC and the government accelerated during 2016; but the PAHD had been watering the seed of the notion of peace as business since the mid-2000s, when it began its campaigns to sell a new life of consumer citizenship to the demobilized.

With the *SoHo* photo spread and accompanying interviews, the magazine’s editors, photographers, and layout artists call on audiences to visually consume the two former adversaries, their curvaceous bodies, and the dramatic twists in their personal narratives. That consumption, in turn, will help the magazine sell advertisements that promote liquor, watches, bicycles, and clothing. A two-page Diesel advertisement that separates the two sets of photos and the interviews features models outfitted in urban camouflage (figure 4.4). The slogan, in English, reads “No military experience required.”



FIGURE 4.4. Advertisement between the photos and interviews of two women combatants featured in the *SoHo* cover story, November 2015.

Taken together, the *SoHo* spread—hyphenated by this advertisement—and the Chance spectacle speak volumes about the urbanization of the Colombian conflict. In the Diesel ad, the indeterminacy of who is and who is not a combatant, the cause of so much death and injury, becomes the basis of a new clothing line. The style could be interpreted as guerilla chic, offering potential customers the opportunity to express their inner (depoliticized) rebel, or as inviting them to unwittingly embody a paramilitary logic whereby civilians serve as extensions of the military. The otherwise deadly military-civilian ambivalence at the heart of guerilla warfare is rendered banal beneath the veneer of urban outfitting. Not to worry, “no military experience required.” The larger point is that the fantastical urbanization of the armed conflict represented in *SoHo* hides the deadly urban war unfolding on the peripheries of Colombian cities, like Raconto, where former combatants struggle to remake their lives in contexts where the war still rages. That urban war, which the demobilized find themselves in the middle of, exceeds classic portrayals of the Colombian conflict that feature images of armed men and war machines in the countryside. Yet the urbanization of the conflict has existed, persisted, and quietly intensified for decades. While residents of impoverished swaths of large cities must navigate armed actors that furiously control much of the metropolis, elites in wealthy pockets of those same cities project very different images of war and urbanism—like this Diesel advertisement or the photographs that emerged from the event in Ninety-Third Street Park. Let’s return to the scene of the latter.

When the narrator of the inspirational video proclaimed that the Chance project was about “something much more than fashion,” he was entirely correct. Not because the fashion world is saving the demobilized, as he insinuates, but rather the contrary. The excess that the disembodied voiceover invokes, I argue, is the surplus value that the fashion industry, often assailed for the exploitation of its workers, stands to reap from its ostensible commitment to peace in Colombia. The token demobilized entrepreneurs, their stories, and the feel-good-fable of leaving guns for sewing machines allow fashion designer Sandra Cabrales, and metonymically her industry, to stake a claim to the category of “ethical fashion.”

Ethical fashion has emerged as a current within the world of “ethical capitalism,” in which environmental and social values become distinguishing features of high-end consumption—think sustainable agriculture or fair trade coffee. The inherently contradictory idea of ethical capitalism relies in large part on the tales that companies tell about their



FIGURE 4.5. The media interview Álvaro, “the tailor” (center), and ACR leader Joshua Mittroti (left). The screen behind Álvaro (not pictured) is filled with the logo of the supermarket chain Éxito. Photo by author, 2012.

supply chains—distributing more profits to impoverished farmers in Honduras, for example.²⁷ Such stories, always presented in sketch form, not only enable a markup but also allow the fashion industry to refashion itself by posing as a socially concerned. In the process, the industry hides its association with classic capitalist exploitation of the likes highlighted by investigative reports about sweatshop conditions in Bangladesh.

As I watched and reflected on the production that evening, I wondered: who is the real beneficiary of this elaborate show? After the ceremony I watched people pose for photographs with the ex-combatant entrepreneurs in front of backdrops adorned with logos. News media besieged “the tailor” and Joshua Mittroti, then managing director of the ACR (figure 4.5). Scanning the press after the event, I found this quote from Álvaro, “the tailor,” appealing to those still in the FARC: “Come out, this is your last chance at life before you are executed over there.”²⁸ Same script, new context, I thought.

As I left the event, I strolled onto the lawn, which was lined with small white tents promoting consumer goods. I walked past a carefully arranged display of creams and soaps beneath pink lighting, a stand for

Dove to promote its brand. I left the launch of Chance overwhelmed by the very subject of my research, the confluence of consumer culture and counterinsurgency. Later that night I reflected: Was this vertigo not the point? Were the over-the-top theatrics not a sensory and cognitive deluge intended to numb one's critical faculties? The spectacle's components—lights, models, garments, music, videos, speeches, commercial kiosks—created a heightened sense of distraction that helped to normalize the questionable conceit of creative entrepreneurship as a strategy for the economic reintegration of ex-combatants. Over the course of the evening, statesmanship (via the minister of defense) and commerce (via the fashion industry) combined to tell a tale of liberal capitalism as the remedy for militant critique run amok.

The scene carried traces of world fairs past. Those fairs did important ideological work. Take the 1939 New York City World's Fair at Flushing Meadow–Corona Park. The organizers transformed the park into a veritable corporate Disneyland that served as the launching pad for magical new technologies, such as television. Edward Bernays, a founding father of public relations, branded the futuristic fair “Democricity.” As documentary filmmaker Adam Curtis has noted, the fair equated capitalist-driven technological progress with modernity and liberal democracy.²⁹ Clearly world fairs, and their heirs, carry a heavy ideological charge. Cultural theorist Walter Benjamin, writing about the exhibitions of those fairs (he was most interested in the Paris World's Fair of 1867), says: “They open a phantasmagoria which a person enters in order to be distracted. The entertainment industry makes this easier by elevating the person to the level of the commodity. He surrenders to its manipulations while enjoying his alienation from himself and others.”³⁰ In the same passage of his unfinished *Arcades Project* Benjamin connects the exhibitions of the fairs to fashion, which “prescribes the ritual to which the commodity fetish demands to be worshipped.” In the technological exhibitions of the world fairs, and in the obsolescence through design of the fashion industry, both of which project into an imminent and fleeting future, Benjamin sees commodity fetishism unhinged—a pleasurable resignation to the deification of commodities. In the Chance show, the thin fiction of demobilized combatants reintegrating into society through a fashion brand was forgotten in an atmosphere thick with desire for the models and the clothing they wore. The event was a call for the demobilized, the attendees, and the consumers of media reports about it to allow themselves the pleasure of entertainment in the pres-

ence of defanged ex-combatants, to surrender to the manipulations of the commodity, in Benjamin's terms.

But if the commodity fetish hides the social and political relationships at the heart of a commodity's production, as in Karl Marx's classic formulation, what were those relationships in the Chance project? Clearly the organizers of the Chance spectacle treated the demobilized more like props than people, which only made me more curious about the former combatants' perspective on the event. Who were the tailors? What happened to Chance? The answer to the latter question is simple: nothing. You might say it never had a chance.

In 2016, four years after the fashion show, I posed that question to *Ciro*, one of the tailors in the Chance project. He was the tailor whom the former reintegration official had put me in touch with (not the one hyped as “the FARC's tailor”)—a success story of the ACR's entrepreneurial reintegration model.

A: What was the story with Chance?

C: Chance was from the government. I don't know who invented that thing. But they came out saying that they were helping us, that they were going to give us a shop to sell our products. Nothing came of it. It was all bells ringing but no ice cream. Imagine, we went to register the brand Chance, but then we saw how many brands of chance already existed in the Chamber of Commerce; we couldn't lodge it anywhere.

A: But the idea was to develop a brand?

C: Yes, to develop a brand, but we couldn't. It didn't work.

A: How long did the initiative last?

C: Barely two months—making the products and exhibiting them. That's as far as it got.

A: And with all of that show, with the models and the minister of defense.

C: We were happy because we were naive. When you are just starting you think, “Here comes a big help, we're going to get ahead.” What a huge lie. That's as far as it went.

One of the few traces left by the mediated experiment of Chance was *Ciro's* dedication to building his own personal brand. When we met in 2016, he was standing beneath a white tent assembled over the brick patio at the base of a northern Bogotá office complex known as the World Trade Center. He carefully arrayed his stock of leather purses, wallets, handbags, and satchels on stylized white shelving. Each piece carried the

stamp of his brand: his name written in a cursive font that made "ciro" look symmetrical. Shortly after I arrived, a military officer patrolling the patio in pixelated camouflage inquired about a woman's handbag on the top shelf. Twenty minutes later, two suited men approached the stand. One of them was the patrolling soldier who had inquired about the handbag earlier. Ciro explained his personal business initiative to the two men, how it employs vulnerable populations, the demobilized and displaced. (He didn't disclose his own background.) The officer bought the black handbag.

It was Friday afternoon and an elimination soccer match between Colombia's and Peru's national teams compounded the collective relief and excitement that comes at the end of a hard-fought workweek. People had begun leaving work early. One guy in a yellow replica jersey picked up a black wallet with white seams and asked: "How much?"

"\$14," Ciro responded.

"Leather?"

"Leather."

Careful not to show too much interest in the wallet, the fellow thought for a moment, then said: "Would you give a little discount?"

"I'll give it to you for \$13, my brother," Ciro said.

"Leather?" the guy asked again, pulling out his own wallet to inspect its tattered state.

"Napa leather, good leather—smell it," Ciro replied. "It's a good deal, I won't make almost anything, but it's fine; I am promoting my brand."

"You wouldn't do it for \$12?"

Affecting resignation and displeasure, Ciro said, "All set, my brother."

After that sale Ciro began to close his stand. He needed to get home, not to watch the game but to go to a funeral. A few days earlier two assassins had killed his brother-in-law. They had come to his house at the top of the hill on the far outskirts of the city at 3 a.m. Ciro explained the cause of death with a trigger gesture of his right index finger, then added: "He was also demobilized."

"From the same group?" I asked.

"Yeah, also from the FARC," he said.

"It's a bit of a pattern," I said.

Ciro's eyes widened as he nodded in agreement. The deceased had worked in private security and left behind three children, one fifteen years old and the other two "really small." I expressed my condolences.

His brand of leather goods was a still unprofitable side project. Ciro

earned his living by running a "satellite workshop" for multinational companies to contract. His sole client is Fapsou, a multinational company that produces backpacks, luggage, clothes, wallets, and shoes for developing markets, especially in Latin America. Ciro turned fabric, padding, and zippers provided by the company into backpacks.

After a manager at Fapsou saw Ciro on the news during the launch of Chance, he called Ciro to fire him, accusing him of having infiltrated the company and suggesting Ciro maintained ties with the guerrilla. Ciro defended himself, insisting he had done nothing wrong. He called the ACR to tell his caseworker the story. The caseworker's advocacy got him reinstated in three days. Pride filled his voice as Ciro finished recounting the episode: "Since then, I have always had work."

The three-story brick building that Ciro has turned into a workshop was lined with backpacks in different stages of assembly. Under his contract with Fapsou, Ciro had one month to deliver three thousand finished black backpacks. The company would pay \$2 for each acceptable backpack—one tenth of its retail price. Fapsou provided the plastic padding, precut fabric, and zippers. Ciro provided the machinery, thread, and labor. On the third floor, people bent over sewing machines stitching straps and pockets. Three of the six workers were ex-combatants. Ciro said he paid them between \$7 and \$14 a day, depending on their productivity—better than a sweatshop but a poor substitute for a stable salary.

We returned to the first floor, and Ciro told me the story of how he joined the FARC only to desert two years later. Until the age of thirty-one, Ciro bought and sold cattle in a rural area five hours from Bogotá. The guerrilla has had a strong presence there but at the time was on the defensive. A FARC *miliciano* stole one of his steers. One morning the two men passed each other. The *miliciano* was herding cattle and Ciro's steer was among them. Ciro said, "I like that steer. Would you sell it to me?" The passive-aggressive exchange soon escalated into a machete duel. "I gave it to him, and he gave it to me," Ciro said, pointing to the scar running diagonally down his left cheek. As the duel wound down, the thief threatened to kill Ciro, so he decided to make a formal complaint to the FARC, which controlled the area. The commander called Ciro and his adversary to a meeting. He told Ciro's enemy, "If anything happens to Ciro, we'll finish you." The commander also told Ciro that if he wanted to stay in the area, he needed to work with the FARC.

Ciro joined but never embraced guerrilla life. He deserted during a

paramilitary incursion into the area, shortly after they disappeared his sister. Ciro's sister had been a member of the Communal Action Board, one of the neighborhood councils where most local governance happens in Colombia. On March 30, 2003, she had been driving a truck that the Communal Action Board had contracted to ferry beer and food to an event. The paramilitaries pulled her out of the truck. Ciro told his commander about it, but he refused to do anything. "She's not from our ranks. She has to defend herself," the commander said. Her husband did work for the FARC as a *miliciano*, but that wasn't enough to move Ciro's commander to action. The day after the paramilitaries disappeared his sister (she was never found), the military arrested her husband.

After his commander refused to help confront the paramilitaries over his sister's abduction, Ciro decided to desert, escaping when the commander sent him to fetch supplies. He sought refuge in his cousin's house and started to pick flowers on a large farm that exports roses to the US for Valentine's Day. The company liked his work ethic and began the process of offering him a more stable contract. When it requested his judicial records, the DAS (the Colombian equivalent of the FBI) captured him. I was surprised that the DAS had known of his membership in the FARC and had a warrant. Given that he had entered the insurgency at thirty-one and spent limited time in the guerrilla, I figured he would not yet have been cataloged in the state's files. What I had not accounted for was that the guerrilla reported his defection to the state as a way of punishing him (and a tacit admission that it lacked the resources to track him down). When DAS agents showed up at his cousin's house, he began a conversation that led to his demobilization.

Ciro's demobilization process was smooth. During the reintegration stage he attended vocational courses in private security and tailoring. He presented his small business proposal—to open a tailor shop—to the ACR. I asked about the nuts and bolts.

A: So they gave you \$4,400?

C: No, they don't give you money. They pay a vendor who sells you the machine.

A: What's the deal with the vendors?

C: It's a bitch, because everyone sells machines, but they don't pay a fee the SENA [government skills training agency] requires that involves a ton of paperwork. Since they have to pay, they pass it on to you. You can get a [sewing] machine downtown for \$389, but there they sell it to you for \$670.

Of the \$4,400 allotted him, Ciro spent \$4,000 on four sewing machines and a riveter, and another \$400 on start-up costs. Ciro's other sister was already running a workshop of her own and advised him. I asked how much profit his workshop generated in an average month. He said it varied, and scribbled calculations on a piece of scrap paper in front of him: roughly \$1,500 per month (about the salary of a midlevel bureaucrat in the ACR).

His leather business, the Ciro brand, was still losing money, but he remained determined to make it viable. The ACR had alerted him to a series of workshops in which corporate executives taught former combatants how to register brands and export merchandise. Ciro had attended the first training at a Juan Valdéz café (Colombia's gold standard for brands) two days before I visited his workshop. "How many other small business people were there?" I asked.

"Just one other," he said. "A guy with a washing-machine business."

The former reintegration official who directed me to Ciro was right, he was a success story, but one of very few. An extraordinarily rare confluence of factors has enabled him to sustain his manufacturing business. He joined the FARC at the age of thirty-one, which meant he had much more experience in economic exchange as an independent adult than the vast majority of former guerrillas who joined as teenagers. Furthermore, he enjoyed doing business. The fact that his sister already operated a workshop meant he could get reliable advice, and his father gave him loans at key moments. The FARC front he deserted had been all but vanquished, and with only two years in the FARC he did not have access to sensitive information, so his security concerns were relatively low. These contextual factors helped enable Ciro to position himself as a success story via the ACR, which has been consistently desperate for success stories.

Ciro knows he is the exception rather than the rule. The former combatants that he hires lead much more precarious lives and are prone to remobilization. Ciro recalled the story of one employee he had taught to sew. "I told him, 'Have a little, but chew it well,' but no, he couldn't resist the temptation of stuffing himself with money. He went [with the paramilitaries]. The guy was a good worker, but ambitious. He got fucked up looking for easy money."

"What did they promise him?" I asked.

"That he was going to be filthy rich because he was going to go over there and steal that merchandise, pure coca paste," he said.

Not quite understanding, I asked, "Carrying packages between here and there?"

"No, he was supposed to take the merchandise from those who processed it. They robbed from the guerrilla; but the guerrilla, watch out, they're nasty."

Theft and reprisals played out closer to Ciro's workshop as well. His barrio, like the neighborhoods of Raconto where Felipe and Luisa live, is another overlooked theater of Colombia's urbanized "low-intensity conflict," which feels anything but low intensity to those ensnared in its web. Ciro tells of how, a decade earlier, one former paramilitary living in his neighborhood started a gang of thieves. A subset of the one hundred former guerrillas who had settled in his neighborhood organized and adapted the FARC's heavy-handed style of revolutionary justice to urban vigilantism, killing the thieves. Trouble, however, has persisted in his neighborhood. When I checked in with Ciro in the summer of 2016, he was facing a death threat. A local gang was trying to intimidate him into leaving the area so it could take over the low-income housing block where he kept his workshop. Even for the few success stories, like Ciro, the shadow of violence does not disappear after demobilization.

The Good Life Deferred

What is the good life? The pursuit of self-advancement and the fulfillment of individual desires, or commitment to the collective concerns of ethics, justice, and societal obligations?³¹ In Colombia, a country with one of the highest rates of inequality in Latin America, the good life has long been framed as the individual quest for wealth, a historical trend that can be traced back to the Spanish conquest and colonists' search for El Dorado. The country's historical reliance on extractive industries (gold, rubber, oil, emeralds), large-scale agriculture (coffee, bananas, African palm), and illegal drugs (marijuana, heroin, cocaine) has led towns and entire regions to boom and bust. The *longue durée* of imagining and aspiring to quick riches percolates into the present and molds contemporary conceptions of the good life expressed in the popular Spanish idiom *la buena vida*, which connotes a decadent lifestyle.

The Colombian government's vision of the good life for former guerrillas at once clashes with and reinforces this historical and cultural context in which the good life is routed through often violent shortcuts

to wealth. What matters to the government, first and foremost, is that former guerrillas definitively abandon their quixotic misadventure in search of socialist ideals and buy into the existing political economic order. This perspective is intimated by the PAHD's media campaigns but only comes into relief in the ACR's efforts to mold the demobilized into entrepreneurial participants in a neoliberalized economy, and in narco-paramilitaries' quest to co-opt guerrilla knowledge while repressing collective organization. This assemblage of forces serves as shock therapy for the demobilized.³²

In the first weeks and months after deserting, the demobilized are dazed and disoriented. When they receive their CODA certification they are pushed into an urban landscape in which society is rigidly stratified.³³ The first order of business is to survive. Once the needs of housing, utilities, food, and basic comforts, like a mattress, are secured, ex-combatants look to transcend their abject status by finding a job that might make them an active member of the working class. Ascent through Colombia's rigid class system is measured through patterns of consumption tied to cycles of debt and credit.

What matters to the ACR is that ex-combatants stay on the right side of the law, that recidivism rates are low (and that rearmament is hidden from public view). In this formulation the good life is but the absence of the bad, illegal life. Yet in the everyday worlds of former rebels who live amid latent and less latent forms of paramilitarism, remobilization appears as the most promising road to *la buena vida*. The best chance demobilized guerrilla fighters have to achieve the aspirations that the PAHD stokes in its marketing campaigns and targeted military intelligence operations is either to collaborate with the military or to work with an illegal armed group, most often narcoparamilitaries. These options offer a shortcut to joining the middle class or jumping straight into the nouveau riche's world of conspicuous consumption. But this vision of the good life is extraordinarily dangerous, as the debts incurred in the act of remobilization are often paid with one's life.

Former rebels who pursue the easy money that rearmament and remobilization promise risk not only their own lives but their family members' as well. Those who steadfastly refuse that path live in a state of extreme precariousness in which the vision of the good life peddled by the government is continually deferred. Like civilians who live in former combat zones in rural areas where heavy rains wash land mines to imprecise locations downhill, rendering the local geography a shifting

terrain of exploding artifacts, former rebels in urban areas traverse a moving minefield of armed actors, economic forces, and moral quandaries.³⁴ For many ex-combatants, the idiom of struggle for survival viscerally connects life before and after demobilization. "We left one war for another" is a repeated refrain in my interviews. Another common invocation was of "the mountain of concrete" or the "jungle of cement," phrases that connect their time in the guerilla to their experience in an urban economic battlefield.³⁵

Faced with this menu of difficult and dangerous options, most former combatants retreat into the private sphere of the family and embrace the popular idiom *sacando adelante a la familia* (pushing the family forward). The phrase expresses a cultural logic of enduring the travails of economic struggle and justifying them with the hope that future generations might join the middle class through a combination of education, hard work, and good luck. The idea of *sacando adelante a la familia*, however, presupposes a stable family life and requires at least minimal employment opportunities. Given the scarcity of both, former rebels hatch short-term schemes known colloquially in Colombia as the *rebusque*, which is perhaps best translated as "scavenging." This scavenging involves juggling piecemeal work in the informal economy, short-term contracts in the official work force, and cycles of indebtedness. In this unforgiving landscape, favors from support networks and the ability to game the meager welfare of the ACR are barely buoyant life rafts. Most see clearly that the prospect of entrepreneurial success is dim, so they don't give the endeavor an earnest shot.

In an email exchange with the former ACR official who introduced me to Ciro and managed a small brigade of caseworkers for more than a decade, she wrote an honest appraisal: "War leaves holes that are significant in civilian life, lack of schooling, distrust in institutions or in others, shortsightedness [*cortoplacismo*], migration to cities and conditions that aren't conducive to a return to the countryside, dysfunctional families and lack of support networks, the lack of a credit or financial history, lack of tolerance and ease of frustration as well as their imaginaries are some of the hurdles." Though her candid analysis identified many structural challenges, she was still somewhat surprised and disappointed that former combatants did not embrace their entrepreneurial projects. "There are demobilized that think paternalistically, who barely fulfill the requirements to get a business plan. Then they fail as a result be-

cause their mission from the beginning was not to be creative and self-sufficient but to scam for resources."

With such an array of structural factors pushing against the possibility that a former combatant's small business might succeed, why has the ACR insisted in emphasizing entrepreneurialism as a path toward economic reintegration? The program's senior leadership is aware of the challenges. USAID, one of the ACR's largest foreign patrons, commissioned a group of high-profile US-based researchers to evaluate USAID's support of the ACR. When the final document was completed in 2013, the ACR buried the report, never releasing it publicly. The report recommended creating "a public sector employment program for ex-combatants," as opposed to the inordinate emphasis placed on entrepreneurialism.

As I will argue in the conclusion, the three-step process of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of Colombia's individual demobilization program has been designed for ritual failure. What is important to underline here is not failure itself but rather what failure produces: atomized subjects who are locked in a struggle for economic survival that leaves little room for political commitments. Mired in extreme precariousness and condemned by their former comrades, demobilized guerrillas are economically and politically immobilized—unless, that is, they choose to remobilize with their former enemies.