

'Peace with a Woman's Face': Women, Social Media and the Colombian Peace Process

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Abstract: The idea that men and women approach conflict resolution differently forms the backbone of the international agenda on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) and is supported by a growing body of scholarship in international relations. However, the role of women who represent insurgent groups in peace talks remains understudied, given the relatively rare appearance of such women in peace processes. The present study examines how men and women from the negotiating team of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) engaged in public-facing discourse on Twitter leading up to a referendum on the peace accords in 2016. Using a mixed-methods approach that includes computational analysis and a close reading of social media posts, I demonstrate that women in the FARC's negotiating team were more successful social media users than their male counterparts and that they offered a distinct contribution to the discourse on peace, centring the relevance of gender and promoting issue linkages like the need to address LGBTI rights.

Keywords: gender; conflict management; social media; Colombia; peace building.

Introduction

Scholarship in international relations gives us ample evidence to support the idea that men and women approach conflict and conflict resolution differently. The status of women, the presence of women in national legislatures, and the number of years for which women have had suffrage are all factors that have been shown to make a country engage in less frequent and/or less severe conflicts (Melander 2005; Caprioli and Boyer 2001; Caprioli 2000). In terms of conflict resolution, the normative idea that women bring a distinct perspective to peace processes – a belief that underlies international initiatives like UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions, as well as national action plans on women, peace and security – is supported by research highlighting gender differences in simulated negotiations (Boyer et al 2009).

Much of the research on the large-scale impact of women on conflict outcomes has focused on women in state governments or civil society groups. At the same time, scholars

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studying non-state armed groups (NSAGs) have documented the presence of women in insurgencies in 60 countries since 1990, comprising the majority of such groups active during this time period (Mazurana 2014; Henshaw 2016, 2017; Wood and Thomas 2017). The United Nations acknowledges that these women in particular continue to be under-represented in peace talks. A 2012 report from UN Women indicated that only about 9% of all negotiators in major peace processes 1992-2011 were women; even where women were present, they 'continue to be disproportionately highly represented in groups that agitate for peace and mobilize communities and society to demand that parties to the conflict lay down their arms' (UN Women 2012: 6). This reflects a concerning disparity between the reality of women's frequent participation in NSAGs and the absence of such women in internationally sponsored negotiations.

This paper examines the role of female members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) who participated in the Colombian peace process. Specifically, by exploring their public-facing role in online communications, I seek to highlight both the extent of their roles as liaisons to the public and the distinct nature of their contribution in terms of how they understood and presented the most salient issues in the negotiations. This analysis addresses gaps in the current literature, both by offering an empirical assessment of the role that women in armed groups play in the context of a peace process, and a comparison that demonstrates one of the key concepts underpinning UNSCR 1325 – namely that the presence of women adds something distinct to peace negotiations, introducing discourse on different topics and the creation of new issue linkages.

In assessing the women's contributions, I use a mixed-methods approach. On a quantitative level, the study draws on statistical analysis, text mining and topic modelling to assess gender differences in the scope and volume of social media usage by male and female FARC members. This work is complemented by a close reading that offers more detail on how specific themes are enumerated by the users.

This study shows that women of the FARC's negotiating team played an important public-facing role, supporting the peace process but also extending the discourse and highlighting the importance of gender issues. The present work additionally shows differences in the way that women in the FARC talked about the peace process, compared to their male counterparts. In general, women appear to be more gender-focused, to highlight different topics and to be more connected and engaged users of social media compared to men. While men and women both appear to be concerned with supporting the peace process, women were much more likely to highlight issues related to gender and the LGBTI population, while men seem more concerned with class conflict and social justice as end goals. Taken together, these findings confirm some of the expectations that underlie UNSCR 1325 and the larger agenda on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). Such findings should strengthen the justification for including women (and, particularly, female members of armed groups) in peace processes.

The Colombian Peace Process

The FARC has been a party to the civil conflict in Colombia since 1964. The group describes itself as Marxist-Leninist and Bolivarian, and its statement of purpose discusses the justification for its struggle against the ‘class enemy,’ the repression of the Colombian people by their government, and against economic imperialism from the USA (FARC n.d.). The division of the Colombian government dealing with victims’ assistance and reparations has registered over 9 million individuals as victims of the decades-long conflict with the FARC and other armed groups, including over 4.5 million women (Unidad para la Atención y la Reparación Integral a las Víctimas 2017).

While the size of the FARC has fluctuated over the years, it is generally believed that women made up 30-40% of the group’s forces, which numbered approximately 7 000 total in 2016 (O’Neill 2015; Daly 2016). Women’s roles expanded over time, with the FARC only allowing women equal status as fighters in 1985 (Herrera and Porch 2008). At the time of the peace talks, women held both rank-and-file positions and leadership roles, although women have never served at the highest leadership ranks of the group. Other factors further suggest a gendered tension within the FARC ranks, as former FARC members have discussed policies of forced abortion, forced contraception and the use of child soldiers (O’Neill 2015; Human Rights Watch 2005).

The FARC’s stance on gender issues has evolved over time, concurrent with the evolving role of women in the organization. Statements issued by the FARC in the early 2000s focus on equality, with a call for equal rights and special attention to poverty (FARC-EP 2005). However, statements specific to women’s issues were relatively infrequent and usually attributed women’s oppression to the same forces – imperialism, capitalism and structural inequality – that impacted other marginalized groups (FARC-EP 2006, 2005). In recent years, scholars have argued that more frequent and substantive discourse by the FARC advocating for gender equality, gender mainstreaming and LGBTI rights has been driven both by the international imperatives accompanying peace talks post-UNSCR 1325, and by domestic pressure campaigns from women’s groups and other civil society organizations, who vocally protested the omission of women from earlier phases of the peace process (Herbolzheimer 2016; Céspedes-Báez and Jaramillo Ruiz 2018; Henshaw 2020).

The FARC began exploratory talks with the Colombian government in 2011, entering into public negotiations in 2012. The talks, held in Havana, Cuba, were facilitated by the governments of Cuba and Norway. Though the talks were eventually hailed as unprecedented in their attention to gender and inclusion of women (Mlambo-Ngcuka and Hawa Bangura 2016), attaining these ‘historic’ levels of inclusion was a process that evolved throughout years of the negotiating process. As agreed upon by the parties, each negotiating team at the talks consisted of 30 people. Five members of each delegation served as plenipotentiaries, five more served as additional delegates, and the remaining 20 team members engaged in supporting tasks like research and writing and reviewing memos, speeches and briefings (Bouvier 2016; Herbolzheimer 2016). When delegates were initially designated in 2012, the teams drew attention for their lack of gender diversity – no women

served as plenipotentiaries on either side, with the FARC designating two female delegates and the government only naming women as alternates (Céspedes-Báez and Jaramillo Ruiz 2018). Dissatisfaction among women's groups and other civil society organizations led to a campaign to highlight the lack of women and to urge greater inclusion (Céspedes-Báez and Jaramillo Ruiz 2018). On the FARC's side, the number of women included in the overall negotiating team grew most significantly between 2013 and 2015, with women comprising just over 40% of the entire team by the end of this time period (Bouvier 2016). The gender diversity gave female FARC cadres a greater opportunity both to influence the peace process and to make the case for the peace accords to the public. Though most women remained concentrated in the roles of technical team members, those team members were at the forefront of public-facing communication strategy, charged with coordinating public relations and education programming (Herbolzheimer 2016; Bouvier 2016). This gave FARC women a unique opportunity to shape public discourse about the peace process leading up to the 2016 referendum on the accords.

An objective of the Havana Peace Process was to create an accord between the government and the FARC that would be held to a public referendum. This further encouraged the FARC to seek out ways to engage with the Colombian public as a means of cultivating support. Throughout the final phase of negotiations, public engagement by negotiating team members would be important to rallying and winning supporters. Social media has been leveraged in the past (with mixed success) by anti-government groups who wish to bypass traditional media gatekeepers, communicating directly with the public, and by 'challenger' parties looking to establish a unique position in the political spectrum (Ali and Fahmy 2013; Turnbull-Dugarte 2019). The FARC fits into both of these categories, given both its history of rebellion and its aspirations to enter the political system as a legitimate party. With high levels of adult literacy (95%) and Internet penetration covering most of the country in 2016, the Colombian public was also likely to be receptive to such social media advocacy (World Bank 2012; Freedom House 2016).

The FARC's entry into the digital space was motivated not only by the need to solicit public support for the peace process, but also to counter anti-guerrilla messaging by the government and groups opposed to the peace process. Government efforts to counter insurgents online included, for example, a 2014 campaign surrounding the World Cup, which used Twitter messages and YouTube videos to encourage fighters to defect and demobilize.¹ The government also issued reports alleging the systematic abuse of women by the FARC, suggesting that all or most female FARC cadres were subject to the types of abuses discussed above (Bedoya Lima 2011). Upon the launch of the *Mujer Fariana* (FARC Woman) website in 2013, FARC leader Timochenko expressed the hope that 'our women will win the cyberwar that has also been unleashed against us...' (Jiménez 2013).

Thus, the social media strategy of the FARC during this period can be viewed at once as an effort to educate the public about the talks, as an effort to enhance the FARC's public image through counter-messaging, and as an effort that carved out a space for discourse on gender – giving voice to both individual women on the negotiating team and to FARC women more broadly. In keeping with these objectives, the FARC's online presence

carried a large footprint including English- and Spanish-language websites, English- and Spanish-language Twitter accounts, a YouTube channel and a Facebook page. Within the peace delegation, individual members also established their own social media presence, allowing them to promote the peace process while framing the discourse in their own terms. Twenty-five members of the delegation, including 11 women and 14 men, maintained individual social media accounts on Twitter, which were compiled into a list by one of the team members.

Gender, social media and peacebuilding

Prior research on gender issues in peace negotiations offers some insight into what gender differences we might expect to see in online communication by FARC delegation members. First, building off UNSCR 1325, there is a baseline expectation that we would see a gendering of topics addressed by male and female users. A key assumption is that the involvement of women leads to peace agreements that are more likely to address gender issues. A report by UN Women supports this, noting a correlation between the formal inclusion of women's groups in peace talks and the 'greater gender-sensitivity' of the resulting agreements (UN Women 2012: 4). Scholarship in this area has demonstrated that while the inclusion of women in peacebuilding dialogues produces more gender-sensitive agreements, it affects the content of peace accords in other ways as well – such as impacting the design of transitional justice and DDR (disarmament, demobilization and reintegration) programs (Paffenholz et al 2016: 10). Conversely, the exclusion of women from peace talks around the world has been linked to post-conflict institutional structures that exclude women, continued inter-communal hostility and the failure to reach a permanent or durable agreement (Enloe 2017: chapter 2; Milnarević, Porobić Isaković and Rees 2015; McEvoy 2009).

Women from insurgent groups may have added incentive to emphasize the importance of gender to a peace agreement. In the past, resistance movements (both violent and non-violent) that included women have been accused of marginalizing gender issues, subordinating the concerns of women to political goals favoured by male leaders. This was the case in nationalist movements of the Cold War era throughout the developing world, where women only recognized the need for an explicit call for rights after being discriminated against within the movement (Molyneux 1985; Tétreault 1994; Hill Collins 2000). The example of women in El Salvador's leftist Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) shows this dynamic at work. Despite being one of the few pre-UNSCR 1325 peace talks to include women in an insurgent delegation, the resulting Chapultepec Accords (1992) largely ignored gender issues, provoking widespread discontent among women. In the years following the accords this fuelled the creation of dozens of new women's groups in El Salvador, many of which lobbied the new government for rights left out of the peace agreement (Luciak 2001; Kampwirth 2003, 2004). Thus, the tendency of female negotiators to advocate publicly for women's issues may not only be explained by the somewhat essentialist expectations of the WPS agenda, but also by a sense of feminist

anxiety that such issues – if not raised frequently – will be forgotten or erased from the discourse.

This leads to two hypotheses:

- H1: Female negotiating team members will discuss different issues in the peace process on social media platforms, compared to their male colleagues.
- H2: Female negotiating team members will use social media to discuss gender issues in the peace process more often than their male colleagues.

We might also expect to see quantitative as well as qualitative differences in social media usage based on gender. Literature from information science indicates that women are generally more ‘successful’ at social media usage than men, having more friends/connections and exhibiting more prolific and positive interactions (McAndrew and Jeong 2012; Thelwall, Wilkinson and Uppal 2010; Thelwall 2008). Experimental research has further suggested that the involvement of women in negotiations leads to a higher volume of communication. In a series of simulated negotiations using middle- and high school students, one research team reported that groups with at least some young women were more communicative than groups made up entirely of young men (Boyer et al 2009; Florea et al 2003). Literature on women and conflict management has suggested that, among other things, the inclusion of women may lead to more beneficial outcomes because women have a relational view of others, defining themselves as individuals operating in the context of larger communities (Boyer et al 2009: 27; Kolb and Coolidge 1991). Research on social media use by female Islamic State recruits has demonstrated these trends. For example, some women affiliated with ISIS are prolific social media users and actively engage with readers of their content (Loken and Zelenz 2018; Windsor 2018). If these findings from experimental research and prior studies on gendered patterns of engagement on social media are valid, we would expect to see that FARC women also use social media more and demonstrate greater engagement than men, for example through retweets, likes, and number of followers. Thus:

- H3: Women will show a higher volume of social media usage than men.
- H4: Women will be more connected on social media, with higher levels of engagement than men.

Gendered communication and the FARC on Twitter

Overview and descriptive statistics

In examining how FARC members utilized social media, I draw upon the above-referenced list of Twitter accounts maintained by 25 members of the FARC’s peace delegation in Havana. Of the 25 FARC delegates included in this list, 11 accounts were maintained by women and 14 by men. As noted above, while the FARC maintained a substantial online presence as an organization during the peace process, I believe the analysis of these individual accounts is important for understanding both how members of the negotiating team helped shape public discourse about the talks and what salient gender differences exist in this messaging. On organizational accounts, authorship of posts and messages is not

always clear because it is not attributed to specific individuals. Even on the *Mujer Fariana* website devoted to FARC women, posts are a mixture of those attributed to men, to women and to those whose gender is not specified. Official FARC accounts may also be subject to censorship or to some form of review by leadership. As a result, examining the accounts of individual members who participated in the negotiations is the most reliable way to capture individual views as expressed by those with the greatest ability to shape public perceptions about the peace process. These accounts form the core of my analysis; however, I discuss comparisons to organizational accounts in the discussion section below.

In preparation for the analysis, I extracted tweets from the individual users included on the list using the Twitter analytics platform Twitonomy. The program allows users to extract and download all available tweets for a user’s account, up to the maximums specified by Twitter.² From the extracted content, I deleted any tweets that were retweets without additional comment (since these do not provide any original content), as well as hyperlinks and tags to other Twitter user accounts. I then divided the tweets based on the gender of the author. A total of 7 004 tweets composed by women were retrieved, and 9 282 for men.

Table 1 below presents some descriptive statistics about these accounts, including the average account age, number of tweets, number of followers and the average number of retweets and ‘favourites’ received.

Table 1 – Descriptive Statistics for FARC-Related Twitter Accounts

	Men	Women
Number of Accounts	14	11
Time Active (in Months)*	11	13
Average Number of Followers	2610	4470
Average Tweets per Month*	1955	2526
Average No. of Retweets	3.30	3.85
Average No. of Favorites	2.25	3.29

*Measured through November 2016.

Source: Created by the author.

Table 1 illustrates some gender differences in communication patterns consistent with Hypotheses 3 and 4. First, despite the fact that there are more FARC men with Twitter accounts, women appear to be earlier adopters of social media. Of the 14 accounts held by men, most were created during or after February 2016, while most of the accounts held by women were created in August 2015 or earlier. The relatively early adoption of Twitter by female delegation members is interesting because, as noted above, many women entered the peace process later than their male counterparts, as the demand to include more women shifted the gender balance of the team over time. The higher average number of

tweets by women may be in part related to their longer tenure on social media, but even adjusting this figure to reflect average tweets per month, women still seem to be more prolific users of Twitter: 194 tweets per month compared to 184 for the men. Finally, women also outpace men in the average number of followers: 4 470 to 2 610. The presence of one internationally recognized figure among the women – Dutch-born Tanja Nijmeijer, whose diary of FARC life was published in 2007 – somewhat skews these results, since Nijmeijer alone has over 14 000 followers, but excluding her account the remaining 10 women have an average of 3 507 followers each.

Statistics on the overall average number of retweets and likes/favourites likewise suggest that the women’s tweets were resonating with their larger audience. Table 2 demonstrates that some of these differences are statistically significant, comparing the difference of means for male and female users in terms of total tweets, retweets and favourites. The difference in average number of retweets is significant at the .1 level, while the difference in favourites is significant at the .05 level. These findings each suggest that messages sent by women resonated with a broader audience than their male counterparts. A comparison of the total number of tweets sent by men and women, however, finds no statistically significant relationship.

Table 2 – Difference of Means Testing: Number of Retweets and Favorites

	Total Tweets	Retweets	Favorites
T-statistic	.1065	1.80	2.34
DF	23	23	23
Standard Error	236.86	.63	.56
P-value	.92	.09*	.03**

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.
Source: Created by the author.

These findings indicate support for Hypothesis 4 above, demonstrating that women were significantly more ‘successful’ users of social media, in terms of soliciting public engagement with and support for their statements. Findings for Hypothesis 3, however, are mixed; while the descriptive statistics suggest that women were more prolific users of the Twitter platform in absolute numbers, there was enough variation among male and female users to cast doubt on whether gender was the primary driver of this distinction.

Computational methods

Text mining and topic-modelling packages in R were used to assess the content as well as the volume of messages sent by FARC members over social media. Text mining has been described as a means of using machine learning to address the problem of information overload, facilitating the analyses of word distributions and trends over a large amount

of text data (Feldman and Sanger 2007: x). Topic modelling is increasingly used in public policy analysis, in particular with respect to online communications like social media postings and blogs. These methods of analysis can be applied to large collections of text in order to reveal the agenda of individuals and groups producing the content (Koltsova and Koltcov 2013: 211). Automated topic modelling approaches envision topics as latent variables within a corpus, and by modelling these topics they also enable the division of texts into thematically similar groups. The most widely used means of accomplishing this is through latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA), a probabilistic model introduced by Blei, Ng and Jordan (2003) that relies on Bayesian statistical modelling. Topic modelling algorithms have been applied to a variety of electronic content including micro-blogging platforms like Twitter (Ghosh and Guha 2013; Koltsova and Koltcov 2013; Li, Xu and Zhang 2007).

Topic modeling has been described as ‘generally more inductive than... most other approaches to text analysis’ (Ignatow and Mihalcea 2016: 157). Although it is a form of machine learning that ultimately relies on statistical models, the individual researcher guides the programmatic inquiry by specifying the number of topics (k) that the program should look for. There is no universal guidance on how to arrive at the appropriate value of k, however there are some recommended practices. One such practice is to generate a large number of topics, then look for patterns of repetition that might suggest a particular topic is robust (e.g., Chung et al 2015; Greene, O’Callaghan and Cunningham 2014). Drawing on this, I generated 40 topics with 4 terms each from the corpus of tweets by women and by men.

The computational analysis has been supplemented with a close or interpretive reading of tweets that fit within the major topics identified by the topic-modelling package. While this mixed-methods approach is somewhat new to social science, it is more common in the humanities – where the large-scale digitization of source materials has led to the adoption of computational techniques that amplify the power of the reader (Eve 2017; Wiedemann 2013). The wider adoption of this approach in the social sciences has been encouraged as a better method for analysing new media and a promising way to bridge the positivist and interpretivist traditions (Bennett 2015; Wiedemann 2013).

Tweets by women are analysed first, and tweets by men are analysed below for comparative purposes. Prior to analysis, pre-processing in R was conducted to remove stopwords, punctuation and numbers, and to standardize capitalization and stem words.³

Application

Table 3 shows the most frequently used words appearing across tweets by women (each of which appeared 200 times or more in the corpus).

Assessing the list of frequently appearing terms in Table 3, peace unsurprisingly emerges as a dominant topic among female delegation members. The word ‘peace’ received more mentions than Colombia and FARC combined – suggesting that women wanted to place a discussion of peace above potentially divisive discourse about the

Table 3 – Most Frequently Appearing Terms (Women)

Term	Frequency
Peace	1451
Colombia	638
FARC	535
Women	314
War	311
Accord	261
RebelArte	236
Havana	206
People	204

Source: Created by the author.

Figure 1 – Topic Modeling – Tweets by Women

Topic ID	accord	colombia	farc/ farc-ep	fight	havana	peace	people	rebelarte	social	today	war	women
1	X	X				X				X		
2	X	X									X	X
3		X				X		X				X
4					X	X	X					X
5		X				X					X	X
6			X			X			X	X		
7		X	X			X						X
8		X				X			X	X		
9		X	X							X	X	
10	X					X		X				X
11	X	X				X						X
12		X				X	X				X	
13		X		X		X				X		
14			X		X	X						X
15		X	X			X						X
16		X	X		X						X	
17		X	X			X						X
18	X	X				X		X				
19		X	X			X		X				
20	X		X			X						X
21		X	X			X					X	
22	X	X				X					X	
23		X				X					X	X
24		X				X	X					X
25		X			X	X						X
26			X			X	X				X	
27			X		X	X		X				
28	X	X				X				X		
29		X				X					X	X
30		X	X			X					X	
31		X			X						X	X
32		X	X		X			X				
33		X				X					X	X
34		X			X	X						X
35		X				X		X				X
36			X			X		X				X
37		X	X					X		X		
38		X				X					X	X
39	X	X				X					X	
40		X	X		X			X				

Source: Created by the author.

parties to the conflict. Several other top terms on the list also explicitly evoke the peace process ('Havana,' 'accord,' 'war'), but concerns related to women and the people generally also rank highly, suggesting support for Hypothesis 2. There is additionally evidence that women sought to use social media in a humanizing way, in addition to speaking directly about the peace process. 'RebelArte,' which appears over 200 times, was a hashtag used by several of the women, but mostly by one female author in particular. The term itself is wordplay in Spanish, since it represents both a variant of the verb 'to rebel' and an amalgamation of the Spanish words for 'rebel' and 'art.' Using this hashtag, women called attention to various different forms of art – including music and literature – that they enjoyed, but which they also connected to the goals of revolutionary struggle. Tweets drawing on this theme may have played an important role as FARC women attempted not only to advocate for the peace process, but also to show themselves as rational individuals who were capable of demobilization and reintegration. Use of this narrative by women in particular may have served to counteract the messaging that female FARC cadres were victims of mistreatment or forced into combat, significant concerns for the FARC (discussed further below).

Figure 1 shows the results of topic modelling, breaking out terms into relevant, related themes.

The topic models demonstrate some repeated patterns that suggest robust topics. The words 'peace' and 'Colombia' appear jointly in nearly every topic. One or both of these terms also frequently appear(s) alongside terms like FARC, war, accord, or Havana, which indicate an interest in discussing the peace talks generally. However, the term 'women' also appears in more than half of the topics generated. This reinforces that women were specifically interested in discussing women's issues in connection with the peace process, in accordance with the expectations of Hypothesis 2. A closer analysis of selected tweets illustrates this pattern at work:

We want peace for all women (Nov. 2015)

*The Gender Commission of the FARC offers an emotional greeting
to the women of Colombia (March 2016)*

We say yes to peace and no to war, because peace is with women. (March 2016)

*#PeaceWithAWomansFace The Gender Sub-commission should continue its work
to build a stable and long-lasting peace! (Aug. 2016)*

Particularly in messages like those above, there is an indication that the message is aimed at *all* women. These messages project that the women of the FARC want to make common cause with women outside the struggle, promising that the peace process has the potential to improve the lives of all Colombian women. Several of the popular hashtags used by the women also evoke a view of support among women as essential to the process,

for instance #LaPazEsConLasMujeres ('Peace is with women') and #PazConRostroDeMujer ('Peace with a woman's face').

Some of the tweets from female FARC members point to a process of articulating what feminism means to them. In these posts, FARC members raise issues including equality of opportunity, connections to a larger feminist movement and concerns about domestic violence and the role of men:

In the FARC-EP we're fighting day by day so that men and women will have the same rights and the same opportunities (July 2016)

This is a good opportunity to renew the important fight of the feminist movement, which has brought us so many achievements (Dec. 2015)

The rising number of femicides in this country is due to domestic violence and the dire economic situation in homes (Jan. 2016)

New masculinity means men assume roles that, until now, have been exclusively assigned to women (Oct. 2015)

The discussion of gender issues is also intersectional, pointing to the FARC women's desire to make common cause with *campesina* women, indigenous and Afrocolombian women, and members of the LGBTI community:

#Peaceiswithwomen Women of African descent, indigenous women, campesinas, workers. Rise up and call for peace! (March 2016)

In Colombia, 18% of maternal mortality occurs in indigenous and Afrocolombian communities (Aug. 2015)

#LGBTI have been discriminated against and rendered vulnerable in their rights (May 2016)

The idea that social media became a space to explore the role of feminism beyond the conflict is noteworthy. It suggests these women had a desire to push the discussions of gender beyond the peace process and beyond the party line of the FARC which, while generally supportive of gender equality, rarely explored feminism with this level of specificity.

Returning to Hypothesis 1, how do the themes expressed by women of the FARC compare to those expressed by their male counterparts? Table 4 shows the most frequently used words among the men in the sample. Since there were a larger number of tweets composed by men overall, Table 4 includes terms used 250 times or more. Figure 2 shows the results of topic modelling on the men's tweets.

There are some noteworthy gender differences between the two samples. Certainly, promoting the peace accords is a priority for both men and women. However, conspicuously absent from the men's discourse is the discussion of women's issues. In the 9 282

Table 4 – Most Frequently Appearing Terms (Men)

Term	Frequency
Peace	1713
Colombia	784
People	651
More	620
War	467
FARC	351
Social	307
Justice	306

Source: Created by the author.

Figure 2 – Topic Modeling – Tweets by Men

Topic ID	accord	be	colombia	fight	justice	more	national	only	onthisdate	peace	people	popular	social	today	war
1			X							X	X		X		
2	X		X					X		X					
3										X	X		X		X
4					X	X			X	X					
5			X			X				X		X			
6			X							X	X				X
7						X				X			X		X
8					X	X				X	X				
9			X	X							X		X		
10	X		X			X									X
11						X				X	X				X
12						X				X	X		X		
13						X				X	X				X
14			X			X				X	X				
15						X				X	X				X
16			X				X			X	X				
17						X				X	X				X
18			X			X				X	X				
19			X		X					X	X				
20			X			X				X					X
21			X			X				X					X
22			X			X				X					X
23			X		X					X					X
24		X				X								X	X
25					X	X				X	X				
26						X				X	X				X
27			X	X						X	X				
28			X							X		X			X
29			X			X				X					X
30			X			X				X	X				
31			X		X						X				X
32			X			X				X	X				
33			X			X				X	X				
34			X							X			X		X
35			X							X		X	X		
36			X	X						X	X				
37			X		X					X					X
38			X		X	X				X					
39			X			X					X				X
40			X			X				X	X				

Source: Created by the author.

tweets examined here, the word ‘women’ appears 172 times, making it only the 25th most frequently used term among men. Again, this lends support to Hypothesis 2, indicating that women were more likely than men to address discourse on gender issues.

In accordance with Hypothesis 1, there are topics that men bring to the debate which the women seemed to emphasize less often. Men shared a lot of messages about social justice; yet ‘social justice’ was often invoked as an end state, without making reference to particular marginalized groups (such as women):

*Each step is a move forward. How much longer until we reach peace with social justice?
#BilateralCeasefireNOW getting closer (June 2015)*

*This is one of the true causes of the war in #Colombia ...
Peace with social justice (Dec. 2015)*

*#MyFavoritePhrase is peace with social justice, full of new values
where truth, harmony, and fraternity are the principles of PEACE (Aug. 2016)*

A discussion of ‘the people’ likewise appears more frequently in tweets by men (651 times) than in tweets by women (204 times). The topic models identified in Figure 2 show a clear and recurrent linkage between ‘Colombia,’ ‘peace,’ and ‘people.’ This further reinforces the idea that men were focused on addressing the class struggle, although sometimes messages about ‘the people’ explicitly referred to poor, rural and indigenous communities.

*For the [FARC], indigenous peoples are the victims and survivors
of a history of exclusion and oppression (June 2016)*

Peace among people with oppression and hunger... does not exist! (Aug. 2016)

*How strong the Colombian people are! Fighting 52 years to open a path
to the right to free political participation. #IVoteYes No more war (Aug. 2016)*

This is not to imply that the men who tweeted on behalf of the FARC did not support the notion of gender equality. Indeed, every one of the 14 men sampled *did* tweet about women’s issues at some point. Several also retweeted messages about women’s issues that came from their female comrades or from the FARC’s leadership. However, not all men did this consistently. This suggests that, while the men of the FARC supported gender equality, it was not consistently an issue at the top of their agendas.

Related to this, while LGBTI rights were not among the top topics addressed by either men or women, there is a gender difference in how they addressed the issue. Women appear to have been more likely to highlight the concerns of the LGBTI community. Nearly half of the female authors (5 out of 11) composed tweets highlighting LGBTI issues at some point during the peace process, compared to only 3 of the 14 male authors. While some additional men in the sample re-tweeted messages related to LGBTI rights, several men did not address these issues at all. Overall, the foregoing analysis offers quantitative as

well as qualitative support for Hypotheses 1 and 2, demonstrating that women discussed gender issues more than men *and* that women also invoked a broader range of discussions on topics beyond just women's rights.

Where are the women? Comparing individual and organizational messaging

As noted above, this study primarily looks at the use of social media by individual members of the FARC's peace delegation because these accounts more clearly show gender difference in messaging and represent the efforts of individuals who had a special role in the talks that included public engagement. However, it is useful to compare how individual discussions about the peace process aligned with narratives promoted by the organization more broadly. Using the methods described above, I retrieved 2739 tweets from the organization's @FARC_EPaz Twitter account, ending at October 2, 2016 when the referendum on the peace agreements was held.⁴ It should be noted that this account primarily shares information in English with some content in Spanish and other languages, an indication that it is targeted at an international audience and not solely the Colombian public. Nonetheless, only a small portion of tweets during this time mentioned 'gender' or 'woman'/'women' in English or in Spanish, 72 total, with some of the same content being repeated multiple times or in different languages.

In terms of content, the messaging was a mixture of discussion about women and gender issues in the peace process and about the status of women in the FARC more generally. There seems to be a particular concern on behalf of the organization to counter messaging about abuses of women by the FARC,⁵ for example sharing content on the historical contributions of in the FARC and the message that 'Guerrilla combatants are revolutionary, aware and free women.' The latter message linked to a 2016 blog post by the FARC confronting charges of forced abortion and discussing its contraception policy (FARC-EP 2016b).⁶ Although the work of the Gender Sub-commission and female delegates was mentioned by the organization several times,⁷ the relative infrequency with which women or gender issues were addressed overall seems to support the argument above that women within the FARC were taking the lead on mainstreaming gender issues in public discourse surrounding the negotiations. Additionally, LGBTI rights issues were not addressed in any tweets by the FARC, again suggesting that individual women engaged in the peace process were at the forefront of advocacy on those issues.

The blog and social media presence of *Mujer Fariana*, as mentioned above, was established at the initiative of FARC women and provides a specific platform for women's and gender issues. An examination of 3 200 of its tweets from calendar year 2016 leading up to the referendum shows it was actively engaged on Twitter but was less prolific than either the FARC's organizational accounts or individual users from the peace delegation. About one third of Tweets from *Mujer Fariana* during this period are retweets, many re-sharing messages from the larger organization and individuals, including the female FARC delegation members whose accounts are analysed above. Much of the remaining content from

this account consists of hashtags and links to the *Mujer Fariana* blog. Similarly, posts to the *Mujer Fariana* Facebook page prior to October 2016 likewise consist mostly of shared links to FARC content and the blog.

As the core of *Mujer Fariana*'s content during this period its blog, as noted above, presented the views of a diversity of authors including women, men, and authors who did not disclose their identity. Though not all authors played a direct role in the peace process, some female members of the peace delegation used this platform to communicate, often in ways that mirrored the conversations taking place on social media. In a 2013 post (prior to the establishment of the Gender Subcommittee), one female negotiating team member discussed the need to:

...open more doors at the negotiating table for the participation of the people in peacebuilding... to offer greater participation to sectors that are always excluded such as ethnic minorities, *campesinos*, the LGBTI population and especially... to women (Villa 2013).

After the formation of the Gender Sub-commission, a portion of the blog became devoted to a discussion of the commission and its work. It also continued to form one element of a cross-platform conversation about gender and the status of women that developed throughout the negotiations. When, in 2016, another member of the FARC's negotiating team authored a blog on 'Feminism in the FARC-EP', the ideas she introduced as part of 'insurgent feminism' – including the need to challenge gender roles in the home, to liberate men from harmful gender roles and to conduct intersectional outreach to minorities, rural women and the poor – all mirror conversations that took place over the preceding months on Twitter (Sandino Palmera 2016). While a complete analysis of the extensive content on the *Mujer Fariana* site is beyond the scope of this paper, these examples demonstrate how social media and other forms of online expression behaved in a mutually reinforcing way, creating a platform that provided space for internal reflection among women of the FARC as well as public-facing education and advocacy regarding the peace process.

Discussion

Overall, what does this analysis tell us about gender and peacebuilding in a virtual space? First, evidence suggests that women in the FARC's peace delegation were, generally, earlier adopters and more influential users of social media in support of the peace process than their male colleagues. Though it is not clear whether they were more prolific users on Twitter, they also adopted communications across multiple platforms. The fact that women had more followers, favourites and retweets on average further demonstrates their effectiveness at online communication, at the same time reinforcing research on gendered patterns of social media use. Perhaps more importantly, the textual analysis of these tweets shows differences in the *ways* that men and women participating in the negotiations presented the goals of the peace process. This reinforces key assumptions of the international

agenda for Women, Peace and Security – namely, that the inclusion of women in peace processes can draw attention to issues that may otherwise be ignored and is essential to creating gender-inclusive peace agreements.

The positioning of FARC women on the Gender Sub-commission was unique considering the low rates at which we see women included in delegations representing non-state armed groups. While the future of their female colleagues following demobilization was a concern in the talks, the messages composed by these women demonstrate their interest in improving life for all women in Colombia. Addressing the importance of gender to the negotiations was a dominant topic in their online conversations, effectively making the case to the public that gender was integral to the accords. These women were also more vocal about the importance of LGBTI issues to the final agreement than their male counterparts. While it appears that all of the men supported a gender-inclusive peace agreement, this was not among the top issues they highlighted in online communications. FARC men seemed more concerned with discussing class issues or ‘social justice’ broadly, leaving focused discourse about the needs of women to their female colleagues.

The dominance of women’s voices in conversations about gender reflects larger concerns about how the WPS agenda has been bounded, envisioning women as its referent without clear or sustained engagement around men and masculinities (Shepherd 2008; Duriesmith 2017). This perception that women ‘own’ these issues further feeds into uncertainties among men about whether or how they can engage with WPS. Duriesmith (2017) discusses the problems of engaging men in these discussions on a global level, suggesting that the paucity of content addressing men and masculinities in WPS leads to simplistic understandings that tell men it is only *other* men – ‘bad’ men – who need to be impacted by this work. The concerns of so-called ‘male champions’ of WPS may also provide insight as to why the male delegation members examined here generally amplified the discourse of women but did not often add their own voices to the discussion. Projects aimed at mobilizing men to support WPS in other parts of the world have generally envisioned the primary role for men as ‘facilitating access’ for women and amplifying their voices in relevant debates (One Earth Future/Our Secure Future 2019; Male Champions of Change 2014). While this certainly aligns with the goals of WPS, what more could be done in addition to this – both to actively engage men and to meaningfully address masculinity – is a topic for WPS advocates to consider. Arguably, in the Colombian case, having a greater diversity of voices engaging on gender issues may have offered some counter to accusations from the political right by groups who mobilized the critique of ‘gender ideology’ to call for opposition to the agreement. This position suggested that inclusions of gender in the agreement were crafted by feminists, atheists, LGBTI populations and the West to undermine society and the family (Beltrán and Creely 2018; Hagen 2017). Though the impact of this campaign on the 2016 referendum, as discussed below, is unclear, open discussion among men that supports WPS goals and explores how a focus on gender and sexuality can positively impact society as a whole could challenge the ‘gender ideology’ argument in other, similar efforts at conflict resolution.

Public-facing communications by FARC negotiators – including outreach both on-line and offline – had a unique importance to the Colombian peace process, because the resulting agreement would be put to a public vote. As mentioned previously, communication and education was also a part of team members' mandate (Bouvier 2016). The referendum, which took place in October 2016, ended in a rejection of the peace deal. The presence of opposition groups that distributed material decrying 'gender ideology,' as discussed above, has led some to argue that the inclusion of gender and sexuality issues were a key reason why people voted against the accords (Céspedes-Báez 2016; Krystalli and Theidon 2016). This might suggest that the social media-based campaign waged by FARC negotiating team members was unsuccessful in promoting the centrality of such issues to the process. However, polling after the 'No' vote seem to indicate that promises of amnesty for former fighters and the ability of former FARC leaders to run for and hold office in Colombia were more prominent concerns for the 50.2% of voters who rejected the accord (Duran 2016; BBC Mundo 2016). When a final, revised version of the accord was implemented in November 2016, references to the LGBTI population and affirmations of a gender-inclusive focus remained present throughout the document.

Pending the reintegration of FARC combatants and throughout the FARC's transformation into a political party, the public efforts of the organization's women to promote the peace process remain relevant. The women of FARC have arguably also served as an example to other insurgent movements where we see large numbers of women serving as combatants. In October 2016, Colombia's second-largest rebel group, the ELN, entered into negotiations with the government. The ELN is estimated to be about 25% women, and prior to the breakdown of those talks the organization showed signs of emulating the FARC's success by creating an online presence and by promoting the inclusion of women in the peace process.⁸

The foregoing analysis offers new insight into the role of women representing non-state armed groups in a peace negotiation, and how social media may be a part of that process. Using a novel methodological approach that combines computational analysis, statistical analysis, and a qualitative thematic reading, the present study offers empirical support for the argument that the inclusion of women can broaden discourse on peace and support processes that address issues of interest to women and other marginalized groups. It further shows how social media can be leveraged by such groups as a space for peace advocacy. Given the ongoing underrepresentation of both combatant women and women more generally in peace negotiations, the international community may want to more seriously consider the importance of both including women and in leveraging their participation in ways that foster public engagement in peace processes.

Notes

- 1 See Sokoloff (2014). Examples from this campaign can be found at <https://twitter.com/infopresidencia/status/485588982525210626> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VPDxWcLaLHo>. The campaign on Twitter used the hashtag #yoleguardoelpuesto ('I'm saving you a seat,' i.e., to watch the World Cup) and encouraged everyday Colombians to do the same.

- 2 Twitter allows for the extraction of up to 3200 tweets from any publicly available user's account. Only users may request a complete archive of their own accounts. Thus, for a few of the most prolific users included in this analysis, the data are left-censored.
- 3 Spanish was the dominant language among the users sampled. All translations were performed by the author. Text mining follows the methods laid out in Silge and Robinson (2017).
- 4 This represents the maximum extractable number of Tweets (3 200), with replies and retweets removed from the sample.
- 5 Accusations regarding the systematic abuse of women were levied by the government, the media and female ex-members of the FARC who spoke out about abuse at the hands of the organization.
- 6 The FARC's presence on other social media outlets confirms this preoccupation with counter-messaging. See, *inter alia*, various YouTube videos that highlight the FARC's record on inclusion of women and the assertion that female cadres have reproductive choice (FARC-EP 2016c, 2014).
- 7 This was also discussed on the FARC-EP's blog, see FARC-EP (2016a).
- 8 For a discussion of women in the ELN see, *inter alia*, Bigio, Vogelstein and Connell (2017). Until her death in 2018, Omaira Elena Vásquez – the highest-ranking woman in the ELN – was also one of its top negotiators with the government.

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'Paz com o rosto de uma mulher': Mulheres, Redes Sociais e o Processo de Paz na Colômbia

Resumo: A ideia de que homens e mulheres abordam a resolução de conflitos de forma diferente constitui a espinha dorsal da agenda internacional sobre Mulheres, Paz e Segurança (MPS) e é apoiada por um crescente corpo de estudos em relações internacionais. No entanto, o papel das mulheres que representam grupos insurgentes nas negociações de paz continua pouco estudado, dada a aparição relativamente rara de tais mulheres em processos de paz. O presente estudo examina como homens e mulheres da equipe de negociação das Forças Armadas Revolucionárias da Colômbia (FARC) se envolveram em um discurso público no *Twitter* que culminou em um referendo sobre os acordos de paz em 2016. Usando uma abordagem de métodos mistos que inclui análise computacional e uma leitura atenta das postagens nas redes sociais, demonstro que as mulheres na equipe de negociação das FARC foram mais usuárias das redes sociais do que os homens e que ofereceram uma contribuição distinta ao discurso sobre a paz, centrando a relevância do gênero e promovendo questões como a necessidade de abordar os direitos LGBTI.

Palavras-chave: gênero; gestão de conflitos; mídia social; Colômbia; construção da paz.

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