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## Confluences of War and Crime: Trajectories into Paramilitary Groups in Colombia

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### ABSTRACT

The relationship between war and crime is complex and multifaceted. Still, insurgents, armed rebels, and paramilitary groups and the violence they perpetrate are often understood within either a framework of war or of crime. Based on repeat interviews with former members of Colombian paramilitary groups, we describe the role of economic motivations, security concerns, social relations, as well as identity and feelings of power in motivating people's involvement in these groups. A life-course analysis demonstrates the many possible confluences of war and crime leading to involvement in paramilitary groups and emphasizes how these change over time.

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Guerrilla and paramilitary groups worldwide brandish their manifestos with their lists of principles and demands. Right-wing paramilitary organizations, espousing conservative principles, crusade for the interests of the elites, whereas Marxist guerrillas, who tend to embrace progressive ideals, fight for land redistribution. Ideology seems to be at the core of insurgencies, whether right- or left-wing. The seemingly ideological nature of political violence has led scholars and policymakers to treat trajectories into illegal political armies as fundamentally different than paths into “conventional” crime.<sup>1</sup> Yet, concepts derived from cartel-state conflicts, such as “criminal war,” “irregular warfare,” and “criminal insurgency,” and research in the crime-terror nexus, describe the many confluences of war and crime in these conflicts, challenging the assumed clearcut distinction between crime and war.<sup>2</sup>

Combining concepts and insights from research on war and terror with findings from research on crime challenges static categorizations of violence. To date, however, the empirical and theoretical emphasis on understanding the many confluences of war and crime has been on insurgency and paramilitary organizations and the strategies they deploy. While contributing important perspectives, such analysis risks misunderstanding the complex motivation and backgrounds of the people who join these organizations. We argue that theorization of how war and crime converge can be augmented by insights and methods from life-course analysis.<sup>3</sup> Concepts such as “trajectories,” “turning points,” and “transitions” may help explore the many confluences of war and crime along peoples' paths into armed rebel and paramilitary groups.

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The boundaries of the categories “war” and “crime” are blurred in many war-affected countries, including in Colombia.<sup>4</sup> Life-history interviews with imprisoned former members of Colombian paramilitaries, self-defense groups created by the national government and the ruling oligarchy,<sup>5</sup> reveal that trajectories into these groups are often similar to common trajectories into conventional crime. These include economic reasons, the need for security, social networks, and the appeal of the identity and feelings of power involvement in paramilitaries offers. With this article, we explore the many confluences of war and crime from the vantage point of life-course trajectories into paramilitary groups.

## The War-Crime and Crime-Terror Nexuses

Ranging from paramilitary groups that run criminal operations to soldiers committing crimes under the cover of the havoc of war, the connections between war and crime are intricate and diverse. Analyzing Colombia’s history of armed conflict, McDougall argues that insurgencies are likely to appear in areas where the state is absent and where natural resources are easy to loot. Armed groups, therefore, not only arise as a response to an unjust society but also in response to crime by becoming “sophisticated protection-rackets, whose existence is both permitted and justified by a state that is too weak to provide security for those living within its borders.”<sup>6</sup> Rojas-Páez points to another overlap of war and crime in Colombia: false positives (“falsos positivos”), the murder of civilians passed off as war casualties. The state has used criminal law, argues Rojas-Páez, to perpetuate war-like violence and disempowerment “through the systemic exceptionality criminal policy facilitated by the systemic denial of the crimes of the powerful.”<sup>7</sup> Franko and Goyes further challenge conceptual distinctions between war and crime in Colombia by asking “why acts such as massacres of civilians, systematic assassination of politicians, judges and other state representatives” committed within the framework of drug wars are classed as “conventional crime.”<sup>8</sup>

Saab and Taylor describe four criminological traditions in the study of the relationship between crime and insurgency. Conspiracy theories emphasize the cooperation between criminal organizations and terrorist organizations, rogue states, and armed groups.<sup>9</sup> Conflict theories predict violence and conflict between organized crime and insurgencies because they both pursue a monopoly.<sup>10</sup> Business network theories “suggest that instead of a situation of pure conspiracy or pure conflict, criminal groups may form varied types of linkages with other criminals or armed insurgents to pursue specific mutual gains.”<sup>11</sup> The final approach asserts that insurgent groups develop their own “in-house” capacities to commit crimes to raise money.<sup>12</sup> All four perspectives highlight the relationship between war and crime with a particular focus on organizations and strategic operations, which has also been the emphasis in criminology.<sup>13</sup>

Organizations and strategies have also been at the center of a long tradition of research on the crime-terror nexus, much of it written about war-torn countries.<sup>14</sup> This literature emphasizes the many similarities between terrorist organizations and “conventional” criminal activity, for example generating income, accessing weapons, obtaining information, recruiting personnel, and developing expertise in violent conflict.<sup>15</sup> These functional, financial, and ideological *confluences* of crime and terror, lead to collaboration between criminal and terrorist organizations.<sup>16</sup> A contemporary line

of research on the “new” crime-terror nexus has challenged this emphasis on organizations and instrumental strategies, and shifted the focus to how individuals may drift from criminality to political violence and back again.<sup>17</sup> These researchers have nuanced the rationalist and teleological thinking that prevail in scholarship on war/terror and crime. Research in the “new” crime-terror nexus emphasizes factors such as identity, emotions, and culture,<sup>18</sup> and include explorations of spatial, bodily, and narrative confluences of war and crime.<sup>19</sup>

The many approaches to the war-crime and the crime-terror nexuses still coincide in that the lines between war, terror, and crime are described as blurry and that the many similarities between the organizations and people involved are foregrounded.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, studies that research individual pathways toward insurgent and paramilitary organizations have been less explicit about the convergence of war and crime. Based on research with Colombian Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia [Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)], a left-wing guerilla group, Higgs identifies six explanations for why children join armed groups: poverty and powerlessness, ideology, replicating social structures of peacetime, initiation rites, enjoyment of violence, and normalization of violence.<sup>21</sup> Nussio has done extensive research on Colombian paramilitary groups, the subject of this study, and the research highlights that the lack of ordinary employment is often a reason why people join these organizations. Envy and seeing others flaunt their association with a group (by having nice cars and clothes, for example) play heavily into affiliation. Nussio also includes self-fulfillment, and fun and adventure (typically including parties, women, and alcohol) as a route into insurgencies. Ideology is also a reason given for joining paramilitary organizations, but it played a minor role for most. Finally, Nussio mentions individual security, but mainly related to post-demobilization.<sup>22</sup>

In sum, we have two bodies of research—one on confluences of war/terror and crime and another on trajectories into insurgent and paramilitary groups—that have developed along parallel lines that could, if brought together, be mutually advantageous. Understanding why marginalization, impoverishment, and insecurity drive people to join paramilitary organizations will expand the understanding of the many confluences of war and crime. The only study, to our knowledge, that attempts to combine these perspectives is Nussio’s research on the relationship between military service and ex-service criminality.<sup>23</sup> The main emphasis in these studies, however, is on post-war engagement with criminality as opposed to our focus on life-course trajectories into both crime and insurgencies.

## Life-Course Analysis

Elder, one of the pioneers of life-course analysis, suggests four aspects that need to be considered in life-course analyses: the socioeconomic and historical context in which people live, the time line of lives, linked lives (individual lives are embedded in the lives of others), and human agency.<sup>24</sup> Life-course analysis is widely applied in the social sciences and has inspired life-course criminology, which studies how people move through time and space, zeroing in on “the onset, persistence, and desistance of offending behaviour over the life-course.”<sup>25</sup> This is transferable to participation in paramilitary organizations.<sup>26</sup>

Three concepts that describe the mobility of individual lives are important in life-course analysis: *trajectories* are the “interdependent sequences of events in different life domains” (e.g., drug use, criminal justice involvement, employment);<sup>27</sup> *transitions* are short-term changes in stages or roles (e.g., getting married or divorced, obtaining one’s first job). Some, but not all, transitions lead to *turning points* that produce long-term behavioral change.<sup>28</sup> These are processes of family formation, stable employment, the disintegration of peer groups, and subjective shifts in identity that are important for changes in offending patterns.<sup>29</sup> The latter two concepts are closely related, but we follow Enz and Talarico in distinguishing between turning points being actual changes in life direction, while transitions are changes in circumstances that lead or do not lead to such changes.<sup>30</sup>

Elder emphasizes the historical and broad socioeconomic context as crucial for understanding life-course trajectories. Lives are not lived in a vacuum: “all life choices are contingent on the opportunities and constraints of social structure and culture.”<sup>31</sup> And while life-course analyses are fundamentally concerned with the impact of the timing of events, the forms of human interaction, and human agency in a life trajectory, “the chance to make certain choices depends on the opportunities and constraints of history.”<sup>32</sup> Signaling the significance of historical time and place, Elder locates it as the first principle of life-course analysis and emphasize that a life-course analysis requires paying attention to how “individual lives are influenced by their ever-changing historical context.”<sup>33</sup> Hence, any study of life courses must be firmly anchored in a thorough understanding and explicit analysis of the historical and societal context in which they take place.

## Structural Violence in Colombia

Since its formation as an independent nation, Colombia has had a highly unequal society with what has been, at times, considered a failed state that has lost control of its territories to various illegal armed groups.<sup>34</sup> The basic needs of a significant portion of the population have been unfulfilled and unguaranteed. This amounts to what Galtung termed structural violence, summarized by de Carvalho and colleagues as “the harms that are subtle and not clearly the responsibility of any specific institution but are the result of the abstract and broad combination of rules that govern social life.”<sup>35</sup> In 1948 war became a revolutionary tool in Colombia to transform economic, social, and political relations within the country.<sup>36</sup> Disappointed liberals together with campesinos launched a guerrilla war for their lands against the state, which defended the interests of the elites.<sup>37</sup>

In 1968 the guerrillas gained ascendancy, and the government, desperate to reverse its fortunes, made sweeping changes in gun control, allowing civilians to own weapons for self-defense (formerly weapons were only permitted for the army) and approved the formation of self-defense militias, also known as paramilitaries. The increasingly fearful and insecure Colombian oligarchy took advantage of this relaxation of gun-control law.<sup>38</sup> Their paramilitary organizations brought together the aspirations of nascent drug cartels and the interests of the elites; drug cartels needed robust structures to protect their commercial activities and the elites required an organization to squelch social and political protest and confront the guerrillas. Paramilitaries thus worked as the

private armies of drug cartels, the private security of landowners, and a political force in defense of a conservative state and its elites.<sup>39</sup> As the guerrillas went on the offensive, the government also attempted to suppress dissent by criminalizing revolutionary political activity, mainly through the support of paramilitaries in service to the government. These groups did not operate within the law but forcefully displaced peasants from their lands, engaged in drug trafficking, murdered leftists and social leaders, and undertook other activities consistent with their anti-communist ideals.<sup>40</sup> 220,000 people were killed in Colombia between 1 January 1958, and 31 December 2012, in the crossfire between guerrilla groups, paramilitary forces, and the army.<sup>41</sup>

In 2003, the Colombian government signed a demobilization agreement with the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* [United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC)], a right-wing paramilitary group. The agreement had a national reach and applied between 2003 and 2006. However, the Colombian Centre for Historical Memory reports that “whereas the number of combatants that demobilized and the number of weapons surrendered to the government were high, there were also high numbers of criminal recidivism and rearmament in all regions”<sup>42</sup>. Informal organizations, also called criminal gangs, or BACRIM, expanded in Colombia after the 2003 paramilitary demobilization.

Commentators interpreted BACRIM as evidence of the ongoing existence of paramilitaries and a sign of the failed peace process. Koessler<sup>43</sup> sees the criminal gangs BACRIM as one of the successors of the AUC because they are “armed groups that, through violence, support political, social, and economic interests”. Paramilitaries grew out of crime (as a tool in the early phases of drug trafficking) and returned to crime (after partial demobilization). In Colombia, crime and political engagement in paramilitaries became indistinguishable at times. Following the peace negotiations, paramilitaries still controlled the chain of illegal drug production. Moreover, during demobilization, many drug lords were eager to be seen as paramilitary members to benefit from reduced sentences, amnesty, and stipends. The criminal and political wings of paramilitaries were not necessarily in conflict nor in a purely business relationship—and the “in-house” capacity for crime had always existed. Importantly, however, after demobilization, paramilitaries were more manageable because they became smaller and fragmented.<sup>44</sup> Saab and Taylor conclude that paramilitaries cooperated and competed with established criminal networks in Colombia through complex linkages with them, but most importantly, that they had substantial “in-house” capacity for criminal business from the start because they were already involved in the drug trade.<sup>45</sup>

Most of the literature on war-crime confluences in Colombia and elsewhere focuses on the organizations involved and the strategies they apply. As important as these studies are, there is also much to gain in exploring the confluence of war and crime as it plays out over time in individual lives. Our analysis of trajectories into paramilitary groups in Colombia is based on a life-course perspective with a particular focus on the social and contextual dimensions of change over time: economic motives, security concerns, and the nature of social relations. Inspired by recent trends in research on the war-crime and crime-terror nexuses, we also pay attention to subjective shifts in identity and include emotions such as feelings of power and excitement when trying to understand participation in paramilitary organizations. The emphasis is on the many confluences of war and crime in the life courses of paramilitary members.

## Methods

The research project CRIMLA (Crime in Latin America), begun in December 2021 and includes in-depth life-story interviews with over four hundred imprisoned people in seven countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Honduras).<sup>46</sup> The seven countries targeted in the project have commonalities such as high indexes of violence and ongoing political turmoil.<sup>47</sup> However, they also each have unique traits that mark the violence and criminality in the country. Participants were chosen for having committed a range of offenses, none of which were related to insurgencies. In Colombia, seven of the twenty-five men and three of the twenty-five women interviewed had nevertheless been members of paramilitary groups, which speaks to the importance of the armed conflict to understand crime in Colombia—and vice versa. The life courses and life-stories of these ten participants are the starting point for the analysis in this study.

Each participant was interviewed three times and each interview session lasted from one and a half to two hours, meaning that we built this article from a data set of thirty interview sessions with the ten participants that had been members of paramilitary groups. The data we use here comprises over sixty recorded hours of conversation. Interviews were organized along the life course of participants and based on an extensive interview guide emphasizing family context, childhood, youth, adulthood, crime, drug use, violence, detention, legal process, life in prison, and perceptions of victims. We made a point of letting participants tell their own stories, and interviewers were free to probe topics of particular interest not covered by the interview guide.

Out of the ten participants who had been members of paramilitary groups, all but one had been imprisoned before; the highest level of education was high school, with most only having finished elementary schooling. Tellingly for our analysis of the confluence of war and crime, most of the participants were in prison at the time of the interview not for their participation in a paramilitary organization but for a range of crimes committed because of, but not entirely explained by, their participation in a paramilitary group. These crimes included violent robbery, kidnapping, drug trafficking, and murder. The life stories of the participants who had been members of paramilitary groups usually revolve around their lives in a militia or their time as combatants. Having such extensive data on each participant, including details from childhood and adolescence, means that although the number of participants is relatively small, we are able to examine in depth the reasons for and circumstances around their trajectories into paramilitary organizations. Our study is not statistically representative; it is a qualitative study that details, in depth, the war-crime confluences in the life trajectories of our participants. What may be lost in terms of a systematic and “representative” analysis is gained in the detailed exploration of paths towards paramilitary organizations.

The analysis was done with help of an initial broad coding of the entire corpus of interviews and then more detailed analytical coding of the sample used in this study. Reading through the ten life stories, we identified the most important reasons the participants provided for joining a paramilitary: economic, security concerns, social relations, and issues of identity and feelings of power. After the initial screening, we returned to the interviews and coded for these categories more systematically.



Importantly, especially since we rely on case descriptions, these themes are not mutually exclusive, and most participants joined the paramilitary for several of these reasons. Of these four categories, “identity and feelings of power” stands out as having been more difficult for the participants to talk about and demanded more interpretation by researchers. It takes a lot of trust to speak about enjoying violence and participating in armed groups, and retrospective interviews (especially in prison) may be skewed towards expressing regret and morally acceptable feelings.<sup>48</sup> Having three interview sessions helped greatly in gaining the necessary trust to also talk about less legitimate reasons for joining paramilitary groups.

The research project is hosted by the University of Oslo, Norway, and we obtained authorization from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) to collect and store life stories. We also received approval from the ethics committees of Antonio Nariño University for the fieldwork we conducted in Colombia. All participants received an oral and written explanation of their rights in Spanish and agreed to participate. Names and important details from their stories have been anonymized (all the names we present in this paper are pseudonyms). Considering that most participants have experienced significant psychological trauma, we implemented a trauma-informed approach that assumed, among other things, that obtaining informed consent from participants was a continuous process across and in the sessions rather than a one-time formality.<sup>49</sup>

#### **Four Elements of Trajectories into Paramilitary Groups**

Decades ago, Venezuelan criminologist del Olmo argued that the difference between violence in Latin America and the rest of the world is that on that continent violence was predominantly structural—as defined above—from which all other types of violence were derived.<sup>50</sup> The trajectories into paramilitary groups of the people interviewed for this study are deeply embedded in and shaped by structural violence and can, therefore, be referred to as instances of post-structural violence: “situations where the victim [of structural violence] becomes the executioner as a survival mechanism in a violent environment.”<sup>51</sup>

The four main elements of the trajectories into paramilitary organizations that we discuss are ideal types and analytical constructs. Individual trajectories often involve more than one element, and possibly all four. Moreover, all four trajectories reveal distinct confluences of war and crime. Under other circumstances, the trajectories we describe would have led our participants to “common” criminality, but in a society marked by widespread structural violence, these trajectories paved the way into paramilitary groups. We present each reason for joining or staying with a paramilitary organization in Colombia with an example from an individual’s life and path and supplement it with several briefer examples. These lengthier descriptions are essential for the qualitative life-course analysis we conducted, tracking changes over time.

#### ***Economic Motivation***

Francisco was sentenced to eight years of prison for ransom, an illegal tactic he used as an informal money lender to collect debts. Francisco’s life trajectory sheds light on his imprisonment, his participation in a paramilitary group, and the war-crime



confluences in his life. His reason for joining a paramilitary organization was primarily economic in nature, and it highlights the confluences of war and crime as it relates to his desire to make money, whether legally, in organized crime, or as a member of an insurgent group.

Francisco was born in the mid-1980s in rural Colombia. The lack of work and other opportunities to make a legal income led him as a teenager to become involved in the drug trade—the first turning point in his life.

When I was sixteen, the coca thing arrived in my town. Many people started cropping coca. A person from [elsewhere in Colombia] arrived. He came with many workers, and they started cropping and buying the crops. They established laboratories where they processed [the leaves]. He liked me and gave me work. I worked in the laboratory, and they paid well. We saw the money. The money I got was for my mom; I helped my mom. So, I worked and worked and worked.

Francisco's first job in the coca industry was carrying packs of coca leaves. His performance led him to transition to mixing coca leaves with gasoline to produce coca paste. Because of an allergic reaction to gasoline, he switched to being a regional collector of coca leaves. But then his business went awry, and he became addicted to drugs. It was then that the paramilitaries captured him. When he failed to pay for the coca leaves he had acquired—his second turning point—the paramilitary group gave him a choice between joining the group or death. Francisco was forced into the paramilitary to repay his debt:

Interviewer: How much drugs had you bought?

Francisco: Like a hundred kilograms. Half a kilo cost COP\$2 million back then [427 USD], so the investment was about COP\$400 to 500 million pesos [85,410–160,763 USD]. They [the provider] caught me...the order was...the order was to kill me...so the guy who caught me said that he had to call the boss. So, he called and explained that they had a guy like me. The boss told them to ask for my name. When I gave my name, the boss said, "wait a minute." He recognized me from my earlier days. And he ordered them to keep me alive but to bring me up to where he was.

After he was enlisted by the paramilitary group, Francisco was assigned to a unit and given a rifle: "The first thing they told me was that the ones who enter cannot leave and that mistakes are paid for with your life." Francisco was trained in combat and strategy by former army members. This turn in his trajectory included extensive training in everything from physical exercise to the use of weapons to military etiquette. After he completed training, he served as a guard controlling drug trafficking routes, but in civilian dress, not in uniform: "If the army approached, I acted like a bell ringer. Do you understand me? If the army was coming by speedboat, so I had to call." He received a salary to cover his basic needs and an opportunity to pay down his debt.

Francisco continued using drugs during his time as a paramilitary but kept it concealed. His superiors "did not allow for vice; if they [discovered any drug use] they would kill you." Friends he made in the paramilitary organization helped each other to keep their drug use secret. Francisco experienced problems with the organization not for his drug use but for charging his own "vaccines" (slang for extortion) to people

outside the organization. Paramilitary leaders only allowed the form of crimes they ordered, not private initiatives. Francisco denied the accusations and, while it is unclear to us whether he actually extorted people without the consent of the organization, he managed to escape. He then engaged in money lending with the friends who had helped him keep his drug use hidden from the leaders but was apprehended.

Francisco's story illustrates the importance of poverty in trajectories into paramilitary organizations. Living in an isolated region with a non-existent state and limited employment opportunities, he worked the only job he could find. The turn towards stable employment, which in normal conditions would have led him towards a law-abiding life, in the context of structural violence set him on a trajectory initially of crime and then war. Exhibiting the overlap between crime and war and the significance of the absence of the state, Francisco's main turning point, or specific episodic experience, leading into the paramilitary was the death threat he received because of his crime debt.<sup>52</sup> Underlying his situation were years of economic and social deprivation.

Other participants experienced pervasive, long-term poverty, which also paved their trajectories into paramilitaries, ranging from absolute deprivation, to relative deprivation, to efforts to guarantee a stable income in an unstable economy. Juan came from a lower-class family that struggled to make ends meet: "I arrived home and saw my mom crying. She did not have money for the rent nor for food." His father abandoned the family weeks after Juan was born, so he grew up with two siblings and his mother. "I did not grow up with a father, so she had to sustain us three," he said. With an absent father and a mother who had to work triple shifts, Juan spent most of his time on the streets with other kids in a neighborhood controlled by gangs and drug dealers. Juan began drug trafficking at age nine, wanting to contribute to the household economy, and from there he "climbed the ladder" that ended with his recruitment by a paramilitary organization—all because of his childhood economic deprivation.

The repercussions of economic deprivation early in life continue to pull individuals towards insurgent groups. Alejandro was born in an isolated rural location to a family with scant economic resources: "My mom moved to a farm. The school was far away—it was always far. The situation became even more difficult when winter came. Neither motorbikes nor cars could come in [to their territory]." Money played an important role in his path into a paramilitary; it allowed him to afford what had seemed impossible before: "I bought clothes, food. I partied. And so on." His "conspicuous consumption" took place on a small budget and as an attempt to experience a lifestyle that he saw other segments of society enjoy on a regular basis.<sup>53</sup> When asked about his monthly income as a paramilitary, he said, "not so good but not so bad... COP\$700.000 [301 USD] in the jungle and COP\$1,200.000 [517 USD] in the city."

For many people in Colombia, economic motivations play an important role in their trajectory into a paramilitary organization.<sup>54</sup> In criminology this is often seen as part of strain theory and includes both absolute and relative deprivation.<sup>55</sup> Sometimes it can also include an element of conspicuous consumption. In a variation of the financial confluence of crime and terror<sup>56</sup>, what matters is attending to economic needs. When a person lives amidst economic precariousness and faces widespread armed conflict—elements that add up to structural violence—the possibility to earn money through illegal acts might lead the person to fluctuate between criminal organizations and paramilitaries. In the Colombian context, the confluence of war and crime in

trajectories into paramilitary groups shaped by economics has an additional characteristic: criminal and paramilitary organizations are often the same. Depending on time and place, they engage in political violence and warfare, regular crimes such as extortion and drug trafficking, or both. Individuals may therefore experience the difference between criminal and political violence as less dramatic than in other contexts where trajectories into crime and war/terror merge.<sup>57</sup>

### **Security Concerns**

Sebastián was sentenced to twelve years and six months of prison for first-degree murder. He was in a restaurant in his hometown with his baby daughter when an honor-related fight broke out. Sebastián took his daughter to a friend's house, picked up his gun in his house, returned to the restaurant, and shot the person who had offended. He explained the murder, while pointing his right hand in the shape of a gun towards the interviewer, by saying “maybe it was because I was always on my own.” Sebastián's life trajectory reveals a continuous search for safety, which first led him into the army and then into a paramilitary organization because of an exaggerated sense of honor and self-respect nurtured through years of insecurity. War and crime connect when people search for protection—one way or another.

Sebastián was born in the mid-1990s to a humble family but where all his basic needs were covered. While his grandfather was a member of a guerrilla group, Sebastián was not involved with it during his childhood. He finished school and at age eighteen transitioned into adulthood by joining the army, where he sold weapons to other soldiers illegally. After leaving the army, with the savings he accumulated during his time as a soldier, he built a house on a hill in an area controlled by a paramilitary organization, although he lacked the required construction permit:

It is a very difficult place where I have my land lot because it is a paramilitary zone; not even the army can get in there....About six or eight years ago, they began to take that part of the mountain....They are from the Gulf Cartel.<sup>58</sup>

It was then impossible for him not to be in contact with the armed group: “I had to talk with those controlling the hill in front of us to install the electricity. They were paramilitaries.” Sebastián collaborated with the paramilitaries as part of his day-to-day work as a community leader, conducting “jobs” for them, which he said numbed him to violence and murder. Sebastián's contact with the paramilitaries was haphazard but also opportunistic and marked by security concerns. An important transition was leaving the army where he had experienced a sense of safety and being on his own in an area controlled by a paramilitary group.

In the context of war and structural violence, people's survival depends on collaborating with whoever has the monopoly of violence in the area they live in. Sebastián's grandfather, concerned about security and the threat of displacement, joined the guerrillas. Sebastián transitioned into adulthood by joining the army, an organization that offered him protection. But once he left the army and took on parenting, he needed to provide protection for his family. He, therefore, interacted with the paramilitaries pragmatically. The turning point in his life of collaborating with the paramilitaries can only be understood in the context of the widespread conflict and structural violence

in which he lived. For Sebastián, as for others, the difference between legal and illegal security providers was of less importance than the security itself. When stable government is in place, people worried about their safety may join the army; but when it is absent, their option is to ally with illegal actors, as Sebastián did following his time in the army.

While Sebastián collaborated with paramilitaries because a long-standing concern for security, others do it to survive. Carlos spent his childhood in an area with a lot of gang violence. A paramilitary organization was heavily present, and crime levels were high. Violence plagued his childhood memories: “I remember that my mom and my dad asked me to hide in a box because after 6pm there was crossfire [between guerrillas and paramilitaries].” Paramilitaries controlled his town, and some of his family members belonged to the organization. His parents tried to shield him from violence and illegal activities during his early years, but both the war and criminal organizations were difficult to avoid. To defend his father’s carpentry trade, Carlos fought a member of a criminal gang and was forced to move in with an uncle, a high ranking paramilitary, to ensure his safety. Victimization pushed him to join a paramilitary group; fear for his family’s safety pulled him to remain with a part of it. His tasks were simple to begin with: “if a house had a problem with humidity, I had to fix it. If we had to fumigate a house, I would do it.” As time went by, Carlos transitioned into more important tasks because of his uncle’s trust in him: “he noticed that I had a strong mind as a child...he told me that I could become powerful.”

Even those who try to refrain from joining illegal armed groups reach a point in which their safety depends on allying with them. Santiago self-identifies as Indigenous and was born in Indigenous territory. His family has cultivated vegetables for generations. The state was non-existent, and a paramilitary organization controlled his people’s territory: “you had to do what they ordered.” Then a second group arrived in his territory: “It was not the paramilitaries; it was the guerrillas. They arrived in the territory at that time. In 1998.” An illegal armed group, which Santiago thought was guerrillas, harassed Santiago’s family on a weekly basis to collect the “vaccine.” Eventually, the group holding his family ransom acted out on their threats and attacked his father. Fortunately, Santiago’s father survived the beating, but knowing that his life and that of his family were hanging by a thread together with their extreme poverty aggravated by war, Santiago joined the paramilitaries:

I felt a lot of anger [starts crying]. They almost killed him [His dad]...I made many friends, bad friendships...one of them proposed that I join; they were recruiting a lot; he asked me if I wanted to join the ranks.

Many people who live in widespread violent conflict—fueled by structural violence—seek out paramilitary organizations for safety and survival. In the same way as security concerns are crucial when paramilitaries demobilize, they play an important role in mobilization as well.<sup>59</sup> The same scenario plays itself out in US ghettos and French banlieues where young people are drawn to gangs for protection, either against the gang they are eventually joining or rival gangs.<sup>60</sup> In life-course trajectories into paramilitary organizations that are shaped by security concerns, the nature of the violent organization that dominates an area is less important than the protection it can offer. People’s alliances for safety and survival shift between criminal organizations,

insurgencies, paramilitaries, and state armies and police forces, revealing another confluence of war and crime.

### **Social Relations**

Paola was sentenced to twenty-four years for kidnapping. Friends she made in a previous phase of her life when she belonged to a paramilitary group, convinced her to participate in a scheme to kidnap five people. The police and army response was heightened because of particular features of the case, and the entire gang was captured by a police task force. As a teenager, Paola's life trajectory was similar to adolescents throughout the world: when they reach a certain age they start rebelling against authority, finding their own path, while not yet being encumbered with the obligations of adulthood.<sup>61</sup> However, in a context of turbulence, violence, and conflict, this search for independence led Paola to participate in illegal criminal and political organizations.

Born in the early 1980s, Paola suffered domestic emotional and physical abuse during childhood. After years of docility, she rebelled in adolescence. She skipped school, hung out with friends in the street, lied to her mother, and drank alcohol. She also had a boyfriend from the neighborhood who was a member of a paramilitary: "I fell in love. He was a very attentive person, very dedicated, very affectionate. But I also fell in love with him because he was the person who got me out of the house." Paola followed her boyfriend to a paramilitary camp when she was fifteen so she could spend more time with him. The paramilitary camp became a refuge for the couple, free from family interference. During paramilitary training, however, the abuse continued: "For every mistake there was punishment, a blow. All of that was hard for me." Paola also witnessed girls being punished for bearing children too young: "they beat them, they beat until they aborted." On one occasion, one of them could not stand it and there was a lot of bleeding, she bled to death. Training camp numbed Paola, hardening her for combat—but also for criminal engagements later in life.

When Paola became pregnant at age seventeen, she feared she would suffer the same fate she had witnessed being inflicted on other pregnant girls. To escape the organization, Paola bribed people higher up in the paramilitary hierarchy and then pretended to have been killed in combat. She moved to a farm, where she could focus on motherhood. The relationship with her first love lasted two more years and they had one more child, but then Paola broke up with him. Paola distanced herself from her ex-partner but kept up with friends and contacts from the paramilitary organization. Through those friends, Paola's life took a turn. At age twenty-two, she met some old comrades, and two of them offered her a "job." Even today Paola wonders why she accepted: "I had a good job on the farm. My boys were fine. From one moment to the next I let myself be convinced and I did what I did. Things didn't go the way we thought."

Paola's case demonstrates two ways that social relations can be important trajectories into armed groups and political violence. In criminological literature, a well-documented turning point in the lives of women who are involved in crime is running away with boyfriends to a life on the street or in gangs.<sup>62</sup> But in a context of widespread war and structural violence, the man who "rescued" her from domestic abuse instead led her to a paramilitary organization. Becoming a mother became a transition that allowed

her to escape from the group, but this was not a complete break. Several years later, friends from the paramilitary group enticed her to participate in a typical criminal kidnapping, which resulted in a prison sentence.

Another example is Andrea, whose life illustrates how social relationships such as romantic partners, family, and friends can lead in multiple directions regardless of how the violence is classified (war or crime) and the ideology of the group perpetuating it. Having experienced sexual harassment from her stepfather and living in the midst of guerrilla and paramilitary violence, she ran away from home: “I was a mom at age fifteen. I flew with a paramilitary leader.” The man with whom she fell in love was thirty-five years old at the time. Because of him, Andrea remained with the paramilitaries for a decade, until when she was twenty-five, when her partner was killed in battle. At age thirty-six, Andrea joined the guerrillas—ideological and war enemies of the paramilitaries. It was her uncle who invited her to join the guerrillas:

He told me “What are you doing here, working so hard, breaking your back to earn a few cents? Let us go to the mountain. I have a fish farm. Come with me and you will see...I left with my uncle, and I arrived for the holiday season in his town which is controlled by paramilitaries. So, my uncle told me that he is part of the guerrillas. And when we were in the party my uncle introduced me to the commanders. One of the commanders liked me. He offered me a farm beside my uncle’s.

Domestic violence and poverty are not a precondition to join the paramilitaries. Relationships, other than only romantic partners and family, can also lead that way. Mateo was born into a middle-class family; both his parents had university education, and his basic needs were taken care of. It was through friends that he first engaged with crime: “It was human trafficking for prostitution. I kept hanging with him, and after a while, I ended up sending women to Japan.” Through his involvement in human trafficking, Mateo connected with drug smugglers and started working for them. With time he became part of the Cali Cartel. “A friend of mine introduced me to them. We met back in [city], and he took me to Cali and introduced me to them.” On a trip he made for them, he was captured by the police and sent to prison. After being released, paramilitaries contacted him, and an acquaintance set up a meeting. Mateo joined the paramilitaries, helped them organize their drug trafficking activities, led troops, and networked for them. When he was sent to a prison partly controlled by the paramilitaries, Mateo kept working for them.

Social relations often play an important role in life-course trajectories into paramilitary groups. For Paola and Andrea, falling in love with a member of a paramilitary organization changed their life-course trajectories radically. The social relations of family and friends also facilitated important transitions and turning points for them, as it did for Mateo, even as their trajectories were influenced by other elements in their life-course trajectories, such as economic and security concerns and identity. The confluence of war and crime included Paola’s trajectory from activities usually associated with war (joining the ranks of a paramilitary) to activities usually associated with crime (kidnapping) and Mateo’s inverted trajectory from criminal activities (human trafficking) to war activities (leading troops and representing the paramilitaries). Social relations played a key role in all of them.

Criminologists have highlighted the role of peers and contacts in engagement with crime *and* extremist groups.<sup>63</sup> These contacts are what is known in life-course analysis as linked lives.<sup>64</sup> Our examples show that a contact can connect individuals with both crime and war. In Colombia, the same people were working with and recruiting for criminal and paramilitary organizations. The Cali Cartel, for example, like other Colombian cartels, was active in the creation of paramilitaries.<sup>65</sup> Contact with them through social relations such as romantic partners, friends, and family could lead an individual either way—to war or crime—or both simultaneously, revealing important confluences between the two.

### ***Identity and Empowerment***

Alejandro was sentenced to fifteen years and six months in prison for first-degree murder. He committed this crime while working for paramilitaries. He oversaw “social cleansing,” a euphemism for murdering people that the group deemed undesirable. The leaders had targeted a poor person who was accused of stealing. Alejandro and another paramilitary member found him, took him to a hill, and killed him. The case can be used to illustrate the fourth element of trajectories into paramilitary groups: the construction of particular identities, the search for a range of emotions, and “existential attractions.”<sup>66</sup>

Born in the late 1990s, Alejandro belonged to a low-middle-class family. He worked first in his grandparents’ small farm and then at age fourteen in construction to help with the household’s economy. He was unsatisfied with the possibilities life offered him. He used drugs and had “always those kinds of problems in the house” that made him feel “a little bored and stressed.” Alejandro joined a paramilitary group because he had problems with his stepmother at home. Joining the group meant living in a strict military regime. He had to get up early, train, and follow orders. As individuals often assume when joining either a regular army or a terrorist group, as Alejandro did, the martial discipline is an opportunity to start anew.<sup>67</sup> A commander told Alejandro in the paramilitary camp, “we are going to change your name—you will no longer carry your current name, you will become someone else.” Unsatisfied with his previous life, he embraced this rebirth. In a few weeks, he metamorphosed from a petty drug user living under his stepmother’s roof to a hyper-masculine soldier at war. He quit drugs and embraced being a soldier.

The friendship and comradeship among insurgent soldiers, the power of the uniform and weapons, and the war atmosphere, exhilarated Alejandro. “The truth is that ever since I was a child, I have liked weapons....[At camp] I was always with my gun, it made me feel good,” he said. Alejandro enjoyed the martial discipline as well: “Even though it’s an illegal group, they teach you many things: to respect, to behave, to know how to live, to pay attention, to be disciplined.” Paramilitary indoctrination provided new meaning in his life: “The ideology is that we have to defend the peasants, the poorest people, the most vulnerable people. Do not let the enemy come; be aware of them.” Alejandro got a high fighting the guerillas and fleeing the army. Combat helped him “get rid of his fears.”

After two years in the mountains, Alejandro’s feelings changed: “I began to feel bored and miss my family,” he said. He had the opportunity to move to “the urban,” slang for the paramilitary branch operating in the city. He was given new tasks:



policing (“making sure that nothing is lost, that no one fights, that everything is in order”), collecting “taxes” for “protection” of businesses, collecting drug-related debts, and punishing those who did not pay. Alejandro felt he was “doing something good” by policing. He also enjoyed the mafia-like activities of collecting money and punishing deviants. Most of his time was spent on the latter—proper activities of organized crime groups. He murdered and kidnapped, and enjoyed the power, fame, and “bad reputation” attached to his new identity:

At first, not many knew me. But I made myself known. They started recognizing me in all the neighborhoods. Everywhere they knew me, all the merchants, the dealers, the discotheques, the bars...one of my best moments was when I worked there [in the city] with them [the paramilitaries]. I wasn't a commander, but my voice mattered.

The fame and power Alejandro enjoyed working for “the urban” allowed him to indulge in pleasures: “They gave me drinks, money, women, drugs; they gave me whatever I wanted.” The only aspect left of martial discipline was the unavoidable principle of “following orders.”

Alejandro's life illustrates the importance of identity and empowerment in trajectories into paramilitary organizations. Coming from a low-middle-class family, feeling he did not matter, and seeing armed groups all around him that dictated his fate and that of his family—elements characteristic of a society with pervasive structural injustice—produced a feeling of disenfranchisement. Joining an insurgent group gave him a sense of pride, belonging, and order, and by moving to the urban branch of the organization, he gained a sense of power, pleasure, and fame. The turning point of joining the paramilitary organization gave meaning to his life, and the transition into the urban section empowered him through his “bad ass” reputation, a well-known path in criminological studies.<sup>68</sup>

Andrea's trajectory into paramilitary organizations also had a strong element of identity and empowerment, even though she primarily joined a paramilitary organization to be with her boyfriend. Asked why she enjoyed reading about Pablo Escobar, branded as an icon by popular media, she said, “He had a life full of challenges.”<sup>69</sup> “When Pablito started working, he did not start wealthy...then he met some people who took him to fame. He had a life full of challenges.” Andrea gloried in having been the partner of a powerful paramilitary leader, “I felt proud of being the wife of a man with a lot of money. Of a man that had me as his queen.” Andrea felt that even though she worked for paramilitaries, she was a good person who used her potential: “I felt supported. I felt very good. I was not on my own, I had a bodyguard. Second, I had power, the power of money.” Another participant, Carlos, was also enthralled by the benefits offered by paramilitaries: “if you are there, you get everything easy: women, money, a chain, a ring, a watch so I started working with him. I got a lot of money. A lot of power.” As noted above, Nussio's study of paramilitaries in Colombia similarly includes self-fulfillment, or fun and adventure (typically including parties, women, and alcohol), as a route towards joining insurgencies.<sup>70</sup>

Appealing identities, encompassing a sense of control, empowerment, and excitement show how in situations of structural violence and poverty people may look for alternative identities in violent organizations. Alejandro's unrest with his life might have

led him into a regular army or a criminal organization in other circumstances, but in a country at war he found paramilitaries. This “search for respect” is often used to explain Western street culture and gangs, and the differences between political armed groups and criminal organizations are not that striking.<sup>71</sup> While the paramilitary organization Alejandro was a part of in the mountains had many characteristics of an armed rebellion group, in the city it functioned as a traditional organized crime group. In this sense, different confluences of war and crime are evident in Alejandro’s transitions between different segments of the paramilitary organization. The identity and empowerment that comes with being part of a violent organization—warlike or criminal—have a particular appeal to the marginal and impoverished, although they also attract people living in different situations and under different socio-economic conditions.<sup>72</sup> Motivations such as identity and empowerment are usually intertwined with the other life-course elements of trajectories into paramilitary organizations, but they can also shape lives irrespective of other motives and concerns.

## Discussion

In their analysis of the Colombian Victims’ Law vis-à-vis drug crimes, Franko and Goyes argued that conceptualizations of war and crime and the borders separating the two follow Northern understandings that often fail to acknowledge Southern contexts. They showed that drug crimes are conceptualized by Northern theory as conventional crime, while in the South, and especially in Colombia, drug issues are intrinsically connected with and have levels of violence similar to war.<sup>73</sup> Our study, which combines life-course and war criminology, reached a similar conclusion but from a bottom-up approach: the careers of those who perpetrate violence are usually an interlacing of criminality and war activities—and some of those activities exist in a typological grey zone. People who belong to a paramilitary organization are neither “common criminals” nor “soldiers in a war” but engage fluidly with violence in trajectories embedded in a context of widespread conflict and structural injustice.

Political ambitions and ideology played only minor roles, if any, in why participants in this study joined paramilitary organizations. Their life courses reveal that trajectories into paramilitary groups follow the same track as into conventional crime, with the important difference being that they are played out in a historical point in time marked by structural violence and widespread war. What criminologists have traditionally identified as paths into crime (poverty, security concerns, social relations, and identity and empowerment), when linked with a particular setting of structural violence can become fundamental trajectories into political armed groups. Because of the historical context of structural violence, war and crime seam together in violent, illegal, and seemingly-political life-course trajectories.

The many confluences of war and crime in trajectories into paramilitary organizations in Colombia and the way paramilitaries have evolved into hybrid war-crime organizations beg the question of whether intersections should be conceptualized as confluences or nexuses at all. A better conceptualization emphasizes the levels of violence, where war has large-scale, highly visible, socially destabilizing logics, while crimes gnaw at the foundations of a society on a smaller scale, but more permanently. Paramilitary activities include a continuum of violence, with many gray zones, in which

elements of scale may be the most important, both analytically and in policy formation, in differentiating war from crime.

At the same time, and as our analysis has demonstrated, concepts such as “crime” and “war” offer insights and can be useful as analytical tools to differentiate between different types of organizations and logics of violence that move beyond the question of scale. Paramilitaries have committed atrocities ranging from forced displacements, to massacres, to re-victimization with hidden mass graves, which in Colombia are violence of a larger scale than the violence of organized crime.<sup>74</sup> Most importantly, the activities of paramilitaries that we have described exist on a continuum representing two systems of violence that come into play when participants made sense of their engagement in these organizations. FARC military camps and warfare in the mountains were, for example, described differently than drug trafficking and extortion in urban settings. Highlighting the difference between certain war and crime logics also resonates with Gutiérrez Sanín’s warning against conflating all forms of illegal activity and with Kleinschmidt and Palma’s insight that in Latin America violent non-state actors such as criminal and insurgent organizations do not often converge at the organizational level.<sup>75</sup>

Following Kupatadze and Argomaniz, we suggest that the metaphor of confluence can be of help when synthesizing these divergent perspectives.<sup>76</sup> The concept of “confluences” suggests that while there may be different streams (or systems or logics) of violence at particular historical times, they “flow together,” making the two indistinguishable. We have shown how war and crime come together, or merge, in the lives of those who executed the actions and perpetrated the violence of paramilitaries in Colombia.

War and crime can also have similar origins, as pointed out by Kupatadze and Argomaniz in their description of ideological confluences: “conditioned by a deviant response to general deprivation, poverty and marginalization.”<sup>77</sup> War and crime are products of the same social dynamics. In Latin America, as del Olmo pointed out, they are often an outgrowth of structural violence.<sup>78</sup> McDougall, for example, highlights how the absence of the state facilitates guerrillas and paramilitary groups to become the agent of “justice” by responding to crime with war-like methods.<sup>79</sup> Findings from this study show a further, and perhaps more widespread, significance of the absence of the state for the confluence of war and crime. In the four categories of our analysis (economic, security, social relations, and identity), a weak state means that individuals seek to meet their fundamental needs through any available means. Those means are often offered by criminal or political armed organizations, converging on the provision of resources.

Linge, Sandberg, and Tutenges conceptualize spatial, bodily, and narrative confluences of crime and political violence.<sup>80</sup> The spatial dimension emphasizes the physical locations where people who engage in violence meet, collaborate, and conspire. In criminology this has typically been bars and public spaces, while radicalization research also notes that prisons are where people convicted of crimes meet people convicted of extremist violence. In Colombia, regions plagued by violence and poverty are spatial convergence points for people who seek bodily and financial security and empowerment. Further, a paramilitary organization is itself a point of spatial confluence, with war and crime merging in its structure. Paramilitaries bring together people interested

in political warfare and ideology with those who are interested in fulfilling their needs and desires, regardless of whether it is through war or crime. Bodily confluences refer to how capacities for violence become embodied, and those capacities can move from one field (or type of violence) to another, for example, from criminal to paramilitary organizations or between different branches within a paramilitary organization. The violent habitus developed includes the use of violence, mastery of weapons and military tactics, and strategies of intimidation.

As described by the crime-terror nexus literature, crime organizations and terror organizations coincide in the search for funds, weapons, information, personnel, and expertise.<sup>81</sup> We identified these coincidences not at the organizational level through deliberate strategies by the leaders, but at the individual level moved by the needs and interests of lower-rank members who seek safety and economic survival. Elements of identity, emotions, and empowerment further facilitate the moves people make between criminal and paramilitary organizations.<sup>82</sup> The life-course perspective that we applied to the lives of imprisoned participants allows not only the mapping of varied paths into paramilitaries, but also avoids fossilizing recruitment as a moment frozen in time. Participation in paramilitary organizations is a process that people undertake along a life trajectory, and their affiliation with these organizations changes over the course of their lives.

The life-course perspective can further assist in understanding the many confluences of war and crime. Researching life-course trajectories shows that linkages between armed groups and criminal organizations happen not only at the higher, organizational level as emphasized by research on both the war-crime and the crime-terror nexus, but also at the micro-level when individuals move between types of organization with the same aims and put the same skills to use.<sup>83</sup> Functional confluences are evident in paramilitary organizations where both war-like and criminal competencies are learned.<sup>84</sup> The lack of any real ideological difference between war and crime for most participants made it possible for them to move seamlessly between paramilitary and criminal activities. Most importantly, the life courses of the participants of this study show how streams (or organizations and logics) of war and crime are deeply intertwined and how structural justice engenders them in complex ways.

## Conclusion

Economic motivations, security concerns, social relations, and identity and feelings of empowerment intertwine in life-course trajectories into paramilitary organizations in Colombia. The two first are closely connected to a context of structural violence and war, and social relations often work as a facilitator for engagement. All three are frequently mentioned in studies of paramilitary participation and more generally in studies of confluences of war and crime.<sup>85</sup> Issues of identity and empowerment are less frequently raised, maybe because literature on confluences of war and crime and on trajectories into paramilitary armies has emphasized organizations and strategies rather than individuals. Yet, insights and perspectives emphasizing identity, culture, and emotions that have emerged as part of the “new” crime-terror nexus can help understand this dimension in the war-crime nexus as well.<sup>86</sup> Further, issues of identity and empowerment are also deeply ingrained in a context of structural violence and

war where people have limited opportunities to build an identity of self-confidence, independence, and achievement. Trajectories into paramilitary, guerilla, and other armed rebel organizations are shaped by the intersection of all these elements.

Research on war crime confluences has emphasized the organizational level and used a rationalist approach emphasizing instrumental strategies. These approaches bring important insights, but they lack a thorough bottom-up understanding of the reasons people join these organizations and their often complex trajectories into participation in violence—as well as their changing forms of engagement over a life course. We have demonstrated that life-course analysis and life-course criminology combined with concerns raised by Southern criminology can assist studies of war-crime confluences<sup>87</sup> and help understand how a context of structural violence produces types of violence that move between what has been defined as crime and what has been defined as war—making the two indistinguishable at times.<sup>88</sup> The former members of paramilitaries that were interviewed in this study did not become members of insurgencies for ideological reasons. Nor was it a simple coincidence—being in the wrong place at the wrong time. It was the result of economics, security concerns, social relations, and feelings of disenfranchisement in life trajectories deeply marked by a broader structure of injustice and conflict.

## Notes

1. For examples of analyses that treat trajectories into illegal political armies as fundamentally different than paths into “conventional” crime see Mauricio Florez-Morris, “Joining Guerrilla Groups in Colombia: Individual Motivations and Processes for Entering a Violent Organization”, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 30, no. 7 (2007): 615–634; Timothy Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes Since 1956* (Chichester: Princeton University Press).
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4. See Bilal Saab and Alexandra Taylor, “Criminality and Armed Groups: A Comparative Study of FARC and Paramilitary Groups in Colombia,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 32, no. 6 (2009): 455–75; Enzo Nussio and Kimberly Howe (2016). When protection collapses: Post-demobilization trajectories of violence. *Terrorism and political violence*, 28(5), 848–867; Katja Franko and David Goyes, “Drug Violence, War-Crime Distinction, and Hierarchies of Victimhood,” *Social and Legal Studies* 32, no. 1 (2023): 75–95, <https://doi.org/10.1177/09646639221091226>; Gustavo Rojas-Páez, “Between Denial and Memory: A Socio-Legal Reading of Securitization Narratives in Transitional Colombia,” in *Criminal Legacies and Minorities in the Global South*, ed. George Radics and Pablo Ciochini (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-17918-1\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-17918-1_4).
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  7. Rojas-Páez, "Between Denial and Memory, 78–9.
  8. Franko and Goyes, "Drug Violence," 81.
  9. Saab and Taylor, "Criminality and Armed Groups." See also Ross McGarry and Sandra Walklate, eds., *The Palgrave Handbook of Criminology and War* (Cham: Springer, 2016); Phil Williams, "Cooperation among Criminal Organizations," in *Transnational Organized Crime and International Security*, ed. Mats Berdal and Mónica Serrano (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), 67–80.
  10. Thomas Schelling, "What Is the Business of Organized Crime?" *Journal of Public Law* 20, no. 1 (1971): 643–52. Saab and Taylor, "Criminality and Armed Groups," 458; Schmid, "The Links between Transnational Organized Crime and Terrorist Crimes".
  11. Saab and Taylor, "Criminality and Armed Groups," 458; Schmid, "The Links between Transnational Organized Crime and Terrorist Crimes".
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