



REFLECTIONS ON TERRITORIAL CLEANSING: LESSONS FROM BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA AND COLOMBIA

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Abstract: This small-N cross-regional analysis examines the link between extreme but far from isolated massacres perpetrated during the Bosnian war 1992-1995 and the 1997-2003 interval in the Colombian armed conflict. The afflicted territories by this form of violence underwent a reconfiguration in their demographics in the aftermath of mass killings, forced evictions, disappearances, and displacement. Despite condemning these acts in ad hoc international criminal courts and national tribunals, the question of the dispossessed and their right to return has always been a challenge. This article is based on documentary research to present a comparative overview of the two selected cases employing Egbert et al. (2016) and Lichtenheld's (2020) territorial cleansing framework to unveil the interconnectedness between the practices and strategies undertaken in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Colombia to contribute to the scholarly work bridging a converging geopolitical perspective within outwardly unrelated episodes of mass political violence.

Keywords: Bosnian war, Colombian armed conflict, territorial cleansing framework, mass political violence, comparative analysis.

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INTRODUCTION

This article employs a qualitative approach in a comparative perspective to examine similar patterns in the use of territorial cleansing massacres as a form of intra-state violence targeting non-combatants during “new wars” contexts. Previous cross-regional studies have demonstrated the relevance of comparing units from different geographical regions (Soss 2021: 370) when the research units benefit from different vantage points (E. J. Wood 2000; W. B. Wood 2001). The unfortunate events in Bosnia-Herzegovina have been exhaustively researched in scholarship related to ethnic conflicts, intervention, state-building, and post-conflict. Yet, in Colombia, the latter is a relatively new field that has been expanding rapidly since 2016, after the signed peace deal with the insurgency of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP).

This article tries to answer two main questions: *a)* To what extent the territorial cleansing episodes in each country are comparable?; *b)* What followed the consolidation of power phase in the aftermath of territorial cleansing? Building on the works of a group of scholars led by Stephen L. Egbert (Egbert et al. 2016) and on the research of Adam G. Lichtenheld (Lichtenheld 2020), this paper argues that when applying the Territorial Cleansing Framework (TCF), both countries saw violent actors following similar stages when idealising a territory and executing massacres for their purpose of removing or displacing the categorised undesired populations. The difference lies in construing the ideologies that define the in-group from the out-groups. However, one additional stage is missing after the initial TCF analysis. Once the consolidation of the power phase occurs, the territorial cleansing campaigns can take two paths through normative and policy implementations. The first one is to reverse, remix or redress the detrimental effects for the survivors of territorial cleansing, and the second path is regarding the possibility of legalising the forced evictions and displacements through peace accords, property acquisition, abandonment rights,



among other tools. Despite the existing norms that protect and encourage displaced persons to return to their lands and reverse the initial territorial cleansing objective, this task has proven hard to accomplish, unintentionally rewarding the military gains through demographic and territorial reconfiguration.

This article approaches two seemingly distant and unrelated contexts. The Bosnian War (1992-1995) and the 1997-2003 interval in the Colombian armed conflict. Due to the scope of this purposive comparative analysis, other concurrent territorial disputes in the ex-Yugoslav space, such as the clashes between the newly independent Croatia and Serbian Krajina (1991-1995) or the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the then-autonomous province of Kosovo (1998-1999), among other campaigns shall be left out of the analysis for pragmatic purposes, highlighting their relevance for alternative TCF analyses.

On the other hand, the selected timeframe in Colombia is intentional, for it includes the period when the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) paramilitaries were active. Alas, they were found to be the prime perpetrators of homicides and massacres. The AUC was formally dismantled in 2006 through Law 975/2005 (Ley de Justicia y Paz) under the administration of former President Alvaro Uribe Vélez (2002-2010). Still, it is relevant to mention that after 2006, the residual paramilitary forces transformed into profit-oriented splinter groups (Hanson 2008). However, they ceased to exist under the AUC umbrella, terminating the conflicting dyad between these extreme right-wing illegal groups and the remaining combatant parties, namely the state military forces and the guerrilla insurgencies.

The proposed analysis in this article contributes empirically to the TCF, using a comparative cross-regional archetypal case selection. Hence, this article aims also to demonstrate the interconnectivity between geographically and politically separate areas of violence to understand the unavoidable link between the political motivations to sustain forced eviction assaults and massacre campaigns to exercise sovereignty through exemplary violent control over desired locations.



In the ensuing paragraphs, it will be argued that whether it can be categorised as ethnic or sectarian cleansing, the aim of at least one of the warring parties in both countries was specifically to clear strategic corridors or zones under the canopy of gaining undisputed control over the territory disregarding the previously established populations. Even though there is empirical evidence on the homicides, convictions and condemnations, the territorial gains were legitimised either through the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA) in the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and through vicious property titles accumulated by the paramilitaries as explained by (Gutiérrez Sanín, Vargas Reina 2016). It is paramount to mention this article draws on the concept of “territorial cleansing” introduced by Egbert (Egbert et al. 2016) and the work done by Lichtenheld (Lichtenheld 2020), on the population displacement strategies in civil wars by undertaking a review analysis of the two selected cases for the duration of their respective violent conflicts¹.

This article is based on documentary research and will be divided into the following sections. The first part offers a brief background to the case selection followed by the analytical framework section which includes theoretically informed concepts such as massacres, mass violence, territorial cleansing, and genocide. The third part will explore the evidence from Bosnia, notably referring to the Srebrenica genocide. The fourth section will elaborate on specific massacres that occurred in Colombia at the pinnacle of the selected interval. The fifth segment will include the comparative analysis through the TCF to conclude with some final remarks suggesting further research venues.

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

The 2016 Havana Accords signed between the Colombian Government and the FARC-EP insurgency established in its Chapter 5.1.1.1 the creation of a “Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence, and Non-Repetition”² (hereinafter the “Truth



Commission”). Their guiding criteria, mandate, and duties included elaborating a thorough, inclusive, and pluralistic final report to understand the intertwined causes and patterns of violence during the plus five decades of armed conflict. The Truth Commission presented its findings on 28 June 2022 in Bogotá, after analysing nearly 30.000 interviews from diverse survivors, witnesses, combatants, perpetrators, irregular actors, politicians, artists, journalists, scholars, and citizens in general³. The ten-volume⁴ document includes special examinations on the violence towards women, the LGBTIQ+ population, the ethnic groups, and the youth (Cano 2022). In addition, it elaborated recommendations based on the victims’ testimonies, given their diverse perspectives and experiences during the conflict. The event’s solemnity made it possible to unite in the same venue, victims with perpetrators whose unheard voices lie now within the more than 8,400 pages of the report.

The Truth Commission mapped and determined the forms of violence: selective and extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances, evictions, and massacres⁵. On the latter, according to the National Centre for Historical Memory (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica in Spanish), between 1958 and 2019, there is a registry of at least 4,237 massacres, with its peak between 1998 and 2002 (Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad 2022a: 575). They occurred in 62 per cent of the municipalities in the country, claiming the lives of at least 24.600 civilians. For the commission, the “massacres demonstrated violence had no limits, from the cruellest to the most indiscriminate, they were used as a strategy of social control, territorial cleansing, but also to spread terror between the community”⁶. However, it should be stressed that between 1985 and 2018, the main perpetrators of the homicides were the paramilitaries (45%), the FARC-EP insurgency (21%), the official agents - including the armed forces (12%), other perpetrators (9%), ELN insurgency (4%), other insurgencies (2%) (Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad 2022a: 142). The findings of the report reinforce the idea of a blurred line drawn between legitimate and illegal armed actors as well as a deliberate use of mass violence



against civilians located in strategic corridors and territories throughout Colombia's extensive geography.

In tandem, in the easternmost region of Bosnia-Herzegovina, survivors and families gather every July to commemorate the 1995 Srebrenica genocide. A six-day-long massacre where between 7,000 and +8,000 Bosnian Muslims perished in an offensive by joint forces of the Bosnian Serb Army of Republika Srpska (VRS) and Serbian Scorpions paramilitary units. Srebrenica was targeted amidst the operation code-named Krivaja 95 during the Bosnian interval (1992-1995) of the Yugoslav disintegration wars. It was part of a campaign to annex the Bosnian adjacent territory to the Serb-controlled areas along the river Drina to join Serbia and Montenegro in their goal to keep the Yugoslav Federation. However, high-ranking individual Bosnian-Serb leaders⁷ – such as Radovan Karadžić⁸, Ratko Mladić, Vujadin Popović et al., and Radislav Krstić – considered the expulsion of the majority of non-Serb civilians a condition sine qua non if they were to succeed with the annexation. The nature of the systematically organised atrocities and summary executions in Srebrenica have triggered indictments, prosecutions, verdicts, appeals, convictions and, in some cases, denial narratives. Notwithstanding, the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia was the earliest to determine the massacre as a genocide in 2001, a decision confirmed in the 2004 appeal and later also upheld in 2007 by the International Court of Justice⁹.

According to the Missing Persons Institute spokesperson Emza Fazlic, the remains of 6.671 people have been found and buried at the Srebrenica Potočari Centre. With the 2022 burials, the number will increase to 6.721, leaving 1.200 more remains yet to be found (Trepanić 2022). Even when the Srebrenica Memorial serves as a tribute to the Bosnian Muslim civilians killed, the Srebrenica municipality was still allocated to the Republika Srpska, the majority Bosnian Serb administered entity within Bosnia-Herzegovina as a part of the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement.

Together, the unveiling of the Truth Commission's final report in Colombia and the commemoration of the Srebrenica genocide

in Bosnia-Herzegovina reveal not only the breaches of the International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and the demonstrated crimes against humanity but also the detrimental effects of territorial cleansing as a strategy to spread terror and clear a desired or idealised area either through elaborated ethnic-based exclusion narratives or through allegedly legitimate counterinsurgency policies serving exclusionary state-building projects.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Violence and territorial cleansing

Professor Jennifer Fluri claims “[v]iolence has been a regular feature of geopolitics and political transitions” (Fluri 2022: 698). And yet, for some authors, the term ‘violence’ embeds complex contours without a single definition, being sometimes explicit and clearly detachable and sometimes requiring a deeper theoretical understanding of the term. What seems to be undeniable is the link between violence and power. Even when the goal is not so clear in terms of dominance, the use and display of violence can uncover a short-term exercise of power, even when unintentional (Springer and Le Billon 2016).

For a definitional purpose, a ‘massacre’ is understood as the calculated assassination of three or more civilians or non-combatants under the protection of the International Humanitarian Law (IHL), embedded withing the exact circumstances of time, method, and place. However, other registries define massacres when its four or more. (Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad 2022a). Furthermore, massacres are associated to have a substantial collective impact, affecting the cohesion of communities and increasing the perceived fear and distrust in the affected populations. In addition, massacres are linked to forced displacement, land grabbing, and collective threats (Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad 2022a).



The term “territorial cleansing” was first acquired by (Egbert et al. 2016) in an attempt to describe the ‘geopolitical where’ of genocide and mass violence from the perspective of geographers. Indeed, when analysing the use of demographic engineering strategies, the explanations have relied upon the ethnical and political cleansing motives. (Lichtenheld 2020). The introduction of the term “territorial cleansing” offers a geographically based definitional canopy for “category-based persecution” (Egbert et al. 2016), while concepts such as “political mass murder”, “ethnic cleansing”, “selective mass killings”, “murderous cleansing” (Mann 2005), or “demographic surgery” (Ferrara 2015), are among the cognates.

The authors define “territorial cleansing” as “a geopolitical project consisting of processes, policies, and actions designed to remove a particular, Othered group from an idealised place by another group – the in-group – residing within that place” (Egbert et al. 2016: 299-300). Even though it might seem simple, the term envisions a wide range of actions, from discriminatory acts to slaughter. However, the focus on territoriality denotes only the initial step, which “begins with the in-group’s formulation of an imagined place that is idealised and valorised, a set of ideas regarding how a place should be” (Egbert et al. 2016: 300).

In addition, when analysing state or inter-state violence, political geographers can do it at the macro scale, focusing on the local dynamics as crucial sites of analysis, and sometimes integrate ‘multi-scalar analyses’ (Fluri 2022). Thus, as Egbert and his group write, “[u]ndertaking territorial cleansing at any scale requires political and social capital” (Egbert et al. 2016). More so, it entails also military means to carry out such cleansing events occurring in the more violent end of the political violence spectrum. Thus, “if [a] territory is understood as an expression of power relations, then any theory of territorial cleansing must take into account the relationship between space and subjectivity” (Egbert et al. 2016: 301).

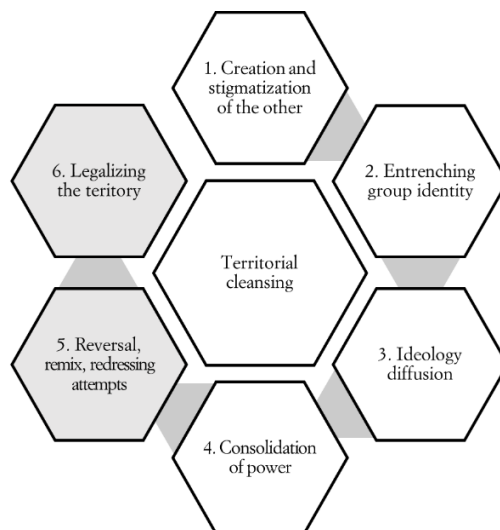


Fig. 1. *Stages of territorial cleansing.*

Source: Egbert et al. 2016, for 1-4 stages. Figure elaborated and complemented by the author with stages 5-6.

The stages of “territorial cleansing”

The authors have defined four foundational stages (fig. 1), which may or may not occur linearly, with the possibility of all four stages coinciding. On this note, the authors explain that:

Before the cleansing of a territory can occur, both space and population must be defined, hierarchised, and partitioned: knowing who is to be excluded is only part of the equation; the other part is knowing where they are – and defining where they should not be (Egbert et al. 2016: 306).

Therefore, the stages leading to a territorial cleansing event are: 1) the creation and stigmatisation of the other; 2) entrenching group identity; 3) ideology diffusion; 4) consolidation of power. The stigmatisation is emphasised by:

The creation of an Other is a complex process of ideological constructs promoted by charismatic leaders and groups in positions of power, the manipulation of identity narratives, and the stigmatisation of minor differences (Egbert et al. 2016: 304).

Moreover, it is vital to understand that “different actors – states and ethnic groups – view the same territory in different ways” (Toft 2003). Nevertheless, “successful discourses legitimise the in-group’s claim to an idealised place, defining it in accordance to its particular ideology and territorial agenda” (Egbert et al. 2016: 307). Later, the authors explain,

[a]fter in-group actors have defined their idealised place and established their ideological right to claim it as their own, the next step in cleansing a territory then occurs through policy, where the in-group actors take action to work towards their geopolitical objectives. These policies and actions seek to promote both homogenisation and purification of space, thus making sure we have our land and that our land is safe for those whom we deem acceptable (Egbert et al. 2016: 308).

For Thoft, “[t]erritory is a sine qua non of the state and can be an irreducible component of ethnic group identity” (Toft 2003). Therefore, the term “territorial cleansing” can offer a geopolitical contextualisation of scenarios where massacres and genocidal conduct occurred, even under the pretext of nation-building, given its broad nature, which is more prominent in scope. Yet, it is paramount to address the legal implications of committing war crimes and infringing the IHL, which still prosecutes in terms of genocide, ethnic cleansing, and violations of human rights, having only a specific note in terms of massacres committed without evidence of strategic importance of territory.

This is significant because there have been no recent discussions since the inception of the concept in 2016, with the limited exceptions of a few mentions in the same-year editorial by John Agnew (Agnew 2016) reflecting on how the TCF “suggests a rather more violent source to who is ‘inside’ and who is ‘outside’” (Atzili,

Kadercan 2017) in their aim to bridge disciplinary divides to understand “territorial designs” (Cayli 2020) and the use of the term “imagined bandits” and the need for social control in the “imagined territory”, which is “sustained by [a] state authority by cleansing unwanted bandit groups” (Cayli 2020), and, in its comparison between China and Taiwan in the use of nationalism as tying a particular people to a specific place or claimed for habitation by a specific people (Chao 2024).

Based on the experiences in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Colombia, this paper proposes the inclusion of two additional stages to the TCF, where there are: 5) Reversal, Remix, and Redressing demographic attempts supported by legal tools and legislation. However, these efforts are not always successful at reversing the detrimental effects of the territorial cleansing campaigns, therefore triggering a subsequent phase in which third parties aim at: 6) legalising the cleansed territory (fig. 1).

GENOCIDE AND “ETHNIC CLEANSING”

The term “territorial cleansing” might seem less conventional in use, when considering “genocide” and “ethnic cleansing” are more broadly recognised and used in academia, activism, and public spheres¹⁰. Since the nineties, the term “ethnic cleansing” has been associated with the genocidal practices carried out in Rwanda in 1994 and the violent episodes during the break-up of Yugoslavia, especially in Bosnia-Herzegovina between 1992 and 1995:

A geographical comparison of Bosnia and Rwanda can shed only partial light on this disturbing undercurrent of social behaviour through empirical observations of genocide-related spatial patterns: forced migrations, selective property destruction, and, of course, massacres. Each mass killing, expulsion, or other atrocity can be “placed” spatially and temporally in conjunction with similar events, thereby helping to demonstrate that genocidal acts are well-planned (Wood 2001: 62).

Moreover, the 1948 United Nations Genocide Convention (UNGC), in its article II, defines the groups subject of genocide in



“national, ethnical, racial, or religious groups” terms. However, for (Egbert et al. 2016), the targeted out-group can be of any kind or belong to any type of collective, namely political affiliation, age, class, and family, to name a few categories. Furthermore, territorial cleansing may have cyclical (or counter) features varying in scale, from a few individuals to thousands and even millions of people. In words of (Dahlman, Ó Tuathail):

Ethnic cleansing relies on an extremist discourse of political geography, defined by an aspirant power structure, that maps an exclusionary and idealised political identity onto a particular territory. Put into practice, elements of this aspirant power structure use terror and violence to clear all “others” from the territory to realise an idealised convergence of identity and space. For its perpetrators, ethnic cleansing is a means to realise a political geography of security through separation and distinction borders (Dahlman, Ó Tuathail 2005: 573).

For example, on 30 January 2023, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruled that the Colombian State was responsible for the systematic extermination of over 6,000 members of the Unión Patriótica (UP) political party, who perished between the 1980s and 1990s. While their assassinated members did not share any distinct racial, class or familiar category, their targeting was fuelled by the fact of being affiliated with the UP party. In other words:

Members of the UP were forcibly disappeared, massacred, extrajudicially executed, murdered and suffered, threats, attacks, various acts of stigmatization, improper prosecutions, torture, forced displacement, among other things (ABColumbia, 2023).

In the following paragraphs, the paper will rely on documentary research to contextualise the archetypal massacres occurring in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Colombia during their armed conflicts, to further analyse the methods, outcomes and implications given the “territorial cleansing” analytical framework.



BOSNIA AS A RESULT OF TERRITORIAL CLEANSING

The large-scale violence choice

The Bosnian War has been subject of multiple interpretations regarding the nature of the armed conflict. Was it an inter-state war? Was it a civil war? (Gray 1997) Was there an aggressor? Being aware of the risks of oversimplification and due to the complexity of the dynamics of organised violence, labelling the conflict will depend on the author. For this article, I agree it can be interpreted as a “new war” given the plethora of goals, actors, methods, and forms of finance (Kaldor 2006; Kaldor 2012). Despite some critical approaches (Kalyvas 2001; M. Berdal 2003; Mello 2010; Malešević 2010) about the relevance of using the term “new” or reading the Yugoslav Wars under these lenses (de Graaff 2005), Mary Kaldor explains the term not as an empirical category but as a way of understanding the logic of contemporary war in its complexity and dynamics, avoiding the reductionism of its critics (Kaldor 2013).

For instance, the participation of paramilitary units, self-defence forces, and the atrocities committed against the civilian population are concomitant to the countless massacres aiming to cleanse Bosnia from its unique and “dangerous cosmopolitanism of its cities” (Ali, Lifschultz 1994) to reconfigure the demographics within a more homogeneous desired territory. The aim of the land clearance may be explained through ethnic redistribution swift (Bennett 2016: 101). Still, the main objective was to violently overtake and control the land considered essential for each state-building project.

The eruption of large-scale violence in Bosnia-Herzegovina dates to 6 April 1992, the day its independence was recognised by the European Community, and following a series of provocation events, including the shooting of pro-unified Bosnia demonstrators holding signs declaring “We can live together”, setting up barricades and the shelling of Sarajevo Community (Ali, Lifschultz 1994). However, the prelude to the bloodshed was an iteration of the wars between Croats, Serbs and Slovenes the previous year (Wood 2001: 59; Bennett 2016: 66), following the first competitive



and democratic elections held in Slovenia and Croatia in April 1990 (Bulutgil 2016). However, it would be inaccurate to rely on the sole assumption that the conflict was unleashed based on the “ancient ethnic hatred” cliché, especially since this patronising explanation has been debunked and challenged by a consensus among rigorous academic literature (Ali, Lifschultz 1994; Bulutgil 2016; Pinkerton 2016).

However, the competing views on security (Dahlman, Ó Tuathail 2005), sovereignty, and the interpretations of the meaning of “nation” and “state”, which could be referred to as the supremacy of the geographical entity or the ethnonational group could be at the centre of the debate (Bennett 2016: 54)¹¹. Even so, both views are undisputedly interconnected regarding the territory each notion is set to dominate. On this matter, the role of nationalist political leaders, the engagement of militia commanders, and criminals only added to the fear between prior neighbours, ending in vicious attacks (W. B. Wood 2001), which aimed to fundamentally alter the geopolitical landscape through military conquest, mass murder, and expulsion (Dahlman, Ó Tuathail 2005).

It has been established that for the Serb leaders of the early nineties Yugoslavia, the territorial calculation was based on the unequivocal destiny of all Serbs to live in one state (Ali, Lifschultz 1994) and the advantage in firepower they had *vis-à-vis* the non-Serb populations¹². These estimates made their leaders confident about a victorious campaign to expel civilians to create a homogeneous Serb territory to exercise sovereignty over the geography and population. In a sense, “the first wave of forced expulsions were conducted by Serb forces in Bijeljina and Zvornik in early April 1992” (Bulutgil 2016: 126). The Croatian nationalists did their part, and later on during Operation Storm (1995), the reintegration of Eastern Slavonia and the eradication of the proto-state of Republika Srpska Krajina (RSK) brought some controversial stability and effective territorial control by Croatia at the expense of the exodus of between 150.000 and 200.000 Serbs settled in this area previously (Bennett 2016: 81). Depending on the “irredentist manipulation of history” (Ali, Lifschultz 1994), Croatia also claimed not only Bosnian territory, but Bosnian Muslims as their own (Palmberger 2016). Even



in Bosniak-dominated areas, there was a dichotomy between Bosnian unitarian pluralism and Bosniak nationalism (Jansen 2011).

The Dayton '95 paradox

A particular emphasis has been placed on Bosnia-Herzegovina and the achievements and failures of the Dayton Peace Agreement signed in 1995 (Campbell 1998; Chandler 2000; World Bank 2004; Bose 2005; Belloni 2007; Bennett 2016; Bieber 2018; Chrzová et al. 2019). For many scholars, policy analysts, and practitioners, the country has been considered one large “peacebuilding laboratory” (Berdal 2009), relevant enough to be included in any edited volumes referring to comparative analysis or literature aiming to understand the complexities of post-Cold War conflict resolution (Guzina 2019), while also configuring learned lessons for other post-conflict societies.

One of the contradictions of the Dayton Peace Agreement was nurtured in the spatial concessions given to Republika Srpska (RS) (Bjorkdahl 2018). Richard Holbrooke documented how former Bosnian president Alija Izetbegović was against keeping the name of Republika Srpska, even comparing it with keeping the Nazi labels (Holbrooke 1999). Indeed, Izetbegović’s perspective towards *The general framework agreement for peace* signed in Paris should be underscored since “it recognised the existence of Republika Srpska, thereby acquiescing in what had been obtained by ethnic cleansing and rewarding aggression” (Bennett 2016: 80). For Wood (Wood 2001), the “territorial segregation was being solidified by continued expulsions, blocked refugee returns, and constraints on freedom of movement” despite the formally recognised “territorial integrity” of Bosnia and its Inter-Entity Boundary Line (IEBL) separating the Republika Srpska from the Bosniak-Croat Federation. In a way, the recognition of territorial entities created as a result of the ethnic cleansing campaigns was seen as a reward to military conquests (Jansen 2011), where the Dayton Peace Agreement was legitimising the notion of security through separation (Dahlman, Ó Tuathail 2005: 577).

In the definition of the in-group and out-group (Bulutgil 2016) has established that even when most Bosnian citizens were aware of some distinctions among them, their language followed the same Shtokavian variation, and their lifestyles were similar, often sharing everyday experiences. Regarding religious differences, the forty-five-year communist rule had made them more secularised while tackling income inequalities in general. In the words of Wood (2001):

Bosnia's largely secular "Muslims", a product of Ottoman occupation (converted more for political, economic, and military expedience than for any Islamic fervour), were the least cohesive of Bosnia's three major "ethnic" groups. "Muslims" were thus most inclined to continue the multi-ethnic balance that former Yugoslavian president Tito had secured before his death in 1980 (W. B. Wood 2001: 59-60).

Parallely, the Bosnian Institute in the United Kingdom documented a list of 296 Bosnian Muslim villages which were targeted by Bosnian Serb paramilitaries, resulting in the uprooting of some 70.000 civilians and including massacres with at least 3.166 documented civilian casualties (Toljaga 2010). For former deputy high representative Christopher Bennett:

Had Washington backed the Vance-Owen Plan and been willing to commit the number of peacekeepers it subsequently deployed to oversee implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement, the fighting would likely have ended some two years earlier (Bennett 2016: 268).

However, the Bosnian Serb leadership was reluctant after the drafting of the Vance-Owen plan since their victories had constituted a broader territorial control, already "cleansed" from the non-Serb population-defined out-group.

The right or the obligation to return?

Around 2.3 million people were expelled or forcibly displaced during the 43 months of the War (Heimerl 2005), henceforth the

Dayton Peace Agreement established in its Annex 7 the rights of refugees and displaced persons¹³, in an effort to reverse the policies of ethnic cleansing registered all over Bosnia-Herzegovina (Phuong 2000; Rosand 1998). The process has not been entirely successful as Balkans expert Martina Fischer recalls the reluctance of refugee Bosnian families towards the idea of returning to areas which now form part of Republika Srpska (Fischer 2007).

Similarly, Monika Kleck underlines that:

By the end of February 2000, 4,881 evictions had been carried out in the Federation [Bosnia-Herzegovina], compared with just 424 in the RS. By the end of 2000, 23.2% of property claims had been processed and implemented in Tuzla, whereas the total figure for Zvornik was just 3.15% and in Srebrenica, it was even lower, i.e. 2.18% (Fischer 2007: 110).

Christopher Bennet recalls the situation in Republika Srpska in the following terms:

In 1991, the territory that became Republika Srpska had a population of 28.77 per cent Bosniak, 9.99 per cent Croat, 54.3 per cent Serb and 7.53 per cent Other. The territory of what became the Federation had a population of 52.09 per cent Bosniak, 22.13 per cent Croat, 17.62 per cent Serb and 8.16 per cent Other. By the end of the War, the figures were 2.19 per cent Bosniak, 1.02 per cent Croat and 96.79 per cent Serb in Republika Srpska and 72.61 per cent Bosniak, 22.27 per cent Croat, 2.32 per cent Serb and 2.38 per cent Other in the Federation (Bennett 2016: 101)¹⁴.

In other words, the return process has not been always voluntary (Heimerl 2005; Stefanovic, Loizides 2011), and the guarantees of safety and dignity have not been met while the concept of “home” is problematised and debatable (Black 2002). One of the examples is the village of Jusići in northeast Bosnia. The Dayton Peace Agreement established that the village was part of Republika Srpska, even though before the war, Jusići was a historically Muslim community. However, the Serb forces cleansed the village in the summer of 1992; therefore, when the returnees wanted to go back



to their homes, they were not welcomed back (Dahlman, Ó Tuathail 2005: 570).

Moreover, the term “refuchess” (Jansen 2011) has also been employed as a metaphor to refer not only to the military expulsion of “undesired” persons through ethnic cleansing but also to a purposive displacement of the same pawns or people, nationalist elites claimed to represent. For instance, Bosnian Croats resettled into western cantons, or the 1996 exodus of Bosnian Serbs from certain suburbs in Sarajevo into Republika Srpska, once the Dayton Peace Agreement drew lines of Bosniak control (Jansen 2011). Annex 7 on the Dayton Peace Agreement aimed to reverse this demographic configuration to demonstrate to nationalists on all sides that their war exploits “would not be rewarded with mono-national mini-states” (Jansen 2011; Phuong 2000), but instead reversed by recreating a multi-ethnic country (Black 2002). Since the end of the hostilities, there has been no municipality where the pre-war ethnic composition was re-established, implying a near-total unmixing of Bosnia-Herzegovina as a “place of coexistence and tolerance” (Heimerl 2005). In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the international community encouraged the return of the fleeing populations as a means to promote the security of the forcibly displaced (Dahlman, Ó Tuathail 2005: 574), despite the right to return established in the Annex 7 of Dayton Peace Agreement, implementing it has proven challenging.

THE CASE OF COLOMBIA: A STRUGGLE FOR LAND WITHIN AN IMMENSE TERRITORY

The Conflicting Dyads

Despite a common consensus towards the nature of the armed conflict in Colombia, for Posada Carbó, it does not classify as a civil war in the traditional definition since the majority of the population has not been involved either directly or in support of conventional military confrontations (Posada-Carbó et al. 2003). On the same



note, Cramer and Richards plea for disaggregation of “those phenomena typically classified as civil wars” or “intermediate armed conflicts” (Cramer, Richards 2011: 290), for the evidence shows that many recent and ongoing violent conflicts have roots in, and are shaped by, agrarian structures, relations and change. And processes of agrarian structural change are themselves inherently conflictual and frequently violent (Cramer, Richards 2011: 278; Grajales 2011: 772).

For the comparative analytical purpose of this article, I argue the Colombian armed conflict can also be read as a “new war” in the terms introduced, developed and defended by Prof. Mary Kaldor (Kaldor 2006; Kaldor 2012; Kaldor 2013). Specifically, because:

[They] involve the fragmentation and decentralisation of the state. Participation is low relative to the population, both because of lack of pay and because of lack of legitimacy on the part of the warring parties [...] battles are rare, most violence is directed against civilians, and cooperation between warring factions is common (Kaldor 2006: 95; 2012).

Moreover, one factor explaining Colombia’s dynamics of conflict is its fragmented geography. Arguably, it has configured a paradoxical potential for mega biodiversity and a natural obstacle to human development in the state-building process. For some, this complex topography has nurtured limited contact within and with surrounding neighbours (Serrano 2016). For instance, the borders with Brazil, Ecuador, Panamá, and Perú share problematic access due to areas of dense jungles, swamps, rivers, and mangroves, which are hospitable to the flow of illegal activities (Cragin, Hoffman 2003; Paul et al. 2014). The same geographical configuration established strategic corridors and territories for the different armed groups that disputed the control of key municipalities.

The areas which could be distinguished are the north of the country, where the AUC achieved control in the Urabá-Antioquia and Córdoba in the Montes de María area while confronting the ELN in the south of Bolívar. On the other hand, the southeast was the traditional FARC-EP strategic rear-guard, whose uncontested



dominance was challenged by the massacres committed by AUC in places such as Mapiripán (1997), El Aro (1997), El Salado (2000). The challenge to the FARC-EP also came in 1999 as the increased presence of the newly trained and modernised Colombian Army benefited from the United States (US) contribution through Plan Colombia. However, such focus would require a whole different scope to elaborate on the international involvement in the political violence in Colombia and the more profound and unintended effects of such threads.

Given the confronting dyads, one can say conflicts are far from binary, as they involve multiple warring parties who tend to act based on rational choices (Richani 2013: 194). For instance, the FARC-EP guerrilla evolved since its foundation in 1964 growing in size, tactics, and strategy “with a centralised hierarchical structure, general staff, military code, training school, and political program” (Molano 2000: 27). Oscar Palma refers to its nature in terms of a complex dynamic “commercial insurgency” instead of a monolithic and static organisation (Palma 2019). Nonetheless, since the Seventh Conference of 1982 in El Guayabero, the FARC-EP adopted the Jacobo Arenas Plan, where the insurgents aimed to combine all forms of struggle. The aim was to procure and build a larger and more organised military force, following a more defiant presence around the capital cities (Echandía Castilla 2011), in addition to establishing a political party representing their interests separating themselves from the Communist Party.

Even though the FARC-EP formally ceased to exist as an armed group since the Havana Peace Accord was signed in 2016, they were a force to be reckoned with at the pinnacle of their military strengths during the second half of the nineties. For instance, the FARC-EP insurgency “conducted an average of 1.035 military actions in the period 1997-2000 but conducted an average of 1.493 actions in the 2007-2010 period” (Maher 2015: 224). Moreover, the FARC-EP “crushed the FF.MM in *Las Delicias, Puerres, El Billar, Miraflores* and *Mitú* between 1997 and 1998” (Cragin, Hoffman 2003: 5-6).

Parallely, paramilitary groups have been associated with rural elites and the protection of their property rights in principle. They



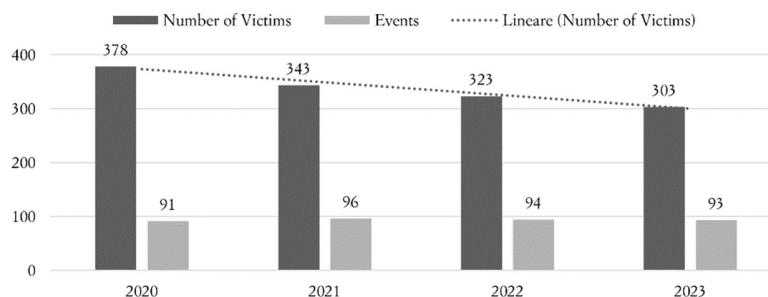


Fig. 2. Massacres in Colombia (2020-2023).

Source: Observatorio de Derechos Humanos y Conflictividades de Indepaz, 2024.

have also been pivotal in containing landless peasants' demands and rebel insurgency while clearing the territory for extractive projects (Berman-Arévalo, Ojeda 2020), often carrying out campaigns of terror to dispossess and accumulate land (Grajales 2011, 2013). This paramilitary phenomenon has been broadly covered as early as 2001 when these groups overtook the FARC-EP in terms of political violence (Tate 2001). At their height, the AUC established alliances with the highest spheres of power, colluding with official agents and support from some "entrepreneurial" sectors (Hanson 2008; Hristov 2009, 2010).

Massacre as a method

In May 2002, FARC-EP's José María Córdoba 58th Front¹⁵ assaulted the Bojayá municipality with around 2.000 combatants to reclaim¹⁶ absolute territorial control in the *Atrato River* basin, which had the presence of nearly 400 units of the AUC's paramilitary bloc Élmer Cárdenas sheltering in the civilian urban areas (Neira 2022). Despite the pre-emptive alerts from the Ombudsman's Office of Colombia and the high commissioner from the

United Nations, the negligence of the Official Armed Forces was notorious. The crossfire forced the inhabitants to seek refuge in the town's church. The FARC insurgents launched four of their non-conventional gas cylinder bomb mortars in the attack, hitting the church (Centro Nacional de Memoria 2010). The civilian casualties were 119, including 47 girls, boys, and teenagers (Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad 2022a), 79 directly wounded due to the explosions, plus the displacement of 5.771 persons (Centro Nacional de Memoria 2010). After the Bojayá massacre, the FARC-EP would cease to be considered an insurgent people's guerrilla and instead became labelled as a terrorist organisation.

Alas, targeting civilians was – and still is – not an uncommon practice (fig. 2). On 18 February 2000, a group of 450 paramilitaries from the AUC, assaulted the “El Salado” village claiming 61 civilian lives. The brutality of the methods used, such as impaling, hanging, stabbing, dismemberment, homicides by asphyxia using plastic bags, and elders murdered by punches, aimed to send a clear message to the stigma the village had of being a supporter of the *guerrilla*, automatically turning the villagers into military objectives (Santamaría 2021). The message was clear. We have no limit, no moral breaks, no mercy, nothing. Or as Jaime Santamaría refers to, a “calculated butchery” (in Spanish: “una carnicería calculada”) (Santamaría 2021). What occurred in El Salado answered to an established plan and a defined strategy within what can be understood as the “engineering of terror” (Santamaría 2021: 168). Indeed, mobilising 450 paramilitaries requires some logistical efforts.

Curiously, and according to García Marrugo the massacres registered in the two leading newspapers used language to associate the FARC-EP with major crimes while referring to “bandits” or “unidentified group” when referring to paramilitary actions (Marrugo, 2013). This created a reinforced view of FARC-EP as the main perpetrator while diluting the atrocities committed by the AUC paramilitaries. The published report of the Truth Commission unveiled the central role of the paramilitaries in committing massacres (Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad 2022a). Having said this, the aversion towards FARC-EP was always higher



than towards the AUC, despite the evidence pointing out that the latter was accountable for more crimes than the guerrilla.

The AUC took the conflict to its limits. To acquire territory, they used massacres to make an example and empty the territories from their inhabitants (Centro Nacional de Memoria 2009). For these reasons, the Montes de María region is characterised by its inhabitants' expulsion and ghost towns' existence. The National Centre for Historical Memory (Centro Nacional de Memoria 2009) recalls that in Carmen de Bolívar, almost a third of the population was displaced, causing there is population in only seven villages out of the seventeen belonging to the municipality, with forty-two countryside districts completely desolate (Centro Nacional de Memoria 2009: 108).

The empirical evidence demonstrates that the outcomes of massacres in Colombia are Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), abandoned towns, land occupation and land grabbing. Cases of forced selling of land to paramilitaries who also sold them to “good faith” tenants are subject to Law 1448/2011 (*Ley de Restitución de Tierras*), which has been lengthy in its application and implementation. But the damage goes deeper. The paramilitary actions affected and diminished the viability of the “campesino” farmer economy (Centro Nacional de Memoria 2009: 107). The massacres and evictions perpetrated by the paramilitaries culminated in forced displacement and illegal transactions to legalise the captured territories.

ANALYSIS

Despite their juxtapositional differences in terms of location, geography, economic size, history, and demographics, this paper suggests both cases share relevant similarities to bring lessons from a comparative analysis (Schaffer et al. 2021). The existing literature needs this kind of effort, given the limited scholarly exceptions available (Vásquez Santamaría 2019; Díaz Pabón, Santander 2016; Kappler, Monroy-Santander 2018). Perhaps there is an assumption that conflicts and identity-building processes are better-analysed ca-



Tab. 1. *Case comparison through the six stages of territorial cleansing*

Stages of territorial cleansing	Colombia	Bosnia-Herzegovina
1. Creation and stigmatisation of the other		
<i>Artificial definition of "out-group"</i>	"Guerrilleros", "insurgents", "communist".	Religious, language-alphabet, ethnolinguistic.
<i>Role of civilians</i>	Civilians targeted, labelled, and sectarianised.	Civilians targeted, labelled, and sectarianised.
2. Entrenching group identity		
<i>Entrenching strategies</i>	Through labelling collaborators; through exclusionary spatial discourse.	Through religion at first. Through irredentism (Greater Serbia – Greater Croatia); through exclusionary spatial discourse.
3. Ideology diffusion		
<i>Collusion of leadership, paramilitary and official forces</i>	Yes	Yes
4. Consolidation of power		
<i>Number of IDPs</i>	7.8 million (2020)	2.2 million (1995)
<i>Objective of massacres</i>	Empty the territories; spread terror; make an example.	Spread terror; force displacement; make an example.
<i>Massacre as strategy</i>	More frequent, less than 100 casualties per event.	Less frequent, more than 7000 casualties in one event.
<i>Relevance of territory</i>	Strategic corridors for military operations and illegal activities.	Consolidates nation-state's sovereignty.
5. Reversal, remix, redressing attempts		
<i>Existing normative</i>	Land Restitution Law in Colombia (Law 1448, 2011)	The Rights of the Returnees in Bosnia Herzegovina (Annex 7, Dayton Peace Agreement)
<i>Status of planners</i>	Most paramilitaries dead; collusion with official authorities is suspected, but no confirmed indictments.	Indictments, sentences, and convictions.
6. Legalizing the territory		
<i>Outcome of massacres</i>	Survivors' unwillingness to return; legitimization of eviction through property titles and "good faith" tenants' property transfer.	Survivors' unwillingness to return; legitimization of eviction through the Dayton Peace Agreement.

se by case, deliberately neglecting the interconnectedness between geographically distant regions.

The massacres committed in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Colombia evidenced the calculated nature of the atrocities (see table 1). For instance, in Bosnia Herzegovina, the executioners took care to spread the body parts along different mass graves and burial places to sever the possibilities for further identification of the dead. In Colombia, the paramilitaries aimed at transforming the excruciating bodies into their minimum condition to be referred to as merely despicable inanimate objects (Santamaría 2021). Given these practices, one problem was effectively having reliable counts and data. For the Srebrenica genocide, the numbers are still in dispute; in Colombia, depending on the source, there are also discrepancies. However, these methodological challenges do not obscure the cruelty of the outcomes in each case. Furthermore, an intended result of a massacre is to empty the desired territory and force its inhabitants to flee under threat of violence and death. The examples covered in this article demonstrate the detrimental effects of these massacres in terms of displaced people unwilling to return to their previous homes.

The TCF is a more suitable framework for a comparative analysis between Bosnia-Herzegovina and Colombia of this magnitude. While the term 'ethnic cleansing' has been associated as a core strategy by the warring parties in Bosnia-Herzegovina, primarily but not exclusively from the Serb nationalists, their motives and strategies were also aiming to carry out a territorial cleansing campaign. However, in the case of Colombia, there is arguably a case to claim the military offensives were based on categorisations based on racial, religious, or linguistic grounds. Colombia recognises more than sixty-five official indigenous languages and a similar number of ethnic groups, including Rom, Afro-descendants, Palenqueros, and Raizales; the empirical evidence does not show the violence was targeted at any of these populations for this reason only. The pluricultural nature of Colombia has never exacerbated a clash between ethnicities, let alone racial or language categories. Since the major categories cannot be used towards civilians, mostly farm-



ers, then the minor differences to be exploited are the ones associated as being collaborators of the different armed groups because civilians, and more specifically, community leaders, were targeted by each group for collaborating with the opposing side.

Thus, a critical step was the labelling or categorisation before beginning the territorial cleansing campaign. Human rights defenders, social community leaders, “guerrilleros”, or a reinforced ethno-religious, a forced linguistic differentiation that was irrelevant prior to the 1990 elections in the former Yugoslavia, are intended and artificially constructed categories to define in-groups and out-groups. The categorisation is not detrimental “per se” when it aims for self-recognition. Nonetheless, it can be devastating when it is used to carry out selective killings, massacres, and genocide to clear an idealised territory. Precisely, according to the observations of Zeynep H. Bulutgil, there is a “possibility that territorial conflict was largely endogenous to the political shift within the ethnic groups rather than being a cause of it” (Bulutgil 2016: 123).

For that matter, one could argue that in the case of Colombia, the massacres committed aimed to strengthen the nation-state building by entirely demonising what remotely resembled Marxist, socialist, or subversive insurgent behaviour. In many cases, without any evidence to prove what should not be punishable by death. Still, it seems that creating a homogenous Colombian state required obliterating any opposition to the established governing class. Any attempt to redefine what should constitute a cohesive state should be made within the already exclusionary political system where there was no room for alternatives that aimed to redirect the attention to the less-fortunate population.

The work of Camilo Echandía Castilla offers a thorough analysis of the territorial control gained by the campaigns of the FARC-EP guerrilla between 1990 and 2011 through their peak of dominance (Echandía Castilla 2011). Paradoxically, the year 1997 also offers a meeting point when the massacres perpetrated by the paramilitary forces in guerrilla-dominated municipalities as a malicious campaign to send a message to the guerrilla blocs by murdering civilians, mostly “campesinos”, who were extrajudicially charged for

collaborating with the insurgency. Recent reports from the Commission of Truth reveal and confirm the collaboration between official military forces and paramilitary units to effectively carry out their attacks on civilians. The Truth Commission revealed the registry of at least 6.402 cases of extrajudicial killings in 31 provinces, which were planned with a high degree of sophistication involving different official nodes and accomplices who distributed functions in a well-organised chain of command (Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad 2022a).

Another point of comparison is the lives of the forcibly disappeared, a significant challenge that embroils both countries. Moreover, due to the calculated strategies, the remains are hard to find. The figures in Colombia are around 100.000 disappeared, with only 20.000 being exhumated (Humphrey 2018). The Documentation Centre Sarajevo (RDCS) has collected municipal-level information on 96.895 persons who have been reported as missing or killed during the 1991-1995 period in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The mass graves have been proven difficult to find since they are unevenly scattered with destinations such as “rubbish tips, rivers, construction sites, and unmarked graves” (Humphrey 2018: 453).

There is a powerful message sent through the display of terror during and after the execution of a massacre. In this regard, other works have been done in anthropology to establish the link between masculinity and war or masculinity and cruelty¹⁷. After all, the vertical violence committed is also to channel horizontal violence towards the adversary (Valencia 2010), specifically the males. Indeed, what occurred in Srebrenica displayed the aim to annihilate all capable males of bearing arms, de facto leaving all women, children, and elders somewhat defenceless. In the case of the massacres in Colombia, while the El Salado massacre took place, the paramilitaries forced women to cook for them, in a humiliating gesture since it aimed directly to overshadow the masculinity of the “guerrillero” adversary. The research of Jaime Santamaría is valuable since it elaborates thoroughly on the link between masculinity and cruelty (Santamaría 2021).



FINAL REMARKS

Even with their precise geographical and socio-economic contexts, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Colombia endured what Mary Kaldor conceptualised as “new wars”. While the dimension and maturity of each conflict may answer to a complex interplay between societal and security dynamics, the warring factions targeted the civilian population in both scenarios. Targeting civilians was a calculated practice aiming to clear idealized territories from the presence of “undesired others” after a sustained process of artificially constructing the “out-groups” by opposition to the “in-group”.

In the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the competing notions of security were mutually exclusive between the contrasting visions of society and democracy (Ali, Lifschultz 1994). One was the cosmopolitan, multi-ethnic society and its opposing “insular, parochial, ethnocentric” view championed by nationalist leaders in Serbia and Croatia. For the exacerbated “blood and soil nationalist” discourse, territorial cleansing was a necessary condition for acquiring national security through separation. Yet, Bosnia-Herzegovina has managed to sustain a durable peace (Filipov 2006) that some consider fragile at least, especially after Milorad Dodik’s advocating campaign towards the separation of Republika Srpska, undermining the Dayton Peace Agreement (Associated Press, Euronews 2022). It seems as if “the optimism of the immediate post-war period has been replaced by a fatalistic pessimism” (Bennett 2016: 267).

On the other hand, the use of massacres as a method was, and still is a significant violence issue in Colombia (fig. 2). Despite the AUC paramilitaries and the FARC-EP formally ceasing to exist, according to the *Instituto de Estudios para el Desarrollo y la Paz* (INDEPAZ), between 2020 and 2023, there were 374 massacres reported, with 1.347 victims (Observatorio de Derechos Humanos y Conflictividades de Indepaz, 2024).

In that sense, whether the massacres perpetrated by violent actors were committed through malicious ethnic-based narratives or allegedly legitimate counterinsurgency policies serving exclusionary spatial narratives, the aim was to cause territorial cleansing as

the goal. In the case of Bosnia, the cleansing resulted in a demographic redistribution of the villages and municipalities into homogenous administrative political redistribution legitimised through the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement. Despite the legal prosecution of individuals who committed war crimes, crimes against humanity, and crimes against civilians, the result was an effective territorial control that connected ethnically to the will of the political leaders of the early nineties. In the case of Colombia, the territorial cleansing carried out mainly by paramilitary forces aimed at weakening the FARC-EP territorial gains through their offensives beginning in 1982, which came to the point of being militarily positioned 18 km away from Bogotá.

This comparative overview serves as a bridging point for future or ongoing cross-regional research avenues. Such may include in-depth interviews or focus groups with displaced, dispossessed, or unwilling returnees to better understand their experience and the reasoning behind the reluctance to return despite the existing norms and legislation. Another ambitious venue could be to use large-N surveys aiming to rediscover the public's perceptions of the actions taken to reverse, redress and counter the effects of territorial cleansing. With both countries facing a new phase in their citizenship-building and reconciliation processes, redirecting the efforts to cross-regional analyses could develop perspectival tools for the study of post-conflict successes and failures.

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NOTES

¹ There has been a debate whether the decades-long conflict in Colombia can be classified as a civil war (Posada-Carbó et al. 2003). Most of the authors refer to it as an armed conflict, while others label it as a narco-terrorist menace, sometimes denying the existing structural causes for systematic violence and downplaying the insurgency to non-politically motivated criminal structures.

² The Truth Commission is an autonomous extrajudicial mechanism established pursuant Legislative Act 01/2017 and Decree 588/2017 with a duration set to three years. It is part of the “Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, Reparation, and Non-Repetition”, aiming to recognize and dignify the victims in the country and in exile to find the truth behind the events, violations of human rights, and breaches to the International Humanitarian Law, occurred during the armed conflict in Colombia. Their findings shall contribute to the promotion of coexistence, to ensure the non-repetition, reconciliation, and a stable and enduring peace. Fragments of the nature of the commission are available on its official website (Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad 2022b).

³ The data collection began in November 2018, and it gathered 15.000 individual and collective interviews in Colombia as in 23 countries with citizens in exile, reaching almost 30.000 interviewees. More information on the data collection is available at Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad (2022c).

⁴ The second volume encompasses fourteen separate volumes, as this chapter refers to the conflict dynamics disaggregated by region, such as the Amazon, Antioquia, the Caribbean, the Northeastern border, Nariño and Southern Cauca, the Centre, the Pacific, Valle and Northern Cauca, the Urban, and the “Campesinado”.

⁵ Given the extension of the report, I have included only the most relevant forms of violence. However, other categories include forced child recruitment, kidnapping, extortion, sexual violence, restrictions to free movement, inter alia.

⁶ Author’s translation from original text: “Las masacres demostraron que la violencia en Colombia no tenía límites. Desde las indiscriminadas hasta las más crueles, fueron usadas como forma de control social o de vaciamiento del territorio, y también para simplemente provocar terror entre las comunidades” (Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad 2022a: 129).

⁷ “Radovan Karadžić was President and Supreme Commander of the VRS and Ratko Mladić was the Commander of the VRS. The VRS was comprised of six geographically based Corps, including the Drina Corps. The Drina Corps was divided into several brigades, including the Zvornik Brigade and the Bratunac Brigade. Radislav Krstić was the Chief of Staff of the Drina Corps and, subsequently, the Commander of the Drina Corps” (Mechanism Information Programme for Affected Communities 2022).

⁸ Radovan Karadžić was sentenced to forty years without parole by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia on 24 March 2016. The decision was appealed on 20 March 2019, increasing the sentence to life imprisonment on the then-proven charges out of eleven indicted, including genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

⁹ There have been legal proceedings within national courts as well, with the most recent indictment of Milenko Zivanovic, wartime commander of the Bosnian Serb Army’s Drina Corps, where both Serbian and Bosnian jurisdiction have overlapped. More information in Stojanović (2022).



¹⁰ At the time of writing this article, it is expected the term genocide will have a more comprehensive definition at the turn of the events since Israel's offensive against Hamas triggered by the 7 October 2023 attacks. Despite confronting positions and public debate, there has been a toll on civilians during the military operations. While it is legally challenging to demonstrate and uphold that the Israeli military is deliberately targeting a particular group based on ethnic grounds, the definition could experience a definitional debate given the level of unintentional casualties and the destruction of civilian infrastructure, including cultural sites, healthcare facilities, and education institutions.

¹¹ Views as to how and why war broke out essentially boil down to competing interpretations of the right to self-determination. Critical to this debate are competing definitions of "nation" – whether all people living within the territorial boundaries of a given political community or all members of a particular ethno-national group. Leaders of each community had a different view as to where sovereignty lay – whether in a geographic entity or in the ethno-national group – and how self-determination should be implemented (Bennet 2016: 54).

¹² Simultaneously, the Muslim Bosnians were aware of their military shortcomings compared to the Bosnian Serbs.

¹³ The full text of *Dayton Peace Agreement* is available online at the website of "Union Nations Peacemakers" (United Nation of General Assembly Security Council 2019 [1995]).

¹⁴ Cristopher Bennett notes that the International Management Group and the UNHCR originally calculated the figures.

¹⁵ The FARC-EP was organized in Fronts, Columns, and Squads (Palma 2019).

¹⁶ Previously, in March 2000, the FARC had already assaulted the municipality, murdering 21 police officers, wounding three, and kidnapping 10 more. Additionally, the insurgents accused and executed eight civilians for allegedly collaborating with the paramilitaries.

¹⁷ Please refer to anthropologist Rita Segato (Segato 2018). Citation from Santamaría's work (Santamaría 2021: 161-91).

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