INTRODUCTION TO SPECIAL ISSUE:

**POST WAR AND NON WAR VIOLENCES: LEARNING ABOUT PEACE AND PEACEBUILDING FROM LATIN AMERICA**

Jenny Pearce & Carlos Mario Perea

This collection of articles explores the challenges of understanding the particularities of violence in post war and non war contexts in Latin America and what this means for the concepts of ‘peace’ and ‘peacebuilding’ in the region and beyond. It brings together a group of academics from Europe and Latin America who are part of the Violence, Security and Peace academic network[[1]](#footnote-2). This Special Issue highlights how the peace and peacebuilding fields of research and practice need to find responses not just to war, but to post war and non war violences. Latin America shows the complexity of the task, but also the richness of the thinking and practice in the region.

The introductory article maps the quantitative dimensions of homicides in the region to highlight its severe crisis of violence in comparative perspective and the challenges for the subcontinent. Colombian historian, Carlos Mario Perea shows how Latin America emerges, alongside the Caribbean and Southern Africa, as one of the regions with the highest levels of homicides in the world without a war. Only Colombia has suffered an internal armed conflict into the 21st century; a peace agreement with one of its key actors, the FARC, was signed in 2016, although multiple other conflicts with criminal groups and the ELN guerrillas remain. Eight countries of Latin America stand out for their levels of ‘extreme’ violence[[2]](#footnote-3). Some of these experienced wars in the second quarter of the 20th century (El Salvador, Guatemala, Colombia), but most did not experience inter or intrastate wars. Latin America thus poses the question, how do we explain these high levels of violence without war and ongoing violences in countries that formally ended their wars? And given that persistent violence is a challenge in other parts of the world, emerging from war or not, might Latin America offer us insights into the meanings of peace and peacebuilding in contexts beyond the region?

Perea uses global homicide data, but is aware of its limitations. Violences in Latin America not only have multiple expressions and high levels of intensity, but they reproduce through time and space. This has led to efforts to find new ways of characterising the specificities of violence in Latin America, as ‘chronic’ [[3]](#footnote-4), or ‘hybrid ’[[4]](#footnote-5) or the broader characterisation of ‘non war violences’ (Perea this volume). In Latin America, not all bodies are counted. The phenomenon of ‘disappearance’, for example has particular associations with the epoch of military dictatorships in the 1970s and 1990s, but has continued in the contemporary era. Human Rights Watch[[5]](#footnote-6) reported in 2017, for instance, that more than 32,000 people had gone missing since 2006 in Mexico, a member of the OECD, with little progress in investigating and prosecuting these cases. They include the emblematic case of the 43 missing students from the teacher’s college in Ayotzinapa who disappeared in 2014. The word ‘homicide’ does not fully capture the differentiated character of lethality, which is particularly important in Latin America. Of the 25 countries in the world with the highest levels of femicide[[6]](#footnote-7), 14 are in Latin America. And of the 10 countries with the highest levels of homicide of children, all are in Latin America and the Caribbean, while one in three deaths of adolescent males is due to interpersonal violence[[7]](#footnote-8). Nor do the *numbers* of deaths, give insights into the many nuances in the dynamics of homicide. Rankings of cities in the region which show the numbers of homicides over time, have led some to build their reputations on new security models, that can, however, contribute to and/or conceal mutating forms of crime and violence[[8]](#footnote-9) . The case of Colombia post Peace Accord also illustrates how the *numbers* of deaths can take away from their significance. Levels of homicidal violence have declined notably in the country since the peace negotiations in Havana began in 2012 (see Perea this volume); which is of course, to be welcomed. However, amongst the homicides which have taken place between January and October 2018 are those of 92 social activists[[9]](#footnote-10). This 92 speaks volumes about the implementation of the Peace Accord in Colombia and its ongoing vulnerabilities.

The homicide rate also fails to emphasise the significance of the multiple expressions of *non lethal* violence, with which it has been argued, it is correlated[[10]](#footnote-11). Violence in the intimate space and against women and children has only begun to receive attention[[11]](#footnote-12).However, these other forms of violence are still not measured in a systematic way, partly because impunity, lack of confidence in institutions and even fear of the police, mean that much violence and crime is never reported, the so-called *‘cifra negra’* or ‘dark statistics’ [[12]](#footnote-13). The global statistics of homicides are thus only the most comparable measure available at present for measuring violence as intentional lethal acts. However, they do tell an alarming story and Perea sets out some of the factors that might explain their persistence and what this means for Latin America if it is to find sustainable and peaceful solutions.

Recognising the particularities of violences in Latin America is, it is argued, a challenge for ‘peacebuilding’ in its varied guises from ‘liberal’ to ‘local’. The world is still debating and learning about what it means to build peace after war. This Special Issue takes up some aspects of this debate by giving a strong focus to Colombia and its post Peace Accord challenges. However, following the setting of the ‘violence’ scene, the next two articles look at Latin America in terms of its contribution towards *peace* thinking. First, Jenny Pearce and Wolfgang Dietrich, Unesco Chair for Peace Studies at the University of Innsbruck, discuss their experiences of Latin America, beginning with the Central America revolutionary civil wars of the 1980s. They reflect on how these influenced their thinking, not only about violence but also about peace, or peaces as Dietrich prefers[[13]](#footnote-14), a plural conception which emerged precisely through his interactions with Mayan and other indigenous of Latin America. That ‘peace’ is not a universal or homogenising concept, privileging a pre-defined ‘good’ and ‘bad’, is discussed alongside learning from Latin America about violence as a phenomenon and responses to its varied expressions. Agency for ‘de-sanctioning’ violences has been a remarkable feature of the region[[14]](#footnote-15); with histories of movements and organisations that have brought victims and their families together as well as mobilised other actors. The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, are only the best known of these movements. They organised against the disappearances of their children in the midst of the Argentine military dicatorship of the 1970s and 1980s. More recently the families of the Ayotzinapa students have similarly kept up the pressure in Mexico, while Colombia has a rich spectrum of women’s, victims, and human rights movements. The region is a potential source for a ‘post Galtung’ recalibration between ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ peace, in which the inter-relationship rather than counter-positioning between these two forms of peace, emerges as key to our understanding of peace. In other words, attention to precisely *how* inequality, and other structure like exclusions in varied fields, relate to violence reproduction. This involves a deeper, interdisciplinary debate on the particular logics behind Latin American violences, as well as between epistemologies and different forms of knowledge[[15]](#footnote-16).

Yet governments in Latin America have still not got to grips with these logics. As Sabine Kurtenbach discusses in the third article in the Special Issue, they have prematurely proclaimed the region to be a ‘Zone of Peace’, precisely because civil wars have come to an end. Latin America certainly reveals the dangers of a vision of peace as the absence of war. Kurtenbach discusses the deep challenges of democratisation and human rights within the region that counter these claims by governments, many of whom are themselves responsible for violence and human rights abuses that deny democratic participation to many citizens.

An emblematic case of violences in and outside of war as well as efforts to make and build peace, is Colombia. This Special Issue thus focusses strongly on the Colombian case. Colombian violences are associated with many armed actors, from the State army to paramilitary to drugs traffickers and guerrilla insurgents. This is war as multiple intersecting violences and armed actors with over five decades duration. The Peace Accord of 2016 was signed with the FARC, one of the guerrilla insurgents and the most powerful, and with whom the state had waged war since 1964. The country’s violent contestations date back much further, however, to at least the period known as *La Violencia* of the 1940s and 1950s, and its aftermath. There have also been many attempts to make peace with varied insurgent actors in the country. Peace scholar, Pedro Valenzuela, discusses the values behind the 2016 Accord and what it tells us about peace thinking in this highly significant moment in the country’s history. He argues that the Peace Accord is a serious effort to ‘strengthen’ the liberal peace perspective, acknowledging the need for structural reforms to address power imbalances. However, he also draws attention to the fact that Colombia is not a unitary state of the Westphalian imaginary, but one of ‘multiple sovereignties’. Thus, peacebuilding takes on characteristics which once more bring us back to the violences which reproduce in these spaces and places of contested authority.

Amongst these, the rural areas of Colombia play a particularly significant role, although it is an 80 percent urban country as is the subcontinent[[16]](#footnote-17). It is in the rural areas that issues of traditional power and privilege and corporate extractive interests in export led development, clash most directly with peasant and indigenous attachments to land and struggle for subsistence. Agrarian lands and corridors are also vital to drugs production and trade. The relationship of rural development to state formation and modernisation processes in Latin America is also a very key part of the challenge of unpacking the logics of violence and peace. Francisco Gutierrez shows in his contribution to this volume, how they relate to the latter, and most recently the peace process in Colombia. Precisely the reconfiguration of this relationship in rural areas, was integral to what became a non-redistributive peace agreement in terms of the ‘agrarian question’. Despite this compromise, it has immediately come up against that old elite rural order, as well as the criminal and illegal armed actors that co-habit the land and dispute its trafficking routes. He raises the difficult dilemma for peace agreements, between the political feasibility (a non redistributive agrarian deal with pro-peasant economy provisions) and the implementation feasibility, where traditional agrarian interests, as much as if not more than, criminal organisations, retain their capacity to undermine the peace process politically and on the ground.

Anika Oettler and Angelika Rettberg then explore the vexed idea of reconciliation in Latin America and Colombia in particular. This is such a fundamental and still totally contested and disputed field of peacebuilding. On the one hand, it seems obvious that parties and victims to an armed conflict must find a way of living together, but peace processes go beyond those directly caught up in the war. They impact on the society as a whole. Thus, the question posed by the authors, namely who should reconcile with whom? becomes very pertinent. Colombia illustrates so well the need to ask this question, given that the Peace Accord was rejected when put to the people in a referendum in 2016. Experiences of violence and which violences matter, become extremely important issues when peacebuilding is seen in broader historical, sociological and political terms, not as ‘interventions’ and ‘projects’ but as rooted in differentially experienced micro and macro processes. The authors have experimented with a range of methodologies in order to grasp what they call the ‘varieties of reconciliation’ and the multiple contexts involved.

Finally, do the contributions to the Journal and other experiences and literatures, suggest that Latin America offers any *original* insights into the challenges of peace and peacebuilding, relevant beyond the region? Is there, for instance, a particular ‘Latin American Peace Concept’, which emerges from its experiences of violence after and outside of war? At the very least, Latin America encourages us to look beyond war and collective violence to the problem of violence itself and to see the interconnections between the reproduction of violences, state formation, political economy and socialisation processes. Neither violence nor peace can be restricted to the polarisations of armed conflicts between societal actors and the state and their outcomes. Many of the violences of Latin America are around multipolar and localised armed conflicts and competing governance between criminal and state actors, in which *both* use violence. However, Latin America also has very high levels of gender based violence, violence against children, prison violence and many other forms[[17]](#footnote-18). In the introductory article, Carlos Mario Perea focusses on drug trafficking and inequality and the social insertion of criminal actors, as three key factors in generating violence, amongst others. Elite interests and state security-as-repression are two other significant factors. For some in Latin America, there is no possibility for peace without social justice and the rule of law, while for some elite[[18]](#footnote-19) and governmental actors, the absence of war is enough to declare the region ‘peaceful’. It is the systemic connections between the varied factors of violence reproduction that requires further study, rather than the search for ‘causes’.

Latin America exemplifies the importance of reducing violence *and* addressingthe conditions of its reproduction, including the criminal economies that have emerged in the region and deeply penetrated many social and political as well as economic spheres of life, generating violences of all kinds. These are not often taken into account by peace scholars[[19]](#footnote-20), yet arguably the rise of transnational crime as well its national variants, is beginning to herald a new challenge to the building of a peaceful world order. Latin America also demonstrates that agency (or conscious social action for change) in such contexts and its capacity to de-sanction violences as well as build the material conditions for its reduction, is integral to peacebuilding. This, alongside the varied efforts by indigenous movements, Afro Latin Americans and other minorities to promote understandings of the relationship of peace to how humans treat land and the natural world as much as each other. Latin America reminds us in this way of the materiality as well as spirituality of peace and its contested, political nature. It means that peace should be centered in society not just the State, and built from the contextualised social spaces and the ‘many peaces’ that are imagined at the grass roots, in democratic dialogue with each other. Who decides not only who has access to land but also how to use it, or the balance between its cultural as opposed to other values? Or who decides how the wealth of the city is distributed and public services provided? And who decides what kind of security reduces violence?

Violences after and outside of war reveal the ongoing challenges to peace in many countries of the world where such questions are in the hands of the few. And increasingly the traditional wealth and power of the latter, is complemented by the extraordinary new wealth to be made from criminal accumulation of all kinds, of which drugs is the most lucrative of all. Thus non war violences associated with these new criminal economies which economic and political elites are often complicit in protecting, are also a peace issue. Recognising and responding to them are just as important as the processes of reconciliation and the practical tasks of demobilisation of insurgents and transitional justice after war. Building peace from the bottom up, involves recognising the critical importance of sensibilities towards violence and security policies that make participation possible within a framework of law, not impunity, which is accessible to all and equitably available.

CONTRIBUTORS

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1. The Network includes the Latin American and Caribbean Centre at the London School of Economics, the GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies, and the Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding (CCDP) at the Graduate Institute Geneva. In Latin America the Network is building academic partnerships, two of which, with the Universidad Nacional and the Universidad de los Andes, are represented in this Special Issue. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Perea takes the threshold of 25 homicides per 100,000 people which is the average rate in Brazil during the first decade of the 2000s as ‘extreme’, in order to distinguish between higher levels of violence. See Perea, this volume. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Pearce highlights the reproduction of violence in three domains of intensity, time and space and calls for a new measurement approach. The domain of spaces, refers to the spaces of socialisation from the intimate, to the street, to the school, the prison and elsewhere. Violence that is ‘chronic’ not only reproduces through all those spaces in lethal and non lethal forms, but the levels of homicide are at least double the global average for five years or more. Jenny Pearce, Violence, *Power and Participation: Building Citizenship in Contexts of Chronic Violence.* IDS Working Paper 274, Brighton: IDS, March, 2007; Tani Adams, *How Chronic Violence Affects Human Development, Social Relations, and the Practice of Citizenship: A Systematic Framework for Action.*(no. 36) Washington: Woodrow Wilson Centre. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/how-chronic-violence-affects-human-development-social-relations-and-the-practice>. 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Keith Krause, ‘Hybrid Violence: Locating the Use of Force in Postconflict Settings’, *Global Governance,* 18, no.1, (2012), pp. 39-56. Krause is not talking about Latin America specifically in his discussion on hybrid violenes, but to ‘places such as Kenya, Zimbabwe, Somalia, Indonesia, El Salvador, or Mexico…where armed actors and ‘violent entrepreneurs’ wield organised force for a variety of purposes that are sometimes considered legitimate by large sections of the population’ (quote at p.40). By including Mexico, he is acknowledging that this concept might be relevant for countries which have not experienced war as such. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Human Rights Watch, Mexico Events 2017: Enforced Disappearances. (25 November 2018). [https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/mexico#899ef4](https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/mexico%23899ef4) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Small Arms Survey Femicide: A Global Problem (2016).<http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/H-Research_Notes/SAS-Research-Note-14.pdf> . Some prefer to call this feminicide, ie the murder of women because they are women rather than femicide as the gender disaggregated figures for homicide. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Save the Children, Stolen Childhoods. <https://www.savethechildren.org/content/dam/usa/reports/emergency-response/end-of-childhood-report> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Alexandra Abello and Jenny Pearce, Securitising the Global City? An Analysis of the Medellin Model through Participatory Research. *Conflict, Security and Development* , 15, no. 3 (2015) 187-228 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. WOLA, ‘Colombia Update, Colombia Must Act as Assassinations Continue. (23 October 2018) https://www.wola.org/2018/10/colombia-human-rights-update/ [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Manuel Eisner, ‘Long-Term Historical Trends in Violent Crime’ (2003), (<https://www.vrc.crim.cam.ac.uk/vrcresearch/paperdownload/manuel-eisner-historical-trends-in-violence.pdf>. Institute of Criminology, Violence Research Centre, University of Cambridge, ‘Global Strategies to Reduce Violence by 50% in 30 years’, (April, 2015)(<http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/30156/1/GLOBAL%20STRATEGIES%20to%20reduce%20violence%20by%2050%25%20in%2030%20years.pdf>) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. A report by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) in 2012, was the first to present a comparative analysis of nationally representative data on violence against women from a large (12) countries in the region. PAHO, ‘Violence Against Women in Latin America and the Caribbean’ (2012) [http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/173293/Violence%20Against%20Women.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/173293/Violence%2520Against%2520Women.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. The most systematic effort to calculate the *cifra negra* appears to be in Mexico, where the Instituto Nacional de Estadistica y Geografia (INEGI) includes it in its annual survey of victimisation. In its 2018 report, it calculated that in 2017 only 10.4 % of crimes were reported, and of these, in only 65.3% was a file opened on the case. They calculate that the *cifra negra* was 93.2% .’ Encuesta Nacional de Victimizacion y Percepción sobre Seguridad Publica (ENVIPE)’ ( 2018.) <http://www.beta.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/proyectos/enchogares/regulares/envipe/2018/doc/envipe2018_presentacion_nacional.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. See Wolfgang Dietrich’s Trilogy, ‘*Many Peaces’. Interpretations of Peace in History and Culture*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012; *Elicitive Conflict Transformation and the Transrational Shift in Peace Politics,* 2013, London: Palgrave, Macmillan; *Elicitive Conflict Mapping, 2018*, London Palgrave Macmillan. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Jenny Pearce, ‘The Demonic Genius of Politics? Social Action and the Decoupling of Politics from Violence’. *International Journal of Conflict and Violence,* 2017, 11:1-11.De-sanctioning violences through social action refers to the ways violences that have become accepted and then acceptable, are challenged. In the process, repressive state action or abuse of women are named as acts of violence that society needs to address rather than tolerate or even applaud. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. For instance, the discussion on why drugs trafficking generates violence in some parts of the world and not in others, Angelica Duran-Martinez, ‘To Kill and Tell? State Power, Criminal Competition, and Drug Violence’. *Journal of Conflict Resolution, 59 no.8 (2015),1377-1402,*  and Benjamin Lessing, ‘Logics of Violence in Criminal War’ *Journal of Conflict Resolution,* 59 no. 8 1486-1516 (2015). On participatory methods for researching violence which exchange experiential and academic knowledges, see Alexandra Abello and Jenny Pearce (2015), ‘Securitising the Global City? An Analysis of the Medellin Model through Participatory Research’. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. The issue of urban violence in Latin America is an extremely important one and space limitations did not enable us to cover it in detail in this Special Issue. See Carlos Mario Perea, *Vislumbrar la Paz, Violencia, Poder y Tejido Social en Ciudades Latinoamericanas*. (Bogota: IEPRI Debate, 2016), for a discussion on urban violences and peace in Latin America. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. Jenny Pearce, *The “Violence Turn” in Peace Studies and Practice* (Berlin: Berghof Foundation,2016) [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. see Jenny Pearce, ‘*Elites and Violence in Latin America’* LACC/LSE Working Paper No. 1 (August 2018). <http://www.lse.ac.uk/lacc/publications/PDFs/VSP1-Pearce-Elites-Violence-Latin-America-web.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. A notable exception is Caroline Nordstrom*, Shadows of War, Violence, Power and International Profiteering in the Twenty-First Century (*California: University of California Press, 2004) [↑](#footnote-ref-20)