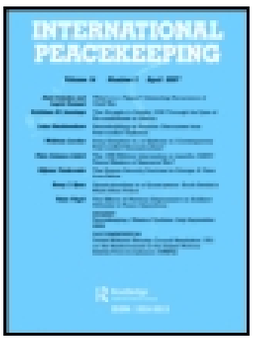

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Violent Peace: Local Perceptions of Threat and Insecurity in Post-Conflict Colombia

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ABSTRACT

Countries that sign a peace agreement to emerge from protracted violent conflict often begin reconstructing their societies amidst continued high levels of violence. Responding to this situation, national security policies often identify core threats primarily from a state perspective, disregarding local community perceptions of threat and insecurity. This paper is based on interviews conducted in Colombia with members of three rural communities that have undergone and still suffer from different forms of post-accord violence. Differentiating between measurable and lived security threats, it identifies the communities' perceptions of threats to their current security situation and compares them to those of the state security actors stationed in the communities. Embedded in the call for more pragmatic, bottom-up peacebuilding, we argue that security is context-specific and stress the importance of understanding the diversity of local community perspectives on security for building sustainable peace under conditions of ongoing violence. Final policy recommendations thus underline the need for a more differentiated approach towards improving security levels that meets the specific threat perceptions and security concerns of local communities and improves cooperation between the communities and state security actors to bring sustainable, localized peace to context-specific security environments.

KEYWORDS Colombia; security; threat; violence; peacebuilding; local communities; post-conflict

Introduction

Since today's post-conflict societies are often characterized by continued high levels of violence,[1] peacebuilding occurs amidst, parallel to and despite continued violence, and it often even produces new violent conflicts.[2] This poses particular hurdles for all international and local actors involved in building sustainable peace and produces a mismatch between traditional peacebuilding ideas and praxis and the reality they encounter on the ground.

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[1]Steenkamp, "In the Shadows"; Nussio and Howe, "When Protection Collapses."
[2]Nilsson and Taylor, "Applying the Security-Development Nexus."

Colombia constitutes a prime example of a country currently challenged with the task of building peace amidst violence. Dating back to the 1960s, the internal conflict in Colombia produced a number of armed opposition groups reacting to widespread dissatisfaction with unequal distribution of power, wealth and land inherited from colonial times. Incapable of dealing with the growth of these insurgent groups, the Colombian government supported the creation of paramilitary self-defence units who became notorious for their infamous record of human rights violations directed against the civilian population they suspected of cooperating with the guerrilla groups.[3] In later decades, the conflict has been increasingly fuelled by a rising production of, and traffic with, illegal drugs, which entangled the guerrilla groups, the paramilitary units, the state security actors and the Colombian government in a web of violence and corruption and further increased the legacy of human rights violations of not only all illegally armed actors but also the state security forces.[4] Between 2003 and 2006, a demobilization process for the paramilitary groups sought to break the cycle of violence. However, the process was flawed from its inception and enabled powerful successor groups to emerge throughout Colombia who resemble their predecessors in their methods and structures, as well as in their ties with security actors and the political elite.[5] After a number of failed attempts the Colombian government also managed to negotiate a peace agreement with the Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia (FARC), the largest guerrilla group, which was ratified in the fall of 2016.

Official statistics underline that homicide rates in the country have been declining not only as a result of the peace agreement but even since former Colombian president Alvaro Uribe greatly intensified the armed forces' missions against the FARC in 2002.[6] However, recent independent studies show not only that the nationwide homicide rate actually started to increase again in 2018 but that displacements and different forms of political violence are growing since 2015, a trend that poses a direct threat to the implementation of the peace agreement.[7] Furthermore, in the rural areas involved in coca production the government's new programme to offer legal alternatives to peasants producing crops used for illegal drug production has caused violent resistance by armed groups involved in the flourishing cocaine trade. The disarmament and demobilization process of the FARC has created growing dissident units and spurred illegal economic activity, such as illegal mining and

[3]Hvristov, *Paramilitarism*; Hvristov, *Blood & Capital*; Grajales, "Private Security"; Maher and Thompson, "A precarious Peace"; National Centre for Historic Memory, *Basta Ya*.
[4]National Centre for Historic Memory, *Basta Ya*. According to the Centre, the armed forces were involved in at least 158 massacres and 2300 selective assassinations, the infamous 'false positives' process not included.
[5]Maher and Thompson, "A Precarious Peace."
[6]Defensoría del Pueblo, *Systema de Alertas*.
[7]FIP, *Sin Política*; Restrepo, *Violencia Política*.

logging, and Colombia's coca production areas have increasingly become a battleground for FARC dissidents, paramilitary successor groups, other guerrilla groups and new criminal gangs.[8] The number of assassinations of social leaders fighting for human and indigenous rights is rising constantly.[9] Land restitution as part of victims' reparation has created new conflicts over land and fuelled the emergence of anti-restitution armies.[10] Thus, while Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos received the Nobel Peace Prize for the successful ratification of the peace accord in 2016, the latter also created a variety of security dilemmas which placed particularly the communities in the more rural parts of the country in a limbo situation where neither war nor peace are present.

Despite recent calls by peace researchers and international actors for more inclusive, context-specific and localized peace that can only be achieved by taking the affected communities' perceptions into consideration,[11] it is questionable if states who face security challenges in post-accord environments inquire closer into those lived realities at the community level when determining their security policies, let alone design security policies with the participation of the local communities. The Colombian government is no exception.[12] Even though Colombia's security policies show signs of an official shift away from exclusive traditional security concerns towards a more comprehensive frame for Colombia's reconstruction process, the government's security concerns clearly identify core threats predominantly from a state perspective.[13] Government programmes such as the Integral Plans for Security and Citizen Co-Existence (*Planes Integrales de Seguridad y Convivencia Ciudadana*, PISCC) and the national police's Integrated System of Rural Security (*Sistema Integral de Seguridad Rural*, SISER), are designed to tackle different forms of direct violence and criminal activities, based on statistics about homicides, kidnapping, political and inter-personal violence, illicit economies and other crimes, and elaborated by state authorities without communal involvement.[14] Even empirical research that analyses local perceptions of threat and insecurity is scarce. This study therefore looks at the perceptions of threat and insecurity in three rural communities in Colombia. It sets out to answer the following interrelated questions: What do local communities perceive as their predominant threats in

[8]FIP, *En Qué Va*; Maher and Thompson, "A Precarious Peace"; CODHES, *Victimas Emergentes*; Hvristov, *Paramilitarism*. The government and the armed forces both maintain, however, that there no longer exist any paramilitary units in Colombia and call all armed groups simply criminal groups (*bandas criminales*, abbreviated bacrim). This was confirmed by the interviews for this article, see below.
[9]El Espectador, *No Cesan Crimenes*.
[10]Nilsson and Taylor, "Applying the Security-Development Nexus."
[11]De Coning, "Adaptive Peacebuilding"; Moe and Stepputat, "Introduction"; Öjendal, Schierenbeck and Hughes, "The 'Local' Turn." See footnote 36 for international actors.
[12]Human Security Centre, *Human Security Report*.
[13]Nilsson, "Building Peace."
[14]Interior Ministry of Colombia, *Methodological Guide*; National Police of Colombia, *Sistema Integrado*.

the current post-accord situation? How, if at all, do the perceptions of local communities differ from those of the state security actors stationed in those communities?

In order to establish a conceptual framework for the study, the following section discusses three concepts – violence, threat (perceptions) and security – and their relationship to each other, followed by an explanation of the methodology selected for this study. Thereafter, we discuss, predominantly through the lens of local perceptions, the history of violence and the current security situation in all three communities. We also compare community perceptions of threat and the actors who represent those threats with the state security actor's views on the security situation and existing threats. The conclusions and final policy recommendations emphasize that security is context-specific and urge external as well as local state actors to consider the diversity of local community perspectives on security, threat and violence when attempting to build peace under conditions of ongoing violence. However, while arguing for the need for pragmatic peacebuilding, we also underline the continued importance of the state as an actor that is needed to facilitate cooperation between local communities and state security actors in order to bring sustainable, localized peace to context-specific security environments.

Conceptualizing Violence, Threat and Security

Violence, threat and insecurity are conceptually intertwined. When protracted social conflicts finally culminate in peace agreements, the latter are expected to reduce all three and initiate a reconstruction process that creates sustainable peace. However, peace accords are often threatened by different forms of continued violence that pose considerable obstacles to actors trying to improve security levels as an indispensable condition for sustainable peace. Most research on post-accord violence concentrates on the more visible forms of direct, physical violence used by spoilers to the peace accord, such as paramilitary and dissident guerrilla groups, state security actors or criminal gangs.[15] While violence is thus most often defined as the use or credible threat to make use of physical force to damage others or their belonging,[16] earlier research had already distinguished between types of violence that go beyond its mere physical expression. Galtung[17] defines violence rather broadly as 'present when human beings are influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations'. His distinction between direct, structural and cultural violence draws attention to types of violence that are less visible but nevertheless

[15]Moser and McIlwaine, *Violence*; Steenkamp, "In the Shadows."
[16]Briceño-León and Zubillaga, "Violence and Globalization."
[17]Galtung, "Violence," 168.

present threats to the security of post-accord societies and the sustainability of peace. Actors use direct violence with the intention to reduce a human being's somatic capacity, for example through deprivation of health or life. Structural violence, on the other hand, impedes individuals from reaching fundamental human needs through discriminatory or unequal social structures,[18] while cultural violence defines any aspect of culture that is used to legitimize violence in its direct or structural form. Galtung[19] underlines that neither of these latter two categories imply specific actors and all three condition and influence each other.

All forms of violence constitute a potential threat for those affected by it. Following Brauch's[20] discussion on the conceptualization of threat, this study defines threat as an imminent danger that has the potential to cause damage to perceived core values. The end of the Cold War contributed greatly to expanding the threat concept by differentiating between traditional and non-traditional threats that need to be tackled by a variety of actors.[21] While traditional threats, such as those produced by war, conflict and terrorism, continue to be the domain of security actors, non-traditional threats range today from environmental challenges and resource depletion to infectious diseases and different forms of transnational crime that need to be addressed by non-military actors and strategies. However, different sectors of society are vulnerable or resilient to different types of threats. What is perceived by individuals or whole communities as a threat to core values can therefore vary greatly in form and levels of intensity and may be caused by all three forms of violence outlined by Galtung.[22] Brauch[23] takes up the distinction between threats and threat perceptions by differentiating between 'objective security dangers' and 'subjective security concerns'. Other research argues that objective security dangers are those measurable and supported by crime statistics, while subjective threat perceptions are social constructions, sometimes imaginary and/or possibly not sustained by the facts that identity the objective security danger, and often intentionally created by other actors, such as the media and political elites.[24] However, we reject the terms objective and subjective threats for this research, as we perceive the definition of subjective security concerns as constructed, potentially imaginary or deliberately created by other actors and therefore not real, to be devaluing the lived realities of local communities. Galtung's[25] different forms of violence show, and our findings further underline, that most threats and dangers are not

[18]Ibid.
[19]Galtung, "Cultural Violence."
[20]Brauch, "Concepts of Security Threats."
[21]Romero, "Insecurity."
[22]Galtung, "Cultural Violence."
[23]Brauch, "Concepts of Security Threats," 62.
[24]FLACSO, *Ciudad Segura*.
[25]Galtung, "Cultural Violence."

measurable and often perpetrators cannot be specified. We therefore differentiate between measurable and lived security threats. The former describes security threats produced by forms of direct violence inflicted by armed actors, such as all forms of political violence, extra-judicial killings, homicides, thefts, forced displacement, destruction of property, violations, torture or kidnapping. The latter includes threats posed by other forms of violence that impact people's everyday security, such as those posed to a person's ontological security (see below). Examples of the latter are provided in the analysis.

Even though research on threat perceptions abounds, it is predominantly anchored in the fields of security studies and international relations and mainly focused on threats caused by terrorism, migration, direct violence in form of insurgent uprisings and urban crime, or environmental catastrophes.[26] That is valid even for those studies analysing threat perceptions in Colombia.[27] Research that explores threat perceptions by communities that endured protracted violent social conflict is essentially lacking. A noted exception is Nussio's[28] work on ex-combatant threat perceptions.

The concept of threat is closely related to the concept of security, as the identification of threats usually provides the basis for the design of security policies to counter them. Brauch[29] defines security as 'an outcome of a process of social and political interaction where social values and norms, collective identities and cultural traditions are essential' and describes it as always inter-subjective, therefore including measurable as well as perceived or constructed threats. This definition comes closer to the concept of human security, defined as freedom from fear as well as from want, that was coined in 1994 by the United Nations Development Programme[30] as an expansion of the more traditional concept of national security. Human security shifts the security referent from the state to the individual and expands the meaning of security beyond the state-centric, military-focused security. A further concept of security that has recently entered the peacebuilding literature and is closely related to this study's understanding of lived threats is the concept of ontological security. Defined as a mental state derived from a sense of continuity, order and meaning, ontological security is severely hampered by all three forms of Galtung's violence categories and individually framed by the lived threats of community members. Threats generated during and through post-peace accord processes can create what Rumelili[31] calls peace anxieties and severely damage individuals' ontological security.

[26]Stevens and Vaughan-William, "Citizens and Security Threats."
[27]DANE, *Encuesta*; FLACSO, *Ciudad Segura*; Romero, "Insecurity."
[28]Nussio, "How Ex-Combatants Talk."
[29]Brauch, "Concepts of Security Threats," 61.
[30]UNDP, *Human Development Report*.
[31]Rumelili, *Conflict Resolution*.

This study parts from the premise that the identification of threats in form of both measurable as well as lived threats constitutes a first step towards outlining strategies capable of tackling the complex security challenges faced by violent post-accord societies. However, even though peacebuilding has been enriched by the expansion of the traditional security concept into human security, the peacebuilding literature continues to focus on measurable occurrences of direct violence and threats. While the concept of everyday peace[32] has been widely accepted in recent peacebuilding literature, research on everyday security is scarce.[33] Only two recent studies have looked into people-centred approaches to security, built from the bottom-up to empower communities to create everyday security by finding their own solutions to local security problems. They underline that building local ownership requires listening to the perceptions of security threats from diverse segments of society.[34] Contributing to the scarce but needed research on local threat perceptions, we evaluate three lived security realities within the confines of a single country. Based on our findings, we highlight the need to understand local perceptions of threat and insecurity in order to identify the root causes of those perceptions, differentiate security benefits and design legitimate local solutions that foster local ownership so that post-accord countries can develop security policies that put people at their centre and combine measurable security threats with lived threats within local realities.

This research therefore follows the call issued by researchers as well as international actors engaged in peacekeeping for more pragmatic, localized peacebuilding, which takes its departure from the reality of post-conflict societies and their everyday practices and capacities to create a context-sensitive, inclusive peace. This approach argues that liberal peacebuilding, the dominant peacebuilding paradigm used by external actors since the end of the Cold War, was essentially externally driven and top-down, delivering dysfunctional peace characterized by poverty and insecurity that focused predominantly on the problem of direct violence, thereby overlooking other forms of violence.[35] A turn to the local underlines the need to include bottom-up perspectives of everyday peace in order to achieve an inclusive and contextual peace rather than a one-size-fits-all, state-centric model.[36] The role of international peacebuilders is thus relegated from leaders to facilitators of an endogenous, locally driven peacebuilding process, reassigning local villagers as the key drivers and underlining the importance of local ownership.[37]

[32]According to MacGinty, "Everyday Peace," 553, everyday peace refers to 'the practices and norms deployed by individuals and groups in deeply divided societies to avoid and minimize conflict'.
[33]For a notable but dated exception, see Andersen, Moeller and Stepputat, *Fragile Sates*.
[34]Schirch and Mancini-Griffoli, *Local Ownership*; Saferworld, *Community Security*.
[35]Moe and Stepputat, "Introduction"; Richmond, *A Post-liberal Peace*.
[36]MacGinty and Richmond, "The Local Turn"; Öjendal, Schierenbeck and Hughes, "The 'Local' Turn."
[37]OECD/DAC, *Supporting Statebuilding*; DFID, *Building Peaceful States*; UNDP, *Governance for Peace*.

Methodology

In order to represent the variety and complexity of local communities' perceptions of threat to their security, both in terms of measurable as well as lived threats, we chose three areas, based on the following principles: (a) they constituted major battlegrounds during the conflict and continue to suffer from measurable security threats; (b) they are important areas for coca production or serve as corridors for the drug trade, which increased insecurity during the conflict and still does today. We coordinated this selection with our network of local contacts, as field research often needs bridging by local actors to provide access for researchers. The communities selected in the centrally located Meta region, Vista Hermosa and Puerto Rico, as well as two smaller settlements (Palestina and Puerto Chispas), have historically been controlled by the FARC and are located within the area that became part of the demilitarized zone in the failed peace negotiations of the late 1990s and early 2000s. However, precisely because of their position as a FARC stronghold, they became the battlefield when the guerrilla and combined paramilitary and state security actors clashed during the early 2000s. In the Cauca region bordering the Pacific Ocean, the Nasa community in Jambaló was selected as an example of a rather isolated and well-organized indigenous community that experienced the continued presence of different armed actors since the mid-1980s. We included the Nasa community because indigenous communities have been, and continue to present, a particular focus for violence, as they often possess their own forms of security and defy control by the state. In the Córdoba region facing the Caribbean Sea the regional capital Montería and the surrounding communities of Tierralta, Puerto Libertador and even more remote rural areas beyond Puerto Frasquillo were the birth places of the paramilitary groups that have been constituting a serious threat to security since the 1980s. After the flawed demobilization attempt in the early 2000s, violence levels even increased.[38] Today, the area continues to suffer from different forms of violence somewhat unaffected by the 2016 peace accord, as the FARC presence has been less prominent in that area.

The field research for this study was conducted in the fall of 2017 and is based primarily on 34 individual and 6 group interviews. For the interviews we chose seven categories of informants: community leaders and authorities (members of the *Juntas de Acción*, social leaders and indigenous authorities), representatives of civil society organizations (agricultural associations and local NGOs), civilian state actors at the local, regional and national level (mayors, *personeros,*[39] representatives of the National Territorial Agency, ANT, and the Agency for the Renovation of the Territory, ART),

[38]Nussio and Howe, "When Protection Collapses."
[39]A *personero* is that person in each municipality in charge of representing and defending the rights of the community before the state.

representatives of international organizations (the United Nations and the Organization of American States), members of the local police and army units in all three communities, representatives of ex-combatant FARC units, and members of the communities in general (five of the six groups interviews, which were conducted in the communities Palestina and Puerto Chispas (Meta), Jambaló (Cauca) and in rural areas around Montería and Puerto Frasquillo (Córdoba)). All interviews were conducted on-site and at locations selected by the interviewees themselves in order to increase the latter's feeling of safety.

The number of participants in the six group interviews varied greatly, as people passing by the selected spaces often spontaneously joined. Group 1 consisted of the Vista Hermosa local drug substitution team employed by the Agency for the Renovation of the Territory (ART) and included 7 participants; around fifteen peasants in the village of Palestina who participated in one of the earlier drug substitution programmes while the conflict was still ongoing and were therefore particularly targeted by a number of armed actors constituted group two; we estimate an average of sixty-five community members in Puerto Chispas to have participated in group 3, but that number was constantly shifting; the interview with group 4 was conducted in a rather isolated agricultural farm outside Puerto Frasquillo with ten to twelve farmers as well as local administrators of a farm project assisting the surrounding communities in turning from illicit to legal agriculture; group 5 consisted of twelve social leaders in Montería, all of them either engaged in agricultural activities or waiting for land restitution; group 6 included all indigenous authorities in the village of Jambaló, as well as a number of other indigenous participants engaged in village administration, a total of ten.

Even though a semi-structured approach served as the basis for the interviews, we gave ample space for personal narratives. However, it is important to underline that these open forms of group discussions also have considerable disadvantages for the researcher. For example, in the discussion with group 3 FARC ex-combatants blended in with the community members and at times pushed the discussion into a direction conducive to their own interests. Interviews were only recorded when allowed and we turned to hand-written notes where we perceived that interviewees were uncomfortable with the recording process. In order to avoid harm to the interviewees, all interviews were anonymized.[40] As qualitative field researchers, we are fully aware of the limitations of this study when it comes to generalizing the results. Instead, we hope to stimulate further research to add on to this initial selection of local community cases to add to the understanding of the rich variety of experiences of violence, threat and security, in Colombia as well as in other countries undergoing similar experiences. We also would

[40]More detailed information about each individual informant remains with the authors.

like to emphasize that this article captures only a particular moment in the country's peace process, when the demobilization process of the FARC had just concluded at the end of the government period of Juan Manuel Santos. Future studies might be able to show a progression of threat perceptions over time, as the peace process enters different phases, particularly under the new, more conservative government of Ivan Duque.

The Background: Shared Experiences of Direct Violence and Measurable Security Threats

Even though all three regions present somewhat different narratives of direct violence, there are certain similarities: all three were areas abandoned by state security actors to the control by illegally armed actors; left with no choice, the communities accommodated to that situation, just to find themselves in the middle between the fighting factions again as soon as state security actors returned. The latter therefore often constituted yet another enemy, rather than a protector.

The Meta region had been completely abandoned by the Colombian military in the 1990s. As one of the major FARC strongholds throughout the conflict, it housed the demilitarized area transferred to the FARC as a sign of goodwill by the Colombian government during the peace negotiation taking place between 1998 and 2002. When the negotiations failed and state security forces re-entered the battleground, paramilitary groups in cooperation with large military units engaged in ferocious battles with the FARC, including in Vista Hermosa and Puerto Rico, resulting in widespread human rights abuses and one of the most notorious massacres in the region's history, in the village of Mapiripán.[41] The inhabitants were accused by either side of collaborating with the other.[42] 'As they were carrying arms and we were only carrying our working tools, we had to do what they said', one participant described the situation. 'We were like a ball that was passed on from one group to the other and we had to attend them all', added another one.[43]

The indigenous Nasa community in Jambaló in the Cauca region also suffered from the presence of different armed actors since the 1980s.[44] Legally or illegally armed, to the indigenous they all represented outsiders who constituted a threat particularly to the community's cohesion. They specifically resented the FARC's efforts to break the community's resistance by recruiting children and about 500 members of the indigenous community, as violence is not acceptable as a form of conflict resolution in their

[41]Maher, "Rooted in Violence;" interview group 2.
[42]Interviews local government 1 PR/M, groups 2 and 3.
[43]Quote by an un-identified participant in interview group 2.
[44]Interviews local government J/C, OAS.

indigenous culture,[45] and by assassinating community members that were pointed out by others as disturbing elements[46] – a legacy Jambaló grapples with even today. As in Meta, the first state security actors re-appeared in 2002, which commenced a decade of daily combat taking place in the middle of the city.[47]

In the Córdoba region, a number of guerrilla and paramilitary groups have been fighting over control of its large agricultural areas for decades. Here the paramilitary groups first emerged in the 1980s to help the state security actors to protect the conservative land owners, the political and economic elites in Colombia, against the left-wing guerrilla.[48] Soon after, traditional agriculture was in part replaced by illicit drug cultivation, which further fuelled the conflict and turned the region into one of the main strategic corridors for the drug trade. Different armed actors replaced each other over time.[49] The inhabitants of the two municipalities selected for this study, Tierralta and Puerto Libertador, witnessed four demobilization processes in the area.[50] State security actors only contributed to the multiple threats to the communities' security, as they were openly cooperating with the paramilitary and suspected the local communities of collaborating with the guerrilla groups. Locals recall, for example, that both the army as well as the paramilitary groups restricted the volume of food items bought by members of the local communities because larger quantities were suspected to be intended to feed guerrilla groups.[51] Thus, comparing the historical background of the three regions selected for this study, common patterns of violence are observable. However, a closer look at threat perceptions today reveals significant differences.

The Present: Three Communities and their Lived Threat Perceptions

Meta's Threat Perceptions: Returning Violence and State Default

The municipality of Vista Hermosa in the Meta region appears today rather calm. Community members, local state employees, the local police and the military agree that measurable security threats and direct violent confrontations between conflict actors have declined after the signing of the peace

[45]Interviews indigenous authorities 1 and 2, OAS.
[46]Interviews local government J/C, indigenous authorities, group 6.
[47]Interviews indigenous authorities 1 and 2.
[48]Interviews military M/C and local expert M/C.
[49]Interview local association 1 PL/C.
[50]Interview local association 2 TA/C. The EPL demobilized in 1991, the M19 in the early 1980s, the paramilitary groups between 2002 and 2006, and the FARC after the peace agreement of 2016.
[51]Interview group 4. That paramilitary groups and military units worked together, not only in Córdoba, has been widely confirmed by research, see Maher and Thompson, "A Precarious Peace"; National Centre for Historic Memory, *Basta Ya*, as examples.

agreement. However, a variety of lived threats persist. The communities' relationship with the FARC ex-combatants is ambivalent. Decades of coexistence with FARC groups that consisted predominantly of members of the local families, have created a view of the FARC that combines fears of control by ex-FARC members even after the demobilization with gratitude that the FARC negotiators pushed through what people regard as crucial parts of the peace agreement, such as land reform.[52] However, dissident FARC groups in the area are growing in numbers,[53] as the Colombian government has defaulted on the promises made in the peace agreement, particularly with regard to the reintegration process for de-militarized ex-combatants.[54] Community members report that they continue to pay extortion money to dissident groups present in the area, despite the denial of the local security forces. The latter 'just don't come here, that is why they don't see them', one informant explained.[55] In all three regions, ex-combatants as well as community members fear that the Colombian government will not comply with the peace agreement terms.[56] Distrustful of a political elite that long abandoned them to their fate, they are suspicious towards promises of a new livelihood that replaces their coca plantations with alternative crops through the government's illicit drug cultivation substitution programme, a result of the recent peace agreement. The government's plans to build infrastructure that enables communities to bring their alternative crops to larger markets have not materialized either, and neither have promises for reparations. Thus, many secretly continue with illegal activities related to cocaine production that provide them with a more secure income and a dependable buyer.[57]

The threat from paramilitary successor groups such as the *Ùsuga* and *Del Golfo* clans that have been found guilty of executing social leaders that are standing in their way was less of a worry for those particular communities under investigation in this study, even though research shows that, in cooperation with the armed forces, they continue to displace people from their land in order to free areas for the palm and livestock plantations of the economic elites.[58] The predominant concern on their mind when addressing threats related to armed actors was their relationship with the FARC ex-combatants and dissident groups. Even though they previously had experienced abandonment by state security actors, the communities interviewed around Vista Hermosa and Puerto Rico want the army to stay on for the extension of the peacebuilding period to counter the 'culture of war' in the

[52]Interviews local government 2 VH/M, groups 1, 2 and 3.
[53]FIP, *En Que Va*.
[54]Interviews local government 2 VH/M, FARC 1 and 2 VH/M.
[55]Interview group 3. This community lives in a rather isolated area that is apparently not frequented much by security actors.
[56]Interviews local government J/C, OAS.
[57]Interviews groups 2 and 3.
[58]Interviews FARC 1 VH/M and group 1; El Espectador, *No Cesan Crimenes;* Maher, "Rooted in Violence."

country and prevent a return to violence. Both community members and civilian state actors seem to appreciate the security actor's new role as development agents.[59] 'Before they insulted us, now they greet us', one community member describes the relationship to the armed forces.[60] However, that relationship also continues to suffer setbacks. Conflicts arise particularly over the issue of forced eradication of coca plantations by state security actors in parallel and in contradiction to the illegal drug substitution programme initiated as a result of the peace agreement.[61]

Cauca's Threat Perceptions: Loss of Community Cohesion

The Nasa community in Jambaló shares with the Meta communities the fear that armed actors will return after the peace accord.[62] Graffiti has appeared overnight on the town walls and armed groups left pamphlets in public places.[63] The Nasa have their own security system consisting of specific security and development plans and 260 indigenous guards who, carrying symbolic sticks, use non-violent methods by placing themselves physically in the way of actors who threaten the community. If need be, they alert the community to come to their support. Equally unarmed but impressive by sheer numbers, women, men and children appear and surround the armed actors as a way of expressing silent opposition to their presence. 'In moments of imminent danger for the community, we are all indigenous guards', explains one member of the community.[64] While the FARC essentially respected the guards, the latter have increasingly come under attack by other illegally armed groups engaged in illegal mining and drug trafficking.[65]

However, the predominant threats, during the conflict as well as post-accord, are those directed against the cohesion of the community that constitutes the core of security for the Nasa, and those threats are often of a non-violent nature. The five *Nejwesx* authorities, who represent the collegiate authority of the indigenous community in Jambaló, are still debating how to reconcile with those community members who turned against the community during the armed conflict by joining the FARC or accepting the latter's offers to assassinate personal enemies.[66] As all forms of violence are rejected by the Nasa and members who join violent actors are excluded from the community, reintegrating them is an important pre-condition to re-establishing the security of the community as a whole. Community members underline that peace

[59]Interviews local government 1, 2 and 3 VH/M; interviews groups 2 and 3.
[60]One community member within group 3.
[61]Interviews local government 1 PR/M and local government 2 VH/M.
[62]Interviews group 6, indigenous authorities 2.
[63]Interviews local government J/C, group 6.
[64]Interview local government J/C.
[65]Interviews OAS, indigenous authorities 1 and 3, indigenous guard J/C.
[66]Interviews indigenous authority 1, local association C/C.

therefore will be the result of a long process of negotiation within and between communities to re-establish the cohesion destroyed by the conflict and peace-making process, rather than any accord reached between the government and illegally armed groups. 'The peace process is not between the government and the guerrilla, but between the people', one of the indigenous authorities underlined.[67]

Another threat to community cohesion is the cultivation of, and trade with, crops used for illegal purposes. The community perceives drugs as undermining the strength, morals and culture of the Nasa and has joined the government's programme to substitute illegal crops with legal alternatives.[68] Nasa authorities also complain that the peace process itself has created new threats to community cohesion. They maintain that during the negotiations leading up to the peace agreement in 2016, the Colombian government and the FARC joined forces against the indigenous roof organization ONIC (National Organization of Indigenous Communities), established in 1972 to defend and promote indigenous rights, by creating a competitor organization, CONPI (National Coordination of Peoples, Organizations and Indigenous Leaders), consisting of former ONIC and indigenous FARC members. CONPI then replaced ONIC at the negotiation table and undermined the latter's demands for their communities.[69]

Thus, perceived threats in this community have little to do with armed actors, and even the statés security actors do not play a role in Nasa security thinking. The indigenous community in Jambaló tolerates the small police unit inside the city parameters but relies only on the indigenous guards for their protection.[70] One interviewee described the role of the local police as 'guarding themselves, because they are vulnerable to other armed groups."[71] An indigenous civilian, the police inspector, serves as the only contact between the community and the police, guarding at the same time the distance between both.[72] Collaboration between the locals and the police is essentially non-existent.[73] 'They don't mess with us and we don't mess with them', as one of the indigenous *Nejsweix* authority summarized the relationship.[74] A police proposal to strengthen the police with posts in the rural areas was rejected by the indigenous assembly as an encroachment on their own security territory and a violation of the government's territorial agreement with the community.[75] The community's relationship with the patrolling

[67]Interviews indigenous authority 1, group 6.
[68]Interview group 6.
[69]Interviews indigenous authority 2, OAS, local government J/C, local government 2 J/C.
[70]Interviews indigenous authorities 1 and 3.
[71]Interview local government J/C.
[72]Interview indigenous guard J/C.
[73]Interviews local government J/C, indigenous authorities 3 and indigenous guard J/C.
[74]Interview indigenous authority 4 J/C.
[75]Interviews indigenous authorities 2 and local association P/C.

army unit in the surrounding countryside is equally strained. They fear rumours of forced eradiation of their coca plantations and rejected a proposal to increase the military presence in the countryside. Several intrusions of the unit into the community's territory to commence demining and look for FARC weapon depositories without proper notification of the indigenous authorities caused major confrontations and further increased mistrust.[76]

Córdoba's Threat Perceptions: Continued Paramilitary Control

For those interviewed for this study in the Córdoba region, the paramilitary groups controlling daily life in Montería and its surrounding areas continue to constitute the predominant threat even after 2016. While most interviewees admit that security has improved in terms of measurable security threats, since the demobilization of the FARC as the main enemy of the paramilitary groups put a stop to armed combats and massacres,[77] more subtle threats to residents' physical and human security abound. In contrast to state actors, including security actors, local inhabitants don't differentiate between the many armed groups present and continue to use the group name 'paras' for all. 'We are living a different war than the government', one interviewee said.[78] Peace with the FARC guerrillas has therefore never been their primary concern.[79]

Through an elaborate information system, paramilitary groups control every segment of community and private life.[80] Just outside Montería, paramilitary groups have established a night curfew.[81] In another community, they issued a decree that villagers are no longer allowed to import food items from areas outside the village, in order to protect the business of the local agricultural landholders they protect.[82] Others report that members of the paramilitary groups force villagers into private relationships to blend into and hide among civilian communities. Interviewees also stress that they gave up on new livelihood projects because they have to pay extortion money to the paramilitary groups for everything they do. The latter apparently patrol the entrances of financial institutions and demand payments from anyone who receives a loan or takes out money.[83] In a farm about an hour's boat ride from Tierralta, locals report that members of paramilitary groups go around with arms and radios to intimidate the local population.[84]

[76]Interviews group 6 and indigenous authorities 2.
[77]Interviews local government PL/C and local government 2 PL/C.
[78]Interview group 5.
[79]Interview group 4.
[80]Interview group 5.
[81]Interview group 4.
[82]Interview local expert M/C.
[83]Interview local association 1 PL/C.
[84]Interview group 4.

Paramilitary leaders also continue to influence local politics. Using methods of coercion and economic power, they decisively influenced the peace agreement referendum in August of 2016 and incited violence against the FARC's new political party.[85] They maintain important ties with large companies and control major political actors in the communities.[86] Armed members of paramilitary groups even enter the FARC ex-combatant reintegration zones and, while the zone's policemen look the other way, threaten inhabitants and force them to abandon the camp.[87]

As those interviewed in Meta and Cauca, interviewees in Córdoba underline their lack of confidence in state institutions. They feel that the peace process and even previous demobilization processes have continuously failed them: paramilitary leaders still own most of the land instead of returning it to the rightful owners during the demobilization process. As a result, their survival strategy is to abide by the rules, pay their dues, keep a low profile, 'don't look and don't talk."[88] After all, the paramilitary groups offer structure where the state is negligent. 'When people have a dispute, they go to the para leaders', admits one informant in Tierralta.[89] Members of a local community outside Montería report that the commanding paramilitary group organizes the residents to perform road construction work once a month. Paramilitary groups even put up rules for behaviour in schools, including how school children wear their hair and uniforms. They also engage in 'social cleaning' by removing rapists, thieves, drug abusers, homosexuals and others who they consider social undesirables.[90]

Communities also feel that the government and its security actors are neither willing nor able to protect them, as the post-accord security strategy to combat paramilitary groups, the Agamemnon Plan, shows only slow progress in Córdoba. In fact, community members maintain that the system of alliances between security actors and paramilitary groups, strengthened over decades of collaboration and mutual profit, continues to exist.[91] FARC ex-combatants even maintain that 90% of Córdoba is controlled by paramilitary groups and only 10% by state security actors.[92] Some of the interviewees are convinced that all police members continue to be on the paramilitary payroll.[93] Even civilian state institutions are suspected of having links with paramilitary groups. 'The legal goes hand in hand with the illegal', one

[85]Interview group 5.
[86]Interviews local association TA/, local association 2 TA/C.
[87]Interviews FARC 1 M/C, military M/C, FARC 2 M/C.
[88]Interview local association TA/C.
[89]Interview local expert M/C.
[90]Interview group 4.
[91]Interview group 5.
[92]Interview FARC 1 M/C.
[93]Interviews local government 2 PL/C and indigenous authority M/C.

women's rights activist underlined.[94] As in the other areas, state security actors often constitute more of a risk than a protection for the local communities.[95] Inhabitants of more remote rural areas outside Puerto Frasquillo admitted that the army units patrolling the region try to establish a better relationship with them and engage in social projects such as building roads or conducting health campaigns, but they are also well aware that the army engaged in forced eradication of coca plantations in the region as recently as four weeks before the interview.[96]

State Security Actor Perceptions: A Focus on Measurable Security Threats

While the local communities differ significantly in their descriptions of predominant security threats, the police and military stationed in the three areas under consideration in this study all underlined in the interviews that the security situation has greatly improved and that they have regained control. They pointed at declining homicide numbers and downplayed the danger emerging from both FARC dissident and paramilitary or criminal groups. Concern was predominantly voiced with regard to groups' new strategies, such as the *Plan Pistola* that targets individual members of the police force around the country. The plan was announced by the *Clan del Golfo* group as a retaliation for the killing of paramilitary leaders by police following the government's Agamemnon Plan, a result of the peace agreement's commitment to fighting illegally armed criminal groups in the country.[97] Denying the continued existence of paramilitary groups, they insist that the latter were demobilized over a decade ago and that the current illegally armed groups are newly established and today jointly targeted by both police and military forces,[98] thereby demonstrating the stark discrepancy between local communities' perceptions of the security situation and those expressed by state security actors.

An overly positive view of their relationship to the communities further underlines the disconnect between the latter and the local state security actors. In all three case studies, the state security actors themselves feel that their relationship with the local communities has greatly improved.[99] However, both members of the police as well as the military admit that the

[94]Interview local association 2 TA/C. Research has confirmed the continued ties between state authorities and paramilitary successor groups, see National Centre for Historic Memory, *Basta Ya*; Hvristov, *Blood & Capital*; Hvristov, *Paramiltiarism*; Grajales, "Private Security"; Maher and Thompson, "A Precarious Peace."
[95]Interview local government PL/C. Our contacts refused to accompany us all the way to the police station, for fear of being associated with the police.
[96]Interview group 4.
[97]Interviews military VH/M, police VH/M, police PR/M, police 1 J/C, military M/C, police TA/C, police PL/C.
[98]Interviews police PR/M, military M/C.
[99]Interviews military PR/M, police PL/C, police VH/M.

prolonged conflict has damaged the population's trust in them and they have employed similar and often joint strategies to mend that relationship. Cooperating with civilian state actors, army and police units engage in social and developmental projects in the communities, ranging from painting school rooms, organizing movie afternoons and holding lectures on health and security issues, to cleaning local parks, organizing snack breaks and distributing school supplies to children. In the Córdoba region, police officers report that they sometimes even accompany people running their errands or walking through the neighbourhood.[100]

However, differences are also apparent. While state security actors are still present in the communities that were part of this study in Meta and Córdoba, the army left Jambaló as soon as peace was signed. The relationship between the indigenous community and the small local police unit left in town can best be described as negative coexistence. The members of the unit insist that the relationship with the community is improving but admit that they are not the actor most people look for in terms of security. With only one mobile army unit of 35 soldiers patrolling the neighbouring rural areas, they feel somewhat insecure, since they fear the formation of new armed groups, even though at the moment the area seems quiet and they maintain that 'not one shot has been fired in Jambaló since the peace agreement was signed."[101] Most important for the local peace is certainly the fact that the police unit has accepted the indigenous security system and respects the primacy of the indigenous guards.[102]

However, the disconnect between state security actors and civilians becomes most apparent in the Córdoba region. While civilians feel abandoned by the security actors and try to cope with the threat on their own, the security actors themselves argue that the largest threat of the armed groups is directed against them, not the civilians. The infamous *Plan Pistola* causes widespread fear in police stations around the area. So far eight police officers have fallen victims to the plan in the region and many police have moved their families to other areas to prevent them from being included in the revenge acts.[103] Police officers carry weapons of war and combat equipment and only leave the station in larger formations.[104] A body encountered in the streets by our research team on the way to Tierralta, an apparent execution by paramilitary groups, was not recuperated from its location until seven hours later, when the police had investigated if it was safe for them to reach the body and if the latter had no explosives attached. These assassinations are apparently a strategy by paramilitary groups to ambush police.[105]

[100]Interviews military PR/M, military VH/M, police PR/M; interview police PL/C.
[101]Interview police 1 J/C.
[102]Interview police 2 J/C.
[103]Interview police PL/C.
[104]Personal observation in Tierralta, September 2017.
[105]Interview police TA/C.

Mistrust between civilians and state security actors is widespread and mutual. One police unit commander summarizes the situation in the Córdoba region with the statement 'one does not know with whom one is talking, one cannot trust anyone … Nobody wants to be associated with the police … The problem got out of way and now we cannot control it."[106] This feeling of an overwhelming problem that does not easily find a solution also seems to lead to a form of negative co-existence between state security actors and armed groups where both sides try to avoid contact with, rather than confront, each other.[107] Even members of the only mobile military unit close by described their strategy concerning the paramilitary groups in the region as an 'I don't mix with you – you don't mix with me' policy.[108]

Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

Thus, although communities in all three cases agree that certain forms of direct, measurable violence, have ceased, our findings present three rural communities who experience a range of very different lived security threats. In the Cauca region, the predominant threat perception is that against community cohesion which comes closest to the concept of Rumelili's[109] peace anxieties, threatening the ontological security of the community. In the Meta communities, the predominant threat is directed against their capacity to procure a livelihood once coca production is replaced by alternative crops. In Córdoba, a complex network of both measurable and more subtle lived security threats controls every aspect of the communities' lives. Thus, in all three cases perceptions of threats to security are not always measurable and often produced by forms of structural and cultural violence.

The communities' relationship with and expectations towards the state security actors emerged as central to the discussion on local security perceptions. As they represent the extension of the state in charge of protecting them, those actors were remembered as former perpetrators by all communities and hence levels of mistrust are still somewhat high. In Cauca they were seen as a useless appendix to the indigenous security system and in Córdoba they were accused as at best accommodating to the illegally armed actors controlling the areas. The perception in Meta was generally more positive, but even here ties to, and fears of, ex-FARC units were still so strong that people continued to contact them to find solutions to their security problems. In both Córdoba and Cauca security actors often appeared as a liability, drawing violence rather than security to the communities, and even in Meta security actors at times collided with the communities. These

[106]Interview police TA/C.
[107]Interview local government PL/C.
[108]Interview military 2 M/C.
[109]Rumelili, *Conflict Resolution*.

findings, particularly the case of Cauca, strengthen earlier research arguing that communities provide for local security solutions in the absence of state structures able to secure their everyday security needs.[110]

The state security actors stationed in all three communities, on the other hand, perceived the security reality rather differently. Parting from an enemy-centred concept of security that focuses on the destruction of the enemy, rather than a population-centric approach used by the communities that puts the protection of the population, their core values and their livelihood as the main objective, they all ascribed to a common (official) discourse based on data measuring forms of direct violence, namely that security for the local communities had improved considerably in the post-accord period. More subtle forms of violence, as they exist in Córdoba, for example, were not considered part of the state actors' security understanding, a fact that accounts for the dramatic difference in the perception of the security reality between state security actors and local communities. Even though aware of the tense relationship with the communities, the state security actors in all three communities described that relationship as much more positive than the communities themselves.

The findings of this study thus reveal a stark discrepancy between the security perceptions of state actors in charge of security and the communities who are subjects to security threats. Cooperation between both actor groups in security matters is essentially non-existent. In fact, they often see each other as security threats. Our findings furthermore emphasize that security is context-specific and they stress the importance of understanding the diversity of local communities' lived security threats. Actors engaged in peacebuilding under conditions of ongoing violence, external as well as local, need to adopt a more differentiated approach towards strategies to improve security levels, an approach capable of meeting the specific threat perceptions and security concerns of local communities and empower those communities to bring sustainable, inclusive and localized peace to context-specific security environments. Building peace pragmatically includes constructing a locally-owned security, placing people at the centre by giving the communities a voice concerning what and who constitutes a threat to their security.

However, while we emphasize the need to include the community into the construction of its own security strategies, the results of this study also underline the importance of the state as an actor. In Colombia, the state's neglect of, and loss of control over, large parts of the territory has been commonly recognized, including by the government itself, as a major contributor to the protracted conflict the country has experienced.[111] However, even here the state is still perceived by those neglected communities as an important player that is

[110]Andersen, Moeller and Stepputat, "Introduction."
[111]Nilsson, "Building Peace."

able to perpetuate or alleviate threats. All three communities ultimately accused the state of being the biggest current threat, either as a collaborator with or as a facilitator for actors that threatened different aspects of their core values. In the Cauca case, the state's new post-accord alliance with the FARC and its insistence on state security actors in the communities parallel to the indigenous security system increases mistrust against state objectives. In Meta the state is perceived as the actor that could facilitate the essential elements to make a new post-coca livelihood possible but seems to follow contradictory policies. In Córdoba the state security actors, as the extension of the state itself, either coexist with, facilitate or accommodate to the actor producing the everyday threat.

For the debate on pragmatic peacebuilding, this means that too complete a turn to the local and away from the importance of the state as an actor in peacebuilding might shift the balance negatively towards a peace that does not engage all actors to the degree necessary. As Moe and Stepputat[112] have recently suggested, a return to the debate on state-building from the perspective of pragmatic peacebuilding, might be inevitable. Pragmatic peacebuilding provides an important shift by arguing for the importance of making 'the local' a point of departure. However, on the path towards sustainable peace, the role of the state might be underestimated. This study therefore underlines the need for both external actors – peacebuilders as well as peacekeepers – as well as state actors to pay more attention to lived security threats in order to evaluate localized security realities. Mapping local threat perceptions and then designing context-specific security plans to counter those threats, both measurable as well as lived, will enable all actors involved in peacebuilding to adopt a more holistic approach to security. This holistic approach has the potential to repair the relationship between communities and state security actors that so often has been damaged by protracted social conflicts and empowers communities to contribute to the process of providing their own security.[113] Such a people-centred approach to security is imperative for localized, context-sensitive, legitimate and sustainable peace. By emphasizing that national security plans need to be context-specific and include local perceptions of threat and insecurity, international actors tackling security challenges in post-accord environments might be better able to help countries navigate the difficult path to restore security in all its forms, physical, human as well as ontological.

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[112]Moe and Stepputat, "Introduction."
[113]Schirch and Mancini-Griffoli, *Local Ownership*.

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