
‘The Guilt Complex’: Assessing How Perceptions of Guilt Impact Reintegration Experiences of Young Returnees from the FARC Across Colombia

Arpita Mitra^{a1}, Joris van Wijk^b, Elanie Rodermond^c

^aPhD Candidate, Vrije University, Netherlands; ^bProfessor, Criminology of Conflict-related Crimes and Post Conflict Justice, Department of Criminology, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam;

^cAssociate Professor, Department of Criminology, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Abstract

This paper examines the first-hand narratives of young people who were former combatants of the FARC-EP (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo*) in Colombia and demobilised after signing the 2016 Peace Agreement. It seeks to understand how perceptions of guilt among young returnees at institutional, individual and social levels shape their reintegration experiences. Through case studies undertaken across four cities in Colombia - Valledupar (Cesar), Medellín (Antioquia), Arauca and Bogotá - this paper contends that unresolved individual and socially inflicted guilt can impede positive reintegration into communities. Nearly a decade since the peace agreement, reintegration experiences of young returnees, including their perceptions of guilt, are conditioned by the specific context within Colombia that they originated from, as well as the environment to which they returned. Additionally, youth who were formerly a member of the FARC continue to hold the values and ideologies of the group post release. Such acquired value systems influence young people’s justifications not only for their past actions but also their present dispositions and understanding of the return and reintegration process itself.

Article History

Received Sep 3, 2025

Accepted Dec 13, 2025

Published Dec 26, 2025

Keywords: FARC-EP, Youth, Guilt, Terrorism, DDR, Combatants, Reintegration

Introduction

Globally, the recruitment and use of children and young people in terrorist groups is an alarming issue. In 2024 alone, the UN Security Council reported that 7402 children were recruited by armed groups, many of them by entities that are internationally recognised as terrorist organisations (United Nations Secretary General Report 2025). Mainstream

¹ Corresponding Author Contact: Arpita Mitra, Email: a.m.mitra@vu.nl; Department of Criminal Law and Criminology, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, De Boelelaan 1105, 1081 HV Amsterdam, The Netherlands. This article solely represents the views of the author and not of any organisation or group that she works for or has been affiliated with.

international child protection frameworks generally perceive recruited children as ‘faultless, passive victims’ (Drumbl 2012, p.168), with no control over their choices or the circumstances that led to their recruitment or participation in armed conflict (UNODC Report 2024, 2017). The limitation of such ‘children-as-victim’ status is that it fails to account for children’s individual recruitment experiences and factors that concern their motivations to join the group, prevailing circumstances, specific experiences during the period of membership, roles within the group, ties to the group, and the nature of the armed group itself (Drumbl 2012, Podder 2008, Honwana 2009, 2006, Rosen 2005).

This gap is reflected in standard reintegration programmes that do not entirely address the complexities endured by individual ex-combatants in their life after exiting the armed group, or, even when they do identify these experiences, fail to incorporate them in the design and monitoring of the reintegration programmes. Disarmament Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programmes, including those for children, are critiqued for being too ‘straightforward’ in their approach and premised on a ‘checklist of issues’ to address a wide range of complex developmental and security concerns (Rodgers & Jensen 2015, Muggah 2010, Clark 1996). DDR programmes are generally fixated on the first two elements, that of disarmament and demobilisation, leaving little time and resources for the reintegration phase. (McEvoy & Shirlow 2009, Gear 2002).

One of the challenging aspects of existing reintegration programmes for young ex-combatants is the ability to comprehend and process their guilt. In principle, guilt refers to moral transgressions and pertains to a feeling that is internally experienced as individuals ruminate over their misdeeds or acts that transgress moral boundaries. Guilt is different from being ‘guilty’ as the latter is determined by a relevant institution, such as judicial systems that pronounce someone responsible for an offence. Instead, guilt refers to the feeling akin to ‘pangs of conscience’ (Braithwaite 1989) that drives individuals to reconsider their actions and even may make them wish they had behaved differently (Akello 2024, Tibbets 2003, Smith et al. 2002, Sabini & Silver 1997, Lewis 1971).

Guilt can affect former combatants’ experiences of reintegration in complex ways. Institutionally, the failure to address guilt among young ex-combatants can limit reintegration success. Desistance is most likely possible when ‘ex-offenders develop a coherent prosocial

identity and role for themselves' (Maruna 2001). However, protection efforts of absolving criminal and social responsibility for young ex-combatants often result in situations where such renewed identities cannot be thoroughly developed. The limited timeline of DDR programmes also contributes to ex-combatants' constrained post-exit life in the mid-to-long period, as they struggle to attain the goods and services relevant to them, including better opportunities, economic resources, political recognition, positions of power or influence, which they may have received through their former group membership. Young ex-combatants' personal experiences involve guilt, as it interferes with their individual self-perceptions, including how they cope with trauma and shame (Thomasan 2016). Socially, too, young ex-combatants may be subjected to social rejection and community stigma upon their return (Annan & Blattman 2010, Betancourt et al. 2010, Carlson & Mazurana 2007). Literature even suggests the limitation of institutional response impact ex-combatants, considering that they remain embedded in, and reliant on, networks of former illicit activities instead of developing renewed individual identities and social networks in the communities (Marsden 2017, Matsueda & Heimer 1997).

Despite such complex implications, there is limited existing research on the linkages between young ex-combatants' experiences of different forms of guilt and their post-release experiences of reintegration (Murphy et al. 2017, Thomasan 2015, Klasen et al. 2015, Kubany 1994). The limited research suggests that young combatants' guilt is not only morally 'permissible', but also morally 'valuable' since it reaffirms their adherence to the values and commitments they share with the moral community (Thomasan 2015). Compared to the scenarios where guilt has been positively addressed, guilt sentiments that are unresolved could result in negative post-reintegration effects. In fact, unresolved guilt has been linked to risks of recidivism, particularly in contexts where ex-combatants resort to 'revenge violence' against their adversaries, or where they link their own physical security to the possibilities of renewed involvement in violence (Gear 2002). Thus, understanding young ex-combatants' guilt is critical in positively influencing their reintegration, including in guaranteeing non-recurrence or recidivism as well as addressing the potential barriers that emerge in terms of community reconciliation.

Within this framework of reintegration, experiences of young ex-combatants associated with terrorist groups remain underexplored, with their experiences on guilt studied even less. Terrorism as a method aims to generate ‘wider psychological impact beyond immediate victims’ and exploit this emotion to influence behaviour (Schmid 2023, Richards 2014). When compared to other armed groups, terrorist groups resort to terror tactics and violence in extreme forms (Jørgensen 2019). The extremity of terror tactics is inherently psychological; the acts of the group are not convened for the act, rather to terrorise and intimidate the wider population (Comer & Kendall 2007, Yehuda & Hyman 2005), creating a climate of fear, uncertainty, and vulnerability, mainly through communication or propaganda (De la Corte et al. 2008, Silke 2005). Terrorist tactics of recruitment and indoctrination are also systemic, often involving entire families and communities in their propaganda efforts toward common objectives as an additional way to bolster young members’ loyalty to the group (Bloom & Horgan 2019).

Some of these recruitment and terror tactics previously described have also taken place in Colombia. About 45% of recruits of the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo* (FARC-EP or the FARC), a designated terrorist organisation were under 15 years at the time of recruitment (Truth Commission of Colombia 2022, p.196). Since the aftermath of the 2016 Peace Agreement between the Government of Colombia and the FARC, the country has been struggling to reintegrate young returnees. Till today, the lack of security guarantees and community acceptance for young people exiting the FARC hinder their successful reintegration. The 2024 UN Annual Report stated that in Colombia, children and youth are exposed to the continued risks of recruitment by a variety of armed actors. Official narratives confirm the existence of eight non-international armed conflicts, involving, among others, FARC-EP dissident groups, the National Liberation Army (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional* or ELN) and the *Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia* (AGC). Although the 2016 Peace Agreement became a textbook example of successful transitional justice and peace negotiations between a State and a terrorist group, approximately a decade following the peace negotiations, young returnees’ reintegration processes in general, and their experiences on guilt specifically, remain largely unclear (*The Guardian* 2022, International Crisis Group 2021, United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia 2020). Most of the judicial

procedures for accountability of past violations focused on the top leaders of the group (command responsibility) while truth commissions focused largely on the narratives of the victims. Young ex-combatants had little to no possibilities to share their reflections and were largely excluded from building foundations for community understanding, reconciliation and dialogue.

Given the above context, this article discusses how perceptions of guilt at institutional, individual and social levels impact the reintegration experiences of young ex-combatants of FARC following the 2016 Peace Agreement in Colombia. After a brief methodological section, the article provides a literature overview of reintegration challenges experienced by young people formerly associated with terrorist groups, as well as the different layers of experiencing guilt. This is followed by the case study from Colombia, analysing youth reintegration at institutional, individual and social levels from the lens of guilt. In conclusion, the article challenges the simplistic labels of young ex-combatants (as victims or perpetrators) by exploring complex layers of guilt. It concludes that many young ex-combatants feel little personal guilt but struggle with collective and relational guilt, and this in turn shapes reintegration outcomes in different contexts. Finally, it highlights some of the assumptions that must be revisited by DDR and transitional justice practitioners in their areas of work.

Methodology

This article is an extension of a previous study conducted between 2021 and 2022 that evaluated youth reintegration programmes in Colombia (Mitra 2022). The coinage of FARC-EP as a terrorist organisation is drawn from its national (Colombia), regional (Peru, Venezuela) as well as its international classifications (United States, The European Union). Soon after the 2016 Peace Agreement, it was de-classified as a terrorist organisation.

This article shall hereinafter refer to youth formerly associated with the FARC as ‘young returnees’, unless otherwise suggested by the respondent or academic source. Young returnees shall comprise individuals who were below the age of 24 years when they joined the FARC and disarmed and demobilised as part of the 2016 Peace Agreement. The age classification of ‘youth’ corresponds with the international definition proposed by the United

Nations as persons below the age of 24 years (United Nations 1981). While such ex-combatants may have played a wide range of roles within FARC – from direct engagement in combat in a fighting capacity to non-combat roles as informants, spies, peer recruiters, brides/wives of other members, suicide bombers or executioners, this article puts emphasis on young returnees who were formerly in combat roles.

This article is based on a literature review and original empirical data collection. Different strands of literature were analysed including academic sources on reintegration of young ex-combatants, in general, and those formerly associated with terrorist organisations in particular. Literature related to the case study of Colombia from academic sources, policy briefs, institutional reports of relevant organisations, newspaper articles, reports from the Colombian Government and transitional justice agencies were also consulted. The literature review was complemented with empirical data collection, consisting of 35 in-depth interviews with three different participant groups and five focus group discussions that were conducted in four cities of Colombia, namely Valledupar, Arauca, Medellín and Bogotá between January and June 2024. The research was predominantly based in the first three locations (Valledupar, Arauca, Medellín), due to the presence of official DDR sites, while the fourth location (Bogotá) comprises the judicial, administrative and relevant institutions implementing the Peace Agreement. A few young returnees were also interviewed in Bogotá upon their availability. These locations were chosen due to the different historical, demographic, geographical and political dimensions of the conflict that they demonstrate in relation to the conflict between the Government of Colombia and FARC-EP and its potential implications on reintegration experiences of young people leaving the group.

Three participant categories were pre-identified: (i) young returnees of FARC-EP (n=17), (ii) community members, including youth and women's groups in the community and specific communes (n=7), and (iii) academics, legal, humanitarian and transitional justice practitioners working in this field of specialisation (n=11). The focus groups – 3-5 participants per focus group – were held with groups of young returnees (n=2), community members, youth groups and associations (n=3). These interactions took place with the aim to understand everyday experiences of reintegration for young returnees and how perceptions of guilt at institutional, individual and social levels are reflected in these experiences. Access to

the research participants was established through pre-existing networks with implementing organisations, particularly the UN Verification Mission in Colombia (UNVMC) and the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (*La Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz* or JEP).

Snowball sampling was conducted to expand the network of participants from the known contacts and their references to other participants. Respondents were not identified randomly; instead, the process was guided by the existing networks of individual leaders or concerned institutions in-charge of reintegration programmes in Colombia. Through these organisations, respondent networks were widened to young returnees formerly associated with the FARC, the ETCRs in La Filipinas (Arauca), Llano Grande (Antioquia), and Tierra Grata (Valledupar), women and youth associations, academics, magistrates and transitional justice practitioners.

A semi-structured topic list based on pre-identified themes was used to guide the interactions with the research participants, which differed according to the sub-study and the groups that are interviewed. Despite the research question exploring ‘guilt’, individual interview questions were phrased in a sensitive, open-ended manner that were neither confrontational, nor evoked negative emotions among the respondents. All research participants were informed about the objective of the study and provided with an informed consent form prior to the interaction. The informed consent form mentioned the researcher’s name, the purpose of the research, and the procedures, risks and benefits involved. The consent form informed participants about the voluntary nature of the research, the confidentiality measures taken to protect their privacy and the contact information of the researcher. It was clarified that participation in the research is voluntary and there are no rewards attached to participating in it. Participants signed the consent form if they agreed to participate in the research and were provided a copy of the informed consent form for future reference. As an additional precaution, consent was asked only at the start of the interaction but reconfirmed periodically during the interaction with ‘check-in’ questions.

Interviews and group discussions were conducted for 60 minutes on an average, at a location convenient for the participants. The interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in person where security conditions permitted (n=24), and virtually (Signal/Skype/Microsoft Teams) in other circumstances (n=16). Some in person interactions

with research participants were followed up and maintained through online engagement (Skype/Teams) until July 2025. Depending on the language preference of the research participants, interviews were either conducted individually or supported by a professionally hired Spanish translator. In restricted spaces, such as certain parts of Arauca or within the territorial reintegration spaces, translation support was provided by a field officer from the designated organisation who had prior access rights to the territorial spaces and the research participants.

Data was analysed manually through structuring of qualitative data into a spreadsheet, corresponding to certain themes. Thematic analysis was used to deduce the meaning behind certain phrases and narratives. To do so, a deducting coding approach, with a list of pre-defined codes was used and then attributed to qualitative data. To ensure confidentiality of the participants and their protection, interviews were coded between R1 to R35, while focus group discussions were coded from RC01 to RC05. Any identifiable information (e.g. name, family information) was removed from the interview reports and no participants were identified personally in the transcripts used for the data analysis, except the location and the participant category to which they belonged.

All respondents were over 18 years at the time of the interviews. This article did not engage with youth formerly associated with the FARC who either escaped from the group or were rescued by external actors due to lack of sufficient security guarantees. The methodological approach of snowball sampling through institutional channels such as the UNVMC may have privileged more accessible or compliant young returnees, raising the limitation of possibly underrepresenting dissenting voices.

Young Returnees and the Challenges of Guilt

Terrorist groups prefer recruitment of young people due to the operational advantages they can provide when compared to adults in executing their terror tactics. The group's ideology is propagated in educational institutions, public gatherings and training camps, bringing it closer to young people and making the prospects of group membership appear more accessible to them. Consequently, the psychological manifestation of terrorism is also borne by them as

participants. Young returnees from terrorist organisations have generally undergone a process of de-sensitisation to violence that neutralises their psychological defences to violence and offers a moral re-definition of what is ‘good’ and ‘evil’. Some of the initiation techniques include conducting mock executions using dolls, viewing of filmed executions and torture to graver practices such as preparations as a suicide bomber, planting explosives, performing execution of captives through stoning, shooting and decapitation, and receiving physical punishments in the form of severe lashings and amputations (Bloom 2019). With absolute loyalty toward the organisation, members avoid any dilemmas regarding the consequences of their acts and/or to justify them at any point as necessary (Pereda 2013, Hills 2002). Such orientation may impact young returnees’ ability to comprehend their acts or assign meaning to the actions and interactions upon reintegration, thus raising the challenges of guilt upon their return.

Institutional Gaps in Reintegration Programmes

DDR programmes are rarely designed keeping in mind the distinct needs, identities, roles and expected responsibilities of youth (Mitra 2022). In fact, standard DDR programmes view their participants largely as passive recipients and characterise them as ‘deficient, ineffectual, misguided, untrustworthy and possibly dangers’ (Harris 2005) due to the fixed template of their response. Some of these official narratives and programme designs of DDR inadvertently reinforce institutional and community-level labelling. This is particularly true in the context of young returnees who are exiting terrorist groups as the priorities clash between ‘rehabilitation’ and ‘security’ or ‘supervision’. Thus, returnees in general, and young returnees in particular, are perceived as ‘less than average citizens’. Much like criminal offenders, their identity is determined less by their social relations and more by their legal relationship with the State (as ‘ex-combatants’, ‘former terrorists’, ‘criminals’), thereby alienating them from fellow citizens and promoting stigma (Uggen, Manza et al. 2004).

Liht & Savage (2013) suggest the incorporation of value complexity in existing preventing violent extremism (PVE) programmes. The authors shared that groups with clear value hierarchies become drawn to Muslim individuals as ‘value monism’ (‘us versus them’, ‘right versus wrong’) resolves the ambivalence of competing values in globalised conditions.

What becomes of value in a PVE context is to transition to ‘value pluralism’ and finding a common set of values between these individuals and the communities instead of attacking the ideological affiliation itself. This is in sharp contrast with traditional DDR frameworks, whereby desistance from future offending behaviour is determined based on structured risk assessments that are tightly designed from the lens of ‘attacking the ideology’, when in reality, individual motivations to join, as well as exit from, terrorist groups remain plenty (Marsden 2017).

Young Returnees as ‘Complex Victims’

Compared to the restrictive design of DDR programmes, Bouris (2007) helps problematise the ‘neat and discreet identities’ of victims and perpetrators that leave ‘little room for nuanced considerations’ such as the multiple identities and relations of a single individual. Bouris examines the limitations in any form of justice administration, particularly its tendency to divide conflict participants into two mutually exclusive categories of those needing justice (the victims) and those who must be held accountable for the justice to prevail (the perpetrators), with the former category rendered as ‘deserving of’ support for their innocence, lack of responsibility and moral superiority due to suffering. Instead, she insists on shifting from identities that are victimised to the types and situations of victimisation and questions the narrative authority of ‘who’ is shaping the discourse. Similarly, Williams (2021, p.6) cautions about the ‘dangers of collectivising the guilt of a group’s actions’ at an individual level. Williams’s coinage of the phrase ‘complexity of evil’ in the context of genocide astutely points to the value in understanding individuals and their motivations for various actions without presuming that ‘each person’s pathway’ must be the same.

Contrary to the Paris Principles and the ‘Straight 18’ discourse that often shape the foundations of DDR and reintegration programmes mentioned previously, academic literature remains less precise in defining children and youth who were formerly associated with armed groups (Bloom 2019, Drumbl 2012, Podder 2008). While some acknowledge that terms such as ‘child soldier’, ‘child terrorist’ or ‘child militant’ may intersect, others argue the very understanding of ‘child’, ‘youth’ and ‘adult’ remains situationally defined, context-specific and culturally influenced. Terrorism itself is a highly contested topic and some academics

even refrain from developing a consistent language to define terrorist groups (Bloom 2019). Equally, young returnees constitute a complex category and contradictions that may arise in neatly demarcating their ‘victim’ and ‘victimising’ experiences, since no two young returnees are alike, even when having participated in the same terrorist group.

Individual Reintegration Experiences of Young Returnees

Studies indicate that the reintegration of young returnees, compared to individuals who were recruited as adults, is relatively challenging in different ways. First, young recruits are perceived as more malleable and easier to be indoctrinated than adults, and therefore more probable to remain influenced by the group’s ideologies in the long term (Goodwin-Gill 2011, Blattman & Annan 2010). Second, since young people are often likelier to end up in frontline combat roles, they are also more prone to experience psychological trauma (Abu-Hayyeh & Singh 2019). Third, the period that young returnees spent as part of the armed or terrorist group is likely to coincide with their cognitive and social developmental period, which includes their interrupted period of education (Blattman & Annan, 2010). It seems therefore that the specificities of youth, in terms of their age, sex, disability, group membership, ranking, inadequately feed into the preventive and response mechanisms of reintegration (Mitra 2022).

As for young people formerly associated with terrorist groups, strains associated with terrorist groups are ‘high in magnitude, and are perceived as unjust, undeserving, and are caused by significantly powerful others’ (Agnew 2010). Consequently, individuals tend to demonstrate vengeance or ‘corrective behaviour’. The experience of strains for a continued period tends to lower inhibitions concerning the ‘consequence of one’s behaviour’. The same has been theorised under neutralisation techniques to deflect blame on the ‘condemners’ in order to justify one’s wrongdoing (Sykes & Matza 1957). Further, dissociative behaviour that normalises violence among young ex-combatants can impede reintegration. Schauer and Elbert (2010) state that children who have learned to cope with trauma by dissociating are vulnerable in continuing to do so, even as a response to minor stressors. The continued use of dissociation as a way of coping with stress can interfere with the ability to fully reintegrate and attend to life’s ongoing challenges. In his study, Gloeckner (2007) observes that children

abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army in Northern Uganda developed a stronger rebel-related collective identity the longer they stayed in the group. The study also sheds light on children's continued identification with the 'rebel group' despite their return to their home communities, particularly in situations where former beliefs about 'right' and 'wrong' actions clashed with current beliefs.

Social Challenges of Reintegration

Reintegration experiences are not only shaped by institutional contexts and individual challenges, they are also influenced by social contexts. Young returnees not only suffer from psychological and self-perception concerns but also experience social rejection and stigma in varying degrees (Annan & Blattman 2010, Betancourt et al. 2010, Carlson & Mazurana 2007). From the perspective of international standards such as the integrated DDR standards (IDDRS), the role of community stigma in impeding youth reintegration is inadequately addressed (Mitra 2022). In terms of community response and reconciliation, Humphreys and Weinstein (2007) draw conclusions from their research in Sierra Leone to state that higher rates of exposure to violence were associated with lower levels of community acceptance. Betancourt et al. (2010) suggest that stigma from community members is manifested against young returnees through perceived discrimination, which ultimately causes an increase in levels of depression, anxiety and hostility over time, independent of the war experiences examined. As a result, stigma may ultimately contribute to fewer positive reintegration experiences, including limited family and community support. Among the stigmatised group, returning women, especially those who are suspected to have had sexual relations with combatants, whether forced or voluntary, as well as those who return with children, are considered to belong to the most stigmatised group of survivors (Schauer & Elbert 2010).

Young returnees of terrorist groups, particularly children born into these groups or in terrorist-affiliated families, as well as those who have spent considerable periods within them, remain at high risk of being negatively 'labelled' upon their exit (Cook & Schneider 2024, United Nations 2017). There is the assumption that they pose security challenges – otherwise known as the 'ticking time bomb' dilemma, as the skills learned during their group membership could be transferred to other civilians and criminal entities upon their return

(Cook & Schneider 2024). The continuation of community stigma and associated negative attitudes may eventually result in social isolation. This has been warned as a likely consequence by Hagman and Nielsen (2002), who project that the existence of ‘ex-combatants’ as a distinct group would imply their continued reliance on special benefits and economic support (most likely from the reintegration programmes designed for them), inevitably provoking feelings of injustice among the civilian population.

Over time, these aspects have influenced discussions on reintegration. Certain studies rightly distinguish between de-radicalisation (withdrawal from or changing violent extremist ideological beliefs) and disengagement (withdrawal from violent extremist behaviour) – an important step to convey that a young returnee’s adherence to or dissolution of the group’s ideology post release need not automatically translate to disengagement from violence and obedience to pro-social behaviour and conduct (Glazzard 2025, Schmid 2013, Horgan 2008). It has been pointed out that existing reintegration initiatives require not only a willing young returnee but also a willing community (Glazzard 2025, Özerdem 2012) for sustainable results. When it concerns young returnees with additional vulnerabilities, such as those who spent a considerable period within terrorist groups or children born within these groups to terrorist-affiliated families, reintegration attempts require a multi-disciplinary approach, primarily to ‘de-securitise’ this population of young people and generate a greater focus on their well-being considerations and outcomes. In doing so, focus must be on individual narratives of young returnees to grasp better their needs and lived experiences (Cook & Schneider 2024).

Guilt and Reintegration of Young Returnees

By now, it is established that young returnees cannot be neatly put in ‘victim’ and ‘perpetrator’ categories as their reintegration experiences upon exiting terrorist groups remain particularly challenging. Understanding the multiple dimensions of guilt that these young returnees endure may thus contribute to a holistic and positive rendition of future reintegration responses and interventions.

Guilt is a unique phenomenon – not only because it manifests in different types, but also because of the varying reactions it elicits based on its realisation individually and socially. On an *individual* level, some persons may judge their own actions and consider them

wrong, thereby evoking personal guilt. Others may experience guilt in reference to the wrongful activities of the group they are a close member of, or consider themselves to be associates, thereby evoking membership guilt (Gilbert 2002), association guilt (Rawls 1963) or collective guilt (Branscombe & Doosje 2004). Distant relations with the perpetrator need not absolve individuals entirely of guilt, as they may experience secondary guilt and vicarious guilt. Secondary guilt is experienced when one is not a primary perpetrator, but maintains some emotional connectedness with the perpetrator (Akello 2024; p.89). Vicarious guilt on the other hand, is the feeling of regret and remorse that an individual experiences on behalf of another person's, group's, or even an entity's wrongdoing, even if the individual was not directly involved in the action (Schmader et al. 2005, Greenspan 1992). Tangney et al. (2002) discuss the centrality of remorse. Since guilt is rooted in empathy, the reaction it generates may be aimed at redressing the harm caused to other people through one's actions (Gilbert 2002, Tangney & Dearing 2002). Thus, as Price (1990, p.162) would suggest, guilt may evoke different elements, these being, the behavioural component, involving the culpable act; the cognitive component that involves an intellectual awareness of one's transgressions; the emotional component that comes with a sense of remorse for having caused the harm, and finally, the spiritual component that acknowledges one's actions have compromised the vitality and intentionality of the other.

On the other hand, Greenspan (1992) explains 'separation guilt' as a phenomenon where individuals may feel guilt without any causal attribution either to the event or the agent. Greenspan further elucidates that individuals could also be exposed to 'self-referential' or anticipatory guilt for the very non-existence of feeling guilty (or guilty 'enough') or generally, as a 'state of mind', described through a series of what if/as if scenarios that correspond to mental states or wishes. However, much of these sentiments do not exist in vacuum, rather in a social environment, making guilt *social* in nature. Baumeister et al. (1994) propose that guilt as an interpersonal phenomenon operates between people rather than just inside them. In fact, guilt can be understood in relationship contexts as a factor that strengthens social bonds, a mechanism for alleviating imbalances/inequalities, exerting influence over others and bringing change.

The social nature of guilt is such that while some individuals may experience guilt in social isolation, many of such instances are nonetheless derivative of interpersonal processes and social interactions. Horney (1937) explains that guilt feelings derive from a basic fear of other people's disapproval, thereby being interpersonal in nature. Additionally, the prototypical cause of guilt is 'infliction of harm, loss or distress on a relationship partner', not only limited to close relationships (where the guilt reactions are stronger), but also in generalised relationships with minimal intergroup phenomena (Brewer 1979). Thus, individuals may feel guilty for inflicting harm not only on close relationships, but on even weak or distant relationships, including a stranger (Baumeister et al. 1994).

The social environment is not singular in nature and individuals can maintain parallel interpersonal relationships with several individuals and groups as part of their social environment. As Rawls (1963) elucidates, despite the perceived moral transgressions in the community, guilt could also come up when an individual seems to breach relations of love and trust vis-à-vis a source of authority ('authority guilt') or a set of principles such as justice or freedom ('principle guilt') espoused by the group. Both 'authority guilt' and 'principle guilt' can thus be effective in understanding an individual's former membership to an armed or terrorist group and the experiences of guilt perceived therein, regardless of the overall moral transgressions perceived by the wider society.

Some of these individual and social experiences of guilt are inadequately captured in *institutional* responses that focus on protective approaches of amnesty or near-total elimination of accountability or attribution of responsibility for young returnees. DDR programmes oftentimes also embody standard rhetoric in their psycho-social interventions, with the use of phrases such as 'it is not your fault' or putting emphasis on 'redemption' and 'giving back to the community' – phrases which may not be universally shared across all ex-combatants (Beah 2007, Bazemore 1998). In the study by Uggen et al. (2004), a 25-year-old ex-combatant expressed his concern regarding the mental health professionals' insistence that he gives back to the community, otherwise it would make him 'a bad person'. Instead of redemption, the respondent was keen on building a better life for himself or finding 'a chance to do better'. In some of these narratives, the distinction between feeling 'guilty for the act

committed' and not attributing guilt for their overall sense of self was clearly revealed as a significant element undermined by institutional responses.

In reality, young returnees do express regret and sadness at having participated in killings (Talbert & Wolfendale 2018, Thomason 2015). The guilt children sometimes express, including regarding voluntary enlistment, implies they are not completely 'non-responsible agents', allowing their social environment to attribute a degree of moral responsibility to them (Sutherland 2023, p.493). Thomason (2016) further explores guilt as part of young returnees' trauma, so much so, that the very confessions of wrongdoing can often lead to enhancement of children's trauma due to self-internalised guilt and shame. Equally, these confessions can be opportunities to redefine the moral identities of young returnees, whereby guilt, regret and feelings of accountability can help in reworking the boundaries of their moral self.

All aforementioned elements are key to develop a more nuanced understanding of young returnees' experiences of reintegration. More specifically, such nuances can be gathered by analysing how the guilt felt by young returnees through institutional arrangements, on an individual level and through social interactions, shape their post-release and reintegration experience. Young returnees may experience one or a combination of the types of guilt listed previously, and this could impact their overall return, recovery, and reintegration process, primarily impacting their perceptions (what they think of themselves/how others perceive them), behaviour (how they behave/others behave toward them), and actions (what they may do/how others may act toward them).

Analysis: The Case Study in Colombia

Nearly a decade after the signing of the Peace Agreement, conflict dynamics in Colombia remain concerning. Certain groups broke away (dissidents) from the FARC and rejected the Peace Agreement, these being the *Segunda Marquetalia* and the *Estado Mayor Centrale*. An estimated seven million Colombians, close to 15% of the population, continue to live in areas under the control of one or multiple armed groups. Some of these groups, such as the ELN, resort to 'rough justice' measures by taking matters in their own hands (International Crisis Group 2023). Such practices have direct implications for young returnees, as they could be

attacked, be perceived ‘at fault’, or their lives might be exposed to serious risks/threats, either for their very decision of exiting the group or for their former affiliation to FARC-EP. Even the Secretary General’s Report confirmed that around 18% of the total former combatants killed in 2021 have been young persons under 29 years of age (United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia 2021).

Guilt on an Institutional Level

Following the signing of the Peace Agreement in 2016 between the Colombian Government and FARC-EP, several transitional justice instruments were instituted, which came to impact how young returnees’ reintegration and guilt were shaped. First, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) was the national judicial body declared competent by the International Criminal Court (ICC) to ‘investigate, prosecute and sanction’ serious violations pertaining to the armed conflict between the Colombian Government and FARC (International Criminal Court 2017). Second, the Truth Commission (*Comision de la Verdad*) established a comprehensive narrative of victim testimonies to clarify the narrative of the conflict and contribute toward dignified memorialisation and acknowledgment of the victims. Finally, national organisations such as the Agency for Reincorporation and Normalisation (ARN), the Colombian Institute for Family Welfare (*Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar* or ‘ICBF’) and international organisations such as the UN Verification Mission in Colombia (UNVMC) were involved in implementation and verification of the Peace Agreement, particularly on the aspects of reintegration.

The JEP convened proceedings to prosecute, among others, the main leaders of the FARC-EP particularly for the recruitment of minors as a systematic practice, as part of its *macro caso 07*. The assigned Magistrates acknowledged the all-pervasive influence of the FARC on children and young people’s lives through the normalisation of violence and the ‘use of force, deception, and strategies of ideological persuasion’. Consequently, the recruitment of children and youth was concluded as an act that generated ‘an environment of permanent coercion’ as the FARC ‘exercised control over every aspect of their (children and young peoples’) lives’ and nullified their autonomy and the ability to consent to, or reject any matter determined by the group or its commanders (Liévano 2024, Special Jurisdiction for

Peace 2024). Based on this rationale, ‘command responsibility’ took precedence over institutional and judicial engagement with young returnees and their individual experiences of reintegration and guilt.

Unfortunately, the legal narrative produced by JEP under *macro caso 07* on the recruitment of minors failed to account for the complexities of young returnees and their experiences. Respondents, who were senior members associated with the processing of this case (R05, R06), confirm that in substantiating allegations of child recruitment by the FARC, young people were confidentially interviewed by the JEP. However, the scope of the interviews was limited, only to attest or refute the fact of their recruitment. Yet, beyond the mandate of the case, young people also expressed their psychological and emotional perspectives. R05 further shared, ‘*they talked about their first incidents and often asked us – am I guilty for this? What was I supposed to do?*’ – questions that remained unanswered within the legal, institutional framework of the present JEP proceedings.

Further, the Truth Commission produced the Report titled, ‘*Hay Futuro si Hay Verdad*’ (There is a Future if There is Truth). The Report relied heavily on victim testimonies, among others, of children affected by the conflict, including those who were displaced, lost family members, were forcibly conscripted, suffered violations within the group, or faced the stigmatisation associated with being ‘children of guerrillas’. The Report documented experiences of guilt felt by victims of the conflict, particularly those who experienced loss of a family member, and how they partially felt responsible. Some of these emotional discomforts persisted ‘even years after the event’, demonstrating the long-lasting impact of the conflict and its effects on coping and re-adjustment ‘post conflict’. Here again, much less emphasis was placed on individual narratives and case studies of young returnees, particularly on how they understand their guilt or how communities perceive them upon return.

As for the temporary reintegration spaces designed within the Peace Agreement, the Territorial Spaces for Training and Reincorporation (ETCRs in Spanish) were officially attributed for young returnees to stay for a limited period of up to a few months. ARN, the organisation responsible for the reintegration experiences of young returnees in Colombia, clarified that the ETCRs aimed at *early* reintegration activities intended to facilitate the *initial* stages of FARC-EP members’ adaptation to civilian life (Corporation for Innovation and

Development 2023, ARN n.d). The timeline for staying inside ETCRs was roughly 24 months, with a temporary status that was due to end in August 2019. However, some of these young returnees continue to reside in these facilities for years up until this date, primarily due to the lack of security guarantees and uncertainty in their conditions of return.

Finally, due to the lengthy and delayed implementation period, a lot of the young returnees lost their eligibility to be enrolled in reintegration programmes designed under the ICBF. Whereas a strong protection component exists in the reintegration programmes designed for minors and supervised under the ICBF, once the individual reached the age of 18, this protective safety net became limited as they terminated their association with the ICBF, except a few follow-up cases (Mitra 2022). As R21 shares, *'there are no opportunities for us, because we are no longer young for the government. We were victims of violence, we were recruited, we lost our families, but we were never compensated, nor given the opportunity to show our skills.'*

Individual Guilt

Despite the institutional bottlenecks and silence concerning the security of young returnees across the four locations of the study, all the respondents introduced themselves using their pseudonym or war name (*nombre de guerra*) that they had received as part of FARC-EP. A strong sense of romanticism was expressed by approximately 71% (n = 12) of young returnees regarding their past association with the FARC, in terms of identity, self-worth, achievement or belief in the group's espoused 'social movement'. Among them, most respondents confirmed they 'like their war name', while other reasons cited were: (i) too young when they joined the group and 'do not remember' their real name, (ii) this became their 'identity', (iii) no one recognises them by their real name, (iv) despite giving up their identity, they continue to remain 'ex-FARC' for others. Among those who confessed their preference for the war name, respondents clearly stated that despite leaving the group and being a *'firmante'* (signatory to the Peace Agreement), they still resonate with and believe in the cause of the group. Thus, respondents' continued affinity with the FARC – through their pseudonyms for primary identification and the espousal of the group's principles – confirms

that despite undergoing demobilisation procedurally, young returnees are not entirely disengaged from the group.

In the interviews, personal guilt amongst young returnees was recorded low as they could justify their actions and considered them ‘right’ due to (i) exceptionality of the situation (it was ‘war time’ and not normal circumstances), (ii) the violations of the State (‘they were throwing bombs, killing our people, taking away our land and resources, and creating fear’), and (iii) the belief in the cause of the group (‘FARC striving for access to welfare, health, education, and protection for all’). When asked about their individual motivations to join the FARC, respondents mentioned several aspects, which were captured in phrases such as ‘State abandoned us’, ‘parents assassinated’, ‘saw family being killed by paramilitaries’, ‘orphan’, ‘parents killed’, ‘displacement’, ‘missing family member’, ‘lack of opportunity’, ‘no other option’, ‘no education’. Particularly for female respondents, the need for ‘protection’ and ‘freedom’ provided by group membership was repeatedly highlighted. In RC02, a respondent shared that *‘most of us (women), including myself, are nurses. We learned to hold a weapon but also to attend to war wounds, even perform anaesthesia’*, referring to the opportunities and protection provided by their membership within the group. Joining the FARC-EP was also perceived by some female respondents as a way to escape societal expectations of marriage and child-bearing roles. At the same time, six former group members re-questioned their decisions to have formerly joined the FARC (*‘how could this be my only option?’*) especially when triggered by family and community rejection (*‘what am I going to do with my life?’*). Three respondents expressed doubt regarding their former membership with the FARC due to their experience of survivors’ guilt, particularly feeling remorseful for having lost a friend or a close member (co-members of the FARC) during the hostilities.

Overall, young returnees seem to recognise the violations committed as part of FARC as an intellectual acknowledgment but remain significantly convinced of, and committed to, the group’s rationale to be able to experience emotional guilt. Post release, about 65% (n=11) of the young returnees clearly stated that while they do not feel ‘*culpa*’ (guilt), they carry a ‘big responsibility’ or ‘heavy weight of history’ to this day. Regardless of this sentiment, Category 1 respondents also admitted being ‘enamoured’ by the group’s beliefs – that of rights, equality, communal changes, defending the collective lives and resources of the

community. As R04 explained, *‘even if I assume that we made mistakes, or that the circumstances of the conflict were degrading, the reasons or the original causes for which this conflict began is still something I believe in’*. Among the respondents, there was a shared acceptance of the violence committed by the FARC, indicative of ‘association guilt’, yet hesitation to delve into the details. Instead, more emphasis was placed on the actions of the State and the violations concerning acts of murder, rape and enforced disappearances. Young returnees perceived these acts of the State as far graver, making them probable justifications for the actions of the FARC. In doing so, they held the acts of the State as unjust and undeserving, while justifying some of the group’s actions.

The spirit of collective action and togetherness was highlighted multiple times. When it came to the decision to sign the Peace Agreement, respondents in Category 1 attributed a higher moral standing to collective disarmament compared to individuals who defected the group individually, committed treason, revealed information to the military or changed alliances to receive personal benefits. R28 complemented this further by sharing, *‘...they (members who abandoned the group) would go to the military in search of protection and for lessening of the charges or punishment. And they would snitch on us and reveal details of other groups, and they would tell the location... a lot of people died from that. Why, because the government, would like, put them in luxurious places. And after these people gave them the information they needed and after they bombed the place, then they would also abandon them. Do we feel bad for them? Probably not, because they committed treason against their colleagues. We cooked together, spent time together, and went to fight together – you do not give up on it like that’*.

In such situations, the way young returnees perceived guilt was relational, thereby claiming a higher moral ground compared to the State violators and defectors from the group. In fact, these respondents did not indicate guilt for abandoning the group as it aligned with the collective decision-making of the FARC. Instead, ‘principle guilt’ was attributed by the respondents to ‘other’ members of the FARC who defected for individual interests and betrayed the principles that the group stood for. Equally, such sentiments not only suggest how young returnees formed their self-identity vis-à-vis their membership to the FARC, but also in relation to other members within the FARC.

Yet, the way young returnees seem to transform their notions of guilt into reintegration is two-fold: (i) through a rights-based discourse and (ii) by actively ‘doing’ reintegration. Young returnees demonstrated significant agency, positioning themselves as drivers of the reintegration process rather than as passive recipients. Some even spoke of their ‘right to reintegration’, having signed the Peace Agreement. In RC03, respondents emphasised, *‘We always fulfil our word, and that’s what we’re doing. It’s only six points (of reintegration as part of the Agreement), and we are only on the third one (economic reintegration). And it’s slow. Everything starts with the fact that the signatories do not have housing. They have an allowance, and when they get to pay rent, they then buy groceries, services, tickets. But we are keeping our word, we are complying, the one that has not complied is them (the government), so our fight has changed...’*

Several respondents perceive the Peace Agreement as an opportunity to serve as ‘peace ambassadors’. Although the JEP addressed the issue of child recruitment at the level of command responsibility, young returnees themselves adopt the judicial terminology of reparative behaviour, also known as Works, Projects, and Actions with a Restorative/Reparative Approach (*‘Trabajos, Obras y Acciones con Enfoque Restaurativo/Reparador’* or TOARs), to guide their individual actions. While TOARs are sanctioned by the JEP as part of the sentencing mechanisms to provide accused individuals with judicial benefits in exchange for carrying out community projects, young returnees assert that they perform TOARs as an individual prerogative. For them, TOARs are more of a way to ‘do reintegration’ and much less as an expression of personal guilt and more as a means of ‘building peace’ and coming to terms with the ‘heavy weight of history’ as indicated previously.

Social Guilt

Identifying oneself as a young returnee formerly associated with the FARC is a double-edged sword; it also exposes oneself to perceived stigma, negative perceptions from the community as well as threats from active members of other armed groups operating in the area. Interviewed young returnees confirmed not ‘feeling safe’ or ‘comfortable’ when it came to voicing their opinions individually as much as they would being part of a collective, for the

fear of being identified or singled out. While respondents felt generally accepted within the ETCRs, they shared that reintegration programmes designed outside the ETCRs and in the communities to which they return were often not attended by young returnees for this very reason. Almost all the respondents in Category 1 shared their awareness that over 300 signatories have been killed upon leaving the ETCRs, most of them being youth (United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia 2021).

As for the respondents who are community members in these locations, some of them expressed their mistrust for initiatives involving young returnees (RC04). Youth associations, in the form of coordinated activities (e.g. sports, photography, agricultural projects) or platforms that bring together young people from an area to discuss issues of concern, share experiences, and promote knowledge-sharing, were perceived with mistrust or suspicion. In fact, many respondents from the community believed that such gatherings were an informal way to recruit more young people into the groups. Compared to Valledupar and Arauca, in Medellín, while such mistrust was not clearly stated, it was noticeable from some of the cooperatives involving young returnees. Approximately 95% of the members were *'firmantes'*, while only five percent were community members, R25 confirmed.

At first, this appears to contradict young returnees' accounts of experiencing a stable community and good relations in their areas of return. However, when Category 1 respondents were asked on what they meant by 'community', most respondents referred to other signatories, their families and extended relations, as well as the victims who had lost assets due to the conflict – whom they would often describe collectively as 'victims of conflict'. When Category 2 respondents were asked if they knew of young returnees in their social networks or among distant acquaintances, they confirmed not knowing, even though they were aware that young returnees may exist in cities. Thus, for young returnees, 'communities' are built around networks of signatories, and branched out to their kinship (children, extended relations, etc.) as well as victims of the conflict sharing the same territorial spaces, as intangible walls for ensuring their own protection. These efforts come with a clear awareness among the young returnees that community stigma outside the 'known networks' persists.

Compared to the male respondents, female young returnees were expecting the possibility of community stigma much ahead of their demobilisation. When asked if, at the time of demobilisation, they expected to reintegrate smoothly and receive community support and acceptance upon return, all the female respondents replied with an emphatic ‘No’, while the male respondents shared mixed reactions. For instance, R18 (female) shares – *‘Since we decided to leave and took this step, we knew that it was going to be difficult. Do we have the support? No, but we continue to work. People don’t shed their stigma and negative perceptions of people like us overnight, but we have to give them time so they can understand what these agreements (the Peace Agreement) and the peace process are and give them the opportunity each day’*.

The aforementioned indicates that two factors, in particular, impact young returnees’ reintegration experiences and their reflections on guilt: (i) security considerations upon return and (ii) community acceptance. The findings indicate that reintegration processes in the four different locations studied differ significantly, and as such, this also impacts young returnees’ reflections on guilt.

In a place like Arauca in Eastern Colombia, bordering Venezuela, groups such as the FARC-EP have had historical roots considering they pre-existed any form of government presence and are, till today, labelled as ‘where all the guerrillas are’ (R26). Within Arauca, respondents confirmed having at least one family member as part of the FARC-EP. Children grew up with FARC members close to their communities and reported having sufficient information and ease in seeking group membership. In such a context, joining the FARC was not only known by the family; it was often ‘approved’ by them in exchange for protection and certain benefits. As R28, a community member, recounts *‘it was a time with high rates of disappearances. Parents did not care if the minor was joining the guerrilla, as long as they knew their child was here with them in town, or not too far away.’* Despite greater awareness within the Araucan community of their recruitment prior to joining the FARC, young returnees tend not to reveal their identity after release, for fear of reprisals from rival groups such as the ELN and FARC dissidents significantly present in the area. Additionally, with their return, entire families were stigmatised, and some confirmed having to leave the area for security reasons. As R26, family of a young returnee, shared, *‘you don’t just remove the*

young man; you have to remove the entire family, because the issue is that they will come even for a single person known to be affiliated with him’.

The case study in Valledupar offered a different perspective on reintegration. Due to the remote location of Tierra Grata – a rural community in the Department of Cesar, the ETCR that houses young returnees and their families has emerged as a nucleus of the growing neighbouring community. Community members are receiving services such as education and basic healthcare, along with opportunities for job creation and development (in agriculture, ecotourism, housing construction) through projects initially designed for the reintegration of young returnees. Reconciliation projects also such as ‘*Son de Paz*’ have convened common platforms for exchanges among youth, involving both young returnees as community members, some of which talked about past stories of loss as well as admittance of guilt. R20 describes one session, ‘*once, we shared through art, some of our dreams and nightmares...it did not matter who you were, maybe ex-combatant or anyone else, but we could relate to each other’s stories...and we realised how similar our stories have been*’. Such platforms allow for a common exchange of individual experiences and participants claim that it has strengthened bonds between the young people in the community.

Moreover, young returnees in Valledupar unanimously confirmed having no intentions to exit the ETCR and instead, to develop a permanent living therein. What works well in Valledupar – and this decreases stigma – is that the remoteness of the location and presence of implementing organisations provide less alarming security risks when compared to Arauca. Both young returnees and the community members are united by the perceived commonality in the suffering and losses incurred due to the conflict and are thus unified in their reintegration efforts. As for the young returnees, the ETCR provided the opportunity to start anew. Most respondents confessed having lost their family members due to displacement, while others confirmed they were orphans at the time of joining the FARC. Consequently, the families they built were either during the period of their group membership or after signing the Peace Agreement, as evidenced from the growing number of children born inside the ETCR. Only a minority of the young respondents reconnected with their families. Thus, in Valledupar, the communities to which they return are not the same communities that they initially left for joining the FARC.

Contrary to the remoteness of Valledupar, cities such as Medellín and Bogotá offer a different reintegration experience to young returnees. With a population of over four million inhabitants, Medellín provides a space for young returnees to seemingly ‘disappear’, with limited chances of being identified. Based on the respondents’ statements, two – on the face of it being paradoxical – observations can be made. On the one hand they express a need for anonymity, and on the other hand, they express wanting to be part of a collective. Some young returnees are creating new areas of reintegration (*nueva areas de reintegracion* or NARs – an informal term used by local and international non-governmental organisations) with the hope of replicating the safety of the physical space and community expected within the ETCRs, while moving outside of them. As noted during the interviews, it is estimated that there are 93 such NARs in major cities such as Medellín, Cali and Bogotá. However, they are neither recognised by the government as part of the Peace Agreement, nor is their identification straightforward. R12, who represents an implementing partner of the Peace Agreement, explained the structural challenges faced in relation to young returnees in NARs. *‘...we don’t have the exact number or data concerning NARs. Generally, they (ex-combatants) need to visit us periodically and sign in order for us to follow up on their status and receive financial support. But we see that they come for, let’s say, one month and then disappear for six months, which puts us in a difficult position to ask where they have been...we are simply an implementing partner, not an investigating body, as this may put our own standing at risk.’*

Outside of ETCR and NARs, young returnees in Medellín prefer to live in closed communes (*comuna*), marked by restricted access. While closed communes offer a sense of protection – due to selective avenues for entry and exit, internal regulations, and conflict resolution – their historical association with armed conflict and forms of violence creates fear and distance among community members living outside and subjecting such spaces (and the residents therein) to socially imposed guilt. Despite the predominance of youth in such places with guarantees of ‘physical security’, what affects them most is the lack of economic reintegration, as opportunities for rebuilding lives and achieving sustainability remain constrained. The negative social perception attributed to restricted communes further exacerbates young returnees’ experiences of isolation. Falling outside the protective bracket

of special assistance particularly affects youth returnees in this area, but the same challenge extrapolates to many other young returnees dispersed across urban spaces. In this sense, the difficulties of urban reintegration become especially pronounced. Young returnees who spent considerable periods in remote, forested areas during their time with the FARC now return to cities where they are already disadvantaged – lacking familiar social networks, possessing low levels of education and having limited familiarity with economic prospects suited to urban settings.

Conclusion: On Guilt Shaping Reintegration Experiences

This article examined how perceptions of guilt at an institutional, individual and social level impact young returnees' experiences of reintegration. Through a case study approach in the Colombian context, it was concluded that young returnees often fell through the cracks of most of the institutional transitional justice responses. The legal narrative that describes young returnees operating in an 'environment of coercion' under the FARC prevented them from receiving judicial sanctions, be it for reparative action, much less, for an expression of their guilt. The Truth Commission narrative did not capture the complex experiences of guilt of young returnees. Finally, the decade-long and ongoing implementation of the reintegration interventions meant that young returnees fell outside the scope of the programmes due to several factors (age, security guarantees, community mistrust, etc.).

Most notably, the findings confirmed that young returnees experienced minimal individual or personal guilt for their former membership with the FARC. In fact, they remained connected with, and even enamored by, their former war identity and norms of the group. Young returnees of the FARC justified their former membership and activities in relation to the 'more violent' acts of the State. Yet, elements of membership or collective guilt emerged repeatedly in half of the interviews and focus group discussions, as young returnees referred to the 'excesses' committed by FARC as a whole, though not necessarily experienced as personal guilt. Regardless, socially attributed guilt remained high, as young returnees confirmed developing doubts for past decisions in light of negative community interactions, or pre-empting community rejection and stigma upon return to civilian life. The article

prominently demonstrated that social guilt was manifested in the young returnees' daily actions, including attempts at self-concealment, social isolation and an increased reliance on a smaller community of known networks comprising other former signatories and their families.

Across Colombia, reintegration experiences were further shaped by the context in which young returnees returned – a factor often undermined in DDR programmes. Some young returnees chose to create their own communities within ETCRs such as in Valledupar, others relocated with entire families from their communities of origin in Arauca or remained low-profile by disappearing in big cities such as Medellín and Bogotá. Across these examples, opportunities for young returnees to share their stories, including perceptions of guilt positively strengthened community relations and reconciliation (e.g. Valledupar). However, these examples were limited as most young returnees and community members remained distant from each other with minimal interaction. In certain congregated communities of young returnees, socially imposed guilt and stigma not only contributed to fewer positive interactions with the wider community, but also restricted young returnees' access to socio-economic support.

All in all, guilt emerged as a moral phenomenon that young returnees navigated as an essential determinant of their reintegration experiences.

Discussion and Recommendations

Young returnees of terrorist groups are exposed to extreme forms of violence, indoctrination and psychological techniques of dissociation from their feelings and moral judgements. Regardless, this article showed that they are not immune to feelings of guilt. In fact, young returnees endure complex layers of guilt in their everyday lives, which influences their reintegration experiences and life decisions post release. In Colombia, young returnees of the FARC may have demobilised after the 2016 Peace Agreement, but they remain strongly aligned with the FARC in terms of their identity, self-worth and values espoused by the group. Theories on 'complex victims' (Bouris 2007) and 'complexity of evil' (Williams 2021) help validate the intricacies in the identities and experiences of young returnees. From the lens

of guilt, when the ‘narrative authority’ (Bouris 2007) belongs to young returnees, they perceive themselves very differently (low individual guilt, with alleged violations justified in relation to the State) from the legal and transitional justice institutions (as passive victims) or the social environment (social stigma and distance) in Colombia. Further, by putting emphasis on individual motivations and stories, various forms of guilt were captured in the narratives of young returnees, in contrast to how transitional justice institutions generalise them as being victims of recruitment under FARC.

While Price (1990) suggested that guilt reactions of the individual occur at an intellectual, emotional and behavioural level, this article further confirmed that these reactions are not interdependent and must not be assumed as such. The theories on strain (Agnew 2010) and neutralization (Sykes & Matza 1957) were validated by young returnees’ justifications for their actions and decisions within the FARC in relation to the violations of the State. Nonetheless, despite demonstrating low personal guilt, young returnees revealed significant acknowledgment of violations committed by the FARC as a group (cognitive reaction) and performed reparative action (behavioural reaction). In fact, they tried to come to terms with ‘membership guilt’ (Gilbert 2002) or ‘collective guilt’ (Branscombe & Doosje 2004), as they experienced an intellectual acknowledgment of the violations committed by the FARC. Some young returnees were observed to replicate the discourse of TOARs and reparative justice for transforming their guilt to tangibly perform reintegration, or as they called it, to ‘do reintegration’.

Thus, an individual may intellectually acknowledge their transgressions, or emotionally express grief for the occurrence of a wrongful event, but they need not necessarily perform reparative action to that end. Alternatively, a ‘guilty’ individual may perform the necessary actions as a procedural, legal or institutional requirement (as in the case of community sentences) but need not experience guilt either intellectually or emotionally, causing further strains in interpersonal and social relations. Such findings have implications for DDR programmes, particularly on the assumptions that completion of certain reintegration tasks automatically results in successful reintegration. As previously mentioned, young returnees struggled with long-term economic sustenance, security guarantees, social

acceptance and strong post-release networking, not just for themselves, but also for their families.

The contrast between low individual or personal guilt and high occurrence of social guilt is noteworthy. Some of the reasons this could be the case include limited attempts to (i) achieve behavioural changes in young returnees and the communities, (ii) develop renewed identities of young returnees that go beyond individual and social identification as ‘ex-FARC’, (iii) facilitate dialogue and exchanges on guilt between individuals and the communities and (iv) build a common system of values and principles uniting young returnees and the communities. Evidently, in a context with low individual or personal guilt and a significant experience of social guilt, such findings make us revisit the priorities and focus of traditional DDR programmes and how ‘success’ would look like, especially those that are myopically individually focused. When it comes to ‘authority guilt’ or ‘principle guilt’ (Rawls 1963), how do reintegration programmes develop newer sources of authority and principles for young returnees? How do such programmes reconcile parallel social environments to achieve holistic acceptance and integration of young returnees that applies beyond their immediate network of ex-combatants and families?

While there is significant potential to transform feelings of guilt among young returnees to ‘morally valuable’ behaviour post release, the same is not fully capitalised in the Colombian context. Instead of reintegrating into civilian lives, young returnees continue to function as per the values of the FARC. This occurs at a time when multiple armed conflicts prevail across the country and unresolved guilt could trigger sentiments of return or renewed violence among the former members of the group. While the recidivism statistics on ‘wanting to return or rejoin the group’ was recorded low in this study, young returnees generally remain a significantly vulnerable group due to challenges of economic, social and in some cases, urban reintegration. Thus, in the absence of a sufficient experience-sharing, dialogue or exchange on guilt, the reintegration of former young members of the FARC remains limited.

More broadly, negotiations between the Government of Colombia and the FARC in 2016, as well as with other groups at present, neither focus on behavioural changes nor provide protective mechanisms for individuals, particularly young returnees. Based on the findings of this article, it is recommended that perceptions of guilt must be incorporated in the

very heart of peace negotiations and the reintegration processes that follow thereafter. From a PVE perspective, reparative actions need to be conceptualised more creatively, beyond a set of monetary compensations or material repairs and distinct from the judicial process. DDR programmes must have well-intentioned, real and inclusive conversations (not as a procedural ‘tick-off’ objective) between the young returnees and the communities to understand what would comprise meaningful reparations vis-à-vis the individual and social guilt parameters discussed in this article. Facilitating these conversations through an indirect medium, such as the arts could be possible options that are more suited to the particularities of the group, in this case, young people. While the self-assumed responsibilities of young returnees to implement the TOARs show some prospects, these efforts call for an official recognition as part of the peace processes.

Integrating an understanding of guilt in shaping positive reintegration experiences not only requires ‘emotive appeals’ to the community premised on a common set of values and priorities (such as giving second chances), but also commonalities in past experiences (such as experiences of loss) through psychosocial interventions. The Colombian case study – be it the historical roots of FARC in Arauca or the shared experiences of ‘loss’ in Valledupar between young returnees and surrounding communities hint the possibility to establish a common foundation of values and experiences. By addressing guilt, reintegration interventions can focus more on developing ‘pro-social’ identities of young returnees, which are different from their war identity. Similar to the concept of ‘value pluralism’ (Liht & Savage 2013), such interventions can instead find a common set of values between the returnees and their surrounding communities. Further, the sentiment of young returnees to ‘do reintegration’ or self-perception as ‘peace ambassadors’ needs further encouragement as presently, these sentiments are felt by young returnees *as* former members of the FARC, not necessarily as citizens, civic participants or reintegrated members of the community. Appealing to the moral personalities of young returnees would be key to frame renewed identities – as a family person, active citizen, good worker, leader, that go beyond their immediate identification as ‘ex-FARC’. Finally, the Truth Commission that summarised the voices of the ‘victims’ could consider publishing a separate report on the ‘truth’ – emotional and experiential – of the young returnees and their reintegration experiences since 2016, as a

step towards ‘meaning making’ and a reminder on the long-term implications of the peace process.

Overall, reintegration experiences need an understanding ‘through the eyes of those going through them’ as it makes the process gain credibility (Marsden 2017, Katz 2008) – something that this article strongly captures through the individual narratives. Equally, in light of the limitations of this study, future research is recommended to study the guilt of young returnees of different profiles, particularly those individuals who escaped the group, the dissidents of FARC, as well as other armed and terrorist groups operating in the country. As a research limitation, the lack of sufficient security and protection guarantees prevented such potential research participants to openly claim their identity as young returnees. Such case studies may be relevant to reflect on existing reintegration programmes and their capacities to engage with young returnees’ guilt to contribute toward good examples of behavioural changes and community reconciliation.

References

- Abu-Hayyeh, R., & Singh, G. (2019). Adverse health effects of recruiting child soldiers. *BMJ Paediatrics Open*. pp 1-3.
- Achilli, L. (2024). Boko Haram's playground: Exploring the role of fun among children associated with armed groups in Nigeria. *War & Society* Vol. 44(1). pp. 95–112.
- Agencia para la Reincorporación y la Normalización ARN. (n.d.) Retrieved from <https://www.reincorporacion.gov.co/es/reincorporacion/Paginas/Los-ETCR.aspx>
- Agnew, R. (2010). A general strain theory of terrorism. *Theoretical Criminology*, 14(2), 131-153. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362480609350163>
- Akello, G. (2019). Reintegration of amnestied ex-combatants and survivors' resistance acts in northern Uganda. *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 13(2). pp 249–267.
- Akello, G. (2024), Stigma and guilt among the children of amnestied ex-combatants in northern Uganda: implications for transitional justice, in Denov, M. ed. *Research Handbook of Children and Armed Conflict*, pp 88-101, Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781839104817>
- Baumeister, R. F., Stillwell, A. M., & Heatherton, T. F. (1994). Guilt: An interpersonal approach. *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 115(2). pp 243–267. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.115.2.243>
- Bazemore, G. (1998) Restorative justice and earned redemption: communities, victims, and offender reintegration. *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 41. pp 768 – 813.
- Beah, I. (2008). *A Long Way Gone*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
- Betancourt, TS., Agnew-Blais, J., Gilman, SE., Williams, DR., Ellis, BH. (2010). Past horrors, present struggles: the role of stigma in the association between war experiences and psychosocial adjustment among former child soldiers in Sierra Leone. *Soc Sci Med*. Vol. 70(1). pp 17-26.
- Blattman, C. & Annan, J. (2010). The Consequences of Child Soldiering. *The Review of Economics and Statistics*. MIT Press, Vol. 92(4), pp 882-898.
- Bloom, M., & Horgan, J. (2019). *Small Arms: Children and Terrorism*. Cornell University Press. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctvfc55rt>
- Bloom, M., (2019). Weaponising the weak: the role of children in terrorist groups. In: Drumbl, M.A. and Barrett, J.C. *Research handbook on child soldiers*. Edward Elgar Publishing. pp. 195–216.
-

-
- Bouris, E. (2007). *Complex Political Victims*. Boulder, USA: Lynne Rienner Publishers. pp. 20. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781626373112>
- Braithwaite, J. (1989). *Crime, Shame and Reintegration*. Cambridge University Press
- Branscombe, N.R. & Doosje, B. (2004). *Collective Guilt: International Perspectives*. Cambridge University Press
- Clark, K. M. (1996) *Fostering a Farewell to Arms: Preliminary Lessons Learned in the Demobilization and Reintegration of Combatants (PN-ANY-027)*. Washington, DC: Research and Reference Services, United States Agency for International Development. pp 14-16
- Comer, J.S. Kendall, P.C. (2007). Terrorism: The psychological impact on youth. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice* Vol. 14. pp 179-212.
- Cook, J. & Schneider, L. (2024). The life of children in families affiliated with terrorism: an ecological systems theory approach. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 17(2). pp 275-30.
- De la Corte, L., Kruglanski, A., De Miguel, J., Sabucedo, J.M., Díaz, D. (2008). Seven psychological principles for explaining terrorism. *Psychology in Spain* Vol. 12(1). pp 70–80.
- Drumbl, M.A. (2012) *Children Who Soldier: practices, politics, and perceptions*. Oxford University Press eBooks, pp. 26–60. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199592654.003.0002>.
- European Commission's Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation. (2008). *Radicalisation Processes Leading to Acts of Terrorism: A concise Report prepared by the European Commission Report*. pp. 17. Retrieved from https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/20080500_cscp_report_vries.pdf
- European Union. (2016). *EU suspends FARC from terrorist list to support Colombia peace deal*. Retrieved from https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/10564_en
- Gear, S. (2002) *Wishing Us Away: Challenges Facing Ex-combatants in the 'New' South Africa*. Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation Johannesburg.
- Gilbert, M. (2002). Collective guilt and collective guilt feelings. *The Journal of Ethics*, Vol. 6(2). pp 115–143.
- Glazzard, A. (2022). Violent Extremist Disengagement and Reintegration: A Framework for Planning, Design and Evaluation of Programmatic Interventions. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 48(4) pp. 419–438.

- Gloeckner, F. (2007). *PTSD and collective identity in former Ugandan child soldiers*. University of Konstanz
- Goodwin-Gill, G. (2011). The Challenge of the Child Soldier. *The Changing Character of War*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 410 - 428.
- Greenspan, P. S. (1992). Subjective guilt and responsibility. *Mind* Vol.101 (402). Oxford University Press. pp 287-303. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2254336>
- Harris, M.K. (2005). In Search of Common Ground: The Importance of Theoretical Orientations in Criminology and Criminal Justice. *Criminology and Public Policy* Vol. 4, pp 311–28
- Hills, A. (2002). Responding to catastrophic terrorism. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* Vol 25. pp 245–261.
- Honwana, A. (2009). Children in War: Reintegrating Child Soldiers. *IDS Bulletin* Vol. 40(1). pp 63-68.
- Honwana, A. (2006). *Child soldiers in Africa*. University of Pennsylvania
- Horgan, J. (2008). Deradicalisation or Disengagement? A Process in Need of Clarity and a Counterterrorism Initiative in Need of Evaluation. *Perspectives on Terrorism* 2, no. 4. pp. 3–8.
- Horgan, J. & Braddock, K. (2010). Rehabilitating the Terrorists?: Challenges in Assessing the Effectiveness of De-Radicalisation Programs. *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22, no. 2. pp 267–29. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Horney, K. (1937). Neurotic Guilt Feelings. *The neurotic personality of our time*. New York: Norton. pp. 230-259.
- International Committee of the Red Cross. (2025). *Retos Humanitarios 2025 Colombia*. Retrieved from <https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/2025-03/Balance%20Humanitario%20versi%C3%B3n%20digital%202025.pdf>
- International Criminal Court (2017). *Report on Preliminary Examination Activities*, Retrieved from https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/itemsDocuments/2017-PE-rep/2017-otp-rep-PE_ENG.pdf
- International Crisis Group. (2023). *Protecting Colombia's Most Vulnerable on the Road to "Total Peace"*. Latin America Report N.98. Retrieved from <https://www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/andes/colombia/98-protecting-colombias-most-vulnerable-road-total-peace>
-

-
- International Crisis Group (2021). *A Fight by Other Means: Keeping the Peace with Colombia's FAR, Report N.92*. Retrieved from <https://www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/colombia/092-fight-other-means-keeping-peace-colombias-farc>
- Jørgensen, N (2019). Children associated with terrorist groups in the context of the legal framework for child soldiers. *Questions of International Law* Vol.60. pp 5-23.
- Katz, J. (2008). *Seductions of crime: Moral and sensual attractions in doing evil*. New York: Basic Books.
- Klasen, F., Reissmann, S., Voss, C. & Okello, J. (2015). The Guiltless Guilty: Trauma-Related Guilt and Psychopathology in Former Ugandan Child Soldiers. *Child Psychiatry and Human Development* Vol. 46. pp 180–193 (2015).
- Kubany, E. S. (1994). A cognitive model of guilt typology in combat-related PTSD. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, Vol. 7(1). pp 3–19.
- Lewis, H.B. (1971). Shame and guilt in neurosis. *Psychoanalytic Review*, Vol. 58(3). pp 419–438.
- Liévano, A (2024). *FARC Leadership Accused of War Crimes over Child Soldiers*. JusticeInfo.net. Retrieved from <https://www.justiceinfo.net/en/138510-farc-leadership-accused-war-crimes-child-soldiers.html>
- Liht, J & Savage, S. (2013). Preventing Violent Extremism through Value Complexity: Being Muslim Being British. *Journal of Strategic Security*, Vol. 6, No. 4. pp. 44-66.
- Marsden, S.V. (2017). *Reintegrating Extremists: Deradicalisation and Desistance*. Palgrave Pivot London.
- Maruna, S. (2001). *Making Good: How Ex-convicts Reform and Rebuild their Lives*. American Psychological Association.
- Matsueda, R. and Heimer, K. (1997) A symbolic interactionist theory of role transitions, role-commitments, and delinquency in T. Thornberry (ed.) *Developmental Theories of Crime and Delinquency*. New Brunswick. Transaction Publishers. pp 163–213.
- McEvoy, K., & Shirlow, P. (2009). Re-imagining DDR: Ex-combatants, leadership and moral agency in conflict transformation. *Theoretical Criminology*. Vol. 13(1). pp 31–59.
- McFadden, K.I. (2020). Book Review on Small Arms: Children and Terrorism by Mia Bloom and John Horgan, *Joint Force Quarterly* Vol.96 (1). Cornell University Press.
- McNeill, F., & Weaver, B. (2010). *Changing lives? Desistance research and offender management*. Glasgow School of Social Work and Scottish Centre for Crime and

Justice Research. Retrieved from https://www.sccjr.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Report_2010_03_-_Changing_Lives.pdf

- Mitra, A. (2022). Developing transitional justice for youth: An assessment of youth reintegration programmes in Colombia. *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 16(1), pp. 82–100. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijtj/ijab038>.
- Muggah, R. (2010). Innovations in Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Policy and Research: Reflections on the Last Decade. *NUPI Working Paper 774, Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs*.
- Murphy, S., Elklit, A., Dokkedahl, S., & Shevlin, M. (2017). Anger, Guilt and Shame as Mediators in the Relationship Between war Experiences and PTSD: Testing the Moderating Role of Child Soldier Status. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma*.
- Noah, C & Madhuraj, A. (2024). *Disengaging from Armed Groups and Desisting from Conflict Activities: Drawing Lessons Learned from Criminology*. Findings Report 34, UNIDIR. Geneva. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.37559/MEAC/24/01>
- Özerdem, A. (2012). A Re-Conceptualisation of Ex-Combatant Reintegration: ‘Social Reintegration’ Approach. *Conflict, Security & Development* 12 no. 1. pp 51–73.
- Pereda, N. (2013). Systematic review of the psychological consequences of terrorism among child victims. *International Review of Victimology* Vol. 19 (2). pp. 181–199.
- Podder, S. (2008). Doctrinal Challenges, Nation Building, Terror Tactics and the Power of the Child: A Tale of Three ‘Sites’. *Strategic Analysis* Vol. 32:1. pp 147-159.
- Price, G. M. (1990). Non-rational guilt in victims of trauma. *Dissociation*, 11(3). pp 160–164.
- Richards, A. (2014). Conceptualising Terrorism. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* Vol.37(3). pp 213–236.
- Rodgers, D. & Jensen, S. (2015). The Problem with Templates: Learning from Organic Gang-Related Violence Reduction. *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development*, Vol. 4(1): 51, pp. 1–16. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/sta.gp>
- Rosen, D. M. (2005). *Armies of the Young: Child Soldiers in War and Terrorism*. Rutgers University Press.
- Rueda, S (2020). La realidad de las nuevas áreas de reincorporación de excombatientes de las Farc’. *El Espectador*. Retrieved from <https://www.elespectador.com/colombia-20/paz-y-memoria/la-realidad-de-las-nuevas-areas-de-reincorporacion-de-excombatientes-de-las-farc-article/>

- Sabini, J. & Silver, M. (1997). In defense of shame in the context of guilt and embarrassment. *Journal for the Therapy of Social Behaviour*, Vol. 27(1). pp 1–15.
- Schauer, E., & Thomas, T. (2010). The Psychological Impact of Child Soldiering. in Martz, E., ed. *Trauma rehabilitation after war and conflict*. Springer Science + Business Media. pp. 311-360.
- Schauer, M., & Elbert, T. (2010). Dissociation following traumatic stress: Etiology and treatment. *Zeitschrift für Psychologie/Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 218(2). pp 109–127.
- Schmader, T., Brian, L., Mathew, C., & Scarnier, M., Ames, D. (2005). Vicarious Shame and Guilt. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*. Vol. 8. pp 145-157.
- Schmid, A. (2023). *Defining Terrorism*. International Centre for Counter-terrorism (ICCT). Retrieved from https://icct.nl/sites/default/files/2023-03/Schmidt%20-%20Defining%20Terrorism_1.pdf
- Schmid, P.A., (2013). Radicalisation, De-radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review. *ICCT Research Paper 97 N.1*.
- Schulhofer-Wohl, J & Sambanis, N (2010). *Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration Programs: An Assessment*. Folke Bernadotte Academy Publications. Retrieved from https://fba.se/contentassets/7da0c74e1d22462db487955f2e373567/ddr_programs_-_an-assessment.pdf
- Silke, A. (2005). Children, terrorism and counterterrorism: Lessons in policy and practice. *Terrorism and Political Violence* Vol.17. pp 201–213.
- Smith, R. H., Webster, J. M., Parrott, W. G., & Eyre, H. L. (2002). The role of public exposure in moral and nonmoral shame and guilt. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* Vol.83(1). pp 138–159.
- Special Jurisdiction for Peace. (2024). *JEP Auto No. 05 de 20*.
- Sutherland, J. (2023). The Spectrum of Liability to Defensive Harm and the Case of Child Soldiers. *Res Publica*. Vol. 30. pp 487-507.
- Stern, J. and Berger, JM. (2015) *Raising tomorrow's mujahideen: the horrific world of Isis's child soldiers*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/10/horror-of-isis-child-soldiers-state-of-terror>.
- Sykes, G.M. and Matza, D. (1957). Techniques of Neutralization: A Theory of Delinquency. *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 22(6). pp. 664–670.
-

- Talbert, M., Wolfendale, J. (2019). *War Crimes: Causes, Excuses, and Blame*. Oxford University Press.
- Tangney, J. P., Miller, R. S., Flicker, L. & Barlow, D. H. (1996). Are shame and guilt and embarrassment distinct emotions?. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 70(6). pp 1256–1269.
- Tangney, J. P., Stuewig, J. & Hafez, L. (2002). Shame, guilt and remorse: Implications for offender populations. *Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology*, Vol. 22(5), pp 706–723.
- The Guardian (2022). *They think we're terrorists': Colombia's female former guerrilla fighters find no peace*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/nov/06/colombia-female-former-guerrilla-fighters-farc>
- The Office of the Prosecutor. (2023). *ICC Report: Report on the Situation in Colombia*. International Criminal Court. Retrieved from <https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/2023-11/2023-11-30-otp-report-colombia-eng.pdf>
- Thomasan, K. (2015). Guilt and Child Soldiers. *Ethic Theory Moral Prac* Vol. 19. pp 115–127.
- Thomasan, K. (2016). Seeing child soldiers as morally compromised warriors. *The Critique*. Retrieved from http://www.thecritique.com/articles/seeing-child-soldiers-as-morally-compromised-warriors/#_edn45
- Tibbets, S.G. (2003). Self-conscious emotions and criminal offending. *Psychological Reports* Vol. 93(1). pp 101–126.
- Truth Commission of Colombia. (2022). *Hay Futuro Si Hay Verdad: Hallazgos y Recomendaciones*. Retrieved from <https://www.comisiondelaverdad.co/hay-futuro-si-hay-verdad>
- The Paris Principles. (2007). *Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups*. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/mali/media/1561/file/parisprinciples.pdf>
- Uggen, C., Manza, J., & Behrens, A. (2004). Less than the average citizen: Stigma, role transition and the civic reintegration of convicted felons in S. Maruna & R. Immarigeon (Eds.), *After crime and punishment: Pathways to offender reintegration*. pp. 261–293. Willan Publishing.
- United Nations (n.d.). *Because Youth Matter*. Retrieved from <https://www.unesco.org/en/youth>
-

United Nations Disarmament Demobilisation Reintegration (n.d.) *The UN Approach to DDR*. Retrieved from <https://www.unddr.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/IDDRS-2.10-The-UN-Approach-To-DDR.pdf>

United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia (2021). *Report of the Secretary-General S/2021/298*.

United Nations. (2017). *Handbook on Children Recruited and Exploited by Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups: The Role of the Justice System*. Retrieved from https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Child-Victims/Handbook_on_Children_Recruited_and_Exploited_by_Terrorist_and_Violent_Extremist_Groups_the_Role_of_the_Justice_System.E.pdf

United Nations. (1981). *Secretary-General's Report to the General Assembly, A/36/215*.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (n.d.). *Return to, and Reintegration into Urban Settings*. Retrieved from <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/legacy-pdf/4b14e01514.pdf>. pp 1-3.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2024) *On the Treatment of Children Associated with Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups*. Retrieved from https://www.unodc.org/pdf/criminal_justice/endVAC/Roadmap/UNODC-ENDVAC_Roadmap_EN.pdf

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2017). *Handbook on Children Recruited and Exploited by Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups: The Role of the Justice System*. Retrieved from https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Child-Victims/Handbook_on_Children_Recruited_and_Exploited_by_Terrorist_and_Violent_Extremist_Groups_the_Role_of_the_Justice_System.E.pdf

United Nations Secretary General Report (2025). *Children and Armed Conflict Report of the Secretary-General*. Retrieved from <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2025/247>.

United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia (2020). *United Nations Secretary General Report*. Retrieved from <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2020/943>

U.S. Department of State (n.d.). *Foreign Terrorist Organisations*. Retrieved from <https://www.state.gov/foreign-terrorist-organizations>

Williams, T. (2021). *The Complexity of Evil: Perpetration and Genocide*. Rutgers University Press.

Yehuda, R., Hyman, S. (2005). The Impact of Terrorism on Brain, and Behavior: What We Know and What We Need to Know. *Neuropsychopharmacology* Vol.30.pp 1773-80.

About the JD Journal for Deradicalization

The JD Journal for Deradicalization is the world's only peer reviewed periodical for the theory and practice of deradicalization with a wide international audience. Named an [“essential journal of our times”](#) (Cheryl LaGuardia, Harvard University) the JD's editorial board of expert advisors includes some of the most renowned scholars in the field of deradicalization studies, such as Prof. Dr. John G. Horgan (Georgia State University); Prof. Dr. Tore Bjørge (Norwegian Police University College); Prof. Dr. Mark Dechesne (Leiden University); Prof. Dr. Cynthia Miller-Idriss (American University Washington D.C.); Prof. Dr. Julie Chernov Hwang (Goucher College); Prof. Dr. Marco Lombardi, (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore Milano); Dr. Paul Jackson (University of Northampton); Professor Michael Freeden, (University of Nottingham); Professor Hamed El-Sa'id (Manchester Metropolitan University); Prof. Sadeq Rahimi (University of Saskatchewan, Harvard Medical School), Dr. Omar Ashour (University of Exeter), Prof. Neil Ferguson (Liverpool Hope University), Prof. Sarah Marsden (Lancaster University), Prof. Maura Conway (Dublin City University), Dr. Kurt Braddock (American University Washington D.C.), Dr. Michael J. Williams (The Science of P/CVE), Dr. Mary Beth Altier (New York University) and Dr. Aaron Y. Zelin (Washington Institute for Near East Policy), Prof. Dr. Adrian Cherney (University of Queensland), Dr. Wesley S. McCann (RTI International), and Dr. Daren Fisher (Hampton University).

For more information please see: www.journal-derad.com

Twitter: @JD_JournalDerad

Facebook: www.facebook.com/deradicalisation

The JD Journal for Deradicalization is a proud member of the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ).

ISSN: 2363-9849

Editor in Chief: Daniel Koehler